

Holt/Smithson Foundation Oral History Archive

Lucy Lippard interviewed by Natalie Rae Good and William T. Carson

February 6, 2023

Lucy R. Lippard is a writer, activist, and sometime curator. She was an original member of the Holt/Smithson Foundation's Board of Directors. Natalie Rae Good is Collection Manager & Registrar at Holt/Smithson Foundation. William T. Carson is Program Manager & Assistant Curator at Holt/Smithson Foundation.

This interview was recorded on February 6, 2023 at Lucy Lippard's house in Galisteo, New Mexico.

This transcript is a lightly edited version of the conversation.

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**Natalie Rae Good**

I think we'll start by saying that this is Natalie Rae Good and William T. Carson of the Holt/Smithson Foundation. And we are here on February 6th, 2023.

Our first question is, Lucy, what is your full name, and where are you currently based?

Lucy R. Lippard

My name is Lucy Rowland Lippard -- my so-called maiden name. And I've lived in Galisteo, New Mexico for thirty years now.

NRG

We are collecting stories about Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson to learn about who they were and what was important about them. Perhaps a nice place to start would be if you could talk about how you were first introduced to Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson, and what they were making at that time?


LRL

Well, I wish I remembered, but I know I met them in the '60s. They were part of a wide circle of conceptual and minimal artists. They were together by then. But Nancy wasn't an artist yet, or wasn't out as an artist yet. Bob was a pretty dominating character and very ambitious—I mean, obviously, he was doing really interesting work. I once wrote that he was a better writer than an artist and he never liked me after that [laughter]. And Nancy said to me at one point years later, when we were out here, "If you'd been nicer to Bob, you'd have a Smithson, and then you'd be rich." [laughter] But I wasn't, and I didn't want to be rich anyways.

From the mid sixties on, Sol LeWitt was the kind of glue for a whole lot of different groups. He was a dear and close friend of mine and I'd known him since 1959 or so when I was working at the Museum of Modern Art Library as a page and Sol was at the night desk. He was a great reader. He wasn't famous yet, and he wasn't even making work that would have made him famous yet, but the Donnell Public Library was across the street. He would pass on nouvelle vague novels and and other interesting reading. He sort of educated us. He was older than most of us, but he hadn't hit his stride yet. When he did, of course, it was epic...This is a LeWitt coffee table. It was orange, then it was green, and it was white, and then it was black. And he said, "I don't know why I gave you that thing because it's always covered with books. You can't see it." [laughter]

Anyway, I probably met Bob and Nancy through Sol. I can't remember exactly when – the art world was smaller then, and we were all into the same kind of work. Bob was impressive. He





was very smart. He'd go to Max's Kansas City with something he wanted to talk about in his pocket. I mean, he planned it ahead of time. Nancy told me this, I think. All these artists were there talking and drinking and he'd bring up his subject and get feedback. Just get a conversation going. I was almost never there because I had a kid and couldn't afford a babysitter.

NRG

That's interesting. We just got a question from a collection about a Smithsonian drawing on a Max's Kansas City napkin, and it looks like a sketch for an idea. Maybe he was asking questions or talking to people about his mining projects. It looks like it says Creede on the side.

LRL

That's classic Bob. He was focused. He wasn't a whole hell of a lot of fun, but he was intellectually focused. [laughter] And Nancy, for quite a long time I didn't really know that Nancy was an artist. I wasn't close, close friends with them. We saw each other around a lot. They weren't in my inner circle, and I wasn't in their inner circle. They were much more in the art world. They went to Warhol's things and I didn't.

