



Smithsonian
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Oral history interview with Knox
Martin, 2014 May 14-July 23

Contact Information

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Knox Martin on 2014 May 14–July 23. The interview took place at Martin's home and studio in New York, NY, and was conducted by James McElhinney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Gabriela (Gaby) Ryan, Martin's assistant, was also present during the interview.

Gabriela Ryan has reviewed the transcript. Her corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. 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 Knox Martin on Wednesday, May the 14th, at Knox's home on Ft. Washington Avenue in northern Manhattan, home and studio. Good morning.

KNOX MARTIN: Good morning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How does that sound?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Sounds good.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. You have a good radio voice, too, so we will both boom away. What is your first recollection of being in the presence of a work of art?

KNOX MARTIN: Well, to call it probably a work of art, it means to—for it to be revealed to you, now you knew, that Rembrandt was a—was a renowned world master. Right alongside of Leonardo Da Vinci. So you knew that. To look at the Rembrandt—like, a lot of people go and look at the name titles in the museum to see if it's all right to be looking at that painting. "Oh, it's a Rembrandt. I could be caught looking at it." So, uh, but I was a student, and as I had three major impacts like that—actually four—that turned my life around in relation to art. So when you say—the question again was what?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: When were you mindful, aware of being in the presence of a work of art, first?

KNOX MARTIN: Okay. So after a hundred trips to the museum as a student—and that's something that I did all the time. [00:02:00] Uh, I walked in one day and I looked and I saw the Rembrandt. I'd seen the Rembrandt—the Rembrandt room at the Metropolitan and had books on Rembrandt, uh, a curious thing; I never thought of teaching art, and I got a call—I had some publicity and renown in the art world and I get a call from Yale University; they would like me to teach there. So I said, "Wait a minute. It's a whole new competition in my life. I'm gonna teach? No, wait. Art can't be taught," I said. So I knew most of the faculty up at Yale and I talked to, like Al Held and a few other people. What is—and he talked to me and he said some funny things, and then I questioned other people, and other people. Now, the closest guy to it, I don't know if you remember Joseph Stapleton, the painter? Taught at the League?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of him. I never knew him.

KNOX MARTIN: So he—I said, "Joe—" we were very close. So he made a gesture with his hand. And I didn't—I saw it and I understood it, but it didn't quite filter through until—and one day, sometime later—I'm going through my book of drawings of Rembrandt, and all of a sudden I turn to this one drawing and I said, "Oh." There was a student drawing of the Annunciation, and the student had drawn in an illustrated manner, like a little angel. [00:04:00] And the thin lines of a little podium and Mary looking down. Rembrandt corrected it; he made the angel fit the page. Top of the head. The wings stretched out like this. The podium was done in dark and it was some strong verticals, and Mary had turned her head sharply to the left and was going like this, instead of like this. So the first angel is going, "Mary, you're the mother of God." The other angel goes, "Mary!" So from that drawing by Rembrandt and Joe Stapleton's figuration—that's what I've done. In other words, a picture

they say is worth a thousand words? Well, I would take a work from someone and sometimes ask the class, look, if you did this and you did this, what is detracting from it or what is part of the whole thing? I mean, which—which is an intellectual transposition adverse to a deep artistic impression or a shape or a form having given birth to the next shape or form. So you had the junior and the senior of the situation in the painting, all corners, the top, the bottom, and the sides are interacting with each other in a language. So then there's another thing. All of the—all of the people [00:06:00] that I got into and had begun to see, still as a student, and everyone, uh, Gauguin collected—Gauguin had five Cézannes. Matisse said, "Cézanne's right, I'm right." Picasso said, "Cézanne is my father." De Kooning said, "Everything thinks I'm a super Cubist, but it's Cézanne that I work through." So—and I didn't see Cézanne yet.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Meaning—meaning, you didn't get Cézanne.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You'd seen—

KNOX MARTIN: Well, I'd seen—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the picture—

KNOX MARTIN: No, no. You look at the picture—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You had held the pictures—

KNOX MARTIN: You look at a picture—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: And you could sort of analyze part of it—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: This does this, this does this, into what you were looking for, but you didn't get a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You beheld many, but you never understood them. You never saw them.

KNOX MARTIN: Right. Saw them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. Got ya.

KNOX MARTIN: So this one day there was a—there was an Impressionist, post-Impressionist exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum, and I walked in and it had just rained. So looking out this big window and the bark of the trees were dark, and the color of the people walking through the late spring, and here was a Pissarro. Then I was looking at a Seurat and, I had passed the Rembrandt earlier and I came back and I looked at the Rembrandt and [claps]. So that had opened.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You got it. You saw it.

KNOX MARTIN: The Rembrandt opened. Another thing—another thing that was the most amazing thing, at the Metropolitan Museum, walking by and I looked at a [00:08:00] Eugène Boudin, French painter, and all of a sudden all painterly brush strokes were mine. I saw the whole thing completely, and therefore, more involved with Cézanne's brush strokes. Brushstrokes that give birth to the next brushstroke. It's like each—each brushstroke is done like a dance of intelligence among the forms, instead of filling in or doing this.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: Or portraying or illustrating or something. The brushstrokes dance and—in this intelligence. And then—so, oh—so every time—there was that—that's the—the payoff of the whole thing. So you take any of Cezanne's and you say, well, the separates over here and there's a quadrant over here. All of these guys also used a—they were involved with a poetic geometry, geometry of rhythms that allowed for repetitions. Perhaps the greatest

artist alongside of Shakespeare was van Eyck, and van Eyck and all these guys used—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think that sound was your computer, not our—

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Oh, okay.

KNOX MARTIN: Oh, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But when you say Shakespeare, I mean, Shakespeare, you're talking about the poetic meter?

KNOX MARTIN: Everything. I mean, total—total Shakespeare. Like, what total Shakespeare was to all of literature, van Eyck was to all of painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I see what you mean. So yeah, there was a—there's a professor at Yale [00:10:00] named Harold Bloom whose argument was that, um, all English literature descends from Shakespeare. That's probably an oversimplification. But I remember Arthur Miller being asked once whether he was influenced by him, and he said no. He said—he said, "I was influenced by the Greeks." Well, that's sort of a—a clever thing to say. But—but, you're saying van Eyck, that's where it begins, because many painters would say—if they were—if they're trying to find a starting point for the Renaissance—they would start with Giotto.

KNOX MARTIN: Well, Giotto now, the wildest thing of all—not—see, this—this all goes into—like, I would say that 99 percent of the world don't get Cézanne. All right? So there's a—let me go to the one—one other step in that. I was—oh. One thing—one thing that happened. I sort of lived in the museums. That's where this stuff was, and I—I was like a cheetah that goes after his prey, and all of these gazelles running about but he's targeted one, right? And got—cheetah runs right in front of me, ignores him and he targets that one and goes right after it and gets it at 70 miles an hour.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: So I would go to museums and see one thing. Like, I had a friend who was a collector. He says, "Knox, I'm coming to town. Please, let's go to the Guggenheim, the Modern Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum." I said, "I'm sorry. I have a headache." [They laugh.] So—so I would target something and spend time. [00:12:00] I went to Munich and I went there to see a Titian and I didn't see the rest of the museum.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The Alte Pinakothek.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Which one? Which Titian?

KNOX MARTIN: Uh, the—you know, I forget right now which one it was.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The one that was—a *Venus and the Lute Player*, or one of those?

KNOX MARTIN: But Titian—no, no. Uh, I think it was—I think it was a *The Crowning of Thorns*, although that might be in Czechoslovakia, that painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, *The [Flaying of] Marsyas* is in Czechoslovakia.

KNOX MARTIN: Huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The—yeah, and the *Crowning of Thorns* might be in Munich.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. Could be. So I mean I live by that painting and that's all I do. In other words, from the Titian—and he was involved. Now, you were saying Giotto. Giotto was a Byzantine painter originally, and uh, there's a whole other—look at that. But let me say this first, just this fourth sequence of from Cézanne to Boudin—or, Rembrandt, Boudin, and then, uh, at the Louvre, I look over, there's the whole Veronese *Last Supper* with Titian and Veronese and the guys in the foreground.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: And then, the *Raft of Medusa* over here, right? And *The Death of Sardanapalus*, Delacroix, looking at that one. And I stepped unexpectedly out in the hall, and in the hall on this big wall is this Velázquez *Infanta*, in a black dress and silver. Well, I looked at that thing and [claps], all of art [00:14:00] embraced me, ravished me, and all of art was now mine. I mean, I—I'm standing there shaking. My friend is looking at me, says, "Are you all right?" [Laughs.] So I mean, that wrapped it up and said, "Here, okay, you've worked your ass off and here's a present for you; all of art." And that was it. And from that day on, everything I've—every—in other words, every drawing that I make, every small piece that I make, uh, I conceive it as nothing less than a complete work of art, modeled on van Eyck and Titian. And Cézanne, and Matisse. Now, here's—here's some odd news—[ringing]--

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is that your door?

KNOX MARTIN: It sounded like my door.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Are you expecting anyone?

KNOX MARTIN: No. Uh, let them ring again. It might be—it might be—do you mind? You wrapped up or—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Not at all. Let's just pause for a moment.

[END OF TRACK.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're resuming. You were—during the interruption, you were quoting a poem. Would you like to do that again?

KNOX MARTIN: Oh, no. That's all right. It's a long [cross talk].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was appropriate to the moment. Could you speak to us a little bit about your early life? I know a little bit about it because we had a conversation about this before, about your aviator father and growing up in Virginia.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. The peculiar thing—well, that's the way it is. My father was a very gifted, talented artist. And his uncle, William Field Knox, who was co-inventor of the Otis elevator and very well-to-do, sponsored my father to go to the University of Maryland to study art. Who knows what year that was, but anyway, right at the turn of the century, give or take 10, 15 years. Anyway. So my father was studying art—that'll come in a minute. And in his art classes, easel, working for the model, he heard this sound he'd never heard before. So the whole class rushed outside and here's—here's an airplane. Maybe one of 10 in the whole world at that time. The—the airplane was invented in 1906 by the Wright brothers, so it couldn't have been too much after 1906 this thing flew over. [00:02:00] So he went to his uncle. He said, "Uncle Will, I want to fly. I want to be a pilot. I want to fly." His uncle said, "Well, you promised to go to Paris and study one year. After a year of study in Paris—at the Beaux-Arts in Paris, let's discuss it if you're still interested." So he went to Paris and the one thing is the elements hit the fan at that time in aviation, and he studied flying with Dumont, who made the first flights over Paris. Now, the curious thing is, that my uncle told me—his brother said that Knox was always—my father's name was Knox—he was always drawing hawks. My grandmother had this big estate with about 40 acres, a big farm. So these hawks would fly over and he would draw them and put little notes; tail turning to the left, tail full down, flaps down, slowing. So he literally learned flying by watching these birds, and he drew them all the time from the garden. So he was a—he was a natural of all things. Did you ever see the books of him with—with photographs? Maybe Gaby [Ryan] will—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I've seen a couple of images of him online.

KNOX MARTIN: Unbelievable. Unbelievable. He looks like a pilot. He's like—every photograph of him he's like—there's some books—I was just sent some stuff from the annals [00:04:00] and the Wikipedia of his flight over the Andes. But anyway, he came back from Paris and he said, "I want to fly." So his uncle bought him an airplane. So he started then. And he winds up, at one time, flying with—I'd have to go over the things—one was Pancho Villa. At the age of 19, he was in Curacaos demonstrated aviation, photographs of that. Now, he was 19. So aviation was 1906. Nineteen—that old. And here he is—then he went to—then he went to China. Oh, no. It had to be before that. But then, he went to—he went to Colombia, South America, and he did a lot of first things; first mail flown, dropped. Years later when I was teaching at Yale, I joined the Aerial Club and I learned to fly. And I flew the

same route that my father flew, to the—to the joy of the South Americans, down in Barranquilla. Uh, and then, first one to fly over the Andes. And just at that point—the this is the plane that he flew, the Jenny. It's an exact reproduction of it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The model of—I'll have to take a photograph of that.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. And I carved the little statue in there of him, with his moustache? Put it in there. [00:06:00] So, uh—and the earliest memory of my father, I was in my grandmother's garden. My mother was holding me in her arms. What was I five? And this airplane comes from nowhere, upside down, about 25 feet over the cornfield, and it was my father, scarf hanging, he's waving at me like that. My mother's saying, "No, no, no!" It's dangerous to fly that low upside down. [Side conversation.] Yeah. Hey! Get a chair and join us here. What? Did you get the coffee? You got the coffee? Okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So I read that he was killed in a—

KNOX MARTIN: Automobile accident.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Automobile—that's ironic. He does all this crazy flying and he dies in a car wreck. Where?

KNOX MARTIN: A test pilot for Boeing at one point.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, he—the strange thing, he was—went up to install, and—and advise and—an airport in Watertown, New York. And they had been drinking, the driver was going along. So my father was like, very conscious of distances and speed. He says, "Hey, you're going a little too fast here." It was a curb. He said, "You? The intrepid aviator? Afraid of speed?" And he sped up and they went off the cliff, right? And he was killed. The driver survived. 1927.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So you would have been four years old, or five years old?

KNOX MARTIN: Five, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So can you tell us a little about your mother? [00:08:00]

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. Well, she—she had—she was an extraordinary—she was from South America, through Cuba, and her mother was French. Her mother's name was Valerie, maiden name, and her father was a—had gone to Cuba on—no, no. No, that's—that's sort of in the shadows. Unfortunately, I met a lady who knew this history and I should have jotted it down. We talked. When I went to South America. And she talked extensively about the family. She had a fantastic memory, and she went over the details. And I didn't know that my family had come from Cuba. My mother's father's side.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So he was Cuban?

KNOX MARTIN: Pardon me? [Phone rings.] Spanish, Cuban, French. What do they—excuse me, one second.

[END OF TRACK.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, so we're resuming. Knox, could you please tell us if your mother was—was also artistically inclined?

KNOX MARTIN: Well, the strange thing, the whole family, they—the family, talent-wise, she had four sisters. So my mother and four sisters raised me. I think that's why—that's why I had a dream. God came down in the dream and said, "Knox. All women are yours." So here I am. So but the sisters were all talented. One—one was a beautiful piano player, loved Chopin, and—and Richetta, Henrietta, did watercolors. Gorgeous landscapes. Watercolors. And so, there was a general talent, like. And they were all incredible cooks. I think cooking is very much like painting: a gourmet cook, and a major painter. But they were talented.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So where did you grow up?

KNOX MARTIN: Um, I haven't stopped growing yet.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, that's a—yes. But where—where were you raised as a child?

KNOX MARTIN: No, I was—I was in South America until the age of two. And then, we came to my grandmother's estate in Virginia—Salem, Virginia. And I guess I might have been [00:02:00] six, seven. When we came to New York, the sisters joined my mother, and they had an apartment nearby, a few blocks away from here. Uh—matter of fact, on 165th Street, like three blocks from here. And, uh, she was living with three of the sisters. The other two—no, two of the sisters. The other two were married. And so, we grew up here in New York City.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Had you siblings?

KNOX MARTIN: I have two brothers; one was killed in the war over Japan, flying, and my other brother's a very talented guy. He lives in California.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is he—is he a painter, writer?

KNOX MARTIN: Painter. Uh, but he's a—all kinds of things; writes, paints, travels all over the world. One of his escapades is, in a little town in Asia, a tiger ate a woman from this little village, so he volunteered and he went and he shot the tiger. That's the kind of—visiting volcanic sites. World travel. He never settled down to do a painting. He was a bullfighter for a while.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where?

KNOX MARTIN: In Mexico, and then in Spain.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh.

KNOX MARTIN: And he came back with this—a bull had hit him in the chest, [00:04:00] caved his ribs in, right? And he was very ill. So we treated him here in New York until he was better, and he—he went off. Then he got married and he's been married several times. Great guy. Great guy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Is he older or younger than you?

KNOX MARTIN: Younger.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you basically are a New York kid, then?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's where you grew up. And this is your hood? This is your neighborhood?

KNOX MARTIN: Absolutely. I mean, I won't go to the Bronx or Brooklyn. Manhattan-bound.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So where were you when, uh, when you heard about Pearl Harbor? It's one of those questions people have to ask.

KNOX MARTIN: Well, it's a peculiar thing. After my grandmother's death, my Uncle Morris—so, at that—I mean, I was drawing all the time, birds, hummingbirds, plants, and my Uncle Morris said, "Knox—" maybe I was 16. So he said, "You're eventually not going to make a living at this. Art is—so, your grandmother was a very close friend with the aunt of the president of Norfolk & Western Railroad, and there are no jobs but there's a job, and you can take the job. You may wind up being the head of the Norfolk & Western Railroad." And I've always been a person where, you gave me a ticket and you said you have to be in Italy, [00:06:00] I go "Duh?" And I go to Italy. And I'm in Italy and I'm there for a summer and someone comes—I taught there for three summers. Someone comes, gives you a ticket, says, "You gotta go—" I didn't miss New York or anyplace. Amazing, uh, and suddenly I find myself back in New York. So it's the same way; someone says, "Here's a job." So I went as an apprentice and I had to study various things and became an electrician. Then a lineman on the Norfolk & Western Railroad, I think this went on for three years, and the war had started, Pearl Harbor.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So where were you when you actually heard about Pearl Harbor? This is one of these things, like people remember where they were when they heard about the shooting of Kennedy. It's like, where were you in that moment.

KNOX MARTIN: Oh, yeah. I remember that very well. Uh—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You were working on the railroad?

KNOX MARTIN: On the railroad.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. Where were you living then?

KNOX MARTIN: It wasn't—it wasn't like an impact of now. As a younger kid, a younger boy, I remember railing against the idea of Hitler dominating the world, and I took—like, I took it personal. Like, how can that be? As a kid. So Pearl Harbor was part of the atmosphere, rather than being—I was a kid.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, so it wasn't—

KNOX MARTIN: But I was on the railroad.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right; you were working on the railroad.

KNOX MARTIN: Working the railroad. [00:08:00] So everyone was being drafted, so I decided, hell, I'm gonna be a flyer like my father. So I had a buddy, Johnny Cochran, and we used to, uh, frequent—in Roanoke, Virginia—parties, this and that, this and that, and I would go in for my test to be a pilot. You know, you say like somebody up there likes you, right?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: So—so, perhaps if I'd done that, I wouldn't be here. So we went down—Johnny and I, both of us, tested, and our eyesight didn't make it. I have—at this age I have perfect vision. For very fine print I may need glasses. So we failed the test for eyesight. Then one day they advertised glider pilots. And we had been sort of like dry for a while, as kids. And we both got in as a glider pilot. So we trained in flying, dead stick landings, so on, and so forth. And then, later, you see this thing—it was insane, because you were trained to fly a bus with wings on it —

JAMES MCELHINNEY: With no engine.

KNOX MARTIN: Huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: With no engine. [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: With no engine. And a body of like 14 men and equipment. And every landing—now, you went behind the enemy lines you were released, [00:10:00] and you went down silently and you couldn't see where you were landing; in trees or God knows. So usually a pilot broke his legs, and if you survived, you were a guy behind the trenches. You didn't have any more gliders to fly; it was a one-shot thing. And of course, it was—the romance of flying gliders, it was just something I always wanted to do. And then, they announced to us, Johnny Cochran, this whole barracks, you are all returning to civilian life; we've overdrawn. When we're ready we'll recall you. So fortunately—I was out of the Army now and waiting to hear, and my stepfather was in the Coast Guard and he was head of a boat pool in the harbor. He says, "Knox, join the Coast Guard." And I joined the Coast Guard, boot training, uh, then—then it took some politics to do this, but the whole bunch of us took a ship that was called the 83500, which is a sub chaser. So we instantly were deployed. We went to—there was—German ships off the coast of South America sinking ships coming in with merchandise to be sent overseas, and they were sinking those ships. So we were a patrol group.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: These were U-boats you were hunting?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. The patrol group, [00:12:00] we had—a ridiculous combination. We had huge, like 12 depth charges, cans like that of high explosive. We were in a, uh, very high-octane boat made of—beautifully built boat—ship with high explosive gasoline, and 20-millimeter cannon on the stern with all the ammunition, and 50-millimeter cannon was in the spray shield. See? Uh, and I'm saying that because, at one point we were sent to Europe to

be part of the invasion fleet. And we were—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So D-Day?

KNOX MARTIN: We were stationed at Pool, England, and then came D-day and we were at Omaha Beach. We were in the first, second, third, fourth, fifth wave. You know, all the waves of guys. Now, the reason I mention those explosives, was the sister ship. We were moored together in Pool, England. We were commissioned together. And in this fleet of 30 boats there was one bomber and it was always busy. So two days before the invasion, this guy cut my hair. So we're in the invasion and all of a sudden the stingers hit the ship.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Your sister ship?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. We were the 83500 and they were the 82500. And all you saw was this giant silver ball. [00:14:00] Everybody aboard had been pulverized. Right? And I'm kind of looking at the thing. I didn't see a shoe or a frying pan or a piece of a refrigerator, or a head, or clothes. It was just a fine ball of mist, silver. A beautiful pyrotechnic, and that was the depth charges going off, the ammunition going off, and the gasoline going off, the high-test gasoline.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it was hit by a shell from the German coastal guns?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

KNOX MARTIN: Now, uh, we went in and raked the beach. We didn't know the pillboxes were open there. You couldn't see anybody. The war was—tons of thousands of airplanes were going over for the invasion. The sky was black with that, and you looked out at sea like that, from horizon to horizon there was an invasion fleet coming in to the coast of France. Uh, but then after raking the beach with a machine gun and the cannon on leaving [ph], the first wave didn't make it. Oh, and, an astonishing thing is, intelligence gave us the information that the Germans were gonna use gas, but the wind was blowing in the wrong direction; it would have carried the gas inland, and the storm was coming. So we wound up to be—well, we had a gas suit, and two gas masks. On your wrist, if your strip turned pink or green, you would take the green gas mask, et cetera [00:16:00] And you put it on this—you had elastic around—and your ankles. And so, you had this—and the reason that wars are fought by the young is, you had no idea of—you weren't afraid. There was no fear. Some of the older guys below in the boat were shaking, fearful, but there was no fear. And we were doing heroic deeds as if it was nothing. We'd jump in the water and pull up bodies. Nothing. So we became a rescue flotilla, you know, instead of like marauders of the beach and combing the beach.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You were evacuating wounded.

