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**Oral history interview with Richard Tuttle, 2016  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Richard Tuttle on November 14 and 17, 2016. The interview took place at Richard Tuttle's home in New York City, and was conducted by James McElhinney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Richard Tuttle and James McElhinney have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking with Richard Tuttle on Monday the 14th of November 2016, at his home in New York City. Okay. Good morning.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Good morning, James.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thanks. Thanks for agreeing to this conversation. When was the first time you were aware of being in the presence of a work of art?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Okay. My mom took me to the Met quite early. I think I could've been four or five years old. Something like that. And it was just like an alcoholic taking their first drink. Something like that. Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Good [laughs]. Do you remember any of the specific pieces that bowled you over that first trip?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, I did a little piece with Michael Kimmelman where he wanted to connect a work at the Met and an artist's work. And because he asked that question, a work of mine came to mind, and that first visit to the Met, where I was taken in as this little boy past these great Assyrian winged bulls.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And, well, I think I had a real art experience at that point as the—you know, I'd known that animals had four legs, and that they—at that height, probably, my eyes went right to the claws of the—the hooves, claws, hooves of the—and I saw five. And I knew that wasn't, that wasn't the real world. That was something—somebody made that for a certain reason. And the tension between the four and the five and the fact that it was foundational and heavy and so on. So that, for me, did all the things art is supposed to do for us, and I was five years old. So, you're five, you know. Something like that. I still go to the Met every Friday night, to renew [laughs] myself.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Charge the batteries.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Exactly. Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, when you say, "What art is supposed to do," you mean it's supposed to transport one to a different reality?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, I think the—I see the, sort of, fork in the road where, say, the right way is, more or less, life where you come to all the bad stuff, the competition and the anger and the grief and everything. And then the left fork where you get beauty and—renewal is an important part, you have a—you have a sense of excitement about life and so on. So, I still make that distinction between—that art is something which brings us to all the good things in life. But it's also, I think—in that case, it was, like, the beginning of a long process of knowing oneself. My family had interest in art, I guess you could say. But the—there wasn't a concept of—a very developed concept to—I mean, I've come to feel that artists are like clouds, that they—you just look, and there's a blue sky one moment, and there's this white cloud the next moment. And where did that come from? How did that happen, you know? Where's it going, you know? All that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: That's like—just like—it's not a career decision, [laughs] you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It's like a—I mean, it's just—and it's part of the social human fabric of—in confrontation with, we don't like to think so, a hostile environment, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A lot of artists of your generation were discouraged from, I think, using the B word, speaking about "beauty."

RICHARD TUTTLE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And if you think about, sort of, going to school at a time when everyone was under the spell of what we now call "Cultureburg" and sort of the formalism of the New York School —

RICHARD TUTTLE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and not yet being aware of how that was being used by other people, like the USA, but that one was not supposed to talk about story telling. One was not supposed to talk about beauty, you know.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was something else. There was some other principle that was guiding what art was supposed to do, which was, you know—without going into an essay on formalism, we all know what we're talking about. But, I mean, I think—I'm wondering if you feel like—and this is hopping ahead a little bit in the narrative—if you feel like having more of a liberal arts education was useful in that way? Less discouraging of that kind of thinking.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, James, I'm going to go to this place where I, you know—there's an action and reaction.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And that the positive attracts the negative, the negative attracts the positive, da, da, da. And I've—I feel that when art, which I tend to personify, or objectify in a personification kind of way—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Manifest.

RICHARD TUTTLE: I—that it's an extraordinary burst of positive energy. And that so often connect—attracts the negative, you know. And the—which, you know—because the negative, basically, wants what the positive has. And they tend to be tremendous energy. And they do everything. They write. They teach. They take over the universities. They take over the magazines, you know.

[They laugh.]

And—but they can't have it. You know, it's not—they're never going to have it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And so, it's—in a way it's a testament of the fact that we have that darkness in my—say, my generation, is a testament that there was, somewhere in there, a great positive thrust, I mean. My first dealer was Betty Parsons.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: And she's remarkable for many, many reasons. But astrologically speaking, she was a double Aquarius, and she was totally full of light and humanity and so on. But her ascendant was a Scorpio. And so, she had—she has a personality—she combined the whitest white and the darkest dark, you know. And if she wanted to she could put her sting exactly where it hurt you, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Like, and I've certainly experienced that, [laughs] but I'm not afraid of the dark—I mean, on some levels, I'm also—I'm darker than anyone, you know. Any of them. So, I'm not—I mean, I can't go around being afraid of myself. So [laughs]—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I think we all have, as human beings—we all have a capacity for divinity and savagery at the same time.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. I think—I mean, that's actually one of the issues. The—I've definitely have come out of a Calvinist tradition. And I had a residency at the GRI, at the Getty, and—where you get your own librarian and research assistant. And so, I could actually ask questions that I've been waiting for years and wanted. Which was the, you know, Calvin and it was the first time—he's a great writer. And he's so influential. But like, I don't think anybody that I've ever met has read a page of Calvin, you know. And—which is very—he did not include art in his ontology, you know. And he tried—he was trying to at the very end. But he didn't—he died before he figured it out. So, I'm—that—like that dark and light that one might mention would be part of Calvin's ontology.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: But it's not part—it's not exactly the same dark and white that I'm talking about.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Which is—I think there is an ontology directly for art, the artist. I consider—well anyway. Let's—we're both talkers I guess. So—yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—yes I think so. We're both story tellers and talkers and thinkers. I—what I'm beginning to wonder is, if your mom brought you to the Met at an early age, she must herself have been very keenly interested in art or the arts.

RICHARD TUTTLE: She had hoped to go to art school. And her grandfather had promised to pay her way. And unfortunately, the Depression came along and he died. So, that was out of the question. And I suspect there—she—that was the days when it was even a matter of pride that the—to, I mean it's even now since we've been, to be—basically she was a house wife, who was very proud to raise her family.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And that she kept the house and she took care of the kids and—one of her issues—we had a long kitchen. And at the one end there was enough space, there was a table. And she might be cooking at one end but at the other end there was always some sort of project, papier-mâché, puppets, or something like that going on.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: She was typical of that generation, I think, where the—one factored in projects with kids. But her case was also, she was an only child and really suffered boredom in her mind. And she vowed that she—her kids would never be bored like she was bored. And that's another reason for keeping projects, some things, going on all the time. And that I remember, I think it was second grade, where, on Mondays, you had this show and tell about the weekend. And someone said they were so bored, and I had never heard that word before in my life. And I went home and had to ask her what that word means.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Because I was too embarrassed not to have ever, you know—everybody else seemed to know what it was. But we didn't, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, where did she grow up?

RICHARD TUTTLE: She grew up in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

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

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes. Sometimes I think they—it was an unlikely marriage in the sense of—that, today it's nothing, but, those days it was a—English background and a German background. And that the—my dad's family basically came down the Lehigh River and my mom's family came up the—what's is it—Saucon Valley—from the Saucon Valley to Bethlehem, you know. And, like two rivers—I'm here because two rivers meet in Bethlehem [laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, Tuttle's an old name in New England, too.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. The—it's a part of the Great Migration, the 1630 to 1635. They were three couples. But I've think that the name is actually from O'Toole.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It's a Celtic—and it's a tribe. It's a, basically, a—like McElhinney, it's a—

designates a tribe.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And there are all kinds of Tuttlés in the—because there's all kinds of McElhinneys. And—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well we're all—yeah. McElhinney is part of the old concept of the northern Uí Néill tribe.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Really?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Wow. How often do—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And goes back to about—the name goes back to about the Eighth Century.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But it's all Ulster people, you know.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I don't know which of the four kingdoms O'Toole comes from. But—

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well that—well, I actually found—well, I didn't but a friend, a Dutch friend of mine, took me from the airport in Dublin right down to the O'Toole Valley. The south of—it's in the—what are those mountains? Wicklow Mountains.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's in Wicklow. Yeah.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

RICHARD TUTTLE: But it was—but I think in the Middle Ages, they went off to—what—Norwich and there became—they've been for a long time as, what is it, East Anglia, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: They're really much part of that East Anglia—that—they felt the various ideas of the Reformation. And they were religiously persecuted, blah, blah, blah. And so—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah they were separatists like the Pilgrims, Puritans, so forth.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Right. Yeah. And they—well actually the three couples—we—there is a sort of a history in the two of the couples are, you know—they—they're born and they die and they get married and that's kind of it. But my branch, they all do like they all require a paragraph or more, because they did like, horrendous—either bad or good or they just have this tendency to chop open their kid's heads or whatever, you know. But it's—they just have whatever that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's a colorful family.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It can be. And it's my excuse for like, just—I don't know. I mean, this—there's a part of the artist—what an—I mean, artists are born always in every culture in every region. And so, it's always, "Well, how do you—how do they—that thing, operate given the context of the time?" If it were Egypt, I'd be working for the Pharaoh or something, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: And—but this crazy thing where we have the individual is supposed to represent themselves or some kind of work. And which I'm—I find it's difficult. What do they say? It's a profession with a lot of hazards.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: And it's—one wonders if it's really going to deliver because I think it's—that's one of my ideas that the—it's a contract with the society.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: Because the society needs freedom that it can't access. And the artist has this special ability to access the freedom and then to interface with the society that winds up, in the end being—it's healing. I mean, you can't heal without being free.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: But now that's so much about the group. The group is so dominating. The individual—and even at art schools. I mean, this whole trend of this—what—the "afraid of the B-word" has escalated, so that they're even distrustful of the individual in art schools.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: You know, it's the—it's kind of—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's kind of swaying from like, the '50s where it was all about the cult of the individual. And that it—

RICHARD TUTTLE: It is very much—like, seems like a pendulum thing. Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And this pendulum's going back. I got out of a—my final pit crit at Yale I got—I was able to derail with, you know, the B word.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Wow.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I was able to derail that critique and just watch the jury argue for 20 minutes.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Wow. That's got—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I figured something out at that point in my life [laughs].

RICHARD TUTTLE: I just did a talk at the San Antonio; there's a wonderful art school there in Texas. The—and I—my—the title was "What Beauty Means to Me." And it—I'm thinking to the last paragraph was amazing. It was about darkness.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: And if you accept the light then you're free from the darkness. But if you find the light in the darkness, it's more powerful as a foundation for building a society because it's more beautiful, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Were you talking—there you could be channeling the ghost of Tanizaki, right, "In Praise of Shadows?"

RICHARD TUTTLE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right? Remember that essay?

RICHARD TUTTLE: I should—I—yes, I actually I do.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Think we all—

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In college we all read that. That was one of those essays that everybody read when they were at a certain age.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Wow. Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But it bares re-reading, I think.

RICHARD TUTTLE: I just finished—I taught myself to read Japanese. And I just finished this moments ago, this Kawabata Yasunari short story called, in English it's called "Reencounter." But it's written just at the—after the surrender, like of the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: —smoke is still in the streets of Tokyo and charred ruins of everything.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: And it's astonishing because most cultures in the world have gone in an alphabet direction, away from the glyph, the—but Japanese has both. The writer can—has a choice of three alphabets actually and then the glyphs.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: And the way they can nail the topic or what they're saying—this last line of this story is, "The windows are broken. There are no doors in the buildings." And the main character walks and breaks a slat, but the sound is the sound of a renewal, you know. And that's the end. Because he's—as a writer, you know, he's trying and give ideas to people how—because it's the confusion and the—all the problems that built up with—where it's just people were devastated. And this man, Kawabata, of the same generation as Tanizaki comes forward and functions as a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: His genius, his creativity functions to guide the people through this extremely difficult, I mean, almost impossibly difficult moment. I've spent a lot of time in Japan and, you know—with people who have strong literary life. And they—the writers—I came in awareness of. But at that time, I never dreamed I could learn enough Japanese to read it in the original—



JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: —which is, there's no—each character is—has a knowledge, a built-in knowledge which is bottomless, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: And a father can, at the end of dinner, just bring up one character and just ask everybody in the family from the five year old to the grandparents what they feel or what they're—what that character is to them, you know. You can't do that with alphabets, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They're are a lot of kanji that are never used in everyday life and are mysterious inventions of compounds of radicals that no one really recognizes. But they know what the radicals mean. So, they can kind of infer what's meant, perhaps.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And there's a—I mean, I find, they—the Japanese genius is, you know—well, to improve. But they—their writing system combines two Chinese characters, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: That in China they're perfectly happy to be single globs of sound and meaning. But when you put the two together it's just, like, it's one of the most extraordinary inventions that—I mean, we—in our family, Mei-mei is a very great poet, I think, and we—one of the things we say that world doesn't exist until it's written, you know. And in a way, that's your world, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: Like, whatever you can write, that's the world for you, you know. And you come to—I mean, like Japanese is far and away the most difficult language in the world, in terms of complexity and all that. But it's also the best language because it trains you, you know. You—makes you think. It—your experiences. It just—and if I'm a little bit angry at the alphabet, why the world has so decided to fall in love with information, mere information, it's like, you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's not necessarily mere information. It's also—it's—but it does privilege the spoken word. The written word with alphabets is actually a way of recording the spoken word.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And I think that what you're talking about, about the Japanese language, is that there's a visual component to it, too.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You have kanji, hiragana, katakana, and the decision to use one or the other in certain sequences changes the flavor or the meaning of what's being said.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean, I understand a little bit. I'm not fluent and barely, like, literate, but I've studied it a bit.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And it's fascinating.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Whereas I think in, you know, European languages, certainly all of the alphabet-based languages, Arabic, Greek, Roman system, it's all about putting the spoken word into a drawing, into written form—

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —into a picture of what the sound is.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But it's not really a picture of the idea. It's just a picture of the noise. It's just a picture of the sound.

