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Oral history interview with Antonio Homem,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Antonio Homem on March 14 and 23, 2016. The interview took place at the home of Antonio Homem in New York, NY, and was conducted by James McElhinney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Antonio Homem and James McElhinney have reviewed the transcript. This transcript has been heavily edited at the request of the narrator 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 Antonio Homem, at his home at 94 Thompson Street in New York City, on Monday, the 14th of March, 2016 [for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution].

Good morning.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Good morning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: When was the first time you were cognizant of being in the presence of art?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, actually, it's unclear, the chronology, but I was very small. I must have been maybe five years old at the most, and my parents had some art books at home. They were two kinds, actually three. There were sort of heavy, hardbound books in French that stopped around 1900 or so, and there were American Pocket Books with reproductions of art. I remember the cover of one of them very well. It was what was supposed to be a Leonardo da Vinci, but it's not. It's an Ambrogio di Predis, with a lady, maybe with some pearls.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: And I very much enjoyed looking at them. And then there was a catalogue of a show—I'm 75, 76 years old, so when I was [that] age, it was soon after the Second World War. I think there must have been a show of German art somewhere, and there was a catalogue of it, and there was an image in it that I found very fascinating. I speak a lot. I don't know whether you need all of this, but I'll just go on.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's fine.

ANTONIO HOMEM: And there was an image that I found fascinating, and I find it fascinating that I did find it fascinating, because I still do. It's a print by a German engraver [Hans Baldung Gruen] which represents a horse with a man lying on the ground in perspective. And I always thought that on the—what do you call it—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Forehead?

ANTONIO HOMEM: —forehead of the man, there was a mark of the horse's hoof. That was invented by me, but it spoke precisely to my imagination, and I think that my first approach to art had a lot to do with literature and with imagination.

I suppose that the first artist that I was very impressed with was Bosch. I saw his work at the Prado when I was 13 years old. I had taken my first trip out [of] Portugal, and I was very impressed with him. That, of course, led me to Surrealism, which interested me a lot. And I think that art which was—which interests me very much nowadays—which was less literary, which had less to do with literature, was not as interesting to me when I was very young.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I recall a story, perhaps apocryphal, of a journalist asking Joan Miró if he considered himself a Surrealist, and he said, "I'm from España, therefore I must be a Surrealist." Being that it's a surreal, surreal place in some sense.

ANTONIO HOMEM: [Laughs.] Yes, yes. But then, of course, one can be quite a realist in a surrealist place, so I think it's more an attitude than an interest that one has. And I do think that Surrealism—and I don't know whether, for instance, Miró would agree with that. Of course, there are many possible Surrealisms and attitudes to Surrealism, but I think that the idea of a literary art, an art that is linked with ideas and with storytelling, in a certain way, is, for me, very linked to it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you think that there's something particular about Iberian culture that has led to, or

informs in some way, the literature of people like Márquez and Borges? Is there something?

ANTONIO HOMEM: I'm not sure. I don't think so. I always tend to be skeptical about geographical, cultural geographical links, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: As a matter of fact, for instance, going from Surrealism and literature, I had a very interesting first—I told you about Bosch, but then there was something that I think was quite interesting about my first encounter, in a certain way, with American art. I must have been 15 years old, so maybe 14 or 15, and I went to Paris [for] the first time, and my father took me to a show I would never have gone to see, which was a show of American art [from] the Museum of Modern Art. And of all the paintings that were shown, there was one that I was quite amazed and interested by. It was the Edward Hopper painting, that I think the Modern has, of the interior of a movie house, with the usherette.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: Now, the reason that surprised me so much was that it was a subject matter that I knew very well, and I had never thought that it could be that something that was so banal, very much part of my everyday life, could be transformed into art. And that is quite interesting to me, in terms of my interest in Pop art later on, because in a certain way, it was already a door to that. But it was a door to that that, at the same time, I think, was linked precisely with that interest in Surrealism, [with that] interest in de Chirico, in metaphysical painting. Because I think that, in Hopper, there is a strong link with it. So for me, that is interesting, the way that ideas come and just continue and branch out into other things.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So that quality that you find shared by de Chirico and Hopper, would you characterize it as a kind of a suspension of time? Or—

ANTONIO HOMEM: That, too, but also—yes, a suspension of time, but also in cultural ways: an idea about an antiquity and modernity that sort of fuse together. You know, de Chirico at the beginning was very influenced by an artist [Arnold Böcklin]. His name now, I'm having a blank with. I can send it to you or give it to you the next time. And it had to do very often with mythological themes that he also used. But the way he deals with them, and the way Hopper dealt with that usherette—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: Of course, at the time I didn't know that; I don't know whether I had seen de Chirico in art books. He impressed me very much, and so, in a way, I think it was all linked.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're speaking—the de Chiricos of which you speak are the ones, I assume, of the sort of architectural spaces, with the trains.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, exactly. Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Not the later—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Bunch of bananas.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Greco-Roman, yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, I don't think they would have reproduced them at the time, but I would have liked them, too, of course.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: They also link with all of that, as a matter of fact.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: You see, in Lisbon, and at that age, I was totally dependent on what would be published. And sometimes it's quite surprising. I left Lisbon in '56, so when I was 16, and I know that I saw in a bookshelf in Lisbon—because it seems to have made an impression and I still remember it—a catalogue that must have been remarkably modern, which was of the torn papers of Matisse [paper cut-outs]. And I'm surprised that there was, in Lisbon, a bookshelf with a catalogue of those. That I would [have seen] it in '55, '56—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: —it must have been, more or less, when he started showing them. I'm not quite sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, two years after he died, I think. He died in '54.

ANTONIO HOMEM: He died in '54. So it must have been pretty close, nevertheless, to the publication of the torn papers and all.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how did all of these encounters with art indirectly—and, of course, directly, at the Prado and whenever you were able to see works in person at museums—how did that inform your trajectory in terms of higher education?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Oh, it didn't at all. My higher education was entirely dictated by my father, and [my interests] had absolutely no link with it. But then it's true that I had no idea of what I could do with my interests. With the interests I had at the time, there were so very few options, and I thought, What could I do? I didn't even know that I could do what I [later] did, basically, work in an art gallery. There were no art galleries to speak of in Portugal. And so I thought, Well, I could be a teacher. I thought that it would interest me to be a teacher in literature or something like that.

But I had no idea, really, so I followed my parents'—my father's—wishes, studying engineering. By then I was in Switzerland, where I went to study. And I spent some years—that for many years I thought were completely wasted years—just trying to cope with my situation. You know, Rauschenberg, there's a movie on Rauschenberg in which he said something that I thought was very funny, because I recognized totally my situation in those years, in which he talks about going to school. And he says, "Every day I went school, there was more I didn't know." [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: And I totally recognized my situation. Now, those wasted years were incredibly important for me, I realized later on, because it was during those years that I realized what I was interested in, and what I could do. I had married quite young, and I felt very much of a responsibility towards my parents, towards my family, and I felt I had to do something for them. And what seemed to be what I had to do for them was something that I was really not interested [in] at all, so it really was a big problem. And in a funny way, I guess that my separation from my wife was very helpful, because it was very liberating, in the sense that I suddenly felt that—and afterwards, also, finishing my studies—I felt, well, finally, I was free, too.

And meanwhile, I had met Ileana and Michael [Sonnabend] some two years before, and at a point, Ileana told me that she thought that I really was making a mistake, that I should be doing what I did later on. And she said, "Well, why don't you come and work at the gallery?" And I didn't want to, because I wanted to finish my studies and all that, because of my parents. But the moment I did finish my studies, I went to Paris, and I definitely knew that whatever I was going to do, it had to do with—it was not very clear what I was going to do, but I liked the idea of the gallery and what the gallery showed.

Yes, all of that was actually Michael and Ileana; [they] were very liberating, of course, for me. I mean, I was very happy with my parents, especially with my mother. My father was a little out of connection with me, but still, they were very nice, very loving, and in many ways quite remarkable. But I must say that Ileana and Michael were very much the real parents for me, in the sense that they did show me what I wanted and what I could be.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What year did you start working at the gallery?

ANTONIO HOMEM: I met Ileana in '65, but I only started working at the gallery in '68. So there were several years during which I knew Ileana and Michael, but again, as I said, I didn't feel free to interrupt—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You were still studying at that point? You were not practicing as an engineer? No?

ANTONIO HOMEM: I had finished. No, I never practiced as an engineer. The moment I finished the last exams, I left.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You left and went to Paris.

ANTONIO HOMEM: And I went to Paris, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And had you known Paris, prior to that?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes, of course. Well, as I said, since I was 14.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right, and where did you go to school in Switzerland?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Oh, it was sort of the equivalent of MIT here. It was the ETH in Zurich. It was a technical university.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How long was the course of study?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Oh, it was probably four or five years, but I stayed there forever. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, but Paris was never a residence? It was really—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Paris was never a residence until I went to live in Paris. And I must say, it was not that much of a residence afterwards, because we traveled a lot.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: From 1970 on, we were spending like two weeks in New York, two weeks in Paris, and it was a period during which I have—it was very difficult to say where—I mean, one was living nowhere. Actually, it was very pleasant. We were traveling continuously between Paris and New York. We were traveling a lot in Europe, and we would spend all the holidays in Venice, where we had an apartment. So it was a very wonderful life.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where was the—or is the—apartment in Venice?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Where was it? It's in a place called San Maurizio, which is very close to the Gritti Hotel, if you see where it is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

ANTONIO HOMEM: And facing the Guggenheim, which is on the other side of the canal.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So in Sestiere San Marco.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Right, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Very, very posh. Very nice.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, I mean, in those days it was very normal. And I know Venice now is more, is inhabited, but at the time, it was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, we know a few Venetians, a few *doge* family people, and they're very eccentric and a lot of fun.

ANTONIO HOMEM: I suppose a few of them are not. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] A few of them are unpleasant, but a lot of them are fun.

ANTONIO HOMEM: A few of them are not much fun. Actually, I do like very much the people we know in Venice, which are a very small group of people, as a matter of fact.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're right across the Canal Grande from the Guggenheim?

ANTONIO HOMEM: From the Guggenheim.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, well, we can talk about the Guggenheim later, but what was your—where was your apartment in Paris?

ANTONIO HOMEM: In Paris it was very close to the gallery, which was rue Mazarine, so just behind the French Academy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: And mine was actually at rue de Seine, or at rue Mazarine itself too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's the fifth [arrondissement]?

ANTONIO HOMEM: So it was very close—no, sixth.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, sixth, sixth, sixth. Yeah, of course. A little to the west. So you must have known Darthea Speyer?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, well, she was just next to us. Very close.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: She had an apartment over near—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, she had the gallery.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The gallery, yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Which was only a few steps from there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But her apartment was up by Champs de Mars.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And she was a character.

ANTONIO HOMEM: She was.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you moved to Paris, and how did you find working in the, you know, in the gallery?

ANTONIO HOMEM: In the gallery it was very interesting. You know, it was very distinct for me.

[Audio break.]

Actually, working at the gallery was totally normal, in a way. And I always say that about both Ileana and about me, and both about the gallery and the collection, and about everything. I always explain that we saw them really as an extension of our lives. We just lived them. They were just part of our life, and so working at the gallery was totally a part of my life. I never knew when I was working and when I wasn't working. It was all one same thing.

I actually had an interesting experience, too, before, which was the fact that without working in a gallery, I had worked in a gallery for a few years, before coming to Paris. I was at that point living, so to speak, above an art gallery in Zurich that had opened since not so long, and actually through which I had met Ileana. I had met Ileana at an opening of a new gallery called Bischofberger. Bruno Bischofberger, who had made—his second show was on Pop art, and Ileana and Roy Lichtenstein had come to the opening. And I met Ileana, and at that occasion I was sitting at the dinner in front of her.

And so later on, I was living next to Bruno's gallery, and Bruno's gallery was like a refuge. The way people would go to a cafe or something, I would go to his gallery. And Bruno sort of let me do whatever I wanted, so I would hang around; I would talk with people. I would sometimes even install shows, and I was just having fun.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: I mean, most people thought I worked there, and it was as if I worked there. But I didn't really work there. I didn't receive a fee. In fact, I was invited for lunch very often—[they laugh]—which I enjoyed. And I would meet the artists that would come and have shows. And so let's say that in a funny way, I started by doing everything that I did later on without realizing that it was something professional. And I think that that was very typical of my life. I basically—my professional life was always my own life, my private life, my—what I really enjoyed doing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There was no leaving the office to go home.

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, absolutely not. No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So when you were engaged in your studies, did you take any classes in the history of art, or—

ANTONIO HOMEM: [Laughs.] As a matter of fact, yes, I did, but of course, they were not part of my studies, but since they were there—and I did go to several courses that had to do with history of art. Actually, mainly architecture. I was interested in, I think, more in that. And then when I was in Lisbon, since there wasn't that much going on, even though I was very young, I realized that there were lectures and things like that. You know, the Alliance Française—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: —and places like that gave lectures, and I started going to them.

When I went to Zurich, I went on doing that, and I saw two lectures that were very interesting to me. One was by

Hans Richter, and actually, I think that I discovered Magritte in that lecture. He showed slides and I found Magritte very interesting. The other one was by a man called Gaston Ferdière, who was Artaud's—Antonin Artaud's—psychoanalyst and who actually got very bad press out of that. But he was a very interesting man, and precisely in a certain way, he dealt—he came and made some lectures linked to a show of—what do you call it—of art—do you call [it] "outsider's art"?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, so people like Adolf Wölfli. Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Exactly. Exactly. And I found that all very interesting. Of course, the links with Surrealism were there still. And so those two lectures were very, very important for me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, yeah, the idea of comparing altered states of consciousness achieved through exquisite corpse or automatic poetry or other Surrealist games or through the condition of psychosis has sort of, some kind of nexus. And there was an exhibition, as I recall, in the '60s, in Switzerland.

ANTONIO HOMEM: This was in the '50s. In the late '50s.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Late '50s.

ANTONIO HOMEM: I mean '57. I would say '57.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It would be interesting to research that because I remember as a student—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —in the '70s finding a book about this.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Really.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was not known much then the way it is now. Now everyone is aware of outsider art—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes, of course.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and people like Ramirez and Wölfli and so forth.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But it was not—it was really—and did that come, do you think, did that come a little bit out of Art Brut? And also there was interest in a primitive—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I think so, but I wasn't aware of it anyway. I mean, it was this wall of things that came to me out of nowhere.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Of course, I remember also going to Paris to see the Surrealist Biennial. It must have been in the late '50s—in which, actually, Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns were shown. It was quite an interesting, interesting show. There was a very interesting Duchamp called *With my Tongue in my Cheek*—I don't know whether know it—which I thought was so interesting, because later on I saw Bruce Nauman's pieces in which he deforms his face. And I don't know whether there is a link, but in my mind there was, even though, of course, the pun was different with Duchamp. But, so all of those shows were very important things.

There were also two magazines which were very important, I think, in my formation. You know, I never studied art, really, so all of these were my art studies. And those two magazines were *l'Oeil*, which was an extraordinary magazine when it started. When I look at old copies of *l'Oeil*, I recognize the sources of most of the interests I still have today. And there was another very good magazine—Swiss/German—called *Du*, D-U, which means "you," and it still exists, also, like *l'Oeil* does. But of course, they have nothing to do with what they were in those years. And that was a very interesting magazine, too. So those two magazines were really a school for me also.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Were there any particular writers or critics who you found very formative?

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, [it was] the subjects that interested me mostly. I mean, there were interesting writers and critics, but it was the subject matter [that] was really what was important.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What were you reading in those days? What was your literary appetite telling you?

ANTONIO HOMEM: I was reading, especially, French. I still do read a lot of French. I don't even know, really. I was reading so much, and I read a lot of history books, too. I read several times, but with not great success, but I

read Proust, which later on became very much a basic work for me. I mean, it's the work, the literary work, I'm the most interested in. And Proust himself interests me. But at the time, I read about him. It's quite interesting, actually, you know. I tried reading Proust—I read Proust without that much success, but still, I mean, I was interested in it. I read great parts of it, and I read books about Proust, by Maurois and people like that.

But it was only in the late '80's, I believe, that I read a book by someone who I met, meanwhile, and who teaches at Columbia, called Antoine Compagnon. And he wrote a book called *Proust Between Two Centuries, Entre Deux Siècles*, and that book was very, very important for me.

It's interesting; I read two books of essays that were both very formative to me, and one was that one in the late '80s. But I read [another] one that, actually, Ileana had bought and explained that it was a book that she had found very important, very interesting, in her life, et cetera. And she bought it, and we were traveling, and it was in my bag. And one night in the hotel where we were staying I was looking for something to read and I thought, Well, let's try this book. And I read that first chapter and it was very much of a discovery, and the book is *Mimesis* by Erich Auerbach. And I still find that first chapter extremely interesting, in which he compares Homer and the Old Testament, and so classicism and expressionism, and I found it quite—I don't think I was reading essays before that, but that started me reading essays, which is what, probably, I read a lot.

I sometimes think of Gore Vidal, who was very scathing about people who didn't read books; they read books about books. And I sometimes think, Well, I'm afraid there is a point there, where everything—I think that's so important to—how can I say—I find it quite amazing that people would read Proust and would get into it immediately. I think that you need to study, to map out books, in order to be able to really get into them. Otherwise, I think one just—I mean, at least I would only have a very superficial view of them. And I'm very fascinated, you see, by the idea of interpretation, of translation, of the way one reads and understands texts. So for me, all of that is very fascinating to me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're talking about a person really reading a book, really digesting it, really thinking about the structure—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Just about, I don't know, really not just reading a story.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: As a matter of fact, I read Proust before. At the beginning, I was just interested by the characters and what would they say and how would they behave, and so there were enormous parts of Proust that I would jump that actually are sometimes quite difficult to read.

