Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Linda Nochlin, 2010 Jun. 9-30

This interview is part of the Elizabeth Murray Oral History of Women in the Visual Arts Project, funded by the A G Foundation.

Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Linda Nochlin on 2010 June 9, 24, and 30. The interview took place at Nochlin's home in New York, NY, and was conducted by James McElhinney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Elizabeth Murray Oral History of Women in the Visual Arts Project.

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking to Linda Nochlin at her home 875 West End Avenue in New York, New York on Wednesday, June 9, 2010. Hello.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Hi.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Nice to be here with you and have this conversation. May we begin by speaking about your life?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where are you from?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I'm from Brooklyn, New York. I was born at Long Island College Hospital on January 30, 1931. And I lived at 250 Crown Street in Crown Heights, which was an apartment building built by my grandfather. He had the upstairs apartment and we had an apartment.

And my mother's parents also had an apartment in that building. And many of my cousins lived in nearby apartment buildings. And, you know, it was an all-Jewish neighborhood, mainly secular Jews, but some others, too.

My grandfather, who was my father's father, who owned the building, had made a lot of money in the newspaper delivery business. Weinberg News—is no longer—delivered all the newspapers in Brooklyn, and in those days, that was a lot of newspapers. He was quite left-wing, very progressive, wonderful guy. And I loved that grandmother, too. My extended family was very much part of my own family, you know. I was very close to them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A large, close-knit family.

LINDA NOCHLIN: It wasn't large. [Laughs.] A small, close-knit.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, but you were saying you had cousins in the neighborhood.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, there were—but they were not—you know, the people who—they were close, I guess, but not that close. No, I was talking about grandparents, aunts and uncles.

My mother's family—my grandfather was a doctor. He was an obstetrical-gynecologist and he had his own little lying-in hospital in Brooklyn. And I would go sometimes to look at the newborns. Always fascinating. And he was a true intellectual. He was a member of the Theatre Guild, knew a lot of writers and poets, mainly Yiddish ones, but also he loved Irish literature. He loved *Studs Lonigan.* I mean, he introduced me to Russian literature, American, English, Irish. I mean, he really loved everything Irish, though we were all Jewish.

He was actively antireligious. Both of them were. The other grandfather was a member of the—I think it was called the Tom Paine Society, which was a secularist, antireligious, atheist organization. And I'm proud to say I am also a member of a similar society with a publication. I can't remember the exact name, but I'm a member of it. I got that from as far back as my grandparents, my mother.

All of them were idealists and believers that everything that was good as well as everything that was good was purely human or natural, period. Nobody in our family ever "passed away"—which has evolved, there aren't as many—but they all died. [Laughs.] Alas. So that's something.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what were the origins of that philosophy, that structure of belief?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I think a lot of people—we always talk about people coming over from the old country. In this case, Russia and Poland or whatever, for freedom of religion. But a lot of people came over for freedom from religion. I mean they wanted a new life, socialism, making their own way and they were Modernists. I mean, they wanted to be part of modernity, part of the modern world and this was one way of being it.

They were also humanists, if I could put it that way. And they believed, like many other people, that religion, far from being a source of morality or comfort or so on, was exactly the opposite. That it was a source of oppression, of guilt—especially around the area of sexuality—of the oppression of women, everything they disliked. So I think that's part of it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So prior to coming to America, were they members of a professional class, also?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They were not?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Doctors, or in construction or anything like that?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, but one—my father's mother's family—and this you can also find pictures of and so on in *Self and History*, which was a kind of homage of my 70th birthday, I think. They were brought over—my great-grandparents—in 1880, as part of a utopian project on the part of Baron de Hirsch to settle Jews on the land and prove that they could set up roots.

I mean, Jews were always accused of being, you know, ruthless wanderers, money-changers without loyalties. So he wanted to prove that Jews could work the land. It was a kind of pre-competitor to Zionism. And he set up Jewish farm communities in Alliance, New Jersey and Vineland, New Jersey.

I had friends who came from the same background. So that grandmother was born in this country and grew up on a farm in Vineland, New Jersey. So that was from which various intellectuals, of course, left the farm, came from to—that was one part of it.

And my other grandfather found ample company in New York. In an intellectual, Jewish, non-Jewish world of artists, writers. He sponsored a lot of them. Like Boris Aronson, who became a famous set designer was a friend. And Sholem Asch was a friend. So they established their own communities.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's interesting because I think a lot of people are aware of places like Roosevelt, New Jersey, which is a later—

LINDA NOCHLIN: That was much later.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Much later, but sort of was also imagined as a kind of workers' town or a socialist utopia.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, this was not so much socialist, though the people might have had those ideas. It was more like the—or not even like the kibbutz. So it's individual farms and farmers, as far as I know. There's a book written about it, but—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, that's interesting. I'm curious how the land was acquired and how—

LINDA NOCHLIN: I don't know. It must have been just wild land in New Jersey.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, yeah, the Pine Barrens and, you know, the Vineland area.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, it's near Philadelphia, I think, Vineland and Alliance.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And Alliance. Where is Alliance? Is it also—?

LINDA NOCHLIN: It's right next to Vineland.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So north of Cape May, south of Philly?