RICHARD TUTTLE: But how do you feel about—because this is—I found somebody I can talk to—but the—no this—when I—it drives me crazy but, you know our experience—I mean European language, "da, da, da, da" [emulating the rhythms of speech]. But when you get, say, kanji, mixed in with, you know, you get, "kunk"[emulating the rhythms of speech]. You know, like—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It's just, like, it just explodes your brain, you know. It's like, my God. I didn't even know I could have that thought through a written thing. And then, that's not even the end of the sentence, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It's just like—and you kind of save that and like, a good writer—I mean, Kawabata's won the Nobel Prize and so on, but I mean, he—that doesn't even say it. I mean, he is phenomenal, you know. And that, you know—you got, "dunk", and then you get this run of the characters. And then you get another hit. And it's, when he chooses, as a writer, to spell it out, spell a word out, or to use the character, it's about music.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It's about rhythm.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It's like, you know. It's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, what a lot of people reading this transcript in the future may need to acquaint themselves with is also the fact that while hiragana and katakana have specific phonetic equivalents, kanji have multiple readings. You have the On reading, the Kun reading, and sometimes the colloquial Japanese wacko kind of habitual alternate reading, too.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Right. Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, each kanji could be sounded in two or three different ways.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, it creates a different kind of environment for the language, for the ideas to move through the language.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Arthur Miller was a friend for a long time.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And went—and we would go out in the woods and cut down trees, and we would take the garbage to the landfill, and so forth.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And often philosophical conversations in the Land Rover on the way to the relay station up in Roxbury.

RICHARD TUTTLE: In Connecticut or is it—yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. So, in one time, he—I don't know what the conversation was about. I guess it was about writing dialog.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And he said, "When I get stuck, I write it in reverse first."

RICHARD TUTTLE: Wow. Yeah. That's cool.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Which is sort of interesting to impose a poetic rigor on it and then colloquialize it.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Have you read Henry Green?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I haven't but I should write that down.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, that's my—*The New York Review of Books*—anyway, it started with *The New York Review of Books*, but now it's called *New York Review Books*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Anyway, they've republishing classics. And they—I've been—they—it's quite successful, and they make an effort to do attractive covers. Anyway, they've invited me to do three of Henry Green's novels, the covers of, you know. And, he wrote nine but—I'm just mentioning it because the dialog that he—he began, say, in the early-'20s and then finished up in the—well, around '47, something like that. But they developed so that the entire narrative is handled with dialog, through dialog.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Interesting.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And along the way, he's done things like throw out the direct and indirect object, you know. And, I mean, he's really restructured the English language in amazing ways. But he doesn't really fit in. He's—you could call him modernist, but he doesn't really fit in that comfortably. And he's sort of a perpetual outsider. But he's a real artist, you know. He—I mean, the novels, I mean, they—they're not long. But they deliver the impact of like a Tolstoy novel. I mean, it's a—but I'm trying to—this guy, Edwin Frank is the editor. And he says, "Well, there are two kinds of covers, you know. You can do a pattern or you can take a work of art from the period and, you know"—but I'm actually—because I—I'm trying to like, energetically connect, and this is another bad word, with sensibility, you know. Like, trying to connect my sensibility with his sensibility.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: And to make a cover so that the reader has this energetic experience as they're actually reading. And hopefully it augments the reading, but it also makes it, everything, the process more easy because I think reading is a percentage, like playing Beethoven or something, like, there is a 20 percent player of that sonata, and there's a 70 percent, and there's a 100 percent player.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: And like the short story is—that's the same. And I think the art, oddly enough, comes through when you can be 100 percent reader.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: That's my idea of a cover [laughs], what a cover should be about and look like.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that's very admirable—I want to know how you were able to get that past the marketing Nazis. I'd like to [laughs]—it's a lot of people who try to work in the publishing industry.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You, you know, you've got a great idea. You've got a great editor. And you've got a great product. And then all of a sudden you have to get through a team of knuckleheads who imagine they understand what people are going to buy.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They could be right or wrong.

RICHARD TUTTLE: I did, you know—that's I guess part of my background. That I, you know, in second grade we had a literary magazine in our little elementary school in Union County, New Jersey. And already I wanted my work to be on the cover, you know. Like that was a big, big deal for me. And there were two issues, spring and fall issues, you know. And the fall one, which came first, was somebody else's work was put on there and I was so upset. And then the spring issue came, and my work was put on the cover. But I was so—still so upset, I could take no pleasure for—out of that, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And so, already—what are you at—at seven years old, or something like that. I was like, this trajectory of wanting to, you know—it isn't so much—I don't know, like a footrace or a competition or something.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Because art—that's, I believe, very much—I had an excellent friend who said that "Art is not competitive." Find that many—I find that absolutely true. I mean, it's like, I mean, it's like yoga. Like, who are you going to compete with, you know?

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Competitive—Olympic yoga.

RICHARD TUTTLE: But then—yeah. Exactly.

[They laugh.]

Well, I'm told that, yeah, you should have gone to my yoga class, you know. Because everybody's like trying to do the back bend.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's New York yoga. It's different, right?

RICHARD TUTTLE: But it—I mean there is something but it's about, you know—for me the—it is exercising all of those possibilities that are with—where are within grasp of the—of a human being, an individual. But we don't always even—my great friend is having a huge success at the Guggenheim Museum right now.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Agnes Martin.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. And it's, I must say—I take so much encouragement from it. It's just a triumph. And I saw the—this is the fourth and last venue. I saw it in London and Dusseldorf and it was really depressing and sad and so on. But lo and behold, this and—her, you know—I know how much her work meant to her and what she put into it. And then finally it breaks through the glass ceiling.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And and I think she's—her work will be available to the people for centuries. And becomes—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Unfortunately, it had to be, sort of, tainted with that controversy about—what was it about? Provenance or—there was a lawsuit. I don't know if it's been settled.

RICHARD TUTTLE: What was that? What? Which one?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, we don't have to go down that road.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But there there've been a lot of these cases of late where people have been suing the writers of the catalogue raisonné because they haven't included certain works in the book. And they're trying to sell them. Or the Peter Doig case, so forth.

RICHARD TUTTLE: That. Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Anyway, we don't—that's, you know, the negative stuff. We don't need to address.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. Because I actually think Agnes is one of the miracles that she got through pretty clean, I mean. I even, myself, just—it's just a matter of time until they get you, sort of thing. Before you go through the glass ceiling [laughs], you know. Where you really, I mean—I don't think it, you know, the fact that she's—I'm sure she's up there looking somehow and she makes—what'd they say? They say terrible things about her like, I think even something like, she's quoted as saying, "I don't care who I have to sleep with. I'm going to make it." You know, and stuff like that. I mean, I wish I can—I can assure you, absolutely never came out of her mouth, you know. And the work has a power in it that the artist puts in it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: You know, we'll have the last say. And it's not final. You know, it's—but it is, I think, a lot—it's inspiring to other artists trying to do their work, you know. It's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, how did you meet Agnes Martin?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, it was a—I was going up to Hartford. There's a—there was a very colorful man. And I think his archives are at the—in the [Archives of American Art in] Washington with you, too. Sam Wagstaff.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Great collection of photography and some other stories we don't need to get into either. They're well known.

RICHARD TUTTLE: But it is—I mean, I must say, this—somehow you get this dovetailing going on with—that I feel somebody in the future can go in and see these connections. Because like, Sam—the photographs were sold to the Getty, which made the Getty the most important museum, I think.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: It's unrivaled. Still, there've been other collections added to Sam's. But then his personal papers—I knew the—like I would send Christmas cards and things. And one of those was published as, you know, and said that it was from the Archives of American Art. Anyways, there's the Vogels and there's Betty and there's like all these other people.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: And they're—it is a story, you know. Some kind of a, you know—how do people meet each other and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, how'd you meet Agnes?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Okay, well that's—that was—okay. So, I'm going up to and opening in Hartford that Sam—of Sam's show. And Agnes was going out there on the same train. And I just saw her

and I heard a voice go off in my head saying, "She has something to say to you." You know. And I think in my case, I'd already pretty much understood that I was looking for someone. And even quite young, when I heard the guy down the street painted on Sundays, I thought, "My God, that's the person I'm looking for." And I'd go down there. And then when I got my bicycle I heard somebody was painting over there, and I get on my bicycle and I go over there. And so, there was always this, sort of, search for someone who maybe was a teacher and then so Agnes was, you could say, in that lineage.

But then—anyway, I wound up—I enlisted in the Air Force and thought I had thrown my life away. I was a pilot and so that's 35 years [laughs] gone. So, I had the courage—that gave me the courage to call.

MEI-MEI BERSSENBRUGGE: Hi.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hi.

RICHARD TUTTLE: This is Mei-mei.

[BRIEF INTERRUPTION]

RICHARD TUTTLE: But so, she had just, I think, come out of an institution. And well, we met and then I did go into the Air Force. But I bought a drawing of hers because I had my savings. I didn't need my savings anymore. So, I bought some art. And it's really the first grid work of hers.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: So, it's a very, very important drawing. And I felt even at that point that I wanted to buy, you know—I wanted the drawing that for her was the—as far as her work had gone. And it wasn't easy to find this particular drawing. It was in a telephone book [laughs], which you had to ask for it and ask for it. But then I went into the Air Force and—but luckily they didn't like me and I didn't like them. So, I was back on the streets of New York in—after about six weeks or so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Really? That was your—

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. It was a nice turn around. And because I was—I felt the—you know and the officer training—it's a 12 week program. And in six weeks your underclass and six weeks you're upper-class. And I could take every—all the shaving your head and like, having being abused and—but when it turned around to—upper-class, they used the upper-class to teach the underclass.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: To haze basically. Yeah.

RICHARD TUTTLE: To—yeah. But the—I mean, it was extraordinary training. Very effective. But it's—I used to say you could set a clock on the emotions that went through people, you know. And it's—so you're treated like a machine. And in a way you're expected to be a machine. And I guess I—anyway—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What year was that?

RICHARD TUTTLE: This was '64? Yeah, it was '64.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, that would have been just as the Vietnam War was really heating up.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes. My brother was in Vietnam, actually. But the—I got this, you know—the whole program was set up to destroy your individuality. So, the tests were multiple choice. And there were 50 impossibly difficult questions and 50 impossibly easy questions. And so, everybody's grade came out more or less the same. But I had this idea to study very, very, very hard to be really on top of the subject. And then I would pick the right answer, color in the right answer—I mean, I'd choose the right answer, and then color in the square to the left of it. So, my test score just like, you know—when they go through the machine the machine broke down or something [laughs], you know. And I was called immediately from the drill field and questioned. And I just said that, you know, that was—I was just following my inspiration, you know. And I'm thinking—

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I'm sure they loved to hear that.

RICHARD TUTTLE: They really loved it. And they said things like, "Well if you fail in officer training you're going to have to go with those enlisted people, you know." And I just thought it was like Br'er Rabbit, you're—and like, "No. Please don't do that, and we'll have to tell your family." And "No. This is a disaster." Anyway, they—I was off to the violent ward with this diagnosis of like, every mental illness that you can—but and then they—it was the Air Force, so they took responsibility. And they—I had an honorable discharge. And I could have disability for the rest of my life if I wanted to go down there every month and show how crazy I am, you know, sort of thing. But—

[They laugh.]

Wouldn't be hard. Just—it's—I mean—I don't know, they—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, why'd you join? Were you about to be drafted?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, I—yes. That was one of the complications, that I was—I enlisted and then I was drafted. And in the enlistment papers, I didn't read the small print at the bottom that said "If you are drafted, disregard it." You know, sort of thing. So, I went over to Newark, New Jersey, and did all that you have to do there. And—but then I—I don't know where that idea came from, because I was—I enlisted to be a pilot. Because I wanted to fly twice the speed of sound, you know. I just wanted, you know, and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's a worthy goal.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. But someone very clever is Henry Geldzahler, I don't know if that name means anything to you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

RICHARD TUTTLE: But he was—he said, "Well, you know, you can do that making art."

[They laugh.]

Which I'm sure was actually on my mind. That's what I was really thinking of, you know. But the—I still like this, I mean—it's so shocking to me what they—how the tests you go through to be accepted in pilot training, you know. I mean the physical, the mental, the—they go and they talk to everybody you've ever known in your life, and all that stuff. I passed that. And so, it's a—it's kind of a high—and then be, sort of, you know—they show you photographs of the land, you know. And like, you have to say, "Orient." You have to deal with that kind of orientation, which because of being so



visual it was like nothing [laughs] it was so easy. You know, for me—I mean, I guess that was the—anyway it was—then we—then I was vulnerable and defeated. And Agnes was also vulnerable and defeated. So, we could talk to—we had somebody to talk with about things that mattered to us. And so, that was kind of like the basis of our—the relationship which—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is that how you came to own property in New Mexico? Because I know she did live in Taos.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. Well, that's probably another loop necessarily. I—as a kid I had these repeating dreams which were very confusing. You know, you sort of—so happy and just jumping down this road along with telephone poles. And then a shack appears and it's like, the most horrible looking thing. And then you have to go in it. And you find it's even more horrible-ness. I realized that, at some point, that was the landscape of the Southwest. And so, if I wanted to figure out the dream, I had to, kind of, go to the Southwest. And so there was already a—and Agnes was Canadian but she had spent a long time in New Mexico.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It was part of a whole getting directed to that landscape. Which but—I just had some surgery and my surgeon, who's excellent—I mentioned that dream and he said, "I wouldn't have believed in that." You know, "I wouldn't have led my life according to that." And I was kind of like, "Whoa. You're not like me." Something like that. And then I realized, well, Who would you want to be your surgeon, you know? Someone who believed in their dreams [laughs]?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Exactly. No. I think you want a surgeon to be a surgeon.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A very rational person.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. A lot of people, I think a lot of Americans, probably the first exposure they had to the Southwest would be either in cowboy movies or in the Roadrunner cartoons, or whatever. But—

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. But I was younger then. I'm trying to think of if I actually could've had any way to know that landscape.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Those John Wayne movies, you know, like *Monument Valley* and—

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. But I never would have seen those at the time. But it's a—I don't know like, that visual thing. I remember very—let's see—*National Geographic* coming into the house that had the first pictures of Lascaux, of the paintings of Lascaux.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: And it was so unbelievably exciting. And I, for the first gesture was tearing open the mail. And then I immediately closed it, like that.

[Claps his hands.]

