



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Susanne Ghez,  
2011 Jan. 25-26

This interview is part of the Elizabeth Murray Oral History of Women in the  
Visual Arts Project, funded by the A G Foundation.

**Contact Information**

Reference Department  
Archives of American Art  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, D.C. 20560  
[www.aaa.si.edu/askus](http://www.aaa.si.edu/askus)

# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a digitally recorded interview with Susanne Ghez on 2011 Jan. 25-26. The interview took place at the Renaissance Society in Chicago, IL, and was conducted by Judith Olch Richards for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Elizabeth Murray Oral History of Women in the Visual Arts Project, funded by the A G Foundation.

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

## Interview

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards, interviewing Susanne Ghez at the Renaissance Society in Chicago on January 25th, 2011, for the Archives of American Art, disc one.

[Break.]

OK.

[Break.]

Susanne, I wanted to start by asking you to talk about your family background, even to your grandparents and your parents -

SUSANNE GHEZ: [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: - and where you were born and raised.

MS. GHEZ: Well, that's interesting. I'm of an age where I don't remember my grandparents; I didn't really know my grandparents. I think I must have been very young when my - the last remaining grandparent died.

MS. RICHARDS: What were their names?

MS. GHEZ: Anna [sp], I remember, was my father's mother.

MS. RICHARDS: And what - his name was - her name was -

MS. GHEZ: Well, that - Anna Gayton.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell that?

MS. GHEZ: G-A-Y-T-O-N. My grandfather I never knew, and frankly I don't know his name. I've never done any genealogy research. So that was on my father's side. And on my mother's side, my mother's mother died when she was - I'm not sure if it was three months or if it was maybe two years or something. My mother was really just a baby when she - when her mother died. So I never knew that grandmother and -

MS. RICHARDS: Do you recall her name?

MS. GHEZ: What was her name? It must have been "Mary," I think, because my mother was "Mary," and I think it was probably Mary Cassels.

MS. RICHARDS: And how do you spell "Cassels"?

MS. GHEZ: C-A-S-S-E-L-S. That's my middle name, actually, Susanne Cassels. And I think that my mother's father could not cope after the death of the - of his wife, and so my mother was raised by two maiden aunts, Lizzie and Susan - oh, was it - I think it was Susan, because I was named after one, and my sister was named after the other. And I think it was "Fallon," an Irish name. They were very Irish.

MS. RICHARDS: F-A-L-L-O-N.

MS. GHEZ: O-N, mmm hmm. [Affirmative.] But -

MS. RICHARDS: Was -

MS. GHEZ: But - [inaudible] - I may have to check all of this for you.

MS. RICHARDS: Where was that?

MS. GHEZ: In a small town called North Attleborough, Massachusetts. I suspect that they were potato famine or the other famine, you know, émigrés from Ireland and came to the Massachusetts area. My father was from Canada, from Nova Scotia.

MS. RICHARDS: And what's his name?

MS. GHEZ: And he was – he always used H. Clive Gayton and –

MS. RICHARDS: C-L-I-V-E?

MS. GHEZ: C-L-I-V-E – right and "H" was for Harvard which, for whatever reason he did not like and just never used, except it was "H. Clive." And my mother was Mary Cassels Gayton. And her father, I think, was Walter Cassels, but again, I barely knew him. So, yeah, grandparents are a mystery. But –

MS. RICHARDS: Did – and how did they come together? Were they both – their families living near each other?

MS. GHEZ: My – what, the grandparents?

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I'm sorry. Moving to your –

MS. GHEZ: My parents.

MS. RICHARDS: Your parents. Your mother grew up in North Attleborough –

MS. GHEZ: In the small town, North Attleborough, Massachusetts.

MS. RICHARDS: And where did your father grew up?

MS. GHEZ: And my father came down from Canada, looking for work, I believe, and I – he had relatives in this small town and met my mother on one of those freezing cold New England days, evidently, when she was work – walking to work in double-digits sub-zero out there –

MS. RICHARDS: What kind of work was she doing?

MS. GHEZ: [Laughs.] She worked at a place called – I believe at that time – Evans Case where they made all these wonderful evening bags.

MS. RICHARDS: Evan's?

MS. GHEZ: Evans Case, yeah, and Evans evening bags, and wonderful mesh evening bags came out of this very small town, and I think she was probably – worked in the packing department of this place, a result of which she was determined that I would never – when I went to high school that I would not follow the college trajectory, the college course, because she had.

My – her uncle, her father's brother was on the board of directors of the school, the local high school and insisted that my mother do all of the college – strictly classical college preparation and then – so what years would they have been? There was no money for her to pursue it and she – you know, I had to learn how to type! [Laughs.] I had to be able to –

MS. RICHARDS: Some –

MS. GHEZ: – somehow provide and get a job and, in fact, every job I've ever had – [laughs] – I swear is because I can type. I got it initially – [laughs] – but that's a longer story.

MS. RICHARDS: [laughs] – we'll get to it.

MS. GHEZ: All right. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So your father went to that town?

MS. GHEZ: So my father, you know – I don't know what he was doing at that time; I'm sure he was working in some manufacturing – I have a vague recollection that he worked – they made tennis rackets, wooden tennis rackets. He worked in this factory making wooden tennis rackets.

But my father was a man who loved to read; loved to draw, actually; and he was very smart. He liked math very much. I remember him tutoring this man, I'm sure who had no background, certainly not in college, and I don't

even know before the - before that; would tutor the neighborhood kids in math. He loved math.

MS. RICHARDS: So when they married - when they met, they got married -

MS. GHEZ: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - and they lived in that town?

MS. GHEZ: And they lived in this small town where I raised, North Attleborough, Massachusetts, south of Boston, on the Boston - what used to be called the Boston Post Road, 30 miles south of Boston.

MS. RICHARDS: So when were you born?

MS. GHEZ: I was born in 1937, December 18th.

MS. RICHARDS: And -

MS. GHEZ: My mother had lost her first child at birth, and I think they were very anxious. They very much wanted to have a child, and I've always felt that, in some way, that's a - that was a very good start to life, to be wanted, to be really wanted.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

MS. GHEZ: I have one sister, with whom I've very close, whom I adore.

MS. RICHARDS: Who was born obviously after you.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, right, she's 4 ½ years younger, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: You mentioned that your father liked to draw. Did he - had he taken art lessons or -

MS. GHEZ: No, just -

MS. RICHARDS: - did you go to Boston as a child to the museums?

MS. GHEZ: No, no, I didn't. That came much later. But - so what is the art connection?

MS. RICHARDS: Were there artworks, you think, hanging in his home when he was growing up?

MS. GHEZ: No, I don't think so. He grew up in a - on a farm in a very small town in Pugwash or something, Nova Scotia. [Laughs.] I've always wanted to go back, but never have - never been to Nova Scotia. Although I've collaborated with - [laughter] - them, a James Coleman project early on. Should have gotten myself there.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, when you were growing up, just -

MS. GHEZ: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: - very, very young, what were your main interests in school? Let's say in elementary school?

MS. GHEZ: Well, you're talking to someone who had 12 years of Catholic girls training, if you want - Catholic schools, I should qualify that because the first eight years, there were boys and girls in the class, and then I went to Providence, Rhode Island.

I mean, again, my parents wanted me to have the best education that they could possibly could get for me, and yet they didn't have the means of, you know, very blue collar, Irish Catholic Massachusetts family. And while all of my friends went to the, like, local high school, they scraped together somehow enough tuition to send me to a Catholic girls high school they had heard about in Providence, Rhode Island. Providence was like a half an hour drive away at that time. So -

MS. RICHARDS: You were obviously successful academically to -

MS. GHEZ: I was. I was valedictorian of my class or whatever.

MS. RICHARDS: In high school?

MS. GHEZ: In high school and, you know, a straight-A student all along, and they would always joke with me - you know, God forbid that I got - and, in those days, they gave number grades, right? You know, if I got a 95 instead of a 98, it was a kind of this big joke that I hadn't been working hard enough or something.

But I loved math. Early on, I think, I wanted to be a math teacher - [laughs] - a math professor, I would tell people. I mean, this is really in the lower grades. So one side of my mind is mathematically oriented. However, the other side is very visual, I know. People often ask me this question: How did you end up in this field? And I know that the visual is where I go for information. I don't go to what I read, to what I hear, to what I sense - smell, et cetera. When I really want information I trust, it's the visual, and it's always been that way. So it doesn't surprise me in a way that I sort of meandered or found myself in this field.

MS. RICHARDS: Before you went to that, you went to the high school in Providence -

MS. GHEZ: So I went to this high school where, you know, I'd have to take -

MS. RICHARDS: What's the name of the high school?

MS. GHEZ: It's St. Patrick's high school and it's not even - it's not there any longer, there used to be a church, a cathedral out on St. Patrick's church, behind the state house, if you know Providence. But it was unstable and it was torn down. Architecturally it was unstable and they tore it down, and there was a school and a rectory there, but there was a smallish girls high school that was very strong. But, again, I went - it's funny -

MS. RICHARDS: So you were -

MS. GHEZ: - to think about these things because -

MS. RICHARDS: - you went away and you slept there and you lived there, you didn't commute?

MS. GHEZ: No, half an hour - no, I commuted. [Groans.] I commuted every day.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. GHEZ: [Groans.] And I would - this weather I would stand on the corner waiting for a bus, sometimes forever in a snowstorm, you know - [laughs] - trying to get home at the end of the day. But I loved - that was the first going out of this small town I suspect and it made me happy.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have any particular mentors or people - as teachers when you were in - before you went to that high school, who were really important to you?

MS. GHEZ: Can't remember. I can't really remember; I remember - [laughs] - oh, I remember quietly some teachers admiring the fact that I didn't always toe the line, that I would - you know, I would - I was always kind of - what do I want to say? A little - I would take risks, I think, even then. And I remember - [laughs] - I was - I stayed out of school one day and I wrote a note, in my third-grade handwriting, to the teacher, the sister - Domitilla - Sister Domitilla saying, "Please -

MS. RICHARDS: Sister Donna -

MS. GHEZ: - Domitilla - saying, "Please excuse Susanne" or something like this - "from school; I think she is sick." And of course I wasn't; I was playing hooky somehow, but when - somehow, I remember, my mother did say that she laughed when she showed her the note, and it wasn't that she was completely angry. I think she admired the spunk that I had to try it out. [Laughs.] And then in - it's interesting because then when I went to high school in Providence, it was this question of, you know, did I follow a classical college trajectory course? You were either - you were segmented, right?

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. GHEZ: Either you were in the - how do I want to say? - the commercial side of it, which meant typing, shorthand - I mean, I could take shorthand today, I'll tell you. I still do; I'm always kind of embarrassed to take notes at conferences and whatever, but I've never forgotten it. Anyway, so I went into this - the commercial trajectory, but somehow - I had an aunt - it was my mother's sister - and, you know -

MS. RICHARDS: What was her name?

MS. GHEZ: - and her name is Rita Hoey, H-O-E-Y. And Rita worked at a place called Bryant College, which was up on the east side of Providence and was eventually purchased by - well, the building was purchased by Brown University [Providence, RI] and every now and then - now - and do you ever? Oh, you don't live here, what am I saying. There's a - there's a commercial for Bryant College in Smithfield, Rhode Island. So they moved to Smithfield, Rhode Island.

But, anyway, she was like the president's right-hand person at this college. In fact, they named a dormitory after her. But she, I'm sure, was the one that alerted my mother and father to the fact that this Catholic girls

high school was in Providence, and that's how I got there. And I don't know if she was in conversation with the - like the principal there or - but somebody was. And so when I came and signed up for this commercial trajectory, which my mother and father, especially my mother, wanted, so I could always get a job and not - it might have been war years when my mother got trapped in all of that. But, anyway, there wasn't money. So it was -

MS. RICHARDS: What did you say - when your mother -

MS. GHEZ: - when my mother - when my mother - I told you, my mother also - my mother took a very classical trajectory through high school, but then the - either it was the war years or there was no money for her to go on to have a classical education, to go to college. So she didn't want me to be jobless, right? And so there was always this pressure on. But the nuns, when they got -

MS. RICHARDS: It sounded like they didn't expect you just to get married. They expected that you'd actually would be independent in some way.

MS. GHEZ: Well, no, they probably thought I would get married. But until then, you know, you had to have a job.

And the nuns somehow - I don't know if it was when I started there or what, but they insisted that I take, like, Latin and that I take algebra - some things that were not a part of the commercial trajectory. So I - and French; so I had two, three years of French. I can't remember exactly, but I'd had a mixed curriculum. Somehow these elderly nuns made sure that I had this mix, and I was put in with the young women from the college courses or whatever, that side of the high school. And then when I got out of St. Patrick's, as valedictorian - [laughs] - I think the only possibility for me was maybe to go to this Bryant College because my aunt was there.

MS. RICHARDS: Why would - why would you say that was the only possibility?

MS. GHEZ: Well, it's - alright, what year? I can't even remember - 1955? My parents had no idea about scholarships, about, you know, Amherst would have been probably the closest state school, University of Massachusetts Amherst, or maybe in Boston. But there just wasn't money. I mean, I didn't have that possibility; I knew it wasn't a possibility.

MS. RICHARDS: What were - what were your ambitions at that point, when you were graduating? What did you imagine you wanted to study in college?

MS. GHEZ: Had I had - been able to go to college? Well, it just - it wasn't a possibility; so it wasn't - it just wasn't something that I really thought about. Yeah.

But one small thing, when I was in this high school, there was a yearbook, of course, and I was the art editor of the yearbook. So, for some reason, I ended up doing that. And why? I can't tell today, but I know that I did it. So already I was interested somewhat in design, the way things looked, and that somehow did carry through. So then I went to Bryant College -

MS. RICHARDS: Were you -

MS. GHEZ: - on a scholarship, thanks to my aunt. And -

MS. RICHARDS: That was a four-year college?

MS. GHEZ: No, it was a two-year college and it was during the Korean War. So it was accelerated classes for veterans coming back from that war, and they could get a four-year degree in two. And in fact, I only went for one year. So I have what is like a junior college -

MS. RICHARDS: An associate degree?

MS. GHEZ: - associate degree, for two years put into one year, OK? But in -

MS. RICHARDS: And majoring in what?

MS. GHEZ: - and, so again, you know, you learn business machines. You learn how to be an assistant, a secretary, a -

MS. RICHARDS: Was that the orientation of Bryant or was that your choice?

MS. GHEZ: No, well, it was all I could - it was all I could do. I mean, it was the - it was the orientation of Bryant, I guess - but accounting classes. And all that served me very well because today - I mean, I never have been

afraid of figures and, you know, I can read a spreadsheet, and one of my strengths today is the fact that I have run an institution for – going on 38 years now, and only twice have we come in with an excess of expenses over revenue, and one of those years that was replaced, that deficit, over two years.

And I don't know how many people you've talked to, but it's rare today. And that's because I have – I know it is – that background, so that part of my training served me very well for what I'm doing today.

MS. RICHARDS: But it's probably not just that training, because –

MS. GHEZ: No, well, as we go on – as we turn toward what happened after –

MS. RICHARDS: But even as you were growing up, obviously, you had the instinct for being thrifty and saving, and being concerned about having debt. I mean, you can just – you can know – you can know how to do accounting and not –

MS. GHEZ: Probably. I was sensible. I was sensible and rational as a person when it came, I suppose, to those things – I was and I wasn't. I mean, I always spent much too much, I'm sure, on clothes and things like that – the visual – the things that go along with all this– [laughs] – profession, the visual arts profession. But we were talking about something else.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were at Bryant, what you were studying and the idea of what you would major in. So you said you were only there for one year. Why did you leave after one year?

MS. GHEZ: Well, there was no possibility in terms of money to go, in terms of income.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean you had a scholarship for just one year.

MS. GHEZ: Right, again, for a junior degree. It equaled a two-year – we went from 8:00 in the morning until 5:00 at night – [laughs] – one class after the other. But again, these were not such demanding classes at the end of the day. But I learned something. You know, I learned a few things, as I said, about accounting.

MS. RICHARDS: And at that point you were still commuting? You lived at home?

MS. GHEZ: I was commuting, and when I turned 16 – well, that's even – yeah, before Bryant – I was working at Texas Instruments in Attleboro, Massachusetts.

MS. RICHARDS: Now, was that in the summers, or was that after –

MS. GHEZ: After school.

MS. RICHARDS: After school.

MS. GHEZ: [Laughs.] And so I would get on the bus in Providence and go to Attleboro, Massachusetts, and work until 5:30 or 6:00 –

MS. RICHARDS: That's where you lived, Attleboro?

MS. GHEZ: – when my dad would come and pick me up and bring me home.

MS. RICHARDS: And were you doing that because that would be the money you had to spend? Or you were –

MS. GHEZ: I was saving money, right. I was trying to save money, I suppose then – what was I saving money for? Was I saving it? I had a little bit of money that I probably helped my parents when I went to college. But also, you know, my first car was an MG TD, an old one, and so, you know, that –

MS. RICHARDS: You bought the car yourself.

MS. GHEZ: I bought the car of my dreams at that time, this little boxy, wonderful MG.

MS. RICHARDS: What do you call it? An MG what?

MS. GHEZ: MG TD, 1953 MG TD, I think it was. But it was, you know, I didn't think that much of it at the time. But if I think about my kids doing that today, you know, I got up really early – [laughs] – when I wanted to and then –

MS. RICHARDS: Did you work in the summers as well?

MS. GHEZ: Yes, and I worked at Texas Instruments also over the summers. I liked to go skiing at that time,

which is also a part of a bigger – of the story because that's really, in a way, too, how I got to Europe. The first time I went to Europe was on a ski trip with a group from this – I knew at Texas Instruments. We had a ski club or something, and that opened my eyes to a whole other world.

MS. RICHARDS: That was when you were still in high school?

MS. GHEZ: And that was – it might have been when I was out of high school, within the first couple years out of high school. So I knew then that I wanted to get out of that small town and travel. And at Texas Instruments, I worked for the vice president of their international operations, who was a Dutch man. And his secretary had left to become – to work for the diplomatic corps.

And I saw that as a wonderful – or potential opportunity for travel, because you would be put in some city for two years and then you'd be moved. So she left him at Texas Instruments, and I visited her once. She was in The Hague. And she was secretary of the ambassador, the U.S. ambassador to The Hague. And I thought, this is a way to get to Europe. I didn't, in the long run, because when I told the man I was working for – this Mr. Boessenkool, his name was –

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell that?

MS. GHEZ: Helmich Boessenkool.

MS. RICHARDS: Helmut?

MS. GHEZ: Helmich. B-O-E-S-S-E-N-K-O-O-L.

MS. RICHARDS: B-O-S-S-E-N.

MS. GHEZ: B-O-E-S-S-E-N-K-O-O-L, Boessenkool. When I told him I was going to leave and join the diplomatic corps, he said, "Well, you know, we're opening this office in Geneva, Switzerland, which will be a central coordinating office for all of our European subsidiaries." At that time they had them in Holland and in France, I remember, in Italy. And I knew, because I was working for him, some of the directors of these plants. They would come in. And so he said he was going to send me.

MS. RICHARDS: At this point in time, had you finished at Bryant?

MS. GHEZ: Probably I'd finished at Bryant by then.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you finished, you ended up working full time at Texas Instruments.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, at Texas Instruments. Right.

MS. RICHARDS: You had a job waiting for you, in a way.

MS. GHEZ: Well, did I have it waiting for me? I mean, I worked my way up through, you know, typing, the accounting department. You know, remember Ditto, that purple stuff? [Laughs.] Coming home in the summer just covered with that.

When computers took up whole rooms – I remember the first computers – and then working in the engineering department as a secretary there, when they were developing bimetal discs. And Texas Instruments, of course, was very involved in – early, the very early computer industry.

But anyway, when I told this man I was going to Europe, he suggested that maybe I might want to come to this – go to this office in Geneva. They were sending a young man, Turkish, there to open the office, and I could go as his administrative assistant. And I thought – but I had to make a Swiss salary – he had all these conditions – which was like, at the time, \$50 a week. And I could not live with other Americans. I had to –

MS. RICHARDS: Why not?

MS. GHEZ: Well, because he wanted me to benefit. Very wisely, he wanted me to benefit from the experience, and he was completely right. Because when I got there, I worked –

MS. RICHARDS: So you accepted.

MS. GHEZ: I accepted. I was terrified.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it a length, a particular –

MS. GHEZ: I can't tell you how terrified I was. [Laughs.] I cried on the train from Attleboro to New York, oh my



God. It was like the end of the world.

MS. RICHARDS: How did your parents feel about your going?

MS. GHEZ: Well, I'm sure mixed, but they let me go. And they didn't put up any defense that I shouldn't go. That was the wonderful part of it.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you know it was for a finite period of time, or was it open-ended?

MS. GHEZ: It was open-ended at the time. It was open-ended. So anyway, I got there and I lived in a French pension, and I worked in an office we were, like, three or four people. They had rented offices from a Swiss company.

And if the phone rang – [laughs] – I had to answer it. I had to – I learned to speak French. So it was wonderful for me, because today I don't speak French so well – I can manage – but I understand just about everything that's being said, and I can read it. But again, at St. Patrick's High School, I'd had my couple years of French. Happily, that had happened, and it provided a bit of a foundation for me in life.

MS. RICHARDS: What year was it that you were in Geneva then?

MS. GHEZ: I came, like, around New Year's '59. I left the States at the very end of December. I probably started to work in 1960.

And it was a fascinating time to be there. Bay of Pigs – I mean, I remember the terror of reading in the *Herald Tribune* about the possible invasion of the United States, and standing up to [Nikita] Khrushchev and all of this, being away. But it was an amazing, amazing experience for me. And there, that's when I started going to museums and to galleries. So that was the beginning of that part of my current life – So in 1960, 51 years ago.

MS. RICHARDS: You were 22.

MS. GHEZ: Is that true? Yeah, right. I think I'd just turned 23, I think. Is that right? 1960?

MS. RICHARDS: In 1959, December '59, you'd just turned 22.

MS. GHEZ: Twenty-two. It was 22, yeah. That's right. So that was rather brave, I mean, in a way, when I look back, because none of my friends did anything – you know, they all just stayed home and got married and had kids in small-town Massachusetts. So I think I was very fortunate.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you, at that moment, picture yourself staying in that kind of work as a career?

MS. GHEZ: I don't know that I really was planning my life so precisely at that time. And that's sort of how it's always gone. I just jump. You know, if there are opportunities presented, you leap, right? Or you don't, and what I've learned in life is that it's good to jump, or to leap. Just do it. I mean, I raised three daughters; I would say it to them all: Just do it. You know, I don't want to hear a lot of talk about a lot of planning about – just do it; get in there and do it.

MS. RICHARDS: So how long did you end up staying there?

MS. GHEZ: So I stayed there for three years.

MS. RICHARDS: And you said you started going to museums.

MS. GHEZ: Yes. So I met the man who was – become my husband in Geneva.

MS. RICHARDS: What was his name?

MS. GHEZ: Gilbert, Gilbert Ghez. And he was working with Battelle Memorial Institute [Geneva, Switzerland], actually.

MS. RICHARDS: P-A-T-E-L?

MS. GHEZ: Battelle, B-A-T – Battelle – T-T-E-L-L-E. I don't know. It's an American company, actually. It's like a think tank. He had just gotten out of college. And so – and he loved the visual arts and would take me around –

MS. RICHARDS: Was he your age or older?

MS. GHEZ: He was a year – actually, he was a year younger, a year younger.

MS. RICHARDS: So he had already finished college.

MS. GHEZ: College.

MS. RICHARDS: And was this a -

MS. GHEZ: Just. It was a first job, right.

MS. RICHARDS: And what was his degree in?

MS. GHEZ: Well, he had done a double degree, actually, in economics and in law. But again, it was the economics part of it that brought us to the United - back to the United States. Yeah, so at that time we weren't married. I remember the first gift he ever gave to me was a book on Marino Marini - [laughs] - so that was sort of, again, my entry into the art world. And his uncle was a big collector.

MS. RICHARDS: Where?

MS. GHEZ: In Geneva.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, his family was from Geneva?

MS. GHEZ: That's such a complicated - that would be the whole interview. That would take a week - [they laugh] - for their family. But the uncle owned this private museum called Le Petit Palais, which I suspect is still there. He was a big collector of Fauves. He had bought a lot of Fauves, too.

MS. RICHARDS: And that's in Geneva.

MS. GHEZ: In Geneva. All of the sudden, I became aware of this other world that I had never been exposed to, but that made me happy to participate in by going to, again, museums, galleries. Anyway, that was Geneva. And then we came back to the United States.

So we married, we married in the United States and in Europe - as often is done, you know, you're married civilly in one place, and religiously or whatever in another, although we did the religious first and the civil afterwards. Because my husband had just become a Swiss citizen at the time. So in fact, I have a Swiss - I have a Swiss passport. I mean, I'm, by marriage, a Swiss citizen. You can - as long as you don't vote - I'm not male, I don't have to serve in the military service. But I've never used this passport.

But somehow I keep it up, because I loved so much my years when I was in Switzerland. And I love that culture, and it changed my life in an important way - not only, of course, through the language, but through the language you get to the culture, and I realized later on, in traveling to Europe, how different it was in Europe in the way they contextualized or thought about contemporary American art.

