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# Oral history interview with George Condo, 2017 May 5-June 20

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## Transcript

### Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with George Condo, conducted by Christopher Lyon for the Archives of American Art, at the artist's studio in New York, New York on May 5 and June 20, 2017.

This transcript has been reviewed and edited by George Condo and Christopher Lyon. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. The 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

GEORGE CONDO: I like winging it, just so you know.

[They laugh.]

I don't mind.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is Christopher Lyon interviewing George Condo at the artist's studio in New York City on May 5, 2017 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Card one.

Well, this should be fun. I'm really looking forward to it.

GEORGE CONDO: [Laughs.] Good morning, Chris.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, let's start at the beginning. You were born in 1957.

GEORGE CONDO: Yep.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What date exactly?

GEORGE CONDO: It's December 10, 1957.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And in Concord?

GEORGE CONDO: Concord, New Hampshire.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And what did—but the family moved when you were young to Massachusetts. Was this to do with your father's teaching or—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, it was that he was initially—you know, he was an electrical engineer, basically trained as an electrical or chemical engineer—electrical engineer. And he had graduated from Purdue University, and then they were—they got married, my mother and my father. And the first place they lived was in Hillsborough, New Hampshire. And Concord was, you know, the big town next door. So, that's where they had my older brother, Pat, me, and my younger sister, Sue. And so, we grew up in—until we were about three-and-a-half, four, in New Hampshire.

And then, they had started to think, like, with three kids and wanting to have a few more, they were going to need a better sort of setup. And there was a small town sort of on the route from Concord—Lexington, Concord, Carlisle, and then came Chelmsford, Mass., and it hadn't really been developed. It was like an apple orchard town—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —and sort of in the middle of the nowhere as far as my father was concerned, but it was right next to Lowell, Mass. And he got a teaching offer from Lowell Tech to be a calculus and physics professor. So, he took that job, and they moved.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is Lowell Tech now UMass Lowell?

GEORGE CONDO: It's now UMass Lowell.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

GEORGE CONDO: It morphed from Lowell Tech into Lowell University, and then finally became part of the University of Massachusetts.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it. Got it. Okay. So, and then there were two further children that came along there?

GEORGE CONDO: The next two after my sister, who is about a year younger than I am, they were born like, you know, five years later in Chelmsford. And then, like another—my youngest sister is about 11 years younger than I am.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. So, all together, there are five children.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it. Got it. And so, it's, Pat is the oldest?

GEORGE CONDO: Pat's the oldest.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You are next?

GEORGE CONDO: And I'm next. And my sister, Susan, and then Christopher, and then Mary Irene.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mary Irene.

GEORGE CONDO: She's the youngest.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it. Okay. And [laughs] so, this is a Catholic family?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. It's a Catholic family. My father was a—you know, he's Italian. He was born in Brooklyn. His father came over—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, really?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, his father came over from Italy as a sort of defiant move from the Mussolini era, you know, seeing this happening. And he was a doctor, and he and his brother were sort of called out onto the street. And his brother who was an ambassador to the Vatican over in—and he was at the White House—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Your grandfather's brother?

GEORGE CONDO: My grandfather's brother.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

GEORGE CONDO: And he said, "Don't go out on the streets." You know, "They're just going to kill everybody. And so, you'd better off come to America. It's a great place. You'll love it." So, he and my grandmother came to America—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —they had my father in Brooklyn.—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: To Brooklyn? Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —and they shipped him back [laughs] because he thought it was so, you know, like a wild—for him it was the wild west over here, for my grandfather.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

GEORGE CONDO: And so, they shipped my father back when he was about nine months old to Florence, and my dad basically grew up there—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh.

GEORGE CONDO: —with his grandparents. And he came back when he was about 10. And

my grandfather, at that point, had established his medical practice in Boston. And then, they moved to the nearby town of Boston. But when my father came back, he had two sisters. He only spoke Italian, and he totally resented his parents for [laughs] saying, you know, having done that to him. And, you know, as what kind of normally happens with these kind of cases, he became a very all-American type of guy: Purdue University, football team, you know, physics, calculus.

And he spoke Italian, but he kind of wanted to forget it. But my grandparents spoke more or less exclusively Italian, and they were—it was a really funny difference between my mother's side of the family, which was Irish—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: —and, you know, she had 12 sisters, and two brothers, and tons of cousins, and everything. And my grandfather's side on my father's side, which was just really, you know—I don't know how you put it really. Sort of, not only old-fashioned, but something out of the movies. You know, him at the head of the table with a sort of napkin tucked into his shirt.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

GEORGE CONDO: Nobody would dare to say a word, and a lady would come by with some roast veal and, you know, cook you something. But he was very cultured.

And he was—he spoke a number of languages. I mean, English was like probably his last language, but he had—my father was definitely in awe of him in a lot of ways. And it was a sort of—it wasn't a love-hate thing, but it was more like a total admiration because he could do things like translate *The Iliad* from Greek into like Russian or something, and skip Italian. And it was like his hobby. And he loved doing that, and he had a lot of beautiful first edition books in his collection and a lot of art around the house. So, I think my real exposure to art as a kid was at my grandfather's house.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And where did they live in relation to where you grew up?

GEORGE CONDO: Probably about 45 minutes away, in Haverhill, Massachusetts.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Haverhill?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: And my mother's side of the family was from Haverhill as well.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Spelled Haverhill, right?

GEORGE CONDO: [Laughs.] Yeah, spelled Haverhill.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: Pronounced Haverell [ph]. But neither of the two families—I don't think that my mother's side of the family, any of them, even met my father's side [laughs] of the family, to be honest with you.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really? Wow.

GEORGE CONDO: And I think of it, I can never—I cannot remember a moment where either my Aunt Theresa or Flora, my father's sisters, met any of my aunts on my mother's side, now that I think of it as we're speaking. But I spent a lot of time—you know, we would go Sunday lunch to my grandfather's, and then we would go after to my mother's side.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh.

GEORGE CONDO: And they would watch the game. You know, everybody would be watching the football or the baseball games and out having picnics and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow. So, this is so interesting—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —because it's almost like right-left side of your brain.

GEORGE CONDO: Oh yeah, it was crazy. In fact, it was very—like, the best thing that happened really was my sister was invited to stay with them because my grandfather thought that my brother, Pat, and I were just too wild, you know. He said, "There's no way I can like—I can't have these kind of little kids running around the house." But she didn't want to go. She was afraid. So, I was like, "I'll go." So, I volunteered to go and stay when I was about seven. And while he was in his medical room, he gave me all this letterhead. And I showed them the drawings that I did at the Phillips Collection—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —in Washington. And, you know, I would make drawings to kind of impress him and sort of—he would always say, "He's the continuation of the artistic side of the family." Which there was one because—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I wanted to ask you about that.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. And so, he was very happy about that. So, we became real close friends. You know, like, at night, I would sort of peep out of my door and see him making a sandwich. And he would look in thinking, "You're not asleep? It's 11 o'clock." And then, I would come out and have a sandwich with my grandfather and all that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, how nice.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And his name is?

GEORGE CONDO: Annunciato Condo.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Annunciato. Wow. Like A-N-N-U-N-C-I-A-T-O?

GEORGE CONDO: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And the last name is?

GEORGE CONDO: Condo.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, it is Condo.

GEORGE CONDO: And it was Condó with an accent, but then they took it off because of the typewriter, you know. They took off the accent.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, Condó?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Like that.

GEORGE CONDO: That was how it was originally written and pronounced, but then they just took it off. And that was long before condos and co-ops were even—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Sure. Sure.

GEORGE CONDO: —in existence or a term. So, it used to have an accent, and they took it off. I guess like in France, you have Condé and in Italy you have Condó.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I was going to say that there is some—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —linguistic or—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —you know, etymological whatever—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —connection with French.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, French and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: But it's not—it's not related. It's more or less from southern Italy which is where the name originates in Calabria.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: This is where it originates, even though they never lived there. I mean, my grandfather didn't ever—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But your—

GEORGE CONDO: —you know, he went to the University of Naples, which was best sort of medical school in Italy.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But your grandfather's uncle—

GEORGE CONDO: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —came from Calabria?

GEORGE CONDO: His mother's actual uncle, believe it or not. So, it was quite a—let's see what it was, it was his—yeah, my grandmother—his mother's brother and that brother's uncle.

[They laugh.]

Those two were from Calabria. There was Salvatore Barca Albano—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —and there was Concesso Barca. And they were the two sculptors in the family. They were from—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: —Salvatore from the late 19th Century—mid-late 19th Century, and then Concesso was early 20th Century. But he worked for his uncle [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: See, he worked as an apprentice at Salvatore's workshop, and Concesso would send notes and letters and postcards and things like that to my grandfather all the time talking about, you know—they would be, like, back and forth about what the situation in Italy was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —during the war and all of that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, the—let me not get too far ahead of myself, but—so your dad was known as Pat?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. His real name was Pasquale, but he was known as Pat.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And he died in '98?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. He died of ALS in '98.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh. Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. It was sad. I must say it was a terrible situation because he had then—he retired from teaching—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —and was lecturing. And he would occasionally give a lecture, and then he sort of had a—I mean, I noticed it, too. I mean, he would come to my openings in New York and everything, but—and my mother as well, but I just said to my mother, I said, you know, "What is going on now that dad's retired [laughs]? He's got a really sort of slurred speech." And she said, "I know. I've noticed that myself." It's funny you picked up on it." And so, they went and had him—and he, you know, checked about it.

And they said, you know, it's either one or two things. It's some sort of a neurological thing. And then, unfortunately, they were hoping it wouldn't be that, but it was. And the doctor told him, you know, flat out, "You've got two years to live." And it was true. Two years to the day of his diagnosis—I mean, within a day or two, he died.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm. Mm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: It was the amazing—the degradation of everything was just so sad.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, let me—was his mathematical ability passed on to you in any way?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, I think—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Are you—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, definitely.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Because he—when we would sit around the table, the dinner table at night—I was always obsessed with the idea of drawing, you know, as a kid. And I remember him seeing the drawings and showing me on a piece of graph paper very specifically how to draw things in perspective.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: And to get, sort of, cubes to be three-dimensional. And explaining the sort of relationships of mathematics in, sort of, Renaissance paintings—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —and pointing out the sort of golden triangle proportions—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —and things of that nature, and he was super-educated on these levels. And also about music, he was very well versed in terms of understanding the mathematics of music.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: So, I understood there was an underlying mathematical concept in certain art forms, but I didn't really know which ones they were when I was 10 or 11 years old, you know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, sure.

GEORGE CONDO: I mean, it wouldn't have occurred to me that great proportions or, you know, Raphael's paintings or other painters that worked really from these mathematical concepts. I mean, we all know that the Leonardo of the "Man in the Circle," but, you know, I didn't understand it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: I just knew that it had to be understood, and that it could also be interesting to find some form of an application of that knowledge into my work. So, it was

great that he—and I think, you know, in terms of numbers all the time. Like, I don't write people's phone numbers down. I don't do any of that. I can just—I sort of just remember them. So, I'm very numerical [laughs] in that sense.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Interesting.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: I don't know why, but when I cut a cucumber, I always cut how many slices. Or if I peel a carrot, and I cut it, I go, "Okay. One, two, three, four, five, six. Okay, 23 slices." [Laughs.] I don't why! It's just a characteristic that goes through my head all the time.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, proportion—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —actually is what you're talking about in a way.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Yeah. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You're seeing the relation of parts to wholes all the time.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, it's funny. You mentioned Salvatore Albano—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —and just, you know, by chance, I was—Deborah and I were at the Brooklyn Museum—

GEORGE CONDO: Oh yeah?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —you know, a couple weeks ago to see that Georgia O'Keefe—

GEORGE CONDO: Okay.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —show. And so, we're downstairs in the lobby, and I'm waiting for her for something. And I look up, and it's an extremely odd but interesting sculpture [laughs] of a fallen angel.

GEORGE CONDO: Exactly. That's his.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Bingo! And that's his, right?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Yeah. That's his. He—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —And the date on it, it seems like it was made in his last year, in 1883, or 1893.

GEORGE CONDO: Is that when he—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: 1893. Yeah, that's what the museum gives as its date—

GEORGE CONDO: Wow. Really?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —so that may actually be his last work.

GEORGE CONDO: Wow.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: That's amazing. I didn't know that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: I know it's there. They had a great piece at The Met, and they deaccessioned it a number of years ago, back in the late '50s. And, strangely enough, then my assistant in there, he said, "There's a piece that's written by the head of sculpture department of the Met—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —about a reconsideration of Salvatore Albano's work, that it would normally at a certain point, it was just too far out for the museum." It was just too explicit or almost kitsched-out or something of that nature. But after Jeff Koons' work—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: —and, you know—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —being a sort of distant relative to George Condo that it would be kind of interesting to re-look at his work. And I mean he's—the whole period of 19th century Classicism from Italian marble, sculptors who worked in marble—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —is an incredibly overlooked period of work.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: I mean, everyone looks at the French works that were sort of more classically inspired during—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —that period of time. I mean, you think about—I mean more like the 18th century, I'm not sure about exactly—but if you think about the sculpted statue of Voltaire by Houdon or you think of—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —you know, these kind of artists.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Who am I thinking of? Yes. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: You know, there's a bunch of the other ones, Carpeaux and whatever.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Right.

GEORGE CONDO: There's beautiful sculptures done in terra cotta and that beautiful classical marbles. And then, the Italian ones are just a bit too smooth and a bit too—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: —sort of, you know, classical and a little racy and a bit, you know, less stylized and sort of let's just say—but, that being said, I suppose if one were to really look into the literature of the time and the connection between those artists and the literature, it might be interesting, because one of the things that he had, Salvatore Albano, that was given to him was a copy of Dante's *Inferno* that was illustrated by—God, I'm at a blank—what was his name? Doré.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Doré. Oh, the famous edition. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, Gustave Doré. So, he had a first edition that was given to him by Gustave Doré.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh my. [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: And that went on to my father.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No kidding!

GEORGE CONDO: Which my brother, Pat, has.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, fantastic.

GEORGE CONDO: And I inherited a sculpture by Concesso, his nephew, you know. So, the two of them: Concesso and Salvatore, did work together for a while when Concesso was young. And they're both sort of—they both did—you know, Salvatore did some amazing churches, altar pieces, and whole entire churches.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There's a strange piece of a figure in a kind of hammock—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Yeah. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Do you know the one I'm talking about?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. [Laughs.] Yeah! Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What the hell is that?

GEORGE CONDO: It's really bizarre.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEROGE CONDO: He had a very peculiar kind of, you know—I mean, I think what it is, is with so much history in the culture of having made sculptures and done marble, is that you just kind of push it to another level. And he did, but that level at that time may have been just way too out there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: A step too far. Yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: It's one of the things that I realize I've never done is tried to work in marble. I mean, I always looked at—you know, I read a lot about, you know, Bernini.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: You read these great books, Howard Hibbard's book on Bernini—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —or you read one thing or another, and they said, you know, when he did the sculpture of Cardinal Borghese, there was a crack in it. So within, you know, a month or two months, he completely recreated that same bust. And it's just utterly perfection, you know, perfect. And one of them is at the Doria-Pamphilj in Rome across from that beautiful, you know, the Velazquez Pope Innocent.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Right.

GEORGE CONDO: It's an amazing room, but probably the other one of Borghese's at the Borghese, you know—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The Villa—

GEORGE CONDO: The Villa Borghese. Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The Villa Borghese. Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: But in any case, I thought, you know, listen, these are the big guys: Bernini, Michelangelo, you know, what was his name that Leonardo worked for as an apprentice? I don't know. You know who I mean, you know. It begins with an S. What was his name? But in any case, there was incredible sculpture. So, probably by the time, you know, 300 years later—it came to 200 years, 300 years later by the time Albano was involved. I mean, he was more—seemed to be kind of part of this sort of—he certainly wasn't involved with the idea of Impressionism or with the changeover to Modernism. He was more the enemy of Modernists.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: I would think.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: Like [William-Adolphe] Bouguereau —

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Apparently, there was an *Amor und Psyche*, you know, *Cupid and Psyche* by him that was in the Savoy Hotel in New York.

GEORGE CONDO: Oh, really?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. I just stumbled across this looking it up. And, you know, there was some long-winded description of what the Savoy looked like at some point in time. It was done by some amateur, but there was a picture of that sculpture—

GEORGE CONDO: Oh, really?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —by him. It was pretty ripe.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: No, they're great. You know, I want to get one somehow.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] That would be fantastic, wouldn't it?

GEORGE CONDO: I would love to get one. I would love to get one.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That would be really great.

GEORGE CONDO: But I don't know how you would find—I mean, I've seen one came up at auction once, and it wasn't terribly expensive. And I could've got it, but somehow, I just was traveling or missed the date.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. Let me back up just a little bit. Can you—

GEORGE CONDO: We're back in the 19th century. How much further can we go? [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. We're pretty far back. Back up in my questions a little bit. I would just like to get, you know, just a sense of what, you know, what the area was like when you grew up.

GEORGE CONDO: Okay.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You know, Lowell came to be thought of as a bit of a pit—

GEORGE CONDO: Oh, Jesus. Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —later on.

GEORGE CONDO: Well, it was. I mean, it was. The only thing it had going for it was Whistler was from Lowell, and there's the Whistler House. And then, Kerouac was from Lowell.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, which became important for you later.

GEORGE CONDO: That became important to me. And, as a kid, I remember always looking on my mother's bookshelf and seeing *Dr. Sax*, and she would say, "Don't read that book. It has bad words in it."

[They laugh.]

I always wanted to pull one out, try to comb through it looking for the words. She said, "He's the guy, he's the beatnik that lives in the town next door." You know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: But then, of course, Bette Davis was from Lowell, so—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, really? I didn't know that.

GEORGE CONDO: She loved Bette Davis and couldn't get around that one.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah. So—

GEORGE CONDO: But it was an old shoe factory town. It's looks a bit like sort of a *View of Delft* but from Vermeer—but without Vermeer painting it. And sort of looks like that—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —with canals and red brick buildings, and all that, but it's not. An old leather town and textile town.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: But there's a beauty to it. There's a real beauty to it, and the simplicity of the kind of the personality—it has a lot of personality.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: It really does. I mean, it's a strange place, but it's got a lot of personality. I mean, Kerouac wrote about it very endearingly in his novels. And I mean, he really captures it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: And there's a place called the Grotto in Lowell that he writes about going out to the Grotto. And it's sort of out in—behind this—I suppose it's a—what do you call it? A refractory or whatever these nurses—not nurses, but nuns.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Nuns. Oh, okay. Yeah. A nunnery. [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: I forgot what it's called. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Not a nunnery. No, it's called a—

GEORGE CONDO: The place where—like a nunnery. "Get thee to a nunnery, Chris."

[They laugh.]