I mean, I remember, for instance, reading *War and Peace* probably three times in my life. And I thought [it] was so interesting, because I read three completely different books, because at the beginning, again, I was only interested in the plot. And then I started getting interested in everything that was not, let's say, the plots, the relationships between the characters, and so every time, it was a different book that I read. And so I think that when I read essays about Proust, they just give me so much more ammunition to understand what I'm reading.

I think that, in art, someone that I think is fascinating in that sense is Leo Steinberg. And I think that his attitude, which was simply of looking at art—not even looking at art, looking at works of art—was so enriching and so extraordinary because no professors in modern art—most people never talk about artworks; people only talk about ideas. And, well, I mean, that's interesting, too, but I'm talking about that because I think that's what I look for in the essays I read about literature and what I would read about art. Basically, to have someone talk to you about what you are seeing, what you are looking at, and opening doors for you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I think perhaps reading a book for the narrative as a form of entertainment is how many people engage in literature.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Which is very good, too, right?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's perfectly—but it's also comparable to a person looking at a work of art, but not reading it.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, it's as a matter of fact or just reading the narration. I'm always very interested in that. For instance, in the National Gallery in London, I've always been interested in the fact that what is written next to the paintings never has absolutely anything to do with the painting. What is explained to you is the plot, or the theme, that is being treated.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Very much. Well, this is, I think, with museums today becoming more entertainment centers than—

ANTONIO HOMEM: But I think it really has to do with an attitude, and it's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —actually I notice that, especially in England. I think it's very interesting. I remember once listening to two older ladies looking at Degas and discussing what kind of cloth the model was wearing, and I thought that was so interesting. And why not, as a matter of fact? So basically the painting wasn't really there for them; it was just a representation of a cloth that they were trying to identify.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There's a show that's currently on view at the Met of Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun, a wonderful artist at certain points in her life; I think she ran out of gas a little bit

at the end, but—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I haven't seen it yet, but I've seen her paintings, of course.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: All the tombstone labels have these narratives that are very gossipy and, you know, talking about the clothing.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Which, in a way, probably in her case it was also—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Apt.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —apt. But you know, even as we are saying this—I mean, I'm fascinated by clothing and the tilts and angles in portraits, for instance, and they are incredibly important. I think I'm more interested by the clothing than by the faces very often, and by the bodies in Ingres. But, well, so there's nothing wrong with that.

And as a matter of fact, when I was talking about my interest, and my interests [in] Surrealism, it had to do with that too. I was interested in the plot; I was not interested in how Bosch painted figures. I wasn't seeing it as a painterly thing; I was seeing it as a narration. And it was a very fascinating narration, and why not?

It was only much later on that I started getting more involved in painterliness. And I think that—I mean, I don't think I know what the chronology was, but in a funny way in the '80s, getting into studying German Expressionism, like studying people like Kiefer and Baselitz, was very helpful, and I think I had been already interested in late Titians, for instance, that are very much about that, but for instance, also Rembrandt I started seeing in a very different way, because I started seeing more in terms of the way they were painted.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, certainly with late Titian and certainly with late Rembrandt, the presence of mark-making and a gestural language that, I guess, as young artists was not permitted because they wanted to create a form and they wanted to create verisimilitude.

ANTONIO HOMEM: I think it's part of the evolution too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So they realized that the painting itself had its own kind of anatomy and its own kind of—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, I thought also they felt freer to do it. And then the way, of course, that goes into Velázquez and from that to Impressionism, all of that, it will make sense.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then you have artists like Lovis Corinth, who has a stroke and—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, totally, totally. Very extraordinary.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But his later work is more interesting than his earlier work, I think, in many ways.

ANTONIO HOMEM: You have, at the period of Titian, you have people like Bassano, who are so interesting in that, and I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Jacopo] dal Ponte [Bassano].

ANTONIO HOMEM: Exactly. And in that sense, I never understood that people thought that late Titians were necessarily unfinished or that there was that notion of unfinished there. Because I think if you look at what was happening around Titian, at people like Tintoretto or like Bassano, [who] are working with those notions at more or less at the same time, I don't think that they were saying that they were being influenced by unfinished paintings by Titian. They knew that Titian was painting that way, and they found it interesting, and it was part of the dialogue. So I always thought it was a bit silly when people say, Oh, well, yes, but the paintings he was painting for the King of Spain were not that way. Well, I mean, so what's new? Of course, he was taking liberties for himself that he didn't feel he could take to paint for—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Charles V.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, by then it was Philip II.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, another charming fellow.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Very good collectors.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, absolutely. But there is this tension in painting between the realization of form and the ability of that form to move through space. The more concrete it is, the less mobile it is. And I think, you know, with Titian, with Tintoretto, there's a real balance. And you think about the *Crucifixion* and the *Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, and I remember taking students in there and they just wept; they couldn't believe it, because it's such a surreal painting, it's such a crazy painting—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] True.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You've got "The Boss on the Cross" and you've got hundreds of figures, and it's very irrational, but it's also extremely authentic as a whole idea; great painting.

ANTONIO HOMEM: And the way he leads—for instance, El Greco is interesting too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's true; so the tension between this is—

ANTONIO HOMEM: All the way it develops.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it also has to do with cultivating your collectors. You're speaking about the King of Spain, the Holy Roman Emperor King Charles V, and son Felipe Segundo, and you know, how does one—of course, somebody could look at Tintoretto with a Philistine eye, without appreciation of art, [and] say, Well, that leg is wrong, or El Greco's certainly—and say, Well, this is not realistic.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Sure. I mean, as a matter of fact, they are wrong, the way Matisse is wrong, the way Picasso is wrong, the way Lovis Corinth is wrong, yes, of course.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But how wonderfully wrong they are. They're wrong in the right way. But how does one—I guess we presume that Renaissance princes were men of great refinement and learning and had somehow, you know, developed—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, then there were all kinds of them, of course. And I think—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There were thugs as well, yes.

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, I mean by that also that there were, I suppose, some that understood better and others that understood less, I imagine.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Like in all times, but still, it must have always been a passage, yes, from what the artist was doing and what the collector—it's still today, I think; that exists always. I say sometimes that, especially nowadays, when success is so important, and it's considered really, like, basically the definition of things. It's success that proves.

And I will say that basically success depends on the possibilities of misunderstanding of work. Works that are successful are works that are able to be misunderstood in many different ways. In other words, you can buy Matisse or Picasso because the colors are pretty, because there's a nice naked woman, because of something like that; I don't know. But you can't buy Marcel Duchamp through a misunderstanding; either you get it or you don't get it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: And so in my mind, no matter how important Duchamp is recognized to be, he can never be as successful as Picasso or Matisse, because that important element of misunderstanding isn't there, isn't possible.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [For] the work of art to be successful, [it] needs to provide the viewer with many ways to—

ANTONIO HOMEM: It needs to be, yes—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —misapprehended.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Interesting idea.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Very.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Of course, in a certain way that is also part of what the work of art is, because after all, the idea is that the work of art is there for each one of us to read it in one's own way. So what you call a misunderstanding, well, maybe is also not a misunderstanding; maybe it's just your own reading. But in the case of Duchamp, again, it's very hard to find personal ways of reading it that don't correspond to the way that Duchamp, in a way, dictated.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He doesn't allow you—

ANTONIO HOMEM: He doesn't let you to, you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —misunderstand him.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Interesting. So there are all sorts of ideas or all sorts of tropes about what an artist is. An artist is a shaman, or interlocutor, or creative force, or auteur, or conduit, and I guess this is dependent on different periods in history needing their artists to play different roles.

ANTONIO HOMEM: I suppose; also there are different artists with different natures.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who can be misunderstood in all sorts of ways.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Indeed.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We hope.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So as you began—we'll go back to Paris; we'll go back to the late '60s and you're beginning to work in the gallery. You've moved to Paris. What was the gallery like? How was it run? What was the space like?

ANTONIO HOMEM: As I said, well, the space was a small space, as was normal. After all, large spaces—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They're all small.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Galleries with large spaces started only in the '70s—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: And went on to become larger and larger in the '80s. And so it was a relatively small space. As a matter of fact, for Paris it was probably even a large space; there were two not-very-large rooms. And the gallery, again, was run just as an extension of Ileana's life, maybe. I mean, I don't think that there was a great difference between Ileana's home and the gallery. As a matter of fact, she lived in a very small place, too, and she spent most of her day at the gallery. In a funny way it was very much like a home, and Ileana always had people working for her, and probably I was a case, who were rather eccentric, or in a sense they were unusual.

We were—nobody was French, as a matter of fact. I was Portuguese; there was a Greek; there was a Turk; there was a German woman; there was a Dutch woman; there was a Korean woman. I can't remember a French person working there. So we were very international, and it was just—everything that happened just followed very much the course of the day. You never knew exactly what you were going to do the next day, so—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So no one had a specific job description?

ANTONIO HOMEM: One had job descriptions, but they were very vague and they were not kept, no. I mean, I never knew what my job description was. As a matter of fact, I remember the first job I had at the gallery, the first more important job, was actually transcribing all of the check stubs that Ileana had made for years for [sales to collector Bernard] Arnault, and we needed to make an accounting for Arnault. And she had all of those check stubs, but nothing had been done about them, so for days and days I was just transcribing things and adding up things. What was that? I don't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So was there a registrar, a receptionist, person to answer the phone?

ANTONIO HOMEM: There was a receptionist who would answer the phone, but we all answered the phone anyway. I mean, Ileana didn't, but the rest of us did. And there was someone who was more about installation and transport and all of that, but it was all very vague. And there were secretaries who would do the job, yes. But there were, yes, no clear definitions, no.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you had a preparator, we would call it, or an installer, people who did that, and other people who worked.

ANTONIO HOMEM: But again, the man who installed the wall would also talk with collectors and sell and all that, so it was all really open.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So did you receive commissions if you made sales?

ANTONIO HOMEM: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just a flat salary?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Just a flat salary.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how did collectors—I guess at that point, Ileana was well known, and collectors were coming to her.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And what, for instance, would have happened if a new collector came in, someone came into the gallery and was sort of a novice, was intuitively drawn to the work that was being exhibited, but didn't really have a developed, a sophisticated understanding of it? How would one interact with them? Who would be the person who would—

ANTONIO HOMEM: There wouldn't be a who. It was sort of like—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just a whole—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The team.

ANTONIO HOMEM: I mean, normally that collector would like to meet Ileana, in any case. At that point it would be normal for him or her to start talking with one of the people around. And of those people around, yes, it would be mainly me and Sarkis, who was the man I was saying who had to do more with installation and all, but so did I also.

But so it would be one of the two. Sarkis is a Turkish artist, Sarkis Zabunyan; he was fairly well known in Paris, and he was an artist in those days, but he worked at the gallery. And I would say, yes; I would think that we would be the two people who would normally talk with people. But Ileana would be very easily involved.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And who were you exhibiting then? Who was in the gallery?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, in those days there were still some of the people like Rauschenberg and Warhol and Robert Morris, but there were also newer people, like John McCracken for instance. There were European people like Wil Amal, like [Christian] Boltanski. There were also newer people like Anne and Patrick Poirier, who were local, too. There were, of course, the Italian Arte Povera artists, other artists: Zorio, Merz, Pascali, who were there. Well, I mean, it depends. And then, of course, there was Jim Dine, as a matter of fact, also.

And with the beginning, with 1971, there was a big amount of new artists who came in, because '71 was when we opened the gallery here. The gallery had already been opened uptown in 1970, but the gallery uptown showed people like Mario Merz and showed some East Coast artists. But it was really with the gallery in SoHo that we started showing new artists. We opened with Gilbert and George, and we had shows [of] people like Vito Acconci and John Baldessari and Bill Wegman and the Bechers [Andrea Robbins and Max Becher], and all of that was a huge, kind of new body of artists that came to the gallery.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you had more space and more—

ANTONIO HOMEM: It was not that. It was the fact that we were starting something, and the idea was to show European artists, of course, but it also—we suddenly realized that there were so many interesting things

happening in New York. And we realized that, again, through two people, I would say—one magazine, again, which was *Avalanche*, of Willoughby Sharp, which was very important for us in opening doors, and then these projects by two photographers who had worked with the gallery for a long time, but who were by then working with Christo here, and they were Harry Shunk, Shunk and [János] Kender. And they made a project that I think is owned by Modern Art, now called Pier 18, in which they worked with many of those artists. And for us it was really like, well, a door that opened into a huge kind of landscape of new possibilities. Of course, we were also already working with people like Bruce Nauman, who was a much modern artist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In Paris you had already been working with him?

ANTONIO HOMEM: In Paris, yes, we had shown—I think Bruce Nauman was the first artist that we showed in Paris that I remember seeing and thinking, Well, this is the beginning of a new world, really. It's something completely new.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So as a European working in a gallery in a city that had, a decade or two before, before the war, had been really the capital of the art world, if you will. Or you know, the central gathering point for a lot of like literary and artistic energies. Of course, the German Occupation and what followed, I think probably—well, one observed that the New York art world was inspired by Adolf Hitler, you know.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Everybody got on the boat and came here, and the boats came to New York. So you had people like Beckmann and—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Léger and Mondrian. But so you're working in a gallery in Paris and then coming to New York. Can you characterize the difference in, let's say, the character, the interactions you were having with artists, the gallery in Paris: collectors, museum curators, critics, the community? I mean, what were the differences between the two places?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Oh, they were totally different. The European collectors were very interested in new things. I mean, there must have been collectors who were only interested in the École de Paris and in older things, I don't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: But we didn't really know them. The gallery in Paris was very much international, but mostly Europeans: Belgians, Italians, Germans; not so much English. But I would say Belgian, Dutch, German, Italian would be the main public. And some French people, too. And they were very interested in new artists. They were very open and very curious. The collectors in America, most of them seemed to be very uncurious and very provincial, really, very provincial in an interesting way, because I'm saying "provincial" in the sense that they were only interested in New York. They were not interested in interesting artists in New York; they were only interested in, actually, in what was New York's École de Paris, basically.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Abstract Expressionism?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes. I mean, but not even—I mean the followers of Abstract Expressionism. I remember the first time I came to New York, in January 1970. It was for the opening of the gallery uptown. I must have seen—it must have been that time, or maybe it was soon after—a Whitney Biennial. And I was so very amused, because, of course, in Europe there were lots of artists who have abandoned what they were doing and started making some kind of European Pop. But at the Whitney Biennial it was as if Pop had never existed. And I thought, Well, those poor people in Europe who have abandoned their Abstract Expressionism to make Pop, if they came here and they saw that, in New York, it's only Abstract Expressionism-derived work that is shown at the Whitney, they would be completely taken aback.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So people like Koons and Olitski and Noland and people like that.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, and I forget even—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Formalism.

ANTONIO HOMEM: I forget even who they all were, but let's say that it was quite amusing and typical that one would come from Europe with an idea of American art being so avant-garde, and one would come here and one would see—

ANTONIO HOMEM: The local people's idea of what the avant-garde was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —was very conservative.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Totally. And it was quite—quite amusing, quite surprising. So—and the collectors were also that way.

Now, New York had something extraordinary, though, that didn't exist in Europe. And it is a public who went to galleries, and who went to museums. Not as much as now, probably, but still, it existed. And I remember when we closed the gallery in Paris—or when we were already spending more time here—collectors in Europe would say, "Of course, you went to New York, because that's where all the collectors are." We'd always say, "Actually, no, all of our collectors in Europe. What they have here is a public," and that is very—that was very impressive, and very exciting for us. Because there was absolutely no public in Paris. We had collectors and we had visitors, but there was no public.

Nobody came in just to see a show. As a matter of fact, sometimes people would look through the window, through the glass doors, and I remember that I used—if I was there—to say, "Don't you want to come in?" And people would immediately recoil and go. And there was this attitude that, basically, you didn't go to an art gallery, because you were supposed to be rich and be able to buy a painting. Which, it's possible, by the way, it's very probable, that it was the attitude anyway in art galleries. And there was still that attitude in Europe, of being elitist, and you just came in if—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: —but, of course, it was not ours, and we were very much interested in having a dialogue with people. I think that, basically, that was, from the beginning, the interest that Ileana and Michael had, and that I had, and have had up to the present, and that interest was in having a dialogue with other people about things that we were interested in.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you found here that the audience was more democratic, it was more—

ANTONIO HOMEM: The audience was very large, and less informed. But the fact that there was curiosity, that was what impressed us.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I guess the local word in New York argot would be the "scene." That there were all of these people who were hangers-on, the artists, their friends.

ANTONIO HOMEM: But no, no, that was different. That was different, and it would exist also in Paris, in a certain way. Much smaller, but—no, that was different. What was impressive were the people, you know, the old ladies, the children, the normal people who would come in. I remember that, and it's funny, because it would be very—still very adequate, the whole thing.

But in the '70s, I remember speaking in Paris with some young people, young collectors. And they were saying, "Oh, but New York, you know, what is that?" And I remember some of them, "It's all about society women buying Frank Stellas." And I said, "Well, isn't it amazing to you that there's a place where society women buy Frank Stella?" And it's funny, actually, because they said—but in those days, I don't even know that Frank Stella was that much in. He became much more in in the '80s, so I have no idea what made them say that. But I remember them saying that, and I remember that was the point. It was—a society woman in Paris would never think of going into—I mean, they would go maybe to an opening, but not an art opening. They would go to an opening where there would be people like them, and family or something.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But not just wander into a gallery?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Oh, not even for the art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: You just didn't do that; it was not part of their interests.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So do you think now, in our time, 40 years after the time you're describing, that galleries in Paris have more visitation? Are they more like New York galleries were?

