



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Dorothy Gees Seckler Collection
of Sound Recordings Relating to Art and Artists,
1962-1976, in the Archives of American Art

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Funding for the transcription of Seckler's interviews with Provincetown
artists was provided by the Shirley Gorelick Foundation in 2014.

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview	1
Administrative Information	1
Arrangement.....	3
Scope and Contents.....	3
Biographical / Historical.....	2
Names and Subjects	4
Container Listing	6
Series 1: Interviews with Artists, 1962-1976.....	6
Series 2: Broadcast Materials, 1962 - circa 1972.....	10
Series 3: Photographs, 1967 October.....	12

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Dorothy Gees Seckler Collection of Sound Recordings Relating to Art and Artists
Identifier:	AAA.seckdoro
Date:	1962-1976
Extent:	1.6 Linear feet
Creator:	Seckler, Dorothy Gees, 1910-1994
Language:	English Collection is in English.
Summary:	The Dorothy Gees Seckler collection of sound recordings relating to art and artists measures 1.6 linear feet and dates from 1962 to 1976. Recordings include 17 interviews conducted by Seckler, one interview by John Jones, and 17 additional recordings of mostly contemporary art-related programs and interviews taped from radio and television broadcasts. Recordings are on 26 sound cassettes and 25 sound tape reels.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The bulk of the collection, including the interviews with the Provincetown artists, was donated 1995 by Don Seckler, son of Dorothy Seckler. The source of acquisition for the Seckler interviews with the Woodstock artists is unknown.

Separated Materials

In 2012, several duplicates of recordings Seckler made for the Archives of American Art's oral history program were removed from the collection including: Peter and Riva Dechar (1965 and 1967), David von Schlegell (1967), Joan Mitchell (1965), Theresa Schwartz (1965), Paul Burlin (1962), Ibram Lassaw (1964), Jack Tworkov (1962), Allan Kaprow (1968), Edwin Dickinson (1962), Nathan Halper (1963), Louise Nevelson (1964-1965), Karl Knaths (1962), and Stephen Greene (1968). Joan Mitchell's 1965 oral history interview remains with the Seckler collection because reel 2 of this recording also contains a discussion of optical art that belongs in the Seckler collection. The oral history interview has been digitized and is available through the Archives' oral history program.

Related Materials

Other related materials in the Archives' collections include several additional interviews conducted by Seckler for its oral history program, a full recording and transcript of the August 28, 1963 symposium on pop art, for which brief sound notes are found in this collection, and

a transcript of the John Jones interview with George Segal in the John Jones interviews with artists collection, 1965 Oct. 5-1965 Nov. 12.

Available Formats

All of the sound recordings in this collection were digitized for research access in 2011-2012 and are available at the Archives of American Art offices. Researchers may view the original reels for the archival notations on them, but original reels are not available for playback due to fragility.

In addition, a transcript of the John Jones interview with George Segal is available on microfilm reel 3949, available through interlibrary loan.

Processing Information

Sound tape reels from this collection were preserved digitally in 2011, as were sound cassettes in 2012, as part of larger audiovisual preservation projects at the Archives of American Art. Duplicates of interviews conducted for the Archives' oral history program were removed from the collection at that time. Transcripts for Seckler's interviews with Provincetown artists were prepared by Jennifer Snyder in 2015, and the entire collection was processed and a finding aid prepared by Megan McShea in 2015.

Preferred Citation

Dorothy Gees Seckler collection of sound recordings relating to art and artists, 1962-1976.
Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C. Research Center. Contact Reference Services for more information.

Conditions Governing Use

The Dorothy Gees Seckler collection of sound recordings relating to art and artists are owned by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Literary rights as possessed by the donor have been dedicated to public use for research, study, and scholarship. The collection is subject to all copyright laws.

Biographical / Historical

Dorothy Gees Seckler was an art historian, critic, journalist, and artist active in New York City and Provincetown, Mass. Born Dorothy Elizabeth Gees in Baltimore, MD in 1910, she completed the program in Advertising Design at Maryland Institute College of Art in 1931 and was awarded a traveling scholarship upon graduation, which she used to study in Europe. She later received a masters degree from Columbia University in Art History and Art Education, and worked during World War II as head of an illustration unit in the Army's Judge Advocate General's office.

