

**GREENWICH VILLAGE SOCIETY FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

Oral History Interview
PAULA DELUCCIA POONS

By Sarah Dziezic
Brooklyn, NY
September 27, 2017

Oral History Interview with Paula DeLuccia Poons, September 27, 2017

Narrator(s)	Paula DeLuccia Poons
Birthyear	1953
Birthplace	Paterson, NJ
Narrator Age	64
Interviewer	Sarah Dziezic
Place of Interview	Poons's apartment in 827-831 Broadway
Date of Interview	September 27, 2017
Duration of Interview	95 mins
Number of Sessions	1
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Paula DeLuccia Poons, Photo by Sarah Dziezic

Quotes from Oral History Interview with Paula DeLuccia Poons

Sound-bite

“Paula DeLuccia, also known as Paula DeLuccia Poons. I was born in Paterson, New Jersey, in 1953. And I’m an artist”... “Larry moved in here in ’74...maybe it was ’74 the first time I saw this space. And it had been William Rubin’s space before Larry took it over, and William Rubin had been the director of the painting department at the Museum of Modern Art. And he had Richard Meier design the space...and it was like you were walking into, basically like a museum. I mean, it was quiet, it was like a different world”... “Elaine de Kooning lived on the third floor. Jules Olitski lived on the second floor; Paul Jenkins lived across the hall; and a woman named Royalene Ward lived upstairs in the penthouse”... “In the back, that’s where the studios are...Larry had been working there from ’74 to ’89 when he dripped paint, and it went downstairs, and the landlord had a brass needle point shower that Cyndi Lauper was going to buy, and it suddenly had pink paint on it. And Larry went, ‘Eh, I don’t think I should do that anymore.’ When he first moved in, he had dripped some paint, and I remember Elaine de Kooning bringing up a fluorescent light fixture and putting it there, saying, you know, ‘You’ve got to replace this.’ And then it reminded me—I came across a letter that Paul Jenkins had sent to Larry saying, ‘I don’t mind if you drip paint, I’ll just put a canvas there and catch it.’”

Additional Quotes

“So, there was a small private art school in Wyckoff, New Jersey—no, in Ridgewood, New Jersey. And I decided I would go there. And they had a pretty good faculty. A lot of the people that were teaching there were actually artists from New York. And actually that’s how I came to meet Larry [Poons], through one of the women that was teaching there. So, I went there for two years, and I think it was a really good school. And a small school, but they had excellent facilities, and good teachers. And then, that woman suggested I go to Kansas City Art Institute, cause it was a much bigger place, and I would have more opportunity, so I applied, and I ended up going there for a year. And then I ran out of money. And then I moved to New York.” (Poons p. 4)

“When I got to Kansas City, I was painting from nature. And I had a really good instructor, who pretty much let me do what I wanted to do, and it was great. I mean, I would take an easel out onto the roof of the studio and paint, you know, just—it was great. And they also had a lot of open drawing classes, and I was drawing all the time, and so the two things that I

remember most are the drawing and painting out there. I took printmaking, but that really wasn't what interested me.

So, when I—I guess, it was Christmas time in 1973, and I came to New York and I visited my friend, Sherron Francis, who was a painter—and actually I think it was the summer before, I did come to New York and look at some art. And she had suggested some shows, and actually one of the shows—I don't even know if she suggested it, but Larry had a painting down at, I think it was Castelli Gallery. It was a dot painting, and it was like amazing. So I had seen a little bit, but when I got to Kansas City, I still had not been influenced by that so much.

Then, come Christmas time I came back, and spent some time in New York, just visiting, and then when I got back to Kansas City I got a studio in the basement of the painting building, and it was, it was a good-size room, considering. It was probably like from there, to maybe the edge of that painting. And then this big. And there were three of us in there, and they were two of my best friends. But in my mind, I knew that this should be my studio. So, I kind of acted up until they finally split [laughing] and went to the room next door. And it had a short wall, I mean, I could like stand on a chair and look over and talk to them. But that was my studio, and I just started painting these big abstract paintings. So. And then the instructor was very encouraging, and I remember he would take the head of the painting department down to see my work, and he would kind of look around and go, 'This is a graduate student situation.' Meaning I shouldn't be there doing what I'm doing, because I was taking up all this space." (Poons pp. 5–6)

"When Larry moved in here there was a blood bank on the side of the building, I mean, sometimes I'm like, 'I can't even believe that!' And on the south side, there was Sylvan's bookstore, so under 827 there was a bookstore, and under 831 there was a blood bank..." (Poons p. 11)

"Yes. I think there had been a card game that a bunch of the—let's see, I don't think it was, I'm not sure it was ever held here. I think it was held uptown. So it was Bill Rubin, and Clement Greenberg, and Larry, and maybe Jules Olitski, and a couple other people. So, they did know each other. And, of course Larry knew—I think you have a photograph there?...This is an obvious serious discussion of—there's Barbara Rose, and Frank Stella, Larry, and Lucinda Childs, and Bill Rubin, and Barnett Newman, and Michael Fried." (Poons p. 12)

"Yeah, Bobby [Neuwirth] and Larry were good friends, and I guess they had originally met at Max's Kansas City. And Bobby also studied painting, and is still a painter, and of course was a musician. And occasionally—Bob had a place out in California, and he still does, and he would come to the east coast and visit, and he would stay with Larry. Almost every time, I think, that he would come to the east coast, he would stay here. And then, I guess, there was this talk of

the Rolling Thunder Revue gonna be taking place, and so Bobby was here a lot. And then, one night—I was here, except I left before everything happened. [laughter] It's like, why didn't you just tell me? [laughter] I remember Patti Smith was here, and then a guy named Danny Shea and Bobby and Larry had gone to the airport, and I think they were picking up T-Bone Burnett. And then [Bob] Dylan showed up, and I don't know who else was here. I don't know if Joni Mitchell was here for that one, but there were a lot of people here, and supposedly it went all through the night, of them practicing...It was a long time before Larry wanted to clean the piano keys that Dylan played on.” (Poons p. 15)

“I mean, well, some people say, ‘Oh, you're never gonna get your money out of there.’ I'm like, ‘So what? I live here!’ I didn't invest in this, you know, I—we just live here, and we like it here. This is our home. It's been, how many people live in a place more than forty years? Obviously we like it.” (Poons p. 29)

“A lot of people. [laughs] A lot of people. So, I mean, when I first moved to New York, or I was first painting in this space, you know, as I said, Paul Jenkins was our neighbor, and I remember one day he came over and looked at this big painting that I was working on, and he said, ‘I want to buy that.’ So it was like, that was great. It was really good. And there were a lot of artists that came through, and, because Larry was, of course, working here, and I was working here; a lot of times you would have to go—you had to go through my studio to get to his studio, so they would have to see what I was doing. And, it's funny, I remember certain things that I had been working on, as a young painter, that people who I thought knew better, they came in and they were like, ‘Oh no, you shouldn't paint like that.’ And then, like I would still have some of those paintings now, and people look at them, and they're going, ‘Who did that?’ And I'm like, ‘Yeah, I did that, you know, like back in 1977,’ you know? And it was like, I should have kept with that! You know, so sometimes you get good advice, sometimes not so good advice. You know, we've had a lot of parties here. A lot of artist parties. We celebrated Clement Greenberg's seventy-fifth birthday here. You haven't, I don't know if you saw the basketball hoop against the wall in the front room?...Well, when there were less paintings against the wall, we would have parties and we would end up playing basketball, some pretty intense games, yup. That was good. (Poons pp. 30–31)

“Well, I think there's just the uniqueness about the building. I mean, I sent Andrew and Eric an email right after Labor Day—I was with some friends at a yard sale upstate, and there were, there was tons of junk, nothing I was interested in. You know, I always go and browse the books, and there was this book called *New York Then and Now*. And I looked through it, cause Eric had been talking about when Abraham Lincoln died, that they paraded his body through

many states, and they had come up Broadway through Union Square, and he was saying, ‘Wow, if you had a photograph of that, it would be great.’ So I’m looking through this book, and it’s 1911, from 10th Street looking north on Broadway, and I’m going, ‘There’s our building.’ And then there’s a shot from like 1974, or ‘75, and I’m like, ‘There’s our building!’ You know, and then, you know, I’d go down to that same corner and take a picture looking north, I’m like, ‘There’s our building!’ So, it’s, looking through that book—and you could see not just this neighborhood, but all the neighborhoods in New York, how they’ve gone through changes. I mean, some of them for the better, and some of them not for the better.” (Poons pp. 32–33)

Summary of Oral History Interview with Paula DeLuccia Poons

Paula DeLuccia Poons grew up in New Jersey, not far from New York City. She enrolled in a small art school in Ridgewood, New Jersey, where she had some exposure to working artists and the New York art scene. She transferred to the Kansas City Art Institute for one year, where she began to make abstract paintings and become more interested in the contemporary art scene.

DeLuccia Poons moved to New York City in 1974, and through a friend found a residence and studio space on Waverly Place, where many artists were living and working at the time. She became involved with artist Larry Poons, and visited him at his loft in the 827–831 Broadway building, ultimately moving into the loft in 1977, where she and Larry have lived since.

