



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Louis K. Meisel,
2009 Apr. 28-May 6

Funding for this interview was provided by the Widgeon Point Charitable Foundation. Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Louis K. Meisel on April 28 and May 6, 2009. The interview took place in New York City, and was conducted by James McElhinney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art.

Louis K. Meisel reviewed the transcript in 2019 and has made corrections and emendations. Selected corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

[TRACK AAA_meisel09_5506_r is a test track.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking with Louis Meisel at 141 Prince Street in New York City, on Tuesday, the 28th of April 2009. Good morning.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Good morning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What was your earliest encounter with a work of art?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: On September 4, 1956, which was my 14th birthday, my parents allowed me to go into New York City from Tenafly, New Jersey, which is right across the bridge, with a friend of mine, Larry Schreiber. He was a year older, and he told me that we're going to go to the Museum of Modern Art [MoMA]. And I said, "What's that?" Up until that point most of my—the culture in my life was music, classical music. I was a pianist, clarinetist, whatever. At any rate, around two o'clock that afternoon, we walked into the Museum of Modern Art. And what was on the walls was Abstract Expressionism. Nineteen fifty-six was the high point. And all of the artists were still around except for Jackson Pollock who'd died two weeks before. What is that? I mean I didn't even have art in the house. I didn't know anything about art or paintings, and that was the beginning.

Larry basically told me that we're going to see a lot of these really great-looking girls with pony tails and short skirts. And it was the beatnik era. And, you know, they were there in the Museum of Modern Art, but I was really taken with the paintings, which were huge, totally abstract, and totally foreign to anything that I ever had even conceived of. Or even thought about. Within four years, by the time I was 18, Larry and I had managed to meet all of the abstract expressionists. I had become friends with Theodoros Stamos who was the youngest of them. And I was totally involved with the contemporary art world.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That was at the age of 14.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Fourteen, 1956, on September 4th.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There was no artwork at home. Anything on the walls?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes, my mother had some Japanese tapestries and, you know, there were some—my grandfather had done some paintings. And you know things like that. Wasn't anything that anybody in my family ever thought about to any great extent, at least that I remember.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What did your parents do?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Well, my father was in the paper business selling paper to publishers, printers, stationers, fine papers. It was a business my grandfather started years before that, back in the twenties. On the other side of the family, my grandfather started a printing business. And the paper and the printing and all that connection eventually led me to become an art publisher in the early '60s, but we'll get to that. In the early '70s—wait, early '60s. Interestingly enough, going back to September 4, 1956, that was my first entry and my first time I ever had anything to do with contemporary art. And exactly 20 years later, in 1976, on September 4, I went to the Museum of Modern Art, and the first painting that I [sold MoMA was -LKM] on the wall, which was a major painting by Audrey Flack. So it was 20 years from the first day I walked in 'til I was sort of there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: After high school?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Okay. High school was Tenafly, New Jersey. Rothko became the artist-in-residence at Tulane University. And that's where I went to college. My entire family from 1908, all the way through decades, with many, many people at a time, were all Cornellians. And of course I was slated to go to Cornell. But number one, I

didn't like the cold weather. And number two I wasn't really a good student, and I really wasn't too avid about going to college. And there was the draw that Rothko was at Tulane. And New Orleans was a great city, and music was involved, and everything kind of came together. And I went to New Orleans. However, even though I knew Rothko, the only time I got to see him was passing at a cafeteria because it turned out you had to be a graduate student with special credits to be able to even go to Rothko's studio. So I reawakened the relationship with him, and it got stronger in the early '60s. Stamos and Rothko were very good friends. And I worked for both of them and was involved with both of them.

So after high school, Tulane University. Took one art course. It was called Art 101. My parents weren't interested in hearing about, you know, an art career. So I told them I was going to study architecture, knowing that the architectural students were going to get a lot of art courses in the beginning. However, it all didn't work out that way. I flunked that course, Art 101, which was the Janson book [H.W. Janson, *History of Art*], 3,000 years of art history. There were 102 women and four guys in the class. And I went to the teacher, and I said, "I can't flunk this course because I'm going to have a career in art. So I have a proposal. All the women in this class were able to memorize all the things you showed them from 3,000 years and all over the world. And I just don't get into doing that. But if you can show me ten objects covering the 3,000 years from anywhere in the world, and if I can tell you stylistically what century and where they come from and how they relate to what we saw, then maybe I can get a passing grade if I get seven out of ten." Which was the idea that I understood what I saw. I was learning what I was seeing, but I wasn't memorizing dates and sizes and names and all that stuff. But show me a vase or show me a painting, and if I can tell you it's from France in 1800s and it's impressionist or whatever. Anyway, I got eight out of 10, and I got a D. And that was the only art course I ever took in my life. So that was at Tulane. Let me just think now. Now what else? Okay. So that's my art history course.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But you worked for Stamos and you said you worked for Rothko?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Stamos and Rothko. When I was back in 1960-ish. And I'm going to jump around, and you can transcribe this any way you want.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's fine.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: In 1973 I put together a collection which is still now one of the greatest collections of Photorealism. And part of the deal was that the collector would have to let it travel to 25 museums over five years, with me administrating, and him paying all expenses for shipping, insurance, and catalogues to promote this Photorealism movement that I was working on. And I said I will build you the best collection. And at one point Rice University took the collection and asked if they could have it just before or after because they were interested. And I said fine. And they said, "What's your fee to come down and lecture?" I said, "Well, Tulane tell them it's a hundred dollars, and I'll pay my own expenses." But they have to give me my check while I'm still on the podium." They said, "That's unusual. You can trust them." I said, "Well, they didn't seem to realize that I was a Tulanian at the time."

Anyway, I went down there, and I did this lecture, and it was the best-attended show and one of the best-attended guest lectures in university history. And at the end of the lecture I told everybody, "I have one more thing to say." And I looked to the head of the department who had the check. I said, "In 1960 I sat in that seat up there right where that lady in red is, and I flunked this course." And I told them the story about how I got the passing grade. And I said, "Getting this check now as an associate professor level guest lecturer is sort of like a better passing grade than the D that I got." So I played games like that. Okay, so that was then.

I came back to New York after having known Stamos before I went away. And I started recording lectures for him at the Art Students' League. Stretching canvases. Just hanging out with him because he was the youngest, and we'd go to the Cedar Bar and Franz Kline would be there before he died. And de Kooning, you know. I wouldn't get to talk to them much, but I was at the table. Or I was at the bar, and they were there. Then one day he asked me to take him and Rothko to get a carton of paper. I was in the paper business, printing business, and so I took them down to Andrews Nelson Whitehead and bought a carton of 150 pounds of paper about 24-by-30-ish. Really fine, you know, French-made paper. We got back, and I put 75 sheets in Stamos's studio, and then we went to Rothko's and gave him the rest.

And about six months later I get a phone call. I pick it up, and he says, "It's Mark." Who's Mark? We never called him Mark. He was Rothko, whatever. And I hardly—I was in awe of the man anyway. I realized I'm talking to Rothko on the phone. He says, "I need more paper." I said, "Okay." He says, "Get it!" And he hangs up the phone. That was Rothko. So I go down to Andrews Nelson White and I buy him another carton of paper, 150 pounds of it. And I bring it up to his studio on Sixty-seventh Street. And I schlep it in. It's very heavy and whatever. And he says, "How much is that?" And I say, "Three hundred dollars." He says, "I don't have \$300 dollars." He says, "Take one of those." And it was one of the paintings he'd done on the first group. I was at Christie's last Thursday, and a similar one is now going for three million dollars.

Anyway, so I took that one, and I had it for years. And in 1972 when I bought this loft for \$50,000, I sold that for 10,000 [dollars]. And a Hopper for 10,000 [dollars] and a Larry Rivers for 10,000 [dollars]. And the other money, I had it. I bought the loft. And I said, well, you know, the loft is five million, and the 10,000 became a million. And then I saw the three million. Anyway—

That brings me to another story. I'm going to keep dancing around. I met Daniel Kahnweiler back in 1961 or '2. I had an opening on Fifty-seven Street, and Kahnweiler represented [Pablo] Picasso which [inaudible]. And he said to me when I told him I was going to be an art dealer, he said, "Always remember that an art dealer becomes wealthy on what he doesn't sell." I said, "I don't understand." He said, "Well, in the '20s I couldn't sell my Picassos." He said, "In the '30s I didn't sell my Picassos." He said, "Now, I have my Picassos." And every time I see Rothko going up in value, I remember what he said. And, you know, if I didn't sell it then, now I would have my Rothko. But you have to do what you have to do. And I was on the way to becoming a dealer. And it went to a worthy cause.

So there was Rothko and probably a dozen visits to his studio. There was Kline and [Willem] de Kooning early, before I went away to Tulane, Fridays in the Cedar Bar. All things that I kind of remember back then. But the abstract expressionists didn't like the pop artists, obviously. You knew there was a conflict. There was the '50s and the beatnik and the beer drinking and swashbuckling and, you know, rough and tumble days. And then came the '60s with the drug culture and the hippies and a completely different world. And the pop artists who were going against the abstract expressionists and bringing all that imagery back.

It was later on that I got to meet and know Andy Warhol when we were competing in collecting certain things. And Roy Lichtenstein and so on and so forth. But by the time I decided to be dealer, for real—and I was selling a painting for Stamos and for Rothko and quietly getting little drawings and things and middling them back then. I opened the gallery in 1967 on Madison Avenue. And it was only big enough to have my last name on it. It said, "Meisel," not Louis K. Meisel, because it was a tiny space about the size of this office we're sitting in. But on Madison Avenue. And I couldn't represent abstract expressionists, and I couldn't represent pop artists. On the other hand, I did end up with Stamos and Mel Ramos, who was a pop artist.

But I had seen, after the return of imagery with pop art—and they were called new realists—a group of artists decided pushing the idea of realist painting and then another group that went to the pinnacle of it in something totally new which was the photorealist. So you had Philip Pearlstein and Sidney Tillim, Harold Bruder, and Al Leslie, and a whole lot of artists who were painting new realist paintings. And it was a Postmodern realist kind of painting; painting that really didn't look like it could have been done before. But then you had a group of artists that were using the camera and using the photograph unabashedly. Because before that it was kind of illegal, you know. People would sneer at you if you used those tools. And they said, Yes, we're painting a picture of a photograph.

And the first one that I saw was Malcolm Morley. The way I met Malcolm Morley is because I had this publishing company called Eminent Publications where I was doing one or two or three books a year. And because I had a lot of press time, I went around to galleries and said I'd like to do your catalogues for you and your announcements and your postcards and what have you. Posters and things. So I started working for galleries. And by the end of the '60s, I guess I was working for I don't know 80 different galleries. I had 20 museums. Reprising what my grandfather had done in the '30s working for the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan [Museum of Art] in his printing company. So I lost my train of thought. Just a second. How did we get on to that?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The question was it's the same—

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Oh, Malcolm Morley. Malcolm Morley. So I was working for Karnblee Gallery, and I met Malcolm Morley. He was doing those incredible ship paintings. And I was doing things with Bykert Gallery, and there was Chuck Close with his incredible faces and heads. And Allan Stowe was one of my earliest clients, and he had Richard Estes. And then, OK Harris showed up. And they were showing [inaudible] California artists. And I also had begun to find artists of my own: Charlie Bell, Ron Kleemann, Tom Blackwell, as time went on. And in this little gallery on Madison Avenue, I had a group of works by a number of these artists that were very precise, what later became called photorealists. And one of the critics, and I can never remember—I'd have to go back and kind of research it—it was either Gregory Battcock or John Perrault or Howard Smith from the *Village Voice*. One of them did a review. Came in and said, "Louis, what do you call these artists?" And I said, "They're the great new Realism. I don't know, people are calling them magic and super and whatever." But it really—it has something more to do with the photograph. They're photographic realists." And I said, "How about Photorealism." So that weekend he came to my show and the next week said, "Lou Meisel is showing the photorealists." And the word came into existence.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So that's how the term was coined.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: That's how it happened. And then when Jim Monte was doing the "22 Realists," which was the

first Whitney show of the decade in the '70s, he had a show called "22 Realists," and there were seven of the artists that are photorealists in that show. And in discussing it, I used the word and he used the word in the catalogue. And then, you know, it went on from there, and it built. In 1980 this book came out with is *Photorealism* [New York: H.N. Abrams, 1980], the first one. And subsequently to that I wrote *Photorealism Since 1980* [New York: H.N. Abrams, 1993], which was in 1990. And then I had *Photorealism at the Millennium* [New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002], which was 2001, taking us up to the millennium. And the three books show 3500 paintings, which is almost every painting by every artist in the movement from 1965 to that date. And I'm contemplating whether I'll do a fourth and final volume which would be called 2010—*Photorealism 2010 in the Digital Age*. [This fourth volume was completed after this interview was conducted. -LKM]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How has the digital age changed the character or the nature of the genre?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: What the 36 Megapixel camera and the computer and its program, etc., have done is enabled the photorealists to see more. Now, they use the camera to gather information. As opposed to sitting out in front of the cathedral like the impressionists did for months and doing drawings of all the details; and then going back to the studio and creating the painting from that information. The photorealists took a photograph. Maybe they took a hundred photographs and got the right one. Or maybe they used information from a lot of them. But now I have artists that have these incredible cameras, \$40,000 cameras, and two of them have actually said, "If I can see it, I can paint it." So later on you look at [Bertrand] Meniel and Spence, who can paint things that no one ever could conceive before because the 36 mega pixel camera can capture it. And then where Meniel who does landscapes, used to put his camera on a tripod and take pictures across a 180-degree spectrum, and then have to spend weeks stitching it all together before he had the image of the thing. Now he's got a computer program that can take all those pictures that he took and put them into one coherent picture. Then Raphaella Spence will blow up this incredible picture that she's got and manipulate it, and make a print of it, and all the detail is there, six feet across. Cuts it into three-inch squares. Holds that three-inch square of information in her hand, and paints the three-inch corresponding grid on the canvas. So it's a tool. Just like the camera was a tool in the very first place, now the computer and the mega pixel camera and all the technology is a tool for collecting and gathering information so that they can see it, they can paint it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What for you was the appeal of Photorealism? Because your initial exposure, Abstract Expressionism—

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —it's totally different. It's physical, it's very intuitive, it's empirical, it's, you know, you try it, you do it. It works, you keep it. You don't like it, you scrape it off, you do it again. You know it's a different process.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: I essentially learned from the abstract expressionists. You know all through history artists, after the camera was invented— As a matter of fact, the main essay in my third book, *At the Millennium*, written by Linda Chase, is about what happened when the camera was invented and how artists no longer had to paint faces, places, and things. They didn't have to record history in the same way that they used to because before the camera, that's what they were doing. They were making a picture of a person or a landscape—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Returning [inaudible], yes.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: The artist then said—and this is just an anecdotal kind of thing—Hey, we don't have to do that anymore. And the impressionists said, Now I can just paint my impressions of things. And as time went on, the artists started throwing off restrictions. Until they got up to Abstract Expressionism, where they threw off imagery completely. And then Minimalism came, which went even beyond that whole thing. So with the artists casting off restrictions and everything else and learning, what I came into was Abstract Expressionism, and they were just talking about the fact that there are no more rules. Forget the rules. We can do whatever we want. Of course they had rules. You can't use the camera and you can't paint Realism anymore. But I read the part that, hey, anything goes. It's gotten to that point now where almost anything goes. And if you call it art, then it's your art. It's art. And then some people will accept that or not accept it.

So I was much more open-minded. And I did get involved with the pop artists, and I did understand what they were doing. And I did understand how pop art was a Realism that couldn't have happened before Abstract Expressionism. The idea is the flatness of surface and compositional aspects. It's so many ideas that came through from the abstract expressionists. And then your link was Rivers and Johns and Rauschenberg. They also started— They were abstract painters, but then they started bringing imagery back. And it was really an amazingly interesting time. Which I long for because I think the whole art world has fallen apart in the last 20

years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: And that whole kind of thing doesn't exist. Those artists were making those paintings because they had to. There was nothing about money. They weren't making any money. They were having a great time. The '50s was a special time. Nowadays artists don't make all this stuff that they're making because they're driven to do it and they have to do it. It's about money and fame and all sorts of other things. And very little of it is what I consider art. Anyway, I was able to move from that with a lot of concepts and understanding. And you go through pop art and get to the Realism. Somehow I can only respect the discipline and the craftsmanship and the technical ability that it takes to paint these paintings.

