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Oral history interview with Wendy Olsoff and  
Penny Pilkington, 2009 January 21 and May  
22

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Wendy Olsoff and Penny Pilkington on January 21 and May 22, 2009. The interview took place at in New York, New York, and was conducted by James McElhinney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for this interview was provided by a grant from the Widgeon Point Charitable Foundation.

Wendy Olsoff, Penny Pilkington, and James McElhinney have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

JAMES McELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking with Penny Pilkington and Wendy Olstroff.

PENNY PILKINGTON: Olsoff. O-L-S-O-F-F.

MR. McELHINNEY: Olsoff?

WENDY OLSOFF: Right.

MR. McELHINNEY: At 432 Lafayette Street in New York, New York, on January 21, 2009.

So for the transcriber, I'm going to ask you to just simply introduce yourselves so that the person who is writing out the interview will be able to identify—

[END OF DISC 1, TRACK 1.]

MR. McELHINNEY: —who's who by voice.

MS. PILKINGTON: Hello. I'm Penny Pilkington.

MS. OLSOFF: And I'm Wendy Olsoff.

MR. McELHINNEY: And I'm James McElhinney. [They laugh.] How did you become interested in art. What was your first memorable encounter with a work of art?

[Cell phone vibrates.]

MS. PILKINGTON: Well, I grew up in the art world. My parents were art dealers in London. So my first memories of family life are to do with gallery, going to the gallery, being in the gallery, helping at a gallery. Friends of the family were artists. So I don't know that I can say that there's a particular artwork, but just the whole art world. Traveling in Europe. Just my whole family was involved—my parents' life was all around art.

MR. McELHINNEY: What was the name of the gallery?

MS. PILKINGTON: Piccadilly Gallery in London, which was started in 1953.

MS. OLSOFF: I grew up in a very different environment, so I never went to galleries at all until after I graduated college. And I was interested in art and art history in high school, but not contemporary art. I was interested in Renaissance art, and I would sit and look at books for very long periods of time and have a fun time with my friends identifying artists and flipping through pages and trying to guess which was Leonardo and which was Michelangelo. And then when I went to college I studied art history, again studying Renaissance, Mannerism, Baroque, Rococo, not contemporary. So those were the periods I loved mainly Italian Renaissance work.

MR. McELHINNEY: At what point did you become interested in being involved in art in a professional way?

MS. OLSOFF: I got out of college, and moved to New York City. I didn't right away go to galleries, and I wasn't involved in art. But after having jobs that I didn't like, I thought, after being exposed to people who knew about the art world and telling me about it, that maybe a gallery would be good for me. Because I wanted to do something with art not making art but dealing with artists. And so a friend said, "Work in a gallery." And I said, "Well, okay. What's that?" And we pored through the help wanted, and I got a job in a gallery in SoHo in 1979. Right on West Broadway.

MR. McELHINNEY: What was the name of the gallery?

MS. OLSOFF: The gallery was called Bayard Gallery, B-A-Y-A-R-D. And it hired me because it had a really quirky owner. His name was Christopher Condon. He had a small inheritance, and he was showing Canadian Realism and Pacific Northwest Indian art. And he was a struggling entrepreneur to the point where I learned to do the bookkeeping and accounting because he was so bad at it and failing at his business so badly, I started dealing with that stuff. And it was a very short period of time, but I learned enough of a skill to go on to another gallery.

MR. McELHINNEY: Penny, I guess you got started with, you know, the family business.

MS. PILKINGTON: It was assumed somehow. Well, I would work at openings and on holidays and Saturdays and things. And it was sort of assumed I would go into it. But there's another family business that I know—the Pilkington Glass Family—when family go into a business, once you've gone in you can't get out. It's very hard to leave. So I decided that I wanted to get as much experience elsewhere first before I went to work for the family. Because how do you tell your mum and dad that you're quitting and you want to get another job? It's kind of hard. So I worked for Waddington Galleries in London, who is still going, Leslie Waddington. And he dealt in contemporary British art, as well as contemporary American: Robert Morris Morris Louis and those kinds of guys. Kenneth Noland and [Milton] Avery. But he also dealt in [Pablo] Picasso and [Henri] Matisse and [Fernand] Léger. And I worked there for about three years. And then I'd had enough of that. And he said he would get me a job in America, in the States. And I was hoping for Knoedler or Emmerich, because he dealt with all these people. He got me a job with his brother, Theo Waddington, who had just opened a gallery on Madison between Seventy-ninth and Eightieth. And he was specializing in Inuit art and other things that his older brother, Leslie, would give him.

MS. OLSOFF: [Andre] Derain?

MS. PILKINGTON: And I got there, and he did a Derain show. And Wendy was working at Theo Waddington's when I walked in. And that is how we met.

MR. McELHINNEY: And that was after Bayard?

MS. OLSOFF: Right. So he closed because it was terrible. It was just an unbelievably interesting training ground. [Laughs] And there was a bookkeeper job advertised by Theo Waddington Gallery. And I needed a job. And I applied, and I got it. I was there for about—how long before you came?

MS. PILKINGTON: I think about three months, or two.

MS. OLSOFF: Three months- and I really, really was not a bookkeeper. But I was a scrappy young person. You know you say you can do it to get the job. And then you learn really quickly while you're there. And they pretty much knew I wasn't like a topnotch bookkeeper. But they kept me on. And pretty much what happened when Penny came as more of an insider, I was displaced because it was a really small business. Bill Cunningham was there. He's now at Sotheby's; he was the director. It was a really small place on Madison, so they put me on part time, which I could not afford to live on. And so I got another job. And I worked at CDS Gallery with Clara [Diament] Sujo, she's from South America. And she's still in business today.

MR. McELHINNEY: If you could please spell Sujo?

MS. OLSOFF: Sujo, S-U-J-O. And she was really, really tough, tough boss who trained me in some ways really terrifically. But she was so incredibly hard that you could not—I mean this was before computers, and if you made one mistake on a letter, I mean she was really rough. But it was a good sort of training ground. I must have left there in 1982. But Penny and I became good friends, and moved in together and shared an apartment on Third Avenue.

MS. PILKINGTON: Also between Seventy-ninth and Eightieth.

MS. OLSOFF: Between Seventy-ninth and Eightieth.

MR. McELHINNEY: Had you studied art in college, as well, or history of art?

MS. PILKINGTON: No. The stories from the art dealers who sat around the dinner table in my parents' house was that the most difficult employee was somebody who'd come with a history of art Ph.D.—not Ph.D.—but master's or something. People who studied history of art were really hard to work with in a gallery because they didn't like the commercial side of the world. They also wanted something to fall back on in case I hated working in a gallery. So I studied geography—human geography, which is very much an umbrella subject. So very similar to studying in the States because you did lots of different subjects. And I love statistics and things that were useful later on. At Bristol University.

MR. McELHINNEY: The human geography, like cultural geography?

MS. PILKINGTON: The study of human interaction on the planet's surface. As well as town planning, studying markets, the history of people moving around the world. So some anthropology. And it's just very umbrella.

MR. McELHINNEY: Industries, resources, so forth.

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: And you studied?

MS. OLSOFF: I was an English major, art history minor.

MR. McELHINNEY: English major, art history minor. So hmm. At what point was it, again, you said '82 was the time when you—

MS. PILKINGTON: I arrived in September '81. And we worked together for three or four months or something? So you probably moved to—

MS. OLSOFF: Very quickly.

MS. PILKINGTON: Clara in like January or February or something.

MS. OLSOFF: I also worked with Clara for a couple of years, though.

MS. PILKINGTON: You were not— We started the gallery in—we went looking for space in August '83. At that point you were working for that guy—

MS. OLSOFF: Oh, Patrick Mocatta.

MS. PILKINGTON: I think so.

MS. OLSOFF: I did part-time work. When we opened the gallery, I worked for an investment banker part time owing to the fact that I couldn't afford not to have a job until the gallery started making money.

MS. PILKINGTON: You think you started working with him when we—well, we opened in September '83.

MS. OLSOFF: So I must have—I don't remember.

MS. PILKINGTON: When you quit Clara.

MS. OLSOFF: I quit Clara because it was just impossible to work there anymore. She was just—I was the longest employee she ever had. I mean people would come in for an interview and leave. Work for 24 hours, and she'd fire them. It was unbelievable how many people worked there. So then I did quit, and I ended up working for agencies like doing temp work for big corporations, just being a secretary. And this guy Patrick, I met him through that, and he hired me privately. So I was doing that when we started working. That's right.

MS. PILKINGTON: One of the good things about working for Clara was that you met Deborah Sharpe. Deborah Sharpe wanted to open her own gallery, and she was looking at space in the East Village.

MS. OLSOFF: And we would go out for drinks at The Carlyle after work and talk about doing something on our own. Penny and I had talked about it. And Deborah, got a space about two weeks before us.

MS. PILKINGTON: Right. She got a space. She called you. I was working—I was freelancing in Switzerland at the Basel Art Fair for Annely Juda Fine Art to earn some extra money and visit family and spread the word, when you called me and said, "You have to come back right now! We have to start looking. There's been an article by—"

MS. OLSOFF: Grace Glueck.

MS. PILKINGTON: Grace Glueck in the *New York Times* about the burgeoning East Village. Deborah found a space on Eleventh Street, a small storefront. We have to do it. Come back!

MS. OLSOFF: Then Penny came back, and I think in two weeks we had a space. And we moved—

MR. McELHINNEY: Where was it?

MS. PILKINGTON: 216 East Tenth Street between First and Second. And we got the ground floor space, storefront. And an apartment on the top floor, the ceilings painted black, Day-Glo pink walls, five layers of

linoleum, and the landlord said—

MS. OLSOFF: Tons of dog hair all over and porn magazines-

MR. McELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MS. OLSOFF: -stuck behind the radiators.

MS. PILKINGTON: Well, later on we found the porn magazines. But he said, “You can have the storefront and the railroad apartment for a thousand dollars a month total if you do all the work yourselves.” And we were paying seven fifty for a railroad apartment on Madison-Third Avenue and Eightieth. So for \$250 more, we had a storefront, and we could start.

MS. OLSOFF: And he was really, really anxious to have us in because he was flipping the building in typical gentrifying fashion. So we were the perfect people to come down for him because we were going to make his building worth more. So he saw that pretty quickly.

MS. PILKINGTON: Wait, that’s a druggie— I mean it was a very druggie street.

MR. McELHINNEY: I remember.

MS. PILKINGTON: Although the north side of the street was the drugs. And the south side was not. And the guys who whistled or looked out, hung out on the stoops on the south side, they protected us. You know you felt at home, you were okay. If you weren’t the right person on the block, it wasn’t okay. But they knew us because they saw us doing all the work ourselves.

MS. OLSOFF: And we were very friendly, too, and tried-

MS. PILKINGTON: And we did all the work in August.

MS. OLSOFF: - not to alienate anyone.

MS. PILKINGTON: T-shirts and shorts, painting and spackling and fixing up the storefront. And then in the evening, going out to see artists. And they just saw us doing it all ourselves, and they got very supportive.

MR. McELHINNEY: So you were true urban pioneers.

MS. PILKINGTON: [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: You had come way downtown and you were balanced on the edge of alphabet land.

MS. PILKINGTON: Taxi drivers would still say, “Are you sure you want to go down there? You know it’s not a nice neighborhood.”

MR. McELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MS. OLSOFF: We didn’t feel nervous about it.

MS. PILKINGTON: No.

MS. OLSOFF: We never really felt that we were urban pioneers. I mean the neighborhood felt fairly pioneered already to us when we were there. From an outsider point of view, would it look like we were urban pioneers? Or maybe we were. But we knew so many people down there already, and there were already five galleries like Gracie Mansion, Fun Gallery and Nature Morte. There was a culture of restaurants and clubs; the art scene was entrenched in its way already. So we were really not. It felt very cozy to us actually, like a new campus. Like it was just so fun, a small village, and everyone knew each other. From the drug dealers to the other art dealers to the artists.

MR. McELHINNEY: And everyone was young, too.

MS. OLSOFF: Yeah, very young.

MR. McELHINNEY: It was a young scene, yes. So when were you able actually to open your doors and have exhibitions?

MS. PILKINGTON: We were completely lucky. Because we opened— Our first opening—and don’t ask me why— was on the first of September. And Nature Morte had its openings always on the first of the month. And we opened on the first of September, having no idea that Nature Morte would have an opening down the street. And

we had limousines parked outside the gallery, and the place was full. Did we even do a mailing?

MS. OLSOFF: The drug dealers brought us champagne.

MR. McELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MS. PILKINGTON: The drug dealers gave us a hundred dollars, and we had this negotiation: Should we take it? If we take it, does that mean that we'll become part of their—

MS. OLSOFF: Part commission when we start.

MS. PILKINGTON: We'll have to hide drugs for them if the police come. Should we do it? And we took the hundred dollars, and we went to the liquor store which had all those, you know, special bullet-proof bits you had to go into.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: I thought they bought us-

MS. PILKINGTON: -No, I went down there.

MS. OLSOFF: You went and bought—

MS. PILKINGTON: I went and bought the champagne. I think I bought two bottles of champagne, and I gave him the change, and he didn't want the change. [Laughs]

MR. McELHINNEY: Funny.

MS. OLSOFF: We didn't show Sue Coe then?

MS. PILKINGTON: No, it was a crazy group show that we did.

MR. McELHINNEY: So what was your first show, your inaugural show?

MR. McELHINNEY: Sue Coe.

MS. PILKINGTON: It was October 1983.

MR. McELHINNEY: And how do you find her? Or did she find you?

MS. OLSOFF: When I was still working at Clara's, we came across a woman named Sally Baker. And it was during "Britain Salutes New York." Which meant that Bloomingdale's had British designers. And that, you know the British composers were at the Lincoln Center, and everything was British. And Sally did a show on Staten Island of artists more renegade, cutting edge artists that were much more critical of the world than the ones that showed up in the museums at the time or department stores. And Sue Coe, who's a really amazing illustrator, was one of the artists there. And we were just blown away. The work is extremely politicized. I don't know if you know her work.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, yes.

MS. OLSOFF: Being very young and idealistic, this was engaging, so engaging. So when we had to think who do we want to show, for our first show? We said, let's find Sue Coe. She lived on the Upper East Side in a tiny little dumpy apartment. And went up there and met her. And she had the most incredible body of work available to exhibit. And that's what we did.

MR. McELHINNEY: She was not represented elsewhere?

MS. OLSOFF: No, she wasn't represented at all. I don't think—

MS. PILKINGTON: She had not shown I mean—

MS. OLSOFF: In the States, right?

MS. PILKINGTON: In the States. I think she was showing at Snug Harbor, showing there in the summer. We had no idea she was known, that she had an underground cult following. We had no idea that people knew her. And when we had the opening, it was amazing, the turnout of people.

MS. OLSOFF: A lot of the raw Art Spiegelman artists and Art Spiegelman. There was that culture, that crowd of

people, were her friends. So we tapped into that kind of energy. Gary Panter, that whole group of people.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, right, yeah.

MS. OLSOFF: But the work— We were nervous because it was so critical, you know, Reagan [Ronald Reagan] and what was going on. We thought we were going to get rocks through our window. And we sold it out. We got reviewed in *Artforum*. We don't do that very often. But it was the first show we did.

MR. McELHINNEY: Good opening with high expectations.

MS. PILKINGTON: We joked about the fact we couldn't do any better. We might as well retire now. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, no! Do it again next month, right?

MS. OLSOFF: That's where Elaine Dannheisser bought a piece from us, right, that show?

MS. PILKINGTON: Was that from that first show?

MS. OLSOFF: And it's now in the collection of MoMA [Museum of Modern Art, New York City]. If you stay in business long enough, you can actually see the pattern, the ability of a collector finding an artist and buying it. And then when people see a good collection, it ends up, eventually, at a museum. And Penny and I went about, I don't know, maybe ten years ago now or eight years ago—

MS. PILKINGTON: Was it 2000?

MS. OLSOFF: When Elaine's collection was shown there?

MS. PILKINGTON: No, when—

MS. OLSOFF: That's what I mean, the one we saw at MoMA. I mean it's just incredibly moving to go to—to remember that first show, and then standing in the Museum of Modern Art and see a painting from that show hanging in the museum.

MS. PILKINGTON: And walk around the museum and like, oh, we worked with him. Or we had her in a group show or we did this or we did that.

MS. PILKINGTON: We've been involved with a lot of these artists who are now you know, in the history books.

MR. McELHINNEY: So if we can stay for a moment in October '83 again, you sold out the show. But who else were your buyers at that show? Just out of curiosity.

MS. OLSOFF: At that time in East Village—the East Village partially succeeded because there was a very, um you know, it was the end of the '70s— I think the East Village was on the cusp of coming out of a recession in New York. You know the late seventies, New York was just horrible. And the art world in SoHo was becoming very foreign. And it was this sort of Clemente and Chia and the [Julian] Schnabel and [Eric] Fischl. That was also dying, and there wasn't anything filling it. So when the East Village started, there was a real need—a gap to fill. It started for a reason, and Deborah, one of the few non-artists started galleries. But people were starting their own galleries because they wanted to see something different. And the collectors did as well. So the museums— And they came down, and they were well-known collectors. When I worked at CDS, Clara would spend every day writing letters to these collectors who would never come in. And we just literally opened our door, and in walked Eli Broad, and in walked the Schwartz' [Eugene and Barbara Schwartz], and in walked Elaine Dannheisser. And streams of them just flowing in all the time wanting to buy art. And we did also sell to museums. But I don't know that from that first show we did. But in the East Village, museums were down there, looking, you know. Joan Nelson, another artist we showed in that first phase, was in the Guggenheim. Exxon did these shows of young artists, and the Guggenheim bought one.