Because I knew this was so important that I couldn't see it in reproduction. I couldn't see it through the eyes of anthropologists, you know. I had to see it like, you know—because the question was, "Is it art?" You know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And that—for me that was the key question. Even at, whatever, seven years old or whatever that was. And I finally did manage to—I was like, the last person to get into Lascaux before they, you know. It's really hard. I mean, you can get in but I don't have the patience to do it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well they built some kind of facsimile, right?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That you can kind of experience what it might be like if you were allowed into the cave.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But the humidity from the breath and so forth was beginning to take its' toll on the paintings.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. But I found I'm completely satisfied that it's art. And that's—and I—that last stone on the hearth there is a million years old. And it's made by our ancestors. Which, you know—and so, you know, the scientists can look at that—or the artists can look at that. And I look at it as the artist and I can tell the shaping that is done on that, is the same decision making, the same—it comes out of the same head that—where my visual ideas come from.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: And so, like, I mean a lot of people despair about the Manhattan art world. You know, ins and outs and everything and I get to look at some—well it's been here for a million years guys.

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, just for the reader I'm going to describe that this is a piece of stone, not being a geologist—I don't know what kind of stone it is. Do you?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Actually, that's a, it's funny.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Some kind of—

RICHARD TUTTLE: The heart of—

JAMES MCELHINNEY:—limestone.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes, I suspect that because it's been here a million years. It was found in the Sahara, the Western Sahara, where it had been for 100,000 years and that the patina on it, which is beautiful is made by a gazillion particles of wind-borne dust.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: So it's whatever—imagine there's a time when the Sahara was the tropics or underwater, or whatever; it seemed—it's seen a lot. It's clearly a tool for like maybe taking a crushing a bone or something, or a vegetable.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well it's almost—it's a little bit bigger than a softball, and it's multifaceted and sort of a Naples yellow color and with a very gently, as you said, burnished surface that has been caused by years of wind and water and dust and other things acting against it. It's quite a remarkable object. Is it okay to take a photograph of it?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Sure, yes, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I'll enclose that with the audio recording and send that to Washington.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It's a little—I think the—I don't know if that's an especially American characteristic, but we have a—there's barriers where, like in terms of time, we don't want to deal with too much time you know, and so you get a million years, that's kind of off putting to a lot of people. Like in New Mexico we are sort of between remains of a volcano that's only a million years old.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes the Jemez Caldera.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes [laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Scary volcano.

RICHARD TUTTLE: But then the Sangre de Christos are 30 million years, and you know, that's a lot of time in between. And I find that—sometimes I tell the guests this. And to me, these huge amounts of time is very—like it gives me a peacefulness, creates a kind of peace. But for a lot of people, it doesn't; it's anxiety.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, in a culture which teaches everyone to be as important as they can, witnessing time in that sense makes one insignificant, which is not a welcome feeling to somebody like the president elect [laughs]. So the other thing too about New Mexico is the native culture and the mythology having to do with that. But actually, where you are in sort of the Rio Grande base, that culture is relatively—that community is relatively new. And when I was out there, I remember having a long conversation with a potter at the Santa Clara Pueblo who had the same birthday as I do, same day, same year, and I had, found hiking up around Otowi Mesa, I had found Chacoan pot shards, and I asked him what the relationship was between Chaco Canyon and the Rio Grande Pueblos and he said, "No one will talk about it." There's a history there and so they actually prefer to think about a mythological antiquity, as opposed to what may have happened a few hundred miles to the west; I guess that's pretty unpleasant.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes, and those—you know, we have a similar case in Maine where the native peoples, at the moment, replaced earlier groups and it's—I've just come from Peru and made two shows in Lima, and at the end, as a reward, we went off to the jungle.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh lucky you. Up North?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well yes, it's the Peru borders, Bolivia in the jungle as well as—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh okay, so to the South.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Tambopata River. You know, I asked who lived here, what the people were—excellent guide, and at first he said, "Nobody lives here," and then he said, "Well, there's some people who had the idea that there had been people here, but when the rubber was found in the jungle that they needed workers, and that they came through and say it's not that long ago, early 19th Century, and they just collected these people and made them—"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Basically enslaved them.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Chicleros.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Depopulated. So a lot of stuff happens.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that was also an area where the native people sided with the Spanish against the Tawantinsuyu, and there was a sort of internecine [warfare –JM], a lot of history there that doesn't make it into American text books.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Did you ever, I know you are a bit of a history buff too, but Parkman, Francis Parkman. Have you ever read him?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Francis Parkman?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh Parkman, of course. *La Salle and the [Discovery of the] Great West* and, of course, *The Oregon Trail*, which is his classic. The description of Reed and Donner having the famous argument at Fort Laramie, we all know how that turned out [laughs].

RICHARD TUTTLE: I find that for today, whatever has gone on in the world that you can read a philosopher of history, like even what might have been written like you know Richard Rorty. I don't know if you—he's—great book, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, it's been published 30 years. But it's like an antique; it's like looking at a Greek pot or something. It's beautiful; it's amazingly put together, but it's so much not today that the effort to be 100 percent reader today immediately puts you in a position where his idea of writing, his whatever he meant, he meant a lot to people of his time, all that becomes very available. You know that—but it also as a package comes your contemporary, it's in your reading experience. It's both distance and then finds its way kind of through some very special exciting, I think, space into our—I mean, I think it's even, if you can say the process that elected our current president is like insane or imbalanced or not well, that this—I'm claiming that this—the reading I just described a book that was written 30 years ago and how it is available to me in contemporary time is the sanity that is opposed on the other side of that insanity, you know?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: It's not privileged either.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It is what it is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's there. Well, another case, even with more time having passed, is

Humboldt, that Humboldt is now—is now speaking to people today who [...] never heard of Humboldt.

RICHARD TUTTLE: That's incredible.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's amazing. But that also speaks to the 20th Century culture of specialization, how easy it was for people to live in silos and not know about things that were absolutely pertinent to what they were doing because of how careers were managed, how markets were managed, how the art world worked. But Humboldt now is of course again the man who invented the idea of nature.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes, yes. I was just in Brooklyn and we were on Humboldt Avenue. I was with people, and I also had the fear that they had never heard of Humboldt. I mean, our Humboldt, so I just really want to—I should try to do the research and find if it could—for some bizarre—and I'm sure, if it is named after our Humboldt—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I'm sure it is. I'm sure it is because he was here. He didn't come to New York. He didn't care about rich people. He only cared about smart people, so he went to Philadelphia and Washington, and he met all the scientists and Jefferson and people like that. He didn't bother to come to New York because that was just—[laughing].

RICHARD TUTTLE: That's—when I was at the Getty—how did that happen? I got very interested in Philadelphia, but I had an extraordinary thick book that actually was intended to be the catalog at the Museum of Fine Arts that was about the 18th—the openness of mind of the 18th century that Philadelphia—I mean, Boston was already closed, and New York hadn't woken up. That's part of the Benjamin Franklin story, that he saw it; he needed people with open minds who were interested in ideas and thinking and all that. But it's—I spent enough time in Berlin to—in the—walked down in front of Humboldt University.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, Unter den Linden.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, it's just like—it's so exciting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What's your favorite place in Berlin?

RICHARD TUTTLE: I find—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: If you had one hour in Berlin?

RICHARD TUTTLE: One hour in Berlin, one hour? I'm afraid it seems boring, but Sanssouci, I think.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh well that's Potsdam anyway [laughs].

RICHARD TUTTLE: And that well—and I don't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's an interesting answer, though, because Potsdam is also where they have the FLUXUS museum.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Who did that?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There's a FLUXUS museum there. I'd have to look the name up.

RICHARD TUTTLE: You know this Silver and the guy from Detroit, Silverstein, Silverman gave his

collection—a big piece of his collection to MOMA with—anyway that—Potsdam. Another answer would have been Schinkel; I just, like—I'm just super in love with his architecture.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, there's that big church, if you go to Potsdam—

RICHARD TUTTLE: Exactly and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the dome, you can climb up in the dome. You could climb up in the dome.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And there's some other things he did there, like as a young—I have a—I collect—I got super interested in early-German Romanticism.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And I have—one of my favorite prints is of an artist who was the son of French diplomats who were in—stationed in Berlin, and he caught these ideas. You know, German Romanticism began at University of Hamburg in these tiny little places, and then the next phase, it hit Berlin and maybe Munich and so on. But he picked up these ideas of—and then his parents were re-stationed back to France, and he went back with them, and he brought these new ideas to France. The little apprentice would never be able to make it in a museum. What is it for me? I would just show it to you, but we don't have that kind of time.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well everybody knows Frederick, but there was also that Weimar cabal that was Schiller and Goethe and the Humboldt brothers and you can only imagine what it would have been like to be a fly on the wall at one of those dinner parties.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It's—I think they're the—what—again, there's a sort of a wall between American—the—it's—you know what I used to say is, to us, it looks like a disaster because it either wound up in Stalin or Hitler.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It's not a very interesting choice [laughs]. But if you can go back to where it began and revisit what was going on, I think it's like on the level of East Greek and the deductive reasoning. It's like one of the greatest cultural explosions that has happened and it's not all bad.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, one of the things about Germany before Bismarck was that it wasn't a country; it was just a cultural zone. You had these little tiny principalities, all of which needed to get along. They were all pretty powerless except for Hanover, which was the king of England, but you know—and maybe Prussia later after Seven Years War that was started here by George Washington in a scuffle with the French in Western Pennsylvania. So the, you know the thing that happened with you know the unification, that's where the nationalism began and that was—that and then the Franco-Prussian war, the absorption of Bavaria and so forth. It was that, I think where it turns, and by then, anyway, everybody's interested in Paris and London. Really Paris.

RICHARD TUTTLE: But it's—one of the things I kind of learned—I felt the impact of Kant was so enormous.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Huge.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And basically—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was also there in Weimar right? Or Vienna?

RICHARD TUTTLE: No, he was not. But he actually never left—what is it? Königs-statt [Königsberg]

but this next generation had to, like, deal with him, and it was all about this, like, what do you see? Is it objective? Is it subjective? Is it some combination of the two? And that they—that is still—like Agnes's paintings are—have this a retelling of the same—the picture is how much subjective, how much objective is going on there. And the—just to know that, because somebody like Barnett Newman never—I'm not trying to be smarter, but one of the real leaders of that, for me, is Frederick Otto Runge [Philipp Otto Runge] —

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Runge

RICHARD TUTTLE: —and he, there's this very much laid out, but you get to Barnett Newman, and you know, one of the things Runge understood about his work, that it was a sort of a beginning. He started the beginning of a wave of which he could not tell himself where it would wind up, you know. And he knew that the implications and ramifications were huge.

But you can find—like an artist like Ellsworth Kelly comes out of that and Vera Neumann comes out of that, that it's—you know, with Agnes's paintings, for example, you can—you know, anyone can say, "Okay, now look at this glass purely objectively. You know, what do you see? You know, like what's there?" Then you can say, "Well, look at this glass subjectively," you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: —and what do you see? I mean, we can—we have that—most of the time, it's some sort of mix that feels right. But with the two—finally, there's some cause to—that we want to, not everybody, but at certain points, you just want to be able to know the world you're living in. I don't know. This is kind of, maybe, a European idea. But because of Lima, I had to make sure I was working on the level of civilization, not culture. And it happened that my curator is the daughter of two professors of philosophy at the University of Lima who specialize in Husserl there. That's their specialty; the mother is a huge contributor. He's like the last important philosopher who attempted to make a system, like a universal system. And he's extremely important with the abstract expressionists. So for me, this was an opportunity to get back and read some Husserl and get a rigorous, a really—get down to like—I thought I might speak to her parents at some point, but it hasn't happened yet. They don't know anything about art; they don't care about art, but they're—you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Lima is an interesting place to ponder civilization because a lot of it's pretty uncivilized. I mean if you go to, if you drove down to Pachacamac, you went past the sand mounds and the shantytowns and the things that no one wants you to see on the—

RICHARD TUTTLE: —tour.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Pan-American highway. When we were there, we had hired a driver, and the tour company, who engaged and didn't want us to go there, said it was a two hour drive. We asked him privately; he said, "Get you there in 40 minutes," but they don't want you to see this part of town. But then there are other areas—which where was your show?

RICHARD TUTTLE: There was actually two shows. The main museum in Lima is called MALI, so it's there and then in San Isidro, which is one of the neighborhoods, and because they were towns

independent but they've all merged.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Vera Flores, Barranca, San Isidro, yes.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Exactly, and there was a collector there who has been putting together a very nice small collection of my work and that he, his business is in San Isidro, which is kind of hot spot at the moment.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It is a hip neighborhood.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And so we showed his collection. And we're doing—it was the first time—and he's also the president of the board of MALI.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What was his name?

RICHARD TUTTLE: His name is Juan Carlos Verme.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Verme?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Verme, V-E-R-M-E. And it's—I've been very excited for almost, more than twenty years about this north—what I call a north-south axis, and this is one of the first times I've had to put into practice some of these ideas. I made all the work in New Mexico, and you know, thinking about—because if you look at the native cultures along that axis all the way from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, there are striking similarities. And I think we—the world has kind of come to an end of east-west energetic thing and we're going to go to a north-south—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, pan—or the transatlantic is—certainly is your granddaddy's paradigm that's for sure. I mean, people are talking about you know the circum-Atlantic world, but that's not as important today, I think.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes, but I'm also—I feel if this transition is to happen, to do what can be done to take with the transition the best you can possibly get to, and so I'm totally into, like, Greek, the foundations of Western culture, which are odd actually because we've been around for a long time. It's just since the 6th Century. That was another explosion, cultural explosion that—I mean, I wish there could be a teacher who could communicate or bring to students' minds the enormity of what happened in East Greece in the 6th Century BC.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: It's, even today you know we talk about education, it's just one question: can you do deductive reasoning? That's it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And can you score highly on standard tests?

RICHARD TUTTLE: But that is deductive.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's right, that's right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: They were all built on deductive reasoning you know. And people are not happy with deductive reasoning. You know, they were much happier with inductive reasoning, you can see in the art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it doesn't utilize the full capacity of the human mind, and you look at



education marginalizing things like design and music and so forth, all which reinforce spatial reasoning, mathematics, and all that. That's all seen as sort of art, which is self-expression, which is a luxury and not a useful mode of thinking.