When we have these concerts here— Classical music is the same thing. There's a certain skill and technique and dedication and discipline that is not really found in too many areas in music today. And when someone is playing *Hungarian Rhapsody* by Liszt, which is extremely complex on that piano, and the audience is looking at that painting by Charlie Bell, and if you look at that with the reflections and the refractions and the [inaudible] and colors, it's as complex and there's some kind of a play between the two. So I've always been involved— If you look at John De Andrea's sculpture and [Duane] Hanson and Robert Graham. And if you look at all the things that interest me, their skill, details, discipline, dedication in it, and that's where I sort of respect and that's where I gravitated. Do I still love the abstract expressionists? More than anything. Over there is a great Stamos. Around the corner is the first painting I ever bought from him. I don't have any more Rothkos. Well, actually, I do. This is [inaudible]. And I have a dozen Kline drawings. Those I never sold. But they're, you know, not as—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I'd include for the transcript that it's a view of the back of a reclining nude. Looks a little bit like the *Rugby Venus* in London. So how much was there an impact on the part of the British artists in the pop era on your radar?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: It wasn't. And it isn't. And even to this day, while I'm fully aware of them and I know everything about them, I just wasn't aware of their—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hockney and Hamilton and Kitaj and all those guys.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Well, yes. Hamilton primarily. But I was looking at Hockney at Christie's last week. And I don't get it; I still don't get it. He was an early realist. I don't see him involved with pop art in any way. He has always been some sort of a realist, like an Alex Katz realist or something like that. I was just never involved with the British artists. Never influenced me, never affected me. But I'm not ignorant. I've been fully aware of them. I just never gave them a second thought.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, a number of people have made the observation that Abstract Expressionism was kind of a macho thing, and that the pop was sort of more of, shall we say, alternative lifestyle thing, the gay thing.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: That's exactly right. It was a completely different personality, a different thing. And by the way, with the pop artists, and the gay thing that we say—and many of them were—came gay museum directors, gay critics and whatever. And the whole thing started to change. And we're not going to get too much into analyzing all that because—

MS. MCELHINNEY: I mean it just included that more openly.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: I mean not that there's anything wrong with it. I was in New Orleans in 1960 at the age of 17 or 18, and found out about the gay world. I mean in Tenafly, New Jersey, you didn't know about that. And I just kind of moved right into it, through that, like I did with the abstract painting going into pop painting and everything else. You know there were bars with [inaudible], [inaudible] bars. And I'd go down there with my friends and say, She's more beautiful than so-and-so back at school and whatever. Then there was a big gay scene down there very, very early on. And then there was a book by Ritchie, *The Sixth Man* [*The Sixth Man: A Startling Investigation of the spread of Homosexuality in America*. Jess Stearn]. Guy's name was Ritchie. First book I ever read by a gay author about being gay. And it just, you know, for the last 45 years to me it's just another normal lifestyle—for somebody else, not for me. I mean I've had many gay friends. My best artist, Charlie Bell, was gay. Unfortunately he died of AIDS, and, you know, it was kind of tragic. And I've lost a number of good artists that way. Probably three. And as I say, Charlie Bell was one of the best. And Henry Geldzahler who was gay and a good friend of Charlie's and mine, who wrote, you know, the Bell book with me. And in the art world, if that's a problem for you, you shouldn't be in the art world.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's got to be inclusive enough to have room for everybody. Another issue, I guess, would be the role of women, you know, also expanding. Because Abstract Expressionism being a macho movement—

LOUIS K. MEISEL: In 1975 I was on a panel with Jansen who wrote the [H.W.] Janson book [*History of Art: a survey of the major visual arts from the dawn of history to the present day*. H.W. Janson with Dora Jane Johnson.] He was about 75 at the time. We were in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. And I sat next to him at a dinner afterwards. And because I was representing Audrey Flack, who was one of the top—is one of the top— One of the leading— She was number one in Photorealism. She was the only photorealist woman. And I've listened to a lot of feminist talk over the last three or four years. So I said to Janson, "How is it that in 3,000 years of the world art history, all over the world, not only is no woman painting or image in the book, no woman is even mentioned. I trust you're aware of that." Anyway. He said, "Well, the book purports to show all of world art history 3,000 years. Let's just start in the last hundred years. In Impressionism, if I'm going to take the leading artists, let's say, three, alright? Is there a woman in Impressionism beyond, you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mary Cassatt.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: No, no. During Impressionism. Mary is modern Impressionism.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Okay. Impressionists. But let's say you have Monet and Manet and Cezanné and Renoir and whatever. Is there a woman that comes above any of those artists in Impressionism? There isn't. Then we go on to American Impressionism, and there's Hassam and, you know, all the others. If I'm only having one to show American Impressionism, is it a woman? And then we go to Surrealism. You have Dali and Magritte. Is there a woman in the top three. And then we come up to—and we go through all the movements. Abstract Expressionism—is there? And then even into the color field where you had Helen Frankenthaler. You had Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland and etc. So I said, "What about Photorealism?" The top three are Close, Estes, and Flack. And in the next volume of the book, they have a full page, color plate of Audrey Flack, first woman in the book. Back in the early '70s there was a group called the Guerrilla Girls. Does that mean anything to you?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They're still around a bit.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: They are. And they used to put up posters all over SoHo on occasion. Putting out their, you know, their whatever it was that they wanted to put out. And one morning we get up and we go out, and there's a list of ten galleries, and my name is number one on the list. I said, "Oh, what is this about?"

[McElhinney laughs.]

Anyway, it turned out that they were ranking the galleries in numbers of women, and I had 40 percent women. Mary Boone at the bottom, and Leo Castelli had none. So 40 percent of the artists in my gallery were women at that time. Many of them fell by the wayside for all of the reasons that people would say that women don't make it. That even Jansen said, you know, they—I won't go into all the reasons. But anyway, they all fell off for a lot of those reasons. And even Audrey Flack, who is my number one and always has been, only did about 40 major paintings in 10 years while the others in Photorealism were doing 150, 200, 300. Since she started doing her sculpture, she's done very few because there's so many other things that she is doing—that women do. And I'm not even sure what they are. But I have just seen it because, while I was blind to whether artists were gay or straight or black or white or women or men, I was just looking for the best that I could find in the area. And if you're good, you're with me. And right now one of the best photorealists, of the new ones, is a woman. She's living in Italy. So now as time went on—now I have two women in my gallery: Raphaella Spence, who is a new photorealist, and Audrey Flack. And [inaudible] for anything other than the fact that they just fell by the wayside. And in Photorealism I can't find a woman that's doing it; I just can't. Although Spence, as I said, is the best in the world—better than any of the men. Her works are so far spectacular beyond anything that anybody's ever seen, it's hard to imagine. And I don't have a picture. If I showed you a picture, you wouldn't believe that either. Because she's like a top ten movie star face, and she's just gorgeous. And sweet and pleasant. Scottish background, literally self-taught. Unique and rare. I don't know. I keep digressing here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, no, but it's the whole idea of a sustainable career in art. I mean a lot of the dealers I've interviewed have said that over the course of a lifetime, somebody who's really hot maybe has 20 years, and that's not always a continuous run. They might be on top, and then they—

LOUIS K. MEISEL: They fall by the wayside.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They fall, and then they come back, and you know.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: It's a true thing. And when you have that first spark, and you have the first three or four or five

years, and things go great, and then it starts to level off, there are a lot that decide to change or leave or go on to something else. And then there are the ones that are dedicated and continue. In my first book there were 13 artists as the originators. All 13 are still with it or until they died. None of them have left. None of their careers have disappeared. All of them have continued. And of the five a decade, that I've found since then, which is another 15, they're all still functioning. They do three or four paintings a year. The demand is always greater than that. I sell their work. There's museum shows at the level of anywhere from three to ten a year. They're traveling around the world and having a lot of fun. And they've done better as a group than almost any other movement that there has been, or genre that there has been.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, having a look at your own career, what was your first job in a gallery?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: My first job in a gallery—I never had a job in a gallery, believe it or not. I invented myself. I was selling privately. In the earliest years I actually took a stand in the Greenwich Village outdoor art show with my wife who is also an artist and sold, you know, hundreds of her paintings that way. But if I had to say something about where did I work in a gallery? In 1964-ish or '5, there was a gallery in Carnegie Hall on Seventh Avenue called Park South Gallery. And it was owned by a woman named Laura Gold. And I had gone in there to look at one of their artists many years ago, and eventually ended up doing a book on the artist; his name was Nathan Wasserberger. But I kind of explained to her—or complained to her—I said, "Laura, you're in Carnegie Hall. How can you close at five o'clock in the evening?" She said, "I don't want to work anymore than that." I said, "But this is the perfect place where art collector type people will be coming between, you know, six and eight before they go to Carnegie." I said, "Let me keep the gallery open for three hours a night on Thursday, Friday and Saturday." And she said okay. And I would go up there, and I would sell more in those evenings to people that were coming to Carnegie Hall, getting out of their limos, well dressed. It was a time when it seemed to me this is a good group of people that might be art buyers. And I ran that gallery for three hours a night for three nights a week for probably two years. So that was my first time standing in a gallery where people came into look at art, and I was selling art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you work on commission?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes, on commission.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just commission?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Ten percent. And I was doing it for the fun of it more than—I mean it was making money, and the money was really important back then, you know. I was probably making \$200 a week in my publishing and printing business. And, you know, I'd go down there, and I'd get a boost when I'd sell a painting for Stamos. Getting back to that, how did I become a dealer? In 1963 or '4, I bought a painting called [inaudible] from Stamos. It's around the corner here. And my parents thought I was crazy. It was \$600. But Stamos told me I could pay him five dollars a week. Anyway, after about a month, my parents, who were kind of messed up about what I was doing, said they were coming into the city with friends of theirs who were art collectors. And if I really want to collect art, I should talk to these people. And they bring them to my apartment in Chelsea. They walk in, and on this brick wall is this beautiful white and red and green abstract painting. And as they walk in, they said, "Where'd you get the Stamos?" So my mother says, "What's a Stamos?" They said, "That." My mother said, "Well, that's what I wanted you to see." And one thing led to another. I said, "Well, he's a friend of mine." "How can he be a friend of yours?" "Well, I know him." Etc. "Can we get one?" So I called Stamos, and he said, "Come on up to the studio." So we went up to Eighty-third Street to his townhouse. And they bought a painting for \$3,000 that night.

And Stamos said, "Come on let's go down to Cedar Bar." About ten o'clock. And nothing was bigger for me than going to Cedar Bar with Stamos. And after the first drink, he said, "By the way, you can stop paying me five dollars a week." I said, "I still owe you \$560." He said, "That'll be your commission on the painting you sold. That's the first time I heard that word commission. That year I sold three more paintings for him. The third one he says to me, "Louis, I don't have—" You know, he'd give me something in his studio: You can have that. You can have that. "I don't have anything to give you." And so I was starting to feel depressed. He says, "So let me give you a thousand dollars." That was a \$4,000 sale. Now a thousand dollars paid my rent at 165 bucks a month for six months. And that's the day I knew that I could make my living as an art dealer. I think that's the turning point when I said, "Okay, I really can be an art dealer, and I can make a living."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That was when you started hunting for a space uptown?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: No. This was back in '64. And then I continued to sell, you know, for him. And I would do little things and get a drawing or a sketch from Rothko. Nothing of any import. Nowadays all of those things are important. I had some small Franz Klines, you know, the things that he painted on telephone books and walked on.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

LOUIS K. MEISEL: And he almost threw out. And you know that kind of droppings. In the late '60s I met an artist named Bradford Boobis, who was a realist. An amazing giant of a personality. He died very early on, probably about 1970. Had a heart attack. And had this gallery on Madison Avenue at 1022 Madison. And he actually came to me to see about publishing a book of mine. And one thing led to another, and he told me that he really hated having his own gallery, and why didn't I take over the gallery? And if I do, he'll let me have his paintings. So I took over the gallery on Madison Avenue, and the rent was about \$600 a month. I had him and three or four other realists that I had found that were willing to come with a new young dealer at the time.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who were they?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Charlie Bell was one of them. John Rumelhoff, who's in that book and has since dropped out; he's in Minneapolis. Arne Besser who's also in that book. And a couple of others. We opened. And I guess I paid \$600 security, \$600 first month's rent. I spent a few hundred dollars on electricity and phone deposits. And I had \$500 left from my initial \$2,000, and I put it into *New York Times* advertising. And by December that year I sold \$100,000 worth of work. And was on my way. And then artists started coming to me the minute there was word that there was a gallery showing realists. I found them, they found me. And by 1972—1973. The fall of '73 I opened down here. And there's a back story on that. Of course there's a back story on everything.

While I had the gallery on Madison Avenue, my cousin was working for a lawyer named Stuart Speiser. And Stuart Speiser was an Army Air Force pilot who got out of World War II after flying B-25 bombers. He was married to a WAC [Women's Army Corps] sergeant. And he started a law firm to represent people against the airlines because the airlines were becoming big, and they all had law firms, and people were getting killed by airplanes. And he built one of the great aviation, you know, firms representing people. Never lost a case. But he was a Jewish boy from the Bronx with no real background. And by the '70s he was a multi-millionaire. Had written 25 or 30 books. He was very famous. But he had this longing to be part of New York society. And my cousin said, "Well —" And he also wanted to have an art collection and pictures of airplanes. And my cousin explained to him that maybe the art world was an entrée.

And then he came to me, and I explained to him that you really don't want a collection of airplanes. But there's this new group of artists we're calling the photorealists. And I can make you the greatest collection in the world of this art. And I will tell them all that you're an aviation attorney, and you love aviation. And if they choose to use that in any way, they will. But you will have a world-class collection. And I'll do it for only a 10 percent commission. You have to give me 150,000 bucks, and a \$15,000 commission on top of that. And I will put this together. But you have to let it travel around. It'll go around in your name. You'll be like the new Medici, and people actually called him that. You'll pay all expenses. You'll get a lot of articles written about you and the collection. And I had this whole program. And I did it. The collection started here when I opened my gallery. It then went to the Herbert F. Johnson Museum at Cornell. And to this day it's now been to 180 different museums.

In 1978, after the first five years, I convinced him to give it to the Smithsonian National Collection. He gave it to them, and they've been traveling it under Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibitions [Service] which is SITES, and that's been going on ever since. So it first happened, he did the collection. The following year, I said, "Okay, you've started supporting this movement. I want you to give the Museum of Modern Art a hundred thousand dollars so that they can buy some of these paintings." And he agreed. Three months after that he was invited to a party at Blanchette Rockefeller's apartment. She was the chairman of the board. It was an invitation for people that were donating, etc. And the Fords and the Mellons and the Rockefellers, they were all there. And Stuart Spizer all of a sudden getting to the New York art scene and the art world. And in 1978, after he gave the collection to the Smithsonian, he got the gold Smithsonian Medal. That year I think Mellon got the silver one. And Spizer, who also had an office in Washington, launched into that world. And he's been with it ever since.

And the collection is a very famous collection. One of the artists, Estes, who was doing storefronts, did the Alitalia storefront on Fifth Avenue with an airplane in the window. Richard McLean, who was painting horses, had a picture of Ralph Goings's daughter sitting on a horse and his son holding a model airplane. Ron Kleemann, who was painting racing cars, painted a racing airplane. Malcolm Morley painted a helicopter over New York Harbor that was very similar to the way his boats were floating in New York Harbor. And so on and so forth. And most of them got the aviation idea into there without it's just being an airplane painting. And when people see the collection as a whole, they may say, Gee, there's a lot of aviation subjects. But on the other hand, they're basically seeing classic works by each of the artists. I told each of the artists you were going to get 10 percent more than you ever got before. I want the best painting you can do. And I all wanted them to be in 1973. So it's the prime year. It's the best paintings by the top artists. And that's that collection.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's really interesting because, you know, your approach is so entrepreneurial and outside the box in a way. If you imagine what a gallery used to be, I mean even before the galleries existed per se, starting about the 1870s, you know, you have a public/private salon. You've got a place that really is not a museum, it's not a person's home. But it's a place, you know, to go have a look at artwork And it always did have a social edge, I think, right?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But I think when most people, including scholars, even artists, imagined what a gallery does for an artist or for a collector, it's a lot of them I think just imagine that it's some kind of retail outlet for artwork. There's less of an understanding of all of the things that you could do—one could do—for a collector or an artist.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: I have to tell you—and maybe it's conceit or I don't know—I invented, I really think I invented the beginnings of a lot of things that all current dealers are paying lip service to and making games out of, which I'll get into. One of the specific things was that because I had artists that only did three or four paintings a year, and when you look at some of this, you know that there were more than three or four people a year that wanted it, I was not selling to people for investment. I did not sell to people for decoration. I didn't sell if they brought their decorator or their architect. I picked and chose who was going to get these paintings. And part of it had to do with the fact that they were real about understanding it, loving it, and wanting it. And part of it had to do with what they were going to do for my artist. There was a collector in Detroit whom I chose, and he built one of the best collections. But he was one of these people that whatever he did, everybody else wanted to do.

