



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with James Rosenquist,
2013 March 28

Contact Information

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with James Rosenquist on 2013 March 28. The interview took place at Rosenquist's studio, in Spring Hill, FL and was conducted by James McElhinney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking with James Rosenquist at his studio in New York City on Wednesday, March 28, 2013.

Good afternoon.

JAMES ROSENQUIST: Good afternoon, and welcome to my humble casa here.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Very splendid place indeed—big room, beautiful skylight, large pictures on the walls. So—

MR. ROSENQUIST: So you want to know how I got here.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, let's start—

MR. ROSENQUIST: [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Let's start, since recently we've been celebrating the life of Will Barnet, who I understood was a teacher of yours and with you remain—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Short and very short.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Really?

MR. ROSENQUIST: One month. And so he died. He was 101. He died. So I asked Elena, how did he die? Well, he went to sleep and I went to wake him up and he didn't wake up.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, that's a way to go.

MR. ROSENQUIST: He sailed—it's a way to go. He sailed to infinity.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you only studied with him for a month.

MR. ROSENQUIST: A month. But, you know, the strangest thing is I met some of my lifelong friends in his class. Lo and behold, they all died ahead of him and they were all much, much younger. It's so weird. [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Who among them?

MR. ROSENQUIST: One was Ray Donarski, a tight, tight friend of mine for years and years and years. And then Henry Pearson. He was older. He was older, though. You know, these—the camaraderie, you know, that he had in his class, it was very relaxed. It was, you know, nice.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So I'm going to ask you a question.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Contrary to other people. Now, Morris Kantor, who was a hell of a nice guy but he was very quiet, and he used to say—he used to wiggle his finger. And then I studied with George Grosz quite a while. He was my good friend. I was poor, you know, on the verge of starvation. And he was a ladies' man and he used to go to a lot of very, very fancy cocktail parties all over Manhattan—penthouses, Sutton Place, everything else.

Here's the curious thing. In those days—that's back in the '50s—in those days, we'd go to these places and I says, "George, [in German accent] was ist the cost here for this to go to this place?" Oh, very expensive—\$300 a month.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Whistles.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: Then we go to another place. George, how much is this penthouse? Oh, it's \$350 a month.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Wow. So the thing was, I met a lot of people, and I thought they were—I didn't know what they were—rich, middle class, or what they were. But they lived really well. They lived very damn well. And then also artists at that time—there weren't very many art galleries. So artists would have cocktail parties and show each other their works, and that was it. And they lived—a lot of them were commercial artists. They did other kinds of works. But the thing was being an artist. But there was no—

MR. MCELHINNEY: You mean earning a living doing—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Anything.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —illustration, window dressing, house painting, whatever.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Let me ask you, when was the first time you remember being in the presence of a work of art?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Easy. Easy. I didn't know what the hell it was. I was little. I was a little boy. I snuck into the Minneapolis Art Institute and I ran out. I went home and I said, "Mama, mama, they've got dead bodies in there and they haven't buried them yet."

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: They were Egyptian mummies.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh.

MR. ROSENQUIST: And also one time—I was still very little—two curators at the museum took out fencing equipment, with the Regalia masks and everything, went fencing in the backyard of the museum. And they cut one guy a little bit. I thought, yikes, he's really bringing the distant history to life with these things that usually just hang on racks in museums. And they were doing it. [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: So in armor, actually wearing armor?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah, they had on armor. And the guy cut the guy.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's crazy. So you grew up in Minneapolis?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Fifteen years. Before that I was born in North Dakota, up where it's very, very flat. And I lived there a lot with no electricity and no telephone. So I know what that's like.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What did your parents do?

MR. ROSENQUIST: [Laughs.] My mother was an aviator in 1931, and so was my dad. And they flew all over the place. And they—[laughs]—my mother met Charles Lindbergh and [Charles] "Speed" Holman and a whole bunch of people. And I had—I was named after an Uncle Albert who went in the Army. At that time you couldn't get in the Army Air Corps. You had to be nominated by a senator or something like that. So he went in the Army Air Corps from '28 to '31, I think, okay.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: And he and my dad both had Model T coupe cars, like they were new. And they were going to—this is a riot, I think—they were going to sell their cars and buy an airplane and start an international airline. You know what that was? Merely a mail route between Grand Fork, North Dakota, and Winnipeg, Canada. That was an international—[laughs]—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, technically speaking, yeah. [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: So Albert crashed in a rainstorm and got killed all over the place. And that ended my father's dream with him. And then the Great Depression came in; came to finally—that was the early '30s—that finally came into the Midwest. Well, we always had enough food to eat, but money was nothing. I mean, there was no money around. I mean, a nickel was a big deal then. A dollar—one dollar was like a hundred dollars today, you know. It was like totally—I had even dreams about money, because we never had any money. But we always had—money was so scarce.

So, I mean, I had this one famous—I mean, this dream I remember forever that I was playing in the backyard and I saw a huge turtle. So I ran and got a washtub and I put it over the turtle. And I ran in the house to get my mother and I says, come here, come, come, come. So I lifted up the washtub, and the big turtle turned into a \$100 bill. [They laugh.] That was like some kind of dream thing. So anyway, you know, and then—oh, I don't know. I mean, I remember the Great Depression very vividly. My mother was a great cook. She used to make an apple pie and put it on the windowsill. And bums that came down the railroad would smell that and say, madam, do you have something to eat? She says, yep, but you have to chop—I need all this wood chopped. So a guy would chop the wood and she'd make him a hell of a chicken dinner with a piece of pie. I mean, it was worth it. But—

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's an opening line to a lot of jokes. You know, bum's walking down the road and comes to the farmhouse.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I know the one of them with—the guy goes to the farmhouse. Says where's the man of the—where's the man of the hour? And he's out feeding the pigs. So he goes out and the farmer's picking up the pig, holding it up to the apple tree—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: —putting the pig down, picking it up again and holding it up to the apple tree and feeding it. The pig eats another apple and the guy says, doesn't it take a lot of time to feed the pigs that way? And the farmer goes, what's time to a pig?

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: I like that line, no matter what it's on.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] There's another one about a pig with a wooden leg. And the answer is, well, you get a pig that—

MR. ROSENQUIST: I know I've heard that one.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] Well—

MR. ROSENQUIST: But anyway, so I—

MR. MCELHINNEY: So your parents were aviators. Did you know that Knox Martin's dad was also an aviator?

MR. ROSENQUIST: I know Knox Martin.

MR. MCELHINNEY: He was also the son of an aviator.

MR. ROSENQUIST: He likes to drink a lot.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So I've heard.

MR. ROSENQUIST: At the Chelsea Hotel bar, that Spanish bar right there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. I think I saw him recently.

MR. MCELHINNEY: He's at the League. He teaches at the League. So when did you move to Minneapolis? You know, you were a little kid, right? Two, three, five, six?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Something like that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah. And when did you begin studying art, I mean, in a practical sense, learning—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Seeking instruction.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I'll tell you. To me, anything to do with art is sort of weird and mysterious always. Why? Because of the experience of it I've had. And when I was in the—let me think now—when I was in eighth grade or something like that, my teacher—I had a weird teacher. My teacher invited us kids to his house to see his pets, his rabbits, and this and that and different little pets. Then about six months later he invited us back to his house. We said, Where's all your pets? And he opened up his freezer and he froze all of them. He was going to

eat them all.

Then in class he said, "Now we're going to have a student in here who's been in a reform school. Don't you talk to him. You just let him be." We were—here was this great big kid sitting there all by himself there. And he was in this guy's art class. I mean, it was just weird. Here was this guy who totally didn't fit.

Anyway, then I did a watercolor of a sunset in Minneapolis and I submitted that to a—what do you—I think it's called a scholastic contest—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: —or whatever.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: And I won a prize, which was really almost nothing. Then—I mean, then I—my mother says, Jimmy, you're always—you're always drawing all the time and doing everything. We don't have any money. Why don't you try to make some money at that? Why don't you answer an ad in the paper? So I answered an ad in the paper that says: wanted, artist, sign painter. So I go see this World War II vet and he's still in his Army uniform, a big rough guy. W.G. Fischer was his name. And he says, "Can you paint these Phillips 66 signs on buildings?" I said, "Yeah, I can do anything." So anyway, "Here's 120 bucks and here's an old Chevrolet truck. I want you to go to North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, and Wisconsin, and meet us in Wisconsin, the crew."

So I went off and painted these things single-handedly up on gas tanks and every goddam thing. Then I met them in Wisconsin and—[laughs]—his crew was largely ex-convicts and stuff and jailbirds. I was a teenager and they were like 29, so they didn't beat up on me. We'd go in a bar and they'd say, give this kid a gin and tonic. No, he's too young. Give him a malted milk. So they would give me a gin and tonic and a malted milk and a whiskey sour and every goddam thing. Then I'd have to—they'd make me drink them all. And they were—a couple of them were bad boys, like one guy tried to rape the girl in the drug store. And so they had to sort of beat him up or let him have it. A bunch of us come out and calm him down. And it went like that.

So we went from town to town in Wisconsin at that point, and we'd get—[laughs]—then we left Wisconsin and we went to South Dakota, I think. And then we came—no, yeah, we got in the goddam truck and drove all the way to South Dakota, in the dust. Then we—North Dakota, North Dakota, to the Williston oil basins. North Dakota, to the Williston oil basins.

So we get in—we go and to paint these great big tanks. And we go there right off the bat. We work like hell all day. Then we get a room, which was a big—about as big as this room here, this living-room area, with three beds in it. But it was, like, a hotel for farmer—thresher and farm workers—farm workers. Anyway, we go to sleep. Then Wally pees. He gets drunk and he pees all over the place. And I go, Goddam it. Wally, we've got to get the hell out of here because we can't come back here. This is embarrassing.

So we worked all—hard all that day, and then we couldn't get out of town. We tried to get out of town. We couldn't get out of town. So we went looking for a new hotel; all filled. We had to go back to the same damn place where he peed all over it. And they said, "Yes." They gave us our room back, all fresh linen and everything. They didn't say a word. [They laugh.] It probably happened to them a lot.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I think it happens with hockey teams nowadays.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Oh, man. So, anyway, I worked with those guys and I picked up a few strange things that they do.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: They're very strange guys. And they have strange logic. The logic is peculiar, because this one guy—his name was Red—just came back from Korea, and he wanted Wally to marry his fat sister. Wally didn't want to marry his fat sister, but that was his best friend. So what did he do? He robbed 10 gasoline stations, found a gun in one, and the cops picked him up with a gun. Then he got charged with armed robbery and he had to go to the slammer, and he didn't have to marry Red's fat sister; didn't have to lose face; still a macho guy. This happened to me.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: In Florida I had a guy who was on parole working with me. And we were all going to go to Russia. It was so strange. He was afraid of going to Russia, so he got a DWI on parole and he couldn't go to Russia. [Laughs.] Still a macho guy. So, anyway, they're funny people.

So, anyway, I did that one summer. And then after that I walked into General Outdoor Advertising Company in Minneapolis, and there was a guy painting a huge macaroni salad for Kraft Foods with macaronis as big as fire hoses. And I said, I can do that. They said, "Oh yeah? We can always use a good man around here." I was still a teenager. So he says, over there, go paint that two heads for Coca-Cola—two kids drinking Coca-Cola. Coca-Cola was very fussy. Everything had to be *perfect*. The hair was dark green. The eyebrows were dark green; perfect complexion. Do all of that. Okay.

I worked like hell all day long. And then he said to me, "I'm sorry, kid, you don't have it. You don't have the swing." Okay. I went away. I came back six months later. [Laughs.] I did the same thing. I walked in. There's this guy, Henry Bivens. I said, "I can do that. Oh, yeah? We can always use a good man here." Go paint those two heads for—another two heads for Coca-Cola. And by that time I'd practiced, and I did a pretty nice job. And he said, "Well, just move the whole nose over an inch," this big Arabesque. And I got the job. And I think I saved up 300 bucks. Then I applied for an out-of-town scholarship at the Art Students League.

And at this juncture, at that time, I met a very famous—well, very incredible artist named Cameron Booth who could draw portraits magnificently. He was a colorist, incredible. He was an abstract painter too. He was a friend of Will Barnet's too. And I finally learned his whole story later. But anyway, he said I should study with Hans Hofmann, his teacher, in Munich after—he's a World War I vet. And—but Hans quit teaching, moved somewhere anyway.

Anyhow, I applied for this out-of-town scholarship. Lo and behold, I won it, which all it meant was a year's free schooling. That's all, nothing else. Free to walk in and go to any class you wanted to go to. So, anyway, I took the redeye and came to New York and got a one-room studio for \$8.50 a week on West 57th Street. And I thought that's too much money. So I moved to Columbus Circle for eight bucks a week—[laughs]—and bounced around.

And I was a starving artist, literally. So I caught pneumonia, went to the Roosevelt ward—the welfare ward at the Roosevelt Hospital. And I got out of there in two weeks. And the doctor said, "James, whatever happens to you, always eat a big breakfast, even if you don't—scrape up something and you have a big breakfast, because you'll get invited the rest of the day or something will happen to you. But always eat a breakfast." So I took his advice. I never had pneumonia again.

And then my schoolmate, Ray Donarski, who I met in Barnet class said, there's this great job in Westchester for some very wealthy people, and they have a great chef. So we went up there, and it was the Stearns family whose father started Bear Stearns stock brokerage. So this girl came bounding out of the house in Bermuda shorts. She says, "Hi, boys. Jump in my Wildcat and I'll show you the castle." And they had this old castle that they had built from this family who—the family was from the Sterns Department Store, S-T-E-R-N-S. And this guy put an A in the name. Anyway, so she served us lunch. And she says, "Well, do you want the job?" I said, "Give us—let me think it over." We thought it over for 30 seconds and said, yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: We were so hungry. So I took the job. And then Ray was supposed to take it in a year, and then he'd take it after me, anyway, because he went to Italy to do some clothing—cloth designs or something, for his uncle. Anyway, I lived in luxury. I had a huge apartment on the top floor. And my job was to drive them around in their cars and then tend bar. And they had—[laughs]—they had parties, like one party they had Romy Bearden, Superman, and John Chamberlain came. So I remained friends with Romy, Romare Bearden. Do you know who that is?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Of course.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. And then Superman shot himself.

