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Archives of American Art

Lady Pink Interview

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Lady Pink. It was conducted by Fernanda Espinosa as part of the In Colors Project. Lady Pink and Fernanda Espinosa have reviewed the transcript and their corrections and emendations appear below.

This transcript has been lightly edited by the In Colors Project for readability. Readers should bear in mind that the original document and medium of this interview is the spoken language and that the audio recording should be considered the original source, with its particular tone and grammar.

In Colors is a project by Fernanda Espinosa, a 2022 Oral History Association oral history fellow funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. This is one of several interviews conducted under this fellowship and in collaboration with the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this interview, do not necessarily reflect those of the Oral History Association or National Endowment for the Humanities.

Interview

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: This is Fernanda Espinosa recording the first session of an oral history with Lady Pink. And Lady Pink is joining me virtually from her studio and home in Gardner, New York. This is part of the In Colors Project for—with—the Archives of American Art. So, today I want to welcome you and thank you for joining me in this project. And I would like you to start just stating your name and who you are, and if you can tell us a little more about your background and where you were born.

LADY PINK: Hi, I'm Lady Pink. I'm a New York-based artist. I was originally born in Ecuador but came to this country when I was a little child. So, I've been raised and grown up in New York and the US and I'm a US citizen now. I've been an artist for about 42 years now. And I've been a professional artist all this time.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thank you so much for introducing yourself. So, I wanted us to start with you telling us a little bit more about your earlier years and, you know, the environment where you were born and grew up. Let's just start there.

LADY PINK: Okay. I was born in Ambato, Ecuador—that is up in the Andes Mountains, South of the capital of Quito—to my mother who was a seamstress, and my father, who was an architectural engineer. And lived there for about seven years in Ambato, as well as in Mera or Puyo, which is in the Amazon rainforest, where my mother's family lives. And from there, she migrated to the US in 1972 with two little girls in tow—myself and my older sister, without any papers, without speaking the language, just having a brother and a couple of cousins living in New York City.

And that was enough for her to, you know, give it a try at the American Dream, and she succeeded. She, um, worked her way up in the seamstress world to work for a fashion designer. So, she was doing real well. She remarried to a Cuban fella that got us our green cards when I was about 16 years old. And she bought a house in Queens, in 1979. That was right around the time where I was starting to write graffiti and dip into the street art world as a young person.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And going back to where you were born, can you tell me a little bit more about your earlier memories, maybe even your first memories that you can remember, as a child?

LADY PINK: That's a little vague, I don't know what you mean. What do you mean? Memories as a child?

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah. So—

LADY PINK: —I lived there for 7 years. I had a lot of memories. You have to be more specific. I think, right?

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: So, likegoing back to your earliest memories that you can remember. For example, I remember some things from when I was two years old or some images from back then. Do you remember any images that come up for you when you were a child in Ecuador? That stuck with you throughout your life—

LADY PINK: —just vague images.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Okay.

Can you describe a bit more about your family background? You mentioned you come from a family of architects and your family was divided, kind of between Ambato and Puyo? Do you have any memories about the people that surrounded you at that point, that were important in raising you in your childhood?

LADY PINK: I have just fleeting memories of childhood. We were surrounded by a lot of family, a lot of uncles and aunts, hundreds seems, dozens of cousins all over the place. We have family in Guayaquil, in Quito, family in Ambato, family in Puyo. Everyone was spread all over. Everyone has so many children. So, there's lots and lots of family. We lived with our grandparents at one point. My parents were not married. My real father had an actual wife and other children in Ambato. My mother was his mistress, so she was fleeing from him. She went back to her family when she decided he was too much of a womanizer and a gambler and not a good father.

[00:05:05]

So, she took myself and my sister back to her family. We were raised by, you know, a lot of uncles and aunts and everyone. Lived in a giant—what do you call, a mansion—in the Amazon rainforest. My family were owners of a plantation, sugar cane, I believe. So, they had land, they had seniority in the jungle. My uncles were high up in the political, whatever. So, they were important family in the Amazon rainforest. And my mother was the darling of a plantation owner. The youngest daughter. So, she was well taken care of, and when she left my father, she had a family to return to in the Amazon rainforest. And then, from there, we migrated to New York City. I was about seven years old.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Once you migrated and moved to New York, are there any memories that you can share from those moments of transition? From arriving from a place like the Amazon, and you know being surrounded by the Andes and the rainforest to coming to a big city—in New York?

LADY PINK: So, it was going from one jungle to the concrete jungle. It was very harsh cultural differences on being in America. It took my sister and I a couple of years to learn the English language. My mother did put us in Catholic school immediately up on arriving. Because that's what Latin people do. We were raised in Catholic school, cause that's all there is in Ecuador.

So, she found the Catholic school nearby and put us in there. And we were the only Latin kids in there. So, we were introduced to racism. You know, how kids can be so cruel, and white kids were incredibly cruel. And after a couple of years of just coming home crying every day, we were being tortured by these kids, my sister and I started skipping school. And then until the nuns came to speak to my mother about it, and she realized how bad it was going for us in school. So, she pulled us out of Catholic school and put us in public school that had lots of minority kids, Puerto Rican kids and kids that spoke Spanish and made us feel welcome. And we weren’t being tortured or have been to endure racism by these white kids, you know, for so long.

We thought we were white in Ecuador. My family is all white. We have the different races down there and we were certainly not of the the Native Americans. My uncles are six-foot tall, white Spaniard-looking guys. On my other side of my family, there's blonde hair, blue eyes in the family. I mean, really. I was told that I was not white when I came to this country. So, no matter how pale my skin is or how white my mother is, she's almost transparent. She's so white. It doesn’t matter. You're Hispanic, that must be a race, and therefore, you have to be,you know, endured racism. So, they didn't understand Ecuador. As soon as you say, they hear your Spanish accent, is you're Puerto Rican and that means you're just trashing the street. Cause Puerto Ricans were not looked on favorably in New York City that it was the lowest form of life. And as soon as they heard my accent, it was that kind of, you know, world.

So, I lived—we lived—in Brooklyn, New York and Williamsburg, on the edge of Greenpoint. And Greenpoint is white people land, Williamsburg was not white people land, that was the minorities. So, we were right on the edge. And we were surrounded by white people, but we used to head South to hang out with more of our own kind. My sister and I with all the Latin kids, Puerto Rican kids, our first boyfriends were Puerto Rican and African American and all of that. It wasn't until in my twenties that I started to get to know real white people.

So, that's how racism works in New York. It depended on what neighborhood you lived in, you were exposed to such a such kind of racism or music or cultures, subcultures. And all of my best friends were Puerto Rican. My favorite food is Puerto Rican food, and some of the cutest guys I dated were Puerto Rican. So, I have a fondness for that. I even went to Puerto Rico once [coughs].

[00:10:00]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Bless you!

Thanks for sharing that. You mentioned that you had—you know first you changed countries and then you also had to change schools. What were some other moments that impacted this time of your life? How old were you when you moved from the Catholic school to the public school?

LADY PINK: When we moved to the public schools, I was in fifth grade and in sixth grade. On sixth grade, you graduate, and you move on to the junior high school, middle school. And I went to junior high school, 1 26. And again, my sister and I were in the top of the top classes of the school. We were like with the bright, sharpest students there. But yet we dated the guys that were on the bottom classes. They weren't too bright, but they were awfully cute.

So, in junior high school, I learned how to be a tough kid. I went over to the dark side when I was about 13, 14 years old when I kissed my first boy and when I tried my first joint. I started smoking weed at 13, I think, maybe 14. So, I started cutting school at 14, when the school was situated across the street from a park in a big public pool, and they would open up before school ended. So, I mean, come on, really? So, I would cut school, go play humble, and I started, you know, instead of being I was sent to the principal's office, I was like, Why am I going to go to the principal's office when I can just walk out the door and go to the park with my friends and have fun.

So, I started going over to the dark side. So, by the time I was 15 years old, and I started dipping into graffiti, when my very first boyfriend from the age of 13 to 15, he was arrested for writing graffiti in the streets, cute Puerto Rican boy, and he was sent to go live in Puerto Rico with family.

At 15, you don't have money to fly yourself back to New York. So, he was gone, he was lost to me. I cried for a month and started tagging his name around the middle school the way he did, and then his friends took me under their wing and taught me how to do it correctly, because it takes a lot of studying to learn style and letters. You know, everything has to be just so—and you got to practice it and practice it. So, so well, when you put it out on a wall in the street, anywhere you do it well and you do everyone justice that knows you, your friends and such. You can't just slap-up whatever letters. They're not random letters. They're so specific, you can figure out where people live. Like, there was a Brooklyn style, there was a Bronx style, there was a Queens style, and a Manhattan style, uptown, downtown Manhattan, even. Everyone had specific letters. You can tell what neighborhood they came from. And now you can tell what country they come from and what era or decade they come from. Like dialect or fashion clothes. You can tell by a photo, Oh! that's from this decade or that decade. The same thing with letters and fonts, and what we did.

So, I had to be schooled. We teach master to apprentice and my very first master was just my first boyfriend's best friend. He was also missing his best friend. I was missing him, you know. And we took up together and more than just lettering and he taught me how to tag correctly. So, that was at the end of my middle school.

And I graduated and moved on to high school, which I had submitted my portfolio, and I got into the High School of Art and Design. I got into another school too, but this school only required one subway train. The other one required two subway trains to get there. So. I went to the High School of Art and Design, that's in the middle of Manhattan, in the middle of New York City. And kids from every corner of New York would go there. So, at any given point

when I was there, there was like a few hundred graffiti writers going there, from all over New York, places I never even knew existed. So, I made friends fast and it took me a lot longer to convince them to take me to the train yards, to actually paint subway trains.

But you do have to get really, really good on paper, how to draw it out, your letters, everything. But then it takes a whole different kind of crazy and courage. And to go out there and do it for real on a subway train in the middle of a train yard—that is stuff! Is way scary, way scary.

A lot of young ladies did not have it in them. And this is how young men, um, tested their metal, their courage. Even some of them couldn't do it because it was so damn scary and frightening. But I made friends with the right people. We went to the right places so that no incidents would happen. You have to know when to go, where to go and, and such.

[00:15:08]

At that time my graffiti career was born. So, at the same time that I was starting in high school and starting painting on the subway trains at night—on weekends with my friends—I was invited to be in the very first gallery exhibits. This was around 1980. At the end of 1980. The very first exhibit was at Fashion Moda, December of 1980. And there was over a dozen guys, and these were the best of the best through all the 1970s. These were the cream of the crop, the elite of all graffiti writers. These guys were my heroes. I was thrilled just to meet them like celebrities, you know? One of them came to my school, Crash, and invited me to be in that first exhibit.

I was only 16 years old, but they felt the women's movement, the feminist movement, all through the seventies. It wasn't just affecting the girls. It was affecting the boys. They felt that they needed a token female in their exhibit. It was just a whole lot of dudes, and they needed a girl, even if from high school, they saw that I had skills and they invited me to be in the first exhibit.

I was so nervous doing my painting that, um, Lee had to outline it for me. My very first painting. I did the piece, but he was staring at me. These guys were staring at me. I'm shaking like this [demonstrates shivering]. I couldn't do my final outline steadily. So, the guy outlined it for me. Lee, who later became my boyfriend for like four years, he was already 20, I was 16. I don't know what he was messing with a teenager for. But anyway, they tell me I was quite a character at that age. I was precocious and all of that.

As a kid, I could not be stop. So, I made friends with the top guys and I was in the exhibits and the documentaries, the motion picture *Wild Style*. I played one of the leads opposite to Lee, who played the other lead. The director, Charlie Ahern of that movie, of *Wild Style*, he saw our love story and wrote it into the film. So, that’s an actual love story. Horrifying. I know. So, there was a world wind of activity all through the early 1980s.

Lots of exhibits, lots of traveling around the world, like a celebrity, lot of nightclubs. We had our names on the guest list to go into all the nightclubs for free, the best music. There was a lot of underage drinking, we had alcohol for free and drugs, just the world wind of stuff going on in the '80s, parties, and rich people's homes, gallery exhibits in some other country, and having to sign autographs wherever I go.

And, you know, I was still a teenager. So, I'd been trained since very young to do this kind of work. Not just as an exhibit, artist doing canvases for paintings, but speaking in public and representing, and all of that which I didn't know was part of the deal of being a painter. Figured we just do a painting and walk away. But, nope, you have to learn how to speak and explain yourself and describe what you do, and represent the movement, represent other young women who are up and coming in the street art. Anyway, all of that.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I definitely want to hear more about all of the—you know the different stages as an artist that flourished pretty early—relatively early. But I also want to go back to hear more about any sense of art or like creativity that maybe was in you or in your family or your environment that kind of connected to who you were later. If you can tell me a little bit more about that?

LADY PINK: I understand. I'd been drawing since I was a toddler and at the age of five, I was defacing and vandalizing my father's blueprints. I hear—and I think—by the age of seven I had made an aerial map of my mother’s village that's outside of Puyo. Every little house,

every little street. I was only seven, eight years old before we left. I made an aerial map of the village. I had it going on. So, I think growing up my mother realized my artistic ability. She got me lots of paint by numbers and other art supplies, and I was definitely doing that.

So, in middle school, my art teacher, this little gay man named Mr. Robbins, a wispy little guy, he encouraged me. He absolutely treasured me. I think I was only 13, 14 years old when I sold my first piece through my art teacher. I did a repeat pattern for a textile, and this was homework. But my homework was so tight and so perfectly done. He sold it to a textile factory for a hundred dollars. I got a hundred dollars for my homework, so, I could paint that well at that age—nice and steady—I understood what a repeat pattern was, and I did something amazing. So, he sold that at that age. But he encouraged me to build a portfolio for high school.

[00:20:26]

And this is where kids have to start at the age of 13, 14 years old. Building a portfolio, so that you can get into art high school, and that gives you a whole leg up in life. The kind of networking and friendships and skills—that most people learn in college—we were learning in high school. So, I was already a skilled artist, easily got into high school, but my major was Architecture.

The first year of high school, you get too deep into everything from illustration to photography to—you know—all kinds of different fields. Every three weeks you get a new one so that in your next year you get to pick a major, you have to have a direction, just like in college. So, I chose Architecture because my real father was an architectural engineer.

I have two half-brothers down there, who are architectural engineers. Now, my older brother—Fabian—he has a company and my younger brother—Mauricio—works for him. They do architectural engineering stuff, like making buildings and bridges and stuff like that, which is awesome. Architecture is in my family, and I have a knack for it, and you can see it in my fine art. It still creeps into my fine art: lots of buildings, lots of bricks, windows, but fantasy Architecture, not no real, actual you know, architecture that will stand up. So, you know, that is always in there.

That was going to be my major. But at 16, I did not have the patience to sit through the drafting, the mathematics, the calculations, and all of that. Architecture is very precise and you got to go to college for seven or eight years. It's insane. That's dedication, as it should be. We want our buildings to stand up, but I did not have it as a teenager. I was wild and free, painting colorful and large and insane. And I barely went to class. I cut most of high school, honestly.

I went to school, but I spent like four hours, four periods in the lunchroom with my friends doing our thing, and then one hour in the lady’s room gossiping, smoking, and chilling with the girls, then I'd call that a school day—I was terrible!—I failed all my art classes for not showing up.

This graffiti thing took a lot of planning. We'd have to go out and get paint. It took all day long to steal paint from all over outside of the city: and looking, watching the train yards, observing the schedules, and illustrating. Honestly, I didn't have time for my last year of high school. I was booked with exhibits and interviews and traveling and with responsibilities, you know, of a professional artist. I barely had time for the last year of high school. So, I took my GED, which is an exam that gives you your diploma, and I was done with school.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: You've mentioned your relationship or your arts' relationship to Architecture, at that point, when these was starting to show up in your life in school. Did you have any relationship to your father or the work that he was doing?

LADY PINK: I did not have any relationship with my father, really. My mother left him when we were kids. I was seven, my sister was eight. We came to the US with no papers, so we could not return until we got our green cards. I was 16 years old, then we returned, and we just showed up at his house, knocked on the door, and my brothers answered. Two of my brothers answered the door. We were like, Hello, we’re your sisters. They were like, Ha, oh my God!

So, of course, my father took control of us a little bit. We had to stay there and visit and so on. But we wouldn't keep so much in touch with my father. He was not kind of emotional,

soft, and squishy type. We were keeping in touch with our brothers. We bonded with them, and they told us that we had an older brother, even from a third woman. Didn't even know we had an older brother until I was 16 years old, and I just saw him like two weeks ago.

My older brother—Patricio—he is an eye doctor and two of his daughters are also eye doctors. My mini nieces, everyone's so small. My oldest brother is about just a little over my shoulder there. He's a little guy. I absolutely love him. Anyway, so there's six of us in total.

[00:25:02]

I have a half-sister as well in Quito, but we keep in touch with our brothers and over the years we hear what was going on with our father. And I think—to make a long story short—there was some kind of a political scandal. My father became a senator, representing—I guess Ambato—in that area, and then there was a big, um, some big scandal.

The *presidente loco* of Ecuador, he barricaded himself in his presidential palace. He didn't wanna leave office when he was kicked out of office, so he took like 17 senators with him. They backed him up, and, eventually, he was thrown out. The president and the 17 senators were jailed.

So, the last time I saw my father, he was in the political jail, which looked a lot like a villa in Quito. It was a villa and there was just a lot of old men—political prisoners—in there. They had freedom to roam the grounds and everything. They were sitting there, playing cards, different board games, and stuff like that. I'm sure it was dreadfully boring, but it wasn't like a complete jail where they were denied everything. They were well taken care of, you know. But still, he was on the locking key there. And that's the last time that I saw him. So, I understand he was released from there and he was sent home, and then he died of a heart attack.

So, my real dad is gone. My brothers, we still keep in touch with. One of my brothers—Mauricio—my younger brother, he treats my mother like if she was his own mother, which is quite unusual. [He] picks her up at the airport, drives her around, does everything that a son would. But, he isn't her son. That is ah—anyway.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: It's interesting that, you know, all of the political context that happens when you belong to different locations, and it all ends up in your personality, in your life in some way. I had two things that came-up when you were telling me these stories. One, that you were actually an undocumented child, and then teenager for almost ten years. So, I want to hear a little bit more about how that impacted your environment. I know that's different from how it is now, but I am interested in knowing how that was for you in—as an undocumented child in the seventies.

LADY PINK: I was an undocumented child. We didn't have any papers living in the US. We didn't have a green card or anything like that. But at the age of 10, I was able to walk into the Social Security Office and just get a social security card—with very little kind of proof. As a 10-year-old kid, we went with a whole, with a few friends from our block, and we just walked into that office and got a social security card.

So, that was helpful, I think. Moving forward, when I got to show him his Social Security Card for things. But as a child, I didn't understand the impact of not having papers or anything like that. It didn't sink in. As a kid, you don't really grasp all of that. I was starting to understand that by the time I got my green card and such—that we could have been deported if they found us or anything like that.