KNOX MARTIN: So we became—that fleet was then designated in the history as a rescue flotilla, preordered so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How were you wounded?

KNOX MARTIN: Pardon me?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How were you wounded?

KNOX MARTIN: That—that was not during the—the action itself. The motorcycle accident I had during the war.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, so you're back in England then?

KNOX MARTIN: Back in the United States.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, U.S.

KNOX MARTIN: So but I was on leave, and that's—leave is protected by—if you weren't on leave, it's strange, you wouldn't have gotten compensation or whatever, what have you. I was in the Brooklyn Hospital for over a year for this leg. And, uh—see this finger? [00:18:00]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: It's the only remaining part of me. [They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So returning home after the Normandy invasion, you—

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, the Normandy invasion.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You went—

KNOX MARTIN: Now, aboard my vessel, a thing that I would do—wherever it was I was drawing—and I would do portraits, and they would send it home to their parents or spouses, whatever have you. So I'd do these with—with no idea of it ever being anything other than, this is what I could do. I painted a cobra on the side of a spray shield, on both sides. Uh, it's like, I'd done a painting when I was a teenager. It's next door. And—and an aunt of mine—no. My stepfather was a commercial fisherman, and he thought that I was gonna be his heir. Was gonna take over the ship and all that kind of stuff. And I never liked to fish. My brother, Morris, was in love with fishing. We were in Virginia and people complained about the goldfish in their ponds missing, and he would go out and [laughs]. One day we were in the kitchen with my grandmother and Lucy, who was the housekeeper, and I look out and there's a chicken rising up, levitating, and my brother was up in the attic and he had a fishing pole and he caught the chicken with it. [00:20:00] [They laugh.] That's how much he loved. So we would go out—we would go out tuna fishing. I mean, the tuna fish is your size, and you get two men on one hook—a hook with no barb. Big hook like that, each guy with a pole and a short line. You chum and the tuna would be, and you go—and you both come up at the same time with the tuna on the hook, boom! kind of thing. So it was amazing exercise. It was dangerous. Seas you wouldn't—wouldn't believe. So. Literally I'd been six years at sea.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then after enduring the perils of the oceans, like your dad, who, after enduring the perils of the skies ends up in a car wreck, you end up in a motorcycle accident. Doesn't take your life, but it lands you on your ass for a year. And then what happened?

KNOX MARTIN: No, and there'd be wild thing [ph]. We were due—to go to Japan for the invasion when I had this accident.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, Coronet. Yeah, lucky, again. Lucky again.

KNOX MARTIN: I mean, that's—so the—so, hey, what's the story? I mean, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Operation: Coronet.

KNOX MARTIN: Hey, what's—what's that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Somebody loves you, Knox.

KNOX MARTIN: How come you've chosen to be a major artist in a male body in New York City?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: Come on.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I remember, you told me some stories before when we were doing that conversation in preparation for that drawing book [00:22:00] that you contributed a terrific job to. And you were telling me some stories about when you were a kid in Virginia and how you were intrigued by the wildlife and how you had kept a pet copperhead.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. Yeah. Copperhead.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is a little unusual, now. Most people don't.

KNOX MARTIN: Well, I've always had—I still have a reptile next door; the king snake. I had a huge, all kinds of snakes, every kind of snake you can think of. In the house I didn't keep a poison snake, but as a kid I had the copperhead. It was deadly. Uh, very interesting that—there's a philosopher, thinker, major guy, Ken Wilbur, and we had a strange rapport. Now, when I was a kid, I used to collect butterflies and beetles and bugs. And my stepfather's

mother was a diabetic and her stuff used to come in little boxes, and rather than throw—one day she was gonna throw heaps of it out, and I said, "Can I have the boxes?" So I had 700 boxes or so, little boxes like that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The insulin vial boxes, yeah.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. So I taped them and I put a beetle or what have you, look up the scientific name, right? Origin, you know, where it's found, and put these things in boxes. I've had spider eggs hatch in the apartment in New York City, [00:24:00] filling the apartment with little spiders. My mother—I used to have a big birding spider, tarantula like this, used to sit on my shoulder. [. . . -GR] You would love it. You would love them. So putting the stuff in these boxes. Now, I hated to—I mean, you stick a pin through a butterfly and it'd beat its wings all—and the color would come off. So I found this something-something chloride, read in a book of collectors. So I had a jar, mason jar, with cotton balls and chloride in it, and I'd put the creature in there, you know, and then I'd put him on a pin and label the little thing. So I called it my killing jar and it was kinda spooky; you'd look over and there's a jar. Anything you put in there was gone. So when I—when I think of all of the—all of the things, like the hideous, deadly, Postmodernist group Bruce Nauman. In the modern museum there's a television screen—big television screen—with his face upside down. You just see his mouth. And he says, "Thank you, thank you, thank you," for 20 minutes. And he says, "This is art." He says, "You know why? Because I say so." So anything else—that—that whole movement [00:26:00] where you can put anything anywhere, and all of this was done by Miro, Picasso, collages, found objects, bicycle seats [inaudible], and Duchamp—and I knew Duchamp. We used to speak once every two months when he would visit my mentor, who was Elias Goldberg, and he would call me, "Knox, Duchamp is coming over. Enjoy his—" and we'd talk about art. And I knew all about his position, why it was, how it happened, what the consequences were, and, uh, you know, simply some guy, college graduate, comes out and says, "Oh, yeah. I'll put a bicycle wheel upside down on a spindle of some kind," or make a bronze cast of a balloon dog.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, you're saying that—that the art student just sees the object without comprehending the philosophy behind it or the motivation behind it, or the wit behind it?

KNOX MARTIN: No, no. It's—guy has a cognition; I'm an artist. He doesn't study this, he doesn't know this, he doesn't know who this is. You know, uh, who was Hokusai—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: —et cetera, et cetera Giotto, uh, this and—oh, I heard of Leonardo! They never go to museums.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: Right? They don't practice. Jeff Koons has a concept, sort of sets it down in a rough—okay? [00:28:00] It's a sculpture of Michael Jackson with his favorite monkey. He sends it to Belgium to be done, which makes this conversation possible, which makes—so he sends it there and they send it back. He doesn't touch it. See? Or a Warhol. These are idea men. It has nothing to do with art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Art—art as—art direction as art, basically.

KNOX MARTIN: The what?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Art directors. They're art directors. Is that what you're saying? You're saying it's more—

KNOX MARTIN: One of my favorite guys, T.S. Eliot, said that Henry James, his mind was so fine, no idea could penetrate it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] Well, apropos to that in a different direction, I remember speaking to Brian O'Doherty, who I guess you must know—

KNOX MARTIN: Say again?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Brian O'Doherty.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And he—he was a good friend of Marcel Duchamp's, he and Barbara Novak. And he said once that Duchamp told him that the reason he had taken his work in a different direction was, in France there's an expression, "*Bête comme un peintre*"; it's like, dumb as a painter, and this always bothered him. So he felt like he had to do something different other than just make pictures.

KNOX MARTIN: James, if you can't do it, and you can't—look. Look, look, look. When I was a student, same room that I'm teaching right now.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. At the Art Students League.

KNOX MARTIN: Art Students League. And there was a hullabaloo, uh—oh, what's his name? [00:30:00] One of the Abstract Expressionists. Terrible label. I mean, how can—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You mean "Abstract Expressionist"?

KNOX MARTIN: Absolutely. Yeah, I mean, how can you equate Jackson Pollock with de Kooning, with—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Rothko.

KNOX MARTIN: Rothko.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Barney Newman.

KNOX MARTIN: With Clyfford Still.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: Barney Newman. Abstract Expressionist? Hey. One is splatter, one—one is—the de Kooning happens to be in lineage of—of great art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: I mean, the—art is art, art, art, et cetera So there was a talk among the students about Rothko. So I went to the Betty Parsons Gallery, 1948. Nobody's that old, right? Anyway, I go there and I was making my—I was doing a variation of a thing on Cézanne at the League on my easel, and I said, brushstrokes and this and that, and I'm working this thing out the corners, and this and that. And I go and look at the Rothko and, huge paintings, hullabaloo, and this and that, and I'm looking at the paintings, and I'm there about 20 minutes saying, wait a minute. Connect this. Oh, and just then I got it. I understood what the story was. And then, just then from the corner of the room, comes a gentleman, you know, with glasses, bald head. He comes over, he says, "Son, this is not art." And I said, "Oh, who are you?" He says, "I'm Mark Rothko." [00:32:00] And I met him many times after that at openings. We'd say hello to each other. I said, "Thank you, very much." [Laughs.] And then—and then, uh, a friend of mine who trained—his name is Jim Harithas. He was the curator at the Dallas Museum, and then he was the curator of the Corcoran Gallery for a while.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In Washington?

KNOX MARTIN: Huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In Washington. The Corcoran?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. In Washington.

KNOX MARTIN: So we were—we were in—we were touring Texas, and he said, "You've got to see the Rothko Chapel." I said, "No, thank you." Uh, so he said, "Knox, you've got to see this. It's been built—it cost a—it's a whole chapel."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. I've been there. [Inaudible.]

KNOX MARTIN: So I said, "Jim, I really don't want to." "Knox, do me a favor; come." So we go in there and there are these dark things, and cushions on the floor—black cushions on the floor, and every 15 minutes—there's guys seated there facing east, holding hands in some kind of yoga pose. And every 15 minutes a guy comes out and hits a little gong. I said, "Oh, okay." This was my cognition when we first—when I first saw the Rothkos, right? I mean, you put something in a room—whatever you want to put in a room, right? You pay a lot of money, you put a chapel around it, you can take a Coke bottle and put it on a mantelpiece and put flowers in front of it, [00:34:00] a bunch of people, and pretty soon it'll be an epiphany, a revelation. Ah!

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's like the Ballantine Ale can that was done by Jasper Johns, right?

KNOX MARTIN: Well, some—Jasper Johns did that in relation to someone saying, "Well, Castelli could sell—"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A beer can.

KNOX MARTIN: Beer cans. And he said, "Oh, I'll do that." These—these artists I call pretend artists.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you knew Bob Rauschenberg?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, I was his mentor. We were very close for years. I—I let him use my studio for almost two years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where was that? Where was your—

KNOX MARTIN: My studio was at 27th Street, between 6th and 5th Avenue. 27th Street.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So were you sharing it with him or was he—

KNOX MARTIN: I allowed him to use it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. So when you weren't there, he was using it?

KNOX MARTIN: No, he was—you know, I would open a thing and come down. And he produced—for example, he produced these so-called white paintings. We discussed it. Many of the things I discussed, he picked up and did. They were discussions. He was—he was—what do you call it?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Dyslexic.

KNOX MARTIN: Dyslexic.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: So I would talk about certain poetry and this and that. Art. I was a precocious reader and read, I think, everything of importance ever written, and was able to retain salient points of it. So with Jasper Johns—for example, Jasper Johns—not Jasper Johns. Cy Twombly—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: [00:36:00] My daughter insisted—my daughter Olivia was a terrific artist, painter. She insisted on having her own easel because my children grew up with me painting in this big apartment I had. So I'd have an easel, look at it, walk back and forth or whatever was done, sculptures, so surrounded—and on the walls I always had a Velázquez or Watteau or whatever it was. And, uh, so she did a lot of drawings. And we used to go to the country and she did drawings of—she was fascinated with bugs of all kind. So she did this drawing of some bugs, and then I said, "Look. I'm giving you a blackboard. Take the chalk and practice doing circles and lines and things like that, right? It'll make your work effective, make you more adept." She—one day I heard a shout and I went to the other room, and—it was summer—and a huge praying mantis had come—was on her shoulder, and she's very upset—and her brother was with her. So I said, "Hey, nothing to worry about. They're a great insect." And I picked the praying mantis up and put him on my finger. Here's this guy looking around. And all of a sudden he started to eat my finger.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

KNOX MARTIN: Now, I couldn't go, "Oh!" I watched him; it was painful, but I didn't flinch. She said—"Dad, he's eating your finger!" [00:38:00] I said, "Nah," you know. And I took my hand out of the window and I shook him off, without being—so she drew that. All kind of insects and that. So I gave a talk. I had collected some children's drawings, and Cy Twombly, Bob Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns, Susan—Bob's wife to be.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Weil.

KNOX MARTIN: Susan Weil. And a couple of the people, uh, were there, and I gave this talk about children's work, I called it. I would never call it art because it isn't; it's children's work, and a haptic thing that occurs. And Cy Twombly jumps up—he's a guy your size. Big guy—he jumps up and he says, "Knox Martin, that's what I'm gonna do for the rest of my life." And that's what he did; scribbled on the thing, insect, you know, children's squiggles. And that's what he did.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They were students of yours at the League? I know Rauschenberg was.

KNOX MARTIN: No, Rauschenberg was a student with me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: With you?

KNOX MARTIN: With me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah because he would have only been a couple years younger. He was born in '27, I think.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. So—yeah, so he attached. Now, when Bob came—I mean, I'm pissed off at the guy because he went to Black Mountain College—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

KNOX MARTIN: —right? And every time he's talked to, he says Black Mountain College. He never mentions the fact that he was three years at the Art Students League as my student, in a way. [00:40:00] I was—we were students together, but I was the guy who—Bob came in. He was painting little lambs, see? And we talked about the nature of art. I introduced him to Picasso, and what happened, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera So and then all of a sudden he took off. And again, these are idea men. Bob would take and, two weeks before his show, he would put the show together. It wasn't a 12-month extension of the work that goes on and on. So basic ideas. He had a big show, um, at the Metropolitan Museum that went on for a quarter mile of cardboard boxes in variations. Okay. Um, we were together with some prominent guy from the Modern Museum. I forget his name right now. So said, "what if we—what if you did this and put something together like this in a—" and Bob says, "I've done that." So three basic ideas from this guy, Bob says, "I've done those." He says, "I'm coming to your studio tomorrow morning. I want to see them." Bob went home that night, worked all night and did the three of them. So one—so, Bob—no, Bob could never draw. So he would take and he put—we put it together, together. We put some lighter fluid on a magazine or a newspaper, what have you, and put it on a piece of paper and take a pencil and make strokes like that, and peel it off, and it would be an imprint. [00:42:00] Done inadvertently by de Kooning. De Kooning would take a paper and put it over the oil paint he was using—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: As an absorption, right.

KNOX MARTIN: Absorbed—exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A blotter.

KNOX MARTIN: But what happened was, the imprint of the paper or what have you was on the canvass, and sometimes he'd leave it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, there's paintings in the '40s, like, you know, the big one in Chicago, and others, that have—have imprints, photographs, et cetera, in the oil point.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. So this is what Bob did. Uh, so because of the pencil accident, it looks like he can draw. You connect them. He couldn't draw. Uh, any kind of drawings that Jasper Johns—there's another museum in Texas that went to at the, uh—which was a—which was a

branch made to contain Twombly's. You know, like the Rothko chapel, this is a Twombly—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's like, you know, the McNeil that's next door to the Rothko.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, the curator for the new—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Houston.

KNOX MARTIN: What?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Houston.

KNOX MARTIN: Houston. The curator of the McNeil—I forget his name right now—asked me, would I please spend an afternoon. He wanted to take me through the museum. And he was writing a book on Rauschenberg. So I filled him in, said, "No, this photograph has nothing to do with this. This is not Susan Weil." Uh, so—um, [00:44:00] you know, you're gonna—you're thinking a bunch of things, why even relate them? They're in this quasi state of stuck [ph]. The Weil thing is Postmodernism, um—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you were saying earlier, it's more—it's more ideas, these guys coming up with a particular concept and having it produced.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, when I introduced—when I interviewed Jeffrey Deitch, six, seven years ago, he said—without blinking—he said, "Well, the thing an artist must do is to find or is to take several different styles that were commercially successful in the past and create a new hybrid." This was his—and this is very much a kind of post-modernist idea, of appropriation—

KNOX MARTIN: Well, it's—appropriates even less than that. It is—an electrician sort of says, "Hey, I think I'm an artist." Produces something. Some—someone's astonished by it, who won't—for example, you take Op art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How many people remember Op art? [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: Well, Op art hit and all—I had a big show at the time. [00:46:00] A major show. And no one really saw it because Op art hit and—and someone who—who can't get—as you say, get art—looks up art and all of a sudden they get dizzy or their eyes are going, "Oh, my God! I got art!" So Op art lasted one year because the Modern Museum took it and had a show in one—one year—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: —and that finished it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So people like Bridget Riley, Richard Anuszkiewicz, Vasarely, these are the people you're talking about? Names that few people even today would recognize.

KNOX MARTIN: Among the pretend artists, the idea artists, Jeff Koons, who says in a manifesto early, when it began to hit, he said, "All of you, uh, bourgeois no longer have to apologize for your bad taste on the air." That was his manifesto. Now, the guy takes a—a balloon dog, puts it in bronze, it winds up on the roof of the Metropolitan Museum, and it means nothing except that, this is art because I say so. Period. And the critics writing about it because it's on the Metropolitan Museum, talks—talks about how—relevant it is to the current society, and so on and so forth, and socio-political—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You mean, superficial, popular, consumer culture.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, but I—no, no. No, you're giving it significance. No, nobody's really done that. [00:48:00] Uh, but giving it a significance—it's significant, it's a reflection of society—you know, in other words, praising this work and giving it a significance it doesn't have. See? So you say—I—I call this, in other words, Pop art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: It's popular art. So that means everyone can see something. Uh, I had a—I

had a work—now, it takes me perhaps a year and some—I have 150 paintings that I'm working on for 34 years. Some—the—the least time it takes is a year to produce a painting. I take total responsibility for it. And I like to include elements of van Eyck, or Titian, et cetera, in the work. Picasso will do a variation of betas [ph] from Cézanne, include this, put in African masks, and the world was filled with revolution. When Picasso painted that painting, it has—it has passages in it from—from the, uh, Venetian painters. And Braque said of that painting, "He expects us to drink gasoline and eat tar." Matisse said it's a joke. And out of—it was the first still life painting—uh, Cubist painting, Cubist still life painting. A little melon on the bottom with a few things.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: And it was then that the word Cubism, which was a vilification, Matisse said *le petits cubes*, and it stuck. [00:50:00] Cubism. That's how it happened. Like Impressionism; it's just an impression.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was that Monet painting *Impression*. When he was, uh, in London as a draft dodger painting a bridge across the Thames and calling it *Impression: Sunrise*. One of the critics used that as a way of cobbling together an insult that it became the proud moniker of the group.

KNOX MARTIN: Yep.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So tell us a little about your training. I remember we had a conversation years ago, again, related to the drawing book, where you describe taking courses at the Naval Hospital in Brooklyn.

KNOX MARTIN: No, no. There's a guy who came, uh—again, I was drawing fellow patients.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. You were in the hospital—

KNOX MARTIN: I was in the hospital.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —recovering from your motorcycle accident.

KNOX MARTIN: So—so, uh, there was a—a painter who volunteered teaching of [inaudible]. So I had a little portfolio of drawings, and he came by. [Inaudible.] He opened it and says, "You're richly talented. Why don't you, you know, pursue this?" So my wife and I, at the time, we wanted to talk to him, and I says, "Can I study with you?" He said, "I don't do that, but why don't you go to the Art Students League?"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you recall his name?

KNOX MARTIN: I will. [Victor Kandel -GR]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [00:52:00] So he recommended that you—

KNOX MARTIN: He recommended it. And I was in a hospital bed and I showed him, so he said, "Very few people can see this." Now, the most—there's so many mysteries. Uh, I have a painting in the studio next door that I did when I was 13, 14, of a ship at sea, and I gave it to my mother at Mother's Day. And in her belongings about three years ago, I was going through a trunk and I looked at this thing. She had it on her wall, and she pinned it on her wall with a thumbtack and the thumbtack mark was still there. And James, in that painting is stuff that I'm teaching now. I mean hey—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You mean about composition and space?

KNOX MARTIN: Composition, brushstrokes. Uh, and I, what? Wait a minute. After going through 100 museums worldwide, studying stuff and opening it up, and all this stuff, and—so—so there's more than is dreamed of in your philosophy, Horatio. You know, there's no—there's really no logical pursuit of that. [00:54:00] You know, you can't—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So do you find that happening often that you'll have a look at one of your pictures and you'll say, wait a minute, I did that 40 years ago. Do you remember the picture where it happened? A particular transition or combination of forms or—

KNOX MARTIN: Well, it's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —color quartz [ph]?

