



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Janine  
Antoni, 2012 December 10-19

Funding for this interview was provided by the Nanette L. Laitman  
Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.  
Transcription of this oral history interview was made possible by a  
grant from the Smithsonian Women's Committee.

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## **Transcript**

### **Preface**

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Janine Antoni on 2012 December 10-19. The interview took place at Antoni's studio in Brooklyn, NY, and was conducted by Judith Richards for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project For Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Janine Antoni reviewed the transcript in 2020. Judith Richards reviewed the transcript in 2014. Antoni's corrections and emendations appear below in brackets. This transcript has been heavily edited by Antoni. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

### **Interview**

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Janine Antoni on December 10th, 2012 in her studio in Brooklyn, New York, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc one.

JANINE ANTONI: I can hear [. . .] the heater.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It's okay.

So, Janine, I wanted to start by asking you to talk about your family background as far back as you want to go, and especially including those people you knew in your life.

JANINE ANTONI: I was born in the Bahamas—Freeport, Grand Bahama—but my background is from Trinidad. Both of my parents are from Trinidad. And there's about 200 years of history on both sides. So I'm pretty firmly Caribbean. Trinidad [. . .], of all the islands, is a real coming together of different cultures, so I probably have many of those cultures in my background.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So your parents met in Trinidad?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, they met in Trinidad. On my mother's side it looks like my heritage is French and English and [Swiss].

JUDITH RICHARDS: What was her maiden name?

JANINE ANTONI: Tucker [sp], and some connection to Alsace-Lorraine. On my father's side we think that "Antoni" comes from Corsica. But more closely, my grandmother came from Venezuela, and Venezuela is very close to Trinidad so there is a connection there. And my grandfather on my mother's side worked in the oil fields in Venezuela, so I grew up with lots of stories about—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Tell me your grandparents' names.

JANINE ANTONI: [My mother's father's name was] Alvin Tucker [sp]. And her mother was Gertrude Zurcher [ph]. [. . .] On my father's side was Barto [sp], or Bartholomew [sp], Antoni. And his mother was Maria Roasio De Madina. Quite a name. And, yes, she was born in Venezuela.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What did your grandparents—presumably your grandmothers didn't have jobs. What did your grandfathers do?

JANINE ANTONI: My grandfather Bartholomew [sp] was a [shipper]. [. . .]. He died when my father was 10, so I never knew him. [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: In Trinidad?

JANINE ANTONI: In Trinidad. But my grandmother had eight or nine kids, and she ran a boarding house to support her kids, to send them away to school.

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is your father's mother.

JANINE ANTONI: That's my father's mother. And then, as I said, my mother's father worked in an oil refinery. He was not educated. He had to leave school because his father died, so he started working very early to support the family. I think he was an elder sibling.

And he supposedly made all these inventions in the oil refining business, but his particular role was to fill the holes after the oil refining happened. That's all I know about that. But he was an investor. He invested my whole life in property, and my mother does that as well. And he was kind of a—

JUDITH RICHARDS: So he filled the holes and he—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, and he was—he invested in land and he was—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Always in Trinidad?

JANINE ANTONI: No, he's the one who brought us to the Bahamas.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, your mother's grandfather—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, he—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Your mother's father.

JANINE ANTONI: He loved the islands [of the Bahamas]. He realized that the Bahamas had no taxes, so if you're going to invest in land that's a pretty good place to invest. And it was beautiful. There's 600 islands in the Bahamas. Most people don't know that. And he just flew over and bought property from the air. And those were, you know, just beachfront property. And everybody thought he was crazy, and we're very lucky that he did that now. [Laughs.] [. . .]

So after spending some time in the Bahamas he encouraged my father to come and live there. And there was no doctor on the island, and so my father was the first doctor on the island that I grew up on. And the place where—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Where was he—where did he train?

JANINE ANTONI: He trained in Canada for his general surgery, and then much later he trained at UCLA for plastic surgery. So he decided to come to the Bahamas. And the town that I was born in and grew up with didn't exist. So there was only a little village at one end of the island called West End. And he had to work there under very primitive circumstances, so he treated everything. I mean, babies, horses, whatever happened on the island, he would be involved.

And since they didn't have really good facilities, he would have to fly people to Florida if something really serious happened. Then he would tell stories of having to call up all his friends and they would park along the runway to light [it so they could] fly someone out in the middle of the night if something happened.

And, you know, being an island doctor—in the Bahamas doctors are very revered and there's not a lot of difference between a priest, a doctor, or witch doctor. My dad is very charismatic and he has a kind of special touch with people. [He always told me that healing was about a persons will. . . .] You know, a person doesn't get well unless you convince them that they're going to get well. [This was one of his talents.]

And then later on he brought his brothers to the Bahamas and they started the first clinic, called the Antoni Clinic. One of his brothers was a baby doctor—[an obstetrician]

JUDITH RICHARDS: And his name?

JANINE ANTONI: Amado Antoni.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mato?

JANINE ANTONI: Amado.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, Amado.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. And the other one was Albert Antoni. He was an oral surgeon. Together they started the clinic and brought doctors down, of course. And I was—I think I was one of the first people to be born in the hospital in Freeport.

My history is parallel to the history of the development of Freeport. It grew up around me and changed a lot during that time. I should say that my mother's father and my father's mother both lived with us when they got older. My grandparents were a really important part of my being raised.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did I get your grandmother's name, your mother's mother?

JANINE ANTONI: My mother's mother was Gertrude Zurcher [ph].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, right.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, but this was Maria—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

JANINE ANTONI: Her name is Maria. We called her Maina. She lived with us and Alvin lived with us. [It was an important part of my upbringing to live with my grandparents.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: And where did your parents meet?

JANINE ANTONI: [. . .] My parents met in Trinidad. So they witnessed—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Why was that important to you that you lived with them?

JANINE ANTONI: That they lived with us? I think that my connection to my heritage was strong—you know, because I think that my parents were losing it—like, they lost their accent, for instance, or it's not as strong as it was when I was growing up. There was a kind of assimilation.

And my grandparents were both storytellers, really amazing storytellers. And I think that that affected both me and my brothers, who were both writers. So to grow up around that—[it is a] Caribbean tradition, this kind of oral history, and even in Calypso is a way of storytelling through music. [I think it is why] I tell stories through objects.

So not only that is my grandmother lived until about 96, and she, you know, having so many children and grandchildren and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: How many children did she have?

JANINE ANTONI: She had eight or nine children and then I don't know how many grandchildren and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: So three of them were the three doctors?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And the others, did they all stay on the islands?

JANINE ANTONI: No. Well, yes, but Trinidad—a lot of them stayed in Trinidad. Some went to Canada. Some went to France. Yes, Trinidadians have a way of getting around.

So, Yes, I think that the storytelling was really important. And this grandmother I was telling you about, she is—as you can imagine after having all those kids that you've seen everything in life. She was very open person, and very open to what I was doing in my life and my art, even at the end of her life when I was starting to experiment in environmental sculpture. She was very encouraging and interested. So it was great to have them around.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So were there any other relatives nearby who were important to you?

JANINE ANTONI: It's funny because in the Caribbean everybody is an aunt and uncle, even if they're not. [Laughs.] So there are always aunt and uncles that were part of my life that weren't really relatives.

I guess the other relative that is important is my father's sister Carmen. She was married Henry Salvatore [ph], who is the only [ . . . ] artist in my background. He was a painter. He painted in a kind of impressionist style, lived in the South of France, spoke many languages, loved the opera. He was just very cultured.

And so we had a [lovely] relationship up until he died, and he was also very encouraging. And then we have his paintings [in my house ]. So I think he was an important relative for me, just knowing him—because growing up in the Bahamas there was no galleries and museums, so there wasn't a sense of what art was. My first encounters with art was when my parents took me on a trip to Europe [ . . . ].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Let me go back for a second. So exactly when were you born?

JANINE ANTONI: I was born in 1964.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And the date?

JANINE ANTONI: January 19th.

JUDITH RICHARDS: In Freeport.

JANINE ANTONI: In Freeport, Yes. And it was a big decision to [give birth to me] in Freeport because in those countries there is this idea of [traveling to give birth]. My citizenship was really thought about, and a lot of people would fly to Florida to give birth, for instance, but they wanted a Bahamian in the family, so I guess I was chosen. My two brothers—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You would be the first?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, my two brothers were born when my father was in Detroit. He also was in medical school in Detroit [at the time].

JUDITH RICHARDS: So they're older than you.

JANINE ANTONI: So they are older than me.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And what are their names?

JANINE ANTONI: Robert Antoni and Brian [sp] Antoni.

So, yes, there was this thought that we should have one Bahamian in the family. [Laughs.] And of course I want to live here, so that's an interesting fate.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. Yes. So let me go back. You said when you were very young you—is this—what age when you took the trip to Europe?

JANINE ANTONI: I was pretty young. I guess the first trip we took was to South America, I think. We went up the Amazon.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was this when you were very young, like 5?

JANINE ANTONI: Oh, I was maybe 8 or something like that, 8 or 10. And then I think the

second trip was to Europe. So, you know—maybe a little earlier, because I went away to school at around 14.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But tell me about school before you went away, school in the Bahamas.

JANINE ANTONI: OK, so I went to Mary Star of the Sea was the name of my grade school.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Wow.

JANINE ANTONI: [My teachers were] Franciscan nuns. So I have a very Catholic background.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Both your parents and your family as well as the school?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, catholic on both sides, church every Sunday, confirmed, Holy Communion, all that kind of stuff. And so, yes, I went to a small school that had an American program, so I guess I should say that we were part of England Commonwealth. So some schools followed [the British] system but mine followed an American system.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Which meant that the curriculum and the grades and the age and the years—

JANINE ANTONI: All of that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —all matched the U.S.

JANINE ANTONI: Right.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Which would make it easier to go—transfer.

JANINE ANTONI: And then I went to an all-girls' [boarding] school called Rosarian Academy in West Palm Beach.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What year was that, like sixth grade, seventh grade?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. Yes, for high school and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Why that place?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, I had a cousin who had gone there, and they wanted me to be in a catholic school. West Palm Beach was really close to the Bahamas, so I could come back every other weekend or so. Staying connected to my parents and seeing them often was important.

And they would also come to Florida. I mean, it's really [close]—it's a 20-minute flight, and little planes are going back and forth. So we would go to Florida to grocery shop. It was really back and forth all the time.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did you feel about going away to school? Was it something you always knew would happen?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, it was something that my brothers had done. There was this idea that the schools weren't good enough in the Bahamas and that—you know, education to my parents was everything.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Had your mother gone to college?

JANINE ANTONI: My mother [didn't go] to college, but she did go to school in New York. She had gone to a kind of finishing school.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Which one?

JANINE ANTONI: I have no idea.

JUDITH RICHARDS: A high school or post-high school?

JANINE ANTONI: I think it was high school. So she was somewhat exposed to the United States, but then she went back to Trinidad and then she met my father. But she also went to an Ursuline convent in Barbados. So I think she was sent away at a very young age. So I

think that that was just something that they [accepted]—you know, was normal, to send [your child] away—I mean, also [something they learned from the British]. Now I look back and I think, I could never send my daughter away so young.

But, yes, I just accepted that. It was hard for me because in the Bahamas [I had] such a free childhood,—I spent hours and hours on my own with my dog exploring on the beach and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were your brothers older so that you didn't really socialize with them and their friends?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, they were— [My brother Brian] spent a lot of time with me when I was little, but mostly they didn't want this little kid hanging around with them, this little sister who was very interested in everything they were doing. [They laugh.] But then they went away and I was there on my own. But I think that I'm an artist because of that freedom that I had in the Bahamas, exploring but also, just time [to be in my] imagination.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you were exploring, was it the kind of place you rode your bike around, or you just walked?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, well—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Very safe?

JANINE ANTONI: Very safe. I could ride my bike around. But also we [took our vacations on other islands, which were very isolated. They had very few people.].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is this summer vacation or holidays?

JANINE ANTONI: Holidays, summers, weekends. You We would drive to the end of our long island and honk our horn and someone would come in a boat and take us to a little island called Deep Water Cay. I spent a lot of time on this little island. [It had only four houses.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Hasn't that become a real destination now?

JANINE ANTONI: It's a destination for fly fishing. [. . .] We recently went back—I asked my parents if I could go back because I wanted to bring Paul, my husband, and my daughter, because it was such a significant part of [my childhood] for me and I wanted them to experience it.

I used to just wander and do crazy things. I had a little floatation and I would swim across to another little island and explore. But the current was very strong between the two islands, so I would have to start at one end of the beach, swim as hard as I could and let the current pull me to that little island.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Wow, that sounds pretty adventurous.

JANINE ANTONI: It was super adventurous and fun. And then wait for the tide to go in the other direction so it could pull be back. [Laughs.] So when I think about those things and now my parents had no idea. I worry about it with my daughter because she has no time alone in New York, and what great things that came out of [my time on my own exploring.]

I was also a big collector, so I collected a lot of shells, and it was the kind of [. . .] a taxonomy. I was very interested in kind of organizing the world.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you do that to sort of create your own taxonomy, or were you looking at studying books?

JANINE ANTONI: No, I didn't even know what that was. I was just interested in finding a shell from the smallest version to the largest and lining them up. Then things that floated in on the beach, garbage from the cruise ships and objects that were transformed by the water over time.

So I had a big collection of things—plastics, sneakers, [driftwood] whatever. [They laugh.] And I was really fascinated by the way the water would sculpt them. [I liked arranging them], a lot of arrangements, sometimes in the woods, on the beach, in the house.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you were in those early years at school in the Bahamas, were there

particular subjects that you were very good at? You know, what were you like as an academic—on the academic side?

JANINE ANTONI: I was a terrible academic. I had some kind of reading issues. And I had a lot of help but nobody caught what it was. Both my brothers had that too, which is interesting that they're both writers now. Of course, immediately they saw that I had some kind of dexterity that was unusual.

I remember. In kindergarten they give you these exercises—I'm sure you're familiar—where they have, like, an apple and then a dotted line [around it] and they give you scissors that are impossible to cut with, and they tell you to cut around the dotted line.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: And I cut around every dot.

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: The teacher called my mother up and she said, "This is weird. I've worked with a lot of kindergarten kids and I've never seen anything quite like this." And my mom laughed because I had this thing I used to do where I would take all of her fashion magazines and then I would cut out every single eye and every [mouth] and every piece of food and every hand.

And then I had bags. I would have a bag of eyes and a bag of hands. And I never made a collage with them or—I just was interested in having them. So I think that's like the shell collecting, some kind of organizing process that was going on. So I got a lot of reward for my making skills.

And I struggled through school and it was absolutely important to get straight A's. And my father—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Important to you?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, [important to my parents]. So it was a struggle, and I didn't always get straight A's. Certainly by high school I was getting straight A's, in spite of my [learning challenges]. I worked all day and night, trying to make those grades. I'm still very slow with reading and probably thinking too. I make very slowly. And I knew quite early that I could compensate for my lack of skill with my creativity.

So every essay I ever wrote was, "Grammar is terrible. Spelling's terrible. Most interesting essay in the class." [They laugh.] So I figured that out pretty quickly, different ways to compensate for my lack of ability. I also wonder whether that contributed to being an artist. Not because I didn't have skill in that area but because I knew I had to use my creativity as my advantage.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you ever finally figure out it was dyslexia? Have your brothers figured it out?

JANINE ANTONI: No, but it seems like my daughter has something. And so we're trying to figure it out. But Paul also had something, so we don't know which side she got it from.

And she's a—I mean, I'm fascinated by her learning process and I am trying to be open in a way that people weren't open with me. I am also giving her the skills that I developed to compensate, but also she's just developing naturally. She has amazing people skills, which I don't know if I have too. A kind of love for people, which Paul has as well. So—

JUDITH RICHARDS: So it sounds like you went through this—you said it was difficult when you first went to Palm Beach to school where you didn't know anyone, but it sounds like you adapted—

JANINE ANTONI: I adapted.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —and did well.

JANINE ANTONI: The thing I hated the most is I had to wear shoes and a robe. I never even heard of a robe before I got there.



JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean a bathrobe?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, like the nuns—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Modesty.

JANINE ANTONI: Modesty. And shoes, even slippers, you know. I only wore shoes to church and to school. I would throw them off immediately and walked on the rocks and everywhere. And so there was something restricting about being with the nuns that was hard for me.

I became interested in the theater in high school. One is because it's the only way I could meet boys. [They laugh.] But also I became really involved in the sets.

JUDITH RICHARDS: In terms of design and construction?

JANINE ANTONI: Designing sets. And when I applied to college I wasn't sure whether I wanted to go to a school for art or for theater. And I was also a dancer from 4 [years old].

JUDITH RICHARDS: What kind of dance?

JANINE ANTONI: I did ballet. Later when I was older I did some jazz. I got as far—

JUDITH RICHARDS: "Older" being high school?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, right before I left, so maybe 13—12 or 13 I did jazz. I got up on toe right before I left, and then I abandoned ballet. Then I started dancing in the theater. I don't think I was ever very good.

JUDITH RICHARDS: In high school?

JANINE ANTONI: —at any of those things. But I was definitely not an actor, so that was clear. So I danced and I made the sets.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were there actual art classes in high school that you could take?

JANINE ANTONI: There were art classes, and I was always interested in art. I remember in grade school I could either take art or typing, and my mother made me take typing because she thought I would have to type my papers in high school, and I was devastated.

My brothers were really good at art too and did huge projects when they were in grade school, and I watched them do those kind of projects. [My] brother, Robert, is very good with his hands—and of course my father, being a plastic surgeon. I used to get to watch him operate. You know, it was the Bahamas so nobody thought anything about having a little kid in the operating room. [They laugh.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you didn't mind the blood?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, I think that I just grew up with it and it wasn't ever presented to me as a problem. We would have people that would just turn up at the house with big, you know—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Wounds.

JANINE ANTONI: —wounds or their ear half off, and my dad would sew them up in the back yard. I would be his assistant.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Wow.

JANINE ANTONI: And he had such a love for the body and such an awe. True awe of how spectacular the body was. So he always approached it that way with us. And so if we caught a fish he would dissect the fish and show us all the organs and just [show us] the beauty of the body. So I just never—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Your mother wasn't involved with helping him?

JANINE ANTONI: My mother doesn't have the same relationship to the body. [. . .] I wouldn't say she's squeamish. There's a certain proper side to my mother and she's a little shocked by the way we were talking about the body—[they laugh]—how detailed we'd get about the body.

So I think that's also something that is in my work. My love and fascination with the visceral—and I think that's also growing up with a relationship to the land and a close relationship to the sea and to what I eat from the sea and catching the—you know, like—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you go fishing?

JANINE ANTONI: We did a lot of fishing, hand-line fishing, mostly when I was little.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Hand-line, that means without a pole?

JANINE ANTONI: Without a pole, yes. I should tell one story about Deep Water Cay, which is this little island that we used to go to that is probably my favorite memory, which is that—

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you went there, did you camp? Was there a building?

JANINE ANTONI: There was a little house that we stayed in. And then we would take a little boat, a Zodiac, to a little reef and we would do our fishing. And then after we had caught a few little fish—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You're showing about 10 inches.

JANINE ANTONI: —yes—we would go to this place that my father called "lovers' lane," which was at the—at the back of every island on the south side—

JUDITH RICHARDS: In other words, that gets the least wind?

JANINE ANTONI: That gets the least wind, there is mangrove. A lot of the islands are built up [by the growth of the] mangrove. Do you know what mangroves are?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: It's a magnificent plant that is almost primordial looking. It has these incredible arching roots and it floats on the water. And the mangroves drop so much leaves that the sediment starts to [collect], and the island can build because it's protecting it from the water. And in that mangrove is kind of the breeding ground for all of the deep-sea fish. So it's this lush place for all of the sea life.

And we would go up a tiny little [inlet in] the mangrove, and my dad would turn off the engine and the current would slowly pull us out. And we would bounce off of the—we'd all sit on the side and [push] off of the roots as the current pulled us out, and we would stay quiet. And that landscape would come alive and we would see the fish and the birds and [crabs]. So that was—

JUDITH RICHARDS: That's why he called it "lovers' lane"?

JANINE ANTONI: That's why he called it "lovers' lane," because that's where they all bred. It was really special. And later in my life I did a work with the mangrove. It was the first piece that worked with the environment of the Bahamas.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you remember when that was?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, it was—I was applying to graduate school.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

JANINE ANTONI: And I had only done very traditional training in college.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, we'll get back to that but go on.

JANINE ANTONI: And I felt like I couldn't really apply to graduate school with a portfolio of figure drawings and still lifes. And I had gone to Japan thinking that I wanted to intern with a Japanese artist. And I got to Japan and the artists—I had found an artist to intern with because [my teacher] in college knew that person. And in Japan, if a friend introduces you, you do anything for them because they're a friend of a friend.

So he had accepted. And then when I got there I realized that was the last thing he wanted to do. At least I think that's what was going on. So I decided to go home and work on my

portfolio in the Bahamas. So I took a year off. And I went back—my brother had gone with me to Japan and we took the Trans-Siberian Express back. And so that was a real experience for me. And when I got back—

JUDITH RICHARDS: In other words, you went from Japan—

JANINE ANTONI: From China—

JUDITH RICHARDS: —to the mainland of Asia—

JANINE ANTONI: Right.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —across—

JANINE ANTONI: —across through—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Europe.

JANINE ANTONI: It was an amazing trip. And when I got back I had seen—I knew of Christo. I had seen those amazing Japanese gardens, and I decided that I wanted to work with the natural environment in the Bahamas. So I started to do what I called environmental sculpture. I worked underwater, and I worked in the mangrove, and I worked in the Caribbean pine forest. And then I used that work to apply to graduate school with.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Let me step back for a second. So there were some art classes when you were in high school, when you were in Florida.

JANINE ANTONI: Right.

JUDITH RICHARDS: At that point did you—I mean, I know you'd been to Europe so you'd gone to museums, but was there any museums or galleries that you visited when you were in high school?

JANINE ANTONI: No, and I actually—I guess the first galleries and museums that I visited were at Sarah Lawrence, and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: So before we go to that—so when you were graduating from high school and you thought you were—you weren't sure you'd be a music—I mean, a dance—or theater—

JANINE ANTONI: Right.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —theater or art, how did you end up choosing where to go to college?

JANINE ANTONI: Sarah Lawrence had both, although it had a much better theater department than it had an art department. I ended up at Sarah Lawrence because of Allan Gurganus. A writer and was a teacher of my brother's—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Gurganus, okay.

JANINE ANTONI: —my brother Bob. My brothers were involved in helping me decide where to go.

JANINE ANTONI: Where had they gone?

JUDITH RICHARDS: My brother went to Duke University for college, and then he went to Baltimore.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Johns Hopkins?

JANINE ANTONI: Johns Hopkins. That's where I think he worked with Allan. And he got his master's there and then he got his Ph.D. at University of Iowa. And so he—

JUDITH RICHARDS: That's Robert?

JANINE ANTONI: That's Robert. He had an idea that after this all-girls' school, that I needed a smaller school, that I wasn't anybody who would be interested in sororities or anything of that kind, and that Sarah Lawrence a school that had a more avant-garde. I was obviously

interested in the arts in some way and that a school that had a more progressive education would be good for me.

And then I applied early admittance and I got in. Sarah Lawrence didn't look at SATs [which as good], because I didn't have that kind of academic background. [I had a] talent that a school like Sarah Lawrence would [be interested in].

JUDITH RICHARDS: And your parents were fine with all of this? It sounds like they didn't really get involved.

JANINE ANTONI: Well, my parents thought that I was going to a mostly girls' school, but—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, in other words they liked Sarah Lawrence because—

JANINE ANTONI: In their mind it seemed like a bit of a finishing school, and they were—I can remember the first day of orientation they were flabbergasted. They just were, "Uh." They didn't want me to go there. And my brothers said, "No, no, no, this is great." And it turned out to be great in the long run.

It was my introduction to feminism. [There were] three girls to every guy. There were some huge changes and it was an incredible shock coming from [a conservative] high school. I was surrounded by New York kids, super sophisticated in every way. So it was quite an awakening.

At Sarah Lawrence you can't major. They have a donée system. And so the idea was that you took three classes and then you had one independent study, and in that independent study you brought those three classes together.

So if I was interested in art, I would look at anthropology through the lens of art, religion through the lens of art, literature through the lens of art. I would create a project that brought those together, which I don't think is very different than the way I make art now, you know, because I'm pushed into all different fields and the artwork is really the coming together of those fields.

Looking back, that that was a great—really great thing.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were there any particular teachers there who were influential?

JANINE ANTONI: I'm forgetting all of their names right now, but I had a psychology teacher. I think I was always interested in psychology, even in high school. My interest in psychology and religion were interconnected, or I interconnected them from the beginning.

I think that I still—I still [think that is still present in my artwork and in my teaching.] I had this catholic upbringing, [that I always grappled with].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was there a kind of outward rebellion against it?

JANINE ANTONI: There was, in various ways. And then my rebellion was really to be interested in other religions, which is kind of—was disturbing to my parents and to the nuns.

In high school a friend and I we decided that we were going to go to a different church or service every Sunday. And the nuns told us it was okay if we also went to a catholic service. And that was the beginning of my [exploration], but at Sarah Lawrence I took my first classes in Buddhism and Hinduism. And I had gone to India between high school and college, and that was a revelation.

JUDITH RICHARDS: A summer trip?

JANINE ANTONI: A summer trip with—I used to travel with my brother, Brian. We went to Japan together and to India together, and those were huge in my understanding of—and also I should say that Trinidad has a big population of East Indians, so it is in my background. . I was exposed to it without knowing, as I was exposed to a lot of other traditions without quite [realizing].

JUDITH RICHARDS: That was kind of a mild rebellion, I'd say, or was it very concerning to—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes—no. Well, I don't think that I rebelled [just for the sake of it]—I mean,

you can see from my art there [is some] rebellion there, but it's not—I don't think it's disrespectful or—

JUDITH RICHARDS: It's certainly not self-destructive.

JANINE ANTONI: Right. Right. So where was I going with this?

JUDITH RICHARDS: I was asking about influential teachers at Sarah Lawrence.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. So there was a literature teacher that I introduced to Joyce. I think that was really important. And so I would say psychology, my religion teacher and my literature teacher. I did have a moment with anthropology that was also important. And I did—I had some art teachers—John Newman was my teacher at Sarah Lawrence, and he sent me to my first galleries. We had to go and look at galleries and come back and tell him what we thought.

And I have to say that I really wasn't a lover of [contemporary] art for a very long time.