So you would plant a good painting in a collection in Nashville, in Detroit, in Bloomfield Hills, here and there. And then more people would come. That was really important because I would go to somebody's house, and I'd see a painting. I'd say, "Gee, that's really great. Who did it?" "Oh, oh, give me a second. Let me think." "Well, what gallery did you get it--?" "Oh, we got it at a gallery in SoHo." "What street?" "I think it was West—" That's a lost painting. If you go to somebody's house that I saw the painting and said, "Gee, that's really nice." "Oh, yes, that's Charlie Bell, and he's with Louis Meisel, and he's one of the top photorealists, and he has the book on him." And they start talking, and they're selling for me. So I always was picking and choosing and placing paintings.

Nowadays—I mean, when Mary Boone came along, you know, you had to get down on your hands and knees and beg. And you had to be on a waiting list. Theoretically she was picking and choosing, right? Nobody was doing that before I started doing that. And I was doing it for a reason other than, you know, the bullshit that goes on nowadays. On Madison Avenue I was wearing my Cardin suits and Gucci ties, and it was all kind of formal, and I never really liked it. And I remember, you know, [inaudible] Avenue, where my wife was working, you'd go up and there was this red velvet room. And there were these guys with the white gloves, and they'd bring in the paintings. And, you know, people were whispering and this and that. I came down to SoHo. And along with Ivan Karp I put on a pair of jeans, my cowboy boots from when I lived in Texas, a blue work shirt, and I was at the front desk available and accessible to any artist that wanted to come in and show me his work; I would look at it. Sometimes I would spend time, sometimes I wouldn't. Any person that walked in and wanted to ask a question, I was accessible to all the collectors. I changed the way art dealing should be.

And I say I. Nancy Hoffman didn't do it. Paula Cooper didn't do it. The 420 Building didn't do it. But Ivan and I were available on that level. And most of the people that started their collecting in the 70's— And I have to say, Charles Saatchi's first collection started right here in photorealism. The Rubells if you know who they are. They started their collection and moved on to something I call Abstract Illusionism.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [James] Havard and those.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Havard and Lembeck and whatever. I can go on and on with all the people who started and just walked in. And some of them have become the most major important collectors in the world today. Stepping back, when I was on Madison Avenue, Gian-Carlo Uzilli came to the gallery one day. And he was married to Charlotte Ford. And here's a sophisticated European gentleman, and he wanted a Vasarely. I said, "Well, go to Denise Rene. In fact I'm doing a catalogue for her right now. She's got a show coming up. [Inaudible] up there, they talk French, they whispered, you know. [McElhinney laughs.] I feel uncomfortable. He said, "Why?" I said, "I tell you what. Come back after lunch." This was at eleven o'clock. I called Denise Rene. I said, "Can I borrow two of those Vasarelys?" And I told her which two because I had the catalogue I was working on. She sends them up, and he came back at three o'clock and bought one. He felt much more comfortable in my little gallery on Madison Avenue buying the Vasarely. Of course it had to do with trusting who you're dealing with.

When I got to SoHo it became as it grew into the '70s. Thousands and thousands of people came down here. Every Saturday it was art world. It was a great time. In and out of the galleries. It wasn't stuffy. You didn't have to open the door and ask permission if you could come in. It was a whole different world.

[Telephone rings.]

And it started right here at 141 Prince Street. Anyway, I came up with all sorts of ideas. And there were a lot of people that sneered at it. And I took a lot of hits—not hits in that way—because I was too much of a businessman. And by the way, Photorealism is my word. Abstract Expressionism, action painting, that was the artists' word. So Realism, Dadaism, Impressionism, those were the artists' words. They all got together. They

knew each other. They were in France first and Paris. Then they were here. Pop art was a word that came about by—Lawrence Alloway made up the word pop art. And those artists were not quite as coherent. But they were all kind of friends and knew each other.

The photorealists didn't know each other. They were in California, they were in Chicago, they were in Boston, they were all over the place. I put them together. I made up the word. And a lot of the artists, the photorealists, said, Well, I'm not really a photorealist. I'm Chuck Close or I'm Richard Estes or whatever. But they all understood at that time and for 20 years how it worked. A museum curator or a critic would come in, and I'd say, "Photorealism," and name ten artists. And they had a handle, and they did a show. And it was a great promotional thing. And of course it stuck, and it's a real word. And it wasn't just a word that I made up. There are books. It's a movement. It's there for all of art history.

When I did the same thing with the Abstract Illusionists, which was another accidental word again. I guess with Howard Smith we were kidding around. Ivan Karp called it illusionistic abstraction. I called it Abstract Illusionism. There were five artists. They all got to be known, and by 1980 they all left the gallery. Lembeck, who was the best and most important, said, "I am Jack Lembeck. I am not an abstract illusionist. Lou Meisel's word is abstract illusionist. I don't want to have anything to do with it." James Havard said, "I invented this. Jack Lembeck didn't invent it. I don't want to be associated with him and the word." And they all split up, and they all disappeared. I don't deny that it was a commercial thing. I maybe didn't realize that when we first said it in 1967 or '8 or '9 when it got started. But it was a useful tool, and it's gone on.

There were a lot of critics and dealers and museum people. First of all, there was jealousy. And second of all it wasn't the way things were done. And I didn't ever work for a museum or a gallery, and I don't have any art degrees. And here I am 40 years later, and there's only three other dealers that have been in this business as contemporary dealers for 40 years. Ivan Karp, who's at OK Harris; Arne Glimcher, who is Pace Gallery; and Paula Cooper. And maybe there's one other. That's 5,000 that have come and gone. Literally. I'm not just making up a number. Between SoHo and Chelsea and East Village and Tribeca and up on Madison Avenue, 5,000 galleries have come and gone. In that time I can't think of another dealer who's written a book, and I've got 16 out there. I do know one dealer who wrote book, this one here. It's called *Dooby-Doo*. It's not particularly about art. But I can't think of another dealer that has written a book. That includes Castelli and Janis and Glimcher and whatever.

So I've done my thing, and I'm still here. I'm not a member of the Art Dealers' Association. They never invited me, and I never tried to join—it's unheard of to be about for 40 years on the level that I've been. But I'm not a joiner. And I wouldn't have even wanted to be part of that group because I don't want to live by anyone else's rules. I make up my rules. They're better, and they're cleaner and more honest. I never had a dispute with an artist or a collector or anybody. There's never been a financial problem with me over the years. All the problems that art dealers have with people, never happened here. They all claim to have their ethics and their standards, but we know it doesn't quite work that way.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, a hundred years ago we'd be calling you an impresario.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes, well something like that maybe.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs] You're in the music business. You're in the publishing business, gallery business.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: The answer to part of that is if somebody said, Well, what's your talent? You know I did paint four paintings about 40 years ago. And I said, "No, not for me." But anyway, what I like to think I do is find talent and then assist it to do what it does: creating, selling, whatever. So I represent painters, and that's how I make my living [inaudible]. I represent concert pianists. When I manage to book them in with an orchestra to do a Rachmaninoff's Third or something, and they can get at best \$5,000 for it, I don't take commissions from them. I've commissioned architects to do buildings where it is I want 4,000 square feet. That's my own requirement. You build what you want to build; I'll pay for it. I would just like to see you win an architectural award. I've commissioned writers to write books. And I always dreamed about—since I was a classical pianist myself—what it would have been like to commission a classical composer: Liszt, Rachmaninoff, Chopin. Go to a studio and commission them to write music. In recent years I met Lowell Liebermann who is a contemporary composer. And I've been commissioning classical music for my classical musicians. It's great fun. And I've gotten him—I'm supporting him in lots of different ways, you know. So wherever it is. If I find somebody who I think is talented, and I can help, I do it. And the only place where I've ever taken any remuneration is with the paintings and sculpture, which is my primary [inaudible].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You're also involved with real estate.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Up until 19—late '80s, anytime I sold a painting, 75 percent of my profit went back into art, and I lived on the 25 percent. Around 1987 or so, I decided that maybe I should take some of the money out of art and put it into something that pays me an income. The paintings are on the walls, and they're going up in

value, and everything else. But you get nothing out of it until you sell it. And because I love this stuff so much, I don't want to sell it. So I hold onto it. So I took some money out of art and started buying some real estate, primarily in the Hamptons. Primarily commercial. Not only to buy but to build. Going back earlier, when I came to SoHo, values were much lower than they are today.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of course.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: And I was able to buy 10,000 square feet on Prince Street. My gallery occupied most of that, and now I just have the 4,000 here. And I rent out both sides. So I have where Coach is, and I have where [inaudible] is. And I have some properties in the Hamptons. And my son went to the Wharton School of Business [Wharton Institute] and majored in real estate development, entrepreneurship. And I find a property, I come up with the concept, I figure out the financing. My brother does all the legal work, and then my son goes ahead and builds it. So to the extent that I'm in real estate, it's because he's good at that, and I'm supporting that, too. And of course it provides a rental income. And right now the real estate's supporting the art. I don't have to sell any of these paintings at any kind of discount like every other gallery is doing. Because number one, I have very few paintings, and I don't need to sell them. And number two, the real estate is providing income for me and the artists when I need to buy paintings in just to give them money and not sell cheap. So I'm in pretty good control of the situation as long as it doesn't last ten years. If it goes on for two or three years, I'm okay. Beyond that, I'm going to start worrying about it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So earlier you stated at that you've been the target of some complaint, criticism about the way you conduct yourself.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Well, not so much complaints. In the early years, I would say that the critics ignored the photorealists to a great extent. It wasn't a matter of giving them bad reviews; it was a matter of just not reviewing shows at this gallery or OK Harris or reviewing these artists' work. I don't know if you've read *Fountainhead*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Ellsworth Toohey explains to Peter Keating, the mediocre architect, that the way a critic gains and retains power is that he says—you know you do not attempt to raise the shrines but enshrine mediocrity. That means ignore the greats. Don't call people's attention to them. But enshrine mediocrity. If you go after a great artist and you try to pan it, people will say, "That looks to great to me. He's got to be wrong." If you enshrine the mediocre and you tell people that that garbage on the floor over there that you thought the janitor forgot to take out of the Whitney Museum is art, well, people say he must know something we don't know because he's smarter than whatever, etc. Plus a lot of those artists are beholden to him and give and do and whatever. So that was the thing. Back in the early '70s Barbara Rose, who was married to Frank Stella, and wrote for *New York Magazine*, panned a Richard Estes's show. But it was kind of nasty panning. It was just bad. And there were so many letters to the editor and so many complaints, that six weeks later she was no longer the art critic for *New York Magazine*. She didn't understand about don't attempt to raise the shrines. But for the most part these artists were ignored.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was that just because of who was in the Establishment at the time?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Well, number one, they didn't, the critics— You've got to understand that the critic doesn't really gain anything by telling somebody that Richard Estes or Chuck Close or Audrey Flack are great. They don't need—people come in and it's great. They don't need to be told anything. And pretty much with Photorealism, you think anyway what you see is what you get. And it's beautiful and everything else. They're much more interested in calling your attention to and building up something that you wouldn't ordinarily get on your own. And you think you need them to explain and tell. That's just part of my thinking on the subject. But the bottom line is that very few artists—I had I guess 300 shows in this gallery; I think I've had four artists reviewed in the *New York Times*: Audrey Flack, Stamos, Jack Lembeck once. Maybe one or two others in all these 40 years. Why is it? I don't know. Did I advertise in the *Times*? A little bit, not much. But that shouldn't matter. Nowadays nobody does—you don't even see one or two one-artist shows advertised in anymore.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So in a way you're saying that the power of the critic is perhaps overrated by some.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Well, it certainly works for that whole scene that's been going on for 30 years. But it didn't affect me negatively. Because every year I was selling every painting, and they were going for more than the year before. And that's been going on forever. And in the last ten years there have been— I get requests from five or six or seven major museums every year to do photorealist shows. The reality is that if they want to do such a show, they have to do it with me because I know where everything is. And in my own collection I have major works that I've held on forever. You know there's a show that just finished up at the Deutsch Bank Guggenheim. Guggenheim in Berlin. In July I'm doing a major show in Krakow, Poland, at the oldest museum in Poland. In November Brescia, Italy. In January is a major realist show in Munich, Germany, going to Emden,

Germany. And so on and so forth. Over the last few years gigantic shows in Rome, Aarhus in Denmark, four museums in Japan, Seoul, Korea. And they're clamoring for it. And when I do it in those foreign countries—in Rome there were 246 articles, reviews, newspapers, magazines, television, radio, it was great. Aarhus, Denmark, also a lot went on. The Guggenheim—I haven't gotten the publicity thing from there—but they said it's overwhelmingly received and written about; there were thousands of people at the opening. So alive and well and strong. But sort of not really in the consciousness of the real art world.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But how then can you explain, you know, the durability of Photorealism? Obviously it is. It's got legs.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: It's doing it without all the publicity that you have, you know, from all of the hot galleries and hot artists. That go up and down and disappear. There's a cadre of people all along that have been collecting. There are new people that are coming into it. Quietly, not for the prestige of bidding at auction and outdoing somebody else. That's not Roman Abramovich, you know, spending \$120 million on a Bacon and a Freud, artists he didn't know five years before that, and doesn't get it. And is not buying to hang on his wall because he likes what they look like. That's not the people that are buying the photorealists. They're real collectors. And there's a lot of talk now about how the real collectors, who have been on the sidelines as these prices are going crazy, are now the ones that are coming in there at more reasonable prices, buying the paintings that they want to look at. And those real collectors, a lot of names you wouldn't even know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: You know some of them because you see their names on paintings that are lent to museums. But they're not doing it for the fame. So you don't see their names in the news and the papers and what's Charles Saatchi buying now? And what's Rubel buying now? What's Marley [inaudible] buying now? Saatchi be in the lead.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's you know, the collectors as opposed to the glamorize people.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So. No, I've heard this from a number of people that, yes, the collectors are still there. They're waiting and watching.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: They've always been there. And by the way, they've been quietly—where they can find and buy. And a lot of them aren't very rich people. It's not a matter of being rich. They're people that really have to think about which painting they can buy this year. And if they were used to buying five paintings a year, maybe they say, okay, I've really got to have that, and it's twice what it should be. But okay so I'll buy two paintings this year instead of five. And I want that painting. And I'm seeing those kind of people coming in. And I'm being generous with them because I can be just because the way the price structures work out.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We interviewed a collector like that not long ago who was really obviously motivated by just love of what they bought. And had their—

LOUIS K. MEISEL: When somebody buys a painting in this gallery, they buy it because they like what it looks like. They want to take it home, hang it on their wall and look at it. And that's what art is for. That's what it's about. And that's not true of 95 percent of what's going on.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes. Well, the story you told earlier about the attorney Spizer, a lot of people are saying now that a lot of the people of whom you were speaking, who don't know anything about what they're acquiring—it's just what they're supposed to be buying, what they're supposed to have on their walls—I mean in a weird way what you did for him is what they're trying to do without the same kind of motivation. In other words, they're trying to find a way to get the art that they own to bestow status upon.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes. That's right. He wasn't in reality. He just wanted some pictures of airplanes for his home and his office. And he was expecting, you know, two or three nice pictures. What he got was great big magnificent things and none of them ever—maybe one or two artists, I got other paintings by them for him to have. But he basically never had any of them in his house. And he just loved the whole thing that it turned into. And he was a really pure kind of guy. I mean, you know, honest and straight. And he understood what was going on. And, you know, when I explained to him that this is what I hoped would happen, he said, "Fine. If it does, it does. If it doesn't, I really like everything you're doing, you know. I'm impressed. And let's do it." Whatever. And of course he got what he wanted. And again, a lot of people buy art because they love it. And then 25 years later they turn around, and they're important, and it's important. Whereas the people that are buying for all the wrong reasons, they end up with some type of garbage. Like there's a lot of people that bought the Damien Hirst's in that September sale.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Right when the market crashed.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Those were all fixed. They were Damien Hirst's. They were done in his studio by the 60 assistants: the dot paintings and the spin paintings and the butterfly paintings. But they were done ten years after the fact. They were remakes. They were copies. They were knockoffs of what everybody thought that they wanted. I got a painting of Hirst, a [inaudible] painting or that painting. Well, I call them fakes. Three months later in November the real things came up from collectors that had them from the original period. They went for a third of what people paid for in September for the fakes. Those people got what they deserved. I don't know what they think they got. Because by that time—the world doesn't give a damn that you now in 2009 have you Damien Hirst dot painting. If you were smart enough to have bought it, you know, 15 years ago or whatever, that was kind of, you know, avant-garde. And you were buying it before everybody else except for Charles Saatchi. Once Charles Saatchi did it, then everybody was clamoring for it. And the dealers pushed the prices to a million dollars before you could even think straight. And all the people that had the money and wanted to follow in Charles's case— And by the way, once that got started, then Charles sold his after the prices went up there. It's all just a big game. And I sit back here. And I would think most intelligent people would be able to see through that. But then think about how many people lost money with Bernie Madoff. Multi gazillionaires that should have known better. You know?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, people can be greedy and—

LOUIS K. MEISEL: I don't even know if it was greed.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It had to have been some kind of recklessness.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes. Money was—I was going to say came to this Wall Street. But my wife is a broker down here. We both are brokers actually. She got into it; I got into it to support her. She's probably been the top loft broker in SoHo for 25 years. And in the last ten or 15 years she said, "You know I bring these kids in. They're from Wall Street. They've got seven and ten million-dollar bonuses. They're 30 years old. And they buy a loft. Then they invite you back a year later to show me what they did. And I go in, and it's the most beautiful work of architectural design. And the furniture is gazillions and everything else. I don't see— There's not a book in the place. There's not a record. There's not a work of art. It's vacant. There's no personality. And there's decorators. As beautiful as these places are, they didn't do it. They didn't think about it. It's decorators that did it all. It's so shallow. And some of them, of course, were convinced, Oh, you've got to have art. Well, they don't know what art to buy, and they don't have the time to go to the galleries and look.

