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Oral history interview with Rachel Adler,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Rachel Adler on 2009 June 18-23. The interview took place at Adler's home in New York, NY, 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 Art Dealers Association of America.

Rachel Adler has reviewed the transcript and has 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 Rachel Adler on June 18, 2009, at 1200 Broadway in New York City. A lovely place.

RACHEL ADLER: Thank you.

MR. McELHINNEY: You had an architect, I imagine.

MS. ADLER: Oh, yes. Yes, but 30 years ago.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, really.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Who was it?

MS. ADLER: Carmi Bee.

MR. McELHINNEY: Carmi Bee.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: It's a wonderful space.

MS. ADLER: It was complicated because the beams are very strong, and they're always present visually.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: So you have to work against them.

MR. McELHINNEY: And you've got a lot of mechanicals exposed, the pipes and everything, but you didn't go for the Beaubourg look.

MS. ADLER: It's closer to the Beaubourg look than most of the current lofts being done. But a loft was not a luxurious abode 30 years ago.

MR. McELHINNEY: There's a sweatshop that was a—

MS. ADLER: This was originally a hotel.

MR. McELHINNEY: A hotel!

MS. ADLER: And became a sweatshop like everything around here. And then was one of the first loft conversions further up from SoHo.

MR. McELHINNEY: So this is a cast iron—

MS. ADLER: Cast-iron building.

MR. McELHINNEY: Eighteen-nineties or something.

MS. ADLER: Eighteen-seventies. It was one of the last of the—

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, '70s.

MS. ADLER: Yes. Downstairs in the lobby there's a very interesting history of the building. And there are wonderful photographs of what this place looked like, what the area looked like when this was built. This was the center of the Theater District. And Madison Square Park was where Madison Square Garden was, which is three blocks away.

One of the most interesting things is when they were raising money to bring the Statue of Liberty here, they sent the torch as a sample of what was coming, and it was in Madison Square Park. There's a marvelous photograph downstairs in the entrance of that sticking out of the ground. It's very funny-looking.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, that was quite a time here in New York.

MS. ADLER: This was Diamond Jim Brady, and this was his hangout.

MR. McELHINNEY: Lillian Russell and those people.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Robber barons, tycoons. Edwin Booth.

MS. ADLER: Yes, that was—

MR. McELHINNEY: Wonderful building. Wonderful residence. I just love it.

MS. ADLER: It's great.

MR. McELHINNEY: And how long have you lived here?

MS. ADLER: Since 1980.

MR. McELHINNEY: Wow! That's wonderful. With all this art around, I'm moved to ask when, as a young person, were you first mindful of art? When did you become aware of art?

MS. ADLER: I'm the daughter of an art dealer, Abe Adler, who was the founder of Hirschl & Adler, who was my father. At that time he was an antiques dealer. But the beginning of the '50s, he felt that it would be a good thing to go more into the picture business because it was, he thought, easier. It was going to be less arduous than hauling antiques around.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, they're flat, and you can store a lot of them in a small amount of space. Exhibit them easily.

MS. ADLER: Sure. So he found Norman Hirschl, and the two of them went into business.

So from the very beginning it was there. I didn't want to do it. I was a political science major in college. I didn't want my life planned out for me. So I decided I was going to do anything else but be in the art business. But then at one point I thought, who am I kidding? It's really what I like.

MR. McELHINNEY: It's in your bones, that's right.

MS. ADLER: Yes, yes. And I went to graduate school.

MR. McELHINNEY: Where?

MS. ADLER: At Harvard. Just for one year. I was not happy.

MR. McELHINNEY: In what?

MS. ADLER: History of art.

MR. McELHINNEY: History of art.

MS. ADLER: Yes. In those days being the child of an art dealer in an academic setting was not a good thing. I was tainted by commerce. And I heard it a lot at school. And I was also—I'd had enough school by that time. But the thing that's interesting, in those days the history of art, as it was taught in school, ended with one lecture on Cézanne as the link with what was to come in the 20th century. That was the end.

My father's favorite period was the gothic. They were at that point selling a lot of American art and Impressionism. So all my experience really was up through the 19th century. I came to New York after school to look for a job. I ended up at the Guggenheim Museum. That, of course, for me was the beginning of—the

opening of my eyes. And that was a fascinating experience.

MR. McELHINNEY: Did you have a lot of siblings?

MS. ADLER: One sister.

MR. McELHINNEY: Did she also—

MS. ADLER: Unwillingly.

MR. McELHINNEY: She also is in the art business, too?

MS. ADLER: She was, but mostly in the decorative arts. She's more interested in that.

MR. McELHINNEY: So as a kid, your dad's an art dealer and antique dealer.

MS. ADLER: And you come home from school, the dining room table's going out the front door. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. You're around it all the time. So it was just part of your life. It was just there.

MS. ADLER: The break with the family tradition came with the choice of century, deciding to make my life in the 20th century rather than the 19th—or before then.

MR. McELHINNEY: And yet here you live in a 19th-century hotel.

MS. ADLER: But you'll notice the art on the walls is 20th century.

MR. McELHINNEY: Lovely. So you studied poly sci, and where was that?

MS. ADLER: At Wellesley.

MR. McELHINNEY: At Wellesley. And then you went to Harvard for a year. There are wonderful collections there.

MS. ADLER: Fabulous.

MR. McELHINNEY: The Busch-Reisinger, the Fogg.

MS. ADLER: Absolutely marvelous.

MR. McELHINNEY: But there was this taint of commerce, you said?

MS. ADLER: It was, "What does the art business think of that, Miss Adler?" With a sneer. There's always the idea that you are slightly corrupt by being involved in the commercial side.

MR. McELHINNEY: I interviewed Eugene Thaw a couple of years ago.

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

MR. McELHINNEY: And he is, as you may know, from Washington Heights [New York City]. He was the child of an engineer who had a lot of activity in Latin America. And I guess he was back and forth a lot. But he went to Columbia [University]. He said at that point in time, when he was going to Columbia, if I recall correctly—I believe the interview is online; I can check it—that he wanted to go into art history, but he felt that opportunities would be closed to him based on social architectures of, sort of, art historians being mostly very privileged men.

MS. ADLER: That's certainly true.

MR. McELHINNEY: And mostly Anglo-Saxon, privileged men.

MS. ADLER: Yes, yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: And that as a kind of upper-middle-class Jewish person, he would not be able to participate in the social activities—this is what I understood; I may be paraphrasing a bit.

MS. ADLER: I think that's perfectly correct, except one of his teachers must have been Meyer Shapiro.

MR. McELHINNEY: I think so.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: But he said that as a consequence of that, he decided rather than pursue higher degrees in art history, he would begin to work with art and begin dealing it. So he knew he wanted a life in art. As the child of an engineer, he wanted a life in art. But he realized that the academic world was still a closed shop.

MS. ADLER: I think it was very much closed. It was.

MR. McELHINNEY: But this would have been prior to World War II, or around World War II.

MS. ADLER: Well, I don't think it changed at all. I was at the Fogg in 1955.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: And it was very much the same then. Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: So it changed, I guess, in the '60s with people like—

MS. ADLER: I think it changed probably with my generation.

MR. McELHINNEY: Barbara Novak, for instance.

MS. ADLER: Colin Eisler. Robert Rosenblum.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: With the students of those people.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: But it was a closed society then. Museums certainly.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, it's interesting also because you talk about your dad. And another interviewee was Ira Spanierman, a guy who started out in the antique—

MS. ADLER: Did he talk about my dad?

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes.

MS. ADLER: Because they were very close.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, he did. He spoke about working in his shop and studying, cleaning pictures and stabilizing them, and making them—

MS. ADLER: Shine.

MR. McELHINNEY: Good to go, yes. And he spoke also about spending hours and days in the Frick Library. And as I recall, his family or uncle was in the auction business.

MS. ADLER: His father was in the auction business.

MR. McELHINNEY: His father was in the auction business. And he made a point of saying that he was raised more or less in the same neighborhood where he now works. Sort of in that area.

MS. ADLER: That's true. I'm just trying to think. It was called the Plaza Art Gallery. And if I remember, it was on 58th Street or something.

MR. McELHINNEY: Something like that.

MS. ADLER: Something sort of east. Maybe Lexington, something like that. I don't know. Our fathers were very good friends.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes.

MS. ADLER: I was scared to death of his father, who chewed a cigar. And yelled.

MR. McELHINNEY: He didn't speak of him much. He did—

MS. ADLER: He was a rough character, Sam [Spanierman].

MR. McELHINNEY: He did speak a lot of your dad, though.

MS. ADLER: Yes. Well, they were very close.

MR. McELHINNEY: Where did you grow up?

MS. ADLER: In Brooklyn.

MR. McELHINNEY: In Brooklyn.

MS. ADLER: Yes, Crown Heights.

MR. McELHINNEY: Crown Heights, okay. Just for the record. And so the house was hung with art.

MS. ADLER: Yes. Always there was—I remember a Giacomo Bassano over the fireplace. It was mostly Renaissance art. My father did not become a collector until after he retired from Hirschl & Adler, because he always felt that one should not be in competition with one's business. That's quite the opposite. Dealers now tend to be collectors and to feel that they can save art for themselves.

MR. McELHINNEY: That I think is true.

MS. ADLER: And also I think his collecting went towards objects. There were a lot of Luristan bronzes around, a lot of English porcelains, furniture. So we were brought up with all of these things.

MR. McELHINNEY: Did he explain them to you?

MS. ADLER: Oh, yes. Yes, yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: You're at the dinner table, and he indicates a new acquisition of art—

MS. ADLER: Well, it was between his assuming that we knew about it because we'd seen it all our lives, and also we were taken to museums all the time. From 1950 on, we were taken to Europe every summer. And we just went from museum to museum.

I remember someone asking my sister what she did during the summer in Europe. And she said, "Well, first I stood on one foot in front of a picture, and then I would change feet and stand on the other foot in front of a picture." [Mr. McElhinney laughs.] We were in Madrid, I think, for 10 days, and never saw anything but the inside of the Prado. Terrible. It was absolutely terrible [laughs] when you're 13 and 16. That's tough stuff.

MR. McELHINNEY: It's not what you're eager to be doing at that point.

MS. ADLER: But he felt that it was a very important thing. And I'm glad he did it.

MR. McELHINNEY: Just to establish some kind of background, what was his training?

MS. ADLER: He was a New Haven boy, very poor. Got a scholarship to Yale. So he went to Yale, graduated from Yale. Then became an architect at Columbia. I don't know whether he ever finished or not. But he started out doing architectural interiors. And in those days people would go to someone and have the whole house done in—you could buy Renaissance furniture, and the walls, the ceilings were done. And he did that for years.

Until, I think it was 1937, some Texas people came and said that they wanted—let's see, I'm trying to think—a Rubens, a Rembrandt, and a Titian, I think. Would he find it for them? And he describes going around to the various art galleries, to Duveen and to Knoedler, and not being given the time of day because they'd never heard of him; they didn't know who he was. And this was Urschel money from Texas. This was big Texas oil money at the time. And finally going to a man named Howard Young. And Howard Young, they sold the pictures. He took him seriously, and that was I think the start of his own business.

MR. McELHINNEY: Then you came along.

MS. ADLER: I was there already. I was 1933.

MR. McELHINNEY: Okay. So you go to Wellesley, and you go to Harvard. You decide to bail out of Harvard; you figure it's not for you; you don't want to pursue that. Hostile environment, somewhat challenging environment.

MS. ADLER: Yes. And I was tired, tired of going to school, as a matter of fact.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. You'd had enough college.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: And so you come back to New York. You get a job at the Guggenheim. What were you doing at the Guggenheim?

MS. ADLER: I was the assistant registrar.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, that's a good job.

MS. ADLER: It was absolutely amazing, amazing. At the time the Guggenheim consisted of one townhouse, one apartment building, and one parking lot. And during the time I was there, Frank Lloyd Wright and James Johnson Sweeney were screaming at each other because of the planning period for the museum. But it was fascinating.

Most of the collection was not catalogued. It was just big drawers full of things. You'd open them up and there are 110 Klees or 50 Feiningers or whatever. It was just amazing! The previous director had been Hilla von Rebay, who had a long affair with Solomon Guggenheim. The minute Solomon died, Madame von Rebay was out. They got Sweeney in. And the museum was becoming a professional organization. But there were a lot of leftovers from the Rebay days.

And really, the personalities involved were extraordinary. The person who helped enormously with everything was Marcel Duchamp. He used to come over and chat with the girls every afternoon. And who helped a lot because he knew all the cast of characters. We just had a great time.

The staff were all doing things that they hadn't been trained for. Louise Swenson was the librarian, the great art historian. Georgina Oeri from Switzerland, another great art historian, was doing publicity. So it was all sort of a makeup crowd. I can't tell you how exciting it was. For me, it was just opening my eyes to everything. I'd never seen these things before.

MR. McELHINNEY: Can you share a few anecdotes about working with Marcel Duchamp? He would show up to chat with the girls?

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Who were the girls?

MS. ADLER: Well, the girls, I was one of them. There were three of them; I don't think the names would mean anything, and I'm not sure I even remember them. But one of the shows that we did there was a Brâncuși show. And that was absolutely fascinating. He helped a lot because they had Brâncuși at home. They had little vases and things like that and furniture in the house. So he would just tell us all of these stories.

MR. McELHINNEY: Didn't he help the Arensbergs, too, organize their whole collection?

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: He was a major part of that.

MS. ADLER: And also the Société Anonyme.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. At Yale.

MS. ADLER: It ended up at Yale.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: He and Katherine Dreier and I guess it was Picabia, or was it—

MR. McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I think so.

MS. ADLER: I never understood how much he had actually been in and out of the art business in a very quiet way, advising. Did he make anything from it? I don't know. But he was in on all of these things. And so we just learned an immense amount from him. It was an inside into the personalities of the artists.

MR. McELHINNEY: What was he like?

MS. ADLER: Extremely charming. Extremely elegant and courtly. And as I said, the stories were just—there was one story about playing chess with Man Ray and Calder's getting drunk and sitting on the chessboard. It was supposed to be an electronic chessboard, and they were going to trace the movements by the paths of the chessmen. And there were—it was just more conversation than anecdotes. And for me anyway, it just made this whole period, this avant-garde period, the most romantic thing that I could imagine. Especially when one of

them is sitting next to you. And as you know, his wife had been married to Pierre Matisse before. So there were stories of people they knew. And Nancy Cunard.

When I think back on it, he didn't talk about some of the people who must have been closest to him. He never talked about Picabia, for instance. I never heard anything about Miró. We heard a lot about Calder. We heard a lot about Léger, but then Léger had been here, so I think there was—we'd hear about Léger from various people.

MR. McELHINNEY: What about Man Ray? He was from Cheltenham, Pennsylvania.

MS. ADLER: Yes. And a friend of my uncle Morris, I don't know how. Don't know. No, I don't remember. He may have been talking more about the people that the Guggenheim was strong in. Or that issues came up.

MR. McELHINNEY: So he had helped advise the collecting of the whole holdings.

MS. ADLER: Yes, yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: He seems to have been involved with that quite a bit. I recently had a conversation with Brian O'Doherty who knew him also. And said he made some comment to him that when he was a young man, there was an expression in French, "Dumb as a painter."

MS. ADLER: [Laughs.] Yes. Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: And he resolved that he wasn't going to be—pardon the pun—tarred with that brush. So he was going to do other things with his life. From an artistic family, the two brothers.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: And a sister, right?

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: She was something.

MS. ADLER: She was one of my girls in the sense that I worked a lot with her work and her husband.

MR. McELHINNEY: How long were you at the Guggenheim?

MS. ADLER: About two years. Then I decided to get married. Well, actually, I quit first because I was being paid \$50 a week, and I thought that was a little insulting.

MR. McELHINNEY: Even in those days, that's a real parsimonious compensation.

MS. ADLER: So after about a year and a half, I went there and I said I'd like a raise. And the first thing they said to me, you know, there could be a line around the block of little girls like you waiting to get your job. And I said, I still want a raise. So I got \$2.50—it was \$50 a week, I'm sorry. So I got a \$2.50 raise. And then after a while I quit and took myself off to Europe for a couple of months. Then I decided to get married, and I married a Venezuelan.

MR. McELHINNEY: How do you decide to get married? Was he already in the picture?

MS. ADLER: No, I met this person whom I had known from school. He's half American and half Venezuelan. And we decided to go off and live in Venezuela.

MR. McELHINNEY: That must have really been—

MS. ADLER: It was not a popular decision. [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: In other words, it wasn't your idea.

MS. ADLER: It was my idea.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, it was your idea.

MS. ADLER: It was not my family's idea.

MR. McELHINNEY: I see.

MS. ADLER: By that time they were looking towards the next generation at Hirschl & Adler, and I was supposed to be it.

MR. McELHINNEY: The family business.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: So what were you doing when you went down to Venezuela? How long were you living there?

MS. ADLER: I lived there for 23 years. I had four children there. After the third I decided that I had to start working.

I first went to work for the English language newspaper. At that time, there was a movement to acquire a portrait of Madame Cézanne by Cézanne. She'd come on a loan exhibition, and I was sent to interview the museum director and one of the artists who was most involved in this movement. And we talked for a while, [laughs] and I ended up working for the museum.

I left the newspaper, and I went to work as the registrar. Because they hadn't ever had—they had no records. And their filing system was wonderful. They had these big high filing cabinets. And what you'd do is you'd put the papers in. And when the drawer gets filled, you close that drawer, and you start another drawer. So in order to do the registry for the paintings, I had to make a filing system for the museum. All the correspondence forever, all of the everything. And I spent about two years doing that.