Traditional art, but at least that was my gauge for what art was. Having gone to these museums. I thought it was all a bit boring. And then he sent me to—was it SoHo in those days? I'm trying to think where I went to see—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. You graduated in '86, so in the '80s.

JANINE ANTONI: I think I saw David Salle.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, at Mary Boone.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, it was my first [gallery show I visited]. And I was furious. I just didn't get it. It made me mad. And that went on for quite a long time, maybe all through college. I kept going to the galleries but kept not understanding and feeling on the outside of it. I took my junior year in London. I went to Camberwell Art College. And there I got introduced—

JUDITH RICHARDS: So picking Camberwell Art College sounds like even though there wasn't a major you felt that your main direction was art.

JANINE ANTONI: Well, yes. Yes, for sure. I knew that I was going to make things. I didn't know—well, I didn't get involved in the theater at Sarah Lawrence, so I was pretty firmly involved in the art department. And John Newman and I got to know each other well because [art students were] required to do one figure drawing class a week and I did every one he taught. So several times a week I drew from the figure. And then I did—you know, I had a painting teacher. I did still lifes, portraits.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Who was your painting teacher?

JANINE ANTONI: I don't remember.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, it's not important.

JANINE ANTONI: No. [I remember it was a revelation when I really saw for the first time.] I was sure that I was the only one [. . .] to really see color. It was a big deal for me.

And then Chris Saunders was my sculpture teacher. He was pretty traditional. We sculpted from a still life. He gave us exercises to do that were all about seeing. He was obsessed with seeing. John Newman was the only person who was introducing some notion of contemporary art, and that art was about meaning. [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did he direct you to Camberwell or did someone else?

JANINE ANTONI: What happened with Camberwell was a bit of mistake. Camberwell was certainly not the art school that it is now, first of all. Two is I went through a program at Syracuse. So Syracuse had an abroad program.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, because Sarah Lawrence is too small to have its own abroad program.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: So I went to Syracuse and then somehow I ended up at Camberwell. [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: You didn't actually go to Syracuse, or you—

JANINE ANTONI: Well, I went to the Syracuse abroad program—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: —that was connected to this.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Okay.

JANINE ANTONI: But I had a teacher, which I should remember his name—I want to say Burkman [ph] but I'm not sure. He was teaching painting but he made us, every week, go and see a lot of art. And I think that's when it clicked. Now, the things that I hated the most are the things that I like the most now.

So I can remember Richard Long, who is, a big giant for me. And it was just so out of the realm of what [I thought] art could be. Some rocks in a gallery. The works that are the least anything, like this piece where he picks up a stone and walks two miles and puts it down. For me that's such a magnificent gesture. [Laughs.]

So now when I find work that I hate, I really have to question myself because those works that upset me so much are really [the ones that] have made me the artist I am today.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So the program was a mistake because it was too conservative, in Camberwell or—

JANINE ANTONI: No, I just ended up there by mistake. I was lucky, in fact—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, I see.

JANINE ANTONI: —that I ended up there. And just being in London was great. Being in another country.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So that was junior year. When you came back you had one more year.

JANINE ANTONI: Right.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you started—did you start thinking—assuming you would go to graduate school as an artist?

JANINE ANTONI: Mm-hmm. [Affirmation.] And I think that my teacher at Syracuse gave me a list of schools to apply to, and John helped me. So I applied to a lot of graduate schools. The normal ones that everyone applies to, and I didn't get in anywhere.

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is planning to go right after you graduated in '86.

JANINE ANTONI: No, that's not true because I took that one year off. I must have known that I needed to build some kind of portfolio.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Because there really weren't enough studio classes at Sarah Lawrence to allow you to present—

JANINE ANTONI: And they were way too—they were way too traditional.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: And I don't know how I knew that I didn't want to be doing that or be in a traditional school. And so, I took that time off.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That must have been—well, how did you feel not getting accepted into those schools?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, it was weird because every—many schools put me on a waiting list. Many schools interviewed me. I mean, you can imagine I had these slides of things made

underwater in the mangrove—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, so you took the year off.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You did this special project.

JANINE ANTONI: Right.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And then you applied and were not accepted.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. Everybody looked at these things—and even if the art wasn't interesting—maybe it was, maybe it was—they were incredibly ambitious because when you [work with] the landscape you have to take it on that way. And then those [particular] landscapes are so beautiful. So you can imagine you're looking through slides and these crazy things arrive. Everybody was curious. But I don't think I had the sophistication to talk about them.

So I think when I went to the interviews, one is people thought, what is she going to make here because there wasn't that kind of landscape. You know, at Yale where am I going to find a landscape to work in? And then, I think that I didn't speak with sophistication about what I was making.

So I was on the waiting list. And I think I was interviewed by Tom Butter at Yale. And he was friends with Wade Saunders. And, you know, this sometimes happens between graduate schools, one school is taking the ones that get rejected from the other. There's a little bit of talk between. So I was on the waiting list for RISD and somebody couldn't come, and then I got a call. So I ended up at RISD.

And then it was shocking to be there because I had no—I didn't know how to deal with a crit. And what was interesting, because RISD is an art school, the undergraduates were professionals at critique. So I would be in a class with Roni Horn, with grads and undergrads, and the undergrads were much more [eloquent.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Roni Horn was the instructor.

JANINE ANTONI: —Yes—was much more sophisticated than the grads. Of course we had a lot more life experience, and I think in a very short time we caught up.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you apply as a sculpture major?

JANINE ANTONI: I did. So I knew that form was my [language].

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you were there for two years, or a year-and-a-half?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, I was there for two years. And it was like finding a new religion. I mean, realizing that art could mean something, that was huge, because I think I thought that it was about making beauty. I think that that was the level of what I thought you did as an artist; you made beautiful things.

And then of course I have a very fraught relationship to beauty because of my family, if I didn't learn about art per se, there was a lot of time spent appreciating what was beautiful, and mostly [admiring] the landscape. But also, remember, my dad is a plastic surgeon, so there was a thought about beauty that was almost like the Greeks, some notion of [perfect] proportion, and I had this thing engrained in me about beauty. I think I still struggle with it and try to reject it almost to a level of rejecting my ability—my skill, because that's another way of thinking about beauty.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: So I think that's deep—still deep in what I do. And the early work was really about a critique of woman and beauty. I was fascinated by the transformation I saw in people after my father would transform them physically. And the psychology of that was really interesting to me, he is a very skilled surgeon and he [had an eye for] proportion.

And, you know, a small woman would come to him and, she wants, big boobs or something,

and he [would convince them to choose a size to fit their body.] He would say, "Oh, yes, those doctors in LA, they just plonked the same nose on everybody but, you have to look at the face and the shape of the face."

So [he often] talked about these things. But what I was fascinated with was that these women. He would transform them but they really didn't look that different to me—but in their mind they were beautiful or sexy because they had boobs or whatever, and that would transform them. [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you're talking about this, is this related in any way to what you were doing at RISD?

JANINE ANTONI: I would say it wasn't—I didn't come to that critique until later. But when I realized that art could be more than beautiful, that was the [revelation].

JUDITH RICHARDS: What were the—what was—

JANINE ANTONI: The link I'm trying to give you is psychological. Why was I so fascinated with what was happening [in their mind.] And I think that somewhere deep in my work is [a question of how] does one's psychology manifest itself physically? And how—how does one speak about that through a physical object? [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you were there for two years, what was the body of work that you produced there? What materials were you using? What ideas did you find yourself—

JANINE ANTONI: The work? I worked with a woman named Beth Haggart. She was in the graduate program and she—

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you say "worked with," what do you mean?

JANINE ANTONI: We collaborated.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh.

JANINE ANTONI: And she was older. And she had had a [full] life before she got there and decided to become an artist. And I connected with her immediately. She had a drive and intensity about her. And we started to work together and we did some works that were very significant in my growth. And they were extremely ambitious. They were all about labor.

So I knew that from early on that the making was important, and [I wanted] to show the making. They had a performative aspect. [. . .] And we were working in video and they were all about the body too. [. . .]

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JANINE ANTONI: [In progress]—[At] RISD [I was focused on] performing the making. [Feminism] came towards the end of RISD. I can remember my fellow graduate students telling me, "Stop with this feminist stuff. We did that in the '70s. It's done."

And Mira Schor was teaching me at the time, and she looked at what I was doing, and she [said], "You need to look at these artists from the '70s," [Artists] like Hannah Wilke and Ana Mendieta. And I couldn't find anything on them in the library, so she brought her own books, catalogs from the New Museum and stuff like that. And I [realized], "Oh, I see what my peers are telling me—what I [was] doing, it really relates to these women."

JUDITH RICHARDS: So the—it sounds as if the major works you did were not works you did alone but works in collaboration. Is that—would the department allow you to create works—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. Yes, so we did two works. One work we showed at Sarah Doyle Gallery, which was part of Brown University, and we spent that entire summer preparing for the show. We made a really complex piece with a grid. It was [. . .] a mapping of how objects have meaning. We had a kind of still life at the top of the grid, maybe five still lives, in a kind of window in a wall. Then we had five signs, which represented those kinds of objects. And then at the bottom we had white-gloved hands doing very simple tasks over and over again.

JUDITH RICHARDS: This was a video?



JANINE ANTONI: No, this was live. And when they did these tasks, which were made at—which were done with abstract materials, those materials were pushed out into the space of the audience. So they were piling up in the gallery space

JUDITH RICHARDS: We you and Beth the performers?

JANINE ANTONI: We just asked our fellow graduate students to perform for us. It was a very slick piece. It was all in black and white, and nobody cared about any part of it except for these mechanical hands doing tasks. And Rob Storr was my teacher at the time, and he saw the piece, and he didn't usually do critiques in his class, but he said he would like to talk about it with the class.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And—excuse me for a second—Rob Storr—I wouldn't picture him teaching sculpture.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: He was.

JANINE ANTONI: He was teaching a more seminar class, but we had asked him if he would come and see our piece, and then he said he wanted to talk about it, and then the next week he did something I've never forgotten, but he got up on chalkboard and he drew out every single detail of this super complicated piece, every object, every—

JUDITH RICHARDS: From memory?

JANINE ANTONI: From memory. And that's a really rare talent, I think, even among curators and critics, to be able to be such visual—to be able to see that way and remember.

So that was a huge breakthrough. I never made anything that sophisticated, that refined, and then it was in a gallery. So to, you know, be showing at that while still at school was a big deal.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That show—you said you worked all summer. So it was in the fall of your second year.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, it was in the fall of our second year. And then we did—then we worked on our thesis piece from graduate school, which was shown in the museum. And we went—

JUDITH RICHARDS: The RISD art museum?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. And so we went to the Bahamas for winter break—winter—I think there—I think you could take a winter session, like it was called.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: And we went to the Bahamas, and we took a huge limestone boulder, and we crushed it to dust by hand. And we videoed the process of doing it, and then we shipped the dust to RISD and we made a sculpture out of it, and we showed the video of the crushing, just our hands hitting the stone, and this sculpture.

So those two things, foreshadowed what I did afterwards. But I didn't continue to work with Beth after we came back.

JUDITH RICHARDS: After you came back from the Bahamas?

JANINE ANTONI: No, after we came to New York.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh.

JANINE ANTONI: We all came to New York together.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you graduated with that—that was your graduate show. And were there—before we leave Providence—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —were there any other fellow student artists who were important to you

who you met and stayed friends with?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, certainly my husband. [They laugh.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: That's where you met.

JANINE ANTONI: That's where we met. And he remembers that work at Sarah Doyle as his big moment when he realized that you can make real artwork while still being in school.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was he—he was also at RISD?

JANINE ANTONI: He was in the painting department. So Paul was in the painting department. Karen Davies [sp] was in the painting department. We were friends. She performed in that piece. Spencer Finch was in the ceramics department, and he got kicked out of the ceramics department, and we took him into sculpture.

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: Sculpture was like the catchall in those days.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Acknowledgement.]

JANINE ANTONI: And then Paul and Spencer—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Just for the record—

JANINE ANTONI: [. . .] My husband, [Paul Ramirez] and Spencer Finch started to collaborate together doing sculpture and performance. So they joined with us [in the sculpture department]. And so [is the] dialogue I took into New York. For many years we kept that dialogue going. I'm still friends with Spencer.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were there any other teachers you haven't mentioned that were important at RISD?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. I was taught by two teachers that were really important, Ron Jones and Tom Lawson. I think Tom Lawson is probably—well, it's hard to say. Tom Lawson, Roni Horn and Mira Schor were really important for me. I think my development as an artist—although Ron really introduced me to a way of thinking and making which I certainly had—one can see very direct signs of it in the early work I did when I first came to New York.

Tom—it was interesting. You know, I'm a teacher, so looking back on their style of teaching and what has really affected me—and Tom was—you know, he was a critic and an artist, and so was Ron [Jones] for that matter, and Mira—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: [They were all] very articulate artists—but Tom had this amazing ability to look at his students and see what their particular talent was and push them in that direction.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It sounds, from your description and other people's, that RISD was a fairly open—unlike some stories of other prestigious graduate programs, RISD sounds like it was a very open atmosphere where you could develop in any direction, that—

JANINE ANTONI: Well—

JUDITH RICHARDS: —almost any direction—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —rather than just in a particular—

JANINE ANTONI: Well, Spencer was kicked out of his program, so in terms of medium—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Maybe that was ceramics. [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. In terms of medium, we were separated, but it was really Wade Saunders that brought all these people to the program, and I think that that's what made the program important at that moment, because if you look at who came out of that moment—[I

also] crossed over with Andrea Zittel—in the undergraduate program was Ricci Albenda. So I would say, as a group, we developed there together with some pretty phenomenal teachers, but I think it was also important that we all came to New York together.

Andrea had written—she was one year behind us, and she had written to all the galleries and artists that she really liked and asked them for work. And she got a lot of response, and she passed that on to us, so we were making other people's art together, we were sharing studios together, we would have a studio visit and then take the curator to [each] others studio. We installed—

JUDITH RICHARDS: This was all in Brooklyn?

JANINE ANTONI: This was mostly in Brooklyn, although I was in New York for part of that time, in—

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you first came from RISD, from Providence to New York, where did you live?

JANINE ANTONI: I lived in my parents' place in SoHo.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Had they had that for a while?

JANINE ANTONI: They had it for 20 years—

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did—that's kind of unusual, that they picked SoHo to have a place in.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, my—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Twenty years—that's from the—from the early '70s?

JANINE ANTONI: No, no, no. I would say early—hm.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Late '60s?

JANINE ANTONI: '80s. I would say early '80s, maybe.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you graduated in '89 and they had the place for about—since the early '80s.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, they already had the place, and my brother found it. [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mmm. Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: But it was just turning—[SoHo] was kind of scary, at that time. It was just turning around.

And so I went and lived there. First I lived there with my brother. [. . .] Then I moved—

JUDITH RICHARDS: What street was that?

JANINE ANTONI: Broome and Broadway. And then I moved to Park Slope, with Paul. Then I moved back in there, with Paul, and then we moved back here. [Laughs.]

But yes, we were really talking about each other's art together, showing together a lot.

JUDITH RICHARDS: In nontraditional kinds of spaces?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, in nonprofit spaces—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: —found spaces.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you're talking about where you were moving, was there a separate studio in all that time, or were you moving your studio as well?

JANINE ANTONI: I had my studio in the loft where I lived for a large amount of time. Then I moved to Warren Street, Warren and West Broadway, and I had a studio there for a really

long time. And—

JUDITH RICHARDS: What number on Warren?

JANINE ANTONI: What?

JUDITH RICHARDS: What number on Warren?

JANINE ANTONI: Sixty-one. So I was really close to the World Trade Center during 9/11.

And then I moved here. So I've only had three studios in my life.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So what years were you—what years were you—did you have a studio on Warren?

JANINE ANTONI: Probably from '95, let's say, something like that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: To?

JANINE ANTONI: To—gosh, how long have I been here? Maybe 10 years. I moved [. . .] [laughs] a year after 9/11. I moved here. Twenty—yes, yes, 2002.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you—if you weren't there from '95, then you made those—the earlier works in your studio in SoHo.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, I made *Gnaw* in the loft—

JUDITH RICHARDS: On Broome and Broadway.

JANINE ANTONI: —made *Lick & Lather* in the loft.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you were living there as well.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did—I think the first post-graduate school piece you did was *Wean*. At least that's the first of this—[about ?]—[laughs]—

JANINE ANTONI: Right, there were a lot of bad pieces.

JUDITH RICHARDS: [You'd be seen with it ?].

JANINE ANTONI: —post—bad postgraduate pieces that I never showed. But—is that true? Yes, I think it's—I think it's *Wean*.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That was—

JANINE ANTONI: And I made that in the wall of my kitchen.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That was 1990.

JANINE ANTONI: And that was—I see that as my breakthrough in terms of understanding where I wanted to exist in terms of the body and its [and its place] within the culture. I think that that—not so much a breakthrough in form, although that piece has a certain sense of absence, which is consistent in my work. I think at that time I was also interested in some relationship between the body and the architecture.

But it also is the first time that this relationship to my mother or mothering comes into the work, although now that I'm [sic] [nursing my daughter], I think what it—I would never make a piece like that about nursing. [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: It's a piece of very minimal materials well—

JANINE ANTONI: Mmm hmm. [Agreement.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: —which is interesting to think about.

JANINE ANTONI: You mean in relationship to the other work, which is more material-based?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, and to other things that was doing—that were going on in the art world.

JANINE ANTONI: I think that that—it's funny. If we think about that taxonomy, I think that that's what that piece was trying to do. It was mapping or a phrase beginning with the body and seeing where it fits within the culture. I wanted to do that without the interruption of material in some way. That's why—it's not really about nursing, because nursing is about milk and about, you know, a whole other thing. It was much more about the whole packaging thing—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: —which has something to do with—

JUDITH RICHARDS: The plastic nipples.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. It had to do with my education being in the '80s and consumer critique [. . .]. I was trying to understand all of that in relationship to the body.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you did that, where—remind me where it was presented first.

JANINE ANTONI: The first time it was presented it was at AC Projects.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I'm not sure. Those early things weren't on your bio. [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: No. Yes. So I think that was the first place that it was shown.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And when it was shown, were you—what was the response—

JANINE ANTONI: No, it was shown—I think it was—I think it might have been shown there after *Gnaw* had been made.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So actually it hadn't been shown.

JANINE ANTONI: I'm pretty sure it had been—

JUDITH RICHARDS: But friends had seen it. I mean, you—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —it sounds like you felt very positive about the—[inaudible]. You said it was a breakthrough.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So even though there wasn't a lot of exposure.

JANINE ANTONI: Well, the problem with *Gnaw* is that it was such a breakthrough in my thinking that I couldn't go back to any of the pieces before [. . .]. There was this incredible attention—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: —and then I couldn't say, "Oh, I have a studio full of work," because that [*Gnaw*] was such a leap for me that [it was the only] piece I could point backwards to that had some precedence for *Gnaw*—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: —was *Wean*.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Let's talk about *Gnaw*—

JANINE ANTONI: Okay.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —how it came to form in your mind. What was the evolution of the—that creative process that brought you to that piece and then the actual physical making of it, those decisions?

JANINE ANTONI: So—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And it was finished in '92, just to place it—[laughs]—in the chronology.

JANINE ANTONI: Right. So it was my first one-person show in New York.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. Did you know about the show before you made the piece?

JANINE ANTONI: I knew about the show. And I don't think that I would—

JUDITH RICHARDS: So—

JANINE ANTONI: —I mean, I couldn't have made—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Excuse me.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So it was Sandra Gering. Did she decide to give you a show based on *Wean*?

JANINE ANTONI: She had shown me in her home. I showed my thesis piece from graduate school between her couches [the work I made with Beth Haggart]. She had shown a few [of my] other works in her house, in a group show. I was introduced to her by Brian Goldberg, who [I met] at Brown University when I was at RISD. He was in the semiotics department. And we had—this is another person—that I had [an important] relationship with in terms of thinking about art. And he knew Sandra and had recommended me to her.

So Sandra knew that she was opening her new gallery in SoHo, and I think I was second or third show in [her] new gallery. So—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Remind us. What street was that gallery on?

JANINE ANTONI: It was on Broome Street. I want to say the cross was Wooster. And it was on the second floor. And so—yes, she offered me the show. I think that [opportunity was] important because I would never—I would never have cast 500 pounds of lard that's going to collapse onto the floor as something to show in a studio visit to try to get a show, right? [They laugh.] So I got a show. I took every cent that I had saved in the bank and I just made the most ambitious thing that I could [think of].

JUDITH RICHARDS: So where did this idea come from?

JANINE ANTONI: I don't know. [Laughs.] I mean, it started with this idea that I wanted to sculpt with my mouth. Now, where that came from, I mean one could say there's a certain oral fixation, with *Wean*, maybe. I was trying other things. The lipstick I was [already] working with. [I was] interested in the lipstick and the nursing, and somehow I guess the kernel that comes to mind is this idea of sculpting with my mouth. And then it just [developed] from there: What material to sculpt in? I came up with the chocolate. And then I wanted it—[the viewer] to have a physical sensation. I knew [I] wanted some repetitive labor. I wanted you to have a physical sensation [when you experienced] the object, so I thought I'm going to make it big [cube] and I'm going to chew on it a lot and you're going to feel that when you look at the object.

I made it as big as I could, given the size of the front door of the gallery and the front door of my studio. So that was the limitation. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: It's the classic painter's limitation, the size of the canvas that fits through the window or on the elevator.

JANINE ANTONI: It's so funny. And I remember getting it through my door. There was—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You're showing about a half-inch margin.

JANINE ANTONI: —a half-inch space to get it through. I didn't think about the weight of it, so that was pretty complicated to get it out of my space.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you think at first about the reference to carving, sort of traditional

transgressive—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. So it comes from [. . .] all the traditional training. I developed a love for the tradition. You can see it in my work again and again. [There is a clear] reference to art history.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I mean to resources, like minimalism or to other—

JANINE ANTONI: Well, minimalism, but also carving is a pretty traditional notion of what sculpture is. So where I got these things from, I'm not sure.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was there a sense of a feminist approach to carving? Not that a man can't use their mouth.

JANINE ANTONI: [Laughs.] Right.

JUDITH RICHARDS: They probably wouldn't.

JANINE ANTONI: The feminist side came from the lipstick. [. . .] [Feminism is also there in the] attack on minimalism, or the playful attack on minimalism. The piece was definitely from a woman's perspective. I remember Roberta [Smith] writing about the piece and talking about it as [an angry] critique. And then I thought, wow, I [also] had humor in it. But then I realized that Roberta is a different generation than me and had a different relationship to minimalism than I did. You know, I didn't experience minimalism as something that rejected woman, even though I knew that [it did] in terms of the history of it. I just thought, you know, we were in a time that was very pluralistic, and minimalism seemed like so hard-headed that it was an easy target in some way to use the minimalist cube as—

MS.RICHARDS: Would you describe—

JANINE ANTONI: The piece?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, the piece, and when you decided to use the *Gnaw* chocolate the way you used it and the lard and the way you used it.

JANINE ANTONI: So it started with the chocolate. And I guess, if you're going to carve with your mouth, I thought, I'm not going to carve with a non-edible material. So that the chocolate is so full of—everybody loves chocolate, so it represented desire. Then I discovered this [chemical] in the chocolate called phenylethylamine [. . .]. It's the chemical that is produced in your body when you fall in love. [. . .]

And I think that's where these heart-shaped packaging for chocolate candy came into play, with this idea of love, but also I had already worked with this packaging in [. . .] *Wean*. [There was] something about the vacuum-formed packaging [that] seemed like contemporary fossils to me. They're always made out of a material that won't degrade, and I imagined many years later people finding this packaging and trying to understand what it packaged.

So [work came together]that way. I spit out the chocolate, [melted it down], and cast it into this heart-shaped packaging. I had already worked with the lipstick. [. . .]I made a lipstick for Artists Space. [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: You made an actual lipstick—

JANINE ANTONI: It was called *Viewers' Red*, and it was a lipstick to wear while viewing art. I was really fascinated with the names of lipstick.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you made that before *Wean*?

JANINE ANTONI: No, not before *Wean*, but before *Gnaw*. [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: *Gnaw*, 1991.

JANINE ANTONI: I was fascinated by [the names of] lipsticks because they seemed like a kind of wish fulfillment, like Million Dollar Red or Network Pink. So I would read these names endlessly and think about how the psychology of the body manifests itself physically. These

lipsticks seem like a perfect example of that.

So anyway, the lipstick was in my repertoire, and then I linked the chocolate and the lipstick with the lard. What was important to me was that these materials passed through my body [the chocolate and the lard]. I had seen Gober's handmade piece of plywood, and I think it was that notion of the handmade readymade. I didn't get it until Gober. I should have gotten it with Warhol, but I got it with Gober. I want to try to do that, but I want to do it in an unconventional way. My mouth is going to be the avenue for this material. And I later go back to the Catholic thing and think about eating the body and transubstantiation, and like almost a—the body having a kind of alchemical ability to transform.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You said "later." You mean years later?

JANINE ANTONI: No, I just mean looking back on trying to find where these things come from in my past [. . .]. [I was trying to line] all these things together from my education. And I was looking at Gober pretty seriously, [Robert] Gober and Kiki [Smith]. And, you know, they were bringing the body back [at that time].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Kiki Smith.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. We were all coming back to the body in the early '90s, and I just happened to be there.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You've talked about Louise Bourgeois being influential, and of course, she's used the body. Was that—did you see her work when you were still even in graduate school?

JANINE ANTONI: Louise Bourgeois came much later as an interest for me. And I'm not sure why. I think that these other women, from the '70s, were brought to me because of what I was making, like Ana Mendieta and Carolee Schneemann and Hannah Wilke. I didn't know that Hannah Wilke had worked with chocolate, When I made *Gnaw*. [I'm embarrassed to say] but I decided very early on that I was going to claim the '70s female artists, that it didn't matter that I didn't know them.

Standing back from the situation and looking at it, I thought, I can't make these things because these women have already made them. That was my first thought when Mira brought me the catalogues. And then I had to go a little deeper and ask myself why don't I know about them? Why do I know all the [male] '70s body performative artists and I don't know the females?

And of course, I'm being educated with '80s feminism, which was a little bit rejecting that '70s feminism, at least in terms of form. And I thought to myself, well what is it that made me go back to this time, and certainly we could trace it to my background, but also I feel like we hadn't absorbed it as a culture. And I felt a gap and I went right there. So I felt like I owe it to these women that every time somebody points to me, I have to point back to them and give them their due but also build on [that] history as a strength, which [we do] with male art all the time, but it wasn't—it wasn't a weakness in me that I had gone back to that time, but [a need.] [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, yes. Were you prepared for the attention that you got for *Gnaw*?