RICHARD TUTTLE: But Lima—I actually—there are people who are, granted, born there, but there is something that's available there to people that it's wonderful. And I think it's a combination of an east-west and a north-south. But you can literally go through the town and you can pick out the kind of European-based colors, and then you see that behind it there are these subtle versions of the very same colors.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well there's a lot—when we went into the cathedral, there's a treasury, and there's a lot of sort of Namban artifacts that were brought from Asia by—through, I guess, the Manilla galleons or whatever, and Lima was one of those ports that had trade with Asia, like Acapulco, so there was always an Asian element there and also a lot of Japanese in Peru, which is not well known.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, have you been pleased by the progress of MoMA in being more inclusive of Latin American art, South American art, you know, people like Gego and like Lygia Clark?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes, well, I find the—you know, one of my things is that art is always the same, but the access is always different. And this is one of the things I'm struggling with at the moment. That you could say visual experience comes in degrees or amounts. You could have 20 percent of like the visual experience of that glass or 30 percent or so and so. And I find—I want the art where I feel it; it's energizes me. I get nurturing and nutrition, and it is one of the strange moments. This is the period that favors the group, but the—in the sense of the individual, the art is something which brings—like I could read two lines of Virgil in the morning, and I have the energy for the entire day, you know; it's just like—you know, art is always—it's there; it's a human invention to take you from sadness, to joy; or the heaviness, or the grief, or the burden of life, to the lightness of life, the joy of life that. So then if you accept that, then you have the question, well, who's the great artist? The one who does it [laughs]; that's the job, you know.

But then, it's also, who's going to go in there and get the bacon? And in a period that favors the group over the individual, some of these questions are not the—I mean, that's problematic in the democratic vision. The Greeks were well aware that people need to share, have participation in their government and so on and so. But when it comes to beauty, the B word, that is not for the group to say [laughs]; that is not a group thing. That is like an individual thing. So how do you—as you might have pointed out, there was a time, not that long ago, where the individual was—had a sort of kind of favor.

But I think one of the things that fascinates me right now is how we all have a—like, there is this polarity that's available to us. For example, most religions want you to suppress your senses in order to get to heaven, to have enlightenment or da, da, da, but the other side of, say, the art actually wants you to develop your senses.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's a spirituality versus a religion, which in Latin, the word literally means, you know, binding oneself to, you know—religare, you know, is to bind, you know, to tie oneself to something. It's not—it's the opposite of freedom.

RICHARD TUTTLE: But I've—I mean, it's also—this is what I'm really struggling with because we

are—I mean, I think we are; we're here. We are—you know, and given that we have the—we sit somehow in the middle of something. Like even in medicine, there's allopathic medicine, and there's homeopathic medicine. You know, there's medicine where you take the antidote to cure the disease; there's a case where you take a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A pathogen, yeah.

RICHARD TUTTLE: —you stimulate the immune system by taking the dose of duh, duh, duh. I mean, you should be able to make that choice. You know, like your government should not say you know, no homeopathic medicine, you only have this and the insurance companies, and you can't get any. You know, there's—Obama care and all that is completely about allopathic medicine which does not do the job in every need. But this other way, where you are born in a world where you can suppress your senses or you can raise your senses to get the good stuff you know. And I find that's really—I mean, in most—I mean, I was definitely trained to go the root of suppressing the senses.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think everybody was; that was the standard.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It is standard. But my favorite philosopher is Epicurus, who is completely maligned and misunderstood, but basically, he said that life—I mean, every sense that we have, including consciousness, has—you're given its birth form; you know, you can look; you can hear; you can taste; you know, you can touch, but each one of those senses is up to the individual to develop. And when you like—this is one of the ironies because, like, democracy depends on people talking to each other. If you don't develop your senses, you have nothing to say—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's true.

RICHARD TUTTLE: —to somebody else, you know. And so how do we live in this world, which is telling us to suppress our senses and expect us to have a democracy that works you know. This is a mess you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well there is a, *The New York Times* had a best seller about how the *De Rerum Natura*, you know, the Lucretius tract was lost and then found, sort of a detective story, but really, it led—I think it led people, also, to reread—to read it for the first time or to read it again after perhaps having endured it in a college class.

RICHARD TUTTLE: You know, I'm just finishing up in the Latin, and I'm really irritated because, in the beginning, it's stunning it's so brilliant, but now, he's talking about the weather, how storms happen, or how it rains or where the rains go—and you know, we've gone so far past that, is one problem. But another problem is it's just not—it's not as well written, you know. The—it's not coming from the same level of brilliance. But I go along otherwise. But then I understood that one of his main jobs is this—what happened in East Greece was, with the invention of deductive reasoning, which is—tells us that our world can be stated through the methodology of—you know, we get to interrelate factual material, on the one hand, and it is not mythology. This glass is not here because Juno liked to drink out of clear glass or something like that. But I actually feel that our real inheritance is both. You know, if I can say, you know—I can literally weave from scientific methodology to a mythology and with the point of communicating to another human being what this glass actually is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's a vessel.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes, but I think we need both. I mean, that's Western culture. To be strong is

an inheritance of twin methods, you know—and that we—what's happening in school is mythology is laughed at. For example Athena is the goddess of—simultaneously of the earth and of the sky, simultaneously of peace and war, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Androgynous, yes.

RICHARD TUTTLE: That—she also, not unexpectedly, the goddess of the arts because Zeus, who always wants you to come to some hard decision, is absolutely the opposite of Athena who has this—but it's together, the way they work together. That's our real—and that's why, if you accept that inheritance and you say, well, should I develop my senses, or should I suppress my senses? It's kind of—you can deal with that, you know. And—because for me, we talk about life and living life and everything, but one thing the human being actually does know, which is not much, is how to live, you know. I mean, we do it, you know. And it's not—we don't do it after we decide how to do it. It happens before. So, I think that's the art of the moment, where, to go into, how is it we know how to live, you know?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what were conversations like at the dinner table, when you were a kid?

RICHARD TUTTLE: At my house? They were kind of dull, and the linguistics were—it was still—I grew up in a period where the kids were thought to be chattel, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They should be seen and not heard—

RICHARD TUTTLE: Seen and not heard.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —at the card table at the Thanksgiving feast.

RICHARD TUTTLE: This is—but then I actually had some—you know, like I would have a mystic-type experience, which was hugely important for me and really exciting, and I thought I'd find—like the truth was within reach and all that and, but I knew that was like off bounds, that was not to be—you know, it would—and so there was—and one, you know—for example, your teacher, no matter how stupid they were, was always right and your job was to respect these idiots.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because they got to give you a grade, right? At the end of the day.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how many siblings had you—have you?

RICHARD TUTTLE: One older brother who is 16 months older than I am and then almost 15 years goes by, and then there are two who are 18 months apart. That's kind of a—same parents.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A couple of Irish twins, as they call them [laughs].

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes. But they're actually young enough—I mean, when I would take care of them, many people would think they were my children. So I was kind of grateful for that because I knew how—what it takes to take care of a child. So I didn't have my daughter until I was 48, I think.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow. So what kinds of trajectories did the other siblings take in life?

RICHARD TUTTLE: The older brother is—I don't know. I think he's not—well, my mother would say, "You're not stable," [laughs] but he's kind of maybe worse than that. Did some form of accounting,

poor guy really did suffer from the Vietnam War because they are—the particular background led to beliefs of—you know, created a horizon that what the world is and pleases this kind of person that when—you know, I'm sure you're somebody who admires Steven Crane as much as I do, but you know, that was a period of yellow journalism and the Spanish American War was very much—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was there. He was at Santiago.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes. But so the newspapers prompted that in order to sell newspapers, so at last, it was a disaster but we won, quote, unquote. But still there was this loss of—tremendous loss of life with the sinking of *The Maine* and all that, so that had to be covered up. And this was an analysis I read, is that, that was the point; when the big newspapers created this idea that America was a righteous nation. This was also the first war that the southern troops and the northern troops fought together after the Civil War.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Joe Wheeler in a blue uniform was seen by many as being an act of treason against the glorious memory of the Confederacy. He looked at it and he said, "What the heck? I'm a soldier. This is my job." So seeing Joe Wheeler in a blue uniform as a general at Santiago or wherever he was, was—

RICHARD TUTTLE: But this concept of the righteous—as an American, you are a citizen of a righteous country, and we will go to bat for anyone who is threatened by—in any kind of bad, evil. And so when you go to Vietnam and nobody could explain why we were there and certainly, much less, a good reason for it.

So I have two, my brother and a cousin, came back, and basically, their brains were shattered. You know, they're gone. But I remember, when I got out of the Air Force, he sent me a letter, and you know, it's like one of the only times I really experienced brotherly love from him, where he said he was so pleased I wouldn't be going to that hell hole.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So where—what was he, in the infantry?

RICHARD TUTTLE: He was in a—what do you call? In intelligence, so he had to be close to the front line, and you know, you sleep with your rifle next to you and all that kind of stuff, you know. So he wasn't really out there in the front-front, but close enough. He didn't go through the drugs; the other cousin got into the whole drug thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that was a double whammy, too, because a lot of the troops did get into opiates. I knew a fellow, an artist, who had been a LRP Sergeant, long range patrol, and he said he would have to pick the men to go out for a week in the jungle based on where they were in their drug use, you know, what kind of condition they were in; were they going to get back to base in time for them to get a fix or whatever? So having to deal with all of that only added to the madness.

RICHARD TUTTLE: I think—my brother was not an officer; he's an enlisted man, but he was, in his group, or close to that time, when the enlisted people, there was resentment against their officers and would throw a grenade under their bed.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's a time-honored tradition of NCO's thinking all officers are idiots. But actually, probably, if—any historian would tell you that wars are not won by generals; they're won by sergeants.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean, combat. And your younger siblings? Is anyone else involved in the arts?

RICHARD TUTTLE: You know, it's kind of not the case. I mean, they're proud of their big brother, in a sense, but it's—I mean, sometimes I say, like, my avocation is a student of creativity. You know, it's sort of like I try—I read the biography of Alma Mahler, Gustav Mahler's wife, and I was sort of surprised how similar his family—I mean, their sort of family because they're all nice people, and they're kind of [inaudible] and duh, duh, duh, but then there's something, like, this one, like, imagination or dimension or just, like, I mean, seeing—like when I first met Agnes, talking to them—she had an extraordinary wisdom. One day she just said, "Well, you know, it's not easier to be smarter than your parents." And a lot of kids think they're smarter than their parents; you know, that's one of the things you do.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think every kid at one point in time or another does.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Does, yeah. But I was like so, taught to be respectful and to—what do you call it? The Confucian term—filial piety.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Filial piety.

RICHARD TUTTLE: But I think that's one of the problems is that, you know, just smarter than my parents. And I mean, that's—I mean, when my father—when I came back from the Air Force, my father called me to his office, and he said two things. You know, one was, "You've ruined your life," and "what are we going to tell the relatives?"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was he a vet?

RICHARD TUTTLE: He surrendered his commission because he had two kids. I think it really led to a sort of nervous breakdown and all. There was a tinge of that kind of stuff going on.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I see.

RICHARD TUTTLE: But it's—what the—yes, both my parents had—their fathers were, I felt, more like—like my mother's father was a geologist, and he had an incredible library, and he collected Navajo rugs and things like that, and then my father's father was a—you know, wrote short stories. But somewhat skipping the generation, something like that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That happens. There is a gap. So how did your dad earn a living?

RICHARD TUTTLE: He was an electrical engineer, and he was very much drawn into the war effort; the manufacturing then and worked over here in Bayonne, New Jersey for a company that produced steel barrels. You know, they—which was because the war was very much about material transport, and they had full shifts around the clock just producing—you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Quartermaster was in Jersey City, right, so they—that was nearby.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes, you can still see these 50 gallon drums. But anyway, he worked in management, and I think he did very well.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you were comfortable upper-middle class, kind of.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Probably. But he—in fact, his father was—what do you call? Say upwardly

mobile, something like that. And one of our particularly family's line is we—you know, the religion, the balance between the spiritual and the material, definitely went on the spiritual side of things. So we did not get involved in all the material ambitions that happened at the end of the 19th Century. We kind of remained spiritual, I guess. And so—but nevertheless, his father wanted to live well, and they had this artistic interest. At that time, believe it or not, Montclair, New Jersey was the artist colony.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh sure. George Ennis was there.

RICHARD TUTTLE: That's right. And so just like SoHo or something, the rest of the people followed suit. And there was—this was kind of a nice life. Anyways, he moved the family there, and there were seven kids or something. It was one of those large families at the beginning of the 20th Century. But my grandmother was a religious fanatic who wore a light denim dress, clog shoes, and a little glass globe with a mustard seed in it every day of her life, you know. And people would come to the house and say, "Is the lady of the house at home?" that sort of thing, because she believed this life is just to get to heaven. And cleanliness is next to God; she was kind of nuts. But anyway, it was a huge influence on her kids. But her husband, who was a bit of aesthete, would buy her, maybe, a nice piece of cut glass, crystal or something like that, and she'd say, "Thank you very much," and before it would go into some closet where it would never be looked at because it was sin, considered sin.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was conspicuous consumption. It's like they talk about Quakers in Philadelphia painting the hubcaps on their Rolls Royce black, right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: God would not like that. Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That whole—

[They laugh.]

That whole ethos.

RICHARD TUTTLE: They weren't—they actually weren't able—this was the family story, that they couldn't afford curtains, or you know, I guess the Depression, at that point, was some part of it, but so my father vowed that he would live in a downscale community, where they would always have curtains. And this was his modus operandi.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I see.

RICHARD TUTTLE: You know, I'm actually kind of happy about that because—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I don't see any curtains on your windows.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes, we have shutters [laughs]. No, it's—like my beloved wife and I are—share—you know, it's pretty intense to have two creative people under one roof. But we like nice things and we—and both our parents are—consider us somewhat decadent because of our liking of clothes, and food, and wine and so on, but we feel it's our—we should celebrate. Whatever you love in life, use your means to celebrate your joy of being alive. You know, we're not into the—not following my—that grandmother was also noted for cleanliness, her obsession with cleanliness, and when the postman would deliver the letters, she would have some version of Lysol, that she would spray the letters with.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Disinfect it.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Disinfect it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Don't know where that letter has been [laughs].

RICHARD TUTTLE: Exactly.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And the family, finally, rose up—you know, got their strength because she's a powerful lady, and they'd say—you know, because they couldn't read who it was from because the Lysol dissolved all the ink, you know. People—so there's a lot of neurosis.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So was she Pennsylvania German by any chance?

RICHARD TUTTLE: She—whether she was—I mean, because—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mennonite?

