



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

**Oral history interview with Eleanor Antin, 2009
May 8-9**

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

Contact Information

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

Transcript

Interview

Interview with Eleanor Antin
Conducted by Judith Olch Richards
At Artist's studio in Del Mar, California
May 8, 2009

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a digitally recorded interview with Eleanor Antin on May 8, 2009. The interview took place at the artist's studio in Del Mar, California, and was conducted by Judith Olch Richards for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for this interview was provided by a grant from the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Eleanor Antin and Judith Olch Richards have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Eleanor Antin in Del Mar, California, on May 8, 2009, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc number one. And that is on.

ELEANOR ANTIN: Okay.

MS. RICHARDS: So Eleanor, let's start out with when and where you were born and then your parents, your grandparents, kind of just set the scene.

MS. ANTIN: Whoa, actually I'm, you know -

MS. RICHARDS: Back, back a little bit.

MS. ANTIN: I'm thinking about -

MS. RICHARDS: And then your siblings if you had any and your immediate family.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, well, it's interesting to me because I'm currently halfway through a kind of memoir called *Conversations with Stalin*, which is what I'm going to read from next week in New York.

It started off as a faux memoir because it has a crazy, narrative voice but it's turning out to actually be a real memoir. So I'm thinking a lot about my family. It's called *Conversations with Stalin* because I'm what they used to call a red-diaper baby.

My parents - well, my father was a Socialist, but you know, as I'm fond of saying, nobody listened to him because Socialists were wimps. My mother was a Stalinist. That was, like, tough, right?

So I was brought up around the time of [Senator Joseph] McCarthy and -

MS. RICHARDS: Go back to when and where were you born.

MS. ANTIN: Oh, I was born in the Bronx [NY] in 1935 and that was in a very, very pretty area with

lots of parks.

MS. RICHARDS: What part of the Bronx was that?

MS. ANTIN: It's the West Bronx. It's sort of the end. It was in a place called Mosholu Parkway and on one side was Van Cortlandt Park and the other side was the big Bronx Zoo and all those parks. So even from a very young age I used to take my bike and go riding back and forth all along the parkways. There was not very much traffic in those days.

And then in the winter there were all these hills in the parks I'd go sledding down in the snow. So it was really a nice place. It had a fabulous elementary school, really wonderful little neighborhood school, small, P.S. 8, a wonderful principal who turned out to be especially interesting because when I was in about the third grade, they started a pilot program. It was a very educationally interesting program for intellectually gifted kids. One of the first in the country, I believe.

We were based in the school library and they put me in when I was some time in the fourth grade. There were about 20 children in all and included several grades. I was in the fourth grade with one other kid who was very autistic and very strange.

We each had individual contracts, math, history, English, whatever, for the week that the teacher assigned us. We got marvelous, personal attention and when we were finished with work, we read all the books in the library. So it was a really wonderful kind of education.

MS. RICHARDS: And your mother?

MS. ANTIN: My mother was a businesswoman who was always failing. She was in summer resorts.

MS. RICHARDS: Where was she born?

MS. ANTIN: She was born - well, it was Poland. I think it may be Lithuania now.

MS. RICHARDS: And what was her name?

MS. ANTIN: Her name was - well, originally it was Jeanette Efron.

MS. RICHARDS: Jeanette?

MS. ANTIN: Yes, J-E-A-N-E-T-T-E, Efron, sort of like Jeanette MacDonald.

MS. RICHARDS: E-P-H?

MS. ANTIN: E-F-R-O-N or E-F-F-R-O-N, yeah, and I don't know if I'm a relation to what's her name - Norah, I think.

MS. RICHARDS: She's P-H.

MS. ANTIN: P-H, no, that's - well, who knows now. Because when my mother came, she was very young but she was already married to my father. His name was Sol.

MS. RICHARDS: S-O-L or S-A-U-L?

MS. ANTIN: S-O-L, the last name, had originally been Piroskia, which was changed at Ellis Island to Fineman, [laughs] which has nothing to do with anything.

MS. RICHARDS: To Fineman? F-I-N-E?

MS. ANTIN: Yeah, like a fine man, you know, and his name in Poland had been Piroskia, P-I-R-O-S-K-I-A. They changed it because the jerk at Ellis Island couldn't pronounce it. I like that name better than Fineman which is so bland and vaguely German.

MS. RICHARDS: So they met in Poland and were married in Poland?

MS. ANTIN: They met in Poland. They came from the same little town of Rusch which no longer exists.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell that?

MS. ANTIN: Well, I don't know. I used to look for it on old Polish maps.

MS. RICHARDS: Rosh, R-O-S-H?

MS. ANTIN: I think R-O-S-C-H. The only place I ever saw the name was at the Holocaust Museum in D.C. They have a room of windows for the ghost towns, each defunct town has its own window. You can see the names looking appropriately ghostly through the windows but they no longer exist. That's the only place I ever saw Rosch.

It was obviously destroyed by the Nazis. There had been a considerable Jewish population though it was a very small village. My father was the son of the woman who my mother used to call selfish Dubka. I'm going to sound like Sholem Aleichem before we get through here. She was a very beautiful woman, my mother said, "Very selfish." My father told me she had a lover and that his father was sort of the town atheist. An unrespectable family.

My mother's parents were very different - my father was like a big time Hasidic wise man, Reb Shmuelmekha. My mother was always saying he was so gentle and intelligent. He was not like a religious fanatic. Her mother was a businesswoman who took care of the scholar husband which was part of the Yiddish tradition. She had I believe a flour mill.

MS. RICHARDS: This is your father's family?

MS. ANTIN: This is my mother's family.

MS. RICHARDS: Your mother's family.

MS. ANTIN: And her mother, my grandmother, was very small, like my mother was very small, like I'm very small and it was one of my mother's favorite memories of her - I should put this in my memoir - was her mother refusing to pay one of her Polish workers because he's so drunk his wife would never see any of it. He's one the big guys who would do all this heavy work lugging the sacks of grain, one of the local peasants, and this guy's drunk as hell and he wants his check and she says, "I'm not paying you till Monday."

So he's towering over her and my father was nearby. He was just a kid playing with my mother and she said, "Shmuel," - I think she called him Shmuel - "Come over here, you tell this drunk I'm not paying him. He's a drunken bastard and will drink up the money," and my father was cowering in the corner and ran away. [They laugh.]

He was I think 12 and this Polish giant starts to laugh but she still refuses to pay him because he

was just going to drink it up and she said, "You bring your wife. I'll give the money to your wife." And he just towered over her threatening her, and then when she said, "Shmuel, take this stick and show this gentleman out." This got everyone laughing especially the giant Pole who laughed so hard he started to cry and ran home crying and my grandmother eventually paid the wife.

So she was a very tough smart little woman. Well, when my mother was a young teenager, she fell in love with the local librarian and they were both into theater and they ran away. It sounds like Sholem Aleichem. They ran away with a traveling Yiddish theater group, always dreaming of Warsaw, or Vilna, you know, the great theaters, the great centers of art and Jewish intellectual life.

She became a Communist in the process. Meanwhile, my father followed his dad and went to the United States. My father was a mathematical genius who didn't have the character for it. He was petrified of his own shadow.

MS. RICHARDS: So they came to the U.S. separately?

MS. ANTIN: Separately. My father came back, you know, as the rich American. He was not rich, but in the old country, all Americans were rich.

He was studying engineering I think. Jews weren't allowed in the Gymnasium [part high school, part-college] but he was in on a scholarship because even though he was Jewish, he was a mathematical genius.

But he couldn't hack it - my father died still trying to prove a particular algorithm, which has been designated unprovable by all mathematicians and he proved it 99 percent. He was 94 when he died and he was still working at that algorithm, trying to close up that one percent, but he didn't have the character to live out in the world of mathematics. Like every other profession it's pretty cutthroat.

So he was studying engineering here and that didn't work out either. But he had good jobs eventually in the dress business, cutting patterns, the sort of job where you need the arithmetical knowledge to be able to cut the correct sizes. So he had good union jobs.

MS. RICHARDS: So he went back to Poland?

MS. ANTIN: Yeah, he went back to Poland to see his mother, who was still there. Oh, this is fun, we'll never get to art. I love it.

He and my mother had always been friends and now my mother, who was incredibly beautiful, was an actress and she traveled around. It was a small potatoes company but they did real Yiddish classics and she was apparently very good.

She could make people cry, she told me. She had one scene where she was ironing a shirt for three minutes. Just staying quietly alone on stage and not saying a word for three minutes is a very long time and she was thinking of her lover who had abandoned her and she's ironing and tears are running down her face and the whole audience is crying along with her. That was her great role.

They got married when she was about 17 or 18 and he was about the same age, 18 or 19, and then he went back to the U.S.

MS. RICHARDS: To New York?

MS. ANTIN: To New York and my mother continued acting in Poland. The rest of her family were all in Israel by then. Her sisters had left many, many years before - they were much older and they had left in the '20s.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean your aunts and uncles?

MS. ANTIN: Yeah, my mother's - well, she had two much older sisters, like 12 or 15 years older, and a brother who became a Bolshevik and went off to the Soviet Union. He became an engineer and then everyone lost track of him. The two sisters were Zionists and they went to Israel, Palestine as it was then, and they were on a kibbutz and fought in the Independence War.

Back in Poland, my mother got involved with party politics, with revolutionary politics, and because she traveled a lot she used to be a courier and would carry passports for comrades from one town to another so they could escape the country.

Then she got caught. The ring got broken up and she had to escape fast. Luckily, she was married to my father and he was an American citizen already, though she didn't feel so lucky. I mean, she wasn't interested in him anymore but, you know, that's life. So he got her quickly to the U.S.

MS. RICHARDS: This was pre-World War I?

MS. ANTIN: No, no, no this is pre-World War II. How old do you think I am?

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

MS. ANTIN: We're talking the early '30s when she came here. She was born, I don't remember, maybe 1914 or something because she remembers the early Bolsheviks, when the Red and the Whites were fighting.

The Reds came into the town. Then the Whites would come in and the Poles would come back, it kept going back and forth, she said the rivers ran with blood. She got politicized early because the ones who were the best to the Jews were the Reds. I guess they trusted the Jews because they knew they wouldn't be Polish spies since the Poles treated them so badly. So they gave them jobs.

She had a cousin who was a quartermaster or something and he fed the Jews in the town. So for the first time they had decent food. But that's when she was a little girl and she remembered [Leon] Trotsky came by. [Vladimir] Lenin too. Stalin was nonexistent. I mean, he was working behind the scenes at the time so I don't know if he was ever there.

MS. RICHARDS: So she came to the States in the early '30s?

MS. ANTIN: It must have been about '31 or '32. Unfortunately, I think she was a coward. She should have gone into the Yiddish theater. It's heyday was over but it was still flourishing. There was the Maurice Schwartz Art Theater. But most of it was what she used to call shunt. Shit, I mean, vulgar, you know, but she should have tried for the Yiddish Art Theater.

MS. RICHARDS: On Second Avenue?

MS. ANTIN: Yes, the woman was gorgeous. She was a marvelous actor, well according to her she was, in the Yiddish theater tradition. And she was good. I saw how she acted through life. She never stopped. I guess it was the immigrant experience that scared her. She's in her early 20s. She's like freaked out. She's thrown into this apartment with selfish Dubka, her husband's mother, all his

brothers and she ended up cooking and cleaning up after them for about a year.

Then she had the good sense to get pregnant and they had to get their own apartment because nobody wanted a screaming baby around and she finally got my father to move out. She didn't know English yet. She was learning. She must have been extremely demoralized until I was born. And I wasn't easy. She was very thin and sickly when she was pregnant. They kept her in the hospital for a month or two before I was born. They thought she would die.

MS. RICHARDS: You were the first?

MS. ANTIN: The first, yes and always her closest. In a way I saved her life because she got out of that miserable house with those - as she called them, grobe yungs. Nice Jewish word for slobs. Actually I grew fond of several of my uncles later. They were all trying to get acclimated to this crazy place, America, and it was a very different crazy place than they came from.

So my parents finally got their own apartment. It was during the Depression. As they explained it to me later, you'd get an apartment and pay a month's rent. And then you would be late with the next month's rent because you snuck out at night and moved into another apartment where you would also pay a month's rent and renege on the next month. So they'd get a free month by dodging the landlord. This is the way they lived because nobody had any money. [President Franklin D.] Roosevelt was doing his best but it took a while until things got better and by the time I remember - I believe in about '38 - we were living in Mosholu Parkway. At some point when I was about five years old, my sister was born.

MS. RICHARDS: What's her name?

MS. ANTIN: Marcia, M-A-R-C-I-A, Marcia Fineman. I was Eleanor Fineman and then my mother got very crazy and sick and my sister went to stay in an orphanage or something as a temporary -

MS. RICHARDS: Foster home?

MS. ANTIN: No, it was a charity institution. I remember we visited her once and there were nurses in white uniforms. But it was a very pretty place. Most of the kids didn't have family. Marcia did, but my mother was bananas. She had postpartum depression that was very severe and it was the summer so I was sent to a convent camp. There were nuns. No, it wasn't a convent because there were boys there too. It was a Catholic camp and the nuns were horrible to me. They were very regimented and I was not regimented. I wasn't brought up regimented and I never in my whole life was regimented.

Like you had to shit after breakfast every morning, which I couldn't do on demand. I'm a little five-year-old. I would sit on the toilet until 3:00, 4:00 in the afternoon because I couldn't go. And I was always falling and hurting myself. I remember they put me to bed early as a punishment. They were mad at me because I wasn't doing things the right way.

They gave me oatmeal. I liked cereal but then they put syrup in it. I was used to having milk and butter in cereal, not syrup. So it made me nauseous. You see I didn't eat. I never ate until I was about eight or nine. The nurse used to call me down to her office later on when I went to school. Is this weird? Is this what you're interested in? The nurse used to call me down regularly. They thought I had a disease because I was very small and very skinny, like my granddaughter is now, though she's a little taller. I used to vomit at the sight of food. Well, the nuns insisted I eat just what they gave me. I didn't mind the oatmeal so much as that fucking syrup. It's a Midwestern thing to

eat cereal that way and I was a little Jewish girl from the Bronx. I would vomit and then they told me, you vomit one more time over the food and we're going to make you eat it. So I didn't vomit anymore, I wasn't stupid, but I started screaming and had fits and hysterics.

So they'd send me to bed all day, to punish me. I was there for maybe two weeks. My father came to visit on Sunday. My mother was back home incapacitated and I'm screaming, "Take me home, daddy, take me home," and he didn't know what to do. He couldn't take me home, he had a job and my mother was bedridden and the other child's in an orphan asylum. [Laughs]. As I said, he's not a strong personality. He's a charming man, a brilliant man, but weak, undecisive. So he went home. But he told my mother. My mother called up and said, "Send my child home immediately." They said, "Oh, she's having such a good time." That's what she told me they said and she said, "I don't care. Send her home. I'm calling the police."

She didn't like the idea of the nuns anyway. What's a good communist doing sending her child to stay with nuns? So the next morning, they sent me home and I've always appreciated that my mother saved me.

Then they sent me to live with an aunt for a couple of months, and her son, who was a teenage kid, looked after me. He was wonderful, my cousin Herbert. So it turned out to be a great summer, after all.

MS. RICHARDS: You were saved.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, I was saved from those horrible sisters and then my sister came back. I think after about seven or eight months, she came back to live with us.

MS. RICHARDS: Your mother recovered?

MS. ANTIN: She recovered, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Did she ever act again?

MS. ANTIN: No, but what she did was start working in the summer resort business, in hotels, started as a waitress and, you know, you have to understand my mother. She was always acting. She was charming. She was beautiful and clever and everyone was falling in love with her and giving her big tips and she's very, very capable and knows how to work. She taught me how to work.

The first place she bought went bankrupt. It was called Elmar Lodge, for Eleanor and Marcia. That went bankrupt when the place up the hill had a polio epidemic. That was what finally closed our place and then she finally got to be the owner of a place called Maud's Summer-Ray, M-A-U-D-S Summer-Ray, or in Yiddish, Zummerai. That had been a very famous lefty arty hotel from the '20s when it had also been something of a nudist colony.

And the guests were very advanced, very lefty, but now they had grown much older. They had been Jewish immigrants from Russia, Germany, Poland. Now they were successful professionals or businesspeople but they still came to Maud's. It was near Callicoon on the Delaware River, upstate New York. Very pretty country.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you go there just in the summers or did you actually -

MS. ANTIN: In the summers. I started to work there when I was about 10 or 11 as the counselor of kids who were sometimes my age. That's when I learned how to work.

MS. RICHARDS: Going - at this point we're maybe back to that special situation in fourth grade, around that same age. We're kind of talking about nine. By that point, did you - I know you academically excelled. Did you express or show or remember any interest in art? Were you like the class artist?

MS. ANTIN: Oh, totally. I knew I was an artist from the beginning. My mother -

MS. RICHARDS: You always thought of yourself as an artist?

MS. ANTIN: Yes - only I didn't know what kind of artist because I appeared talented in - I don't know - painting, drawing, writing certainly, acting by all means, dancing. I was doing modern dance. But not music, my sister Marcia was a musical wunderkind. She was doing concerts and being prepared for concerts already at age three.

MS. RICHARDS: As a singer?

MS. ANTIN: No, no a pianist, I was taking piano lessons but I clunked along - so I sort of gave up on music. Actually I'm not so stupid musically. I'm not talented but I'm not so stupid as I thought I was and but I withdrew from it because my sister was so brilliant.

My mother thought that being an artist was the greatest because she had been an actor and always missed it. They were the best days of her life. And they encouraged me in school. I was in the IGC class [intellectually gifted] so we were encouraged to do our own thing. I remember I used to read the bible at the beginning of the weekly assembly and once there was a story telling contest and I scared the kids to death telling Edgar Allen Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" [1839]. I won. Some parents complained to the principal. Their kids were having nightmares. I was good at scary.

Then I graduated and took the bus to junior high.

MS. RICHARDS: In the Bronx?

MS. ANTIN: In the Bronx, yeah, Elizabeth Barrett Browning [Junior High School] then I went to Music and Art High School. So I had a very good, wonderful public school education.

[END CD 1.]

MS. ANTIN: And then went to City College, CCNY.

MS. RICHARDS: So back in high school, when you were at Music and Art, did you at that point imagine what kind of artist you wanted to be?