ANTONIO HOMEM: I wonder. I tend to doubt it. To start with, there is an enormous amount of people at the museums. Beaubourg [Centre Pompidou] has made an enormous change, and I remember being aware of that many years ago—and actually, it can be dated, because of the shows. Because at the beginning, I always said, "Oh, well, people only go to Beaubourg to look at the view," which was true too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Nice view.

ANTONIO HOMEM: But it was—nice view. But—well, but I have the feeling, the rest, they didn't pay attention to. And maybe they didn't. But then they started. And, you know, I think that that was what was good there. The fact that people go somewhere, and then they start paying attention. If they go. The important thing is having a reason for going.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, the Beaubourg and Les Halles are sort of—have a similar kind of polarity, or comparison with Rockefeller Center, and MoMA.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Les Halles was a total disaster, but Beaubourg—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Total disaster.

ANTONIO HOMEM: But Beaubourg did have—I was very impressed; I used to say that people only went to see museum shows, even in those days, when they were called "a century of" something else. And if it was the century of Louis XIV, or the century of the Conquistadores, or the century of gold, or God knows what people went to. But otherwise, if it was a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: King Tut.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Something like that, yes. Otherwise, people wouldn't go. I mean, there was a Barnett Newman show in Paris that nobody saw. That must have been in the early '70s. But I remember in the '70s, there was—we went, actually, to see a show at the Grand Palais about Chardin—a very beautiful show. And it was incredibly full. And then we went to see a Magritte show [at the] Beaubourg, and it was incredibly full. And I remember saying, "Well, I've never seen this before."

And in those days, we were spending more time in New York already. And that was, to me, completely amazing, that there would be as many people looking at Magritte as there were looking at Chardin. And it was the beginning of that opening of modern art that didn't exist. Of course, here in New York, the moment when that opening took place was in the '80s, in the second half of the '80s especially. And it was quite amazing, and the '80s have—or at least used to have—this reputation of being just about a lot of stupid people spending a lot of money stupidly. And in a certain way, that existed too. But—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Still goes on.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Still goes on, and much more so, as a matter of fact. But what was extraordinary for me in the '80s was that there was such an incredible amount of curiosity. I saw something happen in the '80s that I had never seen before and that was very surprising to me, and it was that people who were very uninformed would come to the gallery, and they would be shown things, and they would buy—they would make interesting choices. And I thought, How strange. I was accustomed to the idea that you have to know more in order to make an interesting choice. And they suddenly made me realize that, basically, it was not a lack of knowledge that was a problem; it was a lack of belief in oneself. What the great barrier was, I think, was about people not listening to themselves—to their instincts, to their interests, to their movements.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Having the confidence of their own taste?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, absolutely. And in the '80s, people had it. Whether they had taste or not, they had—they were completely sure. And the reason was quite interesting. And it was because in the '80s, you just never could be wrong. I mean, everything would go up anyway, so you could do the most stupid thing or the most intelligent thing, and you were equally successful. And of course, there was this situation that was completely unrealistic, and in the early '90s, it all crashed in a very logical way. And after that, I must say, people started collecting again.

At this point, there is, again, a situation like in the '80s, in the sense of a certain kind of euphoria. But it's a euphoria that is very different, precisely because it goes mainly through auctions and fairs, and it goes mainly through commercial success, which is something that is very good. But when you really base your notions on commercial success, you are really—basically you are trusting that the people who have the most money are the people who have the best knowledge and choices, and that's not always true.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No. And every epoch has its own image of itself, and has its own heroes, and identifies with different—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, but sometimes also, how do you choose the heroes? And in our days, it's really practically only a matter of—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Money.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —of auctions, of money at the auctions, yes. And in those days, in the '80s, there was a very

interesting sort of anarchic situation, in which people really felt very free to—they didn't feel that they had to be reassured by an auction price. And that is the big difference, I think, between then and now.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you couldn't go online in those days and subscribe to a service that would tell you what a certain artist's work—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Oh, you could go—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you could research it, but it wasn't instantaneous.

ANTONIO HOMEM: But also—and it wasn't just that, it was just that people really—well, you know, everything would go up anyway, so you couldn't go wrong. And since you couldn't go wrong, you were free.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Robert Hughes compared it to the tulip craze in Holland.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, in a certain way, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And wrote about how in the 1890s there was an auction in London that [inaudible] Vermeer sold for 300 pounds, and a highland stag by Sir Edward Landseer sold for 10,000.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Which is perfectly normal; it happened all the time in the past, and in the present, as a matter of fact. Actually, there's a very interesting book on that subject by Francis Haskell, I believe, which is—you read it—on the formation of tastes. It's quite fascinating; I like it very much.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's not a durable thing; it's constantly evolving.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes, yes, of course.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But just a little housekeeping. When you were working in Paris, when you went to work in the gallery—I mean, we were talking earlier about Darthea Speyer, who I knew a little bit. I'm a friend of her niece, who lives here in New York. And I remember going to see her in her gallery, and she had moved then to rue Jacques-Callot, I think?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, Callot.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And she would actually sort of bring people in off the street, like someone trying to get people to come into a restaurant. If somebody was, like, lingering around the door, she'd call them in.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, I suppose; I suppose I did that, too, but it was in a—I think maybe she's being misunderstood in the sense that I would be misunderstood. I would be described quite that way. I mean, I did that very often, but my idea was that if somebody was looking through the glass door and someone was being curious, and if there was a curiosity, then they should feel free to come in.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

ANTONIO HOMEM: And it was a pity to be limited by that glass door. So I would definitely say, "Come in," and they would go immediately.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But here they would just—

ANTONIO HOMEM: So I presume maybe she would—oh, here, they would come in.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just walk in uninvited, yes.

ANTONIO HOMEM: They would just come, and they would be people with tours and all of that, and it was quite fantastic. And the gang—it was all done with great naïveté, with great lack of information, but the curiosity was wonderful.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Artists I knew in Paris—it's got to be 20, 30 years ago—one of the things they liked to do at parties would [be] to do voice impressions of Darthea's grammatically flawless French, in a Pittsburg accent. But she, you know, just—she's interesting also, because you know what her career track was prior—

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, I don't know, no.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: From a wealthy Pittsburg family, she had a brother who was—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I always liked very much her brother, yes; he was a very interesting man.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Jimmy, and then Nora, who's a painter. But she worked for the USIA.

ANTONIO HOMEEM: I see, I see.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And so she was part of that whole propaganda effort.

ANTONIO HOMEEM: There was a prior Darthea Speyer, in the sense of having that kind of eccentric aura, and it was Iris Clert. I don't know if you met her, but she was quite funny. She was more—of course, she was Greek, too—she was more, I would say that [Alexandre] Jolas and Iris Clert would be a European version of Darthea Speyer.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: She had worked for the USIA, and so therefore had been involved with the propaganda effort to promote Abstract Expressionism and American popular culture and rock and roll as a disruptive element in the Iron Curtain countries. Sort of to promote individuality and free expression, all that. You know all about this, I'm sure. But in 1968, how mindful were you of the impact of American foreign policy on how art was being perceived—how American art was being promoted?

ANTONIO HOMEEM: I was not. I don't think that there was that much being done in terms of what we were doing, Pop art and such. I'm not aware that there was anything much. I mean, granted, maybe with the Venice Biennale, but I think that—and Rauschenberg and all. But I think it was also Leo [Castelli] and Ileana who moved mountains. No, I wasn't aware of that. I mean, I don't remember anything or anyone. I don't remember any diplomats being involved or anything.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But you know about it, right? You know about the—

ANTONIO HOMEEM: I imagine that it must have been there, but in a different part of the woods.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It didn't rear its ugly head in any way; you were never aware of it?

ANTONIO HOMEEM: No, no. We lived completely out of all that, yes. As a matter of fact, the only government [inaudible] we ever had—and it was very fascinating, as a matter of fact. It was with the only minister of culture I ever met who was interested in culture, who was a man called Michel Guy. And Michel Guy was actually, I think, he was a—what do you call it—he was someone who was interested in art, precisely, as an amateur, and he was a friend of Madame Pompidou, and he was made minister of culture.

And he was quite remarkable, because he was very involved and interested in art, and he did something quite extraordinary for us, that I think was a very exciting, amazing moment of our career, which was probably in '73 or '74. He basically told us—he had to do with the Festival d'Automne, the Fall Festival. And he told us that he was giving us the space of the Galleria museum [Palais Galleria], and we could do whatever we wanted with it.

And we made a show that, I remember, we sort of made up a title for it, and it was *Some Aspects of Contemporary Art*, or something like that. And it was an amazing show, really, because it was a show that was a good show, with interesting artists, Rauschenberg and Nauman, and each of them had, actually, one room, and then there was a big room with lots of other artists. But especially because in the central space, there was a continuous show of performances of things.

It opened, actually, with a concert by Phil Glass, which might have been his first concert in Paris, I don't know, maybe in Europe. This was, again, '73 or '74; it was really very early. And it went on with dance, with music, with performances by artists. European, like Kounellis, or American, like Acconci and Oppenheim, and dance by Trisha Brown, for instance, and others. Performance by Joan Jonas and Simone Forti, music by Charlemagne Palestine. It's—they are people who are still being discovered today.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ANTONIO HOMEEM: And it was quite extraordinary. It was very funny, because it really, I think, was a very good portrait of the best of what was happening in New York, that most people in New York were unaware of.

But I also had an experience I thought was very funny in Paris, in the sense that there were always people who sometimes used to live in New York, and who would say, "Oh, it's so interesting in New York; Paris is so boring; nothing ever happens." So I started calling all of these people and saying, "Well, you know, we have these things happening; it's fantastic. Do you want to come"—et cetera. And they would all say, "Oh, I'm so sorry, but I have a dinner at my aunt's," or "We are having the weekend"—I don't know, somewhere else. Very few people came, and I remember saying in the past that it was a marvelous kind of experience of having this fantastic festival and just being—having it done for, basically, a small group of people around us.

Of course, you know, like Phil Glass's concert, which was the opening, had an enormous amount of people. But otherwise, there were not that many people really interested. But there were people—I mean, that was the point—in Paris, and it was interesting. There were few people, but the few people there were interesting people.

Here, there were fewer interesting people, but there were a lot of uninteresting people, which was also very rewarding.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So in Paris, the people who would come were the interested people. Here, everyone would come?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Basically, it became a part of the spectacle.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Absolutely, yes. But the result was that, out of all of that uninterested people, a lot of interested people were created. And out of the few interested people in Paris, a few interested people were created. And it never really changed so much. Even though Beaubourg did change again.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it was a more fertile environment here.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Totally.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And of course, at that point in the '70s, people were coming from all over the United States to New York.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, and of course, SoHo was a curiosity, so people would come. It's amazing how many young artists, for instance, I met, who said, "Oh, we used to come to the gallery"—I mean, "My parents used to take me to the gallery when I was a child." Well, I'm convinced, yes, it really made a difference.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how do you think ordinary people in France, let's say, or in Europe, in those days looked at contemporary art versus here? Do you think that it was just—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Oh, ordinary people in France did not look at contemporary art at all. But people here did go and see, maybe a bit the way they go to the Metropolitan Museum, and I always wonder whether they are seeing something or not. But, well, they go there, and at least they may experience something.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you're not going—one is not going to see anything if—

ANTONIO HOMEM: If you don't go, you don't have—you never read the book, you have no chances to learn from the book. If you read books, even without understanding, you may trip on something.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: One day, you might fall by mistake into—

ANTONIO HOMEM: There is a possibility.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —into the right kind of misunderstanding.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So the culture also of the museums has changed a great deal, I think. And, I mean, I can remember going to the Met, and—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Oh, there's a huge amount of the public that's changed. And sort of everywhere, I think. Everywhere, in Europe too. And it's quite impressive, yes. And there is that curiosity again for culture I find very marvelous. Again, I'm not quite sure how much people get out of what they see. But that they do go there is very good.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They're showing up, at least.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And whether they're paying attention or not, it's there to be—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, what's happening with museums nowadays—all over, in Europe and here—I find totally extraordinary.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I interviewed Arnold Lehman about a year ago, and he shared that his sense was that art museums were following the role model of science museums. The, sort of, interactive displays, and user-friendly, throw a dinosaur in the corner and the kids will show up, that kind of making it more sort of infotainment—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, I'm never quite sure about that, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But as opposed to the temples of art.

ANTONIO HOMEM: I find it always a bit dangerous, that idea, of interest here in art by pretending that it's not art, what you're showing—what they are showing to you. How can I say—I think that people can be interested in art being shown as art. And so—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, to echo what you said earlier, people might come to see the panda, and they might discover an interest in zoology.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, okay, that can happen, yes, exactly. But, well, there's no need to pretend that the panda is something else than the panda.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, but it's cute, and that's why people—

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, no, sure, sure. But what I mean by that is that there is an attitude of saying, "Well, you think you don't like art, and I'm going to show you something that is art. But actually, don't think that it's art because you can think of it as being something else." I'm not quite sure that I'm interested in that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: One of the things that you said, that sort of the ordinary Parisians were not really interested in contemporary art, goes against, I think, a sort of popular inappropriate stereotype that a lot of Americans think that a lot of Europeans are generally more cultured than a lot of Americans.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, and it's not so. It's truer, I think—actually, as a matter of fact, I have the impression that if you look at people who are specialists in something—in art—very often, they are American. I think, actually, that the Americans have the advantage of having more of a curiosity, and maybe also because they are not brought up in that illusion that they are part of a cultivated world and they don't need to know anything to be cultivated; they were born cultivated. You know, the Europeans have sometimes that kind of stupid attitude.

I remember I was talking about a movie—actually, with the woman who made the movie about Peggy Guggenheim, Lisa Immordino Vreeland. Remember I was telling you that there was a very amusing movie I saw about Peggy Guggenheim that I don't think she could find. And there was in it a woman that we used to know—actually, she died. An Italian, a Phoenician aristocrat, who was talking about—actually, it was very funny, because Peggy Guggenheim would say something like, "Oh, well, yes, people come, but the Phoenicians never come; they are so stupid," or something like that. And then it passes to this woman, who was actually a very beautiful woman. And she says, "Oh, well, you know, why do we need all of that? We live with ceilings by Tiepolo, and all of this," and so [they laugh] there is a lot of that stupid attitude, of course. And the Americans don't have that barrier; I think it's very good.

I have read somewhere an idea that I thought was very interesting. But actually, I think it's one of those things that I saw already written by two different people. It was about—I mean, I found it interesting because I thought it responded in a certain way to me. But they were talking about Jewish—the Jewish, how can I say—the openness that Jewish people would have to culture. His point would be that they're not—that they didn't feel as integrated in that culture gave them a freshness and a curiosity and an openness to it that was special. And I thought, Well that's an interesting point, whether for Jews or not. And I felt that—I feel that that is part of me. That basically, all the different cultures that I've been interested in were choices of mine. I never felt that I was born into one of them, or that they—actually, I found that that was of absolutely no interest, being born into them. What interested me was the choices I made, basically.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, because you're less hindered by a sense of entitlement, you're less likely to take things for granted.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And more likely to pay attention.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So why don't we take a break for a minute? We're pausing the recording.

[END OF homem16_1of2_sd_track01.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're back. We just took a brief break, and the conversation continues to be interesting. And we were talking about how a lack of the sense of entitlement is a positive thing because it makes one more curious, makes one pay attention more and not take things for granted. One could say the same thing about a lot of New Yorkers; they think because they have a 1-0-0 zip code that they don't have to be as inquisitive. You were talking about how during the golden age of Hollywood, for example—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, I was saying that sometimes pressure can work in a positive way. For instance, Hollywood in those years, it is so interesting because movie directors were working under great pressure to deliver work that would be the work that people wanted to see. And through that pressure they could manage to do both what was being asked from them and what they really wanted to give. For instance, there is the example of Alfred Hitchcock, who for many years was not very appreciated. I mean, people saw only the aspect of him giving people what people wanted to see, but then suddenly you looked at the other side of his movies and you realized how much they were expressions of his self, of himself.

And so, yes, well, basically I was talking about the fact that it is interesting that sometimes that pressure can be a creative element too. I was actually saying that I sometimes think that someone like Jean-Luc Goddard—who is a very intelligent, interesting, cultivated man—that if he had been under more pressure, he might have sometimes made more interesting movies, that sometimes there is an element of excessive freedom in his work, of him feeling that he basically can do anything he wants to. I don't know whether that always works for the best.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I think one is well acquainted with the idea that the unfettered auteur is the most desirable state that an artist wants to achieve. Where they can do just exactly as they please. But that, too, can become a kind of entitlement and can make one less inventive. I think when someone's holding a gun to your head and you've got a budget and you've got a deadline, you've got to make money for Harry Cohn or Louis B. Mayer or for Jack Warner, whoever it was, or you're going to be on the street, or you're going to be making TV commercials for the local car dealer. That's motivation to succeed. But that, I guess, is what you're talking about, that the whole idea that—you know, commerce isn't all bad.

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, no not at all, I think. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It can inspire people not only in terms of cupidity and a desire to have material success, but also it's motivational as well.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes. I was never bothered by the commercial aspect. In the '70s one who had very often—in the art world people say, oh, that they wish they were artists, because precisely they didn't have—well, they didn't have to deal with commerce, like an art dealer for instance. Art dealers would say that very often. And I always say, Well, I didn't have that problem at all, that I thought that commerce was just part of that kind of sharing of interests that we were interested in doing and that it didn't disturb me at all. It was just the same thing, just part of that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you ever yourself have a desire to make things? Did you—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, everyone does, especially when one is very young. And I used to like to draw and all of that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

ANTONIO HOMEM: But my—it was, how can I say, it was a personal thing, like young women used to play the piano or make watercolors or something.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do ballet, right, ride horses or whatever.

