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Oral history interview with Phyllis Kind, 2007
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Phyllis Kind on March 27, 2008. The interview took place in Kind's home in New York City, and was conducted by James McElhinney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hello? Testing, testing, testing.

[Audio Break.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think we're rolling. This is James McElhinney interviewing Phyllis Kind at—your home? Your gallery?

PHYLLIS KIND: My home.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Your home, at—

PHYLLIS KIND: Would you like to remember the address?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I'm trying to—440 West 22nd Street, in New York—

PHYLLIS KIND: That's it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —on the 28th of March for the Archives of American Arts Smithsonian Institution, disc number one. Well, we appear to be in business as far as the interview goes. So where and—where were you born? You don't have to say when.

PHYLLIS KIND: I was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1933, at Beth Israel Hospital.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hour? Do you know when?

PHYLLIS KIND: At 8 a.m. in the morning on the 1st of April which, as you know, is some sort of special day, which I thought was invented for myself, thank you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh good. [Laughs.]

PHYLLIS KIND: I've done several parties when—Ship of Fools, most notably, and I must take various groups of people or persons to dinner on my birthday, because I don't like surprises, and you can guess why. Buckets of water on my head—even my parents. I remember my mother strung the Cheerios together one morning. [00:02:01]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh!

PHYLLIS KIND: My kids, I have four kids, and there was no end to the joys that that birthday brought them [laughs]. So anyway, that's that story.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where did you live in Brooklyn?

PHYLLIS KIND: Well, I lived—my father was a dentist on Central Park—on Prospect Park West. And we lived in Flatbush. In 1941, he joined the army, much to the dismay of my mother, who was a cardiac invalid. In fact, she spent nine months in bed, I never—she never tired of telling me, to birth me—I was a cesarean, and all that, there. But when my father joined the army, we had to leave Brooklyn, because it turns out my mother was not going to disown him. And being an only child, I guess I went along. So we went down to the horrible, horrible, and hideous St. Petersburg, Florida which, at that time, was very anti-Semitic. And I had to go there from a ghetto in Brooklyn. And I had no friends for three years. It really affected my life, between the age of uh—actually, nine and twelve; eight and a half to nine and twelve, I had no friends at all, which is kind of odd. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Not at all, any contact with—

PHYLLIS KIND: I got right into it, didn't I, see?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Were there any sort of friendly, older, elderly neighbors or anything, or kindly people, or—

PHYLLIS KIND: Well, my neighbors were either in the half-century or three-quarter-century club, moved very slowly. But the persons my age moved just as slowly. [00:04:02] And they played silly games. They used to play these clapping games, like, [sings] "My mama told me" very, very slowly. I used to play, "Don't go to Macy's any more, more, more, this big, fat policeman at the door, door, door"—you know? But anyway, the biggest thing that happened was that my career as a pianist was interrupted. I thought I was some sort of child prodigy on the piano. I don't know if I was or wasn't. But to punish my father, I refused to touch the piano for the three and a half years I was there, even though they got a grand piano in every rental. So when I came back to New York, it was just too late for me to do anything. And it was very traumatic. Besides, I came back at the second half of the eighth grade, which at that time was the termination of elementary school. And going into a school where everybody knew everybody was horrible. So putting all those things together and anticipating the next question [laughs] I, at my parents' request—or insistence—took this test for the Bronx High School of Science. By the time we got back, we came back from Florida, we lived in the Bronx, so it didn't seem so ridiculous. And since it was—that was the first year that they let girls into that school. And the ratio, for that reason, was something like one female to 10 boys—I would love that idea. [00:06:01] And I don't know why, but I got in. So that's what happened to my life. And it was great. It was really great. I was amply boy-crazy, and paid attention to—it turns out that that school, which was founded by a man named Morris Meister, who even convinced the department of education and the city of New York, to hire ex-patriots from Germany. Um, Morris Meister saw to it that it was extremely rigorous, that there was no one in that school teaching that didn't have at least two PhDs. I had one female in the four years I was in school, and five years of physical science in the four years, and four years of mathematics, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. The people I—one of my classmates won the Nobel Prize in physics, in fact. I didn't know what I was doing there, but needless to say, since there was no advanced placement in college at the time [laughs], I was repeating everything when I went into college. And that was an enormous boost for my ego. So I couldn't not continue in that field.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where did you go to college?

PHYLLIS KIND: I went to the University of Pennsylvania. I got a master—I got a bachelor's of science, and then I was on the way to a PhD. [00:07:51] Actually, I did all of the coursework for the PhD in physical chemistry, left in the middle of the night because the guy I was working with—slash—for was a nasty sadist, and I took all my data and left, because he had done all kinds of publishing using my data. I didn't like him very much. Then by that time I had decided to go to music school—can you turn that off for a minute?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I can try.

PHYLLIS KIND: Never mind, it's all right. I just wanted to remark on a blue jay. Is that a blue jay on the fence?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, it could be.

PHYLLIS KIND: Wow. They're nasty creatures.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yep. They are.

PHYLLIS KIND: I don't want them in this yard. What shall I do?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I knew—there's a chap in England who used to catch all the magpies and kill them in order to keep the songbirds around.

PHYLLIS KIND: Oh! Did he?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

PHYLLIS KIND: I knew a—oh, she-he's gone. He. He, a bird with that plumage. Do you know what we had here this morning? We had a cardinal—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

PHYLLIS KIND: —who looked just like a pigeon with red spray paint; it was the fattest cardinal [laughs] I'd ever seen in my life. The guy that works for me was calling it a "McCardinal"—excuse me, because I know what your name is—but he was meaning McDonald's, I believe.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, I see, that he was—

PHYLLIS KIND: Gorging.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —super-sized. Eating a lot of fries.

PHYLLIS KIND: [Laughs.] Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, that's funny.

PHYLLIS KIND: Oh dear, well, that was a run-on sentence, wasn't it?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's okay. It's just—

PHYLLIS KIND: So I came back to New York to study composition. I decided I really wasn't meant—just because I got an A in p-chem, and it was the first time a woman ever did. [00:10:03] You know what I mean? All these pre-med students would come to me and say, "Which number do you put on top when it says this and that?" And I'd go, "Holy smokes, read it!" You know? Like, I understood calculus, I knew differential equations. Quantum mechanics I did when I was a junior in high school. [Laughs.] So I got to feel like I was a brain, and that was pretty devastating. Anyway, I left the field to come back to New York. This was at the University of Pennsylvania, where I had all these accolades and three fellowships, and an Army Ordinance Grant, and my own lab. And then I came back to New York to go to Mannes College of Music and study composition. So that was—I mean, that really didn't work out too well, because I couldn't play the piano. When I first came back from Florida, I would try to play a little Beethoven Sonatas, or Bach Cantata—Cantinos, or whatever they were, for babes. And I would crack up. I literally would scratch my face until it bled. I was a mess. I couldn't believe it, because I would play much more serious things before I left, you know? My piano teacher's name was Shirley, and I naturally pretended that I couldn't study without Shirley. In retrospect, she was probably, you know, 18 and going to school herself. [00:12:00] Not really a genius, I would think.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So when you were younger, when you were a child, or in school, was there, apart from the music and the calculus and everything else, was there an interest in art?