MS. PILKINGTON: I have our first sales book upstairs.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, rock stars came in and other artists. You know David Byrne came in and bought art from us. It was really amazing. And, you know, the collectors, they were literally stepping over garbage cans to get in.

MS. PILKINGTON: Or sleeping humans. I mean the people who slept on the street.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: We even had a man who slept—

MS. PILKINGTON: We had a local guy who adopted us. Who um- my father would joke that a pile of rags would suddenly stand up and say, "Hey, Penny! How's it going?" [They laugh.]

MR. McELHINNEY: So how long were you in that space?

MS. OLSOFF: Well, we expanded in that space. There was a reggae studio next door to us run by someone named—

MS. PILKINGTON: Oh, I don't know.

MS. OLSOFF: The Rastafarian. Right?

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes.

MS. OLSOFF: Who would hire people—you know people would hire his studio. And the noise would be so loud, the vibrations so strong, that all the paintings the next morning would be all—we'd have to straighten them out. And he eventually—I don't know. He was in so much trouble, and the police would come for him. And he was just always in trouble and eventually he didn't pay his rent or he left.

MS. PILKINGTON: And that wasn't very big. That was probably the size of this room. It was probably 20-by-20 or something.

MS. OLSOFF: So with our space which was maybe 500 square feet or something, we doubled . And our first show in that space was TODT, who ended up in the Whitney Biennial. It was an amazing group of artists. Incredible. They'd sleep all the time in the space. And this is a funny endnote to that: They had a very big following in Japan. Lots of very young Japanese kids would hang out and live with them in the space and help them. And then more recently, last year, at Pulse Miami, and [Takashi] Murakami came into the booth and told me that, if I remembered, he was one of those kids. Which I had no idea because I never spoke to them because they didn't speak English.

MR. McELHINNEY: That's a good story.

MS. OLSOFF: It was like, Oh, my God! you know. You're one of those kids! I can't believe it! [They laugh.]

MR. McELHINNEY: So when you were operating in the space on Tenth Street, right?

MS. PILKINGTON: And living on the sixth floor.

MR. McELHINNEY: Living on the sixth floor. What were you doing with the intervening floors? Were they also—

MS. PILKINGTON: There were all regular East Village tenants. Teachers, Ukrainians, people who'd lived there forever.

MS. OLSOFF: It was a tenement. It was a basic tenement with people paying too much rent to live in the type of space that my grandparents desperately wanted to leave.

MS. PILKINGTON: Wendy's parents were kind of upset when she moved back. [Ms. Olsoff laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Where during the warm season they used to sleep on the roof and the fire escapes.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes.

MS. PILKINGTON: And sit outside and play checkers on the street.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: It was a really rundown building. And there were drug dealers living there also.

MR. McELHINNEY: Got to have it, I guess.

MS. PILKINGTON: Do we tell him the other story?

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, we actually ended up in a few other spaces in the building. We kind of expanded where we could. And then we needed more storage. And then I had a friend living with me. First, I moved next door to Penny. So we ended up being not roommates anymore but next door neighbors. Then I ended up getting a roommate, and she said—she wasn't from the East Village, and she claimed something smelled really bad. I said, "Oh, no, it's just the East Village." She said, "The East Village smells." Then Penny and I were going off to an opening—I think it was the Gray Art Gallery—one night, maybe a couple of nights later. And we saw them



pulling a guy who OD'd out across the hall from our gallery in the back, dead. You know on a stretcher. And it was the drug dealer who had died, and he was decomposing—in the back.

MR. McELHINNEY: How lovely.

MS. OLSOFF: And it was really, really unfortunate. But Penny and I immediately thought, oh, storage space. [They laugh.]

MS. PILKINGTON: Not that quickly.

MS. OLSOFF: And then we had our first employee, Ester, Ester Schwartz. And we said, "Ester, we need to get a cleaning crew to clean out that apartment. So can you please call from the phone book. Tell them it's really, really, really dirty."

MR. McELHINNEY: Hazmat head to toe. Hazmat suits.

MS. OLSOFF: So we heard her saying, "It's really, really, really disgusting." And then she got really quiet. And then she said, "No," and hung up. And I said, "What happened?" The person on the other end of the phone said, "It's not like someone died there, is it?" [They laugh.] So we cleaned it out with the help of this company that she found. And then we built storage racks, and that was our storage.

MR. McELHINNEY: So when you opened the gallery initially, your aim was not merely to have a space where you could hang work. But also to maintain amenities like storage

MS. PILKINGTON: It was to represent. I wanted to work with and represent artists. It wasn't just to do one show, because you can't make a living that way. While we were working on the show that's up, you have to be trying to sell before it happens, get press before it happens. And then you have press and hope for the sales after it happens. So you need to have continuity.

MS. OLSOFF: Well, Penny and I were trained by very traditional dealers. We weren't artists, we didn't go to art school. We really barely had art history. So our education in art was from her parents, Leslie Waddington, Clara Sujo. And this was a very traditional art-dealing group.

MR. McELHINNEY: And the model still works.

MS. OLSOFF: It's just barely working. [Laughs]

MR. McELHINNEY: Well.

MS. OLSOFF: Yeah, yeah, it does work. The auction houses and artists doing things themselves is more—I think things are changing right now. And I'll be very interested in 25 years from now to see how the model has sustained in the future. But it does work right now, and it's like a model that is given from generation to generation. There's not a lot of courses in it. You don't go to college. You can go to college to be an art historian. You can go to college to work in an auction house or an art program like Sotheby's.

MS. PILKINGTON: Or arts administration.

MS. OLSOFF: Or arts administration with NYU [New York University].

MR. McELHINNEY: Which is more not-for-profit.

MS. OLSOFF: But it's really, you know—I just did a tour for my college of, a dozen kids who are interested in art. And they wanted to know why we succeeded or what—what is it? And it's really not something you can learn. It's almost like being—I really think it's an intuition, and you have to wear a lot of different hats. And it's hard— And it's just like—you've got it or you don't got it, basically.

MR. McELHINNEY: Energy, flexibility, having a vision, and tenacity.

MS. OLSOFF: And to be able to recognize art.

MS. PILKINGTON: And like to work with people. You have to work with a lot of different people.

MS. OLSOFF: And you have to also be able to explain the art. And if you want to actually sell it to museums and people who do have college educations and Ph.D.'s, you have to be fairly intelligent about it.

MR. McELHINNEY: You were speaking a moment ago about how a lot of artists are starting to go entrepreneurial at the moment. I guess partly empowered by the Internet.

MS. OLSOFF: A Damien Hirst moment.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes. Well, his—

MS. OLSOFF: Which might be not as transparent as it may seem. But still he's making it seem like you can go that route to the auction house yourself.

MR. McELHINNEY: But the timing was astonishingly lucky, too, for him, I think.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: A month later it might have—

MS. OLSOFF: Well, people might not—We'll see what happens with that.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes. But earlier you stated that you were one of the few dealer-run spaces. So that means that back in the early eighties there were a lot of artists also going out on the road in public spaces.

MS. PILKINGTON: Oh, that's true.

MS. OLSOFF: But still, too, I think a lot of the younger dealers who open these days were artists. Like Becky Smith. There are a lot of examples of people who are artists who really aren't—they realize while being artists, they get involved in curating. They open a space where they want to show their friends. And then they realize they want a better dealer actually—I'm an artist myself. And that happens still, I think, a lot.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, I imagine that a lot of artists are curious about how business works. Because they'd like to understand what the people who represent them have to know, have to go through. That helps make them a more useful partner in the whole enterprise.

MS. PILKINGTON: Some of our artists, one in particular or the few I know, interned at various not-for-profits. They say it was extremely helpful in terms of understanding how to put your slides together. Not something you do anymore. But how to put your slides together, how to present your work. And if you don't see how it's happening, if you're just an artist in the studio—I think art schools now are better at telling artists how to get their work out there. But I think back in the eighties some kids had no idea.

MS. OLSOFF: Also I think part of the reason Penny and I survived, too, is because we weren't artists. So we had this very— You know we always had insurance and alarms. I mean we were really good record keepers and inventory keepers and invoice makers. And we knew condition reports. And we were so trained in all that. And the artists like that also because we were giving structure, and it was a real— Even though it was small, it felt real.

MR. McELHINNEY: So, how long were you in that space?

MS. PILKINGTON: We moved to Eighth between Avenue B and C in the fall of '86. So we opened in September '83.

MR. McELHINNEY: Three years.

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Who did you exhibit at the first space other than Sue Coe?

MS. OLSOFF: We showed Walter Martin, whom we still show; and he now works with a woman named Paloma Munoz. And it is better known now. And was quite well known then. But in between the times, you know, 25 years of a career, he's our good friend and our oldest artist who we still work with. But not the oldest artist we work with. [Laughs].

MR. McELHINNEY: But he's the oldest in cooperation, years of cooperation.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes. And we've gone through a lot with Walter, and it's great. We've shown Joan Nelson, as I mentioned.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. PILKINGTON: We did a two-person show of—or was it a three person show?—of Lynne Cohen, Sophie Ristelhueber who— Was it a two-person show?

MS. OLSOFF: No, , it was a two-person show.

MS. PILKINGTON: And Lynne Cohen is still showing and exhibiting. She's a Canadian artist. And Sophie Ristelhueber is still showing and exhibiting in France, I think.

MS. OLSOFF: We showed Erika Rothenberg who is an important artist. And we showed her twice, I think.

MS. PILKINGTON: I think she was in the last show in '86. I think she was the last show on Tenth Street.

MR. McELHINNEY: How long were you exhibiting Sue Coe?

MS. PILKINGTON: Two years.

MS. OLSOFF: We did two shows?

MS. PILKINGTON: I think so.

MS. OLSOFF: Did South Africa have a show?

MS. PILKINGTON: Was the "*Woman Walks Into a Bar - Is Raped By Four Men on the Pool Table - While 20 Watch*", 1983] in the first show?

MS. OLSOFF: No, second show.

MS. PILKINGTON: And where was the huge one of the subway that Jerry Speyer bought?

MS. OLSOFF: I don't remember. Sue found the East Village to be too commercial for her. Her Marxist friends were giving her a load of criticism. And she didn't like the group shows. She was in some group shows that most artists in the East Village in those days would have died or given their blood to be in. And she would waltz into our office, raging like a maniac: How could she be in this show!?! How can these people all like Robert Pincus Witten write this about her?! And you have to sue the publisher of this! And we would go look and find out Tony Shafrazi published it. And we can't do this. So she sent us a letter in the mail, right?

MS. PILKINGTON: No, it was the one and only time I've been handed a letter—when you're served?

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, a process server.

MS. PILKINGTON: I didn't know. Now, I watch TV, I know what that means. But then I had no idea what that was.

MS. OLSOFF: It was extremely stressful.

MS. PILKINGTON: It was awful.

MS. OLSOFF: And she was our main breadwinner at the time.

MS. PILKINGTON: And extremely important in helping us choose other artists and helping us be as political as we were.

MS. OLSOFF: Well, and still is. We spent a huge amount of time with her. And no conversation with Sue is trivial. Everything is about politics all the time. So it was a huge influence on us. And the artists,—look at Paul Markus, who's another interesting, important artist who's very un—what's the word?

MS. PILKINGTON: Under-recognized?

MS. OLSOFF: Under-recognized because his work's so political. So she really defined who we are still today. But she found the East Village—and it was—you know, a gentrifying neighborhood. It was very commercial. It was being exported over going to SoHo and Fifty-seventh Street. And she showed us this letter saying she was leaving the gallery. Had she come in and told us she wanted to leave the gallery, I think it all would've ended up the same, right?

MS. PILKINGTON: Well, the reason she served us, I think, is that she thought we would change her mind. That we'd persuade her not to. And she didn't want to be persuaded not to. That's why she did it like that.

MS. OLSOFF: So we had to get a lawyer, and we had to meet with her lawyer and with her. And it was all really, really tense and unpleasant.

MR. McELHINNEY: A lot of drama.

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes, we weren't allowed to call her. Part of this serving, we weren't allowed to make direct contact.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, as I understand it from the other interviews that I have conducted, the art business seems to be intertwined with real estate in a lot of ways, in SoHo, the Lower East Side, Chelsea. That there's always been some kind of reciprocity between the arrival of the galleries and the desire by owners of the buildings or whoever to elevate the standard of living and also the prices of property in the neighborhood.

MS. PILKINGTON: Yeah.

MR. McELHINNEY: So it seems like inevitable that any time that there's a new hot scene, what's going to happen is people are going to come in, and the artists won't be able to afford to own their buildings. Speculators are going to follow the artists. And then finally throw them out. And that seems to happen a lot. [Laughs.]

MS. OLSOFF: It happens all the time. The galleries like the neighborhood— They come in because they're cheap.

MS. PILKINGTON: Well, usually it is the artists, I think. The artists come in. The artists start it.

MS. OLSOFF: Right. Exactly.

MS. PILKINGTON: The galleries follow. And then everyone thinks, oh, this is okay; we won't get mugged.

MS. OLSOFF: It's kind of like a nice restaurant. Let's renovate this building, and let's kick out those people who've been living there forever and sell it for more.

MS. PILKINGTON: Or rent it for more. It doesn't even have to be selling. It's just the rents started going up. So, we moved east at the wrong time. We moved to 8 BC just as other people were starting to move to SoHo and Broadway.

MS. OLSOFF: No, no Pat Hearn. No one was moving actually. It took another year.

MS. PILKINGTON: No. But I remember Bruce. A good friend, Bruce Mailman, who ran the nightclub, The Saint, who was a collector—had become a friend through coming to the gallery and buying things.

MS. OLSOFF: Buying art. Buying Sue Coe's.

MS. PILKINGTON: And we went with him and Billy that spring on a trip to Jamaica, and he said, "Do not sign that lease. Do not move farther east. The tide is changing." I said, "It's too late! I signed it already."

MR. McELHINNEY: This was '86?

MS. PILKINGTON: This was the spring of '86.

MR. McELHINNEY: That's about the same time that a lot of galleries were opening up on Broadway, NoHo, around here.

MS. OLSOFF: But no one opened on Broadway. When we moved to Broadway, Gracie was in below us. But not much had— Oh, Jamie was already there, Jamie Wolfe

MS. PILKINGTON: Curt Marcus.

MS. OLSOFF: They were all there before us?

MS. PILKINGTON: . They were all there before us.

MS. OLSOFF: See, the thing with us—and this is really the biggest problem for us—is that we really started our gallery because we wanted to open a gallery. Our goal was not to be a big—I mean we succeeded in that sense—to be a big powerful gallery— Our goal was not to be Engluher [sp] or to be [Larry] Gagosian. And we reluctantly moved. We didn't want to leave the East Village. We didn't want to go to SoHo. And then once we got to SoHo, we didn't really want to leave SoHo and go to Chelsea because that even seemed more elitist to us and less fun and more inconvenient and colder. And- were forced to stay in business. So we're not really—we're not very clever in the real estate part of it.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, it seems as if you're not really part of that game. You're just art dealers.

MS. OLSOFF: We're just art dealers.

MR. McELHINNEY: And you've got that focus. Whereas as you're stating, a lot of other dealers also became involved with real estate or entertainment or—

MS. OLSOFF: Or decorating lobbies of condos, you know.

MR. McELHINNEY: [Laughs] —putting yourselves between the artists and the collectors and being sort of the gatekeepers and sort of the people who carried that conversation.

MS. OLSOFF: And also being, you know, being important culturally. You know yesterday when I was watching Obama [President Barack Obama] become president which was so moving, I thought of the artists that Penny and I have shown for the last 25 years. And this is what we sort of realized yesterday was very much what we've been saying, what our artists have been saying, should happen. So, you know, seeping into the cultural *Zeitgeist* and making a difference and selling art because of that is much more rewarding, and why we responded to Sue Coe rather than being real estate brokers.

MS. PILKINGTON: We tried to do the secondary market because most galleries survive on their secondary market work because it makes more money and you don't have to invest in the artists' careers. But we're not good at it, and it takes away from dealing with the artists we represent. So the amount of time you might spend selling—

MS. OLSOFF: Well, you hire someone.

MS. PILKINGTON: You hire someone.

MS. OLSOFF: You hire people.

MS. PILKINGTON: Who specialize in that. I mean we did try to sell at Warhol or something. But you need so much expertise, and you have to spend so much time especially if it's an artist who has fakes out there and this and that, that it wasn't rewarding to us. And it didn't help us. It didn't help our artists. And that's where we have to spend our time, working with our artists and helping them.

MS. OLSOFF: Yeah, one of our biggest problems is sort of like—I need a therapist here probably as well as an interviewer—is that money was never like a huge motivator for us. I mean, yes, we need it, and it stresses us out not to have it. But it's not, you know, real estate and money were never our *raison d'être*.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, a lot of people would say that that's a very traditional attitude. Like if you really want to do a good job as an art dealer representing artists, you can't be only about the money. In fact, the money is there to allow you to do what you want to do. And if your calling is an active expression the way an artist might undertake a canvas or a sculpture, a work of art, as an active expression, then your dealing art is an active expression, too. It seems like that to me.

MS. OLSOFF: That's what Leon Golub used to say. He used to always say that dealers were tweens or something.