LINDA NOCHLIN: You know, I don't even know. [Laughs.] I used to go out there. We had one set of cousins who had a chicken farm.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Interesting. So it seems like perhaps, you know, the values were inculcated in that environment.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, yeah, I think so, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It sort of became a hothouse for, you know, valuing learning and discourse and all that.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So when were you first aware of being in the presence of a work of art?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I can't even go that far back. My grandparents then moved right opposite the Brooklyn Museum—my mother's parents. They lived at 225 Eastern Parkway, which is practically opposite the Brooklyn Museum. And I must have been taken there as a very small girl.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In a pre-ambulatory [ph] state?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, maybe. [Laughs.] Maybe I was ambulatory.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A perambulatory state.

LINDA NOCHLIN: [Laughs.] I'm not sure, but it's—I cannot even remember a time that I wasn't familiar with that museum and the works in it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Were any of the members of your family art collectors, or was there any art at home?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No—yes. There was art at home. I grew up with a Picasso print over my bed of the little girl eating her porridge, I guess? You know, that Blue Period?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh yeah, yeah. The Blue Period.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, and there were reproductions all over the house. In my grandfather's house, however, there were original works by his artist friends, including the teacher of Lee Krasner, who was a sculptor. I don't even remember his name. Daykar [ph], his name was Daykar [ph]. And paintings and so on by his friends, which my daughter has, because she took over my mother's later apartment, et cetera. So I grew up surrounded by art.

Also very important influence: my uncle. My mother's brother was at the Fogg, at the very moment I was growing up. He was younger than she. And he graduated from Harvard, I think in '36. And he majored in art history and I still have his undergraduate thesis, which is on the social history of art. He was very left, and he later had to leave the country under the House committee. He worked at CBS. Within two days, he had to flee, literally.

And he went first to Mexico, where he did *Howdy Doody* in Spanish to make money. And then he went to London with – and worked with ITV for many years and he produced Sir Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation*, so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, can you share his name with us?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes, Robert Heller, H-E-L-L-E-R. So he was very interested in art. When I was a little girl, he would tell me not to make such ridiculous fashion drawings. But, you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: —et cetera, et cetera.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: "Be serious."

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, he was terrific, and he was an enormous influence on me too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So he was a mentor, you would say, in your early years?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, I guess. I never liked that term. He was my uncle. Yeah, but I guess he was. All my family were my mentors. My mother read James Joyce to me aloud when I was eight. I mean, there was no one in the family—but they didn't do it because they thought it was good for me. None of it was ever done to be "good for me" or make me "rise up" or—they all did it because they loved it and they wanted to share it with me and they thought I would enjoy it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So they were sharing their passion for art with you.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, exactly, yeah. It was that virtue. And so I don't associate learning or literature or art with virtue. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Encumbering it with—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —higher values or high-mindedness.

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, none of that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So that would be—

LINDA NOCHLIN: It was taken for granted that it was "the good," not making money or anything.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So within your community, within that area of Crown Heights where a lot of people shared the same roots, were there a lot of people who shared the same values?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Were there people who shared competing values?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Probably. The furthest right anyone I knew was a Roosevelt Democrat. That was as far right—I never knew a Republican, not knowingly, until I went to Vassar. There were no Republicans. There were socialists, communists, left-wing deviationists, et cetera. No Republicans. And I went to the Brooklyn Ethical Culture School, which was pacifist and sang songs like "Hail the Hero Workers" or "These Things Shall be a Loftier Race" and stuff like that. We never sang the National Anthem, we never pledged allegiance, we never flew the flag.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: At Vassar?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No. At the Brooklyn Ethical Culture School.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh at the Brooklyn Ethical—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Which was my elementary school. Vassar was a whole other kettle of fish.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Let's explore your education a little bit. Oh, were there any siblings in your household?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, I was an only child. And I was an only grandchild for eight years. And I was loved, encouraged, and adored. I mean, childhood was Eden. [Laughs.] It was really good.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you enrolled in school at the normal age, at age six?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Age five-and-a-half.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, age five-and-a-half.

LINDA NOCHLIN: And I skipped the third grade, so I graduated high school when I was 16, and I graduated college when I was 20.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What high school did you attend?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Midwood High School.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Midwood.

LINDA NOCHLIN: They had a special program for, you know—for intelligent children, and that's where I went for my high school.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then afterwards enrolled at Vassar?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So during your high school years or earlier, did you ever become interested in artistic practice? Did you study drawing? Did you—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, I did. I took as much art as I could. I drew and painted, you know, mainly independently, but I did it at school. And when I went to Vassar, I took drawing and painting. And I was painting and I was active in the Institute getting more credit for the actual painting and drawing. But I did it all through Vassar.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Were there any teachers who were especially influential or memorable?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, they were memorable. I wouldn't say they were influential, exactly. But Lewis Rubenstein, who taught art at Vassar and taught true fresco. We all made true frescos, which I thought was fascinating. And then Wendell Jones, who introduced us to all the artists in Woodstock. He lived in Woodstock. He was just a wonderful man. Both of them were. And so I got to know Philip Guston when he was still doing social realism. I went to Kuniyoshi's funeral although I never actually met him. I mean I became familiar with some of those people in Woodstock.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And that was when you were in college?

LINDA NOCHLIN: College, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—well, it wouldn't be that far to go across a river from Poughkeepsie—

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, that's the whole point.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Under an hour by car, I would think.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Very much under an hour. But also, in high school, one of the things we did in our crowd was ,of course, go to the Frick Collection, go to the Metropolitan Museum. But above all, go to the Museum of Modern Art. That was a hangout in high school.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Still is a hangout.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, I'm sure it is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: But it was a much smaller, nicer hangout, if I may say so.