MS. ANTIN: I was painting in those days.

MS. RICHARDS: Going to museums?

MS. ANTIN: Oh, that was my favorite activity, always. My mother started taking me to museums and my sister too but Marcia wasn't very interested. She would take us to concerts at Carnegie Hall, too. I don't know if you know the old Carnegie Hall, you can walk up and up and up and look at all these wonderful old photos of great musicians on the walls, singers and soloists, and I used to love those.

We used to go sit up in the last rows. It was like \$1.50 a piece or something. So pretty much, not every Sunday but certainly every other Sunday or every third, we'd go to the philharmonic and we heard Zino Francescatti, all the great musicians of the time.

I liked the concerts but the museums were my favorites and we'd go to MoMA [Museum of Modern Art], which looked different than it does now, and there were different pictures that I adopted, they were my favorites, like the [Pavel] Tchelitchew [*Hide and Seek*, 1940-42] was there and of course the *Guernica* [Pablo Picasso, 1937] was still there. I wasn't crazy about the *Guernica*. I always thought it looked silly like a comic strip and it still does.

But I remember the Tchelitchew I loved and there's this small Max Ernst [*Two Children Are Threatened by a Nightingale*, 1924], I remember I used to look at it sometimes for like an hour. It's still there, a small painting, with a door or a gate. It's an assemblage. A little wooden door or a gate, with a bird above. it's a small, kind of slightly menacing piece.

I remember I used to pick one picture. I'd look around seriously and pick one picture that I would just study for that day. I'd look at other things too but I'd spend much of my time that day in front of the chosen picture and so I remember those in great detail because I really looked at them very deeply and with great pleasure.

I still remember the Tchelitchew. I remember the Max Ernst. I think the [Salvador] Dali, *The Persistence of Memory* [1931] was one of my chosen pictures and now I don't really remember what the others were.

And she'd take us to the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art], where the major pleasure was the Greek and Roman sculptures, and the fact that they were crippled. I adored that. That made it so sad because that's when I started falling in love with ruins.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you sketch these things when you were -

MS. ANTIN: No, no I didn't. I just gave myself up to them and the ruins. *The Persistence of Memory* that I was just talking about is like that. I remember there was a [Giorgio] de Chirico I used to look at, too. Heavy shadows, the setting sun. Ruins.

Already there a fascination with the past, also probably brought on by my heavy reading. I used to make up stories with paper dolls. I was always imagining. I'm so glad there was no television.

So I read all the time and I played with my paper dolls and I'd play with my friends, I wasn't a hermit, but, you know, it was best when I was all by myself and playing and reading. In those early days I would be reading - I don't know if you know Dover put out the blue book of fairy tales [*Blue Fairy Book*. Andrew Lang; New York: Dover, 1966], the yellow book of fairy tales [*Yellow Fairy Book*. Andrew Lang; New York: Dover, 1966], the red book of fairy [*Red Fairy Book*. Andrew Lang; New York: Dover, 1966] - and I was reading all of those.

There was Hans Christian Andersen, there were the Grimm Brothers and then after that, of course, there was Robin Hood which I read maybe 50 times and there was *Robinson Crusoe* [Daniel Defoe, 1719] and *Swiss Family Robinson* [Johann David Wyss, 1812], I didn't like that last one so much, but *A Tale of Two Cities* [Charles Dickens, 1859] was great, and *The Scarlet Pimpernel* by Baroness d'Orczy, I always loved her name, Baroness d'Orczy, all of these incredible books - and then Howard Fast's books, the progressive writer, he was I think on the black list at the time.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. ANTIN: And I read every one of his books, *Freedom Road* [1944], *Spartacus* [1951], whatever, and so there were all these historical fantasies and then I'd invent worlds with my paper dolls.

MS. RICHARDS: Are these different times? I think of Howard Fast being high school. I'm not sure - are you -

MS. ANTIN: I was younger when I read him.

MS. RICHARDS: Younger.

MS. ANTIN: I remember because my mother had those books. She read them, so they were there in the house.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you start eating by then?

MS. ANTIN: Yeah, actually I did. I was in the 4th grade when I started. Yeah, well, I've never stopped since, unfortunately. But yes, I started eating. I think it was around when my sister was born that I stopped. You know, you're kicked out of paradise when your brother or sister is born, even though I was always my mother's favorite, but still - you know, my sister was a very classy kid because everyone would freak out the way she played the piano. So she stole a lot of my attention. That was fine because I had already removed myself from music forever. I'm not a fool, aside from the fact that I had no talent for it. I mean, there's no point in fighting battles that you can't win, right?

But the first grownup book I read was *Crime and Punishment* [Fyodor Dostoevsky, 1866] and I was sick in bed. I think I was in the 6th grade though possibly I was in junior high already. Maybe I was in seventh grade. I don't remember. But it was an incredible revelation, an emotional experience.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were in high school, Music and Art, at what point - I mean, did you always know that you'd go to college and study art?

MS. ANTIN: Oh yeah, I mean that was -

MS. RICHARDS: And you were mostly a painter or focused on painting?

MS. ANTIN: yeah, but I also got a scholarship to the Martha Graham school, which was on 10th Street I think, Sixth Avenue, I don't remember exactly, and I studied with Erick Hawkins. He was Martha's husband or divorced husband at the time. He was her lead dancer. When she started having men in her company it was because of him and they gave me a scholarship because I said we had no more money. My mother was going broke.

MS. RICHARDS: This was an after-school program when you were in high school?

MS. ANTIN: Yes. This was on Saturdays and maybe once during the week. I don't remember and I must have been about 13 because I remember some guys flirting with me at the school at one time and I was out of my league. I didn't know how to flirt.

So I think I was old enough and yet young enough. So I must have been about 12 or 13. We didn't get older as fast as they do now.

And then as soon as they offered me this scholarship, I suddenly developed what the doctor diagnosed as a nervous heart. It was anxiety. I freaked out. I couldn't breathe. My heart would go very fast and I thought I was getting a heart attack and dying. Frankly, I've spent many years being

afraid that I'm getting a heart attack and dying. I'm a terrible hypochondriac. But what happened was they said, "Oh, you can't take gym," which was delightful because I hated gym. I hated athletics. I loved baseball, to listen to it on the radio, but not to play, and they said, "No, sorry but you have to stop dancing."

Oh, how great that was. See, I didn't want to be a dancer. I knew but I couldn't face it because it was like a good thing to get this scholarship and Erick thought very well of me. I was talented as a modern dancer. I wouldn't have made it as a ballerina but as a modern dancer, I was very agile and expressive. Perhaps overly expressive. So talking myself into a heart attack was my sneaky way to get out of being a dancer.

MS. RICHARDS: Did they help you decide what college to go to?

MS. ANTIN: No, not in those days. My mother desperately wanted me to go to Bennington. That was the arty college, where Merce Cunningham was teaching and all the arty girls would go there. But they were all rich girls.

MS. RICHARDS: What about Cooper Union [School of Art, New York City], which was free?

MS. ANTIN: I probably didn't even know about it. No, I was going to go to Queens [College, Flushing, NY] or Hunter [College, City University of New York]. But I didn't want to go to Hunter because only girls went then and I liked having boys around. So I was going to go to Queens though we lived in Manhattan then. It was far for me to travel.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh you had moved from the Bronx to Manhattan?

MS. ANTIN: Yes, earlier, my parents split sometime when I was in early high school.

MS. RICHARDS: And where did you live in Manhattan?

MS. ANTIN: We lived on 109th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam, drug city. It was rough for my sister because she was harassed by a group of African-American girls in the junior high that she went to. Really harassed. They ran after her and tormented her. My mother went to school. But in those days they didn't really do anything about bullying. I wish I had gone and beaten somebody up. Though I was so small myself, they'd probably have killed me. But I was her older sister. When I think about it now, the poor kid was essentially left alone to survive a gang. My mother should have made a terrible scandal, called the police, whatever, but it didn't work out that way. My mother had just split from my father. We had a great new apartment. She didn't want to leave. It was all crazy.

MS. RICHARDS: So you went to Queens?

MS. ANTIN: No, I was very lucky. CCNY, which was a very good school in those days before they had open enrollment when everything kind of fell apart, it was just a short bus ride away. But they had only recently let girls in but only as education majors. I was certainly not going to major in education. How boring would that be? I was going to major in writing and minor in art.

MS. RICHARDS: As a strategy for getting in?

MS. ANTIN: No, that was my plan.

MS. RICHARDS: That's what you wanted?

MS. ANTIN: Yes, I was writing a lot and then it was about three days before I was going to start at Queens when I heard that CCNY had stopped this nonsense about girls majoring in education. Now they said you could major in anything you want.

So I immediately switched and went to CCNY. That's where I met David. I met people like Jerry Rothenberg and Diane Rothenberg, people who became my friends for life and I also had a pretty good education and of course the best thing was I met David there and we became very good friends. We were not lovers for a long time. We were friends and we were always going with other people. It was great at City. I pretty much majored in cafeteria, there were three or four tables where the artists and writers hung out.

MS. RICHARDS: So you wound up majoring in writing?

MS. ANTIN: Well, yes, the art department really was bad. I did take some courses but they were still doing still lifes and water color landscapes. It was pathetic.

MS. RICHARDS: And that was okay with you when you were there?

MS. ANTIN: Well, the writing program was better. I took philosophy classes. I took history, which I loved, and I took literature and writing and I was fine though one of my closest friends, Millie Gendell, was a painter.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell Gendell?

MS. ANTIN: G-E-N-D-E-L-L, though my real closest friend was Roberta Fox, F-O-X, I don't remember what Roberta majored in, and I had a friend, Eleanor Davis, who called herself Eleanora Devigia [ph]. My three best friends all ended up institutionalized. They were all crazy as bed bugs. I was attracted to crazy girls.

I always thought I was crazy. I think being with them kept me a little sane. [Laughs.] I loved them. They were wonderful but they were crazy and in those days they institutionalized people. I don't know what's happened to them. They were smart, beautiful, lively. Millie had millions of boyfriends, not Roberta, she was a hermit, and Eleanora was out of sight loony. I remember she had skin that was so white, it was the color of snow.

MS. RICHARDS: And you were there for four years?

MS. ANTIN: Well, no, because I left in -

MS. RICHARDS: What year did you start there?

MS. ANTIN: Hmm.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what year you started there?

MS. ANTIN: I was still 16. I was going on 17. So I could figure it out, '45, '50, February '52, so I was just 17. So I was 17. Later, when I quit, I had three more courses to take to graduate. I had taken all my major courses, a lot of writing, when I left to be in a traveling company of *Bus Stop*.

I was the second lead, not the Marilyn Monroe role. There is a waitress role in the play, sort of a smart, hip-talking waitress, not the brassy kind, but with funny lines and running commentary. That was fun and then I went to the Tamara Daykarhanova School for the Stage. That was every day. It

was like an academy.

MS. RICHARDS: In Manhattan?

MS. ANTIN: In Manhattan, 60-something Street.

MS. RICHARDS: What's the name of it again?

MS. ANTIN: Okay, Tamara - Tamara, the way they say it here - Daykarhanova, D-A-Y-K-A-R-H-A-N-O-V-A, one word, Daykarhanova. She had been with the Stanislavsky Moscow Art Theater. There was a three-hour acting workshop every day. Then we had makeup and movement classes. It was a two-year program .

Madame was very active in the Actors Studio, which had just started up. I remember seeing her on the stage in a [Federico Garcia] Lorca play where she played this gypsy. I think it was "The House of Bernardo Alba" at Circle in the Square. She didn't like me very well.

She thought I was talented but she didn't like me because she's a strong character and I'm a strong character and I wouldn't be browbeaten and she, like all the "method" people in those days, was in love with their imaginary idea of America. All those Jews who ran Actors Studio were in love with the southern Tennessee Williams blonde, slightly dopey and uneducated crazy victim.

That was their idea of America, or the American girl, and I wanted to play Miss Julie, the vicious Strindberg monster heroine and all sorts of grand roles like that. That's why I was an actor. But they wanted me to play like kooky ingénues, the offbeat ingénue - like I was playing in *Bus Stop* and so we were always fighting. But I stayed for the full two years. I was used to difficult women. I had my mother.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you pay tuition? Were you supporting yourself?

MS. ANTIN: Well, that was one of the problems. I wanted to get a scholarship from her and she wouldn't give me a scholarship. She said, "Your mother can give you the money. I don't give scholarships." You know, she was money crazy. I said, "My mother is a bankrupt businesswoman." She said, "She can pay other people, she can pay for you." So my mother scrounged together the money and I was artist modeling and baby sitting. I was making what I could. At Christmas I would work at Macy's as Christmas help.

So my mother would write these checks and then scrounge around borrowing to cover them. She was supporting me to be an artist, right? She would go hungry rather than take away my classes. At least my sister was getting all these music scholarships until she quit music altogether when she was in high school.

And I did get acting jobs. Some anyway. One nice gig was the first NAACP convention.

Ossie Davis put together a group to do a staged reading and I guess they thought I was dark from my composite pictures and when I walked into the audition, I was the only white person there. Ossie looked at me and I looked at him and we started laughing and he said, "All right, come on, come on in," and I played the bad white person who wanted my maid to ride the bus during the Rosa Parks bus strike, unsympathetic roles like that. I played up southern belle. I was like hilariously revolting and Ossie hugged me after. It was wonderful. That was my favorite gig.

I was doing other gigs, too. I joined equity.

MS. RICHARDS: Now let me back up for a second. You said you met David when you were at CCNY.

MS. ANTIN: Well, we were friends. We were still friends when we left school.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. ANTIN: He was actually about three or four years ahead of me. But David was an undergraduate for about seven years because he liked school. First he got a full major in physics. Then he had a full major in languages. Then he was on his way to a full major in experimental psych when they kicked him out. "You're graduated," they said and he said, "No, I didn't take Math 1." They said, "Yeah, but you took Math 350. Out!!" He also took writing courses, that's where I met him, in the writing classes.

So he got a job as an editor running a company, a publishing company, a science publishing company. So he was okay. But we were still good friends. Though we were always going with other people. He had these long neurotic affairs that would last two years, and I would, you know, be ready to commit suicide over another asshole every two weeks.

So mine were short and tempestuous and unsweet affairs and his were these long dragged out ones and we would meet often and he would have me laughing about the new idiot I was ready to commit suicide over in two seconds.

So we were very good friends and I think I was still an actor. Yeah, I was doing a pilot project for children about great people, heroes and heroines.

MS. RICHARDS: Sounds familiar.

MS. ANTIN: Glad I never saw that program. I'm glad it failed because it was so stupid. I played Joan of Arc and the director kept saying, piety my dear, piety - you know, I'm playing a saint - and I said, hey, you know, she was a farm girl. She rode horses. She's riding into battle leading the French army. You know, the farm girl came first. The saint came later and since it was for children, she doesn't even burn at the end - I mean, it was pretty stupid.

So I couldn't stand it anymore and finally I said, "If he says piety one more time, I'm tired of arguing, if he does it one more time, I quit." He said it. I said, "Fuck you," and walked out. I went back to school and finished up. I had one requirement and one free elective left to take for my degree. I took Ancient History. I returned to my old love, the broken sculptures from the Met, the ruins. That was a fabulous course and I got very friendly with the professor, who was very intelligent. But he was a passionate Catholic who didn't believe in God. I remember he gave me a copy of [Thomas] Mann's *The Magic Mountain* [New York: A. A. Knopf, 1927] as a gift.

I graduated and was still an actor and did substitute teaching in the school system to support myself. You could do that without a license then because they were desperate for teachers and I was working by the day, maybe one or two days a week, and they paid pretty well. I taught early grades in elementary schools in Harlem and later in Bedford-Stuy. I got along very well with the kids. They were really darling.

Then I spent the summer on Fire Island. I got away from my mother, the first summer I didn't have to spend in my mother's fucking hotel and she's - like when I would call she would say, where are you, why aren't you here, they're robbing me. She made me feel so guilty, but shit, I was 24 already, 25 maybe, I don't remember. I think 25 and I said, I can't. She used to release me willingly only to act. But then I'd always have to come back to her. I'd be there working in the late spring and early fall.

But to go to Fire Island to enjoy myself?

I was going to write poetry for the *New Yorker*. That was my plan. You can see how immature I was. I would make enough money to get my own place and I did occasionally rent an apartment but then couldn't pay the rent and have to go back home.

But by the end of that summer on Fire Island, I thought I was pregnant and I didn't know who the father was. No, I thought I knew but he was such an asshole I didn't even want to tell him. So I figured, oh, oh, I need an abortion. But I didn't know how to get one. It was illegal then.

MS. RICHARDS: This was about 1960? You were born in '35.

MS. ANTIN: Thirty-five, '45, '55, '60, yeah it would be about -

MS. RICHARDS: You'd be 25.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, I would be about that and yeah, I went to David. He was living on Cornelia Street and his last girlfriend was still living on the same floor. There were two apartments on a floor and they shared a bathroom so she was still there though they had broken off already. But nobody was going to give up such a cheap West Village apartment just to evade an old romance.

But it didn't matter. I went to him as my friend. I said, "I think I'm pregnant," and also I had been on macrobiotics and I was like down to 92 pounds. I was borderline anorexic. I looked horrifying. He took one look at me and he says, "What the hell," and I said, "I don't know but I think I'm pregnant." Well, what happened is because of my starvation diet I lost my period for a month. It's what happens to athletes, it happens to people who don't eat.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh yes. So you weren't really pregnant

MS. ANTIN: I was not pregnant, fortunately. But we didn't know that then. We found that out as soon as David started fattening me up with bacon and eggs, with ice cream sundaes, pizzas, and that's when I discovered indigestion, which I've never lost. I still have a sensitive stomach.

So I never left and we became lovers and we've been together for 40-some years, 45 maybe. I don't remember. We got married a few months after.

MS. RICHARDS: So at that point you graduated. You started living with him.

MS. ANTIN: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you start becoming an artist?

MS. ANTIN: Well, I was - yes, I was a painter. I was painting. But it was the days of Pop, which is what interested me the most at that point. When I was in Music and Art, I was an abstract expressionist, not bad actually. I guess I would be fourth generation. I was probably really more like fifth or sixth generation because 4th was -

MS. RICHARDS: Elaine de Kooning.