I was living with Charles Simonds when Bob died. He was very interested in Bob's work although his work is completely different. And Bob had been supportive of him too. When we heard that Bob [died], we were in Maine. Charles went out and walked in the mud flats tearfully for a long time. Bob and Nancy had once visited me in Maine. I've gone there every summer of my life, and it's on a tidal bay. I took Bob out to the end of the rocks of a beach and showed him the beautiful view. And he wasn't the least bit interested. He was interested in the rocks. [laughter]

I really got to know Nancy, obviously, when she moved out here. She rented Harmony Hammond's place, across the creek from me, when Harmony was teaching at the University of Arizona. Nancy called me and said, "Is there any place I should know about out here?" And so I said, "Yeah. Harmony's renting her house." That was in the early 1990s. And then she bought a house in Ranchitos de Galisteo, west of the village. She put in a sauna and kept telling us that we were going to get to be in it sometime, but we never were. [laughter]

William T. Carson





I'm curious about when you were friends with them in New York, what were they like as a couple?

LRL

They were a good couple, clearly close, mutually supportive and mutually inventive. In some ways they were an odd couple. Nancy was I think a biology major at Tufts. Then she also worked for one of the fashion magazines. *Harper's Bazaar*. Yeah. I didn't know them during that early period. I was married to Bob Ryman, so originally, we were in the same minimal /conceptual cohort. I was writing mostly about that in the mid to late 1960s. And Sol, as I said, was sort of an intellectual center. He knew Bob and Nancy well, and I don't remember any frictions particularly. Bob loved to argue, and so did I. So at one point, he said to me at some party, he said, "Why do you always argue with me?" And I said, "I thought you enjoyed it as much as I did." [laughter] Once we had an argument about finity and infinity. I was for infinity and he was for finity. [laughter]

NRG

In what ways was he for finity? [laughter]

LRL

I have no idea. I just remember that thinking afterwards, ...that's pretty ridiculous. [laughter] It was just part of his whole entropy thing. I was more romantic, or less scientific. Actually, Bob was pretty romantic. I mean in terms of his art.

WTC

And would you argue about ideas in his work or other artists' work, or anything and everything?

LRL

I don't think it was about his work. We just argued, probably mostly after drinking a fair amount because there was a lot of drinking.

NRG

When you were in Maine, did you ever go out and see the Little Fort Island?

LRL





No, I never did. It's quite a drive from where I am. Maine is full of islands. But I don't know why he didn't do anything there. He bought it to make a piece and then decided he didn't like it. Maybe it was too picturesque, because he didn't like picturesque.

WTC

That's what I've heard as well. It sounded a lot like the moment you described on the beach where he was not interested in the beauty.

LRL

Yeah, yeah. [laughter]

NRG

Thinking about that, how do you feel the artists dealt with the environment? Would you call them environmentalists?

LRL

That wasn't much of a talking point in the art world in the '60s. I remember I learned the word ecology from Iain Baxter, a Canadian guy, who was half of the N.E. Thing Company, a good friend. I'd never heard the word ecology. This whole eco-art thing didn't exist then tho some artists were certainly into it. Pat Johanson, for instance. Environmentalism really wasn't that big a deal until Earth Day happened, in 1970. People were beginning to pick up on it, but it was nothing like it is now, with the climate catastrophe hovering. Bob's ideas weren't totally environmentalist, but they were restorative. Nancy buried her concrete poems in impressive Western places. But I didn't know her well then. I mean I knew her, but I didn't hang out with her. I tended to see them together at social events. Bob took up a lot of space, and she never seemed to worry about that.

NRG

What do you mean when you say Bob took up space?

LRL

Well, he talked, and he was very bright, and argumentative, and he was well known. Nancy held her own. I don't think he dominated her. But he was the guy. Maybe it was me, because I knew Bob's work and I didn't really know what she was doing.

WTC

And when was it that you started to become aware of Nancy's work?





LRL

I don't really remember. In 1966 she did a crossword puzzle about my Eccentric Abstraction show. When was she doing those buried concrete poems? What dates were those?

WTC

They started in the late sixties and then she did her *Buried Poems* in the seventies.

LRL

I loved the whole idea of Earth Works then, which I don't so much anymore. I was always trying to escape the art world -- unsuccessfully, obviously. And I loved the idea of art that was way out there. I liked the West and they both just fell for the West. Charles and Bob went out to this quarry in New Jersey. Michelle Stuart worked there, and Bob did, and Charles made a couple of films out there. I think that's where I got to know them better -- in the early to mid seventies.