MR. MCELHINNEY: George Reeves.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Exactly.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: George Reeves. So then John became a lifelong friend, and he just died. I spent a lot of time with John. Anyway, so I stayed there one year. And then I thought, this isn't my house, my place. I'm living well; not making any money. So I went into New York City, transferred into the International Sign and Pictorial Painters Union Local 230, which was run largely by Italian guys. And I went in there and I said, "I was in the union in Minnesota and I want to transfer in." They said, "There ain't no work for you here, kid. There ain't nothin' here [New Jersey, tough guy accent]." So I said—[laughs]—"I made this speech." I said, "I'm ready to respect the rights of all the older gentlemen in this union, and I'm ready to take—willing to take my turn." The guy goes,

"Hah, hah, hah, hah. All right, kid. Bring your money around Thursday, which was 2[00], 300 bucks." I was in the union. And instantly—

CHELSEA: [Coughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: You okay?

MR. ROSENQUIST: You want wine, water, coffee, whiskey, tequila?

[END TR01.]

This is disc number two.

MR. MCELHINNEY: We're resuming. We're talking about how you got into the union.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So I got into the union. Then immediately, "Do you want to paint stripes on the highway?" "No." "Do you want to paint numbers on the Polo Ground seats?" "No. I only paint pictures. I only"—so anyway, I got—my first job was Brooklyn with a—[inaudible]—company painting a Hebrew National Salami sign on the Flatbush extension, which is difficult because it's like the Superman logo. I didn't know how to letter very well. But I could paint any picture.

Anyway, I worked there for about a month and got laid off. And then—[laughs]—I always had tons of experiences, like you've heard of those painter experiences and stuff. I had them [laughs]. Anyway, I'm working in the area near Bedford-Stuyvesant, Bed-Stuy. On the corner is a bar. Anyway, I'm working on a building when they were tearing the whole area down. And this old Scottish—my helper; I was the boss—we got trapped on the roof. We were yelling. There's nobody around at all; no one around all over. It was like—

MR. MCELHINNEY: How'd you get on the roof?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well, there's a trap door to walk up to the roof. Somebody locked it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Couldn't go home. Oh, what the hell? So, anyway, I couldn't do anything. So I saw a hatch on the roof. [Laughs.] So I pried and pried, pried this hatch off the roof, lowered myself in a dark room. Two people were sleeping in bed.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: And I remember, the Scottish guy says, "Excuse us." We walked out the goddam door and never came back.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: Unlocked their door and ran off and never came back.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: Thank you. And other things like that happened. But anyway, so then I got laid off. So then I got rehired with General Outdoor Advertising in Brooklyn, and it was my first encounter with the Mafia, those guys. And Al D'Ambrese [ph], he says, "Look at this. This is my niece. Ain't she beautiful?" I says, "Oh, she's beautiful, Al." "You should take her out, but you can't fuck her and leave her." I said, "Al, I'm engaged." I saved my life there. "Oh, that's too bad."

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: If you take off—if you take out a Mafia daughter and you leave her, they break your nose. They don't break your arm or your leg. It's all business with them. Whack, one shot. This happened to two friends of mine who took out Mafia girls.

Anyway, I worked there, painted. Gee whiz, I painted 140 Schenley whiskey bottles two stories tall. I could paint them in my sleep, upside down, backwards, everything, because I was good, fella. I was—you know, they could count on me and I was good. So, anyway, I worked there—I don't know—like seven months or something. Then I got laid off again and I thought, gee, you know, that was a recessive period then.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: I can't, which year—we had these recessions people don't really know about, for working

people. Anyway, I was laid off for about a month. Then I was rehired by Artkraft Strauss in Times Square. And it was right in the middle of the movie *The Vikings*.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The Kirk Douglas movie.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. I painted his portrait perfectly. That was my first thing—audition. And I put saliva on his lips, perfect hair, makeup. He looked really good. [Laughs.] Old Mr. Strauss walked by. "Hire that fella. Hire that young man." So I got a job, and I painted everything you can imagine in Times Square, including the Astor Victoria Theater. I painted that sucker seven times with two crews—the DeMille, the Mayfair, the Palace. I painted a lot. I was like the number one. It was me and then there was a German guy, Heinz Drude. He was good too. He was a very, very good painter. He was an old—he was a World War II vet, full of bullet holes in his body.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow. In Europe? He was in Europe or he was in the Pacific?

MR. ROSENQUIST: On the Western Front.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, wow.

MR. ROSENQUIST: So—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, he was in the German army.

MR. ROSENQUIST: German army.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, I see.

MR. ROSENQUIST: So—[laughs]—you want an example. We were painting a big six-pack of Budweiser beer right by the old Madison Square Garden. And he takes off his shirt to get a suntan, and he's all full of holes. And he says, [in German accent] "You see that building there, the big—that was Madison Square Garden. He says, In Hamburg, one British blockbuster bomb hit the building, and *alles kaputt*; 6,000 people. *Alles kaputt*." He said, "I hate war. My mother was killed in the war; my father. I hate war." And then lunchtime is over and he says, "You know what I think? I think them West Germans are going to go in there and clean out those East Germans." I said, "You son-of-a-bitch warmonger." [They laugh.] Okay, okay, okay.

I'll tell you another funny one. It's a painting story. We were working in Times Square and there was the automat right there in Times Square. And we go in there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Horn and Hardart.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Horn and Hardart, yeah. And there was one old guy named Jordan with false teeth, and he used to take out his damn false teeth and put it on the table. I said, would you—will you get your false teeth off the fucking table?

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: You know, you make us sick. Okay, okay. So he put in this blue chalk pocket and his teeth turned all blue.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: So one day he goes—we're at lunch. He goes, "My teeth. I can't find my teeth." So somebody says, "You maybe lost them in the garbage down below where we used to make high-altitude paint cans." We wired them so they didn't fall down, you know. We'd make our own. So he goes—he couldn't find his teeth. This is funny. We come out of the automat. There's his teeth, comes flying across the street and hits the curb. And he goes, "That's my teeth, I think." [They laugh.] He picks his teeth out of the gutter and wipes them off. He goes, "Yep, they're mine."

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: These old—they're old, old guys—old guys.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you used the term chalk pocket. That refers to, like, chalk line, a piece of blue chalk you would use—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Blue chalk.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —you would use for the chalk line in laying out the signs.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Exactly.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: So, anyway, I painted everything and everything and everything. And then in '59 two guys got killed. A.B. Marco [ph] accidentally fell off Klein's Department Store on 14th Street. Another guy fell off a Budweiser sign in New Jersey. And I thought, this is really dangerous work.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You're up on scaffoldings.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. I worked way up, 20 stories sometimes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Now, you were using these scaffoldings that are like three or like two or three heavy planks of wood and an iron frame, and it was rigged from the—

MR. ROSENQUIST: No.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So it was not like window-cleaning scaffoldings.

MR. ROSENQUIST: It was just a ladder. It was two triangulated—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, I got you.

MR. ROSENQUIST: —things on the end of—block and tackle with ropes, and a back 2 x 4 for the back, but no safety ropes, no nothing. There was nothing safety at all about it. And we were like circus performers. We would slide down on the front of the Athos [ph] Theater on two ropes to the ground, seven stories. When I got done, I felt I was like Superboy. But, you know, you learn not to—you're doing all this work, but you're not taking—you're try not to take any chances.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: I was very careful. So and then some of my fellow workers were nervous wrecks and they'd say, "Jimmy, I'm going over to Eighth Avenue for a pick-me-up. You want to join me?" I'd say, "Yeah, I'll get a cup of coffee." So I go over there, and, "Jimmy, you know, maybe a shot of whiskey?" I think, it's 8:00 in the morning. What am I going to do? So I have a shot of whiskey. Boy, am I glad this day is over. What a day it's been. I'd look at my watch. I go, *shit*, it hasn't started yet, and I'm dead tired; the whiskey. Dead tired.

Anyway, I quit in '59 working for Artkraft. I said I wanted \$30 a week more. He says, "Jimmy, you can't do that. You're stepping outside the union. You can't do that. You—blah, blah, blah." I says, "I don't care." And the management was Jake Starr. You ever hear of him? Jake Starr, old Ansonia Hotel, that fancy hotel up on Broadway.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: And he had a number of businesses in Puerto Rico. He was a great big guy. He used to jingle quarters in his hand all the time. And he looked at me. He goes, "What do you want to do that for? You could get married someday maybe. You could even buy a car. You're making money. What do you want money for—more?" I says, "I'm going to leave." So I left. That was it.

The union was run by Dante Morandi. And he liked me for some reason, and he always—when I applied for unemployment insurance, he always put me on the bottom of the pile so my name never came up. So I kept collecting unemployment insurance. And so I—you know, I got a studio on the waterfront for 45 bucks a month.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Was this down near—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Coenties Slip.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Coenties Slip.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. So that was with people like Jack Youngerman and—

MR. ROSENQUIST: He was up near the—right near the water with Bob—Bob Clark, and then later with Bobby Dann [ph]. And then on South Street I think it was Agnes Martin and Lenore Tawney. And then a block inward, Bob Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns were there. They were just around there. It was like a joke living there because it was illegal. So Ellsworth Kelly was in the building I was in upstairs. And I moved in there, and I didn't

know what to do. And I used to watch Wall Streeters come and go to work.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: I thought, boy, I'm living in luxury. I'm living in luxury because I don't have to go to work. I don't have to go to work every day. I just do whatever I want to do. I'm on *unemployment*. So I started trying to figure out what I'm about to do.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So what attracted you to that particular location? Because that—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Fresh air.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Fresh air. You liked being on the roof.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Beautiful. It was right there in the harbor.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: The air is fresh. It's like you're being in a resort.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, you look over to Brooklyn Heights there, right? And—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Right off the Verrazano Bridge.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. So that whole area has become very touristy now and commercial; you know, the Coenties Slip, where, you know, the fish market used to be. It's all different.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Oh, yeah, yeah, I know what you mean.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, but, yeah, the—yeah, I know what you mean.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, how did you hear about that? I mean, how did you know—how did you know to go there? Were you still during—

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, no. Listen to me. I used to go walk on the waterfront all the way up from 57th Street down to the Battery, up to the other side, looking for the perfect place to live. That's where I went.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And that's when you—while you were still up on the scaffolding painting billboards.

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, after—I mean, I left. Then I did—I found a—I found a beautiful loft on John Street, I think it was.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: It had been a printer's studio, with printing presses, with all the skylights, 40 bucks a month. And I found out the owner was two Greeks that had a restaurant in Harlem. And I couldn't—I put \$10 down and I couldn't raise the other 30 bucks, I was so broke. [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: So how did you find the place on Coenties Slip? How did you? Was it an artist you knew?

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, no, no. Yeah, I knew—I mean, I met Ellsworth and I met Bob Clark, so forth. And they said, "Well, Agnes Martin just left the studio on the third floor, and it's available maybe. Why don't you find out?" That's how I got it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So I'm just curious. During the time when you were doing the Outdoor Advertising work, were you still taking classes at the League? Were you still doing any studio work at all? You were just doing—

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, I was doing my own painting, abstract painting.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Your own painting—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —at home at night.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Oh, yeah. See, I'd had apartments on the Upper East Side, \$31.10 a month, five-room apartment; four rooms on the West Side, 54 bucks a month. That's the olden days, yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Were you exhibiting at that time at all? Just painting.

MR. ROSENQUIST: No exhibiting. And I didn't want to ever exhibit anything unless I was—looked *totally* different than anybody else. That's my advice to young people too. Don't copy what's going on and expect to get anywhere.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, a lot of people—

MR. ROSENQUIST: When I was starting out at that period, the art teachers at the time, the abstract professional art teachers—I mean, I knew—see, my heroes then were jazz musicians and a few artists like Bill de Kooning and Franz Kline and Joan Mitchell—Joan? Joan. Anyway, but jazz musicians always intrigued me, because I used to know—I used to know Dizzy Gillespie pretty well. I was on TV with him one time. I bought a drink for Miles Davis one time. And I met briefly Thelonious Monk, my total hero.

And the painters, you know, they were the *real* painters. They painted whether they ever sold anything or not—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: —since the WPA days. I mean, Bill de Kooning then—I met him down on 10th Street, and then he got a big studio on Broadway. And then he moved to East Hampton. And much later, I—right after he moved to East Hampton, I moved to East Hampton too, because of a guy named John McMahon, who's now dead. He was Bill's helper for 15 years. But I'm getting ahead of my story here. But so I was thinking that, because of painting outdoor pictures of commercial things, cigarettes and whiskey, anything, which meant totally meant nothing to me except painting of color and form, how could I introduce imagery back into non-objective painting —

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: —which meant that I was painting—what I meant was absolutely nothing, but there it was right in front of your face. So that's what I was trying to do. So I did a painting with a front of a '50 Ford in a field of spaghetti and two people whispering to each other, and then some other pictures.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So the function of the image was purely abstract, that the content of the image was irrelevant to the picture.