And I often thought about it, and it came from my time there. It was like you had to put a clutch in; you had to move to another place. Things were just different. If I wanted to talk to them about Jeff Koons, they knew the name, but they didn't have, really, a clue about the underpinnings, the back story of the work of an artist like Jeff Koons.

But if they were talking to me about the work or if I was looking at the work of Cristina Iglesias or Juan Munoz or - I'd have to think of a few other names - that dealt with the private and the - public and private, Americans didn't have a clue either. And so, really - and it would start even at [Piet] Mondrian, I mean, the moment that Mondrian makes a curvilinear mark within an abstract painting. It's that private moment, and that's so European.

And Americans, I don't think, in general, could enter the work at that time in the way which I felt I could because I had lived there and, you know, again, been a part of that culture. I lived in a pension where people who - actually lived from all over the world. One of the people in the pension was John Heinz's - Thérèse, I know her as Thérèse Heinz - was from Mozambique, who later married John Heinz, and of course, now is married to Senator -

MS. RICHARDS: Kerry.

MS. GHEZ: Kerry, right. John Kerry. But there were - and it wasn't that it was such a fancy pension. I mean, her father was a doctor, and he just sent her - she was at the Ecole d'Interpretes. A number of -

MS. RICHARDS: Sorry, could you repeat the name of the school?

MS. GHEZ: The Ecole d'Interpretes, the interpreters' school. [L'Ecole d'Interpretation now l'Ecole de traduction et

d'Interpretation]

It was where you go learn to be an interpreter. And a number of people in this pension – but it was a pension where you would sit at a huge long table at lunch – you know, there would be a two-hour lunch – and all this conversation – but again, always in French, but very international. So again, I got lucky, very lucky at that time. And I just took it in like a sponge, absolutely absorbed it.

MS. RICHARDS: By the end of those three years, had you begun to imagine a career, a different career path?

MS. GHEZ: No, that came later. [Laughs.] I can tell you.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you came – when you left there, you imagined you would start working as you had been, in something similar?

MS. GHEZ: We came back to the United States because – well, it's a little complex. Gilbert went to – we went to Yale. So he was accepted in London, at the London School of Economics, and at Yale. And he decided that he wanted to go to Yale. So we came to New Haven CT]. It was really a hard time.

MS. RICHARDS: Why?

MS. GHEZ: Because he had – when you trained as an economist in Europe, you're trained differently than you are in this country. He didn't have enough math. And so it was really very hard, and so they gave him his master's there and suggested to him that a good place to go would be Columbia University, where Milton Friedman was. He must have been interested in some of these issues of human capital even maybe at that time.

Anyway, so we spent the summer in Berkeley [CA] – I had almost forgotten that, all right, and that's important too.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you – how long were you in New Haven?

MS. GHEZ: For a year. And then that summer –

MS. RICHARDS: And what did you do during that year?

MS. GHEZ: I worked in a dress shop.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. GHEZ: And then we went to Berkeley and he took math courses all summer long to catch up on the math that wasn't strong enough. And I took art classes with Herschel [B.] Chipp and Janson. What was his name? The – [H.W.] Janson.

MS. RICHARDS: Janson H –

MS. GHEZ: H – something – Janson, right? That summer. So clearly, there was a desire to learn more at that time about contemporary art.

MS. RICHARDS: Now, what year was that? Do you recall what summer that was you were in –

MS. GHEZ: All right, so we married – I have to think about this – on January 26 of 1963. We came back that summer, so we were there at Yale '63-64. It was the summer of '64. It was an interesting time at Berkeley because of all these riots and God knows what. I remember all of that on Telegraph Ave.

MS. RICHARDS: Where did you live when you were in Berkeley for three months? Do you recall?

MS. GHEZ: In the center, sort of, of town – near the center of town, some nondescript – indescrpt apartment.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did you go all the way to Berkeley? Why did he feel that was the place to study math for a semester, for summer?

MS. GHEZ: I don't know. They must have been offering good math courses. I don't know. I really don't remember. I really don't remember. It must have been suggested to him.

MS. RICHARDS: Maybe he had some kind of scholarship, financial assistance.

MS. GHEZ: He never had any of that. It must have been suggested by someone. Anyway, so we –

MS. RICHARDS: So that summer you took courses.

MS. GHEZ: So I took courses. And then we came to New York City. We lived at 240 East 76th Street. Seventy-sixth, which is important, 76th and Second. I'm just trying to remember now how this all went. So I had my first child there.

MS. RICHARDS: When you got to New York, he was enrolled in a Ph.D. program?

MS. GHEZ: He was enrolled in the Ph.D. program at Columbia.

MS. RICHARDS: So you knew you'd be there for a few years.

MS. GHEZ: And he went, like, to the top of the class. All of a sudden things turned around and he was, you know, he took classes with Milton and Gary Becker. He was – you know, he did very well. But he was a student of Becker and –

MS. RICHARDS: And you – meanwhile were you thinking about starting some big work or you –

MS. GHEZ: I – you know, what did I do then? I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: Or you got –

MS. GHEZ: At that time I was sort of a housewife and then I got pregnant probably shortly after that and had my first daughter in New York.

MS. RICHARDS: What's her name?

MS. GHEZ: Andrea. And then – what happened? Well, I was very busy taking care of a small child – going to Central Park, walking the streets, looking in the – [laughs] – in the windows, taking in all the culture of New York City and the visuals. And then I had a second daughter two years later. They are basically two years apart.

MS. RICHARDS: What's her name?

MS. GHEZ: Mimi – Marissa – or Marissa better known as Mimi. [Laughs.] And – then what happened? When Mimi was maybe – is this possible – two or a year-and-a-half or so, I literally thought I would have a nervous breakdown if I didn't get back in the world of adults – [laughs] – and ideas and whatever.

And it was funny, when we were there we would – we had friends at Columbia who loved to go art galleries, and we'd go around on Saturdays. But at that time it was all on the Upper East Side. And we would, you know, look out – look for wonderful pastry shops. I remember William Greenberg and – which at the time was – there wasn't that much competition but we were always looking for great pastry. We were going to write a book about it.

And so I knew I had to get back to work and I thought, what would I really like to do? If I had my druthers what would I like to do? And I thought, I'd like to work in an art gallery. And I remember telling these friends and they said, oh, you know, Ph.D. students or whatever are selling postcards on the corner of Madison Avenue. Good luck.

And I thought I'll show you. [Laughs.] So one day I walked into Weintraub Gallery and it's terrible, I can't remember if it was Madison and 78th or Madison and 77th. Is it [Issy] Miyake is there – I don't – if it's in that space today. Anyway – because Weintraub did move to another spot on Madison at one time. But so I remember I walked in and I asked for a job. I could type. [Laughs.] I could do all of that – take shorthand, anything they needed. And they didn't need anything of course.

So I was kind of crestfallen and I walked home –

MS. RICHARDS: Why did you pick that gallery to go to?

MS. GHEZ: It was nearby because I lived at 76th and 2nd Avenue. And this was 77th and Madison – 78th and Madison. So – crestfallen, I walk home. I go into my apartment and the phone was ringing. And the person there had quit. This is a true story – and how soon could I come in? This is the beginning of a career, that moment. I always used to say to my mother it was the luck of the Irish and at one point somebody said, no, it's because you're out there, you know, looking and asking. Yeah, but it only took one ask. [They laugh.]

And so I went to work for Weintraub Gallery. And I worked there – I stayed there for two years, actually.

MS. RICHARDS: Who – what was the name of the owner?

MS. GHEZ: Jacob Weintraub.

MS. RICHARDS: Jacob.

MS. GHEZ: Right. And there was a Frank Kent who was also working there. God, these are names from the past. And then what happened? We came to Chicago. Gilbert received an offer from the University of Chicago economics department where Friedman and Becker and many people interested in human capital were working and teaching. So off we come to Chicago – two young children.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you by chance also study art history at Columbia as well as Berkeley?

MS. GHEZ: I – yes. Well, I took, again – I can't even remember. You know, I – did I audit, did I – I probably – audit it. I don't know. But I had to sign up somehow because it was with – oh god, this fabulous man –

MS. RICHARDS: [Leo] Steinberg?

MS. GHEZ: No. The most articulate individual – [laughs] – I felt, on the face of the earth. Oh, what was his name? So that would have been – just at that time – what was his name? I'll think of it – think of it. An outstanding scholar, but such a wonderful speaker –

MS. RICHARDS: What was the course? What was the period?

MS. GHEZ: Oh, you know –

MS. RICHARDS: Contemporary?

MS. GHEZ: Art history. I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: Modern?

MS. GHEZ: Modern or whatever, yeah. Now that I've said Herschel Chipp, I can't remember. You don't remember any of the art historians at that time?

MS. RICHARDS: At Columbia? No –

MS. GHEZ: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Except – oh. Yes, I know who you mean now.

MS. GHEZ: You know who – I'm sure.

MS. RICHARDS: Schapiro!

MS. GHEZ: Schapiro! Meyer Schapiro. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Meyer Schapiro.

MS. GHEZ: Awesome, right? Just awesome enough to want – make you want to go into – [laughs] – that field.

So then we – all right, so we come to Chicago. I have a third child – a third daughter.

MS. RICHARDS: And her name?

MS. GHEZ: And her name is Helena. And when Helena was – [laughs] – about a year and half, again, I thought I'd have a breakdown. I mean, really, just chemically I wasn't feeling well. I knew I had to get out and do some work. And I – you know, I lacked confidence, you know, I had three children. But I just knew I had to get out. I thought, oh, can I do anything? But I can type. [Laughs.] And somebody had told me about the Renaissance Society. They've got this small organization on campus. And at the time it was run by Katherine Lee –

MS. RICHARDS: I that Katherine with K?

MS. GHEZ: Katherine – yes. Katherine Lee Keefe.

MS. RICHARDS: Keefe? K-E –

MS. GHEZ: K-E-E-F-E. And so I got in to the Renaissance Society offices, to talk to – speak to Katherine – tell her I've been in New York, I've had this experience and I'd love to work in a gallery. Of course, there's nothing –

MS. RICHARDS: What year was this when you walked in?

MS. GHEZ: Well, if I started in January of '73 – this may be December or early January of '73.

MS. RICHARDS: Seventy-three.

MS. GHEZ: Anyway, this time it took three weeks. There were no jobs, but the president quit – [laughs] – three weeks later. It's – I know it doesn't sound like it's possible but it's true. The person – and somehow she had kept my – I'd written my name on scrap of paper and she kept it. Maybe she knew that things weren't going well with this other person. And she called –

MS. RICHARDS: What other person?

MS. GHEZ: Well, there was somebody there working with her. In fact, there were only two people at that time, mind you. And, again, how soon could I come in? And I was just terrified because I really was feeling very vulnerable at that time after I had children and, you know, would I be able to do it? So anyway, I –

MS. RICHARDS: This is 1973?

MS. GHEZ: This is 1973. It was January 23rd, 1973, when I was hired. So it's been exactly 38 years now – in a couple days. So Katherine was doing the shows. But then that was at the time that the Smart Museum [of Art, University of Chicago] was coming into being – being birthed by Ed [Edward A.] Maser. And –

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember how to spell – how would you spell Maser? Is it M-A-Z-E-R?

MS. GHEZ: I think it's S – Z or S, I think it's S. I want to go check on that. Because he was – well, he was the first director of the Smart Museum. Anyway, and he was on the board of the Renaissance Society, in the art history department here. And he hired Katherine as his first curator. I don't – you don't know Katherine Lee. She just retired not so long ago as – she's Sherman Lee's daughter.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh right.

MS. GHEZ: I mean, this is the whole thing if you talk to Annie [Anne Rorimer] in –

MS. RICHARDS: She was in Cleveland, yes.

MS. GHEZ: You know, I don't know how much Annie went into all the relationships. But that's how I know Annie.

MS. RICHARDS: You're talking about Rorimer? Yeah.

MS. GHEZ: Anyway, so Ed hired Katherine as his first curator for the Smart – it was called the Smart Gallery at that time. Somebody got smart and changed it to the Smart Museum.

MS. RICHARDS: So he hired her away from the Renaissance Society?

MS. GHEZ: Oh, yeah, right, exactly – [laughs] – where he was on the board – whatever.

And – what happened then? – so there was a search. And they then hired Jean Goldman. And Jean had this –

MS. RICHARDS: To be director?

MS. GHEZ: To be director. And she'd been studying at the University of Chicago doing her Ph.D. in art history, in Italian art or something.

And so she became director, but it wasn't – it didn't work because her husband didn't – was not happy and he wanted her at home, they had two little kids and – whatever. So I think she – Jean may have done one or two shows, if that. I'm looking at this list here and I see "The Anonymous Image" was Jean's show and probably the French –

MS. RICHARDS: This from 1974.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah. Right. Because I – so I was "all other" at the time, so I was work – I was –

MS. RICHARDS: You were what?

MS. GHEZ: "all other" – I always – the administrative assistant. I did membership, I did the books, I did – you know, you name it.

MS. RICHARDS: Everything else.

MS. GHEZ: Everything else that the director, Katherine, didn't do - or that Jean. And then Jean wasn't there that much, as it turned out, because her husband wasn't happy. And so all of a sudden, I was doing a lot of the work.

And so Jean left and then there was another search. She was maybe there six months, I think. There was another search.

And I remember Harold Haydon, who was a - he was - he wrote for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, I believe, for many, many years. He was an artist and he was head of Midway Studio here. And he was on the board of the Renaissance Society. And he was president of the board, I think, at that time when they were doing the search again.

And I was sort of running the place and so I often would say to Harold, you know, "You just - you took a chance" and they hired - anyway, they hired me. They took a chance on me. I would say that to Harold. And I got the most beautiful letter from him once before he died saying, "Dear Susanne, you must stop saying that I took a chance on you. I knew what I was doing." Sweet, generous, really wonderful.

So I started. I was terrified, absolutely terrified.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did you manage the three kids and working -

MS. GHEZ: It wasn't easy.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it full-time or part-time then?

MS. GHEZ: It was part-time at that time. It was four hours. We were open from - was it 10:00 to 2:00? Is that possible? It's possible, at that time, that we might have only been open four hours a day.

So - oh, that - I know - that's why I went back to work. I had - [laughs] - well, I had this child who was maybe a year and a half. And I had two dismissal times. And maybe, with the young one, I had to pick her up at a certain time. But I had one that got out at 3:00, one that got out at 2:00 and then one that got out at 12:00. There are other things I can do with my life except being this, you know, human school bus running back and forth all of the time.

And so I got a babysitter, wonderful housekeeper who also helped out, you know, picking up the children. Because we lived here in the neighborhood, it was easy; it was only a few blocks away from the - from the Laboratory school where they went to school. [Laughs.] Yeah, that's what drove me back to work. [Laughs.] All those - many dismissal times.

MS. RICHARDS: When you started, you were given the job, it was part-time. And did you then hire one person who'd be your assistant?

MS. GHEZ: Right. And it was Richard Born, you know, Richard Born who is the curator of the Smart Museum now?

And I remember - [laughs] - the person who used to be in the gallery --

MS. RICHARDS: It's B-O-R-N-E?

MS. GHEZ: B-O-R-N.

And the person also we would hire on, who was doing a Ph.D. here, to gallerysit was Russell Bowman. You remember Russell Bowman - [laughs] - from Milwaukee [WI] [was director, Milwaukee Art Museum]? He and Richard were in the same class, going through at the same time. And they would come and install for me, right?

MS. RICHARDS: In those early years, when you first started, was there an established program here, an expectation that this institution, this small gallery, would - I should - let me start - what was the defined mission of the Renaissance Society then?

MS. GHEZ: It was not so defined. They were all over the lot. They were - they didn't really know - hadn't really thought about - it was going down the tubes, the institution, so fast, that when I look back, again, we got lucky.

MS. RICHARDS: It was going in the tubes in this -

MS. GHEZ: Well, if one -

MS. RICHARDS: - in the sense of audience? Or - or -

MS. GHEZ: Oh, that was a very - it was very little - no, very little -

MS. RICHARDS: - intellectual credibility?

MS. GHEZ: - very little audience, no real engagement with students or with the public. I don't know. It was a very small group of people. There was a budget of - how much was the budget? At most, 25,000 [dollars]. I want to say 21,000 [dollars]. And that was for staff and all programs. [Laughs.] So that will tell you something about, you know, where it was.

Right.

MS. RICHARDS: So when first became director, did you have a freedom to make it what you wanted it to be?

MS. GHEZ: Right. And it was so frightening to me. I mean, I was terrified. I didn't know what I was doing. I mean, I'm the first to say, what was my training? I mean, I'd had three or four classes and - with amazing people - gone around to galleries - [laughs] - and a little museum -

MS. RICHARDS: Had you been involved, at least, in installing when you worked at Weintraub?

MS. GHEZ: No. I mean, I could see them hanging pictures, you know? Something sold, another thing went up. But no, not at all.

But, you know, I loved - I had art books. My husband had a collection of art books. He really loved art. I mean, I'm indebted to him for exposing me to - to culture, I mean, to visual arts culture. I am. That changed my life - that and, you know, living in Europe and all the things at the time.

But I was terrified. In fact, as I looked at some of this -

MS. RICHARDS: When you got there, there had been exhibitions already planned that would be in place?

MS. GHEZ: There were a couple. The - this - as I look at this list - all right, so I was hired as the second person. I became director in September of '74 - so a year and a half, more or less - a year and something - 8 or 9 months after I was hired, then I was hired as director.

And so there were a couple of things on the books then, and - probably "The Anonymous Image," [1974] that's here; maybe the "[Avant Garde in Theatre:] French Playbills [of the 1890s]," 1974, though that might have been up at the time; the "Contemporary Still Life," [1974] So that was the first time that I actually started making some -

MS. RICHARDS: That was your first show.

MS. GHEZ: - yeah - starting making some choices. Right - again, not knowing what I was doing.

And that - this next one, this -

MS. RICHARDS: Were there -

MS. GHEZ: - "Fifty Years of Photography" [1975]. It's funny that you talk about terror. I remember this so well. It was women in - as seen through the photographer's lens of - and many of them were - a lot of it was fashion photography. I was interested in clothes at time. What can I say? [Laughs.] I was interested in the visual.

And so I don't know what made me do that. But -

Anyway, so off I go to New York because I'm told that the Modern [Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY] had - the Modern - I - [laughs] - we had two people, right? - has wonderful - have wonderful photographs by the people I was looking at - [Richard] Avedon and so on.

And I go to New York and I am so terrified - that I had an appointment - there was this wonderful elderly - I say elderly with much - [laughs] - I am walking on thin ice here - she must have been in her 80s. I would say - wonderful woman who was head of the photography department at the Modern at that time, so it must have been '74 - '73, '74 - '74.

And so I wanted to - I made an - did I make an appointment? I had an appointment, I think.

And I went to the front desk, and I was so terrified I had to leave and walk around the block. And I did this three times. I was so nervous and terrified.

And she was just a lovely person. She could probably see that I didn't exactly know what I was doing.



And she said to me, "Susanne," - [laughs] - and she - I always remember she had this fabulous collar pin like a tornado on her lapel - "if I were in your place, Saks Fifth Avenue just did a show that was so out of place in Saks of women photographers. All of the photographers," she said, "that you're talking about here were in this exhibition." And she said, "What are they going to do with these photographs? If I were you, I would just" - because we didn't have - you know, to borrow from the MoMA, we didn't have the humidity control, we still don't -  
I would go, "What is that?" [Laughs.] So I did. And I got this show.

And I got - those were the days when there were delivery trucks. I don't know if you remember. You go shopping; God forbid, you'd ever bring a package home, it would - it would always be "Send it," all right? I don't know if you remember that, but - and there were trucks that would ply back and forth between Bonwit Teller - New York, Chicago, Saks - same thing. So not only did I get a show - [laughs] - but I got - the shipping free.

So that was the beginning of trying to use my wits, I would say, and listen up to what people were saying and -  
And it was a - it was a not bad show, installed by Richard Born and Russell Bowman - [laughs] - I can still see the two of them.

MS. RICHARDS: In those early days, did you have a sense that it might be difficult as a woman in the art world?  
[End of audio.]

MS. GHEZ: No, I never felt that way. No.

MS. RICHARDS: And were there any people at the university or in the Chicago art world who functioned as a kind of mentor to you? Or to whom you could turn if you had questions?

MS. GHEZ: Well, was it - can I say not yet? But it was coming up very soon, it was Anne *Rorimer*, Annie, whom I met through *Katherine*. I mean, I don't know how much Anne told you of all this. But, so Anne's father was director of the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY], *Katherine's* father was the director of the Cleveland Museum [of Art, Cleveland, OH]. And then there was d'Harnoncourt. Anne d'Harnoncourt. Anne d'Harnoncourt's aunt was on my board of directors.

So these three young women - [laughs] - who had grown - with fathers who were titans in the art world, had grown up together and they all were friendly and knew each other well. Malcolm Collier was Anne's aunt, and not Anne Rorimer but Anne d'Harnoncourt.

MS. RICHARDS: You said aunt? Malcolm?

MS. GHEZ: Yes. Her name was Malcolm - she was married to Don Collier. So through *Katherine* I met Annie Rorimer. And Annie, of course, was at the Art Institute [of Chicago, Chicago, IL] at that time and she was doing some wonderful exhibitions although they didn't give her the time on the floor, so to speak, that she really deserved.

It's unfortunate. But I had the good fortune, on the other hand, to be able to talk to her about all that was happening at that time in conceptual art. And I could play out her fondest desires, in a way, right, because I had the time and the space and could make things happen.

So if you look back through my programing -

MS. RICHARDS: So is that where Joseph Kosuth comes in, 1976?

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, all of that, right. So that probably - it was '76 yeah. "Joseph Kosuth," [1976] the "[Robert] Smithson [Mirror/Salt Works," 1976], actually that was mine - I mean, there's a story behind that too, but -

MS. RICHARDS: Why do you think you - did you personally gravitate toward those kinds of artistic practices?

MS. GHEZ: Well, as a - so - I knew at one point, I told you the institution was really in trouble. We were going down the tubes, especially with the initiation of the Smart Museum. We had to do something that was different, we had to carve out a territory because they were going to be a generalist kind of museum, they had to answer to the University of Chicago faculty in art history.

At that time they didn't come up very far into the present in terms of their faculty. They would come up to the German Expressionists. That was it. Reinhold Heller, Reinhold was the absolute most contemporary person on the faculty. So -

MS. RICHARDS: Reinhold Heller?

MS. GHEZ: Yeah. And if they were indeed answerable to the faculty it was clear to me they weren't going to be doing very contemporary – and maybe, I mean knowing Ed and Katherine's interests in art, I knew that if we really wanted to carve out something of our own that if we went the contemporary route then that would serve us well, which it has in the long run when one looks back over all of these years.

But that was sort of my idea to take that path. I didn't know anything really about it. I've learned – Annie was my mentor. *Anne Rorimer was totally my mentor. And she taught me everything I knew about Conceptual, Minimal, Minimal, Conceptual art, very generously. So I'm very indebted to Annie and at every opportunity, whenever I speak publically, I put that out there because she deserves it.*

*I also felt that I represented the median public, that if I could get it and understand it, if I could wrap my brain around Conceptual art and what was being presented through these artists, you know, Lawrence Weiner, Joseph Kosuth, Smithson, Hans Haacke ["Hans Haacke: Recent Works" 1979] –*

MS. RICHARDS: *That was 1979.*

MS. GHEZ: *Yeah. Then anyone else could, you know. Any thinking person who was living today with the challenges, the political situation, the cultural situation in the world, would be interested in a program that embraced artists like that.*

*In the beginning I had one or two people leave the board; they were very unhappy with that kind of work. They thought it was just terrible. But that's all right. They left.*

MS. RICHARDS: *But you had some who were strong supporters.*

MS. GHEZ: *Who – they were – they didn't know but, again, they were willing to learn. And that's – I often say, I don't know that we have that many specialists on our board – in fact, we don't – but the fact that they're open-minded and willing to learn, of course it's an enrichment of lives. It's a big enrichment – it's been a huge enrichment in my own life, right? So why not share that with the public.*

*And the audiences early on were so small, if we got 30 people at an opening – [laughs] – you know, it was probably lucky when they were coming to see Joseph Kosuth or whatever, or Hans Haacke – well, more than that, but not many. If we got lucky maybe there'd be 70 –*

MS. RICHARDS: *At what point did the gallery expand its hours from four to –*

MS. GHEZ: *I'd have to look back and see, I don't know. I mean, I can look at how the budget grew, how the space grew because we moved, we were not in the space where we're sitting today.*

MS. RICHARDS: *Staff grew?*

MS. GHEZ: *We were in another building where the music department is now. And so space-wise, we've always been constrained space-wise in terms of growth.*

MS. RICHARDS: *When you started out I can see that there was a mixture of thematic exhibitions and one-person shows and then you gradually over the years seemed to favor one-person solo exhibitions.*

MS. GHEZ: *Yup. Exactly.*

MS. RICHARDS: *What was your thinking during the '70s when you were doing this mixture and you had exhibitions, which, for example, '76 that – works on paper, conceptual works – and then you had minimal sculpture and you had Thick Paint [1978] – did you curate that show, Thick Paint?*

MS. GHEZ: *Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]*

MS. RICHARDS: *Were you doing that because you felt that doing a thematic exhibition was a different and interesting way to educate the public, or for some other reason, and that you actually were wishing that you could just do one-person shows?*

MS. GHEZ: *You know, I don't – I was just trying to have a lively program. And again, I didn't know what I was doing. You know, I was trying this out, I was trying that out.*

MS. RICHARDS: *In terms of mentors for the curatorial process, who, if anyone, did you talk to about how to initially focus ideas to create an exhibition, to research and develop –*

MS. GHEZ: That, again, I just learned – it's in the doing, like many things, you learn in the doing. Yeah, as I look at some of these like the folk art ["Twentieth-Century Folk Art," 1975] and, well, the Aaron Siskind ["For You, Aaron," 1975], the show for Aaron Siskind. I think John Vinci probably was very helpful, who's an architect here in the city, because he was friends with Aaron Siskind.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell his last name? Vinci?