ANTONIO HOMEM: But, yes, I mean—so I think that one, how can I say, they are different things. Certainly, I was not as interested by my drawings as I was by other people's drawings.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you haven't had any yearning to turn your hand to making art again?

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, no, not really, no. I'm very happy with my part in the art world.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So just as a way of housekeeping, regarding your years with the gallery in Paris: How long were you there? You were there for only a few years before you moved to New York.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, I mean, I never knew how many they were. Because as I was saying, I came in at the end of '68; in January '70, I came to New York for the first time, and it was the opening of the first gallery. In September '71, it was the opening of the second gallery. And in 1980, we closed the gallery in Paris, but I would say that until '77 or so, we were really travelling all the time between Paris and New York. And from '77 on, we were mostly in New York, even though for the holidays we would always go to Europe. But so it was—it would be almost impossible to understand at which point we stopped living in—I would say certainly after '77 we were living in New York, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it was like the lack of boundary between home and office; you didn't leave the office to go home; it was—your life was your work and it was all wrapped up together.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes. Precisely. And that went also with the question of Paris and New York. It was more or less the same thing again; it was the same life.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And who was the most memorable collector you dealt with in Paris?

ANTONIO HOMEM: In Paris? Well, I suppose they would be memorable in different ways. I suppose Marcel and Giselle Boulois were very early collectors of Ileana, and they made—they had an interesting collection because they had things that I find very interesting, like Rauschenberg, let's say, and others. And they also had things that were not very interesting to me, like the work of an artist called Dado, who was a kind of Surreal[ist] artist.

But what was interesting about them, and that was very Proustian as a matter of fact, was that, seeing their name linked with works that were quite extraordinary, I had a feeling that they had to be someone very refined and very, how can I say, very cultivated and refined, and they were completely the opposite of that. And so that in itself was instructive, too, the idea that you didn't need to be so cultivated or refined to make cultivated and refined choices. As a matter of fact, they were very simple, down-to-earth people. I guess, in that sense, they were interesting.

Of course, I would imagine that of the European collectors, a very impressive one, and very different, would be Count Panza. But there was also Dr. Ludwig, Peter Ludwig, who was a very interesting man.

Count Panza was, of course, the one who collected in the way that I can understand best, because he really was defining himself by his choices. And I do like the fact that, for instance, he didn't buy Warhol, because he didn't like Warhol, which I think is a pity that he didn't, for him. But I do like the idea that since he didn't like Warhol, he wouldn't buy Warhol.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He didn't like Warhol the man, or he didn't like Warhol the work?

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, no, no, the work. No, I don't think he was so involved with the people in themselves. I hope not; I don't think so.

But Dr. Ludwig was completely different. He was a kind of encyclopedic collector, so he bought anything and everything. But in that sense, he was very much in advance, because it was more of what the collector—let's say someone, Charles Saatchi, would be about that. It would be about going out and buying 300 of anything. Actually, in a funny—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hirshhorn.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, probably. Or actually, the way even Peggy Guggenheim collected I always found was very interesting. I mean, if I understood correctly, her collection was made with her going around just before the war and buying a few things every day during a certain period, and so she suddenly makes a remarkable collection in a very small period of time. Those are attitudes that are very modern.

And what I must say I like very much about the Sonnabend collection is precisely that it's the opposite; it really is. I always said that the collection was an autobiography and an auto-portrait of Ileana, for Michael, for me, and that for me is very interesting. In other words, a work is just not something one bought for a certain amount at the moment; it's a kind of distillation of our lives, of years of our lives. And so I think it becomes much richer.

And of course, the collection at the end is also what it is, and what the works are. But there is also, for me very importantly, what the collector is, in the sense, I would say, that after all, an artist, too, is as important as his works. But there are all kinds of works that most artists make that can go from very important works to maybe less important, or maybe even bad works in some cases, but they also have a meaning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So the Sonnabend collection is something that was assembled with great care and thought.

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, no, not at all. As a matter of fact, it was hardly assembled. The Sonnabend collection was, like, over the years what remains. Sort of like one kept making choices without any aim—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —without any structure, and then it all added up to something. And that something, I'm still discovering it. And it's one of the reasons why I find it very exciting to make shows of the collection. And it is, every time I make a show of the collection—there is one right now in Portugal, in Porto—every time I make a show of the collection, I discover things about the meaning of how things happen and how choices take place.

For instance, I was quite struck—and I had not thought so much about it—I was quite struck this time on realizing how uninterested Ileana and Michael were in Pop art made in Europe, in Pop art generally. And when they come to Europe, the people they are interested in are Arman, maybe Christo up to a point, let's say; he's in the collection, but I would say they were interested in him, too, people like [Mario] Schifano and like—Arman, Schifano. I forget now even who else.

But I was thinking that it was interesting, because in a way they are already going in the direction of Arte Povera and other things like that that come afterwards. They started getting interested in a sensibility that is already the sensibility of Arte Povera before Arte Povera appears. And so suddenly, since I was making a room of Pop art and Nouveau Réalisme, that drove the viewer to a room on Arte Povera and Anti-Form. I was really interested in realizing that, basically before they existed, they were already getting attuned to it by their choices. And that is something I didn't participate in, but I find it fascinating to be able to read that in it now.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So did the gallery actually have an impact on the evolution of these artists who were, like Arte Povera, were they—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I have no idea. And possibly not, I don't know. You know, it's difficult always to know what impact a gallery has. I mean, artists have an impact—artists' works must have an impact on other artists' works, and the gallery may facilitate the viewing of those artists' works. But still, it's not about the impact; it's about realizing that, without realizing it, they were getting ready for it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I see.

ANTONIO HOMEM: And that surprised me. I had never thought of it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you were talking earlier about how commerce is often popularly seen as the taint of filthy lucre and something that sort of interferes with the artist's pure calling to their work. And you're saying that that basically is nonsense, that actually great work can be made under pressure in a real economic situation.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Definitely. I don't think it has anything to do with—yes, with it. Actually, the only negative thing is when you can only look at commerce and not see anything else.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But the work of art needs the dealer; it needs the museum; it needs the exhibition process, the same way that a bottle of wine needs to be opened and consumed, because it's not—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Or a book needs to be published.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A book needs to be published and read; it's not wine until it comes out of the bottle and into your belly. So a gallery or a dealer, by giving logic to the work of an artist through their interaction with an audience—you know, a vintner is not going to know whether that vintage was a success until people actually drink it and enjoy it or pour it down the drain or whatever they do with it. So the role that a gallery can play in the creative process is to help the work find its place in the world, or find a logic within itself.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, I mean, basically, I think the dealer sort of accompanies the artist, and sometimes the artist goes places where the dealer didn't really want to go or—so in a way you just choose an artist and try and understand, try to follow his work, even when the work can, again, can become difficult for you to understand or even unacceptable to you, which is really a problem. But I think that very often that is also the adventure. Basically, the dealer or the viewer follows an artist, and the artist is educating himself and educating the viewer and the dealer also. And so the important thing, I suppose, is to keep your mind open and to follow.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So the dealer is an interlocutor of sorts.

ANTONIO HOMEM: It is; it is. Everybody is; every viewer is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So as were talking about this, I'm beginning to become curious if you wanted to share a story about an artist with whom you might have worked during those early years in which their evolution or their conduct became a kind of surprise or ambush.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Oh, it happens with most artists. And especially if you work with them for a certain amount of time. There are very few artists who don't suddenly bring you surprises. And in some cases, you come to understand it, and in others you don't. And that is sort of annoying, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Can you share an example?

ANTONIO HOMEM: What names? No, but I don't think it—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Let's say, it happens.

ANTONIO HOMEM: It happens, of course.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And there are happy accidents and then there are others that are not so happy.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes. I mean, sometimes there are artists that you like very much, and every time they try something new, you think it's a mistake, and then you may come to understand that it's not a mistake. In other cases, you—in other words, sometimes a mistake, you go on believing a mistake is a mistake, but other times you do learn something, which is very important, precisely. You change with the work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How do you persuade collectors who have been nurtured to appreciate an artist's work in one sense—how do you bring them along to the next evolution?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, I think basically, one is there, again, just to have a dialogue with a collector. I suppose that the collector is having the same experience you yourself had. And I sometimes think that the experiences I have, I have them very often talking with collectors, precisely. As a matter of fact, I always say that I enjoyed very much talking with people about work because it clarified a lot of my thoughts and my impressions about work. You know, talking about something does clarify things for you yourself.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, let's, without naming names, think of a difficult artist who is full of surprises. How many of their collectors stayed with them versus the number of collectors who stayed with a particular body of work or were interested—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Oh, it changes continuously and it has to do also with the collectors. As a matter of fact, I always tell the story that—I found it very amusing—of a collector who—and now I can't remember his name. He was a very interesting man. He was active mainly in the '70s. And he was a man who worked maybe in the post office or something; he had very—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Vogel?

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, not Vogel. But Vogel would be—another one more eccentric and more interesting I find than the Vogels. And maybe the post office was the Vogels, but this one was something similar. And he bought drawings always. And he would buy drawings very much at the beginning because he had very little money to spend. And there you are. Sometimes, again, it's like the Hollywood story; sometimes the amount of money you have to spend may be a positive restriction. So he could only buy things at the beginning of a career of an artist; he would buy drawings and he would keep them, I was told, in boxes under his bed. And then after a certain number of years he would give them to museums.

And I remember at a point, the Guggenheim made a show of donations of drawings, and the most interesting drawings came from this man. But then he always had a habit that was very upsetting for the artists of always going around to them and saying, "Oh, what you're doing is very good, but you know, the best work you ever did—now my drawing, that was the best thing you ever did." And of course, that would be one of his first drawings or something. He was not very well seen by the artists.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Artists are not always the most patient or genteel.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, I mean, it's understandable, too; after all, you don't want to be told that the way you were a few years ago was so much better than the way you are now.

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Maybe this would be a good time to pause.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Very good.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thank you for your time today.

ANTONIO HOMEM: You're very welcome.

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JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. This is James McElhinney speaking with Antonio Homem, at his residence on Thompson Street in New York City, on Wednesday—

ANTONIO HOMEM: —the 23rd.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the 23rd of March, 2016. Good morning, again.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Good morning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So to begin our conversation today, how would you characterize the changes in the art world by comparing how you found it when you began working at Sonnabend Gallery and today?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes. Well, I think that the main thing is that there is such a huge amount of public, such a huge amount of anything, actually. Of artists, of dealers, of museums, of auctions, of everything; it's enormous now. It's enormous and it's probably not more interesting than before. I sometimes say, well, you know, in terms of artists there used to be, I don't know, maybe 500, and there were five who were interesting. Today there are 50,000, and there are five that are interesting.

[They laugh.]

But—well, you know, why not? And I do think it's extraordinary, by the way, the amount of opportunities that everybody has. I think that's very positive. But I also think that it ends up being very confusing because there is such a crowd of famous people. As a matter of fact, in everything. It's not only in the art world. They're totally in everything. The amount of celebrities, I can't imagine everybody knows them all. The amount of celebrities I don't know of in any world is totally amazing to me. I think that is the greatest change.

Then there are other changes that have to do with attitudes, certainly, that probably are caused by that crowded kind of situation. When I started in Europe, there was a very small amount of dealers, a small amount of artists, a small amount of collectors. It was a small world really. Everybody knew everybody. And it was probably more closed, but still, you did know about a certain amount of people. And I think that—I mean of artists—and I think that if artists persisted and held some interest, they did get somewhere. But, of course, there was an idea that you didn't get anywhere until you had gone through several tests and things.

Well, nowadays it's quite the opposite. I think it's very immediate, and I think that the idea of novelty is more important than the idea of tests. And that progressed slowly during all these years until now, but always in that direction.

Basically, that was more the—always the American attitude. I think that the Americans always had a great curiosity for something new. It didn't—at the same time I say that, but it could also be quite provincial. We were talking about the fact that, after all, Pop art and most of the new things in American art started by being famous in Europe, not in the United States. So actually, it's interesting because I say that—I say that, but at the same time, what was new in America was not being appreciated in America in those years in the '60s and '70s. But I think that really didn't have to do with the lack of interest for the new. As a matter of fact, there were always new artists and new—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: —fads, and they all had to do with a rejection of an aesthetic that basically—I mean, being American was not accepted in America. And I think that sometimes maybe it had to do—certainly in Pop art—it had to do with the fact that the subject matter being so related to America, it made it more difficult for Americans to look at it as art. I thought it was interesting that—at a point much later on, Rauschenberg was making works with cardboard boxes, found cardboard boxes. And they would use them for compositions, for Combines, actually, using those—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: —cardboard boxes. And I thought that was very interesting because the people who had to do with those cardboard boxes, I mean, sometimes companies and all were the ones that had most trouble on accepting them as art, because they knew it so well. And they have always looked at it as a cardboard box. So it was so difficult to look at it in a different way.

And I think that probably what the American Pop artists were doing dealt with imagery and things that were so totally accepted and known as non-art by the Americans that they had great trouble seeing them new and seeing them through someone else's eyes. I mean, I go through this—it's really quite not what we were talking about, but—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, but I—it—

ANTONIO HOMEM: —that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Warhol, for example, who is perhaps today the best known—

ANTONIO HOME: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and also for his sagacious prediction that everyone would be famous for 15 minutes seems to have come true in this sort of cult of, you know, Kardashians and, you know, Paris Hilton. There's—

ANTONIO HOME: Yes, yes—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —a whole art of just being a celebrity—

ANTONIO HOME: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —without doing anything except finding—

ANTONIO HOME: Well, actually—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —ways to be important.

ANTONIO HOME: —he also had the idea of celebrities who were—how was it—people who [were] "known for being known," yes? [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Correct.

ANTONIO HOME: Which is totally nowadays, yes?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. And that was, to a large extent I think, Warhol's influence—

ANTONIO HOME: Oh, yeah, well, it was actually an influence, but it was also a reading of the facts. He did understand very well. I think that the two people that saw the world in the most prophetic way, to me, were Warhol and Jean-Luc Goddard. And they really saw, had such a prophetic view of—what seemed absurd or crazy or science fiction at the time is all normal life today. [They laugh.] It's really weird.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You were speaking about the genesis of Pop art, which was not American originally. You think the original work of Pop was [Richard] Hamilton's *What Makes America's [Just What is it that Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing? 1956]*—or *What Makes—*

ANTONIO HOME: Yes. On the other hand—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You know, like *Today's Homes*, where—

ANTONIO HOME: On the other hand I think that—yes, well, maybe. But I don't know. Was, really, Hamilton influential on Warhol or—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, but I mean the word "Pop" that—the—

ANTONIO HOME: Yes, okay. Well, with the word "Pop"—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. Right.

ANTONIO HOME: —is not important. As a matter of fact, that's a very European thing of

dealing with a word and of calling it a thing. After all, what the work was I think started here. I mean, well, you can say that it started with Kurt Schwitters, for instance.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOME: And then from there to Rauschenberg, and from there to everyone else. But so you can find—you can find—I think Kurt Schwitters would be probably the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, the *Merzbau* and—

ANTONIO HOME: Yes. Well, and the use of material—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOME: —of everyday material, you know, of actually cartoons or train tickets or whatever and making it into art. That, I think, would be very much a beginning of that, yes. I can't think whether there were other people who were—of course, well, Duchamp, too, right. But the imagery of Schwitters was so very much a beginning of Pop art to my—it seems to me.

MR. MCELHINN EY: But not necessarily a celebration of popular culture and—

ANTONIO HOMEM: But I don't know that Pop art—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —consumerism.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —was necessarily a celebration of popular—it was just—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or a critique?

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, not—no, that was just—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just using—

ANTONIO HOMEM: —using it—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Using it.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Just using it, yes. Actually, it was a very European idea, too, that it was a critique, that there was a model aspect to it. And in certain cases it was quite amusing, because it was a complete misunderstanding, for instance, with Rauschenberg. He was supposed to be criticizing the American society and the consumerism. And the—all of that trash, let's say, and people didn't realize that all of that trash were things that Bob thought were incredibly beautiful. And that the—he had a special love for worn, used things that were fragile, that were stained, that were worn out. And people thought that he was just despising them, and he was not. He was looking at them in awe. After all, he thought those things were very beautiful.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it was taking the Duchamp idea—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Oh—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —of readymade further.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —yes. No, no he—in his case I don't think there was really a readymade attitude. In other words, he saw them as things of beauty.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I see.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Which would be contrary to Duchamp's idea, you know? Actually, it makes me think that the —[Robert] Morris says that he went to a discussion of Duchamp's in which he explained the idea of the readymade. And someone said, "Oh, but they look so beautiful to me." And Duchamp would have said, "Well, nobody's perfect." [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it's not the concept—

ANTONIO HOMEM: But—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —it's actually the—it's actually the—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I think—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —beauty of the object.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —that Rauschenberg, there was a great love for the things he was using. And he loved them for, especially, for being used. I remember also [laughs] Rauschenberg seeing a restored, a very restored Combine and looking at it very sadly and saying, "That work had never been new before." [They laugh.] And so—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And so how could it be restored?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, no, it could [not] be restored; it became new. And—but it had never been new before. It was not being new that was what he liked in it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There was a story, I believe told to me by Donald Saff or—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —one of the people he worked with, about when he had his big retrospective at MoMA, one of the conservators wanted to replace some Scotch tape that had yellowed on—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —one of his early pieces, and he refused. He said, "No, leave it the way it is. The nature of the material is"—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —you know, "that it changes."