MR. ROSENQUIST: It's all—yeah, it's—see, I continued painting about nothing. And I'm still doing that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: And that's an old Oriental thing too about going towards nothing, studying nothing.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The void or that—you know, the—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. It has to do with a lot of things, like Zen. It has to do with many things. And there's a whole history of that coming from India, paintings about nothing, coming towards *nothing*; fractals coming towards *nothing*. Anyway, one day I looked out my window and there, sitting on a curb, was Henry Geldzahler from the Metropolitan Museum, Dick Bellamy, an art dealer, and Ivan Karp, they were sitting on a curb, smoking cigars. I really didn't know any of them at all, really. I'd heard of them. That's all. So about 20 minutes later there was a knock on the door. It was those guys. They come in. Henry runs around the room like Porky Pig, dancing around.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: And Bellamy said, "I'm starting a new gallery." And Karp says, "Don't sign any papers." So, anyway, Bellamy said, "Can I bring somebody down to look at what you're doing?" I says, "I don't care, because my whole life I'd been painting signs. People were always looking over my shoulder."

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I didn't give a shit.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Hey, you spelled that wrong, right? That's the old joke.

MR. ROSENQUIST: What?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Hey, you spelled that wrong. That's the old joke.

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, no. Jake started—what's that movie with the carriages, you know? It's famous, you know, biblical movie, a painting.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, *Ben Hur*.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah, I was painting horses for *Ben Hur*. He says, give that horse a nose. That's too long there. That's too long. I says, give me some quarters. I talked—you're not supposed to talk back to management.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: So, anyway, Bellamy brought Bob Scull down—he owned 120-some taxis—he walked in and he says, [loud New York accent] "Fantastic, incredible. It's that great American spirit!" Then he walked out the door. So then Dick says, "Can I bring somebody down next week?" "I don't care." He brought down Burton and Emily Tremaine, and they came in. And she said, "Dick, how much is that painting?" He says, "It's 750 bucks, but I sold it already." I went, "Dick, come here? What do you mean, you sold it already? These aren't for"—"this sounds funny, but I have a history. It's like—some kind of history." I said, "I don't want to sell it. I don't want to sell them." He says, "Well, the Tremaines want to buy this one for 350 bucks and the next one for 1,100 [dollars], and Scull wants to buy that for 750 [dollars]. You have three sales or nothing." And I went like this. I had no money—[laughs]—no money in my pockets. They were empty. Shit, I could pay the rent.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I could buy some paint and stuff. So I says, "Okay." And so I sold them. And we planned an exhibition for 1962, February or something of '62, something like that. And when the show opened, everything was sold already. Dick had sold everything. So that was cool.

So then all the work I did the following year went to the Museum of Modern Art for Dorothy Miller's *Sixteen Americans* show. Then, on a show with Dick in February '64, the month the Beatles landed over here, it sold out again—wham, bam. Then I was on a plane somewhere with Leo Castelli across the aisle, and he says, Jim, please, if you ever think of leaving Dick, please consider me first. So I joined his gallery, which—his consortium, I thought, because of his ex-wife, Ileana Sonnabend, and I had my first show with them in Paris in—the end of '64. I had a show with Dick in Paris, and I had another show, I think, in California, with Virginia Dwan, it was all in one year.

And so then we went to Paris, and a lot of the old boys were still alive then. Giacometti came to my show. Miró came to my show. Poliakoff came. And then I had a marvelous time. I stayed in Paris four months. I even flew my parents over. I drove them down to Venice and every damn thing. We were all over the place. We had a hell of a time; and then came back to New York and started working on this—I had met people who had been on missions in the war, in a police action. It was a—they called it a "police action" in Vietnam. And it was Paul Burke from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* who went on seven combat missions, and he told me all about it and a bunch of other things too, because I had conversations with—Barney Newman was a good friend of mine. I met him earlier on. And he was always friendly to young artists.

And he had this thing about peripheral vision. Whatever you look at is dictated by what else comes in your eye, and it's that color or not or whatever. And I encountered that a lot of times doing billboards in Times Square and everything else. Anyway, so I decided I wanted to do it for Leo Castelli. I wanted to do an all-around, wrap-around room painting, whatever. Whatever it looked like, I dictated it would look like that because of what came in the side of your eyes. That was—I was working on that in '64, end of '64, and '65. And I showed it in '65. And I think I made the front page of the *New York Times* with that one.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: And things—other things changed. And I think I got 25,000 bucks for it, which I was happy to get. And then, at the end, the Museum of Modern Art bought it for 5 million after the second owner—after the second owner. Anyway, and then life took off. [Laughs.] Life took off, good and bad.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How did you feel about that? I mean, there was that famous confrontation between Rauschenberg and Scull—

MR. ROSENQUIST: That was—

MR. MCELHINNEY: —at the auction.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. I was in that auction too.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Now, how—how does that make you feel? You have a piece that you sold for, you know—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well, here's what I think.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —a living wage, and then—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: So—[makes sound]—there was a guy named Ruben Borowitz [ph]. He was a very oddball and was kind of a crook. And he said to Rauschenberg and me, "You should go to Washington and lobby at the doorways of the Senate for an artist royalty bill." So I went—[laughs]—so I went there with my new friend Marian Javits and Jake. So you can't go near the doorways in the Senate without an escort, and that was Marian Javits. And we went to his office and she said, "Let's go. Let's go there." Jake says, "Darling, I wish you wouldn't. A senator's wife doesn't do those things." [They laugh.] But she said, "I don't care. Come on." I said, "I'm with you."

So we opened the door, went into the Senate, and there was Senator Magnuson from Washington. There was Hubert Humphrey. These guys were going out to the toilet and coming back. Every time they'd go out to the toilet, we'd buttonhole them and quick tell them our spiel. And they'd say, "That's on the floor now. I'm for that." So we had some power. We had Hubert Humphrey, Magnuson. Oh, God, we had a bunch of them; Claiborne Pell.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: We had a bunch of guys on our side. And it passed the Senate; I think failed the House, end of story—[makes sound]—until Alan Sieroty [Assemblyman] rewrote it for California for a 10 percent royalty. But any—because ours was, I think, 25 percent royalty if a picture went a thousand dollars over its original price. So, anyway, that was that. And then—[laughs]—then I protested the Vietnam War there, went to jail with Dr. Spock, the baby doctor.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Of course, yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Bob—Robert Morris, the sculptor. We had adjoining cells.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Was that here in New York?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Washington.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Washington.

MR. ROSENQUIST: And I thought, this is ridiculous. We had the same—we had the same art dealer in adjoining cells.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: Ridiculous. And—

MR. MCELHINNEY: What year was that? Was it 1968, or later? Well, we could look it up.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah, it's about '68; something like that, I think. Anyway—[laughs]—we're laying on the floor of the Senate with Dr. Spock. "How are you doing?" "I'm fine." "How are you?" You know, chit-chatting. And then people can say unusual things. And we're talking, talking, talking. And he says something about gay people. He says, "I've always supported the gays in San Francisco because in my career I've never met a gay person who was coerced into being gay. That's the way they came out of the womb, and that's what I think." I said, "That's what I—I think what he thinks. I think the same thing."

So, anyway, and we got out the following morning. Somebody paid the bail. I don't know who. We got out, and that was that for that. I mean, like, there's funky incidents too. So we go back to the Watergate, where the Javitses lived, and she said, "Darling, I think I'm going to show Jim the roof. He can look at the view from the roof." And he says, "I wish you wouldn't—

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: —because you would just—maybe you'll set off an alarm or something." She says, "I don't care." That's Marian for you. So we—this is funky—so we go up on the roof. We're looking over the top of the

roof and across the street at the Howard Johnson's Motor Inn. I says, "Look, there's a guy laying on the sixth floor. It looks like he's dead." So she says, "Darling, what do you think? He doesn't seem to be moving, does he?" So I says, "I think I'll call a cop. But don't tell him—don't tell him about us. Don't tell him you're calling from here. Don't tell them." And I said, "No, no, no, no, no."

So I called the cops and I said, "I'm at the Howard Johnson Motor Inn, on the sixth floor, I think there's a man in trouble." Sure enough, the cop—six cops come and they're looking around there. Then Marian—she's got balls—she says—so she yells down to the cops, "It's that way, it's over there!" She didn't want them to know that was her, but she's yelling. Okay, so they found the guy. So we go downstairs and, sure enough, the ambulance comes over. The guy's dead. But it was—at that time it was touchy in Washington, with kind of a—there was always a worry about assassinations and everything else. So—

MR. MCELHINNEY: There's always kind of issues with crime and—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. But, you know, what the hell? Anyway—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Just a little housekeeping. I've got a few questions just about what you've been telling us. At one point you said that you dodged a Mafia princess date by telling Al that you were engaged. So when you left Outdoor Advertising and moved down to Coenties Slip, were you married at that time?

MR. ROSENQUIST: I got married—I got married in—listen to me. I moved to Little Italy. I lived in Little Italy six years.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It was after you were living in—up off of Columbus Circle, right? You moved down to Little Italy. This was before Coenties Slip?

MR. ROSENQUIST: It was after Coenties Slip.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I moved to 429 Broome Street.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, all right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I had a huge studio there. And so in Little Italy, in all the coffee shops, some of them are Mafia-run shops. And there was one right back in the café named—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: —Maricaro [ph]—the Maricaro [ph] bar, restaurant. That's a Mafia joint, you know what I mean? And so how did I go in there? Did you ever hear of an artist named Harry Jackson?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: Harry—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Sculptor, right?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yes, that's right. He—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Like Western stuff.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: You got that. Harry was a painter, was a pretty good abstract painter, married to Grace Hartigan.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: And he had a studio in Little Italy and he had one in a foundry in Italy—in Italy somewhere.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: This light keeps hitting me.

MR. MCELHINNEY: We can move.

MR. ROSENQUIST: It's all right. I'll move. So, anyway, I'm walking down the street—I'm driving down the street. There's Harry in the street. "Hey, you old goddam grease monkey! Come on and meet my new wife." So he takes me into the Maricarò [ph] with his new wife, who was—who was like a society gal, very fussy society girl. And he—her name was Sarah. And we go into Maricarò [ph] and Harry started yelling. This guy comes up and says, "Oh, it's you, Harry."

Well, Harry did this beautiful painting for that place, the old Italian guys playing dominos; beautiful, with a checkerboard floor and really well-painted, realistically painted. And he says, "What would you like for breakfast, Sarah?" She said, "I'd like some—an Espresso and some Parma ham." So they bring out—she takes the ham and she says, "Harry, this ham isn't good." And he goes, "Goddam it." And he goes back in the kitchen and he says, "Goddam it, Sarah, this is one of your finest Parma hams, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." And she says, "I don't care." So—[laughs]—so he was sort of notorious around there. Why? Because he's a painter. They like artists. I don't care if you're Mafia or not; they like artists.

So then I made one fatal mistake. I brought Marian Goodman, the publisher, in there with my old schoolmate, Mel Gary [ph], who was a black guy, was in school. I know him forever, from even the West. And immediately in the record player they put, "Hit the road, Jack, and don't come back no more, no more."

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: They didn't like black people at all, period. They even had block captains in Little Italy who'd throw black people out. That was the olden days. So, anyway, the—[laughs]—I met this Mafia guys in there. It was a great club.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: *Buongiorno*. Come va. Take off your hat. They didn't want to know what they do. Badasses.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you were married at that time.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I was married, yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And you—

MR. ROSENQUIST: I got married in 1960.

MR. MCELHINNEY: 1960, okay. So the people who, when you were painting at night, you said you got to know de Kooning and Kline and other people—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —did they come look at your work? Did you go look at theirs? Was there that kind of—

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, no, no, no, no.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It was all—

MR. ROSENQUIST: No. I mean, artists are eccentric. Franz Kline used to make his lunch and eat lunch about midnight—he used to work all night. He was a night guy, totally night fellow. De Kooning, he was very friendly. He moved to East Hampton. Then, in '64, ['6]5, something like that—I can tell two stories about him. I admired him a lot for many reasons. I'm at his place. I go and say hello. He says, "Sit down. Have a drink." So he's out drinking. So I have a drink. Just then [Edy] De Wilde from Amsterdam comes in. First of all, Bill, he was painting away and he didn't like his painting. So he took a palette knife and he scraped all the paint off on the floor—plop, plop, plop. Just then De Wilde came in and he says, "Ach, so, ganz schone fantastisch. We must have this new ghostly style. We're prepared to pay you \$40,000 for this." See, that's when \$40,000 was a lot of money. That's the olden days. So Bill turns around, throws his palette knife on the floor and he goes, "Goddam it, no." He didn't sell it to him. So he was true to his work. And he—you know, he was married, then got divorced to Elaine de Kooning, and she left. And then he got—before he got Alzheimer's, she came back to take care of him. And he had a daughter with Joan Ward from—I don't know where she was from; the South somewhere—and Lisa de Kooning.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: And—but he would just work a lot. He was a workaholic, drinking and working. He was a worker. I mean, he'd paint, paint. That's what he'd do is paint—paint, paint, paint. He'd paint seven days a week, 11 months a year, then he'd go on a big bender, really a big one. And there was a guy that used to take care of him named Carlos Anduze. He was nicknamed Black Carlos. He was from South America somewhere.

Anyway, he'd take care of Bill when he was—tried to keep him from drinking. But anyway—

MR. MCELHINNEY: He was a big smoker too and had to quit smoking, I guess.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well, I didn't know that. I never—I don't know. But—

MR. MCELHINNEY: But he had to give up the liquor too eventually, right?

MR. ROSENQUIST: I don't know about that. I don't think so. I wouldn't know. See, after—I never saw him after 1975. And then he went into Alzheimer's.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Did you ever know Lester Johnson?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: A Minnesota guy.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Sure.