NRG

The *Numbers Show*—

LRL

Shows. There were four of them.

NRG

Shows, of course sorry. Just thinking about the work *400 Seattle Horizons*.

LRL

Yes, in 1969, when I took the pictures for Bob's piece.


NRG

It's a bit like a collaborative work.

LRL

Yes, exactly. But he kept saying, find a flat place. And there's nothing flat in Seattle. It's all hills. So I don't think I did a very good job on those. That whole show was weird because there was no money to bring the artists. So I executed a lot of the works, especially outdoors. I did Carl Andre's piece. He proposed a line of end to end "timber." For me, timber meant logs. So, I did it with logs. And he meant finished wood. [laughter]. I don't know how many of those





things I didn't get right, but Bob seemed to be okay with the Seattle views. I guess it didn't make much difference what they looked like. It was the idea.

NRG

It's our understanding that those photographs are destroyed?

LRL

I have no idea. They were returned to Bob. And I didn't know anything about photography. I didn't even have a camera. I don't know whose camera I borrowed for that. I remember that around the same time, when I went to the Arctic with a group of people, just a few conceptual artists, Larry Weiner, and Iain Baxter, I was included as the photographer, and the real photographers were really pissed off.

NRG

We are starting to think about a lot of these kinds of questions for the catalogues raisonnés with the artists, and especially with Bob. With works like that it's complicated to think about how we would represent them in a catalogue raisonné context. Would we just show the instructions that Bob sent for the exhibition that you received or—

LRL


I would show the photographs and the instructions. I mean, he accepted them and I'm certainly not claiming them. It was more of an economic necessity than an actual collaboration.

NRG

When we think about the *Mirror Displacements* we have photographs of these displacements and it's hard for us to figure out exactly how to best represent the artworks for the catalogue raisonné and how to talk about them in the catalogue raisonné kind of way, in a very limited way of talking about objects and sculpture I'd be interested to hear what you think would be the best way to represent these works?

LRL

I have no idea. Back in the day, when I was doing catalogues raisonnés along with a lot of other stuff, for a living, I didn't know anything about it. I just was winging it. This was in the late fifties, early sixties, when I was doing anything I could, freelance. Anyway, the process had nothing to do with what it is now. When I went to the Foundation's catalogue raisonne committee meeting, I realized this was going to be very different. Because in the '60s we had





no digital stuff or the kind of vocabulary that exists around a catalogue raisonné today. But I'm still convinced that everything that an artist calls art is art. I don't know why there were all these fights with Archives of American Art. It seems ridiculous. But I guess we just don't know whether they call it art or not. I mean, what's the actual problem with Bob's stuff?

NRG

I think that's not necessarily a problem. It's just trying to think about how best to represent these works. I don't think that who took the photo is important.

LRL

I would include everything, but if it's in a show, then you'd select and do something different. Bob did do the *Glue Pour* in Vancouver, in January 1970, the second part of that card show, and I was there for that. I just found two big photos of that which I'll give to Holt/Smithson.

NRG

I'd love to hear about that experience.

LRL

There were these two Greek-American guys, young artists there -- Christos Dikeakos and Ilya Pagonis. They were helping out with the show. We found a hill and a bunch of barrels of glue and rolled them down.

NRG

Did you source the glue, make the decision about what the material was, or did Bob?

LRL

Bob did, because he and Nancy were there then. All I had to do was facilitate. I would have been very bad at choosing the glue.


WTC

And what was the event like? What was the pour?

LRL

It was just the four or five of us there, just doing the pour and then the photographs. And the documentation became more important than the actual act. I don't remember how it was represented in the show, The cards were often completely misleading because they were done before the exhibition and the artists would change their minds, have a new idea. A





Japanese artist recently reproduced one whole show, in Tokyo. He asked artists if he could recreate their work. Most said yes. I know that my son said the painting by Robert Ryman cannot be recreated.

WTC

What was your reaction to the *Glue Pour*? What did you think of it at the time?