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, but sometimes I even think that the material—that is a case in which the material started new and it aged. But very often the material started aged, and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Aged.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —being aged was something positive for him.

I remember Bob always had flowers around him when he worked in Florida. And I remember him saying that he hated the flowers that didn't die, that were not fragile flowers, that were resistant. That he really liked the fragility of things. For him, it was a thing of beauty, the fragility.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So as you're speaking, I'm beginning to imagine other artists who perhaps borrowed from this aesthetic of the using everyday things. Or in the case of somebody like Nevelson using parts of former—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes. It's just a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —furniture or whatever.

ANTONIO HOMEM: She used them in a more artistic way.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In a more formal way, right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, in a more formal way. I think that—well, I suppose you could say that of Schwitters, too, in a certain—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —way. And that, of course, is where Pop art becomes different, where I think that what Warhol was doing was definitely not artistic in that way. So—or Lichtenstein—and so that there is a complete cut, I think, with the rest.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And would that be the sort of ironic undertone that exists in that work? The sort of—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I don't know whether—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —irony.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —the irony is that important. I'm not—I tend to be skeptical about the irony. I think that Warhol was not ironic in that sense. In a way, Warhol was ironic in terms of the people who read things in his work in [that] way. And all of his—whenever he is ironic is when he basically refuses questions by agreeing with whatever is being told to him. I mean, if people would ask him, "Well, all this is a joke and you don't mean it," he would say, "Oh, yes; no, I don't—I don't mean it; it's a joke." And that was his way of being ironic. But I don't think that in the material there was an irony. There was, I think, an interest in the—I don't know if there was an involvement. And so [it] was in the Lichtenstein, I think.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I mean, the Lichtenstein paintings have this incredible sort of timeless, kind of monumental beauty that couldn't be there if it was ironic. As a matter of fact, you see, I think that is a fundamental difference between European Pop and American Pop. And it is because European Pop would be ironic, and literally all the things, by the way, that I said that I started by liking and that I'm not interested in—[they laugh]—later on, in that sense.

And I was thinking that, actually, when I put together the show of the collection, how interesting it is that Ileana and Mike are going to Paris and, being interested in American Pop art, are totally uninterested in any European Pop artists. And I understand that very well, because they [European Pop artists] were being everything that, in Europe, they thought American Pop art was but was not: social criticism and literary attitude. I don't know, it's a whole intellectual thing around it. And they [American Pop artists] were being very, very direct.

And I thought that was interesting that the people that she seemed to find more interesting, which were some of the Nouveau Réalistes, like Arman and Christo, were people who actually—and Schifano very much. Because Schifano was making abstract paintings, but those abstract paintings were also about materials in a sort of almost very Rauschenberg way too. The fact that he was painting with cheap enamels on sort of wrapping paper mounted on canvas. And all of that was, after all, probably a Rauschenberg kind of link.

And so those people that they got interested in are people who, in a certain way, are already leading to the Arte Povera and the Anti-Form. And so it's, I thought, very interesting that they never got interested in all of that concept of Pop art as a less direct, less simple, if one wants, attitude. I mean with all the literature and all the messages.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: All of the readings imposed on it by critics.

ANTONIO HOMEM: No. So I don't know whether they were imposed by critics. I think that some artists just show those—those readings were probably what other artists were, I suppose—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What their intentions were.

ANTONIO HOMEM: I suppose—exactly. What their intentions were. I mean what their work was about. I think that when one has a subject—chooses a same subject, it's—you really think two different ways—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: —being different people. And so someone can read it like Lichtenstein, and someone can read it like Hamilton, as a matter of fact, where it is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's interesting to think about Lichtenstein today, when so few young people encounter the funny papers or that kind of printed dot-matrix—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —image that one would find fairly commonly in cheap printed material back in the '40s and '50s and '60s. And then adapting that to a large-scale painting ambition was, at the time, a very powerful comment.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Today it lacks that impact.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, I think what happens today has probably not so much to do with Lichtenstein but with what Warhol did. So actually, basically, in a funny way, I think that Warhol hijacked Lichtenstein's work. I mean, what there was in it for others was expressed by Warhol in a way that was the way that others followed and understood better, or used better, let's say.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: And in that sense, I think that Lichtenstein remains still very unique, very—someone without much of a—I mean, he has some heirs, of course, both in Europe and in America, but, of course, it has no comparison with the amount of heirs that Warhol left.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's harder to find a comic strip today. And it's still possible to go to Key Food and find a can of Campbell's Soup.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What do you do with people like Fluxus and—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Actually Ileana was a little interested in them, because she thought of doing something with, for instance, with George Brecht.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: I think she actually—she owns some works of his. She owns some works of his. And I think she was contemplating a show. But I don't know how much that was important for her. Well, actually, there's someone that she also has in the collection, and that I think is quite interesting, who is Robert Watts.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: And I even think that he's probably one of the artists that really should be—that I find it wrong that he has not been rediscovered. But—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: To what do you attribute the commercial success of some artists versus the sort of cult following or—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, I think didn't I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —of others?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Didn't I talk in our last conversation on this impression—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A little bit.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —that it's a possibility of misreading it—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's an excellent—yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —it is interpreting. I think that is definitely it in everything. You know, Frank Stella had a huge success in the '80s. And so did, for instance, and does, Gerhard Richter. Whatever their work is about, I think the success has to do simply with the fact that, well, Richter actually plays it in two fields. One figurative and very detailed kind of—well, not hyperrealist because, after all, there is always exactly that idea of seeing it—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —through a photographed image and so a bit imprecise and all. But figurative—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The photo-based, yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: A painting, a figurative painting, is always what people look for the most. And if it's going to be an abstract painting, then color and the material is what people want. So Richter and Frank Stella, especially when he was making those very colorful reliefs and all that, well, they were exactly what people wanted. You just—you couldn't go wrong. Basically, that was what people wanted. I don't think that it's what either Stella or Richter wanted, but they were, wanting or not, what people were looking for.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So by agreeing with everyone, Andy Warhol was making sure that he would be always misunderstood on some level.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, I think that he would—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean saying to everything, "Yes." [Laughs.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: I think it was not that he didn't want to be understood; he didn't want to be classified. I have a feeling he didn't—yes, in a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Fine line there—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —between the two.

ANTONIO HOMEM: One of the funniest things I heard him say, nobody laughed; nobody realized that it was a funny thing to say. And it was when he came to Paris to make the show of the Mao paintings.

It was, of course, tremendously shocking for French people who were—I mean, Mao was a cult figure. Andy Warhol, in those days, was seen like some decadent kind of Salvador Dali, like American artist who just had to do with rich people and big parties and with frivolity. And that he would be painting portraits of Mao was totally shocking.

And now on an aside, you do remember that, in a frivolous way, Mao was also known, not politically, but also because of Pierre Cardin, [the] Mao suits that were very fashionable earlier on, I forget what—a few years before, I presume. And when Warhol came to Paris for that show, I remember seeing that there were a lot of journalists around him. And they were asking him, "Well, why did you paint Mao? What does it mean? How come," et cetera. [Laughs.] And he answered, "Well, I don't know. I was always interested in fashion."

[They laugh.]

And I thought that was such a fantastic—[they laugh]—statement. And nobody noticed it. Nobody laughed.

Nobody commented on it. It just—[they laugh]—went. And to me, that is totally typical of his—he was so clever in that way, because he always was clever by hiding the fact that he was clever. He always said stupid things that were incredibly clever.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What do you think has changed over the course of your career in your perception of why artists are motivated to do what they do?

ANTONIO HOMEM: I never really thought of that. No, to me, it's like, Why am I motivated? Why was Ileana motivated? That, I have no idea. I think they are—they are just needs that one is born with. I don't know. It's about a way of life, a way of—yeah, a way of living.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The reason I ask is because one finds a lot of speculation on the part of the critics and other interlocutors that are trying to explain art to the public or writing about it, what artists' intentions are.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why they are doing something in a particular way. You know, why was Oldenburg doing giant soft electric—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —fans, you know? Was there any—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I have no idea. Why was Michelangelo doing what he was doing? Why was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I think in that case, he was more or less—there was a patronage system and he was —

ANTONIO HOMEM: Oh, but—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —not—

ANTONIO HOMEM: But he was not that very much reliant on following—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —[the] patronage system.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, no, no. No.

ANTONIO HOMEM: [Laughs.] He had a very complicated life because of that precisely. No, I really believe—well, I believe that artists, basically like everyone else, do what they can do. I'm talking about an interesting artist, I think, does what he can do. And an uninteresting artist does something that he saw someone else do, I don't know. Or tries to do what other people do.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So is the answer to the question, what makes an artist interesting, again—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Oh, I think that what makes an artist interesting—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —capacity to be—yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —to me is the—is an artist having a very personal kind of vision of everything, of the world, of what he likes, of what—and I think that having a—yes. I mean, it's really having a personal, surprising, unique attitude. At the point, I remember saying that, in political terms, that I never understood what the point was of someone explaining that being a Fascist was wrong. Everybody knew that. There was nothing to say about being a Fascist being wrong. What else?

Now when Kiefer appears and he starts dealing with ideas that have to do with Fascism or with Nazism, and he deals with them in such an ambiguous way, now that suddenly becomes very interesting to me. I have never thought that could be done. So I think that when an artist interests me, it's because he reveals something—a new attitude, a new vision—to me. But it's very boring when it—I mean, unless someone takes a very boring vision and does something new with it, too, which is possible after all.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, the—is it Hannah Arendt, or someone, characterized Nazism as sort of the banality of evil.

ANTONIO HOMEM: And the banality of evil, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And so taking, you know, the banality of that ideology and its oafish monuments and exploring—

ANTONIO HOMEM: It is—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —them in some way.

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, but you see, Kiefer had such interesting ideas on it. For instance, on these works *The Ways of Worldly Wisdom*, in which he has the forest with the faces of these philosophers and German poets. The notion is so interesting. The forest has to do with the original German victory over the Romans of Armenia. And so it's the idea of that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: —beginning of nationalism. The faces are the faces of intellectuals who, during the Napoleonic Wars, take those nationalist ideas in order to promote a Germany that is united. And these paintings are about bringing those two facts with the idea, with the subject, that these people who promote Germany's unification are then approved and esteemed by the Nazis. And because of that, basically, their reputations are tarnished; their memories are tarnished. That, for me, is a fascinating idea. It was so interesting to see that being treated.

And at the time, it was so funny when I remember, because the Germans are so—were so—German collectors and critics that we knew were so shocked that we would be enthusiastic with Kiefer. And they didn't mind one being interested in Baselitz or Kampf or something, but—because they were good Germans. But Kiefer, it was totally shocking to them. And it was very funny also to us, because in America, all that past is completely unseen. And I remember reading reviews of Kiefer here that were talking about Kiefer as if he was painting, I don't know, the Montagne Saint-Victoire—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —or something like that. [They laugh.] And they had absolutely no idea that there was a political, rather ambiguous, and complicated subject to them.

But then there was always—you see, it's interesting because, precisely, Pop art is understood in Europe, but it's not understood here. But then a European complex thing there comes here, and people are very enthusiastic about it and have no idea what it's about. I remember, as a matter of fact, a review, I think [by] John Russell, in the *Times* of a show of Richter's German landscapes. And he sort of starts talking about German excursions he took and the German wines and I don't know what. And it's quite surreal. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's interesting because—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Not that he was American—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —anyway. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No. Well, he was—yeah, had other starting points.

[They laugh.]

But American art certainly is comprised largely of landscape tradition. And you could even argue, I think, that Abstract Expressionism connects with that in a way, because abstraction is the child of landscape painting. You look at Kandinsky, you can see—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —you know, the development directly. Mondrian, also the development—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —directly out of landscape. And also the, you know, the victory of Hermann [Arminius] over Varus at Kalkriese in 9 A.D. was the defining moment for a thousand years of the history of Europe in what's east of the Rhine, what's west of the Rhine. And exploring that in juxtaposition with National Socialism by an artist who is born immediately at the end of the war is very resonant at a time when—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the two Germanys were coming together.

ANTONIO HOMEM: And then even the way they were painted was very interesting too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

ANTONIO HOMEM: I mean, it was all so tremendously complicated and ambiguous. We thought those earlier works by Kiefer were totally extraordinary. And we were a bit disappointed later on. It was quite interesting; I think he became much more at ease with himself, and that was very negative. There was a tremendous neurotic charge in his early work that we thought was very interesting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: People of a certain age whom I've met in Germany, people who would have been born during the last years of the war, or immediately after the war, are still very conflicted and troubled about that—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —history.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes, I'm sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But at the time, I remember when Kiefer's exhibition opened in the Art Institute of Chicago and then traveled to Philadelphia—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Sure, sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —in '86 was—still a lot of the art being made was under the influence of so-called Cultureburg Formalism and—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes—no, and then also people really didn't have a notion here of what was being dealt with. And of course, it coincided also with that first moment that was very interesting in which American—the American art scene, or the American collectors and museums, they both suddenly became aware of Europe and were interested in Europe. And that, of course, changed completely. I mean the situation as it existed. Before, it was as if Europe didn't exist, or, as a matter of fact, California didn't exist.

[They laugh.]

It only existed—this East Coast, probably only New York. And then suddenly there was this opening, and all of these became news and surprising and exciting. And, of course, people have a very vague notion of the whole thing. And they were also—it was not that they were not aware of the political symbolisms at all, but they didn't know too well what to do with them. [Laughs.] I remember that with [Jörg] Immendorff, he uses, of course, all the German symbols and all the German Nazi symbols and all. And at [one] point, a collector asked him, very preoccupied, and she said, "Well, what do you think that eagle means?" And I said, "Oh, well, you know, it means exactly what the American eagle means, too." [Laughs.] Which, of course, is true; an eagle is always a symbol of power.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The Roman eagle, the Romanoff eagle—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Exactly. Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the Hapsburg eagle.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The Hohenzollern eagle, yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Exactly. No, but he wasn't talking about any of those. He was talking [laughs]—I guess he was talking about the Nazi one in that thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The Mexican eagle too. Let's—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Of course.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —not—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Of course.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Let's not forget the Mexican eagle.

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, no symbols are—symbols always mean the same thing. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's interesting you say that. Because if you've ever been in the House of Representatives in Washington, on either side of the speaker's podium are two fasces.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Oh, yes, yes. Well, of course, which are totally Roman. [Laughs.]

You also make me think of a story which I like very much, which was about us being in a taxi in Ancona, I believe. And there was a beautiful, huge kind of a Fascist or a Roman triumphal arch. And Ileana and I were very much into that period. I mean, not necessarily Fascism, but I mean the '20s and '30s and '40s and all of this kind of neoclassical—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was a Great War monument, yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —sort of—yeah. So all these monuments, you know, so—and we were very excited. And Michael wanted to tease the driver. And he said, "What would you call this style of this monument?" And the driver, who was a very young Italian, said—and I thought [it] was totally, [as] only an Italian would, so good—and he said, "Roman, I presume." [They laugh.] And there was one situation in which Michael had nothing to add, because [laughs] he couldn't get out of that one.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's funny. Yeah, if you go back to Arminius and Varus—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the eagle was, of course, the standard of the Roman Legion.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Sure, sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And so could we say that was when the Germans appropriated the eagle—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —was at—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, as a matter of fact.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —9 A.D. But—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Even though I suppose it came later on too. So, with the Holy Roman Empire. No, I don't know whether it was there before. But that—I presume it must have come with the Holy Roman Empire. I have no idea. It's a good point, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: To the extent that Rome—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I don't think that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —was able to penetrate that.

ANTONIO HOMEM: I don't think that are eagles in the earlier, barbarian, let's say, cultures.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is a different—yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Actually, there are. There are, and I can think about it. They are not with the wingspread. But they are with—actually, there is, I guess; eagles were there. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Eagles or hawks—

ANTONIO HOMEM: You could—yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —or—

ANTONIO HOMEM: You couldn't escape them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But I'm trying to remember if Karl der Grosse had the eagle. I don't think he was using—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I think—but they—I was thinking of all of those Gallois, barbarian early things.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, yes.

ANTONIO HOMEM: And the eagles are—there are eagles; there are lots of eagles in them, yes.

But, of course, they are not the—again, they are not the Roman eagle. They are other eagles. I mean, they are more the head of the eagle and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —and it's represented in a different way.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In the heraldic, you know, the medieval period and people are—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, well, but that comes [much] later.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Later on.

ANTONIO HOMEM: It's comes over—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Later on but—

ANTONIO HOMEM: —after the Holy Roman Empire, I suppose.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So I guess the reason I was asking about artistic motivation was because earlier on we were talking about this whole culture of celebrity.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And whether more artists are motivated to make art because they think it's an easy way to become wealthy or famous or—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I'm sure that's true, yes. And it's not only art. When I was young, I mean [laughs] 60 years ago or something, there were so very few professions that one could have. And nowadays there are thousands of professions. I always say that when I was young, if someone would tell his parents he was going to be a hairdresser, they probably would commit suicide. [They laugh.] And [laughs] nowadays, well, you know, I don't know; there is Frédéric Fekkai and people like that, who, I suppose, people would even feel, Oh, my son is going to be a millionaire like this guy—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A hairdresser, yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —how wonderful.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Vidal Sassoon—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Vidal Sassoon.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —years ago. Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: So many people. So it's true about art too. I don't think that nowadays parents would feel as menaced by a son saying that he wanted to be an artist than they would 50 years ago. So—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Which would be—

ANTONIO HOMEM: —all of that certainly exists. And that, by the way, is something that, precisely, that I think is a big change in the—and it is that idea—I mean, I don't think that people were indifferent to money or to investments in the past. It's just that the options were so few and the possibilities were so few that it didn't come much into their thought. But nowadays there are so many possibilities of money, of gain, and all that, of course, becomes more present, becomes more of a reality. And that is a very important change.