MR. McELHINNEY: So you're a child of the art biz in New York.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: And you studied art history a little bit at Harvard. I'm sure it was part of your academic studies at Wellesley as electives or something?

MS. ADLER: Yes, I had a minor in art history.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right, a minor in art history.

MS. ADLER: And I ended up with a master's in art history.

MR. McELHINNEY: And you worked at the Guggenheim at a period of transition, where it's moving from kind of a private, like a vanity museum into a major public, with an iconic building and all that.

MS. ADLER: With Madame von Rebay sweeping in periodically with her floor-length mink coat to say, "That picture is mine!" And sure enough it was dedicated on the back. [Laughs.] So she'd sweep off with these things.

MR. McELHINNEY: So you were working with a different paradigm in terms of what a museum's mission was and how one conducted oneself in a museum.

So you go to Venezuela, and you find this very kind of ad hoc operation. They bring you in as the registrar. What was your view—I think that this might be interesting to people because we're also interviewing in a couple of weeks people who were active in the Latin American art field—but what was the vision of a museum in Caracas in, let's say, what would this be, about 1960 now?

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Versus New York?

MS. ADLER: Yes, it's an interesting question. First of all, Venezuela, very interestingly, is a country that has always been kind to its artists. Anybody with any kind of promise could find himself with a government scholarship in Paris or in Madrid. Mostly in Paris. Very few would come to the United States in those days, mostly to France. And I'm talking about from the beginning of the 19th century on. And they would go there, and they'd become salon painters. They were not joining the Impressionists or anyone. They were following the official [school of painting]. They'd come back, and their paintings would be acquired by, first of all, by the state, and then by wealthy people.

The museum was there because every nice country should have one. And I think there was always a group of people who were very interested in cultural activities. I noticed in my time in South America that different countries were attracted to different kinds of cultural activity. Colombians are very literature-inclined, as [are] the Peruvians. The Venezuelans were definitely visual arts. And the Argentines, also literature. And they'd be Surrealists. The Colombians were magic realists.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. Márquez.

MS. ADLER: Yes. As were a lot of Venezuelans. Venezuela had, however, a group of forward-looking artists who produced a sort of Post-Impressionism. Caracas has a very, very interesting light. It's very yellow, and it's very high on glare. And the glare blanks out color. Did you ever see the Reverón show?

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, that was—right—Armando Reverón.

MS. ADLER: Alright. Now he's a typical—yes. Now, his idea was all of those white paintings. You couldn't see color under that sun. So painting what he's seeing, he's doing these white paintings with a little bit of blue. That is very interesting. From that same idea, but moving forward into a 20th-century vocabulary, you end up with the Op artists: Soto and Cruz Diez, who are also--object glimmering in light or with movement.

And so you have the museum, which is a fairly staid Beaux-Arts affair. A new director who's been trained by Gordon Washburn at Carnegie Tech, by the name of Miguel Arroyo, and who wants to drag this thing into the modern times. Assistant director is a man who's a German—actually Lithuanian—who was a graphic artist, and who had been trained as a modern designer, living with a woman named Gego, whom I'm sure you've also heard of.

MR. McELHINNEY: Of course. Yes.

MS. ADLER: Also German. So there's a little enclave of the Bauhaus.

MR. McELHINNEY: That show at MoMA, at the same time as the Reverón show, the drawing show. A lot of her work—yes.

MS. ADLER: Yes. And there was a wonderful show at the Drawing Society that was just absolutely fabulous.

So all this is going on in Venezuela. And his goal was to make the museum the center of all of this, which he managed to do. And they were, at the same time, reaching out to different movements all around Latin America. So they were buying a Latin American art collection. It was a very informal setting because whatever your title might be—I was a "professor guide," because foreigners could only be hired by the government in an educational level. We were all doing the same thing no matter what was going on.

A lot of the artists at the time—probably still—were involved in politics on the Left. We had a situation where the nice people, as they called themselves, were battling the communists in the museum, who were going to overthrow I don't know what. So that it all got involved in politics. And at one point we got heavily involved in politics. It was very exciting working there, aside from the fact that I was making \$200 a month, \$300 a month. It sounded better--which was more or less what I was getting at the Guggenheim--but it sounded better there. It was great. It was a very exciting time.

It got a little too exciting. Right after Fidel took over Cuba, Che Guevara, apparently on his way to Bolivia, made a stop to organize some people in Caracas in Venezuela. And they became what they called urban guerillas. And the most dramatic tale of my time in the museum came: One day I was coming to work, and it was raining. I had been to the hairdresser. And so I was honking my horn for one of the guards to come with an umbrella. And he's going like this [shaking head "no"]. And I thought, the hell with it. You've got an umbrella; I don't. Please. So I'm hitting the horn. Finally a young man comes down from the entrance and motions for me to open my window, which I open up to here because I didn't want the rain to come in on my hairdo. He stuck a machine gun in the top of the window, right here. And he said, "You'd better come into the museum." And I said, "Well, if that's the way it is, I'm coming." Anyway, a robbery was in progress.

MR. McELHINNEY: I see.

MS. ADLER: The French government had—and these were the days of Malraux—had promised an exhibition to Mexico for a hundred years of French painting, in exchange for Mexican gold. And the Venezuelans said, "Well, we want it, too. Come to Venezuela." And obviously the plan was to stick it up—the idea was to prove that the government had no force to keep civil order. I had already lived through a revolution, by the way. I skipped over that part. You don't need to hear that, right?

MR. McELHINNEY: Share it. That'd be great.

MS. ADLER: When I went to live there, there was a dictator by the name of Marcos Pérez Jiménez. And after about a year, there was a lot of unrest, mostly led by university and high school students. Eventually their parents joined the crowd, and they overthrew the government.

All of the people who were the subsequent presidents came back from exile, and started trying to impose their own parties. This was a period when Rómulo Betancourt had just been elected. And these guys had all been—they'd all flirted with various degrees of Leftism in exile or in Venezuela. The weakest among them were the

communists. They really never took hold in Venezuela. But there were varying shades of socialism. And this group of young people, the urban guerillas, were—they were radical, more radical than anybody in the government, and they wanted to take over.

They had been really emboldened by Fidel Castro, whom the Venezuelan government had supported enormously. At one point, right after he'd marched into Havana, he came down to Venezuela. We all stood on street corners listening to him, big loudspeakers. And we listened for God knows how long. It was about three or four hours. But it was fascinating.

Oh, there's another story I should tell you about that. I'm jumping around too much?

MR. McELHINNEY: It's all right.

MS. ALDER: Okay.

MR. McELHINNEY: This is all before you returned to New York.

MS. ADLER: Or even before I opened my gallery in Caracas.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: What happened, my husband was transferred after about a year to Maracaibo [Venezuela], to the oil fields. We lived in Maracaibo, which was—had I known then that it was for a short amount of time, I would've been truly fascinated by it. It was very interesting because it was still pretty wild. I mean, we left for Maracaibo in the middle of this revolution. We had to fight our way down to the airport. The revolution came to Maracaibo about three weeks later. And we were living—he worked for Creole [Petroleum Corporation], which was Esso. But it was like living in an oil camp. And I don't know if you ever saw that movie, Henri-Georges Clouzot and Yves Montand, called *The Wages of Fear* [1953].

MR. McELHINNEY: Of course. *Le Salaire de la peur*.

MS. ADLER: Yes. Alright. That's really what it was like.

MR. McELHINNEY: Wow! [Laughs.]

MS. ADLER: It really was like that.

MR. McELHINNEY: Trucks loaded with nitroglycerine going through the jungle. That's great, really.

MS. ADLER: Absolutely. And these Indian ladies wandering around in the city with what looked like black shoe polish on their faces in their big muumuus, they called them. They're big robes. Not speaking a word of Spanish. They spoke Guajiro. And it was absolutely amazing to see all this. The only places of entertainment, of public entertainment--you could go to the movies, and the men used to go to whorehouses. That was where you went to have a drink. But women weren't supposed to. We did go one 14th—

MR. McELHINNEY: Unless you were working there, right?

MS. ADLER: Yes. Poor little things who were working there. Yes, these little 14-year-olds who looked as if they didn't have a square meal in their lives in tulle dresses; it was pathetic.

MR. McELHINNEY: So it was really, the way you make it sound—

MS. ADLER: It was a Western boomtown.

MR. McELHINNEY: It sounds like Deadwood [SD], where the bars are hotels, whorehouses, restaurants, gaming parlors.

MS. ADLER: The major whorehouse in town was called the Acropolis because it was a shack with four pieces of wood in front, which were the columns. It was all really sort of pathetic. And one 14th of July—we had a lot of friends who worked for Schlumberger, who were—they were the guys who did the actual opening of the oil wells. And we had a party on the 14th of July. And we all decided that's where we were going to go, because none of us had ever seen the inside of any of these places. I didn't have a babysitter, so I took my three-month-old daughter with us in the baby carriage. And we all went off. It was quite an interesting evening.

All the little girls—they all wanted to hold the baby. It was so sad, really. But while I was there, one of the people who worked for Schlumberger was a young man named Basilio Gomez. He was a *castrista* and had to leave because he'd been active in the revolutionary movement. And he had to leave his girlfriend, Cookie--not in

Havana; they lived in western Cuba. So the only way her parents would let her leave Cuba was if she were married. So how are we going to get her married? She's there; he's here. He can't go there to get married; she can't come. It was decided that I would marry him by proxy. I would stand in for Cookie. So Basilio and I went off to Caracas to the Cuban Embassy, where the ambassador was going to marry us so that she could—I was going to marry him in her name so she could come.

We get there and we go up to this place. It's all on a hill. And there are people throwing furniture out the windows. The place was an absolute—there were these broken chairs all over the lawn. In the middle of it was this lady wandering around in a negligee with a little cup of coffee in her hand. A little demitasse cup. And she said, "Who are you?" And I told her what it was. And she said, "Well, I'm the ambassador's wife, and he doesn't have a job as of today." Fidel had marched in the day before, and he'd been fired. So she said, "Let me see if I can find him." I said, "We came all the way from Maracaibo. What are we going to do?" And so he married us, and he just dated it the day before. [Mr. McElhinney laughs.] So Cookie could come. So he was still ambassador. Anyway, that was the kind of thing that we had lived through. It was exciting times.

MR. McELHINNEY: The image of tossing the furniture out the window, which is, of course, an expression of welcome.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: *Tira los muebles por las ventanas*. But this was not why they were throwing the furniture out that day. [Laughs.]

MS. ADLER: No, no. It was, down with the imperialist bourgeois furniture.

MR. McELHINNEY: In with IKEA, right? Just kidding.

[END CD 1.]

MR. McELHINNEY: At what point did you decide to become an art dealer?

MS. ADLER: Well, I was working in the museum. Then I went to work for the Friends of the Museum.

MR. McELHINNEY: So in other words trying—

MS. ADLER: Became a director of the Friends of the Museum.

MR. McELHINNEY: —being involved in the development.

MS. ADLER: Yes, yes. And a lot of the purchases were made through the Friends of the Museum. This is a national museum; they had no funds. The last thing on the mind of any of these governments—they're trying to build roads; they're trying to build schools. Frustrating as it is, it's hard to blame them when they have life-and-death issues in front of them.

MR. McELHINNEY: So you are saying in a way that the whole previous year museums and art were somehow standard equipment for any great nation.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: They had kind of abandoned that and were—

MS. ADLER: Well, they did. Because at one point one of the presidential candidates described two kinds of culture: there was the culture of the people, and then there was high culture.

MR. McELHINNEY: The old high, low discussion.

MS. ADLER: And the purpose of the ministry of culture should be to promote the people's culture.

MR. McELHINNEY: The low culture.

MS. ADLER: Yes. The folklore and, at the most, Venezuelan artists. But, no, no international artists or anything.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, what about the Brazilian, the Tropicália, the Oiticica, that sort of—

MS. ADLER: That was very different: these countries had no connection with each other.

MR. McELHINNEY: But that was a low art kind of--these shanties and—

MS. ADLER: Well, no.

MR. McELHINNEY: Representations of—

MS. ADLER: Those are political.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, of course.

MS. ADLER: Those are political comments. And I remember a friend—there's a fellow in Miami whose name I don't remember [Ricardo Pau Lloza], but who wrote a really interesting article in *Drawing* magazine at one point about how, mostly through the fault of northern curators, what the people in the northern hemisphere came to expect from Latin American art was either fruit and flowers or politics.

MR. McELHINNEY: Or chubby nudes.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: But if they got anything else that was anywhere in line with what was being done in any of the art capitals, it was assumed to be derivative. The idea that these things could come from Latin America or could grow up in Latin America—even if they were separate—never entered into anybody's head.

MR. McELHINNEY: I guess we would be including Mexico as part of the north in this discussion?

MS. ADLER: No. Because everything in Mexico is completely impregnated with politics. They just could never get away from it. Didn't want to get away from it and from Mexicanism, as they call it. It was just a very important part of—and to this day. I'm excluding from this a group of very sophisticated collectors in all of these countries.

MR. McELHINNEY: Of course.

MS. ADLER: But the official art. And even they, as sophisticated as they may be, will have a full cast of Mexican artists. I mean that's a requirement in any of these collections.

MR. McELHINNEY: So you get the muralists, you get people like—

MS. ADLER: Yes. Rivera and—

MR. McELHINNEY: Rivera, Tamayo, Siqueiros, Orozco, Dr. Atl.

MS. ADLER: Yes, all of them, all of them. In fact, any Venezuelan collection.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: Whatever it might be—it might be Manzoni and Group Zero—will have the local Venezuelans in it. Now, local Venezuelans. Venezuela received a great many immigrants before and after the war, and they brought with them their own teachings, their own studies. And they integrated into Venezuelan life.

MR. McELHINNEY: What kind of interaction—you stated earlier that most of the Venezuelan artists were trained in France. But right now—

MS. ADLER: They weren't trained in France. They would go to France.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, they'd go to France.

MS. ADLER: And some of them, they had their training in Venezuela, mostly from Chilean teachers, who were imported at one point.

MR. McELHINNEY: But apparently quite a few people did manage to come to New York to study at the Art Students League and other places like that.

MS. ADLER: Yes, that was afterwards. Where they mostly studied, the people who are dying now, in their 80s, they studied at the Denise René gallery in Paris. Vasarely was their teacher. Because there had been a Vasarely exhibition that went around South America, and a group went from Argentina to Paris, and a group from Venezuela.

MR. McELHINNEY: The Op art.

MS. ADLER: Yes, yes. Which was very easy for them to accept. But anyway, you want to know how I got into the gallery.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, what was the segue?

MS. ADLER: I went from the Friends of the Museum. They decided to form a Venezuelan cultural institution. It was called CONAC [*Consejo Nacional de la Cultura*]. And one of the artists who had been involved had been Alejandro Otero. I don't know if you know that name. He was to be a vice president. He was to be the vice president for the arts. And since he would never come to work, I became his assistant and I did his work for him.

And then after a while it was just, again, the politics involved. Anybody who wanted anything modern was accused of being a communist. It just got into class warfare, really. And my father was urging me, my husband was urging me, just open a gallery. By this time I knew all of the artists, I knew all of the collectors. I was very firmly entrenched in the cultural community. So I did it.

MR. McELHINNEY: Was there any kind of ministerial realm of culture? Did they have a minister of art?

MS. ADLER: Well, that was this CONAC.

MR. McELHINNEY: That would be CONAC.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: So this was the organization that—

MS. ADLER: The organization that was to be the cultural czar.

MR. McELHINNEY: But would this oversee things like drama and dance and music and everything?

MS. ADLER: Yes. It would fund these things. For instance, it would promote exhibitions. The Venezuelan Young Orchestra, the *Orchestra Juvenile*. The director has now become the director of the Los Angeles Symphony. That was a music teaching program that was started by a man named José Antonio Abreu, who started the idea—again, with social purposes—of teaching the kids in the slums to play instruments and to give them something else in their lives. That's been one of the most successful programs imaginable. And they would also, for instance, they would promote—if somebody was a great pianist, they'd send him on a tour. They would help that. If a great artist, they'd get him a scholarship to wherever.

MR. McELHINNEY: Where did the money come from to do all this?

MS. ADLER: From the government.

MR. McELHINNEY: And was this from—

MS. ADLER: No, there was money. There was private money coming.

MR. McELHINNEY: I'm honestly unacquainted with, like, the tax structures and—

MS. ADLER: Doesn't exist. Or didn't exist.

MR. McELHINNEY: Because up until a few years ago, the idea of a not-for-profit was viewed as absurd in Europe. But now it's actually working because of the decentralization of--yes.

MS. ADLER: Well, there they had either the government--

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: --or there were several private foundations. There was a man named Hans Neumann, who was a Czech refugee who made a huge fortune in Venezuela. And who established the Neumann Foundation, and along with that a school of design, of graphic design.

MR. McELHINNEY: Was there an academy already in Venezuela? If memory serves, I believe I read somewhere that there had been an academy organized there in the late 18th century at some point.

MS. ADLER: Late 19th century.

MR. McELHINNEY: Or early 1800s, yes. Like around 1800, 1820.

MS. ADLER: An academy for what?

MR. McELHINNEY: For art.

MS. ADLER: You mean a school, art school? There was the School of Plastic Arts that was basically a high school. And that was it. You couldn't study art at the university. You had to study architecture.

Now what there was, which was very interesting, is there was a man by the name of Carlos Raul Villanueva, who was the architect of the University City [of Caracas]. And this was an extremely influential place. What he did is, he got artists from all over the world to do murals. Calder did the acoustic panels for the big auditorium. There are Léger murals. There's a mural by Sophie Taeuber-Arp. There's sculpture by Antoine Pevsner all around.

