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Interview with Marcia Marcus

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Transcript

Preface

This interview is part of the *Dorothy Gees Seckler collection of sound recordings relating to art and artists, 1962-1976*. The following verbatim transcription was produced in 2015, with funding from Jamie S. Gorelick.

Interview

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler interviewing Marcia Marcus in Provincetown on August 28th, 1967.

Marcia, your reputation has emerged along with that of a number of other painters who began to tackle the figure in a new way after a period in which, you know, the period of the reign of the Abstract Expressionists in which figure, if it was done at all, it was done as part of a very painterly expression emerging in a field of paint strokes, and so on.

What I would like to establish right now is some of the main characteristics of the way you handle the figure. I assume that we can safely say that your main preoccupation is with the figure.

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: More or less, the female figure.

MARCIA MARCUS: No, I like to do men. They seem to be less available very often, although I have done, actually, quite a lot of figures. I think all you need is someone who is very patient and somewhat vain.

[They laugh.]

At first, I thought people were just doing me a favor. And then, I realized that a lot of people accepted because they really wanted to have their portraits done. It became that kind of thing. But I have done quite a lot of men.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you don't do portraits as portrait commissions? Your figurative painting is incidentally a portrait, but—

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —not a portrait first of all?

MARCIA MARCUS: No. I mean, I like to get a likeness, but it is really only simply part of the whole kind of accuracy thing in general, but, then, if it isn't a painting, then it doesn't really count.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: You know, I think even a good painting that starts out as a portrait is really a painting. You know, you can think of some of the best portraits that maybe Whistler and Cézanne, or something like that, they're portraits, but they're really paintings. And if it isn't—it's repetitious—but if it isn't a painting, then it might just as well be something that's done downtown here.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Would there be any—how would you decide on what types of people to entertain as a subject for your painting? Would there be some types that are not appropriate or do not lend themselves equally well?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, it's not a question of type. It's a really instinctually kind of thing, in that I choose a person or it occurs to me to ask someone to pose for me, the way anyone would choose a subject for a painting, whether it is abstract and deals only with colors or shapes, or anything else. It is really completely instinctive, and there's something about the person that appeals and that has something to do with my work.

I think if I had to generalize, I would say that I like people who have a certain presence, which is pretty general. But it has to be a kind of force, whether it is in the body or in the face. There is something—I don't know—it has a definite quality. It's a visual quality. Obviously, there has to be something behind it, but it comes out at a visual point. It is the same way I would choose a section of landscape. Some things I can say objectively are pretty that would never appeal to me, and it doesn't have any kind of meaning. It doesn't strike me. But it is certainly nothing I can premeditate about.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Since your paintings are somewhat erratic at times in their conversation—that is, the figure may often be presented frontally and in a very erect stance and looking out at the viewer—this would seem, I imagine, to rather require this presence, rather than, let's say, a person who might be, well, bent or crooked or in any way have less authority because of physical makeup. Would you say that was true?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, not necessarily. I mean, it doesn't have to be in the physical kind of thing. I mean, it is like the total visual impact. It isn't always a frontal pose, although the head is usually that way and straight up.

But I think it is like some characteristic. I mean, you know, it could be somebody who is swayback but whose general feeling is quite strong in any case.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: And it doesn't have to be a really Egyptian look. That certainly appeals to me. But that usually grows out of the person. You know, I don't premeditate that, either. Like I prefer, it just seems, I think I have an instinct when someone is starting to pose to choose the stance or the position that's characteristic. And that in itself would give it an extra force since it's authentic. You know, it isn't a made-up pose.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: It is much easier, of course, if I know someone because then, even if I haven't thought about it, I know immediately what is characteristic and it seems right. But it is really tricky sometimes, because it seems to have naturalistic elements, to assume that the impetus is different than an artist who works with abstract elements, but it really isn't because the same sort of instinctual decisions take place and you don't plan the painting. At least I don't plan the painting and, then, find a person that fits into it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: You know, I have that sometimes that way to a small extent, but in a very generalized way, you know, a certain kind of person, a certain kind of position. But, then, the end

result is pretty much the same because the person is chosen for the same qualities.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You have, of course, I recall, done certain self-portraits. Did your figurative work begin largely with self-portraits?

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes. Well, I went through the usual Abstraction Expressionist hang-up, which wasn't really a hang-up to begin with because it had a freedom which I needed very much in my work. Because the way I worked in about, oh, I don't know, I guess '49 or '50 up until about '53 was very tight. There was a kind of abstracted painting. It always had the start in something recognizable, you know, but it became more and more abstract. But it became very stylized. When I became aware of the Abstract Expression is when I felt that it had something to offer.

And I looked at the usual things that I worked that way, and it was very free. I enjoyed it very much. But, after a certain period of time, I realized I wasn't going to be de Kooning, that I would have to find a way that was more comfortable for me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: And I used figures. I guess for about two years I used figures, but in a very emotional way, or at least with the same kind of beginnings, you know, that we keep in line with Abstract Expressions, you know, like a very strong visual impulse and, then, do it without using a model. Over a period of time, it soon became more restrained and more restrained. There was a point at which I sort of cleared away all of those other elements which no longer seemed right. And that became, sort of went back to what I had done before, but in a much simplified version. When I finally cleared the air in a way, I started to work self-portraits.

I mean, it is not that easy to find a time because I have done it from time to time, ever since I started painting, and I've done it in various ways. But I would say that the real break for me came about '58. And then, I did a series of—I don't know—four or five self-portraits since that was the most private and best way to establish what I wanted. And it was quite a while before I asked other people to pose for me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Okay. Good.

[Audio break.]

Marcia, in 1958, when you began to recover, you know, it was come out on your own and do some of your self-portraits, were you aware then that there were other artists who were perhaps sharing this change of direction with you? Or did you have friends who were feeling somewhat in the same inclination that you did at that time?

MARCIA MARCUS: No. With all due respect to your profession and all, and the magazine world, it's really the magazines that discovered the change. The change was always there.

And I, especially in the beginning, was compared with Alex Katz when he was doing it, pretty much the same thing, since about '54. I knew his work, and it wasn't that kind of thing.

And the other painters who working with the figures and doing it for years, it was really a gradual change because you could say that I started using the figure, I mean as a painter, you know, when I started considering myself a painter, maybe from about '55 really, but there were always elements, or at least the beginning was always something definite.