JANINE ANTONI: Absolutely not. In fact, I didn't know that a work like that was even saleable—like, I didn't know that it could move through the art world in [the way it did].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Now, you made limited editions of the chocolates and the lipsticks.

JANINE ANTONI: That's because—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were—and were they meant to be sold together so—or you'd buy just one?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, it was a huge mistake when I made those limited editions. [Laughs.] I had made a small display for *Viewers' Red*, that lipstick I told you about that was at Artist Space. That was on the front desk, this small display, lipstick display, and Sandra had sold that piece; Sandra Gering. And she said to me why don't we make some more displays from *Gnaw*?



Now the problem [was that they were]clearly relics, and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. Rather than central works of art.

JANINE ANTONI: Right. I don't really make relics. I'm interested in making an object that [holds] its history on its surface. I walk a line between relic and object and performance in the work, but if I have something to offer, I think it's in my ability to leave that history on the surface and not to depend on a photograph or some other form of telling you that [story].

Even though I had such a tremendous amount of press and interest nobody was going to risk buying a work like that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And it was—there was one pair that was unique—you hadn't thought about making yet.

JANINE ANTONI: It was unique. I—well, I could—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You couldn't.

JANINE ANTONI: I guess I knew about editions because I made those displays even though I made every one differently.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But to make an edition, you'd have to gnaw all those pieces.

JANINE ANTONI: First of all, I didn't have the money to make it in edition. I had spent every cent I had to make one. And it was very—I didn't have control of the piece, I didn't know what to do with the [lard collapsing ?], for instance. I was trying to make it not collapse, I just didn't know if that was good or bad or—and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did it collapse? I don't recall.

JANINE ANTONI: It did collapse—

JUDITH RICHARDS: During the show or—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, it collapsed every time [I showed it].

JUDITH RICHARDS: The chocolate doesn't, right?

JANINE ANTONI: No. So it was later that that piece was sold to Saatchi, and he bought it sight unseen. He had seen me on TV talking about the work, and it was Jeffrey Deitch that sold that piece to Saatchi.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Not Sandra Gering?

JANINE ANTONI: Not Sandra Gering. And I don't think that he knew that he was buying anything but the chocolate. I don't think he even knew [what the] whole piece [was]. [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: And was the whole piece also the chocolates and the lipsticks?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. One work.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So they belonged as relics to the piece, and yet you said it was a mistake. They were also sold separately.

JANINE ANTONI: Right.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Chocolates and lipstick in a—in a relatively large edition.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I mean, I saw an edition for 45?

JANINE ANTONI: No. There were 45 heart-shaped packaging made out of chocolate that were in the display itself. And then, I don't know, maybe 10 small displays that were made.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I see. And the lipsticks?

JANINE ANTONI: And the lipsticks—well, you'll see different numbers in different places. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. I saw 400.

JANINE ANTONI: There were 400 made, and then I refined the display. I don't know, maybe there's 150 in it now. Even the look of the display has transformed over time. I'm always working on the work and—because it has to be remade, there's this opportunity to refine it, which is not what you're supposed to do. You're supposed to freeze [your work] in time.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. So all this critical attention, did you feel that—how did it affect you progressing to the next piece? I mean, had you already started—*Slumber* I think was the next major piece. Had you already started thinking about that?

JANINE ANTONI: I actually—I thought the next piece was *Lick and Lather*. Was it *Slumber*?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. Well, *Slumber* is '93 and—

MS. : [Off mic.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, you know? This is where—*Lick and Lather* is '93 too. So I wasn't sure reading—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —because the chronology of the actual making wasn't there, which came first? There was—there were a number—'93 seemed to be an incredible year.

JANINE ANTONI: I don't know how I did it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You did—you did several major—

JANINE ANTONI: I did more work than I'd probably done in the rest of my life in '93. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So then *Lick and Lather* was the—came right after, which makes sense, *Gnaw*.

JANINE ANTONI: Right. Well actually not.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you need to—

JANINE ANTONI: Actually, [. . .] let me tell you that *Eureka* came next—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

JANINE ANTONI: —because I—we have to have a whole discussion about eating disorders, which is what the piece started—be about, which was not my intention. I got to [show it] in the Whitney Biennial, *Gnaw*. I thought people are—taking this in the wrong direction, so I'm going to take the fat and I'm going to make another piece with the fat and I'm going to articulate my relationship to this material, get rid of the chocolate because—

JUDITH RICHARDS: That's *Eureka*.

JANINE ANTONI: —people are getting way too excited about the chocolate. [They laugh.] Get rid of the chocolate, [and] talk about the fat—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You were getting labeled a chocolate artist.

JANINE ANTONI: Right. [I need to deal] deal with Beuys and all of that—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Joseph Beuys.

JANINE ANTONI: Joseph Beuys. I showed that [*Eureka*] at Sandra Gering's simultaneously [with] the Whitney [Biennial], [I thought] that having them up at the same time I could control the reading of *Gnaw*. It didn't work at all.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you had *Eureka* up at the same time.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. And that was a show at Sandra's called—

JUDITH RICHARDS: I thought there was a show at Sandra in '94. I didn't realize it was—oh, yes. They were both—yes. Both in '94.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. Because *Lick and Lather* was also at Sandra [Gering, but much later]. So I did a show called "Add Hot Water," and it had [. . .] Spencer Finch, Paul Ramirez and Andrea Zittel and myself in it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Wow.

JANINE ANTONI: And we all [made] performative objects of sorts [for] that show.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Where was this show?

JANINE ANTONI: At Sandra Gering.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And that was in between the two shows.

JANINE ANTONI: And that was—that was when I showed—I showed *Eureka* in that show.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That was in '93 then.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, that's a—okay. We'll have to stop for the day.

JANINE ANTONI: [. . .]

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JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Janine Antoni on December 11th, 2012, in her studio in Brooklyn, for the Archives of American Art Smithsonian Institution, Disc 2.

Janine, yesterday we stopped in the—just starting—getting to the work *Eureka*, but we wanted to go back and just ask you to describe a few specifics of *Wean* and *Gnaw*.

JANINE ANTONI: *Wean* is a work that is made of negative impressions in the wall. The first impression is my breast. The second is my nipple. Then there are three latex nipples, and the last impression is the packaging from those latex nipples. So everything you buy in the drugstore has a kind of vacuum form package with a cardboard backing. Well, that's the impression that's left in the wall.

And the wall is seamless to the architecture. So I really wanted you to feel absence in front of the piece, and I was thinking about of course separation from the mother, but more importantly is this separation we go through with our own bodies as we're weaned into the culture. So that's how that piece took form.

And *Gnaw* began with this idea of carving with my mouth, and I was—of course came up with chocolate. It would seem like an appropriate material—if I was going to make a sculpture with my mouth, [then chocolate was a natural choice]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, I just want to make a correction. This is December 12th, not December 11th. [They laugh.] Sorry.

JANINE ANTONI: Okay. So with *Gnaw*, you know, then I had to decide what form this material should be in, and I decided to use the minimalist cube as a kind of quotation but also critique.

And then I started to think about what do I do with this material that I have bitten off, and I decided to cast the chocolate into heart-shaped packaging for chocolate candy. I started to research chocolate and started to think about getting fat and fat being the material of the body. So I made the exact same form, cube shape, same size, in lard, and I chewed on that as well.

And then I learned that lard—that originally when they made lipstick, they made it out of

lard. I don't think they do that anymore. So then I took the lard, I melted it down, I mixed it with pigment and beeswax, and I made 150 lipstick.

And then I made a room-sized display where all the walls of the room were glass cabinets, and I created a display of my products in there. And I [put] marble [on] the floor. Those cubes are also on slabs of marble. And the reason I chose marble is that it's kind of a classic sculpture material, but it's also the surface you use to make chocolate. So that seemed appropriate. And I liked the idea that it was the pedestal for the cube, but then when you walk into the display, you're on the pedestal [a marble floor]. So it brought the viewer's body into the piece.

So yes, that's a description of those two pieces.

Now *Eureka* I made because I felt that what happened is, in terms of the dominant talk around that piece, was that it was about eating disorders.

JUDITH RICHARDS: About *Gnaw*?

JANINE ANTONI: *Gnaw*, yes. And I wanted to shift people's thinking about that piece because I was thinking of eating disorders as a metaphor, particularly bulimia, for [a] culture that consumes and spits out so quickly. And people took it literally, and that was interesting to me, that I made a piece about food and the world came back to me to tell me—[laughing]—issues around food. And so I thought, "I'm going to take the lard and make another piece and try to reframe the material and my relationship to the material."

So I had—I showed the piece at the same time when it showed at the Whitney Biennial. Nobody noticed the piece—[laughs]—that time—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Nobody noticed *Eureka*?

JANINE ANTONI: They didn't notice it, no. I—there is such attention [on the] biennial. [It] was kind of a defining biennial in terms of identity politics, and I got consumed into that way of thinking, which—it wasn't that my work wasn't about that, but—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Could you describe the performative part of the piece and the photographic part of the piece?

JANINE ANTONI: Oh, I guess that's probably important. [Laughs.] The performative part of the piece is—of *Eureka*, sure. So what I did with *Eureka* is I filled a tub to the top with lard.

JUDITH RICHARDS: A tub, I read, that was actually a water trough from a stable, or was it actually a bathtub?

JANINE ANTONI: No, what you're doing is you're combining that photograph, 2038—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, yes. Excuse me. I—

JANINE ANTONI: —[laughs]—but that's probably where the tub obsession started. It was this —

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, now I remember the picture. The—

JANINE ANTONI: —yes, what do you call these tubs with the claw—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Corian—claw-foot?

JANINE ANTONI: —claw-foot tub.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: So it was [a] very romantic, beautiful tub. It was filled with this material, which was the same color, white, and slick, and then I submerged my entire body—

JUDITH RICHARDS: It's filled with lard?

JANINE ANTONI: Filled with lard, specifically pork fat. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Sounds so inviting. [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: I know. So I submerged my body in it. When I was completely underneath the lard, I had my friends flatten out the top of the tub.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean your head too or just up to your neck?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, everything. Everything. I was breathing through a tube.

The reason I did that is that I wanted to remove my body capacity, the amount of physical space that my body takes up in the material. So we ended up with this bucket of fat. It was the same volume as my body.

Then I took that fat and mixed it with lye and water, and I made a cube of soap, quite a large cube of soap. And then I washed myself with the cube. So I sculpted down the cube again, but this time, rather than biting, I washed with it.

So I followed some of the same thoughts as *Gnaw*, but this time switching the everyday activity from eating to bathing.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Talk about how the name "Eureka" came to be—

JANINE ANTONI: So—

JUDITH RICHARDS: —if that was part of the conceptual—

JANINE ANTONI: *Eureka* is really important, because by this time people are kind of very titillated by the extreme things I do with my body. And so I felt like I had to explain that. And the story that I'm inspired by for the title of the piece is the story of Archimedes. And Archimedes was asked by the king how much gold was in his crown, and he's killing himself. How can he measure capacity? He's in the bathtub. He realizes his body's displacing the water in the tub. He jumps out, screams, "Eureka!" and runs through the streets naked.

So I'm inspired by this story for a couple of reasons. One is, his body is the tool for the experiment, just as my body's the tool for making, but more importantly is this notion that he came to this knowledge through the experience of his body.

[Laughs] That explained why I do these extreme acts, because I know that you as a viewer have a body and it's not a big leap for you to imagine what it's like to chew on 600 pounds of chocolate—it's probably a fantasy for most people—[laughs]—or be dunked in a tub of pig fat.

[Laughs.] So—and I know or I suspect that you don't have a neutral relationship to those kinds of activities.

I think what it does is it pushes you towards a position of empathy, empathy with my process. You can imagine the texture of the material—right away you said, "Was your head underneath?"—breathing through a tube, all those things, and I think that you have a kind of charged relationship [to what I am doing]. And that is a different way than one normally approaches a conceptual work of art, where they stay very objective, [and] go through a process of decoding information in order to gleam [sic] the meaning [from] the work.

If you're already in this position where you [feel a physical] empathy for what I've done, you are in a more subjective relationship to the object, and that brings up a lot of your own baggage towards those kind of activities. So I thought that was a really interesting position to—or relationship for me to have with the viewer.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What existed—could you describe how the piece existed after you performed it?

JANINE ANTONI: So it exists with a pretty detailed image of my body in the tub and then the washed soap, and that's all. You never see—you never really see images of me dunking in the tub as part of the piece. Those have gone out into the public in, [my], monograph [or a lecture] but the piece is just the object.

I should also say that I think of—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And it's a unique object.

JANINE ANTONI: It's a unique object. And I think of it as a—as my next breakthrough after *Wean*. If you imagine these imprints in the wall as a kind of sentence, *Wean* begins with the body and sort of traces an evolution into the culture, right? By coming to this decision to introduce my body again at the end of [*Eureka*] by washing myself with the soap, I've started to tell a—

JUDITH RICHARDS: [. . .]

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. So I've started to tell a story that begins and ends with the body. And so I become interested in this circular storytelling, but also this idea that if lard is the material of my body, and I use the lard to make the soap, somehow I'm washing myself with myself, you know, if I used my body capacity in fat, somehow metaphorically I've entered the cube and I'm having a relationship with myself. So that was interesting [to me].

I'm also interested in the idea of how redundant is that, to be washing the body with the body. And it brought me back to the lipstick, because what does it mean to decorate the body with the body?

So yes, so that brings us to—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you said it was hardly noticed.

JANINE ANTONI: Well, you know, you think that you put things out into the world in [a particular] way. As an artist, I'm probably particularly obsessed, more than most I've met, with the viewer and [I fantasize] about the viewer and try to understand how works are read and why and what it has to do with my intention and how [a response] is it a reflection of the world.

I really see my art-making process as a dialogue. I'm always curious to figure out what are people's response [is]. Times are interesting because I feel like I can know [people's response] in a way that I couldn't know back then, because back then, maybe a critic would write about it, and that's a very specific kind of viewer. I've enjoyed having close relationships to the guards at museums because I think they see a kind of interaction that, as an artist, it's hard for me to see. But now everybody writes about it on the Internet [. . .]. And so it's been an interesting way in the recent past to be able to find out [what people are thinking about your work]. [This is useful because] the more successful you get, the less you know—[they laugh]—about what you're and how it's being understood.

JUDITH RICHARDS: As you completed that work, I think the next one was *Lick & Lather*. Was it—were you already—do you already start thinking about the next piece before you've finished one? Or is there gap when you're really collecting your thoughts and maybe thinking about the reactions and thinking about your next interest?

JANINE ANTONI: I think it takes me years to understand what I've done. [. . .] I made so much work at that period of my life.

JUDITH RICHARDS: 1993.

JANINE ANTONI: That is a total exception. I'm notoriously slow as an artist. [. . .] I really can only think of one piece at a time. [When I finish a piece] I'm quite sure it's the last piece I'll ever make. So I go into a panic—[laughs]—between pieces and—I don't know what that's about. [. . .] [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So—but there couldn't have been much of a gap after *Eureka* to *Lick & Lather*.

JANINE ANTONI: No. Well, I think what happened is, I got so many opportunities at that moment, and also feeling, as a young artist, that I had to take them all. Now I'm very choosy, and I give myself the time to let something develop to the level that I want it to. But, I didn't feel like I had that luxury at that time.

And so from that point, I got asked to be in the Venice Biennale, which was something that I definitely wanted to do.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What—who asked you? Who was the curator?

JANINE ANTONI: It was Aperto, and they had five curators. And one of them was Jeffrey

Deitch, and so he asked me to be in his section of Aperto.

And so I came up with this idea for *Lick & Lather* because I was thinking about Venice [and its classical sculptures]. What I did for *Lick & Lather* is I made 14 classical self-portrait busts, seven in chocolate, seven in soap. I reshaped my image by licking the chocolate and washing the soap.

So I used a product called alginate, which is something that you—

JUDITH RICHARDS: How do you spell that?

JANINE ANTONI: Hm. A-L-G-I-N-A-D-E. [. . .]

Anyway, you know it because when you go to the dentist, they put this kind of minty-tasting stuff in your mouth that—has the ability to get a mold of your teeth. It [records] every single little detail.

So I submerged my whole head in this stuff—[laughs]—hair and all, in order to get an exact replica of my body. Then I sculpted the classical stand of the bust, and then I cast it in those two materials. And then I washed and licked them all differently.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Technically, you mentioned the—oh, never mind. I was thinking of the lard. We're talking about soap. Forget it. [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. But I would say that—

JUDITH RICHARDS: [There are no ?] technical difficulties casting those two materials.

JANINE ANTONI: Oh, [very] technical difficulties.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Ah.

JANINE ANTONI: Well, one is that I was making the soap from scratch because that's how I had learned to make it for *Eureka*, and the heads would fall off. It's very difficult to cast such a big object in chocolate or soap—and if it wasn't hard enough by the time I took the mold off, so the heads would roll off and—[laughs]—it was a big learning curve.

Now I have professionals cast the soap heads for me when I need to replace them. So I have other issues, archival issues, but not those technical issues.

JUDITH RICHARDS: All right. I'm sorry. Go—let's go back to the—[laughs]—the other—

JANINE ANTONI: And then I needed things like FDA-approved silicone for the mold, [. . .]—you don't want to be licking a surface where there's—each piece [brings me into a whole new] world—well, for *Gnaw*, for instance, I found the guy that makes the largest solid chocolate Santa Claus in the world. When you make chocolate bunnies at Easter, they're hollow. So making a solid form in chocolate is not easy. And he coached me on the phone how to [cast a large solid chocolate cube.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: What was his name? Do you remember?

JANINE ANTONI: I don't know, but he worked for Ambrosia Chocolate. [They laugh.]

And then he also advised me to get what they call the chocolate with the longest shelf life, which [in art lingo] is the most archival chocolate.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It wouldn't necessarily be the chocolate you'd most enjoy gnawing.

JANINE ANTONI: No.

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: It's like that Easter [drugstore]—[laughs]—chocolate—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: —that has a lot of wax content.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: So that's kind of scary.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. Why did you decide to do 14?

JANINE ANTONI: Fourteen because I was taught in school that the Greeks felt that if you wanted the perfect proportion of a body, you would put [7] heads on top of each other. [. . .] That's why the seven in chocolate and the seven in soap.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

JANINE ANTONI: All of my work in those days was trying to work against the grain of traditional ideas of beauty. So I thought by the time I lick and wash these things, they're all different sizes.

So there's always some kind of play with—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And describe how you—how you created the installation.

JANINE ANTONI: Well, it's been displayed two different ways. In Venice I displayed it in a circle, all facing inward.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And were the audience allowed inside?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, so you could walk around and they're all staring at you.

Then later—I think pretty much since then I've displayed it in a line, so that they're all facing in—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Two facing lines?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, and kind of staring at each other.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So it sounds—you said you went to Venice first.

JANINE ANTONI: Only I didn't explain that, you know—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And then the pieces—and they're to be like classical heads. So explain the inspiration for that.

JANINE ANTONI: So I thought that making these classical busts out of [chocolate and soap.] We think of these bronze and stone sculptures as immortalizing the figure through the material. So I thought, "If I work with chocolate and soap, I'm working against the grain of that." And that becomes interesting for me when I'm working with my own image and my own mortality.

So I get to Venice, and Venice is totally eroding, and I see these stone sculptures, and their features are [completely] washed away. And so that was interesting for me, to think about how even stone has a lifespan.

And then I start to think about aging and wondering if I could think of my own aging as a creative process, that we make a lot of choices in our lives and that is a kind of empowering way of aging. So—

JUDITH RICHARDS: There's also the negative side of that, a kind of active defacement—

JANINE ANTONI: Right.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —which—

JANINE ANTONI: So that was really interesting to me, which I didn't think of at first, but certainly in the process I did, especially because this process was so tender in relationship to *Gnaw*, which is sort of aggressive, biting into those cubes, biting into art history, thinking about babies, how the biting is a way of knowing, you know, the way a baby understands the world. Trying to bring the world into one's mouth—curious idea.

And so the licking and the washing were—I mean, I would be hours in the tub with these



busts, washing them down. It was like having a little baby in there. And I started to think [that], through this tender process, I'm erasing my features. [It] says something interesting about our relationship to our surface. I don't know about you, but I look in the mirror and I ask myself what this [image] has to do with who I am, I feel a kind of separation between my surface and who I feel [I am] inside. So I felt like that talked about [a] love-hate relationship we have with our physical appearance.

JUDITH RICHARDS: There is quite a bit written about the erotic—an autoerotic or just simply an erotic sense to the piece.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. I think the autoerotic is interesting to me because [the] eroticism is happening without the viewer. [That is] kind of important to me; that it wasn't—it wasn't something that was projected [on to me] but was a relationship I was having with my own body. [This is] important, especially in the wake of the '70s. Those women embraced a certain eroticism and were dismissed [because of it]. And at times it was [about eroticism, but at times it was not. The culture tends to eroticize women's bodies regardless of the intent.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: However, their work was normally performed in public, and your—the performative aspect of this work and some others was actually in private.

JANINE ANTONI: Mmm hmm. [Affirmative.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So that—[did the different ?]—

JANINE ANTONI: That was another strategy, because of course people wanted to see me lick, they wanted to see bite, and I [hoped that] by not giving them that [opportunity. They would] replace themselves with me,, but human nature is such that when you—when you hold something back, that's what—people want most. So all of a sudden people became interested in who I am. [. . .] My work [is] about me and it's not about me. I mean, it's intensely personal, and yet it somehow hits a chord in others.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I was amazed at all the different lines of interpretation that were brought to this piece.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: One about the—could the chocolate pieces relate to dark-skinned people—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —you know, or—

JANINE ANTONI: I've been fighting that one—

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] That seems so, I mean, odd—

JANINE ANTONI: [My husband and I had long discussions about what it would mean to represent the figure in these kind of material] way. When I made lipstick, it was lipstick. It functioned as lipstick, but to make the figure, was that okay? [. . .] We weren't sure if that was a good idea, and I think that reading [that way] is the problem. The minute I represent myself, then they look at that color and think, "Oh, that's someone with dark skin and that's someone with light skin." I feel like that reading is dangerous because chocolate [conjures] desire and white soap, purity—

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: It just goes down a road that is frightening to me. [Not one I intended.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: I come from the Bahamas, and I'm [sensitive to] racial issues. It's part of my heritage and my background. [. . .] I take all readings to heart.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you started, even in graduate school, working with kind of a, you'd say, nontraditional—although there were many precedents—approach, were you consciously

—it sounds like you were consciously wanting to always explore new territory, break barriers, not for the sake of doing it, necessarily, and this piece—there's a kind of transgressive quality to each decision, in a sense, obviously not so much when you think of it as just a part of the history of your work and kind of a logical progression, or rather there are links between one piece and the next. But did you have a sense that one of the purpose— one of the driving forces in your work was to always be breaking ground, in a sense, artistic ground? It's kind of a gross way or a crass way of putting it. [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: Well, no, it's an interesting question, because I feel like my education was both. My education was postmodernism. Everything's been done. There's no originality. Then, on the other hand, it [made me ask] how do [I] take the dialogue further?

JUDITH RICHARDS: I mean, you were producing pieces that are—obviously have links to other works, especially by women in the '60s and '70s. But when you picture any of these pieces, there's a surprise. There's a—there's a performance and an experience for the viewer they've—that is very different than anything that they've had before.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. I don't know that I knew I was doing that. I certainly wanted to—I wanted so desperately to contribute and to be part of a dialogue. And so you have this— these extremes, if you want to call them that, on the one hand, and then you have this me placing myself in the lineage, whether it be the [minimalist] cube or the [classical] bust or my relationship to '70s feminism.

I don't know where [this need] comes from. I think that that's more curious to me than the [need to be innovative] [laughs.] As a woman I didn't assume that I had a voice and that I would be considered in the patriarchal historical dialogue. Thinking about my education and [artists like] Sherrie Levine [or], Cindy Sherman. Those artists placed themselves [in a critical dialogue with patriarchal art history].

Sherrie Levine had a huge effect [on me.] I don't think I [was using appropriation in the same way,] but I do think I [was] conscious about every gesture and where it comes from and my relationship to it [needed to be articulated]. [ . . . ]

I needed for myself to feel connected to what I'm making—to use the work to feel connected to the world and to locate myself in relationship to materials and [to have a] relationship to others and to [be in] relationship to my past. I find [all those connections] through the body. So something happens when you take the body to an extreme point. Something drops out at that moment, and that's really interesting to me. And I felt like people could go there with me—or wanted to go there with me. I was interested in the making—I was transformed through the process. [ . . . ]

I wanted a kind of discovery in the making. That's why even today, I keep running from myself. I knew I had to stop with the chocolate because it was too much. I also didn't want to get good at it. This could have to do with my generation too, but I admired artists like Nauman that would take on all different forms, and I wanted to give myself that kind of breadth in the making, that I was capable of—that it was really about my ideas and I could take [the form] wherever my ideas would lead me.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Once you showed the work in Venice—and I know a year later you showed it at Sandra Gering—but before that, you did more work. [Laughs.] And did this piece lead directly to—or was the next *Loving Care*?

JANINE ANTONI: No. Actually, *Loving Care*—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Or was that *Butterfly Kisses*?

JANINE ANTONI: *Loving Care* came between *Gnaw* and *Lick and Lather*. Is that right?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh. Wait, there was *Eureka*—

JANINE ANTONI: No, no, no. *Loving Care* came [before] *Eureka*, between [*Gnaw*] and [*Eureka*].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh.

JANINE ANTONI: But, I mean, it was—it was all very close in time.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So there was a piece in between the two chocolate pieces.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. And *Loving Care*—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you talked about the relationship with the audience, and *Lick and Lather* was more distant, but *Loving Care* is right there.

JANINE ANTONI: Right. And, you know, I'm still trying to come back to that relationship with the audience. I would like to—

JUDITH RICHARDS: That was—that's an incredibly ambitious piece because as I understand it, I mean, it just doesn't exist unless you're performing it.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. And I first made that piece as a relic and didn't perform it. And then I realized that—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean performing it privately --

JANINE ANTONI: In private.

JUDITH RICHARDS: -- and just leaving photographs.

JANINE ANTONI: No, just leaving the floor and the dye.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh.

JANINE ANTONI: And then I realized that people didn't get it. They thought I did it with my hands, they—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And it sounds like when I read about the performance that you're pushing the audience, you're moving the audience, which obviously will—that action that that pressure wouldn't be there.

JANINE ANTONI: Right. And that's what I realized, that it was incredibly powerful—the powerful parts, the parts that were interesting to me in terms of meaning were happening in the performance and not in the relic. The relic couldn't hold its own in the way that *Gnaw* could [. . .].