Their top-floor loft, as well as the building generally, was an important space in the New York art scene. The loft was previously inhabited by William Rubin, who had been the Director of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, and who hosted such writers and critics as Barbara Rose, Barnett Newman, Frank Stella, Michael Fried, and Lucinda Childs, along with Larry Poons. In addition to Rubin, the building also housed Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Paul Jenkins, and Jules Olitski, artists whose works are highly respected for their techniques of abstraction.

During their residence in the loft, Paula and her husband, Larry—both also regarded for their abstract paintings—continued to use the space as a hub for artists as well as musicians. A rehearsal session for Bob Dylan’s Rolling Thunder Revue tour was held at the loft, which included Bobby Neuwirth, Patti Smith, T-Bone Burnett, Danny Shea, and Bob Dylan himself, as well as a possible appearance by Joni Mitchell. The well-known art critic Clement Greenberg also celebrated his 75th birthday in their loft, which was a popular site for many informal gatherings over the years.

DeLuccia Poons also details the maintenance of the building across a series of owners, who frequently made minimal, if any, repairs, and the challenges of being a long-term, rent-stabilized tenant, particularly in a building that has dramatically risen in property value. Notably, following an unsuccessful bid to clear the building of tenants, recent owners filed for a demolition permit; this action prompted intervention by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation to propose the 827–831 Broadway building to the Landmarks Preservation Commission for landmark status, and thus protection from demolition, due to the building’s cultural value—detailed in DeLuccia Poons’s interview—as well as its historic façade.

Compiled by Sarah Dziedzic

General Interview Notes

This is a transcription of an Oral History that was conducted by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation.

The GVSHP Oral History Project includes a collection of interviews with individuals involved in local businesses, culture, and preservation, to gather stories, observations, and insights concerning the changing Greenwich Village. These interviews elucidate the personal resonances of the neighborhood within the biographies of key individuals, and illustrate the evolving neighborhood.

Oral history is a method of collecting memories and histories through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of adding to the historical record.

The recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. Oral history is not intended to present the absolute or complete narrative of events. Oral history is a spoken account by the interviewee in response to questioning. Whenever possible, we encourage readers to listen to the audio recordings to get a greater sense of this meaningful exchange.

THANK YOU!

Oral History Interview Transcript

Dziedzic: Today is September 27, 2017, and this is Sarah Dziedzic, interviewing Paula Poons in her apartment at 827 Broadway.

Poons: Yes.

Dziedzic: And this is an interview for the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation Oral History Project. Would you mind just introducing yourself, and saying where you were born, just say your name, and?

Poons: Paula DeLuccia, also known at Paula DeLuccia Poons. I was born in Paterson, New Jersey, in 1953. And I'm an artist. Married to an artist.

Dziedzic: Artists all around. So, before we get to this building, can, I just wanted to ask you a few questions about where you grew up—

Poons: Sure.

Dziedzic: —and, so you mentioned New Jersey, if you could just talk about who you grew up with, and what that place was like.

Poons: I was born in Paterson, and at the time, Paterson was noted—well, before that, actually, it was a lot of silk factories, and there was a large industrial area, and then there was a residential area, and my father was a doctor. So we lived on what was called Park Avenue, and, you know, growing up, you don't think about these things—what's supposed to be an upscale neighborhood or not, and, you know, it was just, there was a railroad track a block from our house, and we used to play in the little dead-end alleyway around the corner from our house, and then I guess the neighborhood started getting rough. And my parents decided that we were gonna move to the suburbs, which we did when I was six. And that was North Haledon, and it was a lot different than Paterson. Since, when we moved there, the street that we were on, I think there was one other house, and the rest of it was fairly wooded. So it was a big difference. And within a short amount of time, that street filled up completely. So—

Dziedzic: What was that suburb like, just in terms of—or what did it become, I guess, just in terms of demographics, and I'm not sure where it is, where is the location?

Poons: North Haledon is probably maybe five or ten minutes from Paterson, but when you're a kid, in your mind, as New York City was, in my mind, growing up, New York City was a million miles away. And I've had to drive back to that area of New Jersey, you know, for different family events, and, say on a Sunday morning, from here to there, maybe twenty minutes. [laughs] It's not very long at all. With no traffic it's like, wow, that was really short. So, you know, when you're a kid, everything is like a million miles away, or, you know, it's forever to get there, why would I want to do that? But, it's not long at all, not a long distance.

Dziedzic: What was the school like that you went to?

Poons: The school, when I moved to North Haledon, I was actually going to a Catholic school. And so when I was in Paterson, I was at the public school. And then when I moved, because of when I was born, they thought I was too young to advance a grade, as—same thing with my sister, we were born like a year apart. So we both repeated one grade, just for age reasons, and so I was there from I think second grade to sixth grade, and then I—I just couldn't take it anymore. It was tough, being in a Catholic school, it was very tough, so then I went to the public school from sixth grade right through high school.

Dziedzic: So your parents allowed you to make a choice.

Poons: I think they saw the necessity of it, that it was really hard. And it was just emotionally very stressful, so we all got to move out of the Catholic school.

Dziedzic: Is there a way that you'd feel comfortable answering what was hard about it for you?
[00:04:45]

Poons: I think the nuns were—well, that nun in particular was, her name was Sister Mary Mellotone, I think. I think that was her name, and she was a very old woman, and not a good teacher. I mean, there were good teachers. I remember the second grade teacher was very good, and then I think the third grade teacher was Sister Superior, and then I think the fourth grade teacher was Miss Collins. I forget who the fifth grade teacher was—I think she was okay. And then the sixth grade teacher was brutal, so you sort of had this kind of up and down with who you had, and having gone to a school where I had siblings who were ahead of me, you know, it's like, "Oh, you're so-and-so's sister," you know, and it's that kind of thing, you know, cause I

had a brother who was a bit of a troublemaker. So, following after that, you know, was hard. I mean, I remember, I have naturally curly hair, and being in school, there was—I forget which nun it was, but she was kind of giving a lecture about hairdos, and I remember, I mean, it took a while for it to sink in that she was referring to me, because most people don't have curly hair, and when I was a kid growing up with curly hair, it was tough. You know, it was different. And I felt that way until I basically got to art school and it was like, "Oh, it's ok." But no matter how hard I tried, it was still curly. And she made some reference about Jackie Kennedy. And I was like, I think she's talking about me. So it was, yeah, it was tough, it was culturally difficult.

Dziedzic: And this is also the mid-[19]60s, right?

Poons: Yup.

Dziedzic: So, a lot of cultural difficulties at that time, generally speaking.

Poons: Mmhmm.

Dziedzic: So what sort of, I guess, changes, did you experience when you went to the public school? I guess both in terms of the kids who were there, and things that you were interested in studying.

Poons: Well, when you—at that time, when you went to school, you didn't really have a choice of—except when you got to high school, and then you could kind of choose different things. A little bit. Not like it is today. I mean, you could pick which language you wanted to study. But in public grammar school, it was just—actually, coming from the Catholic school and going to the public school, you realized how much better the education was at the Catholic school. Cause it was like you knew so much more. So I felt like I was really smart. [laughs] The difficulty was, again, transferring in the middle of a year, and making new friends, that was hard. Because, in a way, they kind of, there was a group of people that kind of made fun of people that went to Catholic school, and they were kind of curious, like we were these "things." Almost like a foreigner. So—

Dziedzic: You're reminding me of how terrible high school is.

Poons: [laughing] Yes!

Dziedzic: All these things.

Poons: Sorry. [laughter]

Dziedzic: So what were you, I guess, were there certain subjects that you enjoyed more than others?

Poons: Well, I always enjoyed art, and probably literature. Thinking back, maybe science. Probably geography. I know that when I was in the Catholic school I enjoyed geography. And for a while I was really good at spelling. I don't know what happened to that.

Dziedzic: What was your—did you have a relationship with New York City at the time?

Poons: The only relationship I had was an occasional school trip, either to a museum, or to the World's Fair. Things like that.

Dziedzic: So, you graduated. [laughs]

Poons: I did.

Dziedzic: [laughs] So, what was your, what were your next steps, after finishing high school, what sort of— [00:09:47]

Poons: Well, when I finished high school, upon graduation, I received two awards that I didn't think I was gonna get. I didn't even think about getting them. It was like, total surprise. I got top athlete, or top female athlete, and outstanding artist. And I was like, oh, well. I thought, well, maybe that will help me make up my mind what I want to do. Cause I hadn't applied to any colleges. So, there was a small private art school in Wyckoff, New Jersey—no, in Ridgewood, New Jersey. And I decided I would go there. And they had a pretty good faculty. A lot of the people that were teaching there were actually artists from New York. And actually that's how I came to meet Larry [Poons], through one of the women that was teaching there. So, I went there for two years, and I think it was a really good school. And a small school, but they had excellent facilities, and good teachers. And then, that woman suggested I go to Kansas City Art Institute, cause it was a much bigger place, and I would have more opportunity, so I applied, and I ended up going there for a year. And then I ran out of money. And then I moved to New York.

Dziedzic: [laughs] What was the style of art education at the Ridgewood school?