MS. ANTIN: Yeah, not like me, at all. So now I did these big paintings. I had never worked that large before. It would be larger than my drawing board over there.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you working in the apartment with David?

MS. ANTIN: Well, I think we moved. I'm trying to remember. At one point we moved to East Fourth or East Third. I don't remember which. No, I think I lived once on East Fourth on my own. This was with David that was East Third behind a quiet old cemetery. I remember Bob Morris lived there after we did.

I think I started those paintings on East Third because we had more room. I think before then I was writing. So I had a little room and I would do valentines. Basically I did funny valentines like the Rodgers and Hart song. They were never centrally placed or whole. They spilled off the edge of the canvas, at the top or bottom. I didn't paint them off the edge. They just ended before they reached their full shape. Sometimes I would do a tight take and the entire canvas was red. Or blue. Or black. Then there was a second canvas, they were double paintings. This was the envelope. Bare, unpainted canvas, with some tape designating the flap at the back of the envelope. And the envelope was always too small for the valentine. Obviously these valentines could never be mailed. I guess I was going allegorical, even then.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you using oil?

MS. ANTIN: No, acrylics. And that was fun. Then I started doing big assemblage collages which I had also done at Music and Art. But these were better, more adventurous. Do you remember Amy Goldin? She was an art critic and painter. Later she became one of the people who helped to popularize the New Decorative Painting. She died too young. She got cancer and died. She was one of the artists at the Brata Gallery, then. That was an artist co-op.

MS. RICHARDS: On 10th Street.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, yes, next to that tailoring store, The Fat Man. They had a big sign, a painting of a fat man. David and a few other poets had a poetry store next door. They sold poetry books to each other. Amy invited me to be in a group show at Brata. I think I gave her a combine painting.

MS. RICHARDS: What kind of materials were you using with the assemblages?

MS. ANTIN: Anything from rope and paint and paper and metal and fabric and wood, whatever.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you thinking - were you looking at [Robert] Rauschenberg?

MS. ANTIN: I was just going to say it was a sort of baby Rauschenberg, whom I loved, always loved, well, his early work I always loved. I mean, I like Jasper Johns, too, but I always loved Rauschenberg because he was so not uptight, so free and inventive, so in your face and unrespectable. So yeah, I think it was related. It popped off the wall.

MS. RICHARDS: So these are the early '60s.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, the '60s.

MS. RICHARDS: And you're painting and did you have painter friends?

MS. ANTIN: Did I what?

MS. RICHARDS: Who were your friends who were also painters who you knew or were they all writers?

MS. ANTIN: Some were painters and sculptors. Some were Fluxus artists, yes, a lot of writers and

poets. I have to explain something to you. It was a great time because the genre boundaries were breaking down. I had no trouble thinking of myself as both a poet and an artist. In fact, that's what turned me onto Conceptual Art. I read it as multi media, performative, mixed genre, experimental, inventive. I didn't read it like a bunch of formal axioms, like Joseph Kosuth. I didn't know it then but I was reading the arrival of post modernism into it, not the end of modernism. Remember I was doing my *Blood of a Poet Box* [1965-68] because I was going to all these poetry readings and I was also writing and publishing poetry. And that was certainly an art work, a conceptual art work.

MS. RICHARDS: So now I believe the *Blood of a Poet* [sic] started in 1965.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, and went -

MS. RICHARDS: So you were painting primarily and doing these assemblages.

MS. ANTIN: And writing.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were writing, were you writing poetry? Were you writing criticism?

MS. ANTIN: In college I had been writing stories, not really poetry. But all my early published stuff was poetry and I think it's because I was going around with poets.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you know [Allen] Ginsberg and other East Village poets?

MS. ANTIN: I knew them but they were an earlier generation. I don't even know if necessarily in age so much as in mind set. They came up in the '50s. But sure, I knew Allen.

MS. RICHARDS: The Beats, yeah.

MS. ANTIN: Allen's in my *Blood Box* in fact. But there were Deep Image poets and then there were Process poets like Jackson Mac Low, out of Cage, these are the people that interested me more and the ones that I knew socially.

But you must not forget something else that started in the '50s and continued into the '60s. Those incredible European movies. Every time a new [Michelangelo] Antonioni film opens, I mean everyone is freaking out, like have you seen it yet? And then you talk about it for hours, dissect its meanings, the different shots. I remember sitting with a guy in a bar and talking for hours about *L'Aventura*. He was even coming on like the architect protagonist. Trying to be cool, like him. The cinema was incredibly important to all of us.

I saw great theatre, too. I saw the original *Waiting for Godot* [Samuel Beckett, 1953]. Well, first it opened in Florida. I didn't see that one. I saw the original one on Broadway that Herbert Berghof directed, that starred Bert Lahr and E.G. Marshall. It was one of my great art experiences but then also Ionesco and Anouilh. Also the Marquis de Sade - who was the director of that one? [*The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*, Peter Weiss, play, 1963]?

MS. RICHARDS: Peter Weir?

MS. ANTIN: Peter Brook I think it was, yes. Actually that one scared me.

MS. RICHARDS: The Death of Marat?

MS. ANTIN: Yes. But, no, is that what it was called?

MS. RICHARDS: It was at Lincoln Center.

MS. ANTIN: I thought it was *Marat/Sade* [Peter Brook, film, 1967]. No, you're probably right. It must have been the Peter Weiss play directed by Peter Brook and his Theatre of Cruelty. There's a section in which they recount word for word from Casanova's journals. He saw the torture and execution of the would-be regicide, the guy who tried to kill Louis XIV.

He was an aristocrat but also a revolutionary. The whole court was titillated and masturbating and fucking while they were torturing this guy whom they must have all known socially, in the middle of these gorgeous rooms. You knew it was real and had happened. I just got sick to my stomach. I had an anxiety attack. I nearly fainted and they had to take me home. I never saw the second act. [Laughs.]

Art is essentially the passion that keeps me alive, the most important thing in my life. But I guess sometimes it can be too much. Or it can even be evil. Like Celine or the Marquis de Sade. And here I was just having a ball, going around with my little green box and my needles.

MS. RICHARDS: What do you mean your green box and your needles?

MS. ANTIN: Well, my *Blood of a Poet Box*. I would go -

MS. RICHARDS: Was that the first basically, conceptual project that you did?

MS. ANTIN: Well, my paintings were kind of conceptual paintings, weren't they? I thought so.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. I think I'm going to start a new disc.

[END CD 2.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards with Eleanor Antin on May 8, [2009], disc two.

So why don't you start with talking about *Blood of a Poet*, that project?

MS. ANTIN: Yeah, I can always tell stories about it, it's one of my favorite pieces.

I was substitute teaching at the time and to make some extra money, I took a kindergarten class for a term when their regular teacher got pregnant. I think this was in Bedford Sty. So on Christmas the kids brought me presents. One of them gave me a little Sewing Susan and soon after I saw this green slide box for sale in the window of a science store. It was a little fragile, a little old, something of a ruin, perhaps, and it reminded me of the [Marcel] Duchamp *Green Box* and so I bought it. Apparently, the new lab slides they were making were too small for this older box, so they don't quite fit, they're slightly unstable.

So I had this Sewing Susan and I just bought some antiseptic and cotton and I started - I started with David to see what it would be like to draw blood - eeww, I stuck his finger. It was gross. But he was my guinea pig and I covered the specimen with a slide cover like they do in the lab. And I had my first blood slide.

MS. RICHARDS: But back up for a second. What - how did this idea -

MS. ANTIN: It was related to the movie, [Jean] Cocteau's *Blood of a Poet* [1930] and I did like

Cocteau's movies. I was sort of kidding around at first with the idea of the artist's soul, his life's blood. So what, who, is a poet? I mean, what could be more basic than blood? Now they'd say DNA, so today you could say my blood box is a treasure trove of poet DNA, kind of ghostly, I guess, since by now, most of them - many of them, not most - are dead. But blood has a poetry to it that DNA doesn't have.

Actually the people in the early part of the box, the first ones, seem to have less vibrant, less passionate blood. For a while, I still had a little trepidation about doing it, I didn't want to hurt or scare anyone, so I drew like less blood. So the blood of those poets seem more modest, less passionate. But afterwards, I got into it, no nervousness, boom, my needle hit harder. Result - those poets all look like they're much more passionate [laughs] because they have thicker, richer blood. And by then the poets were - you know, they were very amiable about it. Everybody knew about the piece by then. It was part of the scene. Obviously I knew a lot of these poets personally but there were a lot of them whom I didn't know.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have criteria for who would be part of it?

MS. ANTIN: No, I wasn't judgemental. I was in the avant-garde, so I preferred avant-garde poets but I would take an academic when he or she appeared every now and then and I think I have some. I don't remember most of them because but I don't own the work anymore. The Tate [Modern, London] owns it.

This was before I was a feminist, before the second wave of feminism, and there were women who were my friends, whose work I liked very much, like Carolee Schneemann, Yvonne Rainer and I thought of them as poets in the real sense, in the sense that all good artists are poets, so they're in the box. And remember we were breaking down all the traditional genre barriers, breaking barriers between mediums, so there was no problem. If I considered a person a poet they were poets. So I could get a couple more women in it. I mean, I also had women who were obviously poets like Barbara Guest and Diane Wakoski. But in those days there were more men poets than women poets.

Some of my people became very famous and some were already famous at the time. Some seemed to have disappeared. A number died. John Ashbery said he couldn't give his blood to me, even though he was a friend because he was scared to have a part of him out there. Like voodoo.

Frank O'Hara in his usual insouciant way said, "Sperm yes, blood no." I said, "Sorry, I don't want your sperm." Too bad because I liked Frank.

And then I missed out on [Pablo] Neruda. He would have given me his blood. That's the one thing that still hurts. Yeah, that hurts. We were going to dinner with Neruda and Jerry and Diane Rothenberg and me and David and we were meeting at - I don't know if you remember an old Italian restaurant called Emilio's. It was off Sixth Avenue, behind Cornelia Street, where we had lived, and we were now living in - what is it called - it's right outside of Brooklyn Heights.

MS. RICHARDS: Fort Green?

MS. ANTIN: No, it's a block -

MS. RICHARDS: Quentin Hill?

MS. ANTIN: No, it's a block past the great Arab markets and restaurants.

MS. RICHARDS: Flatbush?

MS. ANTIN: No, no it's really - it's one block past Brooklyn Heights. We were living over a mafia funeral parlor.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember the name of the street?

MS. ANTIN: Cobble Hill. That's it, the area is Cobble Hill. Now David had begged me not to bring my Blood Box. He said, "Please, Neruda's an old school type of guy. He might be a great avant-garde poet but he's old school. He's a really much older generation. He'll freak out. The guy's a South American. Who knows what he'll think and we're all young North Americans, he'll get very distressed."

Now normally I'd say fuck you, I'm bringing it. And normally David wouldn't ask me to do such a thing. But he was worried. He really admired Neruda. I don't know if he'd won his Nobel Prize yet but he was the great Pablo Neruda and so I didn't bring the blood box. We were waiting for him in the restaurant and then he walks in.

On one side is his wife. The other side is his mistress. He's walking with the two women like this, charming, smiling, he meets me, kisses my hand and I look at David and say, man, your ass is grass.

I'm in a rage. This guy would have given me anything. So, you know, I'm sitting there. I'm starving. I really want to eat. I don't want to miss the chance to listen to Neruda, talk to him. If I take a cab, because we live in Cobble Hill, we're not around the corner in Cornelia Street anymore. I have to grab a cab, and we didn't have so much money - but I wouldn't care about that, I would grab a cab to Cobble Hill, over the bridge, then come back. The meal would be almost finished and I wouldn't have had a chance to charm Neruda yet so that he would give me his blood.

I let it go. It was just not fated. But man, was I mad at David. I never listened to him again when he said something to hold me back - but he never would ask me such a thing normally and he apologized profusely. But anyway, that was a funny story.

MS. RICHARDS: And that project went for three years I think, 1965 to '68.

MS. ANTIN: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did you decide it was done?

MS. ANTIN: A hundred specimens, the box took 100 slides and then it was done. But I kind of lost interest in it by the end and I was glad it was over.

MS. RICHARDS: And you just put it aside in your studio?

MS. ANTIN: Yeah I was doing other works and we moved here in '68. We drove to San Diego with our one-year-old little Blaise, our son.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell his name?

MS. ANTIN: B-L-A-I-S-E, they call him Blaze, but we do the French version. He's named after Blaise Cendrars. That's his name, Blaise Cendrars Antin, the poet, you know, C-E-N-D-R-A-R-S. So he was one year old and we had all sorts of books in the back. We were like a bunch of Okies in this old car and we decided to ride across and see America.

MS. RICHARDS: You had to buy a car or you already owned one?

MS. ANTIN: No, we had one because we used to go to East Hampton and up to my mother's hotel. I think it was the ancient Cadillac, I don't remember.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you feel about leaving New York?

MS. ANTIN: We were very bored with New York by then. It was time to go. It was boring. We were born here - I mean, born there. We were street brats, New York brats, and it was getting boring. The art world was going through the last gasp of Minimalism, which I had really liked. I mean, I learned a lot from the Minimalists.

Michael Fried was right, minimalism was very theatrical. I learned a lot about putting on shows from Bob Morris and the others. I know I put them down in interviews in those early days but that was grandstanding politics. I learned a lot from them and I also liked their work.

And Pop was already over. So was the great Judson Theater stuff, everything was changing. Sure, there was more stuff to be done and there was still Richard Foreman and other artists. But it was time to go.

And so we drove to California. Andy Warhol was shot by Valerie Solanas when we arrived in Phoenix. It made the front pages of all the local newspapers. We were still snobs coming from New York but we were impressed that "our" news made the front pages, though they never mentioned the Italian curator, Mario Amaya, whom I also knew. He got shot at the same time.

And then we had to go through the desert before the days of air conditioning. So we were going to cross at 5:00 in the morning. Robert Kennedy won the California Democratic primary that night. We watched it at the motel. When we left in the morning, the guy on the phone in the office was like freaked. He kept saying, "I don't believe it. I don't believe it."

MS. RICHARDS: Which office?

MS. ANTIN: In the motel where we slept before driving through the desert, and when we heard the guy in the office, David knew. "They've killed Kennedy." And yes, Robert Kennedy had been shot in L.A. just a few hours after Andy was shot and remember Martin Luther King had been shot the month before and we were really like - I mean, it was paranoia all through the desert. And when we got to San Diego, Blaise was sick.

The school [University of California at San Diego] had rented us a charming place with two orange trees in the garden covered with gorgeous oranges because we arrived in June. I mean, I was just picking oranges and squeezing juice for our little boy all day, while David went to buy a refrigerator.

In those days when you rented a place, you had to buy your own refrigerator. He came back shaking. In the store there were personal snapshots of Hitler smiling in parades and the store was selling them like they were shots of a July 4th parade or something. And David said these two old guys were talking to the owner of the store and they kept saying it served him right. It served him right. He deserved it. Obviously they were talking about Kennedy being shot. And when we drove into town, we saw lots of "Race rental" signs all over the place. This was Solana Beach, race rentals, oh, my God. We kept saying, "What are we doing here?" This is horrifying. We were so scared. David was like weirded out all together and I was in total paranoia. We found out later that race rentals meant rooms for rent for the racetrack crowd. The racetrack is in the next town, Del Mar. In the season, you can rent a tacky room for \$2000 a week. [Laughs.]

And yes, there were some Nazis around, though not so many, they were dying out and we fell in love with California, with Southern California anyway. I'm not really in love with Northern California. It's very beautiful, Northern California, but San Francisco has always been a very provincial town. They're very closed and self protective. I've done a number of things there and I always feel like an outsider, which isn't usual for me. Everybody considers me an L.A. artist by now, even though I live in San Diego. So I never feel like an outsider in L.A. I never feel that way anywhere I go because I make friends easily. But in San Francisco, even though I have friends like Lynn Hershman there, and now Moira Roth and Betty Sue Hertz, the place still feels provincial, a closed-in kind of town and I think their art scene is that way also, with one or two exceptions.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you got here, did you immediately find a studio or decide you could work in your apartment?

MS. ANTIN: Well, no, but you see we'd never lived in a house before. [Laughs.] it was an old California bungalow. It was just spread out. And I wasn't painting, I was a conceptual artist. Frankly, all I needed was a desk and a phone and a typewriter in those days. Then we moved a year later into this big house, even bigger, on the cliff over the water and I was doing *100 Boots* [1971-73] and my big Movie Boxes. I was not a painter anymore. I wasn't a studio artist.

MS. RICHARDS: How did the *100 Boots* project start?

MS. ANTIN: Well, the first thing I did when I came out here was make portraits of people out of brand new consumer goods because I discovered the Sears catalog. All these catalogs that I had never heard of - you know, in New York, you take the subway, go to Macy's and buy something. So it was like, what, you could buy a life? so I looked through these catalogs and ordered new consumer goods and arranged configurations of them to make portraits of people. Not realistic portraits, metaphorical ones. The first show of these I called California Lives and I showed it in what was actually the first alternate space gallery in New York. It was called Gain Ground and I showed there in '69.

MS. RICHARDS: Gain?

MS. ANTIN: Gain, G-A-I-N, Ground, G-R-O-U-N-D. Actually it was not my first show. I had had my first solo show at Long Island University before we left town, a set of collages and also my blood box though at the opening reception, they asked me to remove the blood box because they thought it was disgusting, which I thought was interesting.

And they were curious collages cut out from art magazines, similar to what Martha Rosler did later with different content. You know, where you cut people and places out of magazines and books and paste them down in all sorts of relations to each other and to the space. Those were done in the mid-'60s sometime.

So Gain Ground was my second one-woman show and then they closed, no money. They had good artists like Vito Acconci. Vito had his first show there at Gain Ground. John Perreault, who's a poet as well as a curator, he had a show there. I didn't see his show because I wasn't in town. Hannah Wilke, who's dead now, who was a poet did a show, an art show, and me and Robert Newman, who also ran the gallery.

My portraits, my consumer goods sculptures were biodegradable in the environment. After the show, the configurations were dispersed and people took home what they wanted, what they could use. Like an exercycle, say, or a bed, an easel, whatever had been part of the sculptures.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were living here and you conceived the project here but you did it there?

