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Artist Talk with Ann Clarke

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SPEAKERS

Alicia Boutilier, Mark Birksted, Ann Clarke,

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TRANSCRIPT

Alicia Boutilier: Thank you for coming here to hear the incredible Ann Clarke. Today's talk is in conjunction with the retrospective Ann Clarke: A Life in Motion on view here at Agnes until the 28th of March. I hope you have had a chance to see it and will see it again. Now, I'd like to invite my co-curator of the exhibition, Mark Birksted, artist, preparator at Agnes, and studio mate of Ann to introduce our guest speaker.

[Applause]

Mark Birksted: Thank you, Alicia. I too will be reading off my phone. As Alicia mentioned, I've had the pleasure of sharing a studio with Ann for the last five years. I know. It's been five years because I broke my ankle and then had a baby myself, all by myself, and then we got the studio. I find Ann to be an inspiration. I think it's rare to find someone that has been working in the same field for over 60 years that still has an insatiable drive to get to work, to produce. Ann and I have shared many great conversations over the five years. I was thinking about what to say and I remembered Ann telling me about a time one of her relationships was coming to an end and her partner saying, you know, "You focus too much on painting. It takes up too much of your attention." Like, you know, he's trying to get her to stop painting. And Ann's response to this was, "Would you ask me to stop breathing?" She can't stop. I also -- there's many, many stories of Ann. So, to quote Alex Cameron as another story she's told me, "Let me introduce to you Ann Clarke, a damn good painter."

[Laughter & Applause]

Ann Clarke: Thank you. Thank you so much. Wow, I'm embarrassed. I'm going to remain seated until I have to point things out or anything. And I probably have enough material here for about a week of talking. So, it's hard to cut it down. I have so many stories, but that was lovely. This picture is not the beginning of my talk, but they were telling me I should have worn all black and I could look the same. But I think I looked a little bit different there and I used to smoke. OK. Let's -- I'm going to

start with my childhood. And we could switch to The Lady of Shalott. It will be a while before I actually get to her. But -- and I will -- can you all hear me OK?

Audience Member: Yeah.

Ann Clarke: Good. This is supposed to be my influences. So I have to start with my parents. Both of my parents were war orph--. And in this day and age actually, this subject matter is heavily on my mind too and rather depressing in relationship to what's going on in the world today. Both of my parents lost their fathers in the First World War. My mother's father was a skipper of a trawler in the North Sea and he actually got the George Cross which is the highest honour for a civilian. He rammed a U-boat. And trouble is the top of his boat came round and threw him in the water and damaged him and he died in hospital later on, either from his injuries or from the Spanish flu. My mother was the -- that was my mother's father. She was the second youngest of eight children. Her two older brother and sisters went off to New Zealand -- were shipped out to New Zealand and they never saw their mother again. My mother's younger brother died of appendicitis when she was 13. And at 14, she left school and went and worked in Woolworths to help support her mother. She read books. She was amazing, the stuff she knew considering that difficult childhood.

My father's father died on the way back from South Africa where he'd been in the army. And I'm not sure if he died of dysentery or something else, but he's buried in Addis Ababa in Africa. He never saw his son who although there is a postcard that he sent talking about how he's on his way to see his boy. My grandma, her maiden name was Utting which is a Nordic name. Both of my parents came from East Anglia. I like to think I'm descended from Boadicea, the Iceni tribe. It's entirely possible. We also have a big Irish strain. Yeah, my father's grandfather came from Northern Ireland. That's where the Clarke comes in. But that's also a Nordic name.

So, I have this kind of travelling around always wanting to ship myself somewhere else to see new things and everything and I have travelled around a great deal. So, it was Mark that came up with the Life in Motion idea. And I hadn't really thought about it all that much before, but it's kind of shocking how I have moved around. So, that's the East Anglian heritage.

My dad, at 14, his mother married again and that was my granddad. And he was a cobbler. And they lived in a village called Kessingland on the east coast of Suffolk, just up near the Norfolk border too. And I spent a lot of summers there. And that granddad, he used to write us letters. He would -- I would go for walks with him and his dog Dandy when we were there on holiday over the sand dunes and everything. And he'd always be asking me to point things out. And he was also one of the people that got me reading very early because he'd make me read the cereal boxes when we were sitting at breakfast and stuff. And he also used to draw little pictures in the letters. So, we'd get letters from him and there'd be a picture of him, you know, and he'd say, "I went to the beach," or, "I did this or that." And there'd be a little picture of him with his dark beard and his glasses and so on. So, he was an early influence as well.

And then my dad went to art school in Lowestoft which is just north of Kessingland. And he went to an art school where, quite young, where you did half the day regular school and the other half the day art. And he was there till he was 18. And he fell out with his father's family who had a garage and were building racing cars before the First World War. And they wanted him to go and be a mechanic and he wouldn't, he wanted to go to art school. So, this kind of I think I inherited some of that kind of feeling from him as well. "No, I'm going to do what I want to do." "I'm not going to be a good cook." I am a pretty good cook actually, but anyway. I'm not going to -- I never learnt to type, for instance. So, these two parents and my dad was very supportive of me and he was an incredible draftsman. He was also an incredible calligrapher. He knew -- you know the old English letters how they all have squiggles and everything? He knew that off by heart and he did it by hand, free hand. And so he would often do presentation documents when somebody got the Freedom of the Borough and things like that. I think he did one for Margaret Thatcher once because he worked eventually for the town council in Hindon where we lived.