But, we weren't that worried about it. We didn't live under any kind of pressure that we were gonna be kicked out of the country. There were so many undocumented immigrants around us. So, it wasn't a huge danger in any way. When I did get my green card, I was breaking the law and going underground and doing—I guess, you would say—vandalism on, on the subways.

And if I got arrested, I might have been running into the kind of trouble that I would take my whole family with me, and they would deport us all. I was very worried about that. I was worried about that. So I never carried ID with me. And then I had a fake name or all of that. I would just try to weasel and talk my way out of trouble, which I did. I took my way out, out of all kinds of trouble, and I use my fake name liberally.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: It's interesting. I think in one of your interviews you mentioned how hostile everything became after 9/11 in terms of the police, immigration. I was an undocumented child post 9/11 or—not child—adolescent, and by that time, you couldn't walk into the social security office. So, the whole political environment in the United States changed so much. My other question about some of that time in your life, when you were growing up in New York in, you know, graffiti, but also belonging to a family from Ambato, which is a place where there's a lot of a conservative culture, I would say.

[00:30:06]

You mentioned a lot of people going to Catholic schools. What were your family's reactions or what was, what were they saying about the way that you were doing graffiti or the way that you were doing your art at that point?

LADY PINK: Well, my parents of course were—my mother and my stepfather—he was Cuban, they were of course worried that they would get phone calls from the police or from a hospital or that something would happen to me. I was sneaking out of the window and going into the worst neighborhoods of New York. They found out early on that I was doing that. I got caught by one of my other friends. We arrived at his house and his—in the morning—after doing some vandalism, and his mother became aware of what we did, they put us in a car and drove them, and drove us all over to my mother's house. They were Puerto Rican, so, sitting in the living room and hearing all these mothers screaming at us in Spanish about how terrible we were [gestures] *¡Ay Dios mío!* And they're pulling their hair out and carrying on and on.

And my friend and I—Ernie—we were just staring at each other, smiling. We were happy that we succeeded doing what we went out to do that night, some vandalism. We made it home alive in the morning. Of course, we got busted, and our families were very unhappy, and all of that. So, my mother knew for a while that I was doing that. Of course, she was always worried. I shared the room with my sister, and it made it harder for me to sneak out of the window. She would rat me out. When she'd hear me, she'd get back inside, she'd scream at me and make a ruckus, and then I couldn't go. So, she eventually got her own room downstairs.

So, I had a private room, but still sneaking out and going to the worst neighborhoods. Of course, my parents worried, and my mother would cry. She'd stay-up and wait for me. Sometimes I'd try to sneak back in real quiet in the dark, and then I'd get that. I wouldn't even see it coming. So, she was at wit's end.

She even contacted my real father in Ecuador and tried to send me down there. She's like, ”I can't handle her no more”. I was completely out of control. She tried to get that very first boyfriend that I started writing graffiti for. His name was David. He was in the Army now, and they flew him back to New York.

My mother and—father—stepfather, they flew him back to New York, so that he can ask for my hand in marriage. I was 17. I was like, Oh! hell no! So, I had fallen out of love with that boy, and I was totally in love now with the movement, graffiti, the adventure, the fame, the fortune being treated like a celebrity and going to fancy parties and going to paint trains, which are so much fun.

And I was not ready to settle down and marry this boy. I was no longer in love. That puppy love was gone. He was in the army. He was living in an army base in Texas. I was not going there. So, he even went so far as to follow me, begging for me to marry him all the way up into a train yard. He was all duded-up, dressed-up, real fancy and shiny shoes and pleated pants and just like ever so pretty.

And he followed me. I had my bag of paint. I went all the way up town to the Bronx somewhere to meet up with my boys to go painting. And they're like, ”Who's the dude? who's the dude following you?” I'm like, He wants to marry me. He won't go away. He just won't leave me alone. I was like, Go back home. Stop following me. You can't go into the train yard with us. And he finally—he did stay on the train—and he didn't get off with us to go and jump into the train tracks and go into a tunnel. Normal people don't do that. That is scary as hell. And that's what I was doing. So, you know I left him on the train, and that is the last time I ever saw David.

I would not marry him anyway. So, then I did have Lee as a boyfriend after that. Another

crazy jealous Puerto Rican dude. And my mother was trying to convince him to marry me, at least take control of me. If not marry me, at least, you know, I'd be under the hand of a strong guy, and he would guide me and keep me from sneaking out, because Lee had already painted trains through the mid-seventies until the end, 1980s or so. He knew how dangerous it was and as his girlfriend, he did not allow me to go do that because it was crazy dangerous. Plus, I was going out there with a bunch of handsome young guys my own age.

He was not having that. So, um, he wouldn't let me go paint trains, and then, we were always breaking on and off, on and off. He'd have a fit. We'd break off, I'd go painting with my friends, and then he would see my name running on the train, Oh! you were hanging out with this guy and that guy, and I told you not to hang out with those guys anymore, and there you are, painting with them.

[00:35:00]

Then we'd get into fights again. We'd break on and off, and so it went on like that. He didn't want me into danger. No guy would want their girlfriend going into danger. The same reason men don't, don't like women in battle in the army, getting hurt. They don't want to see women get hurt or worse, you know, they have it written in their DNA to protect us, and such.

And when you're, you know, every graffiti writer knows it's every man for themselves. So, you can't be taking a liability with you anymore. Then you would take a child with you, or a 12-year-old because you'd feel compelled to protect them, save them, and all of that. That will get yourself busted.

So, you know bringing the girl into a train yard, she better take care of herself. Not this little screaming—ah! save me. ah! So then—anyway, I had to prove all of that I could handle myself. And I was brave and strong and fearless, and even though I was brought-up a Latina, and I haven't seen my eyebrows or leg hair since I was 12 years. Because they were taught how to do that and how to put-on makeup correctly and accessorize and dress like a fashion plate. And my mother—like I said—worked for a famous fashion designer. I forget his name, Jeffrey—or something. So, she would bring home the kind of clothing that didn't quite make the cut, but there were still beautiful silk dresses and very stylish, elegant clothes.

And she would bring them home for her daughters and we would wear them to school with high heels and completely decked-out nails all done. And made it a lot harder for me to convince those guys to take me to the train yards. So, I did, I was able to dress like a little boy. I was a tomboy, underneath all of that.

I'm very, very strong. I have a lot of upper body strength, could carry my own bag of paint. I could lift a grown man and walk him around. I was absolutely fearless and reckless, and nerves of steel. I would not let the guys see me cry, or sweat, or look scared, or any of that. So, I had to act all and pretend all of that. Then, I became that, but first you have to pretend and act like you're brave and tough, because I was not that as a kid. I was very shy, very, um, bookwormy, and just, we, my sister and I would take us the shopping cart to the library and literally check out like 50 books at a time and read all the children's books.

I grew up just always reading historical romances, science fiction, fantasy. Always, always reading books, gobbling them up. Some of my street friends could not understand why I was always reading, reading, reading. I don't know why. But that was always, a thing. So, we did very well in school.

It was just I had attitude issues, and issues with authority, and all of that. I needed to be a rebel. My oldest sister did not. She was a normal girl, raised normal. Her normal friends made me seem absolutely outrageous. I had a stepsister as well, my Cuban father's daughter, his only daughter—Diana—who was about over two years younger than me or so—a whole different kind of female. The kind that I don't really get along with, a very, very shallow, never read a book from cover to cover. And immediately at 18 got knocked-up and was having babies and going from man to man and making terrible life decisions. I stopped being in touch with her decades ago.

That's the kind of trouble, trouble. So, you know you just cut that off. You don't need trouble in your life. Anyway, where were we?

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: There's a lot of interesting questions that can come- up from what you're telling me, but I was thinking while you were telling me—these transition from being brought-up as a girl, being protected, and then super feminine because your mother is bringing these clothing back to you. And you go dressed to school, and all these things. But, at the same time, you're formulating your own personality, uh, which is more tomboyish, trying to wear clothes that you can actually wear to jump-off trains and run from the police, and all of these things. And I'm wondering, how this transition happened? You also said that you were pretending at first, but then, you kind of became that. Would you say that this was somewhere in there when you were a child? Or is this personality something you actually acquired in New York once you started doing this kind of art?

[00:40:00]

LADY PINK: I think it's a personality that was acquired in New York. I've been told I'm very New York, very brash, very. You know, outspoken in a New York kind of a way. Um, roaming in the streets since I was a kid. My mom worked all the time. So, we roamed the streets with other kids. And when I went to public school, I learned how to be a more of a tough kid and stand-up for myself.

I think the posse of kids that I was surrounded with, taught me that kind of courage. Because I remember going back to the Catholic school and waiting after school for some of those kids that used to torture me, and I think, and I smacked around some white girl. I was 12. I was still angry at being—at the racism.

I enjoyed in that Catholic. I went back there to pay someone back a little bit. I was bigger, I was tougher. I had my friends with me, and I went back there, said—you can't treat me like this, and you can't—Those kids were racist. It was incredible. I had never encountered anything such again. Kids have no filters.

And I learned how to stand-up for myself, but I was also defending my mother at that age. I was, maybe, 10 years old and she took-up with a Colombian guy for about a year. I was 10, my sister was 11. So, this guy was a slacker. He wouldn't work. My mother was supporting him, and he started to abuse us, like he would hit me. He hit me a lot because I was so sassy. My sister and I would try to run away. I think we filled-up a suitcase of all our clothes and then it got to be too heavy for us to lift it and move it. But my mother came home from work to find her daughters were packing-up to leave.

That gave her a clue. So, he also used to smack her up around a lot. She was always black and blue. The end of it was we lived on the third-floor apartment in Brooklyn with no bars at the window, no screen or anything. He was abusing her at the window, we thought he was gonna push her out the window—we really did. So, I used to defend my mother against this man, and I pulled a knife on him at—I think—I was 11 years old, a kitchen knife. I was standing in front of my mother, and I pulled a kitchen knife on this man. I did my first curse word, which I called them ''stupid.'' But, you know, I had that in me.

My sister was not doing that. She was not even in the room. I was defending my mother, I pulled the knife on this man. So, we also had a landlord that was trying to get my mother to pay her rent by not exactly using cash. He was getting all sweet on her and asking for rent to be paid in a different way, this landlord. And I wouldn't let that happen. I was 10-11 years old, and I was glued to my mother in front of her. I wouldn't let this man touch her, talk to her or anything. They couldn't prime me off, so he couldn't get any alone time with my mother to try to abuse her. She was like—I'm going to pay you cash. I want to pay you money, and he's like—he wanted something else, at that age I understood that. I understood that this is not how you pay rent. My mother doesn't want to do that, she wants to pay that. She's got the money. She's got a job. This man was like—my mother was very,very pretty. And again, I'm sure he understood—he was white—that we didn't have papers. So, this is what men do, but I was protective. I was a tough little kid.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I am not trained to psychoanalyze you or anything like that, but I hear like you took on the role of the tough one in your family because also that was needed at that point. You were in a very hostile environment. And you've mentioned right now—and a couple times—that you were constantly defending yourself from all these men who were trying to take advantage of situations, either in your family or in the streets. And I know you've also said that you didn't consider yourself to be a feminist at that point, but I do see these situations coming up—

LADY PINK: —I didn't know the word. Yeah. I didn't know the word at the time. But, I guess, that's just how we were all being brought-up and looked at everything. Yeah, I didn't see it, I didn't know that there was a label to it. This was just in the air. All the girls were standing up for themselves. You know, we can do anything guys can do. I didn't know there was a label for it, like ''feminist,'' not until I was 16 years old that I realized that's what I am.

[00:45:09]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah, and what's very interesting is that you were actually living it. There was a necessity for these. You weren't studying feminism. You were acting then because there was a need for that. I wonder if you did have any reflections around your position in terms of other men around you, and how your mom was trying to get you married so that a man could take care of you and all these. Were you reacting to these situations in a very like spare of the moment kind of thing, or were there any reflections about that environment at that point?

LADY PINK: Well, like I said, it was in the air. The movement of women thinking for themselves and making their own decisions and not having the king of the house be the man. So, when I was dating Lee, I became acutely aware the differences. Lee thought he had to treat me the way the *Honeymooners* do and *I love Lucy* from the 1950s. You see women were treated like little mindless children and they had to be guided. There's always the strong man who makes the final decisions and all of that kind of stuff, and that's exactly how Lee was treating me.

I was resisting, resisting, resisting being treated like any of that—this was 20 years before, in the 1950s—this was the seventies. Now modern time, women are liberated, and such. So, we clashed a lot. He felt that he had to guide me in certain ways he wouldn't. He would give me things that I was allowed to do, not allowed to do. He had a spy in my school that some local kid that lived nearby that would tell him what I was doing. He wouldn't allow me to chew gum. So, some kid was ratting me out telling Lee that I was chewing gum during the day in school, and such, and other stuff. Yes, I'm hanging out with these guys. I'm not supposed to—all these, I'm smoking weed.

Oh my God. So, this kid was ratting me out to Lee and then I was getting into all kinds of trouble because I'm like, What the hell? What is he, my parent? So, eventually by the time I was 21—I think 20, 21—I finally was over him. It has been four years of torture. I moved on. I got a girlfriend. I moved out of my mother's house and moved in with my girlfriend.

And for a little while there, Lee couldn't believe that I finally left him. He'd always been the one leaving me. I was always chasing him, chasing him. Even his mother told me to stop chasing him. So, I finally left him. I was over, and he started stalking me. Hanging around in front of my mother's house, watching where I was doing, who I was going with and whatever, and I finally left.

I moved out. I moved in with my girlfriend and my mother didn't speak to me for about four months. She didn't like that—that girlfriend thing—my stepfather was okay with it—surprisingly—because when he left Cuba in the fifties, I'm gonna say 56, maybe the end of the fifties, he left Cuba and came to the US and the US was giving out citizenships to the, to the Cubans. So, he got citizenship right away. Incredible. But he moved out and arrived in the US and he landed in the home of two friends that were two lesbians. And they took him in, they treated him well. He got to see that these are perfectly normal people. This is just fine.

Anyway, so he didn't have anything against me living with my girlfriend that my mother did. Of course, that is the shame of the family, “Oh my God! you can't tell anyone”. So, um, I lived with her for about nine years, and it wasn't the best relationship. She wasn't happy with me going out with my straight guy friends, and stuff like that.

So, I kind of dropped off the map a little bit—in the social life, of going out to a lot of galleries, events, and places. Cause she didn't quite approve of all my gay, all my straight friends, very macho world, a hip hop, graffiti world and stuff. Not the most welcoming thing for lesbian.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I can't imagine,[laugh] and maybe you can say more about this reaction of your family in Ecuador, hearing the news of what you were doing in, in New York, or if you had any relationship to that. Um, you know, being—

LADY PINK: I think my mother—my mother only—shared that with the women in Ecuador. They gossiped about it. They didn't bother telling my uncles or any of the men, folk, none of their business. They didn't need to know that I lived with the roommate. All they, all they knew.

[00:50:19]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thanks for sharing that. You had also mentioned earlier in our interview, there's an art teacher who actually sort of even sold one of your designs really early on, acted as a mentor and also showed you the possibilities. Are there—either him or other people in your life—who you consider to be your earlier guides or mentors in your career?

LADY PINK: Yeah, absolutely. I recently did—I think just last year—I did like 14 portraits of friends and mentors. Pretty early on, since the moment I started writing graffiti in my first master—Kai—Puerto Rican boy taught me a style. And then I started in high school and one of my first teachers was Seen. And that's Black Seen TC5 who took me under his wing, and he was president of TC5, that's a crew, very prestigious crew that started in the early seventies. So, this was around 1979. I started in high school. So, Seen was one of my teachers, and then his best friend Doze as well.

Everyone taught me something different. Lee taught me the above ground stuff, galleries and how to stretch canvases, and how to deal with a business above ground. My other friends taught me everything, from illustration to doing the letters and fonts and how to use the can control, how to use spray paint, how to steal paint properly so that you don't get arrested while you're lifting all this paint, and such. Everyone taught me a little bit of something.

So, I definitely credit people for having taught me, taken me under their wing, taken me seriously, taken the time, and trouble to even teach me any of these things. Sometimes my mentors were kids my own age. They just knew a little bit more. And that's just the way it works. If you know a little bit more—a little bit of anything—and you can hand it down and teach someone that doesn't know, and it isn't like Sunday school lie, here sweetheart, let me show you how it's done. It's bootcamp, it's rough. It's, you pay attention when I'm talking to you! Do what I told you, do faster, and such [laughs]. You have to do it under intense pressure and such. So, it does take a strong personality to be able to teach and to be able to stomach this. I've taught street art to other people, and it's not for the weak or the emotionally unstable, or fragile kind of people.

It's definitely—I do credit a lot of folks. You know Seen, Daze, my boy Ernie, he's one of my best friends from high school and other guys who have taught me. Lee taught me the aboveground stuff against my will. I wanted to do vandalism and run around, have adventures, Lee was teaching me business and what to do as I grew up, moved on in the world, and take this seriously.

There's an invitation from this museum, that gallery. And as a kid, I didn't understand the impact of what *PS1* is, what the *New Museum*, or any of that. And it took for these grownups to take me seriously and convince me that this is important, You should take this seriously, you better come through, you better show up, you better do what you promise you were gonna do, and so on. It definitely took a lot of these grownups, even people like Jenny Holzer and Martin Wong, who are different street artists, but we still ran in the same circle. I would listen to these guys, and I would respect them when they said, This is important!

You know, I myself didn't understand the impact of these things, but because they felt it was so important. I met Andy Warhol at 17. I didn't quite know—realize, the importance of Andy Warhol, or how big he was. But all these grownups were acting really, really weird. Like that was the man. That’s the man! you understand, I was like, Oh! okay, okay. If you say so. Then I guess he's really important. And I had a short conversation with Andy Warhol, you know he was surrounded by his security people, they backend you through, they called through his security people and then I had a conversation with him, really quick. He had seen me in the movie *Wild Style.*

[00:55:06]

He said he liked the movie, and he liked me in it—or something. And that was about the extent of the conversation, but still, I had to rely and believe all these grownups. They were

telling me all this stuff was important, and all these folks are important. Theis newspapers is important, that TV show, that appearance. You have to be there. We're like, Okay, if you say so.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Talking about *Wild Style* and just going back a little bit in your timeline to that point in your life, would you say, or what would you say about *Wilde Style* represented in your career? Was there a before and after, or what are the points that you see as important, at that point, in your career where you were so young, but you were still flourishing.

LADY PINK: Mm-hmm[affirmative]. So, the movie *Wild Style*, that is directed by Charlie Ahearn, was an independent film amongst so much that was going on at the time. This was just another rich white guy following us around with the film crew and such. There were documentaries, there were those music videos and films.