KNOX MARTIN: It's an amazing thing that things—for example, I did a painting when I was 14, 15, of a boat with whales—a whaling boat at sea, with an ice floe behind it. And my aunt, there was a little frame shop, and there was a prize given for paintings. So she said, "Knox, I'm gonna take your painting." So she took it to this little frame shop and coming from school, junior high school, I walked by and I see my painting on an easel with a ribbon on the side of it; first prize. So I—I went into this—the frame shop, and I said, "First prize, Knox Martin." He says, "Yes." I says, "Well, I did it." He says, "Get outta here, kid." I said, "I really did." He says, "Well, you have to have some proof of who you are." I didn't have any identification. So my aunt went there, says "Yes, I brought it in and I signed for it, and this is my nephew. He did it." So I brought home a little easel and a paint box. See? So that's kind of saying, "Hey, let's go, buddy."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Nice.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. And then, in junior high school, [00:56:00] I did a large painting on brown paper of the George Washington Bridge. And all the faculty of the school, everybody, the principal, everybody came in, ooh. And everything I drew or painted, the teacher would hang up, and I didn't want to be thought of as a sissy or something like that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: —or different.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: There was a little composition that I wrote one time, and the teacher said, "Would you read this to the class?" And I read it. It was about cosmology. I was very interested in astronomy. And I read it. And she says, "Don't you wish you could write like that?" And the bully of the class, George Swann, he said, "If I wrote like that, I'd kill myself." And I said, "Whoa." I backed off.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] Where is he today?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Rhetorical question. Maybe we should take a break, and uh, have a coffee.

KNOX MARTIN: Good. Good.

[END OF TRACK.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We are resuming.

KNOX MARTIN: *Muy bueno.*

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Knox Martin, uh, May 14th, part two. So Knox, tell us a little about how you came to the Art Students League and who you worked with when you arrived. I think a lot of people don't understand how the League works; it's not like a regular art school where you come in as a matriculated student. You have to follow a prescribed course of study. You can sign up for anybody you want for a month at a time. Who did you work with?

KNOX MARTIN: The important thing to know, when I started the Art Students League, it was the GI Bill of Rights, and it's the first time in the history of the United States anyway, that I know of, that an artist could go to an art school, be paid for it by the government, and also get—get art materials. So the League was a target. And you had—it was jammed, and you had GIs from—also you had, because of the interest in the—I mean, there were 60 people to the class. So, um, I mean, I started with, uh, luckily with [Howard] Trafton, and experienced some amazing—amazing things. And the humor of the guy, [00:02:00] and you let—he'd give everyone a project to do. Uh, one of the projects was to—would fix things up beautifully for me to see African sculpture. One was to draw from African sculpture. And then, Harry Sternberg had a huge class. And then, there was one problem; that Harry and a bunch of people in his class were pro-communist, and I was directly opposed to that. Uh, I thought at that time during the war—and I had a good—had a good perspective of what the war was about, and—and along with the general who said don't stop now; fight the Russians.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, Patton.

KNOX MARTIN: Patton. You know, go on, fight the Russians. We'll always be at war with them. Just go on. We'll be fighting them anyway. Which, we're doing today; we're at war with Russia.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Again.

KNOX MARTIN: Still. So here am I in the Sternberg class doing Cézannesque things involved with Titian, and it's there that I discovered a terrible thing; that the Florentine Renaissance had killed all of art. It killed Indian art, Japanese art. [00:04:00] It was the Ming or the Qing dynasty, the Shang, the Han, the Yuan, the Tang, the Soong, [cross talk].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Then—

KNOX MARTIN: So I think in the middle of Ming Dynasty—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Ming.

KNOX MARTIN: —it came and killed it, and the Florentine Renaissance substituted engineering for art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How—

KNOX MARTIN: They—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How do you mean?

KNOX MARTIN: Uh, anatomy perspective. One of the most stunning things I've ever seen. I was in the Prado Museum and there was a whole hall they were readjusting for Greek sculpture. And I said, "Oh, my God." This is the core of—this is really the core of art. This is—this deep, intuitive, artistic sense—artistic sense instead of knowledge or thought. All thought is old. All methods of thought which is old prevents you from—that thought is the killing jar of art. So the Italians had taken it and introduced anatomy and so forth. A brilliant thing. What is the name of the anatomy teacher at the League? [. . . -GR]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, Robert Beverly Hale.

KNOX MARTIN: Robert Beverly Hale. We were friends. We used to discuss many things. Uh, now, on Google you can Google the program and he's giving a demonstration on the only tape that I've ever seen, and he holds up the tail of the [00:06:00] end of a skeleton, and on a board, like, he draws a horse. And how similar we are, the horse has like, eight more ribs that we do. But essentially, by holding up the human skeleton, then doing a drawing of the horse, how close this was—what the heel of the hand was to this, the elbow, and all that. And he said, "Now, what I want you to understand is, I'm teaching you technique and science. This has nothing to do with art."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Good for him.

KNOX MARTIN: Huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Good for him.

KNOX MARTIN: So the Romans had taken—the Italians had taken and they'd put deltoid, trapezius, external obliques, serratus magnus, on the thing that was intuited by this—by this deep, artistic intelligence. Where, the forms and shapes gave birth to the next form and shapes, and were senior and junior to each part, right? Instead of knowledge coming in, the deltoid looks like this, and so on and so forth. Now, the—the thing that I talked to Robert Beverly Hale about was, I said, "Look. The only person who can possibly appreciate what you're doing is someone who knows anatomy. You take a guy from the street and show—he'll see a hand that was drawn, maybe. See? You take an aborigine, an electrician, a street conductor, a cop and show them this, no way does he know that this digit is here and this goes—" you know [00:08:00], and the stuff that puts together. Um, now—now a curious thing—and this is by no way—because the guy is saying this is—this is science and technique, but in the office where Ira is now, there was a desk in there. So he was sitting there and he was drawing—drawing on the back of an envelope, not long before his death. So he says, "Knox, I've finally done it." And he shows me the drawing of a hand. So I said, "Wait a minute.

Where is—where the art?" I didn't tell him that. No, but [inaudible] and I thought—then I've been—then I've been rolling it around and looking up that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, but you said earlier it's pretty much impossible to teach art; you have to see it. You can look—you can teach people how to look, but you can't teach people how to understand it. They have to do that for themselves. You think?

KNOX MARTIN: Uh, a—you know, the assumption is—I mean, I love my class and I'm still there. And, uh, it's—it's [inaudible] you say, [00:10:00] before you do anything, draw what you see not what you know, kind of thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: Now, there's a large—I had—I had a Titian—called Titian *Bacchanal*[of the *Andrians*—blown up. And over the Titian *Bacchanal*, I put a big piece of tracing paper and I put together the—like, the beginning of this thing. You can see the circles underneath that drawn compass?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure, yeah.

KNOX MARTIN: Okay. So the whole thing of the Titian is structured. The hill with the old man is on there, is the center of a laurel wreath that the guy's holding, and the urine stream from—from the kid goes into the movement of her thigh. And this—the center of this, and the branch of this tree comes over and brings this cloud around, and—and the center is a spiral that goes into the whole thing, and there's a kind of spiral. So I brought this in and I put it on the wall at the Art Students League, and two things; I talked about it intensely with a lot of passion, and after the talk I said, "Any questions?" So I said, "I'm gonna leave this up. I want you to study the way that the paint is applied and the brushstrokes, et cetera, et cetera, from dark to light, dark to light. And this—and—and over here is another thing, with the tracing of this, with all the elements within this—this rhythmic, geometric poetry, where rhymes exist, et cetera, et cetera, and the whole thing comes together." So one guy, who's a very big guy, is Craig. [00:12:00] After the talk he says, "Knox, how can you talk about this academic bullshit?" So I said, "You're a fucking asshole."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: And he left the class. A huge guy. Left the class. Now, I told everyone, I says, "Go over and study the brushstrokes." Not one student came up and looked at it on the wall, didn't look at it after that, didn't glance at it, didn't take a picture of it. A huge reproduction of it, have it rolled up. So I'm saying, "Wait a minute, what am I doing?"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why would he describe that as academic? Well, [cross talk] a rhetorical question.

KNOX MARTIN: That simply means—he's been with me for about three years. He could never hear—he would never hear—he had an interior monologue, right? As most people have. In other words, you're talking, in the middle of talking there's an insertion of something that's known, and they are afraid of losing something that's known for a look into the unknown. That's the only fear they have; losing the unknown—I mean, losing the known. So they keep the known intact and they won't look at anything other than that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Gotcha.

KNOX MARTIN: So they absorb whatever you're saying in that mode.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. How do you break through that?

KNOX MARTIN: You have to want to do it yourself. You can't—you can't—you can't—like, another student, who has become very, very popular and is selling work off the wall, [00:14:00] by other students in the class, right? And for the first time, you know, you take—I have, in the window, *Leda with the Swan*. And he says, "Knox, I'm doing—" "And the shape you've got here is good." But for the first time he stopped, "Now listen to me. He's been with me a couple of years." The first time I'm saying, "Wait a minute. So oh. Oh, oh, yes! With the creation, T. S. Eliot, at Ezra Pound's insistent—insistence, published the work of "The Love [Song] of J. Alfred Prufrock."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: That changed the whole world. After—in other words, after that—he's referring to *Dante's Inferno*, he's referring to Shakespeare and John Donne, et cetera, et cetera. Which, every work of art I consider a true work, takes off from this and this and has part of these elements from major figure. So had your figure [ph] in art, painter in art. Uh, so after that, in England, it changed the course of literature. Art had to be taught, which meant that by persistence, if you talk about art [00:16:00] and—and are able to separate that that has nothing to do with art, there's another realm perhaps better than art. So I'll say, "Look, there's no such thing as Russian art, there's no such things as British—British art, there's no such thing as German art—" what the hell was that?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was a bag behind you.

KNOX MARTIN: Oh. "But that gets into—that gets into a severe separate—you mean—you mean, you know what art is?" I said, "Yeah." "Oh! Interesting," I was giving a talk in—a collector had bought three paintings of mine, and he asked me, would I talk in Oregon? Argon [in an exaggerated accent]?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oregon?

KNOX MARTIN: Oregon. That's the way to say it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I say Oregon. Maybe they say Argon [in an exaggerated accent]. Like, you go to California they eat "arenges" [in an exaggerated accent] not oranges. [They laugh.]

KNOX MARTIN: Well, this is northwestern United States.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, yeah. Oregon. Portland.

KNOX MARTIN: So I gave a talk to a large audience. There were college students, there were guys from the press, there were bankers, there were this and that, collectors. An amazing cross section. And I gave a talk with some slides. Very simple. Half of—half of my vocabulary has changed, so a misunderstood word will send a person into a panic—panicky oblivion [ph]. So very simply I put down, hey, this is a geometric three course, and this is what happened with this painting in this period, the Egyptian piece, [00:18:00] and after the talk a student said, "Well, as Tolstoy said, you know, art is very subjective. Nobody knows what art is." So I said "Wait a minute. I'm gonna show you what art is. I'm gonna show you. I'm gonna point to it. And if you're questioning I can tell you why it's art, and I can do it and talk about it at will." So on—on this podium I had a large reproduction of a Cézanne, the *Boy with the Red Waistcoat*. So I held it up and I said, "See? This is art, and I can talk about it." Blah, blah, blah. And I can do it, at will. And who else thought that? Gauguin, uh, there are 500 books written on Cézanne. Every museum worth its salt has a Cézanne in it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're talking about the composition, you're talking about the brushstrokes, you're talking about the whole, uh, tension that exists between the process of discovering the—or the picture being revealed against the plan represented by the geometry and the—

KNOX MARTIN: Exactly. Exactly. Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it's that tension, it's not the thing itself; it's partly how it's—how it occurs, not just the result.

KNOX MARTIN: And his—and I said, "If you want to know anything about art, go to a real artist, not a pretend artist, not a Pop—" [00:20:00] I call Pop viral Pop. I don't call it art. Viral Pop. So I pointed this out to the audience and they became—it's almost as though they got sullen. I said, "Here it is." And usually after a talk, people come up and shake your hand, say—people avoided me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You chastened them in some way.

KNOX MARTIN: They were exorcised and they didn't know what to do with it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, hopefully maybe one or two people in the audience finally was able to use that provocation to see something they were looking at.

KNOX MARTIN: Well, no one came up and said, "Hey!" On the other hand, a very funny thing. I was asked to give a talk in Jerusalem. So I get to Jerusalem and I go to the new modern museum in Jerusalem. There's a big garden outside. And, um, an amazing thing; I look over at a painting across the width of this big room, and I say, what the—and I walk up to the painting and I say, "Whoa." Now, I—there's a woman artist, she did this self-portrait when she was 21 and it's as good as anything that's ever been done. I said, "What?" Gaby, do you remember her name?

GABRIELA RYAN: Judith Leyster.

KNOX MARTIN: What?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Judith Leyster.

KNOX MARTIN: Judith Leyster.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Seventeenth-century Dutch woman, artist—

KNOX MARTIN: She—she worked with Frans Hals.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: [00:22:00] And she sued him because he took a pupil away from her.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: She was scrappy.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. But the wild thing is, the whole other thing to look at; she got married, she stopped painting. She had babies. Amazing thing to look at. Hey, wait a minute. But she's as good as any male painter, so to speak. The only one in the history of art. There's no one else. Unbelievable painting. I keep punching her up over here on my little—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: On the internet?

KNOX MARTIN: Huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: On the computer?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. She's well known now, I think. I do believe.

KNOX MARTIN: Uh, hardly well known. Anyway, on this little machine, I—in other words, I'm not gonna do it now, but I punch it up and I can get Titian, Judith Leyster, Adriaen Brouwer, who—Frans Hals. Punches up Ingres drawings.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The iPad is amazing. Yeah, it really is.

KNOX MARTIN: I use that as a teaching device. Instead of having a dozen books with me in class, I'll say, oh. Muqi, one of the great, great, great, great painters of Asian—painter. Muqi.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, painting of the persimmons.

KNOX MARTIN: Persimmons.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: Is unbelievable. How do you know so much?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I've done my homework. [They laugh.] No, I like the fact that you've got your iPad in this thing that looks almost like a portfolio. [00:24:00] I like that, very much.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, here—here is a small portion—I have been doing nothing—I mean, just a brief [inaudible], drawing some plants. I mean, just a brief—you don't have to look long. Or tomatoes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: If I may, Knox, can I take a picture of you showing us these?

KNOX MARTIN: Sure, sure. Where's that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Bird noise.] That's the parrot.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, I have my little tomatoes right here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That red and green one is terrific.

GABRIELA RYAN: Yeah, it's great.

KNOX MARTIN: And—and—and the—and how do you use watercolor? Like, this is very Zenish [ph], and these parts of the tomato that dance and they do different things. And they whirl this way, and they whirl the other way, and then go back this way and this goes this way, and this fits across here. This moves back this way. Oh, sorry. It's upside down. Fuck. [They laugh.] Yeah, there we go. So—so, this is from Adriaen Brouwer. Moves across here. This moves over this way. These rebound, this goes up this way, and they move in these—in these patterns. So that's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, this is something that I talk about all the time here [00:26:00]; is that, you know how when students draw something, they measure very intuitively. We all do. Very often you'll find that this distance would be the same from each edge, but here they're all different.

KNOX MARTIN: Every—every corner is radically different.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, exactly.

KNOX MARTIN: And everything gives birth to everything. There's a very interesting thing that I came to with the Brouwer, and I detected something which is a communication between the artist and the next artist that sees it. In other words, Brouwer is not—these are the guys that are not doing art for anybody else but another artist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: So—so through the plenum with no time, you take—I hold the thing up like that and it—it says, Titian. Right? "Where is that painting?" I said, "Right here." [They laugh.] Right? When was it done? Says, still—you can go to the museum and see it or it's still here. I say, if you—like, if—you're not thinking of anything and I say the word dinosaur, something that's right here now—and there is no now—it's here. It floods. You see tyrannosaurus rex, you see brontosaurus. Whatever it is that you see—dinosaur eggs. And all the thing is happening—is happening [00:28:00] within your perception.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who were your strongest influences at the League when you were young? When you were forming you—

KNOX MARTIN: I'll tell you, the strongest influence, the guy that really introduced me to art. Everybody else talked about it. [Inaudible] talked about it, uh, a marvelous guy, another teacher whose name I don't remember. But Will Barnet was this Bostonian, very reserved guy. And he would hold up a reproduction of an Ingres and talk about it all afternoon. And we GIs—you know, being a GI, you're used to, *bang, bing, bing!* And here's this guy quietly. And then he would take us to museums and talk about—and then all of a sudden you see, *whoa!* Then he'd have a guy like—what was his name? Guy wrote a major book on Juan Gris. A major book. From France as a guest at the Art Students League, and then later we had—at the home of Devon Meade, who was an heiress.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We can look that up.

KNOX MARTIN: Devon Meade. And we'd have a dinner.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So Will Barnet used to take you to the museum?

KNOX MARTIN: [00:30:00] Will Barnet, yeah, and that—that—I was able to coalesce everything into looking for elements, that these things—he showed—and I keep this next door. I keep a Madonna and Child, Byzantine, and most of our work—most of our work is based on that, through Titian, that is doing the same thing, and a van Eyck, and of course Velázquez. And it's sort of like pretty Catholic in the sense of like, a painting has to do with a certain number of things. Like, I wouldn't put Zurbarán in the same corner as I would put a Velázquez, nor would I do a Goya that way either. Uh, Leonardo, Michelangelo, a part of the Florentine school. Michelangelo goes with—what is the name of the chronicler?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Vasari.

KNOX MARTIN: Vasari to a Titian studio.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. I know the story but tell it anyway.

KNOX MARTIN: No, and after—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: —the studio, Michelangelo says, "You can't draw. There's no design here." And Michelangelo hated painting, loathed it, right? And what he did was, after the Sistine Chapel is cleaned, they took this beautiful sfumato that was formed by incense, and a million people breathing under it, it was darkened, it was chiaroscuro, and they cleaned it, and became like [00:32:00] tinted sculpture. And I don't like his sculpture at all. To me he doesn't—it doesn't come together. And I—I mean, his painting has nothing fucking to do with painting or art. His background is a neuter. Right? And I admire him very much, and—oh! Very interesting. In drawing plants. I've drawn plants since—drawing plants, drawing plants. And I got a big book, heavy book you could barely lift, of Leonardo drawings of plants, and I reserved that, put it aside in my studio. Put it aside. Okay, one day when I have the energy, et cetera, et cetera, I'm gonna draw all of the Leonardo plants. Because I did a drawing years ago of one plant that he did. Bethlehem—I think it was a Bethlehem plant, right? And I said, okay, when I'm ready. So I got my pad together and I opened the book, and this thing was not there. There was no drawing of a Leonardo that had what a van Eyck has, or the Byzantine Madonna. In Italy, teaching there for three summers, you had—you were able to go to any museum.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who were you teaching for there?

KNOX MARTIN: Oh, that's an interesting story, by the way.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're here to collect interesting stories.

KNOX MARTIN: I'm sorry?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're here to collect interesting stories. [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: Nick Carone.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, sure.

KNOX MARTIN: [00:34:00] Now, he was the head of the school called the International School of Art in Umbria. So he had always been a fan of my work and he sent four of his faculty to meet me, saying that he wanted me to teach the International School of Art. So they came here and they opened up a big port—a big, fold-up sheet of portfolio with a teaching asset. I said, "Look. What you're teaching, I hate. It has nothing to do with art, and you're—you're capitalizing on something that is—is within the providence of every layman going around." In other words, if you—if you ask me to teach you, I will fight you all the way. Every moment. I will." So they said, "Well, Nick wants you." I said, "Look. You're gonna be here for two weeks. Find out more about me. Look at my website. Talk to some people, look at the Wikipedia. Read some of the things I say—say." Et cetera, et cetera "If you still want me, I'll go." I wanted to go to Italy. So but I said, "But I will be your worst enemy in Italy." So sure enough, two weeks later they say, we want you. So I wound up with a ticket in my hand, and they have a studio for me and a place to dwell, and a school. Monte Castello di Vibio, a beautiful medieval town. Unbelievable. So from there [00:36:00] I would take the class to Florence, to Rome, to little—little places to see paintings everywhere. Talk about them. Great. So there was a—a teacher there, and I won't mention his name. Twice we almost came to fisticuffs, and it would have been disaster because I trained for years in the martial arts, and I was hopping around and my knee wasn't—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: So we went to a little church that had the Masaccio friezes, where Michelangelo had his nose broken in fisticuffs with another painter who bopped him on the nose. But anyway, so the teacher—he does a little jig. This is wanted to have done all his life, to see the Masaccio friezes. And right across the way is a Byzantine painting by a painter

called [inaudible] Davalos [ph], and I'm looking at the [inaudible] Davalos. There's a whole class, about 30 people, in front of Masaccio. And so, I call attention. I say, look. Do you see this? Look what this is doing, et cetera, et cetera Look at the metaphors used in here. I said, "This is [00:38:00] tinted sculpture in 3D, uh, a Florentine device of engineering. And here the whole thing is right here." See, well that caused quite a consternation with this teacher. He said, "Well that's an antique painting." I said, "What the hell do you think that is? That's an antique painting. You're saying how much more antique—they're right here together."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was Nick there?

KNOX MARTIN: Huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was Nick there? Were you interacting with him?

KNOX MARTIN: No, Nick was another interaction. I showed him—uh, I said what the—he would drive the classes crazy with the idea of the plane. I said, "What kind of fuel do you use in that plane?"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: He didn't—he didn't really get it. He did not—he was talking about Cézanne and he didn't get it. He—he'd refuse—he'd be covered with charcoal, he'd make a [inaudible], and my friend, my buddy, Roland, who came to Italy with me, uh, my guest, and he said, "Knox, I attended his class. It's the most incomprehensible thing I've ever heard." Uh, matter of fact, the New School is what that was all about. And I lectured at the new school, right? And I told them, "What the hell are you talking about?" Uh, what was his name? An Italian name. Italian painter that they promoted. He says, he's much more than Cézanne. I said, "Get the fuck out of here. What is your problem. [00:40:00] Where have you been?" Mondrian—not Mondrian. It sounds like that. Italian.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Morandi.