You know, there's no real way of saying, well, this is where it started or, you know—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: And it's really always, I think, more when someone discovers it that's taken for when it's happening, and it's been happening gradually all along. In principle, it's always the same. I think where I may have changed the awkward style, the things that really made the work have its own mark there, say, in '51, because that was, I think, probably the first definite kind of way of working that I had found.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What were you doing in '51? What did that look like?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, it's hard to describe. It was kind of old-fashioned, maybe cubistic kind of abstraction, but it wasn't really. I think the greatest similarities between that and what I do now were not so much, well, like the spatial things, because that was different. I think I didn't tend to be as flat. Or I haven't looked at those paintings for a while, but just the surface, which is always sort of highly polished and very flat in each section. So, even though other people don't believe it when they see it, I really feel that there's a very strong connection between that and what I do now. It's just that at that point I was just beginning to paint seriously and I didn't really know what I was doing. I was working, say, basically, in a way that I thought was the way to work, which was natural to me. But the surface was always that.

And whatever I did I think, well, through all the various changes really depended on the same kind of minute adjustments. It's almost like a polishing process. You know, even with things that were influenced by Abstract Expressionism, very often the painting is held together by maybe one or two minute strokes without which emphasis there certainly wouldn't have been any impact of the painting at all. I think it's just too easy to say that there was a change. There really wasn't a change. It's just the other painters began or always had their own individual things and they were naturally influenced by what was going on around them, but it takes a while until you feel secure enough—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: —to do your own work.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Marcia, in 1951, what was going on around you? Had you gone to art school? What cubist painting had you seen, and so on? Where were you? At what city, and so on? We have been doing this backwards in time.

[They laugh.]

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, I was born in New York.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, shall we go back to the beginning and come forward a little bit?

MARCIA MARCUS: Okay. Okay. Well, I was born in New York City. There was no problem of where I was because I've stayed here with very small interruptions all the time. And I had gone to school, but I think it was practically useless up to that point.

I think probably the person who influenced me most at that point was a painter named Anthony Toney because I knew him very well. And even though I didn't study with him, I liked his work and I was around it a lot because I was very friendly with him.

And I think, well, I've sort of used "cubistic style" rather freely, it wasn't really that. It was just let's try to express it spatially as opposed to, then, something else.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: I mean, it had to do with sort of penetrations into further—

DOROTHY SECKLER: I remember his work quite well. It was, of course, figurative and painting, in fact, in a sort of faceted manner, wasn't it?

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes. Well, yes. Like my version of it was a very flat facet.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: I mean, each part of it is really very similar to what I do now. The total thing did have, well, maybe a more three-dimensional look.

But I, well, we hate to say it, something like that, but I think that always—well, I never thought of my particular style, which I think is probably why I did have a style at all. I think that is something you really don't think about because it comes naturally. It either is or it isn't. And I never thought about it. So, I guess when I looked at what he was doing and did it in a kind of, well, I want to say a physical way of breaking up things almost arbitrarily, but, then, in the process, in doing it, made my own mark on it and tended to make it in a very sort of flattened way. I mean, each part of it is not like, say, a multi-brush stroke or anything like that. It's always been flat.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: You know, it's hard to talk about things like that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, I think that you're making it very clear, as a matter of fact. If you know Anthony Toney's work and that you thought and did it, you know, it makes sense to me.

I would like just to get the chronology, though, straight. You were born in New York and went to school in New York.

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes. Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: At what point did you know you were going to a painter? I suspect—

MARCIA MARCUS: No point.

[They laugh.]

I give it up regularly every six months. Well, I really didn't even think about it until I went to college, which I didn't want to go to. I wanted to be a fashion designer. I've always drawn and I've always mentored it and that sort of thing. But my mother forced me to go to college to be a teacher, but I took only the absolute minimum requirements for that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What college did you go to?

MARCIA MARCUS: NYU. You couldn't be more New York than that. And I took the liberal arts course, so that I had drawing and painting. And it was a very free kind of class, which was good for me at that point simply because it allowed me to work. I mean, I never had really done a complete

drawing or painting until I went to college.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What years would that have been?

MARCIA MARCUS: I started in '47. No, I ended in '47, '43 to '47. And I'm as old as that because I finished when I was 19.

[They laugh.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: I'm not trying to figure it out for that reason. I'm just trying to get a sense of the time—and what would have been happening then.

MARCIA MARCUS: I mean, I'm old enough. I don't want to add anything to it.

[They laugh.]

But I did finish early, not because I was a good student. It was an accident.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What part of NYU? Was this the College of Liberal Arts?

MARCIA MARCUS: Washington Square College.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes, because I didn't take, you know, the education school thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: But I really did the first things then and I certainly didn't consider myself an artist, but I definitely knew where my interests lay then.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When did you make up your mind to give up the idea of being a designer or a fashion illustrator and become a—more serious artist?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, I guess when I discovered that painting really existed. It certainly wasn't because I had never been to museums or things. I had just never used drawing in any other way except that way.

And then, when I went to college and actually did a whole drawing, there was never any question anymore. I mean, the other just didn't exist.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: I mean, it seems kind of retarded not to have ever been curious enough to do it. It just never even occurred to me. But I just started working I guess in what you would call a very usual, naturalistic way.

[Audio break.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: So, we have you, let's see, in New York finishing NYU and liberal arts and having gotten very much involved in drawing and painting by 1947. At this time, did you have any idea how you were going to make a living or any professional problems occur to you? And had you any idea how you would go about any of this? Did you have friends who were painters by this time

or artists?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, I had friends who were in the same courses that I was in.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: But I didn't really know any painters until after I was out of school outside of teachers, of course. I mean, considering I was born in New York, I seemed to have taken a very long time to find out what anybody in the middle of Iowa would know immediately, but I think it all just works that way because you get sort of hung up in your neighborhood. If you are away from it, you can buy an art magazine and pinpoint the action immediately before you ever get to New York. At least that's my excuse, because I really didn't have any idea what was going on.

DOROTHY SECKLER: By the way, had there been any background for, you know, art in general in your family? What was their background? What were their attitudes toward your work as an artist?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, my mother had done drawings. Certainly, I wouldn't call it in a serious way. But she had taken various cultural courses. You know, she was born—I mean, she wasn't born, but she lived on the Lower East Side and she went to the Educational Alliance and places like that. And she did a lot of drawings.

And my father, he had been in display work. Well, you couldn't call that really having an art background. I mean, there was this thing of using hands. I mean, he made things and he did a lot of creative things that weren't art, but that at least sort of set the feeling for it being around.

And I was never that I can remember discouraged from drawing in that particular way. But I was never as exposed to it as, for instance, my children have been, without instruction, I might add, because I feel very strongly about it. I think they should just be taken to a museum or they are taken to a zoo, and that blooms to whatever they like or not.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Did you have a large family, other brothers and sisters?

MARCIA MARCUS: No, just a sister.

But, well, they didn't mind my drawing, but when I decided painter, I'm sure my mother regretted ever sending me to college because this wasn't what they had in mind.

[They laugh.]

But it was very hard to take. Well I didn't know what I was doing for a very, very long time. As I said, I really do go through periodic things and giving the whole thing up, and it's just too much trouble and forget it, you know, which frees me immediately to start an enormous canvas the next day. [Laughs.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, now, back in '47 to '51, here you were out of school and starting on your own. Did you get yourself a studio? How did you begin in art?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, how accurate is this archive?