Poons: They had, let's see. I took sculpture, I took printmaking, I took drawing, life drawing, painting, calligraphy, art history, so basically everything.

Dziedzic: Mmhmm. Did you have a sense of what was happening contemporaneously in the art scene in New York?

Poons: No, I didn't, not really. Not until probably—not until I got to Kansas City. Yup. And then I started looking at more stuff, and reading more stuff, and they had the Nelson Art Gallery right across the street, and I would go there and look at stuff.

Dziedzic: What were some of the works that you saw, or artists whose work that you saw that were inspiring?

Poons: I saw a lot of, they had a pretty good collection of abstract expressionist art, like, from females, like Grace Hartigan and Lee Krasner, and Elaine de Kooning, and they had a big Jules Olitski painting that I remember that I really liked. Big yellow painting. Those are the things I remember clearly. I mean, they probably had a lot more, but those are the things that I remember clearly.

Dziedzic: And they did start to influence your work formally?

Poons: Yes, I would say, yes. Mmhmm. When I got to Kansas City, I was painting from nature. And I had a really good instructor, who pretty much let me do what I wanted to do, and it was great. I mean, I would take an easel out onto the roof of the studio and paint, you know, just—it was great. And they also had a lot of open drawing classes, and I was drawing all the time, and so the two things that I remember most are the drawing and painting out there. I took printmaking, but that really wasn't what interested me.

So, when I—I guess, it was Christmas time in 1973, and I came to New York and I visited my friend, Sherron Francis, who was a painter—and actually I think it was the summer before, I did come to New York and look at some art. And she had suggested some shows, and actually one of the shows—I don't even know if she suggested it, but Larry had a painting down at, I think it was Castelli Gallery. It was a dot painting, and it was like amazing. So I had seen a little bit, but when I got to Kansas City, I still had not been influenced by that so much.

Then, come Christmas time I came back, and spent some time in New York, just visiting, and then when I got back to Kansas City I got a studio in the basement of the painting building, and it was, it was a good-size room, considering. It was probably like from there, to maybe the edge of that painting. And then this big. And there were three of us in there, and they were two of my best friends. But in my mind, I knew that this should be my studio. So, I kind of acted up until they finally split [laughing] and went to the room next door. And it had a short wall, I mean, I could like stand on a chair and look over and talk to them. But that was my studio, and I just started painting these big abstract paintings. So. And then the instructor was very encouraging, and I remember he would take the head of the painting department down to see my work, and he would kind of look around and go, “This is a graduate student situation.” Meaning I shouldn’t be there doing what I’m doing, because I was taking up all this space. So. [00:16:06]

Dziedzic: And then you said you left.

Poons: Well, I ran out of money. So, I had a choice of staying in Kansas City and seeing what work I could pick up, or moving to New York. And that’s what I ended up doing.

Dziedzic: Mmhmm. So how did you get settled in the city?

Poons: Well, my friend Sherron had a space in her loft, and she said I could—I forget if I was renting, renting part of it? Or if I was just staying there? I don’t know. But within the year, that was at 16 Waverly Place, and this was all on the top floor, so there were several artists in the building; Dan Christensen was in the building, another instructor that I had at Ridgewood School of Art, Jim Anderson, was in the building, and then on the—it went 16, 14, 12 Waverly, so it was all basically three separate buildings, but they connected through these fire doors, so you could actually walk through, or climb the stairs. So, another artist, Mernet Larsen¹ was at 12 Waverly, and she was leaving, so that space became available. So, I was sharing that with another guy, Richard Protovin, who was an animator. And then, during this time, I had met Larry, so I was going back and forth between Waverly Place and here. And that was in, let’s see, moved to New York in [19]74, so by [19]77 I had moved in here with Larry.

¹ In this past, this artist has used the name Mernet Larsen Strawn

Dziedzic: So it sounds like this whole block of buildings on Waverly Place was full of artists, was—

Poons: There were a lot of artists there. There was a musician, jazz musician. I can't remember his name right now. It was an NYU building, and if you go by there now, it's nothing like it was then. NYU took it back and redid it, and there was an old luncheonette on the corner of, I guess that would be Mercer. I think it was Mercer and Waverly, you know, painted that [19]50s green.

Dziedzic: Yeah. And what was the neighborhood like more generally, at the time?

Poons: Funky New York. Definitely. Not what you would call gentrified. I mean, not that that neighborhood—I guess, at the time, there were some odd things, you know, risky—there was a club across the street, The Locale, that the former owner of Max's Kansas City joined up with Richard Sanders, who had that place that was called The Local, and then when they joined up they called it The Locale, formerly The Local. So all I basically had to do was walk down my stairs, and walk across the street, and walk down those stairs, and that was my hangout. And I remember one night walking home and going up the stairs, climbing six flights, and there some guy like laying right at my doorstep, and I was, "Ahh," so ran down the stairs and went back over to my, through 16, and said, "There's somebody in my hallway!" And by the time—he was faking. It was like he was trying to break in. So by the time I got back over, I see this guy running out, and I'm like, "That's him." You know. More than once, my loft had been broken into. Yeah, it was—

Dziedzic: Was it your studio space as well?

Poons: It was. [00:20:08]

Dziedzic: I remember hearing a story about somebody who was, I think it was Jim O. Clarke—

Poons: Uh-huh, I know Jim, yup.

Dziedzic: Talking about how he used to cut a hole in the door to his studio and chain it up, so you could look in and see that it was just a bunch of paint—

Poons: Right.

Dziedzic: —paintings or whatever, and they wouldn't break in. No televisions, no stereos—

Poons: Yup.

Dziedzic: And then you could save the money and buy a—not that anything would get taken, but at least you wouldn't have to buy a new padlock. So.

Poons: Right. I had not known that. His neighborhood must have been a little more risky than mine.

Dziedzic: I think he might have been in SoHo.

Poons: Oh yeah? Ok.

Dziedzic: But he—yeah, I can't remember, I'm not sure. But if you're on the sixth floor, maybe you didn't have quite the same situation.

Poons: Mmhmm.

Dziedzic: And The Locale, formerly known as The Local—

Poons: Mmhmm.

Dziedzic: —did that bring some Max's Kansas City clientele?

Poons: It did. Definitely.

Dziedzic: Or, what was the scene there?

Poons: It didn't have the music scene, you know, Max's had that, the music element, and it didn't have that, but a lot of the artists that hung out at Max's did definitely go there. And then I forget if it was the Lower Manhattan Ocean Club that was the next place that Mickey and Richard opened up, and then they ended up at 1 University Place, called Chinese Chance. And I think that was their final stop. But definitely, definitely attracted the Max's crowd. Yup.

Dziedzic: And were there, I mean, were there discussions about art going on? Or music, I guess?
[laughter]

Poons: I don't remember that!

Dziedzic: That kind of, you know, Cedar Tavern—

Poons: I'm not sure that art discussions really—I wasn't there, [laughter] but I think with all the drinking that went on, I'm not sure how much art was discussed, in you know, all seriousness. I mean, there were definitely some things that, you know, would be talked about/ I mean, at one— at Chinese Chance, you know, there was art on the wall, and sometimes we would talk about that, but, you know, not in depth.

Dziedzic: Right, it's the way that, you know, the kind of late [19]40s, early [19]50s scene in New York is described, as kind of a, you know, a bunch of—like physically fighting over—

Poons: Right.

Dziedzic: —over abstraction. [laughs]

Poons: Yeah.

Dziedzic: So, you know, how that translated into the [19]70s.

Poons: You know, there might have been a little of that. There were definitely—you know, I know that Taylor Mead used to hang out at Chinese Chance, and probably people that I didn't know, but, so there may have been a little of that tension. Julian Schnabel had been working in the kitchen at The Locale, I remember meeting him there.

Dziedzic: Wow. So, what was your, I guess, your, were you making art as a career at that time?

Poons: I was making art. Probably the same way I'm making art now, just making art. I really didn't think of art in terms of career. I mean, I just thought, you'll paint and something will happen. I mean, it wasn't like I was going out pursuing galleries. And I think what happened with art schools—definitely it happened with art schools later on—is they realized that people were coming, and when they were leaving art schools they really didn't have a way to continue. So, they made that more a part of what they're doing. And as you can see now, with what's going on in the art world, that became a big business. Instead of parents sending their kids to college to become lawyers and doctors—not that I think that parents should push their kids one way or another if they have no aptitude for that, they're gonna make terrible choices, but suddenly it was like, “Hey, wait a minute, my kid can scribble; I'm gonna send him to art school.

He's got talent." Or, "I'm gonna send him to college, and I'm gonna send him to grad school, and, you know, he'll get an MFA and be a millionaire." So, that kind of thing developed later on, probably, I would say, maybe ten years later. Cause you could see, just by the dates of who's painting and what they're doing, how that developed. [00:25:27]

Dziedzic: Was there a sense of the art star in the [19]70s in New York?

Poons: Probably that was more from the [19]60s. You know, there were a lot of art stars in the [19]60s. I mean, the whole—there was not this conflict about, "Oh, you paint abstract paintings; you paint this." It was more like everybody was becoming an art star at the same time. And then later on, I think, there was definitely a division between, like, the pop artists and the color field artists. So, I guess it depends on if you were aligned with the pop artists, you would have had a whole choice of who you thought the art stars were, and the same thing on the other side.