PHYLLIS KIND: No. No, I was never particularly aware of any kind of visual acumen, or an interest in art. But I did marry an art historian. That was my downfall, entirely. [Laughs.] Marriage itself. Mm.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And that was—were you still in school? Or was that after you got out of school and while you were here?

PHYLLIS KIND: Well, when I left Penn, when I left Penn, part of the reason was that the guy I was interested in was going up to Columbia and um—to get his PhD in art history. And I supported him. I got a job teaching, first at a nursery school in Manhattan, and then with the department of education as a substitute teacher, so that I could put him through his graduate program at Columbia. But I was going to Mannes in the afternoons and evenings and mornings, and all that. Yes. And then, he was offered a job at Northwestern University after we were married. We were married in '56, and um—[sighs] I was earning something like \$3,700, I think. [00:14:03] And Northwestern University offered this man I was married to \$5,000. Five thousand dollars, for which we left New York to go to the bleak tundras of the Middle West. And when we drove westwards in 1959, I was eight and a half months' pregnant [laughs]. And there I was in Evanston, Illinois.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHYLLIS KIND: One gas station and a drug store, I think. It's a dry place. Evanston is a dry place. But they had great, great faculty parties. And he was teaching in the humanities department, which meant that I got to hob-knob with all the people in the music department and literature. "Litature. Litature." So that was—and I was an academic wife.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How long did that last?

PHYLLIS KIND: Hmm. Well, I started doing things like substitute teaching, and I discovered that the older the kids were, the more interested I was. I had been teaching third grade in New York. So I—like I said, I had to go back and get an advanced degree, but I didn't want to do it in chemistry. And I decided to try literature. So um, I went to the English department at the University of Chicago. That's where he was teaching, after Northwestern. [00:16:00] He was three years at Northwestern, where I had my sons, and then he went to the University of Chicago. And, well, they suggested I had to take nine deficiency courses, they called it, undergraduate, because I hadn't taken any literature at all in my undergraduate days. And luckily, it was half-course, because he was on the faculty. So I did it. But in fact, I took a—I took graduate courses, because a friend of mine in the English department teaching there, a colleague of my husband's, had suggested I might as well take the graduate courses for the same credits. And then the dean discovered that I was doing that and insisted that I take an undergraduate course in 19th century poetry after I had gotten an A in 19th century poetry in the graduate course. Proving that it was essentially about money, I think.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is more and more evident these days in higher education. But when did you get—when—now your husband was an art historian. Do you want to share his name?

PHYLLIS KIND: His name is—his name was and is Joshua Kind. And he teaches at University of Illinois, in DeKalb, Illinois, even now, as far as I know. [00:18:02] I mean, I haven't spoken to him in 26 years, or something like that, or more. Um—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And what was your maiden name?

PHYLLIS KIND: My maiden name was Cobin, C-O-B-I-N.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I just asked because it's the kind of data, historically, that some people might find interesting. It's very useful.

PHYLLIS KIND: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how did you—

PHYLLIS KIND: It was—the name was Kind when I got my master's in English from the University of Chicago. It was Cobin at the University of Pennsylvania.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, so if anybody was interested in doing the diligence on your academic performance, they would not find you under Kind at Penn, so—

PHYLLIS KIND: Is that what you call due diligence, James?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well that's what a lawyer would call it, I suppose [laughs]. But I know enough on my—my wife's an art historian, and I'm sometimes astonished at the kinds of things that she explores, in order to complete the picture.

PHYLLIS KIND: The particular kinds of diligence that she exercises. By the way, congratulations.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thank you.

PHYLLIS KIND: Is that your first? Marriage?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Third [laughs].

PHYLLIS KIND: Third. Imagine. A roué in my very midst.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, dear. Well, the first was a—well, we're not here to talk about me. We'll talk about you.

PHYLLIS KIND: A fluke, no doubt. Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But anyway, finally I've got it right, so.

PHYLLIS KIND: That's all that matters.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's right. So you're in Chicago. [00:20:00] And this is in the '50s, the late '50s, early '60s, in Chicago. What was your awareness of the art scene in Chicago?

PHYLLIS KIND: Well, my ex did reviews for *ARTnews* and for the newspapers in Chicago. And he had one really bad mark against him, inasmuch as he was a good teacher in those days, which is very bad if you're at the University of Chicago, you know. And he was extremely critical. And he was—he was more or less sort of like a Talmudic scholar, in that he could tell you where every book was in the library. He knew which things were happening musically, when things were happening in the visual arts, or in the literary arts. But he never read a book from cover to cover. He always was snipping and sniping around. He used to do things at the Chicago Art Fair, like stick a knife in and turn it a little bit, and then go to the next—he was negative, negative, negative. But—and the gallery was his idea. And I said, "What? Me run a store?" Well, there's a little thread that's missing in this marinated tale. See, when I was doing this master's at the University of Chicago, I was very conscientious, which does happen to people sometimes when they go back to school after being out for a while. [00:22:01] Besides which, my husband could get me any book I was working on, because he was on the faculty. So I would stay up until three and four in the morning. In fact, sometimes I got permission to do one—I remember a choice of paper that took me all semester, it was very, very complicated—and that I substituted for three other papers. Anyway, so I got all A's, and the people at the University of Chicago were agog and aghast because they're so self-impressed, you know, "Oh my God, she got A's from us?" And the head of the department asked if I would continue for a PhD. So since I had had two offers from both master's paper—you had to do two—one was on

Tristram Shandy; it was on the body [ph] in *Tristram*. It was a fabulous paper. The other one was on prosody, where I was trying to use notation to talk about poetry, musical notation. One was with Elder—that was with Elder Olson. But I loved the idea of doing *Tristram* into a PhD. And I was all excited; I went to see the head of the department about this. And he said, "Well"—I was at that moment pregnant with my fourth child. When my fourth child was born, my first child was five and a half, which gives you an idea of how busy I was those days. And the head of the department Glenn Cole [ph] looked at me and he said, "I'm not worried about that, Mrs. Kind. [00:24:01] I know you have three at home. We can promise you a full fellowship. How much of a stipend do you need?" This is called, "queen for a day," right? And I went home and figured it out and called back and told him. "No problem." A month later he called me in. We're talking now 1965. A month later he called me back, and he said, "I don't know quite how to say this, but we've had a lot of applications from young men from Harvard, and uh—unfortunately, we simply can't hold up our end of the commitment, and we cannot—of course we'd love to have you in the department. But we cannot offer you any money at all. No fellowship, no stipend." And I have to say, James, if that was 10 years later, I probably would have taken them to the Supreme Court and been teaching English at Oberlin, even as we speak, because it was definitely because they found out that my ex-husband was not getting tenure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Ah.