But before that, I want to talk briefly about the war. My parents, although they were both from the same place, they met up and they went to London. My dad was a window dresser for a while, but then he signed up in '38. But he was down in Yeovil getting the training and everything and they got bombed at the beginning of the war. But he was -- I consider myself very lucky that this happened. He got in some kind of accident, a car accident, and damaged his leg and his skull and was invalidated out of the army before he could see active service. And he went to London and he worked with Home Defence and so on and became an architect by trial and error, helping to build quick replacement buildings for people whose places were bombed and that sort of thing. And my mother was in London too working in an office. She turned out she was really good with numbers which I didn't inherit. And so when I -- she was expecting me in 1944 is when I was born. And my mom was evacuated to Norwich to one of my Auntie Gladys, one of her older sister's places. And so I was born in Norwich. So, people have been confused about that but I'm kind of a Londoner. I've lived most of my life in London. And after that, coming back, when I was in my young childhood, I would sit on the floor when the grownups got together and they were talking or relatives visited and I'd listen to them talking about what it was like when the bombs fell and how they were all in the shelter thinking and how lucky they were that they weren't hit and things like that. And those memories have been in the forefront of my mind recently quite a lot.

But to get back to art, my dad was a great drawer too. He would do portraits in pencil. I had to sit for him quite a bit when I was a child and he taught me how to do that. And I was very good at doing it too at school. In elementary school, I used to win prizes when we had to -- I remember one time we had to draw a Viking and I had a picture of a Viking in my encyclopedia set that I copied. I mean, you were allowed to do that. But just in pencil. And I won the prize. I think I won a bag of toffees or something. And so, I had that influence at home all the time.

And I also had Arthur Mee's Children's Encyclopedias and they were all illustrated with Pre-Raphaelite. There were a lot of Pre-Raphaelite reproductions in these books. And being a romantic young girl, I thought they were wonderful and they were my ideal paintings. So I got the drawing, then the kind of style of Augustus John portrait drawings that were really good portraits. My dad used to -- when there was a church fête or anything like that, a fair, he'd have a little booth and he

would do people's portraits for them at the fair. It was quite common in those days. And boy, were they good and I can't find one of them. But I can -- so, I like The Lady of Shalott.

And then in 19 -- well, what was it, the snowstorm? Let's go to the next one. This isn't a very good slide of this. I think the colours -- it's got a bit more colours in the actual painting. But my dad also had art books and he also took me to art galleries. We went to art galleries together and we were -- I think this was at the National Gallery. It might have been the Tate. There was a big show of Constables and Turners. Basically, we went to see the Constables because we liked Constables. They're lovely landscapes. And then we were looking at the Turners and I saw this painting with all this free paint and it was just amazing. And I said, as has been written in the -- a few times in the pamphlet, then I went if -- I can remember saying to myself, I did have this art background at school. I was also really good at history and English, those are my areas. But that's when I said to myself, I didn't share it with anybody then, but I remember it well when I said, "That's a good way to spend a life. That's what I'm going to do. I'm going to be a painter." I didn't say artist, I said painter.

And later on, I complained -- we can go to the next slide. Oh, we're there. I complained to my dad that I couldn't do that thick, free painting with the paints they had at school. They had these powder colours that you mix with water and you could get this gorgeous stuff and you'd mix them and mix the colours. And then when they dried, they cracked and fell off. So, what did he do? He, for my -- I think it was for my 13th or 14th birthday, he gave me a pile of oil paints. He didn't go get a kit, a ready-made kit. He went and he picked the colours that he thought I would need, proper brushes. And he made me a palette. And this is it. And I kept it. I've kept it, obviously. It used to have a hunk of lead on the back here so that it wouldn't flip. See, it does that. It has that lead there. So it had the lead there so I kept it. And you can see I used it for quite a while when I used oil paints. Very precious memento for a lucky girl. This is a drawing of my dad's from when we moved when I was pretty young. My sister had just been born so I was about four. We moved from an apartment into a house that my dad built. He was an architect by then for the county he said and that was his career for the rest of his life. And they built houses and this house is right on the edge of the Green Belt in Mill Hill in North London. And this is the view from the kitchen window. And I know it was after I was five because that swing in the background was a gift for my fifth birthday. And it was put up overnight. And when I woke up on my fifth birthday, they said, "Look out of the window," because my bedroom window faced the back on. And there it was. I always remember the surprise. I loved that swing. And that's the garage and the shed. And the bird table in the foreground. It's just outside the backdoor in our house.

But the other reason I put this picture up is because it's in felt-tip pen. 1958, felt-tip pens were just invented. And my dad was really into discovering new media. And I think I inherited that from him as well. It was a big deal to draw in felt-tips back then. I have another picture at home of Westward Ho! where we used to go on holiday and the coast of the seafront at Westward Ho!. And that's in felt-tip as well which is quite unusual. You don't see a lot of felt-tip art from those days.

We can move on to the next one. This painting is in a collection at Kenwood House which is a stately home that's open to the public on Hampstead Heath. And they'd have concerts and things there. Hampstead Heath is quite near Mill Hill and we used to go there for fairgrounds and stuff. They had skating on the lakes there but I never got to do that before I came to Canada. But we went there for

different reasons but we go to the house and I remember standing in front of it. Why this painting is here is because -- and it's -- again, it doesn't really show up in the photograph. But you can see that little bit of white paint on the nose. And I can remember standing. I'm going to stand up. This one works, too. Good. OK. The painting's there. You can't get too close, obviously. But there was also, it doesn't show in this, there was a little bit of green paint behind that white bit. And I remember going like that and imagining, "I could do that. This is Rembrandt. Rembrandt was a real living person like me and he had an arm and he did that." That inspired me. That's an influence worth having, right? I've got my note for this. It says, "Rembrandt, self-portrait in Kenwood House," in brackets, "Paint on nose."