RICHARD TUTTLE: You know, that's something—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sounds like Mennonite behavior [laughs] to me.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It does. But the Palatinate you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh the Palatinate, yes.

RICHARD TUTTLE: You know the Palatinate today is relatively small province of—near Strasbourg, and they're really fun-loving people. They love their wine, and they love food.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And their beer.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, yeah. But then—and so I couldn't compute that with some of my—the people—anyway, I just learned that the Palatinate, in history, is a huge band that goes all the way up to the Netherlands and down to the Northern France.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, it's the lower Rhine, right? It's the—the Palatinate refers to Aachen, to Charlemagne.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It does? Really?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think so, Palatine, because they—the church there in Aachen is called the Cappella Palatina; it's the palace of the first holy Roman emperor. I think that might be the origin of it.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Oh, that'd be very—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But it's all that area around Krefeld and Koln and then on into the Netherlands. And that's where—Krefeld is where the Pennsylvania Germans first came in the late-1600s, 1683. Their whole pile of thousands of them landed—or hundreds of them landed in Philadelphia, then headed out into the Hinterlands.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, leaving us with—well, it's an interesting—it's an interesting community, because they all still speak German at home. A lot do, anyway.

RICHARD TUTTLE: One of my ancestors was the first reform minister in Pennsylvania. His church is still there, and I actually had a ring of—that he had got as an academic prize, you know? At Heidelberg—University of Heidelberg, I think. And the famous story about him is he was—I guess they had to be farmers or tradesmen, and he had this trunk full of currencies, of—they were, the banking—everybody—any bank could issue currency. And they could pay themselves. And so that's before the Revolutionary War. Anyway, he had this trunk full of those kinds of currencies, and when the war was over, then it was useless.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just paper.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. But, no, it's kind of—anyway. I sense that we should have lunch someday or something.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure, I think so. That would be great. Just a little housekeeping because we're approaching, I think, the end of the first session here. It would be to talk a little about—well, number one, I'm curious what the image was on the literary journal that you—that you designed.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Well it's kind of funny. I—it's scary because it's a very significant moment where it's the first day of kindergarten, and the teacher hands you the piece of paper and the box of crayons, you know? And for me, this was—I really felt like it was the beginning of my life, you know? That I—like this is it. And I drew this rainbow, very optimistic, kind of, with a horizon line going. And I looked around at the other kids, and they were doing these, like, flowers, you know? Like, coming up from the bottom, the sun in the upper right-hand corner.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The bottom was the front; the top was the back of the image, right?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, yeah. And I loved their drawings, because to me I saw that—how—the innocence. I really—and—but I knew my drawing was superior. And then a teacher gathered them, and she put it up. And she put up all the drawings and not mine. And this was, like, this was like, so important for me in that it was, like, a first meeting, you know? That first moment when, on the one hand, I think this is the beginning of my life. This is what I'm here for, and this is—all that. And then rejection.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why did she not put it up?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, this was one of these—because she was, like everybody, "Oh, you got Miss Levy. She's the best teacher." You know, like—you know? There was no contest. I knew she was an asshole, but, you know—

[They laugh.]

RICHARD TUTTLE: But my parents and everybody else thought she was—so it was no—but—and at the Getty I got a chance to do some childhood research, childhood development. And that is, like, the—when they do that rainbow, that's very advanced. You know, genius level. You know? And that she never understood—so she just viewed that as, like, some aberration that was, like, not to be encouraged. And so this is this other part of the story where, I mean—but in my first show at Betty Parsons, which was the most important gallery in New York at that time. I walked into the room and I saw—there was this one, this gray piece like that. And I realized that was the same drawing I made in kindergarten but it just took like 25 years or something more to come.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sometimes the same ideas keep recycling.



RICHARD TUTTLE: Like here, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There, like this orange arc. What is the title of this piece?

RICHARD TUTTLE: It's called *Other*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: *Other*?

RICHARD TUTTLE: *Other*. Yeah. It's a little tongue in cheek.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So aside from the unfortunate Miss Levy, did you have any inspirational teachers in high school or K-12? People who encouraged you?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, yeah. The—we had a fourth grade teacher who was marvelous and would do a puppet show and then I got her—was assigned to her. And then the first day of class, she said "We're not going to do a puppet show this year." And I just let out this wail in the back.

[They laugh.]

And she said, "Okay, it's going to be your puppet show." And so we really had so much fun. It was based on a rodeo with Wild Bill Hickok and it was, in the end, a positive type of experience. The—it, you know, you have to—this is one of the paradoxes that—it's just—what? Fifteen miles as the crow flies from here to there, but the—it wasn't until I came to Manhattan and met Ad Reinhardt and Rothko and Newman and Betty Parsons in the circle where I understood that these are some of the best-read, the most-alive, the most interesting and contributing human beings I've ever hoped to meet. And out there, artists are artists because they can't think of anything better to do. And it's a sure way to die in the gutter and all that. And on that level, everybody was just trying to protect me from—and—but—and even I was very successful, very popular, and then sort of invited back.

I was actually [laughs] supposed to be the one to organize the reunions and all of that, and recently—I had a lot of pressure the last time. And I thought I'd go. But then finally I thought, you know, the person who was living out there that you all loved, and he loved you is not who I am, you know? And it's taken me a lot to put together a life where I can be who I am, you know? And I am not going back, you know? I am not. It's just—you know, it's just that I think—

Well, like, even the show in Peru, I argued for more room, or a better situation, and so on. And finally, it became clear was going to happen. And then there was this giant turn that happened, and I said, okay, it's clear I have to—my job is to show my work. You know? And that is the hardest thing for an artist to do, you know? But I'm going to do it. And this is da, da, da, da, da, da. It's just like, it's not schizophrenic; it's just, like, how you have to—whatever the artist contributes—can contribute, processes in ways where it takes time and luck and interest to get to be what it's supposed to be. And it's not what my brothers and sisters; it's not what my parents did, you know? It's not what the people I know did.

I mean, I—one of my best friends—because I had this surgery recently, and a fabulous surgeon, but you know, my best friend is actually a burn specialist. He's extremely bright. And just went to McGill and because of they have the best understanding of anatomy. And he believed that was—really should be the basis of medicine, not the pharmaceutical industry and stuff like that, you know? So he's a good person, and then he went to, I think it was Vietnam thing, and he got all the ones who were, like, totally burned and had to reconstruct their bodies and everything, you know? So I said, you know, just trying to make my surgeon, you know—I'm not, I might be an artist and you're a

surgeon, a doctor, but I've had good friends who are surgeons, you know? I mean, because also my position is art and science are the same and *technos*—it's the same—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: *Ars Medica*.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And I look forward to the reunion of art and science.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I think that's more possible now, let's hope, than the late-20th Century, which was more siloed in a culture of hyper-specialization and so forth.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. Even this—you know, my European friends are so upset about the election, and I just say like, Americans—you know, Americans don't get going until it's really terrible, you know? It's a really, you know—and that—I mean, I think we're—I'm already feeling—I mean, terribly upset and—but I feel in my work that it's got to be—you know, I feel personally responsible that I haven't done my job, you know? And that I'm going to really try harder, and you know?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I think that it's true that—I'll quote Arthur Miller again. He said many times that the United States is a country that is deeply suspicious of anything intellectual, and anything artistic because it is not directly productive. It doesn't move people. It doesn't put food on the table. It doesn't have some kind of immediate benefit that you can measure and that you can put a price-tag on. I mean, he said it much more—I can't recall his words, but I think he just said that Americans are deeply mistrustful of the creative person and the intellectual.

And so it doesn't value those things. And it doesn't value questioning that—or investigation that occurs in that manner. And I think he's right, and I think this election proves it, that you've got basically an emotional response, you know? And also, we're addicted to the idea where we're always expecting an immediate result. And art is a slow thing, I think. Would you agree that you have to look at it a long time? You're talking about the 20 percent reader, the 100 percent reader. The 100 percent reader is devoting a lot of energy to that activity.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. But I think it's also this—I mean, it's a case where from history, there's the firsthand account like well what happened? The person who was there and saw it. And then there's the second level, where it might be four firsthand accounts and maybe one slightly outside. And then that forms a history or a statement of what happened, you know. And then there's the top where—well, it's not the—well, yes, it is the top where it's analysis of contextualization, which is also aimed at the same question: what happened? You know?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A new narrative based on primary sources and ideas that are extracted from this.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Like I can't—I do not believe history repeats itself. I'm not into repetition in that sense. But I can't help but think that the way Caesar—Julius Caesar—found his constituency in the masses and used money and entertainment and song to build—and it was also a time in Rome when change was clear. Everybody knew it had to be change. But that constituency basically—I mean, it was like how clear—what was going to unseat the whole hierarchical power establishment of the families.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, the patrician establishment, yeah.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And I know Shakespeare doesn't really spell that out, but all those assassins were members of the elite, the power elite.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They were all patricians.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, and it was just like, a struggle. And that then the favorite nephew was amazingly clever. But I'm sure time had something to do with it, too, made an alliance with Mark Antony who—and then they then went against the assassins, and ultimately, Octavius became Augustus. And that was—and so this—but I also think in that process, they used prescriptions where they—Augustus and Mark Antony just wrote down 200 names on a piece of paper and said—and published them. And anybody who killed any of those people on the prescriptions would get a bounty. So they didn't have to get their hands mixed up with it, you know?

And it's the artists and the intellectuals. Like Virgil and Horus and the visual artists, as well, were enlisted to create the aesthetics of the new—of a post-Roman Republic world. That's what Virgil—I mean, I love going to the Met and seeing these incredible sculptures of the late first century BC when this aesthetic was in formation, you know? And you can see it in literature and architecture and—but they all knew. And I believe that's why I'm speaking the truth, and that they—as artists, they accepted the job. They knew what the job was. They did the job. But they knew once they did the job, their life wasn't worth, you know—and that's also what happened, you know? And when history books, the door closed. And no one can write—once that door closed, no one knows anything about Augustus, you know? It's just—and so I'm thinking actually because our—the Constitution, which is made by man, and it's—but it's lasted 200 years, and it's made with the melting pot, you know? This is not like France or England or something, and that when you think how many attacks the Constitution has fended off so far and if Trump were to try for a—you know, to use his constituency to build a power that would make him into a kind of a dictator, I don't think that—I mean I think of the Constitution—it's not the Constitution, but it's the fact that we are a mixed people. We are, you know? We're racially mixed; our background is mixed. And I don't think that's a kind of a genius where it's not vulnerable to a political takeover like—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It would be very hard because it's a more heterogeneous society. Each state—he was elected because of the Electoral College, not the popular vote. And the laws state-by-state are very different. And so if the federal government tries to exercise its power in a way that doesn't please the states, the states have and will always continue to refuse to obey, take it to court, fight it, do whatever they need to do. And it's—you know, I think that it's romantic to compare the United States to Republican Rome, but Republican Rome was a very elite club that, as you know, the people—SPQR, the senate people of Rome—the people were not [laughs] the plebes, were not the slaves, were not the legionnaires. They were the patricians. They were—the people were—you know—and don't forget, too, that George Washington was the wealthiest man in North America at the time the Constitution was written, too.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, I mean, I think the sort of neonates idea—I mean, the Koch brothers and, you know, just to name one. But what's actually behind Trump? I mean, that's like kind of an elite, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, one might say that the government in the United States has always been the middle management and kind of a buffer between the people, who have really all the power, and the rest of us. There is a way that that's another argument. We should probably pause now. Oh, before you walk away—before you walk away.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, take this off. And don't knock over the glass.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thanks so much. We'll see you on Thursday.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Okay [laughs]. Okay. Here we go.

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RICHARD TUTTLE: I think I passed a lot of—a moment there was a—I think—there was a time where people liked to talk about their lives, as a sort of autobiographical thing, and I think it's come and gone [laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, we'll try not to talk about your life. We'll try to talk about ideas that you've collected along the way.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Oh, that's nice, more interesting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, just to resume, this is—this is James McElhinney speaking with Richard Tuttle on Thursday the 17th of November 2016 at his home on Vandam Street in beautiful Manhattan. Good morning.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Morning, James.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, yesterday—or yesterday. I should say, Monday, we had a rather sprawling conversation that hit a lot of topics and before turning on the recorder, we were sort of discussing this peculiar culture of studio art education that exists today and generating lots of MF—people with MFA degrees, and one needs—has to wonder what awaits them in the real world which is also in great flux right now, so. Let's talk a little about your own education. It was quite a different experience for a person going to—starting college in the Eisenhower administration, right? You were 59, Hartford? Trinity?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes, did I—but I graduated in '63.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: '63? So, that'd be right, that'd be right if you were there four years.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How did you come to pick Trinity?

RICHARD TUTTLE: You know there's a story that I like to tell, but I think it was probably in the hands of the gods that were helping me because, when I was a junior, an extraordinary curator came to the Wadsworth Atheneum named Sam Wagstaff.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And there were about two people interested in contemporary art in Hartford, he and I, and we met at a radio program that the school—Trinity, Trinity College had a radio program, and they wanted to get him on the station. And then I guess they—I would play—kept a very low profile with my art interests, I would say. But I mean, I was head of the theater group and the literary magazine and did sort of arty, lot of arty things, but I didn't like present myself as an artist, particularly, but anyway they invited me as a student. And that began what I could say was a really top first rate education as far as the contemporary art scene such as it was in that, at that moment. It was just Pop; Pop was beginning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: So, that was also a transitional period, Happenings had just finished, and Pop was beginning, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, did you have the whole Allan Kaprow and the happenings and all of that, the store, all of that?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Which was extremely important, extremely important. I, I, I just—I don't know if you noticed in the next room, there's an Alfred Jensen—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: —Painting from that period, and Alfred, Alfred was close with Kaprow at that moment, and it was very vastly underrated and misunderstood as to what was going on, but I don't underrate it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But especially today when it's all like art world roadshow. It's all—it's kind of like all the news is about the prices that things reach, you know

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And it's kind of hard to sell a happening.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, well, but I think the art world is bigger than we can grasp.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: But it always—it's like an ungraspable pie, but they're always slices and they change all the time.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And they're privileged, and what was privileged in those days was sort of like the individual sort of a leftover existentialist figure or something, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: Which is also a crock of shit, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, artist as hero.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, and, and but it—it's like—I mean, I remember when fighting against it because—I don't know. What—I just don't think of myself as having one of those big personality types, you know and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It was France—Paris, you could say, was still a lot of people's idea the center of the art world, and when I first when to Paris, it was—I just said it's not about this personality [laughs] thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It's—I mean, I'm an artist, and I don't have one of those personalities.