PHYLLIS KIND: I didn't know that at the time. I was just horrified. I was really thrown. Because needless to say, I had gotten mm—tickled pink at that whole idea. And I couldn't afford to do it, you know, it turns out that I couldn't afford to pay for it. Well, I didn't even know that he wasn't going to be the University of Chicago. [00:26:00] But it turned out within six weeks, I did know that I wouldn't be getting half, even half off the course. And it was, like, \$350 a credit. I wonder what it is now. [Laughs.] Nine thousand dollars a credit—whatever it was, I couldn't do it. So that was that. Big disappointment. After that, there was just nothing. I didn't take a job teaching. I could have gotten a teaching job with my master's, but that would take me away from the kids too much, I thought. And I couldn't see doing that. And I got very active in politics, trying to keep the high school integrated. And um—I don't know, I was just not doing anything.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So at this point, were you still in Evanston? Was that—

PHYLLIS KIND: Oh, no, no. We moved to Chicago in '62, when he started teaching at the University of Chicago.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you live in Hyde Park, in that area?

PHYLLIS KIND: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay.

PHYLLIS KIND: We lived in Hyde Park.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's nice there.

PHYLLIS KIND: And then he went to—that was three years at the University of Chicago, three years at Northwestern, and then he went to Illinois Institute of Technology for three years. And we stayed in Hyde Park. And then we moved to Oak Park, because he took this job at Northern Illinois, which was in DeKalb. And I didn't want to leave Hyde Park, because I was very involved, as I say, in integration and politics, and fighting that African American battle. [00:28:07] It turns out that my kids had had a really hard time of it in that beautiful integrated neighborhood, which wasn't so beautiful, and wasn't so integrated. And the boys were just going into fifth and seventh grade, respectively, and it was just a hell. I mean, they would have to get off their bicycles if some kids came up. We didn't have any nasty white kids in the neighborhood at all, or lower-income white kids in the neighborhood, deprived white kids in the neighborhood, which really turns out to be a negative message for kids. I knew a lot of kids of extremely radical, very, very involved parents who had no clue [phone rings]. Because I didn't find out these things until after we moved to Oak Park, and they were so thrilled to be able to ride their bikes. They had been walking through raindrops—around raindrops for many years, and I didn't even know. Interesting. So anyway, one day, this man I was married to came home and said, "Guess what? There's a space available in such-and-such a building, above so-and-so. Wouldn't it be fun to—" and I thought he was absolutely crazy. That was just crazy. Unheard of. I would never consider such a thing. And then we checked with some people in the field of art dealing, and they were all very excited, because [00:29:52] Joshua Kind knew a great deal about early—his PhD—which I wrote, by the way, while I was doing my own papers—was on iconography, Latin [inaudible] starting in Brussels in 1510 as a fiery landscape, and then getting more pornographic as it goes south. It's interesting, actually. I always accused him of doing it, because he was a dirty old man. Everybody did. Everybody did their own types of pornography on that subject, the Latin [inaudible.] Interesting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You think about, like, George Segal had one.

PHYLLIS KIND: Rembrandt had one.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Rembrandt had one.

PHYLLIS KIND: He would go to Washington and look through all these [inaudible.] They were—but then he got into the biblical exegesis. It was very complicated, because in the Hebrew tradition, after all, it was their family. And [inaudible] comes right out of Abraham. But the Christian exegeses had to do something with that, too. It was Christ's family. So it all got very complicated. Anyway, there was an art dealer in Chicago named Marjorie Kovler who thought Josh was the most wonderful creature on earth. And we shared with her our plan. And she had this idea that wouldn't it be fun if she paid for the space. And she took us around this unbeliev—she's very, very rich—unbelievably elegant spot where Josh would have all the books he wanted, and a library with ladders, rolling ladders, and twisting staircases, and all that. [00:32:10] And um—she was all excited. She came over to our house in Hyde Park, and, "Let's do it! Let's do it. And listen, you talk to your lawyer and I'll talk to mine, and we'll do it. I mean, there has to be a way." And she never returned any calls. I mean, looking back, it seems ridiculous, with her—all the things that she owned, the [de] Vion the Picasso, the Miró—because I was just going into prints. In fact, the gallery was called Prographica Arte, A-R-T-E, Prographica Arte, and it was prints and drawings. Period. And my first show was Goya, 1967.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hmm. Which of the Goyas were you showing? The Disasters? The Caprichos?

PHYLLIS KIND: Caprichos. Because Joshua was fascinated with auctions in Europe. He loved prints, first of all. And actually, when I opened this gallery, I had a stone, an etching plate, a lithography, engraving stone, a lithography stone, and would cut examples so I could show people how prints were made. And then etching was like a sculpture that was sitting up on the page to the same extent that the acid bit into the copper—I mean, I was really into it. And he had bought a fifth edition, complete Caprichos, a hundred etchings, sometime in the past for nothing, hardly. [00:34:02] And I had a show of them, in which I charged \$100 each. It was a fortune. And they were really beautiful, because actually Goya used so much [laughs] aquatint in some of those etchings that some of them were too black to see. And with the fifth edition, they were really beautiful. So—but of course, I said this is ridiculous, who could start a gallery? We had absolutely no money. And I was sharing this information with a fellow parent, one of my kids' kindergarten—nursery school friends' parents who said, "Oh, money? This is such a great idea. Your husband knows everything, and you have such a great personality. Why, it would just be fabulous. How much money do you need for such a thing?" So we were flabbergasted. And we contrived this idea: okay, if we had \$5,000 to start with, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, da, da, da. And then, that was when Marjorie Kovler came in and said, "Don't do that. That's so silly. Why don't you come up to my place?" I mean, the mind is so much more elegant. So we let the place go. And then it turned out that she never answered our call, and that sort of got me mad. I mean, it just infuriated me. So I called the guy and said, "We want that place after all." And he said, "I'm sorry, it's taken." And I said, "If you ever get anything like that, let me know." And he did [laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where was that?

PHYLLIS KIND: It was in a building—do you know Chicago? [00:36:03]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHYLLIS KIND: Oh, it was 155 East Ontario, which was one block east of Michigan on Ontario Street, above Bud Holland, B. C. Holland. That was *the thing*. And I was on the third floor. And it cost \$85 a month. And we had to have it co-signed.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hmm.