MS. GHEZ: Vinci. V-I-N-C-I. And he was a good friend of Anne's at the – Anne Rorimer – at the time, and still is. So there was a show that Katherine Lee was doing of Aaron Siskind at the Smart Museum, and so I did the students of Siskind in the city and that was very important. And we really – a lot of people came in. So it was interesting to observe how, you know, if you did something, indeed, that engaged a strong interest of people within the community, visual arts community, that you'd get a sizable turnout.

But today, I don't think – I'm not guided so much by community. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: But in those days one of your goals then was to build the audience – to increase awareness among the student body or the Chicago art world?

MS. GHEZ: A bit – all, all of the above. The collectors, my colleagues curators – my curator colleagues – and it's the same today. It's this big mix. Today we get really quite wonderful audiences, in fact, to openings. During the week, it's hard to park and to get down here, but we get a substantial amount of people coming through, so I feel very good about that.

But in terms of – I don't know, why did I do – [laughs] – like, "Ideas in Sculpture: 1965-1977," [1977]? Whatever put that idea in my head, and yet it was a great show and I loved it. I loved working on it, meeting all of these people, installing it –

MS. RICHARDS: At that point did you make a decision that you would not invest time in writing, which some curators might have done?

MS. GHEZ: I'm not a writer. No, right, exactly. Well, some curators would be guided in their programming by what they have to say. I am not a very verbal person. I'm just not. Again, like, reading – I remember at the time people wanted to know what magazines I was reading, and it was like – I didn't read the magazines that much, the art magazines. I was – I remember using the word instinct.

And I remember someone in the office, who still works here now, saying, "Susanne, as a woman, you have to stop using that word 'instinct' because, you know, you'll be classified in some way as a woman using instinct." And, of course today, people have come, I think, around to understand that if you have a good instinct and know how to get in touch with it and move with that that's a strength that a lot of people don't have.

And today I understand I have – I've had good instincts along the way. So I was just following a lot of my own instincts. Again, I was a viewer, what did I want to learn about? I was running a program, answerable, basically, to no one. [Laughs.] At that time, it's scary to say but true –

MS. RICHARDS: You had a board, though, and you needed to keep them supportive –

MS. GHEZ: I did but – yeah, and there was never really a – there was a time when there was a program committee, but at one point I remember, and I am so grateful to him, Tom [Thomas] Heagy, who was the president of the board, just saying to the board – or I had a conversation with Tom, and I said, "Look, this is just pro forma, you know, we don't really need this program committee."

And supposedly we talked, but there was not so much of that going on. Why don't we just say if the board is unhappy with the program that they fire me and they find somebody, you know, whom they like and is doing the kind of programming they like. But in the interim I would really love to have complete autonomy, and they gave it to me.

And I've had that, and that's been an amazing gift. And you know, there've been some clunkers maybe along the way, but in general I think that we've done well.

MS. RICHARDS: During the '70s, you added some staff members as you went along. But you always maintained –

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, I'd – I could go back and find those numbers, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, you always maintained the curatorial role as yours.

MS. GHEZ: Always, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Though you never gave yourself the title director and curator, you never gave anyone else the title of curator.

MS. GHEZ: Right, well, because I was the only one, for a long time, doing it. And then, when Hamza [Walker] came he was education director and that's much more recent -

MS. RICHARDS: Curator.

MS. GHEZ: Well, yeah, as associate curator. Then he was given the title, first it was education director and then it was education director and associate curator. And if I looked through the shows I could probably, at one point, update where he started -

MS. RICHARDS: We'll get to that. When you decided that you would not focus on writing, did you also decide that you would take the approach in terms of exhibition of not having extensive written materials or did you think, well, I'll hire someone else to do the written materials?

MS. GHEZ: I always knew that I would have to hire someone else to do it. It's not my strength - it's good in life to know what your strengths are and what your weaknesses are. And I was in the very fortunate position to tailor my job to what my strengths were, again, to locate - identify and locate interesting work, to present it with great dignity and respect, accompanied by text written by someone who's good at doing that, and to maintain a balanced budget.

MS. RICHARDS: In the '70s, as you were beginning in this role as a museum director, did you get involved in AAM, American Association of Museums?

MS. GHEZ: At one point I decided, no, that I wasn't interested. Well, AAM, am I a member? I think I'm a member today. But I don't - I'm not involved, no.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, as a young professional you might have gone to conferences and gone to panels and thought about issues -

MS. GHEZ: No, we didn't have the money, the budget, to do that kind of thing. If there was money to travel, it was traveling, as I mentioned, always with an eye to an exhibition or to see an artist that I wanted to present or something, but I've never done any of that. And we did not get involved in -

MS. RICHARDS: CAA? College Art Association?

MS. GHEZ: No, never, I've never been, not to one. [Laughs.] Which is - when you look at the program it's interesting. So -

MS. RICHARDS: Since you're at a university.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, right. You know, I was going to say something else but -

MS. RICHARDS: Well, we were talking about AAM, maybe another organization -

MS. GHEZ: Oh, I guess it was accreditation. I was not interested in that at one point. I decided I did not want to spend my years, when we first thought about it, only trying to meet their demands, which I realized probably could never be met, in this space over which we do not have complete control.

And so we just put it out of our minds, and we certainly conduct this program in every possible way as a major museum would. We handle the works with the same care, they're written about with the same intellectual - whatever -

MS. RICHARDS: Rigor.

MS. GHEZ: Rigor, thank you. That would be excellent. But we don't have humidity control, and you know, we've got 30-foot ceilings out there, we just - it's impossible.

MS. RICHARDS: Speaking of the space, have you ever wished you had a separate space not in a building like this?

MS. GHEZ: It's come up several times. There were board - during the, when - early '90s, late '80s, early '90s there where a couple of board members absolutely wanted - thought we should move downtown, it was in the time when there were all these loft spaces and there was a certain area of the city. And I was totally opposed to it. I've always been opposed to it. I feel that we couldn't have a better location than to be in the environment of a great - one of the great universities of the world.

It's a great intellectual environment where there's this constant exploration of ideas, constant questions being asked and thought about. And what a great intellectual, yeah, environment to be in, how perfect, couldn't be better.

MS. RICHARDS: What has your interaction been with the university, with the students, with the faculty, with the administration?

MS. GHEZ: For a long time it practically didn't exist. Well, when I came there was a link, a much stronger link, when Katherine was here. And it was severed because it was when I was working for Katherine we had a treasurer at that time who ran up a big debt, he was having a nervous breakdown, this man unfortunately. And so things had just been let go and with my - [laughs] - interest in figures, as I always said, on the math side of it, I spotted it right away. And I said, "Katherine -"

MS. RICHARDS: Did you think he was stealing or just not keeping track?

MS. GHEZ: No, there was a debt - there was a debt not being paid. What happened was, I never knew him, but there must have been some independent wealth there. And at the end of the year with the society there was a deficit or whatever, he would write a check. Now, we're talking about not huge amounts, but he would cover it and he had divorced and he was just not in good shape, and so things weren't getting covered and were adding up where we had this debt running up with the university. And they were very unhappy about it.

MS. RICHARDS: These were expenses that you were supposed to reimburse the university for?

MS. GHEZ: That's right. We can run some of our expenses through the university. We can buy insurance through the university, we could buy - I could buy a computer through the university -

MS. RICHARDS: You'd be paying for it, but at a lower rate, because it would -

MS. GHEZ: The insurance we'd get at a lower rate, because they're self-indemnified, for instance, that makes sense. Computer - any university, I'm sure, would get the same discount. But there is a system where I can get billed once a month for student, you know - when we have students working for us - work-study students - the payroll can run through the university. But at the end of the month, we have to write a check for them.

And somehow, these checks had not been taken care of. So I remember pointing it out to Katherine, and that there was a big problem there and we had to face up to it. At one point, the university cut us off, and they no longer - because when I first came here, Katherine was being paid by the university. So there was a much closer - and for those first - that maybe first year, I received a check from the University of Chicago. And I got benefits, too. And then it was all cut off. So things like tuition remission - and I had three kids - never received it. It was a huge, huge problem.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you and the board ever try to be reinstated?

MS. GHEZ: Yeah. They weren't willing to do it. But again -

MS. RICHARDS: Because of the Smart?

MS. GHEZ: Probably because - not only, but that might've a part of it, the Smart - but as I said, we were on a very weak footing at that time.

MS. RICHARDS: But you talked about the intellectual environment here, and your part in it. One would imagine that the university would value -

MS. GHEZ: No, you were asking about - you were asking about location, and I just said, in terms of our location, and my reflection on where I thought we should be located, I can't think of a better place than an environment like this that we have now. I mean, who cares to be downtown when some - I mean, then you're just another gallery space, some place that comes and then goes. I mean, here, we have real intellectual footing for what we do, and it is a program based on ideas and raising questions.

MS. RICHARDS: Right. But the university never felt that it wanted to make the Renaissance Society an official institution or institute or anything.

MS. GHEZ: No, no, no. And even to this day it's still, to me, a somewhat painful relationship in that they've never - I mean, they embraced us a lot more since the last 15 or so years. All of a sudden, they realized, because they always want international outreach, that we have a real international outreach, and in fact, the interesting work in contemporary - in the city was being done here during a great number of years that they were completely unaware of. I mean, it was hugely disappointing to me that art historians from the department never crossed the threshold here. How can that be? But it was, and, you know, it's - well, it's a disappointment,

right? But I think today they understand much more. You know, we get wonderful rent-free space. And I – again, we have complete – I want to say, we're completely autonomous. You know, programming, I don't have to run it by any dean, anything.

MS. RICHARDS: So this – tremendous benefit [laughs] in being independent.

MS. GHEZ: Enormous benefits. In the meantime, I've been the ex officio – I forgot what it's called – of the Department of Visual Arts. And that was when the dean Danielle Allen was here, who was a very insightful woman, who unfortunately left to go to Princeton [University, Princeton, NJ], but she's an outstanding woman.

MS. RICHARDS: Danielle Allen?

MS. GHEZ: Allen.

MS. RICHARDS: A-L-L-

MS. GHEZ: -E-N. And she put me on this department, ex officio, which – and I'm still on it. So that brought even more of a relationship with the university.

And today, I really try. We try. And I lean on Hamza all the time to engage as many of the faculty as we possibly can. For instance, we have this show up now that's dealing – looking back at Minimalism, I mean. And Christine Mehring, who teaches a class on Minimalism –

MS. RICHARDS: Mehring?

MS. GHEZ: M-E-H-R-I-N-G. Her graduate students are doing a symposium. And, I mean, and that's perfect. These are the kinds of things that are wonderful when we can make them happen. Like, before, we couldn't, because there was nobody who even understood what Minimalism probably was, and that's the truth.

MS. RICHARDS: When we move into the '80s, you started out, according to your records, with an exhibition curated by Buzz Specter ["Objects and Logotypes: Relationships between Minimal Art and Corporate Design," 1980]. And occasionally, throughout the years – and actually, I noticed an exhibition organized that you curated with Carter Ratcliff in 1979 ["Visionary Images"].

MS. GHEZ: Well, Carter wrote the – did the catalog and wrote the essay.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, so he didn't co-curate it.

MS. GHEZ: No, not – but I mean, I certainly talked to him a lot, and he sent me around to do a lot of studio visits. Right.

MS. RICHARDS: How did the idea of collaboration come up? Because someone suggested it to you? Because you were seeking that experience as a way of spreading yourself more – to do able to do more?

MS. GHEZ: Well, I mean, again, I – you know, I didn't, I'm learning along with everybody else. So I remember Tom [Thomas] Lawson, who also wrote a very important piece in the catalog for us and Janelle Reiring at Metro [Pictures, New York, NY], it was when Tom was an artist at Metro, and I was there – forgot the name of the show ["A Fatal Attraction," 1982], – looking for art and she said, "Gee, you know, you should talk to Tom Lawson. He's a wonderful writer." And I thought, "Oh, that's perfect. He can write the essay." Again, I don't write, right?

So, I went – and the same with Carter, and I don't remember who sent me to Carter. I have a vague recollection that it might have been Alexander, not Carolyn but – I'm forgetting–

MS. RICHARDS: Brooke Alexander?

MS. GHEZ: Brooke.

Because I think Carter was close to Brooke. And that was probably an artist I was looking at who was –

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah – the show "Visionary Images," I can imagine that some of these artists were represented by Brooke.

MS. GHEZ: Right, that – by Brooke. And he would've said, "Go talk to Carter." And I did, and he wrote a book, and very helpful again that, you know, pointing me in other directions. So that's –

MS. RICHARDS: What about the exhibition in '79 that was organized by Michael Walls for – I guess in collaboration with the Anderson Gallery, Virginia Commonwealth [University, Richmond, CA]? That was a

collaboration in some way?

MS. GHEZ: Yeah. Yeah, and I don't really remember the specifics of how that happened. Somehow, I met Michael Walls around the time - at that time, but I don't really

MS. RICHARDS: So you were open to -

MS. GHEZ: I'm always -

MS. RICHARDS: - different kinds of relationships.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, and I'm trying to, you know, you'll see later on with the Art Institute, to foster these things. I love the fact that we can collaborate with the Art Institute, it's like the little engine and the big engine, but they can come together.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. I'm moving to 1980 - you did a show of Joan Snyder's work ["Joan Snyder: Paintings and Drawings," 1980]. How did you -

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, that's not one I can really -

MS. RICHARDS: And then after that, Jene Highstein ["Jene Highstein: Black Sphere," 1980].

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, Jene I can respond to. Joan, I don't remember. I don't remember how that happened. But that was a show - Joan Snyder - that we took somehow. I'd have to pull out the catalog. I didn't actually curate that, I, you know, installed it, and -

MS. RICHARDS: So Jene Highstein, it was a permanent installation, I think.

MS. GHEZ: Right, it's across the street.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that one of the first, if not the first permanent installation that the Renaissance society organized while you were -

MS. GHEZ: Well, we don't really do permanent installations. It just - it was a temporary installation.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh - that became permanent.

MS. GHEZ: That - yeah, that became permanent. When I think back to it - how did it -

MS. RICHARDS: Was it your ambition -

MS. GHEZ: Because it had been at Berkeley, the ball. Did I see it at Berkeley? And we moved it here, which was just crazy when I think of the way we moved it, because it was just in a rented truck over the mountains. I mean, this huge -

MS. RICHARDS: It's how everyone worked in those days. [Laughs.]

MS. GHEZ: I mean, absolutely out of our minds. But it came here and in the beginning all the students saw it was across the street and it hadn't been landscaped at all, and the students thought it was such fun and they pushed it out into the street, so it became -

MS. RICHARDS: What was it made out of, or is it -

MS. GHEZ: Well, it's -

MS. RICHARDS: - that you could move it?

MS. GHEZ: Yeah - you can. Well, it was round, and we didn't have it really that well, I suppose, secured, and they paint happy faces on it or eights on it, an eight ball and - anyway, but the Bergman family, there was an anniversary of Ed [Edwin] and Lindy Bergman and the children - I guess they must've liked it and - the children liked it or Lindy and Ed liked it, and so they bought it as a gift for them, for their anniversary, and it just remained here at the university, because Ed was probably - at that time, he was chair of the board of directors of the University of Chicago, so that's probably how it - because we didn't do any permanent exhibitions here.

I mean, there was - what was the name of the exhibition with the Sol LeWitt outside? "Ideas in Sculpture," '77. I mean, we had a, you know, the whip out in the quadrangle, it was really very wonderful, but it was only temporary.

And we had James Surls at one time, very - earlier on, from Texas. Something art of - was it "Art of Texas" or something, I don't remember what I called it.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, Art of -

MS. GHEZ: "Art of Texas," right. Well - oh, it was after, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: When I'm looking down here, also in 1980, there was an MFA thesis show.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, that, I want to say - so - and that was Buzz Specter too, curated by Buzz. Buzz was a graduate student at Midway Studios [University of Chicago] and he had - when we were given this space, part of the deal - when we moved from Goodspeed Hall, you know, that smaller space, over here, and we moved in '79, you know, if that's - timing's right - we had to agree to do the exhibition of one graduating student, like the best of the - the pick of the lot as determined by the faculty at Midway. So I -

MS. RICHARDS: Midway Studios was the studio art -

MS. GHEZ: Studio art branch -

MS. RICHARDS: Graduate program, or undergraduate?

MS. GHEZ: Yes, graduate, graduate. "Laura Volkerding," [1979]- that was their choice, the photographs of Laura Volkerding. That was the first one. And then Buzz the next year was that choice. And then we were able to get rid of it, but when did we get rid of it?

MS. RICHARDS: There was one in '83. '82, '83. Yeah, that's the latest one I found.

MS. GHEZ: Where? Which one?

MS. RICHARDS: Listed on your website - 1983.

MS. GHEZ: MFA thesis show. Yeah. That's - all right, so they must've leaned on us - or I see another one in '81.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, I mean that '83 is the latest. Yeah, you have '82, '81 - actually, they're every year, '80 to '83.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, so, we had to do those for a little while when we came here. And then I pointed it out to them how much more appropriate it would be if the Smart Museum were doing them, because they are the official museum of the University of Chicago, and so it was switched over there.

And it lasted for a little while, but not too long; they got rid of it, too, because it is a - I mean, you know, it's not really - I shouldn't say that, because think of how many university museums do this kind of exhibition. And undoubtedly, it's important in the lives. But they are the university and we are "at," not "of" - there is that big distinction of that little preposition, "at" and not "of." And the Smart Museum was of, but then they felt, too, that it wasn't a work [offer?], isn't up to a - of a quality that they wanted to be showing.

So there's a new - you know, with the new - what's the name of the center that's just being built? This is terrible, he just died.

Logan. The Logan Art Center [The Reva and David Logan Center for Creative and Performing Arts, University of Chicago]. David Logan. He just passed away this weekend .

They will undoubtedly, in their gallery space, be doing, and appropriately so, the graduates of the department of visual arts.

MS. RICHARDS: What about the shows that started, I guess, in '83 called "Emerging 1983," and there was "Emerging 1985," and it was, I believe, a large exhibition of Chicago artists, all of whom were nominated.

MS. GHEZ: I went out to other people. I was trying to mix it up. [Laughs.] Again, I still trying to find a, you know, a way to keep things lively.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there pressure from someone to include more local artists, or was it something you felt?

MS. GHEZ: That - maybe - could be - I've always felt responsible to my own community. I really have. I mean, we, in those days - I mean, I think the - mayor's arts council is broke now, but from the city we would get some money, and from taxes, and you know, there is good talent here if you just get out and beat the bushes, there



are some wonderful things happening.

With that, what I thought – well, I go to all these people, because remember I went to Jim [James] Speyer, I went to a lot of people and asked them to nominate artists, but it was a mishmash, you know. It didn't continue on. I mean, maybe we did three of them or something like that. The early ones I did, but –

MS. RICHARDS: It looks like, maybe starting in 1982, when you did a retrospective of Ed Paschke's work ["Ed Paschke: Selected Works"], that you thought about actually doing a survey or a retrospective. Was that a conscious choice that you thought before you wouldn't do, and in terms of the –

MS. GHEZ: Again, it wasn't so predetermined, Judith, it just – I'm looking up above to see if there were any others. Not really, that was probably the first one, yeah, at – and then there were a number of them afterwards, right, from Chicago.

But Ed was, I think, a wonderful talent, and thinking about media well ahead of his peers here in the city. And I'm really happy that we did that. I'm trying to think, did the institute – it's funny, there are shows that, regrettably, didn't take place at the [Art] Institute [of Chicago] or at the MCA [Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL], you know, retrospective kinds of things. And so there, I saw another niche for us, again, to really dignify the work coming out of Chicago, right, to do it as well as we possibly could, and to have a catalogue with an essay.

Again, this was a big deal for us at that time, because we had – you know, if one looked at the budget, I think we had – if, by then, we had \$200,000, it's probably a lot of money. It was a strain, but it was a worthwhile endeavor.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it a conscious decision to publish substantial catalogs on a regular basis?

MS. GHEZ: As much as we could. Again, I was always looking at that bottom line. And if the artist had a lot of catalogs already, then it didn't seem necessary. There are some shows where we don't have catalogs. Or we just frankly didn't have the money. There some essays, like, I remember in this – the book, *History of Renaissance Society: The First 75 Years*, [The Renaissance Society: Chicago, 1994] there is an essay on Daniel Buren that we just didn't have, unfortunately, the money to publish at the time. And so I felt so guilty about it, or the –

MS. RICHARDS: You mean, you had paid the author, they wrote it –

MS. GHEZ: It was such a good essay, and I felt really that we should get it out there. And so we inserted it here. As I look back, in terms of – [sighs] – you know, building a book, I don't know if I would do it that way again, but I'm happy that it's there.

Let me just look into – Anne Rorimer did it ["Daniel Buren. Intersecting Axes: a Work in Situ," 1983, Renaissance Society]. Yeah. I was thinking that John Michi [ph?] did something, too – I think John -- there's a lot of Anne Rorimer here on Buren, I thought one was John.

MS. RICHARDS: From talking to Anne and learning about Conceptual and Minimal art, which was international – so at the very beginning, your idea was that this program should be international –

MS. GHEZ: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: – and not only should it not focus on Chicago, but not focus on the U.S. necessarily.

MS. GHEZ: In the very beginning, did I really – again – you have to –

MS. RICHARDS: – or maybe a few years later. [Laughs.]

MS. GHEZ: It's – you know – it's again, it happened in the doing. I thought that it should be – indeed should be international. And again, you know – this – my background, in living in Europe.

MS. RICHARD: Thinking about when did the first international artists appear in the list of exhibitions, other than the group show, and I suppose it might be –

MS. GHEZ: What is that – international?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. GHEZ: Well, you know, was Robert –

MS. RICHARDS: Daniel Buren?

MS. GHEZ: - was Robert [Smithson] - oh, from Europe? Probably Daniel.

MS. RICHARDS: He was 1983. That was the first once - solo exhibition of a- non-American artist.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, right, right, yeah, right.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that partly a matter of the money?

MS. GHEZ: Jeff Wall's, ["Jeff Wall," 1983] Canada, right after.

MS. RICHARDS: Doing an exhibition with an artist from abroad would incur more expenses -

MS. GHEZ: It would incur -

MS. RICHARDS: - shipping or travel or more artist fees?

MS. GHEZ: - more expenses - but often, like with Daniel, if you move the person [laughs], you moved the show. You know, did we bring him in before? We probably did bring him once before; I mean, when we do shows with artists from abroad we try to get them here to actually see the space. You can send pictures, sketches, diagrams, sketch-up all sorts of things of the space - but until you've walked into it and experienced it, it's an eccentric, wonderful - it's an eccentric space, but it's hard to deal with unless you've seen it.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Thinking back and looking at this beginning of adding international artists to the program, it could in a way mirror the art scene in the U.S. where, I know, other institutions where I was - you look at the '70s, and it's almost all American. And you look at the magazines and you think about what people were thinking of, and it seems that in the '80s, institutions - maybe only the more progressive - started really opening their program up internationally -

MS. GHEZ: Yes.

MS. RICHARD: - and maybe that was part of that evolution at the Renaissance Society.

MS. GHEZ: Probably. I mean, you know, again, Anne did that. What was it - "Europe in the Seventies [:Aspects of Recent Art," 1977]? Such an important exhibition. Such an important exhibition. And I think that opened all of our eyes in Chicago to what was going on abroad and, you know, we wanted to see more.

With the Renaissance Society - it's interesting. Historically they've always been connected to Europe and not to New York. If one looks back to that early Léger show - the Fernand Léger - shown here [Fernand Leger, Screening: *Le Ballet Mécanique*, "1931; then it went to the Modern. The early board members were affiliated with the artists of Chicago, they were travelling to Europe - I just think there's always been this European connection and, when you look - there's isn't so much of the American school -

MS. RICHARDS: In the first 75 years?

MS. GHEZ: In the first 75 years, right? Which I can't comment on too much, but there's a book. [Laughs.] Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. How did you develop your approach as an administrator working with the staff, working with the board? How would you describe that learning process. I mean, you hadn't managed a staff before.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, by the seat of my pants. I mean, again, it's that same thing. You learn in the doing. I mean, we were two people, and then we were three, and maybe we were three and a half, and then we were four. So today, we're seven full-time - something like that - and some half-time and then crew as needed for installations. And the budget, as I said, has gone from 21-24 [thousand dollars] to a million and a half.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to the question about the program - I think you said, in opposition or to complement the program at the Smart, you would focus on living artists. Was that a conscious decision? Was it almost part of the mission or did it become your mission statement?

MS. GHEZ: Not only - did it become a part of our mission statement?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. GHEZ: Eventually it may have - well, but it's more, you know, art at the moment. I'm interested in what's happening today.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, more than just -

MS. GHEZ: Right, I'm interested in what's happening tonight or has happened in the last three or four years. So it's rare that we go back further than that – before, earlier we might have, but today, not so much.