But it's one of those kind of places.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: One of those places. Right.

GEORGE CONDO: And in the back, it's got this grotto with all these white marble sculptures —

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No kidding?

GEORGE CONDO: —of Madonna and Child and various other sculptures all lit up—that light up at night.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, my God.

GEORGE CONDO: And people would go out there at night, and it's really got this amazing, you know, sort of—I don't want to use the word, "magical," but ethereal or something, you know? It's really something else, you know. It's like an exhibition of a row of sculptures with all this sort of green wreaths hanging down above them and, you know, trees—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

GEORGE CONDO: —weeping willows and sculptures located under them in kind of a walkway, and you go back and look at—you know, you look around.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And you saw this as a child?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. And Kerouac writes—later when I read his books when I was like in, you know, my late teens and 20s, I mean, I could—a friend of mine, Peter, was a classical guitarist, and we would go over there. And he would say, "Let's go to the Grotto." And we

would go over, and hang out there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

GEORGE CONDO: And Lowell is cool because—it wasn't cool when I was little, you know? We never went there when I was a kid. I mean, we only went sometimes to go shopping or something to get your outfit for your first communion or something like that—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: —but we wouldn't go there for anything other than—and my father went there and taught, but my mother—we would more or less stay in the—I mean, it really felt like it was a very big difference between Chelmsford and Lowell, even though they were right next to each other. Chelmsford was much more connected to Carlisle and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh.

GEORGE CONDO: —it's, in fact, about one of the oldest towns in America.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

GEORGE CONDO: If not the oldest, strangely enough.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Huh.

GEORGE CONDO: It was one of the very first places that was called a town. Like, the houses are from like—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: —the houses are from like 1642 and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No kidding?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. It's a very old town.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow. Wow.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, you wouldn't think of it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No. No.

GEORGE CONDO: I read a book on it just called *Chelmsford,* and it says something like, you know, Brits were here, and you know, it's before Lowell, and it's before Boston having been really considered a town. And it's named after Chelmsford, England, of course.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Right. Right.

GEORGE CONDO: Well, they all are in that area.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Sure. Sure. Okay. So, this is really interesting because I would like to—you know, your drawing book, the very first drawing in it is of a crucifixion.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. That's when my mother said, "You always had a morbid sensibility," she said.

[They laugh.]

And she said, "I'll never forget when you were about three or four years old, you came back from church, and you did this drawing of the crucifixion." And she said, "But it was quite detailed." But she said, "But all the blood and everything," and it was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, my.

GEORGE CONDO: So, I started drawing and working as a sort of being involved with that really young. Like, the drawings that are in that book are from—I realized when I was in the third grade, that's when I went and stayed at my grandfather's and when I did all the dinosaur drawings—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, okay.

GEORGE CONDO: So, that's really about when—and the crucifixion was earlier. That was probably before I was even in first grade.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But pretty good for a first-grader.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. I just was into it, you know? I mean, I flunked first grade because the—when I got there, because my birthday comes in December, it was either send him when he's—and then they didn't have pre-K, K, and this and that. I mean, they had kindergarten, and I would just go there and fall asleep.

And then, came first grade, and I had to go when I was four. And they said you should come when he was five, but my mother wanted me to get in thinking I'll turn five in January. But I sort of had to start in September when I was four, and so—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow. That's really young.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, that was the beginning of my art career, though, because the teacher would send out a quiz. And I just couldn't read, so I would draw something on it thinking if I made a nice drawing, she would give me a good grade. And I sat on the teacher's lap, and gave her a kiss. And they said, "Okay. He's definitely got to go."

[They laugh.]

That was the end of my first grade. They said, "We think he might—we're going to start him again next year. Let's just say, you know, he's too young to start first grade." [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The reason I'm focusing on this is, you know, just the basic question: Did you—it's odd to think of a child being, you know, actively religious. I mean, you do what your parents and your family—

GEORGE CONDO: Oh, yeah. I just went and went to church, you know, and counted the number of pieces of wood on the ceiling. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But it really prompts me to ask whether the iconology of Catholicism had a kind of subliminal impact on you because, you know, one way to think about your gallery of impaled and [laughs]—

GEORGE CONDO: Exactly. Yeah, totally.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You know, I mean it's like, you know, they're like martyrs. It's like the portraits of the saints or something.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. No, it did. You know, I mean it was completely like you're hardwired into—this age is when you're the most impressionable. And there were was this kind of bizarre parallel reality to that either, you know, belief in the Bible and all the stories that happened and what their moral sort of code was or whatever you want to call it, the moral of the story. And then, like I guess what you could call [laughs] real writing, and that would be something else.

But real writing seemed to reflect a lot of these sort of—they were re-telling sometimes biblical tales but in disguise. And you know, even as simple as something like *The Call of the Wild*, you know, by Jack London, would have some sort of feeling of this martyrdom, you know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: So, there was always this cross-referencing between that. And we had to go to church every Sunday, and we had to catechism.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: And so, you saw a lot, and you talked a lot. But in Chelmsford, it was a very, you know, liberal town. It was all about McGovern, I remember. My mother was all on the McGovern team and all that. And so, when we went to catechism, you know, at night, when I was, you know, 13, 14, or whatever, it was all about like dissecting, like, Bob Dylan's lyrics, "The Times Are Changing" and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

GEORGE CONDO: —a lot of that kind of thing. And how does that relate to what, you know—somehow, they'd tie it all into Catholicism. You know, they really would. From one Joan Baez or like, you know—whatever it was, somehow it would be tied back into Catholicism.

And I was never like a judgmental type of person or one-dimensional person when it came to religious ideologies. So, I couldn't buy into a single religion. That was my problem. I just thought, when I discovered the idea of Eastern religions, that was a more sort of an overview of spiritual concept. It seemed to be like a larger concept than just sort of one religion or another. You could be any religion you want, but you could have this somewhat of an Eastern way of thinking. And that was a big thing in the early '70s, you know, Suzuki, and, you know —

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: Sort of analyzing the difference between Eastern and Western philosophies and all that. And ideologies, you know, Zen and all that. And so, I just think that it got in me through the exposure, and then it came out of me through a completely different sort of filter. It wasn't necessarily in support or in contradiction or confrontation with any of these Biblical characters and stories and tales.

It was more in thinking, like, for example, I did a series of the crucifixions later.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: And I hadn't thought about the early drawing, like my first real drawing of the crucifixion, you know? I just simply thought, "Well, all the artists that I really admire, whether its Velasquez or whether it's Goya, or whether it's, you know, any artist, they've all tackled the crucifixion, and I have to do it," you know? From that standpoint, I thought, even, you know, Picasso took Cranach's crucifixions and did a great group of them.

And I thought interestingly enough, it's these constants that really define the era from which an artist worked. It's something that everyone knows that tells you when something was done. Like, an apple painted in Pompeii, you know that it's from Pompeii. Then an apple painted in the Renaissance, you know. Or a Spanish apple by Cano, you know it's that. Then Chardin, you know. By the time it hits, you know, Cézanne—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Cézanne. [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: —you know. And if it was just an abstract thing or a form, you wouldn't really be able to, say, critically zero in on the era from which it was painted. So, crucifixions happen to do that as well. They could only be done during the period of time in which we live or they lived, whoever did it. So, my idea was just always looking for constants and variables. Back to the mathematics.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Right.

GEORGE CONDO: So, that was the impulse behind it. And you can imagine my mother had a total nervous breakdown over the crucifixion paintings I did. She said, "That's not the Jesus I want to see when I go to Heaven." [Laughs.] I said, "But what about Grunewald's? You want to see him covered in holes and nails and green, and he's bleeding from every single position?" At least mine is in celebration of his existence, and, of course, he looks like a madman. But maybe, you know, Christ was a madman for all we know, if he even existed.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's funny.

GEORGE CONDO: [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I had meant to ask you about those. That's great. Okay. We've got through all of that. Okay. So, your mother is Muriel?

GEORGE CONDO: Muriel.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. And you—a large Irish-American family. How many children?

GEORGE CONDO: She had—I think there were 13 or 14 kids. And I was named after George Goodwin, her father. And he was a sea captain, and then he came back from sea and was just—I don't know what he did. But he died. I never met him, but I was named after him.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But Goodwin is the family name?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. She was Muriel Goodwin.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's an Irish name?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. It's an old family that really was like on the Mayflower, you know? They really have documentation of that from back then. They really came over on the Mayflower. Not an important family, not like a prestigious family, but they just—they were there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It sounds more like English name than an Irish name.

GEORGE CONDO: That's what I always said: Goodwin is an English name. But she always said that she's Irish, you know, that her mother, I guess, was Irish and her father was English. She always said, "We're Irish-English but more Irish," because I think once her father had died when she was—I think she was 5. Maybe that's why I never met him. I think she was young when he died. She was the youngest of all the sisters.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, my.

GEORGE CONDO: She was the last one of the family.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I see.

GEORGE CONDO: And, you know, she met my father—she was on her way to being a doctor. She was in nursing school at that time, and then my father came in as a patient where she was interning, I think. And she was going to make the step into the medical profession. I mean, she already was in it, but, you know, that's where they met. And then she said, "Okay. I'll just get my RN, and then, you know, we'll get married and we're out of here." And she never went back to medical school after that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And she worked through—all through your childhood?

GEORGE CONDO: No, she never really did. When we were kids, she was just a homebody housewife.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Homemaker.

GEORGE CONDO: Homemaker. And she enjoyed it. And then, when we got older, of course, she got bored doing that. And my father was, "Well, you know, there's always the nursing home." Because he was teaching at night school, teaching day school, correcting exams, nonstop. And he didn't mind if she wanted to go and do a night shift or two. She missed it, you know, essentially. So, she would work at nursing homes, and she, you know, could sort of do any shift she wanted.

And it was fun. You know, my father would have to cook dinner, and it was like the world's worst. I mean, you know, coming from Italy, having grown up in a family where they had a cook, he didn't know what he was doing. And it was a riot.

[They laugh.]

You know, I mean, it was really funny. You know, you would have, you know, his version of cooking chicken would be once it's cooked on the outside. We would all be like, "That's not enough. You need to cook it through."

[They laugh.]

GEORGE CONDO: It was fun.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's great that you survived.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, seriously.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did she have artistic or musical aspects to her?

GEORGE CONDO: She was a reader. She was a literary person.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: She didn't have—neither one of them did, and, you know, really made anything. None of the kids in my family made anything, none of my brothers and sisters. Nobody did anything artistic in the family, except my parents appreciated it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: They had a knowledge of it, and my mother was more a literary person. Like, she had read every book by this guy and that guy you could think of. And then, my older brother is a real literary guy. He reads every book written. I read stranger books that were not interesting to them. Interesting to my father, but not so—my mother didn't—I mean, I read John Cage's *Silence*, and my mother just was like, "That's not literature." My father thought it was because I would explain to him. I would show him, you know, because this was before I got to college, and when I was making the decision about classical music versus painting—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —and doing the two at the same time. I ran into all of that sort of through classical music: John Cage, Merce Cunningham, even Andy Warhol, you know, and the performances they did together and even Duchamp, Dada, everything I ran into somehow through this other channel, which is interesting. I would not have discovered it if I hadn't said, "Oh, well what's that? Who's Marcel Duchamp? I'm going to look him up." And then start to see he was a painter and then he went—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —the other way, and John Cage was, you know, this inventor of a different kind of music. And his scripts, the scores of things like "*Atlas Eclipticalis*" or one of these pieces that he wrote just looked like mathematical equations. So, I would show them to my dad, and we would look at them. And I would go to the—and as a kid, you know, like when I was early teens, he would say, "Well, why don't you come with me to night school? You can go over to the library, and you can—they've got a great listening library there." And so, I would do a lot of time in the listening library at Lowell.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow. That's great.

GEORGE CONDO: And I really enjoyed it, you know? I would listen to Mario Davidovsky and, you know, Edgar Varèse and all this electronic music and really just—I mean, once I discovered 12-tone music and then took it from there to serial music and Stockhausen and all that.

And I could find in—concurrently, of course, the Beatles were a phenomenon. They came out, and, you know, I could figure out the connections between someone like John Lennon and—you know, where they would have been interested in some of those kind of sounds and those kind of things. Or Hendrix or whatever that were manipulating tapes like David Tudor and people of that sort. Like, you know, I could make those connections. And I just thought, "That's what I need to do as an artist, but there's no way I can get that message across in a first-year college course as a painter. They're just not going to let me do it." So, I just went in as a music person originally to college.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And this was at Lowell?

GEORGE CONDO: At Lowell. We all had to go to Lowell. That was the deal. My father got us in for a dollar a year because he taught there. And he said, "You do two years. If you get through those two years, then you can go to whatever college you want to go to. But I'm not paying for some expensive, fancy college and have you just go party all night in the dorms." Fair enough, but I hated it. I lived at home, you know, my first two years of college, driving in

every day with my father and his math buddies. You know, making the rounds, picking them up and you have to be in at 7:30, and my first class was at 1:00 in the afternoon.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, for heaven's sake.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. I would just sit there in, you know, two feet of snow, and "I hate college."

[They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. But I learned—you know, I learned a—I had art history and music theory were my majors basically. I refused to take any studio courses. I did not want to expose myself as a visual artist there. I only went in as an undercover artist who was technically gifted enough to make it into the sort of music school.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it. Okay. Just briefly, your mother arranged for you to have art and music lessons outside of school?

GEORGE CONDO: That's true. What happened there—yeah, it's true. It was my mother that really did it. My father being—you know, was one of those, like I said, we would sit around the table and talk about perspective and whatever. But she was the more practical doer because he was always teaching. And so, you know, that was the story of like when we—my brother and I both tried out for the little league team in Chelmsford. And, of course, he was, you know, eight inches taller than I was. I was kind of like a little shrimp. And he got up and he hit the ball. And he caught the ball, and all that. I got up, and I just like, you know—it was like I would be holding the bat, and the thing would go by me. And I would be like, "Okay. Are they going to throw another one?

[They laugh.]

I hope so. I missed that one." And get out in the field and, you know, put my glove up, and the ball would be way over there someplace. And so, it was just—but still, it was like Little League.

And I remember sitting around the dinner table, and the phone rang at about 6:00. And they said, "Well, Pat's on the Chelmsford Braves," you know. And about 7:00 or 8:00 and everybody going, "Well, what about George? What happened?" So, my father said, "This is really upsetting." He said, you know, I mean, "Come on." I was like eight years, nine years old, whatever I was, I don't know. This is ridiculous. And he calls up the coach who called about my older brother. And he said, "What is this, the Red Sox? I mean, you don't have any place for him?" And they said, "Sorry, no." So, we sat around, and my mother said, "But you love painting, and you love drawing. Why don't we go to the YWCA in Lowell where they do painting courses? And why don't you do Saturday classes?"

So, she set me up with that. And the first painting I ever did there, the first oil painting I ever did, I painted a rose for my mother. And then, I joined the Garden Club, so I could pretty much officially say I was a pretty nerdy kid at that point in my life. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Would you describe yourself as quiet, shy, withdrawn—

GEORGE CONDO: No.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —or were you very social?

GEORGE CONDO: No, I was kind of a prankster and a joker in class—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: —and always getting in trouble, you know, left and right, but I got good grades so I could slide through.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Get away with it, yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: You get away with it. But I wasn't like that. I would just—like constantly said no, you can't be on the baseball team, but you can be on the art team. You can't do

this, but you can be in the Garden Club. And at the end of the day, you know what? I loved—my parents had gotten me a subscription to *Outdoor Life*, and I spent most of my childhood with my brother riding our bikes and fishing. So, that's why in that book—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: —I drew a beautiful, the best I could, a beautiful fish drawing and gave it to my mother when I was about nine. And that's why she wanted me to go take classes and learn how to turn that into painting.

And so, I was just accepting of the fact that, you know, my mother was like, "I don't want him out there on the football team. He's going to get hurt." So, they were very protective of me. Whereas, my older brother, you know, he got his license right away and, you know, would get a Camaro and smash it up and take—you know, go out with cheerleaders and all that kind of bit and I was very—on that level, I was completely the opposite. I was much more into just sort of—my head buried into classical music, drawing. And I had my own bedroom and just locked the door. And I would go into, you know—early times I would go into Cambridge, take the train in from Lowell to Cambridge.

A friend of mine actually, who is still an artist today, Dawn Clements. I don't know if you know Dawn, but she's a great—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I don't.

GEORGE CONDO: —she's really—she's the same exact age as me. We went to Chelmsford High together. She sat next to me in third grade, and were the two people—she played oboe, and I liked, you know—as we became teenagers—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —she played the oboe, and she was taking lessons at the New England Conservatory. And so, I would go in with her and bum around Cambridge while she was in her lessons, and go to the Harvard Coop. And I would come home with all these really cool posters of Juan Gris and, you know, Picasso's *L'aficionado* and, you know, Cézanne. So, my room was just plastered with posters of all these art works. And that was my world, you know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Great. Okay. Do you—

GEORGE CONDO: And I could relate to Cubism, coming from a mathematical perspective, you know? Having a father who was really a mathematician, I thought that would be a way of sort of having him sort of legitimize myself as an artist by saying that, you know, "I got it, you know, what you're talking about in terms of perspective and, you know, sort of things foreshortening and things coming out at you." But I liked those principles and that math applied to this kind of art.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: And so, that would be the dialogue, like, "You hear it, Dad?" Can you hear it in—what, you know, 12-tone is very interesting. It's a combination of 12 notes rearranged in various orders, and serial music is completely mathematical." But he said, "Yeah, but it sounds awful."

[They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, the fact that you could even have this dialogue with him is pretty remarkable.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. That was what was cool. That was what was cool. Trying to spend my life convincing him that things that he hated were great, you know? That he would—he didn't hate them like with a passion. He wasn't a hateful person, but just like, "I just would never." You know, he would want—I remember him telling me, "Look it, why don't you do me a favor? Go in your room, and listen to Rachmaninoff's "*Scheherazade*." It's one of the most beautiful violin solos ever done." And it really was, you know? It turned me on to—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —you know, it turned me on to that kind of music and brought me into another, you know, sort of—he always opened doors for me, you know, in terms of—mentally.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's great. Were there any teachers in lower school or high school or even in that first—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —that sort of recognized what you were doing and had an impact on you?

GEORGE CONDO: Definitely, there were. I was thinking—that's why I said I was thinking about this the other night because after having done the Phillips show, it was sort of coming back to me that there were a couple critical things that happened when I was in grade school. In fourth grade, I had a teacher named Mr. Russell. I had to think, "What was his name again?" Yeah, Mr. Russell. And when I got the *Outdoor Life* thing for Christmas that year, I had done this big drawing of a safari hunt. It was in there, you know, of a guy from behind the bushes with a rifle like about to shoot a, you know, stampeding elephant. And it was like two pieces of construction paper put together, and it was done with pastel and crayons and pencil. And it was really the best I could do.