I have a whole course that I teach people when they start off. They can't come in my gallery the first day and just buy art. I mean you have to come back. You have to talk about it. You have to meet the artist. And you have to go look at about 20 other galleries I tell you to look at, so that when you buy this painting, you're sure that this is what you really want. In the meantime, I'll hold it for two months while you do that. It's my own way of doing things.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're educating people.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes. And another thing is that if you sell to people the way I have, very few times do these paintings come back on the market or even to me. I guarantee people that if you're buying artists—they read my book—by my top photorealists, after you've owned it for three years, if you don't want it, you don't have to give me a reason. Come back, and you get your money back. So long as the painting is in the same condition I sold it to you. And I say, "I raise prices 10 or 15 percent a year, and after three years, you know, I'll make a profit. I'm guaranteeing you bottom line." And that goes on forever after that, not just three years. You can't lose money—I'm not telling you you're going to make money—but I'm, you know, tell you you're safe there. In this environment that we're in right now, where people are being flooded with all sorts of art, I have not yet been offered back one of my photorealist paintings. I actually was hoping that maybe it would happen. But people aren't selling them. They didn't buy it for status and when the status part of that artist disappears they want to sell it. They didn't buy it for an investment and when they saw it go up they sold it. They didn't buy it because it was a decorating fad and now you're redecorating and you want to sell it. They bought it for the right reasons. And very few come back. At the auctions, you may see one painting by each artist in a year. Or at best, one painting in the spring and one painting in the fall. But you don't—there are some of the photorealists that never come up at auction because they bought them for the right reasons.

The other thing was I would prevent a lot of people from buying two paintings from any particular show or series. Because I remember somebody had two Jackson Pollocks. And when their prices went up, they sold one and took a big killing. And he said, "You know I'm famous because of my Jackson Pollocks. If I only had one, I

could never sell it because, you know, there would go my fame. People come here expecting to see my Pollock all the time. But if I have two or three, I can cash in and still have my Pollock." There are people I'll show two, three, and four paintings to, the most serious of collectors, once I know them and they trust me and I trust them. Another thing is that I tell them when the time comes that you don't want them any longer, one of the options is that it would be great to give it to a museum. Number one, you're going to get a good tax deduction. Number two, your name is going to go on the wall with that painting in whatever the museum is, and it's going to have something to do with you lasting a lot longer than your lifetime. And all the reasons. And there are a lot of paintings donated to museums. And certain museums [inaudible]. But they're building great collection, and I'll funnel things for them. The Guggenheim got 22 paintings from me that way. The Modern, five or six. Well, different museums.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How many people or how many institutions are you working with outside of New York?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: When you say how many—?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean like—I'm sorry. I mean like museums who are interested in acquiring canonical Photorealism. And you hook them up with a collector.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: In the last 15 years I've given art to 70 museums personally. And I don't know how many others I've funneled work into from the Allied Academy Museum [Berlin, Germany] to the Detroit Art Institute to the new museum at Duke University [Nasher Museum of Art] and whatever. When somebody wants to make a donation, the first thing I ask them is what university or college did you go to, and I determine whether that—most colleges do have museums, some are good and some don't matter. Then I [inaudible] major museums, do I know somebody there? And I'll call up and say, Gee, So-and-so has this. Would you like to have it? One of the best museums I'm working with is the Herbert Johnson at Cornell University.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

LOUIS K. MEISEL: That's a pretty [inaudible] something for them. But every case is different. It just depends on where they are, what the situation is, what the tax consequences are, what the art that that museum is interested in, and you know. And I kind of know where each piece should go when the time comes. And I know who's missing, you know, who's missing a Close or who's missing an Estes or who's missing this. You know I get an Estes, and it's a museum that has one. Well, even if it's in their local town, I want to find someplace else. That's all part of the time that I spend working on this. And, you know, actually I haven't donated much or done anything with museums out of the country. Although there are people in those countries that I will make recommendations. Right now I'm doing this show in Krakow, Poland, and I'm going to donate probably ten major prints by photorealists to that show. Things that I published, and I had inventory. And I've rather have it in a museum in Krakow, Poland, or they'd just got another person in the States. And the numbers aren't that big, you know, and I can afford to do it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You told us earlier that there's work going into a show in Brescia.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Brescia, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you know Goldin, Marco Goldin?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's an interesting story because a lot of the things that even speaking about entrepreneurial. So one of the new wave of sort of private money helping the public institution at the Santa Giulia Museum [Brescia, Lombardy], you know, which is this huge complex that was organized by an Italian impresario working for the city.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Is Brescia a city?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, yes, yes. It's a—

LOUIS K. MEISEL: I don't even know. This show, it's kind of complicated, what went on. The building of my show at Deutsch Bank Guggenheim was—it's 32 paintings. And it was a reprise of *documenta 5*, which was when the photorealists were discovered and introduced to Europe. Germany, big show there that happens every five years from 1972. So we try—we have the same artists, and we try—I actually was able to come up with a lot of the same paintings that were in that show. And that was a kickoff then. And now this is sort of a second kickoff, new wave in the twenty-first century. And the show as then supposed to expand to 100 paintings and go to [inaudible]. But Guggenheim [inaudible], back in November they found out they were embezzled out of \$600,000 euros. They fired the director and the chief financial officer. And there's a turmoil there. So it wasn't going to go to [inaudible]. They've got to get it straightened out. And there's a new director coming in. So then

they offered it to Peggy Guggenheim Museum in Italy, and it was too small.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Too small.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: And at the same time Giorgio Merucio, curator who did the big Rome show with me, came and said he wants to do a major realist show in Milan at the Piazza Real. And it was going to be a hundred paintings starting with Edward Hopper.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Coming through the photorealists as a nucleus. And going forward to the present, all the artists that were influenced by the photorealists. And we ended up changing that to actually starting with Andy Warhol and the pop artists. That's—Postmodern realists—and go forward. Then he called me and said that they're doing an Edward Hopper retrospective that's going to [inaudible] to the timeframe, and he's going to Brescia. Can he have the Guggenheim's show as a nucleus? But the timing didn't work out, and the people that lent to Guggenheim didn't want to let the paintings stay in Europe for up to six or eight months, and then show. So that came apart. And we reconstituted a whole brand-new show going to Brescia. In the meantime Krakow, Poland, started. And they're happening there. And so some of the things that are going to be in there show that ends in September are going to go on to Brescia. And I'm just wheeling and dealing and moving all these things around, and trying to figure it out. There's not that many paintings. And a lot of the people have lent their paintings so many times that they said, Louis, if it's the Met in New York, yes, I'm going to lend it. But I'm not lending otherwise anymore. Now it's really tough. But I do with each time and have fun doing it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's interesting because it'll open right at the tail end of the Biennale, just as you know the Biennale is closing, you know, the Brescia exhibition will open.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Oh. No, the Brescia's supposed to be in November.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. It overlaps a little bit. Because we were there a year ago—a couple of years ago.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: I don't even know which museum they're doing it at in Brescia.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, there's one called the Santa Giulia, which is a combination of a couple of old churches in a monastery that's great. It's a great venue, and there was a show two years ago called "America," that was all nineteenth century art work, you know. Everybody from—

LOUIS K. MEISEL: The luminists, the Hudson River School.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Luminists, Hudson River School up to [Frederic] Remington and all those people and Andy Wyeth at the end. And that was actually the same kind of a story where a core exhibition was added to by a show that was traveling from the Wadsworth Atheneum. So it was another kind of marriage like that [inaudible].

LOUIS K. MEISEL: That's right. Jack Carrot was there when I did my first Photorealism show very early on at the Wadsworth. The show in Poland is going to be called "The American Dream." And it's art, music, literature, science. And the painting part of it is Photorealism. And "The American Dream" is what the Polish people were aware of but was inaccessible from 1949 to '89 when they were behind the Iron Curtain. And one of the big icons to them was Harley Davidson, which of course Tom Blackwell painted Harley Davidsons, and Ron Kleemann's racing cars and Charlie Bell's games and toys and happiness and things that they didn't have.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In that show what will be the music? Will it be rock and roll, jazz?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes, it'll be that. Woodstock. There'll be a Woodstock room. When you enter the museum, there's going to be blacktop road with a dotted line in the middle Route 66 was going to be on the road. And Jack Kerouac is going to be—a lot of literature from the hippies and the beatnik times and whatever. And then the paintings in one gallery will be the photorealists.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sounds great. Maybe it would be a good moment to interrupt the conversation. It seems like it's arrived at a opportune moment for us to do that. It's eleven o'clock. So we'll organize another time. Okay?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. Great Thanks.

[END OF TRACK AAA_meisel09_5507_r.]

This is James McElhinney speaking with Louis K. Meisel at his home on Prince Street in New York City, on—what is today? It's Wednesday, the 6th—the day after Cinco de Mayo—2009.

Were there a lot of people out on the streets last night at the Cinco de Mayo festivities?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: You know I never even noticed. Where was I last night? I was here. Oh, I went to Lincoln Center. So I was up at Lincoln Center for a concert. And then I had a Chinese dinner up there, and I didn't see what was going on in SoHo.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's like the Mexican St. Patrick's Day.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes, right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Everybody's Mexican.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Well, Cinco de Mayo and May Day—oh, May Day was earlier. This is Cinco de Mayo. May Day was May 1st. And then May 7th is my daughter-in-law's birthday. So I've got to remember that. And I remember that because there was a book called *Seven Days in May* [Fletcher Knebel and Charles W. Bailey.], do you remember that book?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The movie [1964] starred Burt Lancaster. Yes.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes. Anyway.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you ever deal with artists from Latin America?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: I had one artist whose name was Jorge Sanchez, Dr. Jorge Sanchez, who was from Dominican Republic.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

LOUIS K. MEISEL: And he was one of the earliest artists I represented, and he was a surrealist. He died very early, like in the early '70s. He was a doctor. When he came to America, he chose to be an artist. He smoked like crazy, and he died of lung cancer.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's terrible.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: And aside from that, I have never had an artist from south of Huntsville, Alabama, that I can think of.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How about collectors?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: No collectors from South America or Latin America at all ever. And interestingly enough, not that means anything else, but I've only sold one work of art to a black person in 45 years of art dealing, and it was Sidney Poitier.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow! And what did he buy?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: He bought one of Susan's paintings actually, my wife.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, really.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: This was back in 1967 or '8. And it was fun. And then just, you know, it's basically I would have to say that at least 50 percent of who I sell art to are Jews from New York, Michigan, California, a lot from Europe. Probably half.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Any African-American artists?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: I have not represented any African-American artists at all ever. I did collect a couple of them: Alvin Loving was an artist that I was involved with.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: And now I'm losing my mind. What's his name? I had a couple of his. Cartoonish kind of guy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Colescott

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Colescott, Bob Colescott. Yes. Colescott was my favorite of that duo.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: His history paintings.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes, yes. Even the earlier ones. Like the one I had was of a black guy looking in a window to rob a white girl or something like that. It was all racial stuff. And it was actually cartoony and kind of fun. So Colescott was one. Loving I knew and was involved with. Let me just think, who else? We did a lot of printing for Romare Bearden when I had Editions Lassiter & Meisel. That's something you don't even know about. In the mid-'70s, Susan was doing a lot of prints. And she went out to the New York Institute of Technology to work with them there. And there was a man named Norman Lassiter. And he was one of the finest printers around at the time. And he basically said, "You tell me anything you want me to do in the way of multiples and prints, and I'll do it." He said, "One guy asked if I could print on running water, two colors in register." He said, "And I did it."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow!

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Now, what it was is there was a convention, and the guy was in the printing business. And what Norman did is he set up this tank that was sort of like a race tank looking thing. Probably as wide as this desk, three feet. And it went along ten feet. Came around and came back. And he had a pump moving it along so it was moving very slowly. And on one side he had two silk-screens, or screens for screen printing. And you print with very strong grease-based paint. It was grease almost. And the water was moving very slowly. And he hit it first with a squeegee with the red centered logo. And then as it moved past the next one, he hit it again with the black out part of the logo. And then guy's logo floated out on this tank. [Inaudible] came around, it was filtered out, and printed again. He printed on running water.

Anyway, he and I started with Susan a company called Editions Lassiter & Meisel. And we started making these major prints for the photorealists. Charlie Bell, Audrey Flack, Tom Blackwell, Ralph Goings. The prints ran between 80 and 150 colors. Norman built a table that could print a seven-by-nine-foot print. We printed on masonite, we printed on paper. Did plenty of work for Bearden and Richard Anuskiewicks and Paul Jenkins. And Andy Warhol actually. We did a lot of work for Rupert Smith who was printing for Andy Warhol. And that went on for about five years or six years. It wasn't profitable. I supported it. It took the photorealists somewhere between a year and two years to actually finish up making one of these giant prints. When they were finished on masonite in 80 colors, it almost looked like a painting. And they were framed like paintings. So that was it. And I forget what I got into this with Lassiter & Meisel. Oh, we were talking about Loving and Bearden. That's how I knew Romare Bearden. So I had some of his work that we traded for printing, too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So Lassiter was doing mostly—was it mostly litho?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Screen printing. Screen printing was the specialty.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Silk-screen. So it was a photo—