MR. MCELHINNEY: He was one of my teachers.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Not really well, but I knew him. I knew his work. He was always painting these—pictures of these guys. I don't know what that's all about. But he moved to Washington, D.C. later, Lester.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, I knew him at Yale. He was one of my teachers. But I guess he ended up living somewhere in Connecticut along the Long Island Sound.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Really?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Because I think I saw him in Washington, D.C.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, people jump around a lot.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you didn't really have sort of a circle—I think a lot of people, like, looking at the AbEx Group or looking at, like, Rauschenberg, Johns, Twombly. You know, they imagine there are these circles of artists who all meet and kick around ideas and—

MR. ROSENQUIST: I think they were square heads instead of circles.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Maybe. [Laughs.] They have sort of—

MR. ROSENQUIST: People imagine a lot of things.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: But I'll tell you—I can tell you all about it, because the Abstract Expressionists, they have to—they develop a title for a group of people, a group of energy, for a bunch of energy, energetic people. Look, Christ, that's when artists were totally different.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: Look at the difference between de Kooning and Rothko for instance, and Barnett Newman, and Franz Kline, and so forth. They're all totally different personalities; same with Pop artists too. They're quite different. The only thing that connected Pop artists was most Pop artists had been some kind of commercial artist. Roy had been was a draftsman. Oldenburg did cartoons.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Warhol.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah, he did little designs for magazines and stuff. That was—that's the only thing I could think of that connected them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I guess what I'm trying to get at is did you have a kind of meeting of the minds with a group of people where you would meet and discuss ideas or, you know?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Never.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So there was not that kind of intellectual—because this is an image people have of Barney Newman was that he was a very sort of intellectual fellow.

MR. ROSENQUIST: [Laughs.] Well, he used to argue usage between "and" or "but." And then he was always talking about onement.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Onement?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Onement. You know, I was at—I remember I was at a big cocktail party with the Sculls out in Great Neck, and there was a stick sticking out of the water. And he says, That's it! That's onement. Bing! And I don't think it ever got him anywhere, his onement, because he used to do these big, long, wide pictures with one line in it; a lot of color. But what it did do was it had to do with, like, peripheral vision. You'd see all this color and you'd gaze at that one thing, and that one thing was that, because of all the other color he developed around it. But there were big, long—they weren't surrounding you. They were just big, long paintings. But I—I wasn't in any group of thinkers at all.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Did you ever have any kind of connections with or camaraderie with writers, critics?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. Robert Hughes. He was my friend. He was a smart guy; just died.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah. That's a great loss.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Peter— Peter Schjeldahl. I think he's smart, but he's an oddball. But he's pretty—he writes well. He writes well.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: I know him. He's the—[laughs]—when I lived in East Hampton, people used to hang out at my house like a clubhouse. And he used to come out there and play poker. He used to come out and drink and party it up and everything. And that was in the beginning of their careers, really. And then they metamorphosed. They all—let's say they hardened up. [Laughs] Instead of being flexible, they hardened up.

MR. MCELHINNEY: They ossified.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Exactly.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Did you have any contact with Brian O'Doherty? Do you know Brian—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —and Barbara?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. In fact, I was on kind of—I think I was on NBC-TV with him and Lawrence Alloway one time. It was so funny, because—with Barbara Walters. So it was early in the morning when we go on there, and Alloway and Brian O'Doherty are arguing with each other like hell. We're in the same room, but they're making all this noise and they're pissed off and they're arguing. So I thought, nyah. I left them and I went over to Barbara Walters, who's sleeping in a chair. I said, "Good morning. I'm Jim Rosenquist. I think I'm going to be with you this morning." Oh. She was very congenial. She was very nice. "Sit down. Have a cup of coffee." So we chatted nicely and quietly while these other guys were making all this goddam—

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: They were afraid of going on TV in front of all these housewives. They were just nervous about it. I didn't give a damn. I wasn't nervous. I was just having a nice time.

I'll tell you another funny one. Recently I just went to a dinner. My friend Michael Douglas had a dinner for his dad, who was also a good friend of mine. He collected my work a lot. And who was there? Oscar de la Renta, Henry Kissinger, Barbara Walters, Lauren Bacall.

The reason I'm saying this is all these people are *old*, but they're all working.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: They were all—they're all workers. They all had to meet because they're going to go to work. So I said to Barbara, I says, "Oh, you remember, I was on TV with you." She says, "Well, that was my first job at

NBC." And I said, "You were sleeping in a chair. And I said, we had a cup of coffee." And then in front of—later in the evening she said to everybody, I slept with Jim Rosenquist.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. Yeah, different chairs.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: [Inaudible.] She's not well now.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Too bad.

MR. ROSENQUIST: But anyway, and I asked Henry Kissinger to—I said, "Mr. Kissinger, I just bought a book of the Quran. And I always wondered if, in Washington, did they ever have a think tank that studied the Quran?" And he says, "No. And it wouldn't do any good anyway, he says, because they'd all read it and they'd all come out with a different answer anyway." [Laughs.] He's a—I don't like him too much, but he's smart.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: Henry's a smart fellow.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: He's negotiable.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So are you—

MR. ROSENQUIST: So any—what?

MR. MCELHINNEY: So are you a member of the Century Club?

MR. ROSENQUIST: I was put up—I don't know why you ask that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Because he is.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Who?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Kissinger, I believe.

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, I was put up for that by—by Alan Schwartz and an actor or somebody. But I went there. Thank you very much for that, because I'm never in this neighborhood.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: I never come here. But thank you very, very much anyway. So I didn't—I didn't become one.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you were really not in a kind of intellectual cabal like a lot of people were at that time.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Who were? Who were?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, this is the way the history of art is being taught. Maybe we can correct that here. But the—

MR. ROSENQUIST: I think there needs to be lots of corrections.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The discussion about artists, like, gathering in certain places, like in the Village, Abstract Expressionists; Coenties Slip—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well, I'll tell you about that then.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —or SoHo later, you know, and these various different migrations.

MR. ROSENQUIST: You ever hear of the Friday Night Club?

MR. MCELHINNEY: I have heard of—

MR. ROSENQUIST: See, that's where—

MR. MCELHINNEY: —a Friday Night Club, yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: That's where the early Abstract Expressionists and people used to go. I went there a couple of times myself.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Is this the Cedar Tavern? No.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Pay 50 cents and you hear somebody talk about anything.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: I heard Stuart Davis one night. What's his name? People who'd—see, in those days the Abstract Expressionists would get up and demand that they were artists, with a capital A, art. We are artists, and this is our art. The Pop artists never did that. They'd go, "Well, somebody called me artist, but I don't. I'm cool." They're so cool. They were really cool. But the Abstract Expressionists were hot.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. So they were more prone to arguing with each other and—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Indeed, and get up arguing. Yeah. Oh, yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So it must have been interesting at that time to see sort of how artists conducted themselves the way in which they did, how that changed between sort of the generation of the Abstract Expressionists—de Kooning, Kline—by the time you were in contact with them, probably Jackson Pollock was already gone.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I missed him. I was in another part of the country. I was working as a chauffeur and a bartender, and he was drinking in East Hampton and he hit that tree.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I knew Ruth Kligman. That was a good friend of mine, Ruthie. She was in the car with him and she survived. She just died recently.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I saw that. I saw that. And she was a friend of yours?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. Oh, yeah. She was a—she was a sexy beauty for a while. Then she got old.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So—but there's been a lot of discussion about how sort of the scene changed or the whole climate of the art world in New York changed from the AbEx period to the Pop period and—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well, do you want to know how that happened?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Tell me.

MR. ROSENQUIST: In the summer of 1962—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: —the big sea change was—I'm losing my memory—the big Sidney Janis Gallery took Jim Dine on. And that really made people go crazy a little bit.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Why, because it was representational?

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, they thought—yes, partly. But everybody left Sidney at that time, except de Kooning. And then he left there. He left too. But that was—the Jim Dine thing was a big thing. What is that? Well, Sidney Janis—Sidney Janis's gallery had gray walls and rugs.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: And if you joined Sidney, you had to have an ism on the back of your art. Across the hall was Betty Parsons, fresh-painted cracked walls, wooden floors. If you went into that gallery, you could become somebody with no isms. You could be something new. And she showed—they loved Pollock too. But she showed a lot of people. I knew her, Betty. I knew Betty pretty well too. She was a great gal. And her place was like freedom. And Sidney was—you had to be an ism in your work.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So other people who were on the scene at that time—I guess you had people like Philip Pavia, who started this magazine, *It Is*, trying to give shape to some kind of intellectual critical—

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, I heard of him, but I didn't know him at all.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay. Louise Deutschman. Did you know her?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Who?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Louise Deutschman; worked with Janis maybe.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Never heard of that name.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay. She also worked with a bunch of people; Glimcher and others, anyway. But just trying to sort of propose a couple of landmarks we can try to connect. So the sea change was Jim Dine. And was the response to that?

MR. ROSENQUIST: What?

MR. MCELHINNEY: What was the response, that the abstract painters felt—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Here's a story I heard.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —betrayed? Is that it?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Then at the same time, when Dine went into the Janis gallery, then you had Jasper Johns emerge, and then after that Bob Rauschenberg—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: —right after that. So that was Dine in the Janis gallery and then Castelli coming up with—then the artists become really well-known; low prices, but really—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: —got out there. And then there was—well, Martha Jackson too. She did a big show in 1960 called *New Forms, New Media*. And she did another one, *New Forms, New Media Number Two*. You could have bought a Rauschenberg diver picture in there for \$600, which somebody did; just sold two years ago for \$16 million to the Met. I didn't have—I was a day late, a dollar short. I couldn't buy it anyway. But there were a lot of other people in that show, a whole lot of—what's that—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, we can look that up.

MR. ROSENQUIST: See, those—simultaneously, a lot of these things came to fruition. And that's that for that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So your first real busy year was in the mid-'60s. You had the show with Dwan. Did you know John Weber out there?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Oh, yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: He was—yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: He was a surfer guy.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah. He recently passed away.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I know. I know it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I had the pleasure to interview him for the Archives about seven years ago; interesting—interesting story.

MR. ROSENQUIST: He—I think he had a—this is not for publication, but I think he had—he was married to this gal that I know. And then he had this other family in Italy, I think; another girlfriend and family over there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, he did seem to live large. Just a little more housekeeping, just historical details, at what point did you get involved with your activism in protest against the Vietnam War? What got you into that? Was it just outrage at what was going on, or were there other friends who were—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well, Robert—Robert Morris. He was—and Jack. I wasn't very active. Robert—Jack Youngerman, really, he was—he protested a number of times, and they said something to him, do this again and we're going to throw you in the slammer and throw away the key. [Laughs.] So some people were threatened.

And I don't know. But that, you know, was like a wave of things. It comes and it goes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But—so he was sort of the linchpin of the whole thing or the—

MR. ROSENQUIST: It seemed—let me tell you something else. Right now our Art in the Embassies Program called me up a year or two ago. Jim, do you have a big painting we can put in a new—brand-new building in Moscow, our new embassy building in Moscow? I says, I don't know, because I didn't know what the hell to do, because Russia used to be communist. I went to Russia in 1965, totally unusual place, different kind of country. And I had a big retrospective there in '91. I went there in '90 and '91. Then it was terrible because it was—people didn't have food and everything else. And there was this big change, sea change going on in Russia.

And now recently—see that thing on the wall there, that big folder right there—shiny folder, in the middle?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I—

MR. MCELHINNEY: The Hermitage Museum Foundation.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. That's me. I'm on the Hermitage Museum Foundation now in St. Petersburg. Well, now Russia is hard right-wing, going back to the tsars. And Putin bought a beach in down in St. Barts for \$90 million. Where the hell is a public servant getting 90 million bucks? So he gets a rake-off of tons from rich guys.

So, anyway—

MR. MCELHINNEY: So tell us a little about your—

MR. ROSENQUIST: So then—I want to finish!

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay.

MR. ROSENQUIST: So then I thought, what am I going to do? So I did this painting called *Multiverse You Are, I Am*, which are all the many, many universes that go out are outside our universe. And the scientists I talk to, they say that—they speculate there's over 6,000 planets attached to all these places that are identical to the earth, which means there could be other people, things living there, people, it could be anything living there, which then is a statement about chauvinism. You can't be chauvinistic, because we're like just dust in the—all the universe, I mean singular—but, contrary to that, you have a brain. She has a brain. I have a brain. And that's—our brains are as complicated as outer space. There are so many parts to it. It's just billions of pieces. So, therefore, we can challenge it, even though we didn't think we can go there. But anyway, so I submitted that painting. They loved it and they bought it. I got a donor to buy it, and it's going to go to Moscow.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, congratulations.

MR. ROSENQUIST: And that's the end of story. Yeah, that's my latest, biggest thing.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You spoke of a big contrast between the Russia you found in 1965 and—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —the one you found in 1990-91. How do you get to Russia in '65? Under whose auspices? And —

MR. ROSENQUIST: Okay, I—I showed my *F-111* painting in Moderna Museum in Stockholm. When I got over to Stockholm, I thought, gee, I'm near Russia. So I went to the Russian embassy in Moscow, which is a little slit in the wall about 10 feet up, and the guy goes, "Da, da. You know, what? [Speaks Russian phrase. Pagolista, pagolista, da]" I want a visa to go to Leningrad. All he knew in Western language was "*domani*" ["tomorrow" in Italian] come back tomorrow.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: So I came back, *domani*, *domain*, and I got my permit and I went through. I flew over to Leningrad to see my buddy, Evgeny Rukhin, my pen pal.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you had a Russian pen pal. For how long?

MR. ROSENQUIST: That's the reason—well, he had seen my work. He worked—his mother was a geologist and he was able to pretend to be working for her while he did his painting or whatever he did. And he was—he was

just an artist. He wasn't political. But the Russians thought he was political, and they killed him in '76. The KGB killed him. You know, they kill anybody in a minute over there. They're totally lawless.

So that's why they gave me this thing, because they knew I knew him or something. And all of a sudden they're making a big thing out of the guy, like a big myth. So, anyway, Russia ain't—you know, it just changes drastically all the time. And now—excuse me—I don't think it's in a good place at all, because there's some of these—this one oligarchy guy allegedly bought his daughter a nice little condominium for 70 million bucks. [Laughs.]