KNOX MARTIN: Morandi. Morandi.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Bottles.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. Morandi. Morandi is greater—is much greater than Cezanne. That's what we look to. I says—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: Funny thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's taste, isn't it? Not form.

KNOX MARTIN: I'm up—I'm up at Yale.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: Second month there. Right? The whole student body was in my class, so Bernard Chaet says, "Knox, what are you, giving these guys drugs?" I says, "Why don't you join the class and find out?" I just gave a lecture on the—all the Chinese dynasties.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That would have been a compliment from Bernie.

KNOX MARTIN: So shortly after that, attend a conference we're talking about. So I go. Twenty minutes into the conference I stood up and I said, "Aren't you ashamed of talking about something you know nothing about?" This is the whole faculty. I had lots of friends then. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I can imagine.

KNOX MARTIN: Oh, come to our meeting. No thank you. Join the gym with us. I'm anxious to go back to New York to my studio. So you had—you had a faculty that made it their job to be there and that was their thing. They were—they were teachers at Yale, and I wanted to get back to my work. I'm a painter who teachers at Yale. [00:42:00]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: Not the other way around.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you were invited to come to Yale by Jack Tworokov?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. Tworokov, Al Held, George Wardlaw. George Wardlaw was the one who—he was—he was a director, uh, up at—not Yale.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was he in charge of the graduate program?

KNOX MARTIN: I'm sorry?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was he in charge of the graduate program?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah,

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

KNOX MARTIN: Graduate program. Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because I know Tworokov was the dean.

KNOX MARTIN: Dean. Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And who else was there? You had—well, Bernie Chaet.

KNOX MARTIN: Bernard Chaet. There was a sculptor, there was a print maker.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Bob Engman, was he there then?

KNOX MARTIN: There was an Expressionist there. I forget his name. Dark figures of men with hats on.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, Lester Johnson.

KNOX MARTIN: Lester Johnson.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Had you any other interactions with Lester at all?

KNOX MARTIN: I'm sorry?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Had you any other interactions with Lester Johnson?

KNOX MARTIN: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: As a painter?

KNOX MARTIN: No, not at all.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But Held was—Held was a friend?

KNOX MARTIN: Held, I used to—Held, I found out, was my—you know, the story of Mozart and Salieri? Well, Held was my Salieri. Right? I found out three years ago—I used to—he used to meet me on the corner and I used to—I was driving then. We drove—would drive once a week up to Yale. And we'd talk. And there was something I showed him that changed his life in art, uh, we were at a group and I was showing him Ron Gorchov—remember him? And I show—I was showing Ron Gorchov [00:44:00] that geometric, rhythmic poetry at a friend's house. So he called Al over. "Al, look what Knox is doing." So I showed it to him. He says, "Knox, that's you." So we parted during the summer, went our ways. At the end of the summer we put—we—"What'd you do over the summer? What's your summer?" And we said, "You know that thing on the—Frans Hals? That's what I'm doing." So he's doing these big paintings in black and white stretchers, and like that. So I showed him—I opened another book that I'd done a lot of these things from Hals. He says, "Don't show that stuff around." I said, "What?" So unbeknownst to me, a close friend is a Salieri; every move that I make that could have been beneficial—a major gallery was coming to—someone called my name out in his gallery, and he came out from behind the door. He says, "You're Knox Martin?" I said yes. "Can I see your work?" I said—major, major, major gallery. So I said sure. So he came to the

gallery—or, my studio, and I had this—not far from here—I had this huge studio. The greatest studio I've ever seen. And saw—for a moment I moved to the next room, and he was looking at these big canvasses. I had a dozen big canvases stretched on the wall for him to see. [00:46:00] And so, he said to me from the next room, "Are you using mind control?" And I came back to him and I said, "What are you talking about?" So—so, that's Al Held's take on me. That was his dealer, and he wanted to be the only one, and he prepared this guy for his visit to the studio. The origination of coming to my studio was his, Emmerich, okay? And Held gave him a pep talk; he's involved with this, he's involved scientology, he's involved with—with peculiar psychology. He's mystic. Watch him; he'll control your mind.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: So that was my Salieri. And a lady at the National Academy, says, my God, says, "Your friend Al Held—" and she filled this—I didn't know. So we got him.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Strange. A little housekeeping. You—you alluded to having studied the martial arts. Which ones in particular did you study?

KNOX MARTIN: Uh, I did judo and—and I did a bit of karate, and then I worked with a bow—a Japanese bow, for four years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yudo [ph].

KNOX MARTIN: Yudo, Judo.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Judo—jujitsu is different, but Yudo [ph] is—

KNOX MARTIN: And I did some tai chi, and before that I was boxing. I had done some boxing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Somewhere—maybe you put it out online. [00:48:00] Somewhere on the internet or on an email, there was a photograph of you in like a—a bodybuilder pose.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, I was a body builder.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Either nude or in a G-string—

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —striking some kind of Greco-Roman pose.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. I was Mr. America.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You were Miss Amer— no, you were Mr. America.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Holy—what year was that?

KNOX MARTIN: '47—what?

GABRIELA RYAN: 1948, something.

KNOX MARTIN: '48

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what was the deal there? What inspired you to do that?

KNOX MARTIN: I was a body builder. So they said hey, do this.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So this was before you were at the League, or you were at the League?

KNOX MARTIN: During—during—the same year as at the League.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But you never were a model at the League or anything?

KNOX MARTIN: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But you were—you were—

KNOX MARTIN: No, but I would—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —in the gym and you were a body builder.

KNOX MARTIN: —flex muscle, take the pose. Back pose. Gaby's gonna get some pictures.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how did the Mr. America thing come about? You were just encouraged? You were sort of talent scouted to enter the—

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. Talent scout says, "Whoa!" So this guy—what the hell was his name? He was at the League. He says "That's incredible. I take photographs of body builders," and this and that. You could be Mr. America. And I says—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Bird noise.] [Laughs.] It's the parrot.

KNOX MARTIN: So I was on a television program, Mr. America. Uh, it was funny. Before there was editing or redone—you know, then. So not ever being a model or what have you, I didn't have any robe or something like that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: [00:50:00] And I had these leopard skin shorts that I had to be sewn into, which was embarrassing to me. You know, sewed into like that. And no robe to sit on, certainly I'm half-naked, and out comes Miss America. And she's about your size. So—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: From what year? [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: '48.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, okay. Really?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. So I come out like that, and then she's supposed to lead me away, but I said no. So I ducked under and I put her on my shoulder and walked toward the camera with her ass toward the camera, and I'm smiling.

GABRIELA RYAN: [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: It was never recorded but we—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [They laugh.]

KNOX MARTIN: Oh, there's my pictures—there's my pictures in the war. The invasion? No, you just—you just missed them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, wow. Oh, I see.

KNOX MARTIN: No, that's—that's '54.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is [cross talk].

KNOX MARTIN: That's in the service. That's in the service.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Small crew, eh?

KNOX MARTIN: I was the smallest guy in that crew. Right after that—yeah. Oh, there's the—from the invasion. And I didn't pose for that. That was taken when I was running with a life preserver to jump over. We were rescuing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, yeah, this picture I saw. This has been—

GABRIELA RYAN: On the flip side—check out the flip side.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Beefcake? Major. Major beefcake. Very impressive. So what was it like, the pageant? [00:52:00] Did they have a pageant? Yeah, they had a pageant.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There he is.

KNOX MARTIN: Which one is that?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: At the League.

GABRIELA RYAN: They had those lockers, too?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how long of a process was involved with the Mr. America pageant?

KNOX MARTIN: It was an instant thing. I mean, I was so beautiful—so attractive, so beautiful—this is the way I looked. Oh, that's when I was at the League, doing a Cézannesque thing. But this is what I used to look like; there were the shoulders.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You look like you could steal Tony Curtis' girl, so.

KNOX MARTIN: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow. Is this your daughter?

KNOX MARTIN: Granddaughter. No, not granddaughter. My wife's daughter.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, your wife's daughter. All these complications. Well, I know your—your papers are going to be going to the archives so people can plumb the depths of your life that way, I suppose.

KNOX MARTIN: Uh, Gaby has much—now, I used to—there's a guy who used to come once a year and collect them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is it Charles Duncan?

KNOX MARTIN: I don't know. And then—I don't know his name—but I would save these. Said, save these. So—and then it stopped, for some reason or other.

GABRIELA RYAN: [Inaudible] putting it together.

KNOX MARTIN: What?

GABRIELA RYAN: I've been putting together [cross talk]—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: She has—

GABRIELA RYAN: So it's not [inaudible.] And they contacted him.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I was in contact—yeah, I called.

GABRIELA RYAN: You contacted and they contacted—they found us.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it's all—the circle is becoming reconnected again, so I think you can expect more attention. So did that—did that have, uh, any kind of effect on your life? Being Mr. America? Was there a prize?

KNOX MARTIN: What?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was there money? Do you get money for it?

KNOX MARTIN: No. No, but I mean, they wanted me [00:54:00] to do this and—I said nay. At one point, when I had a show—Charlie Egan was the number one gallery in the world, uh, with de Kooning, Franz Kline, Noguchi, uh, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera Stable. And I thought, naively at the time, when I finally have it together I'm gonna approach this guy. And Franz Kline took a painting of mine, put it in a group show, Charlie Egan saw it and he—and he said, "I'd like to open the 10th anniversary of my gallery with your work."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

KNOX MARTIN: And I was blown away. So that was like winning an Oscar.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

KNOX MARTIN: All of a sudden I was going to all the—there was a party every night. On the

weekend, four or five parties. The fanciest parties, the Rockefellers, this and that and so on. The parties—et cetera And I liked it so much, and I was very attractive. So you know—you know, God came to me in a dream—did I tell you?

KNOX MARTIN: Yes, you—about an hour and a half ago you told us, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. All the women belonged to you.

KNOX MARTIN: All the women belonged to me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: So I said, "I can't do this. If I'm gonna do what I'm gonna do, I've got to get back to the studio." So I became a recluse. I used to go to all the openings. You know, was a familiar figure and this and that. So I became a recluse for years. The one—one break I had early was I went to Mexico. [00:56:00] Uh, I was very interested in pre-Columbian art. That's the only break I took from being in the studio, seven days a week. No teaching, nothing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So when you traveled, did you usually travel with a sketchbook?

KNOX MARTIN: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you never would keep a journal or anything?

KNOX MARTIN: No—no, but I—but I have—when I went—when I went to Nepal, you know, at another time I could show you an amazing chronicle. I was drawing in Nepal. Nepal, uh, there was this little town where all the trekkers congregated before they went to Everest or Annapurna or whatever it was, and they gathered there in this—in this town. And I was drawing one morning and this guy came over to me and he said, "Why don't you stay with me and my family? I have something to show you. I'm not gonna tell you, but if you agree to?" And I said, "Okay."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The Nepalese guy?

KNOX MARTIN: Huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's a Nepalese person?

KNOX MARTIN: Nepalese. Hindu. So this—this structure belonged to the museum. So I go in there and there was a little room with like a little bay window. He said, "Wake up at dawn and look out the window." And there were flowers around the window and off—I wake up at dawn, and there's Everest. It just touched—it was pink. [00:58:00] And then the next altitude and next—and pretty soon the tops of them were all pink. It was incredible. And the people there, James, were so beautiful. Every third woman could have been on the cover of *Vogue* magazine. And they were little people, tiny. And they were very different from Tibetans. Tibetans reminded me of like American Indians. These were aquiline, thin-looking, perfectly-formed, smaller people. And like children. The worst businessmen in the world. So—but the drawings had—I'm on the banks of this lake. The most beautiful lake in the world, like the gorgeous, transparent Aqua lake. And this mountain. *Machapuchare*. Very much like saying *Machu Picchu*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: *Machapuchare*. And here's this perfect pyramid. So I'm drawing. It was a book I picked up made up of bark paper.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: So I'm drawing this, and how do you make this—how do you make this mountain look the size it is? So like here's the mountain—top of the mountain, and I did the village like one little line to give it the scale. And—and every moment like that when I'm drawing, it's as if I have—[01:00:00] when a musician has perfect pitch? So in the drawing, it tells you. All right, how do you make this the size? You do this. And this goes this way, and a cloud—the light is over here. There—there was a place in Nepal we went to at an altitude of 14,000 feet. And the sky was like a strange blue-purple. And the sun was different. The top of the mountain was all snow-clad. Ice, snow. And this village at 14,000 feet. And miracles were occurring all the time, and out of that—so, this guy, his name—his name was Oteche

[ph]—the guy that asked me to stay at his—at his place. And every morning I'd go up to draw. For example, I've got this drawing here, and I'm drawing a fence with some foliage on it and I'm getting the shade and so on and so forth. And I said, "I need something down here." A crow flies, pointing exactly at the angle that I needed, and I drew the crow in there. And the minute I finished, the crow flew away. [Laughs.] So I mean, hey.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Someone up there likes you.

KNOX MARTIN: What's that?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Someone up there likes you.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Maybe this'd be a good time to take a break from.

KNOX MARTIN: Sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And we'll resume next week.

KNOX MARTIN: Okay.

[END OF TRACK.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're—we're resuming, and we're—after a repast of—of roasted chicken livers and excellent cheeses, and baguettes and coffee. We were talking about how there's a—now a ruckus about penmanship not being taught in schools.

KNOX MARTIN: Well, getting back—getting back to the seaman aboard the Beagle with Darwin, and the difficult thing is to reconcile this guy's masterful—I mean, there's nobody who has penmanship—he kept a diary of the journeys in a large, flowing scrawl like that, with an immaculate—t's, s's, o's closed. Beautiful penmanship. And on the pages illustrating his statements were fragments of landscape, et cetera, et cetera Natives. And the work was primitive in the sense that, if you—you can—you can take every aspect of a Rembrandt, the drawings of a Leonardo, uh, you can show them the Dutch grid, you can show them van Eyck and the—and also Ingres in his geometrically dividing that rectangle, et cetera And—and the person—primitive will not alter. We're talking like a Grandma Moses or a Rousseau.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: Right? Nothing you can say to them, [00:02:00] nothing you can exhibit to them, nothing—nothing you can philosophize about, nothing that you can teach them alters what appears to be, uh, a radical metaphor say, of a cat or a bird or people, see? And not one primitive that I've ever known has ever, ever escaped a surround. Now, the wild thing in that is their personal universe is monitored by that also. In other words, it's not—it is never the perception of someone who's free of that. And I've seen academicians work with so-called primitive artists with not a fraction of a move. If it looks like—if it looks like it's put together a certain way, still underneath it is this concept within—within a different kind of universe, that is common. I have a big, thick book on primitive art, and it's common. It's like instantly you know children's work is children's work. I don't call it art; it's children's work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: So, uh, Afghanistan, South Africa, German, United States, Eskimo kids. Children's work is the same. You know it's a child's work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Schematic.

KNOX MARTIN: Hm?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's very schematic.

KNOX MARTIN: Well, it's haptic.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: I'm talking about haptic, uh, I mean, simply a child takes out a crayon and

looks at a crayon and is amazed by the tubularity [00:04:00] of the thing emerging as blue. Then he takes the paper and somehow is aligned with shape of the page, then feels the texture of it, then takes the blue crayon and drags it across the thing, and is amazed in this haptic sense by coming out of that stick is a blue line, right? And—and he drags it across the top of the thing and concludes that the sky. Of course it is the sky. Another child, five, I have that—I have a collection of these, right? There's a page, and all but three quarters of the page is the sun—is the moon. And way down at the left corner is what appears to be an adult, and she has a necklace with a little heart, red shoes, and an evening dress, and she's swooning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how do you feel about the—the organization in the last half century of this whole idea of outsider art, or naïve art? Sort of, folk art?

KNOX MARTIN: It—it shouldn't be called art. It's naïve art, it's whatever it is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: People like—

KNOX MARTIN: Grandma—you look at a Grandma Moses or Rousseau—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: —and—and you don't look at it seriously as art. If you want to see something that's serious as art, you look at Cézanne or you look at—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Titian.

KNOX MARTIN: —Titian. Veronese, Tintoretto, uh, you look to that—to art. [00:06:00] Um, in a—in a strange way, a Leonardo or Michelangelo were primitive. Vasari and Michelangelo went to Titian's studio, and the conversation between Vasari after he left, says, "What did you think?" He says, "Well, he doesn't know anything about design and he can't draw." It is Michelangelo who can't draw. He was illustrating sculpture and tinting sculpture. The minute they cleaned off the Sistine Chapel, the sfumato, the years of incense burning and humidity, the cleaned it, the things were revealed as tinted sculpture. The background was neutral.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, there were even some people who, at the time of the cleaning, were trying to argue that Michelangelo himself had rubbed ashes on the painting for effect, or something like that. You don't buy that?

KNOX MARTIN: He just fucking did—he did—he did the cartoon.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: And—and punched little holes and popped charcoal in there, and it stayed, and they filled the thing in. And the—and the figures and everything got bigger and bigger because he hated what he was doing. Towards the end the figures were huge. In the beginning they were small. It was too much work, so they got bigger and bigger. At the end of the thing they were immense, right? But he's not my—far from my ideal as an artist. I dislike his sculpture. Uh, every—every piece of—his *Leda and the Swan*. The early *Pietà* was —was an amazing one. The very early one he did. You know what's amazing? At the age of 15 years old, van Dyck self-portrait. [00:08:00] I don't know if you know it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I do.

KNOX MARTIN: It's stunning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, he's coming out of Rubens and Rubens is coming out of Venetians, and—yeah, so.

KNOX MARTIN: His contact with—did you ever see his work on Adriaen Brouwer? The portrait he did of Adriaen Brouwer?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Van Dyck's portrait?

KNOX MARTIN: Van Dyck's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Uh, no. I don't—I know—obviously I know Adriaen Brouwer.

KNOX MARTIN: The what?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Obviously I know Adriaen Brouwer. Yeah, so, uh, he's—he's remarkable. Yeah, I was saying there's some exhibition or the National Portrait Gallery just acquired a major Van Dyck. London.

KNOX MARTIN: Well, as soon as van Dyck discovered Titian, he changed. It was through Rubens.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

KNOX MARTIN: Rubens shot down that miserable dog of—Nicolas Poussin who said that Caravaggio was born to destroy painting. So Caravaggio is the Walt Disney of—the guy that did, uh, Krazy Kat and Ignatz Mouse.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: Disney took everything the guy ever did, from [Herriman -GR].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, Krazy Kat.

KNOX MARTIN: Krazy Kat and Ignatz Mouse, Officer Pup. Those three.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: And that little cartoon there of Officer Pup and Krazy Kat, says—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Cross talk.]

KNOX MARTIN: —"Officer Pup, I don't recognize this scenery." And he says, "Me too." [They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: When did you start, uh, teaching at the League?

KNOX MARTIN: [00:10:00] Uh, God, I don't—it's—it's been—Gaby?

GABRIELA RYAN: 1972.

KNOX MARTIN: 1972.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, so that was just shortly after you had left Yale. Do you know what year you left Yale?

KNOX MARTIN: Sixty—no. 1970, maybe.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. So then it was around that time you were teaching at NYU in between?

KNOX MARTIN: Oh, come on. I—I don't believe I got it that fast. Here is the portrait of van Dyck of Adriaen Brouwer.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, wow.

KNOX MARTIN: Do you believe that?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's his portrait of Adriaen Brouwer.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow. Marvelous.

KNOX MARTIN: Make it a little larger with your fingers, just—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, the resolution is not so high. So I guess people reading the transcription of the interview will have to just go and research it themselves, but—I don't know where that is.

KNOX MARTIN: It's right there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean, where the original—where the actual object is, yes.

KNOX MARTIN: In your hand.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's in my hand. All right. Where—where the work on paper is. Is this a drawing? Is it a—

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Marvelous.

KNOX MARTIN: And their relationship is interesting. He went—he went back to Antwerp. He was a Holland guy. He went to England and he got fucked over by the British. There were no painters in Britain ever, so Josh Reynolds, Gainsborough, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

GABRIELA RYAN: [00:12:00] You were at Yale '65 to '71.

KNOX MARTIN: I what?

GABRIELA RYAN: Yale was '65 to '71.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: '65 to '71.

KNOX MARTIN: '71 I left Yale, yeah.

GABRIELA RYAN: You spent time at University of Minnesota, '72. Maybe a semester.

KNOX MARTIN: I don't—you know, I don't remember.

GABRIELA RYAN: And then you went to the League. That was by their invitation.

KNOX MARTIN: She's the only one that knows, Gaby.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So the League contacted you and invited you to come and teach.

KNOX MARTIN: The League contacted me. Klonis.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Stewart Klonis, yeah.

KNOX MARTIN: Said that Morris Kantor is sick, and he's asked you, would you teach his class, right? And—and I loved Morris Kantor so much that I said yes. And I was gonna teach that term and he was gonna come back. But he died. So all the students wrote a, uh, a thing, would I please come back. I was not gonna teach. And I came back, and I'm stuck. And I love it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where were you—where were you then showing? Who was—who was handling your work then?

KNOX MARTIN: Uh, I think I was still—I might have been with Rose Fried at the time. Rose Fried Gallery. She was the first—first person to show Mondrian, Rose Fried. And Switters.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How did you—how did you manage to, uh, meet up with her? How did that—

KNOX MARTIN: She called me and wanted to meet with me, and she said some praiseworthy things, and we were together and she owned the building off Madison Avenue in—in the '70s, and it was a beautiful relationship. She placed a lot of work with her clients. And it was then that I met Alex Katz—not from the other guy, [00:14:00] but it was from her—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Not Fischbach—

KNOX MARTIN: Not Fischbach—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —but through—through her.