PHYLLIS KIND: And one person gave us \$2,000, and three people gave us \$1,000 each. And the deal was that they could have anything they wanted at my cost. Dong! I mean, stupid? So, the very first thing that happened was that, I remember so well, the one that gave \$2,000 immediately grabbed this Rembrandt that I had gotten—or Josh had gotten. It was a fantastic piece. But of course we didn't make any money on it, and then I realized we needed more money immediately, and they realized that they could demand a lot more. And so we got out of it. And then we were stuck, and there was no turning back. I mean, I owed everybody money. I had borrowed from this one and that one. Josh kept saying, "Well, if it causes you such anguish, why don't you just close the gallery, for God's sake?" You see, his whole idea about art is, or was—is still I think, similar to some museums, is, like, if the hat's in the ring, you have an obligation. And I didn't feel that way at all. [00:38:00] I started falling in love with things.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]?

PHYLLIS KIND: And in fact, I knew the Hairy Who as a group, because Joshua had reviewed them in '66. We opened our gallery in '67, and that was the second Hairy Who show. And I knew there was something odd about

them, something really—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You mean other than the name?

PHYLLIS KIND: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] Well, it's interesting because Chicago has, in its history, people like Ivan Albright, who is very eccentric, you know, as sort of being local genius, you know. And then Jim Dutton is always—

PHYLLIS KIND: And who was noticed, despite his eccentricity. Maybe even to some extent because. But it just—partly it was the faculty at the Art Institute of Chicago that gave these guys permission to do something personal, do something they wanted to do. Now they never were a group, like some people think they were. And that there are groups that existed—the Blue Runner—I mean, we could name a million groups. But they agreed to show together, because they respected each other's work. But the work was very different. Of course it was more different from the prevailing mood in New York than it was different from each other. But if one looked at the artist individually, one could see easily that totally different one from the other.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you see any link between what they were doing in Chicago and, like, art brut and other things in Europe that were tied in some way to outsider aesthetics?

PHYLLIS KIND: Absolutely not. Not at the beginning. [00:40:00] These guys were very interested in that kind of material, as well as being interested in Sepik River, Japanese wood cuts—I mean, there's a guy at the Art Institute named Whitney—there was—Whitney Halstead, who made them go to the Field Museum of Natural History to look for sources. And um—he was the one that discovered Joseph Yoakum. When he put Joseph Yoakum in for me to look at, it was 1968. I didn't see much in it at all. You see, the Chicago Imagists, quote-unquote, were actually each of them chosen by me. And there were many more people in Chicago who were doing work that I didn't choose. I mean, it wasn't like a bouquet—under a tree, or one that had chosen itself, in a way. Four of them had been members of the Hairy Who, but there were 10 artists altogether. So, it all came about in a gradual way. Um—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who were the ones you picked?

PHYLLIS KIND: Well, there's Jim Nutt—and what happened was, at the very beginning, I guess Jim went to Sacramento in '68, and his wife, Gladys Nilsson, who was also one of those artists—and in 1969, when they came back to visit, there I was with this gallery called Prographica Arte. [00:42:00] And he and Gladys came in on their visit to Chicago in '69, and asked if I would like to do one show. Not that they wanted me to represent them, either one of them, but they would consider doing one show. Now in those—not quite two years, I must have done something right, because there's nobody more critical than Jim Nutt. So I agreed, and then it was Gladys Nilsson who had the show first, in '69. And then it was agreed that Jim would have a show in '70. Well, once they were with my gallery, everybody wanted to be with my gallery. Because he was highly respected by the artisan town. And then it became a question of choosing. It's funny, because Roger Brown, in '70, was just going through a metamorphosis, '70-71, and that's when I really liked his work, and I hadn't liked it before. So I—I was really awe-struck by these guys. And the timing, you see, James, was just perfect. Because it was their work and the phenomenon of its being so individual that really grabbed me, and radically changed me into, well, the person I then became. [00:44:03] You know, I was just writing a piece, which I emailed to a group that's specifically interested in outsiders. And in this piece, I was talking about a show that Harry Szeemann did for Document 5, which was in 1972. And he called it *Individual Mythologies*. I don't know if you know the work of Adolf Wölfli.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHYLLIS KIND: But he was included. Adolf Wölfli was literally in the center of that documenta, which itself was of major significance because it was unlike any other documenta before it, and after, actually. And all of the artists were chosen based on their individuality and based on their really personal vocabulary or form. And as I pointed out recent—just this morning in this letter I was writing, it was a result of that show [laughs], that documenta in 1972, that the Kunst Museum Bern actually took on, the Wölfli's.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hmm.

PHYLLIS KIND: A man actually got up in the senate, on the floor of the senate, whatever they have, the senate in Switzerland—Bern, of course, being the capital, and said, "There was this man in documenta who was Bernese. Where is his work? Why don't we know? Why don't we have it?" And they challenged the Kunst Museum Bern, who went to this mental institution, mind you, 1972—where is this work? [00:46:04] Well, Wölfli died in 1930. It was sitting in the attic for 42 years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Good lord.

PHYLLIS KIND: Paper. And a stack as high as a man's height, or at least Wölfli's height, which he had made into books of music and poetry and collage, and unbelievable drawing. And that was his life's work. But a year later—that was '73—the Adolf Wölfli Foundation was founded. And I became a very close friend of the woman who was running that for 30-some odd years, and analyzing the work and researching it. *Individual Mythologies*. It's an interesting idea.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think so. I think, yeah, at that point in time I was in art school, and I became aware of—

PHYLLIS KIND: Which art school, James?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Tyler. I went to Tyler and Yale.

PHYLLIS KIND: Oh, you did?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. So I was mindful of the connection between Philly and Chicago; there's a gallery there, Janet Fleisher, who exhibited a lot of—there seemed to be a Chicago connection there, somehow. Of course Anne d'Harnoncourt and Joe Rishel and, I guess, the late James Speyer, who stayed in Chicago. But they were—you know, there was a kind of mobility, it seemed, that was sort of ex-Gotham scholars and dealers and collectors, and so forth. [00:48:08] And I was aware of that even art school, even as a sort of punk art student kid, you know, at Tyler. But also, I think there's a popular association of Chicago with outsider art, I think, and—don't know—artists like Albright and the Harry, Who—and the Imagists School and all of that. So how did you evolve from Prographica Arte to Phyllis Kind Gallery?

PHYLLIS KIND: Well—circumstantially. Which is, as I think about it, how so many things occur. Um—[laughs] it's funny, because I will go back to that question. It's a very good question. But what came to my mind right away was the fact that when Jim Nutt went to Sacramento State, one of the first things that happened there was that he saw a work of art like that piece over there, that cowboy, which is Ramírez, and it was about that size and it was wrapped in vinyl in one of those racks in the visual arts department. [00:50:06] Most visual arts departments have those kinds of things, you know—reproductions of Uccello and Botticelli, and whatever.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHYLLIS KIND: And, there was this thing, and it was a real drawing. And he goes, "What's this?" So he traced that and he found that the work was in this garage just sitting there, collecting animals and dirt, and water stains. And when he looked into it further he discovered that the man whose garage it was, was teaching—was doing occupational therapy at a mental institution not far away from Sac State, and was also teaching at Sac State. So he was curious enough to go there. And then he sent me some slides, and then I tried to buy them, and that took about three years. Almost. For us, we bought them together, the whole body of work. There's a show right now at the American Museum of Folk Art, just happened—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I've seen them, yeah.