And I gave it to him as a gift, and it was like something he thought was just really incredible that like, you know, like that this kid was really interested in the arts. And he called my parents, and he said, "You know, your son really is talented. He gave me this really great drawing. I mean, it's a beautiful drawing." He said, "I've got it at home, and when we look at it, you know, it just looks like, you know, not like a kid's work. But it looks like real art."

So, then, he—and this was, of course, another one of those Little League stories. He organized that—and I didn't know it at the time, but he organized some special people to come into class one day in the middle of nowhere, one of the other classes. I don't know what it was. He was a science teacher. But he organized somebody to come in, and they came to the door. And the teacher, she was a nice teacher, and she was like, "Hi. George?" And she said, "These two people are here because they would like to see you go up to the blackboard and just draw a dinosaur for them." And so, I said, "Okay." I said, "Really? Well, I don't know if I can do that." And they were sort of there, and I just refused to go up and do it because I just thought one mistake, and the embarrassment. And she was trying so hard to get me to do it. And the kids were all looking at me, "Come on. You're always making drawings. You know, you're the one who loves to draw. Why don't you go up and do it?"

And then, I didn't do it, and I remember they called my parents. And they said they were from some place in Boston and that they had heard from this teacher, Mr. Russell, that I was talented as a kid—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I know, but what a way to do it.

GEORGE CONDO: It was so, like, shocking to me. I just said, if I make a mistake, they're just going to walk out the door and say, "Yeah, what did you call us for?" It just felt like that. And gave me a feeling very early for the critical, you know, sort of accuracy. Oh, you need to know what you're doing. And, you know, you're not just a wind-up toy who goes out there. Even though when you're a young artist or a young musician—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —you are kind of a wind-up toy because you don't know any better. You know, they go, "Hey, give him a pen."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Dance for Grandma. Dance for Grandma.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Give him a pen, and give him a piano. And, you know, he'll be unbelievable. He doesn't even know how to, you know, add two and two, but for some reason he can play piano.

So that was really devastating. And my mother was a little unhappy about that, and I couldn't get over it myself. Like, "why didn't I just go up and make a drawing for these people?" I just never really figured it out. Why wouldn't I have done that? What was wrong

with me? At the same time, no matter how difficult it was, I didn't know why they were there. It wasn't like Mr. Russell told me they were coming.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. That's really odd.

GEORGE CONDO: Well, you know, tomorrow these really interesting people are going to come and they're going to—I want them to see—and he asked me about it. He said, "So, how did it go?" And then I said, "Well, you know, these guys came to the door, and they were sort of in suits. And I didn't know who they were."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It just wasn't handled well at all.

GEORGE CONDO: No.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow. But even so, what is this—

GEORGE CONDO: It was pretty radical, man. I've got to tell you. It was like I had no clue what—as a result of that, the anxiety that it created in me just forced me to go home and just make like 50 drawings. And like every day, just one drawing after the next, so that in case this ever happened to me again, I'd be prepared. So, I started to be really—you know, at that point, I knew that I needed to perfect this craft because this could happen again. And if it does, I'm going to be, you know, I'm not going to not get up there and do it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But the whole notion of drawing as a test, you know? As opposed to being an expression.

GEORGE CONDO: Well, it was just so natural to me to do it that they couldn't understand why I wouldn't just get up there and do it. I probably was up there drawing on the blackboard all the time and, you know, the kids would love it—before the teacher came in, I would draw something funny on the blackboard and sit down, and they knew it was me. But I just—when it came to a really test-like moment, I just wouldn't do it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

GEORGE CONDO: I know. It was a mindblower.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That sounds like one of those events that could just get unpacked forever for its implications—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. You either—you go one direction or the other. You never draw again, or I went the other, which was to just become obsessively involved with it and just—you know, from that point on, I probably—I mean, by the time I would have gone to college, I can say from when I was, you know, in the third or fourth grade and that kind of thing happened until then, I must have done hundreds—I did hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of art works, and that's all I did.

The guitar was something I picked up later, you know, when I was 14, 15. Music was later. That didn't come natural.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No?

GEORGE CONDO: No. In fact, that was the interesting thing about it, was that you had these little black dots all over a piece of paper, and all you had to do was know how to read them. [Laughs.] And with art, you don't have a road map, which is what is interesting about it. You know, interpretation and all of that is ultimately the most important thing in music when somebody can read.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Right.

GEORGE CONDO: But until you can read music, it's not like most people can sit down and just, like, improvise a fugue. But they are written down so you can play them. But when it comes to painting, there's no real—there's nothing—there's no road map, you know, even to sit down and say, "Okay. Let's just start from drawing a vase with some flowers." It goes back to Durer, it could be. Or it could be someone else. Where's your reference? What are you after?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Yeah. And who are you talking to?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Who are you talking to? And what's, you know, until you understand the difference between—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I mean, that's one of the problems with the anecdote about the two people coming to your class is, like—

GEORGE CONDO: —Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —you didn't know who they were.

GEORGE CONDO: I didn't know who they were.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, you didn't know what they wanted.

GEORGE CONDO: I didn't know who they were, and I didn't know what they wanted.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: I didn't know what—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You didn't know who you were talking to.

GEORGE CONDO: I didn't know who I was talking to. I didn't know what the hell—it was right in the middle of class.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So strange.

GEORGE CONDO: And I can remember it vividly because it was just something that under any circumstances, I probably would have done. But at that point, seeing the way they were dressed, knowing they weren't from my school, they weren't teachers, they weren't people from the school. Who are they? They looked like the FBI or something. [Laughs.] You know what I mean? Like, "This guy is in big trouble. Get up there and draw a dinosaur."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] Hey, there's a guy drawing down there. Let's go get him. [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. I was like, you know, petrified. And it really was shocking, but it did drive me to making—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But you're hitting on something so interesting here. The notion that, you know, in art you don't have a road map. I mean, not to jump ahead, but there's an anecdote in Tompkins about you, you know, being in—someone lent you a studio, and Andy Warhol comes and, you know, you go up to the canvas and you just start—

GEORGE CONDO: Oh yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —drawing. And he said, "I could never do that."

GEORGE CONDO: It was him. Yeah, that was Andy. It's true. I was at Keith Haring's studio. I didn't have a studio in New York at that time, and he used my place in Paris when he traveled. And it was always like whenever I come to New York, you know, I can use your—Keith would let me use his studio. He said, "Andy wants to come over and meet you." And I said, "Oh, great." And I was in the middle of a big painting, *Dancing to Miles*, and that's at the Broad Foundation. And so, Andy comes over. And he's got his camera and he's just like, you know, "Just keep working." And I was working and drawing away. So he said, "So you mean you just go up to the canvas and paint anything you want?" I said, "Yeah. Like, is there any other way to do it?"

[They laugh.]

Kind of in my head, I said, "Yeah." And he said, "I could never do that." And I never understood if he meant Fred would kill me. Fred Hughes. If I went up there and just did what I want, my dealers, you know, they would kill me—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Interesting.

GEORGE CONDO: —because he had the talent to do whatever the hell he wanted. There was

no question. I mean, you know, you look at his earlier—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —drawings, his record album covers. He was an amazing draftsman, but it was just a conceptual statement, in my opinion.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. So, that's really an important clarification. It isn't that he didn't have the skill, it's that he didn't have the framework to be able to just do that.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. He was lamenting the fact that he—"I could never do that. I could never get away with that. If I did that, they would kill me." You know, like a real Andy Warhol type thing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: But it wasn't that he wasn't capable. I mean, if you see his early soup can drawings and all that, they're amazing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: That was really the way I interpreted it. That's what made me laugh.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No. That's so much more interesting than the way I was thinking about it.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, the music really didn't come—the playing of the music—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —wasn't really a natural—

GEORGE CONDO: The muscle memory and the actual technical bit was good, but I didn't think I had the ear for it the way—what was necessary, and what's really important in music and what you're up against are kids with perfect pitch and—you know, no matter what sequence of notes that the teacher just comes in and just goes, you know, bing, bang, bong. And they're like, you know, B Flat, D Flat, C. And when the gun sort of gets pointed in your direction and you're like, "Well, give me an A. Let me see. I've got relative pitch. I can sort of figure if that was that note relative to the A what it is."

But that, kind of, you realize by the time you've done that calculation has gone up a third, you know, you're behind—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The other guys.

GEORGE CONDO: —those kids that are going to make it to the first chair at the Boston Symphony Orchestra or whatever, you know? And the guitar was not an instrument for symphonies and you never—there wasn't—so I switched to Renaissance music because at that point, I found that you were able to play with ensembles. And so, that was what drove me back to, like, sort of John Dowland and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —the earlier music because you were then in little, you know, sort of—you could then be in like a quartet or something of that nature. I mean, other than contemporary—late contemporary like Bruno Hansa and people like that, that were writing later or Richard Rodney Bennett and Benjamin Britten's later pieces and things like that. You weren't—there's nothing really for, like, guitar quartet. But if you were a lute player, you would play an accompaniment to sort, of you know, Dowland songs—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Right.

GEORGE CONDO: —or you could play along with viola da gamba players, and that's why I switched to viola da gamba in the end. Because to tell you the truth, the pedagogical issues of painting and playing when you're left—I'm a lefty. So, just the complications of getting

involved with fugues and, you know, sort of contrapuntal lines; and then taking that same hand and holding a brush and having the motions and the wrist movements being completely different, gesturally speaking—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —started to wear. It was just—I had to choose.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: You can't do them both. It's really, I mean—

[END OF TRACK.]

GEORGE CONDO: —Sunday painter if you're a musician, but you don't want to use those muscles the wrong way.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Interesting.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, it's an issue—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: We have to talk about that more—

GEORGE CONDO: It's an issue for—it becomes an issue as the music gets really complex. I didn't think I would be good enough at it. In fact, I had that cathartic moment as well, which was kind of fun. It was just like the third grade all over again, when I was in Lowell, and I went to the [laughs]—you know, I played the pieces that I had to play, and I passed. But then, I remember going into—you also had to take a second instrument, so that was viola for me. But then you also had to know how to play piano which was easy because any kid that couldn't play, you know, they had to. And so, you would learn what you had to learn, but it wasn't like you were expected to be, you know, a Chopin or whatever.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: But so, the moment comes that I've got solfège, and that was a tough course for me, because that's real ear training. And [laughs] so, I go in there, and by now, I was like, you know, full on, sort of teenager—you know, college, first year or second year of college. And, you know, in the '70s, and just all about, you know, Coltrane, and this and that and starting to sort of think I don't know, "Now I'm an artist." I'm listening to jazz, and I'm studying music and this is getting a little bit out of it, okay? And I've got to have a job. My father was like, "You know, you and your brother, you know, it's job time. It's either that or, you know, you're going to get drafted in Vietnam," and all that business. It was like the Vietnam draft was right before that. Luckily, they called it off, but it was like, my older brother could have easily been drafted.

What was I going to say? Oh yeah. So, I go this course to go to the test, the ear test. You get in a room alone. The piano player says, "Alright, you know. We're going to do some testing, you know. I'm going to play a little sequence of notes. I want you to just sort of solfège out these." And that one didn't work. Then it was something from Brahms, and then it was something from Shubert, and they're just little—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —motivic sort—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: —of sections. Finally, he says to me, "Alright. Let's do something different. Just sing the 'Star Spangled Banner.' I'll give you the first notes." He said, "Just sing the National Anthem." And I couldn't remember the words.

[They laugh.]

I was like, "Wait a minute. How's this thing go again?" And then he says, "Alright, how about 'America the Beautiful?'" And I couldn't remember [laughs] that one. He says, "Listen. Alright. What do you do?" He said, "What do you really do? What do you really want to do?" I said, "Well, I'm really," I said—you know, looked around and I was like, you know, we're

behind closed doors. I said, "Actually, I'm really an artist," you know. "I'm really a painter. I just love music." And I wanted to learn as much as I could about it, but that's really what I do." And that was a moment where I first declared that to anybody.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow. So, this was the music teacher at Lowell?

GEORGE CONDO: At Lowell University. Yeah. He said, "Well, that's what I think you should pursue." And then, I—he said, "Because, you know, I don't know how you're going to ever make it in music. You passed the performance, but that's reading notes." But he said, you know, "A lot of it is ear training."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: "And a lot of it is, you know, your theory grades—music theory grades are great; but, you know if you are ever going to think of composing or this and that, it's like transcribing what you hear in your head onto the paper without necessarily, you know, going via the piano."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: It is a real test to ask for people that don't hear the notes 100 percent the way that they should be heard.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: So, I understood that. I said, "I don't disagree with you at all." I said, "You know, somebody plays"—if I'm supposed to play in B Flat when I was trying jazz changes. The changes are so outrageous in terms of if you try to play a solo over something like a Thelonious Monk piece like "'Round Midnight," I mean, it just changes every half a bar, the chords.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: So, that was it was like, you know, alright, that's it. You know, I'm an artist.

[They laugh.]

This ain't happening.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But that's terrific. So—but music has always remained important to you?

GEORGE CONDO: But I always loved it. I realized—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And did you say your daughter is a musician?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is this your younger daughter?

GEORGE CONDO: Both daughters are musically inclined. Raphy, Raphaelle is now at Bard College. And she's a music major, and she's a vocalist. And she's amazing, very talented. You know, she's really got the sense of pitch, and she can hear—she hears, you know? She's really got it. And Eleonore is an actress and a sort of—but they all, both of them did all that Broadway musical stuff when they were really, you know, from kids up to where they are now. Still sort of, in my mind, kids. But one is 26, the other one is 22.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: But she's more into dramatic acting now. And you know, she would do musical theater. Like, her hero is Bette Midler. I mean, she knows every single song and every single, you know, every play and every Broadway thing that's ever been done. But she's a big reader. She also would love to edit. That's one of her other passions. But Raphaelle is really the one of the two of them that you could say, you know, was the musical factor—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: —you know, just about music. She did musicals, and she just hated being out on stage as an actress and doing all that, even though she was amazing. But she didn't want to do it. She likes jazz singing like Ella Fitzgerald and doing and learning about all that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wonderful. Wonderful. So, interestingly, I think we could talk about this more in the next session with specific works in front of us, but your affection, especially for jazz, seems to have become an important part of your thinking about your visual art.

GEORGE CONDO: It did.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You mentioned the painting *Dancing to Miles*—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —but this goes beyond that.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. What I was saying earlier, about a constant and variables, very much applies to what it is that I love about jazz. Now the constant would be—let's just take a Gershwin tune like *Summertime*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: Depending on who plays it, you know exactly who it is. You know when—you know, Miles Davis' "*Summertime*," Charlie Parker's "*Summertime*," you know. And so they worked from these constants, what are known as standards, as we know—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: —and the improvisations on those standards became what distinguished them as great artists.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: So, I like the idea as an artist to improvise on standards and that [laughs] —in that sense, people—I think it's more intelligible what it is that you're doing that's different and distinguishes you from other artists.

And so, people at first—I don't think they quite understood the concept of, let's just say, constants and variables in my art, where they would just think, "Oh, it looks like Picasso" or it looks like, you know, this guy and it looks like that guy. But those were the constants, you know, those were the standards. Those were the motifs that I was improvising on. And when other artists attempted that kind of thing back in the '20s and the '30s, let's just say, you would have more like a "school of—"

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Right.

GEORGE CONDO: You never had somebody that would disrupt the—Picasso did. He was not the school of Cézanne. He took Cézanne, improvised out on it, and came up with *Demoiselles d'Avignon* out of *The Bathers*. So, he was kind of doing what Coltrane did to "My Favorite Things." It was like he took his favorite things and just blew them out into another dimension. And so, I think as an artist, I never really sort of articulated that point. But, like, that I think this is where I was coming from in the formative years.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah. That makes sense. So, do you think that our sort of accepted ideas of originality are, in a certain sense, an obstacle to, you know, being able to read this kind—

GEORGE CONDO: I think the perception of originality is an obstacle for most people that they haven't evolved further than these catch phrases like "originality." They don't even know what it means. They use it because it sounds good to them. You know, they sound intelligent. Like, "Oh, that's not original." But do they even know what original means? You know, you realize that most people, intellectually speaking, when it comes to a critical sort of discussion on things like originality, don't understand that the definitions of originality are changing depending on the philosophical interpretation of, you know, things like being and essence and sort of appearance of being versus the, you know, substance of being and

"What is a thing?"

You know, you start with Plato when you talk about originality and you say, "What is a thing?" It's everything that it's not. So, how can you know what anything is until you know what it isn't? And it gets much more complex than just simply like, "Oh, you know, he's really not an original artist. It looks just like so and so." And then, you know, "It looks just like this. It just looks like that."

Now, that's a problem with a lot of artists, okay? I'm not saying that that problem doesn't exist outside in the art world or in every world. You know, you hear a guy play, you know, saxophone. And you're like, "Yeah, he never got past Coltrane." You know, that—and he never will. Because you can't. All you can do is learn from them and, you know, show your respect but have your own thing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: Great artists' works show their respect for the artists who they learned the most from. I've never seen an artist whose work didn't incorporate or include all that art which they basically either loved, hated, or learned from.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, you know, this goes further than that. You know, it's sort of a conception of art as a social activity, as not just a form of communication between the artist and the viewer, which is fairly banal.

GEORGE CONDO: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But the communication within the ever-widening circles [laughs] of first your contemporaries, then the people that proceeded you, then art history, then—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —I mean, there's a complex—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And it's pretty evident in music. I mean, you can hear jazz musicians reaching back to Bach, and—

GEORGE CONDO: Totally. Yeah. I mean, you know—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —and nobody objects to this. [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: No. They shouldn't because the thing that, you know, the only people who do, like, let's just say, a jazz musician comes along and somebody that's been playing Debussy says, "This just sounds like bad Debussy." You know, these guys have no idea what Debussy was up to. And you think, yeah, well, you know what? If you were to have to take your instrument and play on top of what that jazz composer came up with, you would not know what to do. You would not know how to move through those chordal projections because you're just not trained to do it. And you could interpret what's written, but you can't write, you know, in real time. Which is what you have to be able to do as a great, you know, jazz musician.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: You have to create in real time, and that's what I like about painting. It's creating in real time, and people don't realize that because by the time they see it, it's a frozen object.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: They don't get the real-time aspect of art. And so, what I like is art that looks like it was all made at one go even though you know it couldn't have been. [Laughs.] You know, like, you think, you know you look at something like a Pollock and you look at something like a Leonardo da Vinci, okay? And people think the Leonardo da Vinci must have taken him three years, and the Pollack probably took one hour. But it may not be like that. Sometimes a lot of these great masters, like in the earlier times, like people like Raphael or this—they made a painting in a day. It looks like it took them a year, you know? And a guy

like Rothko might have taken six months to make one.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: You know, it's just hard to figure out the time and the relevance of the time to, say, make a work of art. And then, that's not about, let's just say, the importance of the work based on how much time it took to make. The only guy that really is in that classification seems to be Vermeer, you know? He seems to be the one who was really all about, like, it took so long to make that painting. And they're so precise and so exquisite, but, you know—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —it might be by the means that he used to make it as well took longer. Like, copying a photograph takes much longer than it does to, say, just paint your ideas.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: But back to what we were saying about originality. Those kind of associations and catch phrases—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —are pretty outdated, and I wanted to outdate them. I wanted to give an idea that originality grows from, you know, sprouts out sort of a—what's the word? [Divericate –GC] of some sort, like a branching out of thought and of objectivity in art. And, I mean, if you think about it, I could just say this—it just sounds absurd, but, you know, going back to music—just take the most famous piece, one of the most famous pieces that Beethoven ever wrote called the "*Hammerklavier Sonata*," and then think of the "hammer in the piano" by John Cage.