And at the same time, one of the Venezuelan cultural attachés in Paris, his wife was acting as sort of an art dealer, and in a way bludgeoning some of the new millionaires to buy art. So you had some really good art collections in Venezuela. Money was being made because the country was being built. And the money was being made in construction.

[Telephone rings.]

I'm not going to answer the phone.

MR. McELHINNEY: And oil.

MS. ADLER: No, oil went straight to the government.

MR. McELHINNEY: It went straight to the government.

MS. ADLER: Yes. In Venezuela all subsoil rights are owned by the government.

MR. McELHINNEY: Was there any support coming from the expatriates? Because there's a pretty big expatriate population.

MS. ADLER: You mean Venezuelan expatriates in Paris or—yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right, yes.

MS. ADLER: They were poor. They were struggling. And in fact, at one point—there was a national painting prize. At one point Bienuevo worked it out so that Soto could win the national painting prize, because it had some money attached to it and he needed the money. And these guys were—they'd get these tiny little scholarships. And after a while they'd run out, and they were—a lot of them were existing by working for Vasarely, painting by the numbers. You know all those big paintings. They'd get numbers, and then they'd have these big consoles with the different paints.

MR. McELHINNEY: So he was hiring people like Mark Kostabi or Jeff Koons.

MS. ADLER: Yes. And for instance, as soon as Soto made it, he started hiring people. You can tell when he made it because the work goes down in quality, because somebody else is doing the backgrounds. So anyway, that's when I started the gallery. And I got all of these people to work with me.

MR. McELHINNEY: What was your first step? Did you write a business plan? Did you open a bank account?

MS. ADLER: No. I came up here, and I stood behind the plum velvet curtains in the salesroom at Hirschl & Adler and listened to my father and Norman sell paintings. That was it. And my father gave me \$10,000. That was it.

MR. McELHINNEY: So you learned how to close deals by hiding behind the curtains.

MS. ADLER: By listening.

MR. McELHINNEY: By hiding behind the curtain.

MS. ADLER: I was hiding behind—yes. Do you want to see some of the posters from the gallery?

MR. McELHINNEY: Sure.

MS. ADLER: You'll see them now or—

MR. McELHINNEY: Maybe we should look at them at the end of this conversation.

MS. ADLER: Alright. Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: And we can talk about them in the next one. Yes. So where was the gallery located in Caracas?

MS. ADLER: In the Edificio Galipan, which was a building in the center. Not in the downtown center, but in the uptown center, right across from the country club. It was a very modern building. Venezuela was always very kind to architects. It was very important that your house have a name architect. It's one of the few places I know where domestic architecture was really encouraged. And there was competition. So modern architecture was already very much a big thing. And with that was going the art.

MR. McELHINNEY: So was the gallery modeled on your dad's gallery?

MS. ADLER: No.

MR. McELHINNEY: Did you hire help immediately, or was it just you?

MS. ADLER: No, I had somebody working with me right away.

MR. McELHINNEY: Answering the phone, doing the—

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: So just—

MS. ADLER: And we did very well from the beginning because people were interested in having a gallery. My idea at first had been to feed off Hirschl & Adler, selling Impressionist, Post-Impressionist art. There were other people who were extremely kind to me, and I was taking exhibitions from them. One of them was Leonard Hutton. Helen Serger from [Galerie] La Boetie [New York City] was another one. I worked a lot with Jim Goodman. At one point I was—it didn't last more than two minutes—Marlborough's representative there. And we really did—because we were the closest thing to selling contemporary art.

MR. McELHINNEY: In Venezuela.

MS. ADLER: In Venezuela, yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: So what was the relationship you had with other Americans in Caracas? Were there any Americans in your circle?

MS. ADLER: Yes. Sure. Inevitably.

MR. McELHINNEY: Any you want to share?

MS. ADLER: Well, I don't know. Mostly these were corporate people. Caracas had a very cosmopolitan society because people would come from all over the world to do business. And brought with them whatever it was that they were. Many of my friends to this day are still Venezuelans. Or were foreigners who lived in Venezuela. They would come to work at a museum. The wife of that cultural attaché later became the director of the new museum in Caracas [Museo de Arte Contemporaneo]. Her name was Sophia Imber.

MR. McELHINNEY: Of course.

MS. ADLER: So she founded this contemporary museum. It was a very active scene. People would come, people who had Renaissance paintings or who had, I don't know--some of the Germans came with Group Zero paintings.

MR. McELHINNEY: So when you opened the gallery, how many galleries were there in Venezuela?

MS. ADLER: There were probably 10 galleries. Some of them selling only Venezuelan landscape art. Some of them Impressionist, Post-Impressionist art. Clara Sujo opened a gallery shortly after—about a year after I did, doing more or less the same thing. But I made a point of quickly becoming an international gallery. And becoming a gallery that was selling a certain kind of art, which was the kinetic art. And doing it from all over. So we had a lot of Argentine artists. We had, interestingly enough, no Brazilians, because they have this very strong art scene of their own, and we didn't have the Argentines. Nobody in Argentina was interested in any way in contemporary—in that sort of thing.

MR. McELHINNEY: American artists?

MS. ADLER: No. American artists never liked that stuff either.

MR. McELHINNEY: How about Brits or French?

MS. ADLER: Brits, yes. French, no. Germans, Italians.

MR. McELHINNEY: I'm thinking about the kinetic sculpture, obviously Calder.

MS. ADLER: Well, Calder was a Venezuelan god.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: Because he had spent a lot of time there with the Villanuevas. And he had a couple of exhibitions that I think sold out in about two and a half minutes. You had to have a Calder. It was simply an absolute must. And it was, you know, bragging rights. At the time I worked at the museum, we bought a Calder, a large stabile mobile, for the museum. And I had a lot of fun because I had to ghost the correspondence.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, I see.

MS. ADLER: It was supposedly the director of the museum doing the correspondence. He spoke good enough English but not quite enough for—

MR. McELHINNEY: Eloquence.

MS. ADLER: Yes, that's right. So that was fun.

MR. McELHINNEY: What kind of space was it? How did you organize the space?

MS. ADLER: The problem was the front window, the glass window. It had to look solid, it had to look classical, and it had to look as if it had been there for a while. But also reminiscent of a storefront or in London. So it was wood with tempered glass; it had to be. And then a door with a big push and the name of the gallery on the door. There's a lot of thought that went into that. It changed over the years. There was a showroom. You came in, and there was a showroom to the left. And then you went in, and there was a big exhibition room. And then a couple of offices and then bins.

It got to the point where the gallery became a sort of a meeting place. People would come. Most of the collectors were men in Venezuela. They'd come on their way to work and going home. When an exhibition was coming and the crates were coming in, they were opening the crates and buying from the crates. So it was exciting. They were people of my generation and still friends, because it became—and they became a group themselves.

MR. McELHINNEY: As local art collectors, I'd imagine that there had to have been some kind of salon, café society scene, or were there openings—

MS. ADLER: There wasn't. We were it.

MR. McELHINNEY: The gallery was it.

MS. ADLER: There was an awful custom, which [was] that openings were on Sunday morning. Galleries were open all day Saturday and for two hours on Sunday, and that's when you opened your exhibition.

MR. McELHINNEY: That's when you held the opening reception.

MS. ADLER: Yes, yes. And it became a big thing. You had to go—

MR. McELHINNEY: In the morning, you mean a minute past midnight?

MS. ADLER: No. From 11 to one on Sunday morning.

MR. McELHINNEY: Why was that?

MS. ADLER: I don't know.

MR. McELHINNEY: Did you introduce the American habit of evening openings eventually?

MS. ADLER: No. I just went with the flow. At one point we had an Erté exhibition, and Erté came.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, he lived down in the islands, right?

MS. ADLER: Eric Estorick lived in Barbados, and Eric had Erté in a cage that he used to carry around. He was—that was so funny. It was just the funniest thing. When they came, and they were coming with Erté to Venezuela, when they got off the plane, there was Erté: his hair was long in a pageboy; he was wearing velvet pants with a silk blouse over it with a gold chain. And of course, everybody assumed he was a woman. Because at that point

there was a large gay community in Venezuela, but nobody knew anything about it. It just didn't exist. That was just one of those things that nobody knew about it.

MR. McELHINNEY: Like "Red Tie Club" or something.

MS. ADLER: Well, no. It was a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" sort of thing. We were afraid they weren't going to let him in the country. But they had just—in Venezuela a married woman's name is her name and a D-E, small D-E, and then her husband's name. My name was Rachel Adler de Conkright. His name is Roman de Tiertoff. And everybody assumed that it was Madame Tiertoff. So he came in: Yes, Madame. Yes—Si, Senora. Si, Senora. Nobody disabused him.

Anyway, we had some really funny incidents with him. There was a scene in a restaurant. We all went out to dinner. And he at one point said he wanted to go to the bathroom. So my husband said to him, "Well, it's down there." And then two minutes later lit off after him and got to the men's room just in time to see Erté opening the door. And all the men in the men's room going, "Eeeh!" Because they assumed it was a woman coming in. So anyway, that's part of—but there were 500 people at that opening.

MR. McELHINNEY: Wow!

MS. ADLER: Obviously, they didn't fit into the gallery. The gallery gave onto a large parking lot. And the parking lot was filled. We sold every single thing.

MR. McELHINNEY: What was the size of the gallery, square feet or meters? About the size of this room, smaller, larger?

MS. ADLER: No, it was smaller than this room. I would say that the exhibition room was, let's say, the size up to that column. To the wall, from there on.

MR. McELHINNEY: Okay.

MS. ADLER: And maybe to here, from there to here would be the showroom. And then there was storage and stuff like that.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. Office?

MS. ADLER: Yes, and offices and stuff like that.

MR. McELHINNEY: How many offices were there?

MS. ADLER: There were two offices and storage about the size of the two offices together. We had two storages and then finally rented another storage because I was doing—I've always sold a lot of sculpture. And so I was doing all these sculpture shows.

I was working with Dina Vierney, and we sold a lot of Maillol; we did a couple of exhibitions. Jim Goodman used to put—we used to put these sculpture shows together here. A lot of English sculpture. Because the British Consul had been circulating these artists for years around Central America—around South America.

MR. McELHINNEY: You mean like Hepworth and Moore?

MS. ADLER: Hepworth, Moore.

MR. McELHINNEY: Nicholson?

MS. ADLER: Butler. And so they knew Armitage; they knew them very well. The International Council of the Museum of Modern Art had been doing the same with American artists. So these people were known. And when somebody comes in after that, with selling them, that's what people wanted to buy. So we sold a lot, we sold a lot of Maillol.

MR. McELHINNEY: Sculpture's notoriously hard to sell.

MS. ADLER: I know.

MR. McELHINNEY: So how did you manage that? Were you involved, for instance, in the installation of the sculpture in their homes or in their gardens? Did you hire people, or did you do it yourself?

MS. ADLER: Always. Well, we had people who schlepped the art around. I wasn't doing that. No, we were always making bases and doing things like that. Always involved. People had large gardens and could have sculpture

gardens.

MR. McELHINNEY: So did you hire a preparator or have one in-house or have a part-time preparator?

MS. ADLER: We always had someone who was on call. We had a messenger. That was necessary because the mail didn't work. So there was always a messenger. And there was a trucker who worked for us. The preparator was a very luxurious event and didn't—

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, I guess when you arrived, so was a registrar. [Laughs.]

MS. ADLER: Yes, yes. That's true.

MR. McELHINNEY: So did your operations in any way influence any of your colleagues in the business? Did people ever look at what you were doing and say, look's like a good idea; I think I'll do that, too. No?

MS. ADLER: No. The art collecting came from politics, social stance, and everything. Certain people—who had a certain kind of politics, who went to church, who voted for the status quo, who considered themselves to be society—collected a certain kind of art. And other people who insisted that they were on the Left—it was this romanticized Left—and who knew poets, and who knew poets from other countries, who knew artists, who had friends, the artists were friends, the musicians were friends, they collected another kind of art.

MR. McELHINNEY: Was there any mingling of the two?

MS. ADLER: Well, they were related to each other. They were all in the same families. But they were—

MR. McELHINNEY: Divergent sets of sensibilities.

MS. ADLER: That's right.

MR. McELHINNEY: Interesting. So what year are we at now, about 1965?

MS. ADLER: Sixty-eight.

MR. McELHINNEY: Sixty-eight.

MS. ADLER: End of '68. And so I went on my way for about 11 years. By about—let's see—about '74, I needed help. So I got a partner.

MR. McELHINNEY: Help you mean in terms of capital?

MS. ADLER: No. One of the problems I faced was that there were still a lot of people who couldn't believe that a woman was running a business. It was an issue. So I decided I needed a male partner. They would come in, and they'd say, "Where is Mr. Conkright?" The first name of the gallery was Galeria Conkright. "Where's Mr. Conkright?" At work. Well, would you tell him I came and I want to buy something? I said, "I'm sorry, you're going to have to buy it from me. I'm Mrs. Conkright. You're going to have to buy it from me." "Well, I'd rather buy it from him."

So that would happen a lot. So that became one of the issues. Another issue was some of the wives of my clients were a little worried about my relationship with my—you know, four kids and a husband. So that was something else that there was a need. Also business was—I was at this point traveling a great deal. Didn't want to be away from home that much. I was traveling to Europe, to the United States a lot. I was traveling so much I was getting my hair cut in New York, just to give you an idea, that I was having to be up here so often.

MR. McELHINNEY: And what was the reason for the travel? I mean specifically.

MS. ADLER: Business.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well—

MS. ADLER: Alright. I'll give you an idea. One day someone appeared in the gallery from Argentina. A woman who was a restorer. And she came and said, "Would you possibly be interested in a Renoir?" I said, "Sure." If not for me, at least for the gallery up in New York.

And I said, "Can I see it?" She takes this black linoleum stuff off it, and there is the most exquisite thing I've ever seen. A big painting of a young girl, blond little girl, with a big straw hat sitting in a field of poppies. So I said, "Just wait a minute." I went in the office, and I called my father. I said, "What do I do?" And he said—oh, wait a minute, I'm sorry. She showed me first the photographs. I said, "What do I do?" He said, "Buy her a ticket to

Argentina and get her to come back to Venezuela with the painting. And then you come up with her to New York."

So we got the picture up to New York finally. And everybody was hysterical. So then the research starts. And supposedly, there's a story. This belongs to the brother of someone who owned a printing press. And this man also owns a printing press in Buenos Aires. This Renoir is supposed to have spent the summer—this is the daughter of the landlady with whom he lived in this particular town. But unfortunately, the city hall was blown up during the war. So there's no record. But the picture had been seen by the son, by Claude, and he had said it looked like his father's work.

Anyway, so all the research starts. We have a friend in Paris who's got a gallery. And we've got to get the picture to her. All of this is rushing and rushing and rushing because we've got to find this thing, because at that point it was a \$500,000 picture, which was huge.

MR. McELHINNEY: A lot of money in those days.

MS. ADLER: Huge! The only way to get the picture to Paris in a hurry is to go down to the RCA offices—I guess it was RCA—downtown at Wall Street, and with a photograph, and get the radio operator to send the picture. The way they used to do newspaper photographs.

MR. McELHINNEY: The Telex.

MS. ADLER: I guess that's what—it was line by line.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right, it was a Telex machine, yes.

MS. ADLER: Anyway, so I went down, and it was the day astronauts were circling the moon for the first time. The whole world is agog with this thing, and I'm worrying about whether the picture's going to go through. And I remember the operator in New York saying to the operator in France: Are you receiving this image? And the guy saying, "Yes, it's a Renoir." And I'm thinking, my God! Even the Telex operator, the telephone operator, recognizes it. So, my God! Anyway, everybody's running around. And somebody was closed over the weekend. This was a Friday or something. Closed over the weekend. So nobody is sleeping.

The phone calls are going back and forth between Paris and New York. Everybody's wandering around and really on—and the next day Sherman Lee, who was at the time the director of the Toledo Museum [OH], came into the gallery. And my father says—"Oh, Mrs. Astor had seen the picture, and she said she'll buy it once the papers are done and everything. So they're absolutely—everything's fine." Sherman Lee walks in, takes one look, and says, "It's a fake." "What do you mean it's a fake? How do you know?" He said, "Because the date this picture has to be, that hat was not yet in style. That hat didn't come in till 10 years later." And that was the end of that.

But you know these things happen a lot in the art business. I'm sure you've heard a story like that many times.

MR. McELHINNEY: Many, many times. There are a lot of spurious pictures out there.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Some of them pretty good.

MS. ADLER: And a lot of them went, by the way, to Argentina. Either fakes or stolen pictures. I remember being offered pictures, shown photographs, and being told you can buy this in five more years. Well, there's something a little—

MR. McELHINNEY: What's the expiration of the statute of limitations? Then you can buy it.

MS. ADLER: Yes, and it would come from places up in the mountains in Argentina or in Bolivia or places like that.

MR. McELHINNEY: So what was the name of the gallery in Paris you were working with?

MS. ADLER: Galerie René Drouet, Sylvia Drouet-Blatas. Who was really very kind to me, because I would go there and sit and listen, and she'd introduce me to all of these—the artists' widows or the girlfriends or whatever, who knew stories and stories and stories. I remember one time I was talking to her from Venezuela to Paris, and she said, "I have to go; I have to go to Fernande Olivier's funeral." Fernande Olivier had disappeared from sight in 1919 or '18 or something like that. He was there.

MR. McELHINNEY: Still around.

MS. ADLER: And he [Picasso] supported her, unbeknownst to her, for the rest of her life.

MR. McELHINNEY: Françoise Gilot had an exhibition here just a couple of years ago.