OK. So now, we're going to move on to my -- I went to a girls' grammar school. Actually before we get to Harold, I went to a girls' grammar school. I had two -- it had a really good art department with two wonderful teachers, one was a graduate of the Royal College and one was a graduate of the Slade. And I was encouraged and I got out, I had a wonderful math teacher who let me out, I was absolutely useless at math and she got me to paint pictures of flowers for her because I was always at the back of the class drawing in math class and I didn't actually need a math general certificate of education to get into art school. If I'd done art history, I would have needed it. But for the actual art schools, I didn't need math and my A levels were art, obviously, English, history, and believe it or not, economics. I got an -- oh, that wasn't an A level. That was an extra O level and I got biology. I mean, I had something like eight or nine O level so I was -- I had plenty. I just didn't have any math or physics or any of that stuff. And those two -- the two teachers whose names I couldn't remember the other day, I have a little story about them because they -- one of them had three boys and a musician husband. I'd like to visit her home once and my friend, Joan, and I went visited there. She lived out in Hampstead too and we ended up washing the dishes in the sink because we took pity on her because she had all this family. She was a full-time teacher and the other one was a full-time teacher as well. And later on, when my mom came to visit and I was talking about teaching and she said, "Do you know when you were a kid you said you were never going to be a teacher?" That's because the norm was when you graduated from grammar school, which is like high school here, you were expected to -- and when you graduated from art school, if you were a woman, especially, you were expected to go to teachers' training college. And -- so, you could teach in schools and I said I was never going to do that and I said to my mother around that time I'm never going to be a teacher. And when she came visited me in Canada and she said, "You said you were never going to be a teacher and here you are teaching." And I said, "I am not a teacher. I am a professor," which I enjoyed very much. There's a few people here I think that can speak to that. I'm very glad that they made it here. It's great to have Facebook. I'm so thrilled. I'm in touch with people that I've taught in Edmonton, in up at Lakehead, at the U of A and a lot of different places. I taught at Red Deer, I taught -- all different places all over including a little bit of Queen's. And yeah, and they can -- they get back in touch with me now. It's wonderful.

OK, now, we can go to Harold. So, I got into the Slade and the thing to do at the Slade was life drawing. They were really -- you had to have X number of life drawings a year and X number of figurative paintings and stuff for the first years, and the first year was nearly all life drawing. Luckily, I was very good at it but I started wanting to be a bit more experimental. I got bored copying stuff and I thought, "Well, isn't that why we invented photography? Why do I have to be a machine that copies things that I see all the time? I want to make things up. You know, I want to explore my

materials and so on." So, I'm really glad that I learnt to draw very well because that really stood me in good stead when I was teaching because I do it better than most people. Thanks to my education and I was lucky that way. But -- so, Harold Cohen was one of the teachers and he was a abstract artist and hardly anybody at the Slade was doing abstract art. And in the second year, I was -- and one of the other professors was Andrew Forge and I'm going to malign him because he maligned me. I had -- they had a summer -- this -- the annual summer exhibition and paintings were put up all over the school and I think I was in the second year then, and I was playing with sticking shape things together. It was either the second or third year, and in the painting, he came to my work and he said, "I have nothing to say about this person's work. They're wasting our time and wasting their time." And, of course, tears began to burst out of my eyes and -- but I did -- I got mad. I didn't -- and my friends were sitting in the -- we were in the second row, I think, of this discussion and my friends were saying, "Don't take any notice of him. What does he know?" And it made me mad and it made me -- he doesn't know. And the end story of that is I'm going to jump ahead to my last year at the Slade when I won the painting prize and I also was in an exhibition at The Institute of Contemporary Arts of young painters called Five Young Artists which was taken from painters from all over the British Isles. After the young contemporary show, they selected some people out of that and this show was opened by the Minister of Culture. And they had champagne, they had this really good champagne at the -- it's the first time I had champagne and Andrew Forge was there drinking my champagne. And I wanted to go up and say, "So?" but I didn't have the nerve. I've never -- but I've told that story quite a lot. So, I got back at him for being so obnoxious.

That -- there's -- something will underlie a lot of that stuff and that's the fact of being female. It's always -- there's always been added difficulties of being taken seriously. When I had Ben -- he's probably heard this story before. Before, in the summer holidays, very conveniently between my third and fourth year at the Slade, I took him to the -- they had a big tea out on the lawn like they did that kind of thing over there. This is University College London where the Slade is and I took Ben along. He was about three weeks old and William Coldstream who was the head of the school who's actually a -- usually a wonderful guy, I always appreciated him but he took Ben and he practically threw him in the air and said -- and turned to me and say, "Why do you want to be an artist for when you can have such beautiful children?" And in my head, I cursed and I said, "Any old cow can have babies." I didn't say it out loud but he went down in my estimation as a result of that. That underlines the kind of issues I had to face throughout my career from the beginning on. He thought he was being congratulatory and he was being awful.

So, just to -- but Harold saw that I was making abstracts and encouraged me. He started off with me babysitting one of his kids which was great because I always needed money and he gave me -- so, he was one of the tutors at the Slade and he would come and criticize my paintings fairly, not by saying, "Why aren't you doing, you know, figurative paintings?" And he gave me a book. He -- actually, at this time, he went on -- in 1968, he went to the States, he went -- ended up down in Albuquerque and he invented an art computer called AARON. And I -- when I first -- I'm going to skip to when I first moved -- I went to Toronto. I think it was '73 or something. Hang on. I went to Toronto and he was in the Ontario Science Centre doing a -- something with his AARON machine. So, it was around '68, '69 or -- no, it was '80 by then, 1980. And I looked him up and he had an apartment over Honest Ed's on Bloor Street. And he was packing up because he was just leaving. It was the last few days before he was going and he'd been doing this stint at the Ontario Science Centre and he gave me

some plates which I -- and I dropped one the other day. I thought this was really interesting. I've got these bits -- the -- these plates that he bought from Honest Ed's to use while he was -- for the six months that he was staying there and I still have one of those plates. He has since died, he went back to the States but he's fairly famous for the work he did with computers. I think maybe some of the drawings in the background of that are some of the computer work he did, but he was doing computer paintings and his brother, Bernard Cohen, was -- when I went back to the Slade as a visiting artist not long ago, he was the head of the school. So -- I -- my life had been tied up with those and they -- he was an abstract painter as well, pretty good. And so, the way the Slade worked is they would, people would -- they'd be different people. So, R. B. Kitaj a lot of well-known artists both American and British, mostly an American rather than European but you were exposed to a lot of influences, let's put it that way.