After the war, she worked at the Museum of Modern Art as an art historian in the education office until 1950, when she began writing for *ARTnews* magazine, reviewing New York gallery shows for its "Gallery Notes" section, and exploring painters' processes in the "Paints a Picture" series. She later served as contributing editor for *Art in America* from the late 1950s through the late 1960s, where her published

work included features on Robert Rauschenberg and Louise Nevelson, as well as broad surveys of contemporary art such as "A Folklore of the Banal" (Winter 1962) and "Audience is His Medium" (February 1963). She taught at New York University and City College of New York, and wrote a long essay on the history of the Provincetown's art colony, published in *Art in America* in 1959, and later updated for the catalog for the 1977 exhibition *Provincetown Painters, 1890's - 1970's*. Between 1962 and 1968, she conducted thirty oral history interviews for the Archives of American Art and served as one of its manuscript collectors.

Throughout her career as a writer and critic, Seckler painted and worked in collage, and her work was shown in several Provincetown galleries, and in the Provincetown Art Center and Museum. She married Jerome Seckler in 1937 and they had one son. Seckler received the American Federation of Arts Award for outstanding writing in the field of American Art in 1952. She died in 1994.

Scope and Contents

The Dorothy Gees Seckler collection of sound recordings relating to art and artists measures 1.6 linear feet and dates from 1962 to 1976. Recordings include 20 interviews conducted by Seckler, one interview by John Jones, and 17 additional recordings of mostly contemporary art-related programs and interviews taped from radio and television broadcasts. Recordings are on 26 sound cassettes and 25 sound tape reels.

Interviews with Artists consist of 17 interviews by Dorothy Seckler with artists including Elise Asher, Fritz Bultman, Judith Rothschild, Giorgio Cavallon, Marcia Marcus, Jean Cohen, William Freed, Lillian Orlowsky, Shirley Gorelick, Hans Hofmann, Wolf Kahn, Raoul Middleman, Robert Motherwell, Helen Frankenthaler, Olin Orr, Larry Rivers, Alvin Ross, George Segal, Jean Tinguely, and Niki de Saint Phalle. Several interviews are with two subjects at once. Many of these interviews were conducted in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and are referenced in her introduction to the catalog for the exhibition *Provincetown Painters, 1890's - 1970's* held at the Everson Museum and the Provincetown Art Association in 1977, and several interviews were conducted as research for articles Seckler wrote and published in *Art in America*. Also found are group interviews on specific subjects, including an interview with Julio de Diego, Marion Greenwood, Fletcher Martin, and Anton Refregier on the Woodstock art colony, and with Sally Avery, Boris Margo, Jan Gelb, Margit Beck and others on Op Art. In September of 1966, Seckler recorded some of Andy Warhol's *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* in Provincetown, which includes a performance by Nico and the Velvet Underground, as well as an interview with one of the band's members, John Cale. A single interview conducted by John Jones of George Segal appears to have been copied by Seckler to prepare for her April 1966 interview of Segal.

Broadcast materials include sound recordings of television and radio broadcast programs taped off the air presumably by Seckler. Most programs are interviews, with subjects including Maxim Karolik, James Thomas Flexner, R. Buckminster Fuller, Merce Cunningham, Alex Katz, Phillip Pearlstein, Roslyn Drexler, Barnett Newman, Saul Bellow, Ben Shahn, Marshall McLuhan, Isamu Noguchi, Andrew Wyeth, and William H Whyte. Other recordings include documentary programs related to contemporary art, book reviews, and a comedy performance with actor Peter Ustinov.

Photographs include 12 color slides from October of 1967 that appear to have been shot in Provincetown, Mass. Subjects include Dorothy Seckler and two other unidentified women.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged in 3 series.