MS. ADLER: She lives across the street.

MR. McELHINNEY: At the [New York] Studio School [of Drawing, Painting, and Sculpture]. Do you know the late Louise Deutschman?

MS. ADLER: Yes, I do know her.

MR. McELHINNEY: Wonderful lady.

MS. ADLER: She certainly was.

MR. McELHINNEY: We almost interviewed her, but she—

MS. ADLER: It would've been great.

MR. McELHINNEY: I knew her for years just through mutual friends. Really a wonderful lady. She helped organize that show at the Studio School, as I understand. So what was it like? You're a woman working in this sort of macho Latin environment where the men would be shy if a lady walked in the bathroom. How macho is that? [Laughs.]

MS. ADLER: In those days it was, and probably still.

MR. McELHINNEY: I guess, yes. Were outraged.

MS. ADLER: Well, they were just stunned. [They laugh.] If nothing else.

MR. McELHINNEY: And was it like that for the entire duration of your experience there?

MS. ADLER: No, no. It was not always like that. I had to win my way into this group. A lot of the artists didn't want to have anything to do with me because I was an American.

MR. McELHINNEY: And ergo politically incorrect.

MS. ADLER: Politically incorrect. I had to either be CIA or I had to be—

MR. McELHINNEY: A wealthy, entitled capitalist.

MS. ADLER: Yes. So it was complicated. But the person who became my partner was a man named José Guillermo Castillo, who had been living here for many years. He was an artist who was part of something called the New York Graphic Workshop with Liliana Porter and Luis Camnitzer. But he had been working at the Center for Inter-American Relations, which became the Americas Society. Or joined the Americas Society.

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

MS. ADLER: And they had three programs: there was a literary program; there was a music program; and there was an arts program. José originally had been involved in the literature program. And he was very much responsible for what they call the Latin American boom. You remember that? What they did is they picked Latin American writers and had their work translated. *OneHundred Years of Solitude*.

MR. McELHINNEY: This is in the '70s, early '70s. Yes.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Sure.

MS. ADLER: And Lezama Lima, Borges. All these people were—what's his name? *The Three Sad Tigers*, Cabrera Infante. All of them. What's his name? The Peruvian, Vargas Llosa. All of these people were translated, and he claimed he did it without ever reading a book, and I think it might have been true.

MR. McELHINNEY: [Laughs.] Well, if you're coming back and forth a lot from New York, and you were having one kind of profile or one kind of—

MS. ADLER: Well, we were doing exhibitions at the Center, by the way.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, you were.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: So you were organizing exhibitions—

MS. ADLER: We were doing exhibitions. We did a Domingo Alvarez show there. We did a Gego show there. We were also working with the University of Texas in Austin. Donald Goodall. And doing exhibitions there.

MR. McELHINNEY: Not to taint this conversation with commerce, but how did that make you money?

MS. ADLER: By giving me bragging rights.

MR. McELHINNEY: Ah! So it put you, in a way, above commerce.

MS. ADLER: And it also, it kept the artists quiet.

MR. McELHINNEY: So it gave you street cred with the artists back in Caracas.

MS. ADLER: That's right.

MR. McELHINNEY: Okay.

MS. ADLER: And it gave me a profile here. All the expenses were paid by these shows. I was going to the Basel art fair [Art Basel]. I was taking these environments to the Basel art fair.

MR. McELHINNEY: So there's your niche.

MS. ADLER: And there I was selling them. I sold them.

MR. McELHINNEY: In Europe. When was the first one, 1960—

MS. ADLER: And I—we sold one here.

MR. McELHINNEY: Sixty-nine.

MS. ADLER: Sixty-nine.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, that would have been the first. So were you doing—this is the '70s, too, is about the time when the art fairs begin emerging.

MS. ADLER: That's right.

MR. McELHINNEY: Sort of in the spirit of Basel.

MS. ADLER: Well, for instance, I was in New York. Ernst Beyeler was with my father in the purple velvet room. And they called me in, and my father said, "Why don't you do the Basel art fair? I'll give you a really good place in the fair." Right next to him. "And you can do the fair." And this is the best way to open up your—and I said, "I can't afford it." And so they worked out, and I did it. I did it from the second year. I did about four or five years.

MR. McELHINNEY: Were there other art fairs that you started to do in addition to Basel?

MS. ADLER: No, none of them existed, as far as I knew.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, when did the show begin in—

MS. ADLER: Well, there was the San Paulo Biennale, if you want to call that an art fair, except supposedly nothing was for sale. I think Basel was the first—

MR. McELHINNEY: I think so.

MS. ADLER: —of the art fairs.

MR. McELHINNEY: But then when did FIAC [*Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain*, Paris], was that later?

MS. ADLER: Oh, much later than that, yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Much later. [Art Chicago] would have been the Navy Pier in Chicago.

MS. ADLER: Much later.

MR. McELHINNEY: Much, much?

MS. ADLER: Yes, that was in response to the idea that there should be an American version of the Basel fairs.

MR. McELHINNEY: So that was the genesis of Chicago, which is now at the Merchandise Mart.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Which is in Chicago. But art fairs are not de rigeur.

MS. ADLER: They're the only place to sell art these days.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right, right.

MS. ADLER: And it's no fun. It's very difficult, because first of all, you're shelling out a lot of money on spec.

MR. McELHINNEY: A lot of galleries will actually have an architect, to organize a space that looks like a gallery.

MS. ADLER: Yes, they will.

MR. McELHINNEY: And spend lots of money on the installation.

MS. ADLER: I have some very firm ideas on all of that. And I think that brings me to something that—there are two different, currently, I think, two different art businesses going on. One where you're selling the dealer and the gallery. And the other one where you're selling the art. I think you're selling a lifestyle.

MR. McELHINNEY: Or using art as an instrument for social mobility.

MS. ADLER: Well, it always has been in this country.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, of course. Yes. But maybe more so than ever. I guess, at some point in the past, there was some attempt to claim that art was about ideas and about—

MS. ADLER: It is still somewhere.

MR. McELHINNEY: --beauty or artistic selfhood or whatever.

MS. ADLER: Look, along with the banking system, the art system really ran away. It became investment. People got involved in the art world and the art business who didn't really care about the art. They were investing. It was an alternative investment.

MR. McELHINNEY: It was a medium of commerce.

MS. ADLER: It was an alternative investment.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: And it screwed up everything. It screwed up prices. It screwed up, I think, a generation of young artists, who when you start taking collectors around to the studios of master's candidates, you're—

MR. McELHINNEY: Like at Yale and Columbia.

MS. ADLER: --you're ruining them forever. They start selling for \$30[,000], \$40,000. What's going to happen? You know how cyclical the art business is.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes. Common wisdom counsels that even the most successful artists might have a sustained career of 10, at the outside 20, years, with dry periods in between years of a lot of activity, a lot of attention, a lot of sales. There are very few people who actually seem to have these predictably sustained careers.

MS. ADLER: That's because society's tastes change.

MR. McELHINNEY: Of course.

MS. ADLER: Décor changes. And if the majority of people are changing their décor every however number of years, the art's gone out with the chintz. I think the people who have done that haven't done the artists very much of a favor.

MR. McELHINNEY: I don't think you'd find many people to argue with that today.

MS. ADLER: What about the people who did it and who bought it? Some of them are very influential—supposedly very influential—in the art world.

MR. McELHINNEY: One of the other dealers we interviewed observed—there was an article in one of the monthly glossy art magazines about the top 100 collectors—that the top 10 collectors all had virtually interchangeable collections. He posed the question: Well, what kind of a collection is that? In other words, what kind of individual taste does that represent?

MS. ADLER: Well, have you taken a trip recently around the United States? You can find at least 10 museums that have got virtually interchangeable collections.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, that's due also—

MS. ADLER: All in a Mies van der Rohe wing.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right, right. Or Libeskind.

MS. ADLER: Yes, but it's the same collection.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, everybody's got to have one—

MS. ADLER: One.

MR. McELHINNEY: —mentality. Right? Everyone's got to have one of these, one of these, one of those. So that there's some kind of a boilerplate model for what constitutes—

MS. ADLER: For what you have to have. And it has to be recognizable from the front door.

MR. McELHINNEY: Which is perhaps—is that why there's a trend now towards regional art museums having sort of signature—

MS. ADLER: Buildings.

MR. McELHINNEY: Buildings like the Guggenheim, in the tradition of—

MS. ADLER: The problem is that they bankrupt a community, and no art is bought.

MR. McELHINNEY: From the community.

MS. ADLER: From the community. There's no money left to buy art for the museum. The community's been tapped out giving donations for the building, which in many cases is very much needed—agreed. But that means that that museum is off the buying map for probably at least 10 years.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, not only do they have to pay for the building, as I understand it, but when you build a building, you're assuming substantial maintenance costs. That's going to expand your nut ever year. And that means you have to raise money for that before you can raise money for acquisitions.

MS. ADLER: That's right.

MR. McELHINNEY: Then, they have these Friends organizations, which they have here; they have everywhere.

MS. ADLER: But they've been all tapped. They're tapped out. And then now we've got a major crisis on our hands because investments have fallen, endowments have fallen.

MR. McELHINNEY: Some by half, a quarter, a third. But major losses across the board.

MS. ADLER: Sure.

MR. McELHINNEY: One or two other dealers with whom we've spoken in New York in the last year, or since October, have expressed the view that the collectors are still out there; they're just waiting for the glamourista to take their toys and leave. And for prices to come into line with their expectations of what things are really worth.

MS. ADLER: Well, there are a couple of fallacies, I think, in that plan. They hope that's going to happen. But I think, first of all, the dealers got rich. So they're not so fast to have distress sales. Dealers made money during the last few years.

MR. McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Artists, too.

MS. ADLER: Yes. And the longer this famine goes on, that money is going to be used up. I also think that, depending on the kind of collector, my collectors—and don't forget I sell non-mainstream art—you need to have read a little bit, hopefully, to buy this stuff. So that's not the usual buyer of art these days.

A lot of them are dying off. There are younger people. This was a generation that was a lot older. But there are a younger people. They're much more conservative. They tend not to speculate. They never bought that much more, and they're not buying that much less now. The range is smaller. But they aren't buying at the moment. They're stunned. The others may not go back to buying art at all.

MR. McELHINNEY: They may decide to buy other things.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Racehorses, yachts, whatever.

MS. ADLER: Whatever it could be. Whatever it could be. And someone like Jeff Koons, he doesn't need to lower prices. Damien Hirst. They don't need to lower prices. If they never sell anything again ever, it'll be okay.

MR. McELHINNEY: They'll be okay.

MS. ADLER: They'll be okay.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes. I think certainly the reputations Koons has is as a person who rolls over a lot of his earnings into new enterprises.

MS. ADLER: I'm sure.

MR. McELHINNEY: So he's—

MS. ADLER: And who is also apparently a collector of Old Master paintings, which I find very amusing.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, the man has taste after all. But that's perhaps just a different model. But artists who have attained a certain level of attention, recognition, and success would have the industries around them like Stella.

MS. ADLER: But hasn't that always been?

MR. McELHINNEY: Of course.

MS. ADLER: Think back into the Dutch—

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, like Rubens. He was hiring other artists, too, of note, who 20 years ago were his peers as his employees. Yes, sure.

MS. ADLER: So the successful artist becomes a magnet—but I think the money is out there, and I think it is being held for a while. What it's going to do when it decides to loosen up—

MR. McELHINNEY: A lot of people have been offering speculation—and I know this is a time-specific question since this is 2009—but the 1988 economic crisis, the stock market crash in '87 or '88.

MS. ADLER: No, it was in '88 or '89, I think, '89.

MR. McELHINNEY: Eighty-eight. It took three or four years when it slammed the art world.

MS. ADLER: It hit the art world in '91, I think.

MR. McELHINNEY: Ninety-one?

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: It took three years.

MS. ADLER: Yes. My father used to say the art business was the last to suffer and the last to recover.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. Makes sense.

MS. ADLER: Yes. We're not really necessary.

MR. McELHINNEY: So how does this period of time compare. Are we looking at a pattern? Is history repeating itself?

MS. ADLER: Well, since I've been in the art business, history has repeated itself more or less every 10 years. We had the '70s; we had the '80s and the '90s. And now—we held off for a really long time. The current one always feels like the worst. There is in the last month, I sense, a certain lightening of spirit. It's very interesting. But you know the pier, the Armory Show on the piers?

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

MS. ADLER: That was very interesting because nobody sold anything.

MR. McELHINNEY: That was a couple of months ago.

MS. ADLER: Yes. It was in February or March. No one did very well. But they were immensely excited about it and very optimistic. And I am sensing now a bit of optimism, because everybody's selling a little bit. There was a period of nothing. No phone calls, no—nothing. But now everybody's doing a little bit of business. It's time to invest in new art fairs now, and people are doing it. Maybe some of the minor fairs are being cut out. But essentially people are going in. And that's laying out cash in advance. Basel—my son went. He said there was a good buzz. Now it seems things are a little bit better in Europe than they are here.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, perhaps it's because they just expect the boom and the bust, and they—

MS. ADLER: They weren't in hock—they're not in hock the way we are. They can't borrow. They all own their homes because they don't get big—they don't get loans; they don't take out loans. So I think—

MR. McELHINNEY: So the banking laws were not allowing the kind of—

MS. ADLER: Well, they have strong central banks.

MR. McELHINNEY: —reckless speculation that we had here.

MS. ADLER: That's right. For instance, speaking of reckless speculation, what do you think's going to happen to all these Chinese artists?

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, that's a good question. We should probably explore that, but I think it is another trend. I remember back in the late '80s all of a sudden—the early '90s—there were all these Russian artists. And they sort of came and went. And now there's all these Chinese artists.

MS. ADLER: I sold a very, very, very large Russian collection just before this—we were finally paid completely, I think, in September. And the Russian economy went to hell. Would I be able to sell it now? I doubt it. I sincerely doubt that we would be able to make that sale now.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, it's always interesting, I think, to look at these art scenes that are sort of international in a discrete way. Like the Latin American-North America dynamic or pole. My wife is an art historian. She's perpetually complaining about how she's so weary of the presumption that it's all Paris-New York, Paris-New York, Paris-New York. And she will argue that New York-Latin America at many points has a long history going back almost 200 years.

MS. ADLER: Yes, and I think she's absolutely right.

MR. McELHINNEY: And that people need to pay attention to this axis of hemisphere, not the transatlantic Paris-London-New York axis.

MS. ADLER: Mary-Anne Martin and I have done—we've shared stands at the Basel-Miami show for a long time.

MR. McELHINNEY: I'm interviewing her in a couple of weeks, yes.

MS. ADLER: And we came up with this idea, it's north, south, east, west. Because, for instance, the first shaped canvases were not done by Ellsworth Kelly in Paris, but in Argentina in the 1940s.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, Europeans—

MS. ADLER: Well, actually, they were all—they were either Poles or Hungarians—in Argentina, Argentines. But in *Arte Concreto*—it was an Argentine movement. So, yes. But that's what this friend of mine, this guy who wrote this article, had said. I'll have to get that name for you.

MR. McELHINNEY: That'd be great.

[Pause.]

Well, perhaps we should have an intermission at this point.

MS. ADLER: Sure.

MR. McELHINNEY: Rachel Adler, thank you very much for speaking to me today, and I look forward to speaking to you in a week or so.

MS. ADLER: It was my pleasure.

MR. McELHINNEY: Thank you.

[END CD 2.]

MR. McELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking with Rachel Adler at her home on 29th and Broadway, New York City. Disc two of two, part two of a conversation we began last week.

How are you today?

MS. ADLER: Fine, thank you.

MR. McELHINNEY: Great. Nice to be here again.

MS. ADLER: Nice to have you.

MR. McELHINNEY: We spoke about a lot of topics last week: your being raised in the art business, your education, your marriage and moving, sort of expatriating yourself to South America, your opening a gallery, some anecdotes of that, trends, observations.

Perhaps this week—well, is there anything you'd like to retrieve and insert in the conversation that slipped your mind last week?

MS. ADLER: Yes. I think it has to do with the bringing of the Latin American art up north.

MR. McELHINNEY: Great.

MS. ADLER: And I think I have to elaborate a little bit. Because it was that the northern climes knew the Mexican artists. Tourists would go to Mexico. Americans had homes in Mexico. And the Mexican artists would be brought here. We had Diego Rivera involved with the Rockefellers. Tamayo. But it was always Mexico-United States. And I think that's as far as most Americans thought that was what was then called South America.

And when we started bringing these things up, through the Center for Inter-American Relations, we were bringing something that I think was quite exotic, even though it was geometrical. The vocabulary was hardly romantic. But I think just the fact that these people were coming from South America was very important. And some of the things were fairly spectacular. We did an exhibition at the Center of Domingo Alvarez. We ended up on television in New York. We ended up with lines around the corner because people couldn't believe what they were seeing.

And what they were, were sort of passages that were completely mirrored, top-bottom, all sides, with frosted glass, etched glass. Behind—you would walk through them. And your image would be interrupted by the etching in the glass, and would be sort of fragmented. At the same time, from behind the glass, light was shining, and there were color wheels going from the light. So adding to this fragmentation of the figure was the fragmentation of color. It was very, very luscious and very spectacular. And people just had a great time with it.

We then took these things to the Basel art fair. We were the first Latin American gallery to exhibit at the fair. So again, we were something of a phenomenon. We had people waiting in line in the fair itself to get through. Unfortunately, they had to take their shoes off. And people didn't wash their feet all that well. So sort of every hour we'd have to close down and spray the place and clean it out. But it was very spectacular. We then did it again—by the way, we were selling these things.