KNOX MARTIN: —but Alex Katz. What a memory you have.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. How long were you with her?

KNOX MARTIN: A few years. And I still get buzzes from her clients, like a drawing, got a painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Okay, iPad away. So, uh, you began teaching at the League. How did you—how did you find that after your experience at Yale? A very different atmosphere.

KNOX MARTIN: Very different, and, uh, again, I wanted to be free. They wanted me to sign a contract, I never signed. I said no. Well, everybody signs a contract. I said, "Well, I'll go home." And I was smoking at the time. Says, no smoking. I said, "Well, I'll go home." So I was the only one evidently in the whole school who was permitted to smoke. And I had my fancy cigarettes and I—I still miss them. Occasionally I smoke a cigar.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: People—

KNOX MARTIN: Did you smoke?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of course. People, especially like—like, Balkan Sobranies, and Turkish smoking cigars was a favorite of mine.

KNOX MARTIN: Love cigars. Love them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. But, uh, alas, one's health doesn't—doesn't tolerate these things [00:16:00] beyond a certain age.

KNOX MARTIN: A—a pilot for Avianca sent his sister over with a box of cigars from Cuba. You couldn't declare them. It was, I guess, against the law. Whoa, I mean, they were the top Cuban cigar.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Well, there are—it is possible to get Cuban cigars in the U.S. because they export them from Cuba to Nicaragua in bundles where they put them in different wrappers, put the rings around them, put them in boxes, and export them as a Nicaraguan, but you have to know which ones are which. But I used to buy them by the box. I don't—I haven't had a cigar in 10 years.

KNOX MARTIN: Well, there's a place three blocks from here—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Don't tempt me.

KNOX MARTIN: —and they have—they claim Dominican cigars are superior to Cuban cigars.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They—they're very good.

KNOX MARTIN: So there's a lounge in there and all these guys are in there smoking cigars that can't smoke them at home. So I bought a cigar there, \$18. The guy says, "Try this one." How much? "Eighteen." So I sit there in the lounge. Wonderful. I got high.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Arturo Fuentes.

KNOX MARTIN: A little buzz. You know, a gentle, little buzz. [Inaudible] smoking a dragon. Whew.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—

KNOX MARTIN: I usually smoked two packs of cigarettes a day.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, my God. That's—that's a commitment. That's a serious—

KNOX MARTIN: Well, I did that for 40 years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. Yeah, well, I guess you chose the right time to quit since you're still here. So, um, but why don't you tell us a little about the League and your experiences teaching there. I mean, you'd come from Yale, which was a couple of days a week [00:18:00] and it was in New Haven. You had to—had to drive in your Cadillac, or take the train, or whatever it was. Um, but the Art Students League of New York is a very different kind of

environment, and how did you find it, and how did you—

KNOX MARTIN: I employed pretty much what I was doing at the, uh, at Yale. There wasn't too much difference. When I felt the call I would give a talk. Uh, I gave a talk yesterday over something that cleared the air in relationship to art. I saw a program the night before on Channel 13 by a guy who was making stuff. Uh, his name was Paley [ph]. This guy has a studio half a block long, two floors, 30 employees, welders, a shop boss, uh, assistants, secretaries. Now, this guy steps in—Paley—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Albert Paley.

KNOX MARTIN: Albert Paley.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Steel—iron working, right.

KNOX MARTIN: Steel and iron. So he steps in—oh, I just saw an interesting connection. He steps in, and the first you do is look at the guy; he's not an artist. He's not. There's no way this guy is an artist. Says me when he first stepped in. And they don't have to look alike, you know, but there's something that manifests from an artist that's different. At any rate, he wheedles a commission up where he's gonna do [00:20:00] Park Avenue, seven blocks, and on each corner is gonna be a 30-foot sculpture, or whatever the fuck you want to call it. So he goes—he goes back there and—and so he has to sell each one to make up—so, he sells seven of them. One of them is the length of this apartment. On one of those—it takes up the whole island in Park Avenue.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: Right? And he makes these columns. Paints one all red and he's got these different colors and stuff. Takes him two years to put this stuff together. Now, there is not one fraction, not one particle is art, and—and interesting thing, for some reason or another, I have perfect pitch. In other words, a student's work is there and I say, do this—[claps]. "Shane, put this white in it, take this red out [claps]." Where do you sign the name? Right here. Oh, I was gonna—sign it. Slope this way. Do it. I've had like, groups stand there. Where would you sign it? Um, most of the time the signature is added there and it fucks things up because it doesn't go with anything. If you're gonna put something on a canvas, it should generate from the shapes that are there. If it's an intellectual thing, uh, or conceptual thing, it—it's not gonna go. But if this is painted red and it slopes up this way against this that goes this way in that corner, and each corner and top and side and the bottom dictate what each piece is, see? [00:22:00] That's the evolution of a work of art as—as I see it to be. So I went—I was in Minnesota. I was in northern Minnesota where it was summer school for the University of Minnesota. Peter Busa was the guy who was in charge. And up there—so, there was an exhibition in a zeppelin hanger of Indian artifacts; the Cree, the Utes, the Flatheads, the Mohicans. Every Native American tribe was represented by work there. There were these—there were these 300 tables with 50, 60 works from each group. And I went over there, and over there, and over there, and there were hasps, there were pendants, there were necklaces, there were bracelets. Everything you wear, et cetera, and not one single thing exceeded the craft. It was metal, it was this, and there was a stone. It was whatever it was—mother—whatever it was. It never, ever—it isn't the idea of it being some parts, but infinitely more. It was—it was—now, the thing that settled it, in the vitrine—or what's left of the middle of the floor—in a glass case, was the old Indian stuff. Now, these things were not made to sell, right? They were sacred and it showed. Everything was beautiful. It—it was like African sculpture. The real African stuff. Not the sculpture, the shit that was sold to tourists, but the real thing. [00:24:00]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: The real Senufo or the real Fang. Um, so I got so pissed at that idea that here was craft being worn. So I got home and I said, "I'm gonna make some sculpture." So I made—I spent like months making sculpture out of silver. Shaped it. I made a bracelet of a school of fish, and each fin and each space in between gave birth to the next space in the thing, and it was—wildflowers. A bracelet of wildflowers. A bracelet of flying birds, gulls, right? Where each gull wing and everything gave birth to the next gull wing, and the beak did this in the space in between. See? So a butterfly belt. It tilted this way, this way, and the butterflies—slight bar relief for the butterflies. It was magnificent. Um, a big silver piece here of roses.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Arm band.

KNOX MARTIN: Huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: An arm band.

KNOX MARTIN: Arm band of roses, right. You know, much like—every space is considered—you know, it's—

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

KNOX MARTIN: And that—and that goes with the greatest win—one of the great wins that I had. I was drawing lilies in Holland. I think I told you. And these three young women come over. And I stop for a minute and the woman says to me, "Sir, your drawing is more beautiful than the plant." And I stopped. I said, "You understand English?" "Yes, sir." So I said, "I taught at Yale, at NYU, et cetera, and you're the first human being who's ever come back with that accuracy. [00:26:00] Of course it's more beautiful than the plant. It creates the plant." So, um—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So art imitates life.

KNOX MARTIN: What?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Art—Oscar Wilde said art imitates—no, like, life imitates art, but actually you would be agreeing with him that life imitates—

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The reality is, art is what gives reality—what gives—

KNOX MARTIN: Reality is what—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the concrete world its reality.

KNOX MARTIN: In other words, like, you are the music.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: A Mozart is the music, right?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: A—a Cézanne—I don't believe—I don't believe it. Every time I see a Cézanne I get an epiphany. I was in the doctor's office the other day. He had moved his office from the second floor to the fourth floor, and he'd inherited a print of Cézanne.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

KNOX MARTIN: Right? And I'm looking at the print and he says, "Wait a minute. Your blood pressure is usually the blood pressure of a teenager." And I'm sitting there roiling, and I said, "Well, I'm looking at the fucking Cézanne."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: And the Cézanne [inaudible] was driving me crazy and my blood pressure was up. I could feel it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—so art is—art is the thing that—that gives the physical world its sense of reality.

KNOX MARTIN: It is reality.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: It is man, it is woman. The cave painting gives you a buttock or breast, or the animal, success in the hunt. And then, like each male artist is painting his woman. Like, Titian's woman? My God. Or that *Bacchanal* with the—or *The Rape of Europa*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: Or—there's a—there's a Van Eyck painting of Adam and Eve.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [00:28:00] Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: And you see Adam; magnificent. But Eve is transcendent. She's like a pod.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We were looking at—at that last week. You had the book out, the Van Eyck. The details of that. Yeah, that's from the *Adoration of the Lamb*, right?

KNOX MARTIN: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: From—from the *Ghent Altarpiece*.

KNOX MARTIN: I went to Ghent to see that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or, as you say, Hghent [ph]. [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: Hghent, yeah. I want to go to Ghent. What? Write it down. Oh, you mean Hghent.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You were speaking earlier about the *Grünewald*. Did you ever go to Colmar?

KNOX MARTIN: No, no. I've seen the thing profusely reproduced.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. What's your opinion of that—

KNOX MARTIN: But I was at the Picasso Museum to see his *Crucifixion*, and I studied it. It is, to me, amazing. Absolutely amazing. Amazing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This the Picasso Museum in Paris?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. Yeah. Um, tell us again—I mean, again, prior to starting the formal interview today, we were talking about your—your exhibition *She* at Golden.

KNOX MARTIN: Well, Golden invited me to—to have this show. Uh, and all I'd worked on for about three years and the whole production of 14, 15 paintings, was—they came, picked them up, wrapped them and shipped them there, and the—the show lasted about four months, four or five months.

GABRIELA RYAN: Six months.

KNOX MARTIN: Six months, says Gaby. Less—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This was held at the Golden Foundation in Upstate New York?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. Right. And we had [00:30:00] an incredible encounter. They asked me to talk about the work, and I said, "Well, as a rule. I don't." But I talked about one piece. At Yale they wanted to talk about a piece. Now, the piece that's in the hall at the League, I gave a talk about that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's hanging there now, the painting that—

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What was the genesis of that body of work?

KNOX MARTIN: Well, *She* is—in other words, de Kooning's women, Picasso's woman, Matisse's woman.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: What Picasso took from Cézanne's *Bathers* and woman, kind of thing. The whole connection. And, uh, long ago when I was a kid, I had a dream. God came down and

said, "Knox, all women are yours."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You told us this last week, yeah.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. So I said, "Oh, okay."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You taking notes, there?

GABRIELA RYAN: Yes.

KNOX MARTIN: So—so, you're mine, too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, she did.

KNOX MARTIN: Anyway. So that—I feel that way. It's unfortunate to be stuck with that, but that's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's a big responsibility.

KNOX MARTIN: A big responsibility. And I treat it well; I don't have any enemies.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How long—so you worked on the body of work for three years?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But were you mindful that it would be an exhibition?

KNOX MARTIN: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

KNOX MARTIN: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You just—

KNOX MARTIN: I loved the idea—I wrote—I wrote some poems inspired by Yeats, on *Mermaid*. [00:32:00] You ever see that? My poems?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I did. I don't—I don't have a copy of the book, but I did—I did see—yes, I think you did email a number of those poems out to people.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah? Well, you can have a copy of the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I will look forward to that.

KNOX MARTIN: So—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: When was that published? That was like, 2008 or something? 2007 or [200]8?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. So the idea of—of calling it *She*, uh, right. And—and the—like, the alien thing about it, Yeats' poem was, "A mermaid found a swimming lad, picked him for own, pressed her body against his body, laughing, plunged down, forgot in cruel happiness that even lovers drown." So I followed that with, uh, about 40 poems to mermaids.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeats. There's a lot of Yeats, I believe wrote about the death of—of—of Fergus mac Róich, and he's in with Medb, and they're older and in an embrace, in water I believe, when he dies. I can't remember the poem. But what—what—what, uh, drew you to Yeats?

KNOX MARTIN: Oh, I mean, the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was he always—

KNOX MARTIN: The poem that threw me was "Turning, and turning in widening gyre, the falcon can no longer hear the falconer." "The Second Coming" was the title of the poem. Uh, the blood red tide drowns the ceremony of the innocence. The best have no opinion; the worst are filled with [00:34:00] sound and fury. Surely some revelation is at hand. Surely the

second coming is at hand. The second coming—the second coming, no sooner that I see this word, and out of the desert, moving so slow thighs, the body of a lion and the head of a man." [Bird noise.] Thank you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's an obstreperous parrot.

KNOX MARTIN: [Laughs.] And—and that poem ends with—and—oh. "What beast, its hour come at last, crouches towards Bethlehem." Remember that? "And what beast, its hour come at last."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I thought his dad had some contact with the League early on. There's a famous painting by John Sloan of the father of William Butler Yeats, in New York.

KNOX MARTIN: Amazing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He lived here for a while.

KNOX MARTIN: What do you think of Jack Yeats, painter? Again, of the same—

KNOX MARTIN: Of who?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Jack Yeats, the Irish painter. Do you know his work? Horses and—

KNOX MARTIN: Can't be any painters. Here's a—here's a horse. Anything less than that is like [00:36:00]—that's the horse I ride every morning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is—we're having a look at, this is a replica of the—

KNOX MARTIN: Exact replica. Geometric horse, Sixth century, BC.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: Greek.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: From the Met collection. Is that from the Met shop? That piece? So, um, the exhibition *She went*—went off well.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, amazing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was up for six months.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And the author of the essay, the catalogue essay—

KNOX MARTIN: Bill Fried.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Bill Fried. Tell us—

KNOX MARTIN: Amazing. I was—I was showing paintings next door, and there's—there's a painting that—that I dedicated to Manet, and I used something out of Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*—which was the bedding; I painted it a certain way. And he says, "My God, this is out of *Demoiselles d'Avignon* by Picasso." He was the only person that saw it. Like, a ton of painters have seen it since then. And he saw it. But he's perceptive that way. And also, he's the guy that fathered the idea of publishing the poems. He taught poetry at the New School, I think—and I gave him the poems to read and he says, "Knox, I don't believe it." And he went over and he exclaimed in how complex they were and they were—it was very simple, and then it was, uh, Gaby and her friend—what's her name? [00:38:00]

GABRIELA RYAN: Brigitte?

KNOX MARTIN: Brigitte who took the work and had it published.

GABRIELA RYAN: [Inaudible.]

KNOX MARTIN: What, Gaby?

GABRIELA RYAN: She did the layout, I did the editing.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. So, uh—and the book of poetry, I got letters—amazing letters from that. But this guy saw those poems. Now, I studied poetry like I studied painting, you know, [inaudible].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So obviously you see a parallel between what painting can do visually, and what—what language can do musically.

KNOX MARTIN: Well, Shakespeare invents—never heard before—125 words in the English language. The creation of—the creation of Hamlet, Lear, whatever it is. The creation never—that didn't exist before in mankind. One of the great creations and typifies so much is *Don Quixote de la Mancha de la Triste Figura*. Cervantes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: Creation of a whole body of connections.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Some coincidence between Shakespeare and—they died the same year and almost the same day, the two of them.

KNOX MARTIN: Uh, you know who were very close in—in dying, in date, uh, van Dyck and Brouwer, and—and both—I mean, Brouwer died at the age of 32 like Mozart. He had sort of finished what he wanted to do.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But he also had a kind of, a dissolute, wild existence.

KNOX MARTIN: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No?

KNOX MARTIN: You get that from what he painted.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. [00:40:00]

KNOX MARTIN: So he—how could he possibly do his work? He was in a debtor's prison for a while. Uh, Rubens bailed him out and he was living with Rubens, and he never saw the guy. He was always working. He never drank; that interrupted his work. So the idea of doing barroom brawls, there were—these—the International School of Art had a bunch of slides of Brouwer, and he was a fucking asshole that we almost came to blows a couple times. But this guy, he said, "Where did you get all those angles at?" I said, "Asshole, they're in the painting." So the Brouwer is not far away. Sorry, that's the [inaudible]. I thought it was the Brouwer, but—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It could be.

KNOX MARTIN: It is the Brouwer.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It is the Brouwer.

KNOX MARTIN: This is the most distant photograph ever taken. There's a section in Ursa Major that looks blank, and the space telescope took a picture of it and this is what resulted. Now, each one of these is a galaxy with an approximation of like, 350 billion stars. Uh, and the light traveling from there is taking like 13 billion years to reach us. Light travels 168 miles a second.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, 186 thousand miles per second.

KNOX MARTIN: Per second. And it travels six trillion miles in one year. So six trillion times 14 billion. [00:42:00] Close. These guys, these books I showed you, dealing with this.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So let's talk a little about the League. When you got to the League, what kind of students were you dealing with? It was very unlike, uh—

KNOX MARTIN: Oh, here's my book of poetry.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the students at Yale, I would expect. Ah. Marvelous.

KNOX MARTIN: Beautiful color, huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sort of a robin's egg blue, the cover of the book of poems.

GABRIELA RYAN: He picked the color. He painted it on a piece of paper for us.

KNOX MARTIN: "She squats on the beach, wind-colored eyes, aqua haunch, brine glistens on the domed forehead, vibrating tail, live with sea scale song, she dives in a flapping flounder." It's very similar, very complex resonances and stuff.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: When, you know, we talk about picture making and about movements of space and shifting and arcing and bending and flipping and flipping out the Crucifixion with the yellow hand being a positive element in one side of the painting and being the background in the other, it sort of—yeah.

KNOX MARTIN: It sounds like great sex you were describing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It could be, I suppose.

KNOX MARTIN: [Laughs.] That's for you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thank you. Thank you. Um, yeah, there's some rock n' roll song lyric I'm trying to remember that—that is, you know, you can't tell who's who in the amorous madness. It's—you know, it's—

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, it [00:44:00] can be like that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The space—

KNOX MARTIN: You know, that's amazing; it can be intellectual, or it can be purely animal.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It gets back to my—my idea about predators. The calm predator, the observant predator, studying the horizon, waiting for lunch. So what were the students like? When you had got there in 1972, you had been to Minnesota, a little NYU, a lot of Yale. Left Yale. What—what did you find at the League?

KNOX MARTIN: The same. The graduate students at Yale were all ready to go and conquer New York.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: All individuals that—I took these guys and something I learned, I won—a little group asked me, would I teach some kids from a settlement house, and I agreed to do that. They gave me an enormous amount of money to—for the amount of time. So I mean, the dumbest thing you can do is take a kid and talk to them about—a kid—and talk to him about Van Gogh. It's like talking a tree into taking a drink of scotch, you know? So I sized up the thing and it was—interesting, it was an amazing period in my life, that. Large group of kids, eight to 14 or so, whatever it was. I made the gang leader, [00:46:00] the Puerto Rican kid, the monitor. Most genius thing I ever did. He commanded this whole thing. So they had these little poster colors in these little jars, and these fucking brushes, like 10 for a quarter. So I said, "You want me to teach. You're not serious. This is what you've got to do; I want quart jars—transparent quart jars of red, green, black, white, blue. And I want some big brushes. Huge cans for water, filled with water, and I want big pads." They had little pads like this. "And I want your faculty, the guys, to take a drop cloth—plastic drop cloth to make little aprons so that their mothers don't kill you for—if they get paint on them." So that was settled. And I never talked to them about art. Uh, I would say, "Look, it's Thanksgiving." It was about a year I did that. I said, "It's Thanksgiving." I had this huge brown paper. I said—about 40 kids. I said, "Who here knows how to paint grass?" I got the rough part out of the way. Three guys raise their hand. "Okay, you guys paint the grass." "Who paints trees? Who paints skies? Who can paint a turkey?" Ah, okay. "Pilgrims, Indians?"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: So each guy had their job, right? So—and it was—it was—I'm sorry I don't have pictures of those things. But up at Yale University, here are all these guys. There [00:48:00] was one guy—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, you remember any individuals who you worked with closely?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, well, a lot of guys I talked to; Chuck Close, Richard Serra, George Parrino. Guys like that. But here—for example. This guy was—I forget what his name was. It was like Sandberg, Sand [Fred Sandback -GR]—student at Yale. Invites me to his studio. I look in there and there's a shadow on the wall, and on the rim of the wall and over to this place is a string, right? And then in the corner, from corner, to corner, to corner is designated by a string. Makes a strange space because the string cuts off—there's one along the banister and there's one string. So I said—he was a landscape painter. So I said, "Hey." I said, "You're a finished artist." And I meant it as—as being finished. I said, "I tell you what." He says, "You see it. All the faculty was here. They couldn't see it." I said, "Okay. All right. There's the—" I said, "I'm gonna give you two galleries. Choose the stronger one. They're both gonna accept your work." So we went down to the galleries, [claps], both of them accepted his work. He chose the stronger gallery. Within one year he had a solo show at the Modern Museum.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You remember his name? [00:50:00]

KNOX MARTIN: So now, going back to Yale—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: —passing this guy in the hall, he never said hello. Never one fucking word. I'd look at him and he'd turn his head. I mean, yeah. "Oh, thank you, Knox." Not a word. It was like—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where is he now?

KNOX MARTIN: He's in hell. Barking in hell. He died. He committed suicide a few years ago.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sad.

KNOX MARTIN: Fuck him. Sad. I mean, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's unfortunate a person can't extend the least bit of courtesy or warmth to another who's helped him.

KNOX MARTIN: He became—within one year he was a millionaire. He was raggedy and had this [inaudible]. Sandberg? Sand? I'm very close to his name. [Fred Sandback -GR] Yeah, he's barking in hell right now, where he belongs. I mean, you know—you know, I don't care about—you don't treat anybody like that. It's just not—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

KNOX MARTIN: There's nothing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, do you think there's this kind of culture of entitlement and self-importance, and certain people think that being an artist is the same as being a celebrity, or rather, being a celebrity is the same as being an artist?