So more and more, I think, the direction has been refined, and that may – you know that, as boards get stronger – and my board is getting a lot stronger – other refinements may kick in. I – right now, I don't know; who's to say?

MS. RICHARDS: Also in the '80s, Richard Flood curated or co-curated?

MS. GHEZ: Yes. He worked with us on –

MS. RICHARDS: There were two shows in '83 called "The Sixth Day: Figurative Sculpture."

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, right. "The Sixth Day," the – yup, that was Richard – that was curated by Richard, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And then next year, "Rapid Enamel: The Art of Graffiti."

MS. GHEZ: Right, so we probably at that time talked about graffiti art.

MS. RICHARDS: Had he thought about his joining the staff? Did you think –

MS. GHEZ: No.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you like the idea of having a guest curator on a regular basis?

MS. GHEZ: Right. He's been a dear friend for a very, very, very long time since the '70s – late '70s. I mean, I've really known Richard and admired his work. And again, you know, it's wonderful to have colleagues with whom you can discuss ideas and, if it works out – again, Richard's a wonderful writer. So, it's that weak side that I have; you know, I can follow up on some of the ideas or if I get pointed in an interesting direction – in those days, I would just go and make it happen – but again, I couldn't really write about it; I wouldn't write about it. I didn't feel confident enough in writing it. It's just not my – I'm not a strong writer.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you say probably because you didn't have the academic background?

MS. GHEZ: I don't have that background. Yeah. And it's funny – I was thinking of this earlier in the day about academic background and about risk-taking. One of the reasons that we have, I think, succeeded so well, is that we've taken a lot of risks, and my personal ability to take risks comes from the fact that I don't have a – you know, an MFA; I don't have a Ph.D., any of that.

So failure – what did that mean? Not much. I didn't have much face to lose, right? So it's very easy to leap, to jump, to take a lot of risks because I wasn't worrying about – I mean, what would that mean? Nothing. [Laughs.] You know, and that's something to think about in life. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Did you find then, maybe continued to find, that not having an academic background adds to a rapport with artists who, most of whom might – some of whom do have an academic background, but most of them don't –

MS. GHEZ: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: – and in that you are looking at things so visually instead of verbally –

MS. GHEZ: Right. I'm not always going to talk about this –

MS. RICHARDS: Then it's a benefit that –

MS. GHEZ: – oh, yes – about this art historian from Europe or that one or –

MS. RICHARDS: Interpret their work in certain ways.

MS. GHEZ: You know, right. Yeah, I'm not – I don't care about those things, no. Right. So – whatever, it's worked all of these years, and I hope it will work for a few more.

MS. RICHARDS: From the beginning, I think, but certainly soon after you arrived, there were other kinds of programming that the Renaissance Society was doing in support of the exhibitions and along with the exhibitions. There were panel discussions and film programs and readings, and all kinds of other activities. Did you assign those to other people? Did you feel that those were essential for you to do? How did you develop those other programs?

MS. GHEZ: The film program I can remember well because here at the University, there is a film society. God, what's the name of it? Anyway, it was located down the hall here, on the fourth floor of Cobb Hall, they had offices. And so I would talk to them, and they would just advise me of what we should be showing and also there were screening rooms there.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. GHEZ: Ted Chen - that was the name of the guy.

MS. RICHARDS: Ted?

MS. GHEZ: Chen, C-H-E-N. He has since died; he died very young.

MS. RICHARDS: Were they involved in the film program that you had? Oh, where is it -

MS. GHEZ: Doc Films is the name of the group. Doc Films.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I can't find it here; I know there was a number of programs.

MS. GHEZ: "Video and Language/Video as Language," [1987]? Scott Rankin.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, that was an exhibition. So you collaborated with them on the film programs, and what about other kinds of -

MS. GHEZ: Well, when we - when - I had an education director - I'm trying to think when it started - but Jeanne Dunning was probably the first person, who's an artist - the first person in that position, and then Joe Scanlan, and then Hamza. So, it was at that part of the program that was in different hands.

MS. RICHARDS: I notice that Joe Scanlan in your book is listed as the assistant director, and then when Hamza came, he was - at that point - the curator of education. Was there a moment when you decided that you didn't really need someone who would be an assistant director -

MS. GHEZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: - but you wanted someone who was a curator of education?

MS. GHEZ: I wanted somebody who was a curator of education and would write all of the written material. But - and as a, you know, wonderful colleague to discuss ideas with, and then so gradually, I'd have to look at the dates I started to give Hamza the opportunity to do curating as well as associate curator. We changed the title.

MS. RICHARDS: And then shifting - just a couple of other questions - were you thinking about audience? We talked about this; you were building audience. But were you - was it a kind of mandate from the board at all that you should have a bigger audience and should you do exhibitions that would attract more visitors?

MS. GHEZ: Well, I think that boards always want that. But that's never, ever going to be the goal that leads my programming, and I've made that very clear to them.

MS. RICHARDS: Nor the issue of how, quote, "difficult" the work would be?

MS. GHEZ: Right, right, yeah. I've made it very clear -

[End of disc]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards, interviewing Susanne Ghez at the Renaissance Society in Chicago on January 25, 2011, disc 2.

I wanted to move into -

MS. GHEZ: Can I just follow up on what we ended with?

MS. RICHARDS: Please. Yes.

MS. GHEZ: I have always said to my board, on innumerable occasions, that the program has to be the carrot that leads the donkey, that leads the cart - not the other way around. And so the - you know, it has to be program first, then we worry about money, about audiences, all the rest afterwards. But program absolutely has to come first.

And they've absolutely been supportive to me in that goal. You know? Maybe if you say it often enough.

[Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Uh huh. When you've gradually built up the staff, you've been gradually building up the board as well.

MS. GHEZ: Yes. [Laughs.] Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And you've talked about how well you've managed the budget. What have been the most challenging - not to the present, yet - but what, do you think, have been the most challenging aspects of working with the board over, let's say, the first - in the '70s and '80s?

MS. GHEZ: Oh, gosh.

MS. RICHARDS: Is it -

MS. GHEZ: To get them to, yeah, engage in some way. I mean, it was a struggle. Because optimally you want them to be involved with you somehow in development. And -

MS. RICHARDS: You mean fundraising development?

MS. GHEZ: In fundraising, right. And frankly, there wasn't so much of that. At one time - I mean, they are interested in the benefit. They get very invested in doing a great benefit.

Well - and for many years - for the first 17 years, I did - ran something called the "Art for Young Collectors" exhibition, which was such an enormous struggle. We would bring in works on consignment from all over the place - I mean, from New York, from all around Chicago. It was something like at least 3,000 works of art. And they - a lot of works on paper, and everything had to be inventoried in, inventoried out. So it was a huge volunteer effort on the part of the board. And they loved it. They loved it. I hated it at one point. [Laughs.] It really, it was - drove me crazy.

And at the end, it was clear that it wasn't - you know, at its peak, it was making - clearing - and that was without anybody's time - \$15,000. And I thought - there's a better way to make money, to raise money, than this show. But everybody loved it. But they never bought enough to make it really, you know, substantial in terms of income.

MS. RICHARDS: \$15,000 from 3000 works?

MS. GHEZ: Yes. Well, I mean, there would be wonderful Japanese prints in those days for 20 bucks. We had somebody in the art history department who was a - Father Harrie - I don't know if you know him, Father - what was his last name? Harrie Vanderstappen. He was a specialist in Japanese art, which, well, when he was around - and a good friend of Katherine Lee's when I first came. And he would go to China - or he had another - a missionary friend who would send him all these wonderful Japanese wood block prints that would go for, really, like \$10, \$20, \$30 would have been a lot. I mean, they were wonderful wood block prints.

So - but there was just a lot of material. And then, you know, we would take - 10 percent? We took so little - yeah, I know. [They laugh.] It was crazy. Right, I think we took 10 [%].

MS. RICHARDS: How did you escape it? How did you end it?

MS. GHEZ: Oh, I just convinced them that there was a better way to do that, do it. And so then we started with auctions - ugh, you know, that's another rocky road that's filled with mines. And that's where we still are.

MS. RICHARDS: Hmm. Auctions with gala dinners, or just by themselves?

MS. GHEZ: With gala dinners, and, you know, fairly - they've become a fairly substantial part of our budget, which is very frightening. Well, you know, 25 percent of our budget. So, you know, between 300[,000 dollars] and \$500,000, net of - not netting - yeah, netting.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. GHEZ: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Thinking about the curatorial process, can you talk about how you formulate ideas for exhibitions? I want to have this relevant to the earlier, earlier years of the Renaissance Society, too, so if you know it's changed, you could address that. I mean, did you keep notebooks, sketchbooks, file drawers of ideas?

MS. GHEZ: No. Oh, you know, so - I'm looking across my office, and I'm just seeing these grey archival boxes, and in each one of - each one of those boxes represents an exhibition. And they're filled with coffee-stained napkins and things like that. No.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did you keep all those things?

MS. GHEZ: Oh, I don't know. At some point - at some time, somebody wanted - I mean - in answer to your question, no, I don't keep extensive notes or anything like that. I mean, again, there are ridiculous notes, in there [laughs] - in very bad condition. What it'll tell anybody in the future, I'm not sure. But we keep some of them.

MS. RICHARDS: But the evolution of your thinking about certain ideas, certain artists, certain concepts for group exhibitions?

MS. GHEZ: What I always try to do, to build the program, in one year, around making sure that there was an artist from the Chicago vicinity, that there was an artist from the nation, that there was an artist from - you know, worldwide, from the globe, if you want, international art. International being abroad, outside of the United States. Because you could very well - and I think we do - have an international artist in Chicago.

And then, beyond that, it was just sort of a random pick of what I would find interesting at that time or have the opportunity to present, what I had seen. Something that had - maybe this is a little early to talk about it, that really changed the programming a bit - was when I was a co-curator at "Documenta." And we traveled the world, we really did. I mean, we were in China, we were in India. We were in Cuba. We were in Europe. We were just all over.

And so, much of the research and the looking that went on at that time was played out later at the Renaissance Society. So I was lucky.

MS. RICHARDS: In the '70s and '80s, was part of your thinking about building the program ever women artists?

MS. GHEZ: I never focused that way. Women were naturally a part of the program.

MS. RICHARDS: But were you conscious that you were, maybe, doing better than other institutions? Did women artists come to you and say I really think the Renaissance idea has a good record?

MS. GHEZ: I don't - I'm sure along the way that there were people who wanted - you know, there were years when people wanted those kinds of figures. But it's just not a way I choose work. Good work is good work, and it falls out. I mean, if you look back through the program, you're going to see a lot of women, you'll see a lot of different - [laughs] - races, religions, sexuality. It's all there. And it just came up naturally. It's never been forced in that way.

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

MS. GHEZ: Again, I'm not that kind of a structured - maybe it would have been better if I had been a structured individual, and - but I was just sort of following my instincts, wherever I went. Wherever I had the opportunity to go, again - there wasn't a lot of money. So if I was in one city - you know, the artists are a great source of information. So whoever I was working with, you can believe that over dinner or over drinks or coffee, we were talking about other artists.

And some of those people are just so - were so generous, like, I mean, Dan Graham was wonderful. I - oh, I remember Dan in particular. You know, he probably turned me on to Jeff Wall, or also to James Coleman. He had met James in an exhibition he was in, in Italy.

But again - and then I would follow up on these things if so-and-so said that X artist was interesting, well, I'd look for myself to find out. And then this - I think I mentioned to you about the artist whom I just invited in Berlin. It was that same system, you know, people - some other artists or colleagues had mentioned his name, and so you just follow up. And then, at the end of the day, it's your own instinct and your own choice you can say, No, I'm not interested in that work or I think it'll make an interesting program.

I also want - and beyond this mix of local, national, and international, I want an interesting program. So you don't know if you're going to see drawings - a drawing show when you walk in. Are you going to see the whole room blackened and darkened, and the show like we have up now - and Gerard Byrne - or will you see - sculpture came before, Rebecca Warren?

I mean, I do there consciously try to mix it up so that we don't have too many runs of video. Although, frankly, it pays to do - [laughs] - a couple of video exhibitions in a row because we go through enormous efforts to film all of the windows: We put three coats of film; we have to get high-risers, again, to get them up and into the space. It's sometimes a challenge.

So if you have a dark space, maybe - [laughs] - it does pay to do two in a row. But if I look back, I'm sure it - [laughs] - doesn't happen that much. The one - I always say that when the economic situation improved in the United States, our luxury was to move walls. For a long time, we didn't - if you look back at the photographic documentation, we didn't move walls. We didn't have the money. So that was really a big plus to be able to break down walls and to build them for almost - you know, differently for almost every exhibition.

MS. RICHARDS: When you when you identify an artist whose work you're interested in, and you go and visit, and you decide that you'd like to do an exhibition, let's say, someone like Jeff Wall or Robert Barry, how much of that exhibition concept comes from the artist working, talking to you, or you're talking to the artist, and how much comes -

MS. GHEZ: A lot will come from them. My position has always been - and this is something I say to the artist often, especially when we're working with new work that they're going to produce - oh, by the way, that's something we might talk about.

We - at a certain point; I want to say in '85 - became producers of new work. And that was a distinct change.

MS. RICHARDS: And that was in 1985?

MS. GHEZ: I think the James Coleman was probably the first time. I lost my train of thought.

MS. RICHARDS: I was asking you how much of the exhibition concept comes from the artist.

MS. GHEZ: Yes. So what I loved to be able to say to them was, look, you dream the dream; I'll make it happen. And then we discussed from there, you know - but as best I can, I try to make it happen.

MS. RICHARDS: And your hope is that they want to present the newest work, or they might -

MS. GHEZ: They always want to present their newest work - [laughs] - without fail.

MS. RICHARDS: So you might - you wouldn't go to them and say, you know, I loved that body of work you did 10 years ago. I want to show that -

MS. GHEZ: Yes, probably not. I mean, maybe earlier on, that happened. But basically not - and what I also wanted to say is that over the years in terms of the financial management, we have no endowment. But what

I've been able to do is build up a cash reserve or a cash balance by bringing the program in year after year with an excessive revenue-over-expenses these many years, and investing it.

So we did build up – it was never very much, but we were – maybe had a million dollars on the side.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it philosophical that you didn't want to call it an endowment and make it an endowment?

MS. GHEZ: "Endowment" is a very tricky word; you have to be very careful with it because when you set up a true endowment, you cannot touch it come hell or high water. And I wanted a cash reserve you can touch; it's an unrestricted fund. And that's what I wanted so that indeed, I can go to the artist and say, you dream the dream and I will make it happen.

I don't have to say, you dream the dream and I'll see if I can, you know, find the money to make this happen. I knew I had the money.

MS. RICHARDS: But you must have had in the back of your mind a maximum budget for the project.

MS. GHEZ: But I never would start there. I would start with a dream.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

MS. GHEZ: No, that's who I am. I mean, you know –

MS. RICHARDS: So if they came back to you with some amazingly challenging project that you knew would cost more than –

MS. GHEZ: Then, we'd have to talk – [laughs]. But it really –

MS. RICHARDS: So there were no limits.

MS. GHEZ: I suspect that the artists overall had been realistic people – [laughs] – as well, you know? But basically, that formula has worked out. It's – [laughs] –

MS. RICHARDS: Nobody has –

MS. GHEZ: – amazing.

MS. RICHARDS: – had to trim their project?

MS. GHEZ: Well, maybe – yes, a little. But that's a discussion that – but at the outset, I think it's important – instead of saying, well, if I can find the money, or if I can raise money for this, or if we can get a grant for that – I've never started a project like that, and that's because of this cash reserve that I built up. And you know, the board has left it, happily.

It's like – I don't like to talk about it out loud because – [laughs] – if some of the board members understand what I've been doing here – and it's not that it's ever been squandered; it's been invested carefully. But it's there –

MS. RICHARDS: Have you used board members to help you invest it?

MS. GHEZ: We have an investment committee. I mean, you know, we suffered in the downturn like everybody else, but a little less because – [laughs] – of just through – what was I going to say – committees not meeting whatever we were left in cash. [Laughs.] Or sometimes, I would just languish in cash for a while because I knew – or I suspected what was going on.

But we do have today a good investment committee with some real professionals happily on it.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. Let's go back to that point you made a few minutes ago about commissioning work, starting in 1985. How did that start happening?

MS. GHEZ: Right, we became producers of new work. And I think that that timing – and I'd have to – my recollection is, because I used to – I have served some of these NEA artist panels; if you remember, the NEA would give money to single artists, and then there was a point at which they cut it all off because they were unhappy with some of the work being made under their name.

And so the burden of production – and it was also at a time when video was coming in. And the burden of production, for one reason or another, started to shift into museums, which was strange. Well, it wasn't strange because before with galleries, I mean, they had to help the artists, I mean, what, buy canvas and paint? But

once we got into video, we were talking about some relatively serious money.

And that burden shifted absolutely – and I remember when it happened – into the museum scene, and how different museums dealt with it – they all dealt with it a little bit differently in terms of their relationship with the artist and with galleries; there was the eventual sale of the piece, et cetera.

And we had a very specific way of dealing with it; we never – only once, and that was in a – one exception – took money from the artist. The artist just gets the piece and walks away with it afterwards; I hope the artist, and not the gallery, but probably the gallery, eventually when it gets sold gets a half of anything – but if you think of all of – [laughs] – how hard it is to –

MS. RICHARDS: Have you thought that you would explore the possibility that the gallery would agree to share some of the income with you?

MS. GHEZ: I don't want to be a bill collector with galleries for the rest of my life. I have better things to do – [laughs]. And so I have walked away from that, perhaps stupidly.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the first – was it the James Coleman?

MS. GHEZ: So the first all right – and that was actually a co-production – [laughs] – with Nova Scotia.

MS. RICHARDS: James Coleman.

MS. GHEZ: Yep.

MS. RICHARDS: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design [Halifax, Nova Scotia].

MS. GHEZ: Yeah. Right. And it was a piece that he had done, and was unhappy with – the slides were falling apart. And he was – he wanted to finish it up and re-shoot it.

Anyway, we split the costs. I think it was, like, believe it or not in those days, like \$12,000, *Living and Presumed Dead* [1983-1985], major piece. And we each put in \$6,000.

But that was the beginning. And then, as I look down on the list, there certainly have been a lot – you know, it's building; it gets more and more. Let's see. Mike – did we help him with anything?

MS. RICHARDS: Mike Kelley?

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, I'm trying to think – no.

MS. RICHARDS: That was 1988 ["Mike Kelley. Three Projects: Half a Man, From My Institution to Yours, and Pay for Your Pleasure."]

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, no. "Hirsch Perlman," [1988] maybe a little bit of production money there. So it was more later on, Michael Asher –

MS. RICHARDS: 1990.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah. "Jessica Stockholder [: Skin Toned Garden Mapping]" I mean, that was a major piece.

MS. RICHARDS: Let's see, what year was that – it was 1991.

MS. GHEZ: But again, she didn't take that away, so that's not – it was more when we really got into video. And so that really happened like in the '90s. "Diana Thater [: China," 1995], trying, "Stan Douglas [: Hors Champs and Evening," 1995] we put a lot of money into, Evening –

MS. RICHARDS: Over the years, have you contemplated changing that scenario that you've described?

MS. GHEZ: I'm very uncomfortable with changing it. It comes up from time to time. The one time that we did receive money, I was working with Russell Ferguson at the Hammer [Museum, Los Angeles, CA], and Russell felt very strongly that we had to have a contract with Catherine –

MS. RICHARDS: Sullivan?

MS. GHEZ: Sullivan, right, and that when – if the work sold, that we would receive our production money back, which was \$25,000 between the two of it. And I just felt, well, we'll never – we'll never see that money – you know, she's young and just starting out. But sure enough, like three years later, got a check in the mail from Catherine. She is a very honest, forthright individual. So that was the only – the only time –



MS. RICHARDS: When tougher financial times have come since then, have you thought back to that, and that, well, maybe, you know there are -

MS. GHEZ: I suspect that --.

MS. RICHARDS: - other artists who would be willing to pay back the generosity that you had shown them?

MS. GHEZ: Well, I'm hoping that what goes around comes around. You know, and certainly for - sometimes for these benefit auctions, artists will give us pieces. And we do have a centennial coming up - [laughs] - which would - and it would be great if some of these artists, whom we helped very early on, could help us at this juncture. But we'll see.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you feel that your own personal curatorial practice is in a way defined by the ambition to break new ground, to show new work, to open up new avenues of thinking, at least in the art world, about new developments -

MS. GHEZ: Right - that's for sure -

MS. RICHARDS: - just as these artists are breaking new ground? The artists who you are showing are artists who are in some way breaking with traditions.

MS. GHEZ: Right. So that's in some way what I am looking for. But you know, I'm always looking for that wonderful painter - [laughs]. But again, when we showed "Albert Oehlen," [1995] I mean -

MS. RICHARDS: Those were masterful.

MS. GHEZ: They are masterful. But at the time, no one would give him a second look. And they won't even tell you how much they were insured for it because it was, you know, a small amount of - a very small amount of money.

But this notion of the gesture that he was doing it, you know, with a mouse, this little wrist gesture with the computer mouse that then goes through the silk screen process, or through the computer onto a silk screen, and gets blown up and then gets - when then he goes in again with a hand and a paintbrush to connect - I mean, this is interesting work- it's wonderful work. It's fabulous work. The black-and-white paintings of Albert Oehlen are just the best.

So you know, I love good painting. I love mark painting; I love - you know, I've always been very invested in Conceptual artwork, but also I love wonderful mark making. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Have you done an exhibition that focused on that in some way?

MS. GHEZ: No. But if you look at the work, you'll probably come up with a lot of work that -

MS. RICHARDS: Do you find it comfortable to be thinking about many new projects at once, or do you feel like you need to focus on one at a time?

MS. GHEZ: I end up focusing probably on one at a time, which drives a lot of the staff crazy, you know, especially with development - [laughs] - well, I get a leg up on things. But it's really hard when you're doing everything else. I don't know; there's just so much involved in running a small institution, a small organization.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you ever get a graduate student to be an assistant, an intern, a work-study student to help you with the research?

MS. GHEZ: No. I'm not good at that, at delegating like that. No. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So you do everything -

MS. GHEZ: I do it myself. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: - in terms of curating every exhibition.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, right.

MS. RICHARDS: Except when -

MS. GHEZ: The ones that I work with - yeah, right.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it difficult to allow other people to curate exhibitions in your program?

MS. GHEZ: No. Now, again, it's just about this charge in the way of bringing good, wonderful work to the public - whatever way - by whatever means necessary - [laughs].

MS. RICHARDS: When you're developing an exhibition, from the very beginning to the end where the visitors are coming in, what piece of that whole process do you love the most?

MS. GHEZ: I love installing. I love installing.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you enjoy creating the idea yourself and going in there, or do you - are you completely open to collaborating on an installation with the artist?

MS. GHEZ: Oh, working with the artist - but I just - I love it. I really - I love it. And today, I know that I have a talent for it today. I didn't always understand that, but -

MS. RICHARDS: Were there certain artists who educated you - [laughs] - in terms of installation who were really important?

MS. GHEZ: I learned installation from John Vinci, this architect friend who early on installed all of our shows. I mean, John was really wonderful and helped us with, you know, understanding the placement of walls. And I learned a lot from John.

MS. RICHARDS: Are there times when you - knowing that you are good at this, need to negotiate with some artist who might not be the best at installing their own work?

MS. GHEZ: Right. They're not always the best, right. Well, I just try my best to - [laughs] - make the outcome a positive one. And often, they're open to discussion. But you know, even the idea of installation, I mean, when do you - again, a painting show, a drawing show? I mean, how often - [laughs] - anymore do you do those kinds of things? I mean -

MS. RICHARDS: Well, everything has installation issues.

MS. GHEZ: Right. Yes, absolutely, even video. I mean -

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, thinking about the viewer's experience, thinking about the juxtapositions among -

MS. GHEZ: We do so many different kinds of things -

MS. RICHARDS: - works.

MS. GHEZ: Right. We do so many different kinds - I mean, even with video - of installations to try to -

MS. RICHARDS: Do you have a particular, in terms of video, policy about sound bleeds and caring about that, making sure - let's say, if there's more than one in ear shot that they're only heard with headphones instead of - do you make it loud, or you don't - doesn't really matter -

MS. GHEZ: No headphones.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see. No headphones.

MS. GHEZ: No, no headphones. [Laughs.] No headphones, no - all this text on the wall. You know, we'll - yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Just brochures -

MS. GHEZ: I just try to keep it - art. You know? And if people pay enough attention, they'll work their way back to an understanding, I believe, of where the work is coming from, or what it's trying to say.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you thought about using audio - you know, people dial their cellphone, and hearing the artist speak?

MS. GHEZ: We've - have we done? - we've tried a little bit with cell phones - is it cell phones, or little iPods -

MS. RICHARDS: Cellphones.

MS. GHEZ: Little iPods, actually. You know - but I don't know. I always think, you know, just walk in and spend some time, look carefully. We're always here to talk to whomever is interested in coming in and talking to us.

And then, you know, there's the poster with a good - a really serious essay by Hamza about the work - sort of

grounding the work.

MS. RICHARDS: Have there – has there been an exhibition that proved to be seriously controversial here?