Dziedzic: Mmhmm, mmhmm.

Poons: So I think with regard to, say, the color field group, Jules Olitski was considered a star, Helen Frankenthaler, Ken Noland, Larry, to a certain extent. But he was younger, he was like a generation younger than those guys. Larry Zox was around, Dan Christensen. But those, again, were younger, Dan being even younger. So.

Dziedzic: Mmhmm. Hadn't thought about that before.

Poons: Yeah!

Dziedzic: Well, so let's talk about this, this building. So you started coming here in 1974, you said.

Poons: Right. Well, Larry moved in here in '74, and then I moved to New York in '74, so probably, maybe it was '74 the first time I saw this space. And it had been William Rubin's space before Larry took it over, and William Rubin had been the director of the painting department at the Museum of Modern Art. And he had Richard Meier design the space, probably more than—you know, probably more than once, I would say. I don't know for sure, but I know that when Larry took over the space, Richard Meier had, there was wall-to-wall green carpeting, none of the windows were exposed—

Dziedzic: Meaning there were drapes?

Poons: No, there was a wall. A wall built over them. Basically, you were like walking into this space, and it was like you were walking into, basically like a museum. I mean, it was quiet, it was like a different world. So—

Dziedzic: It's still quiet. I'm surprised by how quiet it is.

Poons: Yeah. But it was even quieter. And, of course, there was less stuff. I mean, Larry was working in the back, so this was the living area. One of things that Bill Rubin—or that Larry got from Bill Rubin—was this very large, modern Danish table. And it had a bunch of brown canvas director's chairs around it. And I remember one night Larry said, "You know, this isn't mine, this is Rubin's. Let's get it out of here." And I'm thinking to myself, "Not sure you want to do that." So we marched it out to the street, and it was gone in no time. I mean, that was probably several thousand dollars worth of table. And years later, I said to Larry, "That was probably a valuable table." He said, "Well, why didn't you tell me?" I said, "I think I did." [laughter] So, the only paintings in the loft at the time were things that were hung on the wall, so now, you know, there's piles of stuff, and things have been rearranged, and, you know, it's our home now.

Dziedzic: Mmhmm. What else do you know about the transition between Bill Rubin and your husband?

Poons: Well, the first thing Larry did was paint the bedroom dark blue. [laughs] And it was like, really dark blue, like navy blue. It was not a nice color, I was like, "Why did you?"—ceiling, everything! It was like, "What were you thinking?" Maybe he painted both bedrooms dark blue. I think he did, definitely. Lasted like that for a long time. And, more, there were changes in the building, throughout the downstairs. When Larry moved in here there was a blood bank on the side of the building, I mean, sometimes I'm like, "I can't even believe that!" And on the south side, there was Sylvan's bookstore, so under 827 there was a bookstore, and under 831 there was a blood bank. And there was a glass door instead of the double green doors out front. And there was not the separate entrance door on the inside. So when you come in the double doors, then there's another door? That wasn't there. And people were coming in all the time, I forget. There was a buzzer system, but somehow people were somehow able to get in this building pretty easily. So, occasionally, you know, somebody would be ringing your bell that shouldn't be

ringing your bell. It was a little—it was a sketchy area, in a way, definitely. There was a bar on the corner of where the restaurant right here, Pret A Manger, a seedy bar. I can't remember the name of it, but I don't think I ever went in it. Yeah. [00:31:30]

Dziedzic: Did Larry know Bill Rubin somehow? Is that—

Poons: He did.

Dziedzic: Is that how—

Poons: He did.

Dziedzic: —he ended up with the space?

Poons: He did. Yes. I think there had been a card game that a bunch of the—let's see, I don't think it was, I'm not sure it was ever held here. I think it was held uptown. So it was Bill Rubin, and Clement Greenberg, and Larry, and maybe Jules Olitski, and a couple other people. So, they did know each other. And, of course Larry knew—I think you have a photograph there?

Dziedzic: Right, yes. It's not a card game, but—

Poons: No, this is an obvious serious discussion of—there's Barbara Rose, and Frank Stella, Larry, and Lucinda Childs, and Bill Rubin, and Barnett Newman, and Michael Fried. So, and if you look at this picture, this corner is like that corner in that room. But you could see here, he had a wall. And that wall, I guess, was another renovation. Yeah, I would have to, I mean, that's—there's a book of Richard Meier's, all his works, and the Bill Rubin renovation is listed in there. It's not illustrated, but I would have to, like, compare that date to this photograph. Cause this was in the [19]60s. And I don't think I see a big green rug, but I'm not sure. [laughter]

Dziedzic: And that rug was over these floors, I guess, these original—

Poons: Yup, yup.

Dziedzic: Do you know what was, what the industry was that was in this building?

Poons: Well, I've read some articles, and sewing machines. And I think there was something else, tobacco? I'm thinking tobacco? And then there was something about importing stuff from

Japan? I was just reading all this just recently, yeah. Which is ironic, because Larry was born in Japan, and his father was in the import/export business.

Dziedzic: Wow.

Poons: Yeah—

Dziedzic: Interesting.

Poons: —so I was saying, “I wonder if he had any dealings.” I would have to go back and check dates, but.

Dziedzic: Wow!

Poons: Yeah.

Dziedzic: So can you talk about the other artists that were in the building, too, when you first started coming here?

Poons: So, when Larry moved in here, Elaine de Kooning lived on the third floor. Jules Olitski lived on the second floor; Paul Jenkins lived across the hall; and a woman named Royalene Ward lived upstairs in the penthouse. And she actually lived here longer than—she had that space longer than Larry had this space. She got that space from Elaine de Kooning, so—then, I didn’t know that. I mean, years later, Royalene told me how she got it. And then there was Pratt Graphics, I forget which floor they were on. And Fred Dorfman was a print dealer, and he was on the third floor, right, he was on the third floor on the north² side, and then where Elaine de Kooning had her studio. Eventually Elaine moved out, and Paul Jenkins took over that space. So, Paul was actually a really friendly neighbor. He was actually a great neighbor. He would always write letters and slip ‘em under your door, and he loved to collect knives and occasionally he would give you a knife, or a sword. [laughs] [00:35:22]

Dziedzic: So it’s not just the ivory knife for painting, it’s—

Poons: No, no! He loved, he loved to collect knives. Yeah. Jules, you saw him occasionally, he kind of kept to himself. The way Jules worked is he would sleep during the day and paint at

² This should read “south side”

night. He also had a place on Bear Island in New Hampshire, so he would spend his summers up there. And then in the '70s, he bought a place down in Islamorada, Florida, so he spent some time here, some time not here. And he had a studio assistant named Richard Ziello, and Richard and his wife spent a lot of time here. So we got to spend time at that loft, by visiting Richard and Joanne, who we were friends with.

Dziedzic: Do you know if Bill Rubin had anything to do with kind of populating the building, or—

Poons: No.

Dziedzic: —how that came about?

Poons: No. De Kooning was already here. [laughs] Actually, in a way—I only learned this from Dan Budnik—Ray Parker had this space, and another artist, who Dan could not remember the name of. And Bill Rubin, I guess, was familiar with the building through, probably, de Kooning, and with Jules Olitski. And he approached the landlord, and said, “I’ll give you ten years rent in advance, if you get them out of the top floor and let me have that space.” So that’s what he did.

Dziedzic: Oh wow.

Poons: Yeah. Not nice, but it happened.

Dziedzic: Ten years of rent.

Poons: Mmhmm!

Dziedzic: I’ll have to do the math. So was this, you know, kind of, aside from this building, were there a lot of artists living in this neighborhood at the time? Or was this—this is kind of far east, in, in a sense.

Poons: Let me think. Yes, there were. Wolf Kahn was right down the block, at 813. I can’t remember his name. Lived right on the next block. Well, between Grace Church and, I guess—11th Street, let’s see, doesn’t go through there, so beyond that block, I can’t remember his name, but he and his wife lived there, and she still has the place. There were some artists right across the street. So there were probably more artists than we knew about. I mean, it’s just that kind of

thing, that sometimes you just don't know who your neighbors are. I mean, it took us years before I knew Wolf Kahn was down here.

Dziedzic: And what about musicians, also?

Poons: I don't know. I don't really know of any musicians that really lived in the neighborhood.

Dziedzic: Mmhmm. Maybe it would have been further east.

Poons: Probably.

Dziedzic: But I read something about Bob Neuwirth having rehearsals in this—

Poons: Yeah, Bobby and Larry were good friends, and I guess they had originally met at Max's Kansas City. And Bobby also studied painting, and is still a painter, and of course was a musician. And occasionally—Bob had a place out in California, and he still does, and he would come to the east coast and visit, and he would stay with Larry. Almost every time, I think, that he would come to the east coast, he would stay here. And then, I guess, there was this talk of the Rolling Thunder Revue gonna be taking place, and so Bobby was here a lot. And then, one night—I was here, except I left before everything happened. [laughter] It's like, why didn't you just tell me? [laughter] I remember Patti Smith was here, and then a guy named Danny Shea and Bobby and Larry had gone to the airport, and I think they were picking up T-Bone Burnett. And then [Bob] Dylan showed up, and I don't know who else was here. I don't know if Joni Mitchell was here for that one, but there were a lot of people here, and supposedly it went all through the night, of them practicing. [00:40:14]

Dziedzic: Wow.