In those days, [what] interested me [was] to make an object that could [hold its history on its surface]. Now I think about *Loving Care* and how that relationship with the audience is very interesting to me and something I want to go back to. But basically, I should explain that.

[. . .] Well, I guess I should say is I'm using similar strategies—my body is the tool—*Gnaw* [is] about sculpture, [*Loving Care* is] about painting, but [it is not a] painting .

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. There's a lot written about the abstract expressions—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. So I was—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Gesture.

JANINE ANTONI: The piece was photographed in black and white, and I realized wow, this really connects to Pollock, and those paintings we know of him doing his dance around the canvas. And so those are the images that I put out into the public outside of the piece to kind of conjure [Pollock's gestures].

But for me, the main kind of reference in the work is [to] Yves Klein. The paintings he did when he put blue paint on the [naked] women's bodies and had them roll on the canvas. I felt that this was kind of a reaction to that work. He said, "rather than to paint the model, he wanted to paint with the model." And I like to say that *Loving Care* is about trying to be the model and the master at the same time—why do I want to be the model and why can't I be the master and why can't I do both. This kind of sums up the problems of being a woman artist and how we're conditioned as women to be the model. [To be the subject of the gaze.]

[. . .] One of the problems of the reading of that work is [that] a lot of people who have written about it didn't see it, and I think that when you see it, there is this tension, [an]

overriding tension, of wanting to be able to see me and being [. . .] pushed away. And for me, that's where the meaning of the piece resides, that I'm mopping the floor, I'm using material called Loving Care Hair Dye, many, many bottles of it, and I'm dipping my hair in it and I'm mopping the floor—I'm doing this gesture with my body that looks like mopping. But instead of cleaning, I'm dirtying and using the Loving Care Hair Dye, [is] like paint.

And so I was thinking about my mom. My mom used Loving Care Hair Dye to cover her gray. I loved the name of that hair dye. I think it's really interesting. And she would say to me when I was little, OK, so Jannie, go out and play because I've mopped the kitchen floor. And I thought, wow, that's interesting.

So during the time when the floor is wet, the kitchen is her space. I thought can I do that with the museum or the gallery. And would this claiming of the space, [the museum space, but mopping is] historically woman's work and [yes I wanted to be the master].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did the piece—I understand you performed it many times—or several times.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you find it changing as you performed it?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, it's funny we talked about [how] *Gnaw* was such a breakthrough for me and [my older work didn't make any sense in relationship to *Gnaw*. I had] nothing to show. So after I made *Loving Care*, because there were no objects to show, people wanted me to do the performance over and over again. And since I didn't have time to make new objects, I did it several times. And it changed, but I also did it in many different cultures, so the audience changed and the kind of response changed.

When I first did it, I wasn't sure if people would move out of the room, but after a while, I got very confident. [But I like] the first one, I like the best [when it was] the most awkward. It was a difficult thing to do [so it had more tension].

I remember the strain on my body to do it, and then after a while, I got a technique down and it becomes more of a dance at that point. But—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you—did you prescribe a certain dimension of space that you would want to cover with this activity?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, of course every space offered a different situation. I was very insistent that I would mop the floor, that there would be no surface put down on the floor like paper or canvas. In one case, they built a floor on top of their existing floors because they didn't want me to mop their floor. I didn't want to make a painting, I want [it to be about] painting, and I felt like if I did [it on] a surface it—[. . .] people would look at the marks as a painting. I was more interested in mopping in relationship to painting. [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was the response what you expected?

JANINE ANTONI: I would say that it was one of my most controversial pieces, and I think it was—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Surprising to you, controversial?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. What I'm doing seems to make so much sense to me, you know. [Laughs.] And so I think it's going to make sense to everybody else. And it seems so—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Are you implying that the controversy was about judging it as a work of art—whether this is a work of art?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. Whether—

JUDITH RICHARDS: There's also this upsetting image of a woman doing what you were doing. It's—it was disturbing—

JANINE ANTONI: There are many, many—that piece has been reenacted.

JUDITH RICHARDS: With your permission?

JANINE ANTONI: Never with my permission.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It isn't something that you actually sold, is it?

JANINE ANTONI: No. I can't tell you how many people remake that they have a desire to do what I did.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do they credit you, or—is that an issue for you?

JANINE ANTONI: [. . .] I haven't seen it interpreted in a way that is interesting to me. Usually, it's less interesting, like they put down paper—[they laugh]. So then it makes me wonder—is it understood. It would be exciting if someone took it a step further.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Have you left instructions or would you leave instructions so in the future someone could re-perform it, like a choreographer would do?

JANINE ANTONI: It has never been a thought that someone else could do it—because my work at that point was so much about my experience—and [the] relationship that I'm having with myself that—I've never entertained that [idea]. Not that I wouldn't, I guess.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That issue, of course, has come up for artists who are --

JANINE ANTONI: [. . .] I guess since Marina [Abramovic] did those pieces, *Seven Easy Pieces*.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. The issue—after an artist passes away, the issue of bringing that kind of work to life—

JANINE ANTONI: Well, it's—already [a problem. Curators] want to show the video, and I keep saying that they can show it within the context of documentation of performances and not as a work. And that hasn't always been honored.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you—is this a video that you made of those early enactments before they were in a museum?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, although I've videoed it every time, so I have documentation of every time it's been done. I haven't even looked at [it], but [it] does exist.

JUDITH RICHARDS: After that piece, then you went on to the *Butterfly Kisses* piece?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. So I was thinking of it as [the] drawing equivalent to *Loving Care*, and what I did is I put Cover Girl Thick Lash Mascara on my eyelashes, and I put my head against the page and I blinked my eyes. Well, I made a couple of them, but the first one I winked my eyes 1,142 times, but it is a diptych, so [each] eye on [a] page.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean half of that on each page twice? [They laugh.]

JANINE ANTONI: [Not that many] Twice.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Okay. More than 2,000.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. But I gave it that number because I wanted you to imagine—to feel your eyes blinking, you know. What would it mean to do it that many times? And my brother writes in the style of magic realism, and what he told me about Garcia Marquez—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is this Robert?

JANINE ANTONI: -- yes. Garcia Marquez says that he would—tell you something that was totally fantastic but tell you in exact detail and that that would create a level of believability. [. . .] And so I took that idea into the work to give [it a] kind of detail.

It's something that I tried to do with the work—I find it's interesting when you go and look at a label, you see the material, the date, the name of the artist, but there's no explanation of how something is made. And to me, how it's made is as important [to] the meaning of the work as what it's made of. And that goes deep into[our experiences as a] culture—that we are dealing with objects on a daily basis that we have no idea how they're made [or] who made them. [This fact] creates an alienating relationship to our world, and I think that that is at the root of our exploitation. If we knew the person who made it or what it took to make it,

we [might] not even [want] it, but we'd certainly use it differently.

[For example] when you wear a sweater that your grandmother knitted for you, it's a different experience.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: What I do with my work is give you that information either through the object or through the material list so that you have some kind of relationship and understanding of how it's been made.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And because you want the viewer to understand how it's made is the reason why you have long titles that incorporate the process so that no curator could decide not to—not to put it up, I guess.

JANINE ANTONI: Right. Well, I've had a lot of arguments about that. [For example can I] call my mother and father a material when the piece is a photograph. [. . .] The museum's way of labeling [is very rigid.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: So it's interesting how it's very hard to get people to veer from that format.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you did *Butterfly Kisses*, it was—it was a very different approach, since you're making actual pieces that are hung up and could be sold, and have that kind of immediacy that a drawing—compared it to a drawing has versus a painting or a sculpture which you've been doing. Yet—so I wanted to ask you what were the qualities of that experience that were things that you enjoyed and fed off of, and yet I don't think you've returned to that kind of process or that kind of end result again was a kind of a—maybe less dimensional in many ways than other pieces?

JANINE ANTONI: [. . .] It's interesting you bring up the dimensional [aspect.] I'm clearly—I feel like when people ask me what I am, I say I'm a sculptor even though I take photographs and [make] video, perform and installation. But I think as a sculptor even if I make a flat work. It's really about me putting my head to the page. [It is in the] action [that the] piece [lies].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Even though this piece was really arduous to make—all the blinks—in a way, it feels like a pause—

JANINE ANTONI: Right.

JUDITH RICHARDS: -- because of that one dimensionality of the piece.

JANINE ANTONI: Well, I don't know about the one dimensionality, but I definitely think of it as a drawing, [a] drawing of *Loving Care*. If one were to make—if one were to prepare themselves to mop the floor somehow—[laughs]—if we think about sculptor—it's really a sculptor's draw.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: You know, it's not a—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you use—when I thought about the blinking and I thought about going from the hair to the eyelashes rather than lipstick, you could have made a lot of kisses or—like, I don't know, ears. But they're not quite as evocative as eyes or mouths.

JANINE ANTONI: Well, I was—I called it *Butterfly Kisses*, and I thought—[about] a few things. One is that [it's] a really tender—I don't know if you know about butterfly kisses, but it's a really tender way of people communicating with each other and also kind of magical to think about. The movement of the eye as a butterfly wing is really nice.

And then there's of course this thing that's going on in the work at this point, which is all about women and beauty. I was interested in, [it as] a drawing made in this unconventional way. Drawing is another tradition, the tradition of women and beauty. [Just like both traditions are culturally defined.] If I look at these two traditions in a parallel way that I could call both of them into question. What are the assumptions that we take from our history and ways of making and what is aesthetically beautiful. What are the assumptions that women have been taught about their bodies?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you go consciously from the—or I should say what is the connection—I believe the next piece was *Slumber*, I think it's also '93. [Laughs.] Did—was there this obvious kind of connection between the eyes and sleeping between those two pieces?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. That came up in the process, but [it was] not as the impetus for [making] *Slumber*. [. . .] I thought, OK, if *Gnaw* is a piece about eating or turning eating into a sculptural process, now I would turn sleeping into a sculptural process.

And so then I went down the same road of thinking. [Asking myself,] what's the material of sleep. I wasn't satisfied with the bed. [I] decided that dreams were the material of sleep, [but I] got stuck because dreams are not material. [I] went to psychoanalysis, [then] to surrealism. [I] picked up a book on the physiological approach to sleep, opened it up, saw the polysomnograph, which is basically an EKG machine. Saw the lines that the eye was making on the page and then thought about butterfly kisses. The movement of the eye was making the mark on the page, but it was the closed eye which seemed interesting. [Art] is about seeing, but what does it mean to look inward [as] a way of knowing the self.

And that brought me straight to the unconscious and dreams—but keeping it in the physiological approach to the body, which seemed consistent with [the] approach that I had done thus far. So then it was just a matter of turning that whole [idea] into an artwork. It [was] so in line with so many thoughts that the other works had brought up [for me].

So I just followed my nose and I went to a neurophysiologist and I started to learn about this machine, what can it do, and spoke to him at length. And his philosophy about [sleep] really affected the work. He—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you remember his name?

JANINE ANTONI: Dr. Michael Thorpy.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Thorpy?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. And he was from the Sleep-Wake Disorder Clinic in Yonkers.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is it T-H-O-R-P-I-E?

JANINE ANTONI: Maybe. And he named his clinic the Sleep-Wake Disorder Clinic because he felt that you couldn't look at sleep in isolation. Just as we go through different stages of sleep in a night, so do we go through different stages of being awake in the day, and that those were interrelated. And in my piece, those are interrelated. What I sleep—what I dream at night and my marks [of my rapid eye movement], I weave in the day and then I get back in the bed—I guess we should explain this piece. [Laughs.]

So what I did is I took a loom, or I invented a loom, but basically, it's [based on] a basic loom, but it's expanded into the space of an entire room. So instead of the warp threads, just going across a small section, the warp threads go all the way across the room, they go up through a heddle that is connected to the ceiling, and then it connects to, I don't know, like 150, maybe more, spools that are on shelves. So it's almost like this—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Spools of regular cotton—

JANINE ANTONI: Of wool.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Wool.

JANINE ANTONI: Wool. It's almost like [the blanket] could [be continually made forever.] [. . .] So then [the yarn] went to the weaving apparatus. I constructed the weaving apparatus in such a way that the blanket came out onto the ground and up over a bed which was under all of these warp threads at the middle of the [room].

Then I got in the bed, I slept in the museum or the gallery. I hooked myself up to the machine, the polysomnograph. I recorded a night of my sleep. I get 1,500 pages of information. Then the neurophysiologist taught me how to look at those marks and know which sections are my dreams. [I] isolated those sections, photocopied them onto a grid and got onto the loom, used strips from my nightgown and drew—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Cut strips?

JANINE ANTONI: Cut strips, ripped strips and weaved them into the blanket. [. . .] [Then I] getting back in the bed to sleep with my dreams once again transformed into [the blanket]. So that piece I did for—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And how many nights did you sleep in each location?

JANINE ANTONI: Only one night because I got so much information and [weaving] takes a long time, so actually I would be out of material, out of nightgown material, before I had woven all my dreams from one night. So I only recorded on that one night, and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: But you remained in the museum weaving for subsequent—

JANINE ANTONI: Until my nightgown was consumed into the blanket, so that could take anywhere from two weeks to a month. So it's—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You were actually at each venue that long?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. So I spent a lot of time in the piece. The piece is a history of my time spent with it. It's over 200 feet long, it has something like seven [night gowns in it.]

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[In progress.]

JANINE ANTONI: So I just separated from the piece. I guess it's been a few years now, but that was a big decision.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And what did you do with the remains of the piece—the blanket?

JANINE ANTONI: It's all connected to the loom, with the spools and everything. So it still stays in a—in a state of potential. So there's still this idea that—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Dormant.

JANINE ANTONI: —it could go on forever.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you have any intention to begin again?

JANINE ANTONI: I don't think so, but anything could happen, I guess.

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] But that was a huge amount of time.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes—yes, it was. I think what happened to me is I was attracted to [the idea of] living the fairy tale. I realize it's very hard to live a fairy tale, but it was a comfort and kind of irritating to have to continue to return to this place in my creative process after I had evolved. And I felt at some point that the accumulation could hold the meaning of the work, and it didn't need me anymore.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And part of it was talking to the audience as you were weaving each day?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, I didn't know that that would be [so] important. I was just thinking that I didn't want to be objectified into the sculpture, and so I thought, if I talked to people, then they would have to deal with me as the artist making the work. But it's unusual to be in your work talking to your [viewers] as you're making it. And that was a revelation for me in terms of understanding the way—I told you, I'm obsessed with how my work is being read. So that was a real research project. And also, I went to so many different [places with the work]. So I got to see the cultural difference—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Both in Europe and the U.S.—beyond those two? [Inaudible.]

JANINE ANTONI: No. Let's see—Europe and the U.S. But—what was I going to say?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Talking about the audience.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, so—

JUDITH RICHARDS: The different interpretations or different kinds of experiences.



JANINE ANTONI: So one is—you know, I started in London, and I thought I was a storyteller, or at least explaining what I did, and was really thinking that every single culture has a story of a woman weaving and that I was just telling my version of that story. Well, the British love to strut their literary knowledge. So they started quoting Shakespeare and the "Lady of Shalott" and all those stories. I started to gather these stories.

And then I went to Zurich, and people were afraid to talk to me there. They were really shy. And I did a lecture, and all of these Jungians turned up, and they wanted to talk about archetypal symbols, [collective] unconscious. So that was really interesting to me. And then I went to Spain, and I was nervous that I didn't speak Spanish but also [because] the response I got in Zurich. So I installed the piece differently; I wanted people to feel comfortable. [But it] didn't matter in Spain. People were really warm and [they were] touching the piece, and we were communicating in sign language—and then I did it in Greece, which was great, [because of] the history of the loom and Penelope.

And then I did it three or four times in the United States. And they just wanted to know about the polysomnograph and [the] science, and what can [this machine] tell you about your dreams.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Interesting.

JANINE ANTONI: So [it] was interesting, to [witness] these different cultural readings. But more importantly was to [hear] the personal readings. And what I found is that it was a very kind of cozy setup there—the romance of the piece, and in this—I would light it very, like, dimly. So—you got [a] sleepy feeling when you [entered] the room. And people would really share with me. The dream they had the night before [sometimes.] Their fear of sleeping alone would come up. The last time I did it, a woman walked in, and she said, oh, you have a dreamcatcher above your bed, too. And I had never thought of all those warp threads as a dreamcatcher, but it was such a beautiful image.

So this was something for me to think about, because up until this point, I'm thinking of the work as—that I'm leaving clues, like the scene of a crime. I'm leaving clues for the viewer to put a story together. I realized that in order to do that, I have to have a sense of some kind of consistent reading. But what I realized is that our personal experience colors our reading of work more than anything else. And that's curious as an artist, because I can't really know your personal experience. And if I'm an artist that wants to connect to you and your everyday experience, that's really difficult. [It] changed the way I communicated after that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That—sorry—

JANINE ANTONI: Go ahead.

JUDITH RICHARDS: In the sense that it—

JANINE ANTONI: It opened me up a lot.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And did that lead to the piece involving your mother and father, which was '94? So that was—was that the piece after "*Slumber*?"

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, I think so. I don't know if I can trace it specifically to that piece. I think it took me a long time to absorb what I learned [with slumber]. I think I'm only starting to leave that openness in the work now and feeling confident. But we can think about that as we go through the works.

JUDITH RICHARDS: One little diversion—I meant to ask you when you were talking about first coming to New York in '89—we're only up to '94; this is just five years. Did you—did you have something—a work that you were doing to support yourself?

JANINE ANTONI: When I first got to New York, I—when you're a foreigner, you get something called a year of practical training. You actually get two years. And so—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean, in the process of getting a work permit or a green card or—

JANINE ANTONI: Well—Yes, if you're going to get a work permit, right. So I could work during that time. So I got a job at the drawing center, and—well, I got a show at the drawing center, and then they gave me a job. And that was really part of my art world education. One is that

I was partly in charge of the slide—they had a slide library.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Slide registry.

JANINE ANTONI: Registry. And that gallery was right across from American Fine Arts, which was the gallery—the hot gallery at the time. So I was kind of in the neighborhood, and I got to see how things work from the nonprofit to the commercial.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you were living on Broadway at that time?

JANINE ANTONI: And I was living in SoHo. So that was [how I came to] understand how this art world thing works, and just [observing]. And I, at that time, was showing at the nonprofits for a year or two.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Which spaces did you show?

JANINE ANTONI: I showed at Artist Space; I showed at the Drawing Center. I showed at Snug Harbor. I didn't show at White Columns.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And did we—I don't recall—besides *Wean*, what—you didn't show *Wean* in any of those places. What were you showing in those locations?

JANINE ANTONI: I showed a lipstick piece at—Connie Butler [showed me] at Artist Space, and I showed a lipstick piece in a show I was in together, I think, with Andrea Zittel and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: At the Drawing Center? No, I meant—

JANINE ANTONI: At Artist Space at the Drawing Center. Olivia Georgia was there [When] I came to New York. [I didn't] know where to begin, and the Drawing Center has a program, which I think they still have. The treat it maybe a little differently, but you could actually make an appointment and bring in your drawings. They would see everybody.

And so it was my only inroads to anything at that moment, because I had no idea how you did this whole thing. But I was like, "so someone will actually look at something." And so I decided to make some drawings. And I made these little drawings, and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: What were they made of?

JANINE ANTONI: They were made of paper. [They laugh.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: I guess I meant, what was—what did you draw with?

JANINE ANTONI: I didn't really draw on the paper. I used a needle, and I pricked holes in the paper many, many, many times. And as I did that, depending on what side of the paper I pricked, the paper started to create sculptural form—shapes that looked like shell-shapes, I showed these five little drawings. And one—I think I showed—yes, one drawing made with hair.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Hair on the surface or hair—

JANINE ANTONI: On the surface. So—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you still have those?

JANINE ANTONI: That—though—I have some of them—one sold to my teacher—[laughs]—and then I continued to make those hair drawings. So there are a couple of them out there. And they're just a loose leaf piece of paper, but the lines of the loose leaf are hair, and the one—when the hair comes [off] of the page, it kinds of—

JUDITH RICHARDS: It recoils—yes—

JANINE ANTONI: Curls off the page.

JUDITH RICHARDS: After you—you were only working. How long do you recall working at the Artist—I mean, at the Drawing Center?

JANINE ANTONI: Maybe it was a year? A little longer than a year? Because then my status ran out. And then I worked for artists—not sure if this was in the same time [period]—I worked a

little bit for Christian Marclay and a little bit for Roni Horn, both connections that Andrea passed on to me. So that—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Andrea Zittel?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, Andrea Zittel. [It] was important for me to see the way these two artists worked and how totally differently [their practices were]. What I understood from [the experience of working for artists] is that there is no one [specific] way to be an artist. I think it's such a myth when you're in school. [. . .] And it was important for me to understand that there was no way to do it, and that one could invent their way of being in the art world, but that [it] should reflect the work, because [I observed] that the way they went about it reflected the way they made their work. So that was a big freedom [and] I try to pass [this knowledge] onto [younger] artists.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. At what point did you start teaching?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, I didn't start teaching till much later, but I immediately got asked to lecture about my work, and I enjoy talking about my work. And so I did a lot of that from the very beginning.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And that was a useful source of income.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. I probably do that even now more than most artists I know. [It] always is a tremendous education in terms of going all over. In the early days, I did [a lot of visits to schools] in Europe, too, but I go all over the United States and I do lectures and I do studio visits. So I have a really good sense of—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Graduate students usually?

JANINE ANTONI: Graduate students—sometimes undergrads. [I learn about] what young artists are thinking, what they're looking at, what's important to them—that's been great [because it keeps me] limber, not stuck in my time in my education, [it] force me to articulate myself both what I'm doing, but also what I'm seeing. So that's been my continued ed. [Laughs.] [Later] I got a job working at Columbia [for about] 10 years I worked at Columbia—I went to—

JUDITH RICHARDS: When did that start?

JANINE ANTONI: 10 years ago—11 years ago, maybe.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

JANINE ANTONI: So I do really—or have been doing—

JUDITH RICHARDS: In the—in which department? Just visual arts, it's called?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, in the fine arts department. So I teach artists, photographers, painters, sculptors—video. But I do a really unique program there. [It is] called a mentor program, where they have a choice of 10 artists to choose from. They get to choose two of them; they work with those artists a week a semester—[we] see them four times in their time in graduate school, and we work all day, every day for a week, 9 to 5. [It is] more of a workshop model, which I'm really interested in.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you spend that time in their studio space?

JANINE ANTONI: No. I can do anything I want with them, and I really push that to the limit.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It sounds like they don't have much of a say.

JANINE ANTONI: So—well, they can choose me or not.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But if they choose you, they do what you say.

JANINE ANTONI: They do what I say, but I—first, I used to scare people off. [Later] I made sure they know what they're getting into when they choose me. [Laughs.] So I usually get the people who [are interested] in my particular flavor of torture. I have done so much creative exploring related to my work in those workshops. So that has been—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were you looking for something of that sort, or did someone bring you to it?

JANINE ANTONI: I had been asked to do studio visits at Columbia, periodically, and I had said to Jon Kessler, who was the head of the program at the time, that I was not interested anymore in this hit and run method. I was bored by the half-an-hour studio visit, I wasn't sure how helpful it was, and that I felt like I needed some—I needed a more evolved relationship to actually be able to help [the students]—I don't really like the model of [the visitors studio visit], you walk into a stranger's studio, and you have to say what you think, and then you walk away. The next day, you realize what you should have said.

So he developed this idea, which he could have artists that would be able to commit a week [instead of] one class a week for a whole semester [which makes it hard for artists that show a lot]. So the students stop all their other classes for that week and just attend this workshop, which worked really well for me.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you said they picked two. So they'll do a week with you and a week with somebody else.

JANINE ANTONI: With somebody like Mark Dion or—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Each year—[inaudible]—

JANINE ANTONI: Of a two-year program. And really, it was the idea that you taught your process, right? But that means something different to everybody.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Your creative process?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. So I developed a lot of ideas around—I'm really interested in what it means to nurture the creative process and I think it's the one thing you don't have in school. You're in this nurturing environment, and then you're pushed into the world without the skills—what does it take to keep it going? So that's basically what I [cultivate in my workshops.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you said you've been doing this for about 10 years?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, so it's—and so what I've done now is—I'm so interested in the workshop model—also because I'm very involved in dance now, and they use the workshop model a lot—I've been offering to do workshops rather than studio visits. So the schools that will let me—that's what I do, and that allows me to be creative and allows more people to interact with me and actually know what I'm about.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And is that usually also focused on the graduate level, or is it—could that be undergraduate?

JANINE ANTONI: Whatever they give me. I've never done—I mean—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Across the U.S. or also beyond?

JANINE ANTONI: I've done a few in London—I have a relationship there with [LADA and Adrian Heathfield]—it's brought me back to do workshops, but in a more performative setting than here.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What institution is that?

JANINE ANTONI: Well it's the—what is it called—[The Live] Art Development Agency, which is an institution that works with performance artists and finds sites around London to show performance, but also does workshops and other events.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Great. Is there anything else in that area, or should we move back to the work?

JANINE ANTONI: I think we might go back to teaching now and again. I could tell you about some of the workshops. I don't know if that's interesting.

JUDITH RICHARDS: We'll see—we'll get back to that.

JANINE ANTONI: Okay. See if it comes back.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Maybe when we get to the chronological time when you started.

In '94, you did the "*Mom and Dad*" [tryptic] of photographs, which was a departure, in many respects, from the previous work. How did that come into your mind to do that? How did the piece kind of develop?

JANINE ANTONI: I'm not sure how it came into my mind, but my parents are incredibly supportive, even though they have no background in art or [an] understanding of art. [Although] they're creative people. I think they would have been supportive in anything that I wanted to do with my life, and so in the early days, [I made] environmental sculptures—the whole family would come out to help me make them, and so they were always very involved in my ideas.

We also made, as a family, crafts, and we always had a big craft table in the house, and we were always making something together.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean like home decorations and costumes and—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, whatever it was. Costumes certainly, and we would make things for the church fair, like [at] Christmas—we made all our Christmas decorations. We covered the entire surface of the breakfast room with shells.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean the walls?

JANINE ANTONI: The walls, yes. We made things out of shells; [and other] things we collected on the beach. So yes, there's just—my mom did a lot of crafts [like] jewelry making. There was always some project going on. Making my art [is] just an extension of [our family projects], and everybody should help. [They laugh.]