There was always something going on. We didn't really take the film seriously. It was—really—so low budget. We figured it's not gonna go anywhere or just fizzle, and nothing. Not realizing that it would be a cult film to go on for decades and decades, and to be the basis of, perhaps, what the coin—the phrase "hip-hop"—and introduced it to the whole world as the elements of Hip-Hop with breakdancing and graffiti and all of that lumped-up together.

Honestly, that only happened in certain neighborhoods that you lived in, not everywhere in New York, and such. So, that film did that kind of a disservice that it stereotyped us all into being Hip-hop. I am still a Hip-hop icon. I've been told I should just take it's fine! But, um, I was there to witness the beginning of the birth of Hip-hop and all of that: the music, the dance.

But again, I did not live in the neighborhood where you saw that, heard that everywhere, and other people did not. And they've lumped-up graffiti as a backdrop to the concerts, which was in the film *Wild Style*, and that doesn't reflect everyone's life or personality. That is not what sums-up my whole being.

We were all very focused on our graffiti, doing our vandalism, and only a few, few people dipped into all of that. They did a little graffiti, a little dancing, a little MCing on the side. They were kind of all talented, like that. Very, very few. Most of us were just single mindedly focused on our vandalism just to do that well.

So, the movie *Wild Style* grew up organically. Charlie Ahearn met the rappers. He built the movie around it. He met Lee and I, and he saw our love story. He put that into the film and I brought the break dancers to Lee's 21st birthday surprise party. I threw a surprise party for Lee. I brought my break-dancing friends from high school, the Rock Steady Crew, which was Doze, and Crazy Legs,and Frosty Freeze, and all of these super famous guys now. I brought them along to the party to introduce them to Charlie Ahearn, and as soon as he saw the break dancers, he included them in his movie. So, it grew up organically this way, as he saw stuff and the elements. Then they wrote a plot to go along with all of these artistic people that he saw, but everyone in that film is an actual artist, dancer, MC. They even used a couple of actual muggers with a real sort of shotgun in one of the mugging scenes there. So, I mean, it was really, really low budget. We didn't think it was going to go anywhere. We didn't take it seriously. We didn't have any wardrobe, makeup,—you know, acting lessons or anything. We just roll off our beds and just show up and film for a little bit. Again, we didn't take it seriously, but, um, it is an iconic film now.

[01:00:00]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And what would you say, what would you say the film did for you at that point, as you were getting so much exposure from something that was unexpected in so many ways?

LADY PINK: There was a lot of exposure from so many different directions, so we were already being treated like celebrities. But after that film came out—it was released on Times Square, and it played for a ridiculous amount of weeks, 13 weeks, maybe—they just kept it going, and going, and going.

And then I became an international celebrity. Then they played it in cities all over the world, but also, at the same time, Subway art books, and spray can art books were also launched and that brought a whole different level of audience to what we were doing. So, I

immediately became—you know—famous. Then I had to live-up to it. Once you do, you know, great stuff, great art, and it's in the forefront, everyone sees it. You've gotta keep-up the brilliant works. I started-off strong and I've had to keep it strong all these years, keep it going, keep amazing work going, and have that kind of pressure behind me that I become a role model for lots of other young people.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And before that, you were already, you know you, had exhibitions and you were already living of your art. Can you tell me more about that? Like when you realized that this is something that you were going to be doing? As a way of living?

LADY PINK: I was selling my painting since the age of 16, and I had a nice fat bank account as a teenager that I squandered my money, but I was giving myself, um, um, you know I had a, what do you call it? An allowance. I allowed myself to take out about $200 a week and I would just squander that on whatever, you know, anything, buying clothes, or drugs, or liquor, traveling with my friends, or anything. So, I had a little entourage, since I always had cash money. I was a good person to hang around with, but I didn't squander my money so much.

I mean, I literally gave myself an allowance of 200 a week, to just spend on myself. But I tried to give my parents money to help with the mortgage and the bills, and they did not take my cash. So, I started buying them expensive gifts that they couldn't turn away. I had to give them back somehow. So, I learned how to handle my money early.

I've always had a nice bank account, but by the time I was in—maybe—my early twenties, um, some of the sales of the paintings were starting to slide-off, I was not living with my girlfriend, so I wasn't frequenting the galleries nearly as much. I realized that maybe I should start getting a real job, like normal, like regular people.

My sister went right off from school right off to work, in the offices in Manhattan. That was always her choice to work nine to five, to working in an office for somebody. I tried that. I lasted for maybe three months. I tried working in retail, which was as much fun as being a mannequin. I tried a couple of different things, I would last for a week, a few days. I was not made to work for someone and have a regular real job like that. You know, I had to be an entrepreneur. I had to work for myself, and I had to make the artwork for me, because it's the best thing that I did. Then I realized how many hours people put in and then they bring home a pitiful amount of money that I could make easily on one painting or such. I just do that. So, I had to make the hustle work, return phone calls, reach-out to people, see what's going on, go to galleries, make friends, network, and all of that. So, I'd already had a lot of contacts and I knew people.

I just needed to follow-up on that and chase that down and see like I always teach young people that you have to hustle, hustle, hustle. And I think, I learned to do that in my early twenties, when I realized that I could not hold down a regular job and work for people. Then you spend all your time doing something that you hate, and you come home. At the end of the day, you're too tired to do anything and before you know it, it's morning and you gotta go do it again. It was the most depressing thing. I could now understand why people look like zombies on the train. When you have no other choice and you have to go, do a job—not a career—but a job, and you're working for someone else to get rich, you're doing something you could care less about, it's boring, but you gotta do it every single day, for years and years and years, this is how you see your future. It's like, Oh! my God, this was the most depressing thing. I'd come home and cry. I was like, I have to try something else. So, I tried hustling art better. It's like, I have the talent for this. I can make loads and loads of money, so I got to make this work.

[01:05:38]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And at this point—I think you said for nine years—so, from like about 21 to 30, or 29, you live, you shared an apartment with your girlfriend. What neighborhood were you living in?

LADY PINK: We first started living in the area where she came from, which was Woodside. Okay. Yes, Woodside. We had an apartment there for maybe a year—maybe—two blocks away from her mother and her aunt. Um, but I preferred the neighborhood that I'm from which is Astoria. So, we got a couple of different apartments right in Astoria, where I liked it better. First apartment was on the third floor, did not like that. Second apartment, I had a

backyard. So, I have always needed a backyard and being able to grow plants and things like that and have an outdoors, cannot just live in an apartment with no outdoors.

That's crazy for me. I only did that for a few years with my girlfriend. But—so, in Astoria, Queens—just a couple of blocks away from a long shopping strip with hundreds and hundreds of shops there and the subway right there about 15 minutes from Manhattan. So, I lived right in the heart of Astoria. That was my community for over 35 years.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Astoria is great. Um, and I wonder though, I'm sure at that point, what was it in the eighties? I'm wondering what was that like? You know, you came to New York as a child, end of the seventies and now it was a different environment. And also, Queens has always been different. Each borough is different from each other. But what was your environment, living in Astoria in the eighties as a working artist?

LADY PINK: Uh, I'm not sure what you mean, environment.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Just the context of your daily life. What was happening in New York at that time? Were you still, I know you transitioned to doing more gallery work at that point. So, what kind of things were you doing in relationship to the city? Yeah. What was happening at that point around you?

LADY PINK: I don't know. in Queens. Huh? In Astoria in the eighties. I don't know. I lived with my girlfriend and my dog. I don't, I have no idea what my environment was like. My mother lived 10 blocks away or so. Mm-hmm. She had a job. I stayed home and painted. Mm-hmm[affirmative]. We had horrible neighbors who were homophobic, so I had to hear it from some horrible guy down the street whenever we walked outdoors. So, it wasn't as welcoming for the LGBTQ community as it is now. So, we did get some hostility outdoors, but I'm not sure what you mean by environment.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah. Just the context of what was happening at that time. Before that, you said like, in the seventies, um, there was a lot of talk about feminism, and I was just wondering how the different—decades—have changed as you were living them. A lot about, I think, oral history is also about how you experience history. But if nothing comes up for you, there's you know no need to dictate. I know Astoria now. It's definitely not, is definitely ah queer friendly. So, that has changed a lot. And Can you talk more about we've been doing these—for about an hour—so I was thinking maybe we can stay for another—I don't know—10 or 15 minutes, if that's okay for you? But let me know if you want to cut up earlier, that's fine for me too.

LADY PINK: So, um, I'm afraid I don't really have too many memories of the eighties and such. I don't really have that much memories, you know? Mm-hmm. I've fried my most of my memories away, so I have very little. I don't know what was going on in the eighties, and such. I guess a lot. I don't know.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah, that's fine. Can you tell me more about so like, if we talk about you, more personally, instead of the context of what was going on. You said you decided to go back to hustling and doing your own business. What did that look like? What were you doing? Who were you working with, at that point?

[01:10:47]

LADY PINK: During the mid-eighties—or so—84, 85, 86, I think, I was collaborating with a Jenny Holzer. She had a building and a studio Downtown, near Houston Street on Eldridge Street. She contacted me and asked me if I would collaborate with her. She would prepare the canvases. She would stretch them, right on big canvases, like ten feet square, nine feet square, big ones. Right onto the wall in her studio. I would come in and paint whatever imagery that I wanted, and she would apply the text—one of her truisms to it, she'd ponder on the imagery that I painted, and then she'd apply just the right truism that she felt belonged there. That was painted by a sign painter onto the canvas. Nice, neat, perfect straight letters, you know. So, there was lots of exhibits, lots of whirlwind of traveling, and lots of paintings. I was always booked up with some show or another. There was never any let down of not being involved in something. So, you know, there's lots, lots, going.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And in your later twenties or so, um, I understand there were some transitions in what you were doing. Also, I think when you were about 30, you got married, or met your future husband. Can you tell me a little bit more about this change of decade, and

also sort of transitions in life?

LADY PINK: Um hmm[affirmative]. So, I think in the late eighties, European kids started to come over from Europe to New York City—the mecca of graffiti—to want to do vandalism in New York. In the early nineties I started to meet more and more European kids. I met Mickey. We traveled over to the Netherlands. There was a huge exhibit at the Groninger Museum, and she is from that city, Groninger. Mickey, she's one of the most prolific female writers in Europe at the time. So, we became friends, and she would always visit the US. But there was always other kids coming, young people coming from Europe to paint graffiti in New York. For nine years—I think I was about 29, for about nine years or so—I hadn't been breaking the law. I hadn't been doing any vandalism, just been doing galleries and legal stuff. And all my friends were doing all of that as well, just legal stuff. And then I had a young man, a Swiss boy named Alex, he wrote "Jack," he was sent over by a dear friend of mine, Luana. She sent over her true love to stay with me.

He was a real cutie pie. So, he was crashing with me in my girlfriend's house, but he really wanted to paint the subway train, and none of my friends knew how to get into the subway yards anymore, everyone was doing just legal work—and you have to know exactly where to go, when to go so that nothing bad happens. It took me about a week to get my husband's phone number from a friend of mine, Harley. He got me Smith's phone number and Smith was the one of the last diehard subway painters. So, I contacted Smith and he agreed to meet with me and my Swiss friend—young guy—, he was only 20, and he agreed to take us to paint a subway train.

I didn't really wanna go, but he wouldn't take the Swiss kid unless I went. Oh, I was like, Oh God! I'm too old for this. I'm going to not wanna run from the police. If the police come, I'll stand here and get arrested and such. But, when we did go and it was to a new tunnel underneath Central Park, all brand-new construction and such. Smith brought along a French kid, so there was four of us, and he said, We only had about an hour to do this. And I was like, That's crazy! At my time we had the entire night to do this. We can't do this in one hour. That's just nuts. So, we were there about an hour and a half, and then the police did come and chase us. I turned to see and there's a couple of big guys running at us, I turned to see my friends, they were already gone.

[01:15:39]

It was just a cloud of dust. They left. So, I had no choice, but to run as well. I didn't wanna stand there and get arrested. After all, my instinct kicked in and I ran and fled and climbed some girders and got open to another live tunnels and the Swiss kid stayed with me. We navigated the life tunnels until we came out into a hatch in the middle of Central Park on a bright, sunny afternoon, and we escaped. We got away. The Swiss kid had the sense to have his wallet on him, so we had money to get back home. We made it home and Smith called me later and realized that I got away, and he got away. We just got split-up in the dark and such. And I think that's when we probably fell in love, and whatever—

But I was still living with my girlfriend and that was just about over, I was just looking for an excuse to fully break up and such.

So, um, I started seeing my new husband, knowing certain terms, told her that I had a boyfriend now, and that this was over. She has to move out and such. So, that was that. And I think, I was married within a year. I think we knew each other maybe six months or eight months, and then we got married.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Okay. Thanks for starting to tell me that story. I think this is a good place to stop if you're okay with that?

LADY PINK: Yeah, sure, sure. That would be fine. And then we can pick it up from there.

[END OF TRACK 1]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Okay. So, we're recording the second session of an oral history interview with Lady Pink. And I don't think I said what date was last session, but—for this session today is Tuesday, October 25th, 2022. And these oral histories are for the In Colors Project, which will be archived at the Archive[s] of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

And yeah. so, just thank you for being here again. It's been a pleasure to be able to talk to you and interview you. And I was mentioning before we started recording, we sort of skipped over some of your twenties. And, you know, life is like that. We remember different things at different times.

So, I was hoping you can continue telling me a little bit more about how that period of time was, for your work especially. You had mentioned that you started doing some collaborations. You had also tried to do sort of a regular nine to five job, for some time, and then realized that was not your thing. You went back full force to doing some of the gallery work and collaborations. If we can go from there and then we'll continue.

LADY PINK: Sure. Yeah. Go ahead, shoot some specific questions. Uh-huh[affirmative].

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: So, what year we're in? We spoke about like 84 to 86 or so. You were in your early twenties, and I think you had just moved to Astoria. And you also mentioned—at some point in our last session—that when you were living with the partner at that time, that person wasn't too into you hanging out with all of these guys that you were hanging out with and all of the scene that you were part of. So, tell me more about how that was for you during that time.

Like how you were balancing what was expected from you at home, sort of, and then trying to continue all of these connections that you had built from the time you were, you know, 15 or 16

LADY PINK: Well, I was living with my girlfriend, Nancy. We lived together for about nine years, but in the beginning, it was harder and harder for me to hang out with my friends, the way I always used to.

It was a lot of straight guys, a lot of good-looking guys, and she was insanely jealous. So, I had to keep a lot more to myself and just focus on my artwork. And I had an easel and I've always had paintings going and exhibits and, and such. I did some spray painting, but a lot more brush work, because I was living in an apartment, and I didn't have access to an outdoors nearly as much.

So, I did a lot more paintings with brushes and, and that was great. I had to explore my skills at that. The city was still kind of rough as it was in the 1970s, the 1980s. It was still dangerous. Some neighborhoods were just a little too risky, and that's where the happening scene was at in the East Village and in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

It was just starting to grow, and it was not a place where young ladies would go by themselves. So, I would always need like some of my homeboys or friends to come with me. And when I couldn't find guys to come with me my girlfriend wasn't that willing to go all the way downtown and party all night. She had a regular job. She worked all day and didn't wanna feel like partying. She was also 11 years older than me, so I was still rip roaring, running around, having fun while she wanted to be a little more stay at home and she was tired after work and all of that, and didn't feel like hanging out with a bunch of these straight guys, always trying to, you know, flirt with me.

And she was always so jealous. So, I kind of moved away from the scene and lost touch with some friends and, you know, stayed doing what I was doing. But, you know, I think for the bare minimum, bare minimum I wasn't hanging out downtown all the time. The East Village really was very rough and shady, a lot of drugs, a lot of hookers still hanging around, and and and stuff going down.

It was fine if you're there with a posse of friends, but you know, a pretty young lady, walking down the street by herself is just looking for trouble. So I had to, you know, kind of stay away from some of that scene. Mm-hmm[affirmative].

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: At this point, where you had participated in the movie that brought a lot of attention also to what your work, were you still building on those connections and being invited, traveling to other countries and exhibitions? I think you had also briefly mentioned that before about some of those experiences, but can you say more about that?

[00:05:24]

LADY PINK: Yeah. You know, my memory is fuzzy, but I was still part of some exhibits,

traveling and going on about the town that never kind of dwindled off. It slowed down for a bit in the eighties, but by around 88, 89—or so—, I was starting to branch off and I was working with two friends of mine from high school, Erni and Gil.

They had a company, Erni & Gil Designs, they did a lot of interior murals. And I started working with them. The painting sales were slacking off a little bit. We did need for me to keep using my artwork to get, gain a living. My two friends fell into doing a lot of interior murals using our graffiti skills and our fine arts skills from high school, and all of that into serving our purpose.

With that, the jobs just kept rolling in and rolling in and more work than they could possibly handle. I fell right into that painting with brush painting, with spray paints, you know, working with groups of artists and creating large spaces with murals. It just came very natural to us. So, that helped us survive as artists when others who were just depending on the sales of their paintings in fine art galleries to survive. That was just dwindling off. By the late 1980s, there wasn't nearly as many exhibits, the interest was falling off a little bit as, as we all imagined, the artwork is. The art world is very fickle, and they change, it changes like fashion. They're into some new hot thing and, and so on.

We all needed to figure out how to stay—remain working as artists—and survive as artists. So, doing commission jobs for a lot of clients, all with all styles of artwork. Luckily, we were all very versatile. Erni and Gil were masters at airbrush, which is just like miniature spray paint. And they could do photo realistic portraits and all kinds of amazing artwork in all styles. This is what clients want. They don't want just one trick pony that could come in and just do graffiti stuff. Letters and graffiti characters, there's a specific style for that. They want an artist that can do handle all styles that fits their needs, that could do it quickly—no nonsense—, and fit their budget.

You know, we don't come in and take murals for like a few months. Like some slow artists with brushes. We come in and very, very quickly in a week or two paint massive murals all over restaurants and nightclubs and all kinds of different businesses. So, I've been doing that since the late 1980s as well.

I exhibit in galleries, but I've also run a mural company with my husband, and we take in all these kinds of commissions. I usually design this stuff, but I send out my team, and I cruise to paint that stuff now and I train them to do these jobs as well so they can handle smaller jobs. So, I've been doing this all along as well. Doing commission murals and organizing big things. Mm-hmm[affirmative].

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: You mentioned before that when you moved to Astoria, you also started doing more work with brush and sort of smaller scale for some time. Before you went into the murals what was your studio practice like at that point? If you could describe it, you know, on a regular day. How were you exploring your art?

LADY PINK: I don't have any memories of that.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Okay [Laughs.]

LADY PINK: Yeah. No, I don't think I had a studio, but just a room in the house designated for my art.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Mm-hmm[affirmative].