So, Harold gave me this book on Rothko's paintings but it was a book and I looked through these and I thought, "Well." I wasn't interested at all. I thought they looked really boring, just pictures on a page in a book. You know, it was a catalogue. This picture is from sometime later and a lot later since when I was in Canada, when they got a collection -- the collection at the Slade -- at the Tate. I went back and walked into this room and burst into tears. They were just so wonderful, so overpowering in that. So, Harold was right, it was just like you have to see the paintings. It doesn't work in a book. They're really boring in books. But he encouraged me in abstraction which was very valuable. Mark Rothko, I looked him up recently, he went from Latvia to the States in 1913. And after -- he went abstract after World War II and he went to art school in the States. And one of his teachers was Arshile Gorky who was another immigrant artist and I didn't know anything about Arshile Gorky. But when I was at the Slade, I had roommates like I -- at first I stayed at home in Mill Hill but it -- that really got in the way because if I missed the last bus or the last tube home, you know, it was terrible. I had to live near a school. And so, I moved into a place in Marble Arch with a bunch of friends and different places over the years. And eventually, I was in an apartment in Queen's Park and Maro Gorky was one of the people that had it -- that I moved in with her and a couple of other women students. So, she's Arshile Gorky's daughter and when I found that out, I looked into Gorky and found out quite a lot about, but those kinds of coincidence, there's been a lot of that happened in my life. It's really -- when -- I never thought of it but when I start putting this list together, you think, "Wow, that's amazing." She lives in Italy now. She married Matthew Spender who used to come to the apartment all the time who is Stephen Spender's son, the English poet and they were a fun couple.

So, I met quite a lot of rich London people. Maro's mother lived in Hyde Park. She'd married an admiral, American Admiral, and then they divorced and everything. So, I met her and I went -- got invited to their house and there were all these Gorkys on the wall in London. It was quite amazing. So, I must have been influenced by them as well. But the idea of what you can do and what you can do without coming from rich families and working your way to it, you know, and just having the drive. So, around that time too, a couple of things I just remember.

1962, I went to the Slade, I got in which was great, had to have an interview. I had the -- I had enough A levels and O levels, you know, and I had an interview with five men in a room to get in because I had to have a scholarship. I couldn't pay. And my mom came up to London with me, you know. It was a day's trip and I'm in this room with these five people and they asked me questions

like -- and I -- they had some of my paintings which were mostly portraits and the stuff I'd done at school and -- in oils and the questions they asked me think -- were things like, "How long did it take you to do this?" which, looking back on it, you think, "What? Weird question." That's the main question I remember. But at that -- in 1962, when I got in, these, bringing it up, I don't know if this is an influence or not, we all went up to Kew Gardens, a whole crowd of students, first year and other years, I made friends with people in other years, to see the Rolling Stones at the pub in Kew. It was their first public concert. Now, Mick's 80 and so am I. That was pretty good and I always followed the Stones although I had a friend who'd gone to school with John Lennon and I always like the Beatles as well. But when people were comparing them at school, who you stick up for, I stuck up for the Stones because I'm a Londoner, right? But I did like the Stones. And another thing that happened when I was at the Slade and I think this might have been an influence is we went to a performance at the Drama Lab which is in the theatre district in London of Yoko Ono doing one of her cutaway performances. She was well known Fluxus artist and a whole crowd of us students went to see her performance and I'll always remember that. I thought it was a bit weird, but I was impressed. And then, she had the show in London and I went there with my mother. We would go up to town to do shopping on Oxford Street periodically and we went to the show, and it was funny. One of the things -- I mean, I remember it, but one of the things I remember was that in the entrance, as part of the show, because it was all kinds of objects and things really different to anything I'd seen before, there was one of those figures of a dog for the Humane Society, for the SPCA that you put money in. Do -- you have them here as well, don't you? And it was in -- and it was part of the show. And the first thing my mother did was reach into her purse and get some change out and put it in which I've always remember that. I said, "But it's art, Mom. You don't --" "So what? I want to." And I've always appreciated her for that and that is the show where Yoko met John Lennon.

Yes. And there's a thing in the paper about her too. This -- oh, I don't have the actual date of this. This was just the other day, an exhibition. New exhibition aims to bring Ono's art out of Lennon's shadow, an exhibition at Tate Modern Gallery in London spans seven decades of work by artist Yoko Ono and includes more than 200 artworks that trace her career from New York to Japan. She's one of my -- she's an influence not in terms of the way my art looks but in terms of being a figure that I can respect and follow and kind of be a bit jealous of because she was married to John Lennon for a while. How are we doing for time?

OK. Schwitters. Kurt Schwitters was a hero of mine -- I saw a lot of his -- his work was shown in London galleries. He was captured by the British and sent to prison war camp on the Isle of Man but he was -- there were artists in England who knew about him, especially the St. Ives people who included Barbara Hepworth and they bought him art supplies and sent them to the Isle of Man so that he could work while he was a prisoner of war. And then, after that, he stayed in England and I -- at this time, I saw a lot of his work in London galleries and liked them. I mean, this is much later but he ended up -- there's a big -- one of his Merzbaus has been reproduced up in Newcastle and I made a trip up there, especially to see it at one point and I was always very interested in his work. And it's the first work that I saw that uses stuff from life, you know, like the detritus of everyday living and the use of collage and so on. So, he's really important as I said. This picture, this collage was done in 1944 which is the same year I was born. Let's go to the next one.