MS. ANTIN: I didn't have any connections here yet. I mean gallery connections or even artist connections. I knew New York artists. When Gain ground closed, I did my new consumer goods sculpture show, "Portraits of Eight New York Women," at a room in the Chelsea Hotel. They emptied out their furniture and for a month I put mine in. So people came to the hotel and saw my show. I remember Lawrence Alloway reviewed it in *The Nation*. I knew people in NY but out here I didn't know anyone yet except people from the school.

MS. RICHARDS: That's early important critical attention.

MS. ANTIN; New York was my hometown. I felt that's where I belonged and I felt confident there. I had friends. Sylvia Sleigh, the painter, was married to Alloway and she was my friend. I modeled for her when I was in NY. But though I knocked on doors and tried to get a regular gallery I had no luck. My work looked too weird, I guess.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

MS. ANTIN: But I was tired of traveling into New York to show. I thought I've got to do a piece that can get around the world without me, so I can stay here. I loved old San Diego before the McMansions came in. I lived over the ocean. I didn't even drive in those early days. I hitched. You could hitch in those days. It was before Charles Manson. It was a different world.

Solana Beach and Del Mar, they were little beach towns. Del Mar had a certain cache because movie stars used to go there. Mary Pickford's little pink cottage is still there across from the post office. Solana Beach was just a little sleepy town of kid surfers and older people who were retired.

Enter *100 Boots*. My new hero.

I bought 50 pairs of boots, big men's boots, in the Army-Navy surplus. I think they cost \$200 in those days for all of them. Now they would cost a fortune. It was six cents for a postage stamp, for a first class postcard. In the middle of the piece, it became eight cents. I didn't like that. I was indignant.

But I put together a mailing list. When I had a pretty big one, I started mailing out my *100 Boots* and I didn't have to leave town. All I had to do was shoot them and print them up as postcards. Suddenly they hit all over the place. They were written about all over the country. Like *The Washington Post* did this interesting thing. They'd print a different Boot image on each page. The caption would suggest the reader go on to see the next image on another page. Then the next one and the next one. Then people would write to the paper ask if Eleanor Antin would put them on her mailing list. The paper forwarded the letters to me and I'd add the names to my mailing list.

Some people would say, stop harassing me, go away, I hate you, take me off your mailing list. Some people, when they'd move would let me know their new mailbox, their new address. I would make the changes in my mailing list. Other people wouldn't and when their cards were returned, they were removed. The piece went on for two-and-a-half years. It hit so big.

MS. RICHARDS: How did the different situations evolve in your mind? What was the progression that one - I think there are 51 of these postcards?

MS. ANTIN: There are 51 cards. I didn't want to do 52.

MS. RICHARDS: So there's 51 of these, like a deck of cards.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, minus one. I knew *100 Boots* would end up in a museum some day so they would officially become art. Somehow I thought that the Whitney [Museum of American Art, New York City], would do it.

But it was MoMA that invited me to do a Boots show. I said, well I have another year to go and then we can do it. *100 Boots* was one of their very early Projects shows. Jane Nicol was the curator. She worked with Kynaston, Kynaston McShine.

It was a five week show. We built a crash pad for the boots. You could only see them through a chain locked door so they remained romantic figures. We shot them around the city and showed the New York adventures along with the original postcards. I chose five images from the New York adventure and the museum printed them up as postcards and mailed one each week to my mailing list. Five weeks later, when the show was over, I mailed out the last card *100 Boots go on Vacation*. You see the soles of their feet lying in the back of the van. Finished. The work was completed. I shot that one the same day we did the first one, *100 Boots Facing the Sea*.

The MOMA show was a beautiful show but before it got on the road we had a problem. A big one. I'll tell you this story because I think you'll get a kick out of it. Our problem was [John] Szarkowski who was the legendary curator in charge of photography. He said the piece comes under his rubric, it's photography. So Painting and Sculpture where Kynaston McShine and Jane Nicol were situated, can't show it. But Szarkowski hated the piece. He wont show it. But they have no right to show it either since it's photography. This was a territorial fight, big time.

So Kynaston and Jane went to William Rubin, who was the legendary head of Painting and Sculpture. By the way, he was on my mailing list. They had all been on my mailing list. Bill Rubin said, "It's conceptual art. It belongs to Painting and Sculpture. It's not Szarkowski's. It's ours. Put it up." So that was -

MS. RICHARDS: A blessing from God.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, exactly, he was on our side. So it was a done deal. Then, there was another problem - I got a call two weeks before I was coming into New York. They told me we have a problem. I was initially going to place the boots around the gallery. This was before artists were doing installations. Their presence just standing around would hardly maintain the heroic romanticism they had built up but the museum didn't care about that. They were afraid that somebody would walk out with a boot. Steal them.

I said, "How could they do that? You have so many guards. I mean, they're big. You can't put them in your purse. You can't put them in your pocket. There's no way." They said, "We're sorry but the insurance people are freaking out. But we have a way of solving this. We'll nail them to the floor."

"What? You want to crucify my boots?" That really freaked me out. "Now I'm not doing the show." I had so humanized them by then, you see. They were my children, right? They were my friends. "No, you can't do that to them. It would feel like you're crucifying Jesus." Which was a pretty weird response from a nice Jewish girl but I wasn't kidding.

So they said, "All right, Eleanor, you think of a way to solve the problem. We can't." And that's when I thought of the room, the crash pad, the country music playing, the mattresses around, the beer, whatever, all imperfectly seen, partially seen, through the crack in the chain locked door. In those

days, everybody in New York had chain locks. Why not the Boots?

[END CD 3.]

MS. ANTIN: They built it very fast. Those were the days when New York was coming down, everything was under construction and they used to protect construction sites by surrounding them with the apartment doors that had been in the original torn down buildings. So we stole one of these doors from a site, me and the guys who work in the museum, and used it for the crash pad. The installation turned out so much better than it would have in the original plan and you know, it was desperation that gave birth to the idea.

Afterwards, Hal Glicksman who was working as curator at the -

MS. RICHARDS: What was his name?

MS. ANTIN: Hal Glicksman. G-L-I-C-K-S-M-A-N. He's left the art world, now. But he had been a hot curator in L.A. The art world was New York centric and by this time, I really felt like a Californian, even my galleries were always in New York.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you represented by a gallery in the early '70s?

MS. ANTIN: Yes, there was a gallery in the Valley up in LA. Orlando, the Orlando Gallery, and I did a show with them shortly after the Museum of Modern Art show closed. It was when Marcia Tucker was the head curator at the Whitney and she asked me to do a piece for the sculpture Biennial. In those days one year they did sculpture and the next, painting. That's how old-fashioned everybody was. I was already way beyond them and I think California was beyond them, or at least a number of us Californians were.

And the woman who - oh, this was so funny. I'll tell you this whole story. The woman who eventually started - what was it again, wait a minute. Metro Pictures, I think.

MS. RICHARDS: Who worked for Marcia Tucker?

MS. ANTIN: Who worked for Marcia Tucker. I guess as assistant curator.

MS. RICHARDS: Helene Winer, or -

MS. ANTIN: Yes, Helene Winer. Did she run Metro Pictures?

MS. RICHARDS: She does.

MS. ANTIN: Then that's her. I remember she asked me what I would give them for the sculpture Biennial. I knew they were asking me to do a *100 Boots* piece. Hadn't it already been okayed by MoMA? So they assumed I'd do *100 Boots*.

But the piece was over. I started telling you before that Hal Glicksman who was curator at the Corcoran [Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.] by then, wanted me to bring them to Washington. I made a whole plan. It was going to be a very amusing show. The March on Washington.

Washington is built in concentric circles. There would be a big battle map set up at the Corcoran. It would tell you where they would be every day. I'd shoot a picture on each planned street and then they'd finally go round and round and get to the Capitol to protest. That's where everybody used to

march to protest against the war [Vietnam War].

Good idea, but I decided not to do it because the piece really was over. I didn't want to be Christo and Jeanne-Claude who cover everything up. They're wonderful, very interesting artists but I was not about to do that. I have a low boredom threshold. So that summer, I just went back to myself and did *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* [1972] for the Whitney. They asked me to do a sculpture, so I did *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*.

MS. RICHARDS: Carving wood?

MS. ANTIN: No, it's symbolically carving flesh -

MS. RICHARDS: Oh I know the piece.

MS. ANTIN: It's the one with the 144 photographs. I went on a diet and every day photographed myself naked, you know, front, back, two profiles. The images are hung on the wall in four rows, each day vertically, and by reading each row horizontally you see how I'm slowly carving down as I lose weight. It's sort of [Eadweard] Muybridge like, like a slow motion film. It's similar to the traditional Greek way of carving around the marble. It's very funny. I quote Michelangelo in the scenario, saying there is nothing in the marble that isn't already there. You discover what's in it by carving it. It's from one of his sonnets. He was a poet too, you know. A good one.

MS. RICHARDS: It was in the "WACK!" ["Art and the Feminist Revolution." 2007] show?

MS. ANTIN: Yes. Wait, I'll tell you, this gets even funnier. So I told the Whitney, "This is what I have for you, a traditional sculpture for a sculpture show." But they said, "Oh no, this won't do, this is not sculpture. It's conceptual art." This is where the art world was at that time. They were so slow. I mean, these are smart people, but far behind us Californians.

So I showed *CARVING* first at the Orlando Gallery along with *The King* videotape [1972] and my "Domestic Peace" [exhibition of drawings, 1971], which was also in the original "WACK!" show though I don't think it came to New York for some reason. I don't know what happened. It got lost along the way. Anyway. I called that show "Traditional Art."

But anyway, when the Whitney was doing its 2000 show - we're skipping about 28 or so years here - which was going to chronicle the art of the past century, the 1900s, the 20th century, they asked for *CARVING* and I cracked up, it was so funny. So ironical.

I spoke on the phone with the curator who had called to ask me for it and I said, you know, this is really funny because back in 1972 I did this piece for the Whitney and they turned it down because they said it wasn't sculpture and now you want it as a major piece of the 20th century? [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. ANTIN: He was laughing, too. I said, "It's owned by the Art Institute of Chicago. You can ask them for the loan but they are very unfriendly. They lent it to LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art] for my retrospective but they wouldn't send it to Europe when the show traveled to the UK. They're very unfriendly. You ask them if they'll send it to you. I bet they won't." I was right. They wouldn't even lend it to the Whitney. They're very possessive. Like a Jewish mother. But according to my contract with them, I was entitled to make an exhibition set.

MS. RICHARDS: An exhibition print.

MS. ANTIN: I never did because it's expensive and so I said to the Whitney curator, you pay for it, I need an exhibition set, anyway.

MS. RICHARDS: You said this to the Whitney?

MS. ANTIN: To the Whitney. I said you want it, you have to pay for it. You know, Judith, these were different people. It was about 25 years later. But I hold a mean grudge. Anyway, the Whitney curator said, "Fine." I knew he would. So they paid me thousands of dollars, and I got an exhibition set. Sometimes there's justice in the world.

MS. RICHARDS: They made a set from the piece in Chicago?

MS. ANTIN: No, no I have the negatives. It was done from the negatives. It was a beautiful piece. Printed in the dark room like the original.

Okay, now where are we?

MS. RICHARDS: You talked about Solana Beach. You're doing the personas.

MS. ANTIN: I did *The King*. So I'm doing the personas. Okay, I started - I did a number of works that were -

MS. RICHARDS: In '74, '75.

MS. ANTIN: *The King*. I was a very active feminist by then and I was wondering what kind of a man would I be if I were a man. I didn't want to be a man but, you know, like how would I be if I were.

So I thought, "What do I need to turn into a man?" Well, not much I could do with a cock, right? But they also have hair on their face, which we don't have. So I did the beard videotape and on the tape I find out what sort of man I would be. I trim the beard and go through different types of characters until I find the perfect beard for my small face and it turns out that I look like the [Anthony] Van Dyke portrait of Charlie 1, [*Charles I*, 1635]. I start studying Charlie I, the only Brit king to have his head chopped off. He was impossible. Even [Oliver] Cromwell didn't want to chop off his head. Regicide was very sinful in those days but he was such a nudnik. I mean, he was a hopeless romantic, and very authoritarian, and secretly very attracted to Catholicism in a fiercely Protestant country.

And so I realized he's like me. He's my political self. An anachronism. I never voted for anyone who got elected. Well, [President Barack] Obama did though in the primary's I did vote for [Hillary] Clinton. I was way to the left of the country. I despised [President Ronald] Reagan and both Bushes, though the last one was the most poisonous. I was a political outsider and so was Charlie 1. An absolute monarchist in a revolutionary time.

So I discovered that he was my political self and I was a deposed king, politically helpless like him. A king needs a kingdom so I went out into the streets of Solana Beach to meet my people. And I began doing street performances.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were doing that, you had also started videotaping.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, I videotaped the -

MS. RICHARDS: Right after the *100 Boots*?

MS. ANTIN: The first pieces that I did after *100 Boots* were *CARVING* and *Domestic Peace*, then *The King of Solana Beach* was '74 and '75.

MS. RICHARDS: And that was a video?

MS. ANTIN: The video was earlier, the transformation into the king, how I turned into the king because that's the kind of face I have. After the live performances, I began doing theatrical performances before audiences, that was *The Battle of the Bluffs*. The story was that I led the very old people with their shuffleboard sticks, they were my infantry and the very young people on their skateboards, they were my cavalry, and I led them against the developers. The developers were destroying my small sleepy beach town of Solana Beach. It was changing into a land of condos and McMansions. Southern California was changing all around me and in my theatrical performances, we, the people, were fighting the bad guys idea of progress, and hey, we almost won. But we were betrayed and at the end I go around and pass a cup around to raise money for a new army.

This was a theatrical performance. I did the photographs in '74, '75 in the streets, they were live performances, improvisations in the world. The theatrical performances began a little later. I performed *The Battle of the Bluffs* on the opening night at the Venice Biennale, in the Pink Biennale as they called it, in '76.

I realized I needed some translation. So part of it was written so that I could have a courtier translator though when the big battle erupted I would always improv. You didn't have to translate that part. It was clear as day. I was yelling and smashing those developers and their sheriff's men with my stick. No translation needed.

So that's how I started writing my theatrical performances and I got back to writing. My videotapes were done for videotapes, as my movies were done for movies. I did not tape my live performances - the only one that was ever put on tape was *The Angel of Mercy*. It was originally performed live in '76 and '77 and then it was in 1982 or '83 when I redid the whole show for the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art that I put the performance on tape. I'm glad I did, too. But the others are not on tape. They've never been on tape. My tapes were created for tape. They are art works on their own.

So while this was going on I wondered who could be my most wonderful female self. the first published works I have of the *Recollections of My Life with Diaghilev* were in '73. My female self became the ballerina. She was my artist self . I studied in front of a mirror with a book to learn the grand Russian method of classical ballet.

MS. RICHARDS: When you began that project, did you know -

MS. ANTIN: They were all about the same time.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you know what forms it would take, that it would be a video, that it would be a -

[Cross talk.]

MS. ANTIN: No, in the first video, *Caught in the Act* [1973], I recorded the difference between the moving camera and the still camera. I recorded the photography session, which would freeze me into these beautiful correct poses, but I had to do that by holding on to a character named Help. He had a broomstick and I held on, while Phel, the photographer, snapped the picture because standing on point was beyond me and I was very good standing still.

Yeah, I don't look like the Balanchine ballerinas, the way they look now, but they didn't look that way in the Russian days either. They were smaller. They were more muscular, squatter, you know. So in this video, you see the difference between the moving pictures and the still pictures and they're both true because for one fraction of a second, I was perfect before I collapsed into continuous reality.

Then I guess I did *Black is Beautiful* [1974] because suddenly black people were appearing all over, on television and they were beautiful with big afros. And I don't even know how I got to it. I mean, it's a long time ago but my fourth self became black, a black movie star. I was so into grandeur. Why have a deprived fantasy?

That particular video didn't work out because it was so art world typical, a one move thing, too simple for me. My work had more levels and this was like a single joke in which I think I started off white reading *Ebony* magazine, then I painted part of my face dark and I'm reading something that's a little more white than that and at the end I'm black and I'm reading the *Wall Street Journal*, I think it's the *Wall Street Journal*. It does have political implications and it was funny but it was too klutzy for me.

So I threw that piece away. Actually I did one show of it at UC-Irvine [University of California, Irvine] where I was teaching at that time. Looking at the tape and the photos on the wall, I realized where I'd made my mistake. A black movie star is like all movie stars. They play roles. But if you're a black movie star then you have a dark skin, whatever role you're playing. So I thought, "That's it, my black movie star will play all of my other roles and they will turn black." And that's when Eleanora Antinova, the Black Ballerina of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes was born. By the way, I'm not very black at all because with my light blue eyes and particular features, I just turned a little dark. African Americans are all different shades of dark as anglos are all different shades of white.

That's when all the recollections and the stories and ballet performances happened, when Antinova turned black. Suddenly I was in the middle of the Diaghilev ballet racism though they themselves were victims of racism. All of Europe adored them but they didn't want Russian classical ballet. They wanted Scheherazade. They wanted Cossacks. Exotic ballets. They wanted Primitivism.

And Diaghilev was trying all the time to show the classical ballets he loved, and when I appear in the saga as the American black ballerina, I imagined they would have wanted me to play Pocahontas and other exotic roles - like the daughter of Pharaoh who finds baby Moses in the rushes. But, like all ballerinas, I would want to do the great classics, what they call the white ballets - Giselle, Sylphides.

When The King turned black he became the gypsy king. I did one piece with that, my one big failure. I did it in 1983 in New York. It was actually an interesting show and an interesting performance but I had troubles with it that were technological and it just didn't work. People attacked me for it. It was *El Desdichado*, which means the unlucky one in Spanish. So I guess it was perfectly named.

MS. RICHARDS: What about the role of humor? It's in your work from very early, in *100 Boots*, everything that you talked about since.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, yes I'll get to that but I should say if we're talking about my personas, that I also was a Nurse.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, oh, of course.

MS. ANTIN: And then the Nurse would also have turned black but I stopped doing Nurse pieces by then. I already did two Nurses, the little Nurse Eleanor with the paper dolls was like out of tacky romances, soap operas, more in line with Richard Prince's nurses later on. When she turned black she was going to be a dugout nurse - I'm a big baseball fan, -and she was going to become the manager of the Padres baseball team. I wish I had done it. Made paper dolls of the team, real players. But I was onto other things. So the nurse never did get to turn black.