LADY PINK: So, I didn't have a separate studio or anything like that. So, you know life went on. I had a lot of pets in between the pets and the working and the girlfriend holding down a regular job. I don't know what went down.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Mm-hmm[affirmative]. So, it wasn't necessarily a structured time of your day that you would separate to do your art at that point—

LADY PINK: —No, no, no. I think I got it done while she was out at work. So, you know, I don't know what my daily routines were, or anything, you know, 30, 40 years ago, Sorry.

[00:10:04]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah. You mentioned your animals and, and I know that animals,

plants, nature has been an important part of your identity and work as an artist. Can you say more about how you started to bring this into your life and into your painting? Like, I know you—you spoke about the Amazon and how that's a big part of your identity, but like how you brought it together to bring that into a space like New York?

LADY PINK: So, well, when I still lived with my family, my mother and my sisters and all, they had chihuahuas. So, we had a posse of up to six chihuahuas—honestly—so, as soon as I moved out, I got my own dog. I got a little tiny, one-pound, fluffy thing in, in Ecuador. I was sitting in an outside cafe in Quito with my girlfriend and some guys walking by, selling doggies, puppies. And I bought one, had to get her passport, her papers, and brought her back named HB [ph]. She was with me for about 16 years.

She would've been like roadkill in Ecuador, you know. Life is cheap for animals down in South America. So, she was my baby. Nice fluffy girl, very, very sweet dog. I got a chihuahua from my mom and my chihuahua got my sister's Maltese pregnant. So, I got a one puppy out of that and I ended up keeping the puppy.

So, I had three dogs already in an aviary, a room full of birds. I always kept my birds free and loose from parakeets and finches, canaries, and such. They've always made babies. So, at first it was a problem with so many baby birds and trying to give them away to families. Eventually I started just taking them to the pet store and catching the babies by the net goal and taking them to the pet store to be sold. I can keep all the babies. I've always had a room full of 20-30 birds. By the time it's 40 birds, it's too many, too much to clean. So, when I moved to the country, I got them an even larger room, like three walls, all Florida ceiling glass. So, they feel like they're out in the woods. It's gorgeous!

But now I'm only down to one bird. I've had birds since 85, when I got my very first parakeet, a little baby parakeet named Lilly, and I taught him how to talk. He had a vocabulary of over 150 words, he would say all kinds of funny things that they'd tell me that he had my Spanish accent. That's so funny. I used to have him on my answering machine saying, "Speak up, speak up!" What do you want? What's your problem? Speak up![laughs]. Funny things like that. People would call just to hear the bird talk on my answering machine, you know. And he was the first one. So, then somebody gave me a female and then they had babies in my pocketbook, and then it accumulated more and more birds, more and more babies.

And so, I eventually have become a birth mommy. I can feed little, tiny baby birds with an eyedropper and keep them alive and such when the parents can't do it, or if they're bad parents, or if I find a baby on the floor. So, I'm a birth mommy. And I don't really wanna be. [Laughs] So I've always had pets and then I had a four-foot iguana. She lived to be 18 years old—Cleopatra—and I kept her loose. She was trained to use a kitty litter box. She'd take herself to the bathroom and use the kitty litter box, then come back and sit on the sofa behind my husband and I, on the radiator, she'd get the sunny window—the radiator—and then she would fool people thinking that she wasn't real.

She would just be very still, then when she'd move, she would freak out. My guests—big, tough guys—would jump across the room and pretend like it didn't scare them. It didn't scare them, but—yeah, yeah. She scared them. She was a big girl. Really big, about four feet long, like that.

So, I've always had pets. My husband married me, he had to learn how to like pets, how to sleep on the bed with small dogs, and all of that. Now he's good at keeping even baby birds alive, feeding them. He's had to do that when I've had to travel or had to go do a commission job, somewhere. He's got to keep the pets alive and the plants. So, I've got dozens and dozens of plants and birds. I keep a jungle. Like I've always enjoyed it that way.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Where do you think that comes from, the wanting to have nature around in a place? You know, it's not so easy to have nature around.

LADY PINK: Well, yeah, it is a lot more challenging in the city, but, again, living in Queens gave us the opportunity. We had a backyard where my mom had a house in Queens, and we grew tomatoes, had a lawn, flowers, and such. When I bought a house, I also had a nice big backyard and lots of growing of vegetables and flowers and greenery.

[00:15:13]

And I think that comes from my love of the jungle of the Amazon rainforest when I was a

little kid. So, even when I was a teenager, I kept house plants in my house in, in Queens. And in the Brooklyn—when we first moved in—, I had house plants, as a little kid, I would take care of house plants, but then they all died when I became a teenager, and I was running out there partying. I was never home. So, all I think all the plants died. My mom gave-up because I always had a green thumb. I was always very good at that. And the only time I've ever been arrested was for gardening.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Say more about that.

LADY PINK: [Laughs]. I was growing about a dozen pot plants in between my tomato plant, and my pepper plants in my garden in Queens. And I was also feuding with my neighbors because they abused their dog, I reported them. So, they, in turn, reported me and got me arrested for the pot plants in my garden.

They were, you know, fully grown just before harvest. They had buds, the size of my fists. It was amazing and very pungent, by the way. Then the police came, and they arrested me for that. But my lawyer—brilliant woman—and my husband, they dropped the charges completely. He doesn't even smoke weed. It was just all me. So, I took the fault, but my lawyer proved that I do a lot of community service in New York City, painting all those beautiful walls. She proved all that, and all the judges could say was just, ”Keep up the good work”. So, that was my sentence to just keep up the good work and doing the community service, painting, murals, beautifying neighborhoods, inspiring artists.

They were like a dozen plants. Artists—that's what they do. Artists do that. They grow a little weed, not a problem. It wasn't like I had an operation going on or anything like that. So, it was just a little slap on the wrist for that one. But again, you know, I have a green thumb and you can get arrested and go down for all kinds of skills if you, if you cross the line [laugh]. So, gardening it was.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: You know—It's interesting you say that, because from everything that I've learned from, what people say about you—there's definitely so many labels that people have kind of put you in, and especially being associated with graffiti and that being the thing that put you out in the world.

And it's so interesting to hear that, actually, the one thing that put you in, you know, that got you arrested. What was this part of you that's so much more personal and at your home and that has nothing to do with really what you were doing in the streets? So actually, talking about that, I know you've said a couple of times during an interview that it's been hard to remember daily life of what was going on at that time.

So maybe, we can transition into thinking more broadly about your work and your life, and maybe some things that you come-up for you that something important milestones that you have kept in your memory and that you want to discuss?

LADY PINK: I think, right around 88 or so, I did get an actual job working for Franklin Furnace, that is a museum of artists—books by artists. And it's run by Martha Wilson. I've known Martha Wilson for years and I believe I was reaching out to contacts, trying to get some kind of steady work. And this is just before I started working with Erni & Gil painting murals. So, this was just a year before. So, for a year, I worked at Franklin Furnace in a nice-steady nine-to-five job, or so, as the program director, which meant I organized exhibits every month from artists from all over the world that came to do installations and different exhibits. Everything from hanging paintings to hanging weird stuff all over the room.

Our installations can go in all kinds of directions. And I was also the program director, I had to organize a different performance art piece every week. Including, putting a stage set on, lighting and the sound. I had technicians. I ran this, and I was still in my twenties. I had no prior experience doing any of this stuff.

[00:20:02]

I only did the pretty paintings and handed them to someone, and they took care of it. I didn't know how to hang anything on the wall, how to light it, how to do anything. I had to do press, I had to do publicity. I had to do so many titles, and so much that I had to learn. I learned it all very, very quickly and I was doing it pretty well and stuff. But you know, I was also taking advantage, running amuck a little bit. But I did learn how the other side of what happens when you paint a pretty picture and then you give them, to the gallery people. And

so, I learned all about press and I learned what my press release was. I learned how to write one, who you reach out to, and then how you have to chase them down and all of these little bits and pieces. I had to document everything. I had to be the photographer for all of these performance art pieces and installations. I had to learn how to do all of that, how to shoot artwork, I mean, a whole variety of skills.

It probably should have been like five or six different people doing this. But I had to do it all. And I loved it because I was learning a lot, meeting a lot of interesting people, some people I didn't like at all, then you also have to learn how to work with folks that you don't like. It's temporary, but get it done. Get it done well. You're not here to like anyone and make friends. You're here to do a job, and so on. So, I learned a whole lot of different skills, which made me a whole lot more sympathetic for the rest of my life, for those poor folks that have to take care of all of this shit. So, I understand what they're going through.

I do know what it entails when I ask for stuff and I order them to do these things, I know what it takes. I know how it's supposed to be done. So, don't lie to me and say you tried your best, you could do better. Make those phone calls, chase the newspapers down, get this thing out there. So, I was a beast. I know, but I learned quickly, and that has helped me with organization skills and how to run, because they were a nonprofit museum, a small space. But, you know, everyone loved each other, everyone was friends, and we had interns from college and all kinds of responsibilities. We had funding from all kinds of directions. It was an amazing, amazing place. I'm still friends with Martha Wilson today, even though they fired me like a year later. But I—it was my fault. I was slacking, I was taking advantage. I was sleeping with the staff. It was terrible. [Laughs]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Before I ask that question, I just want to comment that side of things is something that often artists don't talk that much about, like how much it takes to sustain an actual art business, and so it sounds like this job actually helped you get some of those skills to later continue your business. How do you integrate those skills going forward in your transition to your mural business that you were talking about?

LADY PINK: I'm even representing myself as an artist. I do know how I want to be represented. I don't need a gallery to hold my little hand to walk me through, navigate through regular life—you know—I don't just paint the little pictures, but I do run a staff of people and I make them do all of these things that need to be done. So, it helped me be independent. It's helped me be self-sufficient. It's helped me understand what a commercial gallery does and is responsible for and what it costs to put together an exhibit.And what a non-profit is for, a non-profit is for emerging artists. They get funding elsewhere. All of these things I learned about pretty early on, and it's surprising how some artists don't really understand how to market themselves. What is a non-profit? They go knocking on the door of a big fancy gallery. They're not gonna take you in. You're an emerging artist. College has taught you nothing, and—even worse—growing up in the streets and being a street artist, even less so, you're there to be taken advantage of. So, all of these, I guess, administrative skills I learned early on. I also learned that I don't really wanna do all of that stuff, but I do know how to get other people to do it.

So, it's my husband who handles all of these things, and my assistants who make it all happen. But it's always helped me to have a better grasp of the art world and how to navigate it and survive. And then I teach others and train others, that I could.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thanks for sharing that. You had started also talking—transitioning—to working with your friends in a different kind of operation, very different from graffiti, and also the canvas work that you were doing before. What was that like—the actual transition—and what were the differences of working with murals, clients, and that kind of work?

[00:25:09]

LADY PINK: Well, when you're, you know, painting your own fine art. There isn't anyone that tells you ''boo'' or any. You can do whatever you want under the sun, and no one can tell you squat if you're working in a stable gallery. They specifically want you to do this kind of style or this sort of painting because it sells, so that they direct you and push you to do something like that.

A lot of us didn't have that, so we all went off on our own style and did whatever we wanted. But I always had some exhibit in the horizon and deadlines to meet. So, whether I liked it or

not, that was always my priority when some big exhibit came along and a big gallery was demanding such and such works, I had to put everything aside and focus on that.

And if it conflicted with a commission job that had to wait, a commission job I would not take it. My priorities have always been the fine arts and the galleries. So, when there's exhibits coming up, I make it happen. I make it happen. Even if it's a brush work or if I had to spray paint outdoors, I would just take it right out onto the street or my mother's backyard, or something like that. I would spray paint pieces. And that's what some of my works from the 1980s and the 1990s, early ‘90s, I would do it in the backyard. I would take the canvases outside and spray paint that. But, yeah. The difference working for clients is that they are directing you and that you have to paint themes and styles that isn't your own. Sometimes you're working for crazy people and working for themes and stuff that you could care less about, but this is what pays the bills. Also, went through the ‘90s, that was a huge craze of four finishes, like fake marble, and other fake stones, and such—like that. That isn't glamorous, it isn't fancy, but it does pay a lot. There's a lot of big spaces, like they don't want anything illustrational, they just want textures like with a sea sponge or looks like crushed velvet or, nightclubs like that kind of stuff. They've got lots and lots of space and loads of money. So, that's how I paid off my 30-year mortgage in 15 years.

Then half the time, paid off my house trained my husband and my other assistants to do that, and I didn't even have to go out there. So, I was still, you know, the boss of the team and art directed them all, but I didn't have to actually go on-site to many of these jobs. They handle it on, on my behalf and this is how our business is run. Someone's in charge and you send the people out, the soldiers out to do their thing, and we've made loads and loads of money that way and employed lots of different artists. We've always got some kind of unemployed artists, friends in New York City that could use—that could pitch a hand.

So, we've had a regular staff of artists that come and help. And some have different skills. Some could only work with spray paint, others could work with a lot of different mediums, you know, a rag, a pigeon feather or whatever it takes.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: When did you start this business with your husband? Is that when you—because I think I heard in one interview I read somewhere that as soon as you got together, you kind of started working together. But tell me how that went—

LADY PINK: —Well, I worked with Erni & Gil for a few years, but those guys were hired to go to out west to work for in the film industry. They became members of SAG, the Screen Actors Guild. They were painting murals for television shows and films and such. So, they took off and they kind of left me behind in New York. Well, I had a life and I had to just hold down the fort, because there was still a lot of commissions coming in.

You know, they couldn't do it. They were out west, so I was getting the jobs. So, I was in charge, but I was also feeling like, you know I was the only female on site at a construction site and I wasn't getting treated all that well. You know, a lot of these guys, they weren't as sensitive to women movement or anything.

And they'd treat me like as a secretary, going to go fetch some coffee instead of being treated like a respectable artist here to do a big job. You know, they didn't know how to talk to me. Some of these guys are from the old country or just off the boat, or you know immigrants who were raised here or they were gangsters, and they don't treat women as equals, but as decorations.

It's a tough business. Do you know? You know what I'm saying? So, I was looking for a guy partner. I even, you know, hooked up with a couple of other guys to work with initially, and then I came across my husband that, and he was working in an office as an assistant wearing a suit and stuff and going in nine to five into Manhattan and working that.

[00:30:25]

I made him quit that when I got a really big job, and we needed all hands-on deck. Called up Erni and he was in and made my husband quit his job—he was in—and we handled a really big job together. And that was the first time that he worked with us and he never went back to working in a suit and being an assistant to just, you know, in general, office personnel when you could be an artist when you could make way more money and have way more fun painting cool stuff and being around other artists, and such. So yeah, he became my partner pretty early on and I realized that using a white guy with the blue eyes, you know, and

pushing him forward to speak about money, we would get a lot more money than a little Latina girl like me. I mean, this is still a white man's world and we're in North America and he is, you know, a white guy with blue eyes.

He's very soft spoken and very quiet. Doesn't like to be the front man, doesn't like to speak very much, but it's been necessary for him to do it. So, he handles the administrative—anyway, the accounting, the money—I talk with clients about themes and colors and artistic stuff and art direction and all of that. And he speaks to them about money, invoices. And when a white guy asks for thousands of dollars, he gets it. Latina girl, not nearly as much. So, you know we don't have to mention to our clients that we do murals for about our graffiti background. That's irrelevant. They're also not asking if we have a master's degree in fine arts or anything like that, what school we went to, or anything like that.

They just know our previous work, know that we can meet their deadlines and their budget and such. We're phenomenal artists and a lot of that, I just go as Sandra, the artist, not even as ''Lady Pink'' or anything like that. And that's fine. So, I've never advertised or anything like that, but it's just one job leads to another, leads to another. Even though I now live in the country two hours away from the city, I still get those commission jobs in the city. But I've trained a couple of my young assistants to go and handle that. I'll design it with them here, but then off they go, and they can paint just as beautiful, and I don't have to go and work for crazy people anymore.

So, I take less and less commissions. But when I—when we do—it's usually my husband that goes out with the team. So. we still, we're still doing that. It's hard to say no to big money.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And just to situate ourselves, you started doing these and running this operation that you kind of took over after the two other artists left when,—this was around in the 1990s?

LADY PINK: I believe in the early 1990s. That then my friends took off out, out west to start working on TV shows like that. So, for a couple of years, I held it down on my own and I met my husband in 93. So, that's as early as, as we got it together and we got married in 94 and pretty much filed as a partnership and came up with a company name, became a company that early. So, it said that it benefits us when filing taxes to be a partnership or something, but we've just recently dissolved that because apparently it doesn't help with the taxes. It just makes it more complex and was unnecessary. So, we've dissolved that, do a partnership. As a partnership—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —as a partnership?

LADY PINK: Yes. And now I'm back down to being an individual artist.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —that’s interesting.

LADY PINK: Yeah, it was a pain in the butt, and our accountant, really, really pushed for it, that it was unnecessary, and we were paying twice as much for to have our taxes done and it became complicated when I was getting paid from abroad, you know from some other country. They needed like paperwork from the IRS stating to the fact that I would remain being a business in this country by next year and so on. And you know how slow it is to get any kind of paperwork from the IRS six months on an average. And this is before COVID. So, it just became a pain in the butt to get all the paperwork that you needed in order to get paid by some stupid company abroad or whatever. And and it was unnecessary as an individual artist, I didn't need to do some of that anyway. I who understands tax stuff—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —I try to, but [laughs] I'm learning a lot right now.

LADY PINK: [Laughs.]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: So, you were doing all of the work was kind of going through this partnership initially, as I understand it, you were doing your own individual work and at the same time you were also handling the company with your husband, correct?

LADY PINK: Yes.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And can you say more about—you mentioned this important position you had with Martha Wilson—then you started your mural company. Are there other

important moments, either personal or in your work from the nineties that you would like to discuss?

[00:35:38]

LADY PINK: At one point there was that huge exhibit over in Groningen , the Netherlands. They did a huge exhibit with over 18 artists. They flew us out there. The whole museum—or most of the museum—was devoted to our work. They put out a huge catalog and they still own a lot of the work. It's part of their permanent collection for sure. And we got to go out there and I met Mickey. She is the queen of Europe and one of the most prolific females to bomb and destroy and put her graffiti up there. A prolific artist and a beautiful, beautiful woman. She's been my friend ever since, I think this was 91 or so, 92 perhaps, that we met, and we became aware of how the European kids were receiving all of this. They'd now seen the documentaries. They got the books, break and art, subway art *Wild Style*, style wars, and they were excelling at what we started at first, the Europeans didn't quite understand the font and the letters, they made a big mess of things, but then they got it.

Then they surpassed whatever we had invented in New York City and did in our time. It was off and roaring in Europe. We were thrilled to meet new artists, different artists from different countries, everyone doing the same thing in the same spirit of what we had started in New York. And that was a huge awakening. So, by 1989, the subway trains were completely cleaned off and there wasn't any more graffiti. And they bought stainless steel trains and you couldn't really paint graffiti on the subway trains anymore. The penalties got hired with felonies, and I believe so everything went above ground.