KNOX MARTIN: Well, the amazing thing with that, uh, I've—since a kid I've been doing magic, a magician. I had a teacher. Frank Garcia. He was called The Man with the Million Dollar Hands. And he was incredible. And Slydini. When I went to the magician's convention, at supertime, Slydini—a little bit of an Italian guy [00:52:00]—he walks in at supertime, everybody stood up and gave him a standing ovation, just for him walking in. He was the teacher of Frank Garcia and many people. Dick Cavett was a student of his.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, really?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. Slydini. Major movie stars are shown in films with him, and his manner. He had a heavy Italian accent, but he would, I mean, do things that were like. But the point of this is that, every magician will tell you that this part of the move is from Harry Loran. Frank Garcia conclude this way. This goes back to Slydini. This comes out of this and this comes—every single magician. There's not one that performs. Uh, I belong to the magicians group and a couple times a year we have a meeting, and these guys performing for other magicians; yeah, well this—this comes from Harry Cross, and this is this and that, and so on and so forth. Artists try to tell you, "I was born this way." Nobody's—students that I've fostered never mention my name. They get—I come from God, or whatever the hell that—I'm my own. On the contrary, some people come to you and say, "My God, what I've

encountered. The rest of my life. You changed my—" blah, blah, blah, blah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Are you still in contact with any people from Yale from your Yale days?

KNOX MARTIN: Once in a while. Once in a while I get—I get letters from—my God, I'm catching on to what you instructed about.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So when you went to the League, it was a different environment [00:54:00] and a different—

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, but not really different in a sense. I mean, there were people—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean, they had—they had other agendas. They weren't all going out to conquer New York next year.

KNOX MARTIN: Well, they were doing something worse; they were going into vanity galleries, which I—the thing I—the thing I went to Ira with, I said, "What are you gonna do with the last stuff they did?" I told you about this.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh yeah?

KNOX MARTIN: [Inaudible] on Channel 13.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, sure. That film.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. Two, eight months apart, different but the same. And they're the dearest thing I've ever seen in my life. The League is portrayed as a retirement place, and the old folks, "Yeah, I'm retired now. Now I can paint," and stuff like that. And they had some Japanese girl who was doing the dearest fucking sculpture. You know, a little—horrible little—horrible figure. Young, Japanese girl. And—and—so, the general thing was, it's a great place to retire. There's nothing—you know, nothing really happening there. Now, there is no one more dedicated to artists or the Art Students League than Vaclav Vytlacil, who was at every meeting, every attendance, passionate about this. And he—he gave the League the Vytlacil Estate.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, his house in Rockland County in Sparkhill.

KNOX MARTIN: His house and barn, and then his daughter gave more land, recently. So he's built structures there to do sculpture. Amazing. And then the people who have given things to the League. And there was—there was Morris Kantor, who was beautiful [00:56:00] in the sense of—like, his talk on Hieronymus Bosch and what that meant, and how Brueghel was no part of that. Brueghel didn't touch it [ph]. Was not on the same planet as—as Bosch. And introduced a number of things. We would—a group of us would go out, myself as a student, on Thursday nights, and we would go to a cheap Italian restaurant, and he knew them and we'd get great food. And we'd discuss art, and blah, this and that, art, this and that. Great discussion. And then—and then the guy that gave me art was Will Barnet. You know, I told you all that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You spoke a little about Will the last time.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But you—you worked with him as a colleague. How is he as a colleague?

KNOX MARTIN: Uh, we saw each other, you know, occasionally would say this. The last show I had at the Woodward Gallery—there's a painting right there that was on the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, yeah. I remember that show. Down on the lower, Lower East Side.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, so that was on the wall. So John Woodward called me and says, "Will Barnet wants to speak to you." So he says, "Knox, I've been here—sitting here in front of your painting for an hour. He said, "As far as I'm concerned, you're the greatest American painter." I said, "Wow, coming from you." See, but he's the guy that really introduced me to Ingres and the Byzantine school.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: And he would take his class to the—to the Metropolitan. Uh, he got Kahnweiler to come to class. [00:58:00] Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler who wrote the major book on Cubism, Juan Gris and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, he lived for a very, very long time, and—

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, he was over 100.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And, uh, he was right up until a few months before he passed, he was out at the openings and—

KNOX MARTIN: Every opening. Every opening.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

KNOX MARTIN: I saw him a couple months—Rosemary and I had dinner with him at the National Arts Club. And we chatted. He showed me some catalogues, gave me some catalogues. And—and, at the National Academy, they had introduced Will Barnet and we were talking about him. And the guy was—the guy was talking—Gaby was there with me, right?

GABRIELA RYAN: Yeah, you [cross talk] the curator of the show—

KNOX MARTIN: So the guy was talking to Will Barnet as if he's some ancient thing that he had to remind—

GABRIELA RYAN: Do you remember? Do you remember, Will? Do you remember, Will? That's how he—

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. Yeah. So I said, "I want to say something," and this guy would ignore me. So I said—big crowd—so I said, "Asshole. I'm gonna say something." And Will Barnet says—so I told him that this is the only person that ever introduced me to art, and I described it a little bit.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was still alive at that point in time.

KNOX MARTIN: What?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was he—was he alive still?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, he was on the—it was on the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, oh. He was—

KNOX MARTIN: I was addressing him on the podium, right?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was receiving an honor.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. Receiving an honor.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: As he did.

KNOX MARTIN: And this guy was treating him like, "Oh Will, you remember"—he says, "Yeah."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [01:00:00] He had an amazing memory, because I worked with him—remember the book we did that you and I worked on, he also had a chapter in that book and we also had an interview format. And I remember going to his place in the National Arts Club and bringing him down in his wheelchair and going across the street into the park, needing the key to get in. There was a statue in the middle of Edwin Booth. And then, wheeling him around, you know, the pebbles, and then spending the afternoon going line by line over the—over the text. Marvelous guy. Marvelous spirit.

KNOX MARTIN: But he's the only guy who'll bring in a postcard with an Ingres on it. I usually have something like this with me at all times. How the hell did I get a grease spot on it? Anyway, you know, where—where the line of the mouth goes to the edge of that hat? See that?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: And this rolls and that rolls. This imitates what the hat does. This—that rolls this way, this rolls this way, that comes this way, this is this way. These emerge over here. This creates this corner, triangle, and a big one over here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I'll just describe to the transcriber, we're looking at a graphite drawing, portrait drawing, of a woman with a—a hat with a kind of brim, bill, and she's in a wicker chair with a long dress, and you're describing all of these curves and—

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, curves and straight, a straight but against a curve, and a thick against a thin. The line with the hair with the beads, and the—and the rings on the finger. [01:02:00]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: Uh, each pleat. That, as a shape against this is a shape, each one giving birth to the next, filling it out, expanding, engaging the bottom and the top. I mean, the face is placed exactly where it has to be, dictated by whatever this is, in that haptic sense.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: Not an intellectual, this and that, or whatever, have you, and it has nothing to do with anatomy or the mechanics of a woman seated, or anything like—not even remotely connected.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well so, you're talking—I mean, you're talking, in a way, about line as poetry, visual music. And that's—that's what you call art. And that's what's so hard to achieve and see.

KNOX MARTIN: Well, the thing that I was talking about, this guy Paley—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Albert Paley.

KNOX MARTIN: Albert Paley. There was nothing he did. The thing cost him \$60 million to produce. He broke even by selling everything, right? But these were like 40-foot towers of nothing. This long piece the length—the length of this apartment on this island on Park Avenue was painted white, and it looked nothing like—it was defunct of the accidental touch of aesthetics that a crumpled piece of paper has. I mean, you know, if you—if you took this and did that to it, made it a block long—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: It's better than the fucking thing he had there, a block long, painted white. There was—the amazing, ungracious, [01:04:00] devoid of a single resonance or rhyme of anything that was any more than the residue of—of a thought that's thinking—he did jewelry, and each piece of the jewelry he did—he was first at making jewelry, and each piece—it was the same thing I was talking about the Indian things. They were nothing. They were horrible. Hasps, pendants, and things that were—that were—I mean, could you, in one man, put—I mean, I can think of a few people—but, put the—the tail end of a—of a sacred curse to be—to be the arch enemy or the antichrist, or whatever it is to art? There wasn't a single fragment. It shows him welding and bending things, and he'd bend the piece of metal, he's put the—every piece of metal that he chose to put together was sheer shit. Even that's better than what this guy did.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who—who are the contemporary artists you admire?

KNOX MARTIN: Well, there was a guy by the name of McElhinney that I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: I think his first name is James.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But—but who—

KNOX MARTIN: Uh, well, I mean the only guys I can say is Elias Goldberg and de Kooning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: And, uh, and I suspect [01:06:00] Will Barnet's work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: Interesting thing. I had a show in the Bonino Gallery on 57th Street, perhaps the most beautiful gallery I've ever seen. And I started teaching at the League just about then, and the grace of a Vaclav Vytlacil, he took his class to see my show.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Uh, the Bonino was sort of a Latin American Gallery, right? They had some kind of Latin American connections?

KNOX MARTIN: But very—they had a gallery in Brazil.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: And a gallery here. The place was marvelous. It was beautiful. And, uh, the problem with it is the lady who ran the gallery in Manhattan, who was desperate and lived with her husband, and her husband had left her. So there was that thing. Undercurrent thing. But things were placed. They had a big following. Uh, the fanciest openings you could imagine. Now, with Vytlacil, I thanked him. I said, "My God, you took your students to see the show."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: He said, "Knox, you're the only guy who's doing it." He says, "I'm just beginning to." At a big age, I'm just beginning—so he saw whatever it was.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, but painters today—painters working today, not—not that many people—

KNOX MARTIN: Koons, Hirst—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, I don't mean those guys. Those are—that's not really what I think you'd—you would—I don't imagine that you would accept them as painters; they're more art directors.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. Conceptual artists, idea men.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: [01:08:00] Rauschenberg was an idea man.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: Jasper Johns, Twombly, all these people.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How about any of the Europeans? Any of the German?

KNOX MARTIN: None. There was never a German painter except for one. Uh, I—you know, Dürer. But there's one German painter.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Friedrich?

KNOX MARTIN: Huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Friedrich? The landscape.

KNOX MARTIN: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Menzel?

KNOX MARTIN: What?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Menzel? Adolph Menzel?

KNOX MARTIN: No. There's one guy. Head and shoulders—in the—at the Florence Museum of Art, right here is a Dürer, *Eve*, and right in front of him is this German's painting of *Eve*, and the *Eve* of the German painter is color, it's head and shoulders—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Cranach

KNOX MARTIN: Huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Cranach?

KNOX MARTIN: Lucas Cranach.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Lucas Cranach.

KNOX MARTIN: Lucas Cranach. Head and shoulders. The Dürer *Eve* is—give me a fucking break. The Cranach is color, it's everything. Amazing. There's a—there's a passion, there's an instance. This—the *Eve* that Dürer makes is mechanical.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I know Cranach painted scores of *Eves*.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Over and over and over again. He couldn't get enough.

KNOX MARTIN: At the Metropolitan is an amazing picture of a selection among three women by—beautiful.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Any—any writers during your lifetime? People writing during your lifetime, any, uh, any of the critics of any interest to you, ever? Did anybody ever—the painters—

KNOX MARTIN: [01:10:00] Uh, nope. Nope, nope. I had a running fight with Hilton Kramer. I think he died.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He did.

KNOX MARTIN: But, uh, I invited him out to fisticuffs one time. At a party, I said—I said, "Hey." He said, "I don't indulge in fisticuffs." I said, "Well, you fucking better learn."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why not swords or pistols? That might have been—offer him a few more choices.

KNOX MARTIN: I'm—I'm a terrific shot and a great swordsman, too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I imagine.

KNOX MARTIN: I did Zen—I did the Zen sword for four years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, um, did you ever meet—or, did you know Fairfield Porter, or Tom—

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —or any of those people?

KNOX MARTIN: Everybody.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How did you—how did you interact with them? How did you like Porter?

KNOX MARTIN: Fine. The last time I saw Porter, he came to my studio and we talked about art, and he was offended. I said—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why?

KNOX MARTIN: "Don't take any offense." I mean, we're talking about—you're talking about something you don't know. If you want to listen, listen. Look at this, look at that, look at that. But Porter told me that he was an abstractionist, and he heard Clement Greenberg say you can't do the figure these days. [Clap.] Next day he was doing figures. He did figures the rest of his—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: He told de Kooning. Interesting thing. There was a criticism by Greenberg

about de Kooning's work, and then in the Evergreen Review there's an apology, a couple of years later. He said, "I didn't realize de Kooning's Ingres-esque ambition." [01:12:00]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Ingres-esque. Yeah.

KNOX MARTIN: Ingres-esque ambition. And, uh, I mean, he would—he would come—he had been interested in boxing. He would come and ask, "You still boxing?" I'd say, "Yeah, come on." And—yeah, his—his abandonment of Pollock for the color field guys. He wrote a—he wrote a major article, was published in the *ARTnews*, on Oriental art, and he didn't get it right. But he was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Now you're speaking about Greenberg?

KNOX MARTIN: Greenberg.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

KNOX MARTIN: Now, this is so—so alien. Uh, he and Al Held and I were seated together, and Al asked him, what do you think of what I'm doing? He said, "You have no ambition." And Al Held said, "Fuck you." So Greenberg said—[inaudible].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why do you think they were all so combative? There's this image that we have today, I think it was widely promoted—maybe it's part urban legend—of people going to the Cedar Bar and—

KNOX MARTIN: That was rare. [01:14:00]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —screaming and yelling at each other.

KNOX MARTIN: I used to go there all the time. It was rare.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Well, it's like, in the '70s and '60 there were—there was a figurative alliance thing that were people like Leland Bell and Paul Resika and Gabriel Laderman and those guys.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, I gave a—I gave a talk at the studio school with Bell and all those—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: And I gave the talk and they said what? And they were promoting Morandi over Cézanne. I said, "Give me a break. You don't have a fucking clue as to what art is." The batch of them, all at the studio school, including Nick Browning [ph], and Bell, to—to promote Morandi.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hm. Well, the point was is that there was this—down at the YMHA down on East Broadway, they would have—every Friday night they would have these confabs where someone like Louis Finkelstein or—or Paul Georges, or one of these characters would show slides and talk. And then someone who was in another camp opposed to whatever camp was, you know, the entertainment du jour, would come and heckle them and they would end up in arguments, and so forth and so on. I just wonder, I mean, how do you think—I guess, art schools get so combative? Or painters get so combative? They thought that what you had to do was argue with each other all the time?

KNOX MARTIN: Uh, there was—there was an interesting thing. The talk you arranged at the League—and I was one of the speakers.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: Now, what's the name of the tall abstractionist, the teacher there?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Dorfman, [01:16:00] Hinman?

KNOX MARTIN: No, took over Vytlačil's class.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: O'Cain?

KNOX MARTIN: O'Cain.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: So after the talk, O'Cain's wife—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, yeah.

KNOX MARTIN: Came up to me crying. She said, "Knox, you're the only one among all these guys that talked about art." Dorfman, O'Cain. And—and I didn't think about it, but after she said that—she's crying—you're the only one who really talked about art. I said thank you. And you don't know what you're saying, yet—I haven't seen the tape or anything—but, I said, "Okay. It sounds—it sounds right." I said, "Okay. I—" Now, of course, uh, you know, I could talk about, well, anything like a concept of nested parallels in mathematics that's alien to anybody. So? Okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why is it important, do you think, for people to understand art? But let me ask you two questions.

KNOX MARTIN: That's a good question.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why do you think it's important for people to have art in their lives? If you can have it without understanding it.

KNOX MARTIN: If art is the creation of reality. So Picasso paints a—a blue period and thin actors with shaven heads, and thin women, uh, saltimbanques, and all of a sudden, the whole—[01:18:00] at that time, years ago, the whole village looked like that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: Looked like his paintings. You know, these thin types, saltimbanques, and stuff like that. So if—if the world has changed, but without—there's no knowledge of change. All of a sudden every cartoonist, and every illustrator, is doing aspects of a Picasso lucid drawing with odd changes, and it's no longer an illustrative kind of thing, but it's a Virgil Parks, this guy—all these guys are doing aspects of a Matisse or a Picasso. The way people dress and look will change. The universe at large is—every—major changes. The change that—change that—so—so, you shouldn't have any walls, should you display it someplace, but for example, when Picasso finished his *Demaiselles d'Avignon*, the closest guy to him was Braque, and Braque says, "He expects to drink gasoline and eat tar." And Matisse coined the name of the movement. He says, "*le petits cubes*," and it became Cubism after Matisse, it was—but it was a matter of denigration; he was denigrating a movement. This other guy says, "You're gonna find Picasso hung behind that painting."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I've heard that.

KNOX MARTIN: It lay rolled up under his bed for 20 years, but the aspects that were seen and talked about changed the whole art world. Cubism was born out of that. Braque started with Cubism, the Russians Cubism, the British Cubism, the American Cubism, it rained Cubism for a while. [01:20:00] See, so it changed the structure of where—what are we talking about?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I think an idea that's always interested me was that—that modern art wasn't a reaction—wasn't a rejection of the image, like some people say, like some orthodox, pure abstractionists say. I wonder if it might not have been a rejection of the kind of mimetic, data-focused photography, and Impressionism.

KNOX MARTIN: James. The whole thing was owned by Bouguereau Cross—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: —and these are the guys in the academy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: The disciple—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: —of Charles Baudelaire—Manet—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: The change occurs with the depiction of what the artist is by Poe. Poe says, in his essay on how he wrote *The Raven*, he says the artist is the great artificer. He's an artificial artist. If you think you're—if you think—you think if you have to hold up nature like Leonardo said, you have to be a mirror of nature, that has nothing to do but mechanics and something that's already been done. You're going over the dead fodder of what has been nailed down. So—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But an artificer is also a workman in the parlance of that time; somebody who puts things together.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, but he talked about—he's talking about the guy who's, uh, the artificial artist, the great artifice of [inaudible]. In other words, [01:22:00] out of this came Impressionism. Out of Poe, out of Baudelaire's translation of Poe came Stravinsky, out of that came Cubism, and synthetic Cubism, et cetera, et cetera. Now, what has come back now is a cesspool of—the little piece you sent me. The shit you sent me? Right? In other words, it is Hirst, it is Koons, it is this, that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, that thing I sent you, the—

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The Australian—the young Australian critic explaining Conceptualism?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, perfect. Perfect.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, so the whole thing is conceptual.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Peter Drew. Peter Drew.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, so as I said—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Very funny.

KNOX MARTIN: At the Modern Museum, high on the wall, there's a big television with Bruce Nauman with his face upside down saying, "Thank you, thank you, thank you." Just the mouth. "Thank you, thank you," for 20 minutes. And then he says, "This is art. You know why? Because I say so." So whatever you do, you know, you hang out—put out a box of nails and spill them, and say see this? Put them in a museum. This is art because I say so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or because it's in a museum.

KNOX MARTIN: What?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or because it's in a museum.

KNOX MARTIN: Well, of course. I mean, of course. Whoever says so. So who do you know who's powerful enough to allow you to put a box of nails in the Modern Museum? You know, some intrigue among people who are—whatever have you. Is it part of a daisy chain, like the Francis Bacon, uh, Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Twombly, and the guy that was in between that, brought that stuff together? It was all one big daisy chain.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was also partly the Cold War, [01:24:00] the—the USIA using abstraction, rock n' roll and other things to project a disruptive kind of role model behind the Iron Curtain.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, but that was—that came out of this stuff.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right.

KNOX MARTIN: The art comes first and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The art came first.

KNOX MARTIN: —the art bullshit.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, but it was juiced.

KNOX MARTIN: Art is never journalism. It's never personal expression. It's not therapy. Art is about art. About itself. About how it plays with itself. That's what a Mozart—the great Mozart is. I mean, when I listen to a Mozart, I'm home.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you see a connection, also not only with poetry, but mathematics?

KNOX MARTIN: Yes. That's right. Well, Seurat said—Seurat, one aspect of him, he's one of the greatest artists of all time.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: The one guy who was in that area is Muqi.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes. The persimmons.

KNOX MARTIN: The persimmons. He's in that area. The harbor scenes, the bay of a Seurat are scary, sacred, incredible, implacable things. And—and the, you know, in other words, very much like, Agatha Christie, anybody you can think of, uh, Sherlock Holmes, comes out of Poe's *Murder in the Rue Morgue*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: So one creative strike and the sparks go all over the place. Poe is that. And then for a monster artist like Baudelaire to pick it up, and for Manet to illustrate—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: —the translations from—of Poe from—of [01:26:00] Baudelaire from Poe, illustrates *The Black Cat*, instead of—uh, an extraordinary painting of Manet of Mallarmé. Paul Valéry says, "Mallarmé takes poetry to beyond the farthest star," then he elaborates on that. He goes into whole essay about what it meant. His *coup de dés*, *Throw the Dice*, goes into, uh, Einstein, and says God doesn't play dice with the universe. An amazing connection. Amazing connection.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: See, so—so, I mean, simply, this guy Paley had nothing whatsoever to do with art. Art is about art. Uh, this component of a compote dish by Cézanne begins to speak to the corner and it's elongated this way, so it has a congress with this little chamber group. Then the drape goes down, points down, and then the figures in the drape are the rhyme of the bottle in the drape.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: And the straight and the curve sets this off, and the tabletop doesn't meet.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: And there's a little edge of a chair that makes a curve against a straight that's divine. And then—then a painting of a so-called background, it's like a chord of Bach coming through the whole thing. And so, this—this music comes together and the reciprocity of the elements, and the curtain behind, and the table. And—and an onion, leaves [01:28:00] become the leg of a table in another painting that's on the floor. So—so, the leaves of the onion becomes the table leg, and this thing comes up and the—exactly what I'm talking about. Here's the start of the onion, becomes the leg of this table in this painting, and this curve, right? And then you've got the apples, and it rhymes with the stomach with an indentation is a cheek—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Like this is a cast of the Cupid—

KNOX MARTIN: —there's an apple.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —with apples.