This is Joan Miro's studio. And I wasn't super influenced by his work, although I have been more recently, I've been to see it in Italy -- in Spain. But at that time, when I was looking for female role models, and here's Joan, this artist is Joan. I thought Joan Miró was a woman and was very impressed and influenced. I was kind of sad when I saw it was a man, but I had to put that in because it was the name, you know. And there was another thing that happened too. I had studied the work of Augustus John with my dad. You know, he was a great portraitist and his drawings are great and he went to the Slade and, you know, he was a role model for me. It wasn't until a lot of years later when I went up to Norwich where they have a big exhibition collection of Gwen John's paintings, his sister, who was awarded the painting prize, the same Slade painting prize that I got, and who had never been mentioned in any of the art history that I had at the Slade or anyone. And, you know, I was quite old when I found that out. Just -- Barbara Hepworth. Now, that comes later.

There's another little story about Barbara Hepworth who's a sculptor down in St. Ives. I did go and visit and so on. In 1967, I had two babies or a toddler and a baby, in a flat in London, and I was standing at the sink washing dishes, wishing what am I going to do with my life? My husband was almost never at home. He was teaching part-time in different art schools in different parts of England and would come in at like after 8.30 at night and leave at 7:00 in the morning after the boys were in bed. And I was pretty depressed as you can imagine. And Barbara Hepworth was on the radio. I listen to CBC here now all the time. I listened to the BBC in those days. And she had just been awarded the -- made into a Dame. I always wanted to be a Dame. I guess I'm not going to make it now. But I thought it would be good. Don't you think, Dame Ann? Yeah. Anyway. And she was being interviewed and she -- it turned out in this program I was listening to, I can picture myself now. There's Jason on the floor. I don't know. Ben was probably next door at the neighbours and Barbara, Dame Barbara was asked, "How did you manage?" She was married and had triplets. Yeah. And they said, "How did you manage?" And she said, "I just made sure I did some art every day in some way or other." And I took that, that's one of the biggest influences in my life. I took that as my, what's the word, my code or my reminder every day even if it's just studying a picture in a book or something.

Now, we can go to Josef Albers. I saw one of his paintings. I'd seen some of his work and hadn't paid much attention to it. But I had studied the Bauhaus people and so on and there are probably others that did colour. But some years later, I went to, from Lakehead went down to Minneapolis and they had an exhibition of Albers' paintings of this period. These are called Homage to the Square and they were done in between 1950 and 1976. He was in the States by then from the Bauhaus. He did a thousand, at least a thousand of these. And I knew about them from books and stuff, but I actually saw some in the gallery and I saw the colour and how the colour went together and the colour relationships and it blew me away. That was a big learning experience for me about working with colour. It's not what your favourite colour is, it's what your favourite colour looks like next to this colour and how that colour looks like next to that colour, and how they move backwards and forwards and how they influence each other, as well as the kind of other meanings that they have. That was a big influence and a big learning experience.

OK. Larry, number 10. This painting is a little bit later than the story that goes with it. When I was at first -- I was in Edmonton in 1968 and I had a show, my first show in Canada was in a little private gallery but it was works on paper that I'd done before. And so when I got painting, as you could see

in that picture that was up right at the beginning, the paintings on the walls and there's one or two in this show. With the lines of paint, I was doing those then in my studio in Edmonton. And when people saw them, they said, "Oh, you're copying Larry Poons. You've seen Larry Poons's paintings." I hadn't. So I immediately stopped doing it and started putting lines that went sideways in as well. But '73, I went to New York. I got a Canada Council Grant. I took out Canadian citizenship so I could get a Canada Council Grant. I had thought we were going back to England and I found out that I was stuck in Canada if I wanted to stay with my children. And so, I made the most of it, took out citizenship, got a Canada Council Grant, rented a studio and really started working. And I also went on a trip to New York. I had met some people in Edmonton. Terry Fenton who was the director, and Karen Wilkin who was the curator, top curator at the gallery there, were incredibly supportive and wonderful. I was so lucky to be there with them at that time. The exhibitions they had, they had Helen Frankenthaler exhibitions. They had all the American artists but also a lot of Canadian artists. I made friends -- I was reminded of this during your opening because I made friends with Alex Janvier who had a show at the -- and came. And I had a show at the same time at the Edmonton Art Gallery. And we were introduced and we shook hands. And what a wonderful man. And he told me, "You know, you went to the Slade, right? I nearly went to the Slade." He said, "I got accepted to the Slade but then I met," and he said her name which I forget, "and we got married and I decided to stay here." So, he went to the Alberta College of Art instead.

But the other thing about him is that handshake was the warmest handshake. His energy was there in his handshake. And I've had that happen again with a couple of other Indigenous artists that I've got to know and I have got to know quite a lot over the years, both in Edmonton but also the fact that I taught at Lakehead and I had a lot of First Nations students that I'm very proud of and very happy. I learnt so much from them as well.

Doo pie doo, where are we? Oh, and Larry -- OK, Larry Poons, I went to -- there was a workshop at the Edmonton Art Gallery by Mike Steiner who's an American New York sculptor. And I walked in. I was doing these shape paintings because I had to stop doing the Larry Poons paintings. But -- and I was doing different things and he said -- maybe I have these dates. And he said, "What are you doing? You're not a carpenter, you know." I said, "Yeah, I'm a painter." And he said - so I think that's when I started doing these paintings actually. I think prior to these paintings, I was doing these big shaped stained ones. The one in the show, the first one in the show, that dark one with the one line in was a small version of a lot of work I was doing there. And then I went to the Steiner workshop and then I started doing this. And then, but Mike didn't see those till later and it was after that that people said, "Oh, you're copying Larry Poons." So when I went to New York and I had met him before, again in Edmonton, I was taken by Clement Greenberg to Larry Poons studio in Soho. And it was neat because he lived in this three-storey building with like a big room on each floor. And the ground floor was his garage like he raced motorbikes and stuff. And the middle floor was his studio. And the top floor which I didn't go to was where he lived. So he had to walk through his studio every time to go in and out which was neat. And the walls were covered with canvas and the floor was covered with about this depth of various layers of plastic with all paint in between. He didn't clean up. He just put another layer of plastic over the top. So, the floor kind -- so you didn't get paint on you but the floor kind of squelched. It was really weird. And there were bucket -- he threw the paint at the walls.

