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Archives of American Art

**Oral history interview with Raquel Rabinovich,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Raquel Rabinovich on September 25 and October 9, 2012. The interview took place at Rabinovich's home in Rhinebeck, NY, and was conducted by James McElhinney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Editors' note: Where the artist has substantively changed the text from the original recording, words are in brackets. If entire passages were replaced, they are in brackets and initialed. Editors have made minimal changes to adhere to Archives style and to ease in reading; factual changes by the editors are indicated in brackets with the abbreviation "eds." The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking with Raquel Rabinovich at her home in Rhinebeck, New York, on Tuesday, September 25, 2012.

Hello, Raquel.

RAQUEL RABINOVICH: Hello, James.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Nice to be here with you in your beautiful, lofty studio.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, I like it a lot, as well. It feels to me like it's a temple, like a cathedral, because of the silence, the light, the space. It's more a space than a place. And I spend most of my life here. I feel a deep connection with this place.

MR. MCELHINNEY: This interview is going to explore your life and your life in art. And perhaps I could open with a question.

MS. RABINOVICH: Please.

MR. MCELHINNEY: When was the first time that you can remember being in the presence of a work of art?

MS. RABINOVICH: I was born in Argentina in 1929. My awareness of art was [mostly] through books and reproductions. The first time I encountered a [really extraordinary] work of art, it was probably in 1955 when I moved to Paris, I mean to Europe, and then, first, I was in Paris. Probably, I went to the Louvre. And probably it was the *Gioconda*, most likely. I was very eager to see it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's a very popular painting, still is.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right, very much reproduced. And I remember I saw it many, many times before actually seeing the original.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you had learned about art by looking at books.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And you're looking at European art, mostly.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, European art was our source. [It was the subject] of publications [that] we art students would have access to.

MR. MCELHINNEY: People sometimes jokingly—other Latin Americans sometimes refer to Argentinians as Spanish speaking Italians who can't make up their minds if they'd rather be English or German. This is sort of a joke. What are your own family origins? How did your parents or grandparents arrive in Argentina?

MS. RABINOVICH: My parents—mother and father—were both from Eastern Europe. From my mother's side, they went there from Russia, Jewish immigrants, settlers, because of the persecution of the Jews at the time. From my father's side—a similar story, but from Romania.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And what time, what year—do you know—did they arrive in Argentina?

MS. RABINOVICH: Towards the end of the 19th century.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So they arrived—

MS. RABINOVICH: Probably 1880, maybe 1870, just around that time.

MR. MCELHINNEY: As kids, so they arrived as children.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right, yes. My father, actually, at the beginning of the 19th century, maybe 1910, 1914, just before the First World War.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So he came to Argentina right before the First World War.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right, right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And your mother?

MS. RABINOVICH: My mother's parents immigrated first. So she was born, actually, in Argentina.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, okay.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right, but the background of both families [was that they] were Jews troubled by the persecution, the discrimination. And all of them found Argentina to be a place of refuge, where they could live their lives, build their families, and feel safe.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So did they come to Argentina because they knew people who were there already?

MS. RABINOVICH: No, no, because they were, as I said, settlers from my mother's side, which means they established a place where they began as a community, building houses, schools, et cetera, et cetera. And that's where my mother was born. And from my father's side, he emigrated first, fleeing from the treatment the Jews received at the beginning of the 20th century in Romania. Eventually, he met my mother, [got married], and that's how the family started in Buenos Aires.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So were they sponsored? Were your mother's parents—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, they were sponsored by, if I remember [correctly], Baron Von Hirsch. He was

a philanthropist based in Europe who facilitated immigration of Jews to other countries for safety because of the persecution. So they established [colonies] in different places, and this was one of them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's very interesting. In a prior interview I conducted, the interviewee was discussing how certain communities in New Jersey were actually organized, basically, to prove that Jews could farm, and were organizing immigrants into these sort of semi-rural areas. And I believe the genesis, in part, of these communities led to others a bit later on, places like Roosevelt, New Jersey, who you perhaps might be—

MS. RABINOVICH: Probably the stories are very parallel and similar, right?

MR. MCELHINNEY: I'm just curious about it.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, they had to cultivate the land. Probably, all these people you mentioned, and the ones I mentioned were intellectuals [and did not know how to cultivate the land].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MS. RABINOVICH: But they had to do everything out of necessity.

MR. MCELHINNEY: They had to grow their own food. They had to take care of their own organizational needs, organizing the community, building.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I see out the window that you have a garden.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes. I love that garden, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So were your parents involved in any way with the arts or with education? Were they intellectuals?

MS. RABINOVICH: No, they were not.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What did they do?

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, my mother was a housewife, dedicated to raising us, me and my brother and my sister. And my father was a salesman.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What was his product?

MS. RABINOVICH: Everything.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Just anything that people might buy.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, because in those times, merchandise was not so specialized that you would go to different stores for different items. So there were stores called a "general store" or something like that, where you could buy from sugar to sneakers to suitcases to notebooks. It was a place in small villages where people could get all their needs. So my father would go from village to village by car and would make sure that those things would be delivered to those places.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And where did you live?

MS. RABINOVICH: . . . In Córdoba, which is in the heart of Argentina, not as important as Buenos Aires, which is the capital, but it was a lovely city, where we had everything in a simpler way because it wasn't so crowded or populated. And that's where I grew up. Though I was born in Buenos Aires, I grew up in Córdoba. There I went to school, and there began my interest in art and political activities. Whatever I did as a young person was initiated there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What were the attitudes at that time towards Jews?

MS. RABINOVICH: A lot of prejudice, because there you had in the '30s all this climate against the Jews building up in Europe, mostly in Germany. And when the war began in '39, I was maybe 10, 11. The whole atmosphere of fear, of anxiety because of all the relatives and friends and the Jews at large that were put in concentration camps, and the Holocaust and all that. So that atmosphere was very present in the early years of my life.

And then people from my father's side that he was able to rescue [eventually] from death and persecution, they were still in Romania. He was able to send for them. . . . And they all came and lived in our house for a long time. . . . So all this atmosphere, even the language, which I didn't understand, was what I remember around me in my childhood.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What was the first language that you learned?

MS. RABINOVICH: Spanish.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So that's what was spoken in your home?

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, but when these relatives arrived as refugees, they spoke Yiddish, which is the language of the Jewish people, not in Israel today, where they speak Hebrew. But the Jews at large in many countries all over are connected through this common language, which is called Yiddish, that I didn't understand, but that's what they spoke.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's very close to German, I guess.

MS. RABINOVICH: Probably you're right, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I think it's well known here in America. Almost anyone, I think, who lives in New York knows at least a few words.

So this would have been in the '30s. So how many relatives would have been staying in your house pending their establishment of their own domiciles and careers? Were there many people all the time?

MS. RABINOVICH: I remember many, yes, many. And always the radio would be on, because that was the way to get the news, usually very tragic news. So though I couldn't understand the language, I could sense the fear and the pain they felt during all that time.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Argentina was not directly involved in any of the conflicts, but—

MS. RABINOVICH: Not a direct involvement, but we had a government in the early '40s, beginning in '43 probably—Perón—that was very much [pro-Nazi]. He offered German [officials] to [come to] Argentina as a haven for them and that was a way of siding with the Nazis, though they didn't officially say that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, this, of course, is part of the story of the postwar era, all of the Nazis escaping from Europe.

MS. RABINOVICH: Escaping, right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: To the southern cone of South America, or to Uruguay or Paraguay.

MS. RABINOVICH: Correct, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And so did that express itself also as anti-Semitism?

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, very clearly. I remember when I was young, still in Córdoba, that this agitation and pain and fear that I described, and not understanding the language, affected me personally in a way that made me respond by looking for refuge, actually, in churches, Catholic churches very near our home, because [they were] silent, and it was very peaceful. And though I wasn't Catholic, I would go there and sit for hours on end, enjoying the peace, the silence, even the atmosphere. It was like a sacred atmosphere, which I appreciated. So maybe I would say that was my first [instance], although it wasn't conscious, of looking for spaces that offered me something deeper than the space itself.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Can you recall the church where you used to go? Or could you describe it?

MS. RABINOVICH: A typical church with very high ceilings. The light was filtered through the stained glass, so there was a sensation of elevation, not mystical, but sacred. [It felt] spacious, and there was a sense of freedom, too.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you were responding to the space, and also the light, as well.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right. This is a very early memory, before I made art. [I was] being drawn to those kind of spaces, which I still do, actually.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, churches were, I think for a lot of people, the first point of contact with works of art, because the ordinary people couldn't afford to buy art, and so the church would hire artists or use artists to decorate the chapels or ornament the spaces or to design the windows. And so you're being aware of something made to be beautiful or made to be capable of transforming sensation, visual ideas, into some kind of emotion or some kind of idea. This is where I think a lot of people would have their first contact. Did you go to museums at that time?

MS. RABINOVICH: [Yes, I remember the museums Genaro Pérez and Emilo Caraffa in Córdoba, and later on the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Buenos Aires. I didn't resonate much with the art I saw in those museums. I think that my real love for museums was awakened when I was in Paris for the first time, in 1956 -RR.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: So how did you come to leave Argentina and go to Paris?

MS. RABINOVICH: I would like to go a little bit back now to create more of a background for that.

[When I was in high school, I became very interested in politics, poetry, and art. I was fortunate to meet at the time Ernesto Farina, an Italian painter I admired very much, who became my art teacher. I began going to his atelier, maybe there were four of us painting there. He was an outgoing, very warm, passionate man and was extremely supportive of his students. He used to talk to us about art. So a lot of the learning I had was not only the studio practice of actual techniques for painting,

but also knowledge of art history—European traditions that came maybe from the *quattrocento* or the Renaissance -RR.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: How did you meet him?

MS. RABINOVICH: I don't remember how I met him.

MR. MCELHINNEY: He was not a teacher in your school, or he was a neighbor, or—

MS. RABINOVICH: No. We didn't have art in high school.

[I remember that at one time, towards the beginning of high school, I ran across two photographs: one was a portrait of Beethoven, and the other of Lenin. I just fell in love with those heads, and what they represented. I began listening to Beethoven's music and reading Lenin's writings. I became involved with Marxist philosophy and became, myself, a political activist with the underground student movement during Perón's dictatorship in Argentina. It was an amazing experience how you can be so young, so idealistic, and really believe you can save the world. At the same time, wanting to draw those heads from the photographs, I took some drawing classes where they had a live model. Maybe it was there that I heard about Ernesto Farina. Shortly afterwards, I stopped attending the drawing classes and began my art studies with Ernesto Farina at his atelier -RR.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: How would you describe the relationship that you had with him?

MS. RABINOVICH: Very close and very wonderful, really very nurturing and wonderful. On the other hand, my parents were not very happy about my studying art. They thought it was inappropriate for a woman to do that. . . . They said to me that I could do it as far as I would take a real career, whichever that was. So I [enrolled in] medical school, and for four years was doing both. I was 20, 21 [when] I dropped out of medical school and moved to Buenos Aires to continue with my art studies, and eventually from there to Paris.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How did they feel about your interest in Marxism?

MS. RABINOVICH: They were very afraid.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And what were their politics?

MS. RABINOVICH: And rightly so, because I was in jail for some time in Córdoba.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, really?

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, because of the political activities.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How did that occur? How did you end up in jail?

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, the police came to our house. They searched all over for books, and they also, I don't know—is there is a word for that when they pretend they find something that isn't there? How do you say that?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Plant.

MS. RABINOVICH: Plant, right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: They take evidence and plant evidence.

MS. RABINOVICH: They did that. And so they took me, and I was in jail for three months.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And how was that? What was that like?

MS. RABINOVICH: I was so young and believed so much that it was the right thing to do, not only to save Argentina, but we thought it was to save the whole world, so there would be peace and equality and justice for everyone. It was an absolute belief I had, so I felt I was doing something right. I never doubted that it was the right thing to do.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So I'm just curious, were you jailed with other people like yourself?

MS. RABINOVICH: Right, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Other young women who were politically—

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you weren't tossed in with killers and prostitutes.

MS. RABINOVICH: Not in the same section, but in the section next to us.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I think a lot of people of a certain age are very well acquainted with [inaudible] Martinez's book about his experiences many years later, but your experiences were not like his.

MS. RABINOVICH: No, no. Though some people were tortured there, not me, personally. When you're so idealistic, it's a different way of reading the world, because the spirit is so strong that no matter what you do, it sustains you. I am not an activist today, but even thinking about it, it gives me a sense of what we should do. [There] would be peace [in the world], and we would be much better as human beings. You know what I mean, right?

MR. MCELHINNEY: I do, indeed. So at what point—how did you manage to move to Paris? You're a young woman. How did you, as it were, get all your ducks in a row to leave home and relocate to Europe? Were you on a scholarship or a grant?

MS. RABINOVICH: I was in a romantic relationship with José. You know José? We met [in Córdoba] through political activities. He was in his school in Buenos Aires. I was in my high school in Córdoba. And there [was a network of students connecting with] one another. And so we met. I was 15 when I met José. . . . And then I met him again probably when I was 20, in Buenos Aires. He was already a scientist, just graduated from Caltech. He studied here in the U.S. He said he was going to go work in Scotland as a scientist.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Scotland?

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, because there was nothing in his field [as a geneticist] in Buenos Aires. You see, he studied here in the U.S., in Michigan, in Ann Arbor, and then at Caltech. He returned to Argentina, and there was nowhere to do his research. And we met again. I skip the romantic part, because it's very lengthy. Maybe it's not interesting to know that part, unless you really want to know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, it's what you would like to share. So if you don't feel it's necessary, we

don't need to explore it, but if you want to share it, it's perfectly appropriate.

MS. RABINOVICH: No, I don't think it's necessary.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay.

MS. RABINOVICH: We were very romantically involved. [He went] over to Edinburgh, Scotland, and we corresponded. We decided we wanted to be together. So we met in Paris and spent time there. Then we went to Edinburgh and got married.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I think you could have found a more romantic place to meet than Paris. [They laugh.] Just kidding. But what was he doing in Edinburgh? Was he working?

MS. RABINOVICH: Research, scientific research, at the university.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So dealing, you said, with—

MS. RABINOVICH: He was a geneticist.