Just around the time where I met my husband, I realized that you can just get permission and paint murals outdoors. It became easy enough. So, I'd already done a few murals, and then I met my husband who insisted that I could easily ask for more murals, like permission from landlords. I had put together a nice portfolio, the portfolio that I professionally used in my business of showing club owners and restaurant owners, This is the work I do. So, I had a book with great big photos, you know, nice and fancy, completely filled up, very impressive in using that. And knocking on doors for landlords, got us permission walls easy enough. So, this was a new thing. You can get a permission wall and paint in the daytime and flex your skills that way and paint whatever you want.

So, that's how street art started to get bigger and bigger when everyone started to realize that you could just get permission from a landlord, and it's not graffiti and it's not illegal and you can do something more elaborate and spend a long time doing it.And it just grew and grew and grew. And we'd invite our friends and we'd had at, at any given point, my husband and I were running about a dozen permission walls. We had like permission papers because it had to be on paper so that the cops wouldn't arrest you. You had to have permission, "The landlord says. Yes, these artists have permission to paint this address."

And then the cops couldn't arrest you. You would think a person my age didn't need that anymore. But we still need that. So, you with a permission paper and then you invite your friends. So, you couldn't just walk up to a wall and paint it. You had to be invited there and told this is the spot. We would rotate the work every few years.

So, we'd, you know, throw events and, and bring our friends and make it a weekend and everyone partying and hanging out and socializing and, you know, and, and it's the kind of recreational mural painting that it became different than working for a client because they need to approve the work. They need to just sew in their logo and their name, the art director, street art is just—you get permission and then most landlords do request that you don't do anything controversial. Nothing religious, nothing political, nothing crazy. They gotta live there. Their neighbors live there. Every now and then some neighbors will misunderstand something and give the owners a hard time. They don't need that. So, it was difficult to do political statements, or anything like that.

[00:40:05]

And I like to be subtle about it, but I push the envelope. I'm always pushing the line there. I gotta, I gotta use my voice. I gotta say something like, recently I was doing something about pro-choice. I am pro-choice, and America here is going backwards with, with the women's movement. So, I just, you know, had to scream out about that the previous year and the year before that I was doing Black Lives Matter in a nice, pleasant way so that it wouldn't

disturb the neighbors or upset people who have to walk back and forth.

So, it's a tricky line there, you know saying something and not being disturbing or upsetting.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And why do you think it's been important to you to use the attention that you've been able to get to also speak on these political themes, not just in the last few decades—but even going back—there's famous pictures of you with, with political statements, and why has that been an important part of your trajectory?

LADY PINK: Oh, I don't know.[Laugh] I have no idea why. I use my voice as I do. There are other artists that don't use their voice and they just do decorative work, and they never address current issues or anything like that. And I just can't understand that this is our platform. This is a way of, of bringing attention to a cause or just screaming out our grief, you know bringing out our emotions and, and telling a story or something like that. Most free thinkers are on the edge of controversy at all times. I'm not here just to do decorative work. So, I have a voice, I have an opinion, and I guess I'm opinionated and outspoken, always have been as a kid, it reflects in my work.

You know, I am outspoken. I don't care what you, what you think about what I have to say. I'm gonna say. And I think it's important that I say it. So, my work always tells a story. I mean, I do some decorative pieces once in a while. Just beautiful for beauty's sake. I don't always, always have to put, you know, a heavy message in my work, but it does, it does. It a reoccurring thing.

you know like—again—this women's how the, the Supreme Court reverse role versus Wade, that just blew my mind. I wanna go out and kill something, somebody, I'm so angry and this comes out into my work. So, I did a mural recently. I had to be subtle about it and it's in the street, but I did stencils of little co hangers and little sperms and little uteruses and such. I collaged it in a way that it looked, they look like flowers, but you look closer and there's my message and there's my grief coming out as like, I can't believe that this country is going backwards and they're denying women their rights and such.

Anyway, so I'm passionate about some issues and so I will speak out as often as I can, as much as I can get away with. I know that in fine art, in my fine art I can say all of that and there's nothing to stop me and I'm not painting just to have the work sold. I have pieces that are about abortions.

I have pieces that, you know, are kind of gnarly and sick looking, and I know people not gonna really wanna have to hang this in their house or anything like that. But I'm not painting to please people or just for sale. I'm painting because I've gotta say something and I don't know how to verbalize it into little words like a poem.

I can splash it into little pictures, there's my statement. So, the only clue that I really give is just the title of my paintings. So, either you understand it or you don't by the title. I don’t really care. I just needed to say this. I needed to get it out.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thanks for sharing that. I'm gonna pause for one second.

LADY PINK: Sure. Okay.

[Recording stops, restarts.]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: So, continuing on these paths that we're sort of following that I'm really liking actually, it kind of, if I wish that it's sort of like a tree. So, we're talking about your, what's been important for you as a trajectory, but then everything that's around it. You started talking about the, the working with your husband and running an operation.

How has that looked like over the years? You said also that you continue doing your own work. But how does that shown up in your life? It's almost been like 30 years of doing all of that work, right?

[00:45:12]

LADY PINK: Yes. I've been married now 28 years. After the first three or four years we were renting a house, but we had a nice big backyard and, and such. Then we bought a house in Astoria on 42nd Street by 30th Avenue that had two stories and a basement. So, we had

tenants on the top floor three college kids, and the basement wasn't finished, so we spent a whole summer finishing that. Digging out a back room and finishing it up and making it into an apartment.

The garages that we had was rented out to a neighbor who had kept this couple of fancy cars and some motorcycles in there, but we evicted him after a few years and my husband converted the two-car garage into my art studio. He got he, they put running water. They put heat in there and it was the only place where I could put my washer and dryer.

There wasn't any place else where it could accommodate that. The switch pipe was too high and such. So, the garage was it, I had a beautiful shiny candy, apple red washer and dryer stacked together. So beautiful. It was, it was, it was awesome. I didn't mind doing my artwork there and also taking care of the laundry.

Just remember not to touch the laundry when your hands are really dirty and stuff for, it defeats the whole purpose of laundry. So, that was fine. I had a slap sink and heat and the garage door opened up and right into the street so I could let clients in, and people coming to visit the art studio or business—whatever—, and without letting them into my house.

Because by the time they got into my house, they got enthralled by all my pets, the dogs, the lizard, the birds flying around, birds, and such. It became such an ordeal to have people in the house didn't need that. So, kept the business down in the garage and I had interns that would come and work with us.

I would pin canvases up for jobs. It became easier to take in-house and do really long canvases for businesses than to actually work on site at a dirty construction site. Guys are making a lot of dust and noise and, and mayhem and chaos. It's difficult to have artists standing there for, you know, a few weeks doing fine art when there's so much chaos going on.

So, we would do it on canvases and a lot and a lot of times, I worked about, no, I lived about 10-minute walk from the Frank Sinatra School of the Arts, and that is a high school, and I've been getting a grant for over 22 years now. and I've been working with that school, painting murals in the community and Astoria all that time.

So, I get a grant from the Martin Wong Foundation, an art education grant, and they give it to me every January. And so, I have to find schools and students to work with. And that school was easy to work with, you know, as soon as Tony Bennett built it right on 35th Avenue and 35th Street. Just a walk from me.

And when I heard about it, I was like, yes, kids. Woo! Then I got a grant. So, I called them up and made friends with the very first the head art teacher for the whole school. I've been working with her all this time. She just retired in June, so I have to make a new relationship with a new art teacher there.

But the kids totally benefit from it. They get community service credits and all of that. For doing murals around the the community. But I would also hire them to come in after school and help fill in and help brush work. I'm still doing that now. I've got a 17-year-old intern coming in from Newport High School.

She's a senior now and she's been working with me for already a couple of years. She comes in and she helps with stuff. Like, the piece right behind me is filled in by a 17-year-old art student, even though it's a commission job. So, on top of that, I will fix it and clean it up and make it all pretty.

But she's getting in all the initial first coat telling me where all the colors are. Everything, you know, everything needs, needs to be cleaned up and polished. But it gives them a little spending money there. So I believe, and I train teenagers, I've always loved to encourage them and get them right at that age when they're still deciding whether they really should go to art, art college and become artists or maybe art isn't for them after all.

And some kids do learn that maybe art school and doing this art thing isn't for you to do art on demand. That is hard. It's sure it's come to do art as a hobby when you feel like it, but on demand every day, day in, day out, it's too much. So, I love working with those kids. So, my life there was always, traveling around and doing commission jobs in my art studio when, always having a painting going, some of my own work, when a commission would come in,

I'd have to put aside my painting or otherwise bring it back out and continue working on that.

[00:50:23]

So, it was always a continuous too much, too much going on. In Queens, we have, we owned this house—my husband and I—we lived there for 16 years and then we held down to it a few more years, and we only sold it a few years ago. So, what is it, it quadrupled in price from when we bought it.

We bought it for like $ 225[thousand], I believe, and we sold it for 1.3 million. So, it, it definitely benefited us. And with that money when you sell property you either pay the government a shitload of taxes or you invest in more property within six months. So, we did that. We bought a couple of buildings upstate and such, besides the house that we already owned.

But we lived there for too long, for 16 years. Everyone knew we lived there—including the police—all kind of fans and European kids, we would host loads of Europeans coming to our house because my husband is a historian and an archivist for graffiti. And he'd always had big photo albums and, and thousands and thousands of photos.

And these European kids would come in and just, you know, this is before the internet. And they would just sit in our house for most of the day, looking at thousands of photos until their little brains would explode. Or I would throw them out because they had been here too long, they'd love meeting us, and historical figures and celebrities, sitting in my house and looking at thousands of graffiti photos, never before seen. Knocked down the internet.

Everything is out there and been seen. That was our, our daily lives. My husband would still love that graffiti stuff. I was more involved in the fine arts. But he always kept in tabs of who's who and who's doing what, as in recently what's going on out there in the world, and who's doing, actual vandalism.

He knows all of that. Who, who's who, where they're from, all their history. And he keeps tabs like that. While I've been unable to, there's just too much going on and I have more of the fine arts to focus on and such, than that. So, but he's always still been my executive assistant.

Before my husband, my girlfriend, she would help me a little bit, but it was my sister, my only sister here. She went to Secretarial High School, Norman Thomas High School. I went toward the High School of Art and Design, so she learned how to be a secretary since she was a teenager. So, she helped me in my early career by doing all the letter writing and all the professional stuff that I needed to be done before computers.

She knew how to type, she knew how to, how to write a proper business letter and all of those things. She helped me organize my life early on as my assistant. But then my husband stepped in, and he studied computers. He almost got a degree in computer science. So, he's been my guide to my tech guy, and has handled all of that.

I am computer stupid tech challenged, let's say. And it's because my sister and my husband has handled that. When the time came along, they decided I needed a website. I was like, No, I don't, I don't want a website, but they made me a website. I have no choice in the matter. And they've been, it's been being updated over the years and it's because it's necessary for business life.

How can you have a, not a business and not have a website or be a professional artist and not have a website? It's just unheard of. But, like I said, when they first appeared, everyone was getting websites and such, they made me one was my. Husband and my sister, they kind of took control of that.

And because it's best for me. I know I just resisted. I didn't want to be out there. I was already getting so much in phone calls, and I couldn't keep up with it all. And the voicemail—it's too much. So, being online and the social media makes me too accessible, and it drives me crazy, the amount of email that I get.

So, these kids have to handle that for me. They come in to specifically answer all that email and sometimes it could take all day sitting here for eight hours, answering emails, sending

us photos, signing contracts, you know, doing all of that stuff. It's just tedious and boring, and I don't want to do it.

Somebody has to—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —and talking about your relationships, do you continue working with your sister in building this career?

[00:55:06]

LADY PINK: We have always up until just last year, I'm no longer talking to her—I'm not talking to her anymore. So, I've cut her off. My husband has been handling all of this, but the last time that they built the website, her name is still on it—they better get over that. So, I'm not on Facebook, but she has been keeping it for the last few years. She controls my fan page on Facebook, so I would always send her photos of everything I'm doing, and she would just post it on there, but it's just the fan page and it says it's a fan page.

So, people that try to contact me through that get sent to my website, it's not something I keep up or anything. So, since I haven't been talking to her in the past year, I checked once in a while, and it looks like she's finding photos online and putting them up there anyway. Even though I'm not talking to her, she has been holding it up a bit. Not nearly as much, but some. She's been putting it up there, but no, she messed up with me and I've stopped talking to her and, anyway. So, I don't know. My mom has got dementia, and she lives with her, so she's taking care of my mom. I don't really know what condition my mom is in or anything.

She was here like a week ago, and her memory is completely gone. She's like very helpless and all of that. But because I don't speak with her, I don't know exactly what's going on, or anything like that. So, it's difficult to get anything from my mom. I ask how she's doing and what has the doctor said? And she's like, She's fine, she's fine, no problem. Absolutely fine, everything's good. I'm like, That's not true. But I don't know if I will ever speak with her again. She really messed up. So—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —you still keep a relationship with your mother though?

LADY PINK: Well, yes. That is a must. Yeah.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And in terms of these relationships that have been around your whole life, how do you—it's interesting to me, just if you relate to your home country or if you still see it as your home country—what's your relationship or what has your relationship been to Ecuador and what's in Ecuador, throughout the years?

LADY PINK: I do have family down there, brothers, sister, half-brothers, half-sister, lots of cousins. Less and less uncles and aunts, but cousins for sure. Ecuador to me is like pretty much any other foreign country. I feel like an American, like I am a US citizen so I go back there and I feel like a tourist, some things are slightly familiar the food and the customs, but I felt the same way going to Colombia and going to Peru, it's just a general South American sort of vibe that is all seems somewhat familiar.

You know, living in Astoria would order Colombian food in all the time. It was close enough. So, I definitely feel like a tourist when I go down there. I feel very American, and I get treated like an American. We were just in Ecuador a couple of weeks ago, my assistant was asking me the same question. Matt was asking me, do I feel like I blend in, or do I feel like I stand out like an American. Like he stands out: big, tall, white guy with blue eyes, six foot tall, clearly an American, but he is asking me do I feel like I blend in? I don't dress outrageous. I dress like I could be local—I guess—but I say, no, I don't blend in.

I can see it in the men folk and in the women too. When they look at me, because I don't act or behave or carry myself like a subservient woman. I behave and I look at men straight dead in the eye, and I behave and I walk like I am a queen [laugh] like I am a value and I am important. I'm not subservient, I'm not stepping out of your way because I'm a female, and such. And when I address and speak to men, I am a lot more direct than the women from my country are. So, the minute I open my mouth and even my dialect, I can speak it well enough. They can immediately tell, you're not from here, are you like, Oh, what gave it away? Is it cause I'm looking at you like an equal? you know, is it that, So, it's my mannerism.

[01:00:00]

I am very, very American, very, very direct and straightforward. I think one of my brothers—my sister-in-law was pointing out to me the difference in the way that they speak and stuff like that instead. I would say, "Can I please have a cup of coffee?" They're like, "If it's no trouble at all, if you wouldn't be such a meany, can you please get me a little cup of coffee?" [mimics a voice] You know? I'm like, Oh my goodness! Okay. Yeah. I see the difference now [laughs], I got it.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah, you definitely have to learn to speak the Ecuadorian kind. You just go around in rounds until you get to the point.

LADY PINK: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah. I know you've been down in Ecuador a few times that you've been invited. Obviously, you're recognized as and looked up as an Ecuadorian artist. And what has been your experience in doing the actual work down here or down in Ecuador?

LADY PINK: The experience is still astonishment from the guys that females can do this, can climb a ladder, and can do big work. And there's still taken back by that and um the difference, still how street art is not fully accepted as contemporary art, there. So, it's still struggling to get respect and to get their foot in the door in some of the respectable galleries and in to be in museums and such. Like for this thing, *Warmi Festival*—run by Toofly in Quito, a few years back—we were hosted by a contemporary art museum that used to be a military hospital up on the mountains. Beautiful place, beautiful. And they had a lot of space inside for exhibits and all of that. And we were hosted and paid—and handsomely—to paint a wall across the street from there. And a bunch of women did some beautiful work, and they didn't maintain it. Because it's all falling off now. It looks terrible. It's like five, six years, I'm not sure. But they didn't exhibit us on the interior of the space.

Why didn't they invite us to put paintings and artwork on the interior of the space? It was all very minimal in there. It's almost on the borderline of worrying what they had going inside the museum. And they had so much unused space as well. And I don't understand why they didn't invite us. We all do paintings. We all do fine art, but we were invited there more as a gimmick or as a performance. Art was painting outdoors perhaps than respected artists for the interior. Anyway, that should have gone hand in hand that we were exhibiting our fine art inside as well as painting something across the street.

Most big exhibits happen that way, but we weren't. So, I can still see the difference that we haven't gotten full respect. We're still outside art perhaps. But then South American countries historically are 20, 30, 50 years behind—culturally. So, it's not expected that they'll get with it, you know and it's much more advanced in Europe than it is in America—they accept us. We're fully integrated into the fine art and contemporary art culture of Europe. Completely, we dominate some of the markets in Europe, a bit here in America, and a lot less in South America and in Asia. It takes a while, it takes a while, it's understandable.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And you think some of that has to do with the art world viewing it as street art or urban art? Or are you saying we, as in women, or are you saying we as in street culture, you know, and being outside of the museum?

LADY PINK: Street culture, just street artists in general. I speak more for that, for all the artists that would consider outsider art or such and not traditional art that's just coming. You go to universities, you come out with a degree in fine arts, and even if you do crap, it's like you're a bonafide artist because some institution said you're a bonafide artist. They'll go with that traditional. As it is here in the US, the old, the old ''fuddy-duddy'' stuffy people in charge are being replaced by younger people who are hip and, and are with it and have seen and the, the value of street art and those who do it well and how that is perfectly valid art.

[01:05:01]

As with anybody. You don't have to study in a university and get a degree to be called a bonafide artist. It's outside of the norm—yes, but it is, art is art. It's art. We've been labeled contemporary art to buy institutions that we've got no control of what they're saying. This is just what the historians and academics and such are labeling us contemporary arts.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Continuing on your relationship to Ecuador,

through the arts—how many times have you been invited to participate in festivals?—from what I know, I can remember a few of those, but maybe there's others. Three times?

LADY PINK: I've been invited to Ecuador three times to paint in Quito twice, and now to paint in Cuenca and in Guayaquil. So, it's been three times—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —that was the most recent one, right?

LADY PINK: Yeah, the most recent one. It was in Cuenca, four days in Cuenca, and two days in Guayaquil. And Guayaquil is still hideous. Oh my God! It's still ugly. I haven't been there in well over 30 years, but it is not a pretty city.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And was your experience when you were in Cuenca and Guayaquil this time different from—if it was different from the other times?

LADY PINK: It hasn't been too different from when I've been here. Again, going to Ecuador, I still feel a bit like a tourist. I don't feel too much like a local, but I do travel around the world a whole lot and, sometimes, I lose track of exactly where I am and such. It's the same kind of experience. I don't know how it was different in any way.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah. You don't see it as different from going to other festivals in other countries?