[They laugh.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: But I mean we were, you know, familiar with modern art. I mean I never saw anything shocking in the *Demoiselles d'Avignon*. I sort of missed that because it was just part of my—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You're already from—

LINDA NOCHLIN: —visual culture growing up. It was nothing. And *Guernica*, of course, was a kind of holy shrine. My parents were active in raising money for the Spanish Republic and I think the first headline I ever read were about the fall of Madrid. But they were very active in that and my father's best friend was killed in the Girona valley, so, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So did you know anybody who served in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I knew—I must have known this guy, but I don't remember. I was very young.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, I mean—yeah, who you remember.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, but my parents certainly knew people, absolutely. And I knew all the songs and I still can sing to you in Spanish all the Lincoln Brigade songs, and German. I know about 300 folk songs in every language. That was part of my growing up, too, the interest in folk and ancient music. I played the recorder. I sang madrigals. But I learned many songs, both art songs and folk—real folk, not Bob Dylan folk—on my own hook because we were interested in that sort of thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Also American songs?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Sure. And I know all the child ballads. I have all the records right back there from the Library of Congress that I ordered both in high school and college. You know, all the Lomax recordings and everything. Deeply interested, and sang them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That means you could sing a couple versus of "Old Dan Tucker" if you—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, and I can.

[They laugh.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: "Tam Pierce." I still know them to this day. I mean, almost automatically. Including the Spanish

ones, which I didn't understand. I mean, I knew vaguely. I could sing in Basque, Catalan, et cetera. Of course, I love it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who would have known?

LINDA NOCHLIN: What?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That you had this—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, this side? Oh, all my friends know. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Musical ability.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I take piano lessons.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I see.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Even now.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Even now.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I do Bach. I don't practice enough, but—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Very rigorous mathematical—

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, very passionate and beautiful. I love the counterpoint.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Also.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. So I mean I have a lot of—and I write a lot of poetry. At one point, I thought I might be—I took my master's in English with literature at Columbia, in 17th-century literature. That was my master's. And I still, once in a while, write poetry.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, when you were at Vassar, it sounded like you were much more involved with studio artists and art history. No?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, no, not at all. I majored in philosophy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In philosophy. But you were hanging out in Woodstock with—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Hanging out, I mean, I was there once in a while, but—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, okay.

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, I wasn't hanging out. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it seems you met Guston and—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, because the whole class did.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, the whole class.

LINDA NOCHLIN: We also did a tour of all the frescos in the New York area, the whole class. What a fascinating experience! We went up to the Bronx post office. Who did that? Famous artist, it's a famous mural.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Were a lot of these produced during the '30s?

LINDA NOCHLIN: The '30s. Yeah, sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, yeah.

LINDA NOCHLIN: And my teacher had studied with Siqueiros, or maybe it was one of the Mexicans down in Mexico to do the fresco, you know? Political fresco. And he did two big antifascist frescos up at Harvard, where he went, which were covered over. They're in the Busch-Reisinger Museum at Harvard, then covered over. And they were uncovered because Germans contributed a lot of money to the Busch. They were uncovered for his 50th reunion, and left uncovered.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, that's wonderful.

LINDA NOCHLIN: But, where were we up to? I can't remember.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Talking about—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, I majored in philosophy and I minored in ancient Greek and art history. Art history was definitely a minor, and I had absolutely no intention of going on with it, particularly. But for some reason, I was to make some money after I got my master's in English at Columbia, which is why I'm here after I graduated.

I got a call on my headset. I was working for AT&T, selling convertible debentures of the phone. A very, you know, part-time—it was just a one-shot thing, got a lot of money.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And, excuse me, the name of the product again?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Convertible debentures.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Convertible?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Debentures.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Debentures?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I'm at sea. [Laughs.] What's a convertible debenture?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, a convertible debenture means you get a kind of certificate for every share of stock that you own, with which you can either buy more stock at a very much lower rate or you can sell them on the market.

And since AT&T owners often were people who only owned two or three shares—they had been given it as a, you know, graduation gift or something—they didn't know what the hell was happening. You know, they got a thing that said, "You are entitled to"—they had your reaction: what's a convertible debenture? Old ladies in Dubuque were afraid their whole little stockpile was going to be taken away.

Our business was when they wrote into us—and they wrote because that's what they did—we would call them on our headsets and explain what a convertible debenture was and how you could use it. Why did I take such a ridiculous job? Well, first of all, it seemed to pay well. It lasted for six weeks or something.

And I have always hated the telephone. I will avoid the telephone at all costs. And I'm terrible at math. And I thought, "This will be good for both of these aspects."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: And indeed, I turned out to be absolutely wonderful. I was asked to join AT&T. I kind of enjoyed it. I mean, it was hard work. Heat with no air-conditioning, and a lot of overtime. And it did not cure—I still hate the telephone and I'm still [laughs] terrible at math, but I enjoyed the job because I felt no responsibility for it. It was kind of fun.

One day, when I was sitting there with my headset, I got a call from the head of the art history department at Vassar, saying, "Our youngest member has just dropped out to get married. Would you come and teach in the art department next year?" In those days, you could do that.