PHYLLIS KIND: You saw the show?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, yeah, a wonderful show.

PHYLLIS KIND: Isn't it?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Amazing.

PHYLLIS KIND: What is interesting to me, by the way, and it's wonderful to know that you know Ramírez and Wölfli, is that in about the same year, '71, I was at an auction in Bern, Switzerland, which I had gone to to see if I get a German expressionist print for one of my clients. And there was this unbelievably peculiar thing, spectacular thing—wow! It—wrapped in vinyl in one of their racks. [00:51:59] And it was a Wölfli—I'd never seen before, I had no idea what it was. I looked it up to see what the estimate was, and I decided to bid on it. Well, of course it went higher than I could afford at the time. I found it 10 years later, or maybe 15, in the Des Moines Art Center. I don't know if you knew Jim Demetrian, he was at the Des Moines. But he had bought it from Alice Adam, who worked for Frumkin Gallery in Chicago. And she was the one that bought it at that auction! He was actually in charge of the [inaudible] as he was pulled in to be director as an interim director, only about two years ago. And a friend of mine called up and told me the story of Jim Demetrian standing in front of her Wölfli and remembering the one that he had bought for that museum, and that I had recognized when I walked in. It was amazing. But just think, it was about the same year. That's how tenuous—how teeny, tiny these connections are, especially in this field.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This was in the '70s, this happened?

PHYLLIS KIND: Seventy-one.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Seventy-one.

PHYLLIS KIND: And then after I saw that Wölfli, I decided to find Wölfli. Well, it wasn't that hard. And then I went and met Elka Spoerri at one of the art fairs in Basel. And we became close friends, and I kept looking at Wölfli until I could possibly get a Wölfli. And I've done Wölfli shows here. But after deciding that these Chicago artists would never be respected by New Yorkers unless there was someone in New York definitely supporting them. [00:54:09] What I tried to do was introduce them by way of New York dealers, so—I remember Joe Cornbley [ph] showed Miyoko Ito—there were several shows that I arranged here. But they didn't really do too well. And it turns out that I couldn't really trust the dealers. How would I know whether they—well, they were treating them like orphans, like secondary citizens—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHYLLIS KIND: —they were not expensive enough for them to care about. And how could they—how could I tell if they were really doing a job? That was number one. Financially, I couldn't stick in Chicago with just those people, because I started them out at \$600, or \$500, or something like that. So I started showing things from New York. And I had moved from the third floor of that same building above Bud Holland. I sublet the space from Bud Holland, not knowing that that building was going to be torn down. He didn't tell me. And I paid him money for the wallpaper, actually, and the tables and chairs, and the lights. And he knew all along that within six months I would get this notice saying that the building was to be destroyed and turned into a parking lot. So I had to move. And that was really devastating. I mean, that was \$30,000 just to move across the street. Anyway, the whole thing became much bigger than I had [laughs] thought it would be. And trying to get shows from New York, I was representing Leo Castelli. [00:56:03] I did a lot with all of the people, you know Castelli shows.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHYLLIS KIND: In fact, there's no dealer in New York that I didn't deal with directly. Arne Glimcher is a close friend; I did three Samaras shows, I did three shows of Alex Katz, oddly enough. But Samaras wasn't with Arne at the time. He was with Fischbach. And so was Alex Katz. And uh—oh, I could go down the list of all the people that I showed. What I did was, I put one New York show in between every pair of—you know, it would alternate between New York shows—or sometimes something from China, sometimes something from Europe, but mostly it was New York. And I just kept trying my best to make a commission. Sometimes I'd work on 25 percent, sometimes 30. It was very tough. And it was very—even tougher because we were going into the hideous phase of outrageously expensive graphics. Remember when I started with Prographica in '67 and did these Goyas for \$100. I also thought I could buy the large Picassos from Paris and sell them fast enough to pay for them. No. What I was doing was building up debt. Specifically, when the gallery was Prographica Arte for quite a while—in fact, Harry Boris [ph] who was a radio person in Chicago, very well-liked and looked into and at, once did a whole program—"Phyllis Kind, well, what's this Prographic?"—because I had started showing paintings the minute I bought Bud Holland's space, which was kind enough to sublet to me. [00:58:21] And I had this big space. Why not show paintings? I mean, first of all, the graphic thing, I discovered after about three or four months that I could consign work from living artists. So it wasn't a question anymore of only buying things and trying to sell them in time to pay for them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. You didn't have to pay for inventory.

PHYLLIS KIND: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Someone who sells shoes has to pay the bank every month for the shoes they're buying.

PHYLLIS KIND: Yeah. So that was a discovery. And that was how come I had started already when Jim and Gladys came in. I had started already before the end of that first year to show local artists who was showing with people like Fiene—I showed Leon Golub—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHYLLIS KIND: —who I absolutely hated by the end of the show. I mean, the work bored the bajillies out of me—those sphynx—those great, bit sphynxes on the plains being done in that very New York school way, with gesture—but that's beside the point. But I started showing, quote, Seymour Rosofsky, George Cohen—I knew all the artists because of my soon-to-be ex-husband. But remember that when he was writing for *ARTnews*, I was treated like royalty by all the dealers. Franz Schultz who wrote the book, also wrote—he was a student of Joshua Kind's. [01:00:00] And he wrote the book about Chicago Imagists—he thought I was the cat's meow. And I could—I had entre into every single place. So I started, sneakily enough, by being able to make some money by selling the prints of these well-known Chicagoans. And again, coming to New York fairly often to look around for works I could sell for maybe \$3,000 to \$5,000, because I didn't think that I had enough prestige to sell things for much more. Meantime, by showing New York work, I was getting some prestige from my Chicago people. Chicago is—no matter what Chicago says—very, very much has a second city syndrome, been going on. They

think that New York has about as much about what happens in Chicago as Chicago think about what happens in New York. And it's simply not true. As you and I know. And I always knew, but the Chicago people still didn't. There are people out there that still think it's not fair, and they'll stamp their feet. But it's fair, because that's the way *it is*. And God, it's a long way around answering your question, but it was when I went in to see Cordier Ekstrom, because I wanted to do a show in Chicago of one of their artists. And Arne Ekstrom sat at a desk about as big as the couch you're sitting on, and it was slate or marble, or something extremely elegant. I guess I don't have to tell you that my situation was extremely down home. [01:02:06] And he turned out to be a really, really, really nice man, but I was very put off by the elegance of the place. And he said to me, "And what is the name of your gallery, Mrs. Kind?" And in front of Himelhoch [ph], I said, "The Phyllis Kind Gallery." Then I ran home and made stationery.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Good for you! [Laughs.] Great story. So you traveled a lot. You went to a lot of art fairs, and documentas—