When I was doing those paintings, I did them on the floor and I use squeegees and various brooms and all sorts of scrapey things. And I had to have them on the floor so I could get high enough to see them. And those painting like that is not like Larry Poons. But that style of painting on the floor, I did them on the floor for a long time. In recent years, I started doing them on milk crates and I made frames because my knees were too bad. I couldn't get down on the floor like I used to. But that's the way I paint now, partially.

So, Picasso. I've got this in here because I learnt -- I mean, I learnt a lot from Picasso over the years, but mostly from the Cubist period where you move the space around without it having to be pictures of stuff. There's also collage. And there's also in this case which was a bit of a revelation, doesn't have to be a rectangle or a square. I think that's one of the first -- you know, the fact that it's an oval painting. That's why I put it in here. That's, you know, little things that remind you what you can do. You can do shape paintings if you want. I'm not doing them anymore at the moment because it's such a pain to build them.

Matisse. This painting I love and it's completely -- I carry it with me. It was done circa 1916. This is just a -- not -- I've looked at a lot of Matisse's over the years. His Red Studios and so on were very -- the fact that you don't have to use the right colour or, you know, you use the colours you like to do what you like. But the thing -- whenever I go in, I always look out for this painting when I go. I understand it's in the Tate. I was thinking it was in the -- I think it was -- I think when I first saw it, it was in New York. I think it must have been lent to the Met or something. And what amazed me about it is the space, the shapes of the spaces between the lines. I just love it. Not any really deep stuff but it's -- you know, it's not that it's a landscape, it's the subtleties of the shapes of the spaces and so on that I love. We are getting there.

Hilma, 13. This is a relatively recent thing. The things that are important to me about this is that here was a person doing abstract paintings like this. This was done in 1907. She was -- oh, I've forgotten the word. What's the word? Not in terms of painting, she was involved in intellectual psychological stuff. Huh? Yeah, not as far -- her paintings are illustrations of this school of thought that was exploring and I've forgotten the name of these groups of people who are in England and in the continent that were exploring psychology, early psychology.

Audience Member: Theosophy.

Ann Clarke: Yes, thank you. Who was that? Was that Judy? Oh, thanks. Yeah, OK. Theosophy and there were whole groups of people and all the spiritual stuff in that. And her painting apparently came out of that. I just think they're fantastic. She did it in 1907. She died in, guess when, 1944. That's been happening. Huh? Well, it's every time I -- it keeps coming up. Isn't that weird? So, what happened is her work was discovered quite late. I think it was in the '50s or something or maybe even more recent than that because it was all stacked away in a garage and forgotten for like 20, 30 years. And it was discovered relatively recently which is wonderful because if it had been found, it would have been destroyed. And so, we have her work and she's a pretty good role model for a person to have like me I think.

OK. We have another Schwitters. I was -- I found this one when I thought I'd finished the slides but this has all kinds of junk in it. Isn't that great? It's called, where is it, Merzbild with Rainbow. I can't remember -- it's 62 inches high, so to give you an idea of the size because the other ones are quite a bit smaller. What does Merzbild mean? I forget. Does anybody know? It's German. It's one of the Dada phrases. I think it means rubbish or something like that. I'm not sure. Isn't that great? I love the way how in his, he used bits of writing and all kinds of things so it's a record of all kinds of things but it's good to look at. And you can keep on coming back -- oh, I haven't said this, the thing about painting that is so much better than movies and music. I usually talk about music quite a lot because I think abstract paint, people say they don't like abstract painting. I enjoy abstract painting like I enjoy a symphony. But in the symphony, I'm sitting there and I'm listening to the sounds and how they weave together and all the different aspects. I'm not looking for stories. I'm not looking for pictures of stuff. And that's the way to look at abstract painting, I think. And yeah, abstraction is like classical music. Instruments, not stories or pictures of anything I've written down here. The advantage of painting is that it's not time-based. So you can come back and look at it again anytime you feel like, years later. And every time you do, you see more. You see more relationships or you notice something that you hadn't really noticed before. And that's what's fantastic about painting and especially abstract painting because you're not distracted by, "Oh, that's a tree." You know, you're looking at painting.

So, OK, and these last two, we'll jump through the Kandinsky. Oh, let's look at it briefly. This was done in 1913. Kandinsky's dates are 1866 to 1944. I didn't know any of this till I started doing it for this talk, looking at dates and things. I just like looking at his work, I don't really have anything. But the fact -- the way he uses lines is kind of impressive. I've seen some big shows of his in my travels to Europe and so on that have been pretty impressive.

And now, finally, my friend, Sir Frank Bowling. I was on sabbatical in London in the Oval and I was renting a studio from David Evison who's an English sculptor. And he said, "You want to meet Frank Bowling?" And I said, "Who's he?" And he had a studio and he said, "Come along." And he took me and I met Frank Bowling in his studio and we had a nice chat and I was blown away and I thought, "Why didn't I know about him before?" And I since found out that he graduated from the Royal College the same year as David Hockney. Everybody knew who David Hockney was, but Frank Bowling was from Guyana, a Black guy, didn't get much notice taken off him. Went to the States, eventually got appreciated, is back in England now. And in 2019, he had a retrospective at the Royal Academy of Art in London and I went to London for a week. A friend came with me and she thought I was crazy most of the time, but I went to see Frank Bowling's show. And it was wonderful. His paintings are incredible. He puts all kinds of stuff in them and pours and his son and his grandson are his helpers in the studio. Sir Frank was knighted recently and he just turned 90 on the 27th of February. This week, last week. Pretty good, eh? And Alex Janvier who I mentioned just turned 89 on the 28th of February. With all these people, I can go and have a drink to celebrate their birthdays. I haven't actually seen this picture. Again, they don't look very good in slides. They're really big. They have all kinds of surface and you need to be close. One of the things he says, and actually Rothko said this about his too, they're not to be seen from the other side of the room.