MR. MCELHINNEY: A geneticist.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So was he working—I've got to ask. I mean, it's Scotland. So was it sheep or agricultural applications?

MS. RABINOVICH: No, no, no. It was pure research.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Pure research.

MS. RABINOVICH: What eventually became known as molecular biology.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, all right. What year would that have been?

MS. RABINOVICH: Fifty-six.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How long were you in Paris? Was it just like a weekend, and then you went back to—

MS. RABINOVICH: No, I was in Paris at many different times. I went to Edinburgh and then back to Paris. There I spent maybe six months, alone. He stayed in Edinburgh. I went to La Sorbonne. I studied art history and French literature. Then I attended the atelier of André Lhote.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, yes.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, yes. And then I went to many museums and met many other artists. It was a wonderful time of getting to know the art world intimately, and opening up to [new art] movements and other ways of making art and the experience of art. So it was a wonderful time in my life, those growing years of discovering a lot of things and experimenting with a lot of ways of doing.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And so where did you learn to speak French? Was that also in Argentina?

MS. RABINOVICH: I began classes in Buenos Aires at the Alliance Française, and then eventually in

Paris. Being there, it was easy to learn. . . .

MR. MCELHINNEY: So can you describe what things were like in Paris? How did you find them? When you finally stood before the *Gioconda*, what was your reaction?

MS. RABINOVICH: Amazement and wonder. Just disbelief that it could be so beautiful and so inspiring and so moving. Then I discovered there were wonderful movements in Paris at the time, from Art Informel to, of course, the Cubists, [and many more]. I loved Braque. He meant for me a very gradual transition from figuration to abstraction. There was the School of Paris, from Soulage to Vieira da Silva and many, many other artists. And there were all the cafes where people would meet and talk, and museums, then galleries. So there was a whole atmosphere, very conducive to being very involved and to falling in love with all of that. Even as a city, it still is my favorite city in the world.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Where did you live?

MS. RABINOVICH: In the Quartier Latin.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Quartier Latin.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, I lived in the Quartier Latin.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay, so it's in the fifth or the fourth [arrondissement—eds.]?

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, it's a part of Paris where you have [many artists'] studios.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No, I know the neighborhood. It's just that specific location.

MS. RABINOVICH: I wish I remember. I don't remember the street, no.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Is it near Saint Germain, or—

MS. RABINOVICH: Actually, the first time I stayed in Paris alone. I had money for two weeks, staying at a hotel, but I really wanted to stay. So what I managed to do was, first, a friend lent me a bicycle, so I didn't have to spend on transportation. . . . Number two, somebody told me about what they call in French a *chambre de bonne*, which is like a maid's quarters. Many apartment buildings would have the apartments for the people who live there, and also the top floor for the maids, maybe 20 little rooms, like a closet size.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MS. RABINOVICH: And these maids would live there, and then work in the apartments of the people they were hired by. And there was no bathroom. I was able to [rent] one of those, so I didn't have to pay much, maybe a dollar a month. Regarding food, it was near a market where, at the end of the day, they would throw away food that they wouldn't want to keep for the following day. I would go there, and take [what I needed]. So I didn't have to spend on food and transportation. And I was fine. I stayed for six months. And that was the time when I went to the Sorbonne and studied with André Lhote and all that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I'm just wondering if you have the actual address. The Quartier Latin is rather a big neighborhood.

MS. RABINOVICH: You're right, but I do not remember it now. Maybe if I do some little investigation.

Maybe next time I see you, I can come up with an address.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, that would be a question: what was the address? So was it near, like, the Jardin du Luxembourg?

MS. RABINOVICH: Probably, because I used to go there a lot. Probably. That was my first time alone there.

Then I went [back] to Edinburgh, and we spent a year traveling. I went to Holland and Greece, and you know, discovering Mondrian and other artists. One of my very inspiring and influential artists was Diego Velázquez in Spain, at the Prado Museum. Then I [discovered Greek mythology, which was very important to me].

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you're studying with André Lhote. And actually, a lot of people studied with him. He was a big, big teacher, and he's not well known today. L-H-O-T-E is the spelling. That helped the transcriber.

MS. RABINOVICH: I think that André Lhote was not a great artist, so that's why he's not remembered today. But he was a very good teacher. And also he wrote books on art. I first knew about him in Buenos Aires [from a book] that he wrote about art. And that's how I was interested in studying with him.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you were interested in his thinking about art, how he understood it, explained it.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Were there any other people studying with him at the time?

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, but I don't remember them. Not anyone, I don't remember, no. I think a great inspiration for me was not his work, but Braque's.

MR. MCELHINNEY: He would have been still alive at the time you were there.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, and I tried to meet him, but I couldn't.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Would this be 1954?

MS. RABINOVICH: Probably '56 or '57.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay, maybe he had just—at the end of his life at that point in time.

MS. RABINOVICH: I don't remember when he died. He was a contemporary of Picasso, who died in 1973. I don't remember when Braque died [1963—eds.].

MR. MCELHINNEY: I think probably—

MS. RABINOVICH: Probably earlier?

MR. MCELHINNEY: A lot earlier. I don't know offhand, but I think it's sometime around 1960. But so what was your work like at this time? You're making art. What did it look like?

MS. RABINOVICH: I think it was a transition from figuration to abstraction. I remember the impact I

had looking at Mondrian in Holland, where he began, for instance, painting a tree that looked like a tree. And gradually over time, many years probably, the same tree will not be recognizable anymore, because it became completely abstracted. . . . That helped me a lot to sort of integrate some elements which came from real life to the elements that went beyond that. I was painting in Edinburgh.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I'm curious about Edinburgh. But I'm also trying to imagine your own pathway, trying to verbally reconstruct it. You said you studied life drawing when you were in Argentina still. And how you met Ernesto Farina—there was a life drawing group. So at that time, was your work figurative? Were you more interested in the human form? Or were you more interested in landscape?

MS. RABINOVICH: I think it was back [then], when I was a figurative artist, mostly landscapes. Occasionally, it would be a figure, but not really predominantly so.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You're just drawing from life as a sort of exercise, sort of the same way that the late Richard Diebenkorn weekly hired a model, even though his work was abstract. He continued to draw from life.

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, I didn't do that, because when I stopped going to these classes with a life model, I really dropped out, because I stopped being interested in that. I didn't last very long there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I see.

MS. RABINOVICH: I became more and more interested in other sources for my art. I think I began mostly exploring, unconsciously of course, what it meant to me, how things came about in a way that wasn't really controlled by the hand and the mind in a literal way.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mondrian is an interesting case, because a lot of students, I think, want to understand abstraction. And he's one of the best teachers, because you can just say, Look at his work; see how he starts out as a landscape painter, and the images dissolve into points in space.

MS. RABINOVICH: Exactly.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And he's looking at the vibrations between points in space or movements—these sort of curves or Xs that he makes. And so he's trying to penetrate the visible image to find some other kind of synapse, some other kind of vibration, as it were, that then led him ultimately to the work that we know and I think that most people know.

MS. RABINOVICH: I resonated a lot with that. . . . Though the titles of his works were referring to objects or things, his painting was very abstract to me. Even if it would say "the moon," it wasn't really for me a moon. It was just pure painting. When I mentioned Diego Velázquez, it's a little bit like that, too, because I was just so engaged and absorbed by the painting of his paintings, the painting itself.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How the paint was handled in his paintings.

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, the presence of painting beyond painting. Maybe there are no words to describe it, but in essence, this was kind of submerging myself into his paintings, regardless of the figures in the foreground.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, here's a problem. I think that a lot of people, especially in our society,

having lived with the photograph for over a century and a half, and having lived with sort of a magnetic kind of visual technology that allows you to reproduce works of art, experience most works of art as imagery. We could talk about *La Gioconda*. *La Gioconda*, the thing that's amazing about it is the absence of the material. The material disappears. And you have this fiction that is more real than life.

MS. RABINOVICH: Absolutely. What you say can describe what I felt with Velázquez, which I just said, because in some way, I could experience the grayness of the background, [what, for me, this] painting is about; so the figures became irrelevant to me.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. Well, he's almost the opposite of Leonardo, because his mark-making is so evident. And that if you look at Velázquez in reproduction, one is struck by the realism of it, by the imagery. But then if you have a look at a picture in person, you're struck by the calligraphy of the mark, and sort of the simplicity of the execution, and the specificity of the color, and it becomes very easy to ignore the image, because it's the least interesting part of the painting.

MS. RABINOVICH: That's exactly my experience, yes. And that really marked me. It was like a turning point in my life.

I went back to see the Velázquezes in 1960. I'm sort of jumping here a lot. . . . In '58 I was in Copenhagen in Denmark, and in '59 in Paris, and then in Argentina in 1960. It was the end of dictatorships at the time [in Argentina]. So José and I—we were already married by then—we went back. Before going back to Buenos Aires, we went to Spain again. And so it was fresh with me, the way you described Velázquez, where the figures were sort of away from the painting.

In Buenos Aires, I began a way of working, which still continues today, that has a lot to do with what I call "the dark." Like having to go there to see everything. Even the famous phrase that says, "If you [can see] the dark, you can see everything." It's like a metaphor to see beyond the surface. I can see behind and behind. So that became like a lifelong interest in exploring and inhabiting what is behind appearance, which I still do today with my sculptures, submerging in the water, or the mud I use for works on paper, coming from a dark place you don't see in the riverbed, and on and on and on.

In '62, I began working in series of paintings. The first one was called *The Dark is Light Enough*. And then on and on and on with different titles, different mediums. And I think it very well could be Velázquez inspiring me to be with that aspect of painting that wasn't the obvious in his painting.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No, it does make sense. So you're talking about the dark as being sort of a visual equivalent to silence.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You spoke about that before, something that you discovered—

MS. RABINOVICH: —in the church.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —in the church. And something that you've created in your own studio, this sort of quiet space.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So the idea is that everything resonates from that.

Okay. I'm curious, how was life in Scotland? How did you find life in Scotland after Paris?

MS. RABINOVICH: I didn't feel connected with the culture or with the people there. I felt like a stranger, which I didn't feel in Paris. And that, I think, sort of invited me, that feeling, to be a lot on my own in my studio. I didn't relate much to other people or to other events or things like that. . . . I think I was more attracted to poets, poetry, and literature. I took courses there at the university in English literature. That's how I was,, quiet and alone, very alone.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Scotland and Ireland are, as sort of Celtic nations, much more known for literary achievements and music than they are for, perhaps, painting and sculpture.

MS. RABINOVICH: That's right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Not that there are no terrific Scottish painters or Irish painters, but that painting, studio arts are not really what one associates with the historical culture of those countries.

MS. RABINOVICH: And I know you know that very well because of your own history, right? You are from Irish descent, right?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes, I have an Irish passport. But it's interesting because the contrast just of a European city to European cities, I would imagine it would have been a rather stark contrast to go from Edinburgh to Paris.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The mindset and the culture—although I think now you'd probably see that Edinburgh's a bit more cosmopolitan.

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, I didn't go back, really.

MR. MCELHINNEY: A good art school in Glasgow.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, I know that. Right. It was[, though,] a good time for me, very introspective time, which I appreciate.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How long?

MS. RABINOVICH: Four years, I think. In '59, I was in Copenhagen. Actually, those places were, in a way, determined by José's research in science—Edinburgh because he was doing that there, Copenhagen the same, connected with universities, and '60 in Paris at the Institut Pasteur.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I see. So he's working on—

MS. RABINOVICH: —molecular biology.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —molecular, right, but he's working on projects. He's working on grants. He's working on specific—

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, usually, would be a team of people, different labs.

MR. MCELHINNEY: A research team, yes.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, a research team. . . .

MR. MCELHINNEY: So was he at any point interested in joining a faculty or establishing—

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, the first time he joined a faculty was [in Buenos Aires and the second time] when we moved to the United States.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I see.

MS. RABINOVICH: Long Island University. That was—I'm jumping ahead of time. That was '67, but we're still in the early '60s in Buenos Aires.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay, so you're in Scotland. You connect with writers mostly and poets. And you're going back and forth to Paris.

MS. RABINOVICH: A lot, and then to London, too. I think I had an exhibition in London in '59.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And what was your work like then? What were you thinking about? What were you doing with your own paintings?

MS. RABINOVICH: I think it went from figuration to abstraction: it became one hundred percent abstract. And there was color there. Not brilliant or bright colors, but there was color, definitely. And in certain ways, I would say, some association with the School of Paris. When I went back to Buenos Aires, after the years in [Europe], I think the impact of Velázquez [was very present still].

Somebody sent me [a book] from Paris. It was called *The Dark is Light Enough* [Christopher Fry, 1954—eds.]. I thought it was the perfect title, which would embody what I was doing at the time, because I had this body of work, but I didn't have a title. I was going to have an exhibition, and I thought that would be the perfect title, but I didn't want to have the title in English, because I was in Buenos Aires. It was very poetic to me, the way it sounded in English. So I didn't know how to translate it well.

I loved Jorge Luis Borges. I have read all of his books, probably, and I connected with his writing. So what I did was to go and see him. At the time, he was the director of the Biblioteca Nacional, the public library. And he was very friendly, very open. I remember that I used to go at the end of the day when he finished working. And then we would cross the street, and there was like a plaza, a square with benches. So we would sit on a bench and we would talk. There I would tell him about what I was doing. He gave me a beautiful title in Spanish for my exhibition.

Then the exhibition opening was coming up. And I said to him, "Would you like to come to my opening? I would like you to see my paintings." And he said, "I can't." He said, "I'm blind." I didn't know he was blind. So that was really very touching for me, the way we connected without him seeing anything. It was absolutely fantastic. [That was in 1963.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: What was the title he gave you in Spanish?

MS. RABINOVICH: Should I say it in Spanish to you?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Sure.

MS. RABINOVICH: *La oscuridad tiene su luz.*

MR. MCELHINNEY: *Tienes—*

MS. RABINOVICH: *Tiene* means "has."

MR. MCELHINNEY: I know.

MS. RABINOVICH: Oh, you know?

MR. MCELHINNEY: The *oscuridad* was sort of "obscurity," like literal cognate.

MS. RABINOVICH: The dark, yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right, dark has your light? Has its light?

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, has its own light.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Has its own light.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, something like that. It wasn't literally translated. It was poetically translated.