Poons: Yeah. Yeah, it was a long time before Larry wanted to clean the piano keys that Dylan played on. [laughter]

Dziedzic: [laughter] Ah, that's funny. Well, I just, I want to talk a little bit about your, like, habitation here, I guess—

Poons: Ok.

Dziedzic: —just kind of from the perspective that we maybe talked a little bit about before starting the interview, which is just having space and studio space. So, how, aside from, kind of, this as a meeting place, or a hub, kind of, how have you used this space?

Poons: Ok, so, basically this part is our living area, and that front room is kind of a living/working area. You know, we have the piano in there, and there's some guitars, and we'll have parties, and we'll occupy that space as well as this space, but in the back, that's where the studios are. Or, Larry had been working there from '74 to '89 when he dripped paint, and it went downstairs, and the landlord had a brass needle point shower that Cyndi Lauper was going to buy, and it suddenly had pink paint on it. And Larry went, "Eh, I don't think I should do that anymore." [Dziedzic laughs] When he first moved in, he had dripped some paint, and I remember Elaine de Kooning bringing up a fluorescent light fixture and putting it there, saying, you know, "You've got to replace this." And then it reminded me—I came across a letter that Paul Jenkins had sent to Larry saying, "I don't mind if you drip paint, I'll just put a canvas there and catch it."

So, let's see, Jack Sobel had been the landlord when Larry moved in, and as things changed in the scene in New York in the late '70s, Jack started getting the itch for more money. So, basically he started harassing Larry. And I remember, we had to go to court. We won. Eventually Jack died, they sold the building to Howard Kaplan and David Kyner. The loft board was doing the whole thing about, you know, legalizing spaces, so there was all of this stuff going on at the time. And—

Dziedzic: Was it all rentals before that?

Poons: Let's see. When the building got sold, Jules Olitski thought there was going to be, like, a big legal battle, and he didn't want to deal with it. And he moved out. Michael Raab was on the third floor, and he's still there. Royalene was upstairs. Let me see. So, right, so when Howard and David bought the building, David took over the space across the hall, which—oh, not immediately, cause Paul still had that space. So Paul had, I think, a twenty-year commercial lease. So when his lease ran out, he had to move, but he had a space across the street, at 840 Broadway. So, the third floor became vacant, and Howard took over that—Howard Kaplan, cause, you know, he owned the building. He had the front part renovated. And I guess they used the back part for doing restoration of antiques.

So, being on the top floor, that was a very, very difficult thing for many, many years. Everybody says, “Oh, you’re lucky you have the top floor.” Well, the top floor is great until your roof starts leaking. And your landlord doesn’t want to fix it. And we went through many, many, many years of that. I mean, it was really bad. Or they would, you know, do something superficial, like have a coating put on. I mean, if you saw this space four years ago, you would have been shocked. I mean, there were chunks of ceiling out, and they’d never painted the place, in forty years, it’d never been painted. So, it was a big difference.

And the only thing that changed all that is when I discovered mold in my studio. And it was bad, I mean really bad. I mean, we used to have a leak in there that in the one corner it would pour down so much that it rotted out the corner of the floor, and I could look right down to the third floor. And take pictures. Which I did. [laughs] So once you get a mold issue, then they have to do something, you know. [00:45:42]

Dziedzic: Were they, I mean, was it just regular neglect, or were they trying to get you to leave?

Poons: I think it was—I think it was a couple of things. Knowing the amount of times I complained, and knowing the amount of times they came up and looked, and knowing the amount of times they did nothing, it was a little bit of a standoff. It was like, ok, am I gonna take them—I mean, I didn’t want to get involved, nor did Larry, get involved with a legal thing. Although in hindsight, we should’ve. It would’ve been much better, to not—Larry in a way felt sorry for them. “Oh, we’re rent-stabilized.” But Larry didn’t realize, nor did I, you know, that when somebody owns a building with rent-stabilized tenants, it isn’t like they’re losing out; they get certain credits. So, it was like, yeah, we should have been more demanding, and less threatening, and more proactive, about getting them to do something, but considering what it took after they discovered the mold, or I discovered the mold, it was, it was a nightmare, I mean, literally a nightmare. I basically had to move everything from the studio into one half of the loft and then everything from here back there, and, very, very disruptive. The guy that they hired was somebody who cut corners, you know, they would say things like, “Oh, I hire the best guys,” and I’d be, like, walking through, and they would’ve taken, say, one of those doors off the hinges, and it would be laying on the floor so that he could lay down and not get dust on him, and he’s sitting there, talking on his cell phone, and I would take a picture and I would send it to him, like, “Oh, this is the best?” You know. So.

So then, we actually got wind that Howard and David wanted to sell the building—this is all right at the tail end of them having to do the mold remediation. I mean, they had to take out the entire ceiling in here, most of the ceiling in the studio, tore down walls in there; it was a big deal. Big deal. So, I had been consulting my lawyer all along, one of my lawyers, and he said, “According to your lease, you don’t have to pay rent on space that you’re not able to use.” So, at some point, we couldn’t use any of the space, so we had stopped paying rent. And, in the back of my mind, I kept saying, “We better make sure that this is all on the up and up.” So, there would be email exchanges between myself and the landlords, and occasionally from my lawyer to them. So, I guess when they were trying to sell the building, they were trying to get as many tenants out as possible. So, one day, I think their lawyer said that we owed them like two years back rent, and by then I had hired one of the top tenant lawyers in the city.

And so we had a little negotiation, and then I called in the city, because there were—at this point, I was like, ok, well, you know, you’ve got these violations that, through the remediation, these shouldn’t have been here, but now they’re obvious, and if—you know, we’re gonna fight fire with fire. And looking at the things that the guy pointed out, there are things I wasn’t even aware of, like there was a crack in a skylight, and he just looked up and went, “Cracked skylight,” and I’m like, “I don’t even care about that.” Broken window, windows that don’t open. I mean, for years the windows didn’t open. So all those things had to be fixed, and the floor had been damaged from all the water, and they should have taken the floor up and redid it, or even just sanded it, but they didn’t want to do that, because at this point they didn’t want to put money into a building that they were selling. So they had a—he was a top quality contractor—come in, and they were basically wanting him to do a down and dirty job, but he wouldn’t do it. But when it came to the floor, the only thing he could do was like take some wood filler and fill in between the cracks. Which is now coming out, you know, if you go in there and vacuum, it all comes out. So— [00:50:22]

Dziedzic: So they had owned the building for thirty, thirty years or so?

Poons: Yes. Mmhmm, yup. But when they wanted out, they wanted out.

Dziedzic: Do you know what prompted them to want to sell?

Poons: I don't know what prompted Howard, but David was renting out the apartment next door—or, it was divided into more than one, so he had at least two tenants over there. So as far as him making income off of that, he was making a good income. They had the Halstead real estate on the north end, and on the entire second floor, and they had the clothing store—there used to—David Kyner had kept the antique business going. I guess it was the entire ground floor for a while, and then Howard had La Belle Epoque, which was a cabaret, for a while—

Dziedzic: So it was Sylvan's, and then the antique store—

Poons: Yeah, once they bought the building, Sylvan's went out, and the blood bank of course went out. I mean, it was hard to believe that the blood bank was there that long, but, I don't know, maybe it was something else that I'm not remembering. But, the whole ground floor became the antique store, and then it was only half. I guess Howard saw the end of the antique business, and David wanted to stick with it. So David did, and Howard then opened—I think it was Howard Kaplan Designs—up in the Sixties somewhere. Which dealt with more modern stuff. So, at some point, David moved to Florida, to Fort Lauderdale, and I guess closed the antique business. So he really didn't have that much of an interest in staying around. And for him to come to New York was basically a headache. So I don't think, you know, when the antique business got separated, it was no longer Howard Kaplan Antiques, it was called David Barton Antiques. That was kind of, I think, the beginning of the end of their partnership. So I think, you know, they just weren't seeing eye-to-eye about things. I mean, this is me observing from somewhat of a distance. Cause they weren't calling me up on the phone and saying, “We're not getting along,” you know, we weren't—I had friends in real estate who occasionally would call me and say, “Your building is for sale.” Not that the owners were saying “Your building is for sale,” but I would find out through other sources. And that happened more than once.

Dziedzic: So wait, had it been on the market for a long time before it was—

Poons: It was on and off the market.

Dziedzic: I see.

Poons: And then, I guess that was in the beginning of—either the end of 2014 or the beginning of 2015, there had been some real interest in people buying the building. And we were getting

calls about being bought out, and, you know, it just wasn't a number that we were interested in. We couldn't do anything—we couldn't get anything like this for the number that people were throwing out. And then, I think Larry and I were in Florida for a motorcycle race, and when I came back up, there was a note for “Mrs. Luccia Poon,” and I figured that was me [Dziedzic laughs]—it was close enough—and it said, “My name is Leo, and I'm gonna be buying the building, and I'd like to talk with you.” And I had a friend who works at Colliers, so I said, “Would you call him?” And so he talked to him. I've never spoken with Leo, who's the new owner. I've never met him.