PHYLLIS KIND: Yes. I went to every art fair. I was—I had a booth from the very first one in Chicago. But I also went to FIAC in Paris four years in a row, Basel—three. L.A.—two, Seattle—no. L.A.—three, Seattle—two. But this was while I was also going to the one in Chicago annually—oh—quite apart from going around to many cities and looking at art, which I did do. And going to museums and trying to interest people in some of my artists.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Other than New York, where you said that a lot of your artists who showed were not—were not embraced as you felt was appropriate to their stature and achievement as artists, you know, there is a difference in terms of attitudes about craft and imagery. [01:04:00] You were speaking earlier about, you know, the gestural qualities of Leon Golub's work, you know, as opposed to the finely-drawn work of Jim Nutt, say, you know, sort of very clean, well-crafted work, I think. And even Roger Brown, his work always feels like it's well put-together, you know? But um, where else in America did you see—did you find a kind of more—welcoming environment?

PHYLLIS KIND: Well, you see, it's a mistake to think that I rejected the concept of gestural painting and abstract painting. It's just that the things of that sort that came up in Chicago seemed derivative to me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No. Really?

PHYLLIS KIND: And Leon's work, which started in Chicago, had a kind of power to it. But when he moved to New York, he started New York-izing it, I thought.

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

PHYLLIS KIND: Now, I could be wrong about that. I think that there was some work in the Bay Area that interested me. Terry—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Arneson, Hudson, Wiley—

PHYLLIS KIND: —Hudson, Wiley, William T., whose water colors were really very wonderful, I thought—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHYLLIS KIND: —more interesting than anything—I went out to see him at a time when he was really going into sticks and minimalism. And it was so disappointing. [01:06:01] He makes the most wonderful smoked salmon of different types, and he fishes—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh.

PHYLLIS KIND: —off the coast there, very dangerously. And where did I see his work recently? He just came back, full swim into painting again. It was so pleasurable for me. But it's too bad. I was just there at the wrong time. Arneson—although I have to say that I avoided anything breakable—I couldn't deal with clay because I'm such a klutz, but I never would show anybody. But I loved Arneson. And I loved him as a person. I showed Bob Gordy from New Orleans, whose work really relates more to Roger Brown than anybody down there, somehow. Roger loved it, too. A couple of people from the Carolinas—one guy that studied with Jim in Sacramento, and then moved down to—North Salem? Is that what it's called?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Winston-Salem? Old Salem? Yep.

PHYLLIS KIND: Winston-Salem.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who was that?

PHYLLIS KIND: A man named Victor Faccinto whose work has always fascinated me. Someone from Boston who

got New York-ified by Mr. Stux, Doug Anderson. It was wonderful, I thought, just really strong. Got New York-ized, Earl Staley, whose work I went to Texas to see, and thrilled me no end, and got New York-ized. [01:08:01] I show the work of Alison Saar. Robert Colescott—this is his.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHYLLIS KIND: There've been numbers of others. One thing that's very, very strange, James, is—talk about circumstance, and things that happen circumstantially—I try to keep my eyes open all the time. And—because things have come up, like for instance, I was asked in 1985 if I would go to Moscow with a group of people who were trying to convince the union of artists in the Soviet Union to allow unofficial artists to come to the fair in Chicago. I was on the selection committee, and I said, "No way, I can't go to Moscow." And then they talked me into it, and because my grandfather was from Moscow. And they were paying for the whole thing, and it was free, and oh, come on. So when I went, it was just at that time when glasnost was beginning, but hadn't started. We were followed by the KGB. A strange thing happened. There were these artists that were working in an isolated way, talk about individual mythologies. [01:10:04] They were making things such that if they were discovered, they'd be sent to Siberia. And the Russian government at the time associated us completely, completely with the government. We were of the government. We were the government. This is happening now in Cuba, that any American that goes down there is suspected of being part of the Bush team, or something like that. And I didn't even realize how serious it was. But we did manage to rest, a few people, out of Soviet Union, and I did manage to have them in my booth in '86. I did a show called *Direct from Moscow* in my gallery in SoHo in 1986, in which I showed bells of apartments [ph] in the front of the catalog. And all of the people—many of the people that I had in my press list—I had 900 people on my press release list—900. And most of them were just names in print. Suddenly, all these people arrived. Why? The hook was politics at that time. Everybody was interested in perestroika, glasnost—I mean, these paintings sold for \$50,000.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

PHYLLIS KIND: Just like that. One man bought four of them. I mean, it was, like, there I was, and I was in the middle of this maelstrom. I think that Mary Boone, two or three years earlier, it was money that was the hook. And I remember the cover of *New York* magazine with a dollar bill in her face, or something like that. [01:12:06] That was the hook. My artists thought I had abandoned them totally. For Russia—why would I like Russia better than I liked them? You're kidding! I never [laughs] made that decision. The decision was made for me. The New York audience is very fickle, I'm sorry. They jump from one thing to another. They loved to think that they followed through on things, but they're more likely to do it 10 years later when they're told, in fact, that this person and that person is pretty good after all, because it went for this and that amount of money.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's a pirate city, really, basically, I think. It's uh—it's all about commerce. It's an engine of commerce.

PHYLLIS KIND: Did you say piranha?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Pirate.

PHYLLIS KIND: Oh, pirate.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The pirates from Holland came and stole the island from the Indians, including some of my distant ancestors. And you know, they've been pirates ever since.

PHYLLIS KIND: Now, wait, wait—were your ancestors Native Americans? Or were they Hollanders?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, they're Hollanders. Part of the bad guys.

PHYLLIS KIND: I could believe that you had some Native American in your—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's possible.

PHYLLIS KIND: —handsome eye structure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thank you. But I think when the generic information's been swimming around here for close to 400 years, it's not unlikely a little particle somewhere, one never know—

PHYLLIS KIND: I'll bet.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's a nice thought. I appreciate it. But yeah, it's curious, because of course, recently there was this big scandal about the Asher B. Durand painting, *Kindred Spirits*, it was more or less sort of plucked out of the New York Public Library. And before anybody realized it had happened, it was gone off to Arkansas, or somewhere. [01:14:03] And something, the same collector tried to pull the same thing on an Eakins

in Philadelphia. And they're keeping it in Philadelphia, they were able to actually resist the acquisition. I don't know exactly how. I'm sure there must have been some arm-twisting going on. But no, it's interesting that you would say that, because Chicago—I mean, I always saw it as sort of, what do they call it, the—windy, obviously, but broad shoulders, you know—

PHYLLIS KIND: Clean-mean. Or dirty-mean, or—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But New York, yeah, is uh—I mean, so you're saying in your experience it hasn't really stood for the same things in a consistent way all along. It sort of follows trends, and it sort of plays with a direction here, a direction there in art. But you think it's mostly commerce? Or you think it's mostly just whimsy? Or you think it—it's only about—

PHYLLIS KIND: I tell you, James, I think that it's not only New York that plays with trends. I think that there are people in Chicago that do exactly the same thing. And they take their clues from what's happening in New York. It's about keeping up with the Joneses, and it's probably as old as the hills. I mean, this phenomenon itself. But New York has a way of sustaining it, and having many different—what I've discovered after quite a while, many different phenomena superimposed. [01:16:13] What many different phenomena circulating at once. For instance, you could go to an opening at MoMA, and next week go to an opening at the Whitney and the following at the Frick, or at the—and just not see the same people. In Chicago, they're the same people everywhere.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, I see.