MR. McELHINNEY: Tweens?

MS. OLSOFF: Somewhere in between a businessperson and an artist.

MR. McELHINNEY: That's funny.

MS. OLSOFF: They were this weird species that sort of hovered between an artist and a businessperson; that they weren't either particularly. That they had their own sort of title—if you want to give it a name. So I thought that was nice of an artist to recognize that.

MR. McELHINNEY: And a successful artist. In your experience, what proportion, what ratio of artists with whom you've worked have been kind of capable of understanding, you know, the business end of things? Or interested in it? You know the artists?

MS. OLSOFF: [Laughs] I don't know.

MS. PILKINGTON: Some do. I mean some really do, and some think they do. And some have no clue.

MS. OLSOFF: I think that-

MS. OLSOFF: -Some choose to not want to know.

MS. PILKINGTON: Some choose not to want to. Some pair up with somebody like a spouse or a partner who can be their sort of business manager.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. PILKINGTON: And sometimes that's a really good combination because you have somebody who's living

with the artist and helping guide them without us— Because we're not the kind of dealers who go in and say, Oh, that's so much more saleable than that.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. PILKINGTON: You know do more of those. I mean we've never done that. Sometimes we wish we could, but we've never done it.

MS. OLSOFF: Well, some are really good partners with us in business, will come in and have meetings. And others are really self-destructive without really intending to, do a lot of things to subvert us from what we need to do to help them.

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes. I mean some of the meetings are totally empowering for both sides. And then you get the other artists where the phone rings, and you think, I don't want to talk to them. I can't talk to them. Because all they're going to do is complain or drain your energy or see something negative in what you think is positive. It's a whole spectrum. I mean if we're working with 20 artists—

MS. OLSOFF: And they've changed over the years so many times.

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes, they're very different.

MS. OLSOFF: But it's a challenge to really deal with them all and keep them all happy and do the best for each one. It's a huge undertaking.

MS. PILKINGTON: I mean and you act as business person to them, marriage guidance counselor to them, accountant to them.

MS. OLSOFF: Career counselor. And friend.

MS. PILKINGTON: And you have to be so careful sometimes where what you say and where you cross the lines between a real friend and saying something on a Saturday evening after a few drinks. And then it comes back to haunt you next week in the office. So it's complicated.

MR. McELHINNEY: So it's important, too, that you work with people who you can work with.

MS. PILKINGTON: We've worked with artists where we finally said, "We cannot work with this person anymore." They call us at six o'clock every day to harangue us. Or they call us at ten o'clock, and if you're not there at five past ten, ten past ten, quarter past ten, until you get into the office and you find 20 or 30 messages. And you think, I can't deal with this person anymore. They're not bringing enough to the table. It's very much like a marriage.

MR. McELHINNEY: That's just rude behavior.

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes. But they're very upset. [Laughs]

MS. OLSOFF: Well, some of them are compulsively involved with themselves. Not everyone's like that.

MS. PILKINGTON: Not everyone's like that.

MR. McELHINNEY: If more artists today are becoming more entrepreneurial, more enterprising, that the permission for artists to behave like romantic bohemian, righteous, holy fools, you know, is that going to go out of style? That kind of, you know, petulant, diva, hissy-fit?

MS. OLSOFF: No, that'll just combine, with the shrewd business person, that's all.

MR. McELHINNEY: That'll just combine.

MS. OLSOFF: In this business, for example.

MR. McELHINNEY: You'll find that that they'll play that role when it works. Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: No, it's interesting because I think that there does seem to be a shift away from a bohemian

—  
MS. OLSOFF: And the East Village definitely is romanticized because it did represent a time of individualism, and eccentricity you don't find anymore. I mean Williamsburg to me always looked like a down-and-out J. Crew catalog or Brooklyn Industries sort of encapsulated it. Everyone looked kind of the same, in the same clothes, and I thought you couldn't even identify who was really fun and who wasn't. It wasn't my crowd either; I was

older. But it was just so different.

MS. PILKINGTON: But in the eighties you had characters like, you know— I remember going to a basement on Sixth Street where Pat Hearn was singing. She was doing her nightclub cabaret thing. And I mean that— Can you imagine any dealer right now doing that?

MS. OLSOFF: Oh, I was going to say the Internet is a huge change. It's a huge change for artists because now, you know, people email them directly. People, they have their websites. People contact them directly. The world is very small. A dealer in New York, is not as important as it used to be because the world's smaller. You know a lot of artists really don't want to have to spend a whole lot of time talking when they could be working. But shooting off an email—I mean they're all—99 percent of artists are extremely literate and intelligent, well-read people. There's no problem, you know, sending out emails.

MR. McELHINNEY: Jpeg images [inaudible].

MS. OLSOFF: Yes. Exactly. And it's easy. There's no slide keeping and labeling. Emailing is right at your fingertips.

MR. McELHINNEY: Everything's successive.

MS. OLSOFF: All they need is a credit card machine, and boom. [They laugh].

MR. McELHINNEY: Ebay. Have you ever seen any artwork on Ebay that artists you knew were—

MS. OLSOFF: No, not on Ebay.

MR. McELHINNEY: —almost showed.

MS. OLSOFF: Not on Ebay, no. We used to look a lot like when it first started. Artists would give gifts to people, you know, someone older, people older who had a history, you know. In the sixties and seventies when work was not worth anything but gifts, we'd be nervous they'd turn up on Ebay. There are Ebay bottom fishers out there who are constantly monitoring it, I'm sure,. But it's not anything we pay any attention to at all.

MR. McELHINNEY: No, those would be people who were more in touch with people dealing in the secondary market.

MS. OLSOFF: It's people scraping off the bottom auctions and that kind of stuff.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, that's, you know, antiques and collectibles market.

MS. OLSOFF: It's the same.

[END OF DISC 1, TRACK 2.]

MR. McELHINNEY: But uh, okay. So '86 you moved to Eighth Street.

MS. OLSOFF: 337 East Eighth Street

MS. PILKINGTON: It was a nightclub called 8BC which was run by—

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh yeah.

MS. OLSOFF: Dennis—

MS. PILKINGTON: Cornelius.

MS. OLSOFF: Cornelius. Conboy and Dennis?

MS. PILKINGTON: Dennis.

MR. McELHINNEY: Dennis for now.

MS. OLSOFF: Our good friend Dennis.

MR. McELHINNEY: And what changed when you moved the gallery? What amenities—

MS. PILKINGTON: This was the first time we spent money, real money. I was friends with John Pawson who's quite a well-known architect at this point. And he had done a few galleries in London. And—he is Mr. Minimalist.

And he did the space for us. It was 2,000 square feet. And from the outside you couldn't tell it was there. He lived in London, but the job was managed by a Dutch—Belgian—guy who lived here called Alain Mertens..

MS. OLSOFF: But the space, just going back, 8BC was a really important performance space. Dennis and Cornelius had won the Bessie Awards. John Lurie played there. Karen Finley.

MS. OLSOFF: Ethyl Eichelberger. It was like *the* place where we all hung out all the time. It was like the best of the East Village. It was on two levels.

MS. PILKINGTON: It was really funky. You went down into what was the basement, but they'd taken out the floor. And the stage was basically the back half of the building which was basically at ground level. It was a really funky space.

MS. OLSOFF: And the whole block was either torn-down buildings, squatters, car repair place. I mean it was really, really burnt out.

MS. PILKINGTON: What's it called when people grandfather or they do it themselves. They go in and they—

MS. OLSOFF: They'd buy for a dollar those buildings that were—

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, right, right. The precise term—

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, it was really— Once you got past the park it was really, you know, it was definitely a crazy place.

MS. PILKINGTON: But the Christodora had opened or was opening?

MS. OLSOFF: It was, while we were there, as being open on Ninth and B.

MS. PILKINGTON: Which was sort of like the first fancy rehab apartment building—renovated apartment building. It used to be—

MS. OLSOFF: We moved into a space that had a big history. I mean Dennis and Cornelius were done and moving to San Francisco to open a restaurant. So we rented it from them, right?

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes.

MS. OLSOFF: Our lease was with them. They owned the building, we rented it from them.

MR. McELHINNEY: So you had the branding, as it were, of the address.

MS. OLSOFF: It was in the family, you know. It was like we weren't renting it from new people coming in. It felt like a good vibe or the spirit of the place.

MR. McELHINNEY: Uh-huh.

MS. OLSOFF: It felt really good. And they lived upstairs? They kept that apartment?

MS. PILKINGTON: They lived upstairs. They didn't move immediately. They lived upstairs. They just wanted to stop doing the bar and the club.

MS. OLSOFF: So John Pawson had at that time—I mean Penny really minimizes how famous he is now. He has books and articles, and he's very, very famous. He was always very elegant and had one shirt to his name: one beautiful Japanese designer and one suit; but he laundered every day and was frayed at the cuffs. But he was always in impeccable taste. And he came into this cacophony, this space, that was just as funky and disgusting. And worked with Alain [Mertens] who was our contract person. And made it the most gorgeous place on earth. So when you walked into our space—if you want to see anything similar to it, you can see the Calvin Klein store on Madison Avenue near Barney's. He did that maybe five years later? Something like that.

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes, yes.

MS. OLSOFF: But it was visionary what he did there. It was beautiful. And from the outside, you know, you'd be seeing a rough, disgusting, lop-sided building. And you'd walk into the most elegant, beautifully-designed space you can imagine.

MR. McELHINNEY: You all were involved in all of the decisions about choice of materials.

MS. OLSOFF: We listened to John. It was like working with an artist.



MS. PILKINGTON: I mean basically the [inaudible] told us clean white walls—

MR. McELHINNEY: Hardwood.

MS. PILKINGTON: No, cement floor.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, cement floor.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes.

MS. PILKINGTON: And I think that the most glamorous thing perhaps was the white marble top of the front counter.

MS. OLSOFF: It was really just taking a really messy space and revising it so beautifully. It was beautiful. And the painted glass door.

MS. PILKINGTON: No door handles, no sockets, no switches, no nothing.

MS. OLSOFF: And if you look at a building he does, like a kitchen, you don't even see a faucet, and it looks like everything's really pared down. So we were there unfortunately a very short time.

MR. McELHINNEY: How long?

MS. PILKINGTON: We moved to Broadway in September '88. So we were there for two seasons.

MR. McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. PILKINGTON: And we didn't know. I mean our timing was crazy. We didn't know that the East Village was going to take off in September '83. We thought we were the only people opening a gallery. We didn't know when we moved to Broadway that the riots were going to happen until—

MS. OLSOFF: Moved to Eighth Street.

MS. PILKINGTON: No, when we moved to Broadway. That summer we moved to Broadway, Tompkins Square riots took place. And the Eighth Street block was closed down for three months. We would've gone out of business if we'd been there. We had no idea that we were moving just before this tremendous event.

MR. McELHINNEY: It was lucky.

MS. PILKINGTON: We were really lucky. Both times our timing was lucky without any, knowledge of—you know crystal ball stuff. So we opened in September '88. Either with Benney or Bo Bartlett, one of those two.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, our first show was Paul Benney, wasn't it? We had a giant, huge opening.

MS. PILKINGTON: For Paul Benney?

MS. OLSOFF: I think so. Our opening show on that street was something very—

MS. PILKINGTON: No, on Eighth Street. I'm talking about Broadway. Our opening show on Eighth Street was a huge Paul Benney show with pieces sort of like the cage, and the cat, and everything.

MS. OLSOFF: He was like our classic East Village artist who's not— Well, he's a portrait painter now, and he does portraits of prime ministers, and people but— At the time he had a classic East Village style. He was our sort of stereotypical famous East Village artist.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: He would be in every trendy show, and we did sell him well, and he was—

MS. OLSOFF: We met him the same time as Sue Coe, and he came with us.

MS. PILKINGTON: He came with us on the ferry to Snug Harbor.

MS. OLSOFF: And he was really well known. His career has totally changed. He's a really well-known portrait painter in totally different circles than we—a different art world right now. But anyway, we had this great big opening.

MR. McELHINNEY: A lot of people, a lot of artists, I think, reinvent themselves every so often, you know- I think.

Which must be challenging for art dealers. The artists keep changing their style or evolve—

MS. PILKINGTON: We have a few artists who decided not to keep painting, which has been sad.

MS. OLSOFF: Like Joe, the East Village Joe Houston. Most beautiful paintings. And we sold every one. He had two shows, and they were small paintings, and there must have been 40 pictures.

MR. McELHINNEY: Huston like Houston?

MS. OLSOFF: Yes. And he's a museum curator now. I mean he just completely— And he was a fantastic painter.

MS. PILKINGTON: Right, he changed—he stopped. He went to be a restorer. And then he went from there to museum curator.

MS. OLSOFF: I think of an artist named Michael Flanagan as an example of someone is interesting. Because we started showing him—he was showing with lots of galleries on Fifty-seventh Street. And he was in his forties when we met him.

MS. PILKINGTON: Bess Cutler, didn't he?

MS. OLSOFF: I don't think so.

MS. PILKINGTON: No, no?

MS. OLSOFF: And he technically was really great, but hadn't really figured out exactly what to paint. But we love technically obsessive, compulsive people. And then he started this series called Stations, where they were trompe l'oeil paintings of photos of train stations. And they also had a written part and they looked like photographs of old train stations. It became a book, and it got huge coverage. And he did three shows of everything. To this day he hasn't really come up with another series to paint. So to me that's a very frustrating thing. And I think for him it's probably a very frustrating thing.

MS. OLSOFF: And then David Smith is fantastic—Fantastic artist. Vietnam vet, did the most incredible shows. These are egg tempera., and he did big installations. But he was so damaged in Vietnam, he really could not ever function even with our support. And we really did so much with him. And now he's down in Brazil, I think.

MR. McELHINNEY: Returning briefly to Eighth Street, how did you set up, you know, the business? Because this is part of what the Archives is interested in having read into the record—is what did you learn from Tenth Street? Like storage, how did you solve the question of storage? Did you hire a staff? Was Ester there- uh was on the team still?

MS. OLSOFF: Ester went to Israel.

MR. McELHINNEY: Okay.

MS. OLSOFF: And we hired—

MS. PILKINGTON: Patrick.

MS. OLSOFF: Patrick. And then Lisa was on Eighth Street. We've had a series of one employee beside us for a long time. So after Ester was Patrick.

MS. PILKINGTON: Patrick had worked on Broadway. Now it's a cigar store.

MS. OLSOFF: OK Harris.

MS. PILKINGTON: Patrick had worked at OK Harris for a long time. And I think he wanted to do his own gallery. His boyfriend was wealthy so he could afford to—he took a huge salary cut. We were paying peanuts. I mean we were making peanuts, we were paying peanuts. We weren't even paying proper salaries to ourselves. I mean at some point the accountant said, "You should start paying yourselves a salary. It's important. It's psychologically important to pay yourself some salary."

MS. OLSOFF: We forgot to do that for quite awhile.

MS. PILKINGTON: Well, there was no money. I mean we were scraping by. Patrick took a huge salary cut to come work for us, and he was like *the* guy; he did everything. And we did, too. I mean we all painted the walls. We all mopped the floors. We all hung shows. We all wrapped and packed and answered the phone. There was no

hierarchy in a sense.

MR. McELHINNEY: So you handled all of the packing, all of the hanging, all of the installation, all the preparation of shows?

MS. OLSOFF: Everything. The last thing you would do for a show was put the name on the wall.

MS. PILKINGTON: That's true.

MS. OLSOFF: And in those days you had to get type and make a straight line on the wall and put it on. That was always my job. We did every single thing, you know, again, before computers. Mailing lists were on paper, stacks of paper, with the labels. Because people had moved then white-out was your major tool.

MS. PILKINGTON: And there was the stamping, the labeling and everything.

MS. OLSOFF: We stamped every mailing. We did everything.

MR. McELHINNEY: And accounting?

MS. OLSOFF: And all the bookkeeping and all the accounting, yeah.

MR. McELHINNEY: And you were still, you know, the first person or—

MS. OLSOFF: Actually no. I had to transfer it to Penny because her math skills are far superior to mine. And her attention to bill paying is much better than mine. She actually pays the bills. Where I hate paying bills. I resent paying Con Ed [Con Edison]. Penny realizes you must pay a bill or else you're going to go out of business. So we had a division of labor early on, and Penny does all the business.

MS. PILKINGTON: I used to make her do the bank rec because I thought—

MS. OLSOFF: I did it for years.

MS. PILKINGTON: For years. And I thought that way she would have an idea of what was going on. But at a certain point she stopped. [Laughs] All that handwritten accounting.

MR. McELHINNEY: So you really shared the tasks. Who was doing most of the selling? Or did each of you have a closer relationship with certain clients, or did you have a good cop/bad cop thing going on?

MS. OLSOFF: I do more-

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes, we'd do good cop/bad cop. And we do, you know, nice English girl, you know—

MS. OLSOFF: Long Island Jewish people are my thing.

MS. PILKINGTON: [Laughs] But we can revert to both. But if there's like— I remember saying to Wendy, "Wendy! I can't deal with this one. You go! You go!"

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, someone walks in, you know, with a French accent or an English accent, yes.

MS. PILKINGTON: Oh, when—what's his name—Spock-

MS. OLSOFF: Leonard Nimoy.

MR. McELHINNEY: Spock? [Laughs]

MS. PILKINGTON: -walked in, Wendy goes, I can't handle it! Penny, I can't handle! Alright, you go. You talked to him.