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Well, it wasn't silk at the time anymore. It was a monofilament. But it was screen printing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Serigraphy.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So now in the day, in the age of the giclée, what do you see?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Well, when you make a giclée print of a photorealist painting, which there have been, I don't know that there is any of the artist's art in it, other than the fact that he gave them an image which they transferred to a digital machine and printed it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: On the other hand, you know, you have somebody like Chuck Close, and his entire career is about how to make art. And I don't know if I told you in my first session about that symposium at a university where the discussion was: What will Chuck Close paint next?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, you didn't.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: And I basically said that's the wrong question. It's *how* will Chuck Close paint next? Because that's what he's been doing for the last 40 years, is finding a new way of painting, whether it be airbrush or fingerprinting or dot sprays or every kind of print process known to mankind going, you know, of every sort to spitballs and crosshatching. You know, you know what Chuck's about.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Ink, pen. How will Chuck Close paint next? So Chuck, of course, has used giclée, and it's just one more method in what he's done. Some of them have much more hands-on, and in my mind is a much more legitimate work of art, as opposed to just a mere reproduction. Richard Estes did— Incidentally, the Photorealism which is what I'm specializing in, the photorealists haven't really been printmakers or been known for their printmaking. And Chuck, of course, has gone beyond Photorealism, and Chuck's prints are worth a great deal, and they're very valuable works of art. Whereas Estes did probably 30 screen prints in many colors, but the technicians cut the screens. He oversaw. He approved. But he didn't cut the screens like artists used to do. You understand. I guess you know how screen printing is done.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I used to be a screen printer when I was in art school.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes, so you know the whole thing. So he didn't make them. And the same thing with a lot of the photorealists with lithographs. When Blackwell and Kleemann and the others did lithographs, they didn't work on the stone in reverse and do all that sort of stuff. The technicians did it, and they approved it and whatever. So somewhere around the '70s, going into the '80s, it became acceptable that anything made in an artist's studio or under his supervision was a work of art by that artist. When Damien Hirst had 200 pieces made for his auction in November, they were made by 65 assistants. They were knockoffs of his dot sprays—of his dot paintings—and his spin paintings and all that sort of stuff. They're legitimate. They're Hirst. They're signed by Hirst. Maybe they're ten or 20 years after the fact, and maybe they're made by other people. We accept that. So the same thing with the giclée. If the artist says I want you to do this, and somebody produces it, whether he touches it or not other than to sign it, the art world accepts the legitimate work of art. I don't see it that way.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, there's a huge chasm between someone like Thomas Kinkade, you know, who adds a touch of color at the end, and, you know, a person whom we might deem to be a serious artist in the way that you and I would agree.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: You know to me an artist makes something.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Maybe at a point in time they were called craftsmen. But they made a painting or they made a sculpture or they made a print, and they worked with their hands and their brain and their mind and hand-eye coordination, and they created something. So what we're talking about, all of this printmaking today, it just goes off on a tangent and, you know— But that's my opinion. I also like what the photorealists do, that takes between months and a year to do a painting because of the skill and the discipline and, you know, the knowledge and the technical ability and everything that they do. That means something to me. But apparently it doesn't mean much to people at the most avant-garde level of the art world—like what you would see at the New Museum down the street here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So you're saying that you want work that's actually made by hand and that uses analog materials like pigment and oil or acrylic emulsion.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Or of some material. Whatever material they want to use as long as they're creating something and doing something. And there's very few people in the world that can do that nowadays. Or anytime in the history. As a matter of fact, apparently in the 80's they decided it wasn't politically correct to demand that of artists because so few could then be artists. And why shouldn't everybody be allowed to be an artist? Michael Branson—was it Michael Branson? Now I can't even remember. And again, I'll find that for you at some point. There was an article in the *New York Times* by the top critic at the time back in the '80s. And the article was entitled "Is Quality a Word Whose Time Has Passed?" Or has gone. And the theory was that quality refers to a certain level of art that almost nobody can do. It's not politically correct. And it eliminates too many people. And we have to be more democratic about who can be an artist. It was ridiculous. I have that article someplace.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's like saying that it's not PC to refuse to eat rocks because they're not advertising. I mean it's—you know if you're going to put it in your mouth and chew it and eat it, it's got to be—you have to have a little encouragement.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It has to appeal to you on some level. I interviewed one of your neighbors who stated that he was very strongly approving of the idea that anyone could be an artist.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: One of my neighbors?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mr. [Jeffrey] Deitch.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Oh, yes? Okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But that's, you know, that's a point of view that's out there.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Anything that anybody makes: If they want to call it art and say that they're an artist, they have a right to do that. But that gets into a whole other world where we could get really into something here. I spend a lot of time with my brother. He was Yale and Cornell in the '60s. I went to high school in the '50s. I come from the hippie—not the hippie—the beatnik and Abstract Expressionism days. And I'm sort of on the right side of center, and he's say over on the left side. And we have lots of arguments about, you know, all that sort of stuff. And now there's a big issue in this United States as to what's going on and what's good and what's bad and what's not. But that's not anything for here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, unless it's important for you to read it into the record.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: You know, is photorealism or any realism today retrogressive? I don't even—it's too hard to get into. I mean once I get into it, I can get into it—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I'm going to try to not ask a Charlie Rose question [inaudible].

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Ask anything you want because I don't care. I mean whatever I say I'm responsible for.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You know it's about what you have to say. But this can be a slightly longish question. A lot of people back in the day spoke about Abstract Expressionism, the scale of it, the wall painting idea, as having come out of the '30s and the WPA and the Depression. It wasn't easel painting. It wasn't just easel painting for wealthy people to hang in their apartments. It was—it had a public ambition of scale. So there was an idea that there was a political aspect to Abstract Expressionism. It was sort of more to the left. Some people, a lot of people, have argued since the '70s and earliest that the return to Realism was somehow also political. In your view, is that true?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: I know all of the artists. So there was no political aspect to anything that they did. I mean the abstract expressionists were a group. I mean they met, they had parties, they had brawls together. They did things together. They named their movement. They had a doctrine, they had whatever it is. And it's very possible that they had political ambition, you know, that politics was part of it. That is definitely not part of any aspect of Photorealism. None of them are politically motivated people. None of them seem to express opinions right or left or center. They also don't drink, they don't smoke, they don't do drugs. They stay married. They're very stable. It's a completely different kind of personality from certainly the pop artists. And, yes, the abstract expressionists. They don't have the time to go to bars and play around with each other and get into arguments. They don't go off on summer vacation together. The photorealists, when I knew them in the early years, when they could, worked eight, ten, 12 hours a day, five, six days a week, and they loved doing it. And there was nothing in their mind that I'm making a political statement about anything.

When Blackwell painted motorcycles, he said, "I was looking for something that couldn't be painted without the use of the camera. I went to a motorcycle show early on in my career. I saw this magnificent chrome. I started taking pictures of it. And I realized that if I move a quarter of an inch, right or left or any way, it all changes. So that if I want to paint it exactly the way I see it, I have to photograph it. So what was Blackwell. Ron Kleemann was interested in the way man puts his mark or his form of graffiti on things: labels, logos, tags. And the racing cars that he started painting, it was not because he liked racing cars particularly but because they were covered with decals and logos and manufacturers' symbols. Audrey Flack was also interested in shiny things and mirrors and pretty things that she could also paint using the photograph—needed the photograph. But she wasn't interested in motorcycles. But she saw her dressing table: the Jolie Madame perfume and the Chanel and all the things that were on the dressing table. And she started painting that. McLean, everybody thinks he loves horses; he didn't. It became an interesting subject to paint. Horses have been painted all through history, and he had some horse magazines. He said, Let me take a picture of that and blow it up. Or let me just take that and work from the horse magazine picture. And he did that. Goings—did I tell you about Goings, how he did his first pickup truck?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, yes.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: That was a Sacramento show. By accident he saw the pickup truck. He did it—OK Harris. OK. Ivan said give me a dozen of those; I'll make you a star. Then he got interested in the diner and the diner interior and the still life. Again, there's no politics involved in any of that. Chuck Close? Chuck Close was painting big, big [inaudible] painted abstract, colorful stuff when he was at Yale. He made a conscious decision: I have to break with everything I know, everything I learned, everything I liked, to see if I can go forward and do something. And he hit upon—first he did a nude that was 22 feet long. The same as his early black-and-whites.

Then he did the first face. And he said, "That's what I'm going to paint. I just need a subject now where I don't ever have to decide what I'm going to paint from now on for the rest of my life. It's going to be faces from here up, and it can be different people. But it's going to be faces, and it's going to be people I know, and then it's going to be how well I paint it each time. John Kacere, who paints the behinds and the fronts with the panties. He went to a show with Ivan Karp again. It was a Mel Ramos show, and it was the one where he was doing the fashion illustrations. And there was a circular cutout showing the panties and crotch on a girl. And Ivan said, "Boy, if somebody painted just that for me, that would be great." And John's whole career stemmed from that Mel Ramos painting. Again, an accidental kind of thing.

Who else? Let's see. Kleemann, Blackwell. I told you Flack. Bell. Charlie Bell was interested in painting colorful things that had to do with how light works: whether it reflects off a surface, refracts and diffuses through it, or projects from within it. Over the years he came up with different ideas. He also wanted to paint still life ten times life size and bigger. Way beyond what anybody else had ever done. So you could inspect. Like if you look at the marbles over there. So the first one was the tin toys. And it had the light reflected off the tin toys, giant tin toys. The second group was the gumball machines and how light refracts through this globe and bounces around on the gumballs. The third series was the marbles where you're getting all sorts of effects of light going through it, mixing colors. And then finally the pinball machines where the light projects. And if you turn the light off over one of his pinball machines and you just have some ambient light, it'll look like you're in a pinball parlor, and the light is actually reflecting and coming through. And how did he do that? Old Masters' technique of 20 transparent layers of color on top of a white ground so the light actually goes down through, hits the white, and bounces back. So that's Charlie. They all came up with subject matter to give them a challenge, to see can I do this? And they all had a lot of different aspects. Bottom line is no politics involved. Nobody even thought of that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or spoke of it.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: OR spoke of it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Would tell us a little about the sculptors you've worked with?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: The three real sculptors that were called Verist sculptors that were shown along with the photorealists were Duane Hanson, John De Andrea, and Jud Nelson. There was also Fumio Yoshimura who worked in wood, carved wood, made motorcycles and flowers. But it didn't have that same realistic illusion of Realism because it was all wood and unpainted. There was another artist named Adams who made furniture, chairs and things out of wood. But they didn't last very long. They moved on to other things. And the ones that did last were the three I mentioned. Jud Nelson shared a studio with Chuck Close. He was also shown with Bykert Gallery. Now he had great, great promise. You've seen his marbles here. He carved marbles out of toilet paper and bread and ice cream pops. And he did two figures: One of them is here, the figure of my wife. There was a period after he went through a number of galleries where I supported him and bought most of his work. He worked in bronze. He cast a black garbage bag, filled up garbage bag. And we used to have a big joke. We'd have it in the gallery here in the middle of the gallery. When the garbage men would come along in the street, I'd say, "Here, can you pick that one up, too, and take it out of here?" And they'd come running in and go to grab it, and it was a bronze that weighed 600 pounds. [McElhinney laughs.] But very [inaudible] Realism. He started off carving Styrofoam. And he started off maybe doing a series of six of each thing that he did. But his problem was that he had a real hard time getting along with dealers, wanted to share what he did. And he also had a very, very inflated idea of what his work was worth. And was so far overpriced in the early years that it basically couldn't be sold. He's a terrific guy. But just very stubborn and very difficult, from Minnesota. Now he's living in Florida. I don't know what he's doing, but I have a lot of his work, and a lot of museums have his work.

Duane Hanson and John De Andrea were the ones who were figurative. John De Andrea is by far the most realistic figurative sculptor that ever lived on the face of the earth, anywhere, anytime. He's now using bronze and painting it, and it's virtually indistinguishable from an actual person. And he's still active. He's basically only one of the verist sculptors still working. Duane Hanson died about ten years ago. They both worked with all sorts of dangerous materials in their earlier days: vials and plastics and all sorts of materials that they used to cast their work. Apparently Duane Hanson got a lymphoma type cancer from that. And he did go to bronze at one point later on. His specialty was sort of middle to low-class people. Everybody's seen as tourists and, you know, his fat lady lying on a chaise lounge and whatever. His detail wasn't anywhere near what De Andrea's was, but you had the illusion that it was. When you walked into a room and you look across at it, it had that illusion, and it was as effective. I compare Hanson to Richard Estes as I would compare De Andrea to maybe Meniel or Spence who are painting nowadays. Estes isn't really detailed when you get up close to it. But he gives you the illusion of great detail.

I don't know if I explained before how he would paint a telephone pole with maybe five strokes going from black to white with a few grays in between. And when you stood at the viewing distance, it looked like a fully blended telephone pole in the street. Whereas Goings would spend a whole day doing that same telephone pole and blending it perfectly around so you'd see no brushstrokes. Well, that the same thing with Hanson and De

Andrea. When you got up close to De Andrea or Hanson, then you would see the great difference in the detail. The Hanson would look like maybe a store mannequin at some decent level. So that's the story about those three artists. And as I say, De Andrea is the only one still working today. I'm representing him, and he's doing very nicely. They're all getting old, all the photorealists, the early guys.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So would you also include Chuck Close in that because when you come up, you know, his early work you can see, you know, thumbprints in it.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Well, no, the earliest work that Chuck did, the eight black-and-whites, are as photographic as anything you will ever see in Photorealism. And then he began moving on. He did some color that was also on that level. And then he started finding different techniques; thumbprint was one of them. And, for the record, for what it's worth, and for the amusement of it, he did one that he called "the dick print." And you can actually—when I'm telling you that—you'll see it looks like a thumbprint, but it's not a thumbprint. He made it with his penis—tip of it. It's a little bit funny to [inaudible]. You may want to edit that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, no. It's part of the history of art. Where is that piece?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: I don't have any idea. I don't know which one it was. I remember it and him telling me about it. You know you could do it with the tip or your nose, or you could do it with your elbow, too. Had to do with the pressure. And again, it was always about decision-making. With the thumbprints, it was a matter of how hard he pressed. The hard pressure was a black, and the bare touch was a white. And he would look at the grid square that he was referring to, and he would decide what kind of pressure it was going to be. So when you look at them, you know, up close, it's not all very perfect. And some are darker, and some are lighter. But in the white areas it was just a quick touch, and in the dark areas he pressed hard.

When he was doing the crosshatching, he would have 20 lines from a pen and ink in the grid square. And the situation was I'd look at the grid square and decide: Is it a one, is it a 15, is it a 20, it is 18? And I'd go ahead, and I would do it. And when it was the dot sprays that he was doing, there was a matter of is it one or one, two, three, four, five? Or one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten? Which would be black. And one would be just hsst! And it would be a little bit of almost white. And then there was the gray tones. And again, it was a decision-making process.

Back in those days it was a lot of fun figuring that. And then when he made his spitball or whatever he'd call it, the soggy paper, you know, he would have 20 vats, and they would go from white paper to black paper, and in between were all the grays. And he would look at the grid square and say, This is a 16, and he would press that and do the thing, you know. Very interesting stuff.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Let's—

LOUIS K. MEISEL: I'll tell you one more thing with Chuck. Did I tell you about the golf series last time?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Okay. The one of Susan you see over here, up there above. That started before he had his medical situation. And he said he was on the golf course with a friend playing golf one day, and, well, he doesn't play golf. He was just on the cart and watching it. And he said, you know, he said, "The first shot is sort of in the general direction of where you're going. And as you get closer, you get more precise as to where you're going to get into that hole." He said, "So what I did, in each grid square I kind of put the basic color that I thought we were going towards. And as I went on and added more colors up, I got more precise to what exactly was going to be the color in that square until the last one. And I called it the golf series." And again, no politics involved. Go ahead.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No politics in golf. Could we talk a little bit about the operations of the gallery?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you opened your own space in the—

LOUIS K. MEISEL: I opened Madison Avenue in '69-'68, '68.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: '68.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: I think it was '68, yes. And then in '72, I bought the space here, and I opened here in '73.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what did the business look like? Just as an operation.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: It seems that every time I was timing it wrong. When I opened in the late '60s, there was a

recession going on. When I got down to SoHo, there was a recession going on. [McElhinney laughs.] But I didn't know it anyway. The gallery on Madison Avenue was at 1022 Madison Avenue, and it was about 200 square feet. So it's not much larger than where we're sitting right here. But it was on Seventy-ninth Street and Madison Avenue, right on the ground floor, all in the window. It was \$600 a month. Arnie Besser, who was one of my real starts at the time and is in my first book, said, "I'll be your partner, I'll give you a thousand dollars to help you open." So I had a thousand dollars, and I took his thousand dollars, and I opened with two thousand dollars. That's my whole career began there. I paid the month's rent and a month security. It was 1200. I put down deposits on electricity and telephone. And I had \$500 left, and I put that in *New York Times* advertising. That was in September that year. By December I'd sold \$100,000 worth of art, on which I probably made forty or thirty-five thousand dollars, and I was on the way.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you were a one-man operation at that time?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: One man. Now Arnie had a lover, a roommate, Duke. And the deal was that Duke was going to work there three days a week: Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. My mother was in the gallery on Tuesdays. And I had a publishing company at the time, and I was doing art publishing, a lot of work. I was in the gallery on Saturdays. But I established the gallery. I decided who was going to be shown, what was going to be done. That was just for the first year or so. So that's how it began.

When I came down here, I opened with one woman, Helene Seaman, as my assistant, and one man, Gerard Morrell, as the guy that hung the paintings and, you know, moved things around. And there were three of us in this space in SoHo. I opened the gallery down here with \$30,000. That's kind of unheard of nowadays. But I was able to do it. I rented the gallery for 1400 a month. And I bought this loft at the time for \$50,000. To buy the loft for \$50,000, I had 20 in cash that I'd save up. I had a Hopper drawing that I got 10,000 for. I had a Rothko watercolor that he gave me for working for him in the '60s. I got 10,000 for that. And I had a Rivers Dutch Masters, probably one of the best I ever saw, about a four-foot wide Dutch Master; I got 10,000 for that. That was my 50 grand, and I opened—I bought the loft, and I rented the gallery, and I opened. And I opened with the Spizer Collection. Did we discuss that?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We did discuss the Spizer Collection.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: So we opened with the Spizer Collection. It was Photorealism. Got a lot of publicity. Not a lot of good reviews particularly. But notations, you know. It was there and also SoHo was very young. There were probably only maybe eight or ten or 12 galleries at the time. And everybody was rushing down to SoHo to see what was going on. So we got a lot of coverage. It was kind of gutsy to open that gallery down here with the last penny I had in my life. With a show that was not for sale for two months. So it wasn't until two months after it opened that I was able to start selling. And then it just took off. And we were selling a lot of art. Right about that time Documenta in Germany had happened. The French and German and British dealers were coming in looking for paintings. I must say that I didn't sell them a lot. I kind of felt that they should stay here in America. Other photorealist dealers sold everything they had for three years; they went off to Europe. And I ended up buying a lot of it back because most of those people were buying because it was a hot, fashionable thing.