And then there is the grand Nurse, Eleanor Nightingale, who deals with issues of life and death and war and service. That was *The Angel of Mercy* [1977].

OK, comedy, humor. Well, remember I told you about those paintings, the valentines with the envelope that wouldn't fit? Then the comic irony of the *Blood of a Poet Box* and *CARVING*? and at the same time I deal with tragic issues and I think there is an aspect of me that comes out of the Yiddish theater tradition. this melodramatic tradition in which the world is like a black joke. It's the way I was brought up.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you call it Jewish humor in some way?

MS. ANTIN: I guess it is, though Jewish humor is known for a kind of lowdown vulgarity, which can be part of it, but I've never been that way. That wasn't my mother's theatre either. With me the world is a basic existential black joke, the hole at the center of the world. It's a more existential vision, not that the Jewish humor, even the popular kind, isn't existential. It is, but what interests me is the pathos of knowing that as a human being you're in a no-win situation. That's the tragic-comic aspect to my work.

So some works partake more of one side of that traditional Jewish humor. Some partake more of the other and some, like my feature film *Man without a World* [1990] and my newer classical Greek and Roman works, partake of both.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. ANTIN: But, I mean, you take even something like *CARVING* which is a more classical conceptual piece in some ways, it's obviously comic and at the same time, as Michelangelo said, you can only get out of the marble what's there. Like I'm not going to look like a model, no matter what I do. Do I want to look like a model? It might be fun but you know it doesn't bother me. My body is what it is.

MS. RICHARDS: So do you want to talk about the beginning of - the merging, the overlapping of the performances and the videos and the photography and the whole - how you established this kind of practice where you were working in all of these areas at once and that was - obviously you weren't the only one - but you were a pioneer in that regard.

MS. ANTIN: Like video was just starting, performance was just starting. The move of artists towards doing conceptual work with photography was starting. Yeah, well -

MS. RICHARDS: And you have this one moment at least of a museum not being able to put you in the right place. They were expecting sculpture and you were doing conceptual.

MS. ANTIN: Oh that's not one moment, my dear. There were many moments like that. The art world likes to put you in a single place. They can deal with you more easily. It's easy for them to say yes, conceptual artist. That's easy. They've accepted it now though they didn't at first because of my theatricality, my narrativity, and also perhaps my feminism.

They could place me as an early feminist. They can place me as a conceptualist. They can place me as a feminist conceptualist. They can place me as an artist doing photography.

But there are places where they have difficulty placing me even though I belong there because they have limited ideas. Like we started talking about the recent Pictures show. We won't even talk about the New York centrality of that show. Actually I was the teacher of a number of people who were in it. But when they say picture, they have no idea of a rich complex image pulsating with levels of meaning.

Half of those artists don't know how to make a complex image. They're not interested in doing it. They're essentially interested in the images that come from the media, you know, Pop images. Images that were born deprived.

MS. RICHARDS: Right, right, that's -

MS. ANTIN: Pictures is not the word to use for them. Though they're good artists, many of them. Metro Pictures called themselves Metro Pictures but they were social climbing

MS. RICHARDS: In the '70s, just still in the '70s for a moment, there were - your work was very widely shown. You mentioned Venice.

MS. ANTIN: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Let me see.

MS. ANTIN: I had the opening night performance.

MS. RICHARDS: There were -

MS. ANTIN: They also asked me to be -

MS. RICHARDS: There was a show in Sao Paolo.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, that was early. That was the first international video show.

MS. RICHARDS: There were a lot of exhibitions and did you feel at that moment that you were getting an important level of recognition?

MS. ANTIN: No, I felt like a failure. Not a failure, because I liked what I did, not a failure as an artist. But I felt that I was imperfectly recognized. I thought that I was really doing very important work. Of larger significance than they realized. I still do.

I'm sorry to sound like this. I thought that I was doing very significant work. But when it was written about, its real complexities were not discussed. They were addressed in much simpler terms- that was the fault of the art world, I guess. It's discourse is really simple minded.

Subsequently I have sometimes been discussed much more intelligently but in those days -

MS. RICHARDS: In the '70s.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, but in the '70s I think that maybe everything I did was so new, people couldn't really deal with it. And then when people accepted some of the new ideas that were fermenting at the time, they made everything more simplistic. They made me simpler than I am. Shit, I never fit in

neatly with anybody. I know that. But at the same time I did have one foot here, one foot there. I was not an easy artist. I understand that. There's nothing I can do about it. Even now.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you want to talk about the films at this point?

MS. ANTIN: *The Man Without a World* [1992], *The Last Night of Rasputin* [1989]?

MS. RICHARDS: Can you distinguish why you would do a performance for one project and a video for a different project and not vice versa?

MS. ANTIN: My entire art life has been devoted to the fluidity of genre. I've always been a mixed media artist.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, there is a performance as *The Ballerina Goes to the Big Apple* and Eleanor

[Cross talk.]

MS. ANTIN: Yes, that was both a live performance and a video.

MS. RICHARDS: And then there were single track videos, *The Ballerina and the Bum*, *The Little Match Girl Ballet*.

MS. ANTIN: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: So what made you do one as a performance and one as a video and maybe I'm mistaken. Maybe they both existed in unison.

MS. ANTIN: At the Clocktower [New York City] when I did *The Adventures of a Nurse* [1976] - the video was embedded in an installation with the paper dolls who acted in the video. I did three performances in that space, one as the king, one as the ballerina, one as the nurse. They were improvs. I don't think they were very good performances. That was '75. I was not at my best improving.

At the Venice Biennale I started writing texts for my performances. I'm a good writer, I enjoy writing and as a writer I could get everything in. When I improv, I forget things so the performances are flatter, they miss different levels of meaning.

David is a fabulous improviser. But David is playing himself. He, David Antin, is improvising. I am playing other characters. I did one improv as myself at the woman's building, called "Eleanor 1954" and that was not uninteresting as an autobiographical, a confessional, performance but verbally, not so swift.

I was so interested in writing plays that back in the later '80s, I was working in the theater. I was performing plays, writing plays. There's a book published by Sun & Moon Press of the Antinova plays. Most of the time, I was acting all the characters but one was a two actor play, me and another actress. I remember that one had a run of three weeks here in a San Diego theatre. Then in San Francisco, we had a week's run. We performed at a major theater convention. Interesting play, certainly not conventional theatre. *Who Cares About a Ballerina*.

I'll confess something to you. I was trying to get away from the art world. I was always trying to get away. As I said earlier, when I was a kid, I didn't know what kind of artist I was. I knew I was an artist, I

just didn't know if I was an actor, I didn't know if I was a writer, I didn't even know if I was a painter. I was fortunate that I grew up as an artist in a time when all the barriers were falling down. It was a time of invention and discovery. I was lucky. Though I think I probably would have been a good painter. Glad I wasn't though. I still draw, you know. I like to draw.

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to - next time I wanted to ask you about the drawings you've done.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. ANTIN: Okay, we're finished? I'm tired. This is tiring. Too much to remember all at once.

MS. RICHARDS: I think this is a -

[END CD 4.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Eleanor Antin in Del Mar, California, May 9, 2009, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian, disc one.

So let's begin with talking about the work you did in the late '70s, early '80s and we could start talking about *Before the Revolution*, which was in 1979, that performance and exhibition and how that work came to be, what led up to it.

MS. ANTIN: Okay -

MS. RICHARDS: Maybe there's something we didn't cover we should have covered before we got to that. [Laughs.]

MS. ANTIN: Well, that performance, that exhibition was part of my ballerina oeuvre, Eleanora Antinova, the Black Ballerina of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, my most complex character invention. I fell in love with her. She's my artist self and so meant the most to me. She became the most complex and multilayered of all my roles with a large body of work in various mediums. Film, video, live performance, writing, drawing.

I had done these photographs of Antinova's Great Roles with descriptions of her ballets in '77, '78, and supposedly Antinova had choreographed and designed the costumes and sets and I drew all of those. She had five great roles. One was in *Before the Revolution*, in which, though I was a black ballerina, I danced the great white queen, Marie Antoinette.

I love this performance because I'm Eleanor Antin in the role of Eleanora Antinova in the role of Marie Antoinette in the role of a shepherdess. So it's a hall of mirrors. I wrote a complex play using life-scale masonite figures as the actors. They were on bases with little wheels so I could move them around. I believe there were five actors.

One was [Vaslav] Nijinsky. One was Diaghilev. One was [Lubov] Tchernicheva, one of the great ballerinas, one was Antinova, one was Stravinsky. But they doubled so when I used gold clothespins to pin the cardboard costume of a French 18th century King on the cut-out of Diaghilev, he became Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette's husband.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you want to - I want to ask you about how those were constructed and some of the issues of how it actually got physically made. Do you want to talk about that here?

MS. ANTIN: Oh, I painted those.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have assistants working with you?

MS. ANTIN: I had assistants when I did *Angel of Mercy* because I needed 42 actors. Forty-two painted masonite figures. Lots of soldiers. I would have died of boredom painting so many. So for that one, I had an atelier. First I took polaroids of my friends in costume. I put them in the positions I wanted them in, you know casual positions, in Victorian dress and uniforms. Then the mice in my atelier painted them from blown up slides.

MS. RICHARDS: You made these uniforms?

MS. ANTIN: No, no, the uniforms were from a costume shop in San Diego which was run by a Civil War aficionado. Every year this guy and his cohorts would reenact the Civil War. He actually was a cockney from Britain. But he was passionate about the American Civil War and here I was doing the Brit Crimean War and since there was only about seven or eight years between them, I just used his Civil War uniforms. I set up 63 or 64 images to be shot and printed in a 19th century photographic style. The Crimean War which preceded our Civil War was actually the first war to be photographed. By Roger Fenton.

MS. RICHARDS: And you had someone else take these photographs?

MS. ANTIN: I set each one up from drawings I made and then yes, I had my cameraman take the photos. You can't direct so many people and be a cameraman too. Especially when you're the main actor in them. Did [Alfred] Hitchcock shoot his own pictures? Do you know how many cameramen Mathew Brady used to shoot the Civil War?

MS. RICHARDS: And this was the live performance at the Ron Feldman Gallery?

MS. ANTIN: No, these were the still photographs section of the show. In the live performance, I played everybody. Besides, I wasn't at Ron's yet.

MS. RICHARDS: *Before the Revolution* we're talking? We're talking about *Angel of Mercy*, sorry.

MS. ANTIN: No, this is *Angel of Mercy*. How the hell did we get back to *Angel of Mercy*? My gallery was the M.L.D'Arc Gallery then. On 57th St. A conceptual art gallery, believe it or not. Anna Canepa was the director. She had been one of the first video distributors.

MS. RICHARDS: Can you spell her last name?

MS. ANTIN: C-A-N-E-P-A. All the early video conceptualists were at some point with her and she was moving stuff around the world. It was very new to show video in galleries and museums.

Mary Lea D'Arc was a very wealthy woman- a great heiress - I think the family made laundry detergent or something. Jesus. You could get rich on corn flakes, why not soap? I guess Anna talked her into having a gallery.-

I liked Mary Lea. A lonely, shy, nervous woman. She looked lost in the art world. We were all on stipends. That was cool. There was me, Allan Kaprow, Roger Welch, Dennis Oppenheim, shit, who else -

MS. RICHARDS: How Dennis Oppenheim? Was he out here?

MS. ANTIN: Dennis? No, no this is in New York on 57th Street. We were a bunch of hip conceptualists and the show I did for her was *Angel of Mercy* which got me enormous critical success, I think partly because the critic in the *New York Times* was Russell, I don't know if you remember him.

MS. RICHARDS: John Russell?

MS. ANTIN: Yes, and John Russell was a Brit and I'm doing the Crimean War, right? And Victorian photographs. He was freaking out with pleasure and he wrote a very intelligent article about it in the Times. In fact, Mary Lea was ready to close the gallery because she had a new boyfriend who wanted to become a Broadway producer so she was closing up but because of Russell's rave, she kept the show open for about another two weeks.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you meet her in the first place?

MS. ANTIN: Through Anna. Anna met her, Anna Canepa convinced her to have a conceptual art gallery.

MS. RICHARDS: And Anna lived here or there.

MS. ANTIN: No, Anna's there in New York. This is all in New York. I told you, I'm living here but my connections are basically still New York. I still was showing in New York.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

MS. ANTIN: Remember, I had been doing the small paper dolls with Little Nurse Eleanor and now I had graduated to these life scale masonite characters whom I was speaking for in the performances and that was quite difficult because I'm a good actor but I'm not good at dialects. And I had to talk for Scotsmen, Irishmen, cockneys, high class Brits. I was studying all these different dialects and I didn't always make it very well.

I remember there was a horrible snowstorm the night that the show opened. I didn't believe anybody would come, but it was packed. It was a really good audience. They seemed to go with it and remember, my performances were not like other artist's performances. I was giving them home made theatre. Avant-garde theater without the late modernist abstraction and in a gallery setting. I'm going around talking for all these characters and they're standing there like masks because they're painted. They only have one expression. The one that's painted on them. And it's a very dramatic story with me defending the soldiers against the upper classes, officers stealing medicine and supplies, an insurrection leading to an execution on stage.

Okay, anyway so it was a few years later, I think about two, when I did -

MS. RICHARDS: *Before the Revolution*.

MS. ANTIN: *Before the Revolution*. With ballerinas and Diaghilev and Nijinsky. These are people I love, right? They're not anonymous soldiers to me. So I wanted to paint these puppets myself. Then performed for them in a kind of Rococo political fantasy.

I played everybody, of course. I'd stand behind the puppets and act them while also talking to them as Antinova. We were all actors together. You'd see my face and the puppet's non changing, painted faces. Even when we're arguing, their faces never change. It must have been eerie. Like Kabuki theatre. I never saw it from the audience, of course. It's never been taped. When it was at

the Kitchen [Center for New Music and Video] in New York, Merce Cunningham and [John] Cage and Tudor, the pianist, were there.

MS. RICHARDS: David Tudor.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, they were in the audience. Peter Frank was sitting in front of them and he told me that every time I talked about performance as a seduction of the audience, Merce would get very upset. Peter said he mumbled, no, no, its not like that. So I always thought they hated it. They never talked to me after. I mean, I didn't really know those people. But I subsequently found out years later from John Cage when I met him at a party. I introduced myself because I thought he didn't know me. So he says, "Oh yes, I remember you from that wonderful performance at The Kitchen."

So I said, "Oh, somebody told me you guys didn't like it." Then he says, "Oh no, we thought it was great." Of course, Merce had not been disagreeing with me, the artist. He was disagreeing with the character I was playing. That was nice. I wish I had known how they felt then, but people don't always tell you when they like something. They're quicker to tell you when they don't. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. ANTIN: But anyway, that was *Before the Revolution*. I would love to actually do that work directing real actors now. I would love to have actors play my puppets.

MS. RICHARDS: So if you wanted to pursue that idea, how would you balance it in terms of a priority with the new work that you're doing?

MS. ANTIN: Well [laughs], you know Judith, my favorite comic strip character was always Wonder Woman.

MS. RICHARDS: How did *Before the Revolution* then flow into *Recollections of My Life with Diaghilev* [*Recollections of My Life with Diaghilev, 1919-1929*]? *Before the Revolution*, happened at Ron Feldman?

MS. ANTIN: Not the performance. That was at the Kitchen. I needed a big space.

MS. RICHARDS: Your exhibition was at Ron Feldman.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, simultaneously and that was the costume drawings and set drawings, the puppet actors, whatever.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah.

MS. ANTIN: And then someone accused me of - I think it was John Russell - he said that whereas the photographs that I had done for *Angel of Mercy* had been so magnificent, these drawings weren't like Bakst or Benois or Goncharova or Picasso, the great designers who worked for Diaghilev. They were charming perhaps, but mediocre. He was right, of course. It was a deliberate decision. It was a stupid decision.

You see I was inserting Antinova into Ballet Russe history, where a black ballerina had never been. The Russian dancers had been the purveyors of modernism on a popular level around the world. If I was inserting her, it didn't seem plausible, since she had been forgotten, to make her designs too good. I thought they had to be pretty and they had to be charming but they shouldn't be too great or they wouldn't have been able to kick her out of history so easily. It was a decision made on

psychological, realistic grounds and it was a stupid one.

For whatever reason, you should never opt for doing something less good than you can. And I really could have had fun with those costumes and sets. But I was on a realist kick, so I did the drawings I thought she might have done, had she been real. Kind of little Rococo costumes which were extremely charming and the drawings were charming. But it was not - you know, it was not wildly, extravagantly original in a modernist style. I don't know what I would have come up with had I let myself go. But I should have tried.

MS. RICHARDS: And this was the exhibition of *Recollections of My Life*?

MS. ANTIN: No, the earlier piece, the gallery portion of *Before the Revolution*. That was about two years earlier than *Recollections*. Regardless of the gallery show, the performance at the Kitchen itself was really interesting. Nijinsky puts on his costume and becomes a soldier of the revolution and the whole thing gets mixed up with the French Revolution and the Russian Revolution and Nijinsky, who was crazy anyway, then makes this mad political speech in which the Russians and the French and everything are all mixed up and it ends up with the violence of the Revolution killing itself and everybody else. There's also a lot of talk about modernism and progress and, of course, issues of racism. It was very political and I think existentially interesting and quite beautiful and so did a lot of other people apparently.

Meanwhile I was still writing my Antinova memoirs and in fact they were getting published in literary magazines. All chapters from *Recollections of My Life with Diaghilev*. Now when I did the show *Recollections of My Life with Diaghilev*, I didn't hold back on the drawings, texts, photographs. I'm proud of that show, still. I think I did it in '80 or '81.

MS. RICHARDS: Eighty-one.

MS. ANTIN: Yeah, most of the works had been done already in the '70s. I just pulled them together for a single show along with an intimate performance of me coming out as Antinova, now retired, old, and I read from my memoirs to a small gallery audience while I'm drinking sherry and getting tipsier and tipsier. At the end, I try to sell signed eight by 10 pictures of myself for \$15, \$20 whatever I could get.