MR. MCELHINNEY: *La oscuridad tiene su luz*.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right, yes, because *oscuridad* is not black. I mean, dark is not black. Dark is very rich. Dark has everything, including the light.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Like *ombra* in Italiano.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, yes, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: *Ombresco*.

MS. RABINOVICH: Actually, I remember many years later—in 1998, going back to Borges, I was here in this studio. Do you mind if I jump in time? Or should I wait until we get there?

MR. MCELHINNEY: No, well, we're talking to Borges on a bench. We can remember that. So go wherever you like. Just anywhere, it's fine. We don't have to follow a script. And we don't have to follow a particular timeline. And actually, you're the storyteller. So you tell the story the way you like.

MS. RABINOVICH: Okay, many years later, in 1998, I was living here. This is my studio. And I did a group of drawings, dark, which I called *Enfolded Darkness*. And that became the title of an exhibition of that group of drawings. I remember sitting here, like now, with David Levi Strauss, who wrote an essay for the brochure of that exhibition. He made a reference to Borges, because he described the connection that he felt—because he knew Borges's work very well—with those drawings, which he was writing about.

There were eight drawings. Each one had embedded in the drawing a phrase. Each one was different. Like for instance, if I remember it by heart, one would say, "The dark is the source of light." Another would say, "It is so dark that it's transparent." They went on and on, each different but similar in the concept. . . . But it's not easy to read the text because it's embedded. It's pastel and charcoal and graphite. So you've got to make an effort to really go into the drawing. You have to embed yourself into the drawing to read that, which emanates from the drawing itself. So David Levi Strauss made some references to Borges's work. . . .

I had to give a talk a year ago about my sculptures which are created at the edge of the Hudson River. I have been doing that since 2001, maybe 10, 11 years ago.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You're talking about the one, the new one at Port Ewen?

MS. RABINOVICH: [No, not about the one I did at Port Ewen.] The talk I gave was at the Beacon Institute last year. I had photographs, and I talked about what they meant to me—how they came about, and so on. And at one point during the talk, I just had that insight, how might they relate to Borges. I remembered, during the talk—nothing that I prepared before—that there was a story in one of his books, which is called *The Book of Sand [and Shakespeare's Memory, 2001—eds.]* in English. Do you remember? In Spanish [it] would be *El libro de arena*.

In that story, a short story, there is a man in his apartment, probably in Buenos Aires, and there is a knock at the door. He opens, and it's a man selling Bibles and wants to sell one to the man in the apartment, which maybe is Borges himself. Then he said, "No, no, I'm not interested, because I have many Bibles." And eventually, the man convinces him that they are so special, surely he doesn't have that. So the man walks into the apartment, and the man is absolutely fascinated by particularly one Bible. He goes through the pages, and so on. It's extremely expensive, but he decides to buy it. He has many Bibles. And he buys it, like a year's salary to pay for that. Then he's alone in his apartment. And he goes to open the page that he loved when he first opened that book. He can never find it, because every time he would open that book, it would be on a different page.

And sort of that happened for me, what happened with the sculptures, because every time you go or I go to see them, they're never the same. So there was another resonance with Borges in that very recent work.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It sounds like maybe the Bible salesman might have been a connection to your dad, too, who must have been a very good talker and a very good salesman. He was a good salesman, your dad?

MS. RABINOVICH: Maybe.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So when you went to Paris and you went to Edinburgh, what kind of contact did you maintain with your parents and your family?

MS. RABINOVICH: Close but far away, because it would be correspondence by mail. There was no really telephone access or—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Fax.

MS. RABINOVICH: [There was no fax or email in those times.] So it was handwriting, very loving, very touching letters that we exchanged.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Did anybody else in your family become an artist or a writer? You said you were the youngest. You were the baby of the family.

MS. RABINOVICH: No, the others didn't. One is a psychoanalyst, my sister. And my brother, who died already, he was more interested in business and other things in life. Maybe a little bit of poetry and literature, but as a reader, not as an engaged man in his own life.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So they remained there in Argentina?

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, they remained there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Did either of them share your political passions? Or were they—

MS. RABINOVICH: Not the same way; maybe sympathetically so, but not the kind of engagement that I had. I think my political life, really—when I think back about it, [there] was so much idealism. I don't know whether it would ring a bell with you or not, but for instance, a writer called José Ingenieros, [who was an] idealist [writing] in a language that I could relate to. [His books were very inspiring to me.]

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MS. RABINOVICH: . . . We moved back to Argentina [from Paris in 1960]. It was a very hopeful, optimistic time politically, because there was a democratic government; there were elections. It was a return to democracy, which didn't last very long. That was 1960. In 1966 there was another military coup, and we left in '67 to move to the U.S.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So that was when you finally left?

MS. RABINOVITZ: Yeah, for the second time; I would say for good.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So when you returned to Argentina, did you return with your idealism, or had you modified your view of politics at that point?

MS. RABINOVICH: I love your question, because I would say that the idealism remained, but not the activism.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The idealism without the activism.

MS. RABINOVICH: I still have that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Was that just a consequence of age? Or was it a consequence of—Winston Churchill has a famous quote that, "A young man who is not a liberal has no heart, and an old man who is not a conservative has no brain." So this is Churchill's way of saying that politics mark the stages of our lives—that when we're young, we can do anything, and then as you get older, you get a little more realistic and a little more—

MS. RABINOVICH: I don't think I'm more realistic, though I am 83. I'm still very idealistic. I think the difference could be that I'm not actively engaged in going to demonstrations or participating in activities, which younger people would do, say my grandchildren. I read what happens in the world every day. I read a lot about politics. I know what's happening maybe in every corner of the world, because I'm interested. I'm not indifferent. I really want to know. It's a way of participating. At least knowing what's happening, and going to the sources of information. I question everything. It's not enough for me to read the *New York Times* or to watch the news. I really want to know what's behind, and know what's really happening, not the stories which are being told for our consumption. So that way of knowing I need to have.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You're a person who draws her own conclusions from all the evidence you can harvest on a daily basis from whatever sources you have at your disposal.

Well, it seems to me there is a kind of thread. I guess I'm trying to imagine being a reader, handling the transcript, and saying, Well, here's a woman whose intellectual life began at the same time as her engagement in politics, and that your exposure to art was probably related to that. It all seemed to happen at the same time. But the literary interests you—you're a poet yourself; your daughter is

a poet. Were your parents the least bit interested in literature?

MS. RABINOVICH: No. My mother a little bit. For instance, I don't remember books in my household when I was young. It would be the books I would buy, because they didn't have a library, for instance.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That would be my next question. If we were to walk into your childhood home, what would be the books on the shelf we might see?

MS. RABINOVICH: There were no shelves and no books.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No shelf, no books. So in a way, your coming to an awareness of yourself as an artist was at the same time as your awareness of yourself as a political being.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, and literature.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And literature. Oh, I mean artistically, including music, literature, whatever.

MS. RABINOVICH: As you know, many times in history, the arts came together. They shared a common space in interests and interactions. Typical of Paris, with Cocteau and Baudelaire, et cetera, et cetera. The cafés [where people would gather to talk], and Picasso with the dancers and the choreographers. And here you have Rauschenberg, and Merce Cunningham and John Cage, and Johns. . . . Even here in this Upstate community, many times we gather around different events, poets and musicians, from Pauline Oliveras, to George Quasha, from Linda Weintraub to Robert Kelly, [who wrote a] wonderful poem about my work just a year ago.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I remember.

MS. RABINOVICH: And now, for instance, my current, very current work, I discovered the other day, relates a lot to that poem. So there is a lot of reverberation, and there is no line separating the arts for me.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Is it safe to say that your preference as an artist is to be in a place, working in a place, where you might interact with other artists? You spoke about Edinburgh as a sort of doleful moment of—

MS. RABINOVICH: You're right. . . .

MR. MCELHINNEY: But that it was not satisfying to you because you like being around, and like being in conversation with, other people, and I guess this is, again, one of my ways of trying to connect your artistic practice and its origins to your embracing a kind of intellectual life—literature, politics, and art all together, and with other people.

MS. RABINOVICH: And it's interesting to notice that, like you're saying, because if you look at my art, it does not represent politics in any literal way. You cannot say that I do political art or social art. Indirectly, I think it connects with spaces of being, which are open to recognize all there is, but it doesn't mean that they are political spaces in themselves—you know what I'm saying?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes, of course. Your work is narrative in a sense, and the very fact you allude to each piece as being part of a book sort of bespeaks of a fragment out of a time-based experience in the whole idea of the movement of rivers, and river mud, and tides, and so forth that is a powerful narrative. But you're not descriptively—it's not—

MS. RABINOVICH: —[an illustration].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. It's not some ecological equivalent to flames and a fist with shattered chains and that kind of like political posterizing. You're not—

MS. RABINOVICH: And the other component, which is very present and I'm aware of, is my engagement or involvement with meditation practice, which is inspired by the Buddhist teachings. And that began in the early '80s.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Interesting because as you were describing the darkness, the idea of *oscuridad*, I was thinking about the Zen idea of *mu*, the void. You see a lot of ink paintings where—just painting a big O as a way of contemplating the empty space, but the—

MS. RABINOVICH: But, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Empty but full of everything.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, but again I do not relate to that kind of art, because to me it is too literal. I don't think what I do represents that, because [my art is] very abstract.

[I think that my work in the context of nature—the *Pabhavikas* stone sculptures in the woods among the trees, the *Emergences* stone sculptures at the edge of the Hudson River, and the *River Library* drawings I make with mud from rivers—are not representations of nature as such, but rather metaphors. We have at once in those works the presence of what's invisible underground and what's visible above ground. I'm interested in nature's *modus operandi*. -RR]

MR. MCELHINNEY: What's underground.

MS. RABINOVICH: Mud under the waters of the rivers[, stones under the surface of the earth].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Do you identify at all with the Romantic tradition in painting—I mean landscape painting—or some of the constructs of the sublime, or through the sort of spiritual depictions of nature? The opposite being, let's say you're talking about the *oscuridad*, the opposite of that, I imagine, would be, let's say, the light of Turner, or the light of Claude, or the light of Frederic.

MS. RABINOVICH: I love Turner, but I don't see that I have been influenced by him or connected in a way that I know of. I think it's mostly that I resonate with insights that come up for me in the process of making the artwork that I do. Like for instance, in this group of pieces I'm working right now, how I became aware of that poem that Robert Kelly wrote, without me knowing that I was doing that, or how the insight about Borges, after so many years of doing the pieces [by the Hudson River].

So I think that it's probably because I don't know for sure; probably I go to a source within me. Which is also the source of many other things inside of me that I resonate with without consciously knowing, and that's how the work comes about. If the viewers resonate with my pieces, I would imagine that what makes the resonance is that they touch something deep within [themselves] that [is also something] deep within my own work.

MR. MCELHINNEY: At what point did you become interested in meditation practices? You're saying this was in the '80s?

MS. RABINOVICH: [José and I divorced in 1979. After the divorce, I moved to New York City from the

house in Long Island where we lived since 1969 and where we raised our three children. We had Celia, who was born in Copenhagen and is a poet; Pedro, who was born in Buenos Aires and is an architect; and Nora, who was also born in Buenos Aires and is a social worker. José and I have eight grandchildren and one great grandchild. After moving to New York City, I became interested in having a spiritual practice. I tried different forms of meditation until I discovered one that really worked for me. It's called Vipassana, or Insight Meditation in English. It's inspired by the teachings of the Buddha. -RR] . . .

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, let's go back a little bit to Argentina. Your work at that time you described as being lyrical abstraction. Were you continuing the same work that you were doing in Paris, or did your return to Argentina affect your painting? Did you change your direction as a consequence of your move?

MS. RABINOVICH: The change—I don't think it came because I moved. I think it changed from my reconnection right before I landed in Buenos Aires, with Velázquez in Madrid. That was fresh with me, the impact it made on me.

Shortly after that, I received a letter from a good friend, who was a writer in Paris, telling me about his experience of seeing a play, or reading a book, called *The Dark Is Light Enough*. I find myself doing this new body of work [at the time], all grays and blacks and very monochromatic, where there is literally no color. Then [I realized that the title of that book is perfect for the title of my new paintings,] the perfect title to evoke what they meant to me. . . .

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I'm just trying to absorb that. Obviously, it would be helpful to have accompanying images to show, imagine what the work looked like, but I'm imagining something that's very painterly. And then with the monochromatic work, were you beginning to eliminate the gesture and shape and—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes. Not Minimal, though, because they're very rich in texture. They're very monochromatic and very rich in texture.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So that's sort of the remnant of the Velázquez as calligraphic marks and—did you—

MS. RABINOVICH: . . . Gray on gray . . . black on black.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What contemporary artists at that point in time were you interested in?

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, I'll come to that.

The years in Buenos Aires I don't remember any particular artists . . . that were significant to me at that moment. Maybe I'm very slow in my response, because there I am, say, in Edinburgh, resonating with what happened in Paris. Here I am in Buenos Aires resonating with what happened in Madrid. . . . But then and there, I was a little isolated, raising three kids and continuing with my painting, and my artist friends and poets, not up to date with what was happening in other parts of the world, Europe and the U.S.

So here I come to New York [in 1967], and I don't know what's happening. It was all new for me to discover, but I remember going to the Museum of Modern Art for the first time with Celia, the oldest of the three kids. Maybe she was five or six at the time. Then I stopped in front of one of Jasper Johns paintings and I was ecstatic. It was the first time I ever saw a Jasper Johns painting. And my little child didn't understand why I didn't move and kept on walking. Then she looked at what I was

looking [at], and said, "Mom, this is your painting." She thought it was my painting.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Interesting.

MS. RABINOVICH: Interesting.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Think about the texture and the monochromatic—

MS. RABINOVICH: . . . I became [enchanted], extremely in love with his paintings. I remember when I was going to have my first exhibition in Bridgehampton, at the Benson Gallery [in 1970]. We were living in Long Island. The gallery owner came to visit and see my work there in the Long Island studio. He knew I was newly arrived in the U.S., and then he said, Whom do you like; whom do you admire? Then I described to him [my response to the Jasper Johns painting].