In 1973 Charles Saatchi sat in my office here and bought Estes from me and Photorealism, and began his entire collecting career with Photorealism. That was kind of exciting although he was a young guy, I was a young guy. And it was just very nice and fun and friendly. When he offered that first-rate collection to the Tate, they turned it down, and he got pissed off and sold it. And then he bought Pattern and Decoration, which was another movement that Holly Solomon was dealing with. And when he filled up that collection with the best of what he could get, he offered that to the Tate, and they turned it down. And he got pissed off and sold it. And then finally the ADC offered him six Julian Schnabels. And I guess they did a Julian Schnabel show, and he was accepted. This Iraqi Jewish advertising kid was all of a sudden part of the—And of course he went on to surpass everybody. He's probably the biggest collector/dealer we've ever seen. And, you know, if he looked at something, everybody wanted to buy it. Anyway, every now and then I see Charles. The last things he bought from me was Malcolm Morley, probably 1982 in September—October. So the last thing time I sold Charles Saatchi anything, it was a Malcolm Morley. And it was through a gallery uptown.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Other than Spizer, who was your first big client?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Well, I would say that Spizer was really the first. He came to me through my cousin who was working at his law firm in the early '70s. And I told you the whole story.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: So you know what that's about. And it was on the commission that I made from him, plus money that I'd saved, that I actually opened the gallery down here. I guess early on there was a collector named Bill Jaeger and Julie Litvak; they owned an insurance company. And the third partner was Howard—and I'm trying to remember because Howard's father was one of the biggest pop art collectors. I can't believe I'm losing my

mind, and I'm forgetting these names. But I'll remember.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In New York?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In New York?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was a collector in New York?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: He was a collector. He owned an insurance company. He and Robert Scull were big competitors. I can't believe I can't remember the name. Anyway, Julie and Bill were junior partners in that firm, along with Howie. And they decided they wanted to be art collectors, too. And they started with Photorealism. And they actually came to my publishing office before I opened down here to demand that I sell them the next two Ron Kleemanns. And one of them got a taxicab painting by Kleemann called *Scull's Angels [Draggin' Sculls, 1973]*, and it was one of Scull's taxicabs. And the other one got a fire engine, which was really one of the icons of Photorealism. And they went on through the '70s buying on a regular basis. And there were a number of people, but nobody that I'd call giant and big.

In the '80s I had three big collectors that were million-dollar a year or more, and that was a lot back then. One of the was Gene Klein, who owned the San Diego Chargers. He was from California. Unfortunately he died of cancer by 1990. The second was a man named John Belloni, who was a builder in Geneva; and he actually built probably the best Photorealism collection in the world. And the third one was a man named Neil Wiseman, who was a hedge fund—a very early hedge fund—genius, who was a top producer probably three out of five years back in the '80s. And he also focused on the photorealists. But only five or six, and he would buy in depth. Most people would say, "Who are the top ten? I want one by each." Neil said I want Estes and I want Goings and I want—you know, there were like four artists, and he collected them in depth. He eventually moved up to Picasso and [Fernand] Léger and [Georges] Braque. Gene Klein died. John Belloni got sick with leukemia at the end of the '90s, and I bought most of his collection back, some of which I still have today. So they come and go.

They were big people, and they'd last for two or three years or four or five years. Sometimes they finish up, and they have what they consider a complete representation, and they go on to other things. There are all sorts of reasons why people stop. Sometimes they simply run out of room, and they can't cope with the idea of having paintings in storage. Never can tell. So at any given time you have a number of top collectors. And right now with me it's more that there's a general group of maybe 20 or 30 that will come in and buy once a year. And then a hundred others that buy once, and you never see them again. I try to avoid selling to those people because I really want to get to know the collectors that I deal with and know that they're going to come back to me if they ever want to sell. Or that they're going to continue buying. Or that they'll be ready to lend art whenever I ask. There's another major collector who's been going on and on recently, for years; his name is Rick and Monica Segel. They have a company called Seavest. And they're one of the biggest realist collectors in the world. They probably have 600 realist paintings. Which encompasses all of American realism and probably a lot of European realism.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So would you say the majority of your collectors are in, you know, the New York area? Or do you have—

LOUIS K. MEISEL: I would say that— It sounds like we've got Jeffrey Link over here, which is nice. How can I help you?

JEFFREY LINK: I first read your book in Pratt College in Brooklyn in 1968—'69?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: No, no, no.

MR. LINK: When did the first Photorealism book come out?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Nineteen eighty.

MR. LINK: Nineteen eighty. So then I would have first seen Charles Bell's paintings.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes, you saw them here.

MR. LINK: I saw there here.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: But look, Jeffrey, I say that about 20 percent are from an area where they could come into the gallery, whether it be New Jersey, Connecticut, New York.

MR. LINK: They look them up. The reason why they deal with you is because they look them up.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Now they do.

MR. LINK: The reason why they deal with him is because they know that he created all of this.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes, with the books.

MR. LINK: You are a catalyst.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: The books.

MR. LINK: Well, it was first the books, yes.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: So 50 percent is American, 20 percent from the area, and the other 50 percent worldwide. And by the way, I was told years ago that there were 250 real collectors in America and 250 in the whole rest of the world put together. And I would say that that's probably still true, of the real dyed-in-the-wool collectors that are here all the time and have to continue with contemporary—not Photorealism, but contemporary art. Contemporary art. I mean you know *ARTnews* has the 200 top collectors. Well, of course, that covers all things, including antiques and whatever. Antique art. But when you look at it and you see that the top ten collectors all have the same ten artists—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, [inaudible].

LOUIS K. MEISEL: That's not what I call collecting. I mean you come into this loft, and you see a range of things that you will not see in any other place anyplace else in the world. Combining the pinups with that—

MR. LINK: Did they go upstairs?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: No, they didn't see the watercolors yet. Stamos you won't see. I mean I've got a lot of my abstract expressionist stuff in storage because the Photorealism is what I'm about. But most collectors that I deal with, they're collectors of unique. They don't relate to anybody else's collection. It's their own personal intelligence and whatever they've chosen. And you know right away when you go in and you see—back in the '80s you saw the Schnabel and the Salle and the Fischl and Cucchi and the Clemente and whatever. They all had the same thing. And you know that these aren't collectors. These just people that are following what other people are doing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's fashion.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're a passionate collector yourself. Towards the end of our conversation last time, you spoke about how you collect everything from, you know, the pinups to air fresheners to [inaudible].

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Well, the air fresheners, the pinups.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, yes.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: The general store collection.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, the general store.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: And the ice cream scoops and [inaudible] and the Keith Murray English Deco pottery also. And in the Hamptons I have—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And the dirigible hangars.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: What?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And dirigible hangars.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Right.

[Side conversation.]

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes. Collections. My first collection was scuttle cups, which is English and German shaving mugs of a very specific kind. And Tiffany Favrile glass. And tiny toys. And modern age. There's all sorts of stuff that interested me from time to time. At one point I was the biggest dealer in the world in antique gambling

devices. And I had 200 slots machines up here, going back to the 1800s into the 1900s, 1920s and '30s.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In working order?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: All in working order. I was the biggest dealer, biggest collector, with my company, Urban Archaeology. I think I have the distinction of selling the most expensive gambling device ever. It was a \$125,000 1880s triple single-wheel slot machine made by Callie Brothers, and I sold it to the Sands Hotel in Atlantic City for their museum. It was \$125,000. I don't think anything ever cost that much. Maybe. I don't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Urban Archaeology was here in—

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Urban Archaeology was on Spring Street.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: It's now on Franklin Street. Urban Archaeology specialized in buying architectural parts of buildings, both interior and exterior. There were arcade machines and other devices. At one point I had six pool tables up here, from a Brunswick Monarch to a French billiards to all sorts of billiards tables. Then there was another time when I got into player pianos, and I had five or six player pianos up here. Then there was something called an orchestrion, which looked to most people like a player piano, but there were like eight or ten instruments in it, and drums and cymbals and flutes and whatever. And there was even a machine that was a player violin, it was called a violano; they go for a hundred thousand dollars or more nowadays. So that was something else I was into. But there were certain things that just took up my whole life. And I moved on. And I kept a sample or two and whatever. But the main thing that has always been my collecting focus has been paintings and watercolors.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why watercolors?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: They are paintings also. And there was a lot of skill. Well, we'll see the watercolors today after you're finished, and you'll get a hint of what that's about. Works on paper. They were just, you know, small gems of American art. All through history.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The historic artwork—

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Bye.

UNKNOWN WOMAN: Bye-bye.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: So I mean the collecting has been about art. I was going say, [inaudible], I have a sculpture for you. I have about 20 or 30 sculptures, including a 35-foot-high Fletcher Benton, a 16-foot Kenneth Nelson, and a major Peter Regginato and Audrey Flack and Shiva goddess and Armand sliced statues and stuff like that. So that's what my sculpture collection is. Pretty hard for anybody to really collect serious sculpture in New York and keep it in the house.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I guess because of the size of the piece and how hard it is to move.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: It's the size. Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It occupies a lot of space.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: I mean, you know, where are you going to put a 35-foot-high Fletcher Benton in New York City? Even if you have a duplex with 20-foot ceilings. You can't do it. And you're not getting it up on the terrace.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or in the door.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Or in the door.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So of all the artists that you've shown over the years, what would you say is the quotient between men and women?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Did I tell you a story about the Guerrilla Girls?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You told me a little about the Guerrilla Girls.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: About waking up one morning and having a poster with my name at the top of the list? I had 40 percent women at that point in my gallery. Audrey of course is my leading lady and always has been— besides my wife who really tops it all. But I had 40 percent women. And Leo Castelli and Mary Boone had none.

Over the years, through attrition, a lot of them have fallen by the wayside. But right now I represent a woman named Raphaella Spence, and I think that she goes beyond anything that any other Photorealists have done since I began dealing in Photorealism. And her latest work is about aerial views of cities. Did I show you any of them?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You spoke about her. She's in Italy, right?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes. If you would like, I will show you some of the things, and we'll get to it in a minute. I can't see that online there. Anyway, she was 23 when she walked into the gallery on Madison Avenue—on Fifty-seventh Street. And my partner Frank said that I have a young lady here whose 23, and I think that you should see her work. I think you're going to like it. And this is funny. And you know without seeing the picture and not knowing what it's about. He said to me, "But even if you don't like the work that much, can we still represent her?" Do you want to turn that off for a minute while I show you something? Or do you want to keep it continuing?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We can, yes. Just hold on, hold on.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Actually we can keep it going because we'll just keep talking while we're doing this because I'm going to show you something that's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're going to look online for a minute.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes. If you'll come around here and just look at this for a minute. Let's see if I can show you this. Documents. Just so when I start talking, you'll know what it's about. Documents. My pictures. And let's see. Spence. Where is Spence? Up here. Okay. The reason he said, Would we be able to represent her even if you don't like the work is because that's her.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, she's gorgeous.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Okay? Okay. So that's Raphaella. Now this girl works 12 hours a day, seven days a week, and let's see if I can find— I want to show you. There's a late painting. No, that's not the one.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How large are these pictures?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Well, I'm trying to find one with her in it—the latest one that she just sent me a picture of with her in it. So you can get the scale. They're maybe six feet, whatever. Damn! I'm looking for the New York paintings. Well, okay. That's one of the recent paintings.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Inaudible.]

LOUIS K. MEISEL: That's about six feet across.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: This is Zurich.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Almost all are taken from the church— Let's see, this— Oh, that's it, yes. Taken from a church steeple she went up in. This one here is a painting of Sarasota, Florida, which is going to be the cover of a catalog for a show in Sarasota in December. This one here is pretty terrific.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, yes.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: That one's in Germany. The New York paintings— This is the last New York painting she did.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They're unusual because of how they're very atmospheric. There's a lot of luminosity.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: The first one that she ever did— Now this was taken from my airplane. We took it up. And you can see the reflection on the window going on here. She even painted that in. This is the estate section of South Hampton. And that's Calvin Klein's mansion right down there. It's beyond belief what she can and does do. And she has a 36 megapixel, \$40,000 camera. She said to me, "Louis, if I can see it, I can paint it."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow!

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Okay. So this girl is far beyond what Audrey Flack was. Audrey Flack was a pioneer, and she's very important. None of them men, with the possible exception of Meniel, come close to what she's doing. She's

30 now. She's pregnant. She's going to have a baby in August. She told me it was all planned so that the baby would be in August when everybody's on vacation. And that's when everybody takes off. [McElhinney laughs.] And in September she'll be back painting again with the baby in the crib. Okay. So that's a very special woman, and she's not only one of the photorealists, she's without a doubt one of the best. And it's not just a matter of technique. There's a vision, there's a feeling. And when you stand in front of the painting, you know that there's something very special about that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just to explore a little bit more—

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Are we back on?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, yes, yes. We're on. Just having left the machine—yes, it's running. How has the gallery evolved? I mean who—what's your staff like now? How is the operation?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Downstairs in the lunchroom we have pictures of the staff all through the years. And it grew from three to about eight or ten. Right now it's me and Susan and Elizabeth and Mark and Sarah and Anna. Now it's seven. I've always kept the overhead down. I've owned the space. So instead of paying what somebody would have to pay, 50 or 60 thousand dollars a month here, the maintenance is \$3,000 a month. My staff gets very well paid, but I don't have 20 or 30 or 120. I don't have to let 25 people go like Pace did. I don't know what Gagosian's doing or what others are doing. And it's been a very stable, manageable, safe situation for 40 years. I never owed an artist a penny beyond the date that it was due. When a check comes in from a collector, on that day the check is written to the artist. It stays in the checkbook until the collector's check clears. And then it goes out immediately. I have never fallen prey to, well, let me use this money now. And when the next money comes in, I'll pay the artist, you know, pay the rent. Never had a dispute with an artist about anything. Eight artists did leave my gallery at the end of the '70s. They all became millionaires, and they all left for different reasons. All but one of them rejoined the gallery. The one that I didn't was one that I threw out because he got into too many conflicts with the other artists.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You told that story last time.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: The Gallagher thing. I've remained friends with every artist. I don't think there is any bad blood between me and any artist in the world. Including the ones that I have rejected for whatever reason. It's been just one great time for 40 years. I've had a wonderful time. Any artist that's represented by this gallery talks only to me. If they need information of technical stuff, they can talk to my Mark who does the framing and installations. They can talk to Sarah. They actually have a notebook here that each one can look at anytime that has everything. It's totally transparent. Everyone of them knows every collector that buys their work. And in most cases, wherever I was able to do it, which is 95 percent of the time, I make sure that the artists and the collectors met. That doesn't happen almost anywhere else. The dealers don't want collectors and artists to meet for all sorts of reasons. But I think it really enhances the experience of owning the work if you know the artist.

That probably started with me early on when I used to meet artists and get to know them, and then buy their paintings. And it meant a lot to me, knowing the artist, and knowing more about where this art came from and why it came from. And most of the collectors love it. You met somebody here for a moment: Jeffrey. He just loves every aspect of the collecting and know the artists and what they're doing. He sends them birthday gifts and you know congratulations on their babies. He's just you know— That really makes for somebody that's solid with you and that artist forever. And it works. And you want people that are like that. Most of the people that are out there now, bidding big numbers at the auctions, they don't care if they ever met the artist. They don't even realize that there is an artist. That's being facetious. But, you know, it's not about the artist and his life and what's important to him and what the painting's about. I've always taken a different approach to it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how do you split up the different tasks among your staff? You've got one guy that does preparing—

LOUIS K. MEISEL: All selling is done by me. When I'm not here anybody in the gallery can sell a painting. But it's usually preferable that they just show people, tell people, everything else. And then they can come and meet with me, and we can talk in depth. But the selling is done by me. I have one person who's called the registrar. She's actually my—I call her the director. She knows where every painting is, when it came in, when it went out, where it goes, when it's lent to a museum. She keeps the records on every painting, its provenance, its history, and everything else. I have one person whose name is Mark, he's in charge of all physical stuff: He hangs the shows, he frames the paintings, he packs the crates, he makes deliveries when I need him to. He's in charge of all shipping, dealing with all our shipping companies, trucking companies. Getting paintings in from artists, getting them out. That kind of thing.