LADY PINK: No, not so much. No, I insist, I totally insist on a four-star hotel or better. So, I know exactly what it is that I'm getting and I'm expecting, I need an itinerary, I need a contract. It's all on the up and up. It's all pre-meditated and I know what to expect. I know how much time I'll have for free. It's just like traveling to any other country this time in Cuenca. I think I had a whole day off, so we got a little sightseeing and such. I travel with my assistant, Matt, so he handles all the logistics and all the details. It's just pretty typical, like most trips.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: That's interesting also that you say you feel more American. But I would almost say like, you're very New York, you're very much from New York, different from other places in the United States, and very contrasting to what you were discussing for people in Quito, especially, and in Cuenca where things need to be really fluffy and the language goes around and around, and it's just so different from how things are in New York.

So, I can see the different contrasts there.

But moving on to thinking about what you're doing right now. So, we kind of jumped to what you're doing right now and if this is fine. I was wondering how much traveling you've been doing or if you're staying more at home these days?

I know the pandemic obviously made us all sort of stay at home. You even had a huge solo show opening during—right after—well, no. We're still in a pandemic, so I'm not going to use time about that. But you weren't able to travel to the opening for your solo exhibition down in Miami. So, tell me a little bit more about how that big moment was for you and the portraits that you worked on for that exhibit.

LADY PINK: So, the COVID did slow down some of the traveling. I was in Miami just before the world shut down and I was having a solo, an exhibit in Spain. Right in the middle of March when all the air, all the flights and everything was canceled, and the world shut down. So, my two assistants couldn't go to Spain with me.

But I got to travel just after the world started to open up a little bit. And in Florida they didn't even acknowledge COVID, so they opened up a lot sooner. And I was able to go to the closing party of my opening—thank goodness. I got to see my artwork up in the museum. And I had worked on about 14 portraits of people who mentored me or inspired me to start my career or took me under their wing and helped me out.

[01:10:03]

Again, people who mentored me and believed in me. I did portraits of my friends that I lost touch with decades and decades ago. So, some people have passed on. So, I glorified them in their portraits. And I had originally just been messing with my friend's portraits from Instagram.

I would grab them and then play with the phone app, turn them into all kinds of colors and weird stuff. I was just doing it for cakes and sending them back to them and stuff, just funny. But then it occurred to me I could do actual paintings out of this. So, I got my assistant map, my graphic designer to collage, the artist artwork with the portrait that I did in my phone app so that each artist had an individual, unique portrait with the artwork, collage in there somehow.

I did that, he did the mockups for me digitally, and then I did actual paintings out of them. I did 14 and now I think I've done a couple of more so. Altogether, I may have maybe 16 or 18 different portraits that I've, that I've done of friends, most are still alive.

A couple of them bought their own portraits, which was funny. Crash bought his own portrait, Demo, bought his own portrait and then some of the other portraits that sold one to people who knew the artist in real life. And that is always very personal and just wonderful that they get to live with this portrait of people that they knew in real life, or they know or cherish and such.

And—and it's way cool, way cool. So, that was a new one for me. I'm not really known for doing portraits of people. I don't really like to do skin tones as they were, but in my phone app, I was again, twisting the colors and shapes into different styles, and such. It felt very personal to me that I should always, I give back to the people that taught me, maybe they only inspired me, or I did a portrait of the very first boy, David, that was my boyfriend when I was 13 to 15. And they got me started in graffiti. I lost touch with him decades ago. I have no idea if he's alive or dead or anything. His real name was David Bonilla.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —and is he the one your mom tried to get you married?

LADY PINK: —that’s him, yeah. And later on—when he came back—she tried to get me to marry him, but I was not having it. I fell out of love with him. But still, I guess the right thing to do for me to do a portrait of him someday, you know? and know I did. I came across a little tiny photo of me kissing him on the cheek, and I thought it was just so sweet and adorable. I was 14 years old before I went over to the dark side.

I did a portrait of that, and I put his graffiti tag underneath it in a throw up. So, someday—maybe—he'll see it or something. And maybe he'll sit in the museum someday. But, you know, he has been immortalized and that's how I see it.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Were they these all digital?

LADY PINK: The mockups were all digital. Yes.

But then I did actual paintings on canvas for them. Yes. We went on to paint them. So, the mockups were digital. The phone app is digital. My graphic designer incorporated their artwork and their digitally and then we projected the images on canvas. So, exactly, what is done digitally.

I project it and then we paint it all in. My assistants sometimes do the base code for even my final paintings, but then I finish it all up myself completely. Mm-hmm[affirmative].

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: So, we're going a little bit from the present to the past right now. And you've had two other solo shows. The first one you had when you were really young, I believe you were around 21. And then the next one was not until 2015 with the Queens Museum. I noticed that at the Queens Museum, you were you were relating a little bit more to graffiti culture as well and using different styles. Can you say more about that solo show and what it meant for you to also be invited to do that after so many years after your first—

LADY PINK: —Wait, which museum?

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: If I'm correct, you had a show with the Queens Museum, not at the location, but they had an offsite location right in 2015—

LADY PINK: —Okay.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —and I was just wondering if you can tell me more about that and having also a solo show, in your home, in Queens, which I guess must have been kind of cool.

[01:15:24]

LADY PINK: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Yeah. The exhibit I did for the Queens Museum in 2015 was at the Bulova Center, which is a building that used to house the Bulova watch factory and it is now office spaces and galleries and such. And they do a lot of installations there—the Queens Museum—from sculptures to paintings. And I got to paint a few walls in there, so I did new installations. Which was very, very different than just putting up canvases. I got a nice big space and I got to flex my mural skills. Usually were confined to whatever size of canvas can be that can fit in the truck and in the door and such, but when given a huge wall to paint, that is my favorite, then I can really go off. So, I did a few paintings in there, some murals I did based on some graffiti pieces but more elaborate and three dimensional, very, very beautiful. Difficult for people to believe that that was graffiti at all. But that is graffiti style. Absolutely. And at the other end of the building, I did something different.I did something unusual. I did a big blackboard, taped it off a huge rectangle—maybe 10 feet across or so—of chalkboard paint. And then I left big chalk there for people from the building who worked there and lived there. And they can themselves put up graffiti with chalk and put up their names.

And the corrections officers worked there. There was a lot of policemen walking around there. And this gave them the opportunity to put up their little nicknames and they were giggling like 15-year-olds and getting all silly and having fun with graffiti. And then they would walk to the other end and see what graffiti has become. So yes, it initially made, maybe it started as, As, you know, just tags and people writing their silly nicknames and, and putting up funny stuff like you'd find anywhere in the world in a bathroom graffiti. But then, it had become into such elaborate artwork that it's, it's unrecognizable as like a different animal.

But I did an interactive wall. I wanted people to get that ceiling and I think security had to buffer every week and it would get filled up again completely from end to end. I, people wanted to contribute, so this was an okay opportunity for them to put up graffiti. It was permitted [to] do. [Laughs.]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And do you maybe recall this was a little more recent, but do you recall if this had a significance for your trajectory that the, obviously it did. What did you feel when you were invited to be part of the show after so many years of not necessarily having your own space to do something like that?

LADY PINK: I don't really have any feelings.

[Cross laughs].

LADY PINK: I have no idea what I felt or anything like that: one event, one project after another. I don't, didn't really feel, see it as my own. I collaborate and paint in so many spaces. I no longer have any feelings. But you didn't feel like—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —But you didn't feel like it was a different from what you were doing and your career?

[Cross talk]

LADY PINK: No, no. We roll up with paint, paint the big wall, and then it's just, it's just the same. I've painted hundreds and hundreds of walls. There was no difference and no sense of ownership or anything like that. It's just a piece that I would drop anywhere and such.

I didn't have any special feelings of like, Wow or amazing. There wasn't an opening I, or was there an opening? I think there was some kind of opening and I had to speak a little bit—but again—I been doing this for so long, it, it doesn't really feel special anymore. I've gotta go to these openings. I've gone to hundreds and hundreds of these events, you know, so it's—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —and then, If we go back, you had your first solo show when you were really young at 21, I believe. Do you have any sort of recollection of what that process was like, or what it felt like to be having a solo show at such a young age?

[01:20:15]

LADY PINK: Again, memories are fuzzy. So, I do not remember very much of that. I

remember that the mayor of Philadelphia was coming to the show. It was at the Moore College of Art, I guess around 85. That's around the time I went there for half a semester, and they offered me—I did the exhibit first and then I went there for half a semester. So, at the opening I had a, a group of friends come down from the city that were break dancers. So, they were spinning around and dancing. In the middle of the show there was music and a DJ. And when the mayor arrived with his with his police escort, half of the audience left, because there were graffiti writers, and they were vandals and they didn't wanna be in the same room with all those police officers.

No thank you. So, I don't really have too much memory. Okay. So, they forced some bunch of teenagers, some toys, some amateurs to do the back wall of the gallery, and they made such a mess. And I was really dead set against this. This was my show, my stuff, why are these young amateurs, there were teenagers? Why are they being allowed to paint that back wall? And they did. They were such nice kids. I had a hard time being ugly about it. So, I let them, you know, that was fine. I let them paint the back wall, it was such a mess. So, that's the little bit of memories that I have about that.

But the president of the school was very, very excited by it. He was in such a happy mood. And then he's like offering that, “Why don't I go to his school? Why don't I attend?” And I'm like, Whoa! Why don't you play my way? I was kidding. Then he did, they offered me a scholarship to go for half a semester.

I was—decided to give it a whirl, give it a try and go to a semester in an all girl’s college. But that was a disaster. I did not care for it. I was still, again, busy with my work and I didn't have time to do homework. Sometimes my priorities were to finish paintings for exhibits and such. I was also I think about 21 and most freshmen were just 18. They were younger than me, plus, I would have been around the world. I'd already seen so much. I was so mature. They were scared of me. I was from New York City and that scared them too. So, you know, I eventually found my niche with the lesbians and the punk rockers.

So, the French crowd, that's the group that I ended up being friends with, which was cool. But I did have an apartment in New York City, a girlfriend, and a dog. So, I would come back every Friday night from college, I'd take the train back to New York City, which was a couple of hours or something. Every weekend I'd come home. My girlfriend and my dog were waiting for me on the train platform. I'd spend the weekend there and Monday morning I'd take right back off to Philly for the week and I'd stay in my dorm room. But that was just for —I didn't even make it there to the he end of the semester. I left one week before the semester was over. I, literally, bailed. I just packed my stuff up. My girlfriend came in the car to get me, and I was out of there. I could not stand another minute. I wasn't learning anything there. You know, the teachers—when I did homework—were holding my stuff up, as an example.

So, the other kids are like, This is how the homework should have been done. I was like, Oh God! they're gonna hate me even more. So, I was already professional and not a freshman. I had already learned all of that in high school, because I went to the High School of Art & Design and that gives us all a leg up.

On what some of these kids are coming out of just regular high school and this is their freshman year and they're learning the very basics of art, which you know I was already in the advanced class—let's say—so college wasn't for me. No way.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: So, I think this is a good place to stop. But is there anything else that you want to mention today that I haven't asked you about?

LADY PINK: I'm not sure.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: You can think about it and just bring it back to the next session. So, I'm gonna stop the recording, but if you can stay on.

LADY PINK: Okay.

[END OF TRACK 2]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Hi Pink. Thank you for joining me again for this third session of your oral history. And I'm just going to introduce myself again, as I do for each session. So, my name is Fernanda Espinosa and I'm an oral historian and I'm recording an oral history with

the artist, Lady Pink. And we're doing this interview virtually.

Today is Tuesday, November 1st , 2022, and this is an interview that's going to go to the Archives of American Art through the In Colors Oral History Project. Mm-hmm[affirmative]. Great. Welcome again. We were just talking off offline about where we left off. We've covered a lot and there's a lot of things happening.

But today I was hoping that we can kind of take-off where we left. So, you were telling me about your experience in Philadelphia and going to school. And then, I don't know if you wanted to say a little bit more about that time. I was interested in knowing more about your teaching career that you've mentioned a couple times, the grant funding that you've established through the Frank Sinatra School of the Arts and your experience with youth and teaching in the last many years. I think you said you've been doing that for almost 20 years already.

LADY PINK: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah. So, if you can just share more about what that has meant for your career and any reflections you may have around that passing on information to a new generation.

LADY PINK: Well, I have my priority is still doing paintings for galleries and museums and my fine art. But, on the side I do like to pass on my skills and all that I've learned in painting murals to young people. So, as soon as I got married in 1994, my husband and I were considering talking about maybe having children. Not quite sure. I'm not a big fan of kids. I never really liked kids, but we were newly married and maybe this was something we wanted, but not sure.

So, I contacted my local high school, which was Bryant High School, in Astoria, Queens. And I had gone there briefly for two months when I got thrown out of art and design. The school was across the street from my mother's house, literally across the street. I could hear their bells from my kitchen. So, I contacted the school and I know they had a big wall there that I had previously vandalized back in 82. I asked for some students, the art teacher, I brought the supplies for it, and we painted a great big wall and we, my husband I, decided that maybe having children wasn't our thing. They grew up to be teenagers and teenagers are pretty much of a handful and they're scary as hell. So, we were not quite sure. So, children never just happened for us. But I continued working with kids and it's now been over 28 years that I've worked with students. And I get offers.

And for about 23 years now, I believe I've been getting an art education grant from the Martin Wong Foundation in San Francisco. Martin Wong was an Asian-American artist who was a dear, dear friend, and when he passed away, in the late '90s or so, his family started a foundation which they mostly give scholarships through universities. I'm the only individual artist who gets a grant and they send me money every January. And it's my responsibility to find kids or a school or a non-profit, or a nonprofit or some organization to work with and teach art, which is what Martin Wong was so into supporting his friends. He bought a lot of our work.

He—he really supported us when we were very needy and in need of sales back in the early 1980s. And when sales started to dry up, there was Martin Wong. He had a huge collection of graffiti art on canvases, in books, on jackets, on all kind, wonderful things. And when he passed away, his entire collection was donated to the Museum of the City of New York, and that is where some of my paintings survive and will survive for generations.

[00:05:00]

These folks at the museum, they really, really treasure our work and conserve it. They Bring it out for various shows. There's a traveling show called *City as Canvas*. They used one of my paintings that I did at the age of 18 as the cover of the book of the catalog for *City as Canvas*.

It's a little train rolling by the city and a little naked girl pointing to it, standing on a pile of spray paint. Something I did in my mother's house at the age of 18. I feel like I'm a self-taught painter. I never took any painting classes. It's just practice, practice, practice. Since I was a kid. With spray paint, with paintbrush. In the wintertime, I developed my paintbrush skills because we can't spray paint in New York in the wintertime.

So, you've got to do something. I've always been busy, always had a painting going at all times. No matter what is going on in my life, there's always a fine art painting that I am working on little by little by little or maybe all in one shot when there's deadlines for sure. So, what were we talking about? I wondered—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —no, that's great. I love wandering. So, you started talking about the grant that you initially got from your friend's foundation and that you've continued over the last 23 years.

LADY PINK: So, the Martin Wong Foundation. It was run by Martin's mom, Mrs. Faye—Florence Faye—she lived to be a hundred and she continued giving me that grant year after year after year and would always complain that I did way too much big work. The walls were too big, too big, and she needed to send me more money and I did so much. And it was no problem at all. It's the most rewarding work that I do—is working with teenagers and young people and teaching them how to paint large. The art kids, like from art high school, they could already draw, they could already design.So, I make them design their own work and just help them put it up on a grand, grand scale. And that is, what I love doing the most. So, year after year, I would continue working with the Frank Sinatra School of the Arts. It would also be my responsibility to locate and get a big wall. We would do walls that were 60 feet long, 70 feet long by like almost two stories high. And I get the parents to sign a waiver that would allow the kids to go up a scaffold or up a ladder and go up high. There's certain rules and such, you need liability insurance. So, the parents would sign a waiver and say, my kid is allowed to go up high and paint up a scaffold. And if the parents didn't want to sign that, their kids were not excluded in any way. We would just, we allow the kids to paint on street level and they can't go up high. They could only paint low. That's fine. Everyone can have fun. I love teaching art to kids and reminding them that art can be fun. Art can be silly, art can be a lot of laughs and giggles and lighthearted and lift up your spirits. It doesn't save that deep and heavy stuff and sophisticated and depressing stuff; for college. Right now, they're still in high school. They can have fun, they can be silly. Enjoy your childhood, don't force these adult themes on them if they wanna do some activism or have a voice.

The previous years, there's been like Black Lives Matter and, you know about bullying and things like that. If this is their choice of theme, I let the kids have free range. Choose what it is that they feel strongly about. And choose images that they love, which then they will do a really good job. So, I teach them how to put this up and my husband helps me. I bring a couple of assistants with me. There are always two or three adults and maybe a mass of 20 kids, and that is what I love doing the most.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: If I remember correctly, I think at Frank Sinatra, and probably also because it's in Queens, there's kids from all over that go there. Where are kids from? What populations do you work with when you work at the school?

LADY PINK: The vocational schools in New York City are very, very competitive. There are thousands of kids that line up to get into the Frank Sinatra School of the Art, and there's only a few hundred positions, and these are kids from every corner of New York City that apply—as far as you can—sometimes kids will have to take a subway train for more than an hour, almost two hours of subway train, just bus after bus, and then a subway train just to get to their school.

So, we worked with kids from all, all over, all, all ethnic backgrounds. It didn't matter what economic situation you were in. The Sinatra is a public school, so it's free for all and it's just for the talented kids, because they do have to show a portfolio and then do an interview with teachers and go over their portfolio and all of that.

[00:10:12]

So, it's very much on the high level , the best schools of New York City. The kids are smart, they're motivated, they're talented, they are a joy to work with. Sometimes regular public-school kids are very disappointing. By the time they're getting near graduation, they've lost their drive, they've lost their love for learning.

Some public schools are terrible. They're right down, terrible. And the teachers are only there for the paycheck. They're not there to teach the kids. At the end of the day, they're difficult to work with. I'm not a babysitter. You gotta have to want to be here and you want to paint this. You're not here just because they told you to be here, and such. I run a tight ship.

I want kids who want to do this and want to learn that. But it's mostly in the summertime that we get to paint. I line up about two, maybe three schools per year. And that is all the projects that we can do. So, we'll come out in April and paint around June when school is ending. It's difficult to get together the kids during the summertime, but sometimes there is summer projects and then we start to wrap it up by September or October.

I will do projects with schools all the way up until October and right around now, which yesterday was Halloween. It's about the cutoff time for us painting outdoors, with kids or all together. Winter is here.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And you're still working with the school?