MS. OLSOFF: I was really into Star Trek at that time; it was way too much for me to handle. But what's really good about relationships, kidding aside, is that we can deal with a huge variety of people, both of us, because of our different backgrounds. So that really helps us a lot. Because you do get a huge amount of people from the suburbs, around this area, and we do get a huge amount of international people. And we're both—we're very chameleonesque and we can interchange, and we can be in any art fair. We can deal with, you know, the art handlers and the light technicians and places that can help us out, you know, the workers. And we can deal with the heads of corporations and fancy women and, you know, booking artists also. So we're very well adapted to deal with a variety of different people.

MR. McELHINNEY: When did you do your first art fair?

MS. PILKINGTON: In Chicago.

MS. OLSOFF: Well, Penny was really—

MR. McELHINNEY: Navy Pier? Well, you had experience going to the Basel Art Fair, as a kid, I guess—

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: —as a kid, right?

MS. PILKINGTON: Well, not as a kid. My parents were frugal, didn't bring us on business trips. [Laughs] But I did work for—I worked for Annely Juda a couple of times there, and I worked for my parents a couple of times there. I remember sitting down in our office on Eighth Street talking to—I don't know if it was Magoo and Tom Blackman [Thomas Blackman], but some people from Chicago, selling us on Chicago.

MS. OLSOFF: I think Phyllis Kind really wanted us to go, too. I mean we had some dealers calling us. And Penny—I remember Penny clearly saying: I really think we should do art fairs. And I didn't know anything about art fairs at all.

MS. PILKINGTON: Because it takes you out of this box. It takes it out of the East Village—or they're just an East Village gallery. There was a certain thing going on about, oh, they're an East Village gallery. So somehow it had turned from a big positive thing to a slightly negative thing. It takes you out of that. You're now a gallery and an art fair with no label. And you are competing.

MS. OLSOFF: So it was definitely a business decision to do Chicago Art Fair. We probably did it in 1985

MS. PILKINGTON: We made contacts with our peers. We made contacts with new collectors. We made contacts with collectors who were too scared to come to New York, or too scared to come to New York in the East Village. We never made a fortune. We made do.

MS. OLSOFF: At Chicago.

MS. PILKINGTON: At Chicago. We didn't come back rolling in dough. We put it down to advertising, PR, spreading the word. And spreading the word for your artists, spreading the word for the gallery.

MR. McELHINNEY: And you were there for 15 years?

MS. PILKINGTON: Or more.

MS. OLSOFF: It was always so complicated because there was a Navy Pier—there was, you know, John Wilson and Tom Blackman and David Lester. There's this triumvirate. And it also became very fractious there. It's such a really long and complicated story.

MS. PILKINGTON: Did you do shows there at the Merchandise Mart?

MS. OLSOFF: We've done that now for two years. And we did a hiatus from Chicago for a few years.

MS. OLSOFF: I mean we just started going back to Chicago recently. But we did it from the East Village for ten, 12 years straight, until the business—until Chicago died. It pretty much had left. The collectors stopped buying. The art dealers, the galleries, the museums. The art fair has changed. And we started doing the art fairs and the ADAA art fair and then the Basel-Miami art fair. And Chicago—

MS. PILKINGTON: Well, we did Basel for four or five years, and we did ARCO for four or five years.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, we do a lot of art fairs. We've always done that. So from those small beginning days of Penny saying we should get out of our box.

MR. McELHINNEY: So do they still mainly serve a PR purpose? Or have they become more profitable.

MS. OLSOFF: Well, they were extremely profitable in the last couple of years. [Laughs] But I think now going we're back to the PR model.

MR. McELHINNEY: I see. I see.

MS. OLSOFF: Which is good, you know. We have perspective on what an art fair can be like when it's not a booming time and what its purpose is. So rather than, you know, if we do art fairs now, we can adjust our expectations. It's not fun. But we understand that the money might come later; you're laying groundwork. If you can just cover your costs, it's a good fair. It's going back to that again.

MR. McELHINNEY: Are there any collectors who you met at an art fair who later came to see you here in New York?

MS. OLSOFF: Oh, yeah, all the time.

MR. McELHINNEY: All the time. Okay. So—

MS. OLSOFF: And you never know, you know. It could be two months or it could be in two years.

MS. PILKINGTON: And you don't necessarily know. It's only if they happen to say, Oh, yes— Unless you have a memory for every single person you talked to. And we talk to different people. That people say, Oh, yes, you know, I saw your booth in Basel in 1992. I mean something happened like that Museum, a German museum, called and said, "I've been following you since 1992 [or 1990] when I saw your booth in Basel, Switzerland. And I'm thinking, that's so European. They don't say hello. They wouldn't dream of giving you a business card. So that it's totally unquantifiable until ten years later they say, Oh, and we'd like to include so-and-so in a show. Or consider buying so-and-so. So it's very difficult. You just know it's good.

MR. McELHINNEY: So, you know, you can't have annual, quarterly expectations of cause and effect. We're going to spend the money on this adventure, and we're going to get a return six months, nine months, a year out. It could be ten years.

MS. OLSOFF: No it's funny, my father was in retail. And when we first started, he saw a store. So we sat down with him for an hour, and he went through a series of questions like what's the season? And what do you have? And I said, "It doesn't really work like that." And we never had another conversation. It's not really the same

MS. PILKINGTON: He said— One thing I do remember he said was: Location, location, location. [Laughs]

MS. OLSOFF: Well, you can't— I mean I think Penny and I, you know, we know every month how much we have to make to pay our bills.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: We don't think about it that much because it's just so difficult. But we know that. And I think other dealers do more about writing things down and juggling numbers, and we're not really that business-minded—as we should be probably.

MR. McELHINNEY: So when you moved over to Broadway, in '88, wow! That was kind of a scary time in the art world, as I recall.

MS. PILKINGTON: I think that's part of what Wendy's saying about the fact we don't write things down. [Laughs] We do things on a wing and a prayer. We took a 5,000 square foot space. We had to. We had to. The tide has turned, and our friend was right in spring of '86. He was right that nobody else was moving east. Pat Hearn, talked about moving out. But nobody else was moving east.

MS. PILKINGTON: Well, she had already moved east. We were slow. Everyone else was moving to Broadway as we were moving to 8BC. So the tide had turned. And this space came up, and it was 5,000 square feet. And we only had 2,000 on 8BC. But we took it. And—

MS. OLSOFF: And renovated, again.

MS. PILKINGTON: And renovated it. And negotiated a low rent to begin with—and it got higher in the ten years—so that we could start low.

MS. OLSOFF: Economy got worse and worse.

MS. PILKINGTON: You know start with something we thought we could afford. And it was tough. It was really, really tough paying the rent there. Very, very tough.

MR. McELHINNEY: Did you use the same architect?

MS. PILKINGTON: No, we used a—

MR. McELHINNEY: We couldn't afford John at all.

MS. PILKINGTON: He'd become too big and too popular. We used a friend who was—

MS. OLSOFF: Ed Mills who's a really good architect.

MS. PILKINGTON: Who's a collector. We met him through the gallery. We met him through Debra Sharpe.

MS. OLSOFF: Who's Deborah Sharpe?

MS. PILKINGTON: [Inaudible.] And we asked him to make it as minimal as possible. And he did make the space as minimal as possible. He put his signature on these amazing doors.

MS. OLSOFF: Amazing doors and desk. He did a real number on that with a guy named Petar.

MS. PILKINGTON: Totally a minimalist. [Laughs] They're beautiful.

MR. McELHINNEY: So how did the business change once you came over to Broadway? Did you hire more people? Did you have a portion of the gallery that was—

MS. PILKINGTON: Interns, yes.

MS. OLSOFF: Well, no we had Scott. And then we had William.

MS. PILKINGTON: We also had—

MS. PILKINGTON: Karen. We also had Karen.

MS. OLSOFF: No one was paid a lot, and we often didn't take paychecks. And Penny often didn't take a paycheck.

MS. PILKINGTON: One employee was subsidized by—

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, but that was a very short time, too.

MS. PILKINGTON: By an outside source who wanted that employee to get experience.

MR. McELHINNEY: So you didn't have per se a preparator or a bookkeeper?

MS. OLSOFF: Well we had people come in and out.

MS. PILKINGTON: I have done the books completely on my own up until three years ago. The invention of QuickBooks or Quicken was a huge help.

MS. OLSOFF: Usually our other person did all the wrapping and packing with us. But when Scott was there, we had at least William and Robert at some point, and they were part time.

MS. PILKINGTON: At one point it was Scott, you, and me, and Carrie, I think. Scott was there when we got our first computer, one computer.

MS. OLSOFF: I don't know how, in retrospect, we did it. But we did. Penny and I were barely getting paid. Everyone was barely making anything. You know the art world looks right, expensive and fancy. But there's a lot of struggle behind the scene, and this happens all the time at every level. People make a lot of presumptions about what's really going on.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, a lot of people are comparing the moment we're in now as a sort of slightly more intense replay of what happened in 1987-88]

MS. PILKINGTON: It took time. I remember thinking there's an 18 month to two year lag in the art world from the economy, the stock market, whatever going down. I think the lag has gone—it's either gone or there's a six-month lag; it's not a two-year lag.

MR. McELHINNEY: No. Right.

MS. PILKINGTON: So I don't think— If '88 was the crisis, I don't think we really started feeling it 'til '90, because we moved, and we were sort of okay. And then it started to really hit.

MR. McELHINNEY: Eighty-seven, October '87. And then all of that unfolding. Yes, by '89-90, it was really shown as I recall.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, just a lot of galleries closed.

MS. PILKINGTON: We didn't even think of renegotiating our lease; we'd never heard of that before. But we didn't think of it.

MS. OLSOFF: He didn't have spaces open in this building Ken. It seems worse now to me than it did then. Maybe we're older now, not younger and foolish. We never made a lot, so we didn't lose a lot. We didn't think life was going to change. Some people in SoHo now who think, well, welcome to my world. They're like it hasn't really changed that much. You know other people lost money. They didn't have anything to lose. Or they're still scraping by. And we were more in that category in the eighties. It's always been hard, and it's still hard.

MR. McELHINNEY: Scraping the scraping.

MS. PILKINGTON: But, you know, now our employees have low salaries, but they get health insurance. We didn't offer health insurance in the nineties. We didn't have health insurance—

MS. OLSOFF: We didn't have health insurance.

MS. PILKINGTON: Until the mid-'90s ourselves, I don't think.

MR. McELHINNEY: Do you ever find artists at the art fairs?

MS. OLSOFF: Yes. Teun Hocks, who we're showing right now. I mean that's a purpose of art fairs. It was easier then to do it. Now there are so many galleries. You know this could change again. Right at this moment you have this conversation in two years, it could be very different. But, you know, in the eighties when we first started, there weren't a lot of galleries. So there were a lot of artists. I mean you could find artists at art fairs or just from friends [inaudible] or going to studios. You know 25 years later, in the last year or the last five years, there's a huge competition for artists from every dealer fighting for some people who do well, coming out of art school and all that kind of stuff. It wasn't happening. Art fairs were a place to find artists and sell art.

MR. McELHINNEY: So the way an artist might hit the radar for you would be through other artists or other collectors or through friends or just—

MS. PILKINGTON: Or group shows.

MR. McELHINNEY: Group shows.

MS. OLSOFF: I think now the best way to find an artist is with your ears from artists you know. It's not with your eyes. And artists you know whom you trust. Now there are artists you know who will tell you all their friends are fantastic. But you never feel a really tapped into what you like and to what's going on. And when they say something, you have to act on it reasonably—really quickly. It took us a long time to figure that out. Well, for me it took a long time to figure it out. Because you would just think, oh, they're just saying this, and they know the person da da da. But it's really not true. I mean I think the best way is through other artists whom you really trust, who are invested in you and your business as well.

MR. McELHINNEY: So what is it that makes you decide that here's an artist I want to represent? Is it their work? Is it, you know, the personality of the artist? Is it, you know, commercial viability?

MS. PILKINGTON: Trust is the work.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, I think when you see it, you have to first—you react instinctively. And then you have to question your instinct. Because you have to ask why you like it. Because a lot of times you like it because it's the type of work you like, and you can't just show all of the same thing. So first it's instinctive, and then the second part is the personality of the artist. And how, you know, sometimes you meet someone, and they just have nothing—end up a big problem. And sometimes you find this out after you've shown them, too. You realize after you've shown them they don't know what the heck they're making or why they're making it. And it's very hard for them—for you—to put it together also. Although it might look very enigmatic and interesting. So you might show it, and then living with it even after an exhibition, you might, not really fully get it. Nor do they. [Laughs] So the ideal situation is you want a thoughtful artist who has articulated purpose on some level without, having them to write a thesis. And work that's continually engaging and evolving. Now it can evolve minutely or hugely from series to series. But there has to be some evolution. So it could be someone who—I say minutely like Dotty Attie, Karen Arm or Walter Martin with what he's doing now. Or hugely like Dinh [Q. Lê] or Sarah [Oppenheimer], people who just go from leap to leap. But other artists are just in their own little world.

MS. PILKINGTON: I think we've learned that personality has a huge place.

MS. OLSOFF: We have made mistakes.

MS. PILKINGTON: We have taken on artists whose personalities in the end have summed up the relationship. Not the art but the personality we just couldn't deal with anymore. And I think we're better at that, don't you think?

MS. OLSOFF: Yes. But there are some artists, too, like are extremely difficult to deal with, like Carrie Mae Weems

who I would never change those experiences ever. For all the screaming and yelling and craziness and stress, they're the highlight of our lives. So you have to sometimes marry the dysfunctional crazy genius.

MR. McELHINNEY: Just because a person's a pain in the ass doesn't mean you can't work with them or you don't love them.

MS. OLSOFF: Right. They've got to be— With that [inaudible], has to come a lot of good stuff. And a lot of common sense. [They laugh.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, it's—

MS. OLSOFF: Like huge stuff. You know because if it's just someone's a pain in the ass and doing like eh, you know, just like pictures that sell. No, it's not worth it.

MR. McELHINNEY: How often did the two of you agree on issues of taste? Or another way to ask the question is: How often do you see an artist about whom you're excited and Penny's not?

MS. PILKINGTON: Most of the time we're on the same page. Sometimes we're really not on the same page, and one person has to dissuade the other. And sometimes you give the other person the benefit of the doubt and let it go. [Laughs] But most of the time we're on the same page.

MR. McELHINNEY: And hopefully, you know, you don't ever have to say I told you so if it—

MS. PILKINGTON: And I think that that's a very bad thing to say.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, I think so. That's not—

MS. PILKINGTON: Wendy goes out and does more nowadays. We used to do them together. But because of the work, Wendy does most of the studio visits. Unless—

MS. OLSOFF: I'm much more impulsive. And I'm much more—I definitely go to all the studio visits. And I go to the art fairs, and I definitely find the artists. And Penny sometimes will look at me like are you completely crazy? I've gotten Penny into some situations that she ends up being much closer to the artist often than I am. Like I'll start the relationship, but Penny unfortunately or fortunately ends up spending more time and getting better friends with the artist or having to get more involved because she does the business with the artists. So in a way she doesn't always trust in me. And then it's a weird dynamic because Penny ends up knowing the artist on a different level than I do.

MR. McELHINNEY: You court them, she marries them.

MS. PILKINGTON: That's not fair, is it? [They laugh.] She has all the fun.

MS. OLSOFF: But they like her better.

MS. PILKINGTON: How can I say no?

MS. OLSOFF: They say, So when do I get to meet Penny. I say, Oh, you'll get to meet Penny. And she's way more social than I am. I have two kids, Penny doesn't. Penny also has amazing social skills. Like all my social skills I've learned from Penny. She can walk into any party—and it's from being English, I think—and just talk to anyone and be really, seem like she's really interested in what they're saying. She's incredible. [They laugh.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, that would be my next question, was how social is your business? I mean how often do you—

MS. PILKINGTON: Totally.

MS. OLSOFF: Every minute.

MR. McELHINNEY: Every minute. But how often every—I mean you're at a cocktail party or a dinner or something?

MS. OLSOFF: Could be. She is. Penny is every night.

MS. PILKINGTON: I mean this week I had dinner with another art dealer on Monday. Last night I went to an art event with Art In General at Beth de Woody's. Tonight it's a group of people, quite a few of them are artists. Tomorrow night I might stay home and watch TV. [Laughs.]

MS. OLSOFF: Tomorrow night I'm going out with collectors maybe. But she will only stay home and watch TV if



nothing else turns up.

MS. PILKINGTON: Tennis is on. There's tennis on right now. [They laugh.]

MS. OLSOFF: Because I have two kids, I often say to them, "I could be out doing much more interesting things right now, so be nice to me." I mean you can be out every night. And we often go out together. In fact when we interview people now, I say, how good are you at socializing.

MS. PILKINGTON We go to openings and see other shows.

MS. OLSOFF: And always remember every interaction you have can lead to a connection, whether it's a curator, an artist, or a sale. So there's a certain type of person who's a dealer, who can go out and socialize really heavily. But also be working all the time. And I enjoy that myself.

MS. PILKINGTON: So an artist also has to know how to clean up and behave.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, I think so.

MS. PILKINGTON: They're not that good. Some of them are better at that than others.

MS. OLSOFF: They always have the dealers out there to do it. Not all artists like doing this so much honestly.

MR. McELHINNEY: One would assume that, you know, the value of the dealer, among other endless benefits, is to have a person to go do things that you don't want to do. So that you can spend your time in the studio.