But you know what's amazing to me too, in the art world now there are—the world is very poor. There are starving people all over. Yet there are huge piles of money all over; I mean, *big* piles of money—China, Canada, Indonesia, all over the damn place; big piles of money. And these people don't know what to do with it, so they think, well, they spread it around; got no more banks to put it in, so they think maybe they should buy art with it. So they'll buy a lot of crappy stuff too, junk.

There was a thing in the paper today. Steve Wynn sold his—

MR. MCELHINNEY: I saw that.

MR. ROSENQUIST: —Picasso—

MR. MCELHINNEY: To Steve Cohen.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Cohen. [Laughs.] I don't get—they're in the high-flyers' mode. However, see—[laughs]—I know that painting. Steve Wynn's bought a lot of his things from me. So what happened? He was going to sell the painting. And then Steve, he can't see very well. He put his elbow through the goddam painting. And then it was totally repaired perfectly.

Now, but the painting has been—the warp and weft has been ripped or something. It devalues the painting unless the artist is alive. And if the alive artist fixes it, it could maintain its value. Well, Picasso's dead, okay? So I looked at the painting. It looks like it's never been damaged ever, ever. It's been rewoven in a very—[whistles]—you know. And now it's been sold to—my dealer did the first deal—Bill Acquavella. And then I saw it when the painting came back, and now it sold again for almost the same amount of money.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So when you went to Russia the first time, though, how long were you there?

MR. ROSENQUIST: About a week.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And how did you find it?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Weird. I go there. I had just come from Colorado, wearing some cowboy boots and, like, an old hat.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: And I got—I got in line with my passport to come into the country. And the person there is saying, "You, you go to Ansonia." Next person—"You, you go to some other hotel. Next, you go to Ansonia. And next—you go to." What's the name of that hotel? So I asked some people on the plane, what's the best place to stay? And they said, "Don't go to the Moscow Stoya" or whatever the hell it was, so I thought. But if you can, go to the Ansonia.

So they come to me. "You, you—[laughs]—you go to the Moscow Stoya" whatever it was. No. No? They thought that hell was breaking loose. "You, you, step aside. Get out of line." Then they said, "Next, you go to Moscow Stoya," or whatever it was. And I get back in line. "You, now you go to Ansonia."

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: So, you know, I had protested, but they let me protest into the one I got. So I had someone following me all the time when I was there. I had a tail.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: I had a guy tailing me all the time. And I met two Greek Orthodox preachers there, and they didn't want to talk to me. And they said, "Are you okay? Have you had anything stolen?" I said, "No." Well, they stole all our camera equipment. You know, I don't know. So there was funny business going on.

Then in 1991—I went there in 1990 and met a good-looking girl named Olga who had a car. And I said, "Could I hire you to drive around Moscow, because we've got to go to different offices and do stuff?" "Da, da. Yeah,

yeah." So I said, "All we have is a van and a limo, and I need another car." So when I arrived in 1990, 1991, I had to call Olga; couldn't get through for about a day. Finally I reached her, and she came over and she took me all around Moscow, different offices, and took me back to the hotel. And the police came up and started questioning her. And I said, "Any problem? Problem?" "No, no. No, no. No problem." I never saw her again.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What do you—

MR. ROSENQUIST: So that's the way it is.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So people just, like, living at the mercy of this arbitrary authority or this—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Indeed. Indeed, yeah, it is. It's—

MR. MCELHINNEY: How are you feeling? You want to take a break now?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah, I think I'll—would you like to have a drink or anything?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Sure. But we can—

MR. ROSENQUIST: So wait a minute. How long are we going to go?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, we can resume tomorrow if you want. We've got two—

MR. ROSENQUIST: I've got another interview tomorrow.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, me.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Paul Goldberger on Frank Gehry.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, wait a minute. We—I thought we were scheduled for two—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Are you thinking again?

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: What?

MR. MCELHINNEY: I had—I had you down for two—

MR. ROSENQUIST: —consecutive days?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah. No.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Tomorrow I've got Paul Goldberger. Friday I've got Joseph Cornell.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you're talking about those people.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I've got to do Frank. He's my friend.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. Well, maybe we could take a break now and then we could do a little more.

MR. ROSENQUIST: What do we—what, are we going to the year 2020 here or what?

MR. MCELHINNEY: No, I think we just want to bring it up to the—[laughs]—to the moment at hand. We're still sort of—we're kind of more or less around 1970 now, and just—

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, we're not.

MR. MCELHINNEY: We've been jumping around a bit, yes, but—well, look, let's take a break and—

MR. ROSENQUIST: There's a break right there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: There we go.

[END TR02.]

This is disc number three.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Wit the late Gene Swenson. Gene.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It was in a—excuse me, but it was—where in Canada was it?

MR. ROSENQUIST: I think it was around Toronto.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Around Toronto. So this is a panel discussion with Marshall McLuhan.

MR. ROSENQUIST: It was just him and me.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, okay.

MR. ROSENQUIST: And Gene Swenson. And Gene Swenson stuttered. I says, "Gene, why are you doing this?" It was his first big thing, and he stuttered. McLuhan wasn't nice to him.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's unfortunate. So tell the story again for Chelsea [James's assistant] about the guy who stood up and made his—

MR. ROSENQUIST: The guy got up and says, "Mr. McLuhan, I've read all your books and I disagree with you." And he says, "Oh, you've read all my books? Then you only know half the story." Kaboom!

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: —which is the truth. Another thing is there's no such thing as history, only autobiography, because how many—I've been to many, many, many stories in the papers, and they didn't happen like that at all.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: So I think, if mine didn't happen like that, neither did anyone else's.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So the only history is a first-hand account.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah, absolutely.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But I'm sure a lot of people would argue that that is not infrequently a self-serving device as well. People tell the story they want people to believe.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I don't know. I don't think so. I mean, I think most of the time they would say it, that's the way it happened.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, that's the way they saw it.

MR. ROSENQUIST: That's right, because they were there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Not someone else's eyewitness account. [They laugh.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: So how did you become interested in or involved in pondering the universe? There seems to be some kind of intrigue, interest in science and—or—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well, wait. I mean, for any young—anybody beginning—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: How do you begin? Just look at yourself. Really look at yourself. Then you'll find out that you're largely made out of water and you have billions of brain cells and everything else.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: It's very complicated. Holy Christ. Holy cow. It's just amazing. And then if you think you've got your finger on something, you think how many billion Chinese people there are. How many other minds are out there? How many peoples? And it's not that—first of all, you think you're insignificant.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: But then the level playing field is that you have a brain. Just think of Christopher Columbus taking out—taking out going towards nothing because he challenged nothing out there all that, nothing; same way with all the talk about nothing. That's what I'm studying now is nothing again.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What was your religious upbringing?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Not much.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Not much.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Lutheran. I had a Lutheran background, with my—[laughs]—my Lutheran background and my family background is just a bunch of hard-drinking Swedes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. So—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Norwegians didn't drink. My mother was Norwegian. My father was Swedish. Norwegians didn't drink much, but the Swedes did.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: They weren't alcoholics, but they drank a lot.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well—

MR. ROSENQUIST: They drank hard.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So this is—

MR. ROSENQUIST: They worked like hell. They worked hard. My grandfather, he lived to 92, and he drank about a quarter-pint of Jim Beam whiskey every day. He never—he was still—at 79, he was tough.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How do you feel about how somebody like Garrison Keillor portrays the northern Midwest?

MR. ROSENQUIST: I could *tell* him stories.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I have no doubt of that.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I would—Billy Goldston tried to hook him up with me, with the thing, doing—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, *Prairie Home Companion*?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. It was sort of a print-portfolio with him and me. I got a big kick out of him. And I'll tell you my story that I could tell him. In Minnesota there was a place called the Gopher Theater, and they showed a movie called *King Solomon's Mines*. And some kids brought some musk oil into the theater. I don't know what animal it was from. Some musk oil, which smells like ten zoos all at once.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: And they put it in the aisle. And you walk into the theater and you see the lions and the tigers and go, Holy shit, get me out of here.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: And they had to defuse the theater. They had to decontaminate it. So then, in Atwater, in the Minnesota part too.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: This little town—a little tiny village, Atwater, Minnesota. On Saturday night they used to have a movie theater, and they used to have Betty Grable dancing movies, Hollywood—flossy, beautiful musicals.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: Then the goddam farmers would come in from cleaning the barn with their overshoes on, and it would smell *heavy-duty* manure, cow manure, in watching Betty Grable. [They laugh.] It was incredible, okay.

Then I come to New York and I'm painting signs for Artkraft. And I painted one where we called it the Smell-O-

Vision.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: It was the Great Wall of China, and they dumped—in the air conditioners they dumped floor-cleaning smells and every goddam thing; horrible artificial-flower smells. And it—[laughs]—it literally ruined the theater, and they had to reupholster all the seats.

Next, they had another one called the *Scent of Mystery*, and same thing. They dumped all these smells in there and it just stuck in the fabric of the theater. I was just going to tell about him about my early Smell-O-Vision to late-Smell-O-Vision events from Minnesota, and a lot of other things too.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, there was that one impresario. What's his name? His last name was Castle, who put electrodes in the seats of the theater for some horror movie with Vincent Price and would shock the audience at key points so that they would respond and—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Sounds shocking.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It was shocking. So do you think this kind of incongruity between Hollywood babes up on the big screen and the smell of a barnyard was in any way influential to your later building these pictures that are sort of visual non-sequiturs? You talked about—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Not a bit.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —about trying to make pictures, that weren't pictures and—

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, no. Let me go back.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay.

MR. ROSENQUIST: --about what a picture—no-picture is? Collage is the way I work. I work in collage. Collage is a contemporary medium.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: What it really is is bringing together expendable imagery that delivers a feeling, and what you get is a feeling. And the work really isn't worth much. It's the feeling you get. And where does this—everyone says old Kurt Schwitters started collage. Shit, it goes way back to the Japanese tea ceremony—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: —many hundreds and thousands—many, many years ago, where they would put a little very highly decorated tea bowl, a flower in a picture, usually in threes, like a collage of three things. And then you're supposed to sit there and drink tea until you sweat it out and contemplate these three things.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: So that thing goes way, way, way, way, way, way back. And it's usually very odd things; maybe not odd, whatever—something that fits in another way. And the result is what you get out of it. And it's not what you have.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: It's what it projects.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You've spoken before about Asian thought or spirituality. [Sound of phone ringing.] Whoops. I'll save that question.

[END TR03.]

This is disc number four.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You had spoken a couple of times—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Look. That painting looks good now in the—

MR. MCELHINNEY: The light is beautiful.

MR. ROSENQUIST: In that blue room.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah. What's the title of that piece?

MR. ROSENQUIST: It's called *Speed of Light, Corner of the Eye*.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So—well, I was about to ask you, you'd spoken about Zen and—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —speaking about tea, chanoyu [Japanese tea ceremony]. So did—were you—at some point did you get interested in, like, Japanese art or Asian art or non-Western art?

MR. ROSENQUIST: I studied Eastern philosophy in Aspen, Colorado, in 1965.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Were you at the Aspen Institute?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. I was one of the first people—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow.

MR. ROSENQUIST: —to go out there by—yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Who brought you out there?

MR. ROSENQUIST: What the hell was his name? John—John Powers. John Powers.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, sure, the great—well, he was a tremendous—John and Kimiko Powers, right?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. Great collectors.

MR. ROSENQUIST: She was his wife.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So they brought you out there. Well, Brian O'Doherty is now exhibiting again, I think, a book or a portfolio he created out there a couple of years later. But he was there a couple of years, I guess, after you, late '60s, or maybe all about the same time.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I was the first one.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So it was—it was the exposure to them? Did that—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well, I studied—we studied Asian philosophy galore. And I had to read a whole lot of books. And we studied India first, China, and then Japan was last.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How did that—how did that change your thinking?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well, see, the reason why I did it—I didn't have to do it, but the reason why I did that was because I thought that artists that I knew were influenced by Eastern philosophy.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Who specifically?

MR. ROSENQUIST: And this guy here, Marcel Duchamp.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, Marcel Duchamp, yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I said—somebody says, "Did you ever study Eastern philosophy?" Not really. He says, "I read *Zen in the Art of Archery*, but that's about it." But speak—I mean, I knew artists like Joseph Cornell and a few others. I thought, where did their thinking come from? What is that kind of rationale? And it's Eastern thought. And—[pause, laughs]—in this group of people I was with was Dr. Wing Tse Chan. He was a very old guy, and he was very obtuse. I don't know how to say it. So—[laughs]—so we sort of had a personal argument. And he—one day he brought in a big, beautiful scroll with a big red rooster on it. And we were talking about the *power* of art and toughness of art, and so forth and so on. So he brought this in as an example. I said "It's very beautiful. It's very incredible. But today's standard, it's not brutal. Done back then, forte, strong, brutal, tough art, but not now." He goes, "Oh, then maybe I should raise price."

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: So then we had three Washington lawyers on there too. And he said to the Washington lawyers, "How do you sentence man to death?" And they were all, "Well, and we study all the Western jurisprudence pertaining to this case, and then we make our decision." Then they said to the Chinese philosopher, they said, "How do you sentence a man to death in the Orient?" "Well, the judge put a black hood over his head and merely say yes or no." And they said, "Well, isn't that judging by a whim?" And he goes, "Oh, isn't your way judging by whim also?" Ha. So he's a tough old nut. But he was fun. Then we have—well, it was a good time.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, you were already—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Zen—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: If you think you know what Zen is—this one poor guy from Japan there, and he said, "Every time I think I know what Zen is, I realize I don't know what Zen is. But then, when I don't know an idea what Zen is, I think I know what Zen is. But then, when I think I know what Zen is, I don't." And he went—repeated it over and over and over again. Finally somebody said, "I think we know what you mean"—

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: —because he was in that ethereal nowhere land, which is like Zen.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, the pursuit of the nothing, the—

MR. ROSENQUIST: But, see, I don't even know—what's so strange, my scientist friends all say that the Germans now are ahead in studying nothing. Really? [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: How's that?