LADY PINK: Well, I live two hours north from New York City, so it's difficult to work with the Sinatra school. I did do so just a few months ago in April, we had some community people ask us to come back and repaint the wall they had gotten. This had gotten disrespected and vandalized over the COVID time when everything was shuttered, nobody was in the streets.

The graffiti writers went to town. They destroyed all kinds of nice murals. So, I lost a few. The community asked us to come back. They got some funding, and I came back with the students. They were amazed at first. The students don't take it as seriously as when they show up and arrive and they see this wall is so gigantic, Oh my God! Is out in the public. Everyone will see. Then the pressure is on and then they step up. And I love it when I see them perform and bring out all they have. They didn't even know they had the ability to paint something so beautiful, so large that the community just so love.

It gives them so much confidence and pride, and courage to keep being an artist. So, it's a big boost. When they do projects with me, they never forget. I hear from kids decades later and they always remember the projects, the mural projects that we did out in public. They taught them so much and brought them so much confidence when they're on the verge of not knowing if they really wanted to be an artist. And then they get this, to people walking by, cheering them and clapping their hands, shaking their hands, bringing us food, drinks, and seeing that they are of value. So, it's important that I bring them out in public.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: So, you mentioned something that reminded me I want to touch on, which is what we've been going through over the last few. It's had an impact, the Pandemic, on everyone—especially, for kids that were going to school and that had to retrieve themselves. But I was wondering what these last few years have meant for you in terms of the impact that's had on you and how you move in the world with this new reality?

LADY PINK: So, we've had COVID now for well over two years, and then the world did shutter down. I was in the middle of a project in Spain. I was traveling too, when that got canceled. Everything else was also canceled and rescheduled. And I was in the middle of a really intense painting that took me two months to do. Month and a half in, I was getting close to finish when the show in Hong Kong was canceled. Art Basel, Hong Kong, the painting was going there. I had no choice but to continue and finish the painting. Then I got very involved in other very, very busy paintings, a lot of detail. I was just here by myself. My assistants were not coming in. I had to let one of them go, and I kept the other boy, Matt still going with doing graphic designing from home.

[00:15:01]

So, I was here alone for not too much time. Then events did start to happen again, and there were virtual exhibits, a lot of virtual things going on. So, I kept busy. Always been keeping very busy here. I was able to produce a lot more work since I didn't have assistance coming in to disrupt my time as well as loads of email and things coming in and that takes up most of the time. So, I got some quiet time that was great, but as in the world shutting down, I barely noticed because I never get out, I never go anywhere. I don't even go shopping. I get out maybe once in a couple of months, do I get out or go anywhere or see anything. So, it wasn't, too different for me. I'm just, tied to my studio almost seven days a week, all day long, all the time.

So, my husband does the going out, he was doing all the shopping and all of that at first, when COVID first hit, and then little by little we started to go out and be able to do things. But it wasn't too different for me I rarely get to go to a gallery exhibit in the city or something. So, I didn't miss too much. I didn't miss what I didn't have. So, I never get out.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Is that something that has changed over your lifetime? Like when we were talking about your early years, you were very much out and about. And how is it, you speak about being inside a lot and not really going out. Is that part of how you've been in the last few years?

LADY PINK: No, I've been like this for decades and decades. I don't get out much. I'm always tied to my work. I'm always overbooked, overloaded with a lot of pressure. A lot projects. I'm always in my studio creating. When I was a teenager and when I was a kid in my twenties, early twenties, and such, I was never at home. But then once I had my own apartment and I had my own pets, I got my first pets when in my early twenties, my dogs and my birds, and I was always home for them. I was always home with my babies. I never abandoned my pets. So, I was a homebody. Always have been. I don't like to be out too much. I'd rather be home with with my little animals for sure. So, it isn't that different for me. Even when I lived in Queens, I was always inside a lot more.

I'm sure I'd go to the shops. I lived right around Steinway Street, that has like 300 shops and I'm a block or so from the supermarket. I'd go to the supermarket every other day I'd just get out locally, I wouldn't even go into Manhattan that often unless I had business. We wouldn't just get up and go to museums or a Broadway show or go tour. We wouldn't really do that. I would hardly ever get out again. I was always booked with jobs. I'd see everybody else going out and having fun, and I'd stay home and cry because I had a deadline and I have to paint this. And I've always had work. So, I was always very dedicated, and I wouldn't just, chuck a job or not meet a deadline or go back on my promise that I promise a client that this will be done by set time just to go out and have fun.

So, I would miss holidays. I would work on Christmas. I would paint on Thanksgiving, I would paint. On all the major holidays, I worked. So, New Year's Day, January 1st, I would work. I always give my assistants the day off if they want it. I don't make them work on holidays, but I will work on holiday, unless I have to cook the giant turkey that takes all day long and everything else, then—otherwise, no deal. I have to do, what I have to do.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And do you think that's something that comes from you being more comfortable being inside and having to go out for big projects? Or is that something that you've had to do because of the amount of work that you have to meet?

LADY PINK: It's what I've had to do. I've had to, be inside and the amount of work and the deadlines and the exhibits and the pressure that I have always creating and painting inside.

Sure. When there's outside projects, yeah, I'd love to get out and paint the murals outdoors, but I've also trained my husband to handle those jobs as well. If it's just a job for a client, I send my husband in charge with a crew to handle these things. We're waiting to hear of a project right now for a Ukrainian organization. And like I said, it's the cutoff time for painting and it's also, it's getting cold now. And if they get back to me and say that yes, they want their wall now, they don't want to wait till spring. My husband gets to go with the assistance—three of them—and I get to stay home with my new kittens that I have this project behind me.

[00:20:18]

I've got a two-week deadline, three paintings that have to be finished. So, I've gotta bust my butt and work on this. And I've been doing this forever. So, it's not any different or foreign to me. It's the kind of worth, worth work ethic that I've developed. And when I make a promise, I keep it.

When I say I'm going to do this, I try to keep it. So, my work reputation. Is, is always that I keep my work my word, and I'm easy to work with most artists, oh, they stress people out. They don't do what they're supposed to. They don't never show up, they don't meet their deadlines. But nope, I'm a very professional person and I keep my word meet my deadlines, no matter what.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: So, you mentioned the piece that you're working on behind you before. Can you tell me more about what you're working on right now?

LADY PINK: The one painting that is behind me is for McAllen Whiskey Distillery Company in Scotland. They've commissioned four paintings altogether. One of them, they bought the rights to the to.

They brought the rights to it as well so that they can use this one painting and they could make labels, they could make napkins, they could use it as posters, whatever it is that they want. They brought the rights to the painting. The other three paintings, they didn't wanna pay for the rights because that cost 'em a whole lot more.

So, I get to keep the rights to my painting. Or artists always keep the rights to the paintings unless they sign it away, unless they sign the copyrights and the rights to it and license it out and give it to somebody and sign it, sign for it. Otherwise, we always own it. So, I could use these paintings as labels for other companies, for other issues or for other projects and jobs that come along.They get to keep the original paintings. They bought 'em, they're gonna have them framed and exhibited in their little galleries or wherever in their company it's theirs. So, that's what I'm working on now.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Any other studio projects or personal projects that you're working on right now?

LADY PINK: Personal projects. I'm not sure what that means [laugh]. Everything that I do is for an exhibit. It's for, it's for mm-hmm [affirmative]. I'm not sure if I've gotten the opportunity to do any personal projects in a very, very long time. Cause whatever it is that I do goes out the door for some exhibit for something or another. I can't, I don't have the luxury.[cross talking] It already has a purpose. It always has a purpose. So, I don't have the luxury just to have a pet project of pissing my time away and doing something experimental when I do piss my time away is because I'm doing a bit of gardening or growing some plants or maybe cleaning my house a little bit. That is when I'm wasting my time.

And I, so I don't have any other kind of projects. I have a few paintings. They are halfway done for galleries, and then when I get a minute to breathe, I will work on that. So for the Christmases coming up, it's in like just, two months away. Yeah. Wow. So, in a couple of weeks, I've gotta give some small items to a local gallery for their Christmas shop.

They have small items for sale, for Christmas gifts, and it's run by a friend. So, I've promised that I would provide a bunch of small items. So, I am working on a bunch of little pieces that are affordable for beginning collectors and such. Most of my work sells in the five figures. So, these sell for $300, $400, $800. Little canvases and paintings—actual paintings by me—right? Partially filled in by my assistants, but I finished them all up. I do all the finishing for all the small works they are by me. And those are great for little stocking stuffers or, beginning collectors because I do know that my work is, is quite valued and prized.

And again, it's out of reach, out of just most ordinary, normal folk, you know we've got a little money to spend on buying actual fine art. This is the place. So perhaps that's my pet project. Also making little zipper bags and little trinkets that could be called more crafty stuff rather than fine arts.

[00:25:00]

Just a few other items like that when, so, in between this project I've got three other commissions that are halfway done and waiting. People who have already paid lots of money for this and they're waiting for their commissions, they know they have to wait three or four months. That's how backed up I am with doing work.

This has got a deadline, so this has got a priority. They're paying a lot. Followed by, we just wrapped up a painting, a commission for a French guy that has got for from Reunion Island, who was opening up a street art museum. Elaine Gnon [ph]. He commissioned a portrait of his daughter. I had that hanging there the last time we spoke.

So, it's got her eyes, and then island of Reunion Island that is in the Indian Ocean. And I went there twice for an arts festival. So, these guys are building a street art museum. The piece that I painted wants to be the centerpiece. As soon as they walk in there it is Lah!. There is Chloe, Elaine's daughter hanging. My assistant Chloe has been painting the Chloe painting, which is so weird that is going on. She's done about ninety percent of it, and I get to finish it up a little bit and sign it and off it goes. That's already paid for. The guy is like, Oh, can you change a little bit this? Can you maybe change?No, absolutely not. It's done. You should have said that in the design process when we went over. Like a dozen designs until he was happy with something. Like, No, it's too late now. It's painted, it's over. Well, anyway, this all the projects that I get to work on. I've got exhibits coming up and I have to start these big paintings for Beyond the Streets exhibit in London that is going on in February.

I have to do two big paintings, like maybe five feet by seven feet, and then hang them on the wall. I mean, literally staple them to the wall, put tape around the edges, continue painting outside of the edges so that it looks like a great big mural and that I get to do in February. I've got four days to finish painting that, but I've gotta do these paintings up now I'm gonna stick them up to this back wall here.

I've gotta come up with a brilliant idea, which I have no idea yet, but I will come up with something I don't know where I pull out my ideas or inspiration, but, when it's in a crunch, those creative juices start flowing in your head and you get the ideas somehow. So, I've got no choice and I've gotta be working on that through most of December. Because they want to ship the pieces out by January. So, I've got that. And right from London, I get to go to Dusseldorf to do a mural installation collaboration with Jenny Holzer. Like what we did recently at Mass MoCA. I did graffiti and street art over her posters, installation; which was awesome.

I heard, from her assistant, say that Jenny Holzer visited that exhibit again, and she just starts to smile immediately. She just loves what we did and added a little bit of fun and flair and flavor to this just—otherwise, posters they are just text, text, text, text—and now we added some colorful stuff and brought to life, some of the words that are in her text.

So, it's amazing that these are the projects that are going on next. And I'm also gearing up to do the collaboration debut that I've done with Louis Vuitton. I painted hand, painted the sneakers and they are debuting this in Milan, Italy. They're building a renovating or building a palace, or something. And that is almost finished, in any time now it's in my contract. I have to show up to a debut in an opening. They also bought one of my really large paintings and they paid like, five times the amount because they bought the rights to it as well. So, Louis Vuitton will get to make—I don't know—purses, clothing, shoes, whatever out of my painting. Bits and pieces. It’s a cool painting. I think it'll work well on fashion and on clothing. Let's see, what they do with it. But if anything at all. But still, it's all paid for. It's all done. I'm just waiting to go to Milan—God, what do I wear? I don't know if it'll be too pushy of me to ask them to send me some clothes or something to wear—I don't know. I don’t know what to do [laughs].

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: It sounds like you've been working on so many exciting things and so many things for many, many years. I wonder if you have any sense of how you'd like to continue in the future. Like, how do you see yourself and your work going forward? If there's anything that you'd like to change or not?

[00:30:02]

LADY PINK: Well, I have been eyeballing houses by the beach, you know, all kinds of different countries and places, and I love the Caribbean, but unfortunately the hurricanes are getting more severe. That's no fun. I've considered Ecuador in some of the beach communities there, and looking at houses and such, but the crime rate in Ecuador is a bit high. So, it has to be kind of like a gated community or something with security. It's a little tricky. I've looked at Panama, I've looked at Belize, I've looked at different places. I'm just looking online, just cruising the world, looking for beach houses because I wanna go live by the beach. I want some time off. I don't ever get any time off I've been making it a thing that I do take a vacation every year, at least a week. My husband and I, we go someplace on vacation. Recently I went to The Bahamas, to Paradise Island, to that resort called Atlantis. There are water slides, pools, and the beach, and there was so much fun. It is very fake, but it was also very convenient, very comfortable. And the beaches were amazing.

Anyway, just emphasized my love for the beach. And I want a beach house so that I can get away for at least a month or even two months in the wintertime. I cannot tolerate the winters here. I'm a tropical flower and the winters are severe. So, the darkness, the dull days, the freezing cold, the snow up to your knee can't even go anywhere.

Not that I go anywhere, but it's too much. So, that's what I'm looking forward to, as in my career goes, I still go with the flow, I sometimes make up my own projects, but I get enough offers that I am booked months in advance. We're not looking at booking me for next year and so on.

That I just go with the flow. I try to take the more, the higher paying jobs and more lucrative opportunities and exhibits and fine arts spaces that pass my husband's muster because he is

my manager. He will make me stop and accepting small projects that don't pay or, stop volunteering for things that are wasting my time.

So, he will easily say no. I have a hard time saying no to nice people. Oh, I'm terrible at saying no to nice people and sure, I'll give you everything you want. My husband is, No, no she can't do this. No. So, that is the cold German side of him. I think that can easily bypass nice people and just tell them, Nope, sorry, she can't.

So, he helps temper my time and helps me organize that so that I don't waste my time just doing things like that. With that said we just spend all of Sunday doing signs locally because it's time to vote here. It's time to vote next week, and exactly one week it's time to vote.

And we've get asked by the local community, there's a group to make signs that say vote. And this time was vote Pro-Choice. So, I painted a uterus with flowers. My intern, 17-year-old girl, she did a uterus with an elephant inside, which symbolized the Republican party. They want to cut abortions and ban abortions for all.

So, we all did Pro-Choice, Pro-Planet, Pro-Science, kind of signs, and they say: Vote—So, these are being, these are all in the lawns. They're on the road. They put them right in the town. They're amazing. They so love the artwork that we can do for free. So, we spent all day four of us here just doing signs for the local community on wood, beautifully painted pieces of artwork, and they're hanging on the side of the road and inspiring people.

Vote, Pro-Choice. Pro-Choice. Vote for the candidates that's going to preserve women's rights. And not, not for the other guy that wants to kill us all. They don't. Women are second class citizens and down all abortions with no exceptions. Not even for the life of the mother. How is that? How is that fair? So anyway, so I do a lot of volunteer work like that and my husband was like, Okay, if it only takes one day, Sure.

[Audio break.]

Oh, you froze there. Hello? Nope.

[00:35:00]

You have frozen. Okay. Oh no. Almost move. You move. Okay.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Okay.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I don’t know if you heard the last thing I said.

LADY PINK: No.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I was just saying in your time off, do you do paintings for other projects that might not be your business, but you're still painting for other kinds of projects?

LADY PINK: Yes. We were always donating to the local communities when they need, some kind of signs painted, or a giant wooden bird painted to emphasize that this bird is going to be in danger. That is going to disappear from our community if we don't do something about climate change you know, all these non-profit groups, they ask us. How do you say no? How can you say no? Of course, we believe in the planet and Pro-Choice and all of these good things. So, we help out. If all you need is a little bit of paint, little bit of time, we do that no charge.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: We're back after some technological hiccups. But you were talking about how in your time off, you're still doing work for causes and things in your local community.

LADY PINK: So, whenever I do have time off, I'm volunteering or doing some projects in the local community or painting some needy wall in a low-income neighborhood, just for fun and for beautifying neighborhoods, because that's what we do. So, I charge a lot for the commercial jobs and murals that we do. I charge a lot and I charge a lot for my paintings. So, it's almost like we're robbing the rich so that we can give to the poor so that I can have the time to donate murals to needy communities and people that really, honestly can't afford us.

I know that very much. I just spoke to the guy for that Ukrainian organization. They want

their flag up there with a girl. I'm offering to charge them about $7,000. The wall is really very large, and I would be normally charging twice as much or three times as much for this wall. But because they're a nonprofit, they they get a discount, and they're not in my community. They're in New York City, so that's going to take a long ride out there. But I think I'll send my husband—the team—to do this project. Hope they make a decision before winter fully sets in. Right now, it's getting pretty cold.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I know we've spoken a little bit about your partner, your husband and your work together. Can you say a little more about that? Is he officially your manager? And how do you negotiate your personal relationship and your business relationship? If you don't mind talking about that, it's fine if you don't—

LADY PINK: —sure. So, I met my husband back in 93. We always had the same friends, but we had not met. We come from different generations. I stopped writing graffiti on subways in 1985, from 1980 to 85. My husband started writing graffiti in 1985, and he went on until at least 93. When I met him, he was still going out and still painting trains. He was one of the last die-hard people to do that. And when we met, I was looking for a partner that can do like commission jobs with me. I felt the need for having a white guy, that can be my front, that can be my spokesperson. For a lot of these jobs that the clients were treating me like I'm just a little girl, I'm just a female.

They don't take me seriously. They're not going to pay me as much. But when you have a white guy with you, it works a whole lot different. So, he became the spokesperson and the front man for our business in a way. I'm still, more the brains and the power behind and the skill and the talent behind that.

He has some talent, some artistic talent. He never developed how to draw figures or people or anything like that. He is a master of letters and fonts and that. So, that is his specialty, doing graffiti letters and fonts. Whenever we get those particular jobs, he's the one that has to design the lettering. I can do it as well, but I use my skills more to do illustrational stuff. We get a lot of requests for that. So, that is my department. The lettering is his department. The making decisions for jobs and or anything—we do as partners. We discuss whatever is going on and what is the course of action that we must take and who's going to be responsible for what.

[00:40:05]

Since we have a few assistants, we discuss beforehand who's doing what, at exactly what time, and everything. So, we, we've got it together when it comes to making final, final decisions, I'm the boss. I'm the head person in charge, but he is also my boss in the sense that he's my manager and my voice of reason when I'm willing to cancel some job because I'd rather stay home with my kittens that I just got. He will remind me, You signed the contract, you have to go. You can't just cancel this because you want to stay home with the kittens. And he is quite capable of taking care of the kittens. And I can go, I'm just being irrational and insane, things like that. He's there to help manage my time and make the best use of my talent and skills.