And the fact that nowadays, indeed, it's the money that becomes very, how can I say? That is the test that an artist passes, basically. The importance of an artist ends up being defined by how much his works make at auction, which means that basically that ends up being defined by rich people who have enough money to spend for those works at auction. And who very often, I suppose, have no clue about it.

So basically, it goes from a situation which, earlier on, I suppose the importance of [an] artist was defined by museums, by art critics, by art dealers maybe. And it became now that definition is now made by people who have money simply, I guess. Because those people might have advisors, but I have a feeling that more and more it's just really about—even the advice is just about money.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Have you found it shocking going to the art fairs and walking around—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I find—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —seeing how much—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I find art fairs very, very depressing more than shocking. And I think that in a way they are also responsible for much of that. Because art fairs gave people the feeling that you don't necessarily go to museums or to galleries or anything; you just go to an art fair and you know all about—all there is to know.

And, of course, the auctions are the ultimate in that. You go there, and the world is what there is in that sale. And you choose something from that sale, and you pay a huge amount of money. And if you paid a lot of money, you are admired for having paid it. And basically it's all defined in that way.

It was very interesting. I remember that there is a profile of Tobias Meyer from Sotheby's in the *New Yorker* in which they ask him, "Well, how did they justify their"—at the point at—"the prices at auction could be so much higher than what prices would be outside of an auction?" And he says, "Oh, well, you know, a collector doesn't buy"—I mean a rich collector, an important collector, doesn't—"the price that he pays doesn't have to do with the price things have. It has to do with the price that he is able to pay." Which is an amazing notion. And I was very amused and surprised when I read it.

And the other day I read that when Louis XIV was an adolescent, he asked someone to give some money to some beggar. Or maybe not, I forget, to someone that he felt should be rewarded. And someone said to him, "Oh, you don't give him that much. Just give him this much." And he said, "Well, this much would have been right for you to give or for him to receive. But I, if I'm going to give money, it has to be three times that amount." And that, I thought, Well, it's very interesting. It's the Tobias Meyer idea, in which basically the price that the collector pays has to do with the collector more than with anything else. It has to do with what he's able to do, and he's able to pay, and he's able to pay that much. And that became—I mean, it's an amazing kind of development and completely new.

Of course, someone in the past, someone like Panza or Dr. Peter Ludwig, who were the huge, let's say, the very big collectors in the '60s and '70s, they were people who had money and spent it. But they were not—I mean, money was the last thing they were thinking of, in a certain way. They had to make enough money to buy the work.

I think that for Ileana and for Leo, money was of no importance too. And people always are surprised when I say that. Ileana and Leo are depicted as very crafty kind of business people. And they were totally not about business at all, because basically they were totally indifferent to money. They just wanted to have enough money to go on with their lives as they wanted to live them. But they were totally uninterested in money.

Actually, it was very funny because when the Museum of Modern Art made this show about Ileana, that really was a vision of theirs, of Ileana. I said that to them, and they were very shocked and surprised that I would say such a thing. And they have in the catalogue a series of interviews that are very nice and very entertaining—I like them very much—with most of the artists who worked with Ileana. And they don't publish the questions; they only publish the answers. And at the first moment, I was very surprised, because all of the artists talk about whether Ileana was a businesswoman or not. And [laughs] then I realized, because actually Hilla Becher told me, that it was because the Modern Art was asking them, each one, "Well, did you think she was a businesswoman?"

And I knew that because Hilla mentioned it, because she was very shocked, because for her that was not something for her to talk about. She didn't have anything to do with that. But I thought [it] was—it was amusing, really. And it's interesting also how things are written, because someone who reads that must have the impression that there must be something interesting in the fact that all the artists talk about whether Ileana was a businesswoman. It all started with me explaining that she was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: —not a businesswoman. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There was a joke that I was told by a collector, just to connect back to the Mao Warhol story, about two collectors out in the Hamptons who were at a cocktail party. And one is talking to the other and asking him what recent acquisitions he had made. One says, "Oh, I just picked up a wonderful Mao by Andy."

ANTONIO HOMEM: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And he said, "How much did you pay for it?" And I forget the number. He said—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —"\$4 million." The other collector said, "I got you beat. I paid six for mine."

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, that's not entirely—

[They laugh.]

But that is totally normal. I remember friends of mine who had a very beautiful collection, by the way, in Europe, saying that they were always so surprised that they had friends of theirs calling them very excited because they had bought something at auction. And they would say, "It was a record price." [Laughs.] And I said, My God; we thought, Well, that couldn't have been good business if it—[laughs]—was a record price. But they were so—[they laugh]—they were so happy about it because they had paid more than anyone else before.

No, no, it's entirely—it's entirely correct, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was the pro se sale of Damien Hirst at which reproductions of dot paintings sold for incredible amounts of money. And then the original ones, when they were offered a year later, sold for much less.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Much less—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And the reason being that they were not in Damien's sale.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

[Cross talk.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: One of the mega-dealers uptown told me once that, in their opinion, the market had murdered the avant-garde. Is that true, do you think?

ANTONIO HOMEM: I think that the avant-garde should exist as an avant-garde. An avant-garde that gets murdered by the market is not an avant-garde. It's like the artist who has to produce because there is so much demand. Any artist who produces because there is so much demand is not an artist who is—who is quite honest with his work.

I had once a museum director talking to me about about an artist. And he was—that he was so sorry because the artist was being ruined because he had to produce so much work with all of these art fairs and all. And I remember thinking, Well, you know, couldn't the artist say no? And then I believe I asked that museum director, who, by the way, had quite a reputation in the history of being quite tough with critics, saying, "Well, didn't you ever say no when you were asked things?" So that idea that an artist is ruined because people offer him money, you know, I don't get it. Yeah. Of course, it's a temptation, but then there must always have been temptations like that to everybody. No, I don't believe that. I believe that artists' work is what the artists do.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—well, there used to be an expression, "selling out." You know, the idea that you—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes. But you sell out at all prices.

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's—

ANTONIO HOMEM: There is a story I like very much, that Satie would have, Erik Satie, would have heard that—oh, what's his name? You know, Ravel—that Ravel had refused the Legion of Honor. And Satie said, "How odd of him to refuse the Legion of Honor when his music had accepted it already since—[they laugh]—[inaudible]."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's a complicated relationship, I think, between an artist and their work. And especially, we spoke about this before, how some artists are said to have done the best work in a certain point in their life and then afterwards never again.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, that can happen independently from—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —money, from money objects.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. But then someone—some enterprising crafty person might be able to come along and resuscitate interest in their—would let in—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, I mean, we—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —lesser works.

ANTONIO HOME: But that—it's not even a matter of crafty people. We should—if we stay open, we will change our opinions and see things differently with time. I remember, actually, seeing a show of Picabia with Bob Rauschenberg in the early '70s, probably in Paris. And we couldn't believe how he had gone from making his early work into the late work. And, I don't know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You mean those crazy—

ANTONIO HOME: —15 years ago or 20 years ago, I noticed that those late works were very interesting after all. And I saw them quite differently.

No, Picasso's late works were despised until after his death. I remember the Basel Museum making a show of Picasso's late painting—or maybe—I don't know whether it was just late paintings. So it was a show of Picasso in the early '70s, and Michael Sonnabend was the first person I heard around me that said, "Oh, the last paintings are so extraordinary. At the beginning he was just a talented man, but then he became a genius with his last works." And I thought, Wow, that's—I was going to see that, and I certainly saw what he meant with time and all. But so, you know, those are evolutions and discoveries. It's part of all of art history.

Can we possibly imagine what was so shocking in Impressionist paintings, that now seem even rather facile to—but how difficult they were for people at the moment when they were painted? I mean, we do reread things. And we are continuously informed by new things. I keep seeing the same works and going to the same places and seeing things again and again. I always—and I believe that one never sees the same thing twice, because either you changed or the thing changed or both changed. Everything is different every time you look at something. And I think it's very important, very important, precisely to keep open to—and change your opinion; very dangerous not to change one's opinion.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, to not—not to continue to grow and to develop.

ANTONIO HOME: Yes, exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You spoke about late Picabia. But then, of course, those pictures, if they're the ones I'm thinking you're speaking of, are the ones which are—

ANTONIO HOME: All the figurative ones, yes. Those—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —layered and—

ANTONIO HOME: Those and even the nonlayered ones. The ones that are tremendously kitsch. And—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, the very kitschy nudes with—

ANTONIO HOME: Yes. As a—all of them, yes, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —African masks and—

ANTONIO HOME: Yes. Oh, and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —bulldogs and—

ANTONIO HOME: And Spanish dancers and God knows what and movie actors. There's actually—there is another Pop—another Pop, in a certain way, another Pop precursor.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Not an artistic nude but a pin-up nude. So—

ANTONIO HOME: Yes, yes. No, and the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —almost anticipating—

ANTONIO HOME: And the portrait of a Rihanna of the period, of some kind of singer, successful singer. Well, you know, that was quite surprising.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, it—you can see also someone like Diego Rivera's painting of [actress] Linda—

ANTONIO HOME: Yes, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Christian, which is—

ANTONIO HOME: Sure, sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —very much like that. Or—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Sure, sure. Well, but then, you know, with the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Wesselmann or whatever—

ANTONIO HOMEM: With Diego Rivera, you have a feeling that he painted Linda Christian the same way he would have painted a rich lady from Cuernavaca. So it was just also basically the fact that he did paint social paintings that were—I wonder whether—I have a feeling that they probably were not tongue in cheek.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, I think in the case of Diego, he was probably very much enchanted by the idea of painting—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —a movie star in a diaphanous top. [Laughs.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: I think so, yes, yes. [They laugh.] No. And he did paint the non-movie stars, very pretty women, who were maybe not as pretty as all that, I don't know. But he had no problem. That is a little different. [They laugh.] With Picabia, I don't even know that he painted portraits of people he knew, let's say.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think they came out of—

ANTONIO HOMEM: But—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —magazines and—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes, exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: So it was more of a Pop—more, really, of a Pop attitude.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But in the '80s you had people like David Salle, and all of a sudden Picabia becomes his ancestor.

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, no, I know. Well, but I think the—David Salle also had to do with people like Rosenquist, who probably would have to do with Picabia. But I don't think he knew that about the Picabia—so, you know, one can—those things can exist because the artist is aware of something, and they can exist when the artist is not aware of it having been done.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I think there are things that are just sort of in the wind—

ANTONIO HOMEM: But it's through that—what David Salle or Schnabel do—[that] can then inform us on looking at Picabia in a different way. And what is interesting to me is that you see Picabia in a different way, even if you're not enthusiastic about David Salle or Schnabel. But even if you're not enthusiastic about their work, they open a new possibility of seeing other works. And that is very interesting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it sort of goes to the idea of what elevated Jan Vermeer to greatness was actually the development of the art of photography. And it needed an ancestor and there he was.

ANTONIO HOMEM: You think so? You think that was it?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think that's part of it—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —because he was not—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I think—yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —as highly valued—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I have to—I have to—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —in the 19th century.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —go and read the Francis Haskell after you say that to me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, there are many opinions but—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I even think I have it around there, so—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —it's one of those opinions.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Because [in] it, he talks about the early French critics who get interested in Vermeer. And, of course—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, the husband of Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun was a dealer in Paris and one of the early advocates of Vermeer and—

ANTONIO HOMEM: He was?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the Little Masters. Yeah. Yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Now, that I didn't—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: People like—

ANTONIO HOMEM: —know. But because that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Pieter de Hooch, Fabritius, people like that.

ANTONIO HOMEM: I see, I see. Oh, yeah, interesting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yeah, because I thought it was a bit—what Haskell talks about, I think, must come a little after the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's later, yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Later, yes, yes, definitely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But I think that—

ANTONIO HOMEM: But how interesting, yes—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Oh, I haven't seen—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, there was that—

ANTONIO HOMEM: —the show at the Met. So I suppose they talk about that too. I[!l] go and see it—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There was that [laughs]—

ANTONIO HOMEM: —on that perspective.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —that essay by—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I think, for me, Vermeer has more to do with the metaphysical order. It has to do in that sense as much with Piero de la Francesca as it has to do with Hopper, if you want. And they are all part of—or with—or precisely with Italian metaphysics.

You know, I had so much trouble finding the name of the—in my mind, memory. I was talking about the artist who I think I said that de Chirico was inspired by at the beginning, and it's Arnold Böcklin.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Böcklin, yeah, yeah, yeah. *The Isle of the Dead*, German, wonderful painter.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Exactly. Wonderful, wonderful. It was when I started in Zurich, I met, so to speak, the work of two Swiss artists that at the time I had never heard of, and that I—I mean, this was in the '50s—and that impressed me so much. One was Böcklin, and the other one was Fuseli.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Fuseli.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And there's also [Ferdinand] Hodler, too.

ANTONIO HOMEM: And Hodler, yes, yes, who, at the time, I didn't appreciate as much, but who I do now, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But that whole vision of nature and the wildness of it, and the dangerousness of it.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Oh, and even just the—actually the sort of kitschy, kind of artificiality of the whole thing, it's quite interesting, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But if you think about [Caspar David] Friedrich, too—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or even [Alexandre] Calame, these people are going back to this thing you were talking about, in Kiefer, this, you know—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Absolutely, yes, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —this obsession with the forest. And Simon Schama writes about that in his book *Landscape and Memory*.

ANTONIO HOMEM: *Landscape and Memory*, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And so that becomes sort of the Northern European muse, is this sort of wild nature. And I noticed this when my wife was Visiting Terra Professor of American Art at the Frei Universitat in Berlin a few years ago, that in autumn, when leaves fall, they just remain where they fall. Whereas, here in New York, if you go to Central Park, they've got leaf-blowers; they're picking everything up; they're taking it away.

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, but that's—

[Cross talk.]

I was telling you about those two images, when I was a child, that impressed me so much in that catalogue of German art. And I was talking about the etching, which is by [Hans] Baldung Grien, you know, who was the pupil of Dürer. And the other one, I don't know by whom it was, but that it was a kind of Friedrich, less good and [a] more romantic kind of wild forest. But it's actually interesting to me that I liked it. Yeah, but I suppose I saw it as a kind of surreal thing, at the time. Which probably is a possible reading, after all, to read Friedrich in a surreal way.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Haunted nature.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes, absolutely. Well, and the presence of death in such an interesting, unusual way, too, after all. Since it's a kind of death as calm and quiet.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It all goes back to [the battle of] Teutoburg Wald, and Kalkriese, and Arminius.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Possibly, even though I'm not quite sure, because that must have been rather bloody. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was, I'm afraid.

ANTONIO HOMEM: A bloody thing, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you know, they've excavated it. They found the site, and they excavated it, and a number of those—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Really?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —a number of artifacts, including an iron mask worn by a Roman cavalryman, and now on display at the Deutsche Historisches Museum in Berlin. And there's a little area—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, I probably never went. Yes, I should go there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, the place where the battle happened is in the middle of nowhere.

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, no, but I mean the Deutsche Historisches Museum; I don't think I ever went there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's full of military stuff.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And having, like, a lot of uniforms and swords and stuff, flags. But, yeah, a little part of it has this display about that, the artifacts of that battle, which no one knew the location [of] for years. But, yeah, that whole idea of haunted nature, which is, I think, part of the British idea of art as well.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, but I think it's the death that makes it—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —German.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —that is the element that is completely different for the Germans. Because after all, Friedrich is about death, probably as much as it is about nature. And the fact that he sees death in such an almost positive way is what interested—I mean, what interests me, and what I think I felt from the beginning as being interesting. As a matter of fact, going, looking at Friedrich with Robert [Feintuch] and Rona [Pondick], made me realize that a lot, because they found him very disturbing, and I don't. I find him very, very quieting, in a strange way.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I'm with you. Well, we're—I'm a barbarian myself. My ancestry is Celtic, and British.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Mine is Celtic, too, with being Portuguese.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it's quite barbaric. But, yeah, I find it very soothing and pleasing and gorgeous and beautiful. But at the same time, I can see where somebody might—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Oh, I can see it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —find it troubling.

ANTONIO HOMEM: I can see it, totally. And it is troubling. But I find it very interesting, the fact that he presents the troubling in that kind of wonderful, sort of quiet way. It's death as peace, basically.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

ANTONIO HOMEM: The way he presents it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So let me ask you about collectors. Because collectors, as you observed, have become very much—they always were a powerful part of the art world. They were the patrons who organized the great museums, and who were the most sought-after clients by art dealers. But I'm sure that one of the things that you and your associates did all the time would be mentoring people who had an instinctive interest or were drawn—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes. I don't know whether "mentoring" would be the right word. Let's say that the people we used to know that were collectors were people that we generally would have—we would talk a lot, the way we are talking right now. And very often, not even about particular artists or works, but just about—I mean, the way we are talking now.

Now I think that that kind of talk is completely over. I don't think that there are—how can I say? I don't think there are talks between dealers and collectors, or even talks between collectors that are this kind of talk. I think that everything became very much about—I don't even know about what, about art politics and money, and so very much nowadays also on all of these things on gender and politics and geography, which I find so incredibly boring. And the need for art to be related to—you know, I find it so odd that everybody starts counting, like, how many women artists are in a collection, or something like that. And I find it actually quite shocking, in a certain way. And in the same way, this idea that, "Oh, what about—don't you have an Indian artist? Don't you have a Japanese artist? Don't you have a South American artist?" and all of those notions. I mean, to me, art is so very much above all of that. And that all of these factors become so important is totally shocking to me.