MR. ROSENQUIST: I don't know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] That's a funny—

MR. ROSENQUIST: I don't know what that is.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's a funny assertion.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So the Germans are ahead in the nothing.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yes. And I've got to find out what the hell—I mean, I can think so far, then they start talking about things that I just can't get a handle on.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, you know, you get the basic idea of Buddhism being—to attain enlightenment means you have to abandon all desire, you know, and be sort of in this place that you can't exist with anything of the material world or anything of the physical pleasure, whatever. You're just—you know, but at the same time, for a visual artist, I mean, you're making things that are basically delivery systems—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well, don't bring the visual artist in it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Why not? I mean, the thing is, you're—I mean, a painting is on some level, you yourself said it gives you a feeling, right? But what's that feeling, you know? And, I mean—well, I guess I'm asking you, you know, you did what you did. You do what you do. You were doing what you were doing. You went to Aspen. You studied Eastern thought. And did that give you a different way to look at your own work?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well, I mean, it just continues.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: Everything just continues and continues and continues. And—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, maybe prior to exploring these ideas, did you take a look at a picture and say, Well,

that's a picture, and then afterwards you look at a picture and you say, Well, that's part of a continuity?

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, I think it's fascinating what people are attracted to.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: You know, and, for instance, the history of painting at a certain point evolved into Abstract Expressionist painting.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: And Franz Kline's, they look just very accidental, but they're just *very*, very tastefully—the splash dots are all in the right place. So that painting evolved into, let's say, non-objective painting. And what it has then that people like can be colorful and beautiful or whatever. Then the old story—I mean, the story goes along where the people say, "Well, my child could do that. They could make a big mess like that." And what happens? Then a lot of young students do make big messes. They do that. And they think that is something or whatever that I don't think it is, but it's the front—the boundaries being pushed out are really based on art history, or Renaissance—cave painting, Renaissance painting, you know, whatever, like that. And then they sit next to—a lot of times it gets sort of disarray and wishy-washy, and you really have a hard time looking for the artist that's pushing the boundary out further, something that's never been done before—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: —not just making a big smear, not making a big mess, whatever. It's like what is it that's further out than ever before? That's hard. And I keep looking.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Do you think it was helpful for you to sort of have cut your teeth in a kind of craft-based industry where you were—you know, you had to paint the Coca-Cola kids the way—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Right, right, right, because it's like they'd give me anything. I had to paint it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: You better do it or you get fired, bam, boom. And we had a big desk. In the morning, "Good morning, Jake." The foreman would say, "Well, kid, pick whatever you want." So then the odd things happened, like I picked a picture of an orange, so a great big—I painted this big 10-foot juicy orange. Then I went back to the desk and I picked up a picture of a Schenley whiskey bottle, and then I painted that sucker. And then I realized that the orange paint I painted the orange with was the same color I was going to use to paint the whiskey bottle. Then it becomes what does color mean? What does color attach to?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: It becomes a non-objective idea, so forth and so on. So, I mean, the earth is—the grass is green, the trees are green, and so forth. We're all accustomed to that. And then the false painters, they paint the sky black and trees red. They switched it, whatever, or complemented it.

But anyway, it's hard to find out what is pushing the boundaries out further, further, further out. In the '70s, we had a lot of changes in that—happenings, electricity—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: —everything else; electric performance, movies, stuff like that. Therefore, at that time the paintings that I did, I thought of them as toms, like all you needed to see my work was sunlight and your own intuition. I was really thought about that a lot where I went to so many shows, and there was a sign on the door: Sorry, show closed; we burned a fuse. That was something.

Another thing is art has always been tied to communication—always. It's also—then it's very hard to be a fantastic artist and hide from people, from the public, from anybody; the mystic. But this day and age, it's hard to hide out.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: There have been cases recently of some artist who was supposed to be so fantastic, and he was never discovered, but he was really good. But I think it was bullshit, because his paintings looked just like de Kooning's.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Of?

MR. ROSENQUIST: But they said he never met de Kooning. I don't believe it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Again this goes back to what you were saying earlier, that, you know, you want to wait until—you didn't want to show until you had something that didn't look like anybody else. You wanted to have your own—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Roy Lichtenstein said, "The trick is to invent your own game and be the star of it, because no one else knows how to play."

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you think it's possible to do that without being in a place like New York? You think a person—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Sure.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —like on a mountain somewhere can do that?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah, sure. Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But, of course, if they have a laptop and they've got Wi-Fi access, they—you know, it's the same as being anywhere.

MR. ROSENQUIST: See, there you go. It's all tied to communications.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So in the '70s you really saw a big change, because a lot of the things you're talking about, like performance art, conceptual art, happenings, that was really—didn't that really get started at first, like, in the '60s, people like Kaprow? You knew Kaprow, Oldenburg, Grooms, those guys.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. But also, even in the '70s, things were flashed around the world quick.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: In any manner they could.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So instead of going to an art fair with a 4x5 transparency, you've got your iPad.

MR. ROSENQUIST: There's another phenomenon now then I see is that young kids, groups, all over the world, they like to do things together in a group. And I'm like, What the hell is that? Well, they can't be blamed for failure because it's all of them. Then the next thing I think, well, maybe it's prelude to filmmaking, because you can't make a film all by yourself.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: You need a *lot* of people. So maybe that's what this is about. I don't know. Even my daughter—my daughter is phenomenal. But my daughter, she felt like that for a while. I don't know what—

MR. MCELHINNEY: What does she do?

MR. ROSENQUIST: She always blows me away totally. She drove to California with her—she drove to LA with her roommate. She got a job immediately, got an apartment immediately. And then she called up and she says, "Dad, I'm coming home." I said, "Well, why?" "Well, the kids here are too laid-back. They don't do anything."

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: They don't do anything out here. She came back, got a job, a good job, immediately. She's got an apartment in Chinatown, which is a wild place. And since she went to work for this design firm, they keep putting her up, up, up, up in a better job. And I'm surprised. She jumps over hurdles galore. I mean, she's—they push—they put her up in the company, in charge of this, that, and everything. She's 23, and I'm just—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow. Well, your work must be discussed sometimes in relationship to cinema, the big scale and the—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —collage-like imagery sometimes. I mean, how do you feel about that? Do you look at movies? Do they influence you at all?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Sure. I used to go to drive-ins. I like the big screen—huge—the grain, the grain of it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, you like to get really close—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —so that the image breaks down.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But you were talking before about how you can't make a movie by yourself. You need, you know, a bunch of other people to help you.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I started to make an experiment.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Have you ever tried to make a film?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Oh, yeah. Sure. I had Mel Sokolsky, a fashion photographer. Then I had Michael Rolles [ph] and another guy. And we—the reason we were doing it was to find out the cost—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: —and to see if we could get things in focus and in the right color; very rudimentary. And we started working on things—testing, testing, testing. And then all four of us realized we had to go back and do our own thing to keep making money.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: We didn't have a backer or anything.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you were never inspired to sort of do what some painters have done, like Schnabel becoming, you know, a filmmaker.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I'm *amazed* at what he does.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Storyteller. Yeah, he's a very good storyteller.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I'm really amazed.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I mean, I think his painting stinks, but I think he's *amazing*.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: And I told him too. I said, you do a hell of a job. A couple of things there—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, it's a crossover kind of discipline—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Oh, yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —because painting in the 20th century was really kind of influenced, I think, strongly by the movies. I don't really believe that the historians have studied how much or to what extent. But you think about even all those ash-can school guys, like John Sloan, hanging out at the Nickelodeon, and the picture-making changed. But really, I mean, the connection between painting and moviemaking would be a sense of time, don't you think?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Okay. A painting has no sound, no time. It has no nothing—no music, no anything. All it has is the ability to seep out information on a singular picture plain.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: And if you can do that, then you're successful.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah. That's—

MR. ROSENQUIST: But a lot of people—

MR. MCELHINNEY: No, but that's a kind of time, isn't it?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well, people—you know, people look at a painting and say, "Oh, I didn't see that before."

Well, people now look at everything because they want to get over it quick. They want to see it, so they can say I saw it. Bullshit. Then they go, "Oh, I didn't see that part before." So that—that would be a good painting.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Time-release. They talk about—

MR. ROSENQUIST: But it's still—I don't know time-release; whatever.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, they talk about, you know, you take a pill for pain or whatever. It's time-release, right? You get the benefit over 12 hours because—

MR. ROSENQUIST: That's what they've got to do is a big pill.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, maybe this would be a good time to take a break.

MR. ROSENQUIST: When are we going to resume, midnight or what?

MR. MCELHINNEY: No, I mean—

MR. ROSENQUIST: You mean break of what?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, we'll just—see, we're in a different time-space continuum here, because—

MR. ROSENQUIST: That sounds—sounds tricky.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It kind of is. I misunderstood our arrangement, and so—

MR. ROSENQUIST: I never did—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay, well, they—you had the—

MR. ROSENQUIST: —because it was never explained to me.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Then you had the drop on me. I figured—I'm sorry if didn't—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah. That's okay. We can—

MR. ROSENQUIST: It's not my fault!

MR. MCELHINNEY: No.

MR. ROSENQUIST: We never agreed on any continuum.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I don't think—I thought we had scheduled two meetings, but we only scheduled one—

MR. ROSENQUIST: No.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay. All right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I hate scheduling, because I've got my calendar right there. You're written on it, only for today.

MR. MCELHINNEY: For today.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Right. That's it—not tomorrow, not the next day, not next month.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Not yet.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Right. [Laughs.] That's it. Want another beer? Sold.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Sure. Okay.

CHELSEA: [Laughs.] Sold. We're a tough crowd around here. Beer? Okay.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I'll be right back with the beer.

[END TR04.]

This is disc number five.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So when you said he was—that Leo Castelli was sort of half for the artist and half for the collectors, you mean he didn't just represent the collectors?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Exactly.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You're saying that today more and more of the dealers—

MR. ROSENQUIST: I didn't say anything about today.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I saw that wink.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I just winked.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: I had this—

MR. MCELHINNEY: But he would do things. You said he did things, favors for artists. So did he keep—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah, he did. Yeah, he did, goddam it. [Laughs.] He gave stipends—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: —to Don Judd, to the minimalists. And a lot of them never paid him back. The whole thing was he would give them so much money a month or a lot of money, hundreds of thousands of bucks. And then, at the end of the time period, he would take work in exchange for that—for that. I think he got slighted out of—I didn't say cheated. He got slighted out of a lot of things by some people. [Laughs.] Yeah, he was fun. He had been in the OSS.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: And he—I remember Chamberlain had a show, and he brought—he brought back a gun from Europe. That was when you could do it. And he showed this P-38 or what the hell it was to Leo. And Leo says, "I'm going to take care of that." He just—he went [makes sound]. And he brought it down into pieces and put it in his—he says, I'll give it to you later. He didn't want a gun on the premises. But Leo knew the whole nomenclature of the gun.

MR. MCELHINNEY: He knew how to field-strip it.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, it'd be a German got a P-38, so—

MR. ROSENQUIST: You know about guns.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Walther [handgun manufacturer].

MR. ROSENQUIST: I used to shoot them. My cousins would bring them back. The cousins were all in the—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Army?

MR. ROSENQUIST: —armored infantry. I couldn't hit the broad side of a barn with them suckers.

MR. MCELHINNEY: This was back in Minnesota?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. Yeah. My cousin Archie liberated Buchenwald, the prison camp.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, my God.

MR. ROSENQUIST: That's right. And he never, ever talked about it much until one time he says—[laughs]—I loved the guy. I loved him, because he was plain—he was a farm boy. He went in the Army obviously as a teenager, and then he—he was very plain. See, World War II people are different. They can be very ordinary,

two-cents plain people, honest, straight and kind of normal in a funny way..

Anyway, he says—he said, "We were making a—we were making a retreat. We were going from Germany back into Belgium and then back into Germany and back, and we stumbled—then we decided to make a pincer move and cut off the Germans. And we went through this forest. We came on this strange camp," he said, "We opened up the gates, and everybody came running out and hugging us." And then the colonel says, "Don't hug the soldiers. We're all diseased people and everything." He says, "Then they went and picked flowers and gave us flowers," he said. And he said they stayed there a couple more days. They says, "We ought to keep chasing the Germans." [Laughs.]

But he was—he was a great guy. And he ended up in San Francisco, and I used to go see him. I used to walk in on him while he was working on his house. I didn't—he couldn't see me. And I says, "Where the hell can you get a cup of stale coffee around this joint?" "You don't need any stale coffee. There's some stale donuts in the cupboard."

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: Then he turned around. "Ah, where did you come from?"

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: So then the—[laughs]—I says, "Archie, I want to take you and your kids out to a nice steak dinner." "Ah, we don't have to do that. We can go to a bar and have some drinks and some Slim Jims." I says, "No, Arch, your wife would like a real meal." [They laugh.] He was terrific.

When he came back from the war, we used to play together. I was a teenager and he was 29. So we—[laughs]—we used to go water skiing together and all sorts of stuff. And he was a very just—what you call super-ordinary. [Laughs.] What a guy.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So when you were with Castelli, was it a big operation? You had access to him all the time? There weren't all curators running around and—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Exactly right. Exactly right. Very personable. The only thing that was chasing him are women.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: A lot of women are chasing him.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Did you have a lot of contact with collectors at that point? Were you—were you socializing with the people who were acquiring your work?

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, not really too much, no. Bob Scull, I was. I was very social with him. Richard Brown Baker, Dick Baker.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: He's the reason my work is up there at Yale.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. He was a big force there at one point.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. He was always a force from the beginning on.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah. The Yale Art Gallery. Also Dick Feigen's involved in that in some way.