[The exhibition opened at the Benson Gallery. One day the owner, Emanuel Benson, called me on the phone and said, "We have a visitor to the gallery who has been coming every day to see your work. He just stays, looks for a long time, goes away, and comes back the following day. One day I approached him and we started talking. Then I remembered your response to Johns's work and thought that there might be a connection or rapport. So I asked the visitor if he also liked Johns's paintings, and he said, 'Yes, I like them very much.' We started talking about Johns and I noticed that he knew a lot about his work. Then I asked him, 'How do you know his work so well?' He said, 'Because I am Jasper Johns.'" -RR]

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] Good story.

MS. RABINOVICH: So eventually we met, and he's a very important person in my life. [I feel] extraordinarily connected.

Not long ago I went to an exhibition of his work in Washington, maybe two, three years ago. I went especially to see his exhibition. A friend of mine who lives in New York said he was also going to be in Washington and thought maybe we could meet there. I think it was the National Gallery. I went there, then I came back, and I called my friend, and I said, I didn't see you there. And he said, "I saw you." And I said, "Why didn't you come up to me?" And he said, "I couldn't, because you were so much inside the paintings. It's like you weren't even there to touch you, to talk to you." I respected that. So it's still happening, and that happens to me rarely that I get so transformed by the artwork I see. Does it make sense to you?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Absolutely, but it is sort of amazing that you weren't—prior to coming to New York, and prior to coming to the MoMA, that you weren't consciously—like what a lot of artists do: consciously trying to put their work in dialogue with their contemporaries or sort of identify heroes, people who are going to inspire them. You talked about André Lhote as being an inspiring teacher, but you didn't really find his artwork inspiring. I guess it makes me curious whose artwork did inspire you when you were younger. Who did you look at?

MS. RABINOVICH: Cézanne.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay, so he's extremely popular, Cézanne, I think.

MS. RABINOVICH: I related a lot to his own transformation from figuration to abstraction. Though the latest work of Cézanne is not seen as abstraction, they're abstract to me.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I think—

MS. RABINOVICH: I go to the pure painting of his latest work.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I think that one might say that any sound picture is so because the abstraction in it is successful, that the—and if you look at Cézanne's landscapes, especially his watercolors, almost none of them are finished, but they're all complete. That whole idea of completion without closure is one of the cornerstones of modern art.

MS. RABINOVICH: Absolutely. Right. That's what I could say also of my sculptures by the [Hudson] River [called] *Emergences*. They are completed to me, but they're not finished. Their constant interaction with night and day, the tides up and down, [the weather, the seasons,] and the currents, they're never the same. Like the Borges story: completed but unfinished.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's interesting because the trajectory of your life spared you from being infected by what a lot of, I think, your contemporaries have, which is a kind of taxonomitis: in other words, that you think about everything as a different movement, and that there's the Abstraction-Creation; there's the CoBrA school; and then there's Abstract Expressionism. I remember Phillip Pavia, who was—I don't know if you ever knew him but—

MS. RABINOVICH: I never met him. I think I knew his work.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Very influential character. Published a magazine called *It Is*. He gave a lecture one year when I was at Skowhegan, and he talked about how everyone spoke about coming up with a new space. And this was the buzz, and whether it was Larry Poons, Bridget Riley, Jasper Johns, whoever it was, it was all about the new space. But what you're talking about is something totally different. And you've come to it, really, on your own, without this sort of participation as a young artist with a sort of culture of movements.

In hindsight, are you happy that your works evolved this way? I think it would be interesting to ponder the kinds of conversations you have with other artists, conversations with abstract painters who grew up in this almost Darwinian culture of one style begetting another.

MS. RABINOVICH: I don't know if I'm happy—maybe I'm not happy and not unhappy, because it just happened that way. Probably, though I don't try to explain it, the fact that I moved so much at a young age, since my early 20s, living in different cultures, at different times, even different languages, without missing or being homesick about my own country. It made me sort of free, in the way that I was very open without adhering to anything in particular. Like I couldn't say, I belong to this; I belong to that. In many ways I was an outsider. I was inside and outside of everything at the same time. Does it make sense to you?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes, well—it seems like maybe it made you more open to things. I think that, certainly, the observation I would have of a person who is—the artists whom I know who are the same age have this sense of identity with a particular movement, or a particular moment, or a particular school. And I'm not convinced that isn't a problem for them.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right. I think I have my preferences, inspirations, connections, but I don't feel [that I have an] identity. I feel free I don't have to be in a certain way at a certain time and in a certain place. Sometimes it could be a disadvantage, a feeling of not belonging to something, and other times it's a freedom because then you can go [just be].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, that's the idealist speaking isn't it?

MS. RABINOVICH: It could be.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I think so.

MS. RABINOVICH: It could be. You might be right there. Sure.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No, because it is interesting trying to construct the evolution of ideas that have informed your work, have come out of your work, and trying to establish some kind of a narrative. From the political activism, interest in intellectualism, literature, art.

MS. RABINOVICH: And meditation practice, which is so important.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right, but I want to do all the housekeeping of your evolution up to that point before we enter into that. It's something I'm anticipating discussion with great pleasure, but—so now we're at about 1968, '69, if we return to the chronology. You're mesmerized by Jasper Johns, and there's a connection that you've made with him. How did being in New York, being in Long Island, having access to New York change your artistic practice? It had to have been an enormous impact.

MS. RABINOVICH: It was. I don't know how to articulate the impact, but it was an enormous impact.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, your kids are older. They're a little older. And José is working, I imagine, at Long Island University.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right. This is the '70s. We moved here in '67. The late '60s is mostly discovering so much going on in New York, . . . which is nonstop new things, and new movements, and new artists, and new approaches. It was a fantastic experience for me to embrace all of that, to see and to understand. It was all there. I moved to the city in 1979, [the year José and I] divorced. He stayed in Long Island and I moved to the city.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And where did you live in the city?

MS. RABINOVICH: I had a sub-basement place, which I was renting [in Tribeca], that had no bathroom. That was a big problem and it was very dark.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oscuridad.

MS. RABINOVICH: Oh, yes. Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You could call it Casa Oscuridad. So where was it? Do you have a—

MS. RABINOVICH: It was on Leonard Street, I remember.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, okay. On Leonard Street.

MS. RABINOVICH: Eighty-one Leonard Street, if I remember correctly.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So, way downtown.

MS. RABINOVICH: In Tribeca. I'm not sure about the 81, but Leonard Street between Church and West Broadway. Right there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Very, now, very desirable neighborhood.

MS. RABINOVICH: I moved there, and this [was a] new experience, being alone, living alone. . . .

MR. MCELHINNEY: Not on Leonard Street?

MS. RABINOVICH: On Leonard Street, yeah. I remember I began there two very important bodies of work. One was the beginning of making [large-scale glass] sculpture [installations].

MR. MCELHINNEY: And so this was where you lived and where you worked. It was everything.

MS. RABINOVICH: [Yes.] I think the great impact for me—like a turning point—[was, in 1978, a] visit to Machu Picchu in Peru. Machu Picchu is a city of ruins, made all out of stone.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Very famous.

MS. RABINOVICH: [When I went there in 1978, there was no place to stay. I took a small bus in Cusco, with other passengers that arrived in Machu Picchu, early in the morning. The bus would wait to take everyone back to Cusco in the afternoon, but I was so fascinated that I didn't take the bus back, and I stayed there alone spending the night at the ruins. The only light was the full moon. It was magical. Before dawn, Machu Picchu disappeared from view, to be very slowly revealed as the clouds lifted from the ruins.

Twenty-five years later, I began doing large, site-specific stone sculpture installations along the shores of the Hudson River titled *Emergences*. Like Machu Picchu, these stone sculptures disappear from view and gradually emerge into view, only this time the stones are concealed by the waters of the river at high tide, to be revealed at low tide. When I returned to New York, I began working in large, site-specific tinted tempered-glass sculpture installations. -RR]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Glass?

MS. RABINOVICH: Glass, tempered glass.

[As I said earlier, there was a quality of transparency in my paintings that awakened my interest in exploring glass as a medium for making sculptures. Glass emphasized transparency over solidity, and invisibility over visibility. During the '80s I did quite a number of large, site-specific sculpture installations. In most of them you could enter visually because of the transparency, though you couldn't go inside physically. Because of the many tinted layers of glass, one could see from nothing to everything and from everything to nothing. The titles of the installations offered clues to their meanings.

At CUNY Graduate Center Mall on 42nd Street I did my first large glass installations: *Cloister, Crossing, Passageway, 1.32*. Remember that mall from 42nd Street to 43rd? I would make a maquette, a scale model, and then a glass factory would fabricate the big panels in scale, temper them, and ship them to the site of the installation, where, with the help of assistants, I would assemble the glass panels together, using silicone, an adhesive. They were temporary installations. To disassemble them, I would cut through the silicone and then remove the individual panels. At the same time, parallel to the sculptures and related to them, I began working on the *Temples of the Blind Windows*, a series of black drawings made with graphite, charcoal, and ink. -RR]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, we can—

MS. RABINOVICH: I think you can read it here.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: *Cloister, Crossing, Passageway*.

MS. RABINOVICH: 1.32. [The title implied] an enclosed space, geometry, crossings, passageways—the idea of enclosure going from one space to another. One point three two, is a mathematical proportion, which I used [to connect the different glass panels], like it wasn't accidental this length with that length. They were all connected mathematically. It was a time when I became very interested in the Fibonacci series and sacred architecture. [In] those drawings also the space is divided according to those mathematical [proportions].

MR. MCELHINNEY: One by 1.32.

MS. RABINOVICH: . . . For instance, zero plus one is one. So one plus two would be three. Three and two is five, and on and on. Sometimes to indicate the partition [of space] in the drawings, I would use numbers [of the Fibonacci series]. I don't remember by heart which numbers, but sometimes just a letter to indicate the different space. That was all of the '80s. I did show those drawings in different venues.

[Also] installations of glass sculptures. . . . There were many in different places, mostly indoors, and some outdoors. . . . They were temporary. The panels [of glass of the sculpture were disassembled and] stored. I don't even know now where they are. . . . I did painting as well [during the '80s].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, there's a bit of a gap. I'm trying to think about how to get from, let's say, 1970 up to 1978, when you do your night at Machu Picchu.

MS. RABINOVICH: It was all painting.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It was all painting.

MS. RABINOVICH: [And] I began some very minimal experiments with glass. I think it all began because I had a dream, probably in 1971; I don't remember the date. In the dream the paintings that were on the walls wanted to be independent from the walls. In the dream, literally, they walked off the walls and were standing in the center [of the studio]. And in addition to that, they became transparent. And I resonated with that dream a lot. Then I thought, Oh, the paintings want to [be] transparent. What does it mean? I thought maybe glass would be something to explore. At the time there was something called Experiments in Art and Technology [nonprofit organization, founded 1967—eds.]. Do you remember that?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Maurice Tuchman? That exhibition?

MS. RABINOVICH: I don't remember the name of the people [involved]. It was called E.A.T. Experiments in Art and Technology. The way they worked was that if an artist would have an issue, question, dilemmas, whatever, of a technological nature, [they] would call them and they would say, "Oh, so and so could help you."

I made that call and they said, "Oh, you should meet with so and so." The person was called Martin Aaron. He was a consultant engineer in materials. We met together many times. I wanted to understand what glass meant, the nature of glass, how to use it, how to cut it, and he helped me. I had this number of small pieces done in my studio in Long Island trying to figure out how to use glass.

I remember during that time the director of the Hecksher Museum in Huntington, where we lived, would come to the studio to look at my work. She saw my beginnings [with] glass and asked me if I ever thought that they could be bigger. . . . I said I would love to [try]. And then she said, "Okay come and do an exhibition at the museum in any scale you want." They [made it possible] for me [to do]

three pieces, not huge, but large. That sort of initiated me in going from the scale model to something larger.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So when you say "large," you mean that a person standing—

MS. RABINOVICH: Maybe your height.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The height of a person, or more.

MS. RABINOVICH: [Yes.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Just a few questions, again a little housekeeping. You spoke about Jasper Johns seeing your work at a gallery in—

MS. RABINOVICH: At the Benson Gallery in Bridgehampton.

MR. MCELHINNEY: When did you start actually exhibiting your artwork?

MS. RABINOVICH: In New York, you mean?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Anywhere.

MS. RABINOVICH: The first—oh, my work in general. Oh, that was in Buenos Aires.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So when you returned in the early '60s—

MS. RABINOVICH: My first exhibition in Buenos Aires probably was in 1953. I left in '55 [for Europe].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Because I think there's going to be interest in the genesis of your career as an exhibiting artist and who you were working with as dealers. Did you have a dealer in Paris? Did you have a dealer in Edinburgh?

MS. RABINOVICH: I didn't have dealers. I just had exhibitions.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you would have these exhibitions at, like, at *kunsthalle*s or small museums?

MS. RABINOVICH: Small places, I would say. For instance, in London [I showed in] a commercial gallery and I would say he was my dealer just for a couple of years. Well, I had an exhibition in Copenhagen, but not [with a] dealer in the sense of representing my work. . . . Then I exhibited again in the '60s when I went back to Buenos Aires. . . . I was in many shows in museum galleries and alternative spaces.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's an impressive sort of task to install a sculpture like *Cloister, Crossing, Passageway*, and so was that paid for by a grant? Or was that paid for by the Graduate Center? Was the venue paying for the—

MS. RABINOVICH: That was paid by the Graduate Center. . . . They [also exhibited] drawings on one of the floors [where] they had a gallery space. I don't remember which floor. The curator was—maybe you knew him—[Ray] Ring.

MR. MCELHINNEY: We could write that down for the next time.

MS. RABINOVICH: Ray Ring?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Ray?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Is it not written on the—

MR. MCELHINNEY: We'll explore it later, and perhaps we can read it into the conversation next time. So you make this shift—just out of curiosity, what triggered the trip to Peru in 1978?

MS. RABINOVICH: For a long time before the actual trip, I was very intrigued by everything I'd read about Machu Picchu, and [then came] my desire to visit the place. I never had, until that time, the opportunity to do it. So I went especially to see it. And it was incredible for me, really. I think it had a tremendous impact. Returning from there, I did the first large-scale installation *Cloister, Crossing, Passageway* [1.32].

MR. MCELHINNEY: So did you go by yourself? Was it a family trip?

MS. RABINOVICH: I absolutely had to do it alone.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So this is 1970—

MS. RABINOVICH: Nineteen seventy-eight.