I said that I never believed, even though it probably existed, that male chauvinist choices existed. I never believed in it until I saw the feminist, the female chauvinistic choices being made. And suddenly I thought, Oh, my God, then if this is happening now, maybe it was happening that way against women. And I find in both cases the idea completely shocking. We never thought of that, and actually, now, it's very interesting, because we showed relatively few women. Most of the women we showed were part of couples, like Bernd and Hilla Becher, or Anne and Patrick Poirier, or that kind of situation.

But curiously enough, we proposed shows to quite, I mean, at least half a dozen women artists. And I'm not going to say the names, because I must confess, it's sort of a funny statement to make, that we proposed shows to at least half a dozen women artists in our lives, and actually all of them refused, which is interesting. And I confess—and that is why I say that I'm not going to say names—that in all of the cases, I'm glad they refused,

because I don't think that their work really was work that we related that much with. And at the time, we proposed a show not because they were women, but because we thought we related to the work, but it didn't stay somehow.

But it's a strange fact, and it's something that I didn't even realize, by the way. I didn't think of it until recent years, because since people generally always ask, Well, why so very few women? And I suddenly thought of that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Perhaps there's some answer to that question in the fact that so many artists have, since the '60s, had day jobs in academia, where a lot of people are making work and exhibiting work. And then they're in the academic world, where these kinds of issues of gender—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, I think that that attitude started in the academic world. And it's certainly drowned everything, and I think it's there all over.

Now this part is really completely indiscreet, I suppose, to say, but I thought it was so interesting. The Met Breuer, open now, there is a show of an Indian artist, a woman of a certain age, I believe, or at least she died old. And it's work that I have nothing against, but I really can't possibly imagine that if she had been an American man, she could have had that show there. And it's very difficult not to think that the only reason she's there is because she was a woman, and she's Indian, and she died at 90-some years. I mean, it's a nice idea to re—to situate, to bring her work. Also I understand that there was an Indian donor who gave huge amounts of money to the museum.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That could have nothing to do with it, I'm sure.

ANTONIO HOMEM: I'm sure it has nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing to do with it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: It would be too shocking, and museums are not for sale. But—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Absolutely not.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Absolutely not. Now, nobody, as a matter of fact, would talk about that in reviews. I mean, the Whitney would be criticized by any Biennial, but this would not, absolutely, be touched. And I believe Holland Cotter, the only thing he has to say is, "How wonderful, and I hope they'll show many South American artists in the future." Why? It reminds me of an older couple who came a few years ago to the gallery, and they asked me, "Do you have any Chinese artists?" And I said, "No, we don't." They said, "Why don't you have any Chinese artists?" And I said, "Well, you know, I generally just look for artists who interest me." They said, "But you should look among the Chinese, there must be one who interests you." And you know, what is that?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, anyway, it's really too strange, really.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, that's a funny, funny observation. Well, back to these issue-based bodies of artwork, things like gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This, I think it's safe to say, is coming out of academia, because this is where these—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Oh, I should think so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —where these taxonomies are being refined into disciplines. And I think that the fact that a lot of artists, including a number of artists that you've shown, have worked in universities and colleges, naturally are kind of affected by that climate. And I can also share that another dealer with whom I spoke, an uptown mega-dealer, said the worst thing an artist can do is teach. Do you agree with that?

ANTONIO HOMEM: I have no idea. The worst thing an artist can do is not have an idea of what he wants to do that is interesting. [Laughs.] I don't think that—well, as a matter of fact, I think it's completely absurd. You know that T. S. Eliot worked in a bank, and you know that at the end of his life, a group of rich friends told him that he could stop working in the bank and just write poetry; they would give some kind of money, a monthly stipend or something. And he was supposed to have said, "Not work in the bank?" It's something in the sense that, basically, working in the bank was what kept him going on with his poetry. Now, I'm quite sure that that is not true for many other people, but I don't believe that there is a rule, that there is an idea—and I especially don't believe that an occupation of an artist can change his work. I mean, I think if he's serious about his work.

In terms of occupations of artists, one story that I find so interesting, too, is the one of Jeff Koons and his career in Wall Street. Generally, the '70s' artists were very proud of making work that was not commercial.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: But they always expected that someone would pay for it, somehow, not even for the work, but at least for them to be able to do their unsellable, uncommercial work. They would like to find someone who would do something.

I remember, actually, a moviemaker of that period, Gregory Markopoulos; I don't know whether you remember [him]. I met him—I didn't know him that well, but he used to come here all the time and [ask] could we find someone who would help him. And at that point, I forget how it was, but I think it was the beginning—it was the early '70s; it was the beginning of us trying to do something with videotapes and films—and I started talking about the possibility of maybe, you know, making cassettes, and being able to sell it. And he was disgusted with me, and he said, "Oh, no, Antonio, I'm not looking for something like that. I'm looking for a"—how do you say it, you know, "someone rich who will give me money for me to make my work."

Well, okay, good, so why not? It was a traditional, actually, idea. It was an art-historical perspective of how you deal with money.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A patron, he was looking for a patron.

ANTONIO HOMEM: A patron, a patron, exactly.

Now I think that Koons had a very interesting attitude at the beginning of his life, because his work needed money to be fabricated; he didn't have money. He couldn't find anybody to give him money. And so in a very Koonsian way, I think he decided, Well, I'll have to make money and finance my work. And so he goes to Wall Street and he makes money. Which is quite remarkable in itself, I think. And he makes money, and he finances his work, and he stops working in Wall Street the moment that he financed his work. It served its purpose, and he's over.

Now, this story I find totally extraordinary, and very interesting, and very positive, and very creative even, in a certain way. It's always quoted by everyone as a proof that he's not really a real artist, because what he is is someone who worked in Wall Street and who made money, and is that an artist, I ask you? Now I find that—those are the things that I find really fascinating. And it's part of that myth of if you—the worst thing is to teach; the worst thing is to make money; the worst thing is, I don't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you said last time, too, that there was this attitude back in the last century that the harder a piece of work was to sell, you know, the better it must be.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes. And they are things, I think, that exist since ever, you know. You know that Proust was refused by the NRF [*Nouvelle Revue Française*], because of, partly because of Gide, and Gide had never even read his manuscript. The reason for being refused was that he was a sort of social young man, of a family with money.

And those are the things that are so dangerous, actually, for one to be influenced by in one's taste. Because these things, we are all, how can I say? We all come to be influenced by them. I never thought of being influenced by gender, and I never thought of being influenced by a nationality. But it could happen that one would have trouble taking someone seriously who one would see as very social, very rich, and all of that.

And I see why people have trouble with that aspect of Warhol's [work], at a moment of his life; he didn't start there. And I did think, as a matter of fact, that Fred Hughes, who was the person who basically helped Warhol build all that kind of social platform, that kind of jet-set image—and I always thought that he did him a tremendous disservice, and I always thought it was funny that he was seen as, well, as a good, a very important financial advisor of Warhol, which he was. But I basically think that the advice he gave Warhol, and the advice that Warhol wanted to receive and to follow, was terrible advice. And Warhol had to die for his prices to go up and for his work to exist on his own. Because in a strange way, everything he did in order to commercialize his work just was bad commercially for his work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you mean his association with the jet-set?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, and also his attitude, which was very Warholian, too, in a certain way. You know, you could—he would do anything you would ask him to do. You would say that you wanted to have a portrait of your grandmother; you would have a portrait of your grandmother. You would say, "I want to do something on Coca-Cola." He would do something—he had done it already. But, well, I mean on anything else. And that, by the way, I think is rather an interesting attitude, and he didn't always do very good work in that way. Maybe someday it

will appear that it's better than what I think it is.

But I think that the fact that he was able to do it, that he was able to basically do anything on anything, is also an interesting fact artistically. And it was part of his attitude, and part of the way he sold his art. And I think it's quite interesting to think, to say, "I can make art out of anything. Just bring me anything, and I can do something about it." But that was very negative. And I must say that I also saw it negatively at the time, that if you went and offered, in those days, \$250,000 to Warhol, you could make an edition; you could make a series of paintings; he could make anything you wanted on anything you wanted. And you hear that and you're sort of like, Oh, dear.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, maybe in his mind that was his day job.

ANTONIO HOMEM: That was his day job, but he always thought, I think, of his art as his day job. That was the point. His art was his day job. And you see, that was what was interesting to me about him. It's like the idea of Kiefer suddenly using Fascism in a totally new way. Warhol used commercialism in a totally new way. Everything that other people would refuse or not want, or be afraid of being linked with, he accepted with enthusiasm.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, there were artists who would go on Johnny Carson, and artists who would not, you know. People like Dali, or Truman Capote, or—

ANTONIO HOMEM: They would go.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, they would go.

ANTONIO HOMEM: They would go, sure, sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But that was the milieu of artists who were not taken seriously on a certain level.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, of course, of course. And Warhol was part of that, too, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. So, but he's overcome that in his post-mortem.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, because again, it's not so much—it's not so important whether he went to the Johnny Carson show or not. Basically, his work is what the important thing is, and his work is what it is, and his work now. You see, at the past, precisely, people couldn't see the work because of him. Now they see him through the work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Good point. So once you take away the guy with the turtleneck and the—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —crazy wig and the sunglasses.

ANTONIO HOMEM: The interesting thing is to find the guy with the crazy wig through the work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Not to see the work through the guy with the crazy wig.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Good point, good point. One of my narrators in another interview actually quoted Ed Ruscha, who said that there were two kinds of artwork. There was the kind of artwork which made you say, "Wow, huh?" And then there was other artwork that made you say, "Huh, wow." [Laughs.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: Very nice. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: About Warhol, though, one of the things that I think is remarkable about his legacy is the philanthropy that has been able to occur through his estate.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, I don't know how much he was really linked with all of that, since—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, he had to have at least given someone power of attorney to do that.

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, no, I'm sure, I'm sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But do you have a sense that more artists today are motivated to make provisions for some kind of foundation?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, I think that generally has to do with situations. If you don't have heirs, and if you—and also in a certain way, if you want to, for your name also to be made, not only through your works, but in other ways, you—after all, it is also a source of power, let's say. So it's very logical that people will want to do it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you have many organizations in town that are artist-estate—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Sure, sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —foundations. Most of which are doing very little for anybody outside of the immediate family, making a catalogue raisonné, or—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes, well, because, I suppose—I don't know, I suppose it's also a matter of money. I'm in that case, in the sense that there is a foundation for the Sonnabend collection, and I'm not going to be raising money. I'm going to be the only source of money, basically, for that foundation. And so I'm not interested in doing anything. All I want to do is to keep the collection intact, and to be able for it to be seen and to exist.

Now there are other—well, you know, it's different, probably. I want for something be kept the way it is. In the case of Warhol or of Mapplethorpe, the idea is you don't keep what there is. As a matter of fact, you try to sell it, and you have other things happen. Why not? I think it's very good that foundations make other things possible. But I don't know, I think that it would be good if they would also concentrate on the artist. I think that I would see it positively that the foundation made by the estate of an important artist would concentrate very much on that artist, more than on anything else. But I imagine—I mean, why take care of other artists if you have not done what needed to be done, or what would be best to do, for that particular artist?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, in the case of [the] Rauschenberg Foundation, which is worth—we don't need to say how much.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, I imagine a lot.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But many, many, many times more than either the Warhol Foundation or Pollock-Krasner Foundation.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Really?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: More than the Warhol one?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Much more.

ANTONIO HOMEM: How interesting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And looking into doing things for nature conservancy and AIDS research and other—and I don't know if they're continuing with Change Inc. and so forth.

ANTONIO HOMEM: I'm sure Bob would be very much for that, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, and also you've got [the] Pollock-Krasner Foundation, which gives money to artists.

ANTONIO HOMEM: I think all of that is very positive, really. I'm not criticizing it. But let's say that I do find also that there should be a feeling of duty in doing something for the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —for the legacy of the artist.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —for the legacy of the artist, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, in the case of—

ANTONIO HOMEM: You see, maybe I'm talking this way because I have a feeling, maybe an unfair feeling, that the right attitude, the correct attitude, is to give to new people, to young people, rather than to give to the legacy, basically, of the artist—and of course, ideally, both should be taken care of. But it seems to me that the first duty would be towards the legacy of the artist anyway.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that certainly you have to do, because in the case of any artist estate, what is fueling, what is providing the funding for other activities is the sale of work.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes, of course. And you know, that happens all the time, too, with collectors. After all, there are collectors, or descendants of collectors, who sell all the work to give it to causes. There's now, like, a

widow of some grandson of Picasso who's selling everything they inherited in order to give it to all kinds of causes of welfare things, and I think she actually has a great distaste for Picasso as a person, and that is deserved probably.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: She's not alone.

ANTONIO HOMEM: She's not alone. But—and so, yes, so those are choices also that people make. But in my case—and God knows what will happen to the collection later on—I know that my son feels very strongly about it, too, but afterwards, God knows how long that will stay. But I like the idea that as long as I stay, I'll do what I can for that collection to exist and, if possible, to be shown. Not particularly even in New York, where there are so many other things to see, but showing it in Lisbon, showing it in Portugal, even showing it in Venice, for me, has meaning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So in your dealings with clients, with collectors, with buyers, I would think there would be three or four categories. You would have art buyers, people who are trying to—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I never made any distinction of that kind. For me, anybody who is interested in anything that I'm interested in is someone that I find interesting. And, yes, and that's really all. As a matter of fact, I'm probably the only art dealer who I always spoke with anybody [who] would come into the gallery. I never had appointments or anything, and I was always very available in terms of just talking with no matter who came into the gallery.

I always did that, actually, not even for a matter of principle, but because it's my nature. I like to exchange ideas with people, the way we are doing right now, you know. So what we've been doing, I would do with anybody. There would be, of course, more interesting dialogues and less interesting ones, and so that would be, of course, the important thing. Now, it's not to say that if someone comes with a well-known collector and all that, I will not try and find out whether there is any link that we may have. But that would be really mainly, it's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, posing the question, because there famously are stories about Leo Castelli and others being approached by buyers or clients wishing to purchase a piece, and being told that they can't buy it because—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, I think that that is probably true, with Leo. Because Leo was very impressed by social status, as a matter of fact. And so he did—I'm quite convinced, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was trying to place the artist's work in the best collections.

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, but also—no, I don't think it's—yes, well, you know, what are the best collections? Very often the best collections are the collections of people who will sell everything the moment it's not in fashion anymore, or something like that. So, and what are the best collections?

I quote sometimes that when we had the first Baselitz show here, it was—those artists, those German Neo-Expressionist artists, were being incredibly successful here. And their dealer in Germany, Michael Verner, was a little taken aback by all the success, and I think he was a little worried about what did it mean, that we were being so successful. And so I told him that I had sold two Baselitzes to some collector, and he looked surprised, and he said, "Well, why did you sell him two Baselitzes? Is it an important collection?" And I said, "Well, Michael, if it was not before, I guess it must be now."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: And that was the end of it. And you know, I have great distrust, precisely, of great collectors in that sense. I think that great collectors are like professionals; they have to be great collectors. I'm not interested in great collectors; I'm interested in people who are collectors who are really interested in their collection, and in their choices, and sometimes those are great collectors. I think that was certainly true for most of the great collectors in the '70s and all, because again, they were people who had no other reason for doing what they were doing aside from their interest in what they were doing. As a matter of fact, I suppose that very often they probably were seen by their families or friends as eccentrics. But since then, starting in the '80s, great collectors are just people who are famous for being famous.

And those people again—what I liked when I came to New York, I remember saying that in Europe, everybody sort of—and it was not true for everybody, but most people had all more or less the same collection. And in New York, people always had very varied collections. And the collections in Europe were much better, and of much higher level, but the collections here were more interesting because they had sometimes very good things and very bad things, but it all had to do—you felt that there was someone behind them, someone making choices.

And for me, the great collections, or the great collectors, are the collectors who make choices, really. And I

guess there are fewer and fewer of those, because it's also difficult for collectors to make choices nowadays. To start with, they have to deal with 50,000 artists to choose from. And to go on, there is also all that pressure on having made the right choices that everybody approves, that make money at auction, keeping your reputation up. I mean, is everything you have the best there is that everybody would envy? And anybody who thinks like that is already somebody I'm not interested in.

You know, I notice with the Sonnabend collection, what interests me the most sometimes are the works of the less successful artists, because the works of the most successful artists I understand and know very, very well. But I sometimes think it's the ones of the less successful artists that I need to live with, because I have to get to know them better, to understand them better. And that is an attitude that—I'm not talking about myself as being a paragon; I just think that I look in others for what I have—for the way I look at things myself. So I do look for other people who would think this way. And the great collectors are rarely the ones who think that way.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Not the people who all have the same 100 paintings by the same 100 artists.

ANTONIO HOMEM: What do you call the people who, in French, you call a *grossiste* [wholesaler], when you sell in quantity? What do you call that, selling in quantity? Or dealing in quantities of things? In other words, you have shops in which you just—like a jewelry shop will just deal in these things, but there's someone selling bananas, and he has bananas from all of the world.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Volume sales, yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, well, I don't know. And the great collectors nowadays are about that. They are all in bananas, let's say. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Everything's in bananas.

ANTONIO HOMEM: I'm interested in people who are seeing it more in the jewelry shop, and they have just this kind of—and I'm not saying this, of course, because jewels are precious and bananas are not. I just mean that when you are selling, when you are dealing with huge amounts of things, you do lose—you have to lose focus.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I guess if you're starting, and you walk on all fours, a banana is precious.