KNOX MARTIN: Huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. I'm just—I have to describe it to the, uh, to the recording. What we're looking at. What is the exact title of that? Can you read that on the back? It's a Cezanne. It's a vertical composition of the cast of a Cupid or a Putto, surrounded by fruit. Any luck reading that?

KNOX MARTIN: I don't believe the title of this thing. Can you read it? Right there. Still life with—what?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: *Still Life with Putto*.

KNOX MARTIN: That's what I thought it said, Putto.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Putto. Putto is like, yeah, the little Cupid baby.

KNOX MARTIN: Putto. I never heard that. *Still Life with Putto*. And then you see it—you see this whole thing coming in this way, and then this straight and this straight against these curves, right?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you tell your students to, uh, do a crit of their compositions by turning them upside down or having a look at them from other—

KNOX MARTIN: Most—most of the students, [01:30:00] I tell him—okay. They show me a finished painting? I say, now turn it upside down. And everyone looks and says, "Wow." I say, now it's fresh. You're no longer painting the things you're conditioned to paint, right? I mean, every fuck and his brother, dictated by the Florentine Renaissance, the foreground goes here, the middle ground goes here, the mountain goes here, the sky goes way back. And you're conditioned to see those post card effects. See? Anyway.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, why is it important for people to understand art?

KNOX MARTIN: That's—they don't have to. It is not—the students—I don't know if I told you this. I've got this Van Eyck on the wall. Fantastic reproduction. Beautifully done.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, you told us this last week.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, yeah.

KNOX MARTIN: And I talked about how the wall was painted, how the brick was painted, the shoes painted, et cetera. Go over the whole thing, this and that, this and that. And I said, "Now, all of you, it's going to be here the rest of the afternoon. Familiarize yourself with it. Go look at it." And I told them yesterday, "Not one of you fucks came up and looked at it. Nobody did. You ignored it the rest of the afternoon. When I asked you to look at the way the floor is painted. Look at the crenulations on her belt; look at the crenulation of this—on the sleeve. Look how the hair is painted. Look at the painter and—and the people in the mirror. Look at the stations of the cross," and so on and so on. And I—I didn't know where that's gonna lead me, because I told them, "Hey, you didn't go up there."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you think even people who don't necessarily understand how to read a work of art, just being exposed to it is going to do them some good? [01:32:00]

KNOX MARTIN: Nothing. Zero. It's a blank. It's a blank. Uh, the recent thing, Picasso's piece he used of black—backdrop in the restaurant, the Four Seasons. He said, "It doesn't mean anything to anybody. We're gonna put in a— [. . . -GR] Damien Hirst here instead of a Picasso.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Like you said, Muzak. You were talking earlier about the Japanese scroll and the Tokonomon [ph]; that it was not Muzak, that it had a function.

KNOX MARTIN: And—and the wildest thing is, everybody from the university—the guys who are heads of the university—the faculty at the Yale University, I said, "You don't know what you're talking about." How—don't you find it's a criminal thing to teach something you know nothing about? Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Winning friends and influencing people, as usual. [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: We want you to join our gym and go to the gym with us. I said, "No thank you. I'm going back to New York and paint."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What are you working on now?

KNOX MARTIN: We can—we can go in—I'm working on this, which is a combination of, like I've been—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I'm gonna move the recorder here for that.

KNOX MARTIN: There's a stack of stuff here, and I have—I have about 400 of these things that I've been doing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's marvelous.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. Uh, every once in a while, I give a demonstration. The—the funniest thing is, [01:34:00] uh, you know this big hullabaloo about Weiwei?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Ai Weiwei, yeah sure.

KNOX MARTIN: Ai Weiwei. So he was a pupil of mine some years ago, Ai Weiwei. So he says, "I went to the League and I was studying with Knox Martin, he's the only teacher I remember." But now this guy was in class—I think I told you—he was doing these little gray nudes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Really?

KNOX MARTIN: Came into class—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Little academic nudes?

KNOX MARTIN: He was doing these little gray nudes—and I said, you know, get a little—get a piece—now let the color—and I showed him some Zen moves with color, and I said, "Do me a favor. Paint a barn with some chickens and a cat and a rooster and a horse, and he did. And people from that class came to see it. It was so unusual. And he said, "But I don't understand what I'm doing." I said, "Good." So then he says to me, he says to me, "Would you show me how to use brush?" So I said to him, I said, "What do you do in China?" He says, "I am calligraphy expert." So I say to myself silently, he wants me to show him how to use a fucking brush?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: So I said, "Look. You have your brushes, Nick [ph]?" "Yes." I said, "Bring them into class and we'll have a demonstration." So I got all the students around and so, he takes his—grinds the ink, takes his brush, gets so much water. I said, "Now, do a calligraphy." So I did a light thing, I did some bamboo. Very—painted like this, the bamboo.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think there's a YouTube of that, there's a video that's made.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, but that's later.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. Later, right. [01:36:00]

KNOX MARTIN: But I did that for him. "Oh!" I said—but he would take off the exact amount of water, dip it in the ink that he ground, and do a calligraphy. I said, "And you want me to show you how to use a brush?"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: And after he did this, the class—class applauded.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

KNOX MARTIN: Right?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Great story.

KNOX MARTIN: So a few weeks later he left the class, and some months later I saw him

coming down from another class, and he had a little gray nude under his arm.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Uh-oh.

KNOX MARTIN: So then he went back to China, and because of his descent and because this is—this is art, you know why? Because I say so. So that's Weiwei, anything he does. Scatters junk on the floor, this is art. So he's—he's a big wheel now. He's having a giant show, 32,000 feet, in Germany, space.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you see that, uh, ink art exhibition at the Met?

KNOX MARTIN: The what? Say again?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The ink art show—

KNOX MARTIN: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The contemporary Chinese?

KNOX MARTIN: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It had a few interesting things in it.

KNOX MARTIN: I—I will go see it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think it's over, but it was—it was—he had a little piece in it. A little wave, ceramic porcelain wave. But there were some people, uh, doing sort of traditional Chinese ink painting with, uh, with a few very interesting contemporary twists that were, I think—

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, but these questions illuminate a lot of things. [01:38:00] Why is—it isn't—it is not important. The art that's done wields its way through. For example, T. S. Eliot. I—I say—T. S. Eliot, when he wrote "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Do you know the poem?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: Pound was behind him to print it. He changed literature. At Oxford, I think. No longer was poetry ever taught or literature ever taught the old way. In order to appreciate [inaudible], you had to teach it—I mean, you had to learn it. The same thing with art; you—[inaudible], whatever he's exposed to, whatever he's doing, if you don't teach art, you know, again, like, um, the guy taught anatomy. What?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hale.

KNOX MARTIN: Beverly Hale.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Cross talk.]

KNOX MARTIN: And we talked at length about things. We'd meet after class and talk and talk. And in—the only thing you get on—on the tube is him talking about—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Anatomy?

KNOX MARTIN: Anatomy. And he gives this demonstration. And he was full of humor, this guy. So he said "Look, what I'm teaching you is technique and science. It is not art."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, he knew the difference.

KNOX MARTIN: Huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He knew the difference.

KNOX MARTIN: And the—and the discussions we had. I mean, something that I— [01:40:00] you know, it's not using it—I think I talked about it. In drawing the hands?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm[affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What advice would you give to anyone who wants to understand art?

KNOX MARTIN: Uh—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Someone who sees, like say, who goes to the Met, sees a Titian, sees the *View of Toledo* by El Greco. Doesn't—doesn't understand what's happening to them emotionally and they want to kind of get closer to it. What would you tell them to do?

KNOX MARTIN: Here—here's an example. There was a collector who came to me. Knox, we want to buy a piece of yours. I said—I knew what he had. And I said—I needed the money. And I said, "Why would you ever want a piece of mine?" "Well, people are talking about it, I guess." So I said, "Only one condition; that you come to the Metropolitan with me."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Oh, you told us this. Yeah. To the Veronese.

KNOX MARTIN: With the—what a memory. My God.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, we just talked about it a couple hours ago.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. So—so the—talked about the Veronese, and they started off saying, "Knox we've heard this. We've been to college. We've heard this stuff. We've had it through the nose." I said, "Give me a few more minutes." And I talked about it, and their mouths started opening, and they said, my God, this is the first time we've been touched by art. Now, uh, Jim Harithas. He was the curator at the Dallas Museum, then at the Corcoran Gallery. So he asked, "Could I go to the museum with you? I've heard about it." I said sure. We became close friends. We go to the museum and he starts to talk [01:42:00], and I said, "Jesus Christ, fucking shut up. Let me talk to you." And I talked to him about the museum and he said, "I have trained museum directors, and this is the first time I've been touched by art." Now, I was at the League and I was giving a talk, and this guy bounces in. And he said, "Excuse me." And he stood up before the whole class and he said, "I wanted to let you know something; I've been this, and I've been training museum directors and this and that, and I've done Corcoran—" and he said, "And this man talked to me about art and it's the first time I've been touched by art." So I mean, you know, you have to—you have to have the true passion to understand that art is the creation of reality. You are the music and you have to hit this with all the passion and industry, and you must surround yourself with art, and surround yourself with the right guys. You don't surround yourself with any fucking Russian art or American art or British art. Uh, you know, if you surround yourself with—they call it French art. It isn't French art. Manet, Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso, and the only guy who went into it and got it on that lineage was de Kooning. And all these guys, including van Dyck, go to Titian. Rubens was a—Rubens went to the Prado, copied all the Titians, 1640.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: [01:44:00] And gave to Velázquez, Titian. Velázquez is one of the guys that are as high as you can go. So a Velázquez, a Titian, a van Eyck, a Brouwer. So if you surround yourself with that—so I've got a reproduction of a Matisse over here. Uh, here's—what—who's that guy again?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Van Eyck.

KNOX MARTIN: Van Eyck, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: An Indonesian mask.

KNOX MARTIN: Um, the funny thing, another inheritance I had, two guys going to prison, and they gave me the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, yeah. The—the car and the suit.

KNOX MARTIN: No, this is another.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Another two guys that went to prison?

KNOX MARTIN: Another two guys went to prison.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. You know a lot of jailbirds.

KNOX MARTIN: And, uh, I had the artifacts. I put them here. They didn't fit. This looks like a mess, but you put something on the wall, it didn't go. I'd get rid of it. Put something else on the wall. Go—I had a beautiful little crystal sculpture I put right here. Didn't fit. These—that fits, rights? Goes—goes with the stuff. Krazy Kat fits over here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's your critic there, right?

KNOX MARTIN: Huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's your critic, with the wings?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. No, when I got to sleep at night, this fucking guy flies around—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: Each room. Investigates everything, sees everything. Says, "Why did you move that painting from there?" I say, I'm sorry. I'll put it back. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hey, thanks very much. I think this is really great, and, uh, we've done quite a stretch here.

KNOX MARTIN: Thank you, James. Thank you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: My pleasure, Knox.

KNOX MARTIN: It's a great pleasure working with you. Really, really, really.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Always is likewise, working with you. Thanks so much. [01:46:00]

KNOX MARTIN: Thank you. Thank you.

[END OF TRACK.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're resuming. This is July 23. James McElhinney with Knox Martin. Take two. You were talking about a gathering of artists.

KNOX MARTIN: A solo—so—so, this was a question about Donald Droll, and I have no compunction or hesitation to talk about Mr. Droll. Uh, now—now—so here was this group at—here was this group at the Rauschenberg dinner for a group of artists. Now, the—Elaine de Kooning, Tworikov and Mrs. Tworikov and his group, sat in the middle of the floor on the rug and they were discussing *Alice in Wonderland*, and laughing about this and this and this. And, uh, Elaine said, "Oh, remember? There goes Bill." And she looks at de Kooning—that was her husband, Bill—he's going—she kicks that he goes up the chimney, Bill, in *Alice in Wonderland*, and they're laughing and this and that. So Rauschenberg was in the next room and he comes back with a major little de Kooning collage, and he—and he holds it up. "Look what I got? We got this for our wedding present." And de Kooning says, "Where the hell did you get that?" You know, really miffed. So the assumption was that Charlie Egan had given it to him, but it was Donald Droll, we learned later, who was robbing Egan and giving it as gifts. [00:02:00] And people were accusing Egan, Charlie Egan, of robbing the work, and he never did that. Never did it with my work, all the time I was with him, the shows, et cetera, et cetera. And so, the history of that—and we used to—we used to get in my car and drive up to see Reuben Nakian and his work, and—and I helped him install Nakian's work, et cetera, et cetera. Uh, but the—now—also, the guy that—that Charlie Egan had in his stable, was, um, what the heck. The guy with the boxes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Cornell?

KNOX MARTIN: Cornell.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Joseph Cornell.

KNOX MARTIN: Joseph Cornell. So Joseph Cornell boxes run about \$5 or \$6 million now, for sale at the auction. Or more. So Donald Droll gave Susan a major Cornell called *Lobster Quadrille*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Susan Weil?

KNOX MARTIN: Susan Weil. Bob's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wife.

KNOX MARTIN: —wife.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: So he'd called up Susan. He'd opened a gallery with—it was Xavier Fourcade.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. The '70s.

KNOX MARTIN: So he asks Susan, he says, "Can I borrow that Cornell from you?" She says of course. So he borrowed the Cornell. A month later, "I'd like to have the Cornell back," says Susan. "I sold it," said he. [00:04:00] Donald Droll.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Another infamous rug merchant in the art business. Why do you think—I mean, there are a lot of people in the gallery world who are perfectly honest and gentlemen. Why do you suppose it abides these near criminal types? If a person were to do that in another industry, they would end up in a lot more hot water. A lot more trouble. I know, no doubt, you must have known people who were represented by Larry Salander, and that was quite a shock. Maybe we shouldn't talk about that.

KNOX MARTIN: No, no. I knew—I knew Salander. But this is—this is not—this is so—I mean, it's the way the world is run. Uh, what's the name of this guy that took people for \$56 billion?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Madoff. Bernie Madoff.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. Madoff.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. He made off with their money.

KNOX MARTIN: The most trustworthy guy. Donald Droll, right? Looked like a successful college graduate. He was like, alert, and there wasn't one trace of him being crooked. He was the crookedest fuck of the world. I mean, you would trust him with your life; say here! He had that appearance. He's the guy—I was going to go to Paris for the friends of—caught between two crooks. I was gonna go to Paris and do an edition [00:06:00] for the friends of the Dallas Museum. I was gonna do lithographs. And, and they were spotting the trip to Paris and I always wanted to work in that ambiance, and Matisse and Picasso had done prints there, and I was like, "Yay." So just before that, I was with the Fischbach Gallery, and he became the curator of the Fischbach Gallery. And, uh, there was a huge painting—oh. No, the Whitney was gonna buy a painting. So I went to—I went to—now, during the show I saw this big painting, a huge painting, and I said, "My God, this needs a major change. It's amazing, but I'm gonna have to change this thing." So I was gonna go to Paris. And I told Donald Droll, I said—there were 14, 15 paintings there. Huge painting. I said, "Show the Whitney everything but this one. Under no circumstances show them this one. I'm gonna put a mark on the back of it not to show it. I'll turn it face to the wall. Do not show this; I have to work on it." So I go—I go to Paris and I have an amazing time there, unfortunately taken by another crook who took the edition that I was making for the Dallas Museum and made an extra edition for himself.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who was this?

KNOX MARTIN: Hugh MacKay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Ah.

KNOX MARTIN: So Hugh MacKay, [00:08:00] and when I came back to the gallery, uh, this guy says, "Hey, the Whitney took your painting!" I said, "Yeah, which one?" Of course.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: The one I told him not to take. They're crazy about the painting. So I called—Dumont was head of the Whitney at the time, and I called and I said, "Monty, you've got to

let me come to the Whitney and I have to make a change." He says, "Knox Martin, we own this now. We've photographed it, it's in our file. It's on the wall. Right? On the Whitney. You can't touch it." I said, "I just have to make a—" I had a big change, "—a small change." "Knox Martin, don't go near it." So that Tuesday, I had a long black raincoat on and a flat, flat paint thing filled with white paint. A big, fat brush. And I went in there, and it wasn't so—it wasn't so hard at that time. The attendants, the guards, were in the other room. I painted this whole fucking section out without getting paint on the floor. Guard says, "Vandal, vandal!" And the guards come running in. I says, "No, it's me." "How do we know that?" And I took out my driver's license. "See the name on the wall? There's my name on the wall, same name—" "Oh." And then suddenly Monty comes—Dumont came into the room. "Knox, I told you not to touch that." I said, "I'm just taking out fingerprints." I said, "Look at this." "Don't touch it!" And there was a little fingerprint on the edge, and I went—said, "I'm just taking out fingerprints, that's all." They never knew.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: Now they know. Now they know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well how much—how much [00:10:00] real understanding do you think a lot of people working at museums have that—

KNOX MARTIN: None.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —when they look at a work of art, do they know it's art?

KNOX MARTIN: None. The only way they can work—the only way these people can work—one of the stupidest guys is this Montebello, you know? I had a student in my class who was part of his immediate entourage working for Montebello, and Montebello came down and he said—Philippe de Montebello. He says, "Okay, guys, I just want to tell you something; that Vincent Van Gogh couldn't tell the difference between yellow and blue. He was on digitalis and that impaired his decision, right?" And anyone who's read the notebooks of Vincent Van Gogh during that time, was using a blue, he says, "I want this fantastic yellow." I mean, the yellow hair, the gasgay [ph], and the deepest blue that I can get out of this color to contrast. So here's this Montebello telling them that he can't tell the difference between yellow and blue, as against the written thing of the same time that he's talking about that?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: So how dare he? Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, he could do no more harm now.

KNOX MARTIN: Huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He can do no more harm now.

KNOX MARTIN: Well, he's—he's on Channel 13.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He is. Well, look. At least—least there's a show about art, or a show about something they call art. At least there's a show about what's going on in museums and galleries, and that's a—that's more than *Let's Make A Deal*.

KNOX MARTIN: Well, it's a strange thing. Like, as a student going on, [00:12:00] you knew that Rembrandt was a giant, and you studied the Rembrandt and you did this, and looked at Rembrandt, and you had a book on Rembrandt, you read about his life, Rembrandt, Rembrandt, Rembrandt, right? I'm at the—I'm at the Metropolitan museum, and I turn like this, and I suddenly see the Rembrandt, and I said, "Oh." I saw it. See, so what does it take to see that? With art, the study of it, and the study had nothing to do with it. I mean, suddenly my art books were new.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: So you go, "Oh shit."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In other words, if you study the right way, great art will always surprise you.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. There's so much you have to go—same thing. Now, I studied Cézanne, and the reason I studied Cézanne more than—Matisse said, "If Cézanne's right, I'm right." Picasso said, "Cézanne is my father [the father of us all]." De Kooning said, "Everyone think that I'm a super Cubist, but it is Cézanne that I work through." Juan Gris, says "Cézanne—" same thing, right?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: And I would look at Cézanne, okay. And I knew I didn't get it. Something I didn't get. So one day there was a loan—I was still a student. There was a loan exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum, and here was Pissarro and here was Sicily [ph] and here was the post-Impressionists, Impressionists. And I looked out of the window and it had just rained. And the black bark of the trees, the bark, and people walking through, I could see the colors. And I went back to see the rest of the show and I turned, like that, [claps], and it's as if—like—you know, [00:14:00] like a—the sound of a refrigerator goes off and you know there was a sound? I could see the Cézanne. I said—and it didn't have anything to do with an analysis of the Cézanne. I had analyzed Cézanne. Gone over every fraction of every part of it, and here I just glanced at this thing. It was a guy sleeping on the bank of a river.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: A landscape thing. And I said, "Oh." And again, the big rush after that. Then—then you could see Cézanne. Now, sometimes I'm carried away with analysis of a Cézanne. I'll—I'll look at a Cézanne—I will. I always keep this here. And I—I look at this and look at it, and if I see this, then I see this, then I see, you know, the way it moves back up this way. That's the one I had in the—in the—in the drawing book, remember?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, it was a—it was a different one. The drawing book that we worked on—

KNOX MARTIN: Same one.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —together. Yeah, the *Visual Language of Drawing*, yes. Where you did the diagramming—

KNOX MARTIN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —of—of the composition.

KNOX MARTIN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it—that great book that was done in—was it the '50s or '60s by Erle Loran? It's—look, there's nothing else.

KNOX MARTIN: He don't get it. He don't get it. But anyway—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's—it's closer to an explanation than—

KNOX MARTIN: Well, it's—but anyway, I mean, to say that the ear pulls up this way, this follows the eyebrow up and the hemisphere, this does that, the features are pulled this way, the action of this going down that way, and this is pulled up, and this has like four or five rows, different rows. The red goes *wap, wap*, and off. But that's not [00:16:00]—that's not the Cézanne. That's what he's doing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: But then all of a sudden, there's this. You know, the whole thing. And it's—it's an epiphany. In other words, when all is dropped and—there's looking, which is the highest thing to do, is to look, right?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you can look at—I guess what I hear you saying is that you can have a look at the bones and the flesh and the logic of a picture, but the thing is, that's like looking at a corpse. You've got to breathe life into it, and that's the art.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, well it touches you with some—so—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And that's what the Loran work doesn't explain.