He will remind me that I don't have to do that crap because I am well above that. No, I cannot exhibit in that little, that little gallery or that little—a bank or a library or whatever. He was like, No, no, you cannot do that. You have to focus on the big jobs, on the big exhibits, and that is where your attention goes.

Yes, of course these people are nice. But no, the answer is no—so that's his job. And I respect that, and I realize that he is usually right when it comes to managing my time and my skills to the best of my ability so that I don't get overworked. Because when I go crazy and I lose my mind and I go absolutely insane, I take him with me. So, he doesn't want to go on that ride. So, he'd rather keep me mellow and comfortable and well fed and warm and happy—happy, happy wife, happy life. So, he tries to do that when I'm sick he has to fill in. We are interchangeable, in a lot of ways. So, when I'm not around he fills in for me.

He's quite capable of doing a lot of the things that I can do. Except for the illustrations and the drawing, I have to design everything. They're quite capable of carrying it off without me there. They'll use a projector, they'll paint just the way that I want them to paint and such. So yeah, he is my rock, and he is well organized.

I think it's his German half. His mom crept over. She snuck over checkpoint Charlie from

Berlin. She was born in Berlin. If you recall. They had a wall in Berlin and people couldn't cross that, so she snuck over as a young woman. So, that's where he gets his courage and guts. She's German and she was just here a few days ago.

My mother-in-law, Oh my goodness! she is in her early eighties, I think she just turned 80, and she has traveled to over 120 countries all over the world. She has been to more countries than countries that I've never even heard of. She just [went to] Africa. COVID stopped her just a little bit from traveling, that she's always going off to every single country in the world.

She's climbed Mount Kilimanjaro. She went to the Antarctic, and she said that was the most fascinating country. The Antarctic, they don't have indigenous people. They don't have a culture or anything like that, but it was the most beautiful and amazing country she's ever been to, so that is worth something.

So yeah, my mother-in-law is quite fascinating. So, my husband inherited some of that wander lost spirit and courage to take on things. He was a notorious graffiti writer. By the time I met him, he and his brother had terrorized and traumatized two mayors: Mayor Koch and Mayor Giuliani back in their days.

But his younger brother killed himself at the age of twenty, Sane. So, they've had to live with that their entire lives with one person missing at the table during all holidays and such. So, my husband is quite organized. He studied computer science. So, he's very apt with that.

He's handled all the correspondence, all the computer work, all the photos and everything from being an artist. Everything has to go into photos, everything now has to go through the computer, absolutely everything since those computers appeared. So, it isn't no more just hand painting.

Everything has to go digital. Everything has to be scanned and photographed and digitized and sent out to the world. So, this, this where I'm at and other people have to handle that for me.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I have a few different questions, but I will start with asking if you had mentioned he also archives a lot of graffiti history. Is he doing that work for your own things and for your trajectory, your papers and all of that? Or is that outside of the scope?

[00:45:03]

LADY PINK: So, when I already met my husband in 93, he had already thousands and thousands of photos in some very large photo albums, like homemade photo albums that covers were literally cardboard with some rings. And then clear pages. Clear pages full of photos of subway trains and walls and absolutely everything. He'd already had thousands and thousands of photos, this was his hobby to photograph everything. And this was, print photos before digital. So, each photo you would cut lovingly and glue it next to the other photo.

Next to the other photo for those long walls, for those long subway trains, you had to do a photo montage and they literally stuck together with masking tape or just scotch tape, each photo stuck next to, and that be having huge albums so that people can see. We would entertain and host loads of graffiti writers from all over the world that would come to see these photos and sit in my house for endlessly all day long until I would throw them out looking at these photos.

So, he continued doing that after we married. But it was difficult to keep up that workload, to document everything around New York City. The work would go up and disappear and you'd have to literally roam all over. But he did now have a life. He had a wife, he had a home, he had work to do. He didn't have all the free time in the world to just be roaming and taking photos of everything. We didn't own a car, so it's a lot harder to get around New York City. You have to get around by Subway and such. So, once he married, things slowed down a bit, but he tried to keep up the documenting of everything that went down. Traveling around when we'd know that something had been painted in some neighborhood, he would travel there, document it, take photos, make sure that everything was kept.

So, he would of course, document my work as well. Everything that we would do, we'd make sure that we would document it well. we all had to learn how to photograph our own work,

so you have to drive back to get back to whatever wall we had painted, just when the lighting is correct. Sometimes the sun is casting a bit of a shadow or it's too bright, or you have to go when the clouds are just right and the lighting is muted and you get your wall and there are no cars parked in front of it. That is the key. So, you have to go during the time where there's a sign that posts, there's no parking here, and you can travel, wait for that Tuesday and get there just on Tuesday, and it's perfect. But nope, there's one guy that left his van there full of tickets. He's not moving it, and it's ruining your whole picture.

So, then you have to come back. So, it is a pain in the butt to try to document your own work. I mean, sure. Now in Photoshop you can just delete that van, that van and remove it. And it looks like new, but back in the day, if there was one car parked in front of our mural, it ruined everything. So, thank goodness he has been able to document everything. And he's got spreadsheets that have all my paintings and murals, illustrations, prints, everything in a different spreadsheet of [clears throat]. Reconstructing my history. So, everything I've ever done it is on a spreadsheet, what it's sold for. When I made it, the size, who owns it, if we know who owns it, which is not always information that I get when stuff is sold.

All of that information we keep, and we keep updating it and keep tabs of all my work. And sometimes paintings resurface out of the blue because when I was very young, I didn't document everything I did. I'd paint something solid and out the door went, I never even took photos and then memories fuzzy. So, I get photos back of my work and I'm like, Oh my God, I did do that! Oh, how amazing! Yep, yep, yep. I remember. So, thank goodness he's well organized and we train our assistants to keep up my lists of inventory. Everything that I do is documented. It's scanned. It is written down in the spreadsheet even as it's going out the door by mail to the, by a buyer or something like that. We make sure that it's documented.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: That's amazing. Because you had also said earlier on that you don't really do a lot of documenting or writing, and so it's so great that you have people around you that are doing all that stuff for such a long career that has so much history. So, thanks to the archivist around you [laughs].

LADY PINK: Mm-hmm[affirmative]. Yeah.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I'm also really happy we're doing this interview for that reason. There's so many things that don't get to be captured.

But anyway, I wanted to transition a bit more into more reflective questions and just look back at what you've done and where you're at right now.

[00:50:08]

In terms of your personal relationships, you have mentioned—obviously your husband—maybe your husband's family as part of your close network, a little bit of fall through with your side of the family—with your sister. Are there any other relationships? I know you had also said that you kept being friends with a lot of the people who you started writing with. Who's close to you right now, like at this stage of your life?

LADY PINK: Well, I'm still close with a lot of the guys that I exhibited with, like Daze and Crash, those are my dearest friends. Then there's Zephyr and even Lee, who is my ex and we've become friends over the years. And another one is Seen and Seen TC5, Black Seen. And that’s the kid that first befriended me when I first went to the High School of Art & Design. We were both 15 years old and he took me under his wing; kid from the Bronx and he had a lot of style and he's the one that gave me my name ''Pink" and taught me how to go into the train yards and all of that.

So, Seen and I am still friends with, we keep in touch whenever I do pay a tribute to him or do something amazing, I end up sending it to him. I mail him prints and artwork and real things for him to have and remember. His mama just died last week. So, I just send them my deepest condolences and such. We all keep in touch with each other. My friend, Lady Heart—who lives down south—we always touch base and talk to each other. She's the only person that I can honestly speak to.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I think, you said your mom lives in New York, right? Still?

LADY PINK: Well, my mom lives with my sister and my sister bought a house north of New

York. She's about half an hour away from me. But just as she bought her house, she behaved very badly with me. She was staying here for a few weeks and was screaming at me and screaming at me. So, I stopped talking to her, but my mom lives with her, so I do still keep in touch with my mom, but my mom has dementia now and she doesn't really remember anything or pretty much anything. All the bad things that I did as a teenager, all of those things have slipped from her memory. It's difficult to have a conversation with her because she just really can't remember anything. It's getting pretty bad the dementia.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And do you keep any of your connections with your family in Ecuador?

LADY PINK: I keep in touch with my half-brothers. I was in Guayaquil recently and I did touch base with my oldest brother, Patricio, who is an eye doctor. And I was in reaching out to my younger brother, Mauricio, who is an architectural engineer. And I do keep in touch with them sometimes. Absolutely. Mm-hmm[affirmative].

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And maybe these questions that I'm going to ask you might be a little more abstract but if you can meditate on how you think people look at you now. Like, how do you, or maybe even like, how would you describe yourself at this point of your, of your career and your life?

LADY PINK: I don't really—am not reflective that way—I'm not going to describe myself in any way. I've got nothing [laugh]. So, let's see, how do people see me? They see me as a role model. Mm-hmm [affirmative] they see me as an inspiration. And folks see me as some sort of a famous artist. Sometimes it's difficult to know who's being genuine because people put me in the realm of being like a celebrity.

So, people act kind of fake and they just gush at you and pretend to like you because you're a celebrity and such. So, I've got those, those dilemmas, people aren't themselves sometimes they just wanna, be around you, not—again—because you're famous. So, I don't have that many friends. Like that. But I'm fine. I don't really like people very much. I prefer animals altogether. So, I'm not a people person. I've got some local folks that come by. Annie, who is a close friend. She just turned 78 and she lives just down the road from here. She was here on Sunday painting some of those signs for the vote.

[00:55:00]

And for organizations, she's always wrestling me into some kind of community project or something.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And how would you like, or if you thought about these, like how would you like people to view you or like to see your contribution to art? What do you hope to leave behind? Maybe that's a better way of putting it.

LADY PINK: Well, I hope to leave behind my artwork and that it has entered into a lot of important collections in museums around the world. So, my work will be preserved for centuries. I'm hoping to at least write one book about my memoirs or life story or such. I have a lot of wonderful stories. I don't write much now right now, but I did keep journals from when I was 13 until I I was maybe 23-24. So, all of that stuff is written down and it should be compiled into a book.

But I've also got a lot of images, a lot of artwork that I've done, thousands and thousands of pieces over the years. And I feel it's, it's important that I should at least put out a book with my work. But that is, that is a daunting project. It takes a lot of time and a lot of effort and, finding a publisher. There's been a lot of street art books that have been published, so that might not be nearly as difficult as it used to be. But still, I have no control of what historians or people are going to say about me. I don't have any expectations or anything about the future or what people will say. I don't really think about it.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I think we can start to wrap up.

One other question I had, and after you can tell me if there's anything else you want to say, but you have spoken a lot about your successes. You've had a very successful career since you were so young. What have been some of the challenges?

I heard you say a little bit ago, like, sometimes it's hard to relate to people because you

don't actually know if they're relating to you as a friend or because they have other interests. So, I can imagine that can be a challenge, but that, are there other things that you've thought about that have been challenging about, the career and the path that you've chosen?

LADY PINK: What has been challenging? Well, I am tech challenged and I don't drive, so I am, pretty much housebound unless someone drives me somewhere. That is a little bit challenging. Being a female in a man's world, being a Latina in a white man's world has always been challenging. But I forget that I am any of that until somebody reminds me, Oh, you're a woman. Oh, you, you're Latina or something. So, I don't feel any of that. I'm just going about my business, doing my thing [clears throat], not being held back by my gender or my size or my race in any way. I do what I have to do and I'm going to go at it like I'm a big six foot tall white man.

I don't know. So, I am very, very set in my ways and I don't let the outside world intrude on me too much. So, what has been challenging is getting an abundance—too much work. I know some artists have struggled with not getting enough opportunities. I get too much so that has been challenging trying to negotiate my time correctly so that I'm not overburdened and go crazy and have a breakdown. Cause I will have meltdowns. Sometimes I will work for months on end with no time off at all, and then I become a babbling idiot and lose my mind. So, try to keep from—those are the challenges, that I get too overbooked, too overworked. I don't know how to say no [clears throat].

Yeah, I think that has been a bit of a drawback.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thank you for sharing that. And I want to know if there's anything else. That I haven't asked you. I know it's been a few sessions and I've tried to cover as much as possible, but I know it's impossible to cover everything. So, is there anything else that you'd like to mention that you think you want, whoever's gonna listen to these, either researchers or the public, or someone a hundred years from now that you want to make sure they know about you?

[01:00:19]

LADY PINK: See, again, I don't remember what we already spoke about, so I don't wanna feel like—I don't want to be redundant and then just repeat everything that we spoke about. So, I'm not sure we spoke about the difference of exactly what is street art and graffiti?

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: We did. Yes!

LADY PINK: Yeah. Okay. We did cover that and people need to understand what everything is. Cause I get so many students and I speak with them, and they don't even know that it is like, well what is graffiti? And they're like, I feel that graffiti is not what you feel. What is graffiti? Exactly. Give it to me in one word. And the one word is vandal. Vandalism. It's not what you feel it is. It's what a judge will say, and the police will say, you don't have permission. It's vandalism. So, that is very clear. Cause I get asked a lot the graffiti that you're doing now, it's like, well, I'm not doing graffiti right now. The murals that I have is not graffiti. That's not what it's called. But people need to label it that. And they still label me as that.

And I feel that, this what we were when we were kids. Graffiti writers. I don't do any vandalism . I don't do any legal work hardly ever once in a while I'll take a little tag in some other country or someplace that I've been or put up a sticker shirt, but I don't, deliberately go out at night and, put on the dark clothing, go out at night and go vandalize anything.

Haven't done that in decades. I don't feel right. Calling myself a graffiti writer. That's just what I did. Just like we don't call you a college student. When you went to college, probably we don't call you that anymore. You, so it's, you can't call me a graffiti writer and I have to set everyone straight.

I'm not doing graffiti. That's not what I do. Let's start over. So, what I do is art, it's in the street. Sure. But if you wanna call it street art, that's fine. That's just a new label or branding for murals. We've had murals in human history for millennia, So it's nothing new. What it is new is that we're not being funded by anyone, and we are not flying our design for approval by anyone.

So, we are in control of our own designs and our own content. We're just doing it with permission, and some are not. So that is, that is the difference in modern day street art. So, it's great when we get these permission walls and we can invite our friends and everyone paints whatever they feel like painting.

That is great. It's completely different when somebody is paying us, and they order and exactly what it is that they like. We're painting for somebody else that's totally different. But people will still call that street art and say, ”Okay, we have no control of these labels. They call me a Hip-hop icon”.

That's great, but I don't really listen to Hip-hop music. I'm not a Hip-hopper. If you, I was there for the beginning and I observe the birth of Hip-hop. Sure. But I'm not into hip hop. I'm, I not the music. I do listen to a little bit of Missy Elliott, but not, not too much. I don't really know all the other entertainers, and I'm certainly not a big fan of the attitude and how they disrespect females. Women feel like they're just bitches and hoes and they're just a decoration on some man's arm, and they don't get any respect or any recognition or any encouragement to do their thing and be good at what they do. They're just a beautiful flower for my arm and a decoration, and I don't like that world.

I don't like that world of hip hop where women are just substandard little bitches and whores, and this how you raise your children to emulate this instead of using their brains and having careers and doing something worthwhile contributing. Instead, they're just a play thing for the men only.

The men are important. I do not like that movement at all, and it is very reflective of the ethnic races where that is prevalent. So, in the African American community, most women are not equal to the men in the Asian community, the Latino community, the Indian community, all of that. Our sisters still have got it bad.

They've still got a big, long fight ahead of them for equality. While the Caucasian, the white girls, they get a little bit more equality. So, it's still a bit of a struggle and this why I feel the need to create activism, art. To be out there and speak my voice. The signs that I just did were Pro-Choice, Pro-Woman.

[01:05:00]

You know, I feel that we should have to end this, that we are all equal and such. But no, we still have to be out there using our voice, screaming out, using our art, using a platform that we do have to try to bring change to try to bring justice to a great big injustice. For a hundred years, women have been fighting here for equality.

It was 1920 that women got to vote in America. Before then, we couldn't even vote in elections. So, we have to keep the fight going. What? Our sisters started way, way back and it's been slow going and now our country is going backwards. So, we have to keep fighting, keep screaming out loud and not quietly go back into the 1950s.

It's just not gonna happen. So, I feel empowered whenever these things happen to us. It's like, Let me just go back to being a quiet little artist painting decorative things. But nope, something in the world happens: a war in Ukraine, the ban on abortion here in this country, the election of Donald Trump.

Oh my God! We have to jump out and scream and scream bloody murder that this is not right there. And show the world that we, there are still normal people here. America is not all crazy. Sure. Understandably, the majority of the country, the middle of the country, is very, very stupid.

It's the edges of the country, California and the East coast, New York and then in Chicago. These places are sophisticated, full of cosmopolitan people who are intelligent and believe in the just world. Then there's the middle of the country here that is very stupid. They vote for Donald Trump, and they're against science. They're against the planet, they're against women's equality and they love guns. So, I cannot relate to that. I sometimes consider just moving to a different country that has a beach. Yes. [Laughs.]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: [Laughs.] In that way though, I guess you have described yourself by telling me more about how you don't connect to certain labels that people continue to impose on you. But from my perspective, I still see your connections when you were writing

graffiti, you were still doing statements against all of the repression that really was happening around you—the NYPD all of these things. So, in some ways, I see you connecting and reacting to what's happening outside.

So, you've never actually gone completely isolated and disconnected to what is happening in the streets and what what's important collectively. And people can label whatever they want, but as you say it, if you want to say street art, that's fine, but if that means that your art is in relationship to the reality outside, then I would say that that seems pretty much to be the case.

LADY PINK: Oh, yes. So, I'm definitely an activist. I hadn't ever seen myself as that. There's just no way of keeping me quiet. I have an opinion, I have a platform, and it's going out there and I'm surprised sometimes how some artists will have nothing to say. I'm sure that they have opinions on these things, but they will not use their art as a platform to be controversial.

I'm always pushing the envelope. I'm always pushing the line. I don't always know what that line is. I have to be held back and pulled back. Come on, dial it back. I'm going too crazy. This, what free thinkers do. This, my job. I have to do what I do and that is scream out about an injustice and try to fix something or defend the voiceless.

I can be the voice of those who can't scream out and speak out, against animal rights, the planet and such. These, they are, they don't have a voice. They need, they need help. And women do too all of us, we still need support. We still need help. We need a sisterhood. We need all of that.

And I feel that there is so much more out there in the world. It's not just about me and my artwork. We are, the bigger picture is, I'm a Latina, I'm a woman, I'm an American. All of these things. And if I can use what I have and I'm a skilled artist, I can think gigantic works huge murals, and I can mobilize other artists into taking over an entire town or doing a whole city block or a great big festival. I can do that. So, I will use my powers to make change.

[01:10:17]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thank you, Pink. Thanks so much for that reflection and thanks for giving us your time to tell us about your life and your views, and if there's nothing else you'd like to say, I'm going to stop this recording now.

[END OF TRACK 3]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]