[They laugh.]

You know? If you just think about it from that perspective, it might of, you know, been like, "He put the hammer in the grand piano."

[They laugh.]

And it's just that—you know, our moment. And if you get that, and you understand—like, what I say was that the idea of originality—and I thought, "Well, I guess the most original thing I could come up with was that I really love old master paintings. And I should just make some." You know? That was it. I just thought, you know, in 1981 and '82, I was moving around with this idea of sort of what I considered to be, in the back of my mind, sort of fake American art. Like, I was sort of doing this thing that looked like the kind of art you're supposed to do to get you into the contemporary world—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: —and it was based on a pastiche of many sort of contemporary styles, and it wasn't necessarily original, like the work I had been doing when I was a kid or in the '70s. That I felt like, when I look back now, I realize was much more original than the work that I did when I first heard about contemporary art being an issue—like '79, '80, '81—that there were real contemporary artists, like Jean-Michel and these kind of guys. And I didn't have anything yet. And so, when I went to LA, I had to think. I worked at Andy's. [. . . –GC]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: I never met him at that point.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: And just, you know, knew him or anything. I knew all about him, but I didn't know him. And when I went to Los Angeles and I left the Warhol job, it occurred to me that I need to come back to New York with something original.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: And what's going to be original? I thought, "Is something original?" Something say, you know, look at it across the room and say, "That's a George Condo." Like, you can look at a soup can and say, "That's an Andy Warhol."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: And that brought me to the—yeah, "Why did he do the soup can?" And then it was like he told his mother he didn't know what to paint. And she said, "Well, paint what you like." And he said, "I don't know what I like." She said, "Well, what do you like the most?" He said, "I like Campbell's Soup."

[They laugh.]

And she said, "Well, paint Campbell's soup. Paint a Campbell's soup can." That's what he says in his book. And so, I thought, "What do I like the most?" I like old master paintings. I love Rembrandt. I like Caravaggio, so maybe I should just paint some. And so, I just created this sort of simulated sort of found object—I wanted them to look as if I had found them in an antique store and took them home and sort of—and more importantly, I wanted them to be painted in the same way that an old master painting was painted but not to have the subject matter that they always used, you know what I mean? I didn't want them to—so, that's what I came up with the idea of painting my name because I thought, "Well, nobody else would have ever painted my name. They might have painted their own, but they never would have painted mine."

[They laugh.]

And there's no way anybody else could have done it except me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. That's unquestionably true. You've got a lock on originality there, I'll tell you.

GEORGE CONDO: [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: One of the things that keeps coming up: You mentioned the John Cage's *Silence*, and Tompkins mentions you reading Huxley *Doors of Perception*—

GEORGE CONDO: Oh yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —and, you know, in your conversation, you're referencing Plato and, you know, and so on and so forth. I mean, you seem to share this—your grandfather's, you know, literary, you know—

GEORGE CONDO: [Laughs.] That's true, true.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —affection, but what were you reading when you were in—as a teenager?

GEORGE CONDO: That's what I was reading. My father gave me a copy of the *Republic* of Plato—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —and I still have it. And he was very into, like, Aristotle. And the reason why is because one of the busts that I have, the one that I got from my uncle, the great-great uncle that was a nephew, was a bust of Democrito, and he did *Democrito*. He did Aristotle. He did all the philosophers—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really?

GEORGE CONDO: —Socrates and this one, and he did a whole series of them. So, my father was very into that. And so, you know, the idea of—there were two things that I remember learning about. There wa—on mother's literary side it was Greek myths, but on my father's side it was Greek philosophy. And there was a vast difference between the idea of Greek myths and Greek philosophy, and I wanted to know what that was. And then, all the literature that I started to read when I discovered *The Doors of Perception*, that book by Huxley, I remember I was in ninth or 10th grade, and I skipped school and I just read it one day under a tree, out by the cows. And the cows were all standing around—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: And that was really a funny time back then. I mean, you would get up in the morning and go to school—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Actually, it sounds like a George Condo painting. [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: —cows were just walking across the front lawn, and the farmer was like, "Where are they going?" You know, [laughs] eating all the apples off the trees and [laughs] it was really fun. It was great growing up like in a kind of bucolic setting like that. You know, it was very—it changed, obviously, like when I would go back in the '80s to see my mom, in like the early '80s. First came to New York in 1979, '80. I would go back in '83, '84, and I would say, "Oh, wow. They put the first shopping mall in." You know? "There's a mall next to Anton's Cleaner." That's amazing." There used to only be Adam's Library in the little town center and sort of—but anyway, it never got to be a big place, but it's, like, they built a lot.

But, like, reading back then was—when I read *The Doors of the Perception*, I went from that to *Heaven and Hell*, which was another book of Huxley's.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh right. Right.

GEORGE CONDO: And then, I went from *Heaven and Hell* to *Yellow*, I think, and *Brave New World*. And I started reading a lot of Huxley, and then I started reading a lot of—I got obsessed with French literature, and I discovered *Nausea* by Sartre. And that sort of turned me on this idea of these kids, you know, like that were rebellious kids. And suddenly I moved into *The Stranger* by Camus—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —and, you know, started to just meander into French literature. Until the point where I really had time to read something like Proust and whatever wasn't until I was in my early 20s.

But in that period of time, teenage era, I mean, I was reading like all of those kind of books about—but a lot of books that I was reading were, in fact, like *Serial Music* by, you know, by —they were all like technical books but I liked—like I liked books about the subject of things, or biographies. The first art book I ever read was Gertrude Stein's book on Picasso, and that was really an eye-opener for me and a real interesting insight into an artist's life. From then, I started reading about other artists. Yes, I would read about Monet. I would read about Manet. I went, "Oh wow, that's the difference." And then, I went back in time. So, I was like into that kind of literature.

I didn't really read when I was a teenager, like, Beat literature, Kerouac and Ginsburg and, you know or Burroughs or any of that stuff when I was teenager. I didn't read any of that. I mean, my mother was very like, "Read Hemingway." And, you know, she loved Gore Vidal, and Gore Vidal hated Kerouac and, you know, that was that kind of thing where I was more—she was kind of Norman Mailer, Gore Vidal, *Who's Who*, and we would all watch, you know—basically we would really bond over like William F. Buckley's *Firing Line*. That was like her favorite show. Remember that show?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I do.

GEORGE CONDO: It was great, you know? Talk shows were different back then.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah. No kidding. Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: Is this thing working?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I think.

GEORGE CONDO: Has it gone dead on us?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No. No. No. It's recording, but I expected it to jump into an hour at a certain point. And I don't know if it moved to the next slot or what exactly it did here. I mean, it's definitely recording.

GEORGE CONDO: What time you got?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's 12:10. Now, you have somebody coming.

GEORGE CONDO: I do.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What time?

GEORGE CONDO: Well, we can continue another—we might have to do three sessions.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's okay.

GEORGE CONDO: Is that alright with you?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah. I did the—the last interview I did was with Duane Michals, and that went on—

[They laugh.]

GEORGE CONDO: For 25 sessions.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I mean, that could have gone on for 20 hours. [Laughs.] But that's—

GEORGE CONDO: They're coming around quarter of, so I could—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Quarter of one.

GEORGE CONDO: 1:00. Yeah, I should maybe—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —and you have to prepare, right?

GEORGE CONDO: I mean, we could sort of stop at *The Doors of Perception*—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: —you know, we could. And then, we can pick up next week if you want.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. Why don't I pause this?

[Audio break.]

GEORGE CONDO: One time we—you know, just talking about like—you know, we would always go to York Beach or we would go to like Hampton Beach—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, York Beach. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: In Maine and everything, and it would just be like this torturous, long trip, you know, like sitting there and like, you know, four hours of traffic. Get to the beach and it would be like 100 degrees—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: —and then go get some fried clams, and then everybody would have to drive home. And when I got—that was, like, when we were kids. But when I got up there and in the late '80s, like, say—and even early 2000's, I remember I got a house up there because I said, "You know, I actually like it up here. I wouldn't mind getting a little house near where my parents live, so I could visit them occasionally." And one time, you know, I was up there with some friends, and we just drove to York Beach. I said, "It's only like 30 minutes away." [Laughs.] Why did it always take us four hours to get here? I think that—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is this before 128, or what is this?

GEORGE CONDO: I am like, "Why did it take us"—it always seemed like the most grueling, like, we could only—we went once in the summer, and I think it's because my father taught all summer, summer school. And the only time we could ever go would be like on a Saturday when everybody else on the planet was going—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, right. And the old whole road is like a parking lot.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. I drove up to York Beach to the—I remember we went to the zoo to

like look at the animal farm or whatever the heck it was called, and it was literally like 30-40 minutes maximum and, you know. [Laughs.] It was like right next door. It was shocking. I thought, "Geez, it always took like a few hours to get here." And my sister said, "No. I know." She said, "Remember when we used to go when we were kids, how it would take us like the entire day to get to the beach?" She said, "You know,"—her husband's name is Bob—she said, "Bob and I go all the time. It takes like half an hour." I said, "I know."

I remember when I used to go to Boston, my father would make a big deal out of like going into Boston. But we could ride our bikes to Boston, and just go up Boston Road. And just drive all the way through Carlisle and Concord and Lexington and the next town. You hit like Arlington and or whatever it was—I think it's Arlington, and there was one other one. It begins with N. I forgot what it's called, but I would stop in at the deCordova Museum and you would be in Cambridge [Laughs.] It's like ride your bike there. It was like a 40-minute bike ride or about an hour, but it wasn't a big deal.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Right. Yeah. No. No.

GEORGE CONDO: I remember when the Bicentennial happened in 1976, and Ford was the President. And they had a big Bicentennial celebration in Concord, Mass., you know, where the Revolutionary War was fought and all the minutemen are out there and everybody—they reenacted all the thing. But Arlo Guthrie and all these guys played at night in the old cemetery. We all camped out in the cemetery. It was really fun. And then, I remember like 2:00 in the morning, my friends and I, we just rode our bikes back home and said, "Okay. We've had enough." We just rode our bikes. It was like 20 minutes away. Fifteen, 20 minutes.

Kerouac was always writing about Concord. He wrote a great poem called "Cat's Catch" on the Concord River and, you know, having Thoreau as a—"Walden Pond" and all, you know—Emily Dickinson and all of that over on that side and then all—you know, Kerouac was highly, you know, sort of involved with that way of thinking. So, I don't know—there's a lot going on there and also that Thoreau sort of had like a graphite company, you know, and they made pencils. He lived in, you know, his house with one chair, and what was that book he wrote, like the famous—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: *Walden*.

GEORGE CONDO: No.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No. No.

GEORGE CONDO: The other one. What's it called?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: On the something river. *The Merrimack River*.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Something about the Merrimack. But the Merrimack was there running through Chelmsford and Lowell. But who was it? It's not *Walden* where he talks about living in a house with—he's got another thing. It's got a funny title. I have to look it up, one of Henry David Thoreau's book about just how they were describing, like, somebody would come and there would just be a chair at a table, like what we're sitting at. There was just like a bed over there, and everything was about him being able to do it himself.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: And Emerson also was into that whole thing. Ralph Waldo Emerson. And all that thing was around there. I guess the big thing with Ginsburg and Burroughs was really *Paradise Lost*, like Milton. That was the big, you know, the sort of—that's why I think he called his character in *On the Road* Sal Paradise, I think, you know, because he was always like lost out there in the world.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh, [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: I mean, you get a lot of—the one thing about being next to Boston and near that area and Concord was exposure to sort of a literary background.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: But there wasn't a visual background. That really—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No.

GEORGE CONDO: —came from my visions of Italy, you know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. No. I mean—

GEORGE CONDO: Imaginary idea about, you know, what it's like to be an artist would be based on what I knew from firsthand experience at my grandparents' house.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Right. Right. Right.

GEORGE CONDO: And also, the disappointments of my earlier third grade, you know, fourth grade, you know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: It's disappointments that either bring you forward or throw you off. And it's a shame to see a lot of people that get these kind of rejections that just call it quits. It just affects them so deeply, either for some pathological reason, they don't take those negatives, or those kind of experiences, and say, "That's the reason I'm going to do it." You know, not because I'm no good, but because people tell me, "Don't do it." So, that means I'm going to do it, you know?

And I think in politics today—you know, just jumping forward, really forward to like right where we are today—it's like more people have to have that feeling. Like you're going to be told everything you do is wrong right now by this establishment that we're sort of living under, you know, this new regime. And I think that it's going to take more guts, like it did back in the Vietnam War and that era—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —to stand up to that kind of oppression than it did before.

In fact, that's what it felt like as an artist back in the '70s. It was very oppressive, the atmosphere in Boston. That they were not at all interested in contemporary art. I mean, I remember seeing an Ellsworth Kelly drawings in Newbury Street in Boston and, you know, you'd go into the museum and there were Morris Lewises and things like that. But it wasn't the MoMA, it wasn't, you know, New York, where a young artist could actually make it. And we'll take it from there when we come back and get into the punk thing maybe.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Good. Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: I become a punk.

[They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

[END OF SESSION]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is a second interview with George Condo at his studio on Spring Street in New York City on June 20, 2017. We're picking up from our previous interview. I do love the Tompkins anecdote about the teacher in your night school class telling you that you were making the only thing that looked like art [laughs]—

GEORGE CONDO: Right. That's true.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —in the class, and that this was a big encouragement for you. So, you just leave school and you decide to—you're going to pursue your art?

GEORGE CONDO: Well, yeah. I mean, it was interesting—well, leading up to that, I had done so much art. My whole philosophy and everything was like, "Why would anybody go to college to stop making art? And what are you doing there?" You know, if you're already doing it, that's what you should be doing. But yet, I could understand the idea of needing some kind of confirmation from a professor or from somebody in the art department of some

school—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —telling you, you know, it's worth pursuing. So, that was the story here, was that I went out of University of Massachusetts in Lowell, which was music theory and art history, and didn't really want to show anybody my actual art there.

So, I got to Mass College of Art. I decide to take a summer night class, and sort of registered for the September thing. And so, I got there. And the guy did that thing where they said, "Everybody go out and pick something realistic from the street, find something that's interesting to you, and make a painting, a rendering, a drawing, whatever you want of it." So, I did. I found a crushed-up Pepsi can out on the street, and it looked cool. So, I got it home, and I had a piece of newsprint paper, and I did a pencil drawing of it. And, you know, I didn't think much about it. You know? I just thought like I had to do a really good job because this is the first time that someone is going to crit my work. But yet on the other hand, it was a little bit bizarre for me because having had done so many—so much art and being so much into abstraction and this and that, I thought, "Oh, here you go, you know, they're going to start making you paint, like, shoes and paper bags—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: —and models, and, you know, all this stuff that, you know, I haven't really been trained for, or in doing. You know, I've done all—I did those things on my own, but they weren't really necessarily under some sort of training.

So, I go in there, kind of a little bit of, you know, trepidation about showing for the first time, and there's the class. We're all sitting in a circle, and he looks at everything. And he says, "Well, everything in here, you know, yours looks like a vase of flowers. Yours looks like this. Yours looks like a paper bag." But he said, "But this one here, this Pepsi can, this is the only thing in the room that looks like art." And he was explaining that it had to do with the placement on the page, that it stood there single-ly, you know, like on its own, regardless of what it was. And so, I was surprised and really shocked and I thought, "Okay, good. That's enough for me." You know?

[They laugh.]

I don't need to go on and continue. Now, I know that what I do looks like art. You know? The big difference between—and that maybe set off a kind of concept of the difference between appearance and being, you know, when it comes to art. And if it appears to be art, then it is art. If it doesn't appear to be art, then what is it? And that discussion's always been sort of funny because a lot of critics love stuff that doesn't look like art. And by writing about it, they turn it into art. But, in fact, nobody else gets it. So, then it, you know, led me to a much, sort of a two-dimensional concept, let's just say. A kind of meta-thinking about—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, that's an interesting comment because one of the things in the—Tompkins quotes Roberta Smith writing about your art that it looks like art, the canvas is taut like art—taut, T-A-U-T, you know—that is has all the attributes of art, but that there's something just a little off about it—

[They laugh.]

—you know, which could be taken as a negative, but it could—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —also be taken as, as you're saying, suggesting, that there was this meta-art aspect that it isn't immediately maybe understandable or perceptible to the uninitiated, shall we call them—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —but, you know, people who are used to looking at a lot, kind of go, "Hmm." [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Like, "I think I've seen this before, but maybe I never have." And it's all the components of what we know to be art are there, but they're made up out of all the

things that we know are art. You know, and this whole problem of originality and, let's just say, the difference between eclectic and a sort of dialectic, you know, is what confounded, I think, the critics—was the idea of bringing together this sort of, you know, multiple languages—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —which would—and to create a singular form from them that is not necessarily at any point now in imitation but a re—sort of—definition of what the languages add up to somehow. You know, in a singular sense.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: I don't know if that makes sense, but—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It does.

GEORGE CONDO: And so, maybe that's what it was. But it's the idea of, like, finding these harmonies and dissonances, and putting that together in a sort of—in an artwork, I guess. You know? And the dissonant aspects of things are ironically what the people know, and the harmonic parts of them all are the way that they're put together.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It seems to me that that would be a concept of being, in a certain way, a lot more available to a musician and a musician's way of thinking than to the art world where—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —there's such a premium on a personal style, almost branding.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. There's that, but—[clears throat] sorry, my voice is going to be cracky all day.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's okay.