MS. GHEZ: Controversial – I mean, what is controversy today? I mean, it's like –

MS. RICHARDS: Well, maybe 20 years ago, that aroused strong feelings among the community here, even in the press.

MS. GHEZ: I mean, I'm sure we've received some bad reviews, but controversial? I can't – I can't really think of anything that became a controversy. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: If there had been bad press, how would you react to it? Do you respond, do you write –

MS. GHEZ: Respond? No. Again, I'm not a writer. It's one person's opinion. They're welcome to it.

MS. RICHARDS: How has the art community of Chicago and the Renaissance Society's relationship to it changed over the years?

MS. GHEZ: We are much more – we're engaging substantially more of the, like, student – there's a big art student population in Chicago. School of the Art Institute [of Chicago], Northwestern [University, Evanston, IL], DePaul [University, Chicago, IL], University of Illinois [at] Chicago campus –

MS. RICHARDS: Columbia?

MS. GHEZ: Columbia College [Chicago], here Midway Studios and – boy, more and more these young people are coming to openings. I mean, a big part of our audience. So they're interested in becoming artists or – anyway they're in the art school system somehow and I know they're coming down.

And we had a concert two nights ago, Tony Conrad, and it was an incredible turnout, unbelievable turnout. And I think they were all – and young people and I knew no one, practically, which is great -- certainly who are studying sound in the city –

MS. RICHARDS: How did he end up being part of the program?

MS. GHEZ: He's basically from the Minimalist period and this work that we have up now is looking back and talking about minimalism –

MS. RICHARDS: So you chose –

MS. GHEZ: Hamza. Hamza does the education program, was part of the education – programming, I mean, is it educational, yeah it is sure. But it's sort of a parallel program to the exhibition program. And then we're having a panel on Minimalism, bringing in all sorts of specialists, and then the program with this Christine Mehring, I mentioned before, with her graduate students who are doing papers on Minimalism. And a whole number of things, I don't – you'd have to look at our poster. It's a lively mix of things. And we have poetry readings, we have on-book readings of plays sometimes –

MS. RICHARDS: So the students themselves – there were always students, but they're more mobile? Or actually the student population is larger?

MS. GHEZ: Well, we're doing a better job of reaching them.

MS. RICHARDS: And they know you more. [Laughs.]

MS. GHEZ: And they know the program now, you know. And more and more, like, if I go to something at the Art Institute or whatever and they'll – someone is speaking and they'll say, oh, this work was shown 20 years ago at the Renaissance Society, and this was shown 15 years ago at the Renaissance Society or 30 years ago. And the students are hearing this, I think, and they're thinking, oh, maybe we should get ourselves down.

It's not easy for them to come down without cars, by public transportation to get here, it's a trek. I mean, it's –

MS. RICHARDS: Is it possible?

MS. GHEZ: Oh yeah, but it's a bus ride or, you know, take the L – not the L but the, whatever, the train that comes down. In cold weather it's a hike. But, I tell you, we had – we must have had I don't know how many people at our last opening.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you run the program here 12 months a year?

MS. GHEZ: No, we close down during the summer.

MS. RICHARDS: In the early years I think it was 12 months, it seemed like there were exhibitions in the summer.

MS. GHEZ: Not in my lifetime. Oh no. It's sort of catch-up time, and people have to take vacations and we're a small staff. So we do as much as we can. I mean, we try to run the place like a major museum and it's – on one hand it's rather ridiculous because of the number, small number, of people we have on staff.

It's like one person is two departments. [They laugh.]

MS. RICHARDS: Speaking of time off, have you ever had an official sabbatical?

MS. GHEZ: No, and man would I have loved to have had that!

MS. RICHARDS: Did that not occur to you or just seemed impossible, like nobody could –

MS. GHEZ: Well, again, sabbatical, you know, we're not the University also. So we get –

MS. RICHARDS: Well, a few institutions, independent museums –

MS. GHEZ: I can't imagine the luxury of it. I would have loved it. Just to travel and see work and think about it, oh, I would have enjoyed that. But maybe it would have been – I don't know, it would have been great. I had, you know, I had three children that I was raising; I was married with three children.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. Were there times when you were really tempted to leave and you were –

MS. GHEZ: No, it was interesting, you know, when I worked on "Documenta" [2002] those years. And there I was able to get away, but it was sort of like 10 days at a time because it's very hard to leave this place more than two weeks maximum. You know, stuff happens when you're away. You've got to keep your eye on everything.

And, I forgot what I was going to – what did you say?

MS. RICHARDS: Have you – were tempted to leave here to work somewhere else?

MS. GHEZ: Oh, so "Documenta," anyway, was a great privilege to work that. And at the end of it I remember people, some major collectors, saying, in the city, you know, would you like to go for a larger institution somewhere, move on now. You've done this huge – worked on this huge exhibition with a great budget and great number of artists.

And I was like, no, I really wanted to come back here because I love so much – I like the scale of what I'm able to do here. I feel so privileged with this one-on-one interaction with the artist without having the pressure of a larger institution. It's like, been there, seen that, participated in that and loved it while I was doing it, but for the rest of my life I really – I love this scale. I love what I do.

MS. RICHARDS: There's tremendous intimacy.

MS. GHEZ: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Without the layers of bureaucracy.

MS. GHEZ: Oh, absolutely. I may have mentioned too, you know, being in Paris and being in Berlin just the last couple of weeks and interacting again with these people with whom I worked 20 years ago, 25 years ago. We have a – many of us have maintained a deep friendship. They've enriched my life, they show me –

MS. RICHARDS: Who are some of your closest artists?

MS. GHEZ: Well, I mean, Thomas Struth is a dear friend. And I've learned through Thomas's eyes to look at the city in another way, totally in another way; and to think about the sociology of the city in another way. Who else am I close to – James Coleman, I saw James when I was there. And it was just great –

MS. RICHARDS: When you were in Berlin?

MS. GHEZ: In Paris. To sit down and to talk to James and –

MS. RICHARDS: He doesn't live in Paris, does he?

MS. GHEZ: He has an apartment in Paris, he has a pied-a-terre in Paris and – but he lives basically in Dublin.

Well, he goes back and forth. I saw Okwui [Enwezor], had dinner with Okwui and we've remained, you know, very close and in touch. And some of the Documenta curators, we all stay in touch.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you surprised that he took the job he's just taken?

MS. GHEZ: I'm happy for him, I think he'll do – knowing him, he'll do a great job. It's a good institution today; Chris [last name?] has left it in good shape. I think there's a lot of money in Munich for him. And Okwui, he's doing a gazillion things, you know, he's working on the [2012] "Paris Triennial" and –

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, I mean, think of him settling again – San Francisco didn't last too many years.

MS. GHEZ: Right, right. Yeah, well, it's hard, yeah, because he has family, he has a daughter in New York and –

MS. RICHARDS: Yeas

MS. GHEZ: It's spending time – yeah. When you have family it's hard to locate elsewhere, but I think they were able to work that out in Munich.

MS. RICHARDS: What other artists have been really important in –

MS. GHEZ: Oh God, I'd have to – there I'd really have to – [laughs] – stop and –

MS. RICHARDS: Well, let me ask you about the Michael Asher project, just going back for a minute to 1990. Tell me about that project and how it evolved and –

MS. GHEZ: Michael worked on that project, I want to say over three years, something like that. Actually he stayed with – we didn't have money often, to put artists up. I was thinking about this recently because Peter Fischli is coming. Peter stayed with us when – [laughs] – he came to Chicago. And Mike Kelley stayed with us and it's – of course now we can put them – put people in hotels.

So indeed when I see Mike it's like seeing family, or a little bit Michael Asher, too. I mean, I have a great affection for Michael. But he did a lot of research at [The Joseph] Regenstein Library [University of Chicago] and he's a wonderful researcher, Michael, he really got into the archives of the university and did a great piece for us.

So I'm delighted whenever I see him. His health hasn't been so good. Who else do I – who else did I just – I saw Lothar Baumgarten. It was wonderful to see Lothar and to be in touch with him again. Jeff Wall I run into every now and then, and that was a great moment when he was here.

MS. RICHARDS: He stayed in your place, too?

MS. GHEZ: No, he stayed – [they laugh] – oh God, at the international center. You don't want to know this place, but you know, with the bathroom down the hall. [Laughs.] We didn't have any money. It was his first show in the United States. So it was fine. Things have changed.

MS. RICHARDS: He was – I'm sure he was thrilled.

MS. GHEZ: Believe me, it's another world for him now.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah, definitely. In 1991 you did a show and I was just curious about it, it was called "A Swiss Dialectic." And hearing you talk about Switzerland, now I know a little – I imagine more of why you decided to do that. Did you initiate that project, looked like it was a collaboration with some other – or there were satellite exhibitions –

MS. GHEZ: Oh, I just had – I was able to secure other spaces so that there were four or five other spaces.

MS. RICHARDS: So at that moment why focus on Switzerland?

MS. GHEZ: Well, I'd have to look at the work that was in it. You know, I knew the country, somewhat. And there was clearly interesting work coming out of it. And I want to look back because I'm wondering if it didn't come out of, like, some discussions with maybe even Peter Fischli, Peter and David. I'd have to see sort of the timeline. "Peter Fischli [and David Weiss]", '87 – when was the Swiss –

MS. RICHARDS: '91.

MS. GHEZ: '91. It could have come out of discussions with them and maybe being back in Europe or that part of world a little bit more often. And so I thought that a group show coming out of Switzerland could be interesting.

Again, why Switzerland, why not Germany, why not France? But I knew, somewhat, the country and the terrain and it was great. I mean, I really enjoyed so much traveling throughout Switzerland at that time, you know, so many different cities and different areas and doing studio visits.

And I can remember being in Roman Signer's in St. Gallen [Switzerland], in his house-studio, he lived on one floor and then he had his studio on the top floor and the third floor. And talking to him and he said that he would set off a dynamite charge for me, but I should go to the end of the studio. And I thought to myself, what am I doing here? I have three little girls at home, I'm in the studio of a man I don't really know, and he's going to set off a dynamite charge in the room. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: In the room?

MS. GHEZ: In the room, right? And then I realized how much of that work is really about trust, and how much of life is about trust. It was an important moment for me. He's an interesting artist, Roman.

MS. RICHARDS: Did he ever talk about his work in that regard?

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, eventually some of that came up but I understood it very clearly then. And in my whole practice trust has been an important word, establishing trust between the artist and myself. Two words that are important in my career: belief and trust.

If you are able to communicate to an artist that you believe in them, you believe in the work that they're doing and establish some sort of a trust – belief comes first, and that is the first step in establishing this trust. Out of that comes amazing, amazing results. And I know it; I know it intimately – belief and trust, key words in life; in my life.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember when that struck you that that was key?

MS. GHEZ: [Laughs.] I don't know, the trust thing came out in that moment with Roman.

MS. RICHARDS: It's almost intuitive that a person, an artist, would need that belief immediately.

MS. GHEZ: Oh, we all need it. We all need it, it's love. I love you, and I believe in you and your work is really the best. I believe it's the best. And we worked together. Trust me, I will bring to fruition this dream, when you dream the dream. I will trust you to deliver to me the dream to make real; and it's amazing time after time after time.

MS. RICHARDS: Is there any other curator who you've met who shares with you this focus on the visual, doesn't write, and you think has achieved a high level –

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, yes, who's been a mentor in way, Kasper Koenig. Kasper does not write. He has run an amazing program in – well he's at the Ludwig now in Cologne [Museum Ludwig Köln]; before that he was at Portikus. Portikus was, in fact, one of the role institutions – role model institutions that I looked at. I mean, we –

MS. RICHARDS: That's Frankfurt, right?

MS. GHEZ: Yes. He was – and that was directed by Kasper when he was dean of the Frankfurt whatever school [Stadelschule, Frankfurt]. But, you know, it was a little space, it was like, I don't know, eight times the size of this office only. Big façade, like a – have you ever seen Portikus?

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] Yes.

MS. GHEZ: It looked like a bank, bombed out back, and so it's a little box in the back. But amazing exhibitions took place in that space. And he was close to the artists, still is, Kasper.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever have the opportunity to visit here?

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, I have photos of him here, yeah. When we did Isa Genzken, he was close to Isa.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you spoken to him about this approach to curating that you share?

MS. GHEZ: No, but I know that we share it. [Laughs.] And if you look into it you see that he doesn't write, ever. And yeah, does anybody – I mean he's the director of the Ludwig, he has a – he's shown artists, he's introduced artists into this world – international scene. I can't imagine, I can't even count the number.

So it doesn't have to be all through the academic side somehow – although sometimes I think I'm the last of the – [laughs] – Mohicans or whatever the expression is. Could you still do that today without an MFA, without a

Ph.D.? I mean, if you look at anybody looking for a curator the first thing - they want some experience and they want that MFA, they want a Ph.D. - I couldn't do that.

MS. RICHARDS: I think it's true in many fields that what you could have done 20, 30, 40 years ago without the credentials you can't do today.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, right, exactly.

How are we doing?

[End of disc]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards, interviewing Susanne Ghez at the University of Chicago Renaissance Society on January 26, 2011, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc 4.

Susanne, I wanted to start by moving away from the Renaissance Society for a bit and looking at projects you've done independently, and starting with a kind of a general question. What is your criteria, for becoming involved in independent projects, for allowing yourself the time to do it, for making sure that while you were doing that, the program here could keep going?

MS. GHEZ: Do you mean by that exhibitions, or, not so much for -

MS. RICHARDS: What I'm thinking - yes. Where you function as a curator.

MS. GHEZ: Right. And there haven't been that many of them.

MS. RICHARDS: No. But a few. There was one in '96 - I was going to ask you about it - for L.A. Contemporary Exhibitions [Los Angeles, CA] - and then in '97 for Artpace [San Antonio, TX]]. And then most substantially for "Documenta" [Kassel, Germany] from '99 to 2002.

MS. GHEZ: Right. The Artpace didn't take. You know, it wasn't that much of a time-sink in that case. It was a recommendation, I think, of three artists, one local. So did a lot of - I went down and did a lot of studio visits in the region, which was great information for me, just as a curator.

And then I - and nationally, I knew who I wanted to recommend, and then internationally. So it wasn't a huge time sink. I mean, I did go down, and I talked to them at a point in their growth. Linda was alive.

MS. RICHARDS: Linda Pace.

MS. GHEZ: Yes, Linda Pace. And they were looking at us, really, as a model to what they hoped to develop, except that they had a residency as a part of it. And so we had wonderful discussions, and, you know, we all came out knowing more, I think, that was the best part of it.

Again, I haven't done much of it, precisely for the reason that you just pointed to. I can't leave here for that long, even for travel, for research, for - you know, working with artists. It's very hard with a small staff because things happen when you're away. And in a small institution, where I function as - not only as chief curator, but as director, I'm responsible, bottom line, for everything that goes out of here, and the way that this place is run, the way things look, the bottom line fiscally, the program as it's developed.

So it's a big responsibility, and while people take the responsibility seriously, I think that as the director, you have to be aware that you're the one that is going to have to answer the questions if things go wrong.

So with "Documenta" - "Documenta" came along, and in fact I was, at the time, being considered as - to be - you know, as director. And I received a call - I believe it was -

MS. RICHARDS: As director of "Documenta"?

MS. GHEZ: - of "Documenta." And I said that I just couldn't leave. I was not ready to leave this place, even at that time. It was complicated, also. I was going through a divorce at that same moment, and -

MS. RICHARDS: This is in 1999?'

MS. GHEZ: - I knew that I couldn't take it all on. The "Documenta" was in 2002, so it must have been around '99, '98-'99, when I got that call. And I said, please, you have to - I was on the short list - and I said, please, you have to remove my name from the short list.

And then when Okwui was tapped to do it - Okwui Enwezor - he called me, and he told me - I don't know if it's

true that I was the first one he called – to ask if I would be a co-curator. He was putting together a curatorial team. And he knew and had admired the work that had happened here at the Renaissance Society. And he also knew that I had been on the short list, and would I be willing to work with him.

And so – you know, we talked about the kind of commitment that that would take. And basically, I was never away, I don't think – if I was away when we were working on it during those three years, and before it opened – if I was away for two weeks, that would have been a long time. Most of the trips, I think, were, like, 10-day trips. And whether it was 10 days to Kassel or – we traveled extensively, it was really – it was wonderful. We – you know, we went to China. We went to Cuba. We went to India.

And some of the trips I couldn't make, so – Africa, Nairobi [Kenya], I just – again, we had an opening here, and as much as I would have loved to have done that, I couldn't go.

MS. RICHARDS: How – what was that experience like? What were your responsibilities?

MS. GHEZ: Well –

MS. RICHARDS: And how was the collaboration structured?

MS. GHEZ: We would meet quite regularly towards the end, like every three months or something like that. And there would be a lot of discussion about people we were presenting when, at that time, we were presenting via slides or videos.

MS. RICHARDS: And when you say we –

MS. GHEZ: The team. The curatorial team, all of the team.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean the whole team had to agree on the group that would be presented?

MS. GHEZ: Pretty much so, yes. I mean, Okwui had the overriding – you know, decision, at the end of the day. And it just happened naturally. It's so bizarre. And I've said this to people. It was never really a vote. And it was interesting to me. We would talk all day long. We would come – well we'd start at 10 in the morning, or something, and –

MS. RICHARDS: Talk about the ideas, and the artists –

MS. GHEZ: About the ideas, the artists – I mean, not so much the – we didn't talk so much about the ultimate shape of it. It was always talking about the work, and the artists. And we would talk, and we would talk, and we would talk. And we would work until sometimes 10:00 at night, and go out – often, in fact, until 10:00 at night – and go out to dinner, and talk some more over dinner.

MS. RICHARDS: Who was in this group?

MS. GHEZ: Uta Meta Bauer.

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

MS. GHEZ: Carlos Basualdo, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, and Octavio Zaya. Now, at one point, Octavio became ill and had to drop off the – you know, active, if you want, part of our work.

MS. RICHARDS: So your charge, the six of you –

MS. GHEZ: Yep.

MS. RICHARDS: – was to make preliminary selections of artists and/or projects?

MS. GHEZ: Well, it was never quite so – you know, things are a lot looser than that in the reality. You get together, and you start talking. It's clear what you're talking about. You want to make some decisions about who you will include.

MS. RICHARDS: And how –

MS. GHEZ: Somehow, it had to fit into something that was never so precisely described, as we were going along with it. But that's what I learned, in a way, from Okwui. Okwui is a person – he loves to discuss work. And we would discuss – hours, hours, hours on end. And at the end of the day, it was almost as if you didn't need to make a decision because you just knew where everybody stood, their positions about – vis-à-vis artists.

And it was just clear, without saying, artist X will be in the exhibition. I mean, sometimes, in the beginning, it



would drive me crazy, until – because I am a person – I don't have difficulty making decisions, in a way. Even if they're wrong, I'll live with them. But it's sort of the same pattern, you know? I'll leap, and I'll take a chance and do it, and if I fail, then – failure is good, you learn by it. And you go on.

But this, somehow – it would just go on and on, and – oh my god, we're never going to come to a decision. But then, in fact, we did. And I think that our "Documenta" was a very strong, very powerful, very encompassing, worldwide of people from all – well, from all – of people from all parts of the world, with all different – with ideas that touched on so many areas. I mean, race, politics, religion, you name it – it was all in there.

So for me – bless you – it was a great – a great, great experience, I can't tell you. And you know, we came in, and we've said this as a group because – there's been a flurry of emails just recently because, Okwui took on this new job at the Kunsthaus in Munich. And so everybody's writing emails, and there's – we're all connected in these emails, you know.

And we've maintained this friendship now, so it's been – what are we now, 2011 – and we started in 1999. And when we started, we had great admiration, one for the other. And when we ended the project, I think, quite unusually, we had even more admiration. And we've remained really deeply – I feel I have a deep friendship with these people.

MS. RICHARDS: Okwui made the selection of the group?

MS. GHEZ: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: So do you imagine that he was really brilliant in thinking about the chemistry, and the viewpoints –

MS. GHEZ: Yes. He's also a very intuitive man, and he's very smart. He's very knowledgeable. He's a wonderful writer. But he's also very intuitive about many things. I learned a lot from Okwui.

MS. RICHARDS: It was accidental that it was – it looked like it was sort of, half men, half women?

MS. GHEZ: Never talked about it – I'm sorry, Judith. [They laugh.]

MS. RICHARDS: Well, maybe that's part of the chemistry.

MS. GHEZ: As much as I would like for – even in this project, it was about women.

MS. RICHARDS: But I'm just noticing that –

MS. GHEZ: It just – again, and it – I mean, some – it worked out – well, you know, Uta would have – Uta was very much of a feminist, a strong feminist. I mean, she felt – but –

MS. RICHARDS: Some other curators, not Okwui, when you look at advisory lists, when you look in magazines, and there are stories about major exhibitions around the world, it's more likely that there's going to be a long list of men. And –

MS. GHEZ: Right. Well, there were two – what, two women out of six, so the balance wasn't, maybe, perfect, but I can tell – and – Angelika Nollert was the in-house, if you want, person.

MS. RICHARDS: Nollert?

MS. GHEZ: Nollert. N-O-L-L-E-R-T. And – who's now director of a museum[Neues Museum of Nuremberg], I'm forgetting, in Germany. She was in Munich, and then she just took another place. It begins with an N. Maybe I can find it afterwards. Anyway, she was a terrific – talk about organized – person. Really added to the team, you know, was present at all of the meetings. And so that would have, if you want, been another woman.

And in fact, the three women, when it was – you know, I remember Uta and myself, when it came to financial aspects – the women were the ones who would really ride hard on – not on the administration there, but we would push back, you know? Because there were times when it wasn't clear exactly what the budget was, where the money was coming from, and all that.

And men – I don't want to tell you. [Laughs.] The three of us pushed hard. And I think that they – I think that the administration, at the end of the day, really appreciated that. They knew that we knew we had our head around the financial part of that operation.

And I did a lot with the installation because I love installations so much. So that fell into – I mean, Okwui, myself – I installed a lot of the Bahnhof, the train station. And I installed a lot. Uta did, Carlos did. And Okwui. Sarat

was really more of a writer, a wonderful writer.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell his last name?

MS. GHEZ: Maharaj. M-A-H-A-R-A-J, I believe. And I think he worked with Okwui, you know, on a position paper, when they were interviewing for "Documenta." And he's a brilliant man, and just a wonderful man.

Again, I tell you, we all came out with- [laughs].

MS. RICHARDS: Those conversations took place at your, you said, meetings, about every three months?

MS. GHEZ: Something like that, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Not during the travels, so much?

MS. GHEZ: Oh, and the travels too, sure. You're together, you're - you know, so many wonderful dinners, you know, conversations over dinners in Italian restaurants. And Sarat was a vegan, I mean, an absolute vegan. So that was always very interesting traveling in these different countries with someone who had severe diet limitations.

But, you know, you - so I learned a lot about being a vegan and came to admire him for that. And, I'm telling you, it was a great period of growth for all of us, learning from each other. I hope that the current team, doing it - you know, working on it this year and the next year - will be as fortunate. I noticed that it's structured differently, that she calls the people - and there's a big group of them - she calls them agents.

MS. RICHARDS: Hmm.

MS. GHEZ: Now, I don't know the base of that. It would be interesting for somebody to look into that and find out.

MS. RICHARDS: And you were all called curators?

MS. GHEZ: We were co-curators - they made it very - we had contracts. And in the contracts, it was stipulated that we were co-curators. And Okwui always introduced us as such. You know, there was a lot of, again, respect.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you feel that your voices balanced with his?

MS. GHEZ: [Laughs.] Very -

MS. RICHARDS: Was this just one more? He was the seventh?

MS. GHEZ: Yeah. He was just another voice, yeah. I mean, just. He was clearly an important other voice, and Okwui and, you know - in a table - roundtable discussion, will have a tendency to lead a conversation. But no, there were wonderful, lively conversations.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel that your point of view, coming from the Midwest, from a major city not on the coast, added something different to the conversation?

MS. GHEZ: I never think of myself as a Midwesterner. And maybe that's because I'm from the East Coast - and having lived, as we discussed, in Europe, before. But I just - you know, I'm part of a global art scene, an international art scene. I'm not part of some - of a - I never think of myself as part of - and, I mean, of course I'm part of a regional one because I'm - I live here, and I show work from here. But I show work from all over.

MS. RICHARDS: Carlos, of course, lives here but isn't from the US. So you're the only person who lives here -

MS. GHEZ: Was I the only American? Okwui is American. I mean, he was - he's from Nairobi, but -

MS. RICHARDS: But I mean, spending your entire career here.

MS. GHEZ: I mean, I'm sorry - Nairobi - Nigeria. Nigeria. Right. But in terms of this question about the Midwest, there's something people always ask, sort of about the Midwest. And there is one thing about the Midwest that's very important, about - in contrast to being from the west coast or the east coast. The center is very open - much more open than the coast. We look in both directions. And, as a result, we're open. But if I had to choose one word to describe the Midwest, it's "open." And again, that's a very important characteristic, in life and in one's profession. You know personal and professional life.

MS. RICHARDS: Speaking of the Midwest, I think I read a quote from Richard Flood when he was at the Walker -

MS. GHEZ: Yep.

MS. RICHARDS: – about what it's like to work at an institution, even as illustrious as the Walker, and feel like you can never expect to get reviews from New York, – that kind of feeling of working a little bit in a critical vacuum.