MS. PILKINGTON: Right. If an artist said to me, Call me, take me to an opening.. I want to get out there.

MS. OLSOFF: They say that, and then they go.

MS. PILKINGTON: And I'm thinking you're a total liability socially. [They laugh.]

MS. OLSOFF: You do certain things with artists. I mean you take them around and say: Oh, this is this one. Oh, thank you, thank you so much. You introduced me to all these fantastic people. Thank you. So it's a lot of work. It's fun, but it's a lot of work. When it works it's great.

MR. McELHINNEY: So how often do you encounter artists or clients whom you're going to work with in the future? Any random—

MS. OLSOFF: You never know.

MR. McELHINNEY: Engagement. [They laugh.]

MS. PILKINGTON: I think it's actually a very small percentage. There's a lot of time put out talking, socializing.

MS. OLSOFF: You can sell things on that.

MS. PILKINGTON: You can. But I think, you know, it's—to meet somebody who's not already interested in art and they get interested in art and you get them to buy from you, a lifetime. If you're going— If you meet people who are already collectors but they're not—they don't know you—and so they don't come to the gallery. But now they've met you. Now they'll come to the gallery.

MS. OLSOFF: It's a lot of work..

MS. PILKINGTON: That's much more potential there. The artist thing, I think meeting artists socially doesn't help. Does it? I mean that wasn't—

MS. OLSOFF: I found Julie that way, Julie Heffernan, I saw her at an opening. Where someone introduced us, and she was having a show in Brooklyn. And I said, "Oh, my God, you're Julie Heffernan! Oh, I know your work! Oh, I love you!" And then we ended up representing her, and she's one of our most important artists now. So that sort of worked out that way. But had we not been there that day, it might not have happened then.

MS. PILKINGTON: You could say that about David Wojnarowicz. We knew him socially from openings and this and that. And I bumped into him on the street, and he'd just had this huge fight with Gracie Mansion. And, you know, we're talking on the street because we both lived in the East Village. And he came in and talked to us, and we took him on.

MS. OLSOFF: Don Hanson was thrown in the middle of it too.

MS. PILKINGTON: Gracie happened to close the gallery and not know what she was going to do for three months. And then she opened on the floor above us on Broadway. But in those three months, David moved from her gallery to our gallery and stayed with us.

MS. OLSOFF: He did the most important work about AIDS at the time. And it was living with history showing him. And then we represented his estate.

MS. PILKINGTON: That came from just being out socially.

MS. OLSOFF: Well, Walter, too. Calvin Reid introduced us at a party a long time ago. You never know really.

MS. PILKINGTON: You never know.

MR. McELHINNEY: I guess a natural question is also: When one speaks about a society of people who meet at restaurants or openings, in a town like this there'd have to be many overlapping circles.

MS. PILKINGTON: Right.

MR. McELHINNEY: And one of the points a lot of dealers I've interviewed make over and over again is that there's not really an art world. There are art worlds. Many overlapping art worlds. You even indicated yourself, people like Art Spiegelman and crowd.

MS. OLSOFF: Right, right.

MR. McELHINNEY: And these discrete sort of social circles who kind of cross and intersect and [inaudible]. How has that changed over the years after you opened your doors over there on Tenth Street. How has that experience changed?

MS. PILKINGTON: You know the East Village was much more of a sort of arts social world.

MS. OLSOFF: I think for us, though, I think that's still going on out there. It's more international and it's bigger and it's not a little village like the East Village was. But being older, it's hard for us to tap into it. Because when Penny goes out, I go out, we're out with our friends, you know, in their fifties or like forties or sixties. And we're not hanging out drinking all night, you know, going doing crazy stuff. So it's harder to find that community as we get older.

MS. PILKINGTON: What you're saying is it's a young community—

MS. OLSOFF: It's a young—

MS. PILKINGTON: —that is sort of cross-fertilizing more than the older communities

MS. OLSOFF: Right.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: So we can easily, you know, find our peers, and they're interesting. But to find the energy of the youth as we get older. [Jeffrey] Deitch is able to somehow get into it. Very few dealers—you need a young director, you need an artist who sells, someone to introduce you. But there's no way. We used to stay out 'til five in the morning. You know we're in bed by midnight and completely exhausted. So you're missing all that stuff that goes on where you can sit around lounges and hang out and have interesting conversations going on that only happen at two-thirty in the morning.

MS. PILKINGTON: But, you know, at art fairs, we do you know— That's one reason to go to art fairs because you will end up talking to international dealers and international artists in a bar, you know, late at night. Maybe not 'til five in the morning, maybe 'til midnight or two in the morning. So you've got still a way of broadening one's art social world that is quite important.

MS. OLSOFF: And at biennales. You go to biennales you can do it. Dinh Q. Lê, he lives in Vietnam. And he's in a lot of biennales and things in Asia. And if you go over and travel, you get swept up into groups of people that you don't know sitting here in New York. It's much more—much more traveling now. People get on planes. I mean going to Santa Barbara, it was a huge thing for us, you know, in the eighties. Getting on a plane to go to Minneapolis; this is like a big deal. Now people go off to Asia like they're going to Newark. You know I meet people it's like this is a one-movie trip, this is a two-movie trip, or is it a three-movie trip? Always traveling I'm just always see Blackberrys constantly and texting. there's no secrets.

MR. McELHINNEY: No one can hide any longer.

MS. OLSOFF: There's no one I know in hiding.

[END OF DISC 2.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Are we ready? Okay. This is James McElhinney speaking with Penny Pilkington and Wendy Olsoff at Penny's home on Lafayette Street, New York City. I think we have address on the previous disc. Can't remember the street number. What's the street number?

MS. PILKINGTON: 432 Lafayette.

MR. McELHINNEY: 432.

MS. PILKINGTON: Opposite the Public Theater.

MR. McELHINNEY: I'm not going to give the apartment. That's classified information. So where we left off was when you had moved over to Broadway from the East Village, and had the space on Broadway. And, well, maybe we should address it—perhaps sort of the, you know, the tail end of the Broadway experience, then the SoHo experience, and then ultimately the move to Chelsea.

MS. OLSOFF: So start in East Village?

MR. McELHINNEY: No, start on Broadway.

MS. PILKINGTON: There was a ten-year lease, and we were there for nine years probably.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: When we got to Broadway, there were very few galleries.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: In fact, no stores on Broadway between Houston and Canal; there were just sweatshops basically. And there was one store—Rector's was the name of a hardware store or something. It was the first sort of big store, on the ground floor.

MS. PILKINGTON: Canal Street Jeans maybe?

MS. OLSOFF: But they were there forever. The store was like—

MR. McELHINNEY: What year was that when you actually moved?

MS. OLSOFF: Eighty-eight.

MR. McELHINNEY: Eighty-eight.

MS. OLSOFF: And John Good was in the building, right?

MS. PILKINGTON: He was on the second floor, yes.

MS. OLSOFF: There were some galleries already starting to take the upper floors. The landlords were kicking out the sweatshops, and there started galleries.

MS. OLSOFF: And some galleries had already moved in. People were finding big spaces, you know, at pretty good rents to get the dealers into SoHo—expanded SoHo now. Braodway had become, you know Broadway was never part of SoHo, the old SoHo.

MR. McELHINNEY: No.

MS. OLSOFF: So the East Village galleries that were surviving wanted more space. And the East Village was too expensive per square foot, and there wasn't that much big space. And then the Tompkins Square riots happened. And the East village became not conducive to visitors at all. And we were among the first ones to move to Broadway. But there were quickly a lot of other galleries there.

MR. McELHINNEY: I remember.

MS. OLSOFF: Gracie Mansion moved in after us. Just above us, ironically, because we were well known East Villiage galleries.

MS. PILKINGTON: Jay Gorney, what did he do? He just went straight to Main Street?

MS. OLSOFF: Postmaster's opened somewhere. 303 opened somewhere. And Jamie Wolfe opened on Broadway. These were all—

MS. OLSOFF: Curt Marcus was there. Salvatore Ala was there. Many, many, many galleries. Many, many gallery buildings. Not to mention all the SoHo activity of the old SoHo is still there.

MR. McELHINNEY: And that was on the heels of a big crash in the stock market.

MS. OLSOFF: On the heels, yes. Well, it hadn't happened yet.

MR. McELHINNEY: Eighty-seven or '88.

MS. OLSOFF: This was—it would be the equivalent of 2007 now.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right, right.

MS. OLSOFF: And there was a boom, so people are moving to big spaces and signing long leases and renovating at great expenses.

MR. McELHINNEY: How long did it take you to feel the effect of that, of that crash?

MS. OLSOFF: Well, our business was never good. So even though we felt it, it wasn't a dramatic difference to us. We were struggling anyway.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: So we continued to struggle.

MS. PILKINGTON: I always said, though, there was a two-year lag between the stock market and the art world. It think it's speeded up now. So in that sense it took two years to really feel the real impact of that. There used to be a two-year lag.

MR. McELHINNEY: So who were you showing? Who did you add to the stable with more space?

MS. OLSOFF: Well, in SoHo we added David Wojnarowicz and Carrie Mae Weems, who were our two biggest artists of that time.

MS. PILKINGTON: Was it when—we first showed Bo Bartlett and Dotty Attie, were two that came on in that time.

MS. OLSOFF: Who we still work with, and of course we have the estate of David now. We worked with Carrie for ten years.

MS. PILKINGTON: We started showing—

MS. OLSOFF: We started showing Nancy Spero in that space, too.

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes, that's right. Martin Wong.

MS. OLSOFF: Martin Wong had fabulous shows in his lifetime in that space. We had great artists. We had a lot of very political shows in that space also.

MR. McELHINNEY: So would you say it expanded by half, the stable? Were you able to exhibit— Well, obviously you were able to exhibit because it was larger.

MS. OLSOFF: Oh, we had a very big space in the East Village. We had—John Pawson had renovated the space in 8BC, the club. And we had a beautiful big space. So it wasn't like we expanded the stable because we had more space. We just, for whatever reason, the fates had it that we were very lucky in meeting Carrie Mae Weems. And it was a moment when Gracie Mansion wasn't working with David because she was without a gallery before she opened, that we were able to take on David. And- there-even though there was such a desperate economy, and so many galleries in the nineties closed, and all these spaces I just mentioned became empty, we were able to trudge through it because we really had these artists. And selling—you know I put Carrie's work in every museum in the country.

MR. McELHINNEY: How do you do that?

MS. OLSOFF: I don't know. The museums called and said they had to have an African-American woman. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Really? Is that [inaudible]?

MS. OLSOFF: Shopping. There was a big gap in their collections.

MR. McELHINNEY: Filled her in particular.

MS. OLSOFF: Well, she just filled them up. Now of course everyone doesn't think about this the same way. So, soon we forget. But, you know, her work was—and we showed it so embraced it, touched everyone, and it was before, you know, the Thelma's show and the biennials and all the shows and post-black shows. You know Carrie was really the voice of what has come to fruition today with Obama in the White House. I mean what she was discussing are the things that now are common parlance to everyone.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, I remember that—

MS. OLSOFF: The Kitchen Table series.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. Of course. But I remember also back in the 1970s there was a widespread attitude among a lot of African-American artists whom I knew that it was a finite universe. That you could enter the art world through a number of institutions like the Studio Museum of Harlem [Harlem, New York City] and there probably were others. And there were certain people who were in the pantheon of African-American art like Jacob Lawrence or Romare Bearden. And one of them basically had to die before another person could ascend. And I think that's changed. Of course you have Martin Puryear and others. But at that point in time I recall having arguments with other artists about, oh, come on, it can't really be that way.

MR. McELHINNEY: —she's a woman, too. So that. And a lot of the people who were African-American artists, who were in, you know, the pantheon, you know, the Jacob Lawrence, the Ben Andrews, you know, it was a male club, too. So what changed in the museum world that—

MS. OLSOFF: No, the curators are people who worked with civil rights and women's rights.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: You've got people—who understood the work. And Carrie's work was different in that it was about the white experience as well as the black experience.

MR. McELHINNEY: It was about—

MS. OLSOFF: No, it was about the white male and female experience. The Kitchen Table Series was saying you dress the way you do, speak the way you do.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: You are who you are because you're black, not because they're black [inaudible]. We dress, we are who we are and speak and our language, our clothes, our thoughts, everything's infused with African history. And she brought that out, and it just became so well-known. And Carrie was teaching. We met her, and she was teaching at Amherst. She had taught at many schools. She was in her thirties. Her ideas were very well formed and developed. She was completely out of the art world and in academia. So when we found her, it was finding, you know, a very, very mature, intelligent person whose work was—it wasn't like we discovered a college kid coming out of grad school. It was a strong—

MR. McELHINNEY: It's not like now where people are—

MS. OLSOFF: This would not have happened to her now.

MR. McELHINNEY: —scooping them up out of the studios at Harvard and Yale and Columbia where they were a few years ago. Yes.

MS. OLSOFF: I don't know if they're doing that now. But they did that a few years ago.

MS. PILKINGTON: But I think it's also there may be writing on the wall for a Cindy Sherman having broken down the photography, issues of photography. So we weren't selling to the photography departments.

MS. OLSOFF: Right, right.

MS. PILKINGTON: We were selling to the contemporary art departments.

MS. OLSOFF: Right, right. It's not the issue of photography anymore; you're buying art, done.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, but to what degree do you think this is all gendered? I mean speaking about the Obama election, there are some people who would say that Hillary's [Hillary Clinton's] inability to be elected was actually underscoring the fact that America's still more sexist than it is racist. I've heard that argument.

MS. OLSOFF: I don't really want to get in to why Hillary lost. But, yes, America is still coming to—I think the battle for younger people today is about gender, not about, not as much about race, though this is still a serious issue. But I think for younger people today and younger women in schools and out there have a battle to fight. there's a lot of big problems for women to be able to be successful adults. And blah-dee-dah have kids and work and be supported really. It's not really that easy.

MR. McELHINNEY: How do you feel in general about how women today, young women, don't seem to feel the need to be as militant about these—

MS. OLSOFF: I feel sorry for them. Because when they're my age, they're going to find their lives are going to be pretty miserable, unless they do something about it. Because not everyone gets to have their own business like Penny and me and get to be an art dealer and make our own schedules. Most women I know are turning around at 50 years old and thinking, "Oh, my kids are off at school now, and I gave up my career. And, yes, I loved being a mom, but now what?"

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes. So you guys really took a big risk, in a way, to step out on your own. Although you, Penny, came from a family who's in the trade, as it were. And you were doing, as I recall, the books for other businesses.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes. I was there. I was an accountant—major.

MR. McELHINNEY: An accounting major.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, I was. [They laugh.] I taught Penny everything that she knows.

MS. PILKINGTON: In the University of Life she graduated.

MS. OLSOFF: You know Penny and I definitely were very risky—risk takers. And I think, too, that we still are. Maybe a little less. But we didn't spend a whole lot of time in 1983, thinking, Should we open a gallery or not? It was like, Let's do it!

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes. Yes, then we didn't sit down with a business plan. So in that sense we're not the most organized of business entrepreneurs.

MS. OLSOFF: We are very intuitive. [Laughs.]

MS. PILKINGTON: Let's give it a whirl.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, at least you came to it with some skills.

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes. We both had training.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes. We had training. And we definitely both appreciate that in each other. And we're both very hardworking and—have expectations of each other, and we don't not show up, 95 percent of the time, when we have to be there. We count on each other, and we're both there.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, how did the structure of the operation change when you got over to Broadway? Because it was a different milieu, you know. It was—

MS. OLSOFF: Well, I think we got our first employees, more maybe. Jason joined us in SoHo as the art handler. Robert and another guy.

MS. PILKINGTON: Lisa sort of oversaw the transition.

MS. OLSOFF: Scott. Scott. We had this kid named Scott Catto whom we had from John Goode. He was John Goode's—

MS. OLSOFF: Intern. And we hired him as our first—not first. Lisa was a real employee. Scott was our second or third major employee. And he was with us, and he helped us so much with Carrie and so much with everything. And he was a great, hardworking person. And he was with us for about ten years. And he was really part of our, those years with us, and we're still friends with him. He went off and now owns, with his boyfriend, a makeup company called Three Custom Color. But anyway, what changed? Not a heck of a lot really, I don't think.

MS. PILKINGTON: The space was double the size. So there was more sort of looking after the space.

MS. OLSOFF: We did have some—

MS. PILKINGTON: It sort of seemed more formal maybe than walking to Eighth Street between B and C. And, you know, going to a building where there was a super and an elevator and people you had to tip at Christmas. I mean in that sense it sort of was more formal.

MS. OLSOFF: We were also in SoHo not in the East Village; so it was a little more grown up. I wore suits for a while.

MS. PILKINGTON: And a dramatic change for us, from a lifestyle point of view, was working Tuesday to Saturday rather than seven days a week or something. I mean because we were open in the East Village on Sundays. So then it was hard to take weekends off or Monday-Tuesdays off. So it became more regimented in a funny way.

MR. McELHINNEY: How did being in that location change hat the social aspects of your work? Just because it seemed like it was a little less bohemian.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes. I mean I guess it was a period when I was wearing like suits and heels. And trying to be more — But maybe that was just— I don't know. It didn't change any.

MR. McELHINNEY: Did it change your clientele?

MS. OLSOFF: No. It was always the same type of clients, the same clients. We weren't doing any street traffic because we were upstairs.

MS. PILKINGTON: We weren't really getting street traffic. The street traffic we were getting on Eighth Street was the wrong kind of street traffic.