I said, "Gee [laughs], I never thought about that." I never thought of even going back to Vassar, but I had nothing else much better ahead of me. I was going to be Girl-Friday at *Partisan Review*, which was a no-progress because girls didn't get promoted. I said, "Sure." And that's how I became an art historian. I taught for a year. I found it interesting, and the year after that, I started graduate work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So this would have been 1951, '52? Around there?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So were you commuting to New York to do—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes, I did.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —work on your master's?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I came in for the class. And for most of my graduate study, I was on three-quarter time—waltz

time as Mrs. Clafton called it, at Vassar—and took one or two classes in New York, and commuted.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And how long were you in that program?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Forever, naturally. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right, right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Like, nine years or something.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Waltzing away.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, waltzing away, around nine years. And I also had a kid, so that was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So at what point did you get married?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Soon. I got married after my first year of teaching. I got married at 22.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How did you meet your husband?

LINDA NOCHLIN: He taught at Vassar.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, he taught at Vassar.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. He taught in the philosophy department. He was Philip Nochlin. That's where I got my name. My maiden name is Weinberg. But I started publishing under Nochlin, so I kept the name. And you had to fight, you know, in those days—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I'm tempted to ask you, since you shared that you majored in philosophy and that you returned shortly after leaving school, whether or not you had known him.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. I never knew him, no.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I just met him when I came back to teach.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, he wasn't there when you were a student.

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, no. He came the year I was away.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I see, I see.

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, I hadn't known him.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it was—

LINDA NOCHLIN: —totally chance. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you had a child immediately?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, '54.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: '54. A couple years later. And it took nine years, basically, to complete the master's. What was your thesis?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Courbet.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of course. So this is your well-known book.

LINDA NOCHLIN: More or less.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or it informed your well-known book.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes, yeah, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: On realism.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. No, realism was quite different. You're probably thinking about—Courbet was my

subject, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How did you find Courbet?

LINDA NOCHLIN: How did I find him?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, the first year I was a graduate student, the Institute—I went to the Institute where I teach now. That was where I got my doctorate.

[Side conversation.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: What did you ask me now?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How did you find Courbet?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Ah. When I was first a graduate student, they had summer courses at the Institute, which of course I took since I worked. I took two courses the first summer, one in 19th-century art and the other in 15th-century. Both terrific, but both demanding because they were short.

Anyway, I wrote a paper for the 19th century course called *1848 and the Artist: The Revolution of 1848*. And it was about how every artist responded to the revolution of 1848: Ingres, Delacroix, Millet, Courbet, mainly. And Janson, the H.W. Janson who did the course, who was a wonderful teacher and a wonderful person. I loved him. He said, "You should publish this article." But then he said, "If you don't publish it, think of it in part or in whole as your doctoral dissertation." But he later advised me, "Do a monograph." Much better.

And I was fascinated by Courbet. I mean, nobody had to push me that way. I thought he was fascinating. Not that I always loved the actual work. I like Manning better. But as a persona about what he did, about his combination of art and politics, he was absolutely—he was the perfect choice.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was very left, himself.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Very left, but in a very interesting way. And I've been working on him ever since, on and off. I mean, I just finished a big article on him. I published my book on Courbet with Thames & Hudson, you know, just in time for the big retrospective.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Here at the Brooklyn Museum, that one?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, that was before.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That was before?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, this is recently—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh this—right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: This was in 2008 at the Met and at the d'Orsay I went over to talk in the d'Orsay symposium. I'm close to all the people working on Courbet there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He's an interesting—as a painter, I don't really—I don't know, I might be off the mark, but there are certain elements about his work that are rather northern, and not typically French.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, they are—Dutch.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Dutch, yeah. But also—

LINDA NOCHLIN: He's highly Dutch.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I don't know, I think about some of the people from the Munich School, too, having that kind of—

LINDA NOCHLIN: They studied with him. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They—right. He influenced them, yeah.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Right. But he was very much—he was very active in Germany. He went to Frankfurt and painted in Frankfurt. He had hunting companions. He was a big hunter in Germany. But he had a big impact on

Germany.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But not like the Nazarenes and those people, or like—

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, no, no.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Kalbach [ph] Piloty, but people like Leibl and –

LINDA NOCHLIN: Leibl was his student.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, yeah, right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Insofar as he had students.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: But there's a huge catalogue called *Courbet und Deutschland*. It's an excellent catalogue.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Interesting. Interesting. Also, the idea of the year 18—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, '48.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: '48 as, like, the nexus of change. I mean, here in the US it was, you know, Gadsden Purchase, Seneca Falls.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean, all of these things happening at the same time.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, it was the Irish immigration, too. That was the year of Irish famine.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, Irish famine.

LINDA NOCHLIN: It's really seminal, or as I like to say as a feminist, a germinal year, you know. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Germinal. Well, in American history everybody likes to frame everything in the 19th century around, you know, the Civil War, which is—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Which is a huge—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Huge thing. But culturally, I think it starts really at the Mexican—the end of the Mexican War.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Mm-hmm [affirmative], exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it's very interesting. I went to Ornans once.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, isn't that wonderful? Unbeatable.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And went up to see the, you know, the source of the of the Loue, the grotto and hiked down into to that gorge. It was boiling hot up top and then just this cool—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, all of us in the symposium, in 2008, were invited by the town of Ornans to visit and we had an elegant procession. We had our own railroad car—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, wonderful.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —and busses and we drank the vin de pays, and since I'm the doyenne of Courbet studies, I had to sit with the mayor. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Arbois, as I recall. They served a lot of Arbois.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, they did. But they also served venison and the most delicious food and drink you could imagine.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. It's a wonderful, wonderful place.