MR. McELHINNEY: Who was buying them?

MS. ADLER: Art dealers. The one here was bought by Allan Stone. And the one in Basel was bought by Dina Vierny. And, in fact, is still up at the Maillol Museum. I don't think it's working, but it's there. And then we did an

exhibition at her gallery in Paris. I think they were a big help to a lot of the Latin American artists who were in Paris at the time. They were all very, very well taken care of by Denise Rene who really did a fabulous job of promoting all of them. She put them on the map. But this kind of spectacular helped a lot. And the French like art of the street. So this was sort of the first of these things. And then they went on. I really had to say more about that, because it was an introduction. It sort of legitimized some of these guys.

MR. McELHINNEY: Earlier in our conversation last week, you made comment that without exception—almost without exception—art in Latin America was political. Artists were political.

MS. ADLER: No, that's not what I meant to say. What I wanted to say, and this article alludes to it, is that northern curators expected the art to be political or folkloric.

MR. McELHINNEY: So the support for Op art and for geometric abstraction from Latin America in Venezuela, was that an attempt to change the image or to try to present a more formal—

MS. ADLER: I think it was simply what these people saw and the way they saw it. As I said, that exhibition of Vasarely had a huge impact. And in Venezuela in particular, which is the scene more than anything, the architect of the University City, who was also working on housing developments and things—and this was true in Brazil as well; Oscar Niemeyer—they brought artists from Europe. They brought abstract art from Europe and incorporated it into their architecture.

This opened up fields that these poor fellows had never seen. There's an interesting phenomenon in Caracas. The tropical light is—it's amazing. It's a different color from the light here. We have a gray, cool light. And there it's yellow and a bit metallic. There's a mountain in Caracas; you just look straight at it when you're in the city. And this mountain, in that light, is changing color continually. You can never, ever capture that, because the light is vibrating in front of it. Now, Venezuela had a generation of Post-Impressionists who were trying desperately to capture that light, and they didn't do it; they couldn't do it. Because the minute you harden something, it loses its—and they weren't as good as Monet. So it didn't work.

This young generation, looking at the failure of their predecessors and at the Vasarelys, came up with this whole kinetic idea, which is capturing vibration. If you look at it, it's Impressionism in geometry. It's the new vocabulary for Impressionism. And they went off in search of it to find Vasarely again. And he, of course, originally was the mind behind the Denise René gallery. And that's why they all ended up there. She took an immense chance taking them all on. She was their den mother for their whole careers.

MR. McELHINNEY: A lot of this work you're referring to as being kinetic, just for the reader here of the transcript, you're meaning that it changes as you move past it.

MS. ADLER: Kinetic can work two ways. Either it moves, or you move. And mostly in the case of the Latin Americans, you move. Julio Le Parc, in some cases the art moves. Vardanega, the art moves. So you do get both.

MR. McELHINNEY: But it's not like Calder; it's not like George Rickey, it's not like Harry Bertoia.

MS. ADLER: Harry Bertoia, it's interesting because there was a lot of Harry Bertoia in Venezuela.

MR. McELHINNEY: That's interesting.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: How did that occur?

MS. ADLER: How did it occur? There was an architect, an American architect, by the name of Don Hatch, who went there and worked in Venezuela. His wife had—I think she's Mexican—had some connection with Bertoia. And they opened a very high-level decorating store. They were selling Bertoias. And every house had Bertoias. Don't forget this is a country that really accepted contemporary architecture. They loved modern architecture. Having, you know, the same way living in New York: That's a lovely dress. Yes, it's by so-and-so. Gee, your house is wonderful. Yes, it's by so-and-so.

MR. McELHINNEY: So it was a designer architect—right.

MS. ADLER: It really was heaven. It was very important. With the war, a lot of European graphic designers came to Venezuela. And you opened a restaurant or a hotel, or a gallery, or any company, and your logo had better be something very good because it was being judged. And I think that's something quite unique to Venezuela.

MR. McELHINNEY: Did the development of this geometric style elicit any kind of new response from the northern curators?

MS. ADLER: No.

MR. McELHINNEY: They still expected it to be political in some way.

MS. ADLER: The French knew it. I would say the French, the Swiss, and the people who were involved in the Bauhaus and followed the Bauhaus. You'd find northern Italy, Switzerland, southern Germany, some in Paris.

MR. McELHINNEY: Max Bill and—

MS. ADLER: Yes. Max Bill was very important because there was a continuum. And in Switzerland to this day there's a great appreciation of geometric art, but here, nothing. And even Venezuela, these guys have to go to Paris, have some success there, before their own country was ready to have them. But then they were accepted. By the time I got there, which was in 1957, they were already on their way to acceptance.

MR. McELHINNEY: So it was almost like each artist, each one of these homegrown artists would have to go somewhere else in order to make a name. Were a lot of them here in New York?

MS. ADLER: No. Most of them went to Europe. Any of the ones who were interested in abstract went to Europe. There were a few very painterly people who did stay in Washington, New York, but not that many. Afterwards, a couple of them went to MIT because of György Kepes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. Of course.

MS. ADLER: He became a focal point. But that was when these guys were in their 50s or 60s.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well at this point in time, it seems like this is coinciding with certain other things that are happening with abstraction the rise of Color Field painting, the so-called Washington School of Kenneth Noland and Gene Davis.

MS. ADLER: Those people, those were the more painterly people. But in general I don't think—except for Cruz Díez—I don't think you could call the Venezuelans colorists. They were really interested in this vibration stuff, I think, far more. Because the other influence that had come—we talked about this a little bit—was from Europeans who'd been trained either in the Bauhaus or in the schools of design in Europe. And they came before the war.

MR. McELHINNEY: So at this point did art collectors in Venezuela start seeing art from their own country in a different way, or did they always expect artists to go elsewhere? Because earlier I think you made some kind of comment that everywhere you go, everybody's got to have examples of the Mexican artists as being sort of—

MS. ADLER: Provided in Mexico.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: And with the Venezuelans, yes, you want to have one even though you're collecting something else. You probably want one of these guys because, after all, they were a huge success. Some of them never went back. Their market was in Venezuela, but they themselves stayed in Paris.

MR. McELHINNEY: As expats.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Who, for example?

MS. ADLER: Soto stayed; Cruz Díez stayed; Narciso Debourg stayed. Those are the ones I think of offhand. And a lot of them just kept going back and forth.

MR. McELHINNEY: Is there some kind of echo in all of this with some of the literary habits of people like James Joyce's the Irishman who had to leave Ireland in order to become—in order to tell his country's story or to access the genius of his?

MS. ADLER: It's probably true of every—can we say--provincial country? Or every non-art-center country. I think one has to go to the art center, make some kind of name for himself, win a prize, do something. Then he goes back, and he's a hero in his own land. But the thing that I found interesting is that there was no interest here at all among Latin American collectors in this group.

MR. McELHINNEY: What were they buying, still the Mexicans?

MS. ADLER: They were buying Mexican. Or they were buying figurative people like Guayasamin, people—now, a lot of it had to do with who was promoting it. Mary-Anne Martin was the source of the collecting of Latin American art. She was the source of the Latin American art field in this country and in the world. She was working at Sotheby's. She started the auctions. Left and became a dealer. And she is the reason Latin American art exists now as a collecting field. But her specialty is Mexico.

And in the last, let's say, seven or eight years, because of two museum shows, this kind of Latin American art has become very sought after. One is Houston and the other at L.A. County. The L.A. County one, while I don't think was quite as influential on the market as the Houston one became, was probably a more interesting show intellectually, because it put these people right smack in the middle of conceptual art. And that's where the connection is; it's in the vocabulary. They were doing the same thing, for different reasons. But they were working with a lot of conceptual artists. Or they were showing them. Soto was a member of Group Zero.

And in fact, if you take a Soto and an Ucker, you can see that they are attached to the same thing. My daughter went to the University of Bologna to study semiotics. And I once went to a lecture with her. It was very interesting because the lecture was on surface, and it had to do with white playing on the surface. Who did it pick? Malevich, Jasper Johns, Soto, Manzoni. No, it was obviously Italian-oriented. It's the same thing about this play back and forth—in fact creating another surface in front of the real surface of the painting.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, that was one of the big theories of abstract painting, Mondrian's essay on neoplasticism—I think that's the term—and that crazy image of Kenneth Noland and other people squeezing their head against the wall to try to see the color jumping off the surface.

MS. ADLER: The thing that's interesting--the Venezuelan artists, anyway, tell the story that I think is completely apocryphal, if you'll excuse me. Seeing the Mondrians, seeing the Malevichs, seeing all these things and deciding that's the way they're going to paint. I don't think they knew who these guys were.

MR. McELHINNEY: It was just a gut reaction, they saw—

MS. ADLER: They found them afterwards, and they found justification for what they were doing. They found historical background for what they were doing.

MR. McELHINNEY: So where was the motivation in that case?

MS. ADLER: I think it goes back to this Post-Impressionism.

MR. McELHINNEY: So they're just reacting against that?

MS. ADLER: I think it is that. No. I think they were so bowled over by something that was in them, this experience of this light, and to find a vocabulary that would allow them to use it. The experience of the light, I know it's something that's very Venezuelan. It's so like color disappears.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, you were saying that about the Reverón.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: That actually his color, which I think a lot of people here would have a look at it and think, oh, this is a monochromatic or achromatic. It's warm browns, and it's very hazy, and it's very loosely rendered. But actually, what you're saying is that the light there dissolves the form and eats color. It just becomes this—I've never been there.

MS. ADLER: Have you seen pictures of the houses in Venezuela?

MR. McELHINNEY: Photographs. But I've never actually been there.

MS. ADLER: They're painted every which color. I once lived in Maracaibo for a while, and I walked into the house my husband had rented. I counted 11 different colors in the living room. I was horrified. But then you can't see them. There's a need for color because you can't see them. It goes.

MR. McELHINNEY: I understand.

MS. ADLER: Leningrad—excuse me for using the word; I'm supposed to say Petersburg--the buildings are painted turquoise and cherry red and all these incredible colors because the glare coming off the ice is the same. You lose the color. And there's this desire for color.

So I really think that this was very important. And I think it's really the basis of this. Different in Brazil. I can't speak for the Brazilians because I didn't live it. But I think in Venezuela that's—

MR. McELHINNEY: So you're saying the Post-Impressionists tried to do it optically by portraying the effect that perhaps happened with Reverón, and that these abstractionists basically were applying the same—

MS. ADLER: They were looking for the same effect.

MR. McELHINNEY: It was the intensity of the color and the geometry was doing on the surface on a wall in a contained space—

MS. ADLER: They were painting the glare.

MR. McELHINNEY: —what the buildings would have done in that light. The intensity of the color of the houses. You've got a turquoise one and then a coral pink one and a yellow one all next to each other. And to our eye, from this area of the world, it would seem like a recipe for overnight ADD, that all our heads would explode.

MS. ADLER: Absolutely. Painting this light. I remember at one point an exhibit—the Museum of Modern Art International Council sent an exhibition which was, I don't know, somebody to Cézanne or [inaudible] to Cézanne or something like that. And I remember one of the curators saying, "Look at the Gauguins! They're incredible! This is the light that they were painted in. We've never seen them in that light. We've only seen them in our northern light." And it looks completely different.

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

MS. ADLER: And it's very important. I remember there was a Dutch curator whose name I don't remember came and saw a Soto show at the Center for Inter-American Relations here. And he said, "It's always been assumed that the northern painters were rationalists, and the southern painters were romanticists." And he said, "I think it's the opposite. I think these guys are going back to the 19th century, not consciously. But they're going back to the 19th century and all of the studies of optics that took place in Paris, which the Impressionists grabbed onto.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, yes, the Gobelins [Manufactory], you know the physicist Chevreul?

MS. ADLER: Yes, that's who it was.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: And this is—it's the same thing but generations later and with a different vocabulary.

MR. McELHINNEY: Interesting, too, because a lot of that interest in science and color and the landscape and science comes from Humboldt, who was, of course, there.

MS. ADLER: Who was there, and who was very important. And the painters who went with him.

MR. McELHINNEY: And afterwards who were inspired. Like Edwin Church and many, many, many, many—too many to count in this conversation. But that's also not understood well, the number of North American artists who actually sought inspiration from the tropics, from the Andes or from the Caribbean.

MS. ADLER: They were so exact. And that later generation—that degenerated to what we were talking about before, the curators looking for that among South Americans, who'd had enough of it by then.

MR. McELHINNEY: And so expecting it all to be political and polemical and radical and revolutionary just because—right.

MS. ADLER: Look at the market: the Diego Rivera that is the most expensive—I'm talking generically—is the one with calla lilies.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: They want the flowers—people want the flowers. They want that reminiscence of a town they went to where it was so quaint, and the poverty looked so lovely.

MR. McELHINNEY: They don't want the sweaty nude worker with a hammer. Yes. Right.

MS. ADLER: They don't want these Mathias Goeritz and the imposition of German Bauhaus training.

What I wanted to say is that one of the reasons I got involved and interested in Russian abstract art is because some of these artists who were working on this whole idea of reflection had been reading [Sergei] Eisenstein. You know a book that he wrote about New York? It's a very small book.

MR. McELHINNEY: I don't. I know the book he wrote about the film, but not about—

MS. ADLER: It's about New York, and he talks about walking in the street and looking in the store windows, and seeing himself, he the spectator, as part of the image in the store window. Because as he was looking at the store window, at the contents of the store window, his own reflection was part of what he was looking at. And so that became a very big, sort of interesting situation. And so I started reading, because there's nothing in Spanish. So I would sit there and translate for hours and got myself very interested in Russian abstract and the Russian Constructivists.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, Eisenstein made a film in Mexico, but it was never, I think—

MS. ADLER: I don't know about it. But that doesn't mean anything.

MR. McELHINNEY: No, no. That's a whole other story. But he made a film, was in Hollywood briefly, and made a film called *iQue Viva Mexico!*. It doesn't have a happy ending. It didn't result in the kind of a film that he was—

MS. ADLER: Maybe he was too political at the time.

MR. McELHINNEY: I think it was a story that was somewhat parallel to the Nelson—in the '30s—it's sort of the Nelson Rockefeller-Diego Rivera story replayed in a movie, or in the making of a movie.

MS. ADLER: And too much for Hollywood to swallow.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes. I think at that time probably. But there are all of these intersections that I think—as an American artist myself—that I was unaware of before I became aware of it. And then am amazed when I understand how extensive and labyrinthine a lot of these histories are between South America and North America, New York.

MS. ADLER: The writers did a lot—

MR. McELHINNEY: You were saying last week, yes, that people like Borges and Garcia Márquez, yes.

MS. ADLER: —through translation. Yes, even before that, this fellow Cabrera Infante, who was living in England. And when they said to him, you should have your book translated, he said, "Don't be silly. I'll write it again in English." I think for the first time people were hearing about life. I think the Cuban Revolution did a lot. We got familiar with Havana, not just as a place to go and gamble or whatever, but as a--it became more part of the vocabulary.

And García Márquez. He wasn't lying about anything. He didn't make up anything. I was married into a family that had relatives like those people. There's a woman by the name of Elizabeth St. Aubin de Terán. She's a French-English person who married a Venezuelan and went to live for a while in the Andes. And she had written some absolutely fabulous books about living in Venezuela and this mythical craziness that's in there. She also wrote one marvelous one called *The Slow Train to Milan*, about some university students who had, of course, tried to overthrow the government and were living in exile in Italy, and would go on a train, on the local trains, so they could plot to go back to Caracas and overthrow the government. It's one of the funniest books you can imagine. But that's off the subject.

MR. McELHINNEY: Not really. There were a couple of names and a couple of other links I was interested in exploring with you. Alfredo Bolton?

MS. ADLER: Alfredo Bolton was a very wealthy man. The Boltons were originally English, had come in the 19th century, and were involved with the Grace Line. They were agents for shipping for trade. They were importers. And they were a very august family, very important in the society. Alfredo considered himself to be a great patron of the arts, and he was. He wrote a lot. In fact, at some point he was writing—he was the only one writing about more modern Venezuelan art. The books are terrible.

[Audio Break.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Alright. We're good.

MS. ADLER: So I think he could make careers. He didn't break people, but he did really promote certain people. For instance, when the Soto exhibition was to take place at the Guggenheim, he paid for a lot of it. In a way it was seen as a great patriotic act. But he got first choice. The collection was magnificent. It was shown well.

But these were poor people. They were poor people, and Venezuela, up until the time that I came there and for many of the years that I was there, was still a society run by the old families. No aristocracy. Nothing like you had in Peru. None of the excessive wealth that you had in Peru or in Mexico or anything like that. But there was

still the oligarchy. The families still ran it. And if one member of one of those families was promoting it, then people listened.

MR. McELHINNEY: He had that power.

MS. ADLER: He had that power. And one of my husband's aunts used to refer to it *gente decente*. The decent folk, the nice people. She was saying the people from society. He was very important in that sense.

MR. McELHINNEY: And very well connected outside of the country as well?

MS. ADLER: Sure. Because when the International Council wants a representative from a country, or they go looking for members from Latin America, those are the people they pick, the people who've been donating to the Museum of Modern Art, the people who—Alfredo did it in the Reverón book, which was the catalogue for an exhibition that went around. And went to the Museum of Modern Art. He became one of the people to be consulted.

MR. McELHINNEY: What kind of role did you have in any of these transactions?

MS. ADLER: At first, a very minor role. And then becoming larger. In a society where people buy art, the gallery owner becomes an important part of the cultural scene in everything. It was great fun. I met everybody who came through there. And it was marvelous.