KNOX MARTIN: So—so—right. So there's—no—I mean, I've read everything ever written about Cézanne, and—and you know, encyclopedic things, everywhere. And no one goes near it. One guy who lectured on Cézanne at the Barnes Foundation—did I tell you about it?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why don't we hear it again, because I know the Foundation and they've got many Cézannes. In fact, I think there are more Cézannes in Philadelphia than there are in France at this point.

KNOX MARTIN: Oh, forever.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That'd be 400.

KNOX MARTIN: They didn't have any Cézannes. That show you how fucking stupid they were.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: They—they—when, all of a sudden the roof came off the—off the buildings. We have no Cézannes. So go through this guy, this guy, this guy to buy Cézannes back for France because they were so—art was so alien to them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Philly, Chicago, New York, Washington. Some great—

KNOX MARTIN: Here's an interesting thing. [00:18:00] Uh, this is right about when I left the League in 1950. My friend just gave this to me, Knox Martin.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's wonderful. Well, I can see a lot of the same ideas are at work now. So this is—this is a 60-year-old—65-year-old painting. I look at this bouquet and I look at the drawings that are around the room. You're still—

KNOX MARTIN: I was stunned by it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

KNOX MARTIN: I said, "My God, this is good." Look at—look at the—look at the reproduction—or, look at the toaster. Fucking give me a break. And those flowers? And this—this was a great tapestry that I had.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, the toaster rhymes with—it's interesting. The toaster rhymes with the vase, and so, this becomes another kind of a bouquet.

KNOX MARTIN: There you go.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Bouquets on the inside, not on the outside. That's very—that's very cool.

KNOX MARTIN: And that fucking spoon and the cup.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: I looked at the thing, I said, "I haven't seen this in—"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sixty-five years, yeah.

KNOX MARTIN: —60 years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

KNOX MARTIN: So we're doing the same thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] Well, they say you only need one good idea, and just to mine it aggressively. Now, another thing you were talking about, apropos to Albers. You were talking about Albers quite a bit. I mean, you had gone to Yale at the invitation of Jack Tworkov, Albers was already gone. Alive, but not—not—not [00:20:00] teaching there.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Um, I have in my notes, uh, "KM prefers, quote, interest subjective

rather than quote Abstract Expressionism." I remember you—

KNOX MARTIN: Intersubjectives [ph]. Remember who always buys a Latin American—Latin—Latino, uh, he used the term "intersubjectives" instead of Abstract Expressionists.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, before you express quite a lot of disagreement with the idea of—of Abstract Expressionism as—as—as—

KNOX MARTIN: I mean, how can you equate Pollock with Rothko, with Clyfford Still? Clyfford Still is one of the worst painters I've ever seen in my life. The earlier things, when he was doing figures and things, were so fucking bad, so miserable, right? Now, if I did this when I was still a kid, that painting? There's nothing like that with Clyfford Still. He had these hideous paintings when he was doing social—social—they were horrible.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In the '30s?

KNOX MARTIN: Huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In the '30s?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, in the '30s, I guess. And, um, let's see.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you were also talking about Albers, I guess, as being—I mean, he was an important teacher at that time, but you were saying that the values of painting embodied by Cézanne [00:22:00], by Tintoretto, by Ingres, by—by van Eyck, that these were all absent in—

KNOX MARTIN: They're absent in anything Albers ever conceived of.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You also had a story about going with a couple to the Met to look at a Veronese.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. The—the couple was gonna buy something from me. And, um—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And again, you looked at the bronze horse. You used, as an example, the bronze horse.

KNOX MARTIN: Right. This couple talking about the painting—and I knew their collection. I said, "Whoa." I said, "Look. The only way you can buy a piece of mine, if you come with me to the Metropolitan Museum." So they came for me, right downstairs, in this huge limo with the champagne, and all the kids in the neighborhood were looking in at this chauffeured limo, and I came down and waved to them, and we drove off to the Metropolitan Museum. And we stood in front of a Veronese. I said okay—start with it. So he says, "Knox. We've both been to college; we've had this up the kazoo." I said, "Give me a few minutes." And I talked to them and 15 minutes passed and they were—and at the end of the tour he says, "Knox, this is the first time we've ever been touched by art." And I showed them a few more things. In other words, I poured on—this, and so on and so forth, look at the light emanating from it, and et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. The rein of the horse goes with the [00:24:00] spear down here, these angles push this, this pushes this over this way, it opens, and—and look how the corners—look at the rhymes. Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So they—another guy, Jim Harithas, who had been the head of the Dallas Museum, and he had been the curator at the Corcoran Gallery, and he had trained a lot of museum—museum curators himself. And he came to my studio—he was brought there by another guy. Came to my studio. So we began to talk. I said, "Do something with me. Come to the museum with me." Jim Harithas. So he said, "Okay." So we go there and we stand in front of a painting and he starts to talk. I says, "Look. Will you shut up and let me talk? Just, don't say anything. Listen for a minute." And I talked about this Frans Hals. And—and he looks and he says, "I've trained museum directors" and blah, blah, blah and been "This—this is the first time I've ever been touched by art."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what—what made you teach? I mean, you describe your experience at Yale as being kind of adversarial, but then you're teaching at NYU, and then you finally get to the League.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah, well, when I was—I had no idea that I was ever gonna teach. So I got a call from Jack Tworkov and he said, "We've been reviewing [00:26:00] this—the board—and

we would like you to teach the graduate school at Yale University. Uh, you'll have this, you're open to a pension, your summers are paid for and you have medicine, insurance and everything." So I stepped over and said, "Art can't be taught." And I thought about it, and I talked to the guys that I knew up at Yale, and they said, "Knox, uh, Al Held said, 'They're a bunch of gangsters, and you'll be the chief gangster.'" That's Held's advice. Now, Joe Stapleton, remember him?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, I never worked with him.

KNOX MARTIN: He was—he was an instructor with the League. He was shot down shabbily by, uh, the director—what was his name? Italian name? Rosina.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, Rosina.

KNOX MARTIN: Rosina fucked him over. He was one of the most brilliant guys in the world. Uh, so Joe—I talked to Joe about teaching. He said, "Knox—" one day he says—and I didn't get it then. So I came home here and I was fucking around, I said, "Teaching?" And I opened the—opened a drawing book of Rembrandt, and I go and I open a page and here is a student drawing of the Annunciation. And there's a drawing by the [00:28:00] student of this angel, little angel, and Mary. Right? And Rembrandt had corrected it. He filled the page with it. The wings were up here, this goes over here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: I've got a copy of it, if you'd got to look and see it. It's right here. And so the student's angel comes to Mary and says, "Mary, you're the mother of God," and she goes, "Oh." The angel that Rembrandt—said, "Grr, Mary! You're the mother of God!" And she said—Mary said, "Oh, shit!" And then I knew—that was—in other words, each image. So I've done that. You get down and push comes to shove, it's this, this, this. Student shows me his work and I say, "Look," and I take a pencil, charcoal, brush; "Oh my God!" And the class can see it and they go, "Whoa!" Something had happened. And it's also, at the League, I've been teaching people how to sign, uh, a drawing or a painting. No one's ever done that. If you're gonna put a signature on it, it should be—it should be part of the life of the whole, instead of an afterthought in some corner.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, people think writing isn't a form of drawing, but it absolutely is.

KNOX MARTIN: I used to—I gave that in a course that was amazing. There was a course where I said, "Okay, everybody. A large piece of paper. Now, as if you were signing a check, fill the pad with your signature."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's a great assignment.

KNOX MARTIN: And I said look. [00:30:00] Look at the *l*, look at the *w*, look at the *o*, *k*. Look at this whole thing like that. That's a Rembrandt, this is an Ingres. This is any—this is Matisse. This is—anything you've ever dreamed of doing with drawing is right there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: With total authority and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: And, you know, get the swing of it. Then that—then that preceded an—extraordinary way. The next thing was, "Okay, now, close your eyes. Put the pencil in the middle of the paper, close your eyes." Large sheet of paper. "Draw a crocodile. Don't peek, you know? "Hold the crocodile." The essence was there. Everybody was going, "Oh my God." I says, "Okay, now, with your eyes opened, draw a farm scene; a horse, a dog, a cat and a rooster and a barn." And then we put that on the wall, and—and each of them said, "My God, that's the way I used to draw as a child." You know? What is—don't think of what a horse looks like; draw the—draw a horse.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what was it you said, when you were—when you were teaching at Yale, all the students migrated into your class?

KNOX MARTIN: It was—it was simply my presence. The guy that wrote—I have it written down here. George Parrino, he didn't write that part, but he did [00:32:00]—he wrote a

beautiful piece about my being there, and what it meant— [. . . -GR]

Uh, it's a very active little piece that he included in his book about, Knox Martin comes to Yale, and, uh—but I was—I was talking about Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Matisse, Miro. I was teaching in, uh, Italy. McElhinney—not McElhinney. What was his name?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Nick Carone?

KNOX MARTIN: No. He was in charge, but no.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Monte Castello, you mean that school?

KNOX MARTIN: Huh? Yeah, Monte Castello di Vibio. Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. Yeah.

KNOX MARTIN: So it's the Irishman.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: McGarrell?

KNOX MARTIN: McGarrell. So McGarrell—now, I went, and driving around I found one of the most gorgeous things in the world, it was a Shangri-La, a hill with an abandoned house, fields below, vineyards. And so I contacted the people. Said, may my class and I go and paint or draw there? You are welcome to. So we used to do that. McGarrell heard about it and he says, "can I take my—" I says, "Yeah. Make sure you clean up after yourself." So he comes back with his students, and the students [00:34:00] have paintings like this, and the sky is a dark alizarin, and the trees are painted black, and the grass is a brown-black. All of them the same. And I look at McGarrell and I says, "What are you doing?" And on a bunch of books that we got, I picked up a book with a Vincent Van Gogh with yellows and whites and great pale blue sky with—I said, "That's what this place is like. What are you doing?" "Don't tell me how to run my class." I mean, you go there, vineyards, the gorgeous blue sky, rolling hills, sheep. And this guy comes up with these little black, uh—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: My way or the highway. So he was basically teaching people a method of making a painting that was based on his own practice and not trying to teach them the truth of art.

KNOX MARTIN: Uh—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's very common though, don't you—I mean, there are people at the League who do that today. You look at the student shows and every, single student painting is the same as the next. That's a culture of teaching.

KNOX MARTIN: Uh, there was one thing I—I always wanted to do. For the summer in Monte Castello di Vibio, magnificent castle studio. So we get this great model, and I said, "You're gonna be in the same pose for this whole time." So—and I talked about Matisse would paint [00:36:00] a model for four or five months. It would take him that much to complete the thing. And so, you're gonna be here—and this model is not gonna move. I said—one of them says, "Can we put it to a vote?" I said, "No. The model is not gonna move. She's lying down comfortably and she's gonna be that way all summer." So three students said—came down one time and they said, you know, "The model is moving." And I said, "You mean she's breathing?" "Well, she fixes her hair, she moves her legs." "They get numb." Okay. I said, "I'm gonna give the class a demonstration." So McGarrell heard about it. He says, "Can I sit in on the demonstration?" I said sure. So my granddaughter, Maya, she's little, and I had introduced her to snails. You take these snails that are closed off and dead, you put a little water—and so, she had a menagerie of snails over everything. And she'd feed them rose petals. I said, "Do me a favor; bring this tureen to my class tomorrow." She used to sit in my classes all—bring the tureen loaded with fresh rose blossoms—blooms, bring a menagerie of snails. She did that. So I started to talk about art. So I removed the lid and the snails started to come out. McGarrell's there. So I take the spiral of the snail, right? And I take the tablecloth and I take the tureen and I make it a spiral into the tablecloth [00:38:00], I mean, you know, done so you can't see it, and make this go this way, and the snails are all moving. I said, "Look, they're all moving." Right? They're alive, they're breathing. And I do this, and rhyme this with this, and have it—and rhyme it with the rose blossoms and the whole thing. And McGarrell says, "I want you to know something. That's a truly great drawing." And he got up with a rolled-up newspaper—I wasn't finished yet—and he starts to swat flies. And he

doesn't look back at me, but he's going, bam! Then looks at me. Bam!

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] That's peculiar behavior, to say the least. You did a lot of teaching, uh, over the years. I remember recently speaking to Ninon Chaet, you know, the wife of Bernie who passed away a couple years ago.

KNOX MARTIN: I didn't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was not a pretty end, but she's alive and well and going to give his papers to the Archives of American Art so they will reside in Washington somewhere near your interview. Um, but she told me, when I saw her and had lunch with her a few months ago, I told her we were having this conversation. She said, "Oh, Knox Martin? I remember him throwing knives and swinging through the treetops to get to lunch." Is that true?

KNOX MARTIN: Uh, when I was a little kid I always thought I was Tarzan.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay.

KNOX MARTIN: I always had longish hair.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: And, uh, so [00:40:00] here was—summer at—summer at Yale—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Norfolk. Up in the hills of Connecticut.

KNOX MARTIN: And each instructor had a little cottage, with a picture window and a rail and stuff. And right outside of this off the rail is a tree, and there's a hill, and there was a lunchroom. So at that time, before going to the thing, I was practicing throwing knives. Now, I can't do it now, but I could take and throw it and catch a fly on the wall and not miss, ever. I mean, I would—I would practice for hours.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you had the throwing knives? You know, the flat, throwing knives that they —

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. I have them—I still have them. So I was throwing these knives with incredible accuracy, and I—and I was doing Kendo with a sword, and I was adept at that. So I used to wear a brace of knives. So what I would do is, I had worked out—do you know what a kip is with a—with a high bar?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. So I used to leap from the bannister into this tree, do a kip, come up and think—leap to the next branch and next branch, and there was a group of trees. And I would leap from the top of the things like that and land up on—the hill had gone up maybe—maybe a little more than half a block long, and I'd do it in the treetops, see? And land right near the lunchroom.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

KNOX MARTIN: And it was funny. One day I go up there, and I had a Great Dane, and he was running loose. Very friendly. So all of a sudden this big dog attacked him, a wild dog attacked him, at the middle of the lunch line. And I just happened to come out of the tree and I landed [00:42:00] and I threw myself on the dogs. And the three of us on the ground, I pulled them apart. And all of the guys in the lunch line says, you know, they talked about it for a long time. But George Wardlaw who was running the summer class, uh, he came down one time, "Knox, where are you? Knox?" I said, "I'm up here." And I had the whole class up in the tree. I was giving—I was giving a class in this incredible tree. Everyone was—I seated everyone on branches and we're talking about art and stuff. Then I'd leap off and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's quite a charismatic teaching style.

KNOX MARTIN: Well, when—when the student body moved into my class, graduate students at Yale, Al Held said to me, "Knox, are you giving these guys drugs?" I said, "Join the class. Listen." One day I filled—the door's closed, right? And I tiptoe over to the door, open the door and there was Bernard Chaet listening.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was no fool.

KNOX MARTIN: Huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was no fool. He was gonna get ideas. Well, you also, last time, spoke about Al Held as a friend, but also as a person who was, towards you at least, a little two-faced.

KNOX MARTIN: It was—you know, he shot me down whenever he could, and people of—of good position for me, you know, and he would shoot them down [00:44:00] by telling them I was an oddball. I might have been an oddball, but telling them that I was an oddball, that I did this—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who was he, Ozzie Nelson?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

GABRIELA RYAN: Reichian therapy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Reichian therapy.

KNOX MARTIN: Oh, Reichian therapy, Scientology. I looked into everything; Freudian psychology—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Zen.

KNOX MARTIN: Jung, Zen. In other words, everything is interesting. If—if you're awake, everything is amazing, Cézanne's time [ph].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you were—you were also talking about how you—you explored connections with the art of Japan, people like Ogata Kōrin, and, uh—

KNOX MARTIN: Ogata Kōrin, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —some of those—Ōbaku masters, and—

KNOX MARTIN: Right. And changed Al Held's whole fucking art and life. Uh, Ron Gorchav, that I was showing the Frans Hals to, shapes in a Frans Hals. And we're at a party and he calls. Al, hello. Al, come over and look at this. Show Al Held and soon, Al Held, the shapes and black and white stuff, and the way stuff goes. And Al Held, "Oh shit, Knox, that's you." So we saw each other at the end of the summer and we compared notes, and he said—I said, "What'd you do this summer?" He says, "Well, you know those things? I'm doing what you showed." And I had opened the book, and I had done some more things. And so he said, "Don't show those around," [00:46:00] you know. I mean, the prick was so fucking jealous and so tight that he wouldn't say to anybody, "Hey, this came from Knox Martin. My whole—all of my art changed because of this guy."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I think artists, when they get into conversation, trigger things. Things happen. It's like, we don't own any of it; we just get to use it if we're lucky. Is that a fair statement?

KNOX MARTIN: Perfect, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Um, let's get back a little bit and, uh, we're approaching sort of the end of this adventure today, but I wanted to get back and talk a little bit about, um, Bob Rauschenberg and the relationship you had with him and Susan Weil.

KNOX MARTIN: Susan and Bob Rauschenberg, they weren't married yet. And they came to the Art Students League and they attached themselves to me. So I invited them to come to my house, meet the family, meet my wife. We'd have dinners together and we'd travel, they went to shows, et cetera, et cetera. So we were—we were always together. And, uh—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is that at the time you were with Laura Bigler [ph]?

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: She—

KNOX MARTIN: That was the time when Bob had impregnated Susan. Susan Weil. He says, "I'm gonna marry Susan. She's pregnant. But I—I want to marry Laura, Laura Bigler."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [00:48:00] How did you meet her, at the League?

KNOX MARTIN: I was at the League, and every once in a while this woman would come in and everybody would go ape. One of the most beautiful women in the world. I mean, unbelievable, the stance and stuff. And she was a dancer with Jose Limon.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

KNOX MARTIN: So I'm in the Kantor class, right across from where I'm teaching right now, and a model appears on the stand and it's Laura. So I'm painting, painting, and she keeps looking at me. So when a break comes, she comes over and she allows the kimono robe to open a little bit. She says, "I'm here—I'm here because of you." I said, well, okay. So it developed from that. So we became very close. So with Bob, you know, Susan, Bob, Laura and I used to bounce around a lot. And, uh, it was difficult because I was married at the time and had a family, three children. So that was a complex set of affairs. So Bob told me, he says, "I'm set up to marry Susan but I want to marry Laura. I'm asking your permission." I says, "Don't ask my permission. I have no—I don't own anybody. Talk to Laura." So Bob Rauschenberg went to Laura Bigler and said, "Will you marry me?" She says, "No, I belong to Knox." As all women do. [00:50:00]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You said you used to spend a lot of time with the Rauschenbergs on Long Island Sound, or Long Island—

KNOX MARTIN: Her parents owned the most beautiful island in the sound, rock-something or another. And we used to go out there and paint together. And the strange thing, the place caught fire and the paintings I had done there, I left with them, and the paintings that Bob and I worked on together, burnt up.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In a fire?

KNOX MARTIN: In a fire. I never went back there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So when Rauschenberg went his way, did you keep in touch with him at all?

KNOX MARTIN: Uh, one day—now, I had loaned him my studio to work in. I had introduced him to Malevich—the Russian painter—and I hated Malevich; he does a black square—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

KNOX MARTIN: Or he does white paintings.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You introduced him to his work because Malevich was dead, right.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah. And Bob says, "I'm gonna do that, white paintings." So in my studio in the 20s, uh, he got the stuff together and he put it—put the stuff and did these white paintings. So—so I've been interviewed about this—there's a lady who's interviewing me about it. Says, "You mean he did those paintings?" Says, "Yeah." So.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [00:52:00] Who is the other interviewer?

KNOX MARTIN: I'm sorry?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who is the other interviewer, do you recall?

KNOX MARTIN: Uh—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was that done for the—for the Rauschenberg Foundation?

KNOX MARTIN: I don't know. It's here—it's here someplace.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's not crucial.

GABRIELA RYAN: Oral history.

KNOX MARTIN: Who?

GABRIELA RYAN: It's an oral history. I have—I have it on the computer.

KNOX MARTIN: Gaby might have it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, this is oral history, too. So there's oral history everywhere, I guess.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You'd also spoken about what you knew of Albers and Rauschenberg, because Rauschenberg of course always told everybody that—at least according to everything I've heard—that he was very influenced by Albers.

KNOX MARTIN: Well, it's—it's simply not true. And—

GABRIELA RYAN: And Jonathan Katz just interviewed you, too.

KNOX MARTIN: What?

GABRIELA RYAN: Jonathan Katz also just interviewed Knox for Rauschenberg for a book on the '50s—

KNOX MARTIN: Do you know who he is?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure. He's a—Jonathan has done some things with my wife. He's very involved with gay art history.

GABRIELA RYAN: Yeah, and they call it queer studies.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Queer studies.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I met him a number of times.

KNOX MARTIN: There was a big interview with him, then this other lady that interviewed me about Rauschenberg.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Karen Harris? No. Well, we don't need to know immediately anyway, but this is just sort of housekeeping. We can always do that.

KNOX MARTIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Uh, well, basically what we've done today is try to reconstruct the conversation that was lost when there was a media failure. So I think we've done that.

KNOX MARTIN: Good.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And it is always a pleasure to speak with you [00:54:00], maestro.

KNOX MARTIN: You too, James. Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thank you, so much.

KNOX MARTIN: Thank you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Big handshake. [. . . -Ed.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thank you, Knox.

KNOX MARTIN: Thank you, James.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thank you, Gaby.

[END OF TRACK.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