[They laugh.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well—

MARCIA MARCUS: I mean, is this supposed to be really the truth and it will not be published until after my death?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, if you want to put it—you would have to put a—

MARCIA MARCUS: A rider?

DOROTHY SECKLER: —seal on it, if you want to do that.

In the section that we're now recording we want to be sure that this will be handled in a tight script at the discretion of Marcia Marcus and she'll have a chance to see in what way this section might be separated from the rest and perhaps sealed or special permission required for its release to anyone.

All right, Marcia, would you like to go ahead now with the answer to the question which I had asked before? How you then went about organizing your life as an artist?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, I didn't.

[They laugh.]

That's the first thing. Because I can't remember—I have a very selective memory, but I don't think that I really felt like an artist, nor did I think I was going to be an artist at that point. I painted, but it was sort of a real separation.

In any case, just after I graduated—and I never even made my graduation ceremony—I was married for about two years and had absolute leisure and did about three paintings, I think, in those two years. But it was during that time that I met Tony and I became very friendly with his wife and himself and spent a great deal of time there.

I also was going to Cooper Union, which I quit at the end of the year because I felt it was a very bad school. I still do. That should take care of any chance of my ever being employed there, except that this is selective—

[They laugh.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: What was your objection to The Cooper Union?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, the first thing, of course, was my own fault. I applied for and got into the evening school, for reasons that I'll never understand because I was completely free during the day. There was no reason why I couldn't have gone during the day.

But I went at night, and I think the course is very, very bad. Whatever it is geared for, it certainly not good for anyone really interested in painting or sculpture. The first year was interesting and covered sort of everything. I thought the drawing was very bad. I thought two-dimensional design—and I still do—was an absolutely worthless course and not qualified to do anything for anybody except whoever is teaching it. And the particular teacher was dreadful. And I don't know that I should even mention his name conditionally because he's really the reason I left, because I thought the whole thing was absolutely awful. I had a fairly-good sculpture teacher and a good architecture teacher, and it was interesting, but it had absolutely no meaning to me. And I finally quit at the end of the year.

A couple of years later, I begged my way back in. By this time, my marriage had ended, which was the only sensible thing. I think, for one thing, of course, I was very young. I was only 19. In retrospect, it is very easy to say it was the only way I could think of to leave home because I was really completely unequipped to do it any other way. But I somehow convinced myself I was in love, but it was useless. I didn't know what I was doing, so it was very unlikely that I would be able to choose someone to do something with, you know, that was right.

But, in any case, it sort of started not quite an odyssey of Ulysses's life, but almost, like about 10 years of working as a secretary, which was deadly dull and dismal, and painting when I could, which probably delayed any kind of progress I made for a very long time. But there's no point in wondering about that since that's the way it happened.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: You know, I did work from time to time, and I suppose somewhere in there I had decided I was a painter. I don't know exactly at what point. I really always think of '51 as the first time that I even came close, and I think it was partly because at that time I had worked enough to collect unemployment insurance, which is the great boon to the artist because it supports you and allows you to do your work. Of course, it gets kind of tricky convincing them why you shouldn't be employed, and I became—a little cagey.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's all right.

MARCIA MARCUS: But I think it was a very slow process because I would have to work every now and then simply to earn enough money, you know, to support my habit, which was now painting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you were not now married to anyone else?

MARCIA MARCUS: No, no.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You were single, divorced?

MARCIA MARCUS: But I guess about '51, or maybe earlier—I really don't remember when I went to Cooper. It's possible that I started somewhere about '47 or, you know, right after I was married and, then, quit and, then, left it. But it was about a two-year gap and, then, I sort of begged my way back in by making up some kind of excuse.

And I was there then for about two years. And then, I was kicked out because I really still didn't like it. It is really a very bad school, and I found myself cutting the three-dimensional class, which I got to in the second year [laughs], to go across the hall and draw. And it always seemed absolutely absurd to me that people who wanted to be painters never got drawing past the first year, and that was bad enough. I mean, that particular kind of drawing class was really terrible. But, anyway, I would cut the three-dimensional art class and go across the hall.

And while I got marvelous marks the first semester—I think it was three A's and a C in lettering, which is given to you as a fine art simply because they want you to earn a living. They don't ask you what you like to earn a living as; they just tell you that you have to learn lettering.

But, in the second half, I really completely lost interest because the thing was hopeless. And I was also again on unemployment insurance which—

[Interruption by child.]

[END TAPE 1.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: So, how did this decade of unemployment and working in pieces and bits, how did that end for you? How did you get out of that and into something else?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, I didn't really get—well, I guess I did get out of it. After I left Cooper, I think within about a year or so, I met someone who told me what a lousy painter I was and told me I should go study with Edwin Dickinson, which I did. And I only studied—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Where was that? At the League you mean?

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: I only studied with him for about a month, but it was very intensive. I went there every day, every afternoon, for a month. And I just drew, because I was painting at home during this time because I was on unemployment insurance again.

And I've antagonized a few people when I tried for awards, and so forth, by saying that he's the only teacher I felt I ever had because I really did. I think it was at that point that I suddenly took the whole thing seriously.

I don't think I was without talent before that, but I don't think I ever really was treated as an equal by a teacher. Part of the reason I quit—well, the last time wasn't quitting, but I really did everything to make it possible for them to throw me out, which they did, for poor attitude, attendance, and grades—simply because I felt that there was no reason to go. The painting teacher was absolutely abominable and used the whole situation as a way of kind of showing how clever he was. You know, he just thought that anyone studying at night must necessarily be completely unimportant and not really interested and, therefore, you do anything you'd like.

But when I studied with Dickinson, I suddenly found someone who never went down to anyone's level, but always came up, brought you up to his, and always treated every person with complete seriousness. I mean, only about two or three people really wanted to be painters in that class, and the rest were middle-aged ladies and men who wanted just to paint in the afternoon, as kind of a higher form of killing time. But I'll never forget one incident, which I told him that a couple of years ago, and he was so amazed I remembered it, which is characteristic. I mean, naturally, I remembered it. [Laughs.] But he couldn't believe that it was that important to me. I mean, he really doesn't understand in a way what a terrific teacher he is.

But a woman came into the class who obviously couldn't get into Frank Riley's class or something like that. And so, she thought this was a great social hour and she started to talk, and nobody answered her because everyone was very busy working. But she never subsided. I mean, she kept talking constantly throughout that day.

And the next day was the day he came in for criticism. And when he got around to her, he treated her exactly as he did everybody else with no concessions to her silly remarks or the giggling, or anything like that. By the next day, she was working as hard as anybody else, you know, with no changes. I mean, with no apologies, no explanation, no anything, he had really brought her up to his level. He treated her seriously; she became serious. I think that probably did more to increase, well, my confidence, or also my awareness, of what it really meant to be a painter than anything else that's ever happened to me.