LINDA NOCHLIN: It was terrific. Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So is it safe to say that Courbet was sort of the person who pulled you into the history of art as a direction?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I mean, I was already in it. I had started out because I got my master's degree in 17th-century English. I had started out being a Baroque, 17th century. But I just knew I didn't want to study religious stuff. I mean, I just didn't. I wanted my—I have always wanted my study to be where my political convictions and my aesthetic convictions are, and 19th-century France was it.

I mean, I knew the literature. I later took my orals partly in French literature. I could read French. France was the country of revolution and liberty and openness and—you know, everything I liked was French. It wasn't—you know, it wasn't the same scene, whoever it was. [Laughs.] And I—you know, as much as I loved Caravaggio and all those artists, I just couldn't separate myself from what I did.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But Courbet was, himself, very much of an individual, and sort of didn't really fit—

LINDA NOCHLIN: That's what I liked. You couldn't ism-ize [ph] him. Yes, realism, but, you know, that's after the fact. No, that's what was so interesting about him.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, he was full of surprises, not like people like Jules Breton or whatever. You know?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Not at all.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Haystacks and peasants.

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, no. And his whole concept of the land and peasants is so interesting and so rich and so ambiguous and multilayered. I mean, he is just a fascinating—always has been.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you received a master's about 1960?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, the master's I got in one year.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, in one year? I see.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, at Columbia.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, but then you –

LINDA NOCHLIN: I had a master's when I started teaching, but not in art history.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I understand. Okay, I was unclear about that.

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, no. I got it in, you know –

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And so it was the doctorate that occupied a lot more time?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, the master's I did a master's essay on Richard Crashaw and Baroque imagery, you know, using some of my ancient Greek in that, too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what was home life like? You're working—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Busy [laughs], to put it mildly. I also played in a recorder concert, which had rehearsals, and we played at official functions. We did all sorts of things.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Your husband was also musical?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, no, no. But you know, I cooked and cleaned and took care of the kid and my husband was not in the best of health. He was an asthmatic. He was a terrific and wonderful and interesting person. We really learned a lot from each other and he was very interested in art, and he painted. He had studied with Raphael Soyer and he was a real—he painted and sculpted and he taught aesthetics. I mean, we had a lot in common, especially friends. We had friends over almost every night for dinner. Really interesting friends.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who was at that point in time in your social circle?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Who? Gosh, well, namely—very much so an artist named Alton Pickens who taught up there. He was part of our close, very close group.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: At Vassar?

LINDA NOCHLIN: At Vassar. A man called Leon Katz, who was probably the world's greatest authority on Gertrude Stein and also put on a production of *The Mother of Us All*. Right, you know? *The Mother of Us All*, a great sort of pageant-play about the great suffragette, I can't remember, who revived a lot of Ibsen and produced—I mean, he was just one of the most brilliant people I have ever known. We saw him almost every night. We all had dinner together. Who else?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's interesting to note that, because New York can be a hard place for people to meet at home. People tend to meet in—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, well, this was up in Poughkeepsie.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, I understand. But I think that—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, we went out to dinner too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, that sort of academic environment, too, where there's a lot of collegiately and—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, with some people. A lot of people were dull clods.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: Everyone was sort of left-bohemian. I mean, that was what everyone—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, were there a lot of people in the college whose opinions and whose politics ran strongly counter to yours? Was there a—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, the students.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, the students were extremely conservative, you would say?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Most of them. But with a good nucleus of very radical ones too. For instance, you know, there were groups who were very much supporters of Wallace and so on.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So was that due to the influence of their parents being—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Probably, but Vassar had an old radical tradition, you know. And unlike Wellesley or Smith or some of the more "fuddy duddy" women's colleges, Vassar had had, and I think still has, teachers who were, you know, radicals. Like, people who started summer school for the garment-trade workers. We did that. People who taught contemporary press in a very analytic way. My darling [Josephine] Jo Gleason who was a psychology professor, who was very left.

And above all, our friend Lloyd Barenblatt who went to prison under the—whatever Amendment that was, Fifth Amendment?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The House Un-American Activities?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Second Amendment, yeah. He went to prison for six months because he had belonged to the John Reed Society at the University of Michigan. And he was the best man at our wedding. So, you know, there was—we were very active politically, but we did a lot of it in New York. We would drive in for rallies and meetings and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, how did you avoid—

LINDA NOCHLIN: They never came to Vassar.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, it was because it was assumed to be a sort of bastion of privilege—

LINDA NOCHLIN: They didn't get there yet. They didn't get there yet. I think we were on the list. We even had a meeting about it for the faculty when I was first there. And I was fearless. I'm not a fearful person. I mean, I'm very timid about making a phone call or something, but—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: —you know, certain things—I said, "You know, if they come I'm just not going to answer. That's it, whatever." They never came.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What was the environment there like, I mean, for teaching? Was it very—I mean, how—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Excellent. What do you mean?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I mean, to compare perhaps with now where's a lot more, sort of, clerical work encumbering people in higher education with outcomes, assessments, and reports on reports, and evaluations, and evaluating evaluations, and—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Nothing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Nothing? Just teaching? Just pure pedagogy?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, what kind of methods were you using as a teacher?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I gave some lectures in the lecture class. Everybody taught the sections. We had no—and still don't, I don't think—any TAs or assistance. The full professors are teaching sections. That's what a good education is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you saw everything?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. You did everything.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Dealt with every student? Yeah.