- Series 1: Interviews with Artists, 1962-1976 (1 linear foot; Box 1)
- Series 2: Broadcast Materials, 1962-1972 (0.8 linear feet; Boxes 2-3)
- Series 3: Photographs, 1967 (1 folder; Box 3)

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Art historians -- New York (State) -- New York
Optical art

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Names:

Art in America
Asher, Elise, 1914-
Avery, Sally
Beck, Margit, 1915-1997
Bellow, Saul
Bultman, Fritz, 1919-1985
Cale, John
Cavallon, Giorgio, 1904-1989
Cohen, Jean
Cunningham, Merce
De Diego, Julio, 1900-
Drexler, Rosalyn
Flexner, James Thomas, 1908-2003
Frankenthaler, Helen, 1928-2011
Freed, William, 1904-
Fuller, R. Buckminster (Richard Buckminster), 1895-
Gelb, Jan, 1906-1978
Gorelick, Shirley, 1924-2000
Greenwood, Marion, 1909-1970
Hofmann, Hans, 1880-1966
Jones, John
Kahn, Wolf, 1927-
Karolik, Maxim
Katz, Alex, 1927-
Marcus, Marcia, 1928-
Margo, Boris, 1902-1995
Martin, Fletcher, 1904-1979
McLuhan, Marshall, 1911-1980
Middleman, Raoul F., 1935-
Motherwell, Robert
Newman, Barnett, 1905-1970
Nico, 1938-1988
Noguchi, Isamu, 1904-1988
Orlowsky, Lillian, 1914-2004

Pearlstein, Philip, 1924-
Refregier, Anton, 1905-
Rivers, Larry, 1925-2002
Ross, Alvin, 1920-1975
Rothschild, Judith
Saint-Phalle, Niki de, 1930-
Segal, George, 1924-2000
Shahn, Ben, 1898-1969
Tinguely, Jean, 1925-
Ustinov, Peter
Velvet Underground (Musical group)
Warhol, Andy, 1928-
Whyte, William Hollingsworth
Wyeth, Andrew, 1917-2009

Container Listing

Series 1: Interviews with Artists, 1962-1976

1 Linear foot (Box 1)

Series contains 17 interviews with artists by Dorothy Seckler, and one interview conducted by John Jones, on 16 sound cassettes and 18 sound tape reels. Seckler seems to have conducted most of the interviews for specific writing projects, although the reason for interviews is not known in every case. Several interviews are with two subjects interviewed together. Many of these interviews were conducted in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and are referenced in her introduction to the catalog for the exhibition *Provincetown Painters, 1890's – 1970's* held at the Everson Museum and the Provincetown Art Association in 1977. Several interviews were conducted as research for articles Seckler wrote and published in *Art in America*, including the Helen Frankenthaler and Robert Motherwell interviews (for "The artist in America: victim of the culture boom?" December 1963) and the Jean Tinguely and Niki de Saint Phalle interview (for "Audience is his medium," February 1963). The interview with George Segal conducted by John Jones was borrowed by Seckler from the Archives of American Art in advance of her April 1966 interview with Segal.

Several group interviews are found on specific subjects, including an interview with Julio de Diego, Marion Greenwood, Fletcher Martin, and Anton Refregier on the Woodstock art colony, and with Sally Avery, Boris Margo, Jan Gelb, Margit Beck and others on Op Art. A 1965 symposium on pop art, which included Seckler as a speaker, is referenced here in a recording of audio notes Seckler made in preparation for the discussion. Also found is Seckler's recording made during a performance of Andy Warhol's *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* in Provincetown in September 1966, which includes a performance by Nico and the Velvet Underground, as well as an interview with one of the band's members, John Cale.

Arrangement is roughly alphabetical by interview subject. Subjects sometimes appear out of order when multiple interviews occur on the same tape. An interview with Joan Mitchell, which forms part of the Archives of American Art's Oral History Collection, appears on the same tape is the group interview on op art, and is physically filed with that item but described elsewhere in the Archives' catalog.

A transcript of the John Jones interview with George Segal is found in the John Jones interviews with artists collection, 1965 Oct. 5-1965 Nov. 12, available through interlibrary loan on microfilm reel 3949.