So, that month really had more significance. It had not so much to do with what I did in class as it had to do with contact with someone who really cared about what you were doing and had a marvelous sort of old-fashioned attitude towards excellence, I guess. And he was always very funny because he always—not intentionally, although he could be—but he would always start off in a very black way and saying, "This is wonderful. If I ever saw an exhibition, I'd think how great that was. But, however, since you're in class, there is a model and here is your drawing, and the angle is not quite the same in the leg," or something like that.

And it really matted because it mattered to him.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: And suddenly, you found that it really mattered to you.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did you feel that you could adopt to your own purposes his way of—I'm a little bit acquainted with it—you know, setting down the broad massing of areas and the extreme awareness of light, and so on?

MARCIA MARCUS: No, because that never interested me. I mean, the thing was that his way of working was not what influenced me. It was his attitude. Also, at the same time, I had become acquainted with a lot of artists. You know, not the great days of the Cedar Bar, but it was right after them. And it was close enough.

DOROTHY SECKLER: As to what, '50?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, '54, and talked to de Kooning and talked to Kline, even Pollock, whenever he would come in, which usually was more flirtation than anything else.

[Laughs.]

But, still, like they were around. And de Kooning especially was very verbal occasionally. And your feeling about it becomes different. I mean, it's still like a personal thing with me. I know that it was very late for me to become serious about it, you know, or even to be aware that it was possible, or even to think about it at all. You know, it wasn't so much a pinpoint; it was just never having had it penetrate before.

But I think it was knowing artists that really made the difference because, then, you feel different yourself. I mean, I had known people who painted, but it was a different kind of world. It wasn't really a full-blooded kind of thing, you know. I never really had enough knowledge of what was involved to ever know exactly what I was doing. I don't mean as an artist, but just the whole idea that it was always like a stumbling into it, you know, like I fell into it and I sort of found things. And sometimes I found the right things, but it was never with any kind of consciousness and with never any real understanding of what was involved.

But it was very important then. I didn't do anything that was so marvelous that I could look at with a certain amount of pleasure at that point.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Can you remember what attitude or positions were being taken by men like de Kooning or Kline that you could take hold of in any way for yourself?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, the only person I really spoke—well, I didn't speak, but the only person who ever said anything, who ever talked about it was de Kooning. I think he spoke of it naturally in

relationship to his own work, but it may have something to do, although not consciously, or I didn't set out to do it, with what I do now.

He talked about the women, for example. He said it had to do with the frontal pose you mentioned before, and that symmetrical kind of thing, that very Egyptian kind of thing with the shoulders, you know.

And the idea that I found very exciting in the whole idea of this pose, even divorced from the fact that it was Egyptian, you know, it was just something about it struck me, which I never used until years later, but I worked very slowly in many ways.

But I think that was the only thing that really counted as a specific that I can remember. Most of it was more just the atmosphere, just the whole thing that you worked, you know, that it had to do with work. And you worked out your own thing. I think I was lucky in my instincts simply because it never occurred to me when I was working in a kind of Abstract Expressionist way to think that this was the way to paint. It was always I need this right now. So that I never lost my own personality, I don't feel. You know, I never thought that this was a way to do it, because that's where the real switch came in and that's what people noticed more, was suddenly all these guys who were 15th-rate Abstract Expressionists switched to 15th-rate figurative painters because they had never really been an Abstract Expressionist, you know. And so, the switch was a very different—I mean, it was a different thing. It was the difference between imitation and influence.

You know, there was every reason in the world to be influenced by it, but there's something wrong if you feel this is the way you work; there is no way to work except your own way, you know. It is obvious I never thought about it until afterwards, except that, I mean, the biggest thing, I guess, happened maybe like '56 to '57 where I one day looked at a painting and said, "But I'm not de Kooning [laughs] and I'll never be that good, and this is not the way for me to work."

You know, it accomplished its purpose simply in making me feel that anything was possible. I could do anything I liked, but as long as it was authentic, it was right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Had you up until that time been working with a field of brush strokes and working very rapidly and putting the paint down in kind of a flux or flow of strokes?

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes, and even after this decision, because even if the obvious elements changed a great deal, the way of working didn't. Yes, there were many essentially 20-minute paintings, but they were—like the beginning was 20 minutes, and then, I could work on them, you know, various amounts of time. But it was an impulse kind of thing. It was an emotional thing, which doesn't mean—I mean, I'm not saying that this is the way Abstract Expressionists work. You know, I never even thought about it that way, except that it was the physical thing was like that and the impulse was like that. And then, you considered it.

In a way, it still is, except that, well, I mean, I always work from something now.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You would not make up a figure?

MARCIA MARCUS: I can't do it that way. [Laughs.] It's hard enough to do it just the way it is without making it up. I couldn't.

And I did, from the time of, well, arbitrarily almost—I mean, the whole change was very gradual in a way, but I remember—I guess the closest, like you could say the seed was something I did, I guess, in '56. And I remembered that de Kooning saw it and he said, "Oh, that's terrific." And I was thinking

of the tapestry at the time. There were two figures, and I had done it very flat and probably very close to what I do now.

But, after he said it, you know, the usual thing; it seems like most Abstract Expressionists always said, "Oh, don't touch it now," like don't go any further, because they had this great big hang-up about finishing something.

And I sort of got nervous, I guess, with that particular one, and then, I sort of Abstract Expressionized it and made it into a pretty lousy painting. It may not have been very good to begin with, but I think it probably would have been better and it would have been more interesting to look at now. But I remember it very vividly in any case because it definitely was what was right for me, but I got nervous and I thought, well, you know, it was really too soon.

But, then, after that I really—I mean, I was making up figures. You know, I had never really worked specifically from something until once in '57 I did a self-portrait and it was still very sort of rapid and loose. But, outside of that, it wasn't until '58 to '59 that I actually, you know, consciously set out to work from something all the time. And I've done it ever since.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-hum.

MARCIA MARCUS: You know, I've done a few pastels during the time that we lived on the dunes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In this period after you began to find your own manner, your own way of thinking about it and your own taste, would your treatment of the figure at that time have had the same emphasis on pattern and elements of pattern, and so on, that it does now? When did that develop?

MARCIA MARCUS: I don't think so. No, because when I did figures, most of the time they were nudes, and there would be no question of patterns in that case.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But was there a similar suppression of modeling, you know, that you were not—

MARCIA MARCUS: Exactly which time are you talking about now?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, I mean, the time when, let's say, de Kooning said, you know, "That's great," and you were aware that you could work in a way that was your own and not have to Abstract Expression—

MARCIA MARCUS: But I wasn't aware then.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You weren't? It took some time later?