You're supposed to go and stand fairly close to them so that they fill your range of vision. That's the experience. You know, you can walk around, you can move both backwards and forwards. But that visual thing is really moving because they're not a picture of anything. They're a visual experience for you to experience. So I thought it was really good to end with a Frank, with a painting by Sir Frank. I should write to him and ask if they'll make me a Dame, but I don't think they will. I am joking. You know I'm joking. I am Canadian. I only went 10 minutes over. Not bad, eh?

Alicia Boutilier: Thank you so much, Ann, for shoring up all these artists and works that have stopped you in your tracks and that have intersected with your own practice and at the same time interweaved these incredible stories of your experiences along the way. We do have a few minutes for questions if you don't mind some questions from members of the audience. And then there'll be refreshments. And oh my goodness, hands are already going up. So, I'll pass around the mic.

Audience Member: Thank you. It's actually not a question.

Ann Clarke: OK.

Audience Member: I'd just like to make a tribute.

Ann Clarke: Oh no.

Audience Member: Sorry, this is completely unscripted.

Ann Clarke: I left some things out of my talk so I guess I'll wait till after.

Audience Member: I just felt there was something missing from your introduction, Ann. I just want to say that I'm an art dealer and I'm a fairly young art dealer. I don't even want to mention the name of my gallery because I'm not going here for a shameless promo. But I have represented Ann Clarke for many years and my specialty is Canadian abstract contemporary art and it's something I've studied deeply for many years. And Ann, I just want to say something that has not been mentioned in this room today. Ann is part of a very special family of Canadian abstract artists known as the third generation. These are the artists that I've studied over the years. And Ann knows very well members of that family and has been a part of it since the late '60s. And having studied the artists in that family, I'm going to mention names like Michael Snow, Tony Urquhart. I'm going to mention people like Coughtry. And I'm going to mention Bolduc and Sluggett and Solomon.

Ann Clarke: I was going to make sure you got Bolduc in there because he was really important to me.

Audience Member: You mentioned Alex Cameron. They're very well known. Ron Martin, on and on. Most of the names I've mentioned so far have been men. Kate Graham, Milly Ristvedt would be the two women I would add into that family. But I have to say, having studied all of those Canadian

abstract artists, no one holds a candle to you in terms of your bold power, your continuation of always moving forward, never repeating yourself. I have yet to see a Canadian abstract artist who has blown everybody out of the water in terms of your power and creativity and energy. So, I just want to say that. That's all.

[Applause]

Ann Clarke: Thank you. I'm going to bring us back down to earth for a minute. I forgot to show you a couple of things. I'm doing collage. This was supposed to be in the Schwitters. We have all this packaging and this after recycling, I've noticed stuff more because you have to flatten it out to put it in. And these marvellous things and the shapes and this, I chew gum a lot because I don't smoke anymore. And this shape is in a lot of my current paintings and I'm always looking for things like that. I also eat cans of smoked oysters quite often and the little packaging that those cans come in I save and they go into paintings. I paint them of course, but this is me being Schwitters, OK?

And the other thing I wanted to mention with regard to the paint, this will come up later, I'm doing some talks with students about materials and methods immediately. But I just wanted to pop this in because I forgot with this business of when I came to Canada, I was using the powder paint mixed with Rhoplex but I was, you know, I couldn't afford. When Bocour started making acrylic paint in the late '50s but it cost a fortune in England. And also a crowd of us got together and bought a 45-gallon drum of Rhoplex which is the poly -- the medium, the acrylic medium and mixed it with powder colour that we bought at Cornelissen's in London which was a pigment house that had been there for, I don't know, a century or something. It catered to the theatre district where they used the paint for painting backdrops and everything. And I used to go and get the powder colour, mix it with the Rhoplex. And then when I came to Canada, I was doing that and also buying house paint. I liked Benjamin Moore's exterior house paint because it had a nice body, some of those early striped and poured ones that are done in a lot of that. And then I would just occasionally buy a tube of paint of it was Bocour then to just put little bits of colour in and coloured lines and so on when I wanted pure colour. When I was in Edmonton, I marched, I got involved in the women's movement and in the anti-bomb movement and I went in a few marches for that with [inaudible] and I met a lot of women. And one of them was this woman my age, Wendy Stevenson, who was a pretty left-wing person which I am actually. And was when we were trying to get, I think we were, what was it we were trying to get for women? Something in the Constitution, some right that we didn't have then and we went on marches. Anyway, Wendy Stevenson's, the daughter of -- her father was starting a paint company, an artist paint company in Toronto, Stevenson's Paints. And they were just inventing them and she asked if I would like to test them so I got this box of Stevenson's acrylics and they were all my first acrylics. So, I wanted to give them some others. That was another little thing. I think that's it.

Alicia Boutilier: Any more questions? Any questions? Oh, someone -- there we go.

Audience Member: OK. Thank you, Ann, so much for this. It's been fabulous. I just wanted to know,

the last painting you showed, Frank Bowling, is that his name?

Ann Clarke: Yes, it's --

Audience Member: And how big is that?

Ann Clarke: Oh, it's enormous.

Audience Member: Oh, so it is as big --

Ann Clarke: Yeah, it's like --

Audience Member: It looks on the screen.

Ann Clarke: I don't have the size on it. It took me a time to find a picture, but it's at least 12 feet wide. You know, it's a wall, yeah. There are some a bit smaller but they mostly fill you. Yeah, they're big.

Alicia Boutilier: All right in the back. Oh, I'll go with you and then I'll go with --

Audience Member: Just a comment about your Stevenson story because I grew up in Scarborough and Mr. Stevenson, the family had their factory at the bottom of my street. I grew up on Brimley Road and I was an art student at York University.

Ann Clarke: Wow.

Audience Member: I would drive down, they sold it at the school but I would go to his house and buy paint from him from his garage.