MR. ROSENQUIST: He's a good friend. I like Dick.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I know him. I met him in Chicago when he had a gallery out there. And I got a prize for painting at the Art Institute. So then he says, "Why don't you come and stay at my place?" So I said, "Boy, is he gay or what?"

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: So—[laughs]—I got to his gallery and stayed in a bed. There was a huge gallery. And I was in one and he's in another. And we had—he'd had a lot to drink. And he got up in the morning with an ice bag on his head, and he sold an Arp sculpture for 40 grand. I thought, not bad! With that ice bag on his head. He sold an Arp. That's just how it is. He's a good guy.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: He's ethically a good guy. I could tell you for numerous reasons. He was very involved in civil rights.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: And—[laughs]—and then he—he's just unusual. He married his first—I've been to all three of his weddings. His first wife, when he married Sandra, had three beautiful daughters. I think one became an actress. After 12 years they got a divorce. Then he married Peggy, had two little 11-year-old twins. They didn't get along. They got divorced after a couple of years. Now he married Isabella; three kids again. We told him, don't get married. Just build her a goddam house on your property.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: It would be—it's cheaper, better off. You'd be much happier. He married her. And she's Austrian. He's Jewish. She's Austrian, okay. But she's a lovely girl. I mean, she's ebullient [makes bubbly sound]. I love her. She's nice.

MR. MCELHINNEY: He likes to wear—I stumble into him at times at the Yale Club, and he likes to wear Trachten; you know, likes to wear those German jackets.

MR. ROSENQUIST: That's all new.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's all for her, huh? Okay. Good to know.

MR. ROSENQUIST: She had a big birthday party for him in Austria. I said, "Goddam, that's no good." How are you going to have all his business-executive friends fly to Austria for his birthday? I was planning a party for him in New York but I never got it done. But—

MR. MCELHINNEY: So—

MR. ROSENQUIST: —to really know him, if you really know him, why is he okay? He—[laughs]—he goes back and takes care of his first wife. When his first wife, Sandra, was screwed out of her house. He gave her a house. She married a guy, and he got her off the deed and made her homeless. What did Dick do? [Laughs.] He went up and bought her a house in Washington, Connecticut. So he takes care of his *familia*, his family. And his kid, his daughter—I shouldn't say this, but his daughter married a good-for-nothing. They have three kids. Who supports them? Richard. He pays.

Let me tell you something else. [Laughs.] He had this Turner painting about this big called *The Reconstruction of the Temple*; one of my favorite paintings. It's two mountains. And in the far distance, it's a Renaissance painting of reconstructing the temple. In the front is this downhill thing where people are playing music and frolicking, but they're going down, like life. You're going towards death.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: But have a good time. Good little painter. So I says, "What did you do with that painting, Richard?" He said, "I had to sell it." He didn't say I had to. He said, "I sold it for \$16 million." I said, "What did you do that for?" He says, "I had to take care of the kids."

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: Next—I'll tell you another one. He has a—not—he has a Turner aquatic painting. And I heard he was offered \$80 million for it by some Russians, and he didn't take it. [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, that shows principle.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I know what it does. He—he's not—he's not—he doesn't have a lot of cash, but he has a hell of a collection. He hates to give them up. He hates to give up his paintings. But he's not—he's not—

MR. MCELHINNEY: This is—

MR. ROSENQUIST: —he's good.

MR. MCELHINNEY: This is the challenge, I think, to a lot of dealer-collectors, dealers who become collectors. It's—it makes it ambiguous. You know, one day you're a dealer; one day you're a collector. Are you a collector of anything?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. I have paintings here and there in Florida—but everything I had in Florida burned to the ground—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, I heard that.

MR. ROSENQUIST: —three years ago. But—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Have you rebuilt?

MR. ROSENQUIST: So I never was a giant collector because I thought—didn't think I was responsible enough for caring for them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So did you exchange art works with your friends or other—

MR. ROSENQUIST: It was difficult, because then Leo would lose two commissions.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, I see. And how long were you with Castelli?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Till he died. So over 30 years.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah. Everybody has a Leo Castelli story. What's yours?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well, tell me somebody else's.

MR. MCELHINNEY: There was some—I'm trying to remember who it was—something about him actually having a heart attack at a dinner party. It wasn't a particularly good story, but—

MR. ROSENQUIST: I'm trying to remember. I'm trying to remember that one. He may have collapsed, but I don't think it was—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Maybe it was a—yeah, maybe he—

MR. ROSENQUIST: —not a heart attack.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —he had some kind of a spell. He had quite an interesting life. I read his biography, the one that came out a couple of years ago.

MR. ROSENQUIST: By?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Cohen-Solal?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. I didn't like it. In fact, I went with her to where the hell—Washington or somewhere—to be on a thing to try to sell her book, but I didn't like it. We did a sit-down thing with an audience.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What about the book did you not like or take difference with?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well, really just all it seemed to do was, like, reinforce his Jewish background. And he never seemed to be that Jewish.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, you're right. The first, at least half of the book is all about his ancestry.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Right, right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Parents, grandparents.

MR. ROSENQUIST: So what? Judith Goldman has been writing a book on him forever. She never finished it. So Annie Cohen-Solal jumped ahead of her, did that book. I mean, Judith, she still could do her own goddam book anyway, cause, it's much more interesting.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, maybe she ought to just try, you know, to publish what she's got.

MR. ROSENQUIST: She's got a lot.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I'm sure. Well, this is the problem. I mean, a lot of people never can step away from what they're doing. How do you decide—

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, no, no. That's true. That's very true too.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, how do you decide when a picture's done or when you're done with a picture?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well, see, what happens, if you do especially really big ones, you learn from them. You learn. And then, as soon as it gets finished, you say, "Wow! I could have done this now and I could have done that and I could have made that more ethereal, more crazy." And then you go, "Oh, I'll do that on the next one."

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: And so that's where that is, because I—some young artists you see now, whatever, they look at the art world and they get—they say, I'm going to jump into that. I can make a lot of money here doing a million things, getting a million things done, and sell them, like Damien Hirst, for example. I encountered that when I left art school, where people—this kid I knew, he says, "Can I rent your studio?" I said, "Yeah, I'm leaving." So then I see him six months later and he's making a plaster lamp. He—[laughs]—had turned the place into a big-production lamp-making place. He's in it for the money, for lamps; same with kids' painting—turn them out, and you have many people paint them, turn them out; same with the businessman too. They look at the art—at the art world as a big place that's possible of making a lot of money. I think it could collapse on them —

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: —big-time—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: —because there's people who own 800 Warhol sketches and all kinds of things that Warhol made. That can all go flat.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, people have speculated that the contemporary art world is—or the market, rather—is somewhat of a Ponzi scheme and that it could—it could—

MR. ROSENQUIST: In some people's minds, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: In some people's minds, yeah. In other people's minds it's a—it's a hell of a way to make a lot of money. But it's not about the art necessarily. I think Arne Glimcher, when they interviewed him, said that what—I don't want to misquote him, but he said something—I think you were there [to his assistant Chelsea]—he said the market killed the avant-garde, something about the money has overtaken the aesthetic or the spirit of experimentation or the adventure or whatever. And now I'm putting words in his mouth. But, I mean, I don't know if you'd agree with that at all.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Not to agree or disagree. It's that I know the history of the way things were done, and people would buy things because they liked them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: They would keep them. And then a guy like Bob Scull intended to buy a lot of things, and he wanted to have his name engraved in the Metropolitan Museum. But his collection got scattered before that. So it never happened. It went up for—it was auctioned. He got a divorce from Ethel. And then this happened to a few others I know. What the hell was his name? He had a great collection. He died. His wife just sold everything to every far-out place in the universe. Now I have paintings, singular paintings, all over the world on postage stamps.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: And they don't—his name was [Leon] Kraushar.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Nobody thinks about Kraushar at all. They go, who the fuck was this guy? They don't even know who Bob Scull is now either, because I think that the collector wanted to show history that they bought things from living people to show you the terrible temper of the times that they exhibited. They bought things that were made while they were alive, not Picasso, Matisse, nothing like that. That's an investment. That's investment banking.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: But to buy avant-garde things to show people you were alive at that time. They got a big kick out of that. Now—now what this—what I think is, is that people with a lot of money can say, "Well, I'm buying the terrible temper of the times." *However*, I don't think it's very good, this stuff. I think it's really—it's usually show-biz, bombastic, and everything.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So what painters are of interest to you today when you go around the galleries or you hear of an exhibition and—when would you say, "Oh, I want to go see this?"

MR. ROSENQUIST: I always look for really young—I met an American Indian named Star Wallowing Bull and I said, "God, he's like a baby Picasso." But he's got a big problem. He has no education. I don't think he went beyond—he's like, you know, just amazing talent, but he's as dumb as—as dumb as can be. How does that equate? I don't know. It's very weird. He's like an idiot-savant kind of guy.

Then—[laughs]—then I have a Korean relative who is—but that's a happy-ending story—he was adopted when he was thrown out of a family by my dumb cousin. And he, a little guy who was a really hard worker. His name is Jin Ho Meyerson. He—my aunt, his grandmother, sent him down to work with me. He arrives a nervous wreck. "I've got to go see my girlfriend. I've got to go. I've got to go." "Well, goddam it, go. I don't care. Go." "No, no, no. I'd better—I'd better stay."

So he stayed. And we stretched up all these canvases for him. And he worked like hell. It was real corny, some corny stuff. What is that? Tell me how you really feel? Whoa, then it came out. Blood and guts, everything came out. We sent his paintings back to his school. He got a year's free schooling for it; moved to Dumbo under the Brooklyn Bridge, married his childhood—this other orphan child, this orphan; divorced her in a year, went to Paris.

Well, he started selling his paintings galore to pretty good collectors. I said, "Well, how much—what's the highest price you ever sold?" He says, "Well, about \$100,000." So he's, like, selling galore. But he's good. And he's a worker, worker, worker; moved to Paris, married a French-Japanese girl, a beauty, and now they have a little baby. So he's a breadwinner. Then he became a—what do you call it?—a Seoul, Korea national treasure. You know, they do that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: Some countries, they—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, Japan does it. Canada does it too.

MR. ROSENQUIST: So they did—they gave him a place in Korea, Seoul, Korea. So he's between Seoul, Korea and Paris. And he's doing okay. He's got nowhere to go but up, and he's going up. And he's no slouch either. He—[laughs]—he's pretty damn good. Anyway, artists are few and far between.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So who do you admire today, painters?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Somebody I always liked was Frank Stella. And Bob Rauschenberg was my very good friend, and he died. And I was with him on his deathbed. And he said, "I don't mind death. I just don't like the infinity part of it."

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: Then I talked to scientists who told me there's no such thing as time. So I did a new artwork called *My Timeless Travel to Infinity*. [They laugh.] Oh. And I don't know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Are there any younger artists who are of interest to you today?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Okay, I'm in London and I go to the Saatchi collection that's exhibited.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: And there's two artists in there that—that's interesting. That's interesting. That's something. I'm going to watch this guy. So he had a show in New York—[makes a noise] fell down.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh. Who was it?

MR. ROSENQUIST: I know the name. I can't think of it. I thought he was pretty—pretty hot.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: But you never know. There are people—there are people—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, you've got your good days and your bad days, or years or decades or whatever.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Who knows—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Who knows, who knows? I don't know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How about the Germans? Are any of them of interest to you, the—

MR. ROSENQUIST: A good friend of mine is Gerhard Richter.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Richter. Yeah, I was about to ask about Richter.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I like—he's a very nice guy. And he got—he has a trick. He does tricky paintings. And he sells them for a lot of money. Then they don't sell here. What does he do? See, I did a painting, a long—I showed it in Germany. You take a big squeegee, a rubber squeegee, and you put color on it and you wipe it across the canvas, and it makes a big rainbow or any goddam thing.

So Gerhard started doing that galore. He started doing a squeegee going one way and then another way, you know, all these things done with squeegees. And it—he called them *abstraktes bild*—his abstractions. And he wants a million a pop, or something like that. Well, okay, but they seemed, like, too easy. But he could paint. He's a painter.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: He's not a schmearer.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: He could paint. And he's born in 1932 in Dresden; lived there in the fire storm maybe, all that crap; and then what's his name too, that guy that does the big black paintings.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Kiefer.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I met him on a rooftop downtown here; nice fellow. But you know what? They're depressing. I've had enough black.

MR. MCELHINNEY: They're heavy and they're serious and they're—

MR. ROSENQUIST: They're very serious, and they're always guilty about—with the Jews or something.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, yeah. It's—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Don't quote me.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No. Well, it's much discussed that he's drawing his imagery from German nationalism, which killed the Jews.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Exactly.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And—but he's drawing it not in a—

MR. ROSENQUIST: He's a nice fellow.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —celebratory way. No, I've heard this.

MR. ROSENQUIST: He's a hell of a nice guy. I showed in Germany with Rolf Ricke. And Rudy Zwirner bought my paintings and sold them to Dr. Ludwig.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, yes. Yes.

MR. ROSENQUIST: And now his son, David Zwirner, has a gallery in New York and seems to be doing very well. I'm the same age as Rudy, and I had dinner already with David at his house. He had a big party and he got up and talked about his father. And he's an up-and-comer, David is.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Did you know Ludwig?

MR. ROSENQUIST: I met him. Okay, so here's one for you. I did this painting, *Star Thief*, 17 by 46 feet, in—I think it was 1980. And they wanted to hang it in the Eastern Airlines area in Miami. And Frank Borman said he'd been around the moon 10 times and space didn't look like that. And my reply was I don't think he ever got off the launch pad.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: And he'd never seen my painting. He only saw a picture, one end of it, okay. So then Eric Sterheim [ph], county commissioner, said, we have to reevaluate our purchasing program because we have—we're going to buy some other painting. But I forget her name. But anyway, so two days later Bert Cantor in Chicago called and says, Can I buy it? First come, first serve. He bought it for 375 grand. Then he kept it for over 10 years and he sold it to Ludwig for a million-six just before Ludwig died.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So is it now in Cologne?