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes, because, obviously, I didn't leave it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So, there was a period of—what, a year or so when you kept on still doing the Abstract Expressionist thing?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, not really, because it was some peculiar cross between the two. I mean, it became more specific as figures and more specific as flat elements in the whole thing, but the actual painting technique was in between. I mean, it was still free, but it was different. I mean, there weren't figures melting into the background kind of thing, you know, or coming backwards and

forwards.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: It was specifically, I mean, background is a bad word because it implies it is not flat maybe. I mean, it was very flat, but there was definitely the separation between the figure and the back part of it, you know, the painting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: It wasn't anything. I don't know, I suppose pattern kind of business could be a throwback to my interest in costume design and clothes and, also, later it was because it was like the real beginnings of the thrift shop syndrome, you know.

[They laugh.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Tell me about that.

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, when I sort of really started doing things, I did things I'd pick up in thrift shops and stuff like that. So, it was an involvement both in the figure and in the costume, which has always interested me and still does. I mean, I am, after all, a woman and I can't deny it.

And I like clothes, and I especially like clothes of the thirties or the late twenties, I suppose, like some of the things I bought, because they were very natural. I mean, they had real lines. And so, that was as visual—

DOROTHY SECKLER: You know, that struck me—

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, it was as visually important as the person I would choose to do—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: —because it had its own visual thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Marcia, you know, when I first saw your things, this immediately struck me, of course, this quality of like the fashion illustrations that one would have run across in copies of *L'Illustration* in 1928, you know. And I wondered, had you ever come across that sort of thing—

MARCIA MARCUS: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —as a youngster?

MARCIA MARCUS: I've been accused of looking at all kinds of things which I've never looked at in my life.

[They laugh.]

Someone did a rather famed review and said that I obviously had looked at the 19th-century painters, the late-19th century or something. I had no idea who he meant because I never looked at them, and if I had, I would have liked them.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You haven't been interested in Aubrey Beardsley or anything like that?

MARCIA MARCUS: No, I didn't like it. I mean, I don't dislike it, but I don't consider it as a source of inspiration at all. You know, they're amusing and it's something else. I mean, I would choose an article of clothing the same way I would choose a person, you know, simply because it appeals, and not for any campy reason. I mean, if it ends up as camp, it's really by indirection. You know, like that's not my intention. I wasn't trying to be nostalgic. I wasn't trying to do anything except do what I like. I mean, if it ends up being nostalgic, I don't terribly object to it because I think that is a very definite element in life and I don't put it down, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You had, of course, this Egyptian thing in mind, and then, the clothes of the twenties. Would there have been any kind of a coalescence of those two things? I mean the straight figure and the Egyptian frontality thing, perhaps complementing each other? Would that have been it?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, I don't know.

[They laugh.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: You never had a—

MARCIA MARCUS: No, I never thought about it, and I don't really think it matters in a way. Because if it is successful, it doesn't really matter where it came from. You know, there's no reason why you have to know where it came from.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: But I like the idea that, for many reasons, because I think it's very powerful and I like strength. But I think, I mean, it was never a conscious thing. You know, I never set out to make an Egyptianized painting of somebody.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: Sometimes it's accidentally happened, but it's usually like the day before I finish the painting or something I suddenly realize, oh, that's very Indian or that's very Egyptian or even Greek, or something like that.

I mean, I like it very much. I love, you know, if that government ever changes, I'll go back to Greece.

[They laugh.]

Because I think it's fantastic there. I think it's marvelous.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Marcia, you said the pattern may have come along with the thrift shop syndrome, and so on. And you thought the suppression of plains—how did that develop? The increasing flattening of even of the plains of a face, and so on, you very much suppressed. They're there and they're not there in a certain way; they're ambiguously there.

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, I can't really tell you, you know. Like I can make up something, but I can't really say. I think at the point where I really completely renounced all the leftovers of what I had been doing before, which took place up here actually in '58, and not working from a model, but just making everything very flat, I don't think from looking at any particular painting. I think probably my painting and my life was quite messy at that particular point, and maybe that was part of it. You know, I don't deny like the psychological impact of life on art. I just think we shouldn't get involved in

it because it is a very dangerous thing to analyze it in that way, the way Freud did. I think it's absurd. But I think that could have had something to do with it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: There was a time when you looked for something very clear-cut and very—

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes, I also think I knew I couldn't keep doing what I was doing. And the simplest way was to completely remove all—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Everything associated with—

MARCIA MARCUS: —everything that was sort of three-dimensional or everything that had other meanings, or something like that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm. If you had to eliminate the atmospheric sunlight and shadow and lights.-

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, there never was that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I know.

MARCIA MARCUS: There really wasn't that. But there were palette knife shapes and things like that, and it really became reduced to a painting, you know, public figures on a beach. I, myself, can't even remember the chronology because I never really thought about it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: I just knew I had to do something very drastic, and that seemed the way to do it. And I spent the whole summer being extremely drastic.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would Milton Avery have been an influence at all—

MARCIA MARCUS: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —or anyone that you admired?

MARCIA MARCUS: Contrary to popular thinking, this also is not an influence.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: I knew him by that time. I never spoke to him about art.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Who did?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, I don't know because I never knew him that well. I only met him just then. You know, like what he was drawing and saw he was drawing. But I never asked him any questions about that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But, I mean, you didn't see a lot of his work or—

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, I knew it. But the thing is that you know things for a very long time. You know, and I got very annoyed when I started doing what I did when people compared me with Alex Katz because I felt it was like two people meeting on a street corner. You know, they have been coming from totally different directions, and they are going to go someplace completely different,

and just for a minute they happen to be in the same place.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: But I wasn't really in the same place because I had never— well, this is part of the sealed part.

[They laugh.]

I'll tell you that, when I was here in '59, which is when we lived out on the dunes, because by that time I had gotten to Terry, he asked me to pose for him, and I did. And up until that point out on the dunes, I had been doing pastels, which were not directly from pastels, but we were living there. I mean not directly from the landscape, but we had been living there, so I was very familiar with it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: And then, I posed for him and I didn't like what he did. [Laughs.] I mean, he made me too pretty and—

DOROTHY SECKLER: You're speaking of Alex now?

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: And he made me too pretty and not wild enough. I had a huge crop of hair at that point. And so, I thought, hmmm. [Laughs.] And so, that's when I did the first painting. I borrowed a mirror, which, incidentally, happened to be his, and bought a canvas and did the first painting I did out on the dunes.

You know, I had done a couple of self-portraits during the winter, among the ones I mentioned before. So that I was already in that direction. You know, I was working from myself and working with a figure directly, but I hadn't done it up here.