LRL

I thought it was wonderful. It was very exciting at that point to see anything happening out of the galleries, and I loved conceptual art because of the dematerialization, so called. The *Glue Pour* was material, but it was very temporary. I also liked the emphasis on texts. As a writer, I could collaborate with artists. I never wanted to be an artist. But everybody was saying, "Everything an artist does is art," so I'd say, "Everything a writer does is writing."

NRG

And for the cards, I know Nancy had done one with *Vision Fixed*, one of her concrete poems and these photographs in circles, kind of. Do you remember? That was, I think, for one of the—

LRL

It was for the women's card show. [Phone rings] Hang on just a second, let me get rid of this. Hello. Oh, hi, can I call you back? I've got people. [laughter].

WTC

People will forever be memorialized. [laughter]

LRL


Well, it's my partner. I wasn't going to explain the whole thing. He said, "Oh, you've done it again." [laughter].

NRG

I was just wondering for those sorts of things were you making a request for the artists to send something or where they just—?

LRL

I told each one, you get a card and that's it. These exhibitions got much more conceptual. The last two weren't huge museum shows like Seattle and Vancouver where there were big





outdoor pieces and all kinds of stuff. Sometimes the work just existed on the card. I didn't see the show in Buenos Aires, for instance. And I didn't particularly like the guy who did it; he claimed it was his show at one point. But Nancy must've been in the women's one at CalArts, and it traveled.

WTC

So with something like *Glue Pour* how do you end up thinking about the materiality of that artwork?

LRL

Well, the combination of materiality and temporaneity was particularly interesting. And then, as I said, it was new that anything was happening outside the museums. I'm not a theorist. I was mostly excited about the art being out there.

WTC

I know that Smithson was also working on the *Island of Broken Glass* around that time and was creating proposals for that. Was that something that you ever spoke with him about?

LRL

No, I wasn't involved in that at all. It was kind of a mean piece in a way -- not my favorite.

NRG

What was your favorite?

LRL

I don't think I had one. Probably *Spiral Jetty*. But he did a great job of endowing everything with its intellectual envelope.


WTC

How would you say that your relationship to his work has changed over time, if it has?

LRL

Well, when I wrote a book a few years ago called *Undermining*, I said Earthworks were kind of lonely. Almost nobody got to see the Jetty. If I hadn't started spending time in the West much later, I wouldn't have seen it either, or Sun Tunnels or the Lightning Field. At that point, it was all so new. And then it got less interesting -- I mean, for me. This happens to a lot of art. *Spiral Jetty* and Sun Tunnels are amazing. They're both wonderful pieces. But they are in a





sense an urban art because it's really for city people, art tourists. At one point after I moved out here, I wrote something for the Land Art program at the University of New Mexico in reply to "What kind of art would you like to have right where you live?" And I said no kind of art. The landscape does it for me. The earthworks are appropriately isolated, and consequently you visit them and you're impressed and that's fine. But it's not a community art on any level, and it's experienced more often in photographs than in lived experience. Because look, most people can't afford to get to these places. *Lightning Field* is more accessible though the experience is carefully curated. I finally went years ago with a bunch of women friends. We had a wonderful time, but for me *Lightning Field* was only a small part of it. [laughter]

NRG

Mostly had a good time eating enchiladas in the cabin.

LRL

Yeah, the cabin was really neat. [laughter]

WTC

When did you go to *Spiral Jetty* for the first time?

LRL

I really have no idea. (Sometimes I wish I'd kept a diary, but my writing energy went into work.) I went once with my partner, which had to be after 1999 because that's when we got together. His sweet dog Rez drank the salt water and was sick as a dog all the way home; he just thought it was water. [laughter] We thought he was going to die. They're saying the Salt Lake could dry up within something like five years. And the Jetty has already gone through several incarnations, given drought and flood. Bob would have loved that.

NRG

They were talking about the toxic stuff that's trapped in that lakebed that would be then brought into the air and then because of Salt Lake City's inversion, it's just going to get trapped there if they don't [crosstalk].