MS. OLSOFF: We never got street traffic in the East Village then, you know.

MR. McELHINNEY: No. Just a lot of art students who would come to graze at openings.

MS. OLSOFF: Art students.

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes. Or local—the people who were doing the what is it called? homesteading who would come.

MR. McELHINNEY: Squatters?

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes. Exactly. That was the street traffic down there.

MR. McELHINNEY: Life on the frontier.

MS. PILKINGTON: And taking us up to the third floor—see, that was a change in SoHo.

MS. OLSOFF: We had an enormous office, me and Penny, for some reason which was very funny.

MS. PILKINGTON: But we met people. I mean in SoHo proper people were walking up and down the streets and going into galleries. Now you had to enter and go up and down an elevator. So.

MR. McELHINNEY: This raises an interesting question. Because in a couple of these interviews I've done, I've observed— I haven't really interrogated the question, so maybe I'll try it with you guys. Some people have immense offices, and other people have little, teeny offices. [Olsoff laughs.] So what was the size of your office on Eighth Street?

MS. OLSOFF: Teeny.

MR. McELHINNEY: And what was the size of your office on Broadway?

MS. OLSOFF: Huge.

MS. PILKINGTON: Huge.

MS. OLSOFF: Now we don't have one at all.

MR. McELHINNEY: A desk in the middle of the floor.

MS. PILKINGTON: There were theories behind this. There were theories that you would sit comfortably with your collectors, and you would have work hanging. And you could sort of subliminally sell them work by other artists

that they weren't specifically interested in.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. PILKINGTON: And then that goes to the viewing room where you have a comfortable chair and couch and coffee table. And you offered them coffee and water and relax. And there's work around that, a sort of more subtle way of selling.

MR. McELHINNEY: The inner sanctum.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, and the privacy. And have meetings in there.

MS. PILKINGTON: I mean we went from 2,000 square feet to 5,000 square feet. Chances were our office was going to get larger.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: Ours was really small, too. Which was fine there.

MR. McELHINNEY: But I'm just curious how the size of the office psychologically influenced the way that you were able to conduct your business. Was it more— Well, obviously you evolved from the closet into a cluster of stuff in the middle of the gallery—

MS. PILKINGTON: Because there are communications issues I think within a gallery, that you don't realize until you set yourself away in an office, is that you don't hear what's going on. [Laughs.]

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, to hide yourself—and it's been done in every sort of permutation, I think, in all the spaces we've had. When you hide yourself away from staff and people coming in, you're losing a lot of information. I think dealers, because it's a free and open business, that anyone can walk in, it's very exhausting. You know people can make it, oh, the front desk person. It's so hard to get to see the dealer. Well, put yourself out in the middle of this space—

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: 12 hours a day when anyone can walk in and tell you whatever they want. Oh, my grandmother did work like that. Or will you look at my slides? Or how come you don't have this? Or what is the price— In other words, millions of things so after doing that day after day, you're not getting any work done. However, that being said, it's very important also to be near your staff. Because otherwise you sit in your office, and every time you need a price or a size or know where something is or who's been in, or what's coming up, you have to ask your staff. And on the phone buzz screaming, "Hey Scott! Where is that Carrie Mae Weems?" So that doesn't really work either. So now we're finding it—if we have to redesign another gallery or stay where we are, that we really want to be in the same office as our staff. And then maybe if you were coming in to see a piece, we'd say, "Come, it's here." So you're not kind of looking at something quiet serious thinking about a first show and acquisition in the midst of traffic. Or diversion.

MS. PILKINGTON: Or we can have a viewing room with comfy stuff with art on the walls where we could sit and conduct this.

MS. OLSOFF: We definitely want to be with our staff always and not feel so distant from the daily activities. Because otherwise it's a very bad way of doing business.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes. As opposed to the cubicle model. Sort of a Feng Shui.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, yes, yes. So it's better to all be together and see who's there and who's coming in. Talk to people.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, I guess these are ideas that evolve over the history, and they change. And I'm sure they'll evolve some more. However, I can share that I have seen one or two operations where, you know, the dealer is an imperial personage, and everyone else is sort of minions who are—

MS. OLSOFF: That's very common.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, it's very—

MS. PILKINGTON: I think if there's—I think it also might have changed, they might have changed or be changing. Because there's an idea of the powerful dealer making deals with other dealers on the telephone, you need to be private. Because you're talking about well, can we get so-and-so to do this? Or who do we bring in on this? Or



how much money is there on that? You know stuff that's kind of sensitive. And you're talking a businessman language.

[Side Conversation]

Like we talked at dinner about with Jane. But the younger you get, the more of this happens on email, where can be in a room of people and still be doing that wheeler dealing, but it's all going to be clickety-click clickety-click. So then you won't get to the level of, oh, it must be a phone call.

MR. McELHINNEY: So technology's actually enabled people to work more in the same space in private.

MS. OLSOFF: Absolutely. Yes. And you can all talk about each other while sitting there.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. You could be texting.

MS. OLSOFF: "Penny, guess who just walked in?" [They laugh.]

MS. PILKINGTON: And then she says, "Have you looked at your email yet?" No. Okay. [Laughs.]

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, but Penny's absolutely right. We do a lot of deals just on email.

MR. McELHINNEY: So with the texting—

MS. OLSOFF: You can be sitting anywhere.

MR. McELHINNEY: —and cell phones and emailing and Blackberrys. There you are, right. It's the new privacy.

MS. PILKINGTON: We don't have to— You do need the private area still, too.

MS. OLSOFF: Talk to your mom.

MS. PILKINGTON: To talk to your mom or to look at a painting and have some piece of advice. Or to have a meeting like this where you don't want to be interrupted.

MR. McELHINNEY: But even without the technology allowing you to be more circumspect in the presence of others, do you think you would rather be in an office environment which was more inclusive?

MS. OLSOFF: Well, that's why we have no office now.

MS. PILKINGTON: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: We're on fair base everyday. And anybody can walk in and talk to us.

MR. McELHINNEY: That's interesting because it's an art fair model. So your gallery space is based on what almost everybody has to do at an art fair, which is to have their office in their exhibition space.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Do you imagine that that's a trend that might—it's an interesting idea.

MS. OLSOFF: I don't know. I don't really think—I don't know. I doubt it. But it works for us.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well who else has this set up?

MS. OLSOFF: We were looking around. I mean Charlie Cowles has an open office. David Juda in London has an open office. They have private rooms, though. As of yet we haven't constructed that. That's why we're here. But they sit at desks with staff. Much bigger, behind a wall, but a low wall. But you can see them. You can see their staff. And everyone can speak to each other reasonably clearly, you know, without being in separate rooms. So there's other examples. But I don't know too many other dealers whom you really see when you walk in, the prime owners.

MS. PILKINGTON: Then they've got the galleries on Twenty-seventh Street. But then they're small spaces.

MS. OLSOFF: They're all small spaces.

MR. McELHINNEY: So it isn't a choice in their case.

MS. OLSOFF: Right. When we opened in the East Village in our first gallery, we were right there pretty much like

that. The gallery on Twenty-seventh Street, they're there. Yes, Schroeder Romero and Ed Winkleman they're there pretty much when you walk in.

MR. McELHINNEY: So how do you deal with things like shipping? Is it all contracted out now?

MS. OLSOFF: It's the same as always. We use shippers.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. and you have a person who is your installer.

MS. OLSOFF: We have an installer in Aaron.

MS. PILKINGTON: We have an installer who works two or three days a week. I mean that hasn't really changed. I think in terms of shipping, people are trying to do it, because it saves money, do it on their own. I mean renting a U-Haul.

MS. OLSOFF: I'm finding now in this economy, compared to the early nineties—

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: —people in all parts of the art world, I think it's a very different type of economic situation. Reflected in people are much more open to negotiation on rates, truckers, printers, everyone. You say, Look, this is what we have. This is what we can pay. We can find someone. I'll pay you over this. Everyone understands we're all in it together. In the nineties, it still felt like those were the rates, and you tried to pay your bills. I don't think they were as negotiable as they are now. Like art handlers and everyone. I mean these days it seems that, you know.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, the prices had gone up quite a lot.

MS. OLSOFF: That's why I think it's different. And we're coming from a moment that was so inflated.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: And everyone recognizes—I don't think the '90s were like that. It was inflated, and everyone thought it was a bad, but not like it was 20 years down the road or 15 years down the road. Everyone can survive on a lot less, and everyone wants to survive. That's the name of the game. And they're willing to do what they have to do to work. The number of people laid off in the art world is big.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, I heard about what happened at Pace.

MS. OLSOFF: You mean a while ago?

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, it's a couple of months really.

MS. OLSOFF: In the fall. But all galleries have laid off people. A lot of small dealers, they're the only ones there. It's just them now.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, times I guess change. One of the other interviews was with Ronald Feldman. I asked him flat out. I said, What happens if you're selling an artist's work at a particular price level, and there is a problem with, you know, the market because of availability of money or people to buy? And his answer was just prices come down. Prices go up. Prices come down. It's a myth that art is a reliable investment or any more so than anything else.

MS. OLSOFF: Well, the difference is it doesn't disappear. Like Citibank goes puff. Well, now she has that piece. And while it may not be worth a \$100,000, it gives her great joy. So it's there.

MR. McELHINNEY: Which is priceless.

MS. OLSOFF: It sounds corny, but it's true. And it might actually be very valuable one day.

MR. McELHINNEY: So how do you guys feel about—I don't know if I should call you, you guys. That's very informal.

MS. OLSOFF: Gals. We like gals.

MR. McELHINNEY: Gals, okay not P.C. Feel about the whole trend over the last—it's been longer than 20 years—this whole idea of art as an investment? People buying art as an investment. I mean as a monetary investment. As a—

MS. OLSOFF: It's a great investment. It's a good time to buy right now.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right now because prices are low again.

MS. OLSOFF: Prices are very low right now, and you can make good deals.

MR. McELHINNEY: Have you had to adjust a lot of the prices of your artists?

MS. OLSOFF: We entertain offers where we can make money. And our artists can make money. Yes. [Laughs] Making money is the main goal to pay the bills, to stay open. So if something—If we made \$60,000 on it two years ago, and I'm making \$25,000, and the artist is making a little less, too. And the artist is happy, and we're happy, and the collector's happy. Seems like a perfectly good situation.

MR. McELHINNEY: So it's more important to maintain a kind of momentum of sales, keep things moving, keep energy going; hold the line on prices.

MS. OLSOFF: I think it's very positive for everybody: It makes the artist happy. It makes everyone in the gallery happy to sell a piece of art. I mean no one likes to make a sale where you have a feeling you're being ripped off. And I don't think we've done that. I don't think we have to do that. I don't think our prices were so phenomenally high that we need to feel like anybody's ripped off now at all or anyone was paying too much before.

MS. PILKINGTON: I think this also—this argument works better with living artists, where they're there. They have bills to pay, and they know they can paint another picture. And I don't know what quite if the artist is dead and you have ten paintings left in the estate.

MS. OLSOFF: Right.

MS. PILKINGTON: You might hold on to your prices.

MS. OLSOFF: Or, if you're a dealer who does secondary work, and you're really a connoisseur, and you have amazing things and you've paid a high price, and then you have to sell it for less, and you really don't want to because you know in ten years it could be worth double. That's not a happy thing.

MR. McELHINNEY: No, no, no. So under any circumstances, it's a little sketchy in terms of knowing exactly how a work of art is going to perform financially.

MS. OLSOFF: There's no guarantees. No. But historically if you go by historical evidence and you're not overpaying, you know, a lot of money for something, you probably will be able to get your money out of it. It'll retain some value; it won't go away. It's not something that's going to go out of business. An artist, a good artist who's in museums, who you feel like, you know, I can look in this room. I don't think Dinh Q. Le or Nancy Spero is going to go out of business. Those are really good solid artists who are important to their time. And who knows? If it's in two years or ten years or 150 years, but it will have value for your family down the road—or a museum or whoever. It's not going to go away; it won't be valueless.

MR. McELHINNEY: So a collector who wants to buy and flip a piece to make money—

MS. OLSOFF: We don't know those people.

MR. McELHINNEY: That's not in your dealing.

MS. OLSOFF: Mm-mmm [Affirmative]. Never. Ever.

MR. McELHINNEY: Because another dealer made a comment that if the top ten collectors in America according to one of the magazines all own virtually the same collection.

MS. OLSOFF: [Laughs] That's true.

MR. McELHINNEY: What makes them collectors and not just people with an art portfolio? So there is a difference, I think.

MS. OLSOFF: There's a big difference. There's a big difference.

MR. McELHINNEY: So—

MS. OLSOFF: Because anyone with money can be one of those people.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. So it becomes a matter of using the art to acquire status or—

MS. OLSOFF: The art-the art has power in and of itself. It can turn people into art lovers, and they realize they really like living with this work.

MS. PILKINGTON: Right. That's completely true.

MS. OLSOFF: And then it's like, oh, now's the time to flip back, and it's like, no, I don't want to flip it. I love it, you know.

MR. McELHINNEY: But that's why you're here, right? That's why you two are here. Because of the art. Right? It's not just to business.

MS. OLSOFF: I hope so. [They laugh.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Is it safe to say dealing art is your art?

MS. PILKINGTON: Dealing art is our work. Yes, dealing with art and dealing with the artists is the art we perform.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, I think the dealers mostly are artists. Not making art. But they're definitely—

MR. McELHINNEY: Working with it, yes.

MS. OLSOFF: —than people selling sweaters at Macy's. You know there's a difference between the retail of art and there's a difference between retail. Which are both—fundamentally they're in the same business of giving someone something for money.

MS. PILKINGTON: But there's also a difference between dealers who have galleries, dealers, play dealers, and private dealers. There's a definite difference.

MS. OLSOFF: I definitely think most dealers are quite eccentric and definitely have an ability to work with artists and create an environment that puts them in a category.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: And some hover between artist and merchant. You know there's not quite a name for it.

MR. McELHINNEY: Entrepreneur? I don't know-

MS. OLSOFF: -I don't think so.

MR. McELHINNEY: Impresario?

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes, impresario is the word people used in the eighteenth century, I think.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right, right.

MS. OLSOFF: I would not call us entrepreneurs or impresarios—whatever that is.

[END OF DISC 3.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, anyway, it seems like you two are showing what you show because you want to show it. Because you have a feeling for it. You connect with it on some, level other than commerce or desire for improving your—

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, we try to be commercial so we have an object to sell. But we can't really ever predict what that will be. The art world doesn't know—in other words, you don't know what that is. In fact our first show is a perfect example, when we opened, as you know, with Sue Coe, and thought we would have rocks thrown through the window because it was so politically strong.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: And so critical. And it sold out. So, you know, if we were thinking money, we would never have put that up. And in fact, oh, my God! They all loved it. So who knows?

MR. McELHINNEY: But you went with your gut, in other words.

MS. PILKINGTON: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes. Totally.

MR. McELHINNEY: And you weren't calculating some kind of a commercial—

MS. OLSOFF: And it's very much like Penny was saying, we didn't have a business plan. We didn't have an art plan either. We didn't go to art school.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, we some dealers have an inventory of work that they know they can sell. So they can represent art that they're interested in but maybe not sure they can sell as easily, you know. That work that sells easily versus work that's a harder sell. Sometimes it's an inventory in the secondary market. Sometimes it's just other artists in the stable who are, you know, the potboilers who pay the bills. Have you any strategies like that you're using?

MS. OLSOFF: We have no strategies, I'd say. I really don't think so. We're not really—we don't really have an inventory that we can sell. We don't really have any resale.

MS. PILKINGTON: We do have some artists that are more important for us, and that would probably be when we say to each other privately, that artist is important to us.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. PILKINGTON: It means that they help pay the bills.

MR. McELHINNEY: I see.

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes. There are some artists who are better at helping us pay the bills than others.

MR. McELHINNEY: So some are, some are less so. Neither are being shown because of calculation on your part that—

MS. OLSOFF: Well, we do a schedule. Let's say we do a schedule of the year, which we do; we do have schedules. We'll say, well, let's not do those three shows in August; the likelihood of anybody buying any of that is low. Let's put in this artist because, you know, he or she is ready, plus we know intuitively that there's a good chance that we'll sell it. There's a demand for it, there's a real lot of interest. So you don't want to put three artists in a show who's work is challenging or hard to sell, will help you sell it. You know so, yes, we have sort of a rhythm. We go to art fairs, we try to balance the booth with things we can sell with others that are much harder to sell.

MS. PILKINGTON: And we had I think— We didn't— I'm not going to name any names. There's one show that we took on because it was a sure sell, and we did the show, and we liked the work. But we really did it because it was an almost guarantee that the work would sell out. We sold two things for \$500. And, you know, we can't—we're not good at making those decisions. So we don't make them. We're much better making decisions we like this.

MR. McELHINNEY: You use your own judgment.

MS. PILKINGTON: We like this—we'd like to live it.

MS. OLSOFF: It's also having faith in the person. Like we're showing a young artist from Holland right now, who lives in Berlin, named Melanie Bonajo And she just feels right. The work is great.

MS. OLSOFF: Whether this is the best body of work she's ever going to do in her life, who knows? But the feeling we have about so far and everything she's thinking of, and how she acts, and who she knows, and what she's making all the time, it's a really good— So let's say in ten years we're working with her or not working with her, I think she's going to be around. This show might not sell at all. But I know there's going to be a residual pay coming—payback—when I can say and Penny can say, We were the first ones to show her. And whether it sells now or not, and now is a good time, there's no way of knowing from this moment.