And then, I took this canvas out and did myself in the same costume in which he had done me, but I think completely differently, because he works flat like to begin with. I think completely objectively, because, I mean, I'm not modest or anything, but I don't like to discuss my art. But I think part of the luminous quality in my work is because I start with a very definite kind of thing. You know, it's loose, but it is very—I wouldn't say "modeled," but it sort of has everything. And then, I work up to the flatness. And I think it makes all the difference in the world between whether it's flat flat or it's flat on the surface and has a life of its own underneath, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I know exactly what you mean.

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes. And so, it's really a process—I mean, it still is—of bringing it up to the surface, of bringing it to that almost no painting quality, which is what I like.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: You know, I don't feel you should be aware of a particular thing, you know, like all those compositional bits and pieces and stuff. So, it starts sort of back there and, then, I bring it forward, you know, working from the inside or from the outside, whatever it is.

But I think that really is what it is all about for me. I did—I don't know—I think two paintings of myself and a landscape while we were still up here because we stayed quite a while. It was really that, you know, [laughs] kind of an indirect way, which became—the thing is, it was a natural progression of things to that point, you know. It was not an arbitrary decision. The only arbitrary decision really was to change completely. But, obviously, the way in which I decided to change was something that was natural to me. Otherwise, it wouldn't have taken place.

[Interruption by child.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: So, we now had you in Provincetown in '58. Was this about—

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, that was '59.

DOROTHY SECKLER: '59, when you did the self-portrait?

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And by this time, you had really pretty well established what we now think of as a Marcia Marcus way of working with the compressed plains?

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes, under hopeless conditions.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Had you at that point also arrived at a way of treating your flesh tones, sometimes in grays or in—

MARCIA MARCUS: I never really thought about it. I mean, it was just, you know, I had mixed paint like I do everything else, like completely unconscious. I never really thought about it. I think I have thought about it occasionally more recently because I definitely wanted it to be neutral. I didn't want it to be specifically skin because it was obvious it was.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: I mean, working the way I did, you know, obviously, this is skin in its place.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: But I didn't want it to be that definite, and the painting really took over and it was that kind of thing. Well, the kind of neutrality of using the gray plains—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: —it got me into a situation where I thought I might call the NAACP. *Life* magazine commissioned me to do a painting that had to do with an issue they put out on the Wild West and how it inspired various things. And I was in Paris at the time and I had just bought these great high boots and they were laced boots. And I also had bought a chemise. So, I did myself kind of Marlene Dietrich on the bar, you know, that boys in the backroom kind of thing.

And I did the painting and I sent it back to New York, and Charles Alan wrote and said how pleased —Dorothy Seiberling was handling the same [inaudible] with the painting and everything, and everything is fine. About three months passed and I got this call, and she said, "I don't know how to tell you this exactly, but, you know, we picked up the painting and the lady who is doing this issue is from the South. And she looked at the painting and she felt that it was a Negro."

And, of course, I had never thought about it. And this is Dorothy Seiberling. And I certainly had never thought about it. That was me, you know. So, she had it hung in her office and asked several people what they thought the figure was. You know, like what it suggested to them. And a couple of people had said, "A Negro prostitute in a New Orleans brothel," or something like that.

[Seckler laughs.]

And they never used it. [Laughs.] I did get paid for it, but they never used it, only on that basis, which, of course, is absolutely absurd. It became more absurd when they published a book on Negro cowboys.

[They laugh.]

I mean, I certainly never intended it. But, you know, so much for neutral skin tones.

I really think people are in a way unspecific. I mean, even if I use specific people, I sort of like the idea of it not being sort of factually specific and not being naturalistically specific, you know, which may account for some of the grays. I mean, I don't think about it. It is just something that seems right at the time.

[END TAPE 2.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: I think that was particularly interesting about the neutral skin tones.

[They laugh.]

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes, it was even more covered than you had intended.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, I think it's beautiful because that's exactly the kind of thing that I like to get very specifically.

Along with that, of course, you began at some point to use metallic paints along with your other colors. How did that come about?

MARCIA MARCUS: Would you believe that Bob Beauchamp gave me an envelope of metallic pieces that he had gotten since he worked in a frame shop. And I carried them around with me for God knows how many years because I never throw anything out because it might come in handy someday.

And the first time I used it, I think, was when I did a self-portrait of me as Medusa, which happened to be my costume for a wild Halloween party I had. And I used it in the belt because the belt was actually gold, and I had this metallic thing and I had never used it yet, I think. And I used it then.

And then, the next time I used it, I think, was in Florence. No, I don't think I used it after that, but I could have. I mean, really, my chronology knowledge is very poor.

But Red Grooms posed for me. And then, before the painting was finished, I had a baby. [Laughs.] He went on a tour with a car or something to Venice. And I had a painting that was almost finished, but not quite, and I had done everything except his hair. And I wasn't sure he was coming back before we had to leave Florence. So, I used the gold in a stylized way in his hair because he wasn't coming back and I hadn't gotten enough to work on regularly. And I sort of liked it. I mean, I liked it not for any decorative reason primarily, but it really makes a color change. And so, I started using it

more and more.

It started out in kind of a factual way, I suppose, because there were costumes I used in the paintings that had gold in them.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: And so, I used, you know, actually gold rather than painting it. And then, I became more and more interested in what it was like as a color. And so, now when I use it, it is more like a color rather than as a representation of gold. And some people are always cornering me at parties or openings when they're very drunk and they say, "Why do you do that?"

[They laugh.]

It's very bad. But I like it. You know, the way I do the same thing with the collage things, well, I just like it. You know, I've got to try it. And I think just because someone doesn't like it is hardly a reason not to do it because it seems less serious.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But surely many people do like it.

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes, well, I like it. [Laughs.] That's what is most important to me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, yes. Well, you in some of the paintings that I have seen recently, of course, you did use it in connection with an actual jeweled necklace, and so on. And you use it in fabrics that might have really gold. But would you use it now in an area which had nothing to do with any reference of it possibly being a metallic surface? You would use it again for—

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, I have.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —red hair, and so on? You continuously do.

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, no. I mean, I only did that once because I subsequently did a painting of Red and Mimi that had the red hair, and the gold was in his sweater and pants.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, I like that.

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes. And that really was a direct result of having seen the small Simone Martini in the National Gallery in Washington, you know, because I had started work on the painting when I saw this.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Sure.

MARCIA MARCUS: And I liked it very much.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, it figures very well with—

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, I use it where I feel I need it. I must say that sometimes it's like a solution to a hopeless situation which I find myself in, which I probably shouldn't admit publicly. Because it does something. It can save something because the total effect is very different than paint, you know, and it's—

DOROTHY SECKLER: But if you're excluding natural light and natural flesh tone, and the point of light and atmosphere on it, then it's rather natural to do what the Byzantines do, which is use metal

as a way of sort of creating a world that is not finite or not fixed by the specific atmospheres, places, it gives it the kind of unchanging timelessness to some extent.