LRL

There's so many things like that going on. I think *Sun Tunnels* is safe. I don't remember the year again. I went twice.

WTC





Did you ever go with Nancy Holt?

LRL

Yeah, yeah. One time we met with her and others there, when my partner and I were on our way to Montana. We went to both *Sun Tunnels* and *Spiral Jetty* on that trip.

NRG

And when Nancy moved out here to Galisteo, what was her art-making process like at that time? I know that she did the *Chilili Graveyards*— she took some photographs there.

LRL

We were there together. I took pictures too. I didn't realize that that hers were an artwork. But we didn't talk about her art much. Maybe she did with other people. I don't really like talking about art that much. I can write about it, but I'm not good at talking about it (as you can see). Once I start writing, I find something to say. Nancy and I took road trips when we were first in Galisteo. One time we went down to the Bosque del Apache for the cranes. I know she applied for the design of the Railyard Park in Santa Fe because I was on the committee. And she also applied for public art for a park in Moriarty. Have you ever been there? Well, when they put out a call for public art, a couple of people I know, including Nancy, applied. And I can't remember what she did, but it wasn't at all a Moriarty type of thing. I mean, they ended up with a cowboy statue or something. She never got to make anything here. She was very pragmatic. I don't remember her being upset about the rejection, or bitching and whining about it. But you may hear completely different things from other people.

WTC

How would you describe her creative process if you ever saw that? Were you ever able to get an inside look?

LRL

No. I know that when I was writing for Alena [Williams'] book *Sitelines*, Nancy was an incredible micromanager. It's one of the worst essays I've done because she wanted to see it, so I gave her a very rough draft because I didn't want her fucking around with the real thing. And she said "well, this is terrible." I said, "well, it's a very rough draft." So then I was stupid enough to send her another draft, or maybe two. And she wanted to change every other word. I was really annoyed, even though I always send monograph articles to the artists to check.





NRG

What do you think that was about was about? Do you think she was trying to shape the story about her work?

LRL

Yes. The weird thing is, even after she was well-known, she didn't ever have one catalogue or a book. I told her she should think about a book. Her lectures were very long and very detailed, but they were wonderful. She would go through every single work and the details of the construction. It was always interesting. I said, all you need to do is tape one of your talks, edit it, and get somebody to write a preface. And she was going to get some woman, whose name I can't remember now, who wrote for *New York* magazine, who was a Buddhist. Nancy wanted a Buddhist. But then when I wanted to call her a Buddhist in Alena's book, she insisted "oh no, I'm not a Buddhist. I can't be called a Buddhist." What that was about, I have no idea because she was clearly a Buddhist. Anyway, that was the only time I tried to work with her really closely. She never did anything about about a book until Alena came along. Her project was completely different, and terrific. But I was just fascinated that Nancy was going to do that and not something introductory that covered all her work. Artists I knew who were much less successful by that time had at least one thing in print. Nancy wasn't written about much, was she? I never kept a bibliography on her, but that was because she was sort of close about her work. I don't know what that was about.

NRG

I don't know. I wonder—I don't feel like a lot of her work was shown either. I've at least blamed that on misrepresentation of women artists in general. But I'm not sure what exactly—

LRL

I don't know whether it was that she just didn't care—and I don't think that was the case—or that she wanted to manage everything. Her shows were very specific, and the Foundation is doing a great job of resurrecting a lot of those. They're important. She could have done that basic book with editing, and I have no idea why she didn't want to do that. Consequently, a lot of her work is unknown because she never put it together.

NRG

We're trying to put it together.

LRL





Yeah, yes. Well, that's really good. [laughter]

NRG

And something I think about a lot with—just thinking about women, in general, being underrepresented still today, at that time also, as artists—is the question of feminism and Nancy Holt. Did you feel like Nancy was a feminist or a radical thinker in any way?