And then another guy, in a very sneaky way, got our number. And said, “Oh, my name is Brent, and, you know, I grew up—my grandmother had a painting of Larry's, and so I grew up around Larry's art, and, you know, I'm gonna buy the building, Leo's not gonna buy the building, and I just want you to know, everything is ok. I'm not gonna do anything, and if I did anything, I would move you out for a little while,” and you know, it was like, very nice, but that didn't happen. So when the building got sold, in August of 2015, the first, our lease was due I think in September, to be renewed. We get a letter from the new landlord saying “We're not renewing your lease,” and it was like this whole litany of things, of why they shouldn't renew our lease, saying we have a home in the country. But this is our primary residence, I mean, everything is done out of here. [00:55:55]

Dziedzic: Which it has to be for rent-stabilized—

Poons: Right. And I know how many days you're supposed to be—and the thing I didn't know, which is an interesting fact, and I learned from our lawyer, is that we travel a lot. I mean, Larry either travels for shows, or, he motorcycle races, so there's a lot of time we spend on the road. And time when you're traveling does not count towards time either here or there, it's like neutral time, which was, like, great to know. So I've kept calendars of how many days I'm in the city, and how many days I'm upstate, and how many days I'm traveling; I have a whole little code. And, you know, I had to go and dig up two years' worth of documents, bank statements, bills, everything, so [laughs] I'm not going through that again.

Dziedzic: Phone records.

Poons: It was a lot of work. And, you know, my lawyer was totally on the up and up, and he said, “Are you sure that you’re there that many days?” and I said, “Absolutely. You know, I wouldn’t be going through this if I wasn’t.” So, they were gonna take us to court, and try to prove a non-primary residence, and my lawyer said, “Fine, but, you know, you’ll end up paying them the legal fees.” So then at some point my lawyer met—these lawyers are always passing each other in court, cause they’re always in court, that’s what they do. The lawyer said, “Well, we’re not gonna pursue the non-primary residence case; we’re gonna apply for a demo permit.” So, we’re like, “Ok.”

Dziedzic: Wow. Were there, were they going through similar things with other tenants?

Poons: They couldn’t, because the other tenant—well, we’ll have to back up a little bit. Royalene. Royalene had been in here since before Larry, since Larry moved in in ’74. She must have been in here easily from 1970, who knows, it could have been earlier—she’s died since then, so we can’t ask her. And at some point, Howard and David wanted that space upstairs. They wanted to rent—she was only paying, I think when she moved out, her top rent was like five hundred and twenty dollars a month. I mean, it’s a small space, but still, five hundred and twenty dollars. And she could have stayed there forever, cause she was a rent-stabilized tenant. So they decided they would offer her [phone rings]—I’ll just let that ring.

Dziedzic: Ok.

Poons: Do you want to turn it off, or?

Dziedzic: Just hold off, hold off on your story until the ring stops.

Poons: Ok. So, they did everything they could to get her out, and then finally, I don’t know if they made a cash deal, as well as got her—they had another property on Irving Place, and that’s where she moved to. And I don’t think she ever liked it there. Royalene was a terrific smoker, if one should use that adjective to describe a smoker, but on occasion, when Royalene was living here, there would be plumbing issues, and we would have water come down, and I’d have to go upstairs and knock on her door, and just walking up the stairs, you’d get like halfway to her place, and you could just smell the smoke. She ended up getting cancer, unfortunately [phone

rings] and died. So, they got her out, and they—we'll just wait. It's probably my husband. I'll be right back. [01:00:15]

Dziedzic: Sure, no problem. [Poons answers phone]

Poons: Sorry.

Dziedzic: No problem.

Poons: Ok. So they ended up gutting the space upstairs, and, you know, made—I mean, it's a small space, maybe eight hundred square feet? Six hundred? Not very big. And then rented it out to a guy, young guy who was a hedge fund—worked, you know, hedge funds. And you'd hear him walking across the roof. Anyway, it turns out that David was also a motorcycle racer, is also a motorcycle racer. I remember the first time I spoke with him, I met him downstairs, and he was in full leathers, and I could see that he was all scuffed up, and I asked him if he was ok. He said, "Oh yeah, I just wrecked my bike." And then, it turns out that he and Larry raced in the same organization; Larry races vintage bikes, David races modern bikes. So, we would talk. And, you know, Howard thought that, you know, David was like, on the total different end of the spectrum from Larry, and when he found out that, you know, we had something in common, he was just like, freaked out. Like, "How could you be friends with them?" I mean, he really did not like us, for no reason other than that we were tenants here. Truly. It was pathetic, but.

So, through my whole thing—my whole legal thing with them trying to get us out, and learning more about rent-stabilized tenants, I said to David, I said, "You know, there's a good chance that that space is still rent-stabilized." I said, "Just because they did renovations, that does not de-stabilize the space. And I'm sure it's still rent-stabilized, according to everything I've learned." [laughs] And, but that's the way they did it. They did things kind of down and dirty. Like, we had a plumbing issue here, and we had no water pressure. I mean, there were galvanized pipes. And when they tore them out, the hole was maybe about an eighth of an inch, so we literally had—so they were doing work on the building, and had a plumber come in, and just break open the walls and run these copper pipes on the outside of the walls. And for, from that day, which was, I don't know, in, some time in the '80s—I actually looked up the permit—until they had the guys doing the work on fixing the space for the mold remediation, we lived with a hole in our wall. I mean, that's like how much they cared about us being up here. I mean,

that would have been a total violation. Had I called in the city, they would have been, like “You’ve got, I mean, first of all, you can’t have those pipes like that, and second of all, you can’t have holes in the wall.” But they didn’t care. It was like, “There, I fixed your pipe. That’s it.” So, it was not, I mean, they’re just—they should be happy that we’re artists and we’re kind of used to funky things, cause anybody else would have said, “This is not acceptable.”

Dziedzic: Right.

Poons: So then David, being a hedge fund guy, they were trying to buy him out to get the building empty before they sold it. And they were like begging him, and he had just renewed his lease, and there was something they wanted him to agree to in the lease that he wasn’t gonna do, and basically it was contingent on the guy buying the building, and it was like the day they were doing the closing. They had David on the phone, and they were threatening him, and bribing him, and everything else, and, I mean, he didn’t need money. I mean, he had plenty of money. So, what happened was David moved to Puerto Rico. I mean, after the new owner bought the building, at some point, his lease was up, and he said, “I’m leaving, I’m moving to Puerto Rico,” cause it was a better tax advantage there. So I’m just hoping he’s ok, I’ve tried to get in touch with him since this thing [indicates recent hurricane affecting Puerto Rico]. Anyway, so then they had another guy rent that space, and he didn’t last very long, and now they just got a new couple up there; we’ll see how long they last. It’s one thing when you rent it in the summer. It’s another thing walking across the roof having to shovel snow in the winter. So we’ll see.

[01:06:08]

Dziedzic: That ends up being the responsibility of—

Poons: Well, I don’t know. David said he had shoveled the snow quite a bit. So.

Dziedzic: Can I ask what, I guess I’m curious about the buy-out offers, you know, I guess I’m curious about the square footage of this space, and what the offer is, if you’re comfortable, what their offer was.

Poons: Well, the former owners offered us nothing. The new owner offered us nothing. I mean, the fellow that we were dealing with at Colliers talked about what we—

Dziedzic: The speculation.

Poons: The speculation. I mean, he went high. You know, and whether that would be real—ever be realistic, I have no idea, but I mean, I've looked at other things, other buildings. Not that we're even interested in moving, because, as I said, where are you gonna get this?

Dziedzic: Right.

Poons: You know. So he was thinking in terms of ten million dollars, because for anybody to build up, they have to have the top floor. My friend who's a developer said that he once—and he's a very good landlord, you know, I said to him one day, "How could you stand being a landlord?" And he said, "It's easy. When somebody has a problem, I fix it." And I was like, "Well, there's a concept I've never experienced." So there's different landlords; they're all not like the ones that we had. So, basically, we haven't been offered anything, but if somebody would approach us with that, maybe that would—cause you've got, then you've gotta pay the lawyer, so he's gonna take twenty percent right away. And then there's the taxman, and he's gonna take, what, thirty percent right away. So what are you gonna end up with? After all that. You better have a plan. I know that they have talked to my neighbor, Mike Raab, and whatever they offered was, like, laughable. So.

Dziedzic: I think it usually is.

Poons: Yeah, I mean, really laughable. He doesn't have as large a space as we do, because this building goes over through that door into—it's actually 47 East 12th Street, but it's all one building. When Jack Sobel bought it somehow they tied it all in. So often if—we'll get a letter, a legal letter, it will say 827 Broadway/47 East 12th Street, you know, they'll cover all the bases.

Dziedzic: I see.