MR. MCELHINNEY: This is sort of leading up to your divorce.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes. Actually returning from that trip, it was very clear that I wanted to divorce and to be alone. The trigger was the need to be alone.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How did you get back to the surface of the earth and out of Leonard Street? Out of your sub-sub—

MS. RABINOVICH: Ask the question again?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Where did you go when you got out of Leonard Street? What was your next—

MS. RABINOVICH: Okay, when I was living there, . . . something happened by chance: I had a letter from my brother and sister, who lived in Argentina, saying that our father had left a small lot in the city of Córdoba that nobody knew he had. We were really kind of poor. We just lived from day to day. And though he died many years earlier, we never knew that he owned that little piece of land. Over time, that area of the city became the city hall area where many lawyers [worked] and many offices were being built around it. They ran out of space, and there was this little empty lot, unbuilt. They found the owner, and it was my dad, who was already dead. So they found my brother and sister. They didn't want to sell it. Eventually they sold it at an extremely good price, which, even converted from peso to dollar, it was very favorable for me. . . . I think it was like about maybe \$100,000.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow, in those days that was not—

MS. RABINOVICH: Right. And I didn't know at first what to do with the money. Then I [decided to buy a loft]. It was so temporary in the basement. It was a rental, and it was so dark and had no ventilation. . . . So I just looked around and I bought [a raw] space on Warren Street. That's 52 Warren Street.

[END rabino12_sd_1of3_track2_m.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking with Raquel Rabinovich on October 9, Tuesday, 2012, at Raquel's home in Rhinebeck, New York.

Hello, again.

MS. RABINOVICH: Hi, James, very lovely to see you again.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You, too. So we were going to try to revisit a few topics—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY:—pertaining to the last conversation we had on the 25th.

MS. RABINOVICH: That's right, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So where do we need to begin?

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, I remember what we spoke about two weeks ago, a thread which kind of began during the '40s, when I still was in Córdoba, in Argentina. I remembered, for instance, the great influence it had on me, knowing Italian Jews, intellectuals, seeking refuge from the fascist regime in Italy.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Ah.

MS. RABINOVICH: Philosophers, poets, and writers. And I was fortunate to be able to meet them. They gave lectures and talks or informal conversations with friends at a cafe, in many different circumstances. And I think that was a strong influence in terms of developing my love for books, for poetry, and European culture, firsthand. . . . I didn't mention that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No, you didn't. Was Ernesto among those?

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, he was my teacher, but for instance, I remember a great philosopher called Rodolfo Mondolfo.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Rodolfo Mondolfo.

MS. RABINOVICH: Mondolfo

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mondolfo.

MS. RABINOVICH: Mondolfo, his last name—many books he wrote. He was very profound in his thinking. So that really affected me very much.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So these were Italians who had come to Argentina—

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: To flee the fascist regime—

MS. RABINOVICH: Exactly.

MR. MCELHINNEY:—in Italy.

MS. RABINOVICH: . . . The fascist regime.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right. So my love of books and poetry—and then sometimes poets were invited to read, even from Spain, because the Civil War continued in Spain. I remember Alberti would come there and [read] Pablo Neruda, [who] was from Chile.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MS. RABINOVICH: So all this inspired me enormously, and it certainly affected my art later on very, very strongly.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, it must have contributed to your awareness of such a thing as an intellectual life.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Because it sounds like the way you were raised with your dad being a salesman and your mom—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —being a housewife, that this would have not been the kind of environment you would have been exposed to otherwise.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right, so it was very rich, very meaningful. I wanted to mention that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So apart from Ernesto, among all of these people—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Were there other mentors, other people who particularly inspired you?

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, Pablo Neruda was extremely inspiring. Even I remember by heart many, many of his [inaudible] poems, yes. And he also shared his political views, a way of being in the world. [I participated in] the student movement. No different, say, from going a year ago to Occupy Wall Street.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MS. RABINOVICH: That sort of consciousness that goes beyond merely me and includes others and includes the world at large, caring for other people.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Would you characterize that as a sense of community or—

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, the community of artists and writers and poets and intellectuals, but reaching beyond the small community itself, trying to reach out and resonate with the world at large. That was important to me, [and] it still [is].

MR. MCELHINNEY: So what about that inspired you? You could have become a cabaret singer; instead, you became an artist. So what was it, do you think, that you found appealing about this?

MS. RABINOVICH: I think there was a spiritual aspect to all of that, something very deep and profound beyond the words or beyond the sentences being articulated. There was something not verbally articulated, with which I resonated very deeply. Like in between the lines, something maybe like seeds that are planted in the mind. And you never know, even if they are there. And eventually is, Oh, ah. And then—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Can this become—

MS. RABINOVICH: Something is unfolding because of that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I get it.

MS. RABINOVICH: Exactly.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So this is a theme in your art, the idea of the thing that's hidden below the surface.

MS. RABINOVICH: Exactly, yes, yes. And I think, looking back at what I call the thread, maybe those first seeds were planted at that time. Because it goes with my going to churches trying to find silence and to find quiet space, empty space. I think it kind of resonated together with these other aspects that were [there and] with art.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You talked also about the stupas in India, the—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, later on, the threads continued in other cities and in other parts of my life.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So these objects, which were like miniature temples concealing objects?

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, but I realize it is not even the object. Like when I think—for instance, I'm doing sculpture with stones now, right? [Actually,] it's not about the stones. It's something that is not in the stones [themselves]. It's something that may be metaphorically or literally in store in the stone. Like maybe in the temples, it's not the temple in itself, but it is something that is embedded in that, that has these resonances and significance. Do you think I speak loud enough?

MR. MCELHINNEY: I think so. We've got Sarah ably monitoring the—you might want to pull you chair a little closer, just to not stress the—

MS. RABINOVICH: And there are cushions there, if you like.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's fine. So the thing about stones is interesting to me. I recently had a conversation with someone who was posing the question, Why was the wife of Lot turned into a pillar of salt?

MS. RABINOVICH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Have you an opinion about that?

MS. RABINOVICH: No, I don't. How about you?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, my opinion was that salt was a form of currency, that it was a—

MS. RABINOVICH: Ah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It was a symbolic revenge, sort of turning her into the object of her own cupidity, which was—

MS. RABINOVICH: Ah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Salt was a bearer of wealth, like gold later, more durable, but—

MS. RABINOVICH: Ah, you might be right. I think so.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, they used to pay Roman soldiers in salt, thus the word "salary."

MS. RABINOVICH: Ah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But then once exposed to the elements, of course, salt melts in the first rain. But this didn't prove to be a satisfactory answer, anyway, although I think it might be correct. But it's pondering the whole idea of permanence.

MS. RABINOVICH: Absolutely.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The durability

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And so with your pieces, let's say, the Port Ewen piece—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You've got a juxtaposition between the durability of the stones, each of which resisted being moved to that location by their sheer weight and unwieldiness.

MS. RABINOVICH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. MCELHINNEY: And then inserted into this environment, where they're redefined by a mutable process of tides and currents and floods and ebbs and so forth.

MS. RABINOVICH: Absolutely right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But do you see [that] in your choice of stone as a material for these pieces or just simply the tactile quality of stone having some kind of poetic resonance? I mean, why not big chunks of iron instead of stone?

MS. RABINOVICH: [Stone has been there all the time. It's the most ancient material, and the core of the Earth. The Earth is really stone. Stones are repositories of history. Their layering in my sculptures suggests geological and cultural times. The sculptures evoke the history of the Earth and the stages of life. They are subject to the rising and falling of the river tides. It's paradoxical, because the stones are such a solid presence that evokes permanence, while at the same time the sculptures themselves are impermanent. They are not under my control, and they continue to exist even if we don't see them, when they become an invisible presence under the waters of the river. - RR]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, in the way they become these open jetties that, no doubt, over the centuries are going to trap silt and ultimately be covered and be earth.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So this is something that you like to ponder.

MS. RABINOVICH: Like we said before, the [sculptures] are never finished, but they are completed. I stay for six hours trying not to get my view, my sight, my eyes off the piece itself, so I can see, literally, change. Because in our culture, everything is so fast that change happens before we are even aware of it. While there, the six-hour cycle allows me to see from everything to nothing and from nothing to everything, in a very slow unfolding of the emergence [and submergence] of the sculpture. It's very important for me to be with that process.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And why is that? Is it just a meditation on nature and time, or—

MS. RABINOVICH: [I want] to be able to stay with the slowness of a process as it happens. Maybe it is not different from nature. If I can see a flower from the moment it's a bloom and then it opens into flower, . . . I might not have the proper words to describe it, but I think that it's a way of registering and being present for time in a way that the fastness of our culture doesn't let me see or perceive. Does it make sense to you?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes, it does. I think that there's been a lot conversation about the process of seeing, especially among people who, like I do, teach drawing.

MS. RABINOVICH: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. MCELHINNEY: The idea has been offered many times that the process of drawing is really not to produce an image, but it to rather structure the experience of looking, to slow you down until you can see what you're looking at.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And let's say your piece at Port Ewen, what is it that you would hope that a visitor to the site might see or might experience? Do you think it would be best for a person who goes to see your piece, any of these river pieces, to plan to stay there for an afternoon, and—

MS. RABINOVICH: I would hope that they can stay for a long time to connect with the slowness of the process, what I call an unfolding of time. Because there are many things in the process of making art in which for me—I don't know for other people—is like an inner pilgrimage in time—to get to a place where there is a possibility that something important is revealed or acknowledged. . . . Many times it's that possibility of something to be known or to be seen. But in the moment, it is not articulated yet, verbally or visually. And what I hope for the viewers is [for them to] connect with [their own] inner pilgrimage, in which something important is revealed to them—that it couldn't have happened without the process of connecting with the art.

For instance, probably 10 years ago, when I did one of my first pieces—I'm talking about maybe 2003 or 2004—a friend of mine who was an actor and a theater director used to go [frequently] to contemplate some of these early pieces and stay there for a long time. And he would call me to share with me his response. Or sometimes he would write to me. And I stumbled [onto what] he knew:, though he was young, he had cancer, and he had just a very short time to live. Then he began writing to me how grateful he was for the art because it was helping him to acknowledge his own impermanence, that looking at the impermanence of the art, he was able to accept his own. And then the month before he died, he asked me to create a sculpture piece that he would donate after his death to the town. That was in High Falls, [where he] used to live.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right. There is a park there. So he would be donating a piece that I [would do] after his death, where he wished his ashes would be placed. And that's exactly what happened.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Where is the park?

MS. RABINOVICH: I will give you the information in a moment. It's off route 209, before you reach High Falls. I don't remember the name of the park, but it's there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So it's on the Rondout Creek, or—

MS. RABINOVICH: No, it's further west.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I see.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yeah, further west.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Very interesting.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right, right. So there is an example of how people can have this resonance with something that perhaps we're not able to see or to perceive. And that is what art, music, poetry have the power to do.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You spoke last time about certain experiences that for you were transformative, like going and spending the night at Machu Picchu, and going to Nepal and learning about certain—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —forms of meditation. So would you encourage someone coming to see your piece to approach it as a sort of object of meditation, that this could be, that your work could somehow introduce them to a process that would be?

MS. RABINOVICH: I don't know whether I would call the process meditation, but I would say it's a process of connecting to oneself in a way that is deep and profound, like parallel to where the source of my work seems to be. I'm very interested or fascinated by the process of how anything, not only the art, emerges from being concealed or hidden. This could be a thought, could be a word, could be a baby being born, or a building being erected because it's usually not seen or known. And to me it's extremely important. . . .

MR. MCELHINNEY: There were a few more points on—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —your pad that we want to be sure that we address, that we include all of these—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —concepts that we didn't speak about or weren't able to explore thoroughly enough last time.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right. Right—it's another thread, I think, that applies very much to the present

moment. It's the idea of libraries.

We talked about books and reading. I became very, very enchanted with libraries, which I still am. And it's like being in the presence of art, in the sense of how it can affect me very deeply. And I realized that it's not about the books I would read in that library. It's the idea of the library. Seeing books—I don't even have to read those books, but it's the idea of the book, which probably is the idea of the possibility of something to be known or to be discovered.

And that resonates, too, with a poet I like very much, St. John of the Cross. I'm trying try to remember, maybe not literally, but the concept of one of the poems. He would say, "In order to know what you do not know, you have to go by a way you do not know." And somehow [libraries are] for me like that, because I don't know those books. In order to be able to discover something that is implied in those books and libraries, it's [important] not to go directly to open the book. I have another way to discover it. And probably that's what I think I'm doing with the art I have been making; I still don't know. [I'm thinking of] the current body of work, which I began a few years ago, called *River Library*. The idea of library offers that possibility.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's a sort of collection or a treasure house of knowledge and experience.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You spoke before, also, about meeting Borges.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And he was working in a library.

MS. RABINOVICH: Exactly, yes. For instance, I realize when I go to a new city, one of the first things I do is go to the library. I remember so clearly the first time I went to the British Library [in London], or to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, to the library at Yale, for instance.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The Beinecke or just a—

MS. RABINOVICH: Wait, what was that?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, there are a couple of libraries at Yale. The main library or the—

MS. RABINOVICH: The one at the college, which is—

MR. MCELHINNEY: That has a Noguchi?

MS. RABINOVICH: What I remember clearly is that one part of the library has music manuscripts that was added to it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I think you're speaking of the Beinecke library, which has sort of a modern building. I can't remember off the top of my head the name of the—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, but the modern building used to be like a courtyard.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: There's a—

MS. RABINOVICH: Just entering that library is amazing. When I lived in the city during the '80s, almost daily I would go to the Morgan Library. I didn't really have to read anything. Being there contributed something extraordinary for me—so that kind of connection.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Sort of being in the presence of all of that knowledge and power and words and books, all together in one place.

MS. RABINOVICH: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. MCELHINNEY: So I'm beginning to have a question for you about antiquity, because there's something about your work that speaks a lot about antiquity and history.

MS. RABINOVICH: In which way antiquity?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I think that speaking about the rivers, the story that's told by the collection of sediment and the movement of water or just sort of the antiquity of stones—because, as a kid, I used to go and open up stones with a hammer and find fossils inside. And so this is kind of beginning to resonate a bit for me.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: This idea that, What could be hidden inside the stone? But do you feel, specifically I mean, anything about a Judaic identity or heritage or awareness, the sort of antiquity of that? Because it is an identity with roots and antiquity.