GEORGE CONDO: There is, but the parallels in music and art are always there, you know? Like at a moment when, let's just say, the German Expressionist movement broke out, there was the 12-tone music and painting. And then, during the Impressionist music, Debussy, Ravel, there was the Impressionist painting. During jazz, there was, you know, Abstract Expressionism.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Improvisational. Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: So, the idea that—and every art seems to—like I always said, you know, if you—and I think maybe this goes back to the teacher there at Bass High. It's—like, if you look at a drawing of a nude, okay? And you sit there, and you think, "Well, how do I decide it's a good drawing?" If it's a Rubens or if it's a—you know, you can't dig her up out of the grave and compare his drawing to her.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: You basically are comparing lines in drawings. You're comparing already known quantities with the way that they're expressed in a linear manner, in order to arrive at an idea of a qualitative judgment. And on that particular or whatever piece of art. So, it has to do with a sort of continuum of, you know, line and form and color and all of that in art, that maybe a lot of the critics are, or are potentially, unaware of that linearity in art, you know?

Because they're looking: "That's a beautiful drawing. Why?" Is it because it represents beautifully that figure? How do you know? Or is it because that drawing follows a sort of tradition leading up to that drawing? And then that drawing spreads, you know, onward to the next drawing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: And artists measure themselves, themselves, not against what critics think but against what great art is from the past. And then, what they're doing at the

present moment is relatively imperceptible to them in terms of how this will, you know, be perceived later.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: So, I don't think that someone like—when somebody makes a great departure like Barnett Newman, he doesn't know where it's going in people's mind. He only knows where it came from in his own. And so, when he kind of obliterates the line and obliterates the figure and starts to realize it's just about the line and it's just about space. It's about a line in space. It's not about a line compared to a thing that that line represents. It's a zip [laughs], you know? And then, they take off, sort of like a jet, you know, with a direction and an idea.

And I think that was what happened to me—[phone ringing]. Oh, no.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Can you take it?

GEORGE CONDO: Just one second. I don't—

[Audio break.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: So, once again, we come back to the line and then—and that's what I came up with in that initial class was just a pencil drawing, you know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: And in a lot of ways, I mean, that led me to the drawing painting idea.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, it's really interesting that you started with something that had been deformed.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You weren't trying to capture some ideal thing.

GEORGE CONDO: True.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You were trying to capture something—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —that had been crushed or whatever.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. That's true, too.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's interesting.

GEORGE CONDO: And it had already had gone through a natural transformation somehow, randomly and unexplainably. It had been run over by a truck—

[They laugh.]

You know? I just liked the way that the graphics were broken up and, you know, and I think about like the Warhol paintings of the soup—the drawings of the soup can where the label is peeled, or has the can opener on them, or there's all this sort of, you know—probably, at the end of the day, I was thinking a little bit about drawing from Pop—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Of course.

GEORGE CONDO: —as an influence.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah. That makes sense.

GEORGE CONDO: You know what I mean?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: Because I always loved that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. So, you leave school. You take a job screening t-shirts—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —and you're in this punk rock band in Boston, yes?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Yeah. That's how I met them, at the silkscreen place. That they were working there, you know? I hadn't had any—all I had was classical music training and some rock guitar stuff—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I see. Oh, you met the band people in your band at the—

GEORGE CONDO: And so, I got this job.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, okay. Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: And when I decided that I was going to, you know, take a job in Boston, I looked for work. And I said, "Oh, you know what? I had experience making silkscreens in high school. So, I went to this t-shirt place, and I said, "I know how to do silkscreens." And they said, "Great." And the guys that were in there—there were maybe five or six people. The drummer—one of them was musician. The other one was a drummer in this punk band, The Girls. And we had the best conversations because they were all, you know—he had gone to the Ringling College of Art in Florida.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: And so, all we did was talk about art while we're like sending these t-shirts down the conveyor belt and letting them dry. This one woman, Margie, was upstairs. And she was also sort of somewhere involved with the punk music scene. And I had no idea what to make of it, because I had heard of—this was in '78 or '79, probably late '78.

I had heard about, like, the Ramones and Johnny Rotten and all that, but I had [laughs] not listened to anything. And so, when I got in there, they said, "Well, you know, we've got a band called The Girls." And I said, "Really? How did you come up with that name?" He said, "Some guy in a supermarket, we asked him what should we call our band. He said, "Why don't you call yourselves The Girls?" [Laughs.] And so, he says, "So, that's what we did." But they just took "the" out, and so it was simply called Girls. So, he said, "Come see us because we're playing at the Harvard dormitories on, you know, in two weeks." So, I go to this thing with my friend from Chelmsford who had also come to Boston and was thinking he would go to Mass High. So, we were like, "What are we supposed to wear this type of stuff?"

[They laugh.]

You know, "What do we do?" You know, like, "What's the deal here?" So, when I went, I was really impressed and really shocked because, first of all, this dorm performance had like a—they were all more or less like big, long kitchen tables. It must have been in the cafeteria—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Right.

GEORGE CONDO: —and they were up on a sort of makeshift stage, and there was a synthesizer, a drummer, and a guitar player. And the drummer that was—it was so absolutely radical, you know, because all the sort of electronic music and everything that I had been studying, Mario Davidovsky and Luigi Dallapiccola and all of these different, you know, Edgar Varèse and all of these guys—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —Subotnick and whatever, like, that I was interested in during my college thing back in, you know, at UMass—ULowell I call it—but it was all there in their music. They were basically playing to that. And the drummer was absolutely nuts. He was the singer. And the guitar player—and everything was so sort of anarchistic, but used—and the synthesizer player was amazing. I mean, he had so many crazy—and it was so loud, and there was so much like—it was kind of like one of the best things I had ever seen. And they did this electronic thing of Joni Mitchell's "*Both Sides Now*" that nobody—you know, they turned it into this screaming punk—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: —sort of screaming punk song with all—it looked like all the wires had been pulled out of a, you know, transformer or something. And so, I told them, I said, "That was amazing, man. You guys are great." And he said, "Yeah, we need a bass player. You think you could play bass?" And I said, "I mean, what do I need to be able to do?" And he said, "You basically need to go boom. Boom, boom, boom. Boom. Boom, boom, boom.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: I said, "I think I can do that after like eight years of Bach, you know? I don't think this is going to be too challenging." But, you know, they had tried out a number of bass players. They had been looking for a bass player. So, I went and tried out, and I got the gig, you know? And it was a big deal. I had no idea that everybody in Boston knew who these guys were. You know, they were the big—they were like—a big, like, sort of underground punk scene in Boston was huge. And the idea that, like, they had a bass player here and a bass player there, but got rid of them.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: But I actually made it into the band.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

GEORGE CONDO: And so, we started rehearsing. The guitar player went to the Boston Museum School. The synthesizer player had gone to art college in Germany. And the drummer, as I said, went to Ringling. So, we had this band. It was so much fun. I got to tell you. It was really fun. And one of the first gigs I did, I remember, was we opened at this place called Paradise Garage, I think it was called. And we opened for Devo. And it was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. And it was a large—it was, you know, TV audience and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —the whole—it was a like a televised live performance. And so, we get there, and my bass for, some reason the sound check went well, but once we got on stage, it didn't work. So, the drummer gets off his drums, takes the bass out of my hand, and just like throws it down on the floor, and he just yells at everybody, "Give this guy a guitar." So, like gives me a guitar, so then I'm playing the bass on the guitar, and then he destroyed his entire drum set. We played like 15 minutes—

[They laugh.]

—and that was our performance. And then Devo came out and did their whole thing. Like, "We are Devo" and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —this and that. And then, they liked us so much that they asked to us play [laughs] with them again.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's great.

GEORGE CONDO: They thought it was the most insane, dysfunctional idea of a—it was like serious art punk. So, that was it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, you guys—and then you guys did a show in New York?

GEORGE CONDO: So, then we got a gig in New York at Tier 3—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: —in '79 or '80. I think it was '79.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I have it as '79 here, but—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, I think it was '79. We did the show at Tier 3, and then—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And Jean-Michel was in the band also performing there?

GEORGE CONDO: Well, Jean-Michel Basquiat's band, Gray, opened for us. We were like the headliners—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh. Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: —and coming down from Boston, and so their band opened for us. So, they were doing their sound check, and Jean was sort of, like, on the ground like plugging things in and getting all his instruments in order. And the other guys were sort of doing their thing. And I started talking to him a little bit about just set-ups and this and that. And he was kind of a person of few words at that point.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: And then, so they played, and then I said, "Well, you've got to catch our set too." And so, he did. And I remember, like, he caught our set, and he was like, "Man, that was fucking nuts."

[They laugh.]

He said, "That was crazy." And I said, "I know." He said, "That's probably like the craziest thing I've ever seen." I said, "That's why I joined the band. I thought the same thing when I saw them." And I said—and so, then he took me around to the Mudd Club—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —around the corner from Tier 3, and we got in, and it was a whole, like, scene that I had never been exposed to.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What was it like?

GEORGE CONDO: It was—I just remember walking in, and there were all these people, like girls in sort of sequined dresses with, like, blonde dyed hair like up and done up with lots of makeup. And it was like very plush inside, velvet and with black lights everywhere—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —and very sort of what—it was very sort of psychedelic and bizarre, you know? But downstairs, it was a performing area.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: So—and upstairs the jukebox or whatever the music was being played—I didn't think they had a DJ. I think it was just like—and then when I went over there with Jean-Michel, he said that he was in—I remember he said he was performing in a sort of a—he was doing *Hamlet*. So, he had sort of a like a toga—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: He was doing *Hamlet*?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. He said, "I'm doing *Hamlet* tonight at like 2:00 in the morning at some other punk club," you know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What? [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: It was like so cool. And so, then when we left, Mark and I, the guitar player and I—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is Mark Dagley?

GEORGE CONDO: Dagley, yeah. And he's an abstract painter, a great painter, from Washington, D.C. originally—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —and still a good friend today. So, Mark and I, we got back to Boston, and

we were like—you know, we had been—went over to the MoMA and looked at the, you know, the Guggenheim and whatever, while we were here. And we were like, "Man, Boston is just so, like, outdated." Nobody here cares about contemporary art. Nobody cares about art. And New York is so thriving.

So, we were in these, like, kind of discussions like, "Geez, what do we do? You know, the band is getting bigger and bigger, and we're getting—you know, people are throwing record contracts at us now and, like, the concerts were getting more like, you know—we had gone out to Cleveland and recorded with this guy, Pere Ubu, with the band—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: This guy David Thomas of Pere Ubu, he produced our first single. And then, they were selling it in like Bleaker Bobs and all these places all over New York—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —and all over London, and we were getting reviews in, like, the *New York Rocker, The East Village Eye*, the, like, *New Music Express* in England and all that stuff. So we went and we did this big performance with them, Pere Ubu, in Boston. And by then, it was like—I was like, "Man, I don't know what we're going to do. Like, we want to move to New York, but we don't want to, like, break up the band." So, we played some more gigs. We did this thing called M80 that was in—we played Chicago, and then we played this thing called M80 which was like a rock festival in Minneapolis in 1980.

But before that, Mark and I had made a move—we decided to move down—we played two more times in New York. We played—it's hard to remember, but we played Tier 3 again, back by popular request, and then we did the last days of Studio 54. We played a Halloween —

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

GEORGE CONDO: —Halloween [laughs]—the last gigs of Studio 54; nobody was there. There was no Warhols and Hallstons and Liza Minnellis. All that was over.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: That was all, I think, mid-'70s or something. It was just basically the end of it all, you know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, sad, sad.

GEORGE CONDO: It is, but it's pretty funny.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But it is funny.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, it was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, you're sort of bridging an era there?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. So then, I remember being here and waking up in New York saying, "Alright. It's day one, 1980." You know? And now, we live in New York, and we have to, you know, go back up to Boston and, you know, do some rehearsals, and go finish up these gigs, but by—I think by '80, '81 at the latest, I was out. I think by '80, we were out of the band.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So—and I think we talked about this last time, you know—sometimes your bios will say that you worked for Andy Warhol, but actually you had ended up working for this printer, Rupert Smith?

GEORGE CONDO: Well, yeah. That was Andy Warhol. It was like—what it came down to was Rupert was the master printer.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I see.

GEORGE CONDO: So, during that time, when I moved to New York, Mark had said the best thing we can do—we formed a new band called The High Sheriffs of Blue. And it was a blues band. And it was kind of a radical blues band—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Hmm. Cool.

GEORGE CONDO: —and the idea was sort of off-center blues—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —because Mark's an actually great blues player. And so, in this one, we performed—I remember we did our first performance at Folk City—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No kidding?

GEORGE CONDO: —and it was just—yeah. We did Folk City first, and then we did CBGB's, and then we did Max's Kansas City—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Cool.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, because we were riding sort of on the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —fame of The Girls—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: —and Mark was really good at getting all these gigs and everything, but there was no money involved. So, he said, "The best scam in New York, here's the scam." It's like, you know, it wasn't called Manpower, but it was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Kelly Girls?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. What's it called?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Kelly Girls.

GEORGE CONDO: Kelly Girls. He said we got a Kelly Girl Employment Agency. You get jobs for two weeks, and then you're gone, you know? You never commit to a work job. So, I signed up with Kelly Girl, and my first job was collating—like I was—that was the high-end word for folding and putting things together in an envelope up at the World Trade Center. So, I was living in a hotel down on Bond Street, and I could see out my window the World Trade Center. And I would walk there every day and go to the, like, 150th floor and sit—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Right.

GEORGE CONDO: —with all these old, like, ladies and just crack them up for seven hours a day.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: All they would do is like, "Man, you really just don't deserve a job, do you?" I was like, "I don't really want a job." And they were like, "You know, well, you're going to have to get one, you know? This is not going to be—" And so, then, the guy like put me in like, you know, with the shopping cart delivering mail on different floors. And then, I was like, "Alright. I'm out of here." So then, Kelly Girl sent me to a gallery that needed somebody to sort slides.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh.

GEORGE CONDO: So, I went to the gallery. And I thought, "Okay. Well, at least this sounds like something artistic." And it wasn't necessarily, but they represented—it was Fred Dorfman's gallery—they represented, and they were on 12th Street, like more or less across the street from The Strand.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, yeah. Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: And they represented Rupert Smith, who was Andy's master printer—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —and Rupert himself, you know, considered himself an artist in his own right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I see.

GEORGE CONDO: His stuff was, for the most part, prints that were hard to describe. I can't remember what category I had put them in, but they belonged—they basically would belong in like furniture stores. It would be like when they stage an apartment, and there's—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

GEORGE CONDO: —an anonymous print?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

GEORGE CONDO: That's basically what he did. But what happened was is he was having a show together with Warhol. He had convinced Andy to show with him in Palm Beach in some strange small gallery in Florida, where he was from. And so, Fred said they need a—Rupert wants, is anybody in this office capable of writing a press release for this show? So, I said, "Yeah, I could do it." So, I wrote a press release, you know like a page long. They sent it over to Rupert's office who said that we have to send this to Warhol's office and just if it—fine, you know.

In the meantime, you know, it wasn't like anything more than that. And then Dorfman says to me, "Hey, listen. Warhol's office called, and they said that whoever wrote this thing, they want to give you a job working at Andy Warhol's, but just writing about what's going on in the Factory on a daily basis."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: And so, I was like, "Oh, that sounds cool." You know, and so he said, "And there's no work here, you know. I mean, you know, your Kelly Girl days are up—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laugh.]

GEORGE CONDO: —basically anyway." So, I said, "No. No, I would love to do that." So, I go over to the factory that was operating on Dwayne Street—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: On Dwayne Street. Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. And it was about up on the fourth or fifth floor, I remember, something like—he had the worst. And I go there, and, you know, I start—I got an old typewriter, and I'm typing, you know, "Today they had foie gras and caviar and, you know, flowers were brought in by such and such a place, and Andy Warhol called today saying he was not happy with the way the prints looked and this, that, and the other thing." And I did that for like four or five days, not more.

And at one point they came in with a picture of Diana Ross that had like a tiny, little white speck in her afro. And they said, "Do you think you could fix this? Have you ever done silkscreen before?" And I said, "Yeah, I did. That was my last job in Boston. I had worked as a silkscreener." And they were like, "Oh, great. Well, can you fix this?" So, I said, "Sure." So, they gave me like a bottle cap with some black ink, okay? And, I mean, it was literally like, you know, take a brush, dab it in, and go like that. And they were like, "Wow. You're such a great artist."

[They laugh.]

It was like, "You fixed it. It's perfect." And I was like, "Thanks." And they said, "Would you be interested to, you know, work on the assembly line?" And I said, "Yeah, definitely." So, then they needed a guy to—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And this is at Rupert's place or at Andy's place?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. No, at—Andy's—Rupert's place was doing Andy's work—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was where they actually did the work, but you were working for Andy?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Yeah, and Warhol would never go there because of the toxicity factor. Once I got to know him as a person, as a friend, I understood why he would never go there because he was so health-conscious—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —and that place was just like, you know—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The fumes and—

GEORGE CONDO: —fumes. [ . . . –GC] You know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: And basically, the setup was amazing. It was a phone next to the press, and this one guy named Hoerst [Weber von Beeren] was the master printer. Rupert just oversaw all these things. He would bring the things. Hoerst was the real printer. And sometimes Rupert—I think Rupert mixed the colors—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I see.

GEORGE CONDO: —is what happened. Rupert mixed a lot of the colors. He would pour them down, give the can to Hoerst. Hoerst would pour the things down onto the screen, and then pull the screen.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Hoerst? Like, a German name?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Yeah. He was—I remember his name. And then somebody else would take the screen, and you would put it in all these racks that were like dryers.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I see, to dry. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: And then, the next screen would come down—you know, those screens would come back onto the silkscreen, and somebody had to clean, luckily not me, the screens themselves to get ready for the second screen. And then, at the end, this whole series was to be diamond dusted. So, my job was the diamond duster. And so, I had basically —like everything was done, and then the last thing they would do would be run the print through like a—run the print through a clear kind of glue that would go over it with a squeegee, and through the screen onto the print.

And so, you would get something like I did the *Myth* series, and they had just finished the *12 Famous Jews* and then the next series, I believe, was the *Myths*, and that's what I started with. And so, you know, think about how many these guys did too. They had—there was 10 *Myths* in an edition of something like 300—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

GEORGE CONDO: —with 40 trial proofs—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

GEORGE CONDO: —and 20 printer's proofs. So, you're talking like 300 times 10, like 30,000, 35, 40—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I was going to say 3,000—

GEORGE CONDO: No, more. More like 300 times—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, 300 times 10 would be 3,000—

GEORGE CONDO: —that's 3,000. So, yeah, we probably—it was more like—probably in the end we probably printed 5,000 prints, okay?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Unbelievable.