LRL

I was totally involved in Feminism—and I never thought of Nancy as an activist feminist. I subtitled my first book of feminist essays *Feminist Essays on Women's Art*, because a lot of the women did not want to be called feminist. Nancy was in it, and in the second feminist essays book. But I have a feeling that she just didn't want to be categorized. She certainly stood up for herself. I get younger women coming up to me and saying, "I don't call myself a feminist, but I'm a strong woman and I stand up for myself." And I said, "Well, feminists stand up for other women too. I mean It's not about just about you." Nancy was certainly a strong woman. A lot of our generation was on that level, and the misogyny was overwhelming. It's always struck me as odd that a lot of these women weren't more militant about where they found themselves. Dorothea Rockburne, for instance, was a good friend at one point. And I offered to do an essay on her for *Artforum* and she said, no, she was going to wait for somebody more important to do it. So there was a lot of heavy ambition floating around.

NRG

When you're saying that Bob was kind of combative or difficult, do you get the feeling that he had any close friends in that art circle? That the people he was talking to were really influential on his work?

LRL

He wasn't difficult or even combative as such. Just kind of a character. I don't know about close friends. He certainly had friends, I don't know about close. But there was a tremendous amount of internal dialogue about what everybody was doing and his work was on the front page.

NRG

And who was there?

LRL





Well, Sol, who was everybody's friend tho he was no milquetoast. And Eva [Hesse], to some extent, but she died three years before Bob did. Mel Bochner was around, whose work I never got into. Carl Andre, Dan Graham. Who else? It was a fairly large community and I didn't keep track of who was on the ins or outs. The artists were forging a whole new approach. Seth Siegelaub lived with me for a couple of years. He was really the mastermind behind a lot of the conceptual and dematerialization stuff. He'd been a dealer and he really framed conceptual art by strategizing how it could get out in the world by bypassing the museums, the galleries, the critics, and so forth.

NRG

There was the conversation that you had with Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt about Eva.

LRL

Oh, Nancy made me publish that.

NRG

Oh, really?

LRL

Yes. I did interviews with all kinds of people when I was writing the book on Hesse and they weren't meant for publication. But Nancy was into it and she could be very persistent. So we did it.

NRG

It has some nice nuggets in it just as far as thinking about that they were using—it really seems like Smithson respected and loved her work.

LRL

Eva was very well supported by a lot of these people, mostly men (though she had women friends). Aside from her smarts and her groundbreaking art, there was a vulnerable aspect to her that was very appealing—and she was also beautiful. That helped. People wanted to help her. She babysat for my kid now and then. Ethan is now an artist, and I tell him he can brag that Eva Hesse was his babysitter.

NRG

He should.





WTC

I'm curious about at that time do you think that Bob and Nancy were really interested in each other's work as well?

LRL

Oh yeah, I'm sure there was a lot of dialogue about that. Nancy was not shy, she was smart, and I'm sure she had a lot to do with some of Bob's work. I'm not sure how she felt about his early work, which was so weird – those sort of surrealist, creepy, sort of horror movie/religious drawings. I didn't know him well enough to know what flipped him into minimalism, or why. It was certainly much more up front in the art world.

NRG

What do you think about the creepy stuff?

LRL

I haven't seen that much of it. It's not my cup of tea, but when I saw it, later, I found it really interesting that he was doing that. That was definitely Bob. He was the kind of kid who would have been into Dungeons & Dragons if it was around at that point.

NRG

We've been looking through a lot of those so I've been—

LRL

You all know much more about both these artists than I do now.

NRG

—just thinking about those drawings because they're so they are so unusual and different.

LRL

Are there are a lot of them around? I mean, does the Foundation have a lot?

NRG

Yeah, we do have a lot of them and there are two shows on right now that are those earlier drawings. One at MACRO in Rome and one that just closed with the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. Reading the conversation that you had with Smithson, and then thinking about these amoebas that are in all those early drawings that are these urban cityscapes with gloopy amoebae-y kind of creatures crawling all over them and figures.





LRL

He might have been a completely different artist if he'd kept on with those. And the sexuality too. I think he sort of invited himself into Minimalism and took it in a different direction. As so often it happens, these artists die and then I think, "Oh, I wish I'd asked them this and this and these questions."