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, I never think of it that way naturally.

[They laugh.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, I won't impose it now. Wipe out the complete question. It seems to have that effect, nevertheless.

MARCIA MARCUS: No, but I only think of it as a color or as—well, as color. It usually does something very different than paint does. You know, and a lot of people who should know better always ask me, "Is that gold paint?" And gold paint is actually dismal. I will have nothing to do with gold leaf. It's a completely different kind of thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You wouldn't use the precious stuff at all for any reason. What you use is just as—

MARCIA MARCUS: It's gold leaf.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, you do use really gold leaf?

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You do?

MARCIA MARCUS: I never use gold paint—now wait. I did buy one tube of gold and one tube of silver paint a long time ago, and I used it and it was absolutely awful—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Really?

MARCIA MARCUS: —because it dried almost instantaneously.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So, you actually get real gold and silver leaf?

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes. My paintings are very expensive.

[They laugh.]

Well, even then, that makes a difference because, when I'm trying an area out, if I think it could be gold or silver, I use a metal leaf, just to see what it's like. But the metal leaf has a totally different texture than a gold leaf. It's much finer and it's much deeper, and it's the same—well, I guess the difference between rhinestones and diamonds is something like that. You know, like it's okay to see what something is like, the test.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: You know, because it does get pretty expensive to use the gold leaf, and I wouldn't use it just to test unless I actually had nothing else.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Does that come in the very last stage of the painting after a lot of other problems have been solved?

MARCIA MARCUS: No, because I never know where I am. And I can spend really a small fortune using gold leaf simply because I haven't really decided, and I do it and it doesn't turn out right, and then, I do it again and again and again.

But the thing is that none of these things are used any differently than any other element in it or the way anyone else would work. You know, it is just the usual process of work.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You haven't used it very much, as I have noticed, as background, have you?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, because I don't use it as a way of showing saints or something like that. You know, that's not really the purpose that I've derived.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: You know, it was in the background of the painting of Red and Mimi, but it was also in the foreground as well.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: I mean, it was when they posed. But it was absolutely a color element.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: It had nothing to do with, you know, like the preciousness of anything.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

MARCIA MARCUS: You know, it is a completely different kind of idea about it, I guess. You know, and maybe the Quarantine saw it the same way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: You know, there wasn't a reverence for the gods or the saints—I've been reading Greek; I'm sorry—really saints, but it was just like a whole other kind of thing. It was I think they really liked it because they did tremendous things with it.

[Interruption by child.]

There will be a short intermission while children show their artwork to the interviewer and interviewee.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Children have the same idea about gold, lovely gold.

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, they're always asking me for it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's lovely.

MARCIA MARCUS: You know, when things blow on the floor, my gold leaf falls on the floor, they are always coming over and picking it up and asking me if they can use it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That made a very nice for the collage of butterflies and golden clocks and—

MARCIA MARCUS: Letters.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —and letters.

I've always been rather fascinated by the way you handle eyes and faces because it seems to me that you do use eyes as a rather magical element.

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, that's interesting. [Laughs.] I never really intended it, but I like eyes and I never think of it. And everyone is always telling me how wonderful the eyes are. And it's not anything that I think about because I just do it. I mean, I do think eyes are special, you know, and they're really like the most important feature in a way. And they certainly naturally would be very fascinating to an artist. Again, I never set out to do I must get the eyes right, you know, like forget about the nose.

But I think eyes usually have the expression. I think the thing is that I always ask people to look straight at me. I always like a very frontal kind of look, you know, and I can't even say that it's definitely Egyptian or Greek or anything like that. I just like it. Because I like—even that is neutral. You know, it is not a specific expression.

I think if you're looking away or if you're looking at something, because some people have asked if they can read, it becomes a romantic thing, like it's a person caught in a gesture. I mean, if you're looking straight out, it's really—it could go any way. You know, it could be on verge of a smile; it could on the verge of tears, anything. I don't like a specific kind of expression. And I think the eyes are part of that, part of that unspecific kind of thing. If you are looking straight out, you are really you. You are not like something else.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm. It's you—

MARCIA MARCUS: I just made that up.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —and your most fixed aspect, I would say. It is certainly a more unchanging aspect.

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, but that's what I want.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Essential, unchanging.

MARCIA MARCUS: I suppose—because it could go either way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: You know, it's not a definite thing. I'm not trying to make a comment about somebody. I'm not trying to say this is this kind of person or that kind of person or anything like that, because I don't believe in it. I mean, I don't think of myself as a portrait painter. I'm rather shocked every time I suddenly discover that I've really made a tremendous insight into somebody, which happens accidentally. You know, it's not something I intend; it just sort of happened that I suddenly looked at the painting like two or three years later, and I think, you know, it's a wonder they're ever speaking to me again. [Laughs.] It's something that just happens, but it's certainly not anything I aim for or want even to happen.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Marcia, you've been showing now for a number of years in New York. Would you like to mention the galleries where your work has been shown and your major exhibitions, and so on?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, the first one-man show I had was with the March Gallery. And I had shown since about 1951 in the small. You know, when the Rocco was on Greenwich Avenue and Tanager.

I suppose the first thing that really kind of got me started was at Whitney Annual, the Young American 1960. After that, I went with the Cober Gallery very briefly and, then, with the Alan Gallery. And I was with Graham for about a year, and now, I'm back at Landau-Alan, where I expect I will stay.

They operate as a gallery and you don't have to do anything on your own. You know, they really do the work for you. So, when I'm finished painting, I don't want to have anything to do with anything beyond the actual painting phase. So, I'm there. I don't think I'll have a show probably, well, like a year and a half, because I had a show at the Graham this last November.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Have you been showing abroad at all? Did you win a fellowship of some kind when you went abroad?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, I got a Fulbright to France's Institute in '63, but I didn't show in Europe and I've not shown many places because I really work too slowly. There isn't enough body of work to distribute that much.

DOROTHY SECKLER: About how many paintings do you produce a year or how long does it take to do a painting, whichever way you would like to—

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, I've never counted, but every time I have a show there seems to be about 13 paintings, whatever that means, you know, of various sizes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Is that every year or every two years?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, I guess it could be every year. I've really never kept track of it, but I think I'm painting somewhat faster now, which makes me a little suspicious and feel I should be doing something else. I wouldn't say it was getting too easy, but it's too easy to fall into a pattern. You know, if you do something and it just seems comfortable, you keep doing the same thing.

But it's very difficult to get enough privacy away from showings to kind of just sit down and absolutely do nothing and, then, figure out what do you do next. I mean, I feel on the verge of that kind of thing, and I have for the last couple of years, but I haven't actually done anything about it. But I don't feel I'm copping out, either, because it takes me about two years to decide to do what I've decided to do two years before anyhow.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Sure. But, of course, we have to, I suppose, include in the tape, anyway, since your children have been popping in and out of your tape—[they laugh]— that you are now married to—

MARCIA MARCUS: Karins Pareau [ph]. [Terrence Barrell?]