In the gallery publicity for the show, my name wasn't mentioned as the artist. The show was announced as "Recollections of My Life with Diaghilev" by Eleanora Antinova. People came to see the ballerina's recollections and memoirs and whatever and to see the performance. I did four performances a week and the show was up for a month while I was actually living as Antinova. I was living as the dark lady for the length of the show. I was indeed Eleanora Antinova. So I was wearing heels, long nails. Ballerinas have long nails to extend the graceful length of their hands. Normally, I never wear anything but jeans. But I was wearing skirts and a leotard top and I was sort of a little dark. One friend insisted, I remember Carrie Rickey insisted, I just looked tan. I darkened myself to look plausible with my light eyes, I wasn't doing blackface. Again, I was doing reality. But this time it made sense.

There's a book I wrote - *Being Antinova* - which is the journal I kept during those 30 days that I lived as a dark lady. Interesting experiences really. Alienating in many ways. Like I couldn't get a cab at night. Black men would flirt with me. Black women would give me the look, would look me up and down. There was not much sisterhood, I could tell.

The last day, when the show was coming down, I was myself, Eleanor Antin, again, wearing my

schleppy jeans and sneakers. No black guys flirted with me anymore. They ignored me. I was just some older white woman with too many wrinkles walking around in jeans. I didn't look glamorous and I was enraged at people no longer treating me in the manner to which I had grown accustomed.

Now, I don't normally want to be looked at in the streets, I want privacy. But I got used to the somewhat erotic narcissism of being a glamorous woman. How glamorous? I looked like I was trying to be glamorous. That's part of the game, the long nails, the heels, the tight leotard top. When I look at the pictures, I didn't look so glamorous. But I thought I was glamorous and people responded that way to my confidence, my intentions. My sister took an apartment for me, no furniture, just a mattress to sleep on, on Central Park West because a ballerina should have a noble address and be served by doormen. My stint at being a glamorous, dark ballerina was hilarious and lonesome at the same time.

On the last day, back in my usual white face, I remember this handsome black guy walking by and he's not looking at me. He's thinking of something and I thought to myself, what a lousy racist. By then, I was used to being looked at, not that these men were especially interested in me but they'd look, they'd catch my eye, and I got used to it over 30 days. When I got home to California, I was very weirded out for the first few days. Alienated from reality. My balance was bad.

Then I had a decision to make, whether I wanted to complete *Recollections of My Life with Diaghilev* or write up my journal of the 30 days I lived as Antinova. I had already written several chapters of *Recollections* which were published in a literary journal and was awarded a Pushcart Prize for Short Fiction for the Best of the Small Presses. An agent had already written to me about representing the book. It was about my life with the Russian dancers in Paris and Monte Carlo back in the '20s. It was very funny.

I felt like writing again. I had done so many exhibitions in the last decade, I figured I could take off a year from the art world and write a book. But which one? I had also kept a journal during my life performance living as Antinova. I knew the *Recollections* would get published probably by a major publisher but the Journal was stranger.

MS. RICHARDS: That would just be those 30 days.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, but so many small events each day. So much happened that I would forget if I didn't catch it now, momentary events and feelings. I had kept notes every night. The racist taxi driver. The gay bartender. My friends distress at sitting opposite an Eleanor who wasn't Eleanor. As usual, I chose the book that was not going to give me either fame or fortune because it was artistically more interesting. The *Recollections* were too easy. I had nothing to learn from them. I did *Being Antinova* [Astro Artz Press, Los Angeles, 1983]. An avant-garde book, an avant-garde press. Out of print now. It's kind of -

MS. RICHARDS: Scarce.

MS. ANTIN: There went my chance to say fuck you to the art world. I was always trying to escape. The only trouble was that I enjoyed making art more than anything in the world. So then I did *El Desdichado* [1983].

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. ANTIN: My one big failure. The critic Henry Sayre wrote about that performance in his book *The Object of Performance* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989]. He loved that performance and

he said that the problem was its intense narrativity. It was a medieval fable, an allegory, and my black king, - he was a gypsy king - was leading a crusade of the old, the blind, the maimed, the poor, the despised to the white city, a kind of paradise, a Utopia in a sense. I wear a large ship made out of this packing material, a kind of layered cardboard. Its like a belt around my waist that's filled with medieval characters. A ship of fools really, because in the end, we find our way there to the white city and it turns out to be a city of blood and ashes and death. My dark side obviously.

And in the first performance, the tech broke down, nothing worked. I did it at Feldman and the people were sitting around me on the floor. I walked through them like in a medieval pageant. I moved the scenes to different areas in the crowd, there was no single stage area. It kept shifting.

It was packed and so I was scheduled to do two shows. One at 9:00, I think, and another show at 11:00 or 12:00 for the people who couldn't get in earlier and they were all hanging around at the door. Ron didn't want people sneaking in so he locked the doors. Man, it was hot and sitting on the floor couldn't have been too pleasant, especially for older people. I know Leo Castelli was sitting on the floor, I mean, this performance was the place to be that Saturday night so he was there. You know, the guy was like not the healthiest guy.

MS. RICHARDS: He was late 80s.

MS. ANTIN: Well, I don't know what he would be then but I'm sure his back must have been killing him. So everybody was feeling crushed together.

MS. RICHARDS: And hot.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, and what the fuck am I talking about, this weirdness, you know, and so at one point, I think it was Leo, this agitated man's voice yelled, "What the hell is going on here?" And nobody could get out anyway because you'd have to walk over other people and besides the doors were locked.

But the show I did at midnight, I threw away the mikes, I didn't need them anyway and everything went right. But the important people were at the first show. Tom McEvilly attacked me violently in *Artforum*. But he had a passion for performances where people hang themselves from fish hooks and do violence to themselves. Where the artist is something of a human sacrifice. I always considered him an asshole anyway.

MS. RICHARDS: At the same time, you were doing other performances. There's another one called *Help I'm in Seattle* [1987].

MS. ANTIN: That's one of the Antinova plays.

MS. RICHARDS: And then *Loves of a Ballerina* [1986]?

MS. ANTIN: *Loves of a Ballerina* was an installation with film. That was in '86.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you want to skip to that then?

MS. ANTIN: Sure. It was the first of my filmic installations. Subsequently we put the 16 mm films on video, but my first filmic installation was done with 16-mm projectors and it was a beautiful show but an enormous headache. It was always breaking down.

It was a three-part installation. The exterior of an old movie palace with a large marquee in a snowy

nighttime landscape. You look through the doors and watch my silent films starring Antinova over the heads of these cardboard figures that are perspectively correct so they get smaller and smaller and they look like a real audience against the screen.

And then in another corner of the gallery, there's Antinova's backstage dressing room. On the large mirror of her dressing table there's a back projected film of Antinova looking at herself. She's in life scale, Antinova's face as if she was sitting on the stool in front of the dressing table which is also covered with a screen of snow.

And you think it's a photograph in the mirror at first because she's not moving, just staring sadly out from the mirror as if she were looking into it. But every now and then you see her move a little. She looks sad and kind of magical in a dark room with old costumes and trunks.

The third part of the installation is a life scale railroad car with sleeping compartments, you know, the way they used to have on the Orient Express. And you have to run back and forth over the tracks to see into the two windows. There's one on each side. There's a view of the life scale cabin in each window with a different lover in each one. One is obviously the rich, older lover, he's not sexy, and the other window shows the handsome scoundrel with a big cigar. He's reading the racing forms so you know he must be a ne'er-do-well gambler who's always broke and treats Antinova badly. Whenever she leaves and goes to the other one, the guy's left alone in the compartment. So Antinova is going back and forth between the two compartments, and the people in the gallery are running back and forth to see what's happening in the windows.

And so those were the three sections of the installation. It was magical and romantic, totally theatrical. Most people seemed to like it. But nobody was doing installations. It was like, "Eleanor, don't you know that everybody's painting now, what are you doing?" I mean, they were all painting in New York at that time. So I said, "Well, I'm not interested in painting. I don't care what they're doing. This is what I'm doing." And sure enough, just a few years later, everyone was doing video installations. Remember? But this was my usual story, too early to be considered relevant -

MS. RICHARDS: Was this before [Ilya] Kabakov's installation, his installation work at Feldman, although he didn't use film [*Ten Characters*, April 30 - June 4, 1988].

MS. ANTIN: Well, the one I remember was the apartments. Is that the one? That's a wonderful show. But my show was earlier in 1986.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you feel that your work was influential in that regard?

MS. ANTIN: Judith, I know it's been influential. But, I do what I want to do when I want to do it. Shortly after that I did another one, *Minetta Lane* [*A Ghost Story*, 1995], and that's the one with the little girl you spoke of, the wicked little girl. I do like wicked little girls.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, now that's from '95. But there's a couple of things in between.

MS. ANTIN: Oh, I did my films before then.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, *The Last Night of Rasputin* and *The Man without a World*.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, that was a film with a performance. I did *The Last Night of Rasputin* - okay, John Hanhardt was still at the Whitney and the Whitney was doing their biannual and I think for the first time they were including media and performance, so he invited some artists to do live performances and we would each have two weeks. Was it a week or two weeks? I think it was two weeks.

I would come in every day at 1:00 or 2:00 and do a performance and then they're open one night a week, I think Tuesday night, so then I'd also do a Tuesday night performance. And I did the film and performance *The Last Night of Rasputin*.

It's a 40-minute film as if it was done in 1924 by my new invented persona, Yevgeny Antinov, the Soviet silent film director. First I come out as Antinova, now old and retired. I'm wearing a ratty fox fur boa, kind of like Lillian Gish talking about her old films years later. So I reminisce about what it was like to go to Russia and help make the Revolution and star in Antinov's movies - and I talked about our love affair and how it was - the dreams, the hopes for the new modernism. And then it was fucked up by Stalin and the artists were killed or sent to gulags or banished to the sticks to perform for dumb peasants. Or maybe they committed suicide like Mayakovsky.

And then I sit down in the audience and watch Antinov's movie that was supposedly made when I was young, and the movie's funny and actually pretty. But it's not as elegantly done as the one I did two years later which was the feature film *The Man Without a World*, Antinov's Yiddish silent film. I think it was three years later. No, it was two years later, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Two.

MS. ANTIN: And the way I got money to make that film, *Man Without a World*, is I performed *The Last Night of Rasputin* around the world. I raised a lot of money. I also passed the word around that I was selling a whole bunch of ballerina drawings cheap. I told Ron Feldman I needed money for the film and he wouldn't get a cut. And that was fine with him. He wanted me to make the movie. They were really pretty cheap and one woman came down from LA and bought 15 drawings. She's been very generous with lending them for shows and everything. And then yeah, I got a small grant from school. I think it was \$10,000. I didn't get any grants from any of the Jewish organizations because while everybody was all into ethnicities - roots, everybody was digging for their roots - Hey, I guess I was too -

MS. RICHARDS: This is for *Man Without a World*.

MS. ANTIN: *Man Without a World*, and I also sold my remaining 100 *Boots* card sets cheap. I wish I had them now.

But I couldn't get any big grants, not from Jewish organizations which were giving money to every other ethnicity. Nobody would give it to me. Nobody was interested in Jewish ethnicity. If I was Vietnamese or African, I mean, any other kind but not Jewish, I would probably have gotten grants. But remember this would be a Yiddish silent film supposedly made in 1928. So I made it without those bastards. And it was successful, I was invited to lots of film festivals too, Berlin, London, USA, I got a distributor, Milestone Film & Video, and we had a limited art house release. It still gets around even now. I like to think of it as a minor cult classic.

MS. RICHARDS: When you said it's a Jewish - it's a Yiddish silent film, obviously it wasn't in Yiddish then. It was acted in the form of -

MS. ANTIN: No, it was done as if it was a Yiddish silent film. It was shot in 16mm and looked real, like what it claimed to be. The acting was in that melodramatic style of Yiddish silent cinema. The sets, costumes, makeup, casting, they were perfect. There are English titles because it's supposed to be translated from the original and there's a music soundtrack. Lee Irwin, who actually used to write music and play for the old silent films did the soundtrack. He was very old at the time.

And then I wanted to do the complete oeuvre of Antinov and I wanted to do three more of his films and the fifth one would be like a grade Z sci-fi talkie that he supposedly made in Hollywood in 1951. You can imagine what it would be like. Magnificently bad. But the one I wanted to do next was Mottke Gonif, Mottke the Thief, which is from a Sholem Asch novel.

MS. RICHARDS: Spell that?

MS. ANTIN: M-O-T-T-K-E. Gonif, means thief or gangster. I would call my film *Mottke, the Gangster*. It would be in the tradition of Isaak Babel's Benya Krick stories of Jewish whores and gangsters. I was dreaming of such beautiful scenes for these Jewish whores in Brazil. They had been lured to South America to find rich Jewish husbands. They came from poor little hopeless shtetls in Poland and of course they were just thrown into brothels by the gangsters. They do that now with girls from Asia, Mexico. The world hasn't changed in the important things, I guess.

And my unfortunate girls would be sitting around in the seedy brothel dreaming about being rescued by a rich Jewish prince. They were very young and dreams were all they had left. But, I couldn't get any money and I didn't have any more ballerina drawings left from the '70s.

Even with a successful art film behind me, nobody would give me any money because it was a Jewish story. About unsuccessful Jews, at that. So this is the early '90s, about '92, '93 and then I said, "To hell with you," to all of them, I'm leaving the art world and that's when me and David started working on a crossover film.

We wrote an interesting script called *The Sandwich Man* [1993] and in those days you could still do an independent movie in Hollywood for like \$5 million, even \$4 million, even \$3 million maybe. And so we wrote it together and I was going to direct it and he was going to produce it. Some Hollywood people were interested and they made suggestions for rewrites, so we would rewrite it and then this agent said, "I'd like to handle it but you need another rewrite."

We must have rewritten that script about four times. It got worse with every rewrite. We tried to keep it classy at the same time as it was crossover. But I don't think we're good at crossing.

MS. RICHARDS: Crossover beyond the art world?

MS. ANTIN: Yes, a Hollywood indie. It did have some good scenes but it was a little creepy. Though in an interesting political way and very dramatic.

MS. RICHARDS: You spoke, way, way back about being excited about film in the '50s and the new films coming out. When you started making films yourself, were you thinking about what filmmakers were doing? Were you influenced by the contemporary cinema at the time?

MS. ANTIN: I don't know. I always have a little trouble with "influenced by" because you know things that matter to you, that really make an impression, you internalize them and I'm always inventing stories or characters or whatever because I did it all my life, from when I was playing with little paper dolls at the age of five or six.

I would say of all the filmmakers, [Federico] Fellini was the closest to me and is probably the one I love the best, though I also loved films like *Last Year at Marienbad* [1961] and I don't work anything like that. Its kind of gorgeous decadent late modernism, don't you think? Though I love the way Antonioni paints. He does a scene in a real street and he paints the houses and the sidewalks. But the sensibility that is closest to me is Fellini.

MS. RICHARDS: So you and David were working on this screenplay, screenplays, but you were saying that it couldn't quite become Hollywood enough.

MS. ANTIN: No, we also didn't push it. We couldn't - like it was nauseating. You had to go around to all those people and they treated us politely actually because those were the days when Hollywood was into independent film and the studio system was falling apart for good. And I did have good reviews, really very good ones from *The Man Without a World*.

And we finally looked at each other and said, "We're wasting our time." David went back to his studio. I went back to my studio. [Laughs.] That was after two years of trying to be corrupted, we gave up. We had fun writing together though. We really did. And the script was a rather insane take on homelessness, which was a big problem at the time. Now it is too but they don't care about it anymore.

Then it was new and everybody was talking about it. Our protagonist was a banker, he works in a bank, and he wants to solve the problem of homelessness by having lunch with the homeless people who hang around outside of his bank. And they get to know him and they talk together. Then he branches out to different homeless hang out places on his lunch hour. He brings about 10 sandwiches with him and he eats one and gives out the others so he's called the sandwich man. That was the name of the script, *The Sandwich Man*. He doesn't charge for them and one of the ten is poisoned. He's careful, not the one he's going to eat, he isn't playing Russian Roulette, he's trying to solve an economic problem.

What he wants to do is make these people disappear, like they got rid of the homeless people in New York by making them disappear by putting them in jail, bussing them away, whatever. The country wants them to disappear. They embarrass people. So one homeless person will quietly die and, of course, nobody's going to pay attention. Homeless people die all the time. Nobody even notices though it goes on for several months.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh you mean he keeps poisoning?

MS. ANTIN: Yeah, like once or twice a week. And then he inadvertently poisons the homeless mother of this little girl and then this little orphan is taken care of by another homeless woman who is a very intelligent, you know, really tough woman. Beautiful, of course, I mean this is Hollywood, after all. And it's easier to get a female star for an indie than a male star because there are so few roles for women over 25. And she and the banker have an affair and they move in with him. Though he still goes about solving the economic problem in his own homemade fashion.

Our protagonist loves his new family. Then the girlfriend discovers his terrible secret. She makes a private romantic dinner for them of sandwiches and he realizes something is up and he wears his combat clothes, the camouflage suit he used to wear in the jungles of Vietnam. And they're sitting there in candlelight and she's dressed in a lovely gown and they talk in this sort of veiled way.

But he knows and she knows that he knows that one of the sandwiches is poisoned and she's about to eat hers but he's afraid it's the poisoned one and grabs it and eats it instead. He doesn't know if she's dead or if he is. It ends with him running through the city streets with his machine gun. It's a very dramatic ending and very sad. The way I would direct it, the audience would cry. It would be such a layered image. But it certainly was creepy.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, I'm just going to change the tape. One second.

[END CD 6.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards with Eleanor Antin, May 9, disc two.

So that film never got made unfortunately.

MS. ANTIN: No, it didn't.

MS. RICHARDS: But then you - would it be correct to say then you began working on *Minetta Lane: A Ghost Story*?

MS. ANTIN: Yeah, I love making films. So back to the art world, again. Nobody in Hollywood wanted to corrupt us. *Minetta Lane*, yeah that was the next one. No, I think the Jewish Museum was opening its new building.

MS. RICHARDS: That's where I saw that

MS. ANTIN: No, you saw *Vilna Nights* [1993]. That was another one, which they own now, and *Vilna Nights* was the one with a smashed wall. We smashed their wall and you look over the wall into a night street in the Vilna ghetto with films of the absent people projecting in the windows.

MS. RICHARDS: I saw *Minetta Lane* somewhere else.