NRG

What do you wish you would have asked Bob?

LRL

Oh, I'm not sure. Now it's all water under the bridge. I never wrote a monograph article on him.

WTC

If you had to guess where his work would have gone, where do you think he would have explored if hadn't died?

LRL

I think he would have hung in with the earthworks. He had these plans for the mine in Butte or someplace. It would have been fascinating to see how far he could take that idea, maybe much more expansive. It's funny, I don't think of him as an environmentalist but of course, you can make a case for putting him in that category. Artists get dumped into these categories whether they like it or not. Bob was more about restorative...


NRG

Are there any contemporary artists that are working today that you think are utilizing these ideas? Either Smithson's ideas or Holt's ideas and expanding on them?

LRL

There are a great many artists following Smithson's ideas but I can't call them up. I really did escape from the art world when I came down here. I told my artist friends I came to New Mexico to get away from art. But it really wasn't the art, it was the art world. I don't keep up with stuff at all, so I'm not really sure. There are probably a lot of artists who have been influenced by Smithson, his art and his ideas. Probably less so about Holt. In a funny way, her trajectory was unique. I can't think of a lot of other people who have followed her but just the other day I saw a picture of a "pipe room" that was definitely modeled after hers. And she was also a model for a lot of younger women's land art. She wasn't standoffish or anything, and





she enjoyed seeing people. But she had had a strange childhood. She talked about coming home from school once to find her mother crouched in a closet.

WTC

Did you ever talk to her about all the work she was doing to manage Smithson's Estate?

LRL

Not in any depth. I remember that when she edited the book of his writingg, she thought she was done with it. And then, of course, it just kept on snowballing. She never complained. She'd say, "Oh, I'm getting another one of these things on Smithson." But she was into it, and definitely devoted to his "legacy" and she was really good at managing the details. He was already a sort of icon by the time he died. And dying young makes people particularly curious. Eva, and then Bob, and then Ana Mendieta, who was a close friend of mine too. I can't even remember what I wrote about Bob after his death. I haven't written much about Bob, have I? You probably know.

NRG

More Nancy. I think that a lot of times you've written about *Sun Tunnels* and shown *Sun Tunnels* as an example, and then used Smithson as an example in talking about this interest in the quarries and these gravel mines, pit mines, and its relationship to the city and its relationship to industrialization.

LRL

Well, that was all *Undermining*, pretty recent. But early on, I must have mentioned him a lot, because he was very important in the context I was writing in.

WTC


I love the way that you mentioned him in *Undermining*. You mention that you disagreed with him about most things [laughter] when you spent time together, but now you've been thinking about his work over the last 40 years and some of his ideas are still in there.

LRL

I never found Bob particularly lovable, but he was admirable.

NRG

When you say he was ambitious, do you mean by object-making or idea-making?





LRL

Both. He got involved early on with Virginia Dwan, for instance. That was a really good move. And he was so articulate, and people listened to him, for good reason. So did I, as he was interesting to talk to and his ideas were original. I didn't always disagree with him.

WTC

Would you say the way that he would talk about his work was similar to the way he would write about his work?

LRL

More so than many people, I think. He knew what he was doing, and he knew how to get it out there, and get it into the right places and so on. Of course, most artists are pretty ambitious, or they get lucky, or you've never heard of them.

NRG

Do you have any other funny stories or tidbits that you'd like to share?

LRL

Nothing is surfacing. I've interviewed older people who are always telling the same stories that they told somebody else in other interviews. And I'm beginning to do that.

It was a very exciting community in the '60s and early '70s. But in 1970, I fell into feminism with a vengeance and spent almost a decade writing about women's art. So I was paying less attention to Bob. I liked women's art that was talking about feminism and had something I could get my teeth into. I can't think of any other stories. Have you seen the Halumina thing?

NRG

Yeah. Let's talk about that.