MS. GHEZ: Right. But if you pay so much attention to that, it'll take you down, and nothing will ever happen. I mean, it's like the bad review. It's – if you're going to get mired in that, you've got to move on. It's – yeah.

And with this place, the Renaissance Society, I feel that, if, today, we have gained a certain recognition, it's because we have just moved forward and just kept doing what we felt was the best for the program – you know, in terms of our mission. And it has, indeed, worked out well.

MS. RICHARDS: You mentioned, yesterday, ideas and exhibitions that came through your experience at "Documenta." Why don't you talk a bit about that now?

MS. GHEZ: Yes, well, one that was particularly wonderful was Amar Kanwar. And when we were in New Delhi, there was a small – we were staying in a – one of these not-for-profit – whatever they call them – not a hotel, but it's a group where – NGOs, is it? It was a residence where people could come and have conferences, whatever.

Anyway, there was a small video show that had been put together, and I had a friend, Barbara Stafford, was there, who was speaking on our – one of the platforms, one of the programs. And she wandered into this room and saw this video work, and came back to me, and she said, Susanne, you've got to go over to see this young – this video about the border, the Pakistanian border with India. It's just amazing. It's called *A Season Outside* [1997]. So I went and indeed it was incredible.

So, somehow through contacts we had there we arranged for Amar to come to a cocktail we were having one evening. And we invited him to work with us. And I invited him – and I made it clear to Okwui that afterwards I wanted to work with him at the Renaissance Society, no problem.

And so in fact, we commissioned or produced a work, a new work, with Amar. And today he's doing, I think, very well. He's now with Marian Goodman, he's shown in both Paris and in New York. He's evidently going to be in this next "Documenta" – he's going to the North Pole with Carolyn and –

MS. RICHARDS: With Carolyn who?

MS. GHEZ: Christov-Bakargiev, the –

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. GHEZ: I never say her name right. So he's – things have gone well. And the work is – it's just very important work, I think. So alright, that was one. Who else from that "Documenta"? Oh God, there were a number of them that came through afterwards. If I had the list – yeah, but this – well, I have, why don't you just pause –

[Break]

So out of the "Documenta" experience, as I said, there was Amar and Joëlle Tuerlinckx.

MS. RICHARDS: And could you speak about how that began?

MS. GHEZ: Joëlle, I don't know whose pick that was, maybe Okwui's because he had been to Belgium and met her, and invited her. And I worked with her within "Documenta" and I thought the work was really extraordinary. And so I invited her to do an exhibition and to do a new work.

Who else – Yang Fudong – Yang Fudong from China. I remember arriving at his – at the area where he was living and there was this group of kids sitting around and there was this young man with long straight hair, you know, well below his shoulders and he had this, I'd say, plaster – it's kind of an old fashioned expression, you know, if there were like two bandages just plopped on the top of his head, on the hair – I can't imagine that it was helping whatever, he'd he knocked underneath it, the head, that this thing is sitting on top of his long hair.

Anyway he looked kind of like a real Asian hippie. [Laughs.] But we went to look at his videos and they were, again, just – they blew us away. And Okwui was so fast, I want to tell you, because I remember in the group was Lynne Cooke, who was then at Dia I think – and man, he was on the phone with Kassel, confirming that they would wire \$25,000, I remember the amount, to Fudong and to finish this film.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the – oh the money is to finish the film.

MS. GHEZ: Finish the film. He didn't have the money; I mean he had no – practically no money at all.

MS. RICHARDS: And what was the competition with Lynne Cooke?

MS. GHEZ: Well Lynne was at Dia. I mean, if you find a new artist all of a sudden you're in this place that's –

MS. RICHARDS: What was she doing, what was her part in that visit? Just coincidentally –

MS. GHEZ: There was a group of us together, it wasn't official "Documenta" but there were a number of us from "Documenta" on the trip. Anyway, so after that we commissioned Fudong to do another new work for us. And it's really sweet, I mean, he – I understand that his – he didn't speak any English at all at the time. So we brought him here and it was quite a challenge.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you get a translator from the university?

MS. GHEZ: I can't remember at the time what we did. I always remember taking them to the airport –

MS. RICHARDS: He and –

MS. GHEZ: He and his wife. And they climbed in the backseat of my car, no one sitting up in the front with me, and his wife had a dictionary in their hand so whenever I would say something to them from the front seat I'd hear all these pages flipping, flipping, flipping as she was trying to translate and say something back.

But again, you know, communication is a funny thing. You don't always have to speak the language and in fact the visual is for the most part non-textual. And it is the challenge of that communication and that's the strength of what we do if – among other things, is to improve that ability of the individual to understand better through – yeah, through visual – to understand better through visual images and presentation. The more you look at that kind – at work that's non-textual, you know, you're refining, you're strengthening your ability to communicate with images and today that's very important.

MS. RICHARDS: Was his exhibition here one of his first in the U.S.?

MS. GHEZ: It was his first in the U.S., yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Has he ever mentioned to you the importance of that to him?

MS. GHEZ: [Laughs.] I get these – so every year at New Years' time I get this wonderful email from him, you know, Yang Fudong say hello. [Laughs.] But he remembers, and I've run into him, you know, in Venice [Italy] and different places and it's always touching the kind of affection that he brings to the table, clearly, or appreciation for the work we did with him.

And, you know, the introductions which we made, because I had talked to Marian Goodman about the work, and Marian came to see the exhibition and then invited him to come with her as a gallery artist. And I'm sure that that's helped his career immensely.

MS. RICHARDS: Immensely. Let me take a little detour and follow up that point by asking you about your relationships with dealers. That sounds like an incredibly important role you played for her, and it sounds like she trusted you immensely to come here to see work that you said was worth seeing.

MS. GHEZ: Right, yeah. I've known Marian, I want to say, since the time when we showed Thomas Struth ["Thomas Struth: Photographs," 1990]. That's when – and we've become dear friends in the meantime, full disclosure.

MS. RICHARDS: That was 198 –

MS. GHEZ: When was that?

MS. RICHARDS: So that was 1990.

MS. GHEZ: Right, and I came, I mean this is a digression; I came to Thomas Struth because Benjamin Buchloh was here at the University of Chicago teaching in the art history – he was doing like a one quarter stint. And so I've known Benjamin and we were having dinner nearby in a Thai restaurant one evening and he's always ask people who – you know, in Germany, among the artists would you recommend that I take a careful look at?

And he said well, there's this young artist from *Düsseldorf* who does some pretty wonderful photographs. And he talked about him a little bit, and so I got on a plane. I don't know if I went exactly – I may have been going for other things at that time, but I went to *Düsseldorf* and I met with Thomas, and evidently Marian came and

*did her first studio visit with him within the – there was a three month, say, period when we both came to him, independently. I didn't know Marian at that time –*

MS. RICHARDS: *Marian didn't come through Benjamin?*

MS. GHEZ: *Might well have, you'd have to do that interview with Marian to ask, because who recommends – you know, whom. I don't know. But it was Benjamin's recommendation that I went independently, again, and it was – and then Marian also went and took Thomas on as an artist and she came out to the show, which we did.*

*Which was probably the first museum show – now I don't remember when she showed him – she might have shown him in the gallery because the gallery, they can move faster than we can within the museum context it takes a while to put things on schedules. Not too much time, though, when you're small you can move fast. Which is a big plus for us, I mean it's a big advantage.*

*So we came at the same time, Pierre Huyghe, I was working with Pierre; I think I mentioned Pierre ["Pierre Huyghe: The Third Memory," 2000] to Marian. Did she come out for that? I can't remember if she came. But there's been a back and forth in terms of – but we found ourselves, and I often think quite independently, on the same page.*

*So clearly there's a similar taste and a similar interest in Europe. I think, of course, one of the early strengths of Marian's gallery was that she was into Europe and showing those artists very early on before a lot of people. And I think then also my interest in Europe – so there was an overlap. And, you know, again in full disclosure, Marian's become a very dear personal friend over the years. And again, I admire a lot what she's been able to do.*

MS. RICHARDS: Have you had the experience that, sometimes, a dealer's interests and your interest collide in some way, where you would hope that the dealer would facilitate a collaboration – I assume you always try to go directly to the artist –

MS. GHEZ: I was going to say, yes –

MS. RICHARDS: But, have there been challenges in that regard?

MS. GHEZ: Oh gosh. There may have been along the line, but my credo in a way is always go to the artist first. Try to deal directly with the artist because once, often the gallery gets involved, you know, they have an agenda. They want to sell; and they want to sell works that they probably have. They're not as open to risk as we can be. I can't think of – I mean so often I've gone directly through the artist. Even with Marian's artists, I mean, I work directly with the artists. When I worked with Thomas again I didn't even – I didn't really know Marian.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to that experience of Yang Fudong's exhibition here, ["Yang Fudong: 5 Films," 2004] when he had his films shown here, was that an occasion which brought people from the university – Asian studies, whatever – to the Renaissance Society?

MS. GHEZ: I wish I could tell you that that's how it works; no it doesn't. We're trying through, more and more.

MS. RICHARDS: But it didn't work then.

MS. GHEZ: Well, Hamza is. Well, we're trying to get out into the –

MS. RICHARDS: Now, 2004 he had his exhibition here.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, right. We try to get out, I'm always encouraging Hamza to get out into appropriate departments within the university where there might be some – you know, the context of the work might spark some interest from – for even a talk or discussion or whatever.

MS. RICHARDS: Thinking of Yang, there obviously are Chinese-speaking faculty and students on campus, somewhere.

MS. GHEZ: Right, yeah. I'm trying to think if Wu Hung was here then and I don't know that he was. And frankly, I would have to look again at the exhibition poster or whatever to see exactly what the programs were. No, I mean we're trying more, as I said, like, with the , with the Minimalism panel, which I think is a – will be a real success.

And I really want for the university; if I talk about the environment of the university being a perfect place then we have to engage that environment a little more than we have. I think that that's a challenge for us and one that I keep pushing on.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to independent projects for a second, you've been a juror and a panelist and a moderator, a nominator for many organizations. Have there been any that were especially important to you? I could name a few that –

MS. GHEZ: One – and it's funny and I don't even know if it's on the list, I'm very bad about a bio because, as I mentioned, I guess I didn't think of myself as being in the job market. I am very content where I am, and so I haven't kept my bio up that well.

But at one point in time I was on a panel here in the city of Chicago to publish – to purchase work for the public space. And –

MS. RICHARDS: Is that Illinois Arts Council? Is that what that would be?

MS. GHEZ: It wasn't – was it through the Illinois Arts Council? I don't know who ran it; actually, I'd have to look back in time. But, anyway, the wonderful – it was the cultural – Department of Cultural Affairs because I remember Madeline Rabb was the director [Chicago Office of Fine Arts] at that time.

MS. RICHARDS: Rabb, R-A –

MS. GHEZ: R-A-B-B, I think, and we're going back quite a way here. But what we ended up with, and I fought very hard for it, was a Bruce Nauman, one of the neon pieces, you know: eat, die, whatever [title, date?]. And it was installed in the entrance to the subway on State Street and it looked like a giant beer sign, you know, it was maybe six feet across, you know, blinking as you walked down the steps, fabulous. It's in the Art Institute today because – and it was a \$50,000 commission at the time, and it's this major piece.

To me it was one of the most successful, when it was installed in that place, works of outdoor sculpture or sculpture whatever, public art. And it was a small panel, but frankly, we ended up with a major work.

MS. RICHARDS: So that was very gratifying that could –

MS. GHEZ: Very, very gratifying. And so rarely is it gratifying, I have to tell you. I'm – the graduate school of business, I'm on this committee with James Rondeau, with Canice Prendergast it's – Canice is a professor –

MS. RICHARDS: Canice?

MS. GHEZ: Canice, C-A-N-I-C-E, which means handsome in Gaelic.

MS. RICHARDS: Prendergast.

MS. GHEZ: Prendergast. He's a high-profile professor at the graduate school of business, and so I'm on this panel with James Rondeau, Dean Valentine and Suzanne Booth. And there, also, we have added to that collection in a way –

MS. RICHARDS: This is the Booth School [of Business, University of Chicago]?

MS. GHEZ: Yes – which makes me very proud. Like when we got the [Giuseppe] Penone. What a great piece. And it's rare when you – you know, democracy sort of works maybe politically. [Laughs.] But when it comes to the art world, it doesn't. You have to have some, usually, someone take the lead and – who knows what they're doing. I don't know, that sounds terrible to say, but it's really true.

But in this case we have on this committee people who really know the art world quite well, and we've agreed on a lot of the works that are going in there. And so that's been, you know, it's not a big time-sink but it's been very rewarding to do that. I don't know, what are some of the others?

MS. RICHARDS: There is also, you were a juror in Basel, Switzerland, for the Kunst-Preis, Baloise?

MS. GHEZ: For the Baloise Preis, got to think, oh God.

MS. RICHARDS: We can move to another one –

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, I'm sorry I'm blanking.

MS. RICHARDS: – there's a Wolfgang Hahn Prize – Ludwig Museum?

MS. GHEZ: Yeah. That was through Kasper König and it went to Raymond Pettibon. So that was very interesting, actually. You know, the discussions with the Kasper, again, my – [laughs] – non-writing friend. But I felt good about that because I think Raymond is an important artist.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you responsible for that major installation he had at "Documenta"? The Pettibon, that room?

MS. GHEZ: Yes. Yeah, right.

MS. RICHARDS: Which was noted as one of the highlights of that show, I think.

MS. GHEZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Had you worked with him before?

MS. GHEZ: Yes, by then I had, because I co-curated an exhibition of Raymond for the Renaissance Society ["Raymond Pettibone," 1998]but I did it with *Ann Temkin* when she was at the Philadelphia Museum [of Art, Philadelphia, PA]. And so we traveled around quite a bit together working on that exhibition which traveled to MoCA in Los Angeles, it traveled to the Drawing Center in New York and, well, Philadelphia Museum and here right, it was great here.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what year that was?

MS. GHEZ: Oh, good question.

MS. RICHARDS: Right, it's 1998, your Raymond Pettibon show.

MS. GHEZ: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And that's the one that you co-curated with Ann?

MS. GHEZ: AnneTemkin, right.

MS. RICHARDS: How did that collaboration begin?

MS. GHEZ: Come about? I can remember very well. We were at a party at Lew Manilow's, Lew and *Susan Manilow's* home here in Chicago over on the North Side. And we were downstairs in the basement floor where he - he had art all over the place. And he had a lot of Raymond's drawings, a whole wall of them, down in that basement.

And I was standing next to - [laughs] - Ann, talking, and said, "You know, somebody really should do a show, a larger show of Raymond. The work absolutely deserves it." [Laughs] - and we just sort of looked at each other - [laughs] - and said, you know, something like, da, "Let's -" as simple as that. And so -

MS. RICHARDS: And how did you work out the collaboration?

MS. GHEZ: Well, we've spent a lot of time together just discussing, you know, in Philadelphia and here, and traveling. Again, it was a pleasure to travel with Ann. I mean, she's a real - Ann is a real scholar. And you know, again, where my picks are often intuitive - and I stand behind them - [laughs] - I know I can make some good picks - she would press me to the wall to say, "Well, why -" you know, this is Ann - "are you choosing that one?" And we'd have the discussion.

So it was great.

MS. RICHARDS: Just going down a little bit to the nitty-gritty: When you decided to collaborate, you made an institutional agreement about who would pay for what, and who would pay for that travel, et cetera?

MS. GHEZ: Paid - well, we each paid for our own travel as we were traveling. I mean, there must have been -

MS. RICHARDS: You agreed on a budget that would -

MS. GHEZ: Oh, there must have been an overall budget for traveling. I mean, the course the idea is that if MOCA or the Drawing Center - there was a fee. I don't remember what the fee was; it wasn't huge. But that, plus shipping from one city to the next by whichever institution - and so in fact, it worked out fine.

And what I always loved, and I still do - and I think I had mentioned it earlier with my collaboration with the Art Institute through James Rondeau - is this possibility of this small institution, The Renaissance Society, to collaborate, to go toe to toe with places like the Philadelphia Museum and the Art Institute.

And what's become clear to me is that also - is that one of the reasons that it's possible is that they have such huge overhead in these places like the Philadelphia Museum to keep that plant, you know, afloat, and the Art Institute, that the actual, direct money going to the project, to the actual production - or to the actual work, be it

a new production or installation – we put as much in as they did because so much of our budget goes directly into the exhibition.

And I don't know – I think that young scholars should think about that sometimes. We can really go toe to toe with these major institutions: It's because we have rent-free space here; we have heat, light, air conditioning; we have, you know, substantial help with insurance through the university, which is – what do you call it – self-insured. So that gives us a little advantage, a little touch –

MS. RICHARDS: Huge.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, huge – in fact – huge. So I could put \$50,000 or something into the actual production of a work, where at the Art Institute, it's like they gulp – [laughs] – to put 50,000 [dollars] because they have to pay for all this huge staff, or, you know, you name it – guards, and – and that's something to be thought about in the strength of these smaller, even younger institutions. You can do some very important work in a small-scale institution that has large-scale impact, right?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Are there – other than Kasper König and Portikus that you mentioned, are there other, smaller institutions are also in this position of having the ability to do things and, in fact, do programs that you admire?

MS. GHEZ: Yes, it's –

MS. RICHARDS: Maybe not all through the time you've been here, but –

MS. GHEZ: It's hard. It's kind of – it's kind of –

MS. RICHARDS: – occasionally?

MS. GHEZ: Yes, we're kind of unique. I mean, with Kasper and Portikus, I don't know how connected it actually was to the school, or if it was independent. But I mean, MIT [List Visual Arts Center, MIT, Cambridge, MA] does a wonderful program. But they're very much a part of – they are a part of MIT. So it's hard to find places that are autonomous, and they work, right?

Autonomous like, we're autonomous, but we're within the university. But still, we do gain by having this wonderful in-kind support by the – but not having to report to anyone, through any dean, to any provost, to any of that. So it's quite unique.

And how do you – I've had phone calls, actually, recently from different institutions in the country asking about that. Because I think that there are places that would like to model themselves after our program, but they can't quite because they are in this fabric of the university, a larger structure. And they – you know, they do have to report. And there is somebody there telling them at the end of the day, you can do this, or you can't do that, or that this is – you know, the budget has to be cut by 20 percent, or whatever. So in – you know –

MS. RICHARDS: So in a way, you're in between the European model and the American model, the European model being – having all kinds of support from an institution, the state, but not having to worry about fundraising and numbers. And the American, then, has more freedom, but has to constantly look for money.

MS. GHEZ: Right, yeah. Exactly. I mean, when I have – [laughs] – conversations with my European counterparts, and they're weeping and pulling their hair out – [laughs] – oh, they have to raise 10, 15 percent of their budget, then it's like, try 100 – [laughs] – you know, annually. They're so unhappy if they don't get that money from the state. It's like, please –

MS. RICHARDS: So that's obviously not an ideal –

MS. GHEZ: But I've often thought that – this may be silly to say – it's not so bad to suffer a little – [laughs] – you know, to have to work hard. Because in large institutions – this is another experience I've had with curators, colleagues in other institutions in the United States – I mean, a lot of them, they don't have a – in large – yeah, large – they don't have a clue where the money is coming from.

I mean, they have a budget, and they will spend it. But if they had to raise every penny that went into that budget for an exhibition, they would spend very, very carefully – a lot more carefully than they do. And they're always kind of shocked –

MS. RICHARDS: So that's the program staff being so separated from the administration and the budgeting process.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, I'm always shocked because money is power. And in those large institutions, people at the



top, they know that very well, right? And they keep control of that. But I have told my kids, and I tell people who work for me, you've got to understand the money situation. And again, that goes back to my little Bryant College background or whatever. You've got to understand where it comes from and where it goes, and how it goes, very thoroughly. Now, that's my advice to a lot of young people coming into this profession. Because it's power. When you know it's power, you can push back.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you actively sought to create some kind of mentoring situation here, thinking of teaching your staff and -

MS. GHEZ: I haven't. You know, I haven't. It's just -

MS. RICHARDS: And you haven't thought about teaching, in addition -

MS. GHEZ: No, I haven't. No. Again, and it's this - I probably feel - and I've always felt vulnerable because I don't have that classical, art historical background, art training, because I'm not a writer, because I'm not a lecturer, in fact, this is more talking than I've ever done - [laughs] - in my life. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: There isn't - if there were a curatorial studies program around here closely -

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, I might.

MS. RICHARDS: Then there would be -

MS. GHEZ: If there was, I might become more involved. Right. I mean, that's an interesting idea because I've heard just with some conversations that wouldn't it be good if something like that was started here at the university. Whether or not they will, I don't know.

Norton Batkin was always very generous to me, and inviting me to come to Bard College, Center for Curatorial Studies, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY]. And I did come a number of times to do critiques. And I think he would have been open, had I wanted two discussions, had I wanted to do more. But again, is this vulnerability, you know - somehow, they're going to find out - find you out -

MS. RICHARDS: That you don't have a -

MS. GHEZ: That you don't have that degree, that you don't really deserve to be - [laughs] - at the front of that room or that class of - so that's a lingering -

MS. RICHARDS: Speaking of curatorial practice, how has the evolution of artistic practice - and it's moving away from the traditional studio - changed your curatorial practice?

MS. GHEZ: When you say, moving away from the studio, that it moves into an office, or -

MS. RICHARDS: Well, I'm talking about more the transition from - or, only for some artists - making objects, finite objects: sculpture; drawings. I mean, I know those are still important parts of the program, but there are many artists who are - as you said, have offices and aren't making objects that you can see. I know you commission works you couldn't see in advance, but there's this - but there's been an evolution: not closing of doors, but just an opening of new doors in terms of curatorial practice.

And how has that impacted - if it has - your work as a curator here?

MS. GHEZ: I don't think it's impacted it at all. I mean, you just sort of roll with the - [laughs] - with the dice, or the die, depending on the artist you're looking at.

I mean, before the Gerard Byrne, which is up now, we did Rebecca Warren, sculptor - classical sculptor - just - excuse the expression - kick-ass, wonderful sculpture.

And I'm trying to -

MS. RICHARDS: I guess it's not an issue with your space.

MS. GHEZ: No.

MS. RICHARDS: Because your space is completely flexible.

MS. GHEZ: Our space is so flexible. I mean, you would never believe it, that this - it must have been a reading room or something early on. This is the oldest building on campus, so that would have been the late 19th century that it was built.

And what people don't realize - [laughs] - here - actually, this just for the record is important, and I wonder often if people even think about this when they come into our space: The only access to this space is that very small passenger elevator. There is no freight elevator. We are on the fourth floor of this very old, neo-Gothic building. We have carried more things up in this Sisyphean - [laughs] - way to the fourth floor - I mean, walls, all of that.

We did the Romanian pavilion, and there were these sheets of -

MS. RICHARDS: You were talking about the Romanian pavilion from the last Venice Biennale.

MS. GHEZ: Right, which we duplicated - replicated here. And in order to build it, we had to bring up sheets of plywood that were 12 feet tall, that were four by 12 - a lot of them - a lot of them.

MS. RICHARDS: How did that fit anywhere?

MS. GHEZ: They didn't. It comes up via those steep stairs. So again, if any - a thinking person, when you see something visual, and you think about your surroundings - how did this get here? - just as a start in exploring space in the world - [laughs], they would understand the Herculean effort that goes into putting this program out month after month after month.

Really, we - [laughs] -

MS. RICHARDS: Have you ever had occasion where you needed to hoist something up and through the windows?

MS. GHEZ: Never - no. Never done that, no. We've, you know, done a couple of crazy things that I would never do again on the stairs that bottom line, I think, were dangerous. And I have really laid the law down in the - here with my staff that safety is absolutely primary concern.

But you know, we do rigging and all of that with heavy objects. With Rebecca Warren, we had to get professional riggers. And we've done that all along the way. But again, not to have access, and to do what we do - if you look through the history books and look at the installations and think that the only access is stairs or this passenger elevator that is, what, four by six feet? I don't know.

At one point, we built a cap on the elevator cab - [laughs] - so we could get four by eight. Now we can get four by eight sheets of plywood or of pressboard, whatever, in there. But before, we couldn't even do that.

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to ask you about some of the important honors that you've received, how you felt because we're talking about the insecurity - [laughs] - of not having a degree. And in fact - well, speaking of Bard, you received their lifetime achievement award, right -

MS. GHEZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: - in 2002. And you were mentioning, I think, the honorary doctorates. Tell me - talk about those -

MS. GHEZ: It was a huge, huge thrill, I have to admit, because, you know, I've always felt that that was my vulnerable spot, that I don't even have a B.A.

MS. RICHARDS: You have them up on the wall?

MS. GHEZ: No I don't. So when I got those calls, I couldn't quite believe it, that I was being honored in that way. And of course, the one from San Francisco, that was Okwui. But Okwui knew intimately the work - I mean, he was so - when I met him, he knew our program so well. He clearly had been following it from New York or wherever he was. And he knew the program well.

MS. RICHARDS: That was 2006 -

MS. GHEZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: The San Francisco Art Institute.

MS. GHEZ: Well, he knew - he knew me, of course from "Documenta." And so it was wonderful; it was really wonderful because I have a - my youngest daughter is in San Francisco - Helena - and we went together, and she had an opportunity to see Mom with - [laughs] - the cowl on.

MS. RICHARDS: Cap and gown.

MS. GHEZ: Cap and gown, sort of. And that was great. And then, the School of the Art Institute – and I forgot what year –

MS. RICHARDS: That's 2003?