At one point, when they started the Art in Embassies program, Bill Luers, who became president of the Met, was the ambassador to Venezuela. His wife, Wendy Luers, I think is the person who started the program. So one night I had at my dinner table Richard Diebenkorn, Frank Stella, Roy Lichtenstein, Dorothy Lichtenstein—because where are you going to go? You go where—I gave these big parties for Fernando Botero and all sorts of people. Simply because you became a fixture.

And I think the fact that I was a foreigner married to a Venezuelan and into one of these families probably was—at the same time people were looking at me cross-eyed because I must be a member of the CIA. They were all sort of saying, well, she has contacts outside. The family has a gallery in New York.

MR. McELHINNEY: When did you open your gallery in New York?

MS. ADLER: In New York. Well, what I did is I spent a year going back and forth. I came to live here in 1979 at the end of the year. In a sense it was starting all over again because while I had been in Latin America, I was people's client. Then I became competitor.

MR. McELHINNEY: Ah hah!

MS. ADLER: I started as a private dealer. And then we moved to Madison Avenue between 78th and 79th. And that was the first open—I'm sorry, I moved to 79th Street. And then from there to Madison Avenue. But 79th Street was the first gallery space.

MR. McELHINNEY: Open to the public.

MS. ADLER: Open to the public.

MR. McELHINNEY: And who were you showing at that time?

MS. ADLER: I was showing some of my Latin Americans. But I was showing, again, Russian Constructivists, German—Hélion, we showed there. I was branching out—I was always doing a lot in Europe and bringing shows from Europe to here. Karl Flinker and I became good friends. I would bring Kandinsky; I would always do sculpture. I can show you the list of exhibitions. I was doing things, as Bud Holland used to refer to it, as esoterica.

When I looked around, when I came back here, I realized I didn't have the clout or the money to be a contemporary dealer. I had been in Caracas half a contemporary dealer and half an historical dealer. And I decided I'd better go into the historical field because I had the connections. The connections I had were with the curators at the Museum of Modern Art, because I had met them as they came around with the exhibitions, and we became very friendly. I knew other curators who ever had visited. I used to meet a lot of French gallery people. And a lot of them, they were extremely kind even when I came here. Like the English galleries were very kind. So they were lending me things; they were consigning art to me. And I was still doing a great deal of my business in Latin America.

MR. McELHINNEY: Did you close your other gallery?

MS. ADLER: No, I left the gallery to my partner. His name is Jose Guillermo Castillo. We came from Galería Conkright—I divorced—we became Adler-Castillo. And then Adler-Castillo came here. But after a year or so, it became clear that he wasn't really doing very much, and I was supporting the gallery from here, both galleries. And I had three kids in school, so I couldn't afford it.

MR. McELHINNEY: You had to make every dollar holler.

MS. ADLER: You're not kidding. It was a tenth of what it is now.

MR. McELHINNEY: What was the difference, in terms of operating costs, between here and Caracas?

MS. ADLER: Enormous, enormous.

MR. McELHINNEY: I would imagine, yes. About 80 percent, 90 percent?

MS. ADLER: No.

MR. McELHINNEY: Sixty percent?

MS. ADLER: No. But probably—Venezuela has never been a cheap place to live in. Probably at least 50 percent.

MR. McELHINNEY: Wow.

MS. ADLER: But probably not more than that.

MR. McELHINNEY: So what kind of operation was your first gallery on 79th Street?

MS. ADLER: It was me with a secretary—we were allowed to call people secretaries then.

MR. McELHINNEY: Now they're administrative [assistants].

MS. ADLER: Yes. And I rather quickly found someone who would come and install shows for us.

MR. McELHINNEY: So you contracted a preparator, yes.

MS. ADLER: Yes. And kept that system all the way through.

MR. McELHINNEY: So you never actually hired a preparator.

MS. ADLER: Never hired anybody.

MR. McELHINNEY: You started out as a registrar, I guess, right?

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: So at some point were you working with—or did you hire a registrar to look after things?

MS. ADLER: Yes, I did it. Or the secretary would do them. There was no formality because we couldn't afford it.

MR. McELHINNEY: It was really a one-person operation?

MS. ADLER: It was a one-person operation.

MR. McELHINNEY: And you had a little help.

MS. ADLER: Yes. Well, I had somebody working for me full-time.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: But, yes. And we worked—I worked six days a week, and we were open five days a week. But I was always—it was six days a week.

MR. McELHINNEY: So the first space would have been in a townhouse? That's a pretty busy street.

MS. ADLER: It was in a townhouse.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, it's a pretty busy street.

MS. ADLER: It was 58 East 79th Street.

MR. McELHINNEY: Okay, so.

MS. ADLER: And other galleries moved into the building, and it was fine. We had a horrible landlady. So when the space was available on Madison Avenue, I went there. It was 1020 Madison, right next to Perls Gallery. And it was a great space. It was really, really good. We did a lot there. Did a lot of sculpture shows again.

By that time I was working with some of the Viennese—they call themselves Kineticists—always early 20th century. And going Hungarian, Polish, Russian Constructivism. I worked a lot with Rosa Esman at the time. And it was just a great—it was really a nice period. We were never making huge amounts of money, let's be clear.

MR. McELHINNEY: Just a little on the side, were you hit by Dr. Waxman, the art thief from Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia?

MS. ADLER: No.

MR. McELHINNEY: Because he hit almost everybody.

MS. ADLER: He hit a lot of people. I was hit when I was in the Fuller Building by people who used to snatch the art.

MR. McELHINNEY: I know Weintraub [Gallery] lost a Henry Moore, I think.

MS. ADLER: No, I was not hit by him.

MR. McELHINNEY: That's lucky.

MS. ADLER: Yes! Yes. And the thing I did a lot, I was always careful in my buying. I would buy with other people. And I would try to buy with people who were elsewhere. June Goodman and I continued to always. Now that's the closest professional relationship I had. I was selling a lot to Venezuelans coming up and to people from other Latin American countries. Because when I started out in Latin America with the kinetics, the first gallery to go international, the first Latin American gallery, to go was Bonino. But I was the next one. And I was in Europe because of the Basel art fair. And so a lot of my connections came from there, from doing the fair.

MR. McELHINNEY: The people you'd meet.

MS. ADLER: Anneli Juda. We used to do an awful lot of business. Someone named Alice Pauli in Switzerland. Carla Pellegrini in Milan. Carla Panicali in Rome. We were a regular little female mafia. [Laughs.]

It's interesting. I was talking today to Debbie Harris—she's the person who runs the Armory Show at the piers. And she said—someone that she'd been talking to about doing the fair showed her a catalogue from the first Basel art fair. I didn't get there till the second one. But she said, "I'm surprised there were so many women dealers." And I said, "I think at that time probably the majority of the dealers were women?" They weren't the richest, but I think the majority.

MR. McELHINNEY: Did you ever know Dorothea Speyer?

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: She's still around, I guess. I think she's not well. Her niece is a friend of mine. I think she's out of the picture now.

MS. ADLER: I think completely. There was a place in Paris, but I think—

MR. McELHINNEY: She was hanging in there until a couple of years ago.

MS. ADLER: That's the great thing about the art business. You do not ever have to retire.

MR. McELHINNEY: Unlike you, she did work for the State Department, I think early in her life. If she had been in Caracas and they were wondering about her—

MS. ADLER: It would've been true.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right, right. I would've been true.

MS. ADLER: When I was involved in that robbery in the museum, the only people who refused to protect me was the American Consulate. And I have a long memory. Did I tell you about that?

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, you did. Arriving at the museum and being basically warned away.

MS. ADLER: They shot somebody. They shot a child who said, "I know who you are!" And it turned out I did know one of them. He was a draftsman for a friend of ours, an architect. But I was so upset by the whole thing. I was so furious that they would dare do this. They stole four pictures—I don't remember too much, but they were carrying them. It was pouring rain, and they were carrying the pictures like this. And I remember yelling at one of them: "Take your damned jacket off and cover the picture with it! How dare you?" And standing next to me was my office mate, who was a member of their crowd. He said, "Shut up! They're going to shoot you. Be quiet." I said, "I don't care. This is infuriating."

Anyway, we got them back. Weeks after that, we had to go look at the mug shots and stuff like that. And later on I was called to testify. I went to the consulate, and I said, "Look, they've got 40 other witnesses. They don't need me." And the answer was: We make it a habit never to get involved when American citizens get involved with the police. And I said, "This is hardly—I was the victim." Anyway, the museum director—they called and they said they wanted the addresses of all the people. They asked for my address. He said—I was sitting right there. He said, "I've lost contact—I don't know where she lives." And that was the end of my testifying. No, I didn't work for the CIA.

MR. McELHINNEY: And if you had, you wouldn't have to tell them anything. [Laughs.]

MS. ADLER: I would've resigned right then and there.

MR. McELHINNEY: [Laughs.] I saw also, reading up on the gallery, that you showed some Italian Futurists as well.

MS. ADLER: Futurists, yes, yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: This interest in early modernism.

MS. ADLER: It's a period I'm interested in, and their connection with each other. And with some of the smaller groups, because it really turns out that there was interesting work being done in a lot of countries. There just wasn't the mass. And a lot of these countries were behind the Iron Curtain at this point. So they weren't being promoted. But, yes, I was very interested. And I've always been interested in Dada and the use of letters and numbers as images.

And that takes me into the words in freedom with Marinetti, which I've done a lot with and into the French Dada. And of course, into the Russians with the Mayakovsky, the unstructured poetry.

MR. McELHINNEY: And you knew or met Marcel Duchamp, so that must have been—

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Did he ever give you a copy of the *Ridgefield Gazook* ?

MS. ADLER: No. He just sat and looked at the girls, like Ira, and talked.

MR. McELHINNEY: I imagine he might have been slightly different.

MS. ADLER: What we did find in those—there was a big apartment house next to the townhouse that the Guggenheim had. It was One East 88th Street. And in it were those grey corduroy mattresses. Hilla von Rebay insisted that you should look at art lying on a mattress, and the art was to be hung one foot from the ground or two feet from the ground. And you would lie on a mattress and contemplate the art. That was the original spiral from the Guggenheim. And we found the mattresses. But we also found all of the original copies of Peggy Guggenheim's autobiography, which the Guggenheim Family had bought up because they didn't approve of her and her way of life.

MR. McELHINNEY: [Laughs.] There was a famous story about Mondrian snogging her in the back of a taxi when she teased him once, but that's another story.

MS. ADLER: That was her story or his?

MR. McELHINNEY: Harry Holtzman's story.

MS. ADLER: Oh, okay. Well, maybe it was real. [They laugh.] Like some of the drawings.

MR. McELHINNEY: A couple of other things we should probably explore: your experience and history as a bridge, or a gateway, between North American and South American art. And I say South American, because as you did—

MS. ADLER: That's what they called it.

MR. McELHINNEY: Last week you made a clear point to say that when you speak about Mexican art, it really is quite a different thing.

MS. ADLER: Yes, I think it is.

MR. McELHINNEY: Needs to be seen all on its own. And certainly I think the connections between Mexico and the U.S. are much more well known, much more transparent. Much more complicated.

MS. ADLER: Also, I think, in general, Mexican society and culture is more bound up in their history than a lot of these countries, certainly as far as the artists are concerned.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, you were saying that some of your experience encouraged you to compare the comportment of Latin Americans with Southerners. Mindful of their past and interested in it.

MS. ADLER: And who's who and the genealogy very—yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: The FFV [First Families of Virginia] and the Mayflower and all that. But, yes, the Mexicans were here in their legions. Like you were saying, Orozco was here, Rivera was here.

MS. ADLER: Tamayo was here.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, he was here for a long time.

MS. ADLER: Tamayo was married to a Polish woman.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: I think that probably changed things a little bit. Perls Gallery was showing Tamayo all the time. Torres García, for instance—this is, I think, a very interesting commercial story.

MR. McELHINNEY: And he's interesting because he's not from—

MS. ADLER: Uruguay.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. He's not from a big country. He's not from Argentina or—

MS. ADLER: No, but, boy, was he a big influence. But he went, he went to Paris, lived with Hélión; in fact, the whole family moved in with Hélión. By the way, when he was in New York, he lived on 28th Street. And there is a drawing of this building that he did.

MR. McELHINNEY: Wonderful!

MS. ADLER: I've been trying to get a hold of it. But the man who owns it won't sell it to me.

But he was an enormous influence. He was part of the Cercle et Carré. And he had a Latin American contingent in Cercle et Carré. And he was the only [one] who could control them, because he was a very strong personality. And he was very, very influencing as far as the whole question of semiotics was concerned. The whole question of symbols in art and bringing the culture into the art. The Christian symbol with the Indian symbols. And then it's all done and it's constructed.

MR. McELHINNEY: Because Mexicans, I think, had this very strong sense of identity based on the idea of the *mestizaje*, if that's the right word.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: The mixing of cultures, *las tres culturas*: the native culture, the Spanish culture, and then the hybridized immigrant Mexican culture.

MS. ADLER: In the Caribbean, which is Venezuela, Cuba—and Brazil, which is not Caribbean, but it does exist there—you have the third, which is the African.

MR. McELHINNEY: That's so huge, yes.

MS. ADLER: You have the Indian, the African, and the European.

MR. McELHINNEY: Much to do about African-Americans in the wake of the election of Obama and so forth, without many people, I think, realizing that only six percent of the middle passage slaves made it to what is now the United States. The rest of those Africans ended up in South America and the Caribbean.

MS. ADLER: Well, there's an interesting fact that's—I don't know, I was amazed by it. After the importation of slavery was forbidden, which was long before slavery was abolished, Venezuela, the coast of Venezuela, became one of the way stations, and they would keep the slaves there, the Africans there, until they thought it was safe to get through. And when the war started, they stayed there. And they were kept in these isolated areas, no roads.

When I got there in 1957, there were still no roads. If you wanted to go, you went in a Jeep. It was a terrible ride to get there. The reason we were going is that a relative of my husband's owned a hacienda there where he grew pineapples. But you could go there, and the dance, the music—the people were entirely African. They have not mixed because they couldn't get out.

MR. McELHINNEY: It was just a transplanted culture.

MS. ADLER: A transplanted culture and people. And a lot of these colleges would go and record the music. The dances they—they had these drums. The drums were hollowed-out tree trunks. Avocado was the best because it was very—it's hollow inside practically. And they would burn the end of it, put it in the fire. And according to how much it burned, you'd get a different sound. And the dancing was incredible!

MR. McELHINNEY: Wow!

MS. ADLER: I remember this man's daughter got married and had a party there. It was amazing. But there they were encapsulated.

MR. McELHINNEY: Wonderful.

MS. ADLER: But they were of the few completely black people in Venezuela.

MR. McELHINNEY: Was this on the Maracaibo side, on the west, or the east, going towards—

MS. ADLER: No, this was to the—

MR. McELHINNEY: Like, you know, the Guyanas.

MS. ADLER: This was west, right on the coast. Now it's two hours away, an hour and a half away from Caracas on a road.

MR. McELHINNEY: So in between Maracaibo and—

MS. ADLER: In between Caracas and Maracaibo; it's mostly Indian, interspersed with a lot of Italians who had been prisoners of war in Bonaire during the war [WWII] in an Italian prisoner-of-war camp. And who went and opened restaurants. [They laugh.] And garages, because all the mechanics at one point—Caracas had a very interesting society.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, today there's—or up until recently—there was a lot of antagonism between the United States and Chavez's regime.

MS. ADLER: Well, that's Chavez.

MR. McELHINNEY: That's Chavez.

MS. ADLER: I don't know if I spoke to you about this book. It's called *Del Buen Salvaje al Bueno Revolucionario*. It refers to Rousseau's Noble Savage. It describes the fact that everybody wants to be anybody in Latin America. There was a man named Carlos Rangel, who's a very astute commentator; he's a newspaper person. There's an enormous American influence on Latin America that's so pervasive that it's almost unacknowledged. What do you drink? You drink a Coke, you drink a Fanta. What do you wear? You're wearing blue jeans. What do you—you know. So many things.

MR. McELHINNEY: T-shirts, ball caps, yes.

MS. ADLER: He said, "It's just—it's there." And the thing that's sort of ironic about it is that in order to be anyone in Latin America, you must be of the Left. You must be a socialist. Otherwise you're simply not respectable. And that means you have to be at least—you have to be a little anti-American. It's the party line. There's a long reason for it, which is so complicated. If you want to go into it one time, we can go into it. But it has to do with their—well, it's so complicated and so long.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, this is sort of not—

MS. ADLER: It has nothing to do about what we're talking about.

MR. McELHINNEY: —about art specifically, but just—

MS. ADLER: No. But it is about the culture.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes. It's tempting sometimes to try to just silo everything and say, okay, we're going to talk about painting or sculpture or art. It ultimately becomes impossible without regarding the context, and that makes the story a lot bigger. Which is a lot harder to consume and organize. And so people want the CliffsNotes version.

MS. ADLER: And you have to talk about the artists who are making the art.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: So that's the issue.

MR. McELHINNEY: So another person who I was interested in asking you about was Clara Diament Sujo.

[END CD 3.]

MR. McELHINNEY: Resuming our conversation. So Clara Diament Sujo is a very influential person.

MS. ADLER: Yes. She went from Argentina. She was married to a man named Abi Sujo, who was a businessman, who I think was visiting. He was the brother of an actress by the name of Juana Sujo, who was a very, very well-known actress in Latin America at repertory theaters and was very important in the theater. She was the first director of the Friends of the Museum in Caracas.

MR. McELHINNEY: In Caracas.

MS. ADLER: And then I think very shortly after I opened my gallery, she opened—

MR. McELHINNEY: Hers.