GEORGE CONDO: Because we also did them on canvas, and we also did them—the test runs on paper, which was what a lot of the selling was later in the Warhol Museum where they would stamp it's an authentic Warhol—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —because these were pieces that were made at that point. And then, the Warhol Foundation would say that's a real print from Andy. It's not some outside guy doing it. And so, I basically would put them in a trough and pour this diamond dust over the thing, and you would have to pick it up in one sweep—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —so it wouldn't be like glitter, and clump up.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: If you clumped it up, Rupert would come in and tear your head off. And, you know, they would have to—so they always printed extras for the screw-ups because other things would screw up along the way before you even reached the diamond dust point. So, I remember going up to Warhol's for the first time to actually meet Andy—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —with a bunch of, like, proofs that we had done.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: Rupert took me up there, and said, "This is George," you know, like whatever. I more or less stood in the background, and Andy was looking at them like kind of going, "Oh, wow. These look great," you know. "These look really great."

But he was involved in such an interesting way. He had like a sort of extra-sensory perception way of working with the operation. Like, in the middle of a print, the phone would ring, and it would be him. And he'd say, "I don't want it—I don't like it the way it was. I looked at it yesterday. I want them all green in the background. I want"—and he would name the green that he wanted. And he would say, "I want 1964 Elizabeth Taylor green." And so, I would go to the cabinet, and there was loads of like shelves of these like paint kind of cans, and they would say like, Turquoise Marilyn or Lips, you know, from Whomever or Background of Whatever Painting, whatever it was. They were all listed as colors from his paintings.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's a wonderful way to remember it, actually.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. So, you'd grab like, you know, the emerald green tone from the one Liz Taylor piece, and we did, like, a trial proof with that. And then, the trial proof would be sent to him. And then, there'd be this pause waiting—in the meantime, carrying on with the other prints, and then they would come back with the yes or the no on whether that trial proof would become the final, you know—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

GEORGE CONDO: —that we would then print the 300 of. So, it was a really cool job.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How long did this extend? This—

GEORGE CONDO: I worked there almost a year.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, a long time.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Yeah. I was there for, like, the entire series plus a lot of the canvases we did in there. And the canvases, I remember we printed on—there was a number of different steps and stages along the road. Like, you did these blueprints back then. They weren't really—they were like—we'd just go to this place where the factory was on 18th Street where the real Andy Warhol factory was. It was near where Nat Sherman's cigarette store used to be.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: There was a place that did blueprints, and I remember we would go there and get a blueprint of something that Andy had photographed, and then, you know—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And they would like—

GEORGE CONDO: —make it to actual size of what the screen was going—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Would, like, they stat it up to—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Stat it up to the scale of the piece—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I see.

GEORGE CONDO: —and then go in and have him look at that, and then bring those blueprints down. They would transform those into screens, like photo silkscreens.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

GEORGE CONDO: And then, we did the canvases of the *Myths*. There was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Would the screens—I mean, a lot of them seem to have been—the images seem to have been manipulated for high contrast or something. Were they—

GEORGE CONDO: Well, that would be Andy's call. That would be the kind of thing he would call about, and say things like in the middle of a piece like, I want—I don't remember what he would do, but it would be always—like, I remember Rupert's voice. Just this high-pitched voice going, "Mrs. Warhol."

[They laugh.]

He would call him. [Laughs.] "Mrs. Warhol just called, and she wants it done like this." And they would all talk to each other like that.

[They laugh.]

That's how they [laughs]—that's what they called him, "Mrs. Warhol," because [laughs] when Andy would call, they would say, "Mrs. Warhol just called, and she wants everything done like that." It was so funny. It was hysterical over there. But like this other kid and I, Michael, we were like the 22-year old or whatever there, and so we had all the hard work which was—like a lot of everything was printed first on newsprint, and then they would look at the newsprint—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: And they would run it by the newsprint a couple of times, and then once the ink was at the right level—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —to put the right paper in. So, at the end of the day, like about 11:00 at night, if you can just picture this, Michael and I would be responsible to just go crunch up all of these Warhols, put them in garbage bags, and drag them down the stairs, and put them in this giant dumpster behind the building.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: And the dumpster would literally be filled with like 65—you know, they were light.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: It wasn't like they were heavy to carry, but it was just like back and forth up and down the stairs, just full of Warhols. [Laughs.] Like 65 garbage bags full of Warhols sitting out behind the building. Crazy. And those are the things that they stamp now. They started, they stamped, and said, "These are authentic." Because they were, you know, in the end of the day. I mean, they were the actual screen, the actual ink, the actual printer, the actual stuff—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And on the actual paper?

GEORGE CONDO: On the actual paper. So, those could be authenticated. And so, when I had

the—so just to jump forward like 25 years, this business of the paint cans being sort of—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —labeled. When they did the catalogue raisonnés on Warhol's work—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —I have a few of them, and I remember that they came to authenticate them in order to put them into the thing, and they had a picture of it—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is this Ron Feldman's thing?

GEORGE CONDO: Feldman was the producer of the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —catalogue raisonné.

GEORGE CONDO: —the *Myths.* Is he the one that's producing those big series of catalogue raisonnés as well?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I believe so. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah. That's sort of his bread and butter.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Well, I'll tell you something. That's where I had the funniest interaction with Andy was that, like, when it came down to the day that we were going—when all the prints went to Feldman's Gallery, and Andy had to come in and sign everything. I remember him showing up with Fred Hughes, and Andy kind of like—there were all these boxes just everywhere and like millions of boxes and piles and piles of prints, you know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

GEORGE CONDO: And Ron with a list of like, "To," you know, "Agnes, from Andy." And just like a load of dedications, and he would just write out and sign, write out and sign. And there was sort of like two guys like taking them, putting them over here, taking them, putting over there.

So, I have to say, I learned a lot about art and a sort of precision. And it was also my funny little dream of saying that, you know, having studied art history, you know that X—I can't remember who I was—I'm trying to think of his name now, but like, you know, Leonardo was an apprentice for Verrocchio. That's what it was. And so, you can tell there's one fish painted in a Verrocchio painting that was painted by Leonardo's hand. And then, so-and-so was an apprentice for this, and there was that whole apprentice thing that—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Sure. Sure.

GEORGE CONDO: —you would read about in history, and I thought, "Oh, if I was ever going to work for one artist, I'm glad I was an apprentice at Andy Warhol's [laughs] shop," you know?

And so, there at the day of the boxing, you know, I remember him saying, "What is this box art?" You know, and making all these jokes about the thing, and just like doing his thing, signing, and this and that. I had only really met him two or three times at that point.

So, that was it. You know, after that job, like after about a year, I think I—about nine months to a year, I had the work, and then I quit because it was just way too toxic. The atmosphere was too toxic. The intensity of it all was just too much. And I felt like, you know, artists like Jean-Michel and Keith were out there, and artists were making it on their own. And I could see myself just being in this place for the next 10 years and being like one of the Andy Warhol artists, and that was it, you know? Somebody who worked for Andy Warhol, end of story. And I thought, I'm young enough to sort of slip out of here without having it be noticeable that I was even here.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's, like—but it's so interesting. You know, artists, young artists, can be so idealistic about—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —you know, the art world—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —and, you know, making it. And you were sort of like shown how the sausage was made.

GEORGE CONDO: Oh, yeah. Totally.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Completely. Yeah. It was like the inner workings—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is the Factory—

GEORGE CONDO: This was the Factory—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —with the machinery and everything.

GEORGE CONDO: This was the wheels that make the turn, you know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: It was making the art itself. Like I actually, when I get them—I've been trying to collect some of the *Myths*—I say, "Oh, that's one I printed. That's one I printed." You know, they're all like—they all are actually, you know, all the diamond dusts that are on those, I did them. So, when I think about it now and I look at a Warhol, I think, "Yeah, I printed that one." I mean, you know, "I did the diamond dust on that one." And I have some of them in my collection.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: It's cool.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, it's 1982. You're 24?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, you quit the printer, and you moved to Los Angeles, right?

GEORGE CONDO: I went to Los Angeles during that time at the—I started going out with this actress, and she—Susan Tyrrell—and she got a job. And she was in a couple of really important—she was in *Bad*, the Andy Warhol, *Bad*, with Carol Baker?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: But she was also in *Fat City*, that John Huston film.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, it's a wonderful film—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. A great—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, I love that movie.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Yeah. She was in that one, and she—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The name sounded familiar.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, and she was in *Cry-Baby* or one of those John Waters films or something like that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, God.

GEORGE CONDO: She played like Johnny Depp's mother, I think. [Laughs.] But anyway, she was 35, so she was considerably older than I was. And so, it was like, she said, "Why don't you come out to LA? Get the hell out of there. I worked in the—I know what it's like to work

at, you know, Warhol's. I was in that movie *Bad*." And I said, "What did Andy tell you in *Bad*? What was his thing?" And she said, "The only—all I can remember is Andy just saying I want more close-ups, you know, like on everything. Like, if it was a telephone, he wanted just a still of the phone, and then it would move on." And I thought that was so Warhol, you know? Because what was his name—Morrissey did most of them.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Right. Paul Morrissey.

GEORGE CONDO: Paul Morrissey did those. But the other guy—so, I go out to LA with her, and she's in a TV show, and her TV show crashes—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Where in LA were you living?

GEORGE CONDO: We were in—she got a place in Hollywood Hills on Gramercy Place off Franklin, as I remember.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. I know where that is.

GEORGE CONDO: And I remember it well, believe me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, just above Hollywood Boulevard?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. It was right behind like Two Dollar Bills, [laughs] this place. And so, she was just totally like Janis Joplin'd-out out there, you know? When the job crashed at the Hollywood—when the thing—what happened was the guy that was the producer was also the producer of like the *Blues Brothers* and all those things—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —and Belushi died, overdosed then, and then all his projects were just like frozen until that stuff was sorted out. Like, nothing to do with her—I never met this guy or any of these people, but she had an interesting crowd of friends, you know what I mean? And so, I remember Michael Tilson Thomas had come over once, and, you know, all these different kinds of Hollywood legend people that were, you know, that she had been in films with or know like Christopher Walken or this one or that one. And they were all like really hard-drinking, hard-living, Hollywood maniacs. And when her thing cut, when the show got cut, I had to start looking for work to get my way back to New York. And I'm like—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —"Great," you know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: Like, now I got to find a way to get back to New York City. And I said "Anyway, I don't know about LA. It's not for me." I didn't have a driver's license. So, I got—the reason why I can remember where I lived was because I got a—I looked in the back of like *Rolling Stone*, and there was sort of an offer, "If you're an artist, an actor, and you don't like work. You don't want to work, but you want to make $1,000 a week, come see us, you know? Part-time." And so, this one woman, Ann Marie, and I, that was a friend of Susan's, we thought it's got to be something shady like porno, you know. This can't be good, but we went. And it was telemarketing—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, God.

GEORGE CONDO: Selling pens like this one with the name of the company on it. And Ed Ruscha and I loved this because we love to talk our—he loves—that was another one of the best jobs I ever had in my life, you know? Like, selling pens in this little office on Hollywood and, like, Cherokee or something. So, I used to have to walk—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. I can picture it.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, I used to walk down Gramercy and then walk all the way up, and I remember like—and I had all my New York clothes, and it was like 100 degrees in the sun, you know, walking to work [laughs], it was stupid. And then me and this other guy named Tex—sounds like somebody out of like Charles Manson. Me and Tex were the two top sellers. And it was so much fun. I got to tell you, they gave me phone books, and you just called

people randomly and tried to get them to put their name on a pen and sell them 30 pens, and it was a riot. It was so much fun.

So, I started actually making enough money to save a little bit, and every day, you know—there was another guy there that was interesting, named Coleman Dekay. His father used to own Doubleday Books, and he was a very literary guy, and he was from New York. And he was, like, trying to get the hell out of there as well. And so, we all would go to Musso and Frank's, which was across—once we started making some money, have like meatloaf [laughs] and lasagna and drinking a few bottles of wine and go back and just like crack people up on the phone. And they would say, "Sure, I'll buy them." You know? And then, I moved back to New York, but—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, this is also the year that you paint the *Madonna*?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This painting, this sort of fake old master that—

GEORGE CONDO: This is the thing—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And this is a bit of a turning point for you, right?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. What happened was, is like all of the life stuff was really fun, but during the back—in the background, I was always painting and drawing. And coming from the Warhol place, they had given me a lot of paper—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, nice.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, which was really cool. And so, I was in LA, and I met this guy, Roger Herman, who was a painter—German painter, still around, showed with Ulrike Kantor.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: And also during that period time, when I was out in LA, Jean-Michel came out because he was going to have his first show with Larry—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh.

GEORGE CONDO: And so, Larry put him up in this—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —Larry Gagosian.

GEORGE CONDO: Larry Gagosian put him up in this house outside of Venice. So, he was there and like one of the only other people we knew was me and him. And so, Jean-Michel comes out, and these kids were there. And I was doing a lot of painting. And what I did as a painter was I kept trying—I had two lines. I had what I considered my haute couture, and then my prêt-a-porter and I thought it's like the prêt-a-porter was the stuff that I thought you were supposed to show in the gallery. But the haute couture was the really good stuff that you don't show them unless something good happens at that gallery.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: Like, I had no idea how, you know, it all worked. But so, my first paintings that were really, you know, sort of, you know, really worked on out there were these sort of fake sort of American psychedelic, you know, LA kind of, sort of Pop meets psychedelia or something.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Are these reproduced anywhere?

GEORGE CONDO: Not very often.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: I did a lot of them though. And the whole show—so what happened—what was interesting was—but on the side, I was working on this *Madonna*, and I had worked on the *Madonna*, I worked on a number of like small—like, I had gone up into the DeYoung Museum, and I saw this these Tiepolos—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —and I started seeing pieces at the Pasadena Art Museum—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: —and they have great paintings in all those places, and I was thinking I really like this kind of art the most, you know? And I don't think anybody would get it, because it's just so regressive in terms of like all of what's happened in art, you know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: And what was happening contemporaneously was not that kind of look of painting. You know, little, small oil paintings, varnished to look like they had been done 200 years ago.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: And so, I showed—so Roger Herman comes over, and he's telling Ulrike, "You got to see this guy's work. You got to see this guy's work." She looks at some pictures I bring over. I didn't know how to present myself. I showed her some photographs, some Polaroids, and she said to him, "I really don't understand this." But apparently, she had had some sort of little affair with Jean-Michel and, you know, she was in her '50s, okay? And she was a real sort of rich woman out there with a gallery and the whole bit. And she was really cool. But she was like, "I don't get it, you know? I'm not interested."

And so, Herman says, "You know what? She's out to lunch. While she's gone, I'm going to come over." And by now, we had left the Hills and we were living on Alfred Street, off La Cienega—and her gallery was down on La Cienega.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: And so, Herman comes over, and he takes a van—with his van. And we loaded up with all my stuff, and we bring it over to the gallery. [Laughs.] So, he puts it all around the gallery because it was like in between shows. We have it all over the gallery, so she could actually see it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Neat.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. I mean, it was a really heroic thing for him to do. So, she comes back from lunch with this guy named Robert Rowan, who was a huge collector at that point. He owned the sort of Greek temple that Roy Lichtenstein painted, you know—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, okay.

GEORGE CONDO: —in the Pop style, and he was one of the biggest art collectors out there. He was like, you know, everything he had, he gave to the Pasadena Art Museum. He was like David Geffen back then, but he was an older guy. So, she comes back with him, and she's like, you know, horrified. And he says, "you know, "Hey, I really like this piece, and I really like that piece. How much are these?" And she says—and so she's kind of like, "Um"—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative]. [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: —and he says, "I want to buy this, and I want to buy this. And I want to buy that." And she said, "Who is this guy?" She said, "Oh, he's my newest artist."

[They laugh.]

"He's my newest artist. That's George Condo."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's a wonderful story. [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. It was incredible, and so [laughs] just like that. It was like—if it hadn't been for Roger to, like, bring the stuff down, it never would have happened. So, he bought this thing that looked like—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Tell me, her name again is?

GEORGE CONDO: Ulrike Kantor.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Ulrike Kantor. Right. Okay. Ulrike Kantor.

GEORGE CONDO: She might have been married to Paul Kantor.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

GEORGE CONDO: But can you imagine? So, he walks in, and he says, "Who is this guy?" And she says, "Oh, he's my newest artist."

[They laugh.]

That was what it was like when you were, like, in the art world back then. You get to New York—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You could just pull stuff like this.

GEORGE CONDO: —you meet Jean-Michel in a punk club, and the next thing you go out to LA, because the Warhol job is just too toxic. The actress' work falls apart. You're painting in the garage. Somebody brings them over. This guy walks in. It was wild.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, in early '83, you moved back to New York.

GEORGE CONDO: No, right in '82.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: '82.

GEORGE CONDO: I came back to New York, and then I went out there for '83 for the show, for my first show.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, I see. I see.

GEORGE CONDO: I got the show. In the garage, I had the *Madonna*, and I had all these other paintings lined up that I was thinking of bringing back to New York. This was like my real art —

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

GEORGE CONDO: —and I also had, like, I called it the prêt-a-porter, but it's not really fair to myself.

[They laugh.]

But in any case, like, the stuff that I thought would look like contemporary art, you know? That was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] It just looks like contemporary art.

GEORGE CONDO: —I was like, "This looks like contemporary art. Maybe that's what I should"—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You know, we're back to that theme again—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. It looks like—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You know, this looks like art—

GEORGE CONDO: —exactly. That's what it is. See, that's what I'm saying. It's a continuous theme. And I showed those pieces. I don't know. They sold some, not that many of them. And then—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I'm sorry. They showed the haute couture or they showed the prêt-a-porter?

GEORGE CONDO: They showed the prêt-a-porter.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And they didn't sell too many.

GEORGE CONDO: No, no. She didn't even know about the "*Madonna*" and all these—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, really?

GEORGE CONDO: —paintings. These were all secret, like covert, you know, missions that I was working on, that I was planning to bring to New York.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, the stuff that Roger took over there was the prêt-a-porter stuff?

GEORGE CONDO: Was all that stuff, yeah. Big, colorful, psychedelic-like Pop art.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it. Got it. Got it.

GEORGE CONDO: Like, Superman reading a newspaper standing on a light post with a giant eyeball next to him. That's the one that Ron got.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh.

GEORGE CONDO: And I've probably got pictures of some of those things. Actually I have a picture of myself in the garage that we could dig out. I'll show it to you when I go for—take a break.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

GEORGE CONDO: It's quite funny.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

[They laugh.]

GEORGE CONDO: I'll show—you can see them all over the floor, and I think it was the day Roger came over, and I was like—they were all over the floor and I was like, "Should we just stack them and show them to her on the floor? How do we do this?" And, in any case, that show at least, I said to Jean-Michel went I went out there—he was out there again. He had a show at the Hollywood Africans paintings and Rammellzee and all these guys that I knew—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —from New York. They all came out at the same time. And the irony and the horrible thing was that it was so—I could see where Basquiat was very, very mistreated in his life, you know? I remember going with him. He would go to someplace, and buy himself an Armani suit and like—some—like, the scene out in LA was great. He had this giant black gangster car that was like a 1940s Al Capone car, and his guy that worked from Steve Torten was the driver. And I remember me and Jean in the backseat, and there was a hitchhiker, okay?