LINDA NOCHLIN: At first I was utterly terrified. I was the same age as some of my students. What authority did I have? Now, they had to call me "Miss," but [laughs] they were my friends that we kidded around the dormitory with. And in those days, rank—you know, being a professor was different from being a student, even if you were a young professor.

And we used to torture the young professors when we were students, so they—form of amusement, torture. Anyone who looked down at you, especially any man, young man professor.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What was at that time the ratio between men and women—

LINDA NOCHLIN: —teachers?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Teaching, yeah?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I think there were still more women. So I was very used to the idea of having women professors, very much so. But this horrible structure—I think it was my senior year—came in, called the Mellon Committee, to evaluate psychologically, sociologically. And they decided Vassar was a homosexual matriarchy—which, indeed, to some extent it was—that encouraged women to be overachievers instead of baking brownies in the kitchen. It was just the most nefarious. It had some famous psychologists in circles as—it was part of the times. It was right after the Second World War, or close to it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: And they were absolutely nefarious. We had to have house fellows so we could see the wives baking brownies. I had utter contempt for them all. Utter. But it must have had an impact, I suppose. And it was after the war. The whole thing was akin to [inaudible], even at best, although—

[Side conversation.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So talking about the impact of the Mellon Commission, or Mellon Committee, or Mellon posse.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So the idea that it was a homosexual matriarchy encouraging women to be overachievers. We would ask: What's wrong with that? [Laughs.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, things have changed a hell of a lot since the early '50s. And, you know, a lot of us didn't believe that. Especially, we would—I mean, editorial board of the newspaper, we were very—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The student newspaper, or the university newspaper.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, the student news. And, I mean, we were very hostile to this whole thing. But the result was, they—I only mention this partly because they looked for more male teachers to even out all this. A

disgrace.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I've got to ask, were there many faculty wives who had met their spouses in—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Some, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —in classrooms?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes, there were some.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's sort of a cliché, I guess.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Right. And I mean, one of the things we—I and my friends—particularly looked down on was the faculty wife.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: An object of high opprobrium.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, yeah. Because you know what they were trying to do, they were trying to lead genteel lives on slum salaries. Everything was neat. I have never been more one for [laughs] domestic virtue, let's put it that way.

[They laugh.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: I mean, you know—and they all wore little brown clothes. And I was always made sure I wore elegant clothes, you know, that differentiated me.

And I had some wonderful women professional friends. One of my closest, who—we felt the same way, which is that—and a lot of them were from Hicksville, so marrying a professor was like, "Wow!" Whereas to me, I mean, it was just the natural companionship that I would have with a person like myself as my husband.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Were any other schools targeted by the Mellon Commission?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No. I think Vassar invited them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But they were constituted in order to come to Vassar?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes, yes, they were purely—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, wow. Were you aware of any other parallel or analogous—

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, not really.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —studies of other women's schools?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Just this, just this.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So where did that come from? Did that come from the administration?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, you know, who knows? The administration, the trustees, I'm sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it makes me wonder if there was some kind of latent hostility between, like, the trustees and the dean, president and the faculty, students—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, probably. Who knows? I don't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But when you were teaching there, how did you find it? Here's the question: How did you find teaching there different from being a student there?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, in every way. It was sort of hard to make the adjustment at first. People who had been the authority figures were suddenly comrades who I had to call by their first names. I was a kid. I mean, I was barely a kid. It's true.

One of my dear friends on the faculty who had been in the philosophy department remained a dear friend, became my first daughter's godmother, and whom I was close to right through—a woman named Mary Mothersill, who was the head—finally the head of the philosophy department at Barnard. Wonderful person. She said, "All your teachers were scared to death of you."

So, I didn't realize that, but I guess they were. I was very smart and very outspoken. I was really a brain. I was

first in my class, but I was brilliant and articulate and I had no—I wasn't afraid, you know? I just said what I thought.

And, like, for social psych, I wrote a paper that I think would still be valid today, that they kept because it was a content analysis of women's magazines. I thought, "What an interesting idea, I can read the women's magazines guilt-free and write about it." But I found something very interesting in all the *Ladies Home Journals* and all those things. They always had one or two articles about famous women who were professional, like Dorothy Thompson or Mrs. Roosevelt or people like that. But in every single fictional story—which was what grasped the emotion of the reader—any woman who dared continue professional life instead of or after marriage was doomed to a horrible fate of old maidhood or rejection or suicide. So punishment awaited. In any of the stories, the fiction, which is what grabbed the reader, even though role models were held up. And the social psych department would publish it, blah, blah, blah, and so on. But I was very aware of stuff like that.