MS. RABINOVICH: I don't know how to answer [that] well. It's a very complex question. But it seems to me that what I appreciate most is not the antiquity in itself, but the accumulation of all the things that happened since antiquity, the richness of all the things that created that possibility of being able today to sort of unearth through art, whatever the medium—poetry, other arts as well—the enormity and the richness [contained within].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, maybe I should approach the question from a different point of view. You spoke before about the influence of artists and poets and philosophers, some of whom were coming from Italy to escape persecution and fascism. But as a mature artist, as someone with a studio practice, with a career, with a mission as an artist, have there been any writers or critics who have shaped your thinking, helped you form a critical method to help you direct the evolution of your work? Are there any critics who influenced you?

Because your work does seem—it's very individual. And it doesn't seem like it would be something that one could easily insert into Arte Povera or abstract painting, or there's no easy fit to say, Oh yes, Raquel Rabinovich, she's one of those. You are very individual in your thinking. So I'm just curious if there were any other artists or any other writers who you found inspiring at one point in time or another.

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, I mentioned Borges as inspiring, very much so, and then during the '80s, which I didn't mention last time[, Italo Calvino].

MR. MCELHINNEY: We didn't get to the '80s; now let's explore that.

MS. RABINOVICH: Oh, that's what happened.

MR. MCELHINNEY: We kind of—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, yes—

MR. MCELHINNEY: —got into the '80s—

MS. RABINOVICH: That's right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —and we never got past them.

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, for instance, Agnes Martin, I think, had a great impact on me. Not only that I love her work, but I know that she would spend a lot of time in the studio not doing anything visible, like sitting and looking. It could be the wall, or could be her canvases, or the process of working. And she used to say that she wouldn't just go there and paint or draw if she didn't touch first [something] deep within herself. And all the time that she would spend apparently doing nothing, it was an important part of her work.

And that resonated with me enormously. It even gave me a lot of peace and comfort to know that I wasn't alone in working in series, which sometimes would take like a year or more to complete because they needed a lot of time in between sessions, or I'd just let it [be] and then go back to them.

When I discovered her work and her way of working, that was when I moved to the city, in the '80s, where everything in the art world appeared to be for me extremely competitive, extremely materialistic in many ways. And also, it happened very, very fast. You have to move on and on and on, you know. And she wouldn't do that. She was already in New Mexico. And really, she inspired me a lot, just to be with what has to be and respect time as a very important element in the working process.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So Agnes Martin; what about the Minimalists? Were any of them inspiring to you? People like Don Judd, or—

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, I didn't see her as a Minimalist.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No, I don't either.

MS. RABINOVICH: Oh, all right, then.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But were any of the others of interest to you?

MS. RABINOVICH: I was very interested in—I think some critics called at the time, but I didn't see the name coming up again—the "diffident avant-garde," which means that the appearance was very monochromatic and very subtle, like Agnes Martin. [Also] Robert Ryman or maybe Brice Marden. But they were not Minimalists. It was much more [also] behind the surface that the appearance of what seemed to be. So I connected with that kind of approach to art. Do you remember that terminology, "diffident avant-garde"?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes, it's amusing.

MS. RABINOVICH: It's what I call "incubation time." [Laughs.] Really.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The idea of a diffident avant-garde, which is almost a contradiction.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: One thinks of the diffidence as being characteristic of a person who is not in the front of a movement.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MS. RABINOVICH: Maybe it wasn't a word that would describe all of [that]. We coin names to associate with movements. It's so arbitrary. . . . But there was a tendency towards monochromatic and subtle. So I connected with that very much, and the slowness of the process.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What about somebody like Dorothea Rockburne?

MS. RABINOVICH: Very much, too. I actually saw an exhibition last week of her work—extremely beautiful—at a gallery uptown; it's called Craig Starr—early work and very, very beautiful. I connect with her, too, very much.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So at what point—I'm trying to visualize your work in the 1980s—how would you characterize what you were making the 1980s? You hadn't begun *River Libraries*.

MS. RABINOVICH: No, I think we mentioned all the glass sculptures that I did.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes.

MS. RABINOVICH: That was the '80s, where I was trying to use transparency as a medium.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, you spoke about the density that, from certain points of view—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That the piece was transparent from other points of view.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It was opaque.

MS. RABINOVICH: [No, it was not opaque.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MS. RABINOVICH: The paintings I did were parallel to [the glass sculptures], and also to the drawings. I think I spoke about the *Temples of the Blind Windows*, which was the beginning of the '80s.

And then in the mid-'80s, I resonated very much with a book called *Invisible Cities*, written by Italo Calvino. I even corresponded with him. He lived in Italy. And I got his permission to use passages of that book to inscribe in my drawings, which I did. And so the drawings are called *Invisible Cities*. I used rubber stamps to hand-stamp some of those passages. They were shown at the Bronx Museum. It was titled *Invisible Cities*. I did a sculpture installation that was like my own city, in that respect. And Barry Schwabsky wrote [about it] very beautifully, really understanding the concept and my art.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Could you repeat the name of the writer again?

MS. RABINOVICH: The name of?

MR. MCELHINNEY: The person who wrote about your exhibition.

MS. RABINOVICH: Barry Schwabsky.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Barry—

MS. RABINOVICH: Schwabsky.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Schwabsky?

MS. RABINOVICH: Do you know him?

MR. MCELHINNEY: I don't, but I just wanted to get it right for the transcript.

MS. RABINOVICH: Oh, yes, I think that's about right.

SARAH: We have it. I can get the exact spelling. We have the access to it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay, it's probably in your bibliography.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, yes, actually I made a package [of materials] for you.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, thank you.

MS. RABINOVICH: That's one thing I had.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I'll send that along with the archives.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, so that was really meaningful for me. That was consistent with my beginning of using some kind of text in addition to the visual, or added to the visual. Remember, perhaps, in the *Temples of the Blind Windows*, I used letters and numbers to sort of evoke proportions and relationships within the space. At the same time, the titles of the pieces became important to me, and sometimes statements accompanied them. . . . It's interesting, going back to the thread. Because in my current work, I don't use written text anymore, the text is embedded in the mud itself. So we go back and forth to the idea of text.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, the title itself, the word "library" alludes to—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. MCELHINNEY: —multiple texts.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So in the '80s, you did this series of pieces based on Calvino, and Schwabsky wrote about them.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And at the Bronx Museum. Were they exhibited anywhere else?

MS. RABINOVICH: No, just the Bronx Museum, right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So did other artists find you? Did artists come and sort of seek out a dialogue with you about the work you were doing? Who were you in conversation with the 1980s?

MS. RABINOVICH: Most of the conversations happened with Bill Zimmer. He was a writer and architect—a lot, a lot of conversations with him. He really was one of the few people who understood [my work] very, very deeply. And to the end of his life—he died a few years ago—until the very end, we continued our conversations about art and all of my work. [Other people were Agnes Denes, Jasper Johns, and Luisa Valenzuela.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: And where are you living at this time? You're in New York City, but—

MS. RABINOVICH: In a loft, which I was able to buy. Eventually, at some point, my three teenage children moved in with me. I remember it was very chaotic with them and very magical. They were wonderful kids. . . .

MR. MCELHINNEY: It had to have been a pretty large loft, I would think.

MS. RABINOVICH: It was large, yes. Yes, right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The names of the children again—I know there's Celia.

MS. RABINOVICH: Oh, Celia, Pedro, and Nora.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Nora.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right. And many times there, poets, friends would come to read and share poetry. I think I mentioned the group AAA would come, and we had meetings there. Many artists were part of the Abstract American Artists group. I don't know if I remember all the names. There was a time when [Agnes Denes] began doing—I don't know if you remember—the *Wheatfield* in downtown Manhattan that she planted.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, that's right.

MS. RABINOVICH: Actually, I helped her planting the seeds there. We were very good friends. And my children helped also with planting the seeds with her.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How long was that up?

MS. RABINOVICH: [A few months,] probably 1982. And it stayed there until eventually some of the seeds grew into plants. And then after that, she did a harvesting. And she kept it in storage in her loft. She did a lot of documentation and photographs.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So the 1980s end in kind of a colorful way, because the whole art world collapses. Were you affected at all by that?

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, in a way, indirectly. . . .

MR. MCELHINNEY: There was a stock market crash in '87, I think, and then the following year—

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY:—following two years, many, many galleries just disappeared.

MS. RABINOVICH: That is true. Well, I remember that at that time, I was very dissatisfied with me and the art world and my art and everything. And I didn't know what to do about it. One of the things that happened was that I fell in love again with my ex-husband. We became very good friends, very close, a very deep friendship. So I shared with him all of these kinds of dissatisfaction and questioning. I was already doing Vipassana meditation and Buddhist meditation. And that motivated our going to India for one year.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I just have to ask you briefly about how you got back with José. You left, got divorced, moved to New York, single woman. It's an exciting environment. And of course, you have the children in common, so obviously, you're in touch with him all the time.

MS. RABINOVICH: I don't know whether chance or how it happened, but our children would visit with him, then with me. And they were very amused, because they heard both of us say how we didn't have anything to do with the other. And at the same time, we were talking about discoveries we were making [that] were very parallel. For him it was meditation and Buddhist practice, and for me too. We didn't know that the other one was doing that. But towards the end of the '80s, Celia got married in the loft, and we met there at the wedding. And I think we fell in love, and ever since, we've stayed together.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, weddings can be terribly romantic things.

MS. RABINOVICH: It happens. We're still together.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] So how old was Celia? She was born in 1962?

MS. RABINOVICH: No, 1960, and she was 26.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, okay.

MS. RABINOVICH: I think her wedding was about '87 or '86, just about.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So the wedding was in your loft and—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: José was there and—

MS. RABINOVICH: Right

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, that's a lovely story.

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, it's a real story. I [had] sublet the loft and went away [with him] for one year [to Egypt, India, Nepal, and Indonesia]. Like I thought that if I was so unsatisfied with everything, that perhaps going to a culture [that] was extremely different, really different, would contribute to something that I didn't know that would be helpful. I thought of ancient cultures, not Europe [but] ancient cultures. We went to Egypt, where I connected beautifully with the temples, though the current culture is not ancient.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MS. RABINOVICH: But there were these extraordinary temples. I connected with the ruins of those

temples, which were very, very meaningful for me. If you can imagine the ruins of Machu Picchu and later those ruins, a lot of resonance, stones, of course, right?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Again, stones.

MS. RABINOVICH: Again, stones, yes. Then we went to India, all the temples [made of] stone again.

[Temple complexes in India have several concentric walls around the main building. There is a time element involved in the walking from the outer wall to the actual building, where the innermost is the sanctum sanctorum, which is in total darkness. It takes a long time to actually get to the sanctum sanctorum. If you don't do it slowly, you miss this kind of incubation time that prepares you for the experience of being there. The stone walls of most temples have sculptures carved into the stone. -RR]

MR. MCELHINNEY: They were all carved.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: With figure or plants or whatever.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, right. And inside you had dance, poetry readings, music, and—how can I say—offerings. They were like small sculptures. And all that happened in that complex, where it all came together. Nothing for profit, nothing to be famous about, nothing to sell or to buy or do anything, just a presence that impregnated the lives of everyone. Still today, [people pray in the same ancient temples]. So that was very meaningful.

And then after that, we went to Nepal, Kathmandu. [Here] the temples were enclosures, rather than places you could enter. And the way I understood them is that sacred objects were placed inside, and then [the temples are] sealed. They have a name, [one word which] could evoke all of that. [The name] is chhodrtens [a.k.a., chortens—eds.].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MS. RABINOVICH: [A name, or word for inner sanctuary] was garbhagrihas, and many like that. And then—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Or stupa is another one, I think, here.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, yes, of course. And then in Thailand, a lot of them, as well, though the [most interesting] temples now were in the forest. . . . And after that, we went to Indonesia, to Bali. Also, the life in the temples, and all that, and the offerings, et cetera. That was a very transformative [experience].

MR. MCELHINNEY: And when you were in India, did you employ any guides?

MS. RABINOVICH: No.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Did you encounter other artists?

MS. RABINOVICH: No, no, it was mostly hitchhiking and staying in places that we thought were wonderful to stay—[ashrams, for instance]. So very freeing, nothing was planned or booked in advance. We just stayed where we [happened to be].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Just went there and—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —let the voyage unfold.

MS. RABINOVICH: Let life happen, basically.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Let life happen. How long were you in India that visit?

MS. RABINOVICH: We stayed six months in India, and then [three months] in Nepal, another month in Thailand, another month in Egypt, another month in Indonesia. Well, we traveled just about a year. So I think many seeds were planted in me through these experiences of the ancient cultures. Actually, not only ancient, but how people lived. For instance, something that had a great impact for me was that so many people lived in the streets in India, right? And they're very happy there. They're very connected to the community, everyone else. They don't seem to need money for anything. And they're content.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So in our culture, these people would be homeless, right?

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: They would be street people. But in India, you're—

MS. RABINOVICH: It was normal. It was just like that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Your feeling of them was that they were not mindful of excessive hardship. That was just their life and they were living it.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, there was not the perception that they lack anything. Like if we would go there for a visit, and compared to our [culture, you would] say, Aw, poor thing, they don't have these. They don't have that. But they don't have that perception of themselves. Yes, they are just [like] that. And I loved it. I really thought it was maybe what I was looking for.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And where in India did you go in particular? What was your itinerary?

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, we stayed a lot in the south, where most of the wonderful temples are. And then I knew that I wanted to spend a lot of time in a place called Varanasi, which is [on the banks of the Ganges River]. I left it for the very end. But then at the time, we couldn't do it because the visa expired.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I see.

MS. RABINOVICH: After six months. So I never [then] went to Varanasi. But I did go especially to Varanasi in 2002. I'm jumping now, right?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, it's a preview of what's to come.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you went back to Varanasi.

MS. RABINOVICH: I went for the first time to Varanasi.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, you went back to India, but you went to Varanasi.