And the thing didn't have good brakes, and the brakes barely worked. You would sort of have to put on the brake and sort of, like, glide over to the side of the road until it stopped. So, we pick up this hitchhiker and give her a lift to wherever she's going. Like, 30 years later, I meet this woman. She said, it's Damien Hurst's wife. She says—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No!

GEORGE CONDO: —"Do you remember when you and Jean-Michel picked me up I was hitchhiking on Hollywood Boulevard, and you picked me up in that big, black gangster car? And I was like, "No." I said, "I vaguely remember." And she said, "Yeah, you guys pulled over. And the car kind of like came to a halt, and I jumped in." She said, "I'll never forget." Isn't that funny? And she was Damien's wife. Like, he had just broke up with her, I don't know, three or four years ago. Isn't that wild?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, how strange.

GEORGE CONDO: It's so funny how the world is. But I remember a couple of paintings I did out there. I did a portrait of Miles Davis, and I did a painting of Jimmy Garrison and, it wasn't Coltrane, but it was like Jimmy Garrison and Elvin Jones.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, Elvin Jones?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: So, they were like black and white—yeah, black and white, sort of semi-realistic Expressionistic-type of paintings—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —and one of the kids that was out there working with Jean-Michel's assistant was Tim Kelly, and his father was Gene Kelly—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No!

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. And so, we would go over to Gene's, and Gene would be sitting around like, you know, he had a liquor cabinet that was literally like a block long.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, my God.

GEORGE CONDO: Okay? He would be literally sitting there like, you know, drinking, like, an entire bottle of vodka in, like, a day. And then next thing you do, I remember he was with Tony Curtis' ex-wife. She would pull up in this silver and black Rolls-Royce and he would say, "Okay. I'm going upstairs." And he would come downstairs with a black tuxedo, all slicked back, and looked like Gene Kelly. But before that, he would just be in shorts and t-shirt hanging out with us. So, he bought the Elvin Jones, Jimmy Garrison painting—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really? Nice.

GEORGE CONDO: —and he got one from Jean-Michel, he got one from me. He was a really cool guy, and his son, Tim, came out to—when I moved to Paris, I eventually saw Tim. So many of these funny little stories, you know, that I can remember.

But going back to the mean-spiritedness with Jean-Michel. He would get himself a suit like we did. He goes out and grabs himself a suit, and then they wouldn't let him into restaurants and say, "No, we don't want people like you in here." And it was basically just because he was black. They wouldn't let him in. And he would sit there. And I remember me and Basquiat just saying like, "That was pretty disgusting," you know. And then, you know, they won't let you into the restaurant. And I remember saying to the guy, "This is Jean-Michel Basquiat. He's one of the most incredible artists in the world. How can you not let him in?" They said, "We don't let people like that in here." And I was like—there was still so much racism that he lived through, you know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: There was a lot of that. It was very crushing. And I remember we ended up at like Tail of the Pup's, hanging outside and having like a hot dog [laughs]—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Tail of the Pup. I remember that.

GEORGE CONDO: —you know, sitting out on a picnic table, like [laughs]—him, very depressing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, also in '83, I think you go to Paris for the first time? Is that right?

GEORGE CONDO: So, yeah. So, everything happens in like these really short periods of time. Like a flash. After that, I said to Basquiat, "What do I do about the show at Ulrike Kantor's?" He said, "Don't even go. Just get in the car and sit out in front and look at the people going in and out." And I thought, "I have to go. It's my first show." You know, I've never had one. So it's like the freaky fright treatment going in and everybody in a gallery looking at your work. It was difficult. And I said, "Alright. That's it. I'm getting out of here. Let's go to New York." I brought most of the stuff back to New York, but she was still out there, the girlfriend. So, I got all the stuff out of her place. I said, you know, "We're broke up. We're done. I'm leaving."

So then, I got back to New York City, and Mark Dagley had some interesting—actually a little earlier, in ''81, during the time of like me working at Andy's, he had gotten—there was the Brooklyn—there was the Times Square show—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: —and there was the PS1 show.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was he in that?

GEORGE CONDO: Neither one of us were in that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: But then, Jean was in the PS1 show. That was where he made his big debut. But then, we got into the Brooklyn Armory show—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —which was another thing that some guy, Ted—what was his name? I don't remember his name. Ted something. I forgot his last name now. He passed way a while ago. But, and Willoughby Sharp—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, yeah. Willoughby Sharp, yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —him and this other guy. Yeah. Yeah. Willoughby Sharp and this other guy—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow. [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: —Ted, yeah, they curated it. And so, we got into that, and then slowly but surely, I got into these shows in the East Village. You know, little shows here, little show there. And one of the shows was at the Anderson Theater that was—Patrick Fox had it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: You know this place, and that was—at this show, I started to show the oil painting, okay?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

GEORGE CONDO: And—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What made you make that transition?

GEORGE CONDO: Well, I figured in LA it was like everything was splashy and crazy, so you want to show those kinds of things. And when I got back to New York, it was like my town. I felt like, you know, coming from Boston—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did you feel like the audience here was more sophisticated?

GEORGE CONDO: I felt like it was more sophisticated. You know, if they didn't get this, forget it. I don't care. I'm not going to change any more. I'm not going to try to do what I think is right any more. I'm just going to do what I want. And so, Andy Warhol was one of the first guy to buy the works. So, when Warhol walks into the Anderson Theater with Keith Haring, and each one of them buy like three, four pieces each. So, the guy calls me. He goes, "Hey, Andy Warhol just bought four of your paintings, man." And I'm like, "Really?" [Laughs.] I said, "That's insane." And then Keith Haring as well. So, then, yeah—so then I met Keith and then eventually, you know, we became good friends.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: And I was working over at his place a little bit, like in '85, working his studio. I went to Paris in between somehow. I went over there, and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. You were invited to a show in Amsterdam?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. I had a show in Amsterdam at Barbara—I forgot her last name. She had a gallery over there. I went to the show in Amsterdam. I had a show there. I got in the show—she had already bought the work, and the idea was, how will I get the money to go there?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: And, like, on Monday, I unroll this big canvas, and this guy says, "Okay. I'll buy it." It was $1,200. I said, "Alright. That's my ticket to Amsterdam." So, I was on the plane like on Tuesday. And I went to London first. I had never been there before. And then, I went from London over to Amsterdam, and then from Amsterdam, I went down to Cologne by train —

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —because I had met Walter—or Jiří "Georg" Dokoupil—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Dokoupil? Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: — Dokoupil in New York during this period, and he said, "You should come to Cologne. Everything is happening in Cologne. That's the place to be." So I was like, "Great." So, I came to Cologne, and then that's where I met Monika Sprüth and Walter Dahn and all—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it. And Monika Sprüth is a young dealer, and she's—

GEORGE CONDO: —and Monika is still my—yeah, a young dealer, and she was like—and I met Kippenberger and Albert Oehlen and all these guys there. And I lived there for nine months. I just moved in. I didn't even want to go back. I realized that the community there was so much more into, sort of, subverting than whatever you want to call it, just going along with the flow.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: You know, it was all about, like, what's the worst thing you can do as an artist? And that becomes the best thing you could possibly do.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You seem always to have had this, you know, kind of urge—

[END OF TRACK.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —to engage with history—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —you know, which is so much more prevalent, obviously, in European paintings, German paintings certainly.

GEORGE CONDO: Well, they were engaged—they are—funny enough. Let me take a break, though. Let me—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —take a little break.

[Audio break.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. So, we were talking about your—you were going to tell me what Walter Dahn and Dokoupil and what they were trying to—

GEORGE CONDO: Oh, yeah. They were really assaulting this sort of market—the American market for artists like Schnabel, and Salle, and all these guys that were making like a lot of money. And, you know, the whole business about the art world being like this big, you know, splashy world where everybody was making art and selling them for, like, thousands of dollars. I don't know how much the stuff was going for back then, but it was seemingly outrageous at the time. And so, they did a—like Dokoupil and "Documenta," instead of doing like a plate painting, he did a book painting. You know, he put all these books on a thing, and he painted over it and like a lot of the Kippenberger paintings were, like, sort of—he would take some—you know, they felt as if that particular group of artists that were called—what, appropriationationists or new image or whatever?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: But they felt like it all came out of Polke, and that in America, people hadn't really caught on to the fact that these were just Polke paintings being re-made by Americans because they hadn't yet been seen—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What's your opinion—I mean, that sounds fairly plausible to me.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Do you agree with that?

GEORGE CONDO: Well, it is true, you know, that like all the plaid, you know, that was cut out —

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —and put onto the canvasses by either one of those guys, and the sort of displacement of images, all of that, you know. Polke coming from Picabia, and then Polke not having transparent figures—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —sort of like running across different fabrics and, you know, these large splashes of paint on, you know, that sort of alchemistic work that he was doing, that I guess, Schnabel and Salle and probably some of the other artists—well, Schnabel for sure had been to Dusseldorf somewhat before that—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —and seen that art, and came back and sort of, you know, embodied some of that in there like—although the plates themselves I think were something that was entirely of his own. But it mostly had a kind of German Expressionist edge to what was painted onto to them.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Who was—oh gosh, what's his name? The critic who was sort of the big exponent of the Germans, the American critic?

GEORGE CONDO: Robert Hughes?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No. He later on gets in very—Kuspit.

GEORGE CONDO: Oh, yeah. Kuspit.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Because Kuspit was, you know, sort of promoting those people at the same time as—

GEORGE CONDO: Oh, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —I remember hearing him talking around 1980 or so—

GEORGE CONDO: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —in Chicago, and, you know, presenting all these German artists and, you know, then you got the Neoexpressionists in New York.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Then Rainer Fetting and Solomon, all those guys, came to New York in the early '80s. And they weren't Kippenberger and Albert Oehlen and the Mülheimer Freiheit or the School of Hamburg, which is what those guys were more or less. Even though Kippy was from Dusseldorf, he had more or less connected—well, there were the two groups that were active in '83 that I remember that were all sort of situated in this one restaurant called Hammerstein's.

It would be every night. And it was Albert Oehlen, Werner Büttner, Martin Kippenberger—what was the other's guy name? He died. Jerry or something like that. I forgot his name. And —God, sorry. I'm tired. Naschberger, Gerhard Naschberger. And then, the Mülheimer Freiheit guys were like Peter Bömmels, you know, Walter Dahn, Dokoupil, maybe Hans Peter Adamski. And then there was another school that was, funny enough, located in Dusseldorf that was sort of magic realist guys like Milan Kunc—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh. Uh huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —and these guys. And Milan actually was in New York for awhile. He was a roommate. We were roommates in 1981, you know. So, I was in and out of New York. If somebody tried to—if I tried to chart how many times I left New York, it was, you know, Germans came, or I went to LA, came back from LA, then when I went to Europe, it was like impossible to—because I keep trying to think, like, how was—because I did the *Cloudmaker*, the one with my name—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —in gems. I painted that in the Canary Islands.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: So, I was in Cologne with Dokoupil and Dahn, and then Dokoupil was going to the Canary Islands. So, he said, "Why don't you come along?" And Dagley somehow was in town during that time, so Dagley was down there in the Canary Islands, as well. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, you go to the Canary Islands, and then you fall in love with this local girl?

GEORGE CONDO: I fall in love with this local girl—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Maria?

GEORGE CONDO: Maria Nieves Martell, otherwise known as Mabe. And so, then we start a romantic affair and all that and we're together. I painted portraits of her, and I started painting all the jewels and gems and coins, gold coins. And I basically thought I could just paint my way into—I said, "How are you ever going to make money? Well, maybe if you paint it."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] Sort of magic thinking, huh?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Maybe just paint some money. So, I started painting gold coins all over these canvasses, and everybody loved them. They wanted to buy them, you know?

[They laugh.]

It was incredible. You know what I mean? It's like, the way things are—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's very funny.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. And then, I just thought that was what started to become part of my process of thinking like, "you make your own reality out of what it is you want to have happen in your world, and your world is inside your mind. And all you have to be able to do is annotate it." You know?

And so—and to go back to this idea of memory. I used to think about like, you know, reading Jack Kerouac and thinking that what people would say about it was he had this steel trap memory where he, you know—there was nothing he couldn't remember. So, that was why he was able to write a book in three days and just start from the first word and end on the last word. And just go through it with very slight revisions, like the Scroll of, you know—*On the Road* or any of the books like *The Subterraneans* was written in three days. And people say, "Oh, you know, he was fueled with amphetamines and blah, blah, blah." And I'm like, "Yeah. But he remembered the name of like 600 Mexican towns that have these extreme long, every single—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Every one is Santa Maria, Maria [laughs]—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, and Texarkana, you know, all these weird—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's amazing.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. And so, like, the idea that he could just do that, I thought, that's how I should paint, you know? I should just start a painting and end a painting, and just have

it all be there in one go.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: And if you start to think, like, you know, you remember from having been to the Prada, you remember from having been to the Louvre or from having been to the Met or Pasadena—whatever you remember, you just paint what you remember. And then, you know, you paint it the way you remember it to look. And you just alter the subject matter for it to not be just simply some guy painting, like, in the style of who knows what.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: And then, it started to become interesting because you could only remember like an ear from an El Greco. But you could remember like a face from a Poussin, and then you could only remember like the landscape of a Picasso and then remember, like, an object from a, you know, like *Sampson and Delilah* or something. I just started painting all the things I could remember [laughs] without any necessary order.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. So, you know, as I said, I didn't want to get totally consumed by biography. I mean, 1985, you sort of make Paris your home base. Is that right?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. I go there after being in Cologne in '83, come back to New York somewhere in between, and then I think I got a one-man show with Monika. And then somebody in Paris offered to do an exhibition or to show some works, Nancy Gillespie. So, Monika and I, we take the train. We go up to Paris, and I had read through all the Proust books and read lots of French literature and loved it and Selene and, you know, Sartre and all the existentialists and everything.

And I always wanted to go to Paris, but I thought, you know, you need to have some reason. So, we went on account of the show. And, you know, the first place I stayed, I remember, was like the Hotel De Creole. And I stayed one night, and it was too expensive because it was just—to be there for a day or two, you know, thinking I'll stay in this place. But it was just way too fancy. So, I walked around the corner, and I found this other hotel, the Hôtel Lotti, and I stayed there for like eight months in Paris, and then decided that I should get a studio here. I really liked it. I didn't understand a word anyone was saying, and it was just white noise around me. And I could just concentrate on, you know, getting to the art store, getting canvas. Everybody would come. Jean-Michel, Keith, all my American friends were back and forth. We all ended up lodging in the same hotels. So, you never really felt too lonely.

And then, I had the girlfriend, who—she had a job. The Canary Island girl, Mabe, she had a job working for a Nobel Prize winner. She was actually a biologist. And so, he was doing this sort of T-cell receptors, and she was working in his lab up in the Pantheon, and so we lived together in Paris. And then, you know, at a certain point, I was still showing with Barbara Gladstone. I was showing with Gladstone, and I had my big show in '84 of the *Cloudmaker*. All the paintings I had done in the Canary Islands, I brought to New York. And I showed those primarily at Barbara's. And that was a really great experience, a sell-out show. I kept that one painting. I remember Pincus-Witten wanted to buy it, and I wouldn't sell it to him. And that was pretty rough. I remember him specifically saying to me at that point, "No painting. No review." And I said—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No shit.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. And I was just like, "I don't care. You know, the painting is $1,200. What the hell, you know? I'm keeping one." Barbara was great because she was like, "You should keep one painting from every show. That's what artists do." And since they had all basically sold out, Eli Broad got one—or three actually. So, I kept that one against the wish of Mr. Pincus-Witten. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's an interesting comment on Pincus-Witten.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And then in '85—

GEORGE CONDO: There was a power back then that those guys had, you know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah. He did, for sure. In '85 you have this immense show in Zurich, right?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Then Bruno—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Bischofberger—

GEORGE CONDO: —came to my studio. Bischofberger came, and I had a studio now for real in New York. I hadd come back, and I got a place on 10th Street between First and A. Bruno came over, and I had one name painting that he wanted to buy, but it had already sold. And then he wanted to buy anything he could buy. And then he said he would like to give me a show.

And so, again, I went back [laughs] to Jean-Michel. And I said, "What do you think about Bruno Bischofberger? Should I do a show with him? I mean, I don't want to, like, step on anybody's turf here." And Jean gave me a great answer. He was like, "He knows a lot about art." I said, "Okay." [Laughs.] That means it's okay [laughs], you know. And so, we did the big show with Bruno, and so that's what happened. I went back to Paris, and I got this place on Rue de Condé, and I did all the painting. Every painting that I did, I said to Bruno, "I don't want to edit. I don't want to say, 'Oh, this is my best painting. Let's just pick the six good ones or let's try to knock it down to the 25 things.' Let's just show every single painting I've made in the last, say, nine months since we agreed to do this show, and every single drawing that I've done and not have any editorial process whatsoever."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It must have been a huge gallery.

GEORGE CONDO: It was definitely a huge gallery, and we showed, I think, 350 paintings and about 700 drawings.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: And it was great.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What did you hang it salon style, just like—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. It was totally salon style, and that's what Rugoff came back to for the New Museum show. It was like, "What about we re-create something like what—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

GEORGE CONDO: —you did at Bischofberger that year?"

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. Okay. Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: But, funny enough, I remember in the installation, they were on the floor and Jean Tinguely was there, and he was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really.

GEORGE CONDO: —and Tinguely was with me—were kind of like arranging them, and Bruno, me, and Jean Tinguely putting them in like, "I think the little ones would look—you know, you can't put them up too high," and this, that, and the other thing. That kind of stuff.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Cool. Okay. So, you know, and then just to put an ending to this, you know, your relationship with Maria Martel ends in like 1987—

GEORGE CONDO: That ends in like '87, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But you also meet the woman you end up marrying. How do you pronounce her last name? Achdian?

GEORGE CONDO: Achdian.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Achdian, A-C-H-D-I-A-N. And get married in 1989. You have two daughters, and I think we did talk about that. Eleonore is born in 1990?

GEORGE CONDO: 1990.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And Raphaelle in 1994?

GEORGE CONDO: Five, 1995.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Five. Okay, good. '95. And then in the mid-90s, you moved back to New York and really put down roots this time.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Yeah. What happened is was by, you know, 1990, both Jean-Michel—all—Andy Warhol, Mapplethorpe, Basquiat, Keith, they all died with AIDS or overdoses, and New York was so dark. And all that was left was like this sort of graying, you know, older generation that were just sort of jealous of the younger generation. And new movements were coming out like, you know—that were actually really cool like Jeff Koons and this sort of neo-geo guys that were shown at, like, Sonnabend and everything. So, there was a new life in that direction, but a totally dead zone in the direction of where I had come from in the '80s.