[Even though my parents didn't understand my work] they were still supportive. And I wanted them to really know the work deeply and understand the ideas behind it and what was important to me. Of course, you can imagine that not only was this [work] radical for them, but [also] a bit disturbing. [. . .] You don't want to see your daughter on her hands and knees chewing on 600 pounds of chocolate. It's a difficult thing to understand. So I really wanted them to understand. So, I dragged them to every show that I could.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Every show—you mean of your work or museums and galleries?

JANINE ANTONI: Of any—of—they came to New York; they had to go to all the galleries. They had to go to museums. I tried to explain the work [we saw.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: They must be very knowledgeable by now, or comfortable.

JANINE ANTONI: Well, we've turned a—we've definitely turned a corner. I don't have to drag them anymore. They go and see shows without me; art is part of their life. My mother has even collected a few things, and she's always wanting me to advise her, and I refuse. But I'm very proud of the few little things she's collected. But they are collectors of other things besides art, so they—that's a whole other part of something artistic in the family. But anyway, I thought, very naively, that if I put them at the center of an artwork, that they would have to deal with the content. But the reason what I do is so disturbing to them is that my content is their baggage. Of course [the] things that I need to deal with on a psychological level are tied up with my family history and, things I'm sorting out for myself. So it was naïve, because I was somehow in that piece—[inaudible]—explain the piece. What I did is I—

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Affirmative.] This is a piece called "*Mom and Dad*," 1994.

JANINE ANTONI: It's called "*Mom and Dad*," and what I did is I—I wanted to imitate those photographs that you take on your anniversary—middle class, upper class portraits that are taken in a studio with a backdrop, and you commemorate whatever occasion by getting a photograph. Not that my parents had those around the house or anything. But I wanted to use—[refer to this] genre [of] portraiture. And so I had this idea that I would turn them into one another through the use of prosthetic makeup. And, I was thinking about gender and my work, and them as my models for understanding my identity and my sexual identity, specifically, and thinking about what kind of models they are. Was my father—did he represent masculinity for me? How did he fit within the range of that? And my mother, her

femininity. And then really looking at their relationship—what are their roles according to these stereotypes and so forth?

So, I thought it would be interesting for me to do the makeup. I knew I could hire a prosthetic makeup artist. They would have done a much better job than me. But I thought [of], again, the meaning of the making. And I thought, well, if I make them—if they made me, I could turn around and remake them. And that [the piece] would be—[an opportunity for us to] talk about all gender [roles].

So, I came home with the idea and [said], "No." [They laugh.] And so then I started to explain and explain, and I couldn't quite—I wasn't—I wasn't so convincing. But they're supportive parents. And then they're from Trinidad. They dress up for Carnival. And you dress up to make a political statement. Those—the bands in Carnival are—some of them are very much about what is happening in the culture. And the cross-dressing, all of that is somewhere in their [history]. I don't think that them dressing up was so strange within that context.

My dad was[worried about what it meant.] I came back from Sarah Lawrence as a feminist. I went to Rosarian to become a "finished lady"—[they laugh]—and it all kind of backfired. And so there was some of that there. So, he knew that there was—that there would be some reading in there about that, and he wasn't sure [if] I might be making fun of him.

But then the process was arduous and fun at times. You know, it was both. I came home with the dress; he put on the dress. We went downstairs; my brother was in the shower. He walked into the [bathroom]. My brother started screaming. Dad's in a dress; the dog started barking. And my dad is a real character and he was enjoying the theatrics of [it] all. [They laugh.]

My mom said yes right away because I think she understood the work to some degree. But then when I actually started to do the work—my dad is much older than her, and it wasn't that I was turning her into a man but that she was becoming—I was making her old and ugly. And she's a very beautiful woman. And I think that [for her] generation—[women's] beauty was really their identity. So, it was kind of stripping her of that. Then you can imagine being married to someone for 40 years and looking into their eyes [of your partner] and seeing yourself. That's a little disturbing. [Laughs.] And so I think it was difficult for them. [Also] it's a funny photograph [especially] to people who really know them.

So, we were practicing. It took me a year and a half to actually complete the work and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Because you couldn't spend much time on it or because you were changing your ideas?

JANINE ANTONI: [First] I had to learn to do the makeup. And then, the more I did the makeup, the more self-conscious they got and the worse the photographs were coming out. So, they're getting to look more like each other but they're not comfortable acting like each other.

I'd hired a photographer in New York and took them to a studio. They were uncomfortable with this stranger photographing them. They're uncomfortable with how they looked. So, then I decided to do it at home in their house. I got a friend of the family to photograph them. I got my brothers to come and make jokes and make it [playful]. And so then I finally got the kind of poses I needed out of them. In the meantime, I'm learning the process of prosthetic makeup. And I don't know much about the photography, so I'm trying to make the photographs better. It was a big learning curve.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was it—

JANINE ANTONI: And it takes about three or four hours each time because I have to put the makeup on and I have to take the makeup off and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you have a preconceived idea of the—how—what size it would be? Would they, in other words, try to be life-size, the photographs?

JANINE ANTONI: I tried to make them the size that one of those photographs would be.

JUDITH RICHARDS: "Those photographs" meaning?

JANINE ANTONI: Meaning those photographs—meaning when you go and get a—

JUDITH RICHARDS: But you could order any size. [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: That's true, you can order any size. But the one that you blow up and put on your wall—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Like, 20 x 24 kind of thing? [They laugh.] Grossly big?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, so thinking about that and thinking about the way that they're framed and all those sorts—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And did you—did you have any issue deciding what size of edition to make? I think you made six.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, in those days I just looked up what Cindy Sherman did and did whatever she did because I had no idea what it meant to make an edition. [They laugh.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] You were showing at Sandra Gering at that point still. Did she have any—was she useful to you in that respect?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, she was as inexperienced as I was. You know, we kind of grew up in the art world together, and so, we were—I was learning how things were done, and I would come back to her and say, OK, well, we need to make a press pack. [They laugh.] Things like that. I mean, it was really—we were really—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You learned from The Drawing Center and—

JANINE ANTONI: From all different places, you know. I was meeting people and there were many people who were very helpful to me in those early days, supportive, and gave me advice about pricing and about who I work with and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you recall who all those people were?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, some were—some were dealers and some were artists. So, Kiki Smith was enormously helpful and supportive of me in those days. I could go to her both about the work but also about, "This gallery tells me I have to give them this percentage, what is that?" Or, was treating me this way or that way. So, that was really great to have [an experienced] artist's [help].

And then in terms of things like pricing or just the way it's done, Jeffrey Deitch was very helpful. Chris D'Amelio was very helpful [as well]. Sadie Coles was very helpful. So, I could bounce information off of those people and see, like, what—[inaudible].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, that's great.

JANINE ANTONI: Because those are important decisions at the beginning. Who should buy things and for how much and, you know.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What about Paul? Did he have any?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, Paul came to his success after I [did]. So, I was pretty much the guinea pig for all of my friends.

JUDITH RICHARDS: No, I meant he might have advice even though he hadn't gone through it himself. [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, we were all, like, groping in the dark at that point. [They laugh.] He certainly gave—put his two cents in for all of those decisions he was part of, and incredibly supportive. But mostly in the making because we had developed [a strong] dialogue from graduate school and kept it going.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you—when you did the *Mom and Dad*, that was the beginning of doing some pieces with your mother. And that led, I suppose, somewhat directly to *Momme*, the M-O-M-M-E piece. Do you pronounce it "Mommy"?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. Yes, so—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And again a photograph.

JANINE ANTONI: Mmm hmm. [Affirmative.] It's a photograph that was—I love Vermeer. Probably my first revelatory experience with an artwork was Vermeer. I guess it's [the] light, I don't know. But I was thinking about all of those paintings from that period of women in domestic settings, and I wanted to imitate that in the photograph. And I wanted it to be familiar to you as a viewer. Like—"Oh, yes, I know that"—kind of image. And that that would allow you to accept it but also take it for granted. And it would take a while for you to realize that there's three feet coming out from under the dress, and then you start to look closely and find weird lumps and realize that hiding under her dress.

But there was a video made before I made *Momme*, which was the precursor. And it's not well-known, but it's how I got to making the photograph. Is that I think this piece was inspired by Vito Acconci, maybe—

JUDITH RICHARDS: What's it titled?

JANINE ANTONI: It's called *Ready or Not Here I Come*.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, yes—[inaudible].

JANINE ANTONI: And what I did is—I went home. My parents have a place in Miami. I went there, and I gave my dad a video camera and I said, "Can we play a game of hide-and-seek?" And I tell my mom about it. I had her all ready. I said to my dad, "So, there's some rules. You count to 10. You say, 'Ready or not, here I come.' You put your hand over the camera when you're counting, and then when you're done counting, you try to find me through the lens of the camera."

Then I had identified three or four places that I would hide in the house. And the last place I hid was under my mom's dress. So, I have to explain.

I would take my parents to the most radical shows that I could take them to so that what I did wouldn't be too much for them. So, in the spirit of that, I took them to see the show [that] Jeff Koons did with Cicciolina. And when they—

JUDITH RICHARDS: That was at Sonnabend Gallery.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. And when they saw that show, I remember my father saying to me, you know, "I don't care what you do but please don't be naked in a work." [Laughs.]

So, I thought that I was creating a setup for him that when I came out of my mom's dress I would be naked and that he would respond on camera and I'd get this great video. [They laugh.] And so we set up this whole thing. My mom [asked], "Can you wear a skin-colored body suit or something?" And I [replied], "No, [It is about his responses]."

[So we are filming and] he finally finds me there and I come out from under her dress. And he doesn't get upset at all. And I'm standing there and I'm like, "Well, this didn't work," and I kind of walk off into the closet.

And then we have a conversation—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did he film all this?

JANINE ANTONI: Mmm hmm. [Affirmative.] We have this conversation with him in the closet.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean he's outside the closet and you're in?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, and I'm in the closet. And he says, "Oh, that's really sweet. It's like you being born again."

And I said, "Yes, but did you get me naked?" And he said, "Oh, yes, just a little bit of you running away." And that's how the piece ends. [Laughs.] So—

JUDITH RICHARDS: So, you from behind.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. He turned the whole piece on me and he—it's a very beautiful, innocent response to seeing his daughter naked; it's no big deal. And [he] recalls the moment [of my



birth because he helped my uncle who was an OBGYN deliver me].

So, that piece [was called *Hide and Seek*].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you show it?

JANINE ANTONI: I showed it quite a few times. But then I realize this image *Momme* was the important thing. What was fascinating to me was that the whole naked thing [. . .], but me going under her dress was completely natural. That's weird. [They laugh.] But my mother—

JUDITH RICHARDS: No—it's a big dress.

JANINE ANTONI: [. . .] [Yes it is.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you're small, that's a common feeling of wanting to go under—

JANINE ANTONI: I know, yes, right, but as a grown-up you don't do that anymore.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: But it was like recalling something that seemed very natural to her. And we're very close. And so I guess it was that response that she had that made me want to make that piece and feeling that extreme connection to my mother. I make many pieces with her now, and really thinking about her in relationship to my feminism and that my mother is the epitome of a certain kind of femininity of her generation—grace and beauty and all those things, and, my push-pull in relationship to [those traditional ideas. To hide under the feminine]. I think all of that was behind wanting to make this piece.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mmm hmm. [Affirmative.] And there's quite a lot of—written about the Catholic symbolism and ideas and—[inaudible]—in many works. In this particular, it talks about a Madonna-like figure—your mother looking. Was that anything that you consciously brought to the work?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, I just gave her that as a [prompt]—as a performative image for her to have in mind. I said, "I want you to look out this window as if it's the enunciation." You know, as if it's that moment of knowing you have a child in you.

So, yes, those references are always there, especially in relationship to painting. It's interesting [and confusing] to have Mary as your deity for understanding the perfect symbol of femaleness. [I am] trying to understand [it] for myself. These qualities as [they were] taught to me as a young child as something to emulate.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mmm hmm. [Affirmative.] Did you—after you'd done both of those photographic works, you, I think, then went to *Swoon*—something that doesn't involve still photography. Was that a sense that you wanted to move on or, just, it didn't—the medium itself isn't really an issue; it's the ideas that are driving each work and what—how they should be made.

JANINE ANTONI: The thing I remember about *Swoon* was that people were really freaked out that I wasn't in it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, that's 1997, so this is the first—the first piece—well, the first piece where you weren't in it in any way. Other pieces of course you weren't there visually.

JANINE ANTONI: Right, so I—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And was that—and did—was that conscious?

JANINE ANTONI: I didn't even realize I wasn't in it until people noticed that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] Really?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, I was just making my work. And it was all about me and my experience, so I didn't really make those distinctions for myself.

What I was thinking about with *Swoon* is I [took] ballet [lessons] from four years old—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mentioned that.

JANINE ANTONI: And my mother said to me that she didn't want me to be a ballerina but that she wanted me to be graceful. So, I was interested in how grace defined me as a woman or was a desirable quality. And when I first came to New York, I remember that my mother brought me to the ballet. I don't remember what ballet it was. But we had seats in the front row, and I remember that there was a tiny little slit between the end of the curtain and the stage, and I could see the dancers [warming up] before the performance. And I don't remember the performance at all. I just remember—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Because that was so interesting.

JANINE ANTONI: I remember the anticipation of that moment. So, *Swoon* is all about that. And I guess it relates to some way in which I use absence in my work and desire.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Why don't you start by—

JANINE ANTONI: Explaining the work.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, visually.

JANINE ANTONI: So, basically what I did is I got a residency at Capp Street. I worked with Mary Ceruti, who's at the SculptureCenter now. She helped me make that piece. And we found two dancers from a dance company, Lines—

JUDITH RICHARDS: A dance company called Lines?

JANINE ANTONI: Lines, yes. We went to their rehearsals. I found my two dancers there and asked them if they would dance a pas de deux—the famous pas de deux from *Swan Lake*. What I did is we recorded that dance. Then I put a real curtain in front of the video. It was—they were projected life-size. So, I put a real curtain—red velvet, scalloped curtain—in front of the dancers so that you could only see the dance from the thighs down.

Then I lit it very strongly so that it created a shadow—so I created a shadow on the ground so you could imagine what was happening above the curtain, even though you couldn't see it, by looking at the shadow on the floor. Then, directly across from the video, projected video, I put a mirror. Same scale as the video and the curtain. So it flattened the dimension between the curtain and the video, so it was easier to see in the image in the mirror. But when you turned around to look at the image in the mirror, your [body] kept getting in the way of the image. So, you start to do an unconscious dance with the dancers.

I should say that—well, first of all, I should say that I choreographed the dance by—I'm not a choreographer, so I got all the documentation of various *Swan Lakes* I could [get my hands on]. And then I looked at those videos and I edited sections by putting a towel over the TV to see what would happen from the thighs down. I edited those sections together to create my own pas de deux that would be tantalizing in terms of not seeing the top half; the dips where she almost falls in [to view]. Lifts where she disappears [above the curtains]. [ . . . ]

Then, instead of using the music, Tchaikovsky's music, what I did is I miked their breath and their feet. I wanted to—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Their feet hitting the floor.

JANINE ANTONI: Hitting the floor. So, I wanted to take the opposite of what you have with ballet, which is [the illusion of] weightlessness—the idea of the toe shoe is about being weightless—and [one would] certainly not [show] the body straining. It should look effortless. They do the dance, but before you even enter the space, you enter something that looks like you're backstage, and you can only hear the sound. And when you hear the sound of [them breathing deeply] and their feet [pounding], it's very strange. You don't know—it kind of sounds like someone might be having sex behind there. She, [the] ballerina, would instruct her partner through her breath and sometimes with words, so there's a kind of weird whispering—counting and stuff like that. Using the breath to say "Lift, lift," things like that.

And then you go around [a wall] and you [witness the video curtain], and then you [can] go literally behind the video, the screen. And when you go back there, you—[It is like] that scene in *The Wizard of Oz* where you see all the equipment [to create the illusion of Oz]. So,

you see all the equipment, and I use this technique where you—when you don't have enough throw to make such a big image, you bounce it off a mirror. So, you get in there and [there is nowhere to stand except] in the way of the projection. Now your shadow is mingling with the shadow of the dancers, so the people on the other side [of the screen] are seeing these other bodies in—sandwiched into the dance.

The thing about the [*Swoon*] is you never know whether you're onstage, in the audience or behind stage. It keeps flipping on you. Your perspective and your reading of the work keeps changing according to where you are.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mmm hmm. [Affirmative.] And I know you showed this after Capp Street. You showed it at the Whitney. What was the—what was the audience response? Did you spend some time watching it?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, it was compressed in the space of the Whitney and it was a much better piece compressed, I think. The Capp Street space was really huge. It was very favorably received at the Whitney.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That was the first time you had used video in your piece?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did—was that a whole process of learning?

JANINE ANTONI: [It] was terrible. I hate video. And I keep doing it. I hate it because it's expensive and it's confusing because anything can look beautiful if you spend enough money on it. And that's very disturbing to me.

So, I—every time I make a video, I say "Never again." And somehow I find myself back there. I mean, it's the easy answer for me because of the performative aspect [of my work].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

Okay, I think we'll end here for today and resume in about 1998 next time.

JANINE ANTONI: Thank you.

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JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Janine Antoni in her studio in Brooklyn on December 19th, 2012, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc three.

When we left off last time, I think we were at about 1998. We had just finished speaking about *Swoon* and related pieces, which was from '97. But in 1998 you received the MacArthur fellowship. And I wanted to ask you how that has—did and has impacted your work as an artist and your life in any other way.

JANINE ANTONI: Right. Well, it was amazing. I didn't even know what the MacArthur was when I received it. And—

JUDITH RICHARDS: That's refreshing.

JANINE ANTONI: It's—Yes, it [was]—such an honor and such a well thought-out grant in terms of support. They not only give you support over five years, so you get the money incrementally; they also give you health—your family health insurance. So it's really as if you have a job but you don't have to work.

JUDITH RICHARDS: For five years?

JANINE ANTONI: So that was huge—gave me just a huge space to—for my creativity but also not have to worry about [money to live on and cost of making work].

And actually, at the beginning I [used] the money [to bring] my studio up to speed. The logistics of my studio. I hired someone to come in and organize everything and set up a system, which I'm still following today. [She organized my] archiving and [did] a tremendous amount of work [creating systems].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. So someone came in and set it up and also were [hands on ?].

JANINE ANTONI: Right. Both physically and on the computer.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is that in a database?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. Some of it is on a database. [It] was enormously helpful. [It streamlined the way I work]. So that was a big deal.

I [also used the money] to make work. And *To Draw a Line* was—I used a big chunk of my MacArthur to make that piece, which was by far the most ambitious work I've made [to this day], so ambitious that it scared me off. [Chuckles.] I haven't made anything that big and complex since.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did the notoriety—that's not the right word—[chuckles]—the recognition—the public recognition affect you, positively or negatively?

JANINE ANTONI: [. . .]. It's the first thing that's announced to this day when I do a lecture, so I think it means something to people. I don't know [how] to [feel about it]. I mean, it's an honor, but there are many other artists that could have gotten it—

JUDITH RICHARDS: It didn't go to your head, obviously.

JANINE ANTONI: —instead of me, you know what I mean? So I just feel very fortunate and lucky that they for whatever reason chose me in.

I was in the last year [that] they give you [an] amount of money according to your age. I think I might have been the youngest to get it that year. And then they changed it, and now everybody gets the same amount.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Why do you suppose that is?

JANINE ANTONI: I don't know. I think at that time they thought about seniority, which makes sense to me. You've worked a long time. Maybe also the scale of your projects and things like that.

I know that there are some people who did actually get criticism for getting it because they were so young. I mean, awards are funny things. At least it's not [about] competitive; you just get a call one day. Now I'm in the grant application world, so a lot of people are competing against each other for money to do projects. I think that's very difficult because it's not always fair who ends up getting the money and why—but yes, all I can say is that it afforded me so much freedom to be able to focus on [my] work, which is the biggest gift you could ever get.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were there other—were there new meaningful relationships that you developed with fellow grantees from that year or any other kind of—

JANINE ANTONI: I didn't, and that was my own fault. I just didn't even think to partake in all of that, and I should have. That's something I regret. But I guess there were these—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You can always do that—

JANINE ANTONI: —weekends and stuff—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh.

JANINE ANTONI: —that I could have participated in.

JUDITH RICHARDS: There were socializing opportunities.

JANINE ANTONI: There were socializing opportunities. But I guess I was so focused on my work at that time that I didn't—I wasn't thinking that way because I'm sure there's pretty phenomenal people to meet—and from other fields, which is kind of exciting.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you've mentioned working on *To Draw a Line*, but there were pieces that you completed before that. Seems like right around the time you got the grant, you did a couple of photographic works. We can look at those briefly. *Ingrown* is one, which is kind of

different than the other pieces in some ways.

JANINE ANTONI: So I guess the big thing that happened in my life—and that was right before I got the MacArthur—is that I found out I had breast cancer. So maybe that's why I didn't go on—do any socializing because I was trying to get better. I only made *Ingrown* in the year of my treatment, and [ . . . ] I had lymph node involvements, so I had some really hard-core chemo and radiation. I basically—my next art project was to get well and to heal. And that was a huge turn in my life, in terms of the way I approach my work, my career, because I had—I don't have breast cancer—[ . . . ] in the family. I don't have the gene.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And yet you got it so young.

JANINE ANTONI: And I live a pretty healthy life. I can't think of any toxic materials that I've worked with. Even though we don't have a reason for these things, one tries to find one for themselves because you want to be able to actively participate in your healing. And, it was right after [I experienced] such extreme pressure [in] my career.

And so as with most of these huge life experiences, you come away with a kind of perspective that you didn't have before, so [it] put things into perspective for me, especially in relationship to the kind of pressure I put on myself to make work. And then, [I] just started to value [my] friends and [my] family [in a new way]. I was so obsessed [with] the work—[chuckles] to the detriment of other parts of my life. I became really interested in health and nutrition. I got interested in yoga. What I realized is the only thing I had [to pinpoint] was [my] stress, and I wanted to learn different methods of dealing with that stress. So I learned to meditate.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Through the medical treatments, were you cured?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, it's been [a long time]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Bravo.

JANINE ANTONI: —I don't know how many years now.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Ten—more.

JANINE ANTONI: [14 years.]

Yes, I mean, after doing the medical route. I went Sloan-Kettering and then I started to look into more alternative ways of approaching my health. So I decided that I wanted to deal with my mortality, and I started to look for ways to do that. And I couldn't find anyone to really talk to me about [it] in a very direct way until I discovered Buddhism. I became really involved in [Buddhism], and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Any particular kind of Buddhism?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, you know, coming from Trinidad, my background being Trinidadian, I have syncretism in my blood—[chuckles]—where—I think that's also the artist way where I cobble together an approach, so I actually tried all different forms of meditation and still am exploring different approaches. But at the beginning I [start with the] Tibetan approach of Shambhala and [later came] Vipassana and Metta, which come from Burma, [at] a place called Insight Meditation.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Insight?

JANINE ANTONI: Insight. And so I started to do silent retreats—you know, 10 days.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is that a typical length of time?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, I think—well, at least at Insight it was. And so I met some really important teachers.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Where is that?

JANINE ANTONI: That is in Barre, Massachusetts, but there is also a New York Insight.

So I had some pretty amazing meditation teachers that have been touchstones for me since

then. They were willing to talk to me about my mortality.

And, you know, I've had a lot of time—I mean, I think I've been obsessed with death with a child—since I was a child, and I had an unusual childhood because I was—my parents didn't hide those things from me, so—both my grandparents died in front me.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean in your home?

JANINE ANTONI: In our home. We slept around them for the last days of—their life. And, I guess it's a cultural thing, we bring the body home, and it's in the living room; we don't have a wake somewhere else. So all of that [was] integrated at a very early age, which I feel very fortunate to have had.

I think there is so much more to say about [this approach], but I think that it changed my work, what my work is about, what my interests are about. I don't know if you can see it in the work, but that early work was much more—there was a critique of the culture. And I don't think [it] is gone, but it's not the first thing you come to in the work. It's much more about relationships. And then there is all the family work.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And relating to time and balance and—

JANINE ANTONI: Right. All those things. So thank you for that.

I took a year off from working, and I just worked on the decisions I had to make about my health and learning about nutrition. But I decided to do one easy piece, which was *Ingrown*. And, you know, *Ingrown* in the—if you look at it in relationship to my work, you have these manicured nails, and there is the whole beauty thing. But for what I was going through [at the time] I was thinking of *Ingrown* as [about] when the body attacks itself, and that's kind of like what cancer [does]. And, the piece feels like entrapment, I guess I should [explain]. What I did is I—[chuckles]—manicured my nails together, from pinky to pinky or across each finger.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You couldn't have done that yourself.

JANINE ANTONI: Right. What I did is I found somebody who, does nails—fake nails. [She] put fake nails between my nails and then made it seamless. And I thought I was—I thought this as a simple piece. It's not a big sculpture, something I could feasibly do while being sick. And [she] came over and did it. And I had it perfectly timed; when [she] finished, the photographer would come and take the photo, and then we'd cut them apart, and that would be it.

I got the nails perfectly done. The photographer came, and when he arrived, he said, "I forgot a particular piece of equipment that I can't take the photograph without. I have to go back to Brooklyn." And I don't know what I was thinking, but I didn't have anyone with me at the time. So they left me with my nails manicured together in the house, and—to go back to Brooklyn—and then I realized, if there is a fire, I can't even open the door, I can't go to the bathroom—[chuckles]—[so for me this is] what the piece was about—being entrapped by oneself, I literally had the chance to experience [it].

[. . .] You can see I have no hair. It's almost like it's been photoshopped. But [it's] because I lost all my hair [when I was on chemo.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, I didn't—I missed that.

JANINE ANTONI: [. . .]. And it's kind of a creepy picture, but not really the kind of creepy I usually go for.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Right.

JANINE ANTONI: [Then I made *And* out of limestone.] I made half before I got sick and half after I got sick. So that piece bookends that experience. I started the first half when I lived with the Shakers.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It was—that was a few years—a little earlier. '96?

JANINE ANTONI: Right. Yes. So I did it in Maine at Sabbathday Lake, where I got to live with the seven last Shakers. Shouldn't say last. There were only seven Shakers at the time. And

then I left it there with them. And after treatment, I was asked to teach at Skowhegan. And then—which is—Skowhegan is not so far from Sabbathday, so I drove and got my two stones and brought them to Skowhegan. And—

JUDITH RICHARDS: These are 800-pound limestone?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. I think—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Boulders.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. I think they're 500 pounds, but I can't be sure.

And I finished—what I did is I stacked them [on top of each other]—we didn't talk about this.

JUDITH RICHARDS: No.