MS. ADLER: —hers, yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: So she worked also earlier for Jorge Romero Brest.

MS. ADLER: Romero Brest. Who was a very influential critic. Very, very important.

MR. McELHINNEY: What papers was he writing for?

MS. ADLER: I don't know because they were in Argentina. And he would write—he was writing books. He was a museum director.

MR. McELHINNEY: Where?

MS. ADLER: In Argentina.

MR. McELHINNEY: In Argentina.

MS. ADLER: And he would come around and give lectures. There was another man by the name of Alejo Carpentier, who was a novelist, who I think—these are my really early days. And I was really much of a bystander in all of this.

MR. McELHINNEY: This was before you opened a gallery. You were having kids, married, right.

MS. ADLER: Yes, yes. I met them when I was starting to work at the museum. And there were people who just became—I think mostly because of their personalities—they were desired guests, highly desired. They would travel a lot, and they were bringing the culture with them.

MR. McELHINNEY: How does all of this Trans-American, Pan-American activity, North America-South America, all of these influences, trends, currents manifest, in your view today, in contemporary art?

MS. ADLER: Well, I can tell you one art dealer it changed a great deal.

MR. McELHINNEY: Tell me.

MS. ADLER: Me.

MR. McELHINNEY: You.

MS. ADLER: It was enormous and still to this day. Because I think it's just extremely important that that part of the world be included in this part of the world.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, there are a number of new ideas that have been floated: a Pan-American idea is not that new, but it seems to be perpetually in a condition of getting started.

MS. ADLER: Because it's never been resolved. People get the idea and don't do anything about it.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. It gets so far, and then it's abandoned, it falls apart, it's reorganized; a lot of excitement, it launches again, another fizzle. How long do you suppose that will continue?

MS. ADLER: I think it will continue until someone at one point says, "We don't need this anymore. It's already happened."

MR. McELHINNEY: So you think that the official organizational, if you will, attempt to shape and codify Pan-Americanism, that all of that is a relic of a bygone age at this point?

MS. ADLER: Commerce is going to do it.

MR. McELHINNEY: Or has done it.

MS. ADLER: Is doing it.

MR. McELHINNEY: Somebody was once saying--this has got to be 10 years ago--at a cocktail party when they were talking about Cuba and the embargo and so forth. I think somebody had—a baseball team had gone to Cuba.

MS. ADLER: Well, half the players are either Dominican or Cuban.

MR. McELHINNEY: But, yes. But here's an idea that here's a game that apocryphally was the invention of a Civil War general from Cooperstown, New York, or whatever.

MS. ADLER: Abner Doubleday?

MR. McELHINNEY: Which is humbug.

MS. ADLER: But it's very important in Cuba. And Fidel Castro is a baseball fan.

MR. McELHINNEY: Of course. Well, they all are, when you think about all the countries—

MS. ADLER: Even Chavez was a baseball fan.

MR. McELHINNEY: —all the countries of the world that are crazy for this sport, like Latin American countries and Japan. We could use—

MS. ADLER: That's one of the other things that Rangel talks about in the book: baseball.

MR. McELHINNEY: Baseball as—

MS. ADLER: I mean B-E-I-S-B-O-L.

MR. McELHINNEY: Beezball.

MS. ADLER: Well, that's the way you get to baseball.

MR. McELHINNEY: Baseball as world diplomacy.

MS. ADLER: As world diplomacy. And I think right now. Look, in this last spasm of great art buying, people were looking for new artists. And they looked around, and we keep hearing these demographic facts that are coming up to us: Latin Americans are going to be a third of the country in no time. Or they're going to be the largest majority or whatever it is. And they say, ah hah! Some of them are going to start to get rich, and their children are going to start buying art. We should get some Latin American artists. And if you look at the rosters of artists, most of the contemporary galleries, you're going to find a couple of Latin names.

MR. McELHINNEY: How long has that been true? I mean apart from the Mexicans about whom we spoke earlier.

MS. ADLER: Five years.

MR. McELHINNEY: Really? So new art, new artists, new faces on the scene. Is that just due to a general globalization of the art world here?

MS. ADLER: Yes, I think it's part of it. But I really think it's what I said, that there's a desire for fresh meat.

MR. McELHINNEY: That's a funny way of putting it.

MS. ADLER: As I said, sorry to put it that way.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: I meet very strange people [dealers] on planes coming back from Latin America. People I would never think of. And it turns out they represent this one or another one. Or they're going to buy this.

MR. McELHINNEY: So there's a market, and there's—

MS. ADLER: There is a market.

MR. McELHINNEY: One of the things—and I don't want to speak out of turn—but I know from conversations I've had with other people with whom I'm close, is that there is not always the friendliest relations between the Latin American or the Latino community and this internationalism.

MS. ADLER: Which Latino community?

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, let's talk about the Chicano community versus and/or the, like, the Puerto Rican--do they really feel, just because they share a language, that they share a culture with somebody—

MS. ADLER: They do not. They do not.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, this is what I'm saying, that there's some tension not unlike the tensions that exist between Africans and African-Americans.

MS. ADLER: No, they do not. That's why, for instance, when you talk about the Latino question in the United States, Los Angeles and southwest America, North America—

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: Have a different Latino population. We have a Caribbean population here.

MR. McELHINNEY: Here. But there [Los Angeles], it's historically—

MS. ADLER: Yes. It's Central American.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: It's changing a little bit here. Somewhat. My daughter is currently the board chairman of the New York Immigration Society, and she runs something called the Westchester Hispanic Coalition. Mostly it has to—a lot of Guatemalans now.

MR. McELHINNEY: Interesting.

MS. ADLER: But, no, they have nothing in common with each other. The Puerto Ricans resented the Cubans enormously.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, this was the kind of thing I was hinting at, I was trying to get you to talk about a little bit.

MS. ADLER: But I don't think that this has to do with the art community necessarily.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, what about a place like El Museo del Barrio or similar institutions that are expanding, in growth mode, were originally maybe more specifically ethnic, Puerto Rican, later on Dominican.

MS. ADLER: Mm-hmm. At least Puerto Rican. Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Now how inclusive do you think they'll be?

MS. ADLER: Because of the people who are becoming their patrons, they seem to be getting more international. I say international because they're doing that, and more sophisticated.

MR. McELHINNEY: Not to say that—

MS. ADLER: They just had a wonderful exhibition—I don't know if you saw it—about the Disappeared.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, yes.

MS. ADLER: That was absolutely fabulous! Politically.

MR. McELHINNEY: No, they do wonderful exhibitions, and they've got wonderful programs there.

MS. ADLER: Yes. But they have not had enough money until now.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, they're about to open again, right? With a renewed home up there on Fifth Avenue.

MS. ADLER: And the Studio Museum of Harlem, when Lowery Sims was the director. Lowery Sims, as she always said, "I just happen to be black and a curator. I'm not necessarily a curator of black art." And she wasn't. Well, she wrote the book on Lam that we all use.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, yes. Enormously important person.

MS. ADLER: Yes. So I think all of it is breaking down because of the patronage money that it's attracting. MoMA is not the place it used to be. It's very different.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, extremely different. Actually, apropos to MoMA, I understand that the Cisneros endower have given MoMA the means to a hire Latin curator.

MS. ADLER: Yes. It's developed a little bit further than that. It's to study Latin American art, either—I mean, they're open. Because it's not just Cisneros. Estrellita Brodsky is involved in that. It could be curatorial. It could be just exhibitions. They have somebody there. I never remember his name because I don't like him very much. I don't think he's up to snuff. He was the curator of the Cisneros Collection for a while. She's got a very good curator now.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, it seems like there is this move from maybe some elements of the population in the United States that are historically disadvantaged being the focal point of certain organizations and institutions. For instance, a place like the Studio Museum of Harlem is an excellent example of the venue that's offered artists, that showcased and highlighted artists, that brought them to public attention.

MS. ADLER: When was the last time you went to an opening there?

MR. McELHINNEY: I was at an exhibition about a year ago, an opening—

MS. ADLER: If you go to an opening, the most expensively dressed women I've seen [laughs].

MR. McELHINNEY: Okay. It's opening up, in other words. So, for instance, as people begin to discuss circum-Atlantic culture—

MS. ADLER: I think so.

MR. McELHINNEY: —then these institutions which were originally created to become a venue for populations that didn't have venues are expanding their view.

MS. ADLER: They're expanding. This is a very interesting question because one thing that I think must be recognized, these things were started as storefront centers: keep the kids out of the gangs, and let's open cultural centers.

MR. McELHINNEY: All good stuff.

MS. ADLER: Yes. All great stuff. The people who are involved in them now are people of a lot of money, very refined taste, and, I mean, the Cisneros collection is wonderful. Did you see it, just a small part of it, at NYU at the Grey Gallery?

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes.

MS. ADLER: It's fantastic!

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

MS. ADLER: And excellent. And beautifully installed. But this is [inaudible].

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, it's an institute at NYU, right? They have a—

MS. ADLER: It's the Grey Gallery.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right, the Grey Gallery.

MS. ADLER: Yes, which is the—it's not the Institute of Fine Arts. That's up on 78th Street.

MR. McELHINNEY: No, I meant the Cisneros had some—

MS. ADLER: That was a traveling exhibition. It came from Houston, then went there. It was all over the newspapers here; everybody loved it. That was an eye-opener.

MR. McELHINNEY: So I think a lot of the assumptions—

MS. ADLER: There's a big gulf between the guys who want a storefront cultural center—

MR. McELHINNEY: Alternative space. Right.

MS. ADLER: Yes. And this. Both are great. I don't think they're going to get together, and I'm not sure they should.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, you need the storefront venues and the alternative spaces to interface with the community.

MS. ADLER: Yes. And they establish the first steppingstone towards something else. It's great they should be promoting artists and allowing artists—do you want to move or something?

MR. McELHINNEY: No, I'm fine.

MS. ADLER: To move someplace where they're going to get some training. I think they serve as that. Because somehow I've noticed a lot of the ladies are on the same boards.

MR. McELHINNEY: Are you active on any of these boards, organizations?

MS. ADLER: No, I'm not. For a very long time dealers were not allowed to get anywhere near museums. I am on the Museum Advisory Committee of the Wellesley College museum, just because I went there.

MR. McELHINNEY: So is that the discussion we had—does that pertain to the sort of taint of commerce?

MS. ADLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] It's going by the way.

MR. McELHINNEY: The conflict of interest, et cetera?

MS. ADLER: Yes. The Chicago Art Institute, they accepted Gray money.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: I said to Douglas Druick the other day, I said, "You know, we're not all bad; we have our uses."

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, he's [Dick Gray] also active in the orchestra and other things.

MS. ADLER: Yes, very much. And he's retired.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. So he's not even really a dealer at this point.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: So he's not—

MS. ADLER: And has been for a long time.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes, yes. He has a wonderful collection, too. What about the durability or activity of these other organizations that have been serving as kind of a bridge between Anglo-American and Latin America or Hispanic America like the OAS?

MS. ADLER: The OAS has been important.

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes.

MS. ADLER: One of the reasons I think it's important is because it foments friendships. You start to find there's a lot of exchange in the banking field, and I think that's very important, because these people tend to go into government in Latin America anyway and apparently in the United States, too.

MR. McELHINNEY: It would seem, yes.

MS. ADLER: But, yes, I think the Pan-American Union, which may have been a forerunner of the OAS; I'm not really sure about that--but then there are these conferences. There were two probably in the '70s. There were two meetings in Mexico of Latin American and North American intellectuals. Absolutely closed to the press. They were 10 days long. And a lot of friendships were formed during these things. People like Carlos Fuentes, who was teaching here, going there. Usually very urbane, good-looking types who would become the bridges for these things. Terrific because projects would be hatched. And since very often there were wealthy people involved, the projects came to fruition.

Do you want me to say something else? [Laughs.]

MR. McELHINNEY: No, no. Just trying to gather a thought or two here. Your gallery here in New York. You opened it in the late '70s.

MS. ADLER: Well, really in '80, '81.

MR. McELHINNEY: Eighty, '81.

MS. ADLER: As a private dealer.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. Okay.

MS. ADLER: I'll have to give you the date. I have to gather the date.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, how long were you in operation as an open venue, as a public venue?

MS. ADLER: Oh, until just a few years ago, somewhere in the middle—I guess about 10 years ago. It was in the middle of the '90s. Things were very poor, and I realized that I all of the business we were doing was on the telephone.

I was in the Fuller Building. People were marching by the exhibition which we had killed ourselves to put up on the walls, and—I want to see what's in the back room. There was a general paralysis of the art business. Like it is now. And I didn't have the means to maintain a full back room and a full front room. If you're not dealing with a contemporary artist, you have to get the pictures and the sculpture by the ones. And I thought this would be a good time to just become a private dealer. I had my clientele, I had my reputation, and I had my contacts. So I moved here, and we ran business out of here for seven or eight years. Then my son [Charles Conkright] decided to come work with me.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, really! Is he still in the business?

MS. ADLER: Yes. That's why it's Adler & Conkright.

MR. McELHINNEY: Conkright, I see. Yes.

MS. ADLER: He had worked for Christie's. Then he went to work for Jim Goodman for about seven years. And at that point I felt I needed him. He went out on his own for a year or so. And I finally said, "Please." And he said, "One condition: we go back into more a public space." So that's why we're in the space we're in as private dealers.

What we did is we have that space for seven years. I figure at the end of seven years, which is now I guess four more years, three or four more years, I'm going to want out. I'm 75 now. And I've had some health problems. It's going to be his, and he's going to have to decide whether he wants to be a public gallery or a private gallery. He's very interested in this Latin American art because he grew up in it.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, it's his heritage.

MS. ADLER: It's his heritage. It really is. And he happens to like the older things. He may continue the way I have.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, there's a side of most art dealers with whom I've spoken that is the business person the person who runs the gallery, who educates the collector, who finds the art, who sells the art, who finds the artists. And then in many dealers there lurks a collector. Are you a collector?

MS. ADLER: Absolutely. But I try hard to restrain myself.

MR. McELHINNEY: From?

MS. ADLER: In the minute—from buying.

MR. McELHINNEY: Anything?

MS. ADLER: No. My father was very strict, and it's something that's sitting here knocking me on the back of the head: "Don't compete with your business. If you deal in something, don't ever buy it for yourself. You owe it to your business."

MR. McELHINNEY: So you keep your personal acquisitions—

MS. ADLER: Well, what happened is when Charlie came into the business, I said, alright, there are certain things—I'm going to sell you my part of the business. I'm going to buy it from you by taking certain things out of the business, and I'm going to take them home. Now he's going to buy it from me by giving me these things.

MR. McELHINNEY: I understand.

MS. ADLER: So we did that to a certain degree, because I like what I deal in. I really think it's the best art, and I find it intellectually very stimulating. And as I get older, I start to buy more of it for myself.

MR. McELHINNEY: How would you characterize your taste?

MS. ADLER: Alright. I'm definitely a drawings person.

MR. McELHINNEY: I was about to ask you that.

MS. ADLER: No question about it.

MR. McELHINNEY: Many dealers love drawings, it seems.

MS. ADLER: Yes. I go straight to the paper. I tend, even though this is counter-commercial, I tend to go for black-and-white.

MR. McELHINNEY: Really.

MS. ADLER: It's the pure drawing. When I was in graduate school, 20th-century art was taught from drawings. And the connoisseurship was taught from drawings. The theory was that color is a trap. The pure art, the purest communication between the artist's mind and your mind is the black-and-white drawing.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, 2,000 years of Chinese ink painting can't be all wrong.

MS. ADLER: That's right.

MR. McELHINNEY: There's no color in those.

MS. ADLER: That's right.

MR. McELHINNEY: So what you're saying is that drawings are a tough sell commercially.

MS. ADLER: Black-and-white drawings are.

MR. McELHINNEY: Black-and-white drawings.

MS. ADLER: And drawings—

MR. McELHINNEY: In general.

MS. ADLER: But they're coming into their own.

MR. McELHINNEY: But you're saying that it's not their lack of color alone; it's also that they're not as easy to get. You've got to work for the juice.

MS. ADLER: Yes, the intellectual content is in that drawing.

MR. McELHINNEY: You've got to mine it, though. You've got to dig it out. It's not just going to—it's not just eye candy hanging on the wall to make you feel good.

MS. ADLER: Which is one of the tough things, by the way, about the field that I sell. You have to read. You must read. And a lot of our current tycoons don't have the time or the patience.

MR. McELHINNEY: Are you ever tempted to vet collectors, say, well, I won't—

MS. ADLER: They don't listen to you.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, you do. You say, I won't—

MS. ADLER: No, we don't—sometimes—there are some guys who have been so dreadful that I wouldn't have anything to do with them anymore.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: But if the collectors think they're being graded, they're great in the galleries. [Mr. McElhinney laughs.] I have news. If you were here, the dealer, talking about collectors, some of the time people who are known as the most important collectors—

MR. McELHINNEY: After the check has cleared, of course.

MS. ADLER: Yes. Some of the guys who are known as the most important collectors, you don't waste time on anymore. In fact, I did tell one curator, I said, "Look, this is useless. The things go back and forth to the house. We know they're coming back the next day."

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, it's the approval game.

MS. ADLER: The approval game. And we know they're coming back. So why are we wasting our time? If somebody comes to me and says, I want to make a collection of this—and in fact, tells me, I should have bought that from you, or I should have bought this from somebody else. And I said, Okay, fine. Now I know where you want to operate.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, they let you know, too, that they're paying attention.