MR. ROSENQUIST: It's in Cologne.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah. Yeah, he's got a few little outpost museums, like Aachen. There's a—in the old chocolate factory.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I know he's got a lot of places.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, a lot of places.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Different styles too.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. He was a big collector.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Oh yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Who is the most impressive collector that you ever knew? I mean, you—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Okay! Okay! Okay! I have a show with Leo called *Horse Blinders*; another wrap-around-the-room painting.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: And we're putting one wall up. Ludwig walks in. He says, "*Fantastisch!* I must have this. How much is this?" Leo says, "I don't know." And he comes over to me. "How much is it?" I says, "I don't know."

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: And then I says, "Tell him to come back tomorrow. We'll have the whole thing up." And then Leo and I decide that the *F-111* went for, like, \$40[000], \$50,000, something like that. Let's say \$70,000. He came back right away, nine o'clock in the morning. He says, what is the cost here? And Leo says \$70,000. He goes [makes sound], like phooey. Just then the phone rings in the back room. It was Philip Johnson. He wanted to buy it. [Laughs.] Ludwig heard this. And I'm left with Ludwig. I don't know him too much. I don't know what to say. I says, "You know, Doctor, our offshore oil rights in California were sold for \$70 million, and then they killed some ducks out there." And I says, "You can't make a duck with \$70 million." He goes—and then Leo pulls up and he goes, "Yes, doctor, we are the ducks." [They laugh.]

So then, when he heard Philip wanted it, he goes, "It's mine, mine, mine. It's mine." So he bought it, *jawohl*.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Good story.

MR. ROSENQUIST: And he's got it. [Laughs.] And it's in Cologne. It's shown off. And I get tons and tons of fan mail from Germany because of that, because of the paintings in Cologne.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The Germans really have kind of stepped up to the plate when it comes to contemporary art. They're really, you know, serious about it. I mean, everywhere, all over the country, there are these little art—

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, no, no. Listen, let me tell you something. I'll tell you, I served six years in the National Endowment for the Arts. When I went in, our budget was \$155 million. That's for everything—theater, dance, visual, everything. Then Ronnie Reagan came in and knocked it down to \$95[000,000,000]. Then it crept back up again. Then, when it was \$155 million, the city of Berlin was—I think it was \$900 million just for the city of Berlin. So you go in any bank, any place, anywhere in Berlin, there's German artists. They show their own. They take care of their own.

MR. MCELHINNEY: True.

MR. ROSENQUIST: There's Richter. There's—everybody and his brother is shown, is bought.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Have you rebuilt in Aripeka [Florida]?

MR. ROSENQUIST: I'm not allowed to by the federal government. They said there's been a new flood plain. They won't let me rebuild. So I'm going to move. I own 100 acres there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I could build a house and my own studio. It's a big bummer. So I wasn't—I didn't—I said, Oh, fuck, I'm not going to fight it. So I made a—did a big project for Steve Wynn in Las Vegas, for Frank Gehry's new brain hospital; you know, did a thing for the Metropolitan Opera in New York. It went over well. Then I did two or three shows with Acquavella . Then I thought, I'm going to fight it. I'm going to fight it. So I called Jo Carole Lauder. Then I called Eugene Shore [ph]. Then I got—next to Obama, the—Zororats [ph]—his left-hand person. Then I got into a ton of paperwork. So I said, screw it. And I haven't—now I'm going to move, but it's not because of that. It's because in my neighborhood, about eight people died. I don't have any reference. I mean, they weren't—

MR. MCELHINNEY: From the storm or from the—

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, no. They just—smoking—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh.

MR. ROSENQUIST: —drinking. They were fishermen, farmers, a couple of artists; just people. And what took the cake is the general store owner, he retired. He was a milepost. Fuck, I—I took him on his retirement dinner. I took him out to dinner, Carl Norfleet. But, I mean, it's the references in your life—[whistles]—gone. So I don't—to me it's like an empty place with no studio.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You going to stay in Florida or are you going to move?

MR. ROSENQUIST: I'm wondering. I like it warm. I like it hot.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How'd you pick Florida? Just the climate or the—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Climate and close to New York—quick to New York.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, you're close to Tampa. You're just—I looked at a map. You're just—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —north of Tampa, right?

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, no, no. It's—I'm thinking maybe, if I could find any place—I don't think I could find anything near Miami. I've got a lot of heavy friends in Miami, though; with a lot of money. I'm going to go down there next week.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: I'm giving a talk for Ben Arison, who owns Carnival Cruise Lines. And they—she bought that painting that's going to go to Russia, because I owed her a favor. But I've been going to Miami for years and years and years—years. I was there during the heavy-duty drug days too.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: [Laughs.] And people going into art galleries with paper bags with 100 grand in cash in 20s, and they—I'd see this girlfriend of mine. I had this woman I knew. I loved her. She was dying of cancer, and she *lived*. She told me a guy came in with a paper bag to buy a painting and she said, "Take it in the back and count it." And then he said, "It took longer for you to count than for me to make it."

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: It was drug money! A lot of drug money then. And then there's a guy, Marty Margulies, he owns Grove Island. He was very nice. He was my friend. He's okay. I've talked about him at the New York Athletic Club. He helped me take care of my mother once, one period. So I've got friends there. But, you know, my amigos, there've been changes—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: —everywhere.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, it's really the gateway to Latin America, for a lot of Latin America.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Sure. No, no, indeed. Indeed. And also it's, in a way, a big—I mean, like, not a stock market, but an economic market with Latin America.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Any immediate plans? New work?

MR. ROSENQUIST: I just finished three paintings in Florida called [pause] *Space Fractals Coming to You*.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Are they, like, on the same scale as this piece here?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Smaller.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Smaller?

MR. ROSENQUIST: But anyway, my scientist friend says, "You're painting fractals." Okay. It was a whole tradition of these triangulated points coming towards nothing. It's a whole concept. And they looked pretty good. We'll see what comes out of it—[they laugh]—what it all ends up with.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How did you find your way into friendships with scientists? Are they artists? Is it—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Pure chance.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Is it jazz-related by chance? No?

MR. ROSENQUIST: This one guy's Japanese, named Inagaki. He's—that guy is—I saw him the other day on the street—he was just in Switzerland, Switzerland, at that collider thing.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: —studying that Bose-Higgson [Higgs bosson, an elementary particle in the Standard Model of particle physics] thing. And then there's—here's one for you. Then he went to San Francisco. And in San Francisco there's a whole group, also funded by NASA, to studying meteors headed our way. However, this study is for meteors 30 years away, because the local ones, they're too close and they can't study them. So we really have no protection from meteors at all now, but they're—you know, they're working on it since fragments hit Russia.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, that's right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: But let me tell you something. When I was little—I wasn't that old. It was in 1938. North of Atwater, Minnesota, a piece of a meteor hit a big fat lady; came through her house, hit her on the hip, didn't kill her. So I made a painting, you know, many years later called *The Meteor Hits Picasso's Bed*. Then I thought, did I dream that? Did I imagine that?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Like the turtle in the washtub?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Did I—yeah, exactly.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: So then my dentist in Florida pulled up her bruised, fat hip on the Internet. It actually did happen.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, my God.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Oh, my God is right. How the hell did he do that? But they showed the bruise. She lived. And she had a big bruised, fat hip from this chunk of meteorite coming through her thing. So what is that—what is all like? It's like—that happening is just like an exclamation out of space. You know, it's like no rhyme or reason. But the scientists, I'm telling you, they're studying that now, a big deal out in California. They need to get a handle on it. They're a little late, but—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, trying to anticipate strikes to the surface of the earth—I mean, this is one of the—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Here's one they got. He said they got—they got one through tracking called the city killer. And it's—I don't know—it's like as big as a boxcar or something like that big. And they said if that hit a city, it would be total devastation, like a hydrogen bomb—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow.

MR. ROSENQUIST: —because he said when a meteor hits the earth, there's a reaction from the earth and it

pushes back; all sorts of hocus pocus I don't know about. [Laughs.] But it's fascinating. These guys blow my mind out there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Did you ever ponder collaborating with a scientist or working with—because I know they did that show. Maurice Tuchman did that big show out in LA—

MR. ROSENQUIST: Maurice Tuchman.

MR. MCELHINNEY: —out in LA, the art and technology show, yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: What'd he do?

MR. MCELHINNEY: He did this art and technology show. He put artists together with industry or science. They put—Oldenburg worked with Disney, as I remember, and they made this show out at the LA County Museum, like, 1968—a long time ago.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I don't know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, thanks for your time.

MR. ROSENQUIST: It's valuable.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It is. It's very valuable. I think if we had a few more beers and another couple of hours, you know, I mean, you could just keep unfolding.

MR. ROSENQUIST: We could get lost.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, that's the way to get found, right? Get lost in the right wrong place.

MR. ROSENQUIST: [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Nowhere.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah. I told my wife, I think I'm going to move to the Caribbean and just stay there. People can visit me or something. I don't give a shit. But I don't know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Are you tired of New York?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Listen, you know what New York is? New York is a tough place to live. It's expensive and nasty. *But* New York is a lucky place. Why is it lucky? All the wealthy Europeans come through and they give you money. They just give you money. They do that. They just give me money. I mean, I've had people give me 10 grand here, 10 grand there. "Here kid, here's some money. Do something with it and give me some back." They think you're going to do, you know, business. It wouldn't happen in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. ROSENQUIST: It wouldn't happen in Nebraska. It wouldn't happen in Iowa. It's in New York City. That's why it's an interesting place.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, if you moved to the—if you moved to the Caribbean, that would be a place where they might also want to visit.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Maybe, yeah. I've been all over the Caribbean. I've been to Cuba, Haiti, Puerto Rico, everywhere. I've been all over.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Have any place picked out?

MR. ROSENQUIST: No.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Any—

MR. ROSENQUIST: No, I haven't. Looking.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, thanks.

MR. ROSENQUIST: So where would be your favorite place to live?

MR. MCELHINNEY: My favorite place to live? That's a tough question. I like New Mexico. I like Ireland.

MR. ROSENQUIST: [In an Irish accent] Sure. You're going to buy me one now, Paddy.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How about you, other than the Caribbean?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well, I mean, goddam, if you look at the map—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. ROSENQUIST: —it's only warm in Florida all the time. It's always down—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, Southern California. Texas is out of the question, I suppose.

MR. ROSENQUIST: I've done work in Southern California. Too much traffic or something, no matter what.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: I mean, no matter what. I mean, I go visit my friends there. We drive for 40, 50 miles to go to dinner—to a nothing dinner place.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: I lived in San Francisco for a while.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: North San Francisco is a nice place. It's always—I don't know. I always like to be connected to New York City some way so I could get here easily.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So regardless of where you go, other than Florida, you will retain your establishment here?

MR. ROSENQUIST: [Laughs.] Yeah. Oh, boy.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, thank you again.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Don't go scheduling me that I don't know about.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, I didn't—I wouldn't dream of it. I wouldn't dream of it. Thanks again.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Welcome.

[END TR05.]

This is disc number six.

MR. ROSENQUIST: [Inaudible]—join you for Christmas with his wife and everything up in Westchester. So I call him up. So, you know, you talk to them like this. "[shouting] Hey, Joey kid. Hey, whaddya doin', kiddo? Hey, baby, talk to me." You know, like that, okay. So I called his wife. I says, "How's Joey? Well, he's fine, but he's got Alzheimer's." So she puts him on. "Joey, baby, kid. How are you, kid? It's Rosenquist from Times Square. Remember, baby? How are ya?" "Why did you call me? To hear your lovely voice, Joey." "What lovely voice?" And he hung up. Gone. He's gone. He's walking dead.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Sad.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Horrible. [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you credit your—

MR. ROSENQUIST: So I'm waiting for it to happen to me.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, you've got an extraordinary power of recall. And you attribute this just to this book you were working on?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah, yeah, yeah, because—

MR. MCELHINNEY: What's the book? What's the book again?

MR. ROSENQUIST: It's called *Painting Below Zero*.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Who's the author? You're the author?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

MR. ROSENQUIST: And it's—what it really means, painting below zero, means introducing imagery into non-objectivity. Anyway, this guy David Dalton called me up and he says, why don't we do a book? Really. So I said, how do you do a book? He says, well, you just sit down and tape and tape and tape and tape and tape and tape it. So I did for about a year and a half—tape, tape, tape, tape it. And he had this person transcribe it so I can change the grammar and so forth. And it was a bestseller. They sold out the first edition.

But then, you know, there's a lot left over that I didn't put in the book. So I'm thinking of writing another book.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, you asked me before how long I've been conducting interviews. And I asked you why, and you said you were—that you could ask yourself how long you've been doing what you've been doing. And then you said—you made a comment about time. You said there is no time; there's only infinity.

MR. ROSENQUIST: That's right. [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Is that right?

MR. ROSENQUIST: That's pretty good. Where'd you get that?

MR. MCELHINNEY: I think I heard it from some guy in a white cap.

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well, I mean, when my old body says I don't like the infinity part of it, that seems that's what death is.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. ROSENQUIST: And time is what you do screwing around doing nothing all the time, waiting for infinity, doing—what's the value of—well, what do you do? It's like timeless, timeless. Anyway—

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, how does painting let you deal with that?

MR. ROSENQUIST: What do I do?

MR. MCELHINNEY: I mean, how does painting let you deal with that? How does painting give you a way to deal with that?

MR. ROSENQUIST: Well, I just—I just—it cuts to the quick. If something irritates me, I think about it and then make a painting, something besides—I mean, mysteriously peculiar, odd bunch of events or whatever. I try to address that in a painting. That's all.

[END TR06.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]