DOROTHY SECKLER: —Karins Pareau.

MARCIA MARCUS: And I have two fantastic children named Jane and Kate.

DOROTHY SECKLER: They're great, charming, and very talented young ladies.

MARCIA MARCUS: They won't have to wonder about what they're going to be because they'll

know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Do you think they're sure already, Marcia? They seem to be very—

MARCIA MARCUS: Not specifically. They're sure of everything they do. Yes, they'll go off in three different directions and do everything beautifully.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: And I'm not going to influence that. I use them constantly as examples of, you know, attitude towards children and art because I don't believe anyone should ever say anything to a child, certainly not before it's—I don't know—arbitrarily 12 or 13. They're only six and seven now. But I think that they really have to be left to their own devices because their instincts are far better than anything you can provide them with. I think they're great, scream at them, though, I may at some time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Sure.

MARCIA MARCUS: But they're fine. I don't want them to be intimidated because my mother's a painter. At the same time, I've known people, which is really appalling, who felt that they shouldn't encourage their children to paint because they, themselves, were either painters or in this case an art critic. And that is actually ghastly because it's natural for any child from any family to want to paint and to want to do things. And you don't have to tell them anything. You just give them a bunch of Crayons or some paint and some paper, and you don't tell them anything.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: You know, there's nothing to be guilty about, just because you happen to be an artist or in that field, to keep them from doing it. It's ridiculous.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When you picked up and went off to Europe, did you take the children with you?

MARCIA MARCUS: Oh, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You mentioned Greece. When you were there, of course—

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, just before the Fulbright started, which was the fall of '62, we spent the summer of '62 in Greece, or at least part of it. And it was marvelous. I went back the next April. I mean, it was marvelous to be in Greece, which was very peculiar. I expected something quite different. And I found when I went in the spring why what I had heard was so different from what I found when I had gone in June. But the work is so incredible, that it really takes you a long time to realize how marvelous it is. You go to the Acropolis Museum, for example. You stand in that room and you look around and you think, you know, how wonderful everything is. But it doesn't become fantastic until you suddenly realize the reason that you're not reacting so strongly is because it is so absolutely right. I mean, there's nothing to think about. It simply is, and it's absolutely perfect.

Because if you go to almost any museum, you are always unconsciously at least saying, well, I like that part of it, but that doesn't quite do anything. No matter how moved you are, you sort of have some kind of specific reaction, but it is so absolute and so perfect that it really takes you a while to react because it just seems completely natural. It is right that it should look the way it does.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Some people, of course, I suppose have moved away from it for that reason.

MARCIA MARCUS: From Greece or from Greek art?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Classic art.

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, I mean, certainly, it's not something for me to turn away from because I think it's marvelous. I think to achieve that kind of—

DOROTHY SECKLER: It didn't affect your work in any way that you're aware of specifically?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, how it affects it is something different. But I think about it, which is kind of having an effect right there, you know. I don't know. Well, I guess it did in a way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did you go to Olympia?

MARCIA MARCUS: Oh, yes, I love that, not for the art because I didn't like the art there very much.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You didn't like the Charioteer?

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, that's Delphi.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, Delphi, that's right.

MARCIA MARCUS: Ah, ha.

[They laugh.]

We have a tune in the background. You must be vanished.

[They laugh.]

[Interruption by child.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: I mean, that was the same business with eyes that you have, the Charioteer.

MARCIA MARCUS: Oh, the Charioteer? That was in Delphi, because we stayed there a month.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In Delphi, yes, of course.

MARCIA MARCUS: And that was really marvelous.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The Charioteer of Delphi.

MARCIA MARCUS: Because the art in Olympia isn't great, except that the place is so wonderful.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I know. It's just that it haunted me.

MARCIA MARCUS: It gives you the feeling of what it must have really been like, I suppose because of the trees. So, you had the feeling that this is really as close to what it used to be like as any place in Greece.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Thank God it's really Olympian, you know.

MARCIA MARCUS: Yes. Well, it's marvelous. I love it. I'd love to be back.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Serene and—

MARCIA MARCUS: I mean, it doesn't disgust me and it doesn't turn me away from that kind of idealism because I'm so not against idealism, which may be romantic. But I think if you don't have any ideals, then there's not even anything for you to aim for. Like you should at least aim for it. If you never hit it, you know, that's truly what's important.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What particular aspect of Greek art interested you the most? I mean, if you had name, let's say, the three things that you remember above all, you can remember—

MARCIA MARCUS: Well, the first thing would be the statue which it hasn't been decided whether it's Zeus or Poseidon—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

MARCIA MARCUS: —in the National Gallery. So poised. It's so incredibly in balance. You know, nothing could be more beautiful.

Well, the second thing would be a piece of cornice that's lying against the side of the museum. It almost was the reason I went back, because here is just what essentially anyplace else would be a decoration, and it was an egg and dart design. It was so beautifully sculpted. It was just as important as a sculpture anyplace. It was just absolutely fantastic.

And the next thing? Well, I guess the Parthenon itself because it's so absolutely beautiful. The color of it for one thing, I mean the color of all the marble there was just like skin. And just the way the points of the column, I mean the points of the flutes of the door or column come together is as exciting as anything, like any sculptor could do. It's incredible. No one ever cared that much about everything they did to make something so wonderful. Going through Europe, I've never been to the super-places. I've just been reading a very bad book, but it was about ancient Greece, but it mentioned a place in Sicily which we didn't go to, which I would like to. Because I have the feeling that places in other parts of the European world that were settled by Greeks with a very high aesthetic sense really produced—I mean, it was sort of like another source, you know, because they were settled by people with a great sense of what was right. And the work that was produced there was beautiful. And then, even to the present, you know, they can have that influence over time.

There is a place near Venice, and I guess it's Acolaya [ph] or something. You know, and the work wasn't that marvelous, but it had a certain delicacy. So that, even a very almost conventional war monument from like the First World War had a certain beauty, I mean aside from its naturalistic elements, just looked at as a sculpture from a distance. It was quite beautiful and very touching.

And I think just the fact that the Greeks had been there made all the difference in the world. They had set their mark on it for other people to follow all this time. I think they are marvelous. I'm not terrified by excellence.

I mean, I achieved at least. You know, I don't think it's something to have contempt for, nor to put down as being too obvious or something like that. If that's not worthwhile, you know, none of the campy things are worthwhile certainly.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Right.

MARCIA MARCUS: It's just a different kind of thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, Marcia, thank you very much. I think this was a very nice note to end on in this golden day, which has been one of the very few golden days [Laughs]—

MARCIA MARCUS: Very rare.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —rare days of summer.

[END TAPE 3.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]