I was also, for example, aware that the students, especially the prep school students, the debutantes, as we called them, called the gatekeeper, the man—there was a big gate and there was a man in uniform—"that little man." Any employee, lower-class person, was referred to as "that little man," "the little man in the store," "the little man." I said, "Would you call your uncle a little man if he was four-feet-three?" No, of course not. This was exactly the sort of thing the Egyptians did, which is status size. Emperors are tall, pharaohs are tall, and slaves are very small. And that's the "little man."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The pictorial iconography of the Middle Ages or Ancient Egypt.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They're small, and the big people are large in the pictorial space.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, I mean, it's esoteric size. Nobody realized that. A lot of people stopped saying "that little man" after—[laughs]. But I was very aware of stuff like that. I mean, you know, always have been. A lot of my work depends on that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that's a big idea, and it's sort of finding things in low culture, or the monthly, weekly periodicals, and sort of, you know, popular reading, that actually is retroactively shaping the hearts and minds—

LINDA NOCHLIN: But that also is imbued with the unconscious ideology of the period, which is, I think—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Which is, from—I guess from your origins, the class-based, religious-based guilt. Right?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Gender-based. Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: "Mind your place and behave."

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And from that slightly outsider view—not that I ever was rejected or experienced any hostility about this, but from being a little bit outside, you can see the structures, the artificial structures that you think are natural. But what's natural is not natural.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is interesting to ponder, what constructs are actually, kind of—you know, the ruins of habit and which ones are being actively maintained, shored up, chinking the wall. So this would go back to the Mellon posse that came to sort of straighten everybody out.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, I suppose it would.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What was the outcome of that?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Hiring more males and having something called house fellows.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So the opposite of affirmative action, basically.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Exactly. Dis-affirmative action.

[They laugh.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: And the institution called house fellows, which were married couples, preferably with children, who lived in apartments in the dormitories to give sort of a family life to—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, yeah, like Yale college masters, or the master of the college who could be either gender but who lived in kind of a model domestic environment.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, right. Setting. That was—those were the two major ones that I knew.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And it was an example to the students how to behave. Are they still doing?

LINDA NOCHLIN: They have house fellows, yes, but it could be now a gay couple. [Laughs.] Now it's very—the most dramatic change that almost—my grandson goes to Vassar now. He's going to be a senior, and he loves – it's a wonderful school, wonderful. He loves it.

But the most dramatic change was the sexual revolution—in all colleges, not just Vassar. You know, we had—if we had a man in the dorm, the door had to be open and your foot had to be on the ground. I don't know, a whole lot of "you signed in, you signed out." Now, of course, they had co-ed dorms and I don't know what's going on there.

And they have, you know, gay dances, gay—you know, so there's gay, transvestite, bi—they have a term for it. But I mean, they're totally recognized. When I was at Vassar, the first two years, two young women committed suicide because they thought they were lesbians, or they were lesbians, or for some reason.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, inspired by guilt?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. But I mean, the whole thing has changed totally in that respect.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So you got your doctorate?

LINDA NOCHLIN: In—when did I get it? '63.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you were still teaching?

LINDA NOCHLIN: At Vassar.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: At Vassar. You had a nine-year-old daughter?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I guess.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Any other kids?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes, with my second husband, I have another daughter who's 40. This first daughter is 55 and the second daughter is 40. But that was when I was later married to Richard Pommer, who also was at Vassar and an architectural historian, very well-known.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you were—where did you reside? Here in New York?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No. I lived in Poughkeepsie until I went to the Graduate Center in 1980. Was it '80? Yeah, I think '80. I got an offer from the Graduate Center and we both moved. Dick and I both moved to this apartment.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He continued to teach at Vassar?

LINDA NOCHLIN: He commuted, and then he got the job at the Institute, and I got a job at Yale, which I taught at for two years. And then he died. My first husband died in 1960, and Dick died, in, I guess, '91. But he commuted to Vassar from here, because he wanted to be in New York too. But then I commuted to Yale. And then when he died I also—I got an offer from the Institute, which I immediately accepted, because I wanted to be in New York. I didn't want to be a 61-year-old widow in New Haven, I'll tell you that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You were living in New Haven then?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, but I had a pied-à-terre. And of course if I were going to continue at Yale, which is what they expected; I had an endowed chair there. I was a Distinguished Professor at the CUNY Graduate Center. I was the [Robert] Lehman Professor at Yale and I am the Lila Acheson Wallace Professor here.

But when I left Vassar, I was the something-or-other professor there, too. They immediately— almost immediately, when I—really when I got my doctorate, I was promoted and I soon got an endowed chair.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So just to get the chronology straight, you then continued to teach at Vassar?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Until 1980.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Until 1980, and moved to New York in 1980, into the apartment that we're in now?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Right now, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And that was a different time in New York, 1980.

LINDA NOCHLIN: It sure was, yeah. I've seen a lot of change. But you know, I had known—I had been coming in on weekends all the time. It wasn't that I had left New York at all. A lot of my life is centered here. My mother and my aunt and my mothers-in-law lived in New York, so we always stayed with them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you were still—were they still alive at that point?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, my mother didn't die until after—I think she died in like '94 or '5, I guess.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how did you like teaching? How was it different teaching at CUNY?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, at CUNY? Well, I only had graduate students.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Oh, of course, at Vassar—

[END OF TRACK AAA_nochli10_1759.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And how did you find that?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, on the doctoral level—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: [Laughs.] I mean, you know, they had all had terrific educations. They were all—Benjamin Buchloh was one of the students. I mean, the smartest. They were terrific.