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Box 1, Item 1 | Elise Asher, 1976 August 17
<i>1 sound cassette</i>
Digital Content
This interview has been transcribed. |
| Box 1, Item 2 | Fritz Bultman and Judith Rothschild on <i>Forum '49</i> Series in Provincetown, Mass., circa 1968
<i>1 sound cassette</i>
Digital Content
This interview has been transcribed. |
| Box 1, Item 3 | Giorgio Cavallon, 1966 August 28
<i>1 sound cassette</i>
Digital Content
This interview has been transcribed. |
| Box 1, Item 4 | Marcia Marcus, 1967 August 28 |

- 2 sound cassettes*
[Digital Content](#)
Jean Cohen interview found on cassette 2 of 2, side 2 of the Marcia Marcus interview. This interview has been transcribed.
- Box 1, Item 5 Jean Cohen, 1967 August 24
1 sound cassette
[Digital Content](#)
This interview has been transcribed.
- Box 1, Item 6 William Freed and Lillian Orlowsky, 1976 July 27
2 sound cassettes
[Digital Content](#)
This interview has been transcribed.
- Box 1, Item 7 Shirley Gorelick, 1968 August 20
1 sound cassette
[Digital Content](#)
This interview has been transcribed.
- Box 1, Item 8 Hans Hofmann, circa 1962
1 sound tape reel
[Digital Content](#)
This interview has been transcribed.
- Box 1, Item 9 Wolf Kahn, 1968 September 17
2 sound cassettes
[Digital Content](#)
This interview has been transcribed.
- Box 1, Item 10 Raoul Middleman and Unidentified Woman, circa 1967
1 sound cassette
[Digital Content](#)
This interview has been transcribed.
- Box 1, Item 11 Robert Motherwell, 1963 April 29
1 sound tape reel
This interview was conducted for the December, 1963 article for *Art in America* entitled "The artist in America: victim of the culture boom?" The Helen Frankenthaler interview was recorded at the end of side 2 of Motherwell interview.
- Box 1, Item 12 Helen Frankenthaler, circa 1962
1 sound tape reel
[Digital Content](#)
This interview was conducted for the December, 1963 article in *Art in America* entitled "The artist in America: victim of the culture boom?" This interview has been transcribed.
- Box 1, Item 13 Olin Orr, 1968 August 4

1 sound cassette (Original recording defective; recording contains distortion and overlap.)

[Digital Content](#)

This interview has been transcribed.

Box 1, Item 14

Larry Rivers, circa 1963

1 sound tape reel

Interview was conducted for the December, 1963 article for *Art in America* entitled "The artist in America: victim of the culture boom?" A second man is present at this interview and is unidentified.

Box 1, Item 15

Alvin Ross, 1974 August 22 - September 16

2 sound cassettes

[Digital Content](#)

This interview has been transcribed.

Box 1, Item 16

George Segal, 1966 April 1

2 sound tape reels

[Digital Content](#)

This interview has been transcribed.

Box 1, Item 17

Duplicate Excerpts of George Segal Interview, 1966

5 sound tape reels

Excerpts of April 1, 1966 interview with George Segal by Dorothy Seckler. Excerpts created by Seckler.

Box 1, Item 18

George Segal Interviewed by John Jones, 1965

2 sound tape reels

Box 1, Item 19

Jean Tinguely and Niki de Saint Phalle, 1962 November

2 sound tape reels

[Digital Content](#)

Interview conducted as for the February, 1963 *Art in America* article entitled "Audience is his medium." The interview has been transcribed.

Box 1, Item 20

Preparatory Notes for Pop Art Symposium, 1963 August 28

1 sound tape reel

Box 1

Group Interviews

Box 1, Item 21

Woodstock Group, 1964 September 26

1 sound tape reel (includes paper transcript)

Members of the group interviewed by Seckler include Julio de Diego, Marion Greenwood, Fletcher Martin, and Anton Refregier.

Box 1, Item 22

Discussion of Op Art, circa 1965

1 sound tape reel

Discussion led by Dorothy Seckler with artists Sally Avery, Boris Margo, Jan Gelb, Margit Beck and others who are unidentified. Recording begins on reel also containing reel 2 of 2 of a Joan Mitchell oral history conducted by

Dorothy Seckler for the Archives of American Art. Reel 1 of this oral history is also filed here.

Box 1, Item 23

Exploding Plastic Inevitable Performance and Interview with John Cale, 1966
September

2 sound cassettes (Sound is very distorted.)