Like, punk was long gone. I mean, all that music, all that stuff was over, like, ages ago. It was all like the grind in New York. All my best friends had died, and then the relationship had broken up with—it was a dark last year or so in Paris. And then, you know, I met Anna and she was an actress and just sort of working somehow in and out of films. But we went to New York, and we went over to visit Julian, out in Montauk, and come back to New York. We stayed a little bit, and then we went back to Paris. And I realized like, well, that was nice, you know. I have another relationship going, and then, you know, the show in '89 at Waddington's which Keith came to, now that I think of it. And Anna came to that, and then it was kind of a raucous situation. I don't know if it's worth taping, but it was turbulent, the relationship at all times.

And so, but somehow, I thought maybe to end the turbulence it would be like we should get married or something. It might calm things down. So, that's what happened. We got married. And then, you know, it just remained [laughs] turbulent.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] Remained turbulent. Funny how things don't change. You can't change people.

GEORGE CONDO: They don't, but the girls were like a great gift to the whole—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How did that change your—if it changed at all, did that change your work, your outlook?

GEORGE CONDO: Well, it changed my loneliness and sadness of losing all my best friends to, like, now having kids that became my best new friends, even if they were like an infant, you know? And dealing with, like—I had a lot of friends in Paris. And by the time I got this place in 1990—or '89 I guess I got this place—Boulevard de la Tour-Maubourg, it was a big apartment.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: I had been living in the Bristol Hotel when I met Anna, and I had studios on Ile Saint-Louis and in the Marais. Keith was working at the one on Ile Saint-Louis, and I was using the one in the Marais. It was just a dump, you know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: It was like in total disarray where friends of mine would come and just crash there, and I would stay at a hotel—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —moved out, and I was mostly working on small paintings in the hotel.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: And now, by then, you know, Bruno and Leslie Waddington broke up the situation somehow with Gladstone. They didn't like the idea of, like—they wanted, you know, I was in the Whitney Biennial in ''87.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: And at that point, Bruno, Waddington, and Arne Glimcher all decide they would love to represent me as a strong trio of real serious art dealers, that serious collectors and serious writers were writing about me, and that I would get out of all this, like, craziness and all these artists are just like dropping dead, and you should sort of—you know, my parents were sort of urging me in a way to, like, get more conservative and get married and like get in some real—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] "When are you going to settle down?"

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, exactly. [Laughs.] "When are you going to settle down and grow up or something?" And so, I was like, "Never!" But ultimately all that pressure was all happening at the same time, so, you know, I ended up at Pace Gallery, now in New York, and then being in Paris and starting—Eleonore being born in '90, by '95 we were like looking at schools and —

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Sure.

GEORGE CONDO: —all that business, and none of them seemed any good. And I kept having to fly back and forth to New York for things. And finally, we just said, "We're now in New York a lot. We should maybe be looking for a place here and start setting up the kids for school, you know—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Sure.

GEORGE CONDO: —Eleonore for school." And then, we were there and we rented a house in Concord, Massachusetts, I remember, for a while, just to be near where my parents lived. And just for the hell of it, because Anna loved it, and it was really pretty. And she was pregnant with Raffi, we decided, you know what? We went back to Paris. Raphaelle was born in Paris, and I think we only lasted like another six or eight months. I think she might have been less than a year old when we moved to New York. And then, we found the townhouse on 78th Street and moved in.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: And we were there until the demise.

[They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I am truly sorry to hear about that. That's not a great thing. You know, I would like to shift gears a little bit. You know, it struck me in reading through some of this how—I think it's unprecedented and really unusual at least, for an artist to function as their own style designator, but—

[They laugh.]

GEORGE CONDO: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —you've been in an unusual way articulate in sort of talking about, you know, how you think about your work in style terms. You know, you called the *Cloudmaker* a simulated found object—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —for example. And then, in the mid-80s, you talked about expanding canvases—

GEORGE CONDO: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —which I took to mean a compositional—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —approach. Have you felt a need to, in some sense, I don't know, control the dialogue about—I mean, have you been frustrated to some extent by how you've written about? I'm just throwing out ideas here.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. I felt like, you know, Rosenblum, Robert Rosenblum said, "What do

you call this stuff? Is it Neo—" I remember they were calling stuff Neo-surrealism at one time, and I thought about it, and I said, "You know what I'm going to call it? Artificial Realism."" Because it's about the realistic representation of what is artificial in the world and what is artificial in—it's a different take on representation and reality and on artificiality and all of that.

And I realized that artificial realism became like a much bigger thing that just a concept that involves me. It is our world today. I mean, Fake News is Artificial Realism. Everything—Jeff Koons is Artificial Realism. I was thinking like Pop art is Artificial Realism. It's the realistic representation of billboards, and, you know, and it's not a term that—you know, Kuspit himself when he wrote about me, you know, I was talking about that. It's not a term that people that didn't come up with them themselves can really swallow that easily.

Like, for example, you know, if it's a writer who comes up with a term, it seems like it catches on and becomes a real thing. If it's an artist, like if an artist came up with the term Cubism, they wouldn't go for it—or Surrealism. It has to come from Andre Breton or whoever came up with the idea of Cubism. [Bell rings.] That's the bell, but I don't know that anyone is here.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There might not be anyone here.

GEORGE CONDO: I didn't see anyone. Did you?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No. Do you want take a break?

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Let me get—

[Audio break.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. So, that's interesting that Bob Rosenblum would be trying to get a handle on what you're doing.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. And so, once that happened, and I started thinking like, Marinetti was Futurist sort of manifesto, and the sort of Artificial Realist manifesto, and I thought an artist should potentially, you know, create—like I thought Kerouac coined the phrase "Beat literature." And I thought you know, I've got to coin some phrases that sort of explain more or less, but like there's a lot of subdivisions in there. Like, "expanding canvases" are something that are, like, to describe a certain kind of work, you know? But Artificial Realism is a real overall concept that embodies, like, the world we live in today.

And when you think about it, it's really interesting because the whole concept of, like, the, let's just say, you know, function of something as opposed to the—like, if you talk about artificial in terms of behavior, you know, the way someone is behaving very sort of artificial, that's one thing. And then, there's also the function of something that, like a plastic cup, is meant to function realistically in the same manner as, say, like a glass. And so, it's more related to function than it is to behavior.

And so, the things that function in the world that are artificial as real things is basically a sort of observation on my part about, you know, what is, in fact, man-made. And that is one of the definitions of artificial is man-made. And it's sort of a horrible thought, but on the other hand, it's totally realistic. And in reality, on the other hand, the definition is that which somehow exists, you know, around us independent of our perception. So, you know—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —if you think of that which exists, you know, around us independent of our perception being made up of primarily artificial things [laughs], rockets, space stations, train stations, you know, police sirens—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: —you know, there are all these—they're real, but they're not. You know, they're like—it's just something—and then this whole new thing of like cyber-warfare and robotics and trolls and bots and fake news and, you know, politics the way that they play out in today's world like, "I said this, but I didn't say that." You know, it's just gotten so bizarre, and the whole thing that even, you know, the idea of, like, tracing all sort of logic back to

something like the Constitution in politics is sort of like living by the Bible in everyday life—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: —it's just sort of almost—like, not everybody believes in the Constitution apparently.

[They laugh.]

There's a lot of different religions, you know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And the fantasy that there could be an original understanding would be definitive is like the idea that God created the world in five days. You know, I mean—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, exactly. Like, it's supposed to say like, you know, you know like you ignore any other form of, you know, government. I mean, Democrito, this Greek philosopher, you know, where democracy is coming out of his concept, you know what I mean? Basically —and, you know, Plato writes a book called *The Republic* of Plato. If you think about it Democritus writes—he's the founder and father of democracy, and a strange, odd way it's two Greek philosophies that we're still dealing with: democracy and republic. *The Republic* of Plato [laughs].

And, you know, it's like—it's so potentially antiquated that I'm not sure if it's going to—you know, like you watch the news, and that's what all these—just going right to today, you know. Like forget about the '80s and the '90s. Like, 2017 is a real boiling pot, you know, of hyper—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But you were—

GEORGE CONDO: —reality.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But it's interesting, you were also talking earlier about how if you could just sort of imagine it in your head, it could become a reality. You know—

GEORGE CONDO: And I think that's what people like Trump thinks he can do. That's what he does. That's what the government today. They imagine something that works for them, and that's just the way it is for everybody else. But it's not art.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. No, it's about power—

GEORGE CONDO: That's the problem. It actually affects—it's like I said to—I was in Washington giving a lecture, and I said, "All these things are fine in art, but," I said, "you know, like I could take the ear from an El Greco and put it together with a leg from, you know, Poussin; but if I was a surgeon [laughs], and I decided to put somebody's brain where their stomach is and their ear where their elbow is, it's just not going to happen. You're not going to come out with a very nice—you know, a good experiment there."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

GEORGE CONDO: And if you do that with politics, I guess what you're doing is affecting people's lives to such a grave extent. And right now, we're on the threshold of a total sort of deconstructed government.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Let's follow-up that idea of the ear on the elbow a little bit [laughs] because you were talking earlier about, you know, in terms of styles—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah, like subdivisions under artificial—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —you know, creating a dialectic or a conversation or however you would want to talk about it between, you know, disparate styles—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. Well, okay, so that's what I meant when I was saying like "expanding canvases" or "psychological Cubism" or, you know, other such titles or thoughts of ways of describing, you know, the subject of a painting. In terms of saying giving the writers or the critics or somebody some way to grasp it, so that they don't just sit around and, you know, write about things from a perspective of, like, where does it fit with, you know, some other contemporary artist who's showing at another gallery that's the same

generation.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Right.

GEORGE CONDO: Because I don't think that that really works in my case because, a) I started so early, and I think that all the earliest thoughts that I had as an artist still are relevant to what I'm doing today.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: And that was what *The Way I Think* was all about in Washington. And, like, in that book, the drawings of dinosaurs that were done on my grandfather's stationery, and they all say, like—we should grab it. Maybe we can get Shelly to get it for us, but in any case, they all say, like—there's a red brontosaurus and then above it is this, like, "Not authentic color."

[They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's wonderful.

GEORGE CONDO: It was like a very important note there, you know? Like from being seven years old, I just want to make sure you understand this is not the authentic color. So, they were always like fake something or another. So, everything was about "not authentic." You know, like it couldn't—authenticity couldn't be verified, and that, I think, is one of the heights of philosophy is to get to the essence of being has always been, like, a kind of a, I think, parallel sort of—what do you want to call it? A parallel goal for a good artist is to get to the essence of being. And if that is able to be done through whatever means, that's what you have to do as an artist.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But there's a paradox in there somewhere. If the essence is artificial—

GEORGE CONDO: Well, that is the potential problem or issue or solution, and one or the other. In one of those three, is that the essence is artificial in our world today of the reality. You know? And hence, the Artificial Realism once again—because the essence of our being, you know, ourselves and the self as a, let's just say, as a source of perception looking outward, is real. And so, from a very realistic and truthful and sort of, you know, let's just say, honest representation of your thoughts and your thinking, that's why I think memory and the way the mind interprets reality is more interesting. And in that sense, it's like a dream can be, you know, let's just say, like—is your mind at work.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And you were mentioning when we were talking during a break earlier about, you know, this limb from Velasquez and that one from Tiepolo, and so on. I mean, when you think of memory, are you thinking of your memory of encounters with, you know, actual works that—

GEORGE CONDO: I'm thinking of how do you—what language in painting you use to describe the memory of just somebody riding by on a bicycle screaming on their cellphone, and that expression on their face reminding me of something from one of those black Goya paintings.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

GEORGE CONDO: You know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: The distortion and the sort of madness in—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, you'll see something in your contemporary world that will, like—

GEORGE CONDO: Spark a—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —spark a connection with—

GEORGE CONDO: —a need to find the way to, you know, materialize that thing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it. Got it. Okay. Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: You know? Like, you'll use this—your encyclopedia, you know, you need a library in your brain, basically.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: You open up books to find definitions or passages or phrases or art books are all lined up in the back of your brain. And you sort of open up one and the Fragonard, and it's like, "Oh, that's a really—probably a good way to sort of work with flowers, you know, in this particular painting because they seem so artificial." Like, if you look at the works of the Frick all those paintings have that sort of affected, you know, prettiness that are beautifully rendered. So, just to say, the grotesque and the beautiful, if they're rendered in a beautiful way, and we go back now to the line in the very first opening parts of this discussion. It's all about somehow comparative sort of analysis of the quality of a line, rather than what the line depicts.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it. Got it. I heard a wonderful lecture once that Leo Steinburg—he was talking about that early Picasso self-portrait that's got the—you know, it's got, like—the cheekbone is just indicated by this line.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And for his students in Pennsylvania, he had just removed the line and said, "Okay. You know, what's different here? What does that line—and his point was the line existed independently of the painting, so to speak.

GEORGE CONDO: Right. [Laughs.] Yeah. Yeah. Interesting.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You know? It wasn't—it was a semantic—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —thing, and that strikes me as being related to what you're talking about. That you spent—

GEORGE CONDO: You could have brought it in from something that he thought, "Oh, I've seen that line in, you know, like a sort of a *Christ* of Titian or something," you know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

GEORGE CONDO: I've seen that cheekbone. I want that in my portrait, so I'm just going to bring it in to this picture.

There's an interesting—in 1901, I think, both Edward Hopper and Picasso, I think, each one of them without knowing each other or anything about each other probably, did pencil drawings. They were basically born around the same time, those two guys. And it's funny to watch Hopper and Picasso running parallel—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What an interesting comparison.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. But there's a self-portrait of Hopper, and he's probably the same age as the drawing of the self-portrait of Picasso.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh huh [affirmative].

GEORGE CONDO: And if you see the Hopper, you're like, "Wow, that's really well done for a 19-year-old." And you see the Picasso, and you think, "Wow, that's really done for a 19-year-old, but why is the Picasso so much more informed anatomically?" It seems to be like the bones and the, you know, Picasso really did understand what was behind the skin. And, like, you can see the difference in the anatomical structure and the way—and I think Picasso was able to really fully understand that at an early age.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And you spent considerable time sort of trying to paint your way into—behind the canvas so to speak with Picasso, I think.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. I thought, he's been always been like a real incredibly great influence in terms of just thinking how he paints whatever he likes with whatever—like, if it was Cézanne's *Bathers* led to—you know, I mean, take what he did with—I mean, in my

opinion, the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* is to take Cézanne's *Bathers* and stick African masks on their faces. And then, talk about the African masks. It's like what—I've always thought this. I've thought, an African mask—if you go to a museum and you look at one, it tells you, "Oh, yeah. That looks just like a Picasso." You know? You know what I mean? It looks like I can see Picasso in this. I can see Brach. You know, you can see all of that stuff in it, and you understand a lot about Picasso when you start to see more and more of them and people got to understand, "Oh, well, that's one region of Africa—there's another region."

But you look at a Picasso, it doesn't tell you anything about the meaning of an African mask. It has absolutely no information whatsoever about what's the spiritual content, what was the use of that mask, all it was used for was—sort of appropriated like a sticker, to—you know, like a way of, like, creating, you know, a kind of again a dialectic of languages, you know that kind of harmonic resolution to two completely dissonant sort of forms of art within themselves to create one fusion. It was kind of a fusion. And so, I thought like that was a beautiful thing about what he did.

Then he would go on to, you know, the *Dejeuner sur l'herbe*. Take, like, a Manet and dismantle it—he did it with *Los Meninas*. He did it with Cranach. He did it with, you know, David's *Rape of the Sabines*. And throughout his career—he did with Rembrandt—he was always about the art that he was really interested in, that he wanted to understand the nature of, that he would transform it. He couldn't let it go. And it wasn't about, "Oh, well you know, everyone's going to think it looks like a Cranach." That's the point. But it's not one, unless they were literally, like, some of the Cranach prints and things that he did, like, that were sort of studies that were distorted—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

GEORGE CONDO: —and made to look like they were done in the style of Picasso.

But by the time he would have to do a big one like the *Guernica*, that would be 100 percent his own painting, it would come from something like the *Rape of the Sabine Women* of David. You know? He would have studied something like that his way into—even if he studied that late or whatever. It's like those studies or those, like, Bacchanals of Titian or whatever. Those kind of paintings led him into these expansive compositions with lots of fragmented figures. Because if you just walk through a museum and look at everything quickly, it's just like, you know, flying all around you. Until you get to say, Velazquez where everything is grounded because there's like four colors, you know? And I think Picasso also learned that, you know, that the less color is sometimes the better. Many times you think there's a lot of color in Picasso, but quite often, they're very monochromatic.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Right. Right.

GEORGE CONDO: So, it's structural and it's—the anatomical structure of things is very important is what I learned from him too. It's like if you're going to make something, invent something. It has to be believable on a level of the sort of anatomy of that thing, regardless of whether that thing is real or not.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh. Oh.

GEORGE CONDO: It's anatomy has to be intact. [Laughs.] You know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, that's very interesting. So, if you have a distorted figure—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —it still has to be able to stand on its own terms.

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. It has to be believable to a certain extent. It's like you're painting a sculpture almost.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh.

GEORGE CONDO: And you're painting like the volumes and the masses and the sort of forms and that those things are, have their own, you know, their real presence. And they could, in fact, exist outside of the painting—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, at a certain point, you begin making sculpture. And is this an

extension of this realization that there's like this structural underpinning to—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. And also the idea of this—the thing about the simulated found object idea is that, like, the idea of, you know, working with found objects is already been, you know, Duchamp did it. But then, in terms of sort of Artificial Realism, I started thinking about, you know, these fake old masters are a sort of simulated found object. They look like, you know, they've already been there. But they couldn't possible have been because they've got your name on it so how could that have been there for like 200 years?

And then, I realized that—you know, I mean, I write about this in the treatise on Artificial Realism that—and at one point, I had the, I was talking—I was listening to that song "I Am the Walrus" by the Beatles, and there's a part where, you know, it goes on like it has all those lyrics and everything, and then it switches off. It sounds like somebody took a radio switch and switches it off and then there's this music that [demonstrates]. And so, like it just happened to be on the radio and then it switches to sitting in an English garden and all that.

And so, I remember I met Ringo in the south of France, and I said to him, "You know, I was always curious about that little section in 'I Am the Walrus.'" I said, "Was that like something, like, just some found music that was plugged all of a sudden?" He said, "No. Actually, John composed that to sound like he had just found it." [Laughs.] And I thought that was really cool.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Interesting. Well, this—you know, I feel we could probably go on all afternoon—

GEORGE CONDO: Yeah. I can't.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —about Tiepolo and Caravaggio and Velazquez and so on and so forth. How are you doing?

GEORGE CONDO: I got to go, because I got to get up to the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

GEORGE CONDO: —thing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Well, we got a solid—

[END OF INTERVIEW.]