PHYLLIS KIND: And the same is true in Philadelphia—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHYLLIS KIND: —and you may recall.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Absolutely.

PHYLLIS KIND: And more so in London, too. I think Damon Runyon [phone rings] said, "Chicago is the greatest American city. New York is an international city." And just so, there are all these things that fling around. But having gone through collections and collectors by name, and then seeing them pop up here and there, I see them social climbing, as it were, going from one position to the next position, and being on committees, of course, because it's all—it all is inspired by collections and collectors. I mean, Leo Castelli had Robert Scull in the States, and Peter Ludwig in Europe, for the most part. For a little while, at least. Then there was Bob Meyer in Chicago. Then, you know, there were big shots that had to be in on the scene, and they could do everything. And believe me, if he hadn't had that support on the part of collectors, he couldn't have done what he did do. [01:18:00]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHYLLIS KIND: Um—it's—the mechanics of it, it's fascinating. But it can make, as well as break artists. It's a cruel—it's a cruel game once you're in it. But I was using it as not such a negative thing as to explicate that I became—what do they call it—[laughs] I keep wanting to say *principessa*, but it's not that [laughs]. The old dowager of outside art—they have this word for me now. "A legend in my own time." But I mean, the first—I was the first to start showing these things in '71, and I always showed them alongside of the other people.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHYLLIS KIND: And it was much later than I realized, that there was certain connections that I was making in my head. And it kind of—it's bigger than I am. It goes back to something I was doing when I was in graduate school, in English literature. There was a school of literary criticism in the '50s. [01:20:00] *Poetic Icon*, which is a book—I can't believe I'm dropping the name of this guy that's so important to my life. But anyway, he posited some fallacies. And one of them was what he called an intentional fallacy, by which he meant that whether an artist ends up by making the poem—it was about poetry—making the work of art that he intended to do originally, is neither necessary, nor sufficient, to assure that this is, indeed, a work of art. So that you couldn't interview a person about, what is it that you planned to do? Oh, that's what the poem does—no. The poem must stand on its own.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHYLLIS KIND: The work *is*. So, I suddenly realized, these people, these people that are in a vacuum that do not think of themselves as artists, that are making the work for some other intention entirely—sometimes it's religious. Sometimes they're proselytizing for Jesus, right?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Howard Finster.

PHYLLIS KIND: Exactly. Minnie Evans was—oh, Yoakum was—oh, that was God's message to the world. They were just the person through whom the message came. They didn't call it "art," they called it "necessity." And they made it because they made it. Well, I think that to some extent, every artist must do that. I'm not saying only outsiders do that, I'm saying that an artist has to listen to what the work tells them. They must start out with something, but they must go in the direction that the work tells them to do. [01:22:02] And then sometimes they go, "Oh, did I do that?" I mean, it's almost like a trance—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHYLLIS KIND: —where sometimes they even have to wait for the muse to enter in. Like the baseball [mimics spitting] player has to spit on his hands, or cross himself before he throws a pitch.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHYLLIS KIND: Oh, he may believe that Christ comes down and helps him pitch, but some of us don't. And even if this artist I'm positing who did go to school forgets what he learned, he has to figure out what it is that's him or her, and not what everything that he knows how to do. I can tell when graduate students come in, that they're doing everything that they know how to do—come on. You have to forget that which is not you, and you have to discover who you are. And once you do, and you let the work come through you—then you're an artist. And that's why Van Gogh has a style, or a vocabulary of form. And you can tell a Van Gogh from a Cezanne or a Picasso. That's why you can tell a Wölfli from a Ramírez.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Makes sense.

PHYLLIS KIND: But here's the difference, James. And this is really important. This is Harald Szeemann. He posited two kinds of obsession: one, primary obsession. Where the person was inside of it and incapable of coming out of it. And only did that which he could do. Like Wölfli, like Ramírez. Second thing he suggested was a secondary obsession like Duchamp. [01:23:58] He actually did a show of somebody named Mueller, who was in the same institution with Wölfli and Duchamp—just those two. Because Duchamp's obsession was secondary; that is, he was in it, but he could come out of it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHYLLIS KIND: And he could play chess somewhere and then go back into it, or wait for it to come back. And I think artists are aware of this almost hypnotic state. I think that that's part and parcel of what the art process is. And this is something that's come to me only through the years, and only through observation of artists, and why I think that these people are so important. At least they're so important for me, because they keep me honest. They keep me honest. They are what they are. They can't be anything else. And they're working out of necessity. Now, my arduous and excitable and excited collecting of these kinds of people—there's a guy over there that you can look at in a minute whose collage—he lives in Osaka, Japan—and there's this place in Osaka where people who with mental disabilities can come in and make things. I did not decide that people with mental disabilities are smarter or wiser, or even better artists. But occasionally—occasionally—it happens. And genius strikes as frequently percentage-wise among schizophrenics than it does in the world at-large.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hmm.

PHYLLIS KIND: I didn't decide that. I didn't find that easy to introduce people because they were in the loony bin. [01:26:00] And that's a common enough misinterpretation these days.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where is that popular construct of madness, you know, the old trope of madness as being the price of genius, that somehow, you know—and it makes for great movie and great story novels.

PHYLLIS KIND: And sometimes it happens.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. Yeah.