Performance in Provincetown, Mass. by Niko and the Velvet Underground, with sound from projected films, including Warhol's films "Hedy" and "The Kiss." Seckler is heard discussing the films and performance with an unidentified man during the show. Side 2 of cassette 2 begins with a 17-minute interview with John Cale, followed by about 8 minutes of blank tape, followed by more of the performance.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Broadcast Materials, 1962 - circa 1972

0.6 Linear feet (Boxes 2-3)

Series includes sound recordings of television and radio broadcast programs taped off the air presumably by Seckler. Most programs are interviews, with subjects including Maxim Karolik, James Thomas Flexner, R. Buckminster Fuller, Merce Cunningham, Alex Katz, Phillip Pearlstein, Roslyn Drexler, Barnet Newman, Saul Bellow, Ben Shahn, Marshall McLuhan, Isamu Noguchi, Andrew Wyeth, and William H Whyte. Some recordings are only excerpts of programs, and sound quality varies throughout. Other recordings include documentary programs related to contemporary art, book reviews, and a comedy performance with actor Peter Ustinov. An empty reel box and a box containing a blank tape have been retained for their markings and are filed at the end of this series.

Arrangement is chronological.

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| Box 2, Item 1 | Maxim Karolik and James Thomas Flexner Interviewed by Brian O'Doherty on Unidentified Television Program, circa 1962
<i>1 sound tape reel</i> |
| Box 2, Item 2 | <i>Modern American Art</i> , 1963 March 11
<i>2 sound tape reels</i> |
| Box 2, Item 3 | Excerpt of Interview with R. Buckminster Fuller Conducted by Brian O'Doherty on <i>Dialogue</i> Radio Series, 1964 May 9
<i>1 sound tape reel</i> |
| Box 2, Item 4 | Excerpt of Interview with Merce Cunningham on Unidentified Radio Program, circa 1964
<i>1 sound tape reel</i> |
| Box 2, Item 5 | Excerpts of Program with Alex Katz, Phillip Pearlstein, and Roslyn Drexler on <i>ArtForum</i> Radio Series , 1964 November 6
<i>1 sound tape reel</i>
Broadcast by WBAI radio in New York, NY. |
| Box 2, Item 6 | Barnet Newman Interviewed by Frank O'Hara on Unidentified Television Program, 1964 December 7
<i>1 sound tape reel</i>
Broadcast on WNET-TV, New York, NY. |
| Box 2, Item 7 | Saul Bellow on <i>Open Mind</i> Television Series , circa 1965
<i>1 sound tape reel</i>
Broadcast by WNBC-TV, New York, NY. |
| Box 2, Item 8 | Ben Shahn on <i>Open Mind</i> Television Series, circa 1965
<i>1 sound tape reel</i>
Broadcast by WNBC-TV, New York, NY. |
| Box 2, Item 9 | Marshall McLuhan on Unidentified Canadian Television Program, 1966 May 15
<i>2 sound cassettes</i> |
| Box 2, Item 10 | Excerpts from <i>New York: the New Left Bank</i> Television Program, 1966
<i>1 sound cassette</i> |

- Box 2, Item 11 Unidentified Television Program on Pablo Picasso Exhibition in Chicago, circa 1968
1 sound cassette
- Box 2, Item 12 Isamu Noguchi Interviewed by Aline Saarinen on *The Today Show* Television Series, 1968
1 sound cassette
Broadcast on WNBC-TV, New York, NY.
- Box 3, Item 1 Empty Sound Reel Box and Box with Blank Tape, 1967-1968
- Box 3, Item 2 *Georges Melies* Program by Willard van Dyke, 1969
1 sound cassette
- Box 3, Item 3 Andrew Wyeth Interviewed by Barbara Walters , circa 1970
1 sound cassette
Possibly from *The Today Show* television series.
- Box 3, Item 4 William H. Whyte Interviewed by Edwin Newman on *Speaking Freely* Television Program, circa 1970
1 sound cassette
An NBC-TV News program.
- Box 3, Item 5 Peter Ustinov Comedy Program, circa 1970
1 sound cassette
- Box 3, Item 6 Book reviews by Unidentified Speaker, crica 1972
1 sound cassette

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: Photographs, 1967 October

1 Folder (Box 3)

12 color slides are found which appear to have been shot in Provincetown in October of 1967. Subjects include Dorothy Seckler and two other unidentified women.

Box 3, Item 7

Scenes in Provincetown, Mass with Dorothy Seckler and Others, 1967 October

[Return to Table of Contents](#)