Poons: So one of the other things that, when they were trying to get us out, they said, "Your mail goes to 831 Broadway, so you don't live at 827 Broadway, you really live at 831 Broadway." And I was thinking to myself, "Well, all these years, I should have been, like, living next door, where you didn't have leaks." I mean, like really crazy stuff. So then, I would be coming in the door, and I'd see a piece of mail to Howard Kaplan, who lived right below us, at 827 Broadway. And it would say, 831 Broadway, and I'd go, "Isn't that interesting, Howard lives next door, too, and he doesn't know it." So, it was like, really crazy little things and it said, oh, something like,

“Oh, you own a boat,” and I forget if the boat is registered—the boat is registered in Florida, but we used to rent a place down there, and we bought a boat, and left the boat down there. And hadn’t used it in, pfft, like twenty years. It just sat, and it still has been sitting. And basically we gave it to a friend to use, but it’s still in our name. So, it was like, what are you, kidding me?

[01:10:01]

Dziedzic: They were worried that you’re living on the boat?

Poons: I mean, no, it’s a fishing skiff! It was a little fishing skiff. I mean, an eighteen-foot skiff. I’m like, I mean—it was all really, you know, like, what can we do now? What straw can we grasp at now that we can try? And it was just like, you can just throw all those things out. [phone rings]

Dziedzic: Do you wanna—it’s fine [laughs].

Poons: Just turn the ringer off.

Dziedzic: All right.

Poons: Ok.

Dziedzic: So, going back to the demolition proposal. Well, are—the two buildings are linked because of the preservation efforts, is that right?

Poons: Two buildings meaning?

Dziedzic: 827 and 831.

Poons: Well, when—I mean, for as long as Larry’s been here, and as long as I’ve been here, and somebody says, “Where do you live?” we always said 831 Broadway. Cause if I said 827 Broadway, you would go to the door over here, which is basically, it’s the door to a stairwell that nobody uses. I mean, for a long time, it was a little scary, cause they used to have that door downstairs locked with a key from the inside, so if you were to have an emergency exit, you couldn’t even get out. You would have to, like, break the glass there. The last time I went down there, they had corrected it, and put like a dead bolt, you know, that you could turn to get out. Or one of those bars. But for a long time it wasn’t like that, it was—and I remember, we were

moving a painting out, and I had to use that stairwell, cause it was a direct shot down, and I got to the bottom, and I'm like, I can't get out. And I had to go find one of the landlords, or somebody who had a key. I said, "You've got to open this door."

Dziedzic: I was gonna ask how you got paintings in and out.

Poons: They fold. And they go down the stairs, if they're big, or they get rolled. Or they fit in the elevator. It's—that stairwell used to be a direct shot, so that was actually the easier stairwell. You just went around one bend and it was straight. And then, when they did La Belle Epoque, they put a separate door between the third and the second floor, and it reduced the height of the ceiling, tremendously, so you're greatly restricted about those paintings that you could have gone out just straight down. Yup.

Dziedzic: So, the demolition threat—

Poons: Yeah.

Dziedzic: —do you think that that was just strictly because they couldn't clear the building and renovate? And—

Poons: Yes, mmhmm. Yes. I think that they realized that it was gonna take a lot to, sure, it's like if you're looking at, what's that guy's, that lawyer's name—David Rozenholc. I don't know if—I have never been to court with my lawyer, but reading some of the tactics, it's like—it's said that if you're a landlord and you hear the name David Rozenholc, it's like, you're going, "Oh, geez." You kind of throw up your hands, cause you know what you're in for—you're in for years of legal headaches. And he's a tough lawyer. So they hired a lawyer, and their lawyer said to my lawyer, "We have another lawyer working with us, but he doesn't want his name known, because he normally represents tenants." And I was like, really? This is interesting. So when we found out who it was, my lawyer was actually shocked. He was like, "I don't know why he's doing that." And I'm like, "Why else? Money." You know? But when you think about who he's representing—I mean, I don't know if you want me to say his name or not, Jack Lester—so, you know, he's represented, like, people over in Stuyvesant Town, you know, and it's like, you're a traitor! How could you do this? But I guess he saw—you know, if you're somebody who paid sixty million dollars for these buildings, you obviously know there's a lot of money behind them.

So. Maybe he needed money that week, I don't know. [Dziedzic laughs] So yes, I do think that when they realized how difficult it would be to get the tenants out of here, that's when they, obviously, like if my lawyer says to them, "You're gonna have a hard time proving your case," and they know who they're dealing with, they should take that seriously, and not as a threat. Because Sam, you know, was going through my papers, you know, with a fine-toothed comb, to make sure that everything was on the up and up. So he wouldn't say to them, "You're gonna have a hard time proving your case" if he didn't mean it. [01:15:31]

Dziedzic: Right.

Poons: So yes, then, you know, without it ever getting to that point, them saying to him, "Well, we're gonna drop that, and we're gonna get a demo permit."

Dziedzic: How did you find out about that?

Poons: Well, that was the first thing that I heard about, and then the next thing that I heard was that they had applied for a demo permit and that it didn't go through. And then, I didn't know that they had a demo permit that did go through until I saw the article in the paper that mentioned Paul, de Kooning, and Larry. And I was like, "Oh, I didn't know that."

Dziedzic: That's scary.

Poons: But then I heard that they had withdrawn it, because they were interested in developing the building because of the tech hub that Union Square is supposed to become. So it's like, a little bit they kinda go this way, and a little bit they kinda go this way, you know, back and forth, about what are we gonna do. Or, I don't know, it's, it's a little odd. Do you want me to turn on the light?

Dziedzic: Sure. It's—

Poons: Yeah, it's getting a little—

Dziedzic: —only gonna get darker. [laughs]

Poons: Yeah.

Dziedzic: Thank you. Whole new era of the interview. So, when did you, or what has your involvement been with Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation?

Poons: Well, the first thing I did is I looked up the names of the people who wrote the article, and I contacted Eric [Rayman], cause he was the first person whose email address I found. And he got back to me right away, and in that email, I had given him a lot of other information, about not only de Kooning and Larry, but Olitski, and Ray Parker, and Rubin, the whole litany of people who had been here. And he asked if he could come over and meet me, you know, bring his wife, and then another fellow who lives in his building who's a friend of my neighbor's, on the third floor, so Michael [Raab] and Tom Wai-Shek came over and we all met and talked, and he took some, a lot of notes, and I guess during this time he had passed my email onto Andrew [Berman], and to Sarah [Apmann], and so we all had been in email communication, I guess that was since the beginning of August.

Dziedzic: Mmhmm.

Poons: So. And the thing that I've discovered is that, you know, every once in a while I'll stumble across a website, like I came across one last night—I think it was called “EV Grieve,” and it's about the East Village. It's a blog, and I was surprised at how many people actually had comments about this building, you know, “Save this building, what a gem,” you know, and then, you know, some people who are like, “Aw, they're never gonna do it, they can't do anything,” you know. So, but people are looking, which is great.

Dziedzic: Yeah.

Poons: Yup.

Dziedzic: And then I saw that there was like a, that the Landmarks Commission is going to—

Poons: They've reconsidered it.

Dziedzic: —take it under review.

Poons: Yeah, yup. Which is great.

Dziedzic: Yeah.

Poons: It's amazing. It's a nice feeling.

Dziedzic: Right, right.

Poons: I mean, well, some people say, "Oh, you're never gonna get your money out of there." I'm like, "So what? I live here!" I didn't invest in this, you know, I—we just live here, and we like it here. This is our home. It's been, how many people live in a place more than forty years? Obviously we like it.

Dziedzic: Right. And so rare, in New York—

Poons: Yup.

Dziedzic: —at least.

Poons: The big thing about this neighborhood is obviously, I would say, the influence of NYU. I mean, there's a lot of building, a lot of real estate that NYU controls, and in a way I guess it's good, because a lot of young people have to eat, so [laughs] so you'll see a lot of, you know, there's a lot of students in and out of different restaurants. But, I mean, I've seen this neighborhood go through a lot of changes, like across the street, where the movie theater is, I remember then when there was a photo shop there, I mean, where you could actually take your film to be developed. And the *Village Voice* had an office over there, so, I mean, a lot of changes. I mean, sometimes you just go—remember when, what was the name of that department store that was where Whole Foods is? I think it was Ames, and then there was another one, Bradley's, and then, I mean, it was like, May's, I mean, there were like three—
[01:20:34]

Dziedzic: Wasn't Klein's somewhere near?

Poons: Klein's was up on the other corner of Union Square. But this other building, right here, where Whole Foods is, there were a lot of department stores up on the top floor.

Dziedzic: Will you do me a favor and twist your microphone so it's kind of facing—

Poons: How's that?

Dziedzic: You can actually turn this little thing like this.

Poons: I got it. There we go.

Dziedzic: Yes, thanks. I wanted to ask too just about, you know, being an artist and having a consistent studio space. You know, what, is there any way in which being in this particular place has affected your practice, or—

Poons: Yeah—

Dziedzic: —impacted your ability to have studio visits—

Poons: —it's—normally, until the whole thing happened with the mold remediation, my practice, I was somebody who would paint at night. You know, I'd go to bed really late at night. And so my whole, everything since then has kind of been disrupted, you know? But it would be great that, you know, I knew that I could just go into the studio any time I wanted. And not be disturbed. Literally, just any time, I could go in there. That was really nice, instead of, you know, having to go—I mean, I know people who live in Manhattan, and have studios in Brooklyn, and it's a forty-minute train ride and they're like, gets a little sketchy at, you know, after eight or nine, so I don't have to think about that, so it's great.