[They laugh.]

So it's, you know, can't be about that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I guess it was also a daunting time because as one of my other narrators commented, and he's now in his late-'80s, he said that the problem for young artists in like the '50s and '60s was trying to get away from Picasso. I mean everywhere you turned there was Picasso. There were prints, books, pots, paintings, exhibitions everywhere, you know.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, I actually—I mean that's another—I mean, I unquestionably felt it was the beginning of a new period and by definition, Picasso wasn't a part of it, you know. I had no problem with that at all, and I still find it's hard—where it's—for example, Vogel's—Herb Vogel, whose collection, whose papers are there, I'm very happy, are at the Archives of American Art. Herb was almost a replay of Picasso. Sometimes I look across the table and his face took a kind of a Picasso-esque character, indeed. He idolized Picasso, he [was] how many years older? Anyway, as a collector of cutting edge art of the '60s that Picasso was still a part of his horizon, anyway, but I really did not like Picasso. I found the—I still think the—this—you know, for me, the only success in art is inside of art, and you don't know that until the last day on this earth if you've succeeded and—but if you see—like the Museum of Modern Art did a Picasso Matisse show [*Matisse Picasso*, 2003].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And for me, it's one of the things I took note of, is that I don't think Picasso succeeded in art, and Matisse did succeed in art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: And that's the kind of stuff is important to me [laughs], you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But how would you—how would you explain that to a layperson, in what way did Matisse succeed where Picasso didn't quite succeed?

RICHARD TUTTLE: I think it's almost I think that human creativity is a gift that if we use can be such a thing that creates our self. As children of two parents, we're very much created by what we're told by them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, and observe.

RICHARD TUTTLE: You know, and the sort of context that they might build for us and it's because they love us. And also genetic—you know, their interest in their genetic[sic] will be carried through us and they'll get [to be] grandparents through us [laughs] et cetera, et cetera. But I find we also can make ourselves, and we can choose a completely different context than our parents, for example, and we can accept or reject what we've been given.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And that in achieving art, which is a kind of magical transformation from a world of life where life in all life's vicissitudes dominate, but at the same time inaccessible to us, we have the—we've designed or society has designed art, which not only brings you—puts you in the driver seat but can bring you to all the good things in life.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And then be the greatest tool that we have. We can have to life itself, which are a series of good things, which I very much think people should take up. If there are lots of people graduating, more people from art school, who can ever have careers in the gallery system and such, that's not a bad thing. So, I actually feel that the degree to which people have art, 10 percent, 20 percent, whatever is good, and if takes going through art school to get the 10 percent, that's good because I'm not—I didn't make the world.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, no.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It's not a—I mean, even—what I said, the only success in art is in art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And—I mean, I certainly don't—I mean, I don't privilege material issues. I can't because if you're going to succeed in art, as art allows, there's no time to focus on material.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, if I understand what you're saying, you're saying that Matisse succeeded because he put the—he was a conduit for the art. He put—he didn't put himself above it. He didn't make himself dominate it. He made himself a kind of facilitator, and that's a form of character as being open to things and noticing things that could be turned into experiences that can lead people to what you're calling the good things in life.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, I think—you know, it's only a feeling. I wasn't there the moment Matisse left this world.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

RICHARD TUTTLE: But I think that he left as the person he created.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Which is actually very rare, you know. I suppose, I don't want to say bad things about people, but I think Picasso did not leave the world as a person he created. He actually, along the way, conceived, which is to some people very understandable, a persona that—he became a kind of brand, you could say.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, but it was also ego-driven, largely.

RICHARD TUTTLE: I guess but it's just not where—I mean the actual comparison—but you could say, at a certain point, Picasso went into this eroticism thing, where he's basically lusting after nubile things.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah that happens at a point in his life where he started to slow down a little bit.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It kind of—.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In the minotaur department.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It kind of does but anybody—you know, like, I mean, hormones are—hormonally, we're just—we just do what are hormones—

[They laugh.]

—tell us what to do, you know? And like well, you could also say that Matisse had a, you know, his blue dancers, was—more like he—if sex was the issue, I think Matisse had better sex than Picasso. Look at the work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: So there you go.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There's more eroticism, less carnality maybe.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Something—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Something like that, yeah.

RICHARD TUTTLE: But even, like with Matisse, I find those, that late work shows up in all over the whole spectrum of visual consumption, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, the cut outs, the Vence Chapel, all those images are very durable.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, it's—again I'm not—that's not the standard. It's really—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

RICHARD TUTTLE: I think the human being, it's—I mean, I don't subscribe to this idea that, you know, youth is a sort of apex. I mean, life is like a year; it's a full season. If you can't find beauty in winter, you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: —what—you know, like I mean don't try to tell me you're doing—in art, one of the jobs of the artist is to show the beauty—as much beauty as they can, and it's much more interesting to find it where people—in the heart of winter. Like New Mexico, you'd be surprised how many people find the leafless trees, the cottonwood trees and the arroyos much more beautiful than the spring or the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's a gorgeous place, every time of year.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But yeah, the winter is—I've actually spent quite a few winters—or I've traveled there during the winter, and it's quite wonderful because it can get tolerably warm during the day and terribly cold at night, and you have those wonderful Pino and fires, green chili, and other things to keep you warm. But maybe we could cycle back to Trinity.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And so Wagstaff—was Wagstaff at the Wadsworth? He was a curator?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, he was hired by Charlie Cunningham and Sam had been floating around Madison Avenue.



JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And I think he decided to go back to the Institute of Fine Arts, and he studied with Richard Offner, one of the great, great art historians of—you know, of that period, of any period. But then he had did this marvelous thing of connecting with contemporary art and then was hired by Hartford in a—somehow he had his glamour and his charisma and so on, but I still often wonder how he even thought of Hartford or how that happened. Hartford had had some really cutting-edge culture with "Chick" Austin or A. Everett Austin who was there in the late-'20s.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And '30s and early-'40s, and there was, for example, a Catholic priest in a downtown diocese who made a remarkable contemporary art collection in the '20s, you know. There was—every once in a while, there was a real moment of creative excitement in Hartford in the way Sam came into that is [inaudible].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You also had, up in the country, in Litchfield County, in areas like that, you had a growing colony of artists and writers and composers like Isaac Stern and Arthur Miller, Cleve Gray, all these people were up there in the Litchfield County area and Calder, Calder Alexander.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, Connecticut is very funny. People think it's one state and everything, but it's—really, it's two states. There's the field of New Haven, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: There is a divide line through it, and it's the Hartford side above and that—and that—it's absolutely true. I mean, and even places like Wallingford, Meriden, they're yes, in the arts, but also in entrepreneurship.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: As far as creative technology, it's like, it's like a Silicon Valley. You know, of a certain period, the mid-19th—20th century but Hartford, it's another—it's really under the cloud of Puritan and the insurance companies but—however, Chick was already connected with Phillip Johnson.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And through Philip Johnson connected to the Tremaines, and so there was a lot of that kind of stuff going on as well. But when I was there as a student, the only—I mean, there was still people—because Chick was—actually started the fine arts department at Trinity, but then he was also phenomenally interested in theater, and he would do theater productions at the museum, and there were still people around Hartford who were totally gaga in love and formed their lives through theater, and they got married and—because they both loved Chick, and they, then, actually became the most interesting people to talk to—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: —for somebody like myself, you know. There's also Wallace Stevens whose daughter, Holly Stevens, was—had a secretarial job at the college and she what—I think there was some distance between she and her dad but she still—I mean, he's, you know, I think one of the greatest poets America's produced and so there was a little bit. But then I'm from New Jersey. I

have no background whatsoever.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, you're from New Jersey.

RICHARD TUTTLE: So this is all, this—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How did you get to Trinity? What sold you on Trinity?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, actually [laughs] my dad had to produce a new line—[inaudible] history but—Manufacturing was already, say in the '50s, if you were awake, you could see it was in decline. And what do we do about that and so, we tried to make a better product, and part of that is design, and part of design is color.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Okay, well, believe it or not there were, there were people at that point called color engineers, and this one man who had functioned in Manhattan as a color engineer was employed by my dad to pick the colors for this new furnace line. And that was about the time I should be looking at colleges, and I had—they knew I had an interest in art, and so my dad asked this color engineer where I should go to school, and it's like—I don't know, I find it very amusing, but it's like what kind of scotch should I drink?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, Chivas Regal, you know. Of course, he wants to be impressive so he actually told my dad—the little Ivy League schools like Williams, and Amherst and so and so, and Trinity was one of those schools.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, my performance in school and testing and all of that was not at all impressive and Trinity was the only school on that list. I mean I hope we remember the fact this is all under the hands of the the Gods, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: So.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: As are we all.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Right, so choose the school. Also, my dad was of a mind that you shouldn't—you can go away but you can't go that far. So, there were schools on the list which were taken off because they were too far. But Trinity came up and my mother had a cousin who was an important psychiatrist in Hartford, whom she admired, so we got in the car one day. It was a Saturday and drove up, and I totally aced the interview, you know. And the interviewer said right then—we walked out and said to my mother this is the kind of person we want at our school. And a faculty member who was on the committee then told her later they reviewed things and that the interview—they had some sort of point system and it was this—I mean, I think they actually said something like that, that they had never taken anyone with academic credentials as low as mine.

But I got a lot going on inside, and I take years. I'm a slow developer, as you might say. That's sort of ironic, too, because in say part of this interview I'm a fast—[laughs] I had my first show in a major

gallery when I was 22.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Something like that, but it's—I don't mind saying that like my daughter is a slow developer, too. My wife is not. I mean, she taught herself to read at 3 years old, sort of thing, you know, so I mean, it's all there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, when did you—what kind of exposure did you have to contemporary art other than through Sam Wagstaff or did he suggest you go see certain galleries or engage with certain artists? When were you?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, actually, I think that's an important story. I'm also trying to think about sharing somebody now, but I had a high school art teacher who was encouraging, very encouraging, in fact, but he was from Central Pennsylvania and his—he had always dreamed of going to—what's the name? The name has changed, but it used to be Carnegie—now it's called Carnegie Mellon, but then it was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Carnegie Institute?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Something like that, maybe like that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where Andy Warhol went.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes, yes, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And was roommates with—

RICHARD TUTTLE: —Philip Pearlstein.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: With Pearlstein which is sort of interesting.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, so I saved all my pennies and bought a train ticket to Pittsburgh and stayed up all night, and I didn't have the money to take a cab to the school, and I didn't even know where the school was. It turned out it was in winter, a snowstorm, and everything. I had my portfolio and I just walked over all the bridges, the five miles—

[They laugh.]

—to go to this interview, 11:00 on a Saturday because I couldn't be away from—And the interviewer was a wonderful, wonderful man who had—he had a kind of a national presence, and I saw him with my own eyes on TV at a later point where he was a judge of the Miss America contest, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you remember his name?

RICHARD TUTTLE: I don't, and I'd really love to be able to say his name because I—anyway, I was sort of terrified out of my mind and I had this, this portfolio and I wasn't that confident [inaudible]. And he basically, he walked in the room and in short order he said, "You don't want to go to this school." And you know I had just spent every cent I had, you know. I walked, stayed up all night and walked this thing and you're telling me I don't want to [laughs] go to this, you haven't even looked at my work, that sort of thing. So, I just sort of blew up and I was—I was admitted there. But part of

this story we tell is that the—you know, with my parents is I chose a liberal arts college with no art program, a liberal arts college which is somewhat of a—I thought of William and Mary because my mother had this dream of raising a gentleman, and she thought that if you go to William and Mary—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you went to Tidewater Virginia, they could speak—

RICHARD TUTTLE: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —You could learn how to hold a fork properly.

RICHARD TUTTLE: You would ride—we had to do riding lessons and all that. I didn't—anyway, and then [I also chose] a real art school, which was Carnegie Mellon. And so whichever one accepted first would get the body, and Trinity actually did, as I said, accepted first, so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What was the name of your art teacher in high school?

RICHARD TUTTLE: My high school art teacher? Oh God, it began with a B. We—Yale yesterday, I met one of the kids who said—who mentioned an art teacher they had, but that they always fought, and that was very much the case of this man. I mean, we—every project that he took us through was a battleground between he and I, but he always gave me the highest—the highest grade, and I also won every—he had this idea that each project would then be put on the wall, or there would be a competition of those, and I won every single one always and so like we have this—I was a well-brought up young man. I didn't say four-letter words to his face, but I still remembered some of the issues that we had. But I think it was one of those— somehow a school like that in Union County, New Jersey could have significant teachers. Some of it was because a lot of them grew up in the Depression, and there just weren't jobs. You would—be a gifted mathematician—if you were a woman and a gifted mathematician, there—you know, there was no place for you to go.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And so we had incredible math teachers, which I mean, meant a lot to me, but I didn't show up—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So when did you start engaging in, you know, the New York scene?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, that teacher actually told me that there were galleries in these what are—I don't remember the word he used, but basically, he said there are places where you can just go and see art that other people are doing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you could buy it, too.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, you could buy, but I was like so under-sophisticated that I just didn't believe him because I couldn't—I mean, my idea of art was so high that, you know it's just not—it can't be that available. So I didn't—but at the same time, this was a period just after Sputnik, and there, suddenly, were all these advanced programs and Columbia, for example, would do a special program for regional kids. They did a program in sort of architecture in the visual arts, the visual realm, and I actually was accepted in that program. But my dad said [laughs], and I think he was thinking about the camp fairs, but he said until you do better at school I'm not going to let you go there and that was just one of my strokes of my bad, horrendous relationship with my dad, but that's also typical 50s thing. People said there wouldn't be rock and roll if guys didn't have terrible relations with their dads, so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: True enough. So—but at some point you must have overcome your disbelief and come to New York and started looking at art.