MS. ANTIN: *Minetta Lane* was at the Santa Monica Museum but it was also at Ron's. You saw it in New York.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah

MS. ANTIN: *Minetta Lane* is a the street in Greenwich Village off of McDougal. it was part of the old bohemia when I was growing up. I hung around there and -

MS. RICHARDS: That's when you were at CCNY?

MS. ANTIN: I started hanging downtown when I was still in Music and Art. Later, I lived down there and when I was with David we continued to live down there. He had a great place on Cornelia Street. Eighteen bucks a month.

And there's - again, it's a life-scale reproduction of part of the street that you see over an old broken fence. In one window there's an old man feeding his birds. In another window there's two young lovers. He's African-American. She's white and they're naked playing in a tub in the kitchen. We had a shower in our kitchen when we lived on Cornelia Street, that's when they raised our rent to \$25. and then there's another window where a woman - an artist - is painting an abstract expressionist canvas and there's a little girl who appears in the different windows at different times and screws everything up. The lovers quarrel and split, the old man dies, she fucks up the artist's painting. The stories play over and over continuously. Little Miriam, I call the little girl, my private name for her.

MS. RICHARDS: Was she an alter-ego would you say?

MS. ANTIN: Yeah, she's a little girl who causes trouble. I named her Miriam in my mind based on the mysterious little girl in the Truman Capote story from *Other Voices, Other Rooms* [New York: Random House, 1948] which was a favorite book of mine when I was a kid.

Of course, the people on the video don't see her. None of them see her. We see her and she's wearing a little black velvet dress just like the little girls who used to go to see *The Nutcracker* on Christmas. They were all would-be little ballerinas wearing Mary Janes, like my Miriam.

I liked *Minetta Lane* but we didn't rebuild it for my retrospective at LACMA because it had been at the Santa Monica Museum just two years before. That was in the late '90s so I was still making films.

MS. RICHARDS: That brings up a question I wanted to ask. Your relationship with actors, what's your -

MS. ANTIN: I love working with actors.

MS. RICHARDS: - process of casting and how much do you direct their performances and do you always use professional actors or do you purposely -

MS. ANTIN: I use whoever. I typecast down the line and sometimes they're professional actors. Sometimes they're acting students. Sometimes they're models. Sometimes they're artists' models. Sometimes I see someone in the street and I say, whoa, and I go up and I say, I'm an artist, would you like to be a dead Trojan?

MS. RICHARDS: You know, we'll talk about this.

MS. ANTIN: Everybody wants to be a dead Trojan. then I have everyone come to my studio and I interview them. Its like an audition but they don't read from a script.

MS. RICHARDS: This is not - has this process evolved from your early films or do you basically do what you used to do?

MS. ANTIN: You know, one of the earliest works I did when I came to California were my movie boxes. They were like display cases lit by neon. They used to have them at older movie theaters to show people what's playing. Nowadays they just have posters but in the old days they were film stills.

And I would have a word printed in each box. Like TUESDAY or COMING or NOW and that was the name of the movie. So COMING had some collaged photo stills supposedly of a sci-fi movie. TUESDAY was a more ambiguous film, mysterious, I think there was a hanging man in one of the shots. NOW looked very chic Milanese, like an Antonioni film, maybe. My favorite was AND. Two stills on top separated from one below by the word AND. Obviously a double feature.

I wanted my films to be in the New York Film Festival, which was just starting up. I think it was at Lincoln Center. In the papers, they said they wanted to do interesting things so I'm a literalist, I wrote to the director and said, "I'd like to do a film festival for you. You could have it in the lobby when people are milling about to go into the scheduled films."

They wrote me a nice letter but they turned me down. They probably thought I was crazy. That was many, many years ago. Sixty-eight I think, or '69. A few years later, they did "play" on the walls of the Cinematheque during a regular film evening. I wasn't there but I heard they got a big laugh. I have no idea if it was appreciative or derogatory.

But even back then, I thought there was so much that you could pack, narratively, characterologically, psychologically, politically, into a single image using actors that it was - you

know, I guess it's like old painting, except in the old days they shared the same myths. I mean, they all had the Bible. They shared the same cultures, like religious culture. Nowadays, in my ancient Greek and Roman photographs, who knows what people can understand. Look at that print. That's *The Judgment of Paris* based on a [Peter Paul] Rubens, okay, and there's Paris and Hermes.

They're actually two surfers wearing exactly the same clothes and in the same position as Paris and Hermes are in the Rubens. And those are the three ladies we know were in the beauty contest they were judging. Hera, Aphrodite and Athena and if you know this is *The Judgment of Paris*, you know that that's Athena because she always wears helmets though in my version she carries a submachine gun and looks like Patty Hearst. And that glamorous looking film noir movie star must be Aphrodite and there's little Eros holding on to her and there's Hera, queen of the gods, and she's vacuuming the ground looking like a '50s housewife.

So I can play around with the old mythologies and transform them into the contemporary world. I added the figure over there. Rubens didn't have her. That's Helen sitting on her suitcase, waiting for her life to begin.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you want to start talking about -

MS. ANTIN: What?

MS. RICHARDS: We talked about *Minetta Lane* and I asked you about working with the actors.

MS. ANTIN: But they're related- when I did the *Angel of Mercy* [1977-1981] and I had 40 actors and I chose each one specifically for each picture that I planned and several were based on 19th century paintings and photographs, though most I invented, to tell the story that I was going to create for the performance. I've been working with actors forever. In a sense I'm doing the same thing that I always did, inventing histories and mythologies out of the fragments of what passes for real ones. Because history is a narrative with actors, often competing narratives, about something that happened years ago, or maybe it didn't. Like the Trojan War. The ancient Greeks and Romans believed that war really happened. Contemporary archeologists are still trying to find out whether and where it really did happen.

I was working with actors when I was a little girl playing with paper dolls.

MS. RICHARDS: When *The Last Days of Pompeii*, the series of photographs, I think was done in 2001, and can you describe - you've already talked about your very early love of ancient Greece.

MS. ANTIN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Mythology and all of that, what was the evolution because this is a dramatically different body of work in a sense.

MS. ANTIN: Oh, why I chose to go back to that?

MS. RICHARDS: Even though it's connected, not just the subject matter, but the large format photography, from doing *Minetta Lane* in 1995, we come to - of course there's lots of work in between - but in 2001 you present this - you did this huge - make this leap.

MS. ANTIN: Well, I do think of them, I must say, as poor man's movies. Now they're not cheap to do but they're cheap by movie standards and for *The Last Days of Pompeii* I had 12 pictures and for the *Roman Allegories* [series, 2005] I had something like 12 also. These are very layered images,

probably more meaningful images than you'd find in most movies. Even good ones.

MS. RICHARDS: Twelve, yeah.

MS. ANTIN: And for "Helen's Odyssey" [Ronald Feldman Gallery, February 15-March 9, 2008], I have nine and I think perhaps I should have called it "Looking for Helen" which might have been more accurate. But I didn't realize that until I saw them all up together and it was too late.

But what can I say?

MS. RICHARDS: Well, for example, did technology - I mean, being able to do something that you couldn't have done maybe 10 years earlier.

MS. ANTIN: Well, yes, now I could make very large prints digitally. Though they are shot on film with negatives. The digitalization occurs in the printing studio. I also was interested in working with color film. Before this, working with narratives of the past, I always had to use black and white film, except for the filmic installations, they were in color. And I love black and white but I was getting bored with it.

And you know, it took a long time to do the retrospective at LACMA. It was a big, big show.

MS. RICHARDS: Which was in 1999.

MS. ANTIN: Ninety-nine, but we were working on it for like two years and it was a very large show and then it traveled and went to St. Louis and then to the U.K., several places. So I went with it and often did *Last Night of Rasputin* performances with it.

And I did it in the Sydney Biennale because it was the Opera House so I couldn't resist. But it was like I was - what was I going to do now.

MS. RICHARDS: You were quoted as saying that after the retrospective, where would you go.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, where would I go, and I'm not kidding. It's exactly what happened. I was riding down the scenic route to La Jolla to see my therapist and looking down at that fabulous view of La Jolla at the edge of the ocean, I suddenly realized that La Jolla was Pompeii.

Now, Pompeii's not that close to the ocean. But it's close enough, like 10 miles or so and Herculaneum is a little closer. But I suddenly had an absolutely powerful aperçu that here were these beautiful affluent - not so beautiful but it was part of the mythos- affluent people living the good life on the verge of annihilation. There's a big fault running right through La Jolla. A bad earthquake can topple the whole town or flood it with a tsunami. The cliffs are eroding.

And it all became so eerily prophetic when we finished the Pompeii shoot about a week before 9/11.

There are so many places that we and they, the Roman Empire and the American Empire come together. The [laughs] military industrial complex, they had one, they just made spears instead of atom bombs. I went back to reading about the ancients. Heroditus, Pliny, Josephus, Suetonius *The Lives of the Caesars*. You know Vesuvius erupted in 79 AD.

But before I could go on, I had a major hurdle to overcome. A big problem.

I can't make an art work unless I have a particular historical style to do it in. I'm not Alex Katz or Roy

Lichtenstein. They each have a great art making machine that allows them to put whatever they want into it and it comes out an Alex Katz or a Roy Lichtenstein. They're great artists, don't get me wrong. But inventing historical images as I do, means borrowing, or rather transforming past styles in which to do them.

But I quickly realized that the salon painters of the 19th century European colonial empires saw themselves as the new Rome, they were turned on by her power and deliciously intrigued with what they considered her decadence. So it was like, that's it, Ellie. You're going to do these photographs in the style of 19th century salon paintings, basically the Brits and the French, and I'm going to allude to our empire and their empire and then the ancient empire that they were dreaming of and re-inventing and once again I've got my hall of mirrors to turn me on.

You look at something in the guise of something in the guise of something in the guise of something and then maybe somewhere there through those mirrors you'll find some truth, a poetic truth but sometimes I think that's the only kind there is.

MS. RICHARDS: And so you started with a body of work you called *The Last Days of Pompeii*. Did you call it that at the beginning?

MS. ANTIN: Yes. I knew there was a book called *The Last Days of Pompeii* [Baron Edward Bulwer Lytton. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1834]. I tried to read it but it was so boring. I mean, I wanted to read it but I can't really read novels about ancient Rome. I can read ancient Romans - I read Petronius and Ovid with great pleasure but I really don't like historical novels. They never get it right. They're always outside. They never get in.

But because I was dealing with the 19th century I wanted to have - you see this character behind you. She's in a Victorian wheelchair and she's wearing what looks like a nightdress but she's straight out of a pre-Raphaelite painting. She's watching what's happening from her wheelchair, nobody seems to see her, a visitor from the future. The African woman here is her attendant who's always with her foregrounding the colonial aspects of empire. The woman and her attendant are always discretely placed so people see her or they don't. There's a Lacan French journal which reproduced the Pompeii pictures and discussed her as an observor. The observor's gaze. The watcher. Very Lacanian.

MS. RICHARDS: Just one more question about did you plan out as if you were making a movie, making storyboards, all 12 of the images at once?

MS. ANTIN: It takes me about six months, eight months, as much as a year maybe, to work out my images. To layer them. To find where their poetry lies. The narrative of each one. How each one fits into the overall narrative. Then I have to chose where to film these stories. Whether to build a set or move into an existing place. Costumes, cast, props, lighting for time of day to shoot, whatever. Its like shooting a movie but nobody talks.

Guess I'm making silent films, again.

MS. RICHARDS: So you plan each one. Then you cast it.

MS. ANTIN: Pam, my assistant, is the head of the San Diego Artist Models Guild. So she has all these models available and then actors come down from Hollywood, there are young actors from the theatre department at UCSD [University of California, San Diego], there's a regional theatre scene here in San Diego, whatever. I interview them all and make precise choices. In *Roman*

Allegories, an actor came down from L.A. who usually plays gangsters in Hollywood and on TV. He works all the time. He doesn't play leads. He's a character actor, a featured player sometimes. He played a satyr in the image of *The Triumph of Pan [after Poussin]* and afterward he thanked me with tears in his eyes. His family was originally from Rome and he felt like being in this picture, he connected with his roots. That's what he said. He found his roots. I thought, as a satyr?

MS. RICHARDS: And what about the costumes? At what point are you designing the costumes?

MS. ANTIN: I work with - because I can't even sew - it's like I can't cook and I can't sew. It's all from being a hotel brat. I learned to take money and seduce people into making room reservations. So I discuss what I need with the designer who then brings me fabrics and sketches and I'll say yes, no, do this, do that. I'm on top of everything.

MS. RICHARDS: Same with makeup and hair?

MS. ANTIN: Yeah, makeup, I have been working with the same guy forever. He runs the makeup and hair department in the theater department at San Diego State. I like working with him. He has a certain style which makes everyone look natural, not manicured.

And the sets? In Pompeii, that wasn't very complicated. My friend Marianne McDonald is a classics professor at UCSD [University of California, San Diego]. She has a huge estate which is beautifully situated with lots of columns and terraces and when I bring in my props and actors, it's Rome.

But as the pieces got more and more theatrical like in *Helen*, we had to paint huge backdrops and murals. When you're going to put real people in front of a backdrop you have to gauge the precise size so when you place the people, the scale is right. People in real life are bigger than people in paintings. Much bigger. It's an interesting arithmetical problem. But I work with a dear friend, Erin Adams, who comes in with her painters and they can reproduce the backdrop of an actual Pompeii fresco or a Couture temple to scale. She's from L.A. And then -

MS. RICHARDS: How does Erin spell her name?

MS. ANTIN: E-R-I-N.

MS. RICHARDS: E-R-I-N, okay.

MS. ANTIN: Like the image of Hades that I have in *Helen*, I wanted us to build a burnt out version of Catherine the Great's ballroom. That's what it started as, Catherine the Great's burnt out ballroom. That's where I put my dead Trojans and Greeks.

And you know, Pompeii is one of the pregnant images of Western culture. It's a very central one. This apocalyptic image of this luxuriant place destroyed so suddenly is very basic to our Western consciousness. *Roman Allegories*, on the other hand, was more complex in some ways. More melancholy, more theatrical, more like a fairy tale peopled with commedia dell'arte characters, a motley band of wandering players. It didn't have the single central poetic metaphor of Pompeii, which is so etched in our consciousness.

In the last picture in the series, *Going Home*, a [Rene] Magritte-like image, the players are walking into the sea under black umbrellas except for the one little girl who remains behind on the beach, dolled up like a Greek Lolita with makeup, under her umbrella, sitting on her suitcase. She's looking off to the side. Is someone going to save her? She's not walking into the sea. But a black crow sits next to her.

I think that image relates to my sister who died from lung cancer a week before the shoot.

MS. RICHARDS: Before *Roman Allegories*?

MS. ANTIN: I was designing *Roman Allegories* when she was dying and I was very close to my sister but I couldn't spend that much time with her even though she was dying. Because I had the shoot coming up, you see. And after she died, three days later I found out that I had melanoma on my nose right in the middle of my face and they didn't know how serious it was. They won't know until they take it off, they said. I said, "Well, I can't do anything now. I have a shoot which will take me 10 to 12 days." It took 12 days and then I had the surgery and I arranged to go to a plastic surgeon. I wasn't going to let them make a hole in my face and then go to a plastic surgeon afterwards. I went to this excellent plastic surgeon to remove the cancer. They said it was on the cusp between a one and a two. So it was taken out and he covered it over very well.

So then we could have the memorial for my sister, which we could not have before because of the shoot. So there is a darkness to *Roman Allegories*. It broods with death. I think it's a more complex set of pictures than *Pompeii*. It's darker certainly.

I think people respected it but as I said, the poetry of *Pompeii* lies very deep in our Western consciousness. But I think *Roman Allegories* was more interesting.

Also, Americans don't have a habit of allegorizing. Modernist art is not allegorical. An allegory, you know, has tentacles all over layers of time and meaning. I don't think American culture is like that. We move too fast. We leave too fast.

MS. RICHARDS: Is it that European audiences responded better to the *Roman Allegories* ?

MS. ANTIN: Not necessarily though I think Europeans get the art historical allusions more. What happened is that people began calling all three series *The Last Days of Pompeii*. And that's fine. It's right in a way.

MS. RICHARDS: As a little footnote, did you and Ron discuss how many - how big an edition each one should be? Did you let that be his decision?

MS. ANTIN: We discussed it.

We had - for *Pompeii* I think we had an edition of five. For *Allegories* we went to four and to Helen I think we went to three. I think. But in each series, some pictures are more popular than others. Some of my favorites are not nearly as popular as others.

MS. RICHARDS: Could you have guessed which ones would be? Did you imagine?

MS. ANTIN: No, apparently I'm a bad guesser.

Well, no, that one, the tree where the girls in the tree are looking coolly out at the dead woman lying on the ground, that one is one of my favorites and may have sold out. I don't know.

But then people love the hanging girls which make me nervous.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you do that?

MS. ANTIN: You can see that on the film *Classical Freize*. It depicts the shooting of some of the

images. Some of the hanging girls have harnesses. One is behind a little bush there. She's standing on a ladder. I'm sneaky.

MS. RICHARDS: But is there not, though, digital manipulation? You're not replacing one -

[Cross talk.]

MS. ANTIN: No, no, the digital manipulation was mostly color adjustments, tonality, all that was very intense actually. It took endless time with Chip, Chip Leavitt, my printer. The only manipulation I did on that one was taking one of the hanging girls out because it looked too crowded. I did that in one other image also.

Then I did "Helen's Odyssey" and I could do bigger pictures.

MS. RICHARDS: What do you mean? Why did you say you could do bigger pictures?

MS. ANTIN: Well, I got bored with the same range of sizes. Though I had some bigger pictures in Allegories and of course *The Death of Petronius* which was one of my favorites from Pompeii, that was bigger. That was longer than the others.

We used a four by five camera to start with. But Grant Mudford, who was working with me had an eight by 10. So I decided to go larger. They were feeling small to me already and I wanted to do something new for myself to make it more interesting because you can get great resolution with such a big camera. I used it for Helen.

Helen was a set of individual allegories, not scenes from a life. Like at first, I thought I had to have an image of her and Menelaus before she runs off to Troy with Paris. It would have been very funny. She and Menelaus would be playing cards, cigarettes dangling out of their mouths. Their little daughter Hermione would be bawling in her playpen and maybe there would be slaves fanning them and they would just look like a totally bored married couple in 5th or 6th century Greece. Classical Greece. BC. I'm old school, I still call it BC. I probably still think Pluto is a planet. Some things are sacred.