JANINE ANTONI: So I stacked the two stones on top of each other with a pole coming up through the center, and then I put another pole coming out from the top on.

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is a steel rod—[inaudible].

JANINE ANTONI: Steel rod. Yes. I got the idea for the piece in Delphi, where I saw these walls that were—the stones were honeycomb shape, and there was no mortar between the stones. And I turn to my friend and said, "how did they do that?" And she said they ground the two forms into one another and—till it was airtight. And so I thought, "I want to make that happen." It seemed really beautiful to have two forms sculpting each other simultaneously. [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Does that seem like it relates to any of your other past work in any way? I can't think of it.

JANINE ANTONI: It related to *Mom and Dad* on the one side and *Mortar and Pestle* on the other, and we can talk about that. But, you know, with *Mom and Dad*, [there are] two forms and me trying to bring them together and the piece exists in the awkwardness of [the attempt]. And with these two stones, I thought the two would marry, like these stones that I saw in Delphi because I was thinking, "this will be my Brancusi's *Kiss*." And limestone is not an even stone—in its makeup, so there are hard parts and soft parts. So as I'm walking five hours a day, [and]the space between the stones is getting bigger and more articulated [rather than becoming one].

JUDITH RICHARDS: The opposite of—

JANINE ANTONI: The opposite. And then I thought, "that's really beautiful," to think of a relationship not as we're going to meld together and be one, which was my ideal, but that we're sculpting the space between us.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I know you started the work before your illness. But it seems afterward, this five hours, it's a kind of healing exercise or strengthening exercise.

JANINE ANTONI: Well, it's a meditation. [Chuckles.] So—I was learning. Yes. To be more aware. The work has always been repetitive, and there has always been this meditative aspect. But then I started to approach it more directly. And I have to say that making that piece, I was happier than I have ever been in my life.

And Daniel Bozhkov, a good friend who teaches—

JUDITH RICHARDS: How do you spell his last name? [Chuckles.]

JANINE ANTONI: Oh, my goodness. I have to look up for you.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, okay. [Daniel] Bozhkov.

JANINE ANTONI: Bozhkov. He taught fresco at Skowhegan, and we both stayed after [the program was open,] and I finished the rock. And we were both in the upper field, this big, beautiful field, and he was doing a watercolor of about a square foot of this field—an exact replica. And we were there all day talking about art, love and spirituality. And it was really a lovely time we spent there together.

The piece is called *And* because I was trying to name that space between the two rocks.

So then [when] did I make *Mortar and Pestle*?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, they're both '99. I don't know which came first.

JANINE ANTONI: *Mortar and Pestle*, is [a] startling—[an] image of me licking my husband's eye. It was shot [with a] 8 by 10 camera.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Open eye.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, his eyeball. It has incredible detail, and it's so close up. It's blown up so big. I thought I was making this really tender photo of me and my husband. And of course, the eye is very vulnerable, so for him to let me lick his eyes, an act of trust, and—but it really disturbs people. People have phobias around their eyes. I noticed. And I was thinking about—it was kind of inspired of the idea that I [wanted to] taste his vision. You can't taste another person's vision, but the idea of wanting to know the taste of someone's vision was interesting to [I was thinking]—when you look into the eyes of someone you love, you wonder what are they seeing. And you can never know. So it's a way of trying [to have] that kind of intimacy—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean, learning through your mouth—the earlier works—

JANINE ANTONI: Well, certainly [the way] babies put things in their mouth in order to know them. That's where the idea comes from, but knowing that it's impossible. And that's the root of all the work. [The] desire for connection but knowing there is always [a] gap.

My illness was an extreme case of understanding that because—when you're sick, you [are alone no matter how much] much love and empathy [you get], and yet no one [can take another's pain away], not even your mother. My mother would have liked to take away [my] pain or the sickness. [If she could.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: You know that as a mother.

JANINE ANTONI: And you can't. [My] the work comes from a kind of loneliness that I feel. Being sick pushed me to that edge of understanding [how alone I am].

And [the] good thing about [the experience] was that I realized that I could count on myself. [It is] a really important thing to know as I go on in life.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You had—when you talked about your childhood, it sounded like you had that understanding when you were very young, with all your independent explorations, all the things you did on your own where you obviously trusted yourself—

JANINE ANTONI: I guess. But I—

JUDITH RICHARDS: —to be very capable.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. I got that kind of imaginative time to be alone. I have one of the most supportive families in the world, and I've also been really privileged supported on all levels. And being sick was probably the first real trial [in my life]. And I survived it. [It] was important on [many] levels.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mmm hmm. When I think of the photograph *Coddle*, which was also that year—I'm not it went before or after—and in *Mortar and Pestle*—but it really—

JANINE ANTONI: *Coddle* has a story too related to my sickness because I made that photograph before I got sick.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Describe that.

JANINE ANTONI: It's a photograph, [a] very simple photograph of me holding my own leg, but it's lit in such a way that the leg looks disembodied. It actually came from yoga. The teacher said, "cradle your leg," and [thought], "what?" And so I loved it as an act of self-love, right, to cradle your leg. And then I was trying to make this image of virgin and child coming from Renaissance painting. So that was all there. I made the photo and I showed it to a few friends and Paul, and they [did not get it], "this is nothing." [. . .] And I said, "OK, whatever." I



shoved it—

JUDITH RICHARDS: So this was way before '99.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. So I shoved it under something. [Chuckles.] Didn't think about it.

And then I got cancer. The doctor said, "it's doubtful that you'll be able to have a kid," right, because most—I was just under the age [where] you go into spontaneous menopause from taking the chemo. So I was freaking out because I always assumed I would have a kid, and so I pulled that photo back out to look at it. And all of a sudden, the photo had a new meaning [for] me. Amy Cappellazzo told me about this book by Jeanette Winterson called *Written on the Body*. And the first line of that book says, "why is the measure of love loss?" And I realized it wasn't the Madonna and child but it was the pieta. The photo was really about the fact that there was no baby there, it was about something missing.

So here I am, facing the fact that I probably won't be able to have a baby. And I'm asking myself, why is it important for me to have a baby? One could adopt, and that's a such beautiful thing to do [for] the world, but, I'm a sculptor, I'm interested in the body, so the whole idea of having that experience seemed incredible to me, just even from a sculptural standpoint to think that you take something from the inside and put it on the outside in order to look at you. I think that describes my work [perfectly]. Of course, now I have a child, and she has nothing to do with me. [Chuckles.] It's not exactly the sculptural exercise I thought I was going to go through. [Chuckles.] But this whole idea of, self-love, which, you know, is really important when you're sick, but being of age where one should have a child and maybe not being able to. So then all of sudden, , this photo is actually interesting [to me].

But I had no hair, and I couldn't be a very good Madonna without my hair. And photo wasn't quite right for me. I tried to re-photograph it with a wig. I tried to re-photograph it as a Pampers ad, you know—

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you—when you re-photograph, when you photograph the *Ingrown*, is there one person who does the photography for you? Or do you set up a camera yourself and use an extension?

JANINE ANTONI: Both. I mean, I was at first using an extension [so I could] hit the shutter [myself but that] seemed ridiculous. What's the difference with *Momme* [I actually] tried to hit the shutter underneath the dress. I was a really crazy contortion for some notion that I'm taking the photo. Of course, I'm not a photographer, so none of the photographs are very good, but—[chuckles]—I have hired people to help me who are photographers. *Mortar and Pestle* [and] *Mom and Dad* [were] photographed by somebody else. But, of course, I'm framing it [in the lens].

JUDITH RICHARDS: So was—so was *Coddle* photographed by someone else?

JANINE ANTONI: So *Coddle* was photographed by a friend who probably doesn't want me to say who she is because she's an artist.

So what happened is out of the window of *Coddle* was the Manhattan skyline, which didn't look very much like a Renaissance painting. [Chuckles.] So I wanted to reshoot the piece, and I could never get the light that was on my leg like that early photograph. So that was the first time in my life that I actually photoshopped [an image] because I was, like, really old school, [adhering to] some notion of truth, which no young artist would ever dream of anymore. [Chuckles.] So yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So what did you photoshop?

JANINE ANTONI: I photoshopped out the skyline, so it's just—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And what did you do about the hair? I'm—

JANINE ANTONI: Oh. So I used the [first] photo, so it wasn't an issue. So that's funny how a piece can seem not important at one moment and then important again at another. I guess just like history, some artworks [have different importance when seen through the lens of the time]..

JUDITH RICHARDS: True. Some artist's work—I mean, the whole body work.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. Scary. [Chuckles.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

When—after you did *And*, I mean, there is—even though you had just gotten well, I guess, '99, you did a lot of—there's a lot of work dated '99. A and the next big project is called *Cradle*, which also has the date 1999 on it, which is a complicated piece. Can you describe that, talk about where it came from?

JANINE ANTONI: So yes, what I—yes, I kind of think of—oh—yes, I think of *Coddle* and *Cradle* as the same work. You'll [notice this] in my work. I will take on a theme and work it [with it in] sculpture or video or photography. I change the medium but keep the thematic aspect.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And do they—does it always start in one medium and go to another, or does that vary? What—I mean, does it always start as a photograph and go to—

JANINE ANTONI: No.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It could—okay.

JANINE ANTONI: But I'm very interested in installing the work, where I put *Saddle* with *Mommy* or even *Mom and Dad* next to *And* or *Mortar and Pestle*, all about these objects coming together, or resisting each other. [Laughs.] With *Coddle*, I'm holding myself. I gave myself the starting point that I want to make a sculpture that's holding itself. So I went out and I found a big shovel from a construction tractor. I got [it] cut in half and [then] melted down. And then—

JUDITH RICHARDS: That's here in Brooklyn—based in Brooklyn when you're doing this?

JANINE ANTONI: I'm in Brooklyn, yes. And so then what I did is I followed those kind of scoops through the culture. I found an agricultural bucket, an excavator, a snow shovel, a fireplace shovel—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Garden shovel.

JANINE ANTONI: A garden shovel, thank you. [They laugh.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Fireplace—yes.

JANINE ANTONI: So it was then a snow shovel, garden shovel, fireplace shovel, serving spoon, soup spoon, and then this baby spoon, which is a loop spoon. And so all of those objects were cast from the metal of half of that bucket. So if you imagine melting it down and putting all of it inside, [is actually] holding itself.

MS. RIGHARDS: It's also treated—some kind of even surface. What is that?

JANINE ANTONI: That's just from the casting—from the melting down and the casting process. It's like those Russian dolls, they're all holding each other. And to me, it goes all the way back to *Wean* because I end with the loop spoon. [Which is] the first spoon you give a child when it's learning to feed itself, so back to the separation from the mother, but also this idea of never losing the need to be held. So that's where that piece came from. And I was very excited to make such a heavy-duty steel work and call it *Cradle*.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And when you exhibited that piece, you exhibited a number of different works—I mean at Lühring Augustine. I think *Mortar and Pestle* was in that show.

JANINE ANTONI: So *Mortar and Pestle* and, which I thought as companion pieces, and *Coddle* and *Cradle*. That's—was the show.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Over that period of time—just want to ask you about the gallery for a second, make a slight detour. After you showed at Sandra Gehring in '92 and '94, what was the transition to be represented by Lühring Augustine?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, I left Sandra—[laughs]—because she was going in a direction that was not conducive for my work—for the context of my work. And I represented myself for three

years, with [my] assistant, Michael Joseph. It was just as I got recognition, so the two of us went on the road. And I did a survey show. I didn't have that much work at the time, but I did a survey show that traveled, and there was a lot of interest in my work, so we traveled the work basically for those three years. I learned a lot about what it takes to tend [to] a career—[laughs]—and the kind of things that I wanted from a gallery, having done it all myself.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Were you being approached by galleries?

JANINE ANTONI: I was approached by a lot of galleries during that time. But I really wanted to find the right fit for the work. I was really concerned that the work—yes, being in the right context.

JUDITH RICHARDS: The right fit—context of the other artists showing in the gallery?

JANINE ANTONI: I realized from [the] early part of my career that when you work with people, you're taking on their history, just as they are taking on yours, and you build each other together. And my work was very sensational, and I attracted people who liked the work for the reasons I made the work and people who were just kind of attracted to the kind of strangeness and eccentric quality and the spectacle. And I had to make sure I found somebody who was liking the work for—I mean—a lot of people came to me for interests that weren't necessarily mine, and it took a while for me to understand the difference.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was there anybody who helped guide you through that process of listening, rejecting, looking, until you finally decided on the dealer you thought was the right —

JANINE ANTONI: No, I think I made a lot of mistakes. As an artist, you just want people to be excited about your work, and you're kind of vulnerable at that stage. You want to believe

everybody's excited for the right reasons. [Laughs.] I learned from experience how to distinguish those things, and just understanding that your—that the galleries—is even the best of galleries—they have different goals than you have as an artist, and you always have to keep that in mind. And it's not like those goals don't overlap. Parts of those goals overlap, but then, there are other things that are—is not your gallery's concern; maybe it even shouldn't be, though you might wish it was. [Laughs.] And you have to stand your ground with those things.

So I was introduced to Lawrence and Roland, and we worked together for a while before I decided to go with them. And—

JUDITH RICHARDS: What do you mean by working together?

JANINE ANTONI: I showed with them, gave them stuff to sell just to see how they worked. And I liked [the] artists that they represented, and I felt like I had an opportunity to be in galleries that supported mostly woman artists, but I felt like for the bigger project of woman artists in the world—[laughs]—I thought for us to kind of ghettoize ourselves into one gallery was not good and that [the] collectors [that support women] would find me regardless. And Luhring-Augustine had a very international program, and their artists—I respected all their artists, even if it wasn't my thing.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mmm hmm. Did you—have you usually worked on the—in terms of having shows, on the basis that you—when you feel you're ready to plan a show, you go and talk to them about planning a show, or do they have this sort of ongoing—do you have a sense that they want you to have a show more frequently or sooner than you're ready, and—

JANINE ANTONI: Well, it's a joke that I'm so slow, and of course they would love [me] to produce more. And I tried to produce more at the beginning, and I felt that the level of my work didn't [hold up. My] creativity, needs a certain gestation period. I now understand [this]. And that's hard because the demand has been so extreme. I still have—[inaudible]—[laughs] to resist[the demand]. So there is a notion that you should show in New York every couple of years, and I stretch that as long as I can—[laughs]—because also, I have—you know, we're talking about the work that's more object-oriented, but I have another side to my work, which is more to do with site specificity and working with different cultures, [also I] the teaching, which—which is very artistic and creative for me. So there's activities going on that—aren't quite objects [making] that nourishing my creative process. They feed into the objects. [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, all those things are competing, in a sense, with your time in the studio to produce work that'll lead to having a show.

JANINE ANTONI: Right, exactly. I've [been in] biennials and [other group shows] that are happening in between [the solo] shows. So it's not like you finish one show and you start working on the next [one].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, yes. When you do have a show, are you involved in writing the press release or—

JANINE ANTONI: Every tiny little aspect of everything. I don't think I've ever had, certainly for a solo show, a press release written for me. In fact, I usually have a fight when—[they laugh]—people want to edit my press releases. For me, articulating the work is part of making the work. I'm very involved in trying to refine the way the work is talked about. You've read—probably read more than anybody has of the things written [about me], and you've probably noticed that there is a repetition going on, and that's because I'm so proactive in terms of [what is written]—I realized at a very early age that critics are happy to—if they agree with you, to repeat things that you say verbatim, and as much as I respect a lot of critics, there's no way that they could spend the time thinking about the work that I have and articulating it. So—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mmm hmm. So even when you're working with museums, you ask that they show you the written material.

JANINE ANTONI: I mean, I've given up, because of the Internet, but I review everything that I can get my hands on that's going out with my name on it, to the point where I don't release images unless I can fact-check, I can't tell a critic what to think—[they laugh]—about the work, but I can make sure that they're not representing the work wrong. And when it's represented wrong, that repeats itself endlessly.

JUDITH RICHARDS: True.

JANINE ANTONI: I've made myself crazy trying to control [what is said], which I don't know if it's wise, but—

JUDITH RICHARDS: In terms also of control, have you—[they laugh]—when you've had exhibitions at the gallery and had things available for sale besides multiple prints, are the restrictions you put on the sale of the work in terms of installation instructions, restrictions in terms of loan exhibitions that—thematic exhibitions that you want to choose whether or not to participate in, restrictions on resale, any—

JANINE ANTONI: Well, yes, I have—over there I can show you binders and binders of the most excruciatingly long, detailed descriptions of installation and just basically [how to take] care of what the work because if [I'm] working in ephemeral materials.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, this is the—so that's the whole—besides installation, the care of the work when it's in the possession of—yes.

JANINE ANTONI: The care of the work, and then you have a work that can be installed in a big room or a little room, and how does the work change [to accommodate] all those things. It's a whole job in itself trying to maintain. I mean, I make a piece, and oftentimes I will—making the way the piece is created. [It can] take as long as making the piece. And I don't always work with packing companies to do that, sometimes they do part of it and I do the other part of it. [For example my work made with] rawhide, which changes shape with the seasons—[they laugh]—there are things that one has to do to make it survive. When someone buys a chocolate piece, they have to know that it's going to age and that if they're not comfortable with that, they shouldn't buy it—so contracts and certificates of authenticity—you know, all these things are part the work because that's how the work lives on it's hard to tell a collector they can't loan a work to an exhibition that you don't necessarily agree with, but I have saved one of everything—I mean, of course, I couldn't—with the big works. When the work is shown again, it usually comes through me, and the reason I do that is to maintain the control. So I don't want them to put *Lick and Lather* in a vitrine because if you can't smell it, you've missed half the piece. So if I show my own and somebody comes and takes a bite out of the chocolate, which happens, I can remake it. Now, when that happens with someone else's piece, it becomes more problematic.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is there insurance that can cover that.

JANINE ANTONI: It's a good question. [I don't think so].

JUDITH RICHARDS: The risk seems awfully high. [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, it's high. And I always tell the gallery and all the guards [to] be careful because it's happened in three different countries. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh. I was going to ask, obviously, since you, as you said, work slowly, and you have a limited number of pieces, I wanted to ask you about showing somewhere else besides the New York gallery. Did you want to have other representation?

JANINE ANTONI: I did not because I worked so slow, and I didn't feel like I could provide enough work for many galleries. And up until now, I could basically make the work and sell the work with having one gallery. And now I feel like we're in a much different world, where New York is no longer the center and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Because there is no center or because it's somewhere else?

JANINE ANTONI: I don't think there's a center. And so I feel like visibility that is broader is important at this moment. So now I'm thinking about broadening myself. I've been with Luhring-Augustine a long time.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. I assume they participate in art fairs around the world.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, they do. So that's something.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So that's one gallery's way—just staying in this area for a minute, do you keep all your own archives? You talked about that archiving project. So you're not relying on the gallery to do that.

JANINE ANTONI: [I keep my own records]. In fact—[inaudible]—when it comes to [my] *Provenance* and—yes. Yes. I think that comes from doing it myself for three years, that I don't really depend on—I'm just independent in that way. That comes from my mother, I think. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: That's great.

JANINE ANTONI: She taught me to, take care of myself.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Speaking of control and looking at press releases and trying to have your work represented correctly, obviously, the public, as well as critics, are going to come away with different readings of the work. Is there a kind of a—do you have a feeling that some—these readings are wrong or—and that sometimes—and does it disturb you when you think your work is being misunderstood?

JANINE ANTONI: That's a really good question. I'm trying to be more enlightened about this certainly at the beginning I would be very disturbed if the reading was wrong, and I would say that the biggest battle I've fought is the eating disorder issue that people [used to] interpret *Gnaw*, and that took me—I still think it's talked about that way, but it took me years to bring to the forefront some of the other thoughts in the work. So I think that one incident could have made me this controlling—[laughs]—you know, because I—it—it was so disturbing to me that people couldn't see anything—it was by far the overriding sense of the work.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Have you had conversations or even developed friendships with other artists who have had these kinds of situations where the work is not being understood because of some obvious social content?

JANINE ANTONI: Right. I don't think there is an artist out there that doesn't have a story like this.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is there anyone in particular that you have a close relationship with that you've shared this concern?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, probably my husband—[they laugh]—is the closest one. You know, it's

really painful when you get a review that you've really been waiting for, and it's taking the work in the total wrong direction, or you feel it's the wrong direction. I—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Have you ever been tempted to write a letter to the editor?

JANINE ANTONI: No, but people have written on my behalf, which has been interesting, other people come to the defense of the work. I think the biggest case I can remember is that when I did *Loving Care*, Benjamin Buchloh was very critical of the piece in *October*, and his student actually—Julie Carson. She did a show called "The Auto-Erotic Object" at Hunter, and she showed *Loving Care*.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Julie Carson?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, and she was a student of Benjamin's, and she went back to him and said, "You got the piece all wrong." And to Benjamin's credit, he said, "OK, so you make your argument, and we'll publish it in *October*." So a few Octobers later, she published [a response]. So that was really interesting to have a piece [that] people feel so passionate about and coming to its defense. [I make] the work [come] alive. I think it's important to separate your ego and to really look at the reading and really understand why it's happening because there are many different reasons, and it could be—one could say it's your fault because you weren't an articulate artist, or it can be all different things. [. . .] [*Gnaw*] being about eating disorders [had to do with] Sue Williams, who's an artist I really admire, in that Whitney biennial. I don't know if you remember, she had this huge puke on the floor—[laughs]—a[the other work can create] the context. [In that] biennial we all became identity [artist for example.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you remember what year that was?

JANINE ANTONI: '93. It was all about identity politics, that's how history makes itself.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Wasn't she also dealing with domestic violence—[inaudible]—

JANINE ANTONI: So there was this [female] figure with the words on them and—so, I think it's more complex—you don't make work in a vacuum. There's what's happening in the culture. There's other artists around you. And one has to pay attention to all of those things. It's a complex dialogue. I think that if I get a review now that is critical or not what I think, I certainly don't take it to heart in the way that I once did. I've also made work long enough and seen my work change its meaning [around] over time. So sometimes it's just a matter of waiting for people to come to your reading.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Going back to the period we were talking about in the work—and I think with—we're talking about *Cradle* last, and then moving into year 2000, you made a three-dimensional piece, *Umbilical*, a small piece, which I wanted to ask you about. And then you did two pieces, *Saddle* and *Bridle*, that have a relationship. I don't know if they have a relationship with *Umbilical*. [Laughs.] But why don't we—why don't we start there?

JANINE ANTONI: Okay. So *Umbilical*. It all started [when] I was in the car with my mom. I had just gotten married to Paul, and he said—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, I was going to ask you when you got married. Thank you for—

JANINE ANTONI: [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: [. . .]

JANINE ANTONI: [. . .] [1999, but we had been together since 1989]. Yes, and then we broke up for three years, and then we got back together. And we got back together when I found out I had cancer. We waited a year [. . .]. [Laughs.] And then we got married. [. . .]. I would say I had the divorce before the marriage. [They laugh.] But we tried to be with other people for those three years with all our might, and then we gave up. [They laugh.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: That's a nice story.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. So I'm in the car with my mom, and she says, "I'd like to give you the family silverware, but I know you'll never clean it." [They laugh.] And I was thinking, wow, is this a compliment or a criticism? So I took the family silverware. It's Reed & Barton Rose Cascade a monogrammed "A." And I cast on one end the negative impression of my mouth,

and at the other end, the negative impression of my mother's hand. And I thought, first I fed from her body, then maybe from this very spoon, and now she's giving me this spoon for feeding others. This object that's loaded with notions of domesticity and class. So—

JUDITH RICHARDS: But when I think of umbilical, I'm thinking, but it's a connection, an unbroken sort of connection.

JANINE ANTONI: Right, so—right, and it's about all those various connections, whether you want them or not—[laughs]—and the passing down. I really wanted a connection between two bodies. I had made it—tried to make another piece which was a kiss where I used the mouth as a mold, and I was so thrilled with it, and then somebody told me that Dorothy Cross made the exact same piece. So I let it—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Dorothy Cross, she's a wonderful Irish artist, yes.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, so I let it go. We overlap a lot. She has a cow thing too. [. . .]. I never got to meet her—someday. And then—and the problem when I had thought of the kiss piece is I couldn't figure out what material it should be made of, what's the material of this negative space. And then when I realized I could take an object and morph it to the body and that it could form this connection. [So I solved the] issue with *Umbilical*. So many year—sometimes [I] have an idea, and it takes three years to actually find its form.

JUDITH RICHARDS: As you're—as you're working on pieces, at one point in something I read you talked about doing something—it wasn't right—I think it was you cast something, maybe a later piece, in some material, and then you realized it should be another material. Is there a lot of that discarding preliminary trials and actual finished pieces that—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, I probably could take you into the other room and show you all of the boxes full of—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You keep it. You keep all the failures.

JANINE ANTONI: —[Yes, I know it] is going to be a piece, but I don't know what it is.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you don't actually discard it. It just—

JANINE ANTONI: Well, sometimes I photograph it. Sometimes I keep it. It depends—[I] try to remind myself so I can come back to it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is not something that you're destroying them, I'm getting rid of—

JANINE ANTONI: Well, I should be getting rid of them because I don't want someone to come later on and decide they're works—

JUDITH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] Such a realistic—a realistic problem.

JANINE ANTONI: —which has happened to many artists I know, that have died.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. So after *Umbilical*, and we come to *Saddle*, how did you—what was the process of thinking about using—going to that material and thinking about—

JANINE ANTONI: What happened is I got to show—[inaudible]—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you had done that other photograph with the [cow ?]—

JANINE ANTONI: Right, so those are all one series of works that I did at the same time. And what happened is I went to Sweden, and I got asked to show at—in this castle in the middle of the woods, and they had a working dairy farm. And I'm really interested in farms because I never grew up near a farm. [I] know nothing about [them]. So immediately I said, "Can I go see the cows?" We go into the barn, and I notice that the cows are drinking out of bathtubs rather than troughs. And I ask them, "Why is that?" And they said, "Oh, that's a very common thing. [We] use bathtubs as troughs." And I thought, that's weird; they're all drinking out of this object that's made to bathe me. And then I thought, what if I take a bath, will the cow come over and still drink? And I learned that cows are very curious animals, and the whole herd came over, and I'm trying to look very relaxed for this image, and I'm terrified. [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: What were you afraid of?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, they're just really huge animals, and they're kind of klutzy, and I didn't know, would the cow bite me [they have] huge tongues and—[they laugh]—and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Lick you! [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: And I'm naked in this tub. [It was] a bit vulnerable. [Laughs.] Anyway, I was going for another image. I wanted a crèche image, me very small with this activity going on around. And we set it all up, and we took about a hundred photos, and just at the last second, the photographer took the camera off of the tripod and started to walk towards me, and then the cow drank as if it was drinking from me, from my nipple. And we took the shot, and then it was clear that was the piece. I called it *2038* because that's the number in the cow's ear. I just thought it was perfect because [of] the fact that we identify a cow by a number. [It] shows our relationship to the cow, that it's [a] biological machine rather than an animal. I wanted to have an intimate relationship with a cow, thinking that I had been weaned off of my mother onto the cow. You drink cow's milk after [your mother's milk]—so she's a kind of surrogate mother or wet nurse—[laughs] and that is a very intimate relationship, but I never got to know her. The piece was about establishing that relationship.