Then I have a receptionist, but she also does all the advertising and all the work on the computer and most of the correspondence. The second person at the front desk—it happens to be my daughter-in-law at the point; she's French, speaks French fluently and other languages. And she's able to talk to anybody. She's very

personable and quite pretty. And handles front desk work and special projects. And basically that's it. I used to sell 200 paintings a year. Now I sell 20. The numbers are ultimately about the same at the end of the year. Best year was probably five or six million dollars. Average year was two or three million.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You said last time that there were some people you didn't sell to, or you wanted to—they weren't read to buy yet. Because you spoke about the idea of like a dead paintings or a lost painting. That was your term.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: In the beginning, when I got started, I was a young collector. People would come in, and I would say, "This may sound strange to you, but number one, I want to teach, and I want to help, and I want to create collections. So what I want you to do is I want you to decide what you feel comfortable spending this year. And then I want you to divide that by five. And I want you to spend two months looking at this array of galleries that I'm going to tell you to look at. And anything else you may come up with. And in each two-month period, I want you to select three or four or five paintings of artists that you really like. And I want you to narrow it down and finally find one painting that you want to buy. So if your budget is \$10,000, you've got \$2,000 to spend. And in two months that's what I want you to do. And sometimes they spend \$3,000, and sometimes 1500. And we'd go through a whole process, and they'd come back every Saturday or whatever day it was, and we would discuss what they'd seen. And sometimes they would buy the paintings from me, and sometimes they would buy it from someplace else. But at the end of the year they had five paintings. I said, "At the end of the year, you're going to feel like a collector. You're going to have five paintings, and you're going to have learned the process of looking and seeing and having to make a decision because you can't buy it all." One couple came in, and they said, "That's great!" And two weeks later some dealer convinced them to spend the \$10,000 on one painting. And they bought it, and they couldn't buy anything for the rest of the year. And because they couldn't buy anything, they kind of lost interest in looking. And kind of we lost them. Do you follow what I'm saying here?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of course.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: So I turn people into collectors. Some people bought six or eight paintings. Some people doubled their budget for the year. But they learned to be collectors. And it was a great amount of fun. And most of the galleries were here. There was no Chelsea at the time, there was no Tribeca. And, you know, it was a matter—I'll talk around with you. Let's go look at this. Oh, you like that abstract painting over there? Okay. Let's go look at a few abstract paintings. I know about that, too. And a good portion of their budget would be spent with me. But I never begrudged that they were buying from someplace else. And when I built a photorealist collection, I only had four or five of the top 15 at the time. I got them to buy four from OK Harris and one from Nancy Hoffmann. If they could afford Estes, or Stone, or Close, I would do that, too. So that the people that came to me built real collections and have collections to this day. If they went to OK Harris, he sold them his five or six artists and said, "Hey, you've got what you've got to get." Buy another Goings and buy another McLean and buy another one. And the same thing when a museum came to me to do a show. I told them, "Here are the 15 artists." If they went to another gallery, they'd say, Well, these are the four that you should have.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how many collectors have you launched [inaudible]?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: How many have I launched. I would say that serious collectors probably 20.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Are they still around?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes, they're all still around. Rubells. You know the Rubells. They're people who started with me. And you know they've gone on and they have their own museum [Rubell Family Collection, Miami, FL]. And they love to collect. Whether they bought anything from me in the last 30 years or not doesn't matter. We're still friends. We still have a history. They still have the paintings. Some people didn't progress beyond Photorealism, and that's all they want. And other people use it as a beginning. And then began, from going to all these galleries, that they learned how to do and not be afraid to do, they found other things, and that's fine, too. So of them did go to the expressionists. And some of them did buy Schnabel and Salle and whatever. But they bought them having had the experience of knowing how to collect. They also had Pattern and Decoration after Photorealism. And they have big collections. And some they liked more than they like the others. And some things they've sold. But those are people that are collectors. And I've had a lot of fun doing this.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you teach them how to develop an eye, how to develop taste.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How to understand. How to read what they're looking at.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: How to understand it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: And there are second- and third-rate realist galleries out there. And I would say to them, "Listen, they have galleries—you go to this gallery or go to that one, they're \$5,000. What I have now is \$50,000. And I know it's beyond you, but you can still keep buying decent Realism by galleries that have been around for a long time. And there's a place for all of it." Most of the time they say, no, I can't. How can I buy that when I saw this? I said, "So save up for a year or two and then buy one." That's all. They figure it out.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Have you ever allowed a collector to buy a piece on time?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Always. In the old days the deal was—I basically said: If you can't pay it off in a year on a monthly basis, then it's more than your rent, and you really shouldn't be buying it. But if you want to take six months or eight months or nine months and pay it off, that's fine. Take the painting home, send me checks. Back in those days it happened, and it worked. And, you know, it helped. I remember dealers doing that for me when I was really young and just starting. When Stamos started with me, giving me five dollars a month—it was five dollars a week. Remember when I told you that story? Paid five dollars a week. I did it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A lot of dealers talk about the secondary market. How large a part of that is—or how large a part of your operation is resale?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Well, I don't get a lot of Photorealism back from my collectors. It's very seldom. I mean there was one collector in Canada who is not a particularly nice guy, and I really didn't enjoy dealing with him. And, you know, he got a lot of work early on. And at one point he came back, and I bought back almost all of his paintings. Not only what he bought from me but what he bought from other people. Occasionally when things would come back up at auction in the 80's into the nineties, I would buy them. Not so much to support the market but because I had waiting lists, and I needed the work to sell. As far as secondary market is concerned, it's important, and I have a lot of things here that I bought back and held onto. And when I do sell them, it will be very lucrative events. And I think any dealer that represents artists on a primary level has to support the secondary market in those artists' work. In recent years the Photorealism thing has gotten away from me.

Years ago people said, Well, if you're not there to buy at auction to support the price, what's going to happen to the movement? And I didn't know what the answer was back then. But nowadays I haven't really been able to buy much at auction or publicly because the numbers are going way beyond what I could even—I mean I would get the numbers on the primary level that I thought were terrific. And I'd hear that somebody bought an earlier one for twice the price. I can't buy anymore. I do make the secondary market when I can. Now, you know there's this pinup thing here. That's all secondary market. That's buying stuff out of the market and creating a market that didn't exist, you know, 20 years ago, and selling the paintings. And you're looking at millions of dollars' worth of paintings here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: All of these would have been seen as just mere historic illustrations a few years ago.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes. But you look at these, and there's some really fine painting and watercolor going on here. Great technique. And Elvgren, who did most of the ones you're looking at, was the number one and always will be known as the number one pinup artist of all time. He worked for Brown & Bigelow. And he did about 15 paintings a year. Twelve of them were for a 12-page calendar. And three of them were for what they call the hanger, where they had one picture and a pad with the twelve months printed below.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is calendar art.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: It's calendar art. That's what it was done for. The one of the girl skiing here was done for NAPA, the auto parts association.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

LOUIS K. MEISEL: And every year for 20 years he did a girl in sports. So they were the pure All-American girl. But there was no sexy—I mean they were sexy, but there were no garters and semi-nudity in those. He also worked for Sylvania. And every year for 20 years he did a girl in an evening gown. We called them "glamour art," and they were also, you know, quite beautiful. And I have quite a few of those. And then there was the general calendar art: the sexy girl that you would see in every gas station and every machine shop and every workshop all over the country. There were literally millions of them. And it wasn't considered sexist, and there was no feminism in the 50's. And they were about the All-American girl that the guys that fought World War II came home to marry and have a family with.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So has it helped the interest in, you know, the pinup that artists like [inaudible] and John Currin had sort of appropriated elements of that language in their own work?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: You know probably what was more important was that Mel Ramos and the pop artists.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, what was the history of that?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Mel Ramos had, you know, Gil Elvgren paintings; and one whole series, the Keyhole Series, was based on an Elvgren that was done in 1939 of the Keyholes. And there have been a lot of artists that have been influenced by the pinup artists, and you do see it. I don't know if it's very conscious that the artists you mentioned are, you know, inspired by or aware of that, and it can be found in their work. I don't see a connection.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's just sort of the same kind of [inaudible].

LOUIS K. MEISEL: I don't see a connection that makes people want to buy this more or less.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, but the idea that maybe it somehow makes this art, which half a century ago would not have been seen as legitimate painting—

LOUIS K. MEISEL: A decade ago it wasn't.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, a decade ago. But it sort of creates a context when it can be seen in that way.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: It does sort of begin to legitimize it. Of course you know that Norman Rockwell and Maxfield Parrish and N.C. Wyeth and Dean Cornwell and [inaudible] Decker, they were all also looked at pretty much the way the pinup artists were looked at in the '50s and '60s. They were illustrators.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: But they were great painters. And now Rockwells go for \$5 million. And Maxfield Parrish goes for \$5 million.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And Howard Pyle or whoever, right.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Pyle was one of the earliest. He taught a lot of the other ones. The American illustrators were artists just like anybody today. Not like anybody today! There's nobody that can paint like that today except maybe the photorealists. And maybe Currin and [inaudible] and a few of the other artists that have, you know, taken it to, you know, use that technique but maybe advance on it to some extent. But it's just beautiful painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or have a kind of ironical approach.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes. There's another thing, too. Elvgren was a painter. The watercolor there is by [Alberto] Vargas. And the watercolor over there is by Vargas. And he was essentially a very sophisticated cartoonist for *Playboy*. And they're very beautiful, but they're not on the same level, as far as art is concerned, as what Elvgren was doing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, they don't use the same full palette of color or the same toolbox of [inaudible].

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Well, it was airbrush work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes. Right.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Pure illustration kind of work. However, it was not assignment illustration. You have different levels of illustrators. With Rockwell, *The Saturday Evening Post* would give him a story to read to make a painting, illustrate that story. And he would be free to do whatever he wanted. Gil Elvgren painted pinups. When Brown & Bigelow went to him, all they could do is say, We want 15 paintings this year of pinups. They couldn't tell him to do a sailor or a cowboy or a nurse or something. He did what he wanted because he was an artist on that level. On the very lowest level you have an artist who's in his studio, and his agent comes to him and says, Okay, Eastern Airlines wants you to paint a cockpit. And over here they want the captain on the left side. And he's got a white shirt, and he's got the little four-striped thing on his epaulets. And a little white at the temples like he's about 50-ish. And he's showing two kids the cockpit, and they're over here and everything else. And this guy's a technician, and he makes that painting. And it gets to be illustrated in a magazine for Eastern Airlines or something like that. There's not an artist. That's a technician that's doing exactly what somebody else conceived of and wants him to do. And he's got technical ability. And then there's a whole range in between of the illustrators. The ones I mentioned before, they're some of the great American artists. And they're all included now in the American Painting Sales at Sotheby's and Christie's and the rest. N.C. and so on and so forth.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it's kind of—

LOUIS K. MEISEL: I think N.C. Wyeth was a better artist than Andrew Wyeth. And certainly better than his

grandson Jamie Wyeth. But he was an illustrator. Who knows? Of course Andrew Wyeth was never looked at as a very high level artist either.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I think that's changed in the last year or two since—well, he just.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: He didn't die.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, he just passed away?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Andrew?!

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Andrew. This year, I think.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Did he? How could I not know that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Earlier this year or last year.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Jesus Christ!

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, but it was very recently he passed away. You [inaudible]? Well, I'm just curious because— Well, it's interesting because in a funny way—well, I think in an important way—Photorealism merges a kind of high-low aesthetic because since, you know, 1890s everybody had a Brownie camera.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Not everybody was able to paint. So it's merging, you know, a kind of a popular art form that everyone was capable of with a highly sophisticated and skilled art form that only a few could manage. And then also with the pinups, it seems like there's that kind of merger of high and low aesthetics as well.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Say, do you ever go shares in work with other dealers?

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes and no. There was a time period when I was partners with my friend Charles Martinetti. He was the leading expert in all American illustration going back to [Charles Dana] Gibson, the Gibson Girl, and then Howard Chandler Christy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Howard Chandler Christy, yes.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Later on in the '20s and so on. He died a year ago February. But he was an obsessive collector, beyond anything you can imagine. And he used to advertise in all the magazines. But he was really not good a negotiating to buy or to sell or to do anything. He was just passionate about it. And when we finally got together in the late 80's, the deal became, okay, Charles, people call you all the time and offer you things. When you determine it's something that we should own, I'll negotiate the deal to buy it. And I'll lay out the money and put it up. And I'll be the one to sell it. And we'll split the profits. And we basically went on like that for about ten or 15 years. We did *The Great American Pinup Book* together. And the Elvgren book and several other books together. So we were partners in the pinups. I wasn't partners in the rest of the illustration because that was his thing. And then he died, and that ended. But I have never in my memory bought art with other dealers or split or shared. I did it on my own. It was just me. And as a matter of fact, whenever I could, I bought the art from my artists. So that when I'm ready to sell something, I don't have to answer to anybody. If I want to lend it, give it away, sell it, or whatever I want to do, it's my art, and I do what I want with it. And I don't answer to anybody ever.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It seems that the acquisition of art on the secondary market by dealers acquiring shares of a piece is a reasonably common practice.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: It is. And there's also something called a ring that is technically illegal. And it's when specific dealers in a specific market—and I'm susceptible to that because this is my market, and the only other people in it are essentially Ivan Karp and Allan Stone and Nancy Hoffman. But they weren't into buying anything back. They never did. But basically the deal was that if there were three dealers dealing in a particular area and something came up, they'd make a deal: Let's buy it together and not compete against each other. Technically an illegal kind of thing. It's called a ring.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Inaudible.]

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Well, a ring they called it. And it deprives the seller of getting the best price. Because instead of three people bidding something from ten to 30 thousand dollars. They decide one person's going to buy it,

and then they'll either share it— Or if they bought three things together, they'll split it up, and they buy it without competing against each other. Plus the fact that there are times when an estate comes up, and there is no dealer that can afford to buy the whole estate. So they call up other people. Now when Charles Martinetti died, I actually thought about putting together a group of museums and collectors to buy out the estate. As it happens, it was bought by one auction gallery, just recently. And they sold ten shares. They bought it for 12 or 12 and a half million, and they sold ten shares at a million and a quarter. They asked me if I wanted to be involved. I said, no. I didn't do it. But, yes, it's a common thing. If it's not a real ring where you're, you know, colluding at an auction, and you buy estates together, it's a perfectly legitimate way of buying things. You can either borrow money from the bank, or you can have partners. I never did any of that stuff.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Not my thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You spoke about a number, you know, collectors you've had over the years and a number of your clients as couples.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: Yes, husband and wife.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Husband and wife.

LOUIS K. MEISEL: It was great when it was a husband and wife, both caring about it together. That was very satisfying. When somebody came in and they told me they couldn't buy it because their wife wouldn't let them or vice versa—Or sometimes there was a Mel Ramos nude, and the woman liked it strangely enough, and the man said, "Oh, what'll the kids think?" You know. I mean those people weren't real collectors. I really like dealing with a couple, husband and wife. Or two guys or two girls. I mean I've had all kinds of couples where they're into it together, and it works best. It doesn't always work that way. There's a guy in Binghamton who bought three things from me. And I heard from the artist who brought them to me that all of the work is in the guy's office because his wife won't let him bring it home. And now he wants to sell them. Well, you know, that happens.

But again, I have my own way of teaching people how to become collectors. And I really wanted to deal with couples. And it always was. When Charles Saatchi began, he was with his wife, Doris. And they were together in it. She was sort of an art critic; I'm not really sure quite what she was. She was from America. She was married to him. The Rubells together have always been together on everything they've done. There are many other couples. Gene Klein and his wife were always here together. Neil Wiseman and his wife, he was the collector; but she kind of liked it, you know. She was part of the whole thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you ever have an instance where you had a collector who let's say—or a couple collector—where, you know, the wife was into urban landscapes and the husband into nudes or another image. Or they each had kind of a pet genre?

LOUIS MEISEL: You know, nothing, specifically, comes to mind. But there have been times where I remember a couple saying, "Well, listen, I want that one. And if you like that, you can get that. And we'll take the two, and you know, I want that in my studio, and you can have that one in the bedroom." I mean, things like that, yeah, because not everybody can like the same thing.

My wife and I have been collecting together forever, but there were different things that we didn't like. Like, Charlie Bell is one of her favorites. There were other artists that she doesn't care much for. But, most of the time, there's nothing here that we both don't like, to some extent. I mean, I don't have anything in my collections, personally, that Susan doesn't like, and vice-versa.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, is there anything that you love that she, sort of, more or less, tolerates?

LOUIS MEISEL: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What would that be?

LOUIS MEISEL: Let me just think about that a second. In here?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or anything she likes that you tolerate?

LOUIS MEISEL: I can't think of any; it doesn't come to mind.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, okay.

LOUIS MEISEL: It doesn't come to mind.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, it's a—

LOUIS MEISEL: I mean, you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —[inaudible]?

LOUIS MEISEL: —we started our collections in 1966 with 10 cent Fiestaware. Do you know what Fiestaware is?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

LOUIS MEISEL: Do you know what Fiestaware is? And we built a collection of 3,000 pieces.