MS. ADLER: They're paying attention. And I can grade him and say, "Okay, this guy has A+ taste. This is what he wants." Things go back and forth that I know that he should be buying if what he's saying to me is really true. And they always come back: well, there was something that was not quite right in the upper left-hand corner. Or something. I start thinking, this guy's a fraud. He's a waste of my time. Why do I call him first, give him priority? And then I know it's going to be a bust. We grade museums, too, by the way.

MR. McELHINNEY: Another dealer whom I interviewed not long ago said that there are certain buyers that represent what he called a non-sale. In other words, if you sell to some people, it's actually going to do something for the artist, for the ideas, for the art. It's going to continue to evolve. By making a sale, you're actually starting a process that's going to do something. Other sales, it's just going to end up in a house—

MS. ADLER: Somewhere.

MR. McELHINNEY: —somewhere. Nobody will really pay attention or care about it. You may as well throw it away and be paid for that and—

MS. ADLER: Because when the client—when the collector—says to you, "I'm a very important collector so you have to give me a discount" [they laugh]. One of them gets it and the other one doesn't—

MR. McELHINNEY: But you develop relationships, do you not, with your clientele.

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: And so you vet them through experience, the same way you vet a friend or—

MS. ADLER: That's right. Look, the guy who comes in and says, "I love that; I'll give you half the price." I say, I can't do it. He turns around and walks out. He has nothing.

MR. McELHINNEY: No.

MS. ADLER: He doesn't give a damn about it. He just needed to screw somebody that morning. If I had said, Oh, yes, of course, he would probably would have bought it.

MR. McELHINNEY: Or you could say, I'm lying on the ground. You can kick me now.

MS. ADLER: You can kick me. It'd be cheaper. [They laugh.] Unfortunately for me, I like my generation of collectors, who are older. They're dying. Or they're dead.

MR. McELHINNEY: Who do you talk to? Do you have other friends? Do you have colleagues? Do you have lunch with other collectors? Do you go to each other's houses?

MS. ADLER: Sure.

MR. McELHINNEY: Great. There's a dialogue?

MS. ADLER: Yes. Sure. Most of the time you're supposed to admire—my father used to tell these terrible stories about going to John Rockefeller's house and feeling under the chair to see if the upholstery had been redone or not. Or whether it was the original work. Surreptitiously looking under the plate to see if it was an original whatever as opposed to—but that was then.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, he was, I guess, incurable in his passionate curiosity about these things. And that's why a person becomes great at what they do.

MS. ADLER: Yes, becomes a good dealer.

MR. McELHINNEY: So what did you hear behind the plum-colored drapes?

MS. ADLER: I heard infinite patience, because there were a lot of people who, like now, were starting to buy and didn't really know what they were buying about. So there's a lot of teaching, a lot of—schmoozing. There were always diapers in the gallery. A couple would come in with a child. There was a grandmother's crib upstairs. My parents lived in the building. You'd come up, the baby can take a nap, and we can continue talking. It was a big deal to be invited upstairs to have a drink or whatever. There was all this—I used to listen—listening to Norton Simon. And I guess it's the way you learn to be an art dealer.

MR. McELHINNEY: Or an art collector.

MS. ADLER: Well, I don't know how much the collectors learn.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, hopefully, you're able to educate them. Isn't that what they come to you for, too?

MS. ADLER: Some do. But I think a lot don't. The best ones come for the discussion, the trading of ideas, because they've been doing their reading. They know. Maybe they were brought up in a household where those things—I had clients—a lot of the people who came from Europe were refugees. They were the greatest pleasure in the world. Because, you know, the picture's sitting here, and you're talking, and you're having a great discussion. And at the end they'll say, "I think we'll buy that." You're not really selling it to them. You put them and the thing next to each other, and the thing is selling itself. Because while they're talking to you and you're talking about maybe the group of people who were associated with the artist or whatever, they are—it's clicking away for them.

MR. McELHINNEY: In none of these conversations have we heard the word "investment."

MS. ADLER: Well, okay. We can talk about it.

MR. McELHINNEY: A number of people whom I've interviewed have expressed the opinion—or the regret—that the business had become about money, to the detriment of art.

MS. ADLER: Primarily. Yes, well, people like Citibank, Chase, have been for the past 20 years maybe promoting art as an alternative investment. That's why I say a lot of the contemporary collectors are not interested in what they have to read about the artist in order to buy it. They're interested in Artnet[.com], and they come in with the pages of Artnet. They want to know what did it bring at auction the last time. The big turnover. That is, I think, one of the severe declines in the business. Another one, which is part of that, is a lot of kids getting into the business who are not interested really in the art. Instead of going to Wall Street, they're going into the art business.

MR. McELHINNEY: Because they've got the money to do it.

MS. ADLER: They've got the money to do it, and their parents will bankroll them. But more important, they look

at it from that point of view.

MR. McELHINNEY: And so they, lacking any curiosity about what's on their walls or not, are not really in a position to educate anybody about it apart from the financial.

MS. ADLER: So they go into contemporary art, where's nothing to educate them about.

MR. McELHINNEY: Woops. [Laughs.]

MS. ADLER: It's your opinion. No, it's your opinion and your taste. But there's no history.

MR. McELHINNEY: It hasn't stood the test of time.

MS. ADLER: There's no history involved, so anybody's opinion is as good as anybody else's.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: Hopefully, the guy with the good gallery, who's got a history of showing good artists, is a better person to sell you the art than the person who's just starting out and tells you it's a great investment or—what does he know?

MR. McELHINNEY: Or who has the best parties.

MS. ADLER: Well, it's a different crowd of people. The people that I had the most fun with essentially dropped out of buying in the '90s. They couldn't afford the high prices. Actually, at the end of the '80s.

MR. McELHINNEY: It really took a jump then. Well, there was that crash and then that—yes.

MS. ADLER: Yes. And they couldn't afford the—who didn't want to spend. Because, for them, they didn't want to go into hock to buy a picture. They wanted to buy something because they knew the artist; maybe their parents had had one or a great-aunt so-and-so had had one. Or they came from Berlin or Hamburg or wherever, and yes, there was one at home. They were people who—it was part of their rounded education. They went to the Philharmonic; they also collected art. And they loved it. And then their children sell it.

MR. McELHINNEY: Earlier you stated that your plan is in four years to step out of the business altogether.

MS. ADLER: Not really. No. I'm never going to step out of the business. Poor Charlie, I'm going to bedevil him till I die.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, good for you.

MS. ADLER: I think we old ladies and gents still have a lot to contribute.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, people are living longer lives.

MS. ADLER: Also we have the gravitas that goes with having been around.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, you know a thing or two.

MS. ADLER: Yes. And we've lived through a thing or two. I can talk about the kinetic artists because I was in there with them.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right. And you knew them.

MS. ADLER: I knew them. I was part of it. So, yes. Also, I think I have good taste, which develops, something that I think develops over time. And I know a lot of history. On the other hand, the idea of having to go to work for nine hours every day doesn't appeal to me very much anymore. So I work about five to six hours a day. That's enough. [Laughs.] They don't need me more than that. I still get the art to sell.

MR. McELHINNEY: So you'll be just available as a consultant.

MS. ADLER: But, no, I'm there. I like to go there. I like art galleries. I really like going to work. I just had a hip replaced. In fact, in the hospital—I could barely see out of my eyes—we bought two drawings. We bought two Ozenfants. Charlie brought them to the hospital. They had belonged to Ileana Sonnabend. He brought them to the hospital, and we loved them. It was the best thing that happened to me. It woke me up. It changed everything for me. I really like it. I'm not tired of it. I don't think I will be.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, I think—

MS. ADLER: You can see how upset I got when you said I should retire?

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, I was being a little provocative.

MS. ADLER: Yes, it's true. It's great to be around. Something came in as I was leaving today to come here to meet you; Charlie puts some papers in my hand and said, "Some guy had been telling us that he was a collector and he wanted to collect certain things." And he said, "Show us some of the things you have so we can find out a little bit about." Charlie said, "Tell me what you think of these." And I called him up as soon as I got here, and I said, "That's a pile of shit." Try it once and see if it works. But we can't expect anything.

So, no, I think really—Annely Judah, up until the time she had that stroke, which was two years before she died, was in there every single day opening up the gallery.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, people who have energy are seldom bored.

MS. ADLER: Right now I'd like to have a little bit more to do. But its summer, plus recession.

MR. McELHINNEY: It's the traditional annual slow time of the year in the art business.

MS. ADLER: That's right. So what I did is—do you know who Elaine Lustig Cohen is?

MR. McELHINNEY: I do not. Please tell me.

MS. ADLER: Arthur Cohen was her husband. Elaine was first married to Alvin Lustig, who was a very famous designer, interior designer, and graphic artist. She is a graphic artist who has, among other things, done a lot of the signage for the Seagram's Building. She worked with Philip Johnson. She worked with everyone. There have been exhibitions at Cooper Hewitt and the American Design—what is it? AIGA—American Institute of Graphic Arts. All over. There's a website about her. Anyway, she has been doing—and they owned something called Ex Libris.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, okay.

MS. ADLER: You remember Ex Libris?

MR. McELHINNEY: Yes.

MS. ADLER: Alright. So they started that field in this country really. And Elaine, at age 82, is an extremely prolific artist. She has done a series of collages and photomontages of the people she's calling her heroes. They're Malevich, El Lissitzky, Mondrian, Moholy-Nagy, the people that she's dealt with in her career. And we're going to have an exhibition in October.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, great!

MS. ADLER: Yes. And then I'm going to find another one to do. She's well known, and she's—last year, there were two exhibitions: Julie Saul and Pavel [Zoubok]—what's his name? Pavel—it's in Chelsea. Anyway, they each had an exhibition of them together. So the old ladies aren't out yet. We are still in there fighting.

MR. McELHINNEY: Thank God. Well, when we were talking last week, you described your experience at Harvard and the sort of Waspy, highly gendered, possibly vaguely anti-Semitic atmosphere—

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: —that tended to sneer at anything smacking of filthy lucre, and created a sort of unpleasant environment for you.

MS. ADLER: Along with the fact that I'd had enough school.

MR. McELHINNEY: And you had spent enough time in school and had other things you wanted to do. How, in your view, has the world changed, A, for you as a woman, and B, for other women? And how might you address a young woman who might be very much like you when you were in your early 20s, thinking about what you wanted to do and maybe wondering if a life in art, dealing art, would be for her?

MS. ADLER: Well, first of all, I think it's a total change. It bears no relation.

MR. McELHINNEY: Whole new world.

MS. ADLER: Yes. The museum world has changed. Everything has changed. And certainly for the better—the majority is for the better. The last subject we touched on, which was the subject of investment, I think is

probably the major turn for the worse. But in general, I think it's better. It's much more democratic. It's much more open. The young dealers who are starting now all have Ph.D.s. They're being turned out by the Institute [of Fine Arts]. They're smart; they're really well-known girls. They have a hard time starting out. They end up, when they are lucky, as gallery directors. You need more money now to start out than you used to.

MR. McELHINNEY: So if you don't have it in the family or at your disposal—

MS. ADLER: Or to go find a bank that's going to—or a house that you can hock or whatever.

MR. McELHINNEY: And you probably have to spend a few years in the business working for somebody in order to build enough contacts to find your own backers.

MS. ADLER: Yes. The best way, I think probably at this point, is one of the auction houses.

MR. McELHINNEY: As an apprenticeship.

MS. ADLER: As an apprenticeship, because you are also going to make the contacts.

MR. McELHINNEY: You're going to see more people in the course of a week or a year.

MS. ADLER: Yes, you're going to feel the art. When you're in graduate school, it's very academic, and you're not touching it.

MR. McELHINNEY: Even in the museum world it's very regulated and sanitized. I know every time I go to Christie's, I find some piece of spackling that hasn't been painted over. There's always this turnover.

MS. ADLER: There's absolutely. But, boy, you really get to know about it. Graduate school, you're looking at everything as a photograph. The photographs are all the same size.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: Chartres Cathedral or a Barbara Hepworth, whatever it is. It's hard, and black and white generally, and it's not—

MR. McELHINNEY: You have to have a physical experience with the art.

MS. ADLER: I think you do. And the best place where you can get the widest is in an auction house. And fortunately, I think there's a lot of lack of attention to detail that's rather important, like getting the names right, getting the provenance right, making sure the picture really is in good condition and not what they tell you. They're very commercial. They also tend—well, they're a little sloppily—

MR. McELHINNEY: It's a volume business.

MS. ADLER: And they tend to call people "Experts." An "Expert" [there] is a job description. It's not an accolade that's given to someone. It's not, you're an expert in this.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: It's here, this is the job called "Expert." Come and sit in this chair. And that's a little bit—

MR. McELHINNEY: Expert is a consultant with more or less knowledge.

MS. ADLER: Yes. But who is learning on the job.

But I do think that as an experience, it's a very, very valuable one. How you go about it? Sometimes I suppose if you're very good, you'll be taken in as a junior partner and allowed to buy in. I don't know if there are many of those cases. A lot of children of art dealers are going into the art business. They didn't use to.

MR. McELHINNEY: Why is that, do you think?

MS. ADLER: I think we had different ideas about who we were, what we were, our place in society.

MR. McELHINNEY: You mean like the next generation had to do something new?

MS. ADLER: No. Because the thing is so big and magnificent and fantastic, you've got to go into it. And I think the money wasn't that much of a lure.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh. And today it's become—yes.

MS. ADLER: Yes. I've got four kids. One of them is an art dealer. One's a social worker, one's a doctor, and one's a scientist who works for the government. They are about as far away—and believe me they have the worst taste that you can possibly imagine. I cringe when I go into some of my kids' houses. I keep quiet; I have to. But it's almost—that's the rebellion. Well, I know a lot of people who are my peers—I'm just trying to think who else. Robin Graham. I'm talking about children of art dealers. Jane Kallir.

MR. McELHINNEY: Ira Spanierman.

MS. ADLER: Ira. Billy O'Reilly. Who else? Oh, Jill Newhouse.

MR. McELHINNEY: Oh, okay.

MS. ADLER: Meg Newhouse, who's out—she just inherited and eventually closed the gallery. Not too many. Partly because in my generation the girls expected to marry and not necessarily work. And we turned the tables sort of mid-career and said we wanted to go to work and have careers. Not go to work, have careers. That was the difference—it was a big difference then.

MR. McELHINNEY: But working at something you felt good about, you were excited about, and you wanted to do.

MS. ADLER: That was having a career.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: As opposed to going and being somebody's secretary somewhere.

MR. McELHINNEY: Not just work.

MS. ADLER: Not just work, but have a career with your own name attached to it.

MR. McELHINNEY: Making your own life.

MS. ADLER: Yes. It caused a lot of divorce.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, paradigm shifts are always thorny affairs.

MS. ADLER: Yes. And we were the generation; we really were.

MR. McELHINNEY: So decades from now, a couple of years after you've moved on into another career, how would you like to be remembered?

MS. ADLER: Alright.

MR. McELHINNEY: This is one of the questions, or is paraphrasing one of the questions: What kind of legacy do you—

MS. ADLER: Yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Some people consciously, I think, are trying to create a legacy with their career. But other people are just excited about things in it.

MS. ADLER: I think that I would like to be remembered as somebody who had knowledge and taste, connoisseurship. And a sort of imaginative sense of history, where I could put things together from different—something I try to do—from different fields and from different periods. And try to find out what links them.

And as somebody who's very stubborn about what I wanted to do, even at the cost of monetary gain. I have always been very, very stubborn about sticking to a particular area, which is the one that interests me. I don't want to sell Joan Mitchell, where the money is. But I really don't want to do it. And my kids are just going to have to understand that. I am stubborn that way.

And I'm honest. I think I have a reputation for being that. That's what I really care about, a lot. That's something that's important. And I hope I stayed honest intellectually. And that I will still have the capacity of saying to a client, "Don't buy that. It's not good for you, for your collection. Get something else."

So that's what—if I think of anything else this morning at two o'clock, I'll—

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, in another 20 years we can have another interview.

MS. ADLER: Alright.

MR. McELHINNEY: After you've had a couple more years in the barrel as an art dealer.

MS. ADLER: Alright. It's been fun.

MR. McELHINNEY: It's been great. Thank you so much.

MS. ADLER: Well, thank you. It's memory lane.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, you've got a great memory, you know that.

MS. ADLER: But you know what's interesting to me, that I found interesting, I wanted to talk to you more about Venezuela than about here, about the Latin American part of it than about New York.

MR. McELHINNEY: So it's the opposite of James Joyce. It's like you don't have to leave New York to understand New York. You adopt a country, and then you come home, and you miss the country you adopted.

MS. ADLER: I had culture shock when I came back here.

MR. McELHINNEY: I imagine.

MS. ADLER: I will tell you. It was hard. And to this day the language I think of first is Spanish.

MR. McELHINNEY: What language are you dreaming in?

MS. ADLER: Spanish.

MR. McELHINNEY: Spanish.

MS. ADLER: You give me a word—when I need a word in a sentence, I'll very often hesitate because I've got the Spanish word; I don't have the English word. And I do crossword puzzles like a maniac in order to keep—that's what I started doing when I came back here. It was terrible. You go someplace when you're 23, you grow up there.

MR. McELHINNEY: Right.

MS. ADLER: I did. And I never would have had a revolution or an earthquake if I'd stayed in New York, or floods. Oh, my goodness.

MR. McELHINNEY: No, you'd have to leave town to find out.

MS. ADLER: You'd have to find those things, yes.

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, thank you so much.

MS. ADLER: It was my pleasure.

MR. McELHINNEY: *Muchas gracias.*

MS. ADLER: *A la orden.* You speak good Spanish. How did that happen?

MR. McELHINNEY: Well, I'll have to tell you when I turn the machine off.

[END CD 4.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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