Then I did a series of work with the cows, articulating the cow [place in] the culture in various ways. So different pieces spun out of that work, and one of them is *Saddle*, where I got hide—I did the first one in Sweden, where I got the hide from a local tanner—

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JANINE ANTONI: [In progress] [It was sent to me] straight off of the cow I [cast] myself on my hands and knees in fiberglass, in five parts, screwed them together, shrouded—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You did that in New York?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, the first one, I did in Sweden, and the rest I did here.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you use fiberglass before?

JANINE ANTONI: No, I got someone to make me the mold in fiberglass. I was terrified of the material [because I don't have ventilation].

And I put the hide over it and you can mold [it]—almost like it's clay—all the folds and—

JUDITH RICHARDS: When it's wet.

JANINE ANTONI: —when it's wet, and it shrinks. It takes 24 hours to shrink. So I stayed with it for those 24 hours, sculpting it, [as] it shrunk, [then I] turned it over and I pulled the mold out. It was like a ghost. You feel both the absence of me and the cow.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And that's—you said you made one there, but they're unique, or—

JANINE ANTONI: They're unique, but it was kind of—

JUDITH RICHARDS: —was it a kind of a multi?

JANINE ANTONI: —you know, all my multiples are not quite—they're all unique, because I'm working with materials like hide, that aren't the same and that don't—[inaudible]—[replicate exactly].

JUDITH RICHARDS: You're using your hands, yes.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, so—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you—what did you find—was there a difference between your—how you imagined that piece would look and how you'd feel about it and the reality after it was done?

JANINE ANTONI: [It] scared me when it was done. It's a very—[haunting] piece. I'm not even sure I can articulate why, and I don't really—it's one of the pieces that I don't talk about extensively, because I feel like it doesn't need me, you know? It's a weird piece to install,



because it becomes animated, like it's always crawling to something or from something, like it's—it does something to the energy of the room in a weird way. And—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Have you put it into an exhibition with other works?

JANINE ANTONI: It's only been shown with other works, and so it's always tricky to install, because it starts to make meanings [on its own.] So yes, I don't know what to think of that piece.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did—how did—was that—so that was shown in Sweden and then it was shown here. Was there a difference in response, critical and audience response?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, you know, I got to show it in a—in like a barn/building in Sweden, so it was kind of amazing to show those pieces there in that context.

Then I came back and I got the [Larry] Aldridge Award.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, I think so.

JANINE ANTONI: [Laughs.] And they gave me a show, and people were confused about why I was working with [the] cow. I really decided I want to bring the cow work into my greater body of work. So I decided to make [show] about the mother and the cow, being providers. And so I combined those works together in [the] exhibition.

And Aldridge was amazing. They let me paint the [entire] gallery space with milk paint. So at the end of the shows [there] was a little label saying you're completely surrounded by the cow, which was really nice.

And I showed *Momme* and *Saddle* together, [accentuating] the veil—so I got to make some relationships [which] felt really nice.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What work—did *Moor*, M-O-O-R—did that piece come right after that body of work?

JANINE ANTONI: I have no idea. But—[laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Right, I mean, the first—the first—I think the first presentation was just in 2001. Was that also in Sweden?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So maybe that is the next piece.

JANINE ANTONI: That makes—maybe.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But that piece has been ongoing in different iterations—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, since then.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —talk about how that—

MS. ANTONI: So I was asked—

JUDITH RICHARDS: That was a—that was a commission.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, I was asked to be in a show in Sweden at this place called Magasin 3. And—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mmm hmm, it's in Stockholm.

JANINE ANTONI: —in Stockholm—and its galleries [are] inside of a working port. So the curator had this idea that they would make a show—his name is Richard Julin—he would make a show that was on the subject of the port.

Well, I come from an island called Freeport, and so I thought, this is interesting opportunity. And you know, I grew up on boats and have an intimate relationship to rope. And so I had the idea that I would make a rope out of materials given to me by my friends. What I was interested in was how [the] objects that I make and the materials that I'm attracted to are

usually very basic materials. And my interest in them is that we all have a [similar] relationship to those materials, whether it be soap or chocolate. [I] use that relationship to create meaning.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You're bringing in your friends in this piece, which is kind of a new thing.

JANINE ANTONI: So—right.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It reminds me of what you said when you were talking about your illness.

JANINE ANTONI: Right, so the thing about my friends or these materials that my friends were bringing to me is that [—well,] I start to think about how an object accrue meaning on a personal level. [For example], you have a relationship to your glasses, but if I just saw them on the table, I wouldn't be able to, just by looking at the object, know as much about them as you do. Obviously, [you] have [an intimate] relationship [to them]. How does that work to make a piece about that? How would a viewer coming from the outside be able to come to those readings or even have a suspicion that those readings exist?

[I] called up all my friends, said, "I want to make this rope, give me anything you have, any—and give me the story that—tell me [about] your relationship to this object." So [I start receiving these] objects, and they came with their stories.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did they—were you telling them that you were going to bind the objects into the rope?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, so I said they at least had to be able to be taken apart in some way and [twisted] into a rope.

I got a lot of clothes, but I got a lot of other strange objects. There's a hammock in there, there's extension cord, there's cassette tape, there's Christmas lights, [and so on].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Sounds like an interesting assortment.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, it really is—it's like a taxonomy of our relationship to different things in our lives. And then how they accrue their personal meanings.

I started to make this rope—and then I convince them to make me a book, and the book would be a compilation of all—

JUDITH RICHARDS: You convinced the institution—

JANINE ANTONI: [Yes, and I made] a compilation of all the stories. I [made] this entire book into one sentence so that all these stories would be woven together. Between each story is Byron Kim's tie is entwined with Paul Ramirez' nightshirt and then the story would [be told]. [The words, "...is entwined with..."]—those line. That line would repeat between each material in the piece.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was there—was there a necessity in your mind to organize, order, the contributions in any particular way? Or was it strictly chronological as they came in? Or was there a visual component to it?

MS.ANTONI: Well, that—well, I definitely thought of it as a lifeline, so it definitely reflects my life and my friends at the time. So some friends are returning to the rope and we're working on it right now, and some are new friends. But that's funny you asked me, because it's not something I ever talk about, but I definitely do my own form of voodoo—[they laugh]—in the sense that I bind families together, I entwine people who are estranged friends—[laughs]—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Has it worked?

JANINE ANTONI: In some cases, it's worked. So yes, I definitely have some suspicion about my labor and the twisting and you know, bringing these people together.

And so I definitely put friends together. Right now, I have some ex-students helping me make the rope and then we have asked a bunch of their fellow students from when they were at Columbia to donate, so they're all there together, which is really nice.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How many ropes have you made? How many pieces?

JANINE ANTONI: I have made maybe five different pieces.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And is this an unlimited kind—

JANINE ANTONI: It's over 200 feet long and—what was I going to tell you?

JUDITH RICHARDS: It was—I read it was over 300 feet long in Sweden.

JANINE ANTONI: Oh, well, then, it's now—it's much longer.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But then you—and you took—and you took that same rope, so you're adding to that same piece.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, so I keep—absolutely—adding to the same piece.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And is it documented, besides the book, in a sense, which piece of the rope is—whose contribution is on each piece of rope?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, I continue to document it. I should say that the titling of the work is—well, the material list is really, really long, like, it's like this big on the wall.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You're showing three feet.

JANINE ANTONI: Right, so—

JUDITH RICHARDS: In normal-sized type—[laughs].

JANINE ANTONI: Right, so it's interesting to watch someone come over to look at the label and then they start to read, and then I watch them, and there's a moment they turn around and look at the rope. And they realize—what's going on, that each thing relates to—there's a revelation moment. And then they go over to the rope and start reading it in the same way, finding the different things. [. . .].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Does that—

JANINE ANTONI: I also install it differently each time. The first time was the best so far—it went from the gallery out the window, over the street, to a little lifeboat that was floating in the center of the harbor. People were getting too attached to the rope to let me do things like that anymore. [Laughs.] But [the idea is that], it could connect things, other things in the world.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is it—is the—is another presentation being planned right now?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, actually the rope is [going to very soon] show and I'm frantically trying to finish [new] piece to send to them to have it in the exhibition.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, where is it?

JANINE ANTONI: It is [in the collection of] Magasin 3 and they're showing their collections.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I see, so you want it to be updated.

Does that rope connect in any way to the tightrope pieces that came later?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, [it] is [actually] the beginning of the tightrope pieces. I realized it was a life line, I decided I wanted to balance on [it], my life. And that's when I started to make *To Draw a Line*. [To make] *To Draw a Line*, I had to learn to tightrope.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you learned to tightrope to do the piece. Is that something you just decided—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, I learned to tightrope because I wanted to make a sculpture that I—that was [about balance.] But I didn't know what that sculpture [would be.] It evolved into *To Draw a Line*, but in the process of making *To Draw a Line*, I made *Touch*, the [video] on the horizon.

So—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Why don't you describe that briefly?

JANINE ANTONI: I went home to the Bahamas, I stretched a tightrope—a tight wire between two backhoes, my neighbor brought two tractors—he's the head of the Sanitation Services [of Grand Bahama.] He brought these two tractors early in the morning. We stretched tightrope between the shovels. We dug a hole for [my assistant who was] taking the video. [We need] to get that point where, [so when] I step on the rope, my weight pushes down the rope, and I, for a second, look like I'm walking on the horizon. And I walked back and forth across that rope with the waves in the background.

[I thought of it as] a [sketch], like a simple, quick piece on the way to [to making] *Draw a Line*, but it has had more visibility and more attention—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Has it?

JANINE ANTONI: —than a lot of my works.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You talked to some place I read about the meaning of the horizon line to you, and that place and—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, my mom—

JUDITH RICHARDS: —the activity of that.

JANINE ANTONI: My mom used to tell me to go out and see the world, because we come from this place that's behind God's back—it's a Trinidadian saying. But she always had this notion that I should [live] abroad. [That] I should leave the Bahamas and see the world and be educated.

And so I love that horizon. I could see it from my bed. It's probably the image that is engrained into my mind the strongest. And so I used to think about the horizon as the world out there; [But the] horizon isn't a real spot, the closer you get, the more it recedes. So I decided that the horizon is really the place of my imagination, you know?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Had you been thinking a while about trying to incorporate the horizon or the notion of the horizon into your work? Or it just suddenly came to you?

JANINE ANTONI: It suddenly came to me. I was—I was moving around the world with my tightrope, videoing myself on the tightrope in all kinds of settings.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That's when you did that piece called *Touch*.

JANINE ANTONI: And I had—yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I'm sorry to—[inaudible].

JANINE ANTONI: And I just had the idea [of a] lifeline, and I was thinking, what if I was walking on this tightrope [and] I kept changing environments? And I tried that, and then I did [it] on the beach. [It was immediately] interesting [to me]. So that's how things happen.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You said you were traveling all over the world with a tightrope.

JANINE ANTONI: Well, what I—is I had this portable tightrope and we would put it in the car and I would [set it up] in a field and I would [do it] in the city.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It's just part of your learning.

JANINE ANTONI: Just trying to make a piece, those are [the] crazy things you do to try to make a piece. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: I see, so you—there were many pre-pieces before *Touch* happened.

JANINE ANTONI: I was actually trying to make *To Draw a Line*, [I was trying to understand] what is so interesting about this tightrope?

JUDITH RICHARDS: And then it was *Tangent*.

JANINE ANTONI: I had made the *Moor*, and it was a lifeline of sorts. [So I asked myself] how

can I articulate another lifeline? And so [those were] the environments of my life, and I was trying to balance in all those different environments.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You talked about—some place about learning to fall, also for "To Draw a Line," in the presentation.

JANINE ANTONI: Well, I think it took me so long to figure out *To Draw a Line*, by the time I could tightrope, I wasn't interested in balance anymore. I was much more interested in falling. [Laughs.]

And I thought, the problem with the tightrope. Well, the one thing I was thinking about is [the] circus. The one thing you're not supposed to do as a tightrope walker is fall. And I wasn't so interested in circus and I thought, well, I'm an artist and I want to do what you're not supposed to do. [Laughs.] That's what we do as artists. So I thought, this falling is really interesting. Why shouldn't you fall? You know, life is about falling; that's learning, that's growing. Let's look at the fall.

I thought, what if I offer a fall, rather than offering balance? Balance is a misnomer. We talk about balance [as a goal], but it's really a fleeting, [an] ideal moment that we pass through [in our] general state of being out of balance.

I wanted to show something more realistic. I thought I checked out balance, now let me check out falling. I call—I got a hold of a stunt man that would teach me how to fall. And he taught me seven different ways to fall. And—because I was going to offer this fall. It wasn't about this Evel Knievel gesture, it was simple. I wanted to offer a fall, I didn't want to get hurt, so—[they laugh]—I needed to learn seven ways [fall] so that it could know what to do when the fall happened. [When I am] balancing, [I] can fall backwards and forwards. And then I wanted to make [a] sculpture that I could balance on and fall into, and that's how the sculpture evolved.

Should I explain the sculpture?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: [I started with] four thousand pounds of raw Romanian hemp, [a] beautiful material. Hemp is the traditional material that rope is made of. [So there was] a big cloud of hemp, then I made two steel incline planes, I put two huge [Con Ed ?] big reels on [them], I put 7,000 pounds of lead in the center of those reels so they wanting to roll down the incline plane. [I] put some huge chocks behind them so that they wouldn't smash the gallery. And I put my—

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is at Luhring Augustine, right, in 2003?

JANINE ANTONI: Right—thank you.

So my rope, I made about 150 feet of handmade rope, it's spun out with its threads, right out of the cloud, it becomes [a] rope and goes around one reel, [and extends] across the room. At the center of the room, it's spliced together with about 300 feet of industrially made rope. And that rope goes to another reel and winds around [it]. Then I unwove the rope and made it into a rope ladder and then it dissolves back into the cloud on the other side.

So at the opening, I climbed up that rope ladder—I stood on top of that reel and I walked out to that splice where the industrial meets the handmade. I tried to balance there as long as I could. I lasted about 15 minutes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: 5-0?

JANINE ANTONI: Not 50, 15.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Fifteen, that's a long time though.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, it was great.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you did that once?

JANINE ANTONI: I did it once, and then the piece exists without me after that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And did you videotape that event?

JANINE ANTONI: I did, but I don't show it. I show people photos of me falling, but the piece really exists without me. And the walking was just the source for making the sculpture. [The performance was a kind of christening.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So it can be shown—

JANINE ANTONI: It is shown without me, yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: —without you, and without any documentation of your performance.

JANINE ANTONI: No, it's really a sculpture, the balance is in it, because these two big reels are being balanced with this rope in this very precarious way. [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: And that was the last piece appropriated to tightrope-walking, so that was completed—

JANINE ANTONI: I think you're right; maybe, I might go back to it. I still do it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was it—was it soon after that that you had your daughter?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: She was born in 2004.

JANINE ANTONI: In fact, I remember saying, "Paul, we can't try to get pregnant until I fall." So day after I fell—[laughs]—we started trying to make Indra.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And obviously, the illness—the threat of the illness was—

JANINE ANTONI: So I was very lucky, three months later, I was pregnant. So yes, she's a miracle. We feel really blessed to have her.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And what's her name?

JANINE ANTONI: Indra.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I-N—

JANINE ANTONI: Indra Maria Ramirez Antoni. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS : Is it I-N-D-I-R-A?

JANINE ANTONI: I-N-D-R-A. Indra is the god of thunder, the Hindu god of thunder. But she's actually named after what I consider to be one of the most beautiful sculptures, which is [. . .] a story told by the Buddhists about interconnect—it's a way to explain interconnection. It's [called] *Indra's Net*, and it's this net that at every knot, is a precious stone. Every stone is reflecting every other one infinitely. So we'll see, maybe she can be an interconnective force in the world.

JUDITH RICHARDS: That's great.

And since her birth, your work has incorporated a few times, imagery and ideas related to being a mother. And I think maybe the first one was *If I Die Before I Wake*, or—that's dated 2004.

JANINE ANTONI: I have no idea when that was made, so that, she was—

JUDITH RICHARDS: It might have been before—the day that it—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, that's a good question.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It sounded like something you might have made after she was born, or when you were pregnant thinking of it. [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, because I [do] talk about her [in] relationship to the piece, so I feel like she was born. Well, basically, the piece is a—your standard porcelain prayer night light,

except that, one hand in the prayer is mine and the other one is my mother's. And I had a lot of ideas when I made the piece, but one was that my mother and my hands are very, very similar, the shape of the hand—and even the way we move our hands. But she's getting old and she has arthritis, her hands are really transforming. Fingers are getting crooked and very wrinkly.

And so for me to put our hands together was a way for me to think about my own aging. And that's why I called it *If I Die Before I Wake*. Of course, we used to say that prayer, and I can remember the moment when I actually listened to the words. It's a pretty frightening prayer to tell a kid right before [they're] going to sleep. Indra's not—she's a wonderful being, but she's not very good at going to sleep, especially on her own, so I spent a lot of hours helping her go from the wake-sleep state to the sleep-state. Contemplating [the] fear of surrendering into sleep, and is it related somehow to our fear of death. [. . .]. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: And I'm—there seems to be a period of a few years after her birth when you weren't doing as many pieces. That was an intentional slowing-down.

JANINE ANTONI: I didn't want to miss a thing. And it's been so mind-blowing, the whole process of having her and I really wanted to participate [fully]. I feel like I'm a much better artist having [her.] She's taught me so many things that have been so beneficial to my work. I knew this was my only chance, so I wanted to really live it. But there are some works that I've been working on since she's born that have not come out into the world, so it wasn't like I wasn't working at all.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, well you did this big commission piece for New Orleans in—*Tear*, 2008.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, *Tear*.

JUDITH RICHARDS: If you could talk about that, that'd be great.

JANINE ANTONI: Sure, so that piece was in the working since 9/11. We were about to go to war, and I was thinking about that and I had this notion of the wrecking ball, because it's this object made for the purpose of destruction, and I thought, what are the repercussions of that kind of destructive behavior? And I thought, what if I made a wrecking ball that's vulnerable? What if it showed [the] scars of its destructive nature on its surface? So, I went about trying to cast a wrecking ball in lead. [. . .] I wanted it to be made out of a soft metal that could change shape through the demolition. [It] was a long process. It took me many years, [to make]. [. . .]

Then I went to New Orleans for a site visit. I started to think about Katrina, the fact that we all witnessed [it] on TV, but there was [a] delayed response. The country just froze. And thinking about what it means to witness something and how it implicates us, witnessing, and we're viewers, we're active lookers. It's not a passive act. That's where the "eye" came into the picture.

So, I guess I should explain the whole piece. It's a video. I took a video of my eye very close up. I worked with this woman, Kirsten Johnson, who's a documentary filmmaker. And she helped me photograph—or videotape my eye very close up and so I could blow it up 11 feet x 11 feet.

And then I took—went into the recording studio and worked on syncing up the movement of my eye to the sound of the demolition. So, when I took the—ball to Pittsburgh to a demolition site, I brought all—this sound recording equipment. I recorded the smashing of the ball. So, I linked up that sound for the smashing to the movement of my eye. So, every time my eye blinks, you hear the ball hitting the building.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You're not seeing it; you're just hearing it.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, you never see it. So, in the installation, you just see the ball with the scars. [. . .] And then you hear the sound of the demolition and you see my eye blinking.

And I was thinking about "tear" in both ways—both to cry and to rip. I think the interesting thing about the piece is that gap. That you have to tie those two things together[—the ball and the eye.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: So you started thinking about that piece long before you were asked to participate in Prospect.1. And then you realized that it was—

JANINE ANTONI: This was an interesting piece, given the context.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What—and so after Prospect.1, where did that piece—

JANINE ANTONI: That's where most of my MacArthur went to—making that piece. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: That was 10 years later. You were—you were saving it.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, that was the end of the MacArthur money.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And where did that piece go?

JANINE ANTONI: It hasn't gone anywhere.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, I see. It's just incurring storage expense. [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: I'm still waiting for it to find a home, yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How—have you found that to be unusual, that most of your big, heavy pieces actually have found homes, or is that really a problem they're so—

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, I know. They all find homes. It's surprising to me that it hasn't found a home yet. Some take longer than others. Of course, you know, when you make a 2-ton wrecking ball, there's many—very few places that can even—floors that can handle 2 tons in such a small [footprint].

JUDITH RICHARDS: It has to be indoors—[inaudible].

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, well, because of the video.

MS. RIVHARDS: Yes, yes. Have you thought about showing anything in the Luhring Augustine space in Bushwick?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, I'm meeting them tomorrow to talk about that. I might be showing something very soon.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, okay. [They laugh.] Initiative.

JANINE ANTONI: We'll see how that goes. [They laugh.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, it sounds like a good pairing—that space and your work.

People have talked about many connections with that piece and thinking about—were you thinking of any artistic or natural phenomenon where the destruction causes the mark on the piece? I mean, like a scar, the scarring. Is that related to some cultural phenomenon or natural?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, it's weird because all my pieces—I don't know, maybe it's about the kind of materials I work with, but they have almost an ecological feeling. Even *Gnaw* [has striations] I grew up looking at the way the ocean transforms objects. The way a landslide [is transformed by the elements.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: When I think about the wrecking ball hitting something and being—I'm thinking of something hitting the rocks on the coast in a storm.

JANINE ANTONI: Sure. So, I know that well in terms of my background. I would say the sea is probably the thing I know most in terms of [a] sculpting tool. [Laughs.] That hits the roots of why I'm a sculptor. Why my fascination—like, I'm a little boy: When I see demolition going on, I'm just—I want to stop and look at it for hours. Moving land [is very compelling].

JUDITH RICHARDS: It shows how sexist it is to think that only boys are interested in that.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, it's true. So, I don't know what that's about, but it's deep in me.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Mmm hmm. [Affirmative.]



Then, a pretty interesting shift to—in the next series of works—not that you're working in a series—that use a dollhouse in some way; either a real dollhouse or a photoshopped dollhouse. I wanted to ask you about that.

JANINE ANTONI: So, it's real, I should say. It's real.

There's a whole other thing going on at this point, which is that I've begun dancing. I've discovered—after doing the meditation, I found a kind of moving meditation. It's called 5Rhythms.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It's called 5Rhythms?

JANINE ANTONI: 5Rhythms. It's a form of ecstatic dancing. It was invented by a woman named Gabrielle Roth. And it is based off of different forms of ecstatic dancing from different cultures.

I should say I've been dancing since, [I was] four—ballet, [and calypso]. But discovering this form of dance was kind of a revelation in my creative process. I found an access to the unconscious that I couldn't readily—I kind of waited to happen in the studio. It wasn't something that I felt like I could readily go into and grab material from. All of a sudden, I found a technique to take me straight there. And that was kind of—

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did you find it?

JANINE ANTONI: By dancing.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I mean, how did you—how did you make your way to dance that—

JANINE ANTONI: How did I find 5Rhythms?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: Because I—the main reason I love being in New York is that you can do many bizarre things every night of the week, and so it's kind of—

JUDITH RICHARDS: There's plenty other people doing it. [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, it's kind of a hobby of mine to just explore different things. And I love to learn new things. I think it's also something that nurtures my creative process.

So, yes, I found—there was this kind of dance going on, and I went—

JUDITH RICHARDS: But you were—you were looking for a kind of dance experience?

JANINE ANTONI: I wasn't even looking for dance. I was just looking for some—it's like traveling. It's like looking for some new experiences.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It wasn't even going to be a physical experience necessarily.

JANINE ANTONI: I was going to a lot of lectures on meditation [and darma talks.] I am interested in this psychological inquiry. I guess that's may be at the base of most of the things that I explore.

I started to do it, and I found it very [profound.] Not only was I getting ideas for my art, but it was also—just psychologically it was a great thing for me and my sense of self. And so I started to do it a lot, to the point where it seemed like I was spending more time in the dance floor than in the studio. I [thought] what is going on? I was just trying to understand what was happening to me.

And so, after doing it for about two or three years, having visions of [fully formed] works in the dance[, and] many other things [came to me] in the dance. It's a very psychic space. It's [feels] like group dreaming. You are—your sense of awareness opens, and you go through these rhythms which are [a] kind [map]. She has of a way of analyzing the culture, the life cycles, sexuality [with this map]. She has many theories about [it]. And there are workshops you can take. I took many. And so, what I decide to do was to lay a dance floor in my studio and dance around my work as a way of trying to bring [my interest in dance together with my art practice].

But, really, the reason I brought this up is because I was dancing, and there's part of this dancing where you [can] partner. And I found that I would always be attracted to this one older woman in the room. And even with my eyes closed, I would find her. And this particular time, [when] dancing together, and the music's playing and there's a fast beat and a slow beat. And I start to dance to the fast beat, and she's dancing to the slow beat.

In the meantime, I'm reading Winnicott, a psychologist who studied mothers and their children. Winnicott [coined the] term "the good-enough mother." And he believed that a good mother was not a mother that was overbearing with their child but [rather] gave their child distance to [allow their natural] unfolding the child [should] always know that they were present, but they weren't intruding on [their developmental process].

So, I had a vision that I was a spider and this woman was like the branches of a tree, and I was making this web, this delicate web, at the center—that she was the supportive structure. And I thought, "This is the image of how—I'm going to be a good mother. So, I thought that I wanted to make an image of a spider that had made a web between my legs.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Why between your legs?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, because I was like the branches of the tree. I was the supportive structure. [Maybe I was thinking of giving birth]. I don't know why between my legs; they seemed like good branches. [Laughs.]

And so I went about trying to do this. Calling spider experts [asking]—"How am I going to do it?" And they [said], "I don't know, it [is] not possible with your movement, the heat of your body."

They [said], "You have to stand all night long. It takes all night for a spider to make a web." And [I thought] "I'm a performance artist; I can stand all night."

Then I got nervous. I decided I'd get a harness to hold myself up, take the harness off [and then], take the photo. I [began to research] the [world of harnesses]. I started to explain—well, I didn't want to explain what I was doing. And then finally the guy was like, "Listen, lady, I've heard it all. Just tell me what you want to do." [They laugh.] And he said, "Oh, OK, well, let me show you this [particular] harness."