But you know, Troy is in Turkey, which of course wasn't Turkey, it was Anatolia then, and if there was a Troy, we're talking 12th century B.C. There were no Greek columns and no classicism. But without columns who would know it was Greece? Anyway, Homer was Greek, if he really existed and wasn't another blind man or several blind men, well, he probably lived around four centuries later.

After Helen, I wanted to write my memoir of growing up as a red diaper baby in New York in the late '40s and '50s and that's this nutty memoir that I am doing now. And I'll make drawings to go with the text. What comes after? Who knows. Something.

MS. RICHARDS: Looking back at your - you've shown in New York mainly but you live in California.

MS. ANTIN: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: And you have a community of artists here. Do you also feel connected to a community of artists in New York?

MS. ANTIN: I don't. We were talking about community and at first I didn't see it.

MS. RICHARDS: Maybe it's a wrong word.

MS. ANTIN: But actually it did fit in the '70s. We used to have avant-garde festivals here at UCSD in the '70s. And the feminist artist scene was based mainly in LA and I certainly felt part of that. I was.

[END CD 7.]

MS. ANTIN: I don't think I have a community anymore unless it's a community of me and David.

MS. RICHARDS: Is it a matter of age and maturity as opposed to coming out of -

MS. ANTIN: Everyone has gone their way. I still have lots of friends and they mean a lot to me. But I don't get to see them that often. And we don't work similarly. Some are artists, some are writers and poets.

And our son Blaise and his wife, Cindy and their two kids, our grandboy Zachary and grandgirl Natalie. We visit when we can. We're very close with the kids but everybody has busy lives.

And Ron and Frayda [Feldman] at the gallery and Marco [Nocella], are close friends. We always stay with our dear friend, the video artist, Ellen Zweig when we're in NY.

You know, life takes you to different places and different people come in and out of your life. But as for a scene? At this point I think I'm my own scene.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you initially become affiliated with Ron Feldman and -

MS. ANTIN: Funny story.

MS. RICHARDS: And have you - are you affiliated with a gallery in Europe or is he the only gallery and how have you -

MS. ANTIN: No, I have a gallery in Brussels, I love the gallerist, Erna Hecey, very much. H-E-C-E-Y, Erna. But my real, real, real dealer and friend and gallery is Ron Feldman. How I got Ron, okay, it's a funny story. It was way back in the mid-'70s. I had just done *Angel of Mercy* at the M.L. d'Arc Gallery but she closed up and ran off with some would-be Broadway producer.

I had already done *The Adventures of a Nurse* with the paper dolls at the Clocktower and I wanted to do a disaster movie with paper dolls because *The Adventures of a Nurse* had been an improv and I wanted to try my little actors with a script. So I could have a bigger cast. You can't improv with a big cast. You won't remember who's talking, how they talk, where the camera should go, it's impossible. I decided to do *The Nurse and the Hijackers*. This was 1977 and it turned out to be a prophecy of the coming oil crisis. It premiered just before the oil crisis and it's about a group of eco-hijackers - it was before hijacking became part of the contemporary consciousness, it was still rather exotic - they hijack a plane to publicize their eco opinions and travel to the OPEC nations to convince them not to sell oil to the West because oil was destroying the Earth.

Which was a pretty mad action since an OPEC nation is an acronym for an Oil Producing and Exporting Nation. So our sympathetic, if mad, innocents visit the colonel, who is [Muammar Abu Minyar al-] Gaddafi. They visit the sheik from Saudi Arabia. They visit these various places and they're turned down and at the end the Israelis come and shoot the hijackers and rescue the plane.

At the time, they were always showing this movie, *Raid on Entebbe* [1977] on TV. It was based on a

true Israeli rescue of a hijacked plane. So this was what my videotape was based on. They were showing that movie ad nauseum on television endlessly. So I wanted to do my own disaster movie but it should be political.

But suddenly, I find myself without a gallery. Again, I didn't have connections here in California. I mean, I had friends. My friends were feminist artists from the Woman's Building and various places like that.

But I was used to Center Stage. I wasn't going to do my new show for the Woman's Building. So it was like what do I do. Well, there's two galleries I could think of, both in New York. There was - what's her name. She died a few years ago. Most of her artists were into the new decorative painting.

MS. RICHARDS: Holly Solomon?

MS. ANTIN: Holly, yes, who had never shown any interest in me. But it was a gallery where I knew many of the artists. I respected her work. They weren't just showing boring paintings. They weren't just doing the last gasp of minimalism and I might have gone to her and she'd probably have turned me down, but I heard about this new gallery on Madison called Ronald Feldman Fine Arts. He had just opened with Ed Moses, so I knew he wasn't prejudiced against Californians. Even Californians with New York accents.

There was also John Gibson. He was on Madison around the corner from Feldman. He represented a lot of the conceptualists. But he was more of a formalist than me. My stuff didn't look like most of the respectable conceptualists, the boys club, as I called them at the time. I was not like them. I considered myself a conceptual artist but those guys had a very narrow idea of what conceptualism was, or could be. So I called Ron from San Diego.

I figured Ron Feldman, I don't know, he's Jewish, maybe that's when I decided to do *The Nurse and the Hijackers*. [Laughs.]

So I call him up. He knew about me because the New York Times had made a big fuss about *The Angel of Mercy* just a few months before and I said, you know, I'm out here in California and I have a new videotape. I said, "I have a new tape with paper dolls." He didn't know about my show at the Clocktower, *The Adventures of a Nurse*.

But he knew *Angel of Mercy* and he was very political and I said, "Oh, and this is titled *The Nurse and the Hijackers* and it's about oil destroying the earth," and he said, "Sounds interesting." I said, "I have an installation and the tape is an hour long." And he said, "I don't have video equipment but I can always get it," and he said, "All right, can you send it to me to look at?" I said, "Well, I'm in the process of editing it." I had nothing, nothing. Just an idea in my head. I didn't even have a script yet. I didn't even have the paper dolls and I think it was May. Maybe early June. I was still teaching until the middle of June because we had a trimester system.

So he said, "Okay, open for me in September." I said, "Great." [Laughs.] I remember I hung up. I said, "Well, David, I'm going with Ronald Feldman." I'm doing *The Nurse and the Hijackers*. He said, "You're doing what?" I said, "I'm doing *The Nurse and the Hijackers*. I'll explain it to you when I know what it is." [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Cancel your summer vacation plans?

MS. ANTIN: Who me? I never had a summer vacation. Remember when I was a kid, I worked every

summer at my mother's hotel. The summer before I did the *Angel of Mercy*, and I had just done it in New York in February. I was scheduled to do the *Angel of Mercy* with a catalogue at the La Jolla Museum, the one that became the Museum of Contemporary Art, it was opening at the beginning of September with an expanded performance to include a small military band and now, a week after I was scheduled to open with Ron in New York.

And I did.

I told Ron this story recently. He never knew but at my party after the Helen opening he took a whole bunch of us out to dinner because a lot of my actors had come to NY for the opening. He took us all out along with some artist friends from New York. We had this whole little restaurant to ourselves and he made a speech to everybody about me and him and how long we'd been together and you know Ron, he's being beautiful and I said, "Oh, yeah, Ron, I should tell you how we did get together," and I confessed the whole story to the crowd and he's looking at me like, "What?" [They laugh.]

MS. RICHARDS: It's unusual but not - it certainly happens to people with the same dealer for so long.

MS. ANTIN: I guess so.

MS. RICHARDS: And how would you describe your relationship? Are you very hands-on? Are you very -

MS. ANTIN: I love him. I love Frayda. I love Marco [Nochella], Everybody there is family and he treats everybody like family, including his workers. He practices what he preaches as a very politically liberal person.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you feel about it not being in Chelsea?

MS. ANTIN: Oh, you mean now? Well, at first I was a little worried. But Ron and Frayda own that SoHo building. It's a beautiful space, a space I know. The second room is a little difficult but I know it already. So I know how to use it. And Chelsea is like Times Square. A single building can have 80 galleries. I mean, it's stupid. The only ones you bother going into unless you know the artist are on the street.

MS. RICHARDS: Ground floor.

MS. ANTIN: Yeah and it's too stupid, like it can't last. Well, it hasn't really, has it? But he's fine in SoHo and if people want to see my show they'll come. If they don't, it's their loss. But I've been around a long time so they usually come.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you always - I think you've answered this. In terms of your work habits, have you always just worked every day, all day, or do you find yourself working more sporadically? Would you describe your work habits?

MS. ANTIN: I remember many, many years ago in the '70s or early '80s, we've been living here in this semi rural bit of old California since '76, though my studio was on campus then - maybe it was about '78, '79. And one summer day I was reading a paperback mystery on the porch and we have this bench that kind of swings a little and I sat there reading. It was in the morning because the sun in the afternoon comes on too strong and you couldn't stay there. So I must have read for about four or five hours. It was so relaxing, so beautiful to sit out there, surrounded by trees on one side and

chapparral on the other, Then I finished the book and walked back into the house and our son was inside and I don't know how old he was, probably about 12, and I said, "Well, that was my summer vacation." I felt so relaxed and so rested. And I just went back to work. That's still the story of my life.

MS. RICHARDS: Four hours. [They laugh.]

MS. ANTIN: Maybe it was five.

MS. RICHARDS: Speaking of vacations, what about travel? Have certain travels really been important to your work?

MS. ANTIN: yeah, when I travel to do a show, I try to get some time off to go to the local museums and look at old art, if you want to know the truth. Though if there's an interesting contemporary, like Sophie Calle, sure I wouldn't miss that. There are a lot of interesting artists around. Sometimes, rarely, but sometimes, we do gigs together and that's like a vacation. Wait, I remember we did do one real true, honest to God vacation, David and me. We drove up to see the redwoods at the Jedediah Smith National Park which is just on the border with Oregon. It was an incredible experience and then we went down to Sonoma and spent a few days pleasantly drunk, tasting the wines at the vineyards. We stayed at a charming hotel and then drove back home and that was about a week, our vacation. Sometimes we would go up to Mammoth where Blaise and David skied and I walked in the woods and planned new works.

And I'll never forget those redwoods. It was like a violent experience. I don't know if you've ever seen them, not the ones in Humboldt because those are prepped up for tourists but when you go up to Jedediah Smith, they're not chopping them down and it's so gorgeous, it's frightening because we're so unnecessary, humans. Those trees don't give a shit about you. Maybe that's why some people like to chop them down because they can't stand being so irrelevant. Nature is so inexorable. It was a primeval experience. Very powerful and frightening as well as beautiful.

Oh yes, and we went to Vegas once. I liked Vegas. My sister was a gambler in those days. One of the big spenders. So we had a suite for ourselves and ate for free in steak houses. I liked zoning out on those machines while she played the tables.

We went to Paris together. David had a gig at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and I was going on to do a show in Brussels. So I went to the [Musée du] Louvre for the first time. It was crowded with all these Japanese students taking notes. And I walked into this big room and there opposite me were a couple of Leonardos [da Vinci], not the *Mona Lisa*. That's a very boring picture and it's up in its own corner somewhere with crowds of people hanging around it. It's not an interesting picture. I think the Duchamp version is more interesting. But there was *Saint Anne [The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne, 1510]* and Leonardo's not my favorite artist. But I couldn't believe it. Leonardo paintings really existed. I had only seen them in books but they were real. I just burst into tears.

But anyway, that was - then we had a fantastic time when I had my show in Brussels. They have a magnificent state museum filled with northern renaissance paintings that you never see anywhere else, Memling, Bosch. We saw the most incredible *Massacre of the Innocents [1610]* and it was a Rubens. I'd never ever seen a reproduction of it. It was the most shocking and devastating Massacre of the Innocents I've ever seen. It was really emotional, not what you think of as standard Rubens.

MS. RICHARDS: Not traveling to Greece and Rome in particular?

MS. ANTIN: Greece. I've never been.

MS. RICHARDS: Fascinating.

MS. ANTIN: But I know where every island is. [Laughs.] I make it all up. You know, Judith, I don't really have to go. I really haven't even been to Pompeii but I know every house that's there. I haven't been to Rome. I've been to Milan. I've been to Florence. I've been to Venice, which I adore.

But it's not something that I have to do for my work. Greece. Rome. I make them up out of old master paintings, literature, theatre, history, dreams, magic.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, let me just ask you as we come to the close, you spent more than - well, 30 or more years teaching.

MS. ANTIN: Yes, well yeah, 30 years.

MS. RICHARDS: And from what I've read, you were an amazing teacher.

MS. ANTIN: Yeah, I was pretty good. I liked teaching.

MS. RICHARDS: Tell me, did you like teaching, what do you think it brought to your work, what approach did you have to teaching and what did you teach, all those questions.

MS. ANTIN: Okay, right, okay, teaching - the pleasure that it gave me was selfish in some ways. It allowed me to have a hand in doing works that I would never otherwise do. By helping young, inexperienced artists find their own voice, their own way, their own style, I was, yeah, in a way I was a collaborator. I could experience with them the pleasures of doing work that I myself wouldn't ever do but here I got the chance to do it, anyway. It was their work, of course, but I was something of a catalyst, I guess, so I felt like part of their creative process because I could lead them to discover what it was that they had meant all along. Is this clear? The experience is somewhat amorphous, you know.

I was teaching studio classes. I'd give crazy assignments. I'd shock them into doing the unexpected thing. Surprise themselves.

I invented a course called Video Sketchbook and that became part of the curriculum. I taught Scripting and Editing. I taught Personal Narrative, which I started in the dept. I taught Performance of Everyday Life. I did the graduate seminar.

I made up my own courses and they usually worked and became part of the curriculum and eventually other people would teach them and of course they'd do them differently.

But basically I always saw myself as supportive. Oh, I also taught life drawing which was actually a very wonderful course. Then I stopped teaching it when the kids changed. Yeah, I

MS. RICHARDS: What do you mean the kids changed?

MS. ANTIN: Well, we didn't have money for models in the '70s and -

MS. RICHARDS: UC?

MS. ANTIN: At UCSD.

MS. RICHARDS: Didn't have money for models?

MS. ANTIN: Well, yeah, because it was a conceptual art department. Who cared? But there were painters and kids liked drawing.

So I had the kids model for each other and eventually, in fact very quickly I would ask who'd pose without clothes and there are always a few gutsy ones and they liked doing the scary thing. But many refused. That is, at first. No way.

But there were enough quick and ready kids willing to take off their clothes. And sometimes they posed together and by the time I was through discussing how expressive and informative their bodies were and what their body language was, everybody wanted to model naked, every fucking person wanted to learn about themselves. Of course, I always found interesting, complimentary things to say about each body.

And that's what happened with my Personal Narrative class. When I said, "The first thing we will do is write about our first sexual experience." Many kids said, "I'm not going to write about that." But when they saw other kids perform or write it about their experiences, and the rest of the class was very serious and sympathetic discussing the meanings and the metaphors of the stories which were usually unfortunately disturbing or bad experiences, everybody wanted to make art out of their own troubling stories.

So in a sense, I was always in collusion with myself to encourage them to come out and bravely do the far out thing and be free.

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds like it relates to acting school.

MS. ANTIN: Well, actually yes, I haven't thought of it that way. Maybe it was. But actors are artists, so why not?

But basically I thought my job, especially with the graduate students, was to find where their voice is, what is it that they really want to do, not what they think they want to do or they think is fashionable or right to do. To be feeling people, thinking artists, inventive, brave, and somewhere in the morass of their experience and expectations and thinking they'll find their own style, their own subject. My job was to encourage, coax, seduce, scold, critique, whatever each one needed to find themselves as artists.

I remember yelling at Carrie Mae Weems because she was doing these romantic portraits of the worn, hard working faces of African-American people. I said, "It's been done a thousand times, so what?" She was shocked, so was the class, and whatever the reason, and I'm sure there were many, you know how interesting her work can be now.

Once or twice I might have been too outspoken and I'm sorry about those times. I was good for many students though not for the ones who might have preferred endlessly theoretical discussions which bored me to tears.

And anyway, I found it very, very pleasurable but after 30 years, I couldn't quite pull it off, handling two jobs anymore. So as always, my art work came first and I retired from teaching.

MS. RICHARDS: When you go to films and performances, what kinds do you prefer? Do they reflect your -

MS. ANTIN: Actually - you mean now? I love to go to the theater. I love to see Greek tragedies. [Laughs.] Shakespeare tragedies. I still like to see avant-garde theatre, even early Modernist theatre.

I used to go to all the artists' performances. I don't do that anymore, except for a few.

And I still love movies, though and this isn't a phrase I ever use, they don't make 'em like they used to. But I do like the Coen brothers [Joel and Ethan Coen] . I also like political thrillers but I don't like romantic comedies. They're boring. They're even boring when Shakespeare wrote them. I've never liked them. I found them boring, except for Julia Roberts in- she's a call girl -

MS. RICHARDS: *Pretty Woman* [1990]?

MS. ANTIN: Yeah. Maybe because I never saw it in a theatre but always seemed to catch it late at night on TV. Good movie when you can't sleep.

MS. RICHARDS: So right now what you're doing is writing your memoir?

MS. ANTIN: My memoirs as a child and young adult only, as the child of Polish, Jewish communist immigrants in New York during the late '40s and '50s. I don't mention being an artist, except for being an actor, which I was in those early days. David isn't in it, nor Blaise. And what a pleasure not to think of the art world all the time I'm writing it. At the end of each chapter I go to Central Park and talk with Comrade Stalin and he solves my problems by fucking them all up. Of course, I don't always listen to him, either.

MS. RICHARDS: Can you imagine down the road what you might do after that?

MS. ANTIN: Well, I want to do the drawings and I know -

MS. RICHARDS: What drawings are those?

MS. ANTIN: Drawings of me and Comrade Stalin walking together in Central Park.

He's like my father and we're walking together while all around us disasters are happening, like someone's running off with a child or someone's getting raped here, mugged there. Some guy is jerking off here behind a tree. All of these things are happening but we're oblivious. We don't see or hear anything except ourselves.

MS. RICHARDS: Is there anything else you want to talk about or should we -

MS. ANTIN: No, I think we're finished.

MS. RICHARDS: Great. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...December 28, 2010