PHYLLIS KIND: Let's face it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

PHYLLIS KIND: Sometimes it does. And then sometimes geniuses go mad in front of your eyes. And sometimes that even changes their work. I have a guy who is a brilliant mathematician, his name is Gorbechevski [ph] and he was actually shown by none other than the chap I was talking about earlier, for whom I changed the name of my gallery. He was shown many years ago. He was a mathematician, and he went crazy, loony-loony. And then he started making these wonderful, wonderful things. He was not an artist before he went loony. Interesting. Artaud, who had a show at the MoMA, I think, was damned good artist before he went crazy. I mean, it didn't thrill me, because he was doing portraiture and things that looked like other people could have done them. But

then when he went crazy, he did scribble-scrabble, and so that didn't interest me, either. You know, each person has his own story. And all the stories, now, they ask, "Oh, the more important thing is biography and not the art?" No way. But once you see this incredible art, you are interested in biography, I'm sorry. [01:28:00] And the biography proves the art. It tells you something. Look, Ramírez could never have seen Paul Klee. [Laughs.] He didn't. We know he didn't. And thank you very much—that stupid catalog. I had nicknames for some of the work over the years, you know, between '71 and now is a long time for me to place the work—every single piece in that show was more or less placed by me. There were only a couple that were resold later. And I wasn't asked to speak, I wasn't asked—I'm only a dealer, you know. And also, I'm very threatening to Brooke Davis Anderson. And also, right now they're on this big kick about how he wasn't crazy at all, he was a Mexican immigrant who couldn't speak English. And that's what the plaques tell you. And funny thing, Peter Schjeldahl wrote a marvelous piece about Ramírez in '76, and Roberta Smith wrote the most incredible piece of writing I've ever seen in a catalog in Philadelphia, Moore College of Art, in '85, and they didn't need wall plaques. And they didn't need sociology. Which apparently everybody now at the museum needs sociology to get into the Mexican-ness of the work. No. I'm not interested in the Mexican-ness unless I'm interested in the art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I think the problem is, partly, that, you know, the interpretation overwhelms the work. I saw the show. I just read the pictures, that's all I did. I just looked at the pictures.

PHYLLIS KIND: Well, I didn't mean to involve you or the Smithsonian in this controversy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, this is—

PHYLLIS KIND: But the reason I mention it even parenthetically is that I wanted to make the distinction between my responding to where I'm put vis a vis this work, and my actual doing it, you see? [01:30:17]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHYLLIS KIND: And, if it seems that that's the only thing I'm interested in, it's only because I'm one of the few people that's really interested in it. But not because I've given up on all other art, not because I didn't rush to see the Fra Angelico show, or go to see the Whitney, or anything like that. It's because this needs doing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you know, you just observed that when someone who's making art becomes an artist is when the ideas come through them in an authentic way. It seems to me just because, I mean, I personally was aware of you as a dealer for years, and stopped in your gallery a couple of times in Chicago when I was younger.

PHYLLIS KIND: You did?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. And in SoHo, too. And, you know, would see these exhibitions. Maybe it was because I spent a number of years in a community which had a kind of awareness or an inclusion of outside awareness and aesthetic in Philadelphia; Janet Fleisher, and, you know, other people there who were interested in that. John Holman, you know who was, I guess, her right-hand man for a while.

PHYLLIS KIND: No. Now he's *it*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He's—

PHYLLIS KIND: It's his gallery now.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's his gallery now. Yeah, I had heard that. But and then there was even a local—there were even a lot of artists who were local artists. [01:32:02] Don't need to name names, but I mean, somebody like Sarah McEneaney, who's a younger painter, and who is obviously influenced by that kind of untutored tutorial language, you know? And attracted to the authenticity in it. The thing is, you know, can you not say that as a person who cares about art, who exhibits art, that you, in a way, your being a dealer is not purely a commercial thing? It's not like—you know, it occurs to me just having had this conversation that you came into the art business. A lot of people I've spoken to were always interested in art from the time they were a child, and their—paintings hanging on the walls of the house. You know, learning to draw, having an interest, buying their first Picasso or something at age 18. And it seems like you've come at it without maybe some of the prejudices that those people would have had. You were an academic wife. Husband, art historian, critic—you know. You get a different starting point. But having a look around the room here, you see lots of work on paper, lots of evidence of some kind of a vision driving what's in this room, you know? And I think—I mean, it's a shame that you appear not to—not to have been accorded your due in the Ramírez show at the Folk Art Museum. But I think, you know, in time, historians and scholars—you know. I mean, when you're doing this for 40 years, it means something, I would think. [01:34:06]

PHYLLIS KIND: It's 40 years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. Somebody who's trying to capitalize on a particular event, or the buzz around a particular renewal of attention to a particular artist is, you know, I mean, I don't know, everybody's got their own agenda, I guess. But, you know, for me at least, just to let you know, it doesn't seem like I have any question about it.

PHYLLIS KIND: I'm pleased that you have an awareness of that, and also that you see it, I hope—as being something that it's worth doing, or it needs to be done. It's—it's here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

PHYLLIS KIND: Now in my email—my website, I make a distinction between art brut, which is, I know you know but I have to reiterate, was used—outsider art was used as a translation for art brut. And art brut was something that was organized and used, as a word, by [Jean] Dubuffet. And did you know that Dubuffet was a wine merchant, and that he used the word "brut" when talking about Wölfli. He said, "Oh my God, it's like a brut champagne." And that was the genesis of the word "art brut." Then Roger Cardinal wrote a book in 1972 in England called *Outsider Art*. [01:36:05] And why is that? It's because he's bloody English. And, you know, the English can't use French. I mean, that's verboten. So the English are still talking about things like Don *Ju-wan*. They can't say "Don Juan." They can't say "art brut." You know. An art brut or *brutt* makes no sense at all in English, so he used the word "outsider." It's a bad choice. It's not a good word. But it means art brut to me. And it meant that to Elka Spoerri, who was the head of the Wölfli Foundation for 30 years. So I make a distinction between art brut and what Americans call "folk art." And this is also something that I've been working on for years. I've suddenly realized, wait a minute, because—oh, there's an artist named Carlo whose work I absolutely adore—there's one piece right there, in which he's in his fourth and last phase—he goes through four separate phases. And I was lucky enough to be able to acquire some in 1972, and then more in '73 and more in '74. Ouch. He died in '74—no. It was '92. Phyllis, how awful. Would you please cross that out? I acquired some pieces [laughs] in '92.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Ninety-two.

PHYLLIS KIND: Ninety-two. And I was trying to convince his one remaining relative—he died in '74 in Verona—his one remaining relative that I had already accomplished great things by virtue of the fact that there were four of his pieces in a museum show. [01:38:07] And he said, "Oh, what museum?" And I said, "The Museum of American Folk Art." And he goes, "American? Folk Art?" You know? Well, it was partly as a result of my agitation, and Sam Farber's, that the museum changed its name from the Museum of American Folk Art to the American Museum of Folk Art. Thanks. It should have been changed to American Museum of Folk Art and Art Brut, because they do address, and they do intend to show works of European, under the heading of "contemporary."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I see.

PHYLLIS KIND: Yes. And now the word "Folk Art" is in question, which it shouldn't be. But that's a whole other story, James, and I think we're running out of time.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We are getting to that point where I think we should organize an intermission. Thank you so much for your time. And I'm sure I have to say something here—so this is James McElhinney speaking with Phyllis Kind at almost four o'clock in the afternoon on the 28th of March.

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