Dziedzic: And as far as people coming in and out of the space—

Poons: Mmhmm.

Dziedzic: —can you talk about, either through studio visits, or more informal gatherings, can you talk about, who's been coming here, and what sort of conversations have happened in this space?

Poons: Over the years?

Dziedzic: Mmhmm.

Poons: A lot of people. [laughs] A lot of people. So, I mean, when I first moved to New York, or I was first painting in this space, you know, as I said, Paul Jenkins was our neighbor, and I remember one day he came over and looked at this big painting that I was working on, and he said, "I want to buy that." So it was like, that was great. It was really good. And there were a lot of artists that came through, and, because Larry was, of course, working here, and I was working

here; a lot of times you would have to go—you had to go through my studio to get to his studio, so they would have to see what I was doing. And, it's funny, I remember certain things that I had been working on, as a young painter, that people who I thought knew better, they came in and they were like, "Oh no, you shouldn't paint like that." And then, like I would still have some of those paintings now, and people look at them, and they're going, "Who did that?" And I'm like, "Yeah, I did that, you know, like back in 1977," you know? And it was like, I should have kept with that! You know, so sometimes you get good advice, sometimes not so good advice. You know, we've had a lot of parties here. A lot of artist parties. We celebrated Clement Greenberg's seventy-fifth birthday here. You haven't, I don't know if you saw the basketball hoop against the wall in the front room?

Dziedzic: I didn't.

Poons: Well, when there were less paintings against the wall, we would have parties and we would end up playing basketball, some pretty intense games, yup. That was good.

Dziedzic: Who were the, who were involved in the games?

Poons: Everybody, anybody. Anybody who walked in the door, you know, for a party. Yup. It would be guys against girls, or mixed teams, yup. Yeah, that was—then the landlord moved downstairs, and we stopped bouncing the ball. [laughter] I'm not sure anybody's down there now, so we might be able to start again. [laughter] **[01:24:55]**

Dziedzic: Wow. And I know that your work and Larry's work is in a number of collections; have there been collectors here as well?

Poons: Sure. I mean, let's see. It was just, like two weeks ago, we had a big breakfast here, cause Larry had a show that opened up on the 16th, so the Friday. I guess it was the Friday before that, we had a big breakfast, and we invited a lot of collectors, and writers, and so, yeah a lot of people came through, and you know, some people hadn't seen my work in a while, and they'd seen Larry's work, cause he shows almost every year, so that was nice. We've been working with Nathaniel Kahn, do you know Nathaniel? He did a movie called *My Architect* about his father, Louis Kahn. And he's been working with Larry—with Larry and me, mostly Larry—but, so he's been here filming a couple of times.

Dziedzic: Wow.

Poons: Yeah, he's doing a movie, a documentary about the art world, so, might be done next year.

Dziedzic: Interesting.

Poons: Yeah.

Dziedzic: And I think I read that there was some, from, information from Michael Raab, about filming in the building.

Poons: Yes. There was a movie that Paul Mazursky did, called *An Unmarried Woman*. And that was filmed right next door. And Kristina Olitski, who had formerly been Kristina Gorby, a dressmaker—she married Jules Olitski—and I think the story was loosely based on their relationship.

Dziedzic: So much in this, just in this apartment.

Poons: Yup.

Dziedzic: Wow. Well, I guess, you know, at this point I think I just want to ask if there's anything that I missed, that I've not asked you about, and anything else that you think is significant to mention about, you know, either your experiences fighting to stay, or, you know, that you've, about people who've been here and its role in the arts community.

Poons: Well, I think there's just the uniqueness about the building. I mean, I sent Andrew and Eric an email right after Labor Day—I was with some friends at a yard sale upstate, and there were, there was tons of junk, nothing I was interested in. You know, I always go and browse the books, and there was this book called *New York Then and Now*. And I looked through it, cause Eric had been talking about when Abraham Lincoln died, that they paraded his body through many states, and they had come up Broadway through Union Square, and he was saying, "Wow, if you had a photograph of that, it would be great." So I'm looking through this book, and it's 1911, from 10th Street looking north on Broadway, and I'm going, "There's our building." And then there's a shot from like 1974, or '75, and I'm like, "There's our building!" You know, and then, you know, I'd go down to that same corner and take a picture looking north, I'm like,

“There’s our building!” So, it’s, looking through that book—and you could see not just this neighborhood, but all the neighborhoods in New York, how they’ve gone through changes. I mean, some of them for the better, and some of them not for the better. I mean, it’s really getting to be ridiculous that you’re walking around a city where you literally have to crane your neck to see sky. I mean, it’s, you don’t want—if you go to Paris, it’s not like that. You can actually look out the city, and if you want to build a big building, you have to go that far out.

Dziedzic: Right. I live in Greenpoint, so we’re losing sky every day. We’ve had it.

Poons: Yup.

Dziedzic: It’s going fast.

Poons: Yup. Right across the street, there used to be a parking lot. That was one of the first things to go. It was amazing, you know. It’s like, oh, wow, where’s the parking lot? Oh, it’s gone. I mean, the same thing with the building on University Place; that used to be a garage. Eric and I were talking about, we used to park our cars there. I mean, back in the day, we had two cars that we could park there. And afford it. I mean it was cheap. Not like now, now it’s like you have to pay another rent to park your car in a garage. [01:30:01]

Dziedzic: That is pretty wild.

Poons: Yup.

Dziedzic: Have you—your artist friends, are they still based in New York, or have you—

Poons: A lot of my artist friends have died. I mean, it’s sad, but some of them still are, yes. But, a lot of them have died. Larry Zox died, Jules Olitski died, Dan Christensen died. A lot of ‘em, yup. I think Wolf Kahn moved out of this neighborhood. Doug Vogel is an artist, he still lives across the street. Clifford Ross, who was Helen Frankenthaler’s nephew, used to have a loft in the building right across the street, and he moved out, I think, to Long Island. I forget where he moved to, but he’s not there anymore. So either through death, or other means, people have kind of left. Stanley Boxer, and his wife, Joyce Weinstein, used to be down on Lafayette Street and then they moved up to Union Square North, and this is years ago. And then, I guess, the landlord was gonna raise the rent, so they couldn’t afford it, so they bought a place upstate. They built a

place, a beautiful space. Stanley died; Joyce is still alive. We have friends who live further south, friends who are in SoHo, and then some who are in Tribeca, you know, artists. Some renters, some who own, so it's like a cross section of—it depends on who moved to New York when. It seems like a lot of people who got their spaces in the '70s are renters, and then people who came in a little after that were buyers.

Dziedzic: Mmhmm.

Poons: Yup.

Dziedzic: And the space that you have upstate, is that within kind of an artist—

Poons: You know it's funny, we have a neighbor whose husband is a lawyer, and she's an artist, and they have an annual party, and the first time we went, it was like all the artists came out of the woodwork. We had no idea that there were that many artists up in that area. I mean, some we knew, and some we didn't, but—

Dziedzic: Is it in the Hudson Valley, or in the Catskills?

Poons: It's in the Catskills, yeah. So we don't really socialize with them [laughs] anyway, except for once a year.

Dziedzic: I think a lot of people that are around my age are thinking about that, just to get any space at all.

Poons: Yup. Well, we have a friend who's a developer, and he has been working in Kingston. I mean, he's in the city, but he bought a lot of space up in Kingston, and he said a lot of people are going up there, cause it's much more reasonable, and you've got the country atmosphere and the city atmosphere. I mean, Kingston's a nice city. So. I think they, I was reading an article where they were calling it something like the Hamptons—Rhine—there was a word where they were taking Rhinebeck and combining it with the Hamptons.

Dziedzic: I think I've seen some kind of similar project, combining the word Brooklyn with something.

Poons: Yeah, yeah. [Dziedzic laughs]

Dziedzic: About Kingston.

Poons: Like Rhineton. Or, something strange. [Dziedzic laughs]

Dziedzic: Oh boy. You can't just have a place, it has to be—yeah. But it's hard, because I think the city is a really important influence on a lot of people, and so leaving it can really be a big influence on the work.

Poons: Yeah. But, you know, a lot of people have left. I mean, some people not only have left New York City, but left New York State. You know, gone out to New Mexico. I mean, New Mexico—

Dziedzic: Right. Art world.

Poons: Yeah!

Dziedzic: Yeah. So is your goal to stay in this apartment for as long as possible?

Poons: As long as I live. [laughs] Yes! It is, yeah. I mean, my doctors are here, that's like a big concern for me. Yeah. It's easy. Yup. **[01:34:56]**

Dziedzic: All right, maybe that's the end of our interview.

Poons: Yeah, ok.

Dziedzic: As long as you live, here here! [laughs]

Poons: As long as I live.

Dziedzic: Thank you.

Poons: And I'm only twenty. No.

[END OF INTERVIEW]