RICHARD TUTTLE: I think that was part of the work of the Sam thing because.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wagstaff.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, we'd actually—you know, there you could hop a train say early, early Saturday morning, and then get to Grand Central at noon, something like that and just go out and see galleries and then go in the evening and so I would—there was something called Hartford Art School.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hartt School of Art. It's part of University of Hartford now.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's in West Hartford, yeah.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And so Sam had a conception of his job as sort of knitting together the community, and so he made his job to go out. So there were a couple students from there, and then we would all go together and then catch the last train back to Hartford, and then I had this all day short order cook job [laughs] on Sunday, and so I get like no sleep and then work the whole day. So, basically I would stay up for 24 hours straight, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow. So, we're you a grill man or a fry cook?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, I mean short order thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: You know, I was good and enjoyed that. It was also a social event because you'd stand making people's sandwiches, and they come along, and they'd tell you—it was what—I think, because at Trinity, I really took it to heart that they had never taken anybody with as bad academic credentials as myself. So, the first year I just worked at academics, and that was a period when most people make their social connections in school and so I didn't really, I didn't really do that, but I became top of my class. And so then, then all of the sort of rewards come along. And by the time I was a senior I went back to my normal pattern of like being the world's worst student but then I did, you know, I was so active. That's also in high school I was hugely active in extracurricular activities, and that's what I did at Trinity too, because you just learned. I had to make—I mean, Trinity, I always say was a happy experience because it's a school where you can make anything you want out of it, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And so I made, I made it an art school for art education. I did design for projects for the school and the sets for the theater, but somehow in that I also understood that— Well, the—I guess I think the point with that, James, is that I'd already—I was already an artist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Already doing, started my work as an artist, although nobody knew it, most of all me, but if I mean—There was just a print retrospective of mine, and the curator was a German,

very highly trained art historian and they decided to begin with a print I made for the yearbook, you know, my yearbook at the school, and it looked pretty good, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What is the image or what is the—

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, it was—I was interested in woodcut at the time, and I felt I could draw. This was a period where felt-tip pens just came into the world.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And I could draw on the wood with a felt-tip pen with a kind of freedom and looseness and then spend hours and hours cutting it out.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And it did lead into I think the first important work of my art called *Paper Cubes*, and they were made. In those days, when you made a yearbook you pasted stuff up, and this cardboard or this paper, the coated paper that we used for pasting up was then the paper out of which I made these paper cubes, so there was this kind of—yeah, so that's the—I mean, the whole—I guess, the art—the art, per se [coughs]—You know, like how is somebody, an artist or how they recognize themselves or—I mean, because it's not a career decision, you know; it's like a recognition of a disability or something [laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that's sort of the difference we were talking about before we turned the recorder on, is sort of the difference between then and now, is that because of the usurious cost of education, schools have to encourage students to believe that the degree is somehow going to make them have a career. But my experience was not and it sounds like you wasn't either, that there was any expectation that art was going to be like a day job that you're going to be able to make money from easily.

RICHARD TUTTLE: You know, but what I think art, you know, artists asks different—wants different things at different periods, and there is a time that—at my starting period art really wanted you to rock the boat, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And now the art doesn't want you to rock the boat, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It wants you make a thousand of the same thing that will sell for the same art price.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, I'm a positive type of guy, but I find—you know, I mean, what I feel when I say rock the boat, I really mean that art wants you to define what's real, reality.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It wants you to make something that—most of human needs are really about defining illusion, the illusion you want to live by.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Image.

RICHARD TUTTLE: I mean, it's like—what? I mean, let's face it; the human condition is incredibly

vulnerable, you know. I mean, there's stuff that wants to eat us; you know, there's stuff in the universe that can come crashing down at any moment; you know, the uncertainty of life, of our species is extraordinary. We do all we can to not face that and to pretend that's not the case and that art is in there, too, so when you don't rock the boat, people are going to feel a lot better than if you rock the boat, but we still need certain moments, very few, as few as possible, where we need a fix of the real.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: What's real.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: You know, and they always—like the '60s of every century always somehow—there's always a moment when we need a fix of the real. Like that was a time—one of the characteristics—it's amusing to me that, fundamentally, the museums were very confused about their job and their position and what's going on, and they invited artists—they gave the museums to artists, you know. The most exciting, the most radical use of—and Sam was part of that as well. He was a superbly trained art historian and one—he made an exhibition about his teacher, Richard Offner; I mean, it stunned everybody because contemporary art has its own, we kind of like this; we kind of like that, like Joe's over there and something, but to find a superbly trained art, a disciplined art, the most disciplined art historian in the midst of this chaos of contemporary art was astonishing to people, you know. He also acquired masterpieces for the Wadsworth Atheneum that were right from underneath the eyes of the so-called elite, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And that's because of he, he knew how to look at art. He knew, he was the best student Richard Offner ever had.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, when you left Trinity, when you graduated from Trinity, how quickly did you move to New York? Was it immediate?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, okay, I was still hoping to go to art school and anyway.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You were at Cooper for a little while, right?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, but I actually in a sense of graduate—to do graduate work. It was also the Vietnam War period and by going to graduate school you wouldn't be drafted, and so I also applied to the University of Chicago at that point, but my dad was the kind of person who said you can get support until you're 21, 21 comes, goodbye, that's it, so. He helped me get a job as bellhop up at the big hotel in Chicago, The Drake.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The Drake.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And that was all set up. I was ready to put on my little bellhop cap and work for tips and all that kind of stuff. Very unrealistic way of thinking—anyway, Cooper Union came up and I came down and I took the test and I actually had to do the SAT all over again and all this stuff because most, when you go in—but they didn't want to accept me because they said they want someone who is loyal because they depend on gifts of the alumni.

And so I went—let's see, how did that go? I had a beautiful relationship with the vice president of

Trinity, Albert Holland, who was a remarkable man, survived the Bataan Death March in the Philippines, among other things. But he was either on the board or knew—he was sort of in charge of the financial side of Trinity and so he was connected with perhaps a board member at Cooper, and I told him how much I wanted to go there, and he say, oh, well that's not a problem, and he called [laughs] up his friend on the board, and he just came down on top and that was that.

So I came—I came and started Cooper in September. I had an apartment in East Village, but and it was—the first days was one of the happiest days of my life because I always dreamed to go to school where people were interested in what I was interested in, and that euphoria lasted about a week or so and then.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

RICHARD TUTTLE: And then I realized that this is not—

[speaking to Mei-mei Berssenbrugge]

Everything okay?

MEI-MEI BERSSENBRUGGE: I have to go pretty soon, and you have a time limit for this interview.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Okay, thanks, thanks, thanks. You know, she's the boss; the boss is being the boss.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, how long were you at Cooper?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Just like something like a semester and then I conceived of this notion of being a pilot and enlisting in the Air Force.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We spoke about that last time.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, and I think didn't even finish the semester at Cooper; I just let it go. I worked at a job at the library at Cooper Union. It was still like the old—there was a museum what's now the Carnegie, The National Museum of Design.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The Cooper Hewitt.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It was at Cooper Hewitt. It's still one of my favorite museums and then the library was actually quite special and the people there, and then I had a job as a soda jerk [laughs] at a kind of trendy, little cafe there and managed to survive. I actually did begin some paintings. That's where—that's a time—after I left Cooper, stopped going to Cooper, I made these paper cubes, and I also made some paintings, which are now in all the top museums and stuff like that. But it was—I mean, already at Trinity, which is a conservative school, I felt this beat of footsteps marking a new period which then became the hippies and the Haight-Asbury and the whole revolutionary, and so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: I was actually doing stuff in this conservative atmosphere at Trinity that was—you just felt the spirit of the new age and it was a time, for example, Frank Stella and—well not Carl [Andre] yet, but there were stunning moments when young, seriously young artists would do significant art and I—it basically, what I say, what they call the youth generation.



JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, it was, but somehow youth was in a position to call—to state what the vitality or give the vitality, and that idea is so overdone now where everybody—I mean, it was—my dealer Betty Parsons would say that I'd never dream of giving an artist a show younger than 35; that was because it just takes that long to get yourself together.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, there was a much comment about the AbEx people, how people like de Kooning was in 40s before he had a solo show—

RICHARD TUTTLE: That's right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY:—and I think he was 42 or 44, but the time you're talking about sort of overlaps with the beat time as well.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And that would have been a moment where you're talking about Kaprow Happenings and a few years before, you have Ginsberg, and Kerouac and whatever.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you have any exposure—were you engaged at all in that?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, I knew Allen because I had a good connection with Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado and Allen because I was like I didn't go to art school. I think I'm a perpetual student of art because I always have to learn. I collect, not to collect but to learn. That's how I learn and so but my one of my questions—it was about aesthetics which is a naughty word, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Another naughty word like the B word.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, but not to me and because I noticed that there was—Okay, so for Richard, in order to make a significant contribution, and I estimated the heroic generation very, very highly and I saw that their achievement was going down and being lost. And so as a young person serving the industry as it were, I wanted to do something which supported what I felt they were achieving so to do that I had to find a way to, in my own work, to achieve what they achieved and then I could take the next step forward. So when I say I noticed in their work there was aesthetic; there were aesthetic issues, I wondered, well, do there have to be aesthetic issues in my work because it was a naughty—there was not supposed to be aesthetic issues and so, but I don't believe—I have to believe in myself or my—So that was a question that I had.

And I conceived the way the question could be asked was like, okay, being close enough to the literary world, there was a slight disjoint in that the naughtiness of aesthetics was less a problem in poetry than it was in the visual world, okay, so that was okay. And shoot to the finish, I knew Allen, we seemed to—we liked each other, so I asked him, okay is the aesthetics of Abstract Impressionism the same as the aesthetics of the Beats?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And he like [laughs], it was like we are so in formation in that aesthetic you are asking me about that it, like, happens before there's anybody in the world. He answered the question in terms of where the hangouts were of the period, like the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The Cedar Bar.

RICHARD TUTTLE: The Cedar Bar but it is—But before the Cedar Bar, there's Hotel Martinique—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Herald Square.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. And that he was still at Columbia at that point, and that he would come get on the subway and come down. And we're talking about, I don't know, like early-'50s or something like that, you know. And that this—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was also a Jersey boy.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, yeah. But the—and he's a poet, and so that's—I believe if you can find a poet as your informant you should feel extremely happy, because they're the best, you know. And so the answer is that this—whatever this aesthetic, which I got from the naughtiness of the word, he didn't even deal with that. He was telling me the aesthetic that's appropriate in this case is something that is developed from the first cellular level and sort of starts growing like that, and that this is useful to say poets in one way and one time and the visual community at another time. But like wow, you know. Because as we all know that the tenets of Abstractionism or AbEx proliferated like across the country. There are a kazillion people doing that, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Everybody's started doing gesture painting and action painting.

RICHARD TUTTLE: But if you look today, they all picked it up as a kind of decorative art, and the thing is—well, okay. I'm going to say this anyway, but Baruch College did an amazing show. It's some time has passed now where they—it was works on paper, and they gathered together, I don't know, like 50 different artists or something, and from the inner group, the important ones, the Newman, maybe Kline or de Kooning, Pollock, whatever, and it was a time when space—there was a spatial change, and it may be the time when suddenly like photography came into a relevancy. And there's lots of those. I experienced it as just like, say, in a frame. It's a picture frame with like that and it worked in the '40s and the '50s and the '60s like that, suddenly it didn't work anymore because everything required a little more sort of something or other.

So Baruch did this show at that time, and it was like all of the people who went to AbEx for decorative reasons that were just like—fell to pieces, you know. But the ones who were concerned with the aesthetic that Ginsburg was talking about, the work holds in that recently-enlarged space, you know. And it was, for me, a huge lesson of how, because finding one's art is a kind of constructive thing, and it does come from somewhere. It exists. It comes to a point, and then it has a future, which is connected. And to build something that's going to last and be significant and really contribute, you can't start like with the developed aesthetic from 1952 and be doing that work in 1958 or something. I mean, it became—you know, it was like just a fashion. And it was also wonderful to me to see that art sometimes—even successful art has to survive the fashion that it creates itself.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. I mean, if Picasso said that the only good cubist were only cubists for a couple of years.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And that the ones that were cubists, had cubist careers, you know, ended up falling it some kind of decorative or commercial brand.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And so what you're talking about is a commitment to continual growth. Of course, maybe the downside of that was somebody like [Clement] Greenberg who got under people's skin with the idea that you can't repeat yourself because of course we always repeat ourselves. If you look at a lot of artists when they get towards the end of their lives, they might recycle ideas they had explored and abandoned when they were in their 20s and they might go back to things that—

RICHARD TUTTLE: I mean, one of the most exciting things in an artist's life work is when an idea repeats because it's never the same. And that—to me, art is one of the greatest arguments because people don't necessarily believe in art or artists, or that there is creativity. I mean, I was at Yale yesterday. I decided for important reasons, knowing Betty Parsons was very special, and she would say to me, "An artwork has to account for the visible and the invisible." Anyway, I said that to the students yesterday, and there was—like they took it in. I could feel that. But then someone came up and said, "Well, what do you mean by this?"

Anyway, I've been stunned recently that I'm—like I don't remember people's names. It takes me three or four or five times meeting somebody until I remember the person's name, you know. But, okay, and so what—and I've always hated myself over it, like, oh, you're really stupid, like you should try harder.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You'd be a lousy politician.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, but what interests me in people is the invisible, is their soul, is their character, is their heart, you know. All the invisible side of a human being, which is to me is unnamable but it's unique. Each person has those things, and balances and relationships that are like—and that's one of my greatest pleasures in life is just walking through and every day knowing that I'm going to meet somebody, who has an arrangement of the invisible parts of them. And I've always been fascinated by that, and I don't care if you're 92 or you're two years old., I'm just naturally focused in that direction, because I never if, you know, I meet you like in another 30 years, I won't remember your name, but I'll remember your , , enjoying your invisible parts, as it were.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I got you, yeah, yeah.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. And so for me when Betty said that, I mean, it was like—what did I say? You know, sort of a gift of that I'm not—what? Probably happens to everybody when you find your community, there are sort of welcome signs, you know. Like I spent my life—I mean, probably most people I know, they're really good at remembering people's names [laughs] but they don't have any idea who you are. They're not interested.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who the person is, yeah.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. And I find that—I mean, as I say, everybody has something, you know. It's not just that everybody is different, but everybody has some unique something, what I say special, combination of—and I love to dream about the sense of the individual or the position of the individual as in relation to some, one little part that both simultaneously makes them different than anybody I've ever met, and solidifies an individual. I don't know if it's just to me or to everybody, I don't care, but it's big. And I think art, one of the important parts of art, to me, is supporting the invisible over the—I mean, I don't care if you're good at your job or not or whatever, you know. You're just, to me—and I don't know where that—but you could put that on, on the human side.