MS. RABINOVICH: I went only to Varanasi. And I stayed there for a month, just next to the river. So I could see the river all the time.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's also some kind of meditative practice, isn't there—

MS. RABINOVICH: Could be, right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —associated—

MS. RABINOVICH: Not consciously, but maybe—meditation could be seen not just as the formal practice where you sit in a certain way or you go to a certain place. Meditative practice [could be] informal, how mindful you are or how present you are in what you do. Like for instance, if now we're talking, I'm not thinking what I'm going to do tomorrow. Or if you're taking a shower, you're not thinking about I should have said this or that. It's a quality of presence. So in that sense, absolutely yes, right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's an ability to be in the moment you're in.

MS. RABINOVICH: In the moment.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Without being somewhere else at the same time.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, to be where you are, right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So our society does require us to do a lot of multitasking.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And while we're working on one thing, we're pondering the next task.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Or wondering how well we performed the last one.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And so this gets back to your idea of slowing, or you're—

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —expressing a desire to slow things down and really—

MS. RABINOVICH: Being there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —make a connection with it.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you got back from India. And what happened? How was your loft?

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Was it still in one piece, or had they had lots of wild parties and torn it to—

MS. RABINOVICH: [Laughs.] It was fine. It was good.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Who did you rent it to, just out of curiosity?

MS. RABINOVICH: A person called—I don't remember the name. He was wonderful.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Was he an artist?

MS. RABINOVICH: He took care of the loft. No, somebody, I think it was like a visiting professor or someone—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, I see.

MS. RABINOVICH: [Someone] who just needed the space for a year in New York. So it worked out very well.

When I was in Kathmandu, I had a studio. I did a lot of watercolors there in small format, which I remember I could put in an envelope and mail to New York. And all of them got here very well. Because of the way I traveled, I couldn't carry things with me.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How does one find a studio in Kathmandu?

MS. RABINOVICH: Oh, we rented a big house. So part of the house I converted it into a studio.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I see.

MS. RABINOVICH: And it was just next to the chhodrtens and the temples and the stupas. It was just very wonderful to be in the midst of it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So being exposed to all of this, did you ever experience a kind of curiosity about Buddhism as a kind of organized religion? Did you ever entertain the idea of becoming a Buddhist?

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, in some of those cultures they adopted Buddhism as a religion.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MS. RABINOVICH: But in my understanding of the Buddhist teachings, the Buddha himself didn't want to be a religious figure. He thought of himself just teaching what he himself learned throughout his life, and that's kind of the way I perceive it. It doesn't seem to me to be a religion, but a spiritual practice[, a way of being in the world with an open heart and a mindful mind].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Seems like a lot of the Nepalese the Buddhism is highly ritualized.

MS. RABINOVICH: Very, very [ritualized], because the Buddhist practice [there] comes [mostly] from Tibet.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yeah, many refugees from Tibet [live] there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —highly ritualized.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: One of the artists who I interviewed a few years ago, Yvonne Jaquette, shared during the course of the interview that she had become involved with Buddhism and actually had taken classes to learn *thangka* painting.

MS. RABINOVICH: Ah, well, I didn't do that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, it's—

MS. RABINOVICH: But some people do, yeah, or did, sure.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But I don't imagine that she was trying to change her studio practices, just another—

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY:—kind of spiritual exercise to—

MS. RABINOVICH: Ah, I think I connected more with what you said, with that sort of attitude, how you explore or how we're open to experience the world. I'm not alone in that, because before I did that in the '80s, John Cage and many other artists did it in the '60s. They also were very inspired by the philosophy, by how to be in life, just how to be. It was a very powerful influence. Or the Beatles in their music and many other artists as well, Pauline Oliveros as a composer.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you get back to New York. What year was that?

MS. RABINOVICH: Eighty-nine.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Eighty-nine, that's right. So you're returning to an art world that's sort of collapsing and reorganizing itself, great flux. And what was José up to at that time, at that moment? What was his work?

MS. RABINOVICH: Actually, we didn't come back [together]. He decided that he wanted to learn more about Buddhist meditation and even become a Buddhist meditation teacher.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Really?

MS. RABINOVICH: He abandoned being a scientist. He had been a scientist before.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes.

MS. RABINOVICH: He gave up scientific research. And then he moved to England, where he spent two years in the south of England in Devon, in Totnes. There he studied meditation with a wonderful teacher. When he came back to the U.S., we [started living] together again. Not that we were really separated. In the meantime, I sold the loft.

[Upon returning to New York City, I realized that the slow process of incubation and unfolding in my art practice was contrary to the fast pace of the art scene and the city itself. This awareness sparked my decision to move to the countryside, which is what I did after selling the loft. I moved to upstate New York. -RR]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Could you at this moment, describe the work you were doing in the late '80s?

MS. RABINOVICH: Right, you mean before or after?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Around 1987 to 1990, what kind of artwork were you doing?

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, it was the last of the glass installations I did.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay.

MS. RABINOVICH: I did a lot of painting at the time and quite a bit of drawing too. And I developed a friendship with a writer that was very, very important to me, still today, called Luisa Valenzuela. Do you know her work or heard about her?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Heard of.

MS. RABINOVICH: She's a wonderful writer.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I've not read her work.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So this is Luisa Valenzuela.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right, she lived in New York at the time. And we became—well, still are—very close friends. She wrote very wonderfully about my work. We have a deep connection. There were many parallels in what she was doing and what I was doing, in terms of sources for our work transformation, inspiration—exactly that, mm-hmm [affirmative]. Let's see—

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you sell the loft.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And then what happens? And where is José? He's in England.

MS. RABINOVICH: He's in England, right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And you're in New York. And you decide you're going to get out of New York.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, but I didn't know really where to go. To move to the countryside was like an abstraction, because where is the country, and what, and when, and how?

MR. MCELHINNEY: And what kind of country you're in, yes.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, yes, I didn't know, really. . . . It was [quite] wonderful. I put everything in storage because the loft was sold. And then I had a residence at an artist colony in Northampton in Massachusetts. That was a very good transition for me. There, I began a series of drawings that I call *Chhodrtens*, inspired by those [chhodrtens I saw in Nepal].

I wanted to come back to New York, though I didn't have anywhere to go to. . . . [My son] was studying architecture [in New York] at the time. And I called him. I said, "I'm going back to the city. I don't have a place yet." In the meantime, he discovered a place that he thought it was ideal for me. And I said, "I'll take it." It was in Queens. It was a house. The first floor was an apartment, and the second floor was totally open and [became] my studio. I moved there. And there I painted the *Chhodrtens* paintings. It was like a natural follow-up of the drawings. And all of that I did show at the

Americas Society, probably '91 [1990—eds.], or something like that. So there I am in Queens in transition. [I also] went to England and spent like six months where José was.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And where was he studying?

MS. RABINOVICH: With a teacher.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So he just had his own?

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, he was staying with the teacher. That was the way [his teacher] taught, yes. He rented an apartment there, and I spent six months with him in that place in the south of England. There again I had a studio. And there I began working on drawings, which I call *Garbhagrihas*, another Sanskrit word, which means—I don't know the translation, could be like "inner sanctuary." I came back to New York, and then I was ready to move to the country. I began looking.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MS. RABINOVICH: . . . I met an artist; you might know his work, Jaime Davidovich. He's a video artist.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I think so.

MS. RABINOVICH: You do. Well, he had a house in the country, actually.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Here, near here?

MS. RABINOVICH: [It was] in High Falls.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, in High Falls? Okay.

MS. RABINOVICH: Or near High Falls. Maybe Marbletown. [One day] I called him. He was [very] friendly and [invited me and José to visit so that we could look around the area and search for a house to rent. He was very generous and warm. We started a beautiful friendship that continues to this day. I found a converted church in Upper Red Hook with fantastic studio space which I did rent for one year -RR].

[END rabino12_sd_2of3_track1_m.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I think a lot of artists have worked in converted churches, or deconsecrated churches, churches that are no longer be used for worship.

MS. RABINOVICH: Of course. Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But the space is outstanding. I know at least a couple of artists, one over in Amenia—

MS. RABINOVICH: That's right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —who has a large, old church. And, yes, I think it's a fairly popular alternative to loft living, or the rural equivalent to loft living.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, it's a very awesome feeling because you have those windows. And it's open to the sky, right?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Absolutely.

MS. RABINOVICH: . . . I just moved. I realized I didn't have a car. I didn't know anybody, and I didn't have anything except all the art in my studio. The only thing the house had was a telephone. Then I was able to call a local place where I could rent a car. I remember the first night there. I had no food. I had nothing, just moved. Then, I went outside to the garden and lay down on the grass. That was amazing. In the city, when you look at the sky, you don't really see the stars. There was a tremendous storm. [There was] thunder and lightning, and it was pouring over me. So that was my first night in the country.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, terrific. So you got the full treatment.

MS. RABINOVICH: Like a baptism.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Like a baptism.

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, anyway. I didn't give anybody the new address, [though,] and I reconnected with friends in the city. I used to go to the city sometimes. And after two weeks, I received a big envelope in the mail. I was very surprised, because I said to myself, Nobody knows where I live; maybe it's propaganda. They [want to] sell me something. I associated it with the car I had. . . . And then, I opened the envelope, and it was a fellowship from the NEA, the National Endowment for the Arts.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, you had to have applied for it.

MS. RABINOVICH: I forgot, because I applied [the year] before—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, I see.

MS. RABINOVICH: I was moving—England, and then Queens, and then this and that. So I didn't have a fixed address or P.O. box. So probably it went to the first place, and then to another and another, and ended up there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It finally just caught up with you.

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, that's right. And it was a fellowship. I used the money to build this [studio] loft, eventually, a year later. Then I had a phone call two weeks after the letter, asking me if I wanted to go to [Paris or to the south of France]. And I said, What is that? Apparently, in that application there were two boxes that you could fill with a dot, saying if you wanted, in addition, to have a residency. And I said yes, which I forgot, too. [José and] I went to Paris for six months. . . . That was '92 already. And just before [we] left, José and I bought this place. He came back from England, and we bought this place.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And so this studio we're in now—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, I had it built after I came back from Paris.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So that would have been early '90s?

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes. In Paris, I worked a lot. I did hundreds of drawings that I called *Thrones for the Gods*.

MR. MCELHINNEY: There was just a piece of housekeeping. We wanted to get the address of a studio in Paris from—I guess your first studio in Paris.

MS. RABINOVICH: I think the first one, though I don't remember the number, was [rue d'Arsonval]. And the second time around, it was La Cité Internationale des Arts.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, Okay. So you were over by Marais there?

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, exactly. Marais.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Hôtel de Ville.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's that big apartment tower there.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes. Yes, exactly.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, yes, you're—

MS. RABINOVICH: It was just wonderful—near the Pompidou, also.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes, it's that whole area, sort of between Louvre—

MS. RABINOVICH: Île Saint Louis.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Bastille.

MS. RABINOVICH: Île Saint Louis. Right. Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Hmm?

MS. RABINOVICH: Very near Île Saint Louis.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Île Saint Louis is—you'd like the ice cream there, the Berthillon ice cream. Well, that whole area now has become—even if you were there in the '90s, that was a really hot scene. Marais was very—

MS. RABINOVICH: Was what?

MR. MCELHINNEY:—fashionable, still is. That's the old ghetto. Did you know that?

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: L'ouvrier d'état—

MS. RABINOVICH: [What do you mean?]

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's the old—I have a friend who just wrote a novel that's being published this spring about Jewish women in Paris in the 18th century.

MS. RABINOVICH: You could see all these small places from the sidewalk where the Jews—there's a name for it—where they read the Bible and the Torah and all these books. And they were really devoted to learning. They have another name, which I don't [remember].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeshiva?

MS. RABINOVICH: Something like that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes, I think so. That's a great place. So by what means did you get that residency?

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, when I applied for the NEA fellowship.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, I see.

MS. RABINOVICH: They said, you could go to [Japan] or you [could] go to France. If you go to France, it could be the South of France or Paris. And then I said, "Paris."

MR. MCELHINNEY: I see, because I knew people. I have gotten an NEA, years before. But in the '90s, they were giving them. This was right at the end, when the whole Mapplethorpe stuff was happening.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, and then they stopped doing that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That was really terrible that they ceased the monies for artists' fellowships. But there was a place in the South of France called Château—or is Château de la Napoule? That was an American sculptor named Henry Clews. He's a very interesting character, I understand, in the '30s. But his estate down in [inaudible]. So you decided to go to Paris instead. Was José in London?

MS. RABINOVICH: No, he came too. He completed what he wanted to do in England, so we went together to Paris.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The two of you in one of those little apartments?

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, my God. That's quite cozy.

MS. RABINOVICH: It was quite amazing.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So was your work like—were you working on—

MS. RABINOVICH: I just had a lot of tables. I filled the space with tables. And I did all these hundreds of drawings, which are called *Thrones for the Gods*.

MR. MCELHINNEY: *Thrones for the Gods*.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And where did this title come from? You didn't get it from Borges this time.

MS. RABINOVICH: [When I was in India, Nepal, and Indonesia, I saw in the countryside not only temples and stupas, but also sort of columns going up into the sky in the middle of nowhere. -RR] And they looked, to me, like thrones, because [they were so high up,] like if a king or a queen would be up on a throne, like higher than everybody else. And because they were so high, you couldn't really see the end of them. I thought of them as thrones for the gods. And that's how I got the title. I did many of them. They were very dark, and I had exhibitions with them in some places when I came

back.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How was the work discussed? What kinds of issues were being discussed? Because I'm trying to create, in my mind, a segue from the glass pieces, these big glass pieces, leaning up against each other, and these varying levels of opacity and transparency. And then you and José, all of a sudden, are stuck on the edge of the Marais, in this high-rise artist residency place—this tiny little apartment. You're doing these tiny little drawings.

MS. RABINOVICH: [José] was quite wonderful to me, because he knew that I needed silence and space. So every day, he would go to a library, to read or to write, so that I would be alone. In that sense, I didn't feel crowded by him.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, how was the work—so the genesis of the work was, you were inspired by these columns that you saw on your travels, which I guess could be like the columns that had been used by early saints—stylites, these people who live on the top of a pillar.

MS. RABINOVICH: Oh, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But where were they exhibited? Were you exhibiting them in Paris at that point? Did you bring them back to New York?