LRL

Well, that was a historical photo of scruffy old miners with our faces montaged on it by Michelle Goodman, a local artist who died recently. She made it after the four of us – Harmony, Lucy, Michelle, and Nancy (HA LU MI NA). -- walked from Cerrillos to Galisteo along the bosque and the mighty Rio Galisteo. and that was a lot of fun. Nancy was a hiker until her knees went. After she got them replaced she began to kind of waddle a little and did less big hikes.





NRG

What sort of things would you chat about on these hikes? Would you talk about art or was it more—?

LRL

Life.

WTC

Was Nancy interested in land use in New Mexico and what was happening locally, or was she thinking about elsewhere?

LRL

Maybe more than I knew but I didn't think of her as being particularly interested in local land use. We may have talked about it. Have you interviewed Hikmet Loe? She knew Nancy very well. And she probably remembers that kind of thing much better than I do. Because I've talked to too many people in my life. When you leave, I'll say, "What were their names?" (I do know your names....)[laughter]

NRG

Is there anyone else that you think we should talk to?

LRL

DeeDee Halleck for sure. She was Nancy's best friend as far as I could tell. It's too bad Michelle is dead. We met her through Nancy who knew her because she was hired to paint Nancy's house and for a couple of years we did a lot of hiking and stuff together. Nancy and I and Harmony and May Stevens—we called ourselves the Galisteo Gals. May is gone too but have you talked to Harmony? Because everybody knows everybody on a slightly different plane and a different way and different reasons .


NRG

Anyone you can think of for Bob?

LRL

Bob, no. He was an international star; he's been dead a long time and so have many of our cohorts. I was thinking Nancy here. Have you gotten into the Buddhist stuff? I was not into it, so I don't really remember who she was hanging out with, but she was going to leave her pied a terre on Escondido to the Buddhists. I guess she didn't. But she was totally involved. I





mean, she even got May into Buddhism before May started to lose it. I had dinner with some of her other friends now and then but I just don't remember their names. If I were youall, I would try to run some of them down because certainly that was a huge part of her life. Not a part I shared at all.

WTC

Was Buddhism something she became interested in when she moved out here?

LRL

No, she was already...it starts with a V.

WTC

Vipassana.

LRL

Vipassana, yeah. It's a part of her life that was sort of private. She wouldn't let me say she was a Buddhist in my essay for Alena's book. Nancy was Buddhist for a long, long time. It was strange she didn't want that in print. Who else? Did you interview Virginia before she died? She knew both of them across the decades. And Jack Flamm.

She had a thing for him at one point, I think. But she never took up with anybody that I knew of. Bob died in '73 and she came out here about '94.

WTC

And they worked together on the *Collected Writings of Smithson*.

LRL

Yes, for the second edition.

NRG

And I think our last question is what do you think is the legacy of their work?

WTC

I guess maybe related to that question of legacy would be, are there certain ideas of theirs or works or concepts that you think will live on?

LRL





Oh, yeah, the art world does well with those. I'm a book person so I think that writing a book about people is the way ahead. But Holt/Smithson's strategy of showing the work all over the world is probably much more effective for the art world.

And of course, all the women artists, nobody paid attention to them until they were either old or dead. Michelle Stuart is one of my favorite artists. And she was doing great work all along. I mean, really as important as Nancy, but she never got that much attention until now. And she just turned 90. so. I guess it's just that I don't care about mine and I don't see why everybody else is so into it.

NRG

Michelle Stuart would be a good person for us to talk to.

LRL

Yes. She knew Nancy. In fact, she stayed with her when she was out here. And Carey Lovelace who's Michelle's partner, they were out here together at Nancy's. And Carey at one point was writing a book on women's art.

WTC

It'd be great to talk to her about, because they were in Alaska, at the same time Nancy Holt and Michelle were there.

LRL

Oh, really? I don't remember that. Yeah.

WTC

Yeah. In '86 when Nancy made *Pipeline* and they were yeah exhibiting together. So it'd be great to—

LRL

Michelle would be definitely a good person to talk to.

WTC

Well, thanks for your patience with our questions.

LRL

I don't think you got too much out of this.





WTC

Oh, we got lots out of it and really enjoyed the conversation.

END