And if we're in a world which has actually broken the unity between technos and humanity then I'm like—and it's the human side that suffers.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And that I'm cast, for reasons I had nothing to do with it, to be somebody who is, you know, the human and the support of the human and the feeding of the human, I mean, that's what art is. It's like nutrition for the human.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So this gets back to what you were saying earlier about Matisse versus Picasso, and perhaps Matisse—another way to say what you were expressing is that Matisse somehow was more mindful of the invisible and somehow maybe made it more accessible through his work.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, he's—I consider myself a student of creativity, too. It's like another avocation, but Matisse is remarkable in a kind of creativity where he did a full circle. And it's like an invisible circle because he was born in a textile kind of industrial textile town. And there was a show—and he kept some textiles from that town. I mean, I guess the reason they were in this show is he was interested in this idea of pattern and the kind of textiles, but also the colors, the palette. And that he in a way, you know, people talk about a painter of light, and they—light—people confuse sunlight and this other thing that's light.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Painting light.

RICHARD TUTTLE: They can say, like I mean, if you read the books or listen to people who are supposed to be knowledgeable, like Impressionism is painting light or something.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But that's a—

RICHARD TUTTLE: But they mean sunlight.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's a mimetic thing. That's sort of an optical reconstituting an optical experience with pigment as opposed to the kind of light I think you're talking about, which is something that emanates from within the painting that comes through the color.

RICHARD TUTTLE: It can. For example, it's a favorite story of mine because I've been fighting about color. I think I mentioned I'm doing this book on color at the Getty, like there's never been a color book like that before. Anyway, Matisse, we know, admired Gauguin's painting, and he loved it so much that he went to Tahiti to see the color, the light in which Gauguin painted. And to me that's—I mean, there's sunlight in Paris. You don't need to go to—there's beautiful light in Paris or wherever. But the light of, for example, which scientists will tell us is colorless or something like that is actually never colorless. You know, it's filled with color, and that influences your color perception among other things, you know. It influences how your brain works among other things.

And for an artist, of Matisse's art ambitions that's a big deal, you know. And he would—I find that's the—okay, so that light that Matisse could grasp and who would go all the way to Tahiti to see, and that word "see" because you can look, but seeing is another thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you have to comprehend it, yeah.

RICHARD TUTTLE: But I think that Matisse actually looked at it synthetically—did not look at it analytically, which is the way I would tend to look at it. But the—I think I'm going to throw in there

that this *eidos*, this Greek idea that there's this moment that combines thought and sight.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Is so major in the construction of our civilization, and it has to be part of art, has to be part of a serious artist trying to make art. And so if you're that kind of person you would get on a boat and go to Tahiti and to see—because Gauguin, who I've been looking—I mean, the Met has some examples, one of which is important. It's the smallest one. But he's a major player. It's an open-ended field, thank God, because I want a future to Western culture, and I don't think it's come to the end. And artists at this moment have a big job to fight against all the doomsday prophecies and show that the culture—what the strengths are, how the strengths exist in today's world, what they might be tomorrow, and so on. The fundamentals of the culture, if one is sufficiently ambitious in art, one is going to pursue.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I'm curious how many of the students at Yale knew who Betty Parsons was.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, she's entered the kind of legendary mythology more than I suspected because she had the world's worst biographer. But I think her name—I've been impressed as time goes on that—how consistent the generations that come through the art schools maintain a sense of importance of the heroic generation, you know. And when you visit there you're going to come up with the name Betty Parsons. And so maybe that's why they know her.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How did you meet her? I mean, she was also an artist.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yes. Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Which made her unusual as a dealer and a collector.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And a collector, yeah. So it's these three things. And, again for me, well, you know, that the—I don't know. A lot of, like, finding your way in the world seems to be about, "Oh, you can't do that and you can't do that," and it's a sort of narrowing. People can see it as a narrowing until you find your place. But, like, when I found my place, it was like this opening thing, meeting somebody, like Betty, who—I mean, I could—but one of these aspects of her is that she had this breadth of interests. I mean, even architecture. I think when I came along she had just recently had her studio made by Tony Smith, you know. Tony didn't do much. There aren't many buildings that he—and we would go out to South Long Island on weekends, and be—there was also a guest house at that point also by Tony Smith. I mean, this was to me this is an open world, and I still have some funny objects on that table in there, which nobody knows. They're clearly old, like archaeological—of archaeological interest, but she had studied with Bourdelle.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: She and Bourdelle, yeah.

RICHARD TUTTLE: What?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Rodin's assistant, yeah.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And she was in a room with 20 or 30 students, but she was next to Giacometti and they became friends at that point. And of course, Giacometti was one of my heroes of the

period, and just to sit and listen to Betty's stories [laughs] of Bourdelle and Giacometti, and this was, this is, unfortunately—I felt at Yale—schools matter and teachers and education, and where can you—the first place, there wasn't a school that could teach you what you needed to know if you were part of the youth generation, we made the world. There was no world out there. It was like beginning from there. But still there were people around who could provide education. Like Sam, for example.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wagstaff.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, yeah. I mean, one of the things, and I'll be grateful, we've had serious falling outs and I'm a very—well, like, I mean, he had great strengths and great weaknesses in the end, but a real interesting person, you know. But one day he just decided to take me into a gallery on 57th Street, which was one of the great dealers of porcelain. And I won't go into that, but you know, the war turned Europe upside down, and that part of European culture came to New York. And I just knew the porcelain that my grandmother had which was just like dreck and sort of symbolized all the horrible world, and porcelain to me meant something I really wanted to avoid.

But Sam takes me in there and shows me like major porcelain from the middle of the 18th century and the tea service design for Marie Antoinette and Sevres, and so on. And like I have the visual position to just like realize, I'm like seeing something, like I'm just knocked over by all of this, this beauty and significance and so on. So like I—you know, my own collecting—I have a beautiful little Kändler white porcelain sculpture there, which I actually got because I wrote an introduction to somebody's catalogue, and a dealer—some of these things I ask, rather than be paid in money, to buy something I have my eyes and heart set on. So those kinds of things. You've got to circle us back on track, I think.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I was asking how you—when was the first time you met—

RICHARD TUTTLE: Betty.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Betty Parsons, and I know that you ended up working for her, and that's where you had your first show, so.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. Well, I was—her gallery director was Jock Truman. And, oh my gosh, tonight I have to say a few words at the gala, the Guggenheim Gala about Agnes. It's honoring Agnes because her show is there. And what I'm going to say is about Agnes inviting me to this opening where her painting was on view as a recent acquisition. Okay, that same evening, Jock Truman, Betty's director, gallery director, was in attendance. And Agnes knew I needed a job, and when we ran into Jock, Agnes said, "Do you have a job at the gallery? The guy in the backroom?" And it happened that the person—the season was just starting, and the person they thought would work there was not going to happen. So I got the job on the spot there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, great.

RICHARD TUTTLE: So once I started the job then Betty, who could be quite tough and assertive as a director, would then come out with some hundred percent chocolate and sort of give people a teeny bit of chocolate to cover up the problem and so on. Oh, and I think—oh, yeah, yeah. She came out at on point, she said something like, "They tell me you're a serious artist," which I thought was a hoot.

[phone ringing]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I'll turn this off for a minute.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Okay, okay.

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JAMES MCELHINNEY: So we're resuming. Okay.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you got the job at Parsons.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, and it was a great job because it was just afternoons, and it was \$50 a week, and it meant I could work in the mornings; I could pay my rent, and it was a very exciting time.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So do you know a lot of other artists in the stable? Did you know people like Lester Johnson?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Lester was not with Betty. He was with—what was her name? Gosh. But I certainly knew—and I met—you know, the circle around Betty was still very much intact because Ad Reinhardt, who I actually think is the most important of the—I mean, Pollock is kind of an originator, but as far as that heroic generation, I think Ad was the most important, and he took the longest time to make his achievement. You know, and he was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, his work was very or is very painstaking in a lot of ways, very careful and very measured, and all of his lists and his whole mental process. I didn't have the pleasure of knowing him, but studying his work, it seems like it was very thoughtful and sort of almost the opposite of the protean, you know, kind of rambunctiousness of Pollock.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, that is an interesting place, but I just heard, much to my delight, that Rothko considered him a much better artist than himself, and I absolutely concur. But it's because I think the—one of the great things that happened was how time, time became like an equal in his sort of material, in a material sense in terms of making a painting. And each one of the major figures used time in a different way in the painting; but Ad's achievement was based on that your fist recognition, say, would be point A, you get this black. You get black. And then as you look at it, the black disappears into colors, into zones of colors and then when it does—when that happens fully, and that's point B. And when you know, the moment you know point B happens, you realize you've had an art experience in between. And this is—I mean, it's such an important concept, and so many artists have—there wouldn't be a James Turrell without an Ad Reinhardt, but nobody has figured out what's going on, you know. But also sometimes I say that if I had an art mother and father, Agnes, who with the sort of, like, white square is my mother, and Ad, with the black square, would be my father, because they've given me a mother and father, but also a possibility to be—to kind of exist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So in terms of trying to describe the experience that you just unfolded, I understand completely what you mean. What you're talking about, I think, or what I hear is that you're got the immediate response that the thing is that—the idea that a picture is something that's delivered to you, you know, like if you think about *The Raft of the Medusa* or something; it's this overwhelming experience that you can kind of interact with in a cinematic way, right? There's a lot of—it doesn't make the audience work that hard, right?

RICHARD TUTTLE: Okay, okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then with somebody like Ad Reinhardt, you're confronted by an experience which you feel is denying you much because you look at it, and first response is, like you say, a black rectangle. There's nothing there. And then you look, and there's a lot there. And finding that space in between the assumption and the discovery is—you know, you look at the black rectangle, and you assume that it's a black rectangle, and then you discover that it's not.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And that space in between.

RICHARD TUTTLE: I mean, in a certain level, I think they're both—both of them are part of a long tradition that, I would say, began at the end of the 18th century with the birth of Romanticism, you know. And I could show you a print of an artist whose name also happens to be Reinhardt, where it's also in a—it's the first generation after Kant, and so people are—I mean, the world—Kant, I mean, we can't imagine today how the world is just really destroyed and reconstructed, you know. Of course, Kant, in his sense, is also coming out of Locke and Hume in the English.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, we talked about Humboldt and Goethe and others last time.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But say American art, which I absolutely value, especially this first generation, is to me stronger because it's the lineage is strong, you know. You don't have a strong art that's not connected to a strong lineage. That's what I was trying to tell the kids at Yale because they're like, "Oh, I'm from Nashville, I'm going to do this and do that," and everything, and I'm saying, "What's your lineage?" Because you're at Yale. I mean, this is a place to refine your discrimination. So anyway, and I—but I was going to say that lineage is a kind of lineage right from the beginning of it where the viewer pays attention, you know. They go out a little bit, and they work a little bit hard, and I'm going to say a metaphor, that they learn that artist's art. And it's a lot about accessing light, you know, because art is—okay, so from that moment, that artist's work enters your life, and you leave a museum, and you're walking down the street, and you have that artist's work, wherever you want, whenever you like.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And it conditions everything you see and everything you respond to.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Yeah. It's not the kind of like *The Raft of Medusa* where you go out and you might remember something about it, but you don't remember the art, you know. And this is the main point. In the democracy, why those horrendous wars in the 20th century were fought was to find a space in which the democracy where we can achieve representation throughout society and figure out how to live together. Like if people just imagined what it is to live with other people, you know. I mean, we don't like each other. I mean, we got serious issues. We're all different, and just like to agree on some system where we can subordinate our problems.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's the Mayflower Compact as they teach you in school.

RICHARD TUTTLE: That's a very, very incredibly important moment, but I think the—I like to kind of use the creative thing to go—I mean, origin is really a big deal for me. I think there is an origin. I think a beginning—

FEMALE SPEAKER: Okay, that's enough.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Well, we're not—

FEMALE SPEAKER: He got in at 11:00. He went out for his first appointment at 4:00 a.m., and he's



got to give a speech at the Guggenheim Gala today.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Understood. So I'll pose one more question.

FEMALE SPEAKER: And he's still recovering from his surgeries. So he's got no responsibilities. So it has to be you.

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. May I have five minutes?

FEMALE SPEAKER: Yes, you have, I promise. I don't like this role, but then if he's too tired, he's going to give a crappy speech.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, we can't have that. Can't have that.

RICHARD TUTTLE: She has a warm heart, too, yeah. She's tough, with a warm heart.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, Rich, let me ask you do you as an artist identify your lineage as being Romanticism?

RICHARD TUTTLE: I'm afraid what generally is held as Romanticism, the word now, is actually a late overdeveloped version, and also by that time sick version of true Romanticism.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: And one of my projects in these last years is despite the horrors that Romanticism has given us politically, aesthetically, destructively, that the origins of the Romanticism is—okay, my God, okay, like the *Hymen an die Nacht*. I mean, the origins of Romanticism are at the end of the 18th Century, which was a period of Enlightenment.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Enlightenment, right.

RICHARD TUTTLE: The questions then that people needed to ask were about the night; as we have to—the pendulum swings, and that the—and I find the— You know, whereas Enlightenment is like a thing where there's this model, and we're all supposed to aim for that model, and we were considered good or bad or acceptable, and the model got tighter and tighter. So like the poor couldn't ever have any chance to get anywhere close to that model. And then Romanticism came back, the pendulum swings back, and actually in conception, it has a place for all humans, you know. And so I find, especially as we begin the 21st Century, which is another period of asking questions of the night, it's very useful to visit the origins of the romantic. And I would say, you know—I think I mentioned this Philipp Otto Runge before—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, you did.

RICHARD TUTTLE: —which is another horrendously misunderstood—like *The Wall Street Journal* just did an article on me, and they called me at the same time "the most influential and the most misunderstood contemporary artist." Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is a good place to end because, if I don't, I'm afraid that I might have to be carried out of the house. Thank you so much for your time.

RICHARD TUTTLE: Okay, thank you. Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]