MR. McELHINNEY: But you feel that she's someone with legs, who's—

MS. OLSOFF: Absolutely, I've never seen Melanie do anything else than what she's doing. She's never going to like say, Oh, I'm not going to do this. I'm not making any money. I'm going to go to law school. She's always going to be making work, and it's always going to be good because she is like that.

MR. McELHINNEY: How much has that happened in the course of your careers? That artists have arrived, and you've exhibited them and had some success and interest in their work, and you were able to help them develop as an artist. And then they leave, they say I've had it?

MS. OLSOFF: It's happened 10 percent. We had one artist, when we were in the East Village, we had huge

success with for an East Village young gallery. The prices weren't high. But we told every painting he did, and that was about 40 paintings. Then he stopped. He wasn't enjoying making work. And now he's doing other things. Another artist we showed, we did two or three shows—just her constitution was not up to making work. She could not produce work. She had a lot of interior issues, was not stepping up to the plate in any way. And we just couldn't continue. And now—I don't know what she's doing now. And I could probably think of maybe a bunch of others. And other people I know in other galleries. And other artists who just—it's a really hard choice to be an artist. And we tell this to all kids coming in from schools for our lectures. You can go to art school, but it's a very hard life. And it's pretty much like if you just want to do this all the time and get your joy from hanging out with other artists and being in the art world and getting stuff up. You know it's a lot of sacrifice, but you really love it. And there are so many artists like that. But there are some who just like, oh, I can't do this anymore.

MR. McELHINNEY: Were there any artists you threw out of the gallery?

MS. OLSOFF: Yes!

MR. McELHINNEY: And left the artwork on the street and said don't come back?

MS. OLSOFF: No. There are artists, and they can only do so many shows before you realize no one's interested but you. And you can't, you know, private beneficiary for that person no matter how much you love it. You can buy it and own it yourself. And you can do two or three shows. And you can bring it to art fairs. And you never get anything but an occasional review—or they want to sell to their aunt. And it's like I'm really sorry. You're a great person. I love your work. We can't just match it.

MR. McELHINNEY: Would that be because of, you know, the time, like the *Zeitgeist* and time/taste—

MS. OLSOFF: No. What we've done, we've stuck with artists over various *Zeitgeist*, and nothing is clicking.

MR. McELHINNEY: Or your venue as opposed to other venues?

MS. OLSOFF: Oh, it could be the wrong context.

MS. PILKINGTON: It could be the context.

MS. OLSOFF: It could be the context. It could be our personality and the art comes to us just doesn't get it. The art world's a big place with lots of—

MR. McELHINNEY: Something for everybody.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes. And we're just— It's not easy, but there's no way you can now with the Internet hold onto artists who have no dialog with anybody but you. Because they're being judged continually by the press and art fairs and collectors look all the time at your website. And if you have a list on a website with names on it, that the work's never changing on it because they don't really change. The work doesn't evolve; it's the same pieces. They do one piece every year. And no one's interested. There's no press. The bio doesn't change. It's just like— The Internet's also changed that. You know I'm just sorry. We cannot keep you on anymore. When you have a very exciting body of work call us.

MR. McELHINNEY: So the Internet's really changed the way that artists have to function in a way.

MS. OLSOFF: You're very exposed, and it's like people— Your website, I guess one might say I don't know art Fair Committee, and we're debating whether to let it go again. It's like, well, let's look at their website. You see the gallery proposal. You're not sure. You're like, okay, let's go to the website now and see what the artist look like and the context of the gallery. Let's see website. Let's see if we like the vibe of the gallery. And a lot of times like you'd put it up and say, on no. Then, oh, yes, this is really cool. So that's as important, the virtual space is almost—as important as the literal space.

MR. McELHINNEY: Interesting.

MS. OLSOFF: And it's global You know it's like—

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, it's interesting partly I think because—I was in school years ago—but I think the wisdom used to be, you know, you would evolve into a mature style. And then an artist would knock around a little bit after school, and then they would evolve within ten years into a mature style. And then you would find representation and have a show every—

MS. OLSOFF: It still happens on occasion.

MR. McELHINNEY: —every two years, and you would gradually expand.

MS. OLSOFF: It certainly happens. Thomas Nozkowski it happened to, right?

MR. McELHINNEY: But now a lot of artists would say that, you know, the pressure was to not change. Because once the dealer had found a niche or a clientele or a fan club—

MS. OLSOFF: It doesn't have to change. But it has to be vibrant. In other words—

MR. McELHINNEY: It has to evolve.

MS. OLSOFF: Well, it can be— Like Dotty Attie does the same thing more or less. I mean it changes a lot in a small way. But she still gets into the shows. There's still reviews.

MR. McELHINNEY: She's busy.

MS. OLSOFF: Not that busy, but busy enough.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: Or like Julie Heffernan, but there has to be something going on. But the funny thing that you're say is like when we started in the East Village, it was the dawn sort of the really big kind of magazine. And kids would wait for their *Artforum* because there they'd see what's happening in New York, and they'd get the big glossy reproductions. And so, you know, you had this revelation. And, oh, my God! You're only as good as your transparency reproduces on the page. Well, now you're going 25 years later, there's no transparency. It's digital.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: And it's how good your art looks online in a viral world, where you're only as good as somebody's blogs on your-

MR. McELHINNEY: —It's the virtual world.

MS. OLSOFF: Virtual and viral is the new thing because people are very—they're not reproducing cards anymore. Because everything is done completely differently. And when we were thinking, oh, this is the new world, how your transparency was produced in *Artforum* in this heavy thing is sent to Chicago. It's like kids will go to the library and pore through *Art America* and *Artforum* to see the East Village. Well, now they just—they're just all over. It's unbelievable.

MR. McELHINNEY: You can even argue that it's how it reads as a thumbnail.

MS. PILKINGTON: In other words you have to open it up otherwise.

MR. McELHINNEY: What are you going to clip on—how does it read as a thumbnail?

MS. OLSOFF: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: We're two or three steps away from the actual object itself.

MS. OLSOFF: Right.

MR. McELHINNEY: So artists have to be aware of that, which is- a hundred years ago wasn't even an issue.

MS. OLSOFF: Right.

MR. McELHINNEY: The photogravure and how would that translate.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes. And maybe Bill's [Bill Smith's] work didn't look good online. Like Bill Smith, he said why didn't he get anything? His work sucks in reproduction. It just totally fails.

MR. McELHINNEY: So should he have another genre of object that he makes that would read?

MS. OLSOFF: No, I think we would probably have to put our energy into figuring out how to reproduce it, and we haven't done that. And maybe that's something to think about because it's really that—

MR. McELHINNEY: Or a video maybe. Have a video and watch it?

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, we tried it. I think we need professional help. [Inaudible.]

MR. McELHINNEY: We could all use professional help. [Laughs]

MS. OLSOFF: We need a stylist. We all need a stylist.

MS. PILKINGTON: No, but it's true. Because I looked at his video, and it was a dark square. And I thought, oh, maybe it's not working. And then because I knew the piece, I suddenly saw the lights coming on like the stars in the piece. And, I thought, oh, it's lighting up gradually. But had I not, I would've already clicked off onto something else.

MR. McELHINNEY: Because that room where he had a number of them hanging up and then lights went out, and then glowing and it was kind of-

MS. OLSOFF: - And you also had to stay in there. So if like the last person came in and it was like all dark, they might just walk out. You've got to give it time.

MR. McELHINNEY: We could have a stationary camera. You'd have to have a person with a steady cam-hand and kind of weaving around in and out of the space. And then you'd have a person to look at it.

MS. OLSOFF: [Inaudible.]

MR. McELHINNEY: So these are all new problems in terms of reading art. The Web has really changed everything.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes. It's a new problem. But it's more beneficial than it is a problem.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, it makes us rethink.

MS. PILKINGTON: It's also disseminating ideas much further and much faster. It's less elitist in terms of who it can reach and who can see what's going on.

MR. McELHINNEY: So how has the Internet changed the way you sell art?

MS. OLSOFF: You can just do the whole deal online.

MS. PILKINGTON: There are no transparencies.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. PILKINGTON: You don't have to FedEx a transparency to somebody overnight.

MS. OLSOFF: You don't have to talk to a person. You can just you know—

MR. McELHINNEY: Do you miss that, though?

MS. OLSOFF: No.

MR. McELHINNEY: Having the conversation?

MS. OLSOFF: Mm-mmm. [Negative.] No. I don't. I like it if someone wants to call and talk, I'm happy to do it.

MR. McELHINNEY: You seem like a people person.

MS. OLSOFF: It's weird, isn't it?

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes.

MS. OLSOFF: I'm really not. [They laugh.]

MR. McELHINNEY: That's, I guess, a part of your craft.

MS. OLSOFF: No, but honestly, you don't have to—some people don't want to talk to you, I found out. They're very happy doing the deal online. There's a lot of people, collectors, not high-flyers, not—

MS. PILKINGTON: Because they're very busy. They can do it on their laptop

MS. OLSOFF: They give you their credit card on the phone.

MS. PILKINGTON: In between changing planes or going to meetings. And they don't have to dedicate a whole Saturday or try and— [Both talking at the same time.]



MS. OLSOFF: [ . They're like, yes, they're in between—they're working. And they're also going on at the same time. They're looking online. They've probably seen it at an art fair or seen it in a gallery or they saw it at a friend's house. They email you how much it is. And it's a whole new conversation online. I've learned sort of how to ask questions, you know, how much is it? How much are you going to— You know it's just a delicate—it's a delicate thing, but I like it. See, I'm talking about art to—and it's like someone says, you know—I always say if someone's interested in this piece, I'll say—I'll reply back often well if you are interested this is the price, and I can tell you about the piece. And then I'm like writing a paper to them, you know, the history of the piece, and they can read it and think about it. And they ask a question. It could be anything from how long will it last? Or do you think it has reference to this artist? It's sort of an interesting to and fro. And then they'll say, Well, how much is it? And can you ship it? And do you include shipping? Or do I have to pay taxes? It's the same conversation.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, all of this raises a few questions. You've clearly moved into the post-office era in your dealer practice. Right? You're using interestingly the model of the art fair/gallery model to run your gallery, your home office.

MS. OLSOFF: It's aggrandized slightly.

MR. McELHINNEY: The mother ship is modeled on an art fair space. That's very interesting. There has been—and you're aware of it I'm sure—

MS. OLSOFF: It's also an alternative space. It feels more like an alternative space, I think.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right, right. Like a 501c3 space, which— Because although it's not-for-profit, it sort of has a little of that aesthetic. You're showing things that are a little edgier than that of—

MS. OLSOFF: Well, we were thrust into this, and we started responding.

MR. McELHINNEY: —more conventional dealers. But there's a lot of conversation out there about the post-studio era for artists. So do you foresee a post-gallery era?

MS. OLSOFF: Post-studio, we've been doing that for a long time. We been very much anyway.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, we're talking about that.

MS. OLSOFF: Post-gallery? No.

MS. PILKINGTON: I think in the end—I mean a post-gallery means there doesn't have to be a place where you actually see the real object?

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, no. Where you have, you know, the monthly exhibitions. Where all of that changes in some way. I don't know.

MS. OLSOFF: Well, there is a slight erosion, I think, in some artists. I think Damien Hirst was putting that out there with his selling directly at auction.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: There's a certain amount of—and I don't know with the recession if that will go back two steps.

MS. PILKINGTON: There's also the Chinese model, too, is to sell at auction not through galleries. That's possible, too.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes. It was a business thing.

MS. PILKINGTON: But they were also manipulating, which I think Hirst was, too.

MR. McELHINNEY: Of course.

MS. PILKINGTON: Manipulating the market from behind the scenes in a very public way.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, in the provenance of a number of the works that were in that sale— Well, we don't need to go into that. But I think—

MS. PILKINGTON: Right. And have gone back into his own collection.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. PILKINGTON: And to Jay Jopling's collection. So, you know, what did sell and what didn't sell.

MR. McELHINNEY: Is it smoke? Is it mirrors? Is it all of the above? Is it a real deal? You know it's all— So the gallery offers an assurance, you know, personal assurance of a dealer who has a permanent address. You know where they live—or work at least. So that's a way of guaranteeing something.

MS. OLSOFF: No, I think artists, you know, a lot of artists—you can't be interrupted by constant questions and phone calls and works makes it hard for them. A lot of artists are really truly bad business people. A lot of people who do art are not accountants and lawyers for a reason. So they're really not good at it. When artists get into situations without us, I would say often they're not paid correctly. They get taken advantage of. They have no real recourse afterwards and no one to stand with them to say hire a lawyer. You know it just is much more protection for the artist to have a loyal gallery whom they trust to do the consignment agreement, to collect the money, to make contracts, and have another pair of eyes on things. So the loan forms actually get back on time. To have the details about how much are they going to get, who pays for framing, is the stuff insured? I mean it's not like the dealer's just sitting there in big spaces clicking around on high heels, having fun. There's a lot of very serious, boring work behind it to protect the artists.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: So if you give it up and not pay your 50 percent, you know, make more money directly, you're giving up a lot.

MR. McELHINNEY: I didn't necessarily mean post-dealer; I just meant post-gallery. How the digital world might change the space that needs to be—

MS. OLSOFF: The dealer—I think it still needs to be seen, whether at an art fair or a gallery, I don't know. But you still need to be seen. The work physically has to be seen somehow.

MS. PILKINGTON: I have a friend who's recently closed their gallery space. But they still have their name, they still have an office, they still have a website. And to all intents and purposes, they're still making sales, and things are still going on. But an artist who should be shown, whose show should be coming up, they can't promise them a show because they don't have a physical space. So these artists are being wooed, approached by another gallery, and he's going to go because he wants a show.

MS. OLSOFF: Why wouldn't he? Right?

MS. PILKINGTON: It's not the best gallery, but it's walls and a physical space. And he needs to—

MS. OLSOFF: Yes, he needs a place where someone can walk in and say, oh, do you have any work by Portia Munson? I've heard you do. Rather than having to make an appointment and have—

MS. PILKINGTON: Rather than going online. Perhaps even going lower and them saying, Oh, they're not making an appointment until next Friday. Well, that's a little more complicated.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, how large is your inventory on hand?

MS. OLSOFF: It's big.

MS. PILKINGTON: It's big.

MS. OLSOFF: It's shockingly big.

MR. McELHINNEY: Is that actually in the gallery or would one be—

MS. OLSOFF: There's another room this size

MS. PILKINGTON: There's a room this size or bigger than this size that's filled with racks, filled with racks.

MS. OLSOFF: And then we have at least three or four off-site places, too, which are in the neighborhood.

MR. McELHINNEY: So you've got a warehouse for inventory, and you've got inventory on site.

MS. OLSOFF: Well, we have two estates: Martin Wong and David's. We have New Jersey stuff in two spots in New Jersey, right?

MS. PILKINGTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative].

MS. OLSOFF: And then we have a whole other spot—and I'm not even in charge of all this, but I feel like there's at least five places, plus the place we have in the building. It's 23 years of work.

MR. McELHINNEY: So how long have you—

MS. OLSOFF: Or more—it's 26.

MR. McELHINNEY: Wow. It is '09.

MS. PILKINGTON: Twenty-sixth in September. We missed our 25th.

MS. OLSOFF: We ought to have a 26th party.

MR. McELHINNEY: Silver plus one.

MS. OLSOFF: That's what we're going to call it. You just came up with the name of it.

MR. McELHINNEY: Silver Plus One, okay. Invite me.

MS. PILKINGTON: How about the Blue Rinse. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Invite Gillian we'll both be there. The Blue Rinse. I think you're years, ages away from that. Dear me. Does anybody still do that?

MS. PILKINGTON: I don't know.

MR. McELHINNEY: So how long have you had a presence in Chelsea?

MS. PILKINGTON: What's this year minus seven? We took that lease seven years ago. So seven years.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh-two [2002]. This was the place that burned, right?

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes, yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: But there was an intermediate space between—

MS. PILKINGTON: On Broome Street.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right, the Broome Street space.

MS. PILKINGTON: We had the Broome Street space for eight years? And then we had the Chelsea space and the Broome Street space at the same time. So we had two years when we tried to do both, and it was very hard. It was very hard.

MR. McELHINNEY: You spoke about that in our last conversation. So you had moved from Broadway over to the Broome Street space right about the same time that many of the galleries were starting to decamp to Chelsea.

MS. PILKINGTON: In '87.

MR. McELHINNEY: And you didn't want to—

MS. PILKINGTON: We looked in Chelsea, and we looked at spaces. We had a lease on a space on Twentieth Street. We didn't love the space.

MS. OLSOFF: See, where we were coming from we did a very, very big space in the East Village. We renovated a big space in SoHo. The idea of doing it again and honestly even now is so not exciting for us. So we always get cold feet. And so we did it—and in a way it's probably been good because we end up in Chelsea in a small space that was perfectly fine and served us well. Maybe we lost a few artists because we didn't have that big enough space. But it was fine, and we didn't get hugely into debt and take the big renovation. And that was very good. And we also didn't do it— And now we're at a point where we probably won't have to do it again because of all these spaces that are renovated in Chelsea, that would probably be a few available in the fall.

MR. McELHINNEY: That's the rumor.