MS. RABINOVICH: No, I didn't exhibit [them] in Paris, no. [I brought the drawings back to Rhinebeck.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Rhinebeck.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes. There was a curator and art historian called Julia Herzberg. She came here soon after I built the studio. Somebody mentioned to her something about those drawings, and she was really interested and curious. So she came. Actually, she was here yesterday for a visit. . . . She organized an exhibition at a gallery called INTAR Gallery—I don't think it exists anymore—where I did show most of those drawings.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And where was that located?

MS. RABINOVICH: On 42nd Street.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Really?

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Interesting.

MS. RABINOVICH: It was an alternative space. [Julia Herzberg has been] wonderful to me. She [also] organized and curated an exhibition I did in Buenos Aires in 2008 [at Fundacion Alon]. [A beautiful book, *Anthology of the Riverbeds/Antologia del Lecho de Los Rios*, was to accompany the exhibition. Julia edited the books and wrote the major essay for it. -RR]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I guess I want to return to the question, How was the work discussed critically? I'm trying to find a segue from *Thrones of the Gods* to the *River Library*. And was there another evolution in between? How did you come to this sort of work that you're now known for?

MS. RABINOVICH: [The thread all along, not only among the different series of drawings but also with painting and sculpture as well—working across mediums—I have been exploring what I call the

"dark source," that which we don't see or seems to be invisible. My art working process consisted in the accumulation of layers of tinted glass panes or stones in my sculptures, of layers of oil in my paintings, and of layers of black mediums or mud in my drawings. This layering process is still today a significant aspect of my art practice. -RR]

MR. MCELHINNEY: But I'm also curious how—

MS. RABINOVICH: . . . I began working with stone, here in the woods, in the back of the property.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So just moving large stones in the—

MS. RABINOVICH: [I began with smaller stones, which I got from a local quarry. I created the sculptures, maybe 20, in the wooded area in the back of my property, among the trees. I called them *Pabhavikas*, a Pali word meaning "emerging or arising from." The pieces themselves seem to constantly emerge from the ground. The stones are layered in different configurations, hugging the ground. -RR]

MR. MCELHINNEY: The idea of concealment.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes. And something emerges from that darkness [concealed and revealed].

MR. MCELHINNEY: So when you are doing the pieces in the woods, and trying to locate the different stones in some kind of dialogue with each other, it was without this much more active environment of the river, which is much more—

MS. RABINOVICH: [As I mentioned before, in addition to sculpture and drawing, my art practice during the '90's included painting as well. I did a series called *Gateless Gates*. The title is embedded into each painting. To discover the words, you have to look at the painting for a long time. You have to sort of dig it out of the painting itself. "Gateless gates" is one of those paradoxes used in the teachings of Zen in order to help the students realize the nature of things. It is not about a gate, but about the mind being transformed by confronting the paradox. For me, making art is also a transformative confrontation. -RR]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Really?

MS. RABINOVICH: They're all here. Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Why?

MS. RABINOVICH: [Unearthing words embedded into the paintings is not so different from unearthing stones from the ground or mud from the riverbed. It's all a sort of archaeology, excavating and revealing something that has been hidden, bringing from the dark into the light that which we don't see or don't know. -RR]

MR. MCELHINNEY: I'm curious. I don't have a visual image of one of these. Well, you haven't exhibited them, so they're not visible.

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, I had a difficult time a week ago looking at those photographs; you couldn't read the words because they're so embedded into the paint.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you know that a word is there, but it's been lost to corrosion or encrustation.

MS. RABINOVICH: Just embedded.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Embedded, yes.

MS. RABINOVICH: You couldn't tell the words from the paint. They're like one.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, we talked about this idea last time, about something being complete without being—

MS. RABINOVICH: —finished.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Finished.

MS. RABINOVICH: You're right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The idea of almost manufacturing some kind of archaeological or geological artifact, or contriving a process where things manifest in a way that reminds you of—the word we used, or I used, was "palimpsest, which is"—

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, which I love, and I have to make a note of it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: This layering idea. So this was all very gradual.

MS. RABINOVICH: Very gradual.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You were not necessarily—as you were arranging stones in the woods, you were not imagining its relationship to some kind of druidic or indigenous ritual, or Andy Goldsworthy, or anybody like that.

MS. RABINOVICH: That's right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Richard Long, or people who immediately come to mind as people who are moving stones around in the woods.

MS. RABINOVICH: I'm really happy that you understand that without my really spelling out completely the concept, because what I see, and what maybe you convey when you tell me that, is that, beginning with the sculptures, the literal and the metaphorical are not separate. Because they are literally stones, and they are at the same time a metaphor.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But what you're doing with them, too, as you're moving them from the place where they're found or purchased to your property. You're collecting them in a certain place, as I imagine the process. And then you're walking around in the woods and trying to find a site to put one or two stones in conversation with each other. And then, you bring more into the conversation. Is the process actually your way of slowing down the experience of nature, and your activity in it, to absorb it or understand it in a different way? It's like a meditation, but—

MS. RABINOVICH: I think it's more being with the process of emergence.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Now, I have to say, and I have to read this into the transcript, that what's really interesting for me about this conversation is we're not alluding to, in any of it, any of the sort of art critical, art theoretical linguistic, semiotic, informed discourse about art relationship to language. Or art in relationship to other art, where you're not inserting yourself into a mood. This is very shamanic.

MS. RABINOVICH: I don't know whether it's shamanic.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Shaman is like an animist. There's something animistic about it. There's something about—if not the pieces being like the idea of a Japanese *kami* living in the rock, that there's a certain kind of nature spirit that abides in all these things—but that your work, in a way, seems to me a kind of alchemy of dealing with these different elements.

MS. RABINOVICH: I'm sure you're right [about being a kind of alchemy].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Are you showing us by your example, your practice is not to deliver some kind of object that we're going to then gaze upon and meditate within, like a Japanese garden?

MS. RABINOVICH: I think you're right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But your activity is really almost more, or as important, to understand as the objects that emerge from.

MS. RABINOVICH: Absolutely. And even some of the stones, many of them, were already in the property emerging from the ground. So I didn't have to bring them. I brought some from the local quarry, but many were already here, just belonging to the earth itself. . . . After completing them again, how do I call them? I called them *Pabhavikas*, which is a Sanskrit word. Or Pali?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Pali.

MS. RABINOVICH: Pali. [*Pabhavikas*] means "constant state of emergence," arising from, emerging from, which is exactly what was happening. Which is to me very parallel to what I was doing with *Gateless Gates*, where the words emerged from the paint itself. So I think there is a parallel to the way of working in the painting, the drawings, and the sculpture. . . . It's completed, but not finished.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So the activity of writing, in a way, it's a kind of writing without writing. So in a way, we go back to that park bench with you sitting there with Borges and talking about, the shadow has its own light.

MS. RABINOVICH: That's right. The darkness has its own light.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, right. The darkness has its own light. So the segue then, from the woodland pieces to the river pieces. What inspired you to do your first river piece?

MS. RABINOVICH: [I think that observing the rising and falling of the tides in the Hudson River and wanting to take further the idea of impermanence and emergence in my sculptures made a click in my mind one day, and that's how the river pieces began. It was important for me at the time, the conversations and interactions I had with poets, writers, and other artists in my area. One of them was the poet Charles Stein. -RR]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Charles Stein. Interesting name, means "stone" in German.

MS. RABINOVICH: Oh, really? Well, I didn't know that.

[The title of a series of drawings I did in the late '90s, or beginning of the 2000s, *Across the Perilous Line*, came from a poem by Charles Stein, Chuck Stein. One of the first people I met when I just moved to Upstate was a wonderful woman called Linda Weintraub. Together we began what's known as *pena* in Spanish and *salon* in French, a gathering of artists, poets, and writers to talk,

read, listen, look, share. -RR]

MR. MCELHINNEY: We met her, yes, at Dorsky.

MS. RABINOVICH: Oh, really? That's right. [Since] we first met, she has been extremely supportive [and wonderful]. She wrote a lot about my work, and actually, she invited me to that exhibition.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wasn't she involved a lot at Bard, with exhibitions there?

MS. RABINOVICH: She was the curator of the Blum Institute at Bard for many, many years. And Bard closed [the Institute] to open the Center for Curatorial Studies, and the Hessel Museum. . . . [Penas took place at] her place or my place. All these people we knew, like George Quasha, too, [and Susan Quasha].

MR. MCELHINNEY: George—

MS. RABINOVICH: Quasha.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Quasha?

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Maybe we should spell that for the transcriber.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right. It's Q-U-A-S-H-A.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Quasha. Okay. Just the way it sounds.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, the way it sounds.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you were having these penas, salons.

MS. RABINOVICH: And sometimes Peter Barton would come and show his paintings and drawings. And David Levi Strauss would come and read from his essays or writings. . . . Different people would present what they wanted to share with us. From poetry to—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Does [Carolee] Schneemann have a place around here?

MS. RABINOVICH: She has a place in New Paltz.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, okay. So near enough.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So who else would appear in this?

MS. RABINOVICH: . . . Marco Maggi, who is from Uruguay. He would come to these penas. . . .

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I guess, the university there is a magnet for a lot of people, as well, and the museum.

MS. RABINOVICH: And then Jaime Davidovich, he still had the house there in High Falls. . . .

The idea with these penas was that we never knew what was going to happen. It was improvised.

There was no plan or no invitation. And after a year or two, with Linda, we discovered that it became so predictable that you knew exactly who would come and who would [do what]. Then, we decided to stop it. That the spirit was not valid anymore, and that was the end of penas.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So it became a clique, in the end.

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, it was, I would say, totally predictable.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's too bad.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right, it was too bad. But, you know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So when they were going on, there was no regular schedule, it was just—

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, we said, [for instance,] the first Sunday, or the last Sunday, come at our house at such and such a time—whoever comes. And it was very beautiful at the beginning, because we were really surprised by it—the interaction [with the artists community].

MR. MCELHINNEY: So once everybody got acquainted with each other—

MS. RABINOVICH: Friendships came about with people.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But it didn't expand. The circle didn't expand beyond a certain point.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right. It became a repetition.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How long did that process take, do you think?

MS. RABINOVICH: I don't remember, but no more than two years.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So this consequence of these meetings, these salons—how did that change your practice, your awareness of the community in which you lived? Did you find new people, other than Linda Weintraub?

MS. RABINOVICH: Well, we became very good friends with the Quashas. That's George and his wife, Susan. They're quite wonderful, both of them. They [founded] Barrytown's Station Hill Press.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Station?

MS. RABINOVICH: Station Hill [Press].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Station Hill Press.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes. . . . They published [many great books]. And they published a beautiful book [about my work], which was called *The Dark is the Source of Light*, where there was an essay by Linda [Weintraub], a poem by Chuck Stein, and an essay by George Quasha—beautiful book. So these interactions continued in different ways—supporting and listening to each other, a dialogue.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So the penas stopped, but the dialogue continued, in a way.

MS. RABINOVICH: Very well said. Right. And then, towards the '90s, probably '98, I did a series of drawings. The title was *Enfolded Darkness*, which I think was probably one of the last drawings which I did with the text embedded. Where you, again, have to really take your time to dig out the

words.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And what sorts of words were you embedding in these pieces?

MS. RABINOVICH: I think there are eight different [drawings]. Each one has a different [text]. I don't remember all of them. One would say, "The dark is the source of light." Another would say, "It's so dark, it is transparent." Another would say, "Extreme darkness." And on and on. I think that word "darkness" [or "dark"] was embedded in all of them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: These he wrote.

MS. RABINOVICH: This group [of drawings] was exhibited at a gallery called Trans Hudson, which originally began in Jersey City, and then moved to the Meatpacking District, on 13th Street. I was very fond of the owner. He invited me to show all of this. He was from Hungary. Joséph Szoecs. I don't know if you ever met him at the gallery.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I didn't, but I did interview Angela Westwater, who was in that neighborhood. I think they were on 15th. No, maybe they were on 13th, too.

MS. RABINOVICH: Yes, the gallery was on 13th Street.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I think they've since moved.

MS. RABINOVICH: And then he had to close the gallery because he couldn't keep it open, economically.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, the Meatpacking area has become so "shi-shi" and trendy, and loads of restaurants, and expensive.

MS. RABINOVICH: Joséph Szoecs was one of the pioneers in [that area]. I say pioneer in the sense that he didn't open a fancy place where you would have famous artists and a lot of money. . . . He loved art. [Eventually he had] to close the gallery. The rent went up, and the expenses. He did everything himself: the invitations by hand, call people to come to the opening, printing, envelopes—he did everything.

MR. MCELHINNEY: He wasn't a dealer; he was a different kind of artist.

MS. RABINOVICH: He was unique.

MR. MCELHINNEY: He was an artist himself. Being a gallerist was his art form. He needed a gallery to represent him.

MS. RABINOVICH: Maybe. So critics like Bill Zimmer gravitated there, because it was such a welcoming and warm place. . . . Just people loved to be in his place, and the art he showed—he gave me wonderful shows. . . . The last [one] was called *Light Unworn*. You know that word, "unworn"? U-N-W-O-R-N.

MR. MCELHINNEY: *Light Unworn*.

MS. RABINOVICH: Right. Literally, we mean light that has not been used yet.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Light that has not found a thing upon which to fall.

MS. RABINOVICH: . . . [There was a] brochure. And the person who wrote beautifully about all of that is Patricia Phillips. She was, at the time, in New Paltz. Now she's in Rhode Island. And I loved the essay she wrote, because in many ways, I think she anticipated *River Library* and *Emergences*.

MR. MCELHINNEY: In what way?

MS. RABINOVICH: [She wrote about those paintings, the series *Light Unworn*. There were twelve paintings in that series, six pairs with apparently contradictory observations. It was the last time I used actual words embedded in the paint of a painting. For instance, "IT IS NOT VISIBLE" and "IT IS NOT INVISIBLE" or "IT IS NOT MEASURABLE" and "IT IS NOT UNMEASURABLE" or "IT IS NOT KNOWABLE" and "IT IS NOT UNKNOWABLE." She wrote about how a sort of archaeology of the sky reflected the archaeology down in the earth. Light and dark, they were the same thing. A few years later, I did *Emergences* and *River Library*, the actual archaeology of digging out stones and mud from the earth. -RR]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Things brought to light. Perhaps we should take a break, just as we've been talking for a couple hours, I think.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]