Ann Clarke: Oh, neat. I did get to visit there later when I was in Toronto. But that reminds me, I do the same thing now with Tri-Art.

Audience Member: Ah, yes, of course.

Ann Clarke: It's hard to get Stevenson's now. They're not making so much.

Audience Member: Hi, Ann. I'm at the back so I'll stand.

Ann Clarke: Oh, hello.

Audience Member: So, thank you for this beautiful talk. And I wanted to evoke a conversation I had at your opening between you and I and you said the paintings that were chosen, part of the reason

they were chosen is because they were actually framed and ready to go out the door, so to speak. And as an artist, and I noticed there's a lot of artists in the room, when there are a lot of artists in the room, we start talking about materials and techniques and nuts and bolts. And the nuts and bolts question I have is about the storage and the works and where do they all go. And also, also, one last part to it, the -- are you -- like if they're rolled up, I think you said to me they're rolled, like are you ever concerned about them becoming damaged? You know, we live in the moment and yet we're in a museum and we talk about archival and there's this tension between those two things.

Ann Clarke: They do get damaged. Of course they do. Lots of them do. I haven't been able to do any painting for six months because my studio is still full of all the work that was brought out of storage to select for the show. And I'm pulling my hair out about it and I want it all shoved back into storage so that I can have my studio back. So, what I do is I store -- those older paintings won't roll. The ones that we're using house painting that won't roll, they fall apart. I have as many again on rolls in my studio that weren't actually looked at for this exhibition. So I could do -- I would like to do a whole another big exhibition of more recent work. What can I say? The one -- the most recent works I'm doing with all the collage elements like the last one in the show couldn't be rolled anyway because of the stuff that's stuck in it. Yeah. So, what I've done is rent storage units and I'm hoping to get that work that's in my studio back into a storage unit so I can do some painting because I don't know how many more years I've got to paint. My 80th birthday is actually in six months. And I'm looking at people like, you know, Henri Matisse who managed to last to 83. But, you know, who knows? My dad was 79 when he died, so. Does that answer your question?

Audience Member: Yes.

Ann Clarke: Sort of?

Audience Member: Hi, Ann, that was really interesting. I was wondering when you became aware of Joan Mitchell and was she perhaps another role model of a very, very independent woman?

Ann Clarke: Yeah. I saw a show in Montreal of her work and her partner's work who is --

Audience Member: Riopelle.

Ann Clarke: -- Riopelle. Thank you. You can tell I'm nearly 80, can't you? I didn't know about her before. I didn't know about her when I was living out West. Maybe she was in some magazines or anything. She's not been one of my major influences, not as much as the Americans like Helen Frankenthaler. I mean, I've always been looking for women, of course. And I don't dislike her paintings but they don't move me very much. What can I say? I maybe haven't seen the right ones. And I do go and look at them when I get the opportunity to. I think the scale is good. There's quite a few women artists. Lee Krasner did some amazing paintings. Usually they're in the shadow of their partners, so. But I like her paintings. And somebody I left out of this. Oh, how could I? Guess who? Jackson Pollock. I have always been wild about his paintings. Not the early ones. I have seen every

exhibition I've had the opportunity to see of his work and the pouring and everything has obviously influenced me. I can't think of one painting that I particularly like more than the others but he was important in my life. Does that kind of answer your question? Joan Mitchell's worth looking at, yeah.

Alicia Boutilier: So we have room for maybe one more question.

Audience Member: Hi, Ann.

Ann Clarke: Hello.

Audience Member: I'm a student at Queens and a docent. And leading tours about your exhibit has been absolutely incredible. And just yesterday, I was with many other fellow docents and we were talking about Leaping Deer. So I wanted to take this opportunity to just ask anything that you want to tell about Leaping Deer because we're all so taken by it. And what we like to say is like when you see the deer, you can't unsee it.

Ann Clarke: Yeah.

Audience Member: Because a lot of us didn't see it quite at first but it's just incredible, and so anything you would like to say about it.

Ann Clarke: That's great. That painting was from an exhibition that I had here in 19 -- when was it, do you remember? You don't remember, Alicia?

Alicia Boutilier: I do have it at the top of my head. It's on a label.

Ann Clarke: It was here.

Alicia Boutilier: Carolyn, do you remember?

Ann Clarke: It was when they used to have shows here in the mid -- and it was when I was living in Tamworth. I had the railway station in Tamworth before I went up to Lake, up to Thunder Bay, when I was director of the Kingston Artists Association for a while and I did a little bit of teaching and various things trying to survive here. And I did quite a lot of portraits. I went all figurative for a while, yes. And there are quite a lot of those paintings. I think that's in the collection of the Agnes and I think there's another one that is as well.

Alicia Boutilier: Ariadne is in the collection of Agnes.

Ann Clarke: Yeah. And so, there are kind of mythological and different things like that from my travels, but the Leaping Deer, there's a boat behind it. The deer is my animal. If I'm an animal, I'm a deer. And this comes from dreams and from a lot of Jungian psychoanalysis I did for a while in the

past. So I've done a lot of dream work in the past. I don't really these days. But I had this dream where I was in the countryside and I met this wonderful lady. She was the queen goddess or something and she had all these clothes. And there was this landscape behind her that was long green and went into mountains and this path went up into the mountains. And there were no words spoken. She looked at me and she pointed up to the mountains and I went running up the mountains. I was that deer. That's my future. Being a deer running up the mountains. I don't know what it means or anything, but it was a really, really strong image. So, something about deer is my, what is it, Totem animal? Or what's the expression? I've probably been influenced by my friendship with the First Nations people as well.

Alicia Boutilier: Well, thank you everyone for questions. And again, thank you once more, Ann, for your incredible talk and sharing your stories. Please join me in -- and we'll have refreshments afterwards. So, I'm sure Ann would be willing to answer any more questions that you may have, but please join me in thanking Ann Clarke.

[Applause]