MS. GHEZ: [200]3. Yes, that was the first one. And – surprise out of left field. It's like they made a mistake – [laughs]. What were they thinking of? But yeah, for me, it was one of the great thrills of my career; I have to admit to it.

MS. RICHARDS: Did it make a difference to your board and the university and the –

MS. GHEZ: Doubt it.

MS. RICHARDS: – challenges you deal with here?

MS. GHEZ: [Laughs] – did the university even know? Did it make a difference to the board? I don't know. I think they sent me flowers for one of them – maybe the School of the Art Institute one, which was very nice, very thoughtful.

MS. RICHARDS: Then they got jaded. [Laughs.]

MS. GHEZ: Right. You know – yeah. You know, life goes on – [laughs] – you move on. But to me, it was important; it was really important – deeply important.

MS. RICHARDS: You've mentioned so many people who've been important to you, like Anne Rorimer and Okwui and Kasper. Is there anyone who comes to mind you might not have mentioned, who was an important influence?

MS. GHEZ: Well, I think I've mentioned John Vinci in terms of installation also, right?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Yes.

MS. GHEZ: In terms of the aesthetic of installation.

MS. RICHARDS: I'm thinking of conversations about art and artists, and also about running an institution – the challenges of that.

MS. GHEZ: You know, when it comes to conversations, the great conversations are always with artists; it's about the work. They just take you to another place. And I think I've been very lucky in life to be able to follow – you know, to go to that place. And the great conversations – I mean, yeah – well, I mean, I have some wonderful colleagues: James Rondeau from the Art Institute, who is a dear friend.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you ever thought of asking an artist to curate an exhibition here?

MS. GHEZ: No.

MS. RICHARDS: Why is that? They have curated exhibitions in other institutions.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, but it's like, why? I don't – I mean – well, yeah, you know, Bob Gober? Bring it on – [laughs] – I'd be happy.

But it's my work; it's what I – it's what I do. It's my joy. It's my great pleasure. It's just – it's the best; I'm so privileged. I think that we in the curatorial field are so privileged to do what we do, and get paid for it.

MS. RICHARDS: Are there other important relationships with dealers besides Marian Goodman that you'd want to mention?

MS. GHEZ: Oh, over the years, there've been – I mean, I've come to know so many of the dealers –

MS. RICHARDS: Who might have been inspiring–

MS. GHEZ: Again – you know, Janelle Reiring, and – Janelle and Helene [Winer] early on when they were at Metro Pictures, and Metro Pictures was down in SoHo; Paula Cooper; Barbara Gladstone; Richard Flood. Richard Flood, who know, worked for Barbara Gladstone for a long time; and many a wonderful conversation I've had with Richard Flood.

MS. RICHARDS: These are all women dealers; is that – an interesting –

MS. GHEZ: You know, I never – you pointed that out. I wouldn't have even thought of that. Let me – if I really try to think about male dealers – David Zwirner. David –

MS. RICHARDS: That's more recent.

MS. GHEZ: And that's – yeah, well, what, early '90s, probably, when – I think that we were out in California looking around at the same time because I remember his – was it his first show? No, his first show was the plinths –

MS. RICHARDS: [John] McCracken?

MS. GHEZ: McCracken, I think. But then, maybe right after that was Diana Thater. And I had just been there looking at Diana as well. So we were both – again, it was like – doing studio visits with artists at the same time – independently.

MS. RICHARDS: Who had mentioned Diana Thater to you?

MS. GHEZ: I'd have to look at that. Did Mike come before Diana?

MS. RICHARDS: The Diana Thater show was '95; Mike Kelley might have suggested her to you.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah. You know, did she work for Mike at that time? She might have been an assistant to Mike and lived right next door. I mean, their houses touched each other in Pasadena. So I was out in Pasadena, but so, yeah. So David and – what was – gee wiz, male dealer --

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] What about European dealers? Have you found them equally as sympathetic?

MS. GHEZ: Yeah. I mean, right now – I don't think you're on –

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yes, we are.

MS. GHEZ: Oh, you are? Daniel Buchholz, I'm working with, or just saw in Berlin. What may be one of my last shows with the Renaissance Society will be the work of Dahn-Vo. And that's D-A-H-N V-O, a young Vietnamese artist. And Daniel --

[End of disc]

MS. GHEZ: -- I've known for quite a while.

MS. RICHARDS: Sorry, go back to the spelling of the Vietnamese artist's name.

MS. GHEZ: Oh, D-A-H-N, and the last is V-O. It's pronounced yahn-vo; I don't know why.

So there are a lot of other European – [laughs] – male dealers, or I suppose especially in Germany, Max Hetzler. Max, I've known for a long time, and in fact, I'm very – this is important, too– I'm very indebted to Max Hetzler. When Max was in Cologne, he would come to the art fair here in Chicago. The art fair in Chicago was very, very important in those years. And I have to look back again – like, it was probably the '80s – have to look at some of the dates when I started showing people.

But you know, Günter Forg – here it is, 1988 – I first saw the work of Günter in a booth of Max Hetzler's at Navy – was it when the – the exhibition was actually – the expo was at Navy Pier; Claes Nordenhake, who is now in Berlin, but then was in – well, no, he was in Sweden – he was in Stockholm; bought Miroslaw Balka. I mean, he was the first dealer of Miroslaw, and took time with me at that expo to talk to me about the work. And that resulted in my working with Günter; Max took time talking to me in those years about Albert Oehlen, about Günter Forg for sure, and probably others that I'd have to put my mind to it a bit here.

So that was critical. It was critical for Chicago, for Chicago collecting at the time. It was such a loss when that fair fell on hard times. They had big management issues, and it just about went under till it was bought by Chris Kennedy and that group. And Chris is working very hard to try to bring it back; and I don't know –

MS. RICHARDS: And times have change and all kinds of competitive affairs have developed –

MS. GHEZ: Right, really got caught. Yeah. So much has happened; it was bad timing. But Chris' heart and mind definitely are in the right place. But I don't know if it's going to be a possibility. But it was, again, so important those conversations had at those early fairs with people like Max and Claes.

Peter Pakesch is another one. I mean, Peter at that time was a dealer in Vienna.

MS. RICHARDS: He's at - in -

MS. GHEZ: He's in Graz now, right. But he - and he had Franz West. That's how I got to Franz West - Peter - and how I got to Herbert Brandl, and how I got to Otto Zitko. I mean, a lot of these artists Peter absolutely introduced me to.

And when I would then go to Vienna, he would take me around. I mean, people were very generous. But again, I think they understood the place that the Renaissance Society was, is, and that it was an opportunity for these artists, if they could get out into these places and be seen with the same kind of respect, dignity for the work - given intellectual dignity in writings that were substantial and not silly, frivolous. Right?

But they sort of got it; they understood the importance. And I understood also. It was a two-way stream, and again, one of great generosity - great generosity from those people - you know, in conversations, in taking me around to show me all of the different galleries, the places where work was generated. I mean, I can remember just wonderful - a studio visit with Franz West when he really had no money - [laughs] - and was in a little studio. And it was one of the happier days of my life.

I remember he had been - he had a hot plate of something, and he had been making this thing of - [laughs] - this pot of beans and something else. And I don't know if Herbert Brandl - I'm trying - it was probably Peter, Franz and myself who were there. And so he invited us to -

MS. RICHARDS: Sorry, Peter who?

MS. GHEZ: Pakesch - just to sit down and share this sort of supper, if you like, with a wonderful Austrian wine and this absolutely delicious - [laughs] - pot of beans he'd had stewing, you know, in the - someplace in his studio. And it was just very raw and very basic, the place, the work. It was thrilling.

Peter is an encyclopedia of where this kind of material comes from in terms of the Austrian - you know, [Sigmund] Freud and the psyche, and all of this. And -

MS. RICHARDS: Did you see the huge -

MS. GHEZ: So I was getting information, you know, left, right and center.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you see the big Franz West show? ["Franz West: To Build a House You Start with the Roof," 2008] I saw it in Philadelphia.

MS. GHEZ: In Baltimore?

MS. RICHARDS: I'm sorry, in Baltimore.

MS. GHEZ: Yes, I did see it. And it was interesting because when I spoke to - was it Darsie?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. GHEZ: She didn't know that we had done this first work of Franz in the United States.

MS. RICHARDS: That was Darsie Alexander, who curated -

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, right. I just met her at that time. And I was surprised. But this happens all the time: We get overlooked; we get dropped from lists - less now, but I want to tell you, and for a long time - and it was like, oh, do I want to spend my life fighting, calling galleries, calling artists, you know, their assistants to make sure, and why do you get dropped? Because you're not the Art Institute, or you're not the MoMA or whatever -

MS. RICHARDS: What do you do in that situation, I having come from a similar - what do you do when you notice that an artist's bio does not list your show?

MS. GHEZ: I remember it, but I let it go. I mean, it wasn't mean. I mean, I've worked with them; it doesn't mean anything. But it's a little painful.

MS. RICHARDS: It's a little bit like being written out of history.

MS. GHEZ: Right. It's like being -

MS. RICHARDS: So many curators use those bios for reference.

MS. GHEZ: Absolutely. Absolutely. And they don't go – maybe – dig too far. And you know, yes, it makes me sad, but I'm not going to spend my life trying to rectify it. Will not.

MS. RICHARDS: It's not an assignment that an intern has – [laughs] – to do that–

MS. GHEZ: Yeah. Yeah, well, it's not – it's a waste of time. It's a waste of time. Takes you away from what the real mission is, and the real goal – you know, finding, producing new work, good new work.

MS. RICHARDS: I want to ask you a couple of curatorial questions now. This is probably a hard one to answer, but what would you say is one of your most important exhibitions, and why? I mean, is there one that stands out to you?

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, I can't do that. It's – you know, I put so much of my – it's like –

MS. RICHARDS: It's like choosing among your children – [laughs].

MS. GHEZ: – exactly. It's like choosing among your children. I put so much of myself into each – you know, the work of each exhibition. I wouldn't know who to pick.

MS. RICHARDS: When I look over the list of exhibitions, I notice that in the '80s, from around 1988 all through to 2000 – well, and beyond – from the late '80s through the '90s, there is a string of mainly one-person exhibitions, which seems to me the heart of your practice.

What was going on with you, with the Renaissance Society, that enabled you to go through that – I mean, especially, let's say '95 through 2000 and beyond – that streak of one after another, not that the thematic exhibitions weren't meaningful, but –

MS. GHEZ: They weren't as – [laughs] – meaningful, that's for sure. And I understood that.

MS. RICHARDS: I think the one-person shows are the heart of your practice. Did you recognize that – [laughs] – that this was a wonderful time?

MS. GHEZ: Well, I recognize– well, you know, clearly in retrospect – [laughs] –

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, it's gone on. I shouldn't say that – it's gone on too,

MS. GHEZ: It was – it's an interesting moment, too. It was maybe easier to locate excellence than it is today.

MS. RICHARDS: How is that?

MS. GHEZ: There's just so much work being produced in the world, and through the media, the delivery of the – by media of the work being done is so fast and so potent. It's harder, yeah, to locate and to just determine where you want to go. I think we're all as curators seeing that.

I think it was – in the mid-'80s, it was easier, perhaps. I don't know – it was clearer.

MS. RICHARDS: So you feel it's a sense of being bombarded by too much information?

MS. GHEZ: Almost too much information, right. Although, I try very hard not to get involved in all of – like, cellphone, I only use it when I travel – [laughs] – I try to simplify my life a little bit –

MS. RICHARDS: Do you make a point of keeping up with art magazines, or not so much?

MS. GHEZ: No. And that – I always – for a long time, I wouldn't admit – this was quite fairly early on; everybody wanted to know, you know, if you were reading *Art Forum*, *Art in America*. And the honest answer was no – [laughs] – I wasn't. And if they came into the office, I'd look at the pictures. And if I was taken by something –

MS. RICHARDS: That's like what an artist does.

MS. GHEZ: Huh?

MS. RICHARDS: Look at the pictures.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah. If I was taken by something, I'd read – skim a little bit. But it never – for the most part, never influenced my program.

MS. RICHARDS: And I find that particularly interesting since you weren't in New York or L.A. or London, one might think that you would feel the need to keep up by reading everything – [cross talk].

MS. GHEZ: Right. But there were other ways. I mean, you know, if you have wonderful colleagues – and again, it's the artists. You know? It's the – like I said, the Dan Grahams of the world who are telling you what they've seen and what they were impressed by. And it's – you know, you'd go out for lunch or dinner with an artist, and you'd talk about what they've been looking at, and younger people – when I was just in Paris with Jean-Marc Bustamante I had this discussion, same old discussion with him.

It was funny because he said – [laughs] – I hadn't seen him, I want to say, in seven years or something – six, seven years – and he said "it was just like when we were working together; it just felt so easy to fall into this pattern of discussion again." But I – and he told me about the work of one of his students that he thought was really, you know, worth looking at. And so that afternoon, I got myself out – the next afternoon – and I went to Chantal Crousel and –

MS. RICHARDS: Galerie.

MS. GHEZ: A gallery in Paris – and looked at the work. And indeed, it was interesting work. And maybe we'll buy a few pieces for the graduate school of business. But that's where – I mean, that's – it doesn't – you don't have to read it. And you're looking; you're constantly out. You're out as much as you possibly can, given that you have to worry about your home base, and everything chugging along smoothly at home.

But basically, you look, you absorb, you have conversations with your – you know, your curator friends, your collector friends, with your student friends, and especially with artists. That's where the real information comes from.

MS. RICHARDS: You mentioned collector friends are sometimes important. Who have been those people in your life?

MS. GHEZ: Over the years? Well, Stefan Edlis, Liliane [ph], Jerry [ph] [last names?]. I'm going to have to get the last name – Jerry – this is terrible – who lived in the Hancock building and died. I mean, he collected [Robert] Ryman and – well, conversations with him? No. It was more the collections; I shouldn't – maybe I shouldn't go there. But Gael and Stefan [Edlis], amazing collections; Lew and Susan Manilow; the Stones, Howard and Donna Stone; Judy Neiser – a woman with a wonderful eye –

MS. RICHARDS: You said Judy Neiser?

MS. GHEZ: Neiser – N-E-I-S-E-R; maybe two S's.

MS. RICHARDS: These are all Chicago collectors.

MS. GHEZ: Right, right. But international collectors, on the other hand. Ruth Horwich is a Chicago collector. To understand Chicago imagery, imagists, and that scene – so people like Ruth Horwich; Don Baum – I don't know if –

MS. RICHARDS: Baum? B-A-U-M?

MS. GHEZ: Right, who was director of the Hyde Park Art Center [Chicago, IL] here in the years with, you know, Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson and Ed Paschke. And so certainly, there were regional – people from the region who were collecting: The Bergmans –

MS. RICHARDS: Edwin.

MS. GHEZ: Ed and Lindy. And there were others here in the city. But again, mainly it's information coming from the artists; they're the ones out looking, thinking –

MS. RICHARDS: You mentioned, speaking about artists, that you thought the two most important tools for a curator were belief and trust. There was something else that we touched on yesterday that I wanted to go back to in that regard. Do you recall?

Do you think, likewise, that the most important responsibility the curator has is to the artist rather than to the institution?

MS. GHEZ: Yes. Right. Yeah – to the integrity of the artist and the artist's work.

MS. RICHARDS: And who would you say –

MS. GHEZ: Just quickly, before I forget this – I want to say – my password, which I will not tell you – [laughs] – for my computer is based on a sentence that has to do with keeping that – it's like my mantra, the notion that the work we do is – it's about the artist and the art; it's not about ourselves. So we have to always keep that in

mind, that this work is about art and artists, and it's not about putting ourselves forward in any way.

MS. RICHARDS: And does that touch on your thoughts about thematic exhibitions, and that they tend to involve the curator putting themselves forward?

MS. GHEZ: Yes, exactly. It's about the curator, and it's not about the art and the artist, I feel. I mean, and that's maybe an outrageous statement because, in fact, the curator can – what do I want to say, not explain, but open up the work of a number of artists. And it's in a very meaningful way, and it's also a great way to see more talent at one time.

But that's how – one of the reasons why we started to go down that path about the solo exhibition, where I felt it better to flesh out as much as possible the work of an artist in an exhibition, you know? And just by – it's tough to make that choice. And I think that that's what maybe some young curators have difficulty making or doing, just going – making the selection – this is the one I want to look at a little more in-depth.

MS. RICHARDS: Yet, there have been very important, influential thematic exhibitions that had been done.

MS. GHEZ: Sure.

MS. RICHARDS: Do any come to mind that were really important for you, whether they looked at a moment in time or a place, or a concept –

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, I mean, for me – even, you know, ["A Fatal Attraction:] Art and the Media" [1982] – the one that I mentioned that I worked with Tom Lawson, and to understand really what was going on there. Or – I'm trying to think of another – I did a show once, and it was – actually, the "CalArts: Skeptical Belief(s)," [1987]; that was a huge show. Oh, my God.

I went out to L.A., and I met with John Baldessari and with Michael Asher. And they both were so kind and generous. Again, did I really know what I was doing? I don't know. But they took a lot of time with me. Michael was amazing; he went through every graduate assistant he'd ever had in his time teaching at CalArts because I was asking for recommendations. I mean, I did hundreds – well, certainly, 150 studio visits at that time – [laughs]. Not in one time, but I would go out.

And he was so careful and precise, as Michael is, you know. And obviously, those who had worked with him as his assistants were the ones he had chosen. And so those were the people he would recommend – he was recommending.

And John Baldessari, from another approach – just off the top of his head – I remember having breakfast with him one morning – [laughs] – in L.A., and, oh, my God, I had a list that was just huge. And I followed up on all of those shows.

But to learn what was really happening at CalArts at that time was very, very important for me in understanding work that talked about production, its own production. It was very self-reflexive. And distribution.

And we ended up with a show that had – oh my gosh – 80 or 90 artists – I mean, a huge show, which was unlike anything I'd ever done. And, in addition to that – and then Stephen Prina had become a friend through that, or even – I think I knew Stephen even before. And it was Stephen who said something – I think that the title was his. That came out of discussions with Stephen Prina – Skeptical Art. CalArts, Skeptical Beliefs – talk about beliefs –

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

MS. GHEZ: – and skepticism. And, in my old age, I've become much more skeptical. And it is a very interesting balance, skepticism and belief. And he thought – those are the days of the art fair, when the art fair was at its peak in glory. And he said, wouldn't it be interesting – you know –

MS. RICHARDS: And what did you say? In Lori?

MS. GHEZ: Glory.

MS. RICHARDS: and glory.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah. Wouldn't it be interesting to do an installation that's built like the art fair, at the same time as the art fair is going on at Navy Pier. And I was like, wow, absolutely.

And so we did. We – if you have a chance to look at the website or in our book, we had all of these little booths, and all of this work coming out of CalArts that talked about the marketplace – you know, right? It was an



important moment for me. Again, I learned a lot.

And that exhibition eventually traveled. I remember it went – Paul Schimmel was in Newport Beach [Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, CA] at the time.

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

MS. GHEZ: And Paul has always been very generous, too. And he was like, what are you doing in my backyard? [They laugh.]

"What are you doing in my backyard doing a show with all these artist I should be looking at?" – but he graciously agreed to take the show. And thanks to Paul – we didn't have the money to do a catalog. And there is a wonderful catalog for that that's out of print – long, long out of print.

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

MS. GHEZ: And it was because Paul brought some money to the table to print it – or to make it – when the show was traveling.

MS. RICHARDS: Speaking of traveling – and you mentioned the Pettibone – that you were involved with traveling – how do you think exhibitions should travel, in terms of – should they be, in a way, re-curated, in a sense, at each venue, in collaboration with the original curator? Or should they not? Should they remain identical? Or should they reflect something about where they are – putting aside the installation realities.

MS. GHEZ: Right. I don't – you know, I don't know. I could take the Gerard Byrne installation we have out now as an example. I don't know if it's a good example. But it's a – this is a co-commission, right – with three different places, Lismore Castle in Ireland, in Waterford, and the – what is it – the Glasgow International Festival of the Arts, and Eindhoven – the museum in Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven [The Netherlands].

So here, Gerard was actually able to shoot one more segment of it. And the installation was completely different, and, I think, more successful than it probably was in any of the other places, although I was not able – we had an opening here, and I wasn't able to go to it when it was opening in Ireland, much as I would have loved to have gotten back to my Irish roots – [laughs].

But the – doing this sort of ceralite thing, and leaning the walls, I think it strengthened the presentation considerably, and he does, too. So, you know, had it stayed the same and not changed, it wouldn't have had this evolution in presentation that really added to the piece. And it's hard for an artist to get a room the size of our room. It's 40 by 80 [feet]. And not a lot of museums have that kind of space to dedicate to one piece. So –

MS. RICHARDS: Very rare.

MS. GHEZ: It's rare, and the artists love it – you know? They – I mean – make magic in that space, believe me. But – so it added. So your question about, should it be the same – it can never be the same. The space is always different.

MS. RICHARDS: So then, for example, the Pettibone travel –

MS. GHEZ: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you always there to oversee the installation so that it would look the way you and Ann [Temkin] wanted it to?

MS. GHEZ: We went to MoCA and worked with Paul [Schimmel], I think. And I think I came to Philadelphia. I think I – I think we were present at all of the installations.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that because you would insist on being present?

MS. GHEZ: Maybe Ann would have been. You know, Ann was from a real rigorous museum training background. I don't know that I would have insisted. I mean, I loved doing it. Again, I'm my happiest when I'm out on the floor installing. I love to install.

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to ask you about some of the other activities that you've involved yourself in, and we can begin with the "Carnegie International" [Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA]. You were a part of the advisory committee, '98-'99, I believe. Was that an important experience?

MS. GHEZ: It was very important to me, and actually, as I think about it, I think that it's how I met – is that how I met Okwui? No, it's not how I met Okwui, but it's how I got to know Okwui, perhaps a bit better.

Madeleine [Grynsztejn] invited me, and she invited Okwui, and she invited Lars Nittve, to be her advisory team for the Carnegie International. And in addition to meeting in Italy, we – I traveled with Madeleine on a couple of occasions. And, in particular, I remember a trip we took to Ireland, to England – or to London, to Glasgow. And so that was really great, getting to know Madeleine even better. I had known Madeleine for quite a while because she was here in Chicago, and we were close at that time.

But it was really – there were great discussions there, too. And again, how privileged I've been to have these discussions with great colleagues, wonderful thinking people. And we were – where were we? Bellagio [Italy]– I think that that's where the meetings were because Mrs. Heinz – the mother of Jack [John] Heinz, had a place there.

And so we went and met and presented, you know, slides, and went over work. But I remember in particular with Madeleine, doing a visit with Darren Almond in London. And I liked the work a lot. And I remember when we left, I said to Madeleine, if you're not going to use this work, I'm going to show it. I hope that's all right with you. Which I did.

And I don't believe that it worked for the Carnegie, but we had a great exhibition here. And Darren is another one of those people, of those artists, who remains a friend today. I'm always very happy when I see him. We can spend time together.

But we had a – you know, walking in Northern Ireland and Derry with Willy Doherty, and hearing, really, the history of that place, walking those streets, seeing those towers that looked into the other neighborhoods, seeing the bridge that separated the religions. It was a great experience for both of us.

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

MS. GHEZ: So Madeleine is a dear, dear colleague and friend, and I think that that's important in my history. She's certainly been very important in my history.

MS. RICHARDS: Moving up a little bit – you also are on an advisory board at the List, the MIT List Center, or were?

MS. GHEZ: Or I still am, actually. And I really – it's the one place I try to go in. Either – there are two things I do currently, today. It's the MIT and MACBA [Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona] in Barcelona.

MS. RICHARDS: And how do those differ, or how are they similar?

MS. GHEZ: One is – MACBA is about purchasing. It's –

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. GHEZ: Right..It's the advisory board for purchases. And again, it's a great committee, and Chris Dercon, and – my god, I'm blocking out his name, who was at the Tate, who just left the Tate, he was Spanish, before Chris, who had the job – oh. And, well, I'll think of his name, maybe – maybe not. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Me too. Me too, it's right there.

MS. GHEZ: It's right there. Vicente Todoli. And who else from South America? Ivo Mesquita, a wonderful man. So again, a great privilege to discuss with these people who have, on their own, run such fabulous programs, and who are willing to share ideas about all of this work that we look at. And we look at a lot of work for purchase.

So that's been a recent – relatively recent – addition, and a lot of fun, and something – you know, I really enjoy. The MIT, as well, I'm – again, it's a privilege to go to MIT. I had – I think I mentioned, two of my daughters went to MIT. And so to go back to that place, and – what was I going to say?

You know, I first knew that program at MIT through Kathy Halbreich – another dear friend and colleague who today remains a friend, and sort of a mentor, I would say. Kathy Halbreich definitely has been a mentor to me, as somebody whose program I've looked to and who's very generous in giving advice.

But Kathy – when my oldest daughter was at MIT, Andrea, Kathy was head of the museum.

MS. RICHARDS: The List Center.

MS. GHEZ: The List – yeah. And Andrea was the student representative from the student body to the List, and she worked for Kathy, filing slides and I don't know what else. And Gary Garrells was the curator there at the time. And Jock Reynolds came and did a piece. I know Jock always asks about my daughter because he and

Susanne did a piece there at that time - it was sort of like a little, one becomes like a family - it's a small - it's a village, the art world.