He showed me a harness where you could attach yourself at several [points on the] torso. And I looked at it and I [thought], "That's a spider web." So I thought I [realized] actually show the harness. It would be better artwork if there's no illusion. So, I thought, there's a [spiderweb] within the [spiderweb]. Then I thought I [have] to keep the spider between my legs to make the web. I [was going to] make a cage that I put on and took off. I thought a house within a house. [Yes,] a web within a web and a house within a house.

So, then I bought the doll's house, took it to an architect, retrofitted it to my body. It fits like a guillotine around my body. Talked to the spider [experts]. We came up with this notion of walls made out of plastic, covered in Vaseline so the spider wouldn't want to attach to them. Put the spider there overnight. Took the walls off in the morning, [and] the spider made a perfect web. Parallel to the picture [plane!]

It [hadn't] finished one pie shape of the web [in the morning so I] went and had a croissant; came back. She had [finished her] perfect [web].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Good spider.

JANINE ANTONI: She's the best assistant I ever had. Stayed [right] there [in the middle]. I put the house on and off about 15 times in two days and she never moved.

I found [the spider] in my backyard. [She] had made a web between the ropes of my daughter's swing—whatever you want to make of that. [Laughter.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Backyard in the city?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, right here in Brooklyn. So, I went through these crazy contortions to make this piece. Nobody even [notices] the spider. It's the tiniest little thing on my knee.

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is a piece called *Inhabit*.

JANINE ANTONI: It's called *Inhabit*. It's an image of me hanging in my daughter's bedroom.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, I looked high and low. I couldn't see the spider in there. [Laughs.] I knew it was there.

JANINE ANTONI: I'll show it to you when we're in front of the real thing. But you see it in host, right?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: I think it's great that it made its web in the kitchen.

So, yes, so the piece involves chasing the spider, but nobody cares about the spider. The piece has a lot of other information in it, and [audience] are more interested in all those things. But I think it's interesting how I couldn't have made that work without Indra having been in my life because when you have a child, you learn how to follow your nose. You can never catch up [as a mother]—you can never be good at it because they're growing too quickly and you just have to keep going.

I don't know, [let's say]—you're on the way to the deli with your child decides that doorknobs are really interesting and that they're going to turn every doorknob on every house between your house and the deli. Then [you have to] give up on the goal, and you become interested in doorknobs [as well]. [Laughs.] And I feel like that is actually a much more interesting way to make art.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I think I read somewhere you talked about the creative process and trying to not plan in advance—in that you wouldn't know where you were going to get. And that you would never repeat yourself.

JANINE ANTONI: Right, and I think I trusted that more and more.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And that you would never repeat yourself.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. And [Indra] helps me—helped me do that. If I [can] just stay attentive, that the piece makes itself or it shows you where it needs to go.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you know in advance that it would be photographed in the—your daughter's actual room?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, I made the photograph in all the rooms in the house, trying to figure out what room it should be in. And it just turned out that it should be in her bedroom. But it wasn't initially—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And it's approximately life-size?

JANINE ANTONI: So, yes, I'm life-size, so the photo's even bigger. It's [11] feet.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Was that something you initially—you thought of from the beginning that that's the size it would be?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, I had to make it that size because I was trying to get people to look at the spider. [Laughs.] So, I did all these contortions for that reason. You know, it's photographed in this crazy detailed way.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It's a—and it's a very limited edition. I think there are only three.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Would you have wanted there to be more?

JANINE ANTONI: I should have. I didn't know at that point that there needed to be more. [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: When did—then you—there was also photographs that peek into rooms that look like they're dollhouse rooms. Those came afterward?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, so I did several. Those were made at the same time, so I made these smaller photos, one, to show the spider and, two, that there were events happening in the

house that were very detailed that I wanted people to pay attention to.

JUDITH RICHARDS: I'm thinking of the white chairs and the table—[inaudible].

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, it has the web [connected to] it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And were you trying to create a kind of sense of mystery in some way or just an exploration?

JANINE ANTONI: I just didn't—I didn't want to idealize motherhood because it's much more complicated than that, so I wanted to show it in [all] its complexity. This is the first—my first attempt. I feel like it'll take me a little longer to totally tackle this. I think it's very important to tackle because I feel like there is a lack of this topic in art, considering how many artists have mothers and are mothers. That's another issue. But I feel very strongly that we need more images out there talking about [motherhood].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you think there's an equivalent body of work by men about their relationship to their fathers? I don't think—

JANINE ANTONI: Well, that is really rare.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, it is.

JANINE ANTONI: There are some but they're really rare.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So, they're both rare.

JANINE ANTONI: They're both rare. And that's an interesting question why that doesn't exist. Because we know why women artists don't want to talk about being mother—or haven't in the past.

But it makes you wonder about those relationships between father and son. It's an interesting thing to think about.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you—when you went on to do the next piece, called *Conduit*, it's very different. There's not—no obvious connections.

JANINE ANTONI: Right, no obvious connections.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How did you come to do that piece? How did that develop conceptually?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, when I was a little girl, my brother was reading a book about pirates. We were really into pirates in the Bahamas because its whole history is [about] pirates. And he was telling me about a woman named Anne Bonney who was a real pirate. And she disguised herself as a man by using an object [to help her pee] standing up. And I thought that was the coolest thing.

And it was in the back of my memory when my brother's girlfriend called me up and said, "I saw this thing online and I think you would like it."

JUDITH RICHARDS: You mean she didn't know that you've been—

JANINE ANTONI: No, nothing. She just knew it was my kind of object. [They laugh.] And it was an object made commercially for women to pee standing up when they were traveling or hiking or whatever.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Sounds like a good idea.

JANINE ANTONI: I [thought], OK, that's really interesting. [I wondered], what can I do with this? There's something—there's a piece here somewhere.

And then I was thinking about how the nuns used to tell me in school that my body was a temple. But I remember misunderstanding [it] and thinking that I could be architecture and thinking that would be really cool.

So, then I put the two memories together, and I thought if I turned this object into a gargoyle then I could really be architecture. So, I researched gargoyles. I found the griffin, which is a

hybrid. And I thought that's perfect because if I use this object, I'm a kind of hybrid. It's a half-lion-half-bird.

And then I thought, OK, so I'll turn the—I chose a material of copper because copper is [used to make pipes] in the bathroom but also architectural detail is copper. I don't know if you know this, but urine is often used as a patina. An excellent patina. It turns the copper green. [That way] the urine could be part of the material of the work. And then I just needed a cathedral to pee off of. So, I started trying to find one. I called Saint John the Divine. I just tried all kinds of different churches. And, of course, nobody was going to let me pee off of their church. I'm not sure why. [They laugh.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Saint John the Divine might. [They laugh.]

JANINE ANTONI: Exactly, that was my first try. Anyway, so, I'm really getting nervous. The show's coming up at Luhring Augustine, and I don't know what to do. I call up Roland and I said, "You've got to—there must be some collector you know." And he knew someone who was a patron of the arts who had access to the Chrysler. Because [in] the end I said, you know, "Gothic architecture will do."

But then the Chrysler came up and it's so iconic. And it's weird because it has griffins. So, I got to pee off the Chrysler, which was really exciting.

JUDITH RICHARDS: The image looks like you're in a very precarious, scary position. Were you really?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, it was really scary. I was—he—they demanded that I was harnessed so at least I wouldn't hurt anyone else. But if I fell over, I would've hurt myself.

JUDITH RICHARDS: But you wouldn't have dropped. You just would have dangled?

JANINE ANTONI: I would've dangled

JUDITH RICHARDS: That's bad enough. [They laugh.]

JANINE ANTONI: But anyway there's these gusts of wind. That was the scary part, is not that I would trip but that these gusts of wind would come flying through these buildings.

But just as I went to take the photo, this gust of wind came and blew my hair up in this crazy way. And I look—I got both my fantasies. I got [to] have a beard like a pirate, but I also look like a lion. [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, yes. Did you—after you did the piece, did it have any other kind of connections to you? Or did it kind of finish itself and that was it?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, the piece was called *Conduit*, and I'm so interested in the gargoyle. It seems almost like the unconscious of the building. And gargoyles—everybody has a different story about what gargoyles mean. They're protectors; they're scaring away evil; they're all these different things. And they're way up there; you can hardly see them and yet they're these detailed things. So, and they're functional. They're about keeping the water away from the building. But this kind of filtering of the rain through to the earth. I have water in the background of the photo.

I guess the thing that resonates for me is using my body as a conduit and that's what making is for me. That it's a process of something being filtered through my body. It's a very Catholic idea that the body can be so—it's a metaphor, it is—it has a power [an]—alchemical power. So, if there's something that resonates with me now, it's that; what does it mean to put one's body in service?

JUDITH RICHARDS: Which relates to some of your earliest pieces.

JANINE ANTONI: I think it relates. I mean, it's deep.

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JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Janine Antoni on December 19th, 2012, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, in her study in Brooklyn, disc four.

We just finished talking about *Conduit*, unless you had something else, and I—and that brought us to about 2009. So this comes to more recent work. And I wondered if there's something you've been working on the last couple of years that may have shown somewhere else that I haven't seen, or something that's been slowly developing.

JANINE ANTONI: So I told you that I laid a dance floor in my studio to try to understand the relationship between what I was experiencing with dance and my creative process in a more integrated way—not that I wasn't getting the visions for work in the dance but how could I mine that or how could they come together.

So I started to dance around my unfinished objects and that was very fruitful. But I also—what I decided to do was to invite people in to use the dance floor. And in New York City space to do anything, but especially to dance, is hard to come by and expensive. And dancers don't have a lot of money. And so as a way of christening my space, I just invited everyone I met into the studio to use it that choreographers, sematic healer, body worker, [etc.].

So I had many people coming through the studio doing all kinds of practices and sometimes inviting me to participate and sometimes just using the space. And a few significant things happened in doing that. I had a choreographer come. Her name is Annie-B. And I had met her at a party. And I just told her that I had this dance [space] I had no idea who she was. I didn't know she was a big choreographer. [Laughs.] And I just invited her to use the space. And she was curious that an artist would do that.

And so I got an email a few days later saying, "I'd love to come and use your space." At that point, I tried to figure out who she was and I [wondered], why is this significant choreographer—she obviously have spaces she can practice in. And I had just seen a movie about Anna Halprin, who is a 96-year old choreographer. And it was the story of her life and it was so inspiring to me—really shook me.

And I thought if this woman is coming to my studio, she obviously wants to be in an artist studio. So she said I'm coming to work on some duet material. So I thought, I'm going to do a little talk for her on my work in relationship to the duet. So she brings two dancers. And I showed her my work on three themes—the duet with myself, the duet with my mother and the duet with the other.

So I showed her [my] works. And when I'm doing showing them to me she said—turns to the dancers and says, OK, shall we dance this? [It was such a strange response] because if I had an artist friend come and give me a studio visit it would be like them saying, "OK, now I'm going to go in the corner and make some art about your art." That would be very strange.

She collaborates with her husband who is from the acting world. She does dance theater.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What is his name?

JANINE ANTONI: Paul [Lazar] [. . .]. He's an [accomplished] actor. [. . .]. [Laughs.] And so we just talked about two creative people who are married working together. And I guess we were talking about mom and dad and, making that piece and relationships and things. And the dancers go off and start to create movement inspired by my work. And then about [15] minutes later, they show us this 10 minute dance that spans, I don't know, 10 years of my life. [. . .]. That's weird. [They laugh.] Interesting and exciting. And we work with them.

And then—so I go for a walk with my husband and Pat Killoran, another friend—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Pat what?

JANINE ANTONI: Killoran. We [often] talk about art together [and I told them what happened]. And I said, [it was like seeing my retrospective in dance. I have been] offered to do [a] retrospective [a couple of times]. [But] I'm terrified. I keep turning them down because I feel like—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Well, not quite old enough to do a retrospective, but a mid-career survey.

JANINE ANTONI: Right, or a big survey. Whatever you call that—terrifying. [Laughs.] And you know, after having Indra, I just want to make new work, not look back. And doing a show like that, especially of my work, could take up two years of my life. So I'm not so interested. But

then I had [the] thought that I could do a retrospective in dance, that I could look back at all my work through the lens of dance. And that way, I could move forward while looking back. It didn't seem so bad. [. . .]. [Laughs.]

So I was broke and thought I need some money. So I started applying for grants. And I will apply with this idea, because I didn't have any other ideas. [Laughs.] And I applied to the Guggenheim and Creative Capital. And I got both grants. Then I had to do it. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: And I wasn't sure what [it actually was]. And so I just finished the first iteration of my retrospective. I asked a choreographer I know, her name is Jill Sigman.

JUDITH RICHARDS: S-I-G-M-A-N?

JANINE ANTONI: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] I thought I wanted to work with five choreographers. I asked her to be the first because I knew her and we were—we'd already been speaking for a year about the relationship between dance and art. And so we worked another year and choreographed a work.

And then the Albright-Knox came to me and said, "We're having our 150th anniversary. And in our history, we showed Cage and Cunningham and we think it would be great to show the first"—they already knew I was working on this. I [said], okay. So [I] went back to Jill and I said, what do you think? And she said, "Sure." And we started to tighten up [the] work. And we performed it.

And the twist in the whole story is that when I went to her to ask her to do it, she said, "Yes. I would be happy to do it with you. But I want to do it on you." And I was like, "You want to do with me or for me, [but] on me?" She started laughing. She [explained], "Oh, that's just a dance term for I want you to be the dancer." So even though I've been doing all this dancing, I don't—first of all, five rhythms is not performative. You know, it's never done for an audience. And I certainly don't consider myself a dancer. [Laughs.]

But it was an interesting proposition. So I said, "Sure, but can we stop calling it on?" [They laugh.] [It's] kind of funny [but it ended up influencing] the way the piece developed because I had been making some work, which I'm still in the process of making, out of clay throwing pots. And I thought—

JUDITH RICHARDS: On a potter's wheel?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. So I thought, when you work on a potter's wheel, you're working on a moving surface. So what if I, in exchange for her putting a piece on me, I made a piece on her. So I literally took material to her body and tried to sculpt it as she moved. And so—

JUDITH RICHARDS: What material did you choose?

JANINE ANTONI: I chose clay because it was the simplest material and I had in the studio and it was very fluid. And so I—she does a very simple gesture, which is sort of a back roll. And as she's doing it, I keep adding the clay to her body. And the roll shapes the clay.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is it meant to, and does it stick to her body?

JANINE ANTONI: It sticks and falls off. So it's these forms through space that articulate this roll that she does. And then we use those poses that we get into to make it as movements to choreograph a dance. And so we do a dance from those movements before the clay is introduced [but we do it] separately. Then we come together with the clay. And then we continue the dance separately, if that makes any sense to you.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So describe the experience that the viewer had at the Albright-Knox.

JANINE ANTONI: I'm telling you the first part of this dance. We ended up in the room which has the Clyfford Stills, which is a big historical room for the Albright-Knox. We danced in that space, so we were in a gallery space.

JUDITH RICHARDS: You and Jill?

JANINE ANTONI: Jill and I. [It was seen in the round but without a raised stage.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: The audience?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. And—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Had you marked out a barrier that they couldn't go beyond?

JANINE ANTONI: We marked that out with objects. We had four objects in each corner that created—defined the space and [they were] the objects we interacted with during the performance. [. . .] I had been working on this ceramic piece with hipbones—female hipbones. So I had a lot of hipbones around. So I made Jill a hip—a pelvic hipbone tutu.

Jill is a modern dancer, but her history is—she danced for the Joffrey, so she has [a] ballet history. [It] was interesting to tap into that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: What was this made out of?

JANINE ANTONI: It was made out of these scientific—you know, when you get these skeletons that you study, it was made out of [plastic].

JUDITH RICHARDS: But then you put them together—

JANINE ANTONI: Then I put them together—

JUDITH RICHARDS: With ribbon, or?

JANINE ANTONI: No, I made a kind of tool belt. You know how tool belts are [made with] tan leather? And it held them out like this. So we had this hipbone tutu and then I had the clay in all its forms. I had water [in] one corner we had bottles of water.

JUDITH RICHARDS: They let you do this with the Clyfford Stills? [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, can you believe it? The other we had wet clay. Then I made dry clay hipbones. So we had these bones that were made out of clay. And we had the toe shoes—I mean, we had the tutu. And so you had this clay in all its different forms, like—

JUDITH RICHARDS: What were you wearing?

JANINE ANTONI: I wore this costume that I designed myself—[laughs]—I was wearing all black from head to toe. And then I sewed lace—

JUDITH RICHARDS: With just your face—head to face is including your head?

JANINE ANTONI: No. I would say I had a turtleneck, so not my head. And I had lace that I had going down, almost like a spinal cord.

JUDITH RICHARDS: White lace on black?

JANINE ANTONI: White lace on black. And it went down between my legs, all the way down to the ground. And then I—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Like a tail coming down? You mean loose?

JANINE ANTONI: No.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, sewn on the inside—

JANINE ANTONI: Sewn on the inside of my legs, sort of like, you know, how the fur of a dog is longer in there—[laughs]—it was like that. And then I put it on the machine with white thread and I sewed back and forth so that it almost becomes like a mane or a hairy chest. So it had a very—somewhere between—you had the skeletal thing but you also had the animal thing going on.

I should say that the dance was—the place where Jill and I intersect is [our] interest in ritual, altered states and healing. And the piece [is a] play on those traditions, like ceremonial dance, [which is] the origin of dance, on the one hand and then ballet on the other. And of course, we think of those as opposites. [Ballet as the height] of culture and refinement. But we started to look at them to see what was similar about them, trying to bring them together.



Many things happen in the piece. She puts on the tutu and she starts to do ballet moves and they morph into something that you would recognize from ceremonial dance. But—[there are also] many references to the ballet and, the firebird and peasant dance. It's complicated. But she also puts on these toe shoes at one point and she crushes the hipbones. So I had suggested this idea to her and she—

JUDITH RICHARDS: They're fragile enough to be crushed?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, because they're not fired. [After I made the suggestion] I—she turns to me and she says, "Do you know that a lot of ballerinas have to get hip replacements because of what being on toe does to them?" I had no idea. I just thought it [would be] a great mortar and pestle [image], these toes shoes?

She crushes these bones and I keep—I partner with her, but I treat her almost like a tool, like a jackhammer. And then we end the performance by taking the dust from [the crushed clay bone], and used it as makeup [or] war paint. We cover each other's faces.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes, using the water on the face.

JANINE ANTONI: So yes. So I have this—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And what's the lighting like?

JANINE ANTONI: The lighting was curious—[laughs]—because we didn't want to make it black box. We wanted to acknowledge the fact that we were in a gallery and not in a theater space. But you know, lighting is everything in a dance. We didn't want to ignore the Clyfford Stills, but we couldn't have the lighting just on the Clyfford Stills because they we were just silhouetted in front of them. So we worked really hard to create the right lighting for the situation.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So it wasn't exactly a theatrical lighting where all the focus is on the center.

JANINE ANTONI: Not at all. No. No.

JUDITH RICHARDS: How many minutes long does this last?

JANINE ANTONI: It was 40 minutes. It was a full-length—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you have it videotaped?

JANINE ANTONI: We have it videotaped. I have images I can show you. And hopefully I'll do it in New York soon. We'll see. We'll see what—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you expect that it will change next time?

JANINE ANTONI: I want to—I want to keep going and see—I have to wait to see what Jill thinks and to look at the video and see how we did.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Did you like doing it in an art gallery in retrospect? You know, so many loaded meanings in there.

JANINE ANTONI: It's totally loaded and was difficult for us, [but] I wouldn't want to do it in a black box. It needs intimacy. It needs to be in the round. You know, in an ideal world, it would not be an art space or a dance space. [. . .]

JUDITH RICHARDS: What? A park? I mean—

JANINE ANTONI: I don't know. Like—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is it definitely an indoor, artificial light piece?

JANINE ANTONI: I think it's pretty—it's indoor, although a park is really interesting when you bring it up. [They laugh.] I never thought of that. There would be something about doing it on the earth that would be nice, that would make sense.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Or the beach—think of you, the beach.

JANINE ANTONI: The beach, yes. So that—it's super exciting. At the same time I'm now collaborating with Stephen Petronio who is another choreographer. And I'm doing something more traditional with him, in the sense that I'm making an artistic intercession into his choreography. It will show at the Joyce in April. But he's very open to all kinds of suggestions so we've been like a house on fire, creatively. We have the Catholic thing in common.

And Stephen is doing a piece called *As Lazarus Did*. So it's all about when Jesus brought Lazarus back from the dead. It's all about resurrection, we have a lot for each other. [He is] very different kind of choreographer. So I'm just starting to learn about all of this and actually where my work fits.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Are you feeling at all missing making objects?

JANINE ANTONI: I'm making objects at the same time. I don't think I can stop in the sense that [it is] what I know and what I am—

JUDITH RICHARDS: So that's proceeding separately.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. I always have some other tangent going on that feeds the work. I've been interested in performance. I've been interested in process. And this allows me to really show that in a way that it's only been implied [so far].

JUDITH RICHARDS: Hmm. Do you imagine the video—being used by itself?

JANINE ANTONI: No.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It's just documentation.

JANINE ANTONI: Everybody asks me that, including my gallery. [Laughs.] Everybody's looking for the thing that will survive. And I think—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: -- something may come. I feel like objects will come out of doing these things and that trying to make this into an object is not the way to go, but I could change my mind if the right thing appears.

JUDITH RICHARDS: So obviously when you redo this you have to remake the hipbone tutu because it was crushed.

JANINE ANTONI: No, actually it wasn't crushed [the tutu was made of plastic hip bones]. The hipbones that I'm talking about were made separately [out of clay.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Oh, so you—all right, so you have a supply of those.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, [a] supply of clay hipbones. [Laughs.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: Readily at hand. [Laughs.]

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And so that really brings us to the present.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is there something—a dream project? I mean, obviously you've got lots and lots of time ahead of you, but is there something that you've dreamed about doing that you actually haven't been able to realize yet?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, I am working on another project right now which is for Inhotim, which is this space in Brazil. They already have two of my major works there, *To Draw a Line* and *Swoon*. But they've asked me to make a piece that would be permanent, that they would build a building to house it in. So that's kind of a dream. [Laughs.] Nobody ever offers—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Pushes your next show at the gallery a ways away.

JANINE ANTONI: Right? [I don't get offers like] that every day.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Right.

JANINE ANTONI: So I'm trying to figure out what is right for that context.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Have you been down to look at the—

JANINE ANTONI: I've been down. I thought I had the idea, and now I'm rethinking it from scratch.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you start out with a budget that they give you or do they wait for you to propose?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. That's a very good question. I think they're waiting for me to propose. [Laughs.] So I think I need more of a concept to bring to them before we—

JUDITH RICHARDS: That's nice, they let you just be very open-ended without a limit.

JANINE ANTONI: Right. [When] a patron offer me that sort of situation. It's amazing.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes. What would you say are your biggest challenges at this point?

JANINE ANTONI: My biggest challenge is money—right now at this moment. My projects have [become] massive. And the art world has changed in terms of how one makes money. And what worked for me at one point doesn't necessarily work now. And so that's created a lot of change in the way I work. [Applying for grants] is something I never had to do that before. [I supported myself] through sales. So that is a challenge.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Is this—it sounds like your work has found—most of your work has found a home, but there aren't that many actual pieces.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes. There's not that much and it takes so much [time and money] to make [my] work. If I can pay for the work and have a little money left over I'm lucky. So—

JUDITH RICHARDS: And you certainly can't count on grants.

JANINE ANTONI: No. So that's complicated. And I've never just made stuff for the—I mean, it's been the only thing that's helped me is being able to make editions of photographs and things like that.

JUDITH RICHARDS: And then there's the teaching that's—

JANINE ANTONI: And the teaching, which is really time-consuming, draining, but very inspiring too. [It] seems like the right thing to do on some level, to give back a little bit.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Yes.

JANINE ANTONI: So money and time because I have a daughter and I have to be there for her. [I am] learning to juggle that. Before I could be totally selfish. Even Paul understood that the marriage could wait for art because we do that for each other all the time. But you can't do that to your child. So time is a big thing.

And for me, being my age, I think the big concern is to stay fresh and changing and growing. And you know, there's this tremendous pressure to continue to do the thing that the world thinks I'm good at. I've always run from that. [Laughs.] I'm running even further now. How do I see the rest of my life? Am I going to do what I know or am I going to push myself.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Do you keep discovering—I read somewhere you were interested in the Lygia Clark, the Brazilian artist. And we talked earlier about—a reference to artists—American artist in the '60s, women, and the '70s performative work. Are there any artists who are new come on the—on your horizon that have been inspiring lately? I don't know, maybe you knew Lygia Clark's work decades ago, but—

JANINE ANTONI: [Talking about change,] Lygia's trajectory from painting, to [sculpture to healing] at the end. If I were to follow my ideas, even if they lead me straight out of the art world, would I have the courage to go wherever they took me? That's a question I ask myself. I love her work and the things she's interested in. But I'm particularly interested in her trajectory.

Other artists? Doris Salcedo is really important to me—if I think about living artists—Charles Ray.

JUDITH RICHARDS: When you have time to go to—I presume you have—you do take times to go to museums and galleries and see art. What do you tend to go to see?

JANINE ANTONI: Well, these days I'm only going to see dance. I'm obsessed with seeing dance. Of course, I go to the shows because I feel like it's [the] responsible thing to do as an artist.

JUDITH RICHARDS: The shows meaning contemporary?

JANINE ANTONI: Yes, contemporary art shows. But really, I don't have a lot of time and I have to be in the studio and weekends are for the family. So whenever I can take a night out and go and see dance. I feel like I'm—it's such a learning curve if I'm actually going to take this on. So—

JUDITH RICHARDS: Speaking of money issues, there are hardly any artists who have a more difficult situation than dancers.

JANINE ANTONI: I know. Can you believe that's the direction I'm going in? [They laugh.] That's not well-thought out. You have to follow your inspiration. And I guess I've been pretty lucky. No one would ever have expected that the things that I made would be viable. And so far, they've been viable. So I have to feel that if I really follow my creative threads that things will be—somebody will figure out a way for me to keep doing it.

JUDITH RICHARDS: As we conclude, is there anything else you have in mind you'd like to—

JANINE ANTONI: I think we did pretty well. [But], we could go on for hours and hours. [They laugh.] But, yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: It seems like a good place to stop.

JANINE ANTONI: Yes.

JUDITH RICHARDS: Thank you.

JANINE ANTONI: Thank you.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]