[phone ringing]

And the two big collectors were me and Andy Warhol. I don't know if anybody's here now. I think I have to answer it. Well, if I don't—hi. No, still interviewing. What's up? So, we started with the Fiestaware, and we built a big collection, and then we sold it. Andy Warhol was collecting it. And we had a lot of fun competition with each other. Twenty years later, for some reason or another—25 years later, Susan started collecting McCoy pottery. McCoy is two steps below Fiestaware.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS MEISEL: It was 10, 15, \$20.00. And I said, "Susan, it's fun. You like doing it. I know you're doing it because your friend, Martha Stewart, is doing it. But it's garbage."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LOUIS MEISEL: "And we're way beyond that. It has—we have gravitated—we have, you know, we're looked at—we're leaders in collecting. What are you doing with that stuff?" And, eventually, it went by the wayside, you know. But, generally, in any given year, Susan would discover 10 things that she liked.

And I would, then, start looking at it and thinking about it. And, in any given year, maybe one or two of them would meet my criteria. And I'd say, "Okay. We're going to go for that." And then I'd find ways to build the best collection in the world.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How'd you meet Susan?

LOUIS MEISEL: A friend of mine was dating a friend of hers. She was, actually—let me just think. She was three weeks short of 18 when I married her in '66. And I met her in '64. So, she was about 16 when I met her.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

LOUIS MEISEL: She was going to Barnard School for Girls in New York. A friend of hers was dating a friend of mine. And I went out with her twice. The second time was to take her to her senior prom, which was kind of strange. I was 22 at the time. Right after that—that happened in, I guess, June of '64. In September, I went in the Army. The following year, I called her up and reawakened it. She made believe she didn't know who I was. She was kidding around with me. She said, "Well, I had a skiing accident and I lost my memory." I said, "What happened?"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LOUIS MEISEL: She says, "Well, I twisted my knee." I said, "Is your brain in your knee?" She says, "I'm only kidding."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LOUIS MEISEL: Anyway, so we went out for six months in '65. In October, we got engaged. And in March of '66, we got married. And as I said, she was three weeks short of 18. [00:04:03] And I was 23—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, it was a—

LOUIS MEISEL: —43 years ago.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —happy partnership?

LOUIS MEISEL: Yeah. And—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Inaudible].

LOUIS MEISEL: —she had gone to different art schools. And she was—at the time, she was going to college at—she was at Pace and then she went to Visual Arts. She finished up at Visual Arts in the late '60s. And we no money or anything at all. And she had these seven paintings that she'd done. So, I said, "You know, I'm going to pay \$10 and get a stand in the Greenwich Village Outdoor Art Exhibit."

And we went down there, and I sold the seven paintings for 25 bucks a piece. So, I cracked the whip and she painted all summer. We went back. And in that fall, I think we made about \$3,000 selling her paintings. I sold 1,000 of her paintings since. She's done 50 editions of prints, sold them all. Now, she's doing a lot of photography, and she's got three books out, and she's working on her fourth one for Rizzoli right now.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Damn.

LOUIS MEISEL: The first two books were about the Hamptons, behind the hedges. The second one was called *Hamptons Pleasures*. Each one had about 300 of her photographs. Then she did a book for Rizzoli called *Gourmet Shops of New York*: 400 pictures, and recipes, and whatever of the best places to buy food in the five boroughs of New York. And, now, she's working on a book called *Fresh New York: Organic Farming, Clean Farming*; good stuff.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Green markets all over the—

LOUIS MEISEL: Green, yeah, green.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —city now. And the art—

LOUIS MEISEL: And that's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the artisan will choose [inaudible].

LOUIS MEISEL: —a Rizzoli book. As a matter of fact, she met with her designer this morning. And they're turning the book in by September.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, at the end of the day, I mean, this is a very full existence, with collecting, and art-dealing. So, have you ever made any art yourself?

LOUIS MEISEL: Yeah, I did four Surrealist paintings, probably in 1962, ['6]3 or ['6]4. And then I said, "You know what? My talent is finding other talent. And my mouth is my talent and I'm not painting anymore."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LOUIS MEISEL: Same thing with the music. I was supposed to be a concert pianist. I was taking piano lessons from the time I was 4 'till I was 14. I was pretty good, but I gave it up. And, now, I represent concert pianists and I—I'm their agent and I, you know, do that kind of thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Is that a new thing for you?

LOUIS MEISEL: Oh, 10 years ago.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LOUIS MEISEL: And I do concerts in the loft here for a lot of them. And I introduce them to conductors, and directors, and producers, and things like that. And I produce CDs for them. And, like, in December, I'll be doing two concerts at—not Alice Tully. I did Alice Tully a few years ago. It'll be at the conference center at Merkin Hall. I'll have two concerts then and, you know, whatever.

That's—I mean, I find talent. Architects, I get them buildings to build. Writers, I commission them to do books; even cabinetmakers to do cabinets. And, recently—I always dreamed about what it would be like to have met Franz Liszt, or Chopin, or Rachmaninoff, and commission them to write music. And, recently, I—recently, I found Lowell Liebermann and I've commissioned him to write several, you know, pieces of music, including one that will be premiered this summer at the Flutist Convention. It's going to be a trio for piano, flute, and clarinet.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Great. I think you spoke about that, alluded to it, the last time—

LOUIS MEISEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —we spoke. Plans for the future?

LOUIS MEISEL: Right now, I am actually seriously considering—and trying to make it happen—I would like to—

since Nancy Hoffman left SoHo—and Nancy, and Ivan, and I were the three—three of the main galleries that opened. There was Paula Cooper, Nancy, Ivan, me, and the 420 building. We were, like, the first eight galleries down here. Nancy left in November, went to Chelsea. All that's left is Ivan Karp and me. There's just two of us left. And I have never considered going to Chelsea.

And I did open on 57th Street eight years ago with Frank Bernarducci. And, early-on, I said to Frank, "I want you to look around, keep your eyes open because there's galleries going to go out of business. And I'd like to triple our space up there in a beautiful, already built gallery space, rent out down here, and go up there, and start all over again." I mean, I've been doing shows down here very minimal. I used to do 20 a year.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LOUIS MEISEL: Now I'm doing two or three because nobody comes down here and my artists don't get the exposure that we're getting on 57th Street. And I went, and I looked at a couple of spaces. And I found an extraordinary space up there. So, right now—three weeks ago, I put this space on the market for rent for the first time in 35 years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

LOUIS MEISEL: And if I get a good tenant for 141, I will expand greatly, go real grand while everybody else is downsizing, start doing more shows, more survey shows, and getting more back to what I was doing in the '70s and '80s, instead of just resting on my laurels and selling some expensive paintings here and there. In the meantime, I've been spending most of my time doing museum shows all over the world, as I told you. Krakow, Poland's coming up in July—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Italy.

LOUIS MEISEL: —Brescia, Italy; Munich, Germany. And Munich, Germany's a big Realist show that's going to cover 150 years, and there'll be some—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And where will that be held?

LOUIS MEISEL: At the Kunstshalle in Munich and then it's going to Emden.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay.

LOUIS MEISEL: So, it's two museums in Germany. And I'll have probably two, three, four, maybe, of the photorealists in there and go over for that. So, I've been doing a lot of that. And I'll do more of that. Right now, I'm setting up a website to give away 500 pieces of art. In the last 15 years, I've given art donations to 70 museums. I'm building collections in a number of them. In others, it's just one or two pieces.

I ended up finding out that I got, like, 10,000 works of art here. And I just—what am I going to do? I'm 67. I got to—I can't sell it all, so I'm going to give it away. So, I've got projects and things like that, mostly working with museums, giving away some of the art that I have, and then going to 57th Street and moving forward with what Photorealism is producing in the 21st century. Unfortunately, I've only found three or four artists that qualify, so far. But I'll look harder once I have a way to know that I can promote them properly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: When you're 100 years old, being honored by society, what would you like them to say about you?

LOUIS MEISEL: Well, first of all, I never even thought about getting to 100. I never thought about being honored by anybody. I'm honored every time I go to a museum show that I participated in and I get all the accolades. I do lectures, and everybody tells me—I did a lecture at Boca Raton back in February. And the youngest woman there was probably 75. And there were a lot of them. And I had a great time. And they were all, you know, flirting with me, like, "Hey, you're terrific;" you know, "Are you married?" And, you know, "Can you come on—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LOUIS MEISEL: —down here and live?" You know, I just have a great time with it. And I, you know, I enjoy the response I get from people when I'm walking through one of these shows and, you know, they know that I kept these artists alive and did it for them all that time. I have 16 books out now. Maybe I'll do another two or three. I even have a novel in me that I might, actually, get around to doing someday. And it's just fun. I'll never retire. It's not something you retire from.

Sitting around and talking like I'm talking to you is what I like doing best. And that's how I sell art: sitting around and talking to people about all this stuff. And when I do lectures—and I've done lectures to 3,000 people at the Smithsonian and 100 people at the college, you know, symposium and everything else. You know, I used to say,

"The first thing you've got to do is give your wallet to your wife or get out of here, because when I'm finished, you're going to be wanting to throw money at me and buy these paintings because—"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LOUIS MEISEL: —you know? And I have a good time doing that. Honored? I'm honored.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. Who do you want to play in the—in, you know, *The Lou Meisel Story*?

LOUIS MEISEL: [Laughs] *The Lou Meisel Story*?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Russell Crowe?

LOUIS MEISEL: No, he couldn't do that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LOUIS MEISEL: Who could do it? You know, that's a question—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LOUIS MEISEL: —that's a question that I'd have to think about that: "Who?" I always liked Dustin Hoffman.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, yeah.

LOUIS MEISEL: As a matter of fact, I don't know if you remember when there was a bomb factory on 11th Street. The weathermen blew up this building and people got killed. And I was across the street from that. And Dustin Hoffman was next door and he had borrowed a lot of art from the Museum of Modern Art. And Susan and I helped him save it when the buildings were burning down and brought it over to our place, you know. But that's a Dustin Hoffman story.

Let me think. Who do I like in the movies? I always liked Robert Redford, but he's too old now. Who's young? Who are the young collect—you know, there's all these action/adventure guys, all these tough guys. I can't think—I can't answer that question.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well—

LOUIS MEISEL: I don't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —you'll have to save the answer for—

LOUIS MEISEL: There's not going to be a movie about me —

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —[inaudible.]

LOUIS MEISEL: —anyway. That's—that's just a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LOUIS MEISEL: —ridiculous thing to even contemplate.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I don't know. It seems like—

LOUIS MEISEL: It's not interesting anymore. I mean, you know, it's—there's no—there's—I don't know. I can't see that what I did is movie material. I mean, there'll be people that'll want to come to the Archives and want to hear these talks and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, sure.

LOUIS MEISEL: —you know, learn more about what I did and everything else, but—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: After that movie, *Pollock*, opened, whenever that was, 10, 15 years ago, with Ed Harris—

LOUIS MEISEL: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Arthur Miller—

LOUIS MEISEL: Was it that long ago?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, 10 years, easy.

LOUIS MEISEL: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Ed Harris, who Arthur had worked with, was in the film, obviously. And Miller stated that, "It was a wonderful picture," he said, "But, you know, the problem is," he said, "you can't show what an artist does." And I guess it would be pretty hard to show what an art dealer does, too.

LOUIS MEISEL: You know, there have been historically-important art dealers, like Kahnweiler, who represent Picasso and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Vollard or—

LOUIS MEISEL: Yeah, Vollard and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Duveen or [inaudible].

LOUIS MEISEL: —Duveen, you know. But, I mean, it was a different world then. And I don't even know. You have to embellish it, and you have to fictionalize it, and add a lot of sex, and all sorts of other stuff that people think is in the art world. Actually, it probably is. I wouldn't get into some of those stories about what happened, you know, in the early years. Back in the '70s, I [inaudible].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, you have stories like that?

LOUIS MEISEL: There's a lot of stories. I mean—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LOUIS MEISEL: —they used to tell an artist—they would tell an artist that, "When you go to a gallery—when you make your photograph to send to a gallery, you should have a couple of them with you in the picture to show scale." I would tell you that I got a dozen pictures in 10 years of nude, beautiful women artists in the picture. They were nude in the picture, you know? And—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Like Lynda Benglis in Art Forum.

LOUIS MEISEL: Well, that's a different thing, entirely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LOUIS MEISEL: But, I mean, and there was some pretty good—I mean, I'd get these pictures and here's this artist and she's nude, you know, whatever. And then there were artists that would approach and think that art dealers had a casting couch just the way Hollywood would interview female artists, you know, female actresses and everything else. So, there were some of those things. But my wife was always here and kept me safe from that kind of thing.

There's an artist who was a knockoff of DeAndrea and is still around. And she called me up to come to her studio out in Long Island. And I went on the way out to the Hamptons and Susan was with me. And the door opens, and there she is in baby-doll outfit, you know, the flimsy outfit and everything else. And it turns out that she was at Visual Arts with Susan and they knew each other. And it's, like, the fangs came out and the—from both sides and everything else.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LOUIS MEISEL: But you know, there are stories like that. But, you know, did I ever have any affairs in the art world? No. I kept myself safe from all that sort of stuff.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Kudos on that.

LOUIS MEISEL: Women collectors, wives of men—of collectors—would come in during the week. And there was flirting. And then there were lots of parties. And, you know, it was the '60s, it was the '70s, and everything else. Nothing that would make a movie, though, it would make it interesting enough for a movie.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, we'll just scrap that idea for now.

LOUIS MEISEL: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I guess we should wrap this up.

LOUIS MEISEL: Okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Trying to find a good coda, but I guess there's just loads of information and—

LOUIS MEISEL: Yeah. You're going to get to write a lot of interesting stuff out of this, and edit it down, and everything else.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, well, they transcribe it. You'll get to see it. I'll—

LOUIS MEISEL: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —get to see it and—

LOUIS MEISEL: Who's going to write it, both of you, together, or you, or—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, no, no. We just—

LOUIS MEISEL: —or you just get it? Other people are—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —we conduct the interview and then the Archives has a transcription service, as I understand it, that takes, you know, the media, and somebody has had funds and they transcribe it. And then we see it—

LOUIS MEISEL: But then—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and you see [inaudible].

LOUIS MEISEL: —you begin to edit it down. Because, I mean, there's, you know—50 percent of this stuff is just chatter.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's all banter. A lot of it's—

LOUIS MEISEL: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —banter and a lot of it—

LOUIS MEISEL: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —but a lot of data, too, a lot of information.

LOUIS MEISEL: Okay. Question for you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

LOUIS MEISEL: On a scale of one to 10 from all the—I mean, you've done a lot of these interviews, I assume. How do you rate what we've gotten here?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Eleven.

LOUIS MEISEL: Good material?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Like *Spinal Tap* amplifiers, yeah, 11. I think—

LOUIS MEISEL: That's good.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —no, you're—

LOUIS MEISEL: So, you got what you needed?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —no, you're a great subject because you've got loads of information, energy, and you push it out there, and there's a lot of enthusiasm.

LOUIS MEISEL: You know, it's like we've just scratched the surface because I keep thinking of all sorts of things. I mean, things about art history. You got—you saw the picture of the photorealists, the group of the photo—did you—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, you showed us—

LOUIS MEISEL: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —last week, yeah.

LOUIS MEISEL: I mean, we used to have parties here, once a month, for every opening. And then we had an artists' brunch twice a year. Salvador Dalí used to come here with his ocelot—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LOUIS MEISEL: —scared the hell out of everybody. They'd walk in. They were—like, sometimes, there would be six or eight people in, you know, an entourage. There were just all sorts of stories that go on with, you know—and the photorealists, of course, they were, like, laid-back, kind of boring people. But all the rest of the people that, kind of, you know, ended up coming here made it more interesting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, as you earlier characterized them, they were grounded, they stayed married, they worked—

LOUIS MEISEL: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —hard, they were not—

LOUIS MEISEL: There's a certain kind—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —bohemian.

LOUIS MEISEL: —of mentality that you've got to have to be able to make this kind of work. An abstract painter could go into a studio, have a few drinks after lunch, and then go, and look, and throw some paint around, and make a painting; literally, make a painting in an afternoon or whatever. And then he could go out to the Cedar bar, and they could socialize, and trade ideas. But photorealists had to be standing there in front of that easel all day long.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, there's a work ethic in all of that that you embody yourself?

LOUIS MEISEL: Me? I don't know. I don't know. I never considered that I work hard. Talking and having fun isn't working to me. I don't know. But I'm not like they are. I don't have the discipline or the skills that they have. But I have whatever I have that, you know—my idea—my thing is to make sure that everybody that I can will know about what they do and what they can do. And when you're just looking at that painting, it needs as much explanation as anything else that anybody ever looked at to make you really love it. I mean, visually, it draws you in right away. People, you know, gravitate towards this right away and they think they know. And then you can enhance that beyond belief by talking about it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Lou Meisel, thanks a lot.

LOUIS MEISEL: You're welcome.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Appreciate it.

[END OF TRACK AAA_meisel09_5508_r.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]