And a supportive village. We raise each other, if we can, in whatever way possible. But MIT - so when they asked me to join the advisory board, I was thrilled, absolutely thrilled, because it was a program I watched and looked to over the years. Jane Farver is there now. She's about to leave, alas.

But she's run a wonderful program. I think they've had a great program there. And I feel very close to that program, in a way, although they are an integral part of the university. So they get a lot - a good size contribution.

MS. RICHARDS: So the advising at MACBA, as you said, was for acquisitions and the advising at the List - what was that for?

MS. GHEZ: At the List - yeah, it's - you know, they tell you about the program that they're doing - and again, right now, with Jane leaving, this transition challenge. So that's brought to the table. They - you know, they want input from the - this advisory board, when they talk about their upcoming program, everybody just supports, as many of these boards do. But I want to be - I'm there - I'll tell you - I'm there because I wanted to be supportive of Jane. I felt she did such a great job. And if I can share anything of my experiences here at the Renaissance Society with Jane, through that position on that board, I am more than eager to do that.

And now they have a young kid - well, Bill Arning was there, and then João is there now.

MS. RICHARDS: Ribas. Uh huh.

MS. GHEZ: Ribas. So they have some great people. And I want that program to go on, and to be strong, and I don't want them to get in this transition, that I - this is something that I have said to them, not to get bogged down in the development side of it, as many boards - and mine are going to face up to this soon as well, because I'm not here forever. [Laughs.]

In transition, they - you know, they want their - they want directors and curators to raise money. And - but not at the expense of the program. And I'm there at every board meeting saying that. So anyway, that's my MIT advisory -

MS. RICHARDS: Let's touch on one other one, the body in Washington that looks at issues of international exhibitions, supported by the state department.

MS. GHEZ: Right. So that's the -

MS. RICHARDS: What's the acronym for that?

MS. GHEZ: FACIE or something, F-A-C-I-E. Federal Arts Committee on International Exhibitions.

MS. RICHARDS: On International Exhibitions.

MS. GHEZ: And I was on it with Richard Armstrong at the time. And - you know, the artist, Ann - who lives in Ohio.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. GHEZ: Oh my god. Again, I'll think of that, too, in a minute. Too many names in the computer in my head.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, I know what you mean.

MS. GHEZ: Yes. I don't know. Anyway, I'll fish that out. Won't come up. I'm trying to remember who all -

MS. RICHARDS: Let's see, what year was that?

MS. GHEZ: Oh, you'd have to look for the bio, I don't know. But it was, like, the last year before they broke up that committee.

MS. RICHARDS: And so who was the artist who was recommended for Venice that year?

MS. GHEZ: So I could sort of see that coming down the pike. Who did we -

MS. RICHARDS: Was that Fred Wilson that year?

MS. GHEZ: Who was it, Fred? Was it Felix? No, Felix, I think, was later, maybe. I think Felix came after that

committee was pulled apart.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. GHEZ: It could have been Fred.

MS. RICHARDS: So what was it like being on that committee, which was so fraught with different issues?

MS. GHEZ: Yes, it was interesting. I - to tell you the truth, I never really understood the politics of all of that, you know? How the Guggenheim [Foundation] owned the building, and - you know, the - how private ownership and state sponsorship, how they could come together. And clearly, the Guggenheim seemed to want the power. I don't know.

And then they put together this committee afterwards, and talk about - if you want to talk about male committees, there wasn't a woman on it. I -

MS. RICHARDS: Which committee was that?

MS. GHEZ: To decide who would go to Venice.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, after this committee was -

MS. GHEZ: When it fell apart, right. There was this rebuilding or recasting of how the selection process would go. But it was kind of run - I don't know, was it run by the Guggenheim? Again, I didn't - I thought -

MS. RICHARDS: Ann Hamilton.

MS. GHEZ: Ann Hamilton. Thank you very much - [laughs].

MS. RICHARDS: It was bothering me.

MS. GHEZ: Ann Hamilton, right. I should know that, because she married one of my assistants, a work-study student from years and years back, Mike Mercil. And I stayed with -

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell his last name?

MS. GHEZ: M-E-R-C-I-L.

MS. RICHARDS: M-E-R.

MS. GHEZ: Yes, C-I-L. He teaches - you know, in Ohio, at Ohio State [University, Columbus, OH]. And he's an interesting artist and a wonderful man. And - yeah, how could I forget that? I've stayed with them - yeah, a dear friend.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] You didn't forget, it just got stuck in a little spot.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, stuck in a corner someplace.

[They laugh.]

MS. RICHARDS: So that was - it sounds like it was a mixed experience.

MS. GHEZ: It was a mixed experience. You know, it's like a bad panel where - you know, democracy rules, and - you know, the art project wins that you're really not behind, but -

MS. RICHARDS: You talked about other things besides Venice, I assume?

MS. GHEZ: Yes, right. Dakar [Biennial, Dakar, Senegal]- I'm trying to remember. There were a lot. But Venice was the major consumer of the available money. The others were very small by comparison.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. GHEZ: And yeah, I don't know how well they really worked, either. You get reports, but unless you went -

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. GHEZ: And at one point, I had the opportunity to go to Dakar, but again, I couldn't leave here. I just - I couldn't leave whatever was going on here. I couldn't go away, and - you know, and then you do a report. They

would send you, and you'd make a report.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Yes.

MS. GHEZ: So that's what we would see: the report of others. I can't remember – there were like – [inaudible].

MS. RICHARDS: Cairo [International Biennale, Cairo, Egypt]?

MS. GHEZ: Cairo was one. There might have been a good half dozen biennials. So it was a very interesting and important committee.

MS. RICHARDS: What part do you think arts professions should play in deciding government support of international exhibitions?

MS. GHEZ: Well, the private support – say that to me again?

MS. RICHARDS: If you could run a committee – if you think a committee is the right form –

MS. GHEZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: – it should take, to bring expertise to the government concerning support, if they were to support, international exhibitions of American artists.

MS. GHEZ: Right. Right. They were doing it right, I think. I mean, they had an interesting committee.

MS. RICHARDS: So what was not working?

MS. GHEZ: I don't know. I can't remember exactly what the politics – again, there were. And it's a wide – it's a broad range. And they tried together –

MS. RICHARDS: [Sneeze.]

MS. GHEZ: God bless you. A broad range of participants on these panels; coming from different places. But, you know, if you look back there're been some good selections over the years, absolutely.

But I was just – I didn't understand exactly what this thing that was going on with the Guggenheim. I never really – and they were always – it was always clandestine, a little, you know, it was never real – there was never real transparency, I felt. Or maybe I just couldn't get my head around it. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: It is a big question. And what is happening right now?

MS. GHEZ: Well, [Jennifer] Allora and [Guillermo] Calzadilla, whom we've shown.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. And they were selected by a group of advisers?

MS. GHEZ: And they were selected by I don't know who anymore. I, you know what, I don't even know. I assume it's the same structure that was set up after the one – the national one. Well, maybe it's still called national, but, again, it was under the auspices somehow of the Guggenheim.

MS. RICHARDS: This is a big question. What exhibition would you love to curate, disregarding any practical considerations – space or money or time or lenders, is there an exhibition that – and especially since you're looking forward to the close of this – of your being here, that you haven't been able to do that you've always – so it's a dream project or just a project that's ideal –

MS. GHEZ: I'm sort of doing it. Yeah, but I'm sort of doing it. And it's not about big, it's not about big budget, it's about strong and interesting work. And believe me, I've thought about this a little because if indeed that time slot is the last time slot that I will curate in this fall of 2012, that's why I put this Dahn-Vo in there. Young, Vietnamese –

MS. RICHARDS: So you've already decided what will be your last show?

MS. GHEZ: Yes. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you ever thought of the fact – one of the most remarkable aspects of your work here might be that it's not so usual for curators to continue looking at new work. So many of us end up being part of our generation, and you know curators who continually re-curate artists of their age, who they grew up with, who they know intuitively or somehow – but to continue to look at new artists is much rarer.

MS. GHEZ: Right, and I understood that somehow early on; that I had to stay with the next generation always, as it was moving along. So this, what will be maybe my last exhibition – I hope not, maybe I can do something someplace else or find another formula. You know, a young Vietnamese artist who is second wave of boat people leaving Vietnam. Raised in Copenhagen [Denmark], art school in Berlin [Germany], living and working in Berlin now. And he's maybe 30, I don't know exactly.

But that's where I want to be, I'm exactly where – I don't want to say I'm not going to end my career, I hope my career is not ended, I hope that there are other avenues for me to continue – but, yes, that seemed – it seemed appropriate.

MS. RICHARDS: Does that mean that what you're trying to do is always capture the current moment, rather than perhaps looking back in any way to identify some past excellence or trying to change the future considerations; but you're looking at the present moment?

MS. GHEZ: I'm interested in the present moment.

MS. RICHARDS: The zeitgeist.

MS. GHEZ: I'm interested in the present moment, also how it maybe shifts an understanding of what we think we know we think we know. What'd I hear recently, and I think it's so true, you should never let what you know get in the way of what you don't know. So you should always be learning and enlarging your sphere.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think there have been changes that you could identify over the all the years you've been here in terms of your curatorial practice or curatorial practice in general? Other than just simply getting better and better as you get more experience.

MS. GHEZ: Yes, I don't think about it in those terms. It's sort of like I do what I do and I try to do what I do well; and be in the moment. And just find the best work, again, within a younger generation – but not always, you know, I've done some – along the lines some work that I feel has been overlooked.

MS. RICHARDS: You did one exception, the Martin Kippenberger show, that was not a living artist. Let me just take a little tangent and ask you about that.

MS. GHEZ: Well, it's kind of funny, yeah right. Martin always frightened me. He was such a wild man. And he had been here in Chicago; he had a small show at the Arts Club [of Chicago], when the Arts Club was in its older space. And there was a dinner or something afterwards, and I was invited to the dinner and of course he had had a lot to drink and he was always so outrageous and – but he made eye contact with me on a number of occasions and he would do this thing – it's hard to explain, I'm going to have to find a way to – he would go like, you –

MS. RICHARDS: Pointing?

MS. GHEZ: Pointing to me, pointing to himself, to his chest. And then, as if he was holding a canvas or something and putting it on a wall – [laughs] –

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds like he's meaning, we'll work together.

MS. GHEZ: Right, exactly. And, then he died and I knew about this piece and I thought, well, Martin – [laughs] – here, you frightened me in life but maybe I can deal with this, and do a good job for you, in death. [Laughs.] And I feel so – you know, really good about it because I saw the piece, not so long ago, at MoMA. And I think ours was such a better presentation than at MoMA in New York, because for one thing, we had artificial turf. I mean, they just painted their floor green, they had a –

MS. RICHARDS: This was in 2000, you did this show ["Martin Kippenberger: The Happy End of Kafka's Amerika"].

MS. GHEZ: Yeah. And they had a – we had a rectangle that resembled a soccer field in its proportions, again, with the artificial turf. And at MoMA it was a square. I mean, a soccer field isn't square, right, and painted floor. So I thought, well, at the end of the day we did all right by you, Martin. [They laugh.]

MS. RICHARDS: Speaking of another challenging artist, you did a fantastic, big exhibition – well, it as big as your space – of Hirschhorn, Thomas Hirschhorn, also the same year, a little before.

MS. GHEZ: Was it?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, 2000, ["Thomas Hirschhorn:] World Airport."

MS. GHEZ: And that was a collaboration with the Art Institute. And that, I was in Venice, and saw it because

that's where it was first presented - was that, oh what was his name who died, his show, his Venice Biennale, from Switzerland -

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, yes, I know who you mean.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah, maybe that will come up in a minute; or not. Anyway, I was there, I was with James Rondeau. And we were on a vaporetto going somewhere and we were talking about it. And James was going to work with Thomas, I think with a new piece at the Art Institute. And I said, you know, I would love, if you're open to collaboration, I would love to present that work that we've seen - just seen in the -

MS. RICHARDS: Arsenale?

MS. GHEZ: Arsenale. It was way in the back of the Arsenale, I know exactly the space because also Francis Alÿs had a piece there that [inaudible], that's a magical space. It's like, what do you call it, the - some people call it the armpit of the Arsenale.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. [Laughs.]

MS. GHEZ: Exactly. And somehow good things end up there. And he was, James was really agreeable. And so we did it. And it was a huge undertaking [laughs] as you can imagine. We had to move all this stuff out by boat-

MS. RICHARDS: I've heard that he is particularly challenging to work with.

MS. GHEZ: He can be challenging. Oh man, he can be - yeah. But I liked him a lot, we get along very well. And I'm always very happy to see him and when I got - received, I don't know, one of these awards, maybe it was San Francisco - he wrote me this beautiful note saying congratulations, well deserved, blah, blah.

He lives in Paris now. Gosh, I should have made an effort to look him up when I was there, I didn't have time. But it, you know, it was good. I mean, he's just - he's demanding. It's like he wants people to respect his work and not take it as trash and whatever. And then I worked - What year was that?

MS. RICHARDS: Did his presenting his work at Gladstone [Gallery, New York, NY] have anything to do with seeing -

MS. GHEZ: No.

MS. RICHARDS: No. Yeah. 2000, Hirschhorn.

MS. GHEZ: That it was here.

MS. RICHARDS: Early 2000.

MS. GHEZ: Early 2000. Gladstone, I'm sure, was after that. At least, the big thing where you walk through, the sort of undulating floors that you walk through. Now, I can't remember, I was going to say something about Thomas but I've forgotten. Gone. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Talking about a challenging artist and - award -

MS. GHEZ: Well, yeah, meeting - I remember meeting with him in Paris with James and yeah, he raised his voice - it was something that James said. You know, he wanted him to respect his work and not - just because the material was poor, the ideas weren't poor, right. It was like -

MS. RICHARDS: Well of course he had that enormous installation at "Documenta."

MS. GHEZ: And that's the thing I was trying to get to, yeah, and then we worked with him in "Documenta." Was that after? I think it was after, because -

MS. RICHARDS: Well, "Documenta" was 2002 and that show here was 2000.

MS. GHEZ: Right. So I would have maybe even brought that to the table, not that I would have had to because clearly Thomas was somebody who deserved to be in "Documenta." And, yeah, it was great to work with him then also, in that Turkish neighborhood.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. GHEZ: Right.

[End of disc]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards, interviewing Susanne Ghez at the Renaissance Society in Chicago on January 26, 2011, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Disc 4.

As we're winding down, I wanted to focus on the present moment and this transition time, and think about – what does it mean to envision turning this over to someone else? And obviously, you have to think about what part you play, what part you don't play.

MS. GHEZ: Right. I think – you know, that it means that it's a healthy thing to do. The time has come. Two years from now, I will have been here, God willing, for 40 years. And for the health of the institution, I have definitely talked to my board and said, the time has come. And we should approach it – although I've actually even had something in writing with them, if I drop dead of a heart attack or whatever, in terms of succession planning and all of that, for some six years now.

MS. RICHARDS: What prompted you to do that?

MS. GHEZ: Well, again, I've worked very long and hard at this institution, and I don't want it to fall apart – [laughs] – after – I'm not saying that I am.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you hear about somebody who hadn't, and there was a bad situation? Or you were just being cautious?

MS. GHEZ: Well, I'm being realistic, you know? Anything could happen. So I wanted to be prepared for it, and in writing. So each board president, in turn – probably over a couple of them, two or three of them, now – had this document, which has been updated a little.

But anyway, I – so I'm now two years into a non – to a contract that's a verbal contract. I've only once in my life – this is maybe interesting – had a written contract. Only once, for four years.

MS. RICHARDS: And why did that moment happen when there was a contract, and then not happen again?

MS. GHEZ: It just seemed like it was kind of a useless thing at the end of the day, this contract. But – and again, it's about trust. Either you trust your board, and they trust you –

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what prompted you to – or maybe it wasn't your doing to initiate that unique contract?

MS. GHEZ: At the time, yes – no, it was built around pension benefits.

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

MS. GHEZ: So that was all intertwined. I've sort of lost my train of thought –

MS. RICHARDS: So you have this succession plan–

MS. GHEZ: But yeah, so I did – yes, and I did have a discussion with the board saying that I thought that, indeed, the time had come. I mean, after all, two years from now, I'll be 75 years old. And although I still, thank God, I'm in very good health, and love to feel like I'm at the pinnacle of what I'm doing, it's time – responsibly – for a younger person to take over.

And I now have a board, which I think will act very responsibly – I have a wonderful chair of the board right now, who is very smart, very rational.

MS. RICHARDS: Who is that?

MS. GHEZ: Jennifer Levine is her name. And I know that she'll get this off structurally, in a good way. And also there's an – the personnel, I have somebody by the name of Marty Friedman, who's been on my board for a long time, and worked with us on a lot of this kind of personnel issues. And he's trained as a lawyer. Both of them are trained as lawyers.

So it's very frightening to me, this aspect of retiring, or – maybe retiring isn't the word, because I do hope that I can find something else. But as I think about it, and just even think about our discussions today and yesterday, fear, in my life, has always been a good thing. Fear is a good motivator.

And so I'm realizing – and I'm realizing that, in my own way, I'm beginning to deal with it. I thought I wouldn't expose myself by letting people know, and here I am talking on tape, that this was coming up. And, in fact, I'm beginning to talk to a number of people about it, so I'm letting it out there. And I think, as I internally think about this, I'm doing this for a reason. I'm starting to lay groundwork or try to find what other possibilities are in



this world of visual arts, in this international community.

So the story remains still to be told.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you spoken to anyone who's gone through such a transition themselves?

MS. GHEZ: Well, I've had different input in the last week. I'd mentioned something to Kerry James Marshall, who's, you know, an artist here in the city, and he said, if I were you, I would just think about moving the umbrella on the terrace from one side to the other every day.

MS. RICHARDS: But he couldn't really be serious. I mean, he as an artist would never stop.

MS. GHEZ: [Laughs.] Exactly. And then, when I was in Paris, I had dinner the night before I left, with Alain Seban, S-E-B-A-N, who's the president of the [Centre] Pompidou [Paris], and a woman who's a friend of mine. And he just looked me in the eye and said, "Make plans very carefully. Make sure, before you retire, that you have definite plans in place." It left a little fear in my heart, I must say.

So I don't know, I'm optimistic, as always. I'm a very optimistic person, and the glass is always half full. And so I think something good will come of it, that I'll find away - oh, I hope so - to keep art in my life.

MS. RICHARDS: I meant to ask you earlier - it kind of relates to this - if, as you're sharing your experiences - and, obviously, young curators would be interested - what would you say, today, to someone - let's say they're an undergraduate and thinking about what to do in graduate school - and say they've majored in art history. They think they want to be a curator. What's the best advice you could give them about preparing for this work?

You know, there's curatorial studies programs. There's internships. There's graduate school in art history, rather than curatorial studies.

MS. GHEZ: Yeah. Well, first of all, I think you have to be persistent about it, going after the goal, if that's your goal. And to get your foot in the door, somewhere - you know, to work as an assistant of somebody, no matter what kind of mediocre work or tasks you're doing with that person. Just get your foot in the door. Get some real life experience in there. Get to know people.

Because, again, it is - it's a village. People are connected. If you're working for somebody, and you do a good job, they'll recommend you to somebody else if there's, you know, some small opening.

So work for nothing. You know, volunteer. All of that. I think it's good. I mean, I see it here, with the young people who come through. And - you know, if they do a good job, we'll recommend them - absolutely recommend them along the way. Try to help them get other positions.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. And if they think that an advanced degree of some kind is needed -

MS. GHEZ: [Laughs.] I'm not the person to ask.

MS. RICHARDS: But would you say, from the younger curators you've met, who've gone through one program or another, that a curatorial studies degree is better or not as good as an art history degree?

MS. GHEZ: Oh. I don't know. Curatorial studies might be more helpful at the end of the day, just in that, again, you have to know about a balance sheet. You have to know about a profit and loss statement. You have to know how - you know, to read them. And even I remember, as a grant reader for NEA, or any of these organizations, I would go immediately to the balance sheet, to the financials. Because all of the gibberish that comes in the project descriptions - people lie, right, left, and center.

But if you want to get at the truth, go to the financials, and it's there. You know, they can say that they're doing I-don't-know-what with their PR. But then you see that they've spent \$10,000 on a PR line in a year. It's like - really? You've done all of this? I think not.

So there's truth in figures. So - you know, if that's provided, and I hope it is - you know, maybe some basic accounting things in a curatorial program. It -

MS. RICHARDS: I don't know if those are included in a curatorial program.

MS. GHEZ: I don't know if they are. I mean, I've had this conversation with Norton Batkin before, and - I think - I went and I did speak to them once. And I brought - what I brought with them was my budget. And my - the cash flow, whatever. And at the time, I did the income -

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, the audited statement.

MS. GHEZ: It wasn't even the audited statement, it's the – we do a thing that – you know, every month there's an update of expenses – income and expense, basically. And where we're at according to the budget, and vis-à-vis the prior year, the audited budget of the prior year. And so – and how you – I talked to them about how you developed that budget, structured that budget, you know, from the earned income to the contributed income, and the – the same thing with the expenses, the direct and the indirect expenses.

And it was interesting, and I was really happy to share my own figures. And I tell young people all the time when they talk – come, I'll share. I'll talk to you. I'll open up all of my figures. It's very transparent here. I'm more than happy to tell you how I put together a budget. But, very importantly, and I have to say this – boy, is this important – with my board of directors, I have bottom line responsibility. I do not have to bring in any line that's put in a budget on the mark – on that line.

The only thing – major responsibility that I have is that we come in in the black at the end of the year. And I've done that for most of my career.

MS. RICHARDS: You can choose to move the money from one use to another.

MS. GHEZ: Right, you borrow from Peter to pay Paul, or – you know. You can move it around. You see that some things – and then, also, in terms of fundraising, I've never said, we'll only do this – I think I've said this before – this exhibition if we have the money. I mean, besides having this cash reserve, you can move it around.

So if, one show, you get a lot of money in income – you know, a lot of income, it pays for the really challenging show that nobody's heard of, nobody cares to underwrite. And you just use it there. But that's very important. But again, that's, again, about the trust of the board, and their experience with me as a financial manager.

MS. RICHARDS: As you're thinking about retiring, and what you'll be doing, are there any sort of extracurricular activities that you do now that you'll continue, and that don't have to do with the Renaissance Society?

MS. GHEZ: Well, I hope that, like, the MACBA, or maybe even MIT, a couple of those --

MS. RICHARDS: But I've been thinking of more personal things.

MS. GHEZ: Personal things. I want to see my grandsons. I have two grandsons. And it used to always be of interest to me when I – I belonged to a professional organization here called Chicago Network, and it's a group of women who have reached a certain point in their career, of national recognition. I think that that's what defines it.

MS. RICHARDS: Not just in the arts, a general?

MS. GHEZ: No, it's – oh, there are representatives, state representatives, state senators – I mean, there are a lot of wonderful people, amazing people. Women. And what I – when I went there, what I really wanted to get out of that, it wasn't so much networking, which it supposedly is known for – and it has never really worked for me because I've never really – well, there were some people who might give money there, some foundation people.

I wanted to know how women – achieving women – could do what they do, with a family. I had these three daughters, and in the beginning, it was hard. It was very hard. And I'd come home some evenings, and I would want to quit, and I'd be wailing away, and telling them – they'd say, oh, no, mom! Don't quit! You can't quit! You love it! You know, you're so happy! No, you can't!

But it was, like, too much. The shopping, the – you know, the homework, the getting to whatever lessons –

MS. RICHARDS: Doctor's appointments.

MS. GHEZ: The music lesson, the – you know, the doctor's appointment, you name it. And so I was always interested to know how other women did that. And so, in a way, the network was a support in meeting women who had a family. But family has always been, and remains, my first priority, in spite of the fact that I have worked a lot, and long, hard hours. Family comes first.

MS. RICHARDS: That – could that networking group, I mean the Chicago group, be a source of support and ideas in terms of this transition that's coming up?

MS. GHEZ: Interesting that you say that. I just received a newsletter from them saying that they're doing a roundtable discussion, precisely on transition, women, sort of at the – I don't want to say the end of their careers, because I don't want to think of it as the end of my career – but who are in transition, from a profession that they've been in for a long time.

And so it's going to be in February, so next month. And I thought, oh, maybe I'll go to that and see. It's been helpful in other ways, like women talking about planning for retirement in terms of the financial, and what people should do, in terms of health – I mean, all sorts of issues that have come up in talks.

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds like a fantastic group. Does it exist in other cities? I've never heard of it.

MS. GHEZ: It's a very – it's a great group. I don't know. Well, again, it's called the Chicago Network. So it's maybe just here. But it's an outstanding group of women.

MS. RICHARDS: Before we close, is there anything else that you might want to say?

MS. GHEZ: [Laughs.] Just that I've enjoyed it very much, Judith, and that – you know, I think you have a – professionally, I would see this as a wonderful job to have, and you're so well-prepared, and your questions are so thoughtful and so insightful. I always say, I don't speak, and I don't write. And when you said something about six hours, I thought, no way am I capable of talking for that long.

But I think you've brought a lot out. So thank you.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, you did it with the curatorial groups from 10:00 in the morning until 10:00 at night, you spoke.

[They laugh.]

MS. GHEZ: Right. Well, it wasn't only me – I.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, anyway, thank you very much for your time.

MS. GHEZ: It's been great, thanks.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...2015 Feb 4