MS. OLSOFF: That's the rumor. So in a way our trepidation and our experience with early renovations for other people—you know because you're doing it essentially for the landlord because that ten years go pretty quickly.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: It's exhausting and draining. And it's not like we have a lot of money sitting in the bank. It means really borrowing. And, you know, we're not a gallery that makes a huge amount of money. So it's exhausting,

the whole thing. So we haven't done it.

MR. McELHINNEY: What inspired your move from the Broadway space over to Broome Street? I mean you're really only a couple of blocks away.

MS. OLSOFF: Because it was dying. We had to move somewhere, and lower SoHo was still cool. You know with Jeffrey Deitch, he's still there.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. He's still there.

MS. OLSOFF: There's a pocket of galleries down there, and it was a slightly alternative to Chelsea, and we were able to move into a Josh Baer had a space there and had a space that was completely renovated; it was 7500 square feet. It was beautiful. We got it for basically nothing. We put very little into it to make it ours. And it was so much cheaper than taking a space that we were looking at in Chelsea and spending \$300,000 or something, and getting a big rent increase. I mean we liked SoHo. We didn't like Chelsea so much.

MS. PILKINGTON: Well, the building stock in SoHo was still good. And moving off Broadway—Broadway was clean impossible. On a Saturday, to walk from our gallery to Dean & DeLuca, which was 50 feet, was a marathon, and it's still like that, right? And SoHo's lovely at eight, nine, ten o'clock in the morning. And then the later in the day it gets, it's just too many people on the sidewalks shopping.

MS. OLSOFF: Well, SoHo is still pretty quiet.

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes, over on Grand and so on down there is still.

MR. McELHINNEY: Do you recall that you had a portion of the space that you leased out:

MS OLSOFF: We sublet 2,000 square feet in the back.

MR. McELHINNEY: To another gallery?

MS. OLSOFF: No, to an ad agency, a fashion ad agency. They were very nice.

MR. McELHINNEY: So that basically helped with the cost of the space monthly nut.

MS. OLSOFF: Definitely Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: You said earlier that you didn't like Chelsea. Why not?

MS. OLSOFF: For the same reason as now. It's a really long hike from the subway. It has no places to go. You eat the same three things every day. There's nowhere to shop. If you need to buy a dress; or you want to go out and you spilled sauce on your shirt, and you need something for the evening, you have to go all the way over to whatever.

MR. McELHINNEY: Eighth, Ninth Avenue.

MS. OLSOFF: And, you know, it's just ugly. I don't mind all the art galleries. That kind of aspect, that's nice, that it's just art galleries, and everyone's there for a reason. There's a sort of similarity of interest among the people who are there, and that's great. Except for the car mechanics add a little local flavor. But those three things: It's hard to get to. There's nothing there.

MS. PILKINGTON: Right at the beginning also there was an uncertainty about it necessarily taking off. When Pat Hearn, Matthew Marks, Paula Cooper, whatever, the sort of original group, the group moved in and they were buying their own spaces. If you followed, it wasn't— You know there was a slight risk aversion to moving over there.

MS. OLSOFF: For us it was a risk. We weren't feeling very pioneering anymore.

MS. PILKINGTON: We'd done our pioneering in the East Village and slightly you know, done that. I mean it's a bit like going to the Lower East Side. That seems like now we've looked, it seems really expensive and very spread out. And it seems slightly like retrogressive to go back down there, having been on the Lower East Side or East Village. But Chelsea has proved itself.

MS. OLSOFF: Oh, yes. Chelsea is great. But I don't know now— What do you think? Do you think now like in a year that galleries will stay in Chelsea or move where there might be cheaper real estate again?

MR. McELHINNEY: Who knows? I mean what's left on the island of Manhattan?

MS. OLSOFF: Well, Madison Avenue, I read somewhere, is interesting. There's 80 empty stores.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes.

MS. OLSOFF: There's a lot of real estate available.

MR. McELHINNEY: A couple of galleries, too, like the Graham.

MS. PILKINGTON: They're still up there.

MR. McELHINNEY: They're still up there, but they're around the corner now in a smaller space.

MS. OLSOFF: Well, Gagosian's up there, right?

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: We can move Gagosian into those little shops.

MR. McELHINNEY: There used to be quite a few in upper stories, like where the Lippinhorn was years ago.

MS. OLSOFF: Yes was.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. So I don't know. It's interesting.

MS. OLSOFF: I just am joking from what you're saying. I think there'll be real estate all over. When you said, What's left? The whole island.

MR. McELHINNEY: Now, now. The economy has just opened up. Yes, that's exactly—

MS. OLSOFF: Dealers will go where it's cheapest.

MR. McELHINNEY: And where do you suppose that will be?

MS. OLSOFF: That's what I'm asking you.

MR. McELHINNEY: I don't know.

MS. OLSOFF: I don't know either, but it's going to be somewhere. It could be Chelsea. If the real estate—Historically, it's the owners of the real estate who make a decision where the dealers go. So they need to take less money if they want the dealers there, and dealers invigorate an area. So what area's going to need the most invigoration? And what owners of the spaces, where there's adequate space, will go down cheapest?

MR. McELHINNEY: It seems like Chelsea worked for a while because of the high cost of space in New York. And people were willing to live without amenities, without restaurants, without shopping, without a post office nearby, etc., which was—everything was there in SoHo. I mean you had a post office—

MS. OLSOFF: There's a post office in Chelsea. To give Chelsea its due; it's a perfectly good post office.

MR. McELHINNEY: But there are only a couple of restaurants. I mean it's a hype area Eighth Avenue.

MS. PILKINGTON: The restaurants—apart from Empire Diner which has been there forever—the restaurants are few, you know, Bottino, Red Cat, Tressler, Cookshop. They have opened a few. But that's what, five?

MR. McELHINNEY: Five.

MS. PILKINGTON: You know as opposed to SoHo which has 500 or so.

MR. McELHINNEY: So but if—

MS. OLSOFF: Or maybe Chelsea's rents will go down. Maybe this is what will happen because there's really very few businesses that will go in there. SoHo's repopulated by fashion industry.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, yes.

MS. OLSOFF: But you need more traffic, and there's no traffic in Chelsea. You know everyone comes because—for art. And the art world will go someplace remote, even if it means two or three long blocks. But the other businesses all need a lot of traffic. So maybe Chelsea landlords will have to go down because no one else is going to come and repopulate. Because in the nineties it was repopulated, but SoHo is a crossroads.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, a year ago people were saying that some of the galleries were going to go to Bushwick or somewhere in Williamsburg.

MS. OLSOFF: No, they'll never go there. But you know what? You have the High Line coming.

MS. PILKINGTON: It has to be easy access. Easy access.

MS. OLSOFF: Maybe that will get some more people to a remote place to buy art. That's opening, which is lovely and will bring traffic. You know there's some swanky hotels opening up. There's still stuff happening there. You have to pay attention to that, I guess.

MS. PILKINGTON: Well, the Geneveil Building is almost finished. And that will have high-end occupants. But whether they're high-end occupants who have an apartment they visit one month a year, I don't know.

MS. OLSOFF: Or has it been really occupied?

MR. McELHINNEY: But there will be a lot of empty walls to fill.

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Which is always I mean, not to reduce art to a decorative level. But it does also serve that purpose.

MS. OLSOFF: Definitely have to hang on a wall.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. That's true.

MS. PILKINGTON: Not always.

MR. McELHINNEY: No. They could hang from the ceiling.

MS. PILKINGTON: If you have a sculpture around groaning.

MR. McELHINNEY: So you moved— You had two spaces, one on in—

MS. PILKINGTON: There was a moment when we realized that we had great shows. The openings were absolutely packed. And then there would be nobody in the gallery for the rest of the month.

MS. OLSOFF: Even getting good reviews.

MS. PILKINGTON: And then so we said, well, we can't just operate on having a packed opening for the packed opening; nobody's seen the show. And 9/11 did not help. And Chelsea stayed alive during 9/11. SoHo was closed off after 9/11 for three months or something. We took this tiny space—or smaller space compared to what we had—and it was a steppingstone. It was a steppingstone to finding something better and bigger in SoHo, in Chelsea, once we got used to it. And for two years we tried to do the two. And we couldn't. And then we found a sub-tenant for Broome Street, and we let go of Broome Street and operated just out of Chelsea, which is pretty cramped quarters.

MR. McELHINNEY: And where you are now, after the calamity—

MS. PILKINGTON: Right, January 7 [January 7, 2009].

MR. McELHINNEY: After it happened—how did that occur? How did you—

MS. PILKINGTON: The landlord was—it's a wood-frame building, and the floors are wood. And the landlord was renovating the floor above us in order to rent it out. The tenant had moved out at Christmas, and this was the first week of January. And it seemed like he was sanding floors and taking stuff out. And it seemed like—although nobody's admitted to it—that the builders left something burning that burnt slowly and burned down through the wooden floor, through the rafters, and into our space. Most of the damage was done—all the damage really—was done by water from putting out the fire. We were very lucky. It was in the second exhibition space, not in the storage. Not in the office. But we were very, very lucky. We lost very little. Everything was wrapped in plastic and cardboard and off the floor. So in terms of trauma it was very traumatic. But in terms of physical loss, you know, not so much was lost. In terms of dealing with the insurance company it's been a complete, nightmare.

MR. McELHINNEY: It had occurred right before our initial conversation.

MS. PILKINGTON: Yes. We were probably in a state of shock.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, I recall slightly. And you've been in the current space for—

MS. PILKINGTON: This where we are now?

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. PILKINGTON: We moved on January 8th. The fire took place on January 7th. We moved in on January 8th.

MR. McELHINNEY: And have you— I think the last time we spoke, I was at an opening—I think it was a Bill Smith opening. And I inquired about whether the space you were in would be on going or you said you'd only agreed to it until the end of the year or something?

MS. PILKINGTON: They allowed us to sign a license to occupy, not a lease. And it's a very cheap rent. And while they hope that we nest and want to stay longer, and then we'll sign a proper lease, which will be more expensive.

MS. PILKINGTON: Right now it's lasts through December.

MR. McELHINNEY: Under the terms of this license.

MS. OLSOFF: They've been very good to us. It's been really good.

MR. McELHINNEY: I have heard that some of the rents have come down a lot in Chelsea. So—

MS. PILKINGTON: Part of what we're trying to navigate.

MS. OLSOFF: Well, they have to because the rents are—in other words- they have to.

MR. McELHINNEY: I know a person who had their rent cut in half.

MS. OLSOFF: Some landlords are not doing it, and I think some more approachable.

MR. McELHINNEY: It's like the recent options where the French impressionist pictures did well, but the modernist pictures did not because prices have been—estimates have been lowered or—

MS. OLSOFF: Well, sometimes the auction house make these guarantees, and their hands are tied, too.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: Not sometimes, often. And they were made before. So they haven't had time to adjust them yet.

MR. McELHINNEY: Let's talk just a little bit—because I think we're coming near the end. I think it's very important. And again in our last conversation we had chatted about it—the idea of, I mean how do you feel about your track record as women in the business world? I mean this is an important thing. Because, I think, historically the art world has been, you know, a male-dominated realm. And you certainly have your own way of conducting yourselves, you know, in the business. As we explored, you're not just interested in commerce. You're mainly interested in the art, you know, in an age which has been very commercial. But speak a little about the women in the business. How has that—

MS. PILKINGTON: I mean there are strong women in the art world.

MR. McELHINNEY: There always were.

MS. PILKINGTON: And there have been. So I mean it's male-dominated, but there are strong women dealers and now museum people.

MS. OLSOFF: But they show men. That's the difference. The women themselves—

MR. McELHINNEY: Show white men.

MS. OLSOFF: Show white men. Have traditionally. There have been very strong women dealers.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. OLSOFF: And that's fantastic.

MR. McELHINNEY: The Parsons, Paula Cooper.

MS. OLSOFF: But the difference is that they show men, and the men make more money. So, you know, they go through marrying Parson's stable; a Paula Cooper stable. I think you'd probably find that they are the money-making artists. And the artists who make the most money are men in the galleries. But I don't think that anybody, any dealers, are making conscious efforts to fight this in any sort of activist way. You know the artists are— There have been some women artists. There are new curators—MoMA now has an amazing curatorial female staff. And I think largely as you look at their shows and their acquisitions, you'll see change. I think change is being made. You have the Sackler—you have the feminist museum wing of the Brooklyn. Huge potential. There's definitely changes being made. I think we're still, you know, 20 years away from seeing significant change in terms of collecting women. And women's prices being equal to men. But gradually I think it will happen. But there's still a lot that needs to be done in terms of choices people are making, and it's on a museum level also.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, have you tried to approach your own work as a dealer from a gendered perspective, to think about changing the paradigm for how the woman deals in the art world or operates in the art world?

MS. OLSOFF: I don't understand.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, I mean as a woman, having you consciously said, I'm not going to follow these other examples. I'm going to—

MS. OLSOFF: No. Penny and I really haven't consciously done very much. I mean we didn't have a business plan. We didn't decide to show art that's saleable and we don't decide to show women artists. We show what we think is the best work. And this work is being done, it seems to us often by women artists. But it's not because we're saying we're just going to show more women.

MR. McELHINNEY: So you're not polemical about it.

MS. OLSOFF: No.

MR. McELHINNEY: It's just that it's happened as it has.

MS. OLSOFF: It just really just a process very intuitive, and maybe because we show political work it seems to us more maybe intuitively the women are making stronger statements.

MS. PILKINGTON: Although the male artist seems more bombastic or something, and we don't want to be hit over the head or something. Who knows?

MR. McELHINNEY: [Laughs] Are all of them that way, head-bangers?

MS. OLSOFF: No, we show men.

MS. PILKINGTON: We've had a lot of artists, male artists.

MS. OLSOFF: We show a lot of male feminists.

MR. McELHINNEY: That's an interesting idea.

MS. OLSOFF: It's a real thing.

MR. McELHINNEY: I heard a hint of rancor in your tone, like you were not altogether happy with, you know, the status quo.

MS. OLSOFF: A hint. [They laugh.]

MR. McELHINNEY: And would like to see it change. I guess I was asking how, as a dealer, you've either consciously or unconsciously kind of leaned, pushed things in that general direction? Just by asserting your own taste?

MS. OLSOFF: Well, I think we're role models for other dealers who have told us that. I think being a role model is your most important power. I think influencing others who come after you is very important, to the generation behind you, is really all you can do.

MR. McELHINNEY: In all probability someone will be having with the transcript of this interview in a hundred years, in ten years, five years. Maybe they'll even have access to the audio if they can have an engineer clean it up enough to right all the background sound.

MS. OLSOFF: I don't understand why Penny's apartment is like this.



MR. McELHINNEY: We should say that we're in, you know, the building is called the Colonnades.

MS. PILKINGTON: The Colonnades.

MR. McELHINNEY: The Colonnades.

MS. OLSOFF: Famously photographed.

MS. PILKINGTON: Built in the 1820s.

MR. McELHINNEY: Inhabited by numerous well-known people.

MS. PILKINGTON: Originally there were nine sort of farmhouses and now there are four. And there's tons of stories.

MR. McELHINNEY: It's a beautiful building. It's one of the last shreds of old New York, last fragments of old New York, which is kind of interesting since your work puts you on the cutting edge of art; here you are in this historic dwelling.

MS. PILKINGTON: As it crumbles around our ears. [Laughs]

MR. McELHINNEY: Incredible upkeep.

MS. OLSOFF: As now 10 or 150 years.

MR. McELHINNEY: So now as we 10- 150 years from now.

MS. OLSOFF: Into the future.

MR. McELHINNEY: How would you like to be remembered, or how would you like to be understood as cultural personages?

MS. PILKINGTON: I think we said last time—

MR. McELHINNEY: In the lost conversation.

MS. PILKINGTON: In the lost conversation.

MS. OLSOFF: The lost file.

MS. PILKINGTON: I mean the fact that we enter the history books of the New York art world as having, you know, steadily done what we believed, and not being swayed by monetary matters or trends. And had a steady group of interesting artists. And helped those artists have careers that they might not otherwise have had. Or got into museums and be around for future generations to look at. This is a footnote. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Wendy?

MS. OLSOFF: I think that if you look back at many of the artists we've showed, you'll see that, like I was saying before about Carrie Mae Weems, I think you can say about a lot of the artists we've shown we were really showing them just before the conversation became popular. So that's the time when you can do the most because it's the time when people are coming up with ideas about things. Whether it's about politics in the most narrow sense of political issues, or about gender or race, I think we have a tendency not to bandwagon. But somehow intuitively tap into the conversation, again, just before. So in an academic sense, or when students are coming in, or when articles are being written, or when people are writing their dissertations, or when curators are starting out their careers, that they're being influenced. So we don't always see the money side of it. But we see the bigger picture. So we can only say that now because we're older, where you can really see where you've had your importance. And there's no way of teaching that to other people to be able to do that. So I always I think when my children look back at what Penny and I do, or their children, if this exists; they can say when they're reading books, and they'll say, Oh, look. My parents—Penny, showed that, showed that art. They have no clue, you know. And my son said to me recently, "Do you think you've influenced a lot of people?" And I said, "Oh, yes, I do." He said, "Like a hundred?" I said, "Oh, no, more than that." He goes, "A thousand?" "Oh, no! Much more than that!" and his eyes just went wide. And it's like we've influenced, I don't know, a lot. A lot of people. And people, you know, all over. And we love what we do. And so we're very lucky.

MR. McELHINNEY: [Laughs] Thank you both. I don't know how we could find a more suitable, inspiring coda to this long conversation.

[END OF DISC 4.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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