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, no, I think bananas are very good. I have one every day; it's just a silly example.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But people famously—like the late Joe Hirshhorn would walk into a gallery, according to legend and lore, and walk around for a minute, and say, "I'll take it all; send me a bill."

ANTONIO HOMEM: I doubt very much, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is reported, that he would do this, periodically.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Sure, sure. Well, but when would he do that? I don't think that he did that in every gallery he would go in.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, no.

ANTONIO HOMEM: So probably it was—I mean, it's the kind of thing that a collector will do nowadays, too, but he'll do it with someone who sells very high at auction, and if he can, he buys all of it, and as a matter of fact he'll sell a few of them at auction one year from now, or maybe two.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So trying to corner the market, and then slowly build the price—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Just to, you know, just buying and selling, it's part of the—as a matter of fact, that is also the situation nowadays. I don't think that most people keep art; they buy and sell, and they just—you know, just something that you keep revolving a door on it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So can you share a few reminiscences or stories about the kind of collector you're describing? The kind of collector who really is building a collection?

ANTONIO HOMEM: I think there used to be—they were practically all of them, in the past. In other words, people were buying, were making collections in a way because they wanted to define their tastes, to understand really what were their choices, what were they interested in. And granted, you don't even need to buy, probably, in order to do that. But having to buy is interesting in the sense that you do—how can I say? It's easy to go somewhere and say, I like this, this, and that. And maybe that would be the Hirshhorn way, too, for him saying, "I like this, this, and that," is the same thing as, "Buy this, this, and that," if he's not paying attention to the money, and if he has enough money for that. But it can't have been that true, because can you imagine the

amount of works there would have been? No matter how many works are in his collection, there can't be enough for him to buy hundreds of full shelves. But anyway, so—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It may have happened twice, but the story has improved.

ANTONIO HOMEM: It must have happened twice, in shows of very established artists. Can you imagine? I really don't. But even though, it can happen, I'm sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what you're saying is that the difference between collectors then—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Let's say that the collections that I'm interested in are the collections in which people really define their tastes. I think that, in that sense, the Barnes collection is very interesting. The big problem with the Barnes collection for me is that I think that Barnes wants to impose to everybody else the same reading of his collection that he had of his collection. And I have nothing against that, but it should be possible that the works could be also seen in a way in which they would be read in a different way.

But I can understand him wanting—as a matter of fact, I want for people to read, when I make a show of the Sonnabend collection, I want for people to read the collection in order to see it the way we saw it. But of course, I also lend works to every show of the artist, or whatever, anytime. As a matter of fact, practically anytime I must for a show, for a loan of a work, I say yes. So the big disaster, I think, with the Barnes collection is the fact that he really didn't want the work to have a life of its own; he wanted the work only to be seen as a part of his choice and of his collection.

So for me, he's not wrong on wanting that. But he's wrong on not wanting everything else. For me, what Barnes wants is good. What he doesn't want is bad. But so certainly a collection like his, I like very much.

Actually, it's funny, I had a conversation just a few weeks ago in Portugal in which I was asked what did I think were the best collections that I knew. And I mentioned that one collection that I thought was marvelous was the collection of David Sylvester, the art critic, and I only know it because of the auction of his collection after his death. And I thought it was so wonderful because he had all kinds of things, and all kinds of things of all kinds of prices, of all kinds of importance. And archaeological things, and prints, and drawings, and paintings, and anything. And it all made perfect sense together. Even the things I don't care for make perfect sense together. And you could see that they were a perfect portrait of him. They were like a map of what his mind was. That is what I admire in [a] collection.

And I sometimes say that the collections I find the most interesting ones are the ones in which there are artists I don't appreciate, but those artists look good and interesting in that collection. That, for me, is a great sign of a very, very interesting collection.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So can you provide an example of that?

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, not immediately. And it just happens here and there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Not like a comprehensive, like the Thyssen collection, and—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, as a matter of fact, the Thyssen collection in Madrid, for instance, yes, he has something very interesting there, which is, he has a series of portraits very often by anonymous painters. And they are all very, very, very interesting. And the fact that they are anonymous painters, anonymous artists, and that they are also interesting, means that they were being shown. In other words, I'm not seeing the work of an artist there; I'm just seeing the work of a selection, and it is very good. Yes, it's interesting that you mentioned Thyssen.

In other words, for me, a collection, what is interesting in a collection—you see, you can look at a collection in two ways, I suppose, probably more. One is as a process of selection, and you are interested in the process of selection and in the person who made the selection. It's the one I tend to be interested in. Then you can be interested in it simply because it's large and full of marvelous things. And my God, nothing to complain about that. Quite the opposite. But of course, you can't, how can I say, one doesn't mean the other necessarily. So that you have very interesting collections like the David Sylvester one with very few masterpieces, and you can have very marvelous collections full of masterpieces, but where there's no apparent selection anyway.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's just sort of a numismatic kind of approach to it.

ANTONIO HOMEM: It's just a huge amount—not even numismatic; it's a hit parade. And why not?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hit parade, yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: What's wrong with a hit parade?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So that's been a criticism that has been leveled at some of the mega-collectors like Eli Broad and so forth, is that they've got—

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, but Eli Broad, as a matter of fact, has lots of things that are not hits, and I don't know whether he shows them. But I must say it's rather nice, because, you know, as a matter of—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So he has a broader appetite.

ANTONIO HOMEM: His generation was still of just choosing. And especially that he had the money, and he was open, so he was quite generous in that sense of buying things without needing an approval. I mean, the hit parades are more, I don't know, people like, I suppose, Geffen or something like that. Or that Las Vegas guy, or people like that. Yes, those have to be hit parades. And why not, and it's great, and they have marvelous things, and I'm—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you have any dealings with—I suspect perhaps you did—with Robert Meyerhoff and his wife?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes, definitely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Have you seen that collection?

ANTONIO HOMEM: I've seen the collection; it's very beautiful.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: His private museum?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes, it's great. I like it very much. And they were a very interesting case, I think. They did something very intelligent, and I think that they probably did it instinctively, even. And it is basically that they made a collection—I mean, they met several important artists, and they made a collection of their friends. And somehow, basically, those friends were very interesting artists. And I don't know to what point—I don't know whether they are their choices or the artist's choices, but they're really both wonderful things. Great openness, and I like it very much, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: She, I guess, was a very able and diligent registrar, and she created this whole archive of their purchases, and what they bought and what they sold. And I interviewed Robert Meyerhoff two years ago, and he shared a story about a dealer who asked his wife, or asked them, "Is there one artist you wish you had collected? Is there one artist who should be in your collection and isn't in your collection?" He said, "Well, let's do this. Let's write a name down on a piece of paper, and then open them up at the same time." And they did, and the name on it was Twombly.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Both of them, it was Twombly? I can understand it, yes. I totally agree.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That was sort of the one person—

[Cross talk.]

But so there is an example of a person who, or of collectors, a couple, who are very clear about, you know, the mission of their volume. And so that interests you more. You're saying you're seeing that less and less?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes, because the financial success became such a defining—these days, the art is so little important. Gender is important; nationality is important; commercial success is important. The art is just a result of all of this. I mean, if you can find someone who has the right gender, the right nationality, and the right amount at auction, then you have what a success is. You don't need anything.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But the art doesn't really have anything to do with it.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Let's say that the art comes after.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The art could be anything, as long as—

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, the art comes after. I mean, given these three things, the art comes next.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Next.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, I think.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Maybe there's social status or—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, I suppose so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Have you had any interactions with some of the notable new collectors building museums, like Alice Walton?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, so many of the older collectors also built museums. And good, I'm all for that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Have you had any interactions with Alice Walton, or have you been to her museum?

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, no, no.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is a different agenda—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Is she the feminist?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, no, no, she built the museum in Bentonville, Arkansas.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Right, and what does she show?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: American art, she's buying American art.

ANTONIO HOMEM: That's already bad. I mean, the fact that one has a limitation, you see. I remember this man who told me that he was making a collection of European woman photographers, and I thought, Am I going to ask him whether they should be blonds or not? Because it seemed like he will, you know—if you were going to choose like that, why not go on? But, yeah, you know, I think it's so poor, when you are making barriers. Again, you see, you're making a barrier that doesn't have to do with art. If it interests you as art, but you don't buy because it's not American, it's already a disaster; you already failed. In my way of thinking, you already failed.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The problem is, I think, with a lot of people who don't have vast amounts of money, in order to get funding for projects, you need to tie the project to one of these themes.

ANTONIO HOMEM: It's very—the theme you should tie it to is your taste.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: And you know, it can be very difficult with your taste. I can have different levels of difficulty, and I can become really difficult with my tastes, and I can be very loose also. And money is a very good way of being rigid, of being thorough.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Money has no taste.

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, money is a barrier. Money builds a barrier, definitely. I mean, being American or not shouldn't be a barrier. Not having the money certainly is a good barrier.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What about—

ANTONIO HOMEM: And an understandable barrier.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —some other collectors, like Patty Cisneros, who's been very—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, she buys South American artists, no?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: I mean, so what the hell do I have to do with that? Someone who buys South American artists, or American, or Czechoslovakian, or Indian, or Chinese, or Japanese?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I think in—

ANTONIO HOMEM: To me, it's someone without any interest.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In the case in—

ANTONIO HOMEM: She's not interested in art; she's interested in South America.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I don't know, I think she's interested in art, also, in abstraction.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes, in case—

[Cross talk.]

If they are South American. And that to me is absolutely—I don't like it, you see. I don't like someone—I don't like it. I don't find it interesting. It's not me. Someone who looks at things—if it's South American, I'm interested; if it's not, I'm not. It's terrible. If it's American, it's good; if it's not American, it's not for me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I don't know if it's really about that. Perhaps it's more about the fact that places like MoMA, during the Cold War, had a particular agenda and got behind certain kinds of work.

ANTONIO HOMEM: You know, I—that doesn't interest me, too. [That] reminds me that once, some Italian woman, mayor, explained to us that people were so bad in not hiring women, that after she became mayor, she only hired women. And I said, "But do you think it's the right way to fight the mafia, organizing a new mafia against the mafia?" And that stopped the conversation.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, the old adage "two wrongs don't make a right," so—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yeah, yeah. So I just don't understand that. I don't understand people not choosing South American artists, and I don't understand people choosing South American artists. It has no part in it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So in a global art world, where you can choose, where you can find art being made all around the globe, 30, 40, 50 years ago, these artists were not being offered to collectors?

ANTONIO HOMEM: They were not being offered; they were not being known. They probably also—no, certainly not. And I certainly think that there was something wrong if somebody interesting was not shown because he was South American; I think that's really terrible. But I don't seem to see that exactly existing, because after all, there were South American artists in Paris being quite successful.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

ANTONIO HOMEM: So—but then they were in Paris, it's true. And if they were in South America, they probably wouldn't have that possibility. I don't say no; I mean, that might have happened. But to be interested in their work because they were South American, because they were women, because they were this or that, no, that I don't understand.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Part of it must be, I hope you'd agree, that it's the technology and the rapidity or the instantaneity—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Oh, of course, of course, of course.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —of communication has made it much easier.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Absolutely, absolutely. No, no, and I certainly understand [that] very well. I just—I find it very impossible to accept that kind of limitation. To look at art being limited by factors that have nothing to do with art, I don't—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Like nationality, gender, ethnicity, and whatever.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Any [factor] that has nothing to do with art, I find that very difficult to accept. And even very offensive, very repulsive to me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So are you encouraged by the fact that now we—that an artist like El Anatsui could be celebrated, a Nigerian artist?

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, yes, I think it's very good. I think it's very good, but knowledge is very good. And of course, it creates the problem of the 500,000 artists. But in itself, it's good, too, after all. I think that if selections are to be made, they should be made by each one of us. But ideally, all the information should be available, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how does a collector, let's say—for example, let's say I've just made a pile of money on Wall Street, and I have this vaguely developed but passionate appetite for art, and I'm going around to galleries, and I'm overwhelmed by all of the—the whole Chinese [restaurant] menu of options, you know. Thousands, it's like turning on the television 30 years ago and there were 20 channels, and now there are 5,000.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Well, you choose the channels on television. You do it the same way with art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You have to—one by one, you have to look [at] the work.

ANTONIO HOMEM: You look at them; you look at them several times; you see which ones are the ones you respond to. And you may end up making bad choices, but those bad choices are what you are. And they are what you are interested in, and that is a very good choice, even if it's a bad choice.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because it's part of your development.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Because it's you, because it's part of your taste; it's part of who you are and what you are.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ANTONIO HOMEM: And I find it more interesting to—

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ANTONIO HOMEM: —have a collection of less important things that reflects you than to have a collection of important things that doesn't reflect you in any way, with which you have absolutely no link.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So I could start collecting Hummels and end up being interested in pre-Colombian Tawantinsuyu—

ANTONIO HOMEM: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —sculpture.

ANTONIO HOMEM: You might even be interested in both. I knew cases in which people are interested in both—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: —which is surprising, but, you know, it can also be informative.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

ANTONIO HOMEM: That's even where I say, suddenly you go and see such a collection and you are surprised to see that, actually, a Hummel seen in that perspective might be more interesting than you thought. That becomes a very interesting collection.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So that's an interesting point to make. Do you see a lot of young collectors these days?

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, I don't see anyone. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, you don't see anyone?

ANTONIO HOMEM: No, no, I see very few people.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But does the gallery, do you think? Are they seeing a new generation coming up?

ANTONIO HOMEM: I'm sure they do, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But I guess my question is, with things moving along, with more artists exhibiting—

ANTONIO HOMEM: I think there's a huge amount of people collecting, and there's a huge amount of everything.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: If there's one thing you could change about the world today, the art world today, what would it be?

ANTONIO HOMEM: I have no idea. [Laughs.] I wouldn't change anything. I mean, it's what it is. Well, yes, as a matter of fact, I would like to live in an art world of the kind that I knew before, it's true, and not because I was younger then or anything like that, but just because there were more people I could have the kind of conversation we are having. As a matter of fact, yes.

Well, look, what I would like to change would be if there would be a world in which I could have this conversation I'm having with you with more people, and I don't think that there are more and more people with whom one can have this kind of conversation these days. There is an enormous amount of people, but very few with—but then it is, as I said, about the artist. Before there were 500 and there were five interesting. Now there are 50,000 and there are five interesting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: So now there—probably with people too. I mean, there would be five people one could have this conversation among 500. Now there are five people among 50,000. It's more difficult to find the five. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What advice would you give to someone who is thinking of becoming an art dealer?

ANTONIO HOMEM: To look around, to look at things, and to enjoy making choices. I think enjoying making choices is very important. And one makes choices all the time, after all, and I think that most people don't want to make choices, or feel afraid of making choices.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They don't have the courage of their own taste.

ANTONIO HOMEM: They are not interested, definitely, in making choices. They want to choose the right thing. They don't want to make a choice so—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Understood.

ANTONIO HOMEM: And I would say, well, Try and make choices instead of choosing the right thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Make your own choices.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And artists, what would you—

ANTONIO HOMEM: The same.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The same thing?

ANTONIO HOMEM: The same advice. For me, it's true for everybody. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The same advice. Any practical advice? One dealer I interviewed said that you had to be able to make the payroll and pay the rent for five years without bringing a dollar into the gallery in order to be successful.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Yes, well, I never did all those mathematics and neither did Ileana, but then we precisely always—I mean, that's precisely what Ileana or Leo never made and that I also never made, so I'm just sort of—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—

ANTONIO HOMEM: —just muddled through.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —dealing art is—

ANTONIO HOMEM: [Laughs.] Even though—you make me think of a story that I always found very funny, and it was very much at the beginning of my time at the gallery. So it was new to me and it was like a different world, but I still like that story very much.

And it was being in Paris with Michael and Ileana, and Ileana becoming worried about precisely the fact that we had not made sales for a long time, and money and all that, and how was it? [Laughs.] And so Ileana took a pencil and she started writing names of paintings that she had, one after the other, and put the price on each thing, and then by the time she added, it came to a million dollars. She said, "Oh, well, look." [Laughs.] So she felt okay; she had a safety net. But so that is as close as I came to that kind of thinking.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: And at the time I thought this was so tremendously funny, but I can understand it very well too. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So optimism is—

ANTONIO HOMEM: You know, you hope for the best.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Ileana was given a prize a few—in the '80s in Germany—and she made a speech and she said that she thanked everybody for having helped her because she had—all her life she had been the—what is it? No, it's not—you know, the La Fontaine thing of the ant and the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —and the—it's a cicada or what? It's not a grasshopper really. I mean, because it's the insect

that sings that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The cricket.

ANTONIO HOMEM: Huh?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is it a cricket?

ANTONIO HOMEM: It's maybe a cricket.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

ANTONIO HOMEM: And at the end of the story, that precisely the ants worked all summer, and the cricket or whatever it was didn't. It just sang all the summer. And so at the end of the summer, the cricket is dying of hunger and goes and asks [for] help from the ant, and [the] ant says, "Well, you sang the whole summer; well, dance now." And Ileana said, well, she always had a very bad opinion of the ant.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ANTONIO HOMEM: And she had always been the cricket her whole life, and she was very thankful to everybody [laughs] who helped her—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's wonderful.

ANTONIO HOMEM: —managing to remain the cricket all her life. And it was entirely—it was a very fair assessment of her life, and that is why I say that she was absolutely no businesswoman and neither was Leo. Leo was totally another cricket. They just sang their whole lives, and I was very lucky in the sense that I was able to sing my whole life too. [Laughs.] So I'm the cricket heir. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thank you so much for you time.

ANTONIO HOMEM: You are very welcome. It was very enjoyable.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And for me, thanks.

ANTONIO HOMEM: I'll miss our conversations.

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