And I suppose that what is more, it was totally different because it was a graduate school.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: And it was more radical in terms of both art history—very much more—and people who had theories and ideas and were shaping the course, especially of contemporary art studies, in every way and were up on the latest things, totally connected to the art world. It was a different kettle of fish, you know. And also we had some weaker students as a result of being a public institution, more and more.

But on the whole, I loved—I just enjoyed it, and I loved being in New York. My daughter—my younger daughter went to Brearley and that was a marvelous education.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Again, where did she go?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Brearley. The Brearley School. One of the great women's schools.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So she's—well, it's a huge asset, I think, to anybody studying the history of art to be in New York.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, wonderful. Even though Poughkeepsie wasn't far, we have sent them all down to write about work in the Metropolitan and the Frick and so on, and poor MoMA.

It's different being in New York. It really is. I mean, the Institute, too, was very much a part of New York—very close to the Metropolitan and MoMA. We have interns in the students all over.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how did your own work evolve over the years, do you think?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, the women's movement, of course, made a great impact. And I've written about that in the book *Starting from Scratch.* Perhaps you've read that article.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, the essay on "Why There Are No—"

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, that's a product. I mean, *Starting from Scratch* tells how I got involved in the women's movement and made it a part of art history. I said already that I liked my beliefs and convictions to be at one with my work, so I changed—I had been in Italy for a year. And I had Daisy in Italy, actually. And when I came back, somebody who—actually, a faculty wife—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] The dreaded faculty wife.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —came and said something about the women's movement, or women's liberation. And I said, "I'm liberated." She said, "No, I mean, there's been a movement afoot." You know, coming out of the events of '68 very much.

And she showed me some of the, you know, Redstockings newsletters, *Off Our Backs*. A lot of that material. She threw me a packet and said, "Read this." And I stayed up all night and read it.

And, you know, it was like Simone de Beauvoir in action in a way. It was one of the—you know, one of the great—even though I was already, you might say, a feminist. That paper I had written in my antipathy toward—I remember poking out Tinkerbell's eyes with a compass when I was a very little girl. I hated goody-goody, little, transparent, wispy [laughs] women. I was always for gender justice somehow. It was built in.

But you know, this was a movement, a political movement with organization and practices and so on. And I immediately changed the subject of my senior seminar to "Women in Art." And that, you know, started the whole thing. It was a wonderful course. Everyone wanted to do three papers. Some of the faculty wives came and participated.

It is indescribable to say how that was. Of course, Vassar had a marvelous library, and other fields, too, about women and feminism because it had been a women's college. And the suffragettes had come out of it and so on.

So there was this huge backlog. And in fact, our art gallery, through Mrs. Claflin, collected the work of many women. And women artists came up and talked to us before there was a women's movement. And we have women artists teaching us painting and sculpture, too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Any who you can recall?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. Concetta Scaravaglione, who had been a famous New Deal sculptor. It was terrific. And Rosemarie Beck, who is a wonderful artist. Yeah, sure. Good people.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean, there were a number of women who had careers with the sort of Abstract Expressionist movement, like the artist you interviewed, Joan Mitchell, or Grace Hartigan or Helen Frankenthaler. But that was still very much a post-war, free-world—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Partly, partly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —male-gendered kind of—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, but there were always activist women artists. One of my students, Daniel Belasco, who's now curator at the Jewish Museum—one of the most intelligent of my students at the Institute—got his degree with a dissertation on pre-women's liberation artists. Women artists and their organizations, their context. Brilliant! You really have to take a look at that.

And he discusses sort of latent activism, the presence of many women artists before the women's movement. It was just that they hadn't united to make a dent in what they called the ruling coteries, in a way.

But there were some famous women artists. The critic Clement Greenberg, in his early work, comments on, very favorably, some of them, without necessarily thinking of them as women artists. And if you want to be perverse, you can point out that probably the most famous artist in the 19th century, throughout the world, was Rosa Bonheur. No question.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of course.

LINDA NOCHLIN: And in the 20th century, Georgia O'Keefe is probably one of the best-known abstract artists there is. But women have always been exceptions. That's not the point. I mean, Madame Vigée Le Brun was one of the most famous portrait-painters in the 18th century. So women have existed always as exceptions.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Rosa Carriera.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. Rosalba Carriera, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Rosalba.

LINDA NOCHLIN: But that isn't exactly the point—or is exactly the point: exception. And the point of the women's movement in art—the women's liberation movement in art—was to get to see women artists as part of being an artist, period. You know, being part of the mainstream, not a remarkable exception.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, a lot of the stuff that I've read about the 19th century—interests that I have in the

history of drawing instruction—there's a lot of endorsement of the idea of teaching women how to draw, how to paint, but mostly so that they can encourage their husbands who are artists, or—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Right, or to teach children—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —or have an occupation to do or something like that. But of course they weren't allowed to use nude models [laughs], for the most part. So I mean, how do you learn how to draw from a model if you're not using a nude model?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you've got your antique room, I guess, and—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes. But that's the first step. That's not exactly the same.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think the National Academy of Design was the first place to actually bring women into the classroom. So we were—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, there are a lot of questions about that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —ahead of the Europeans in that regard.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Maybe.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But it was interesting to learn that Archibald Robertson's academy here, which was sort of the pet project of the Livingston brothers, was the—his first students were, you know, the Livingston daughters. But yeah. Again, it was a secondary thing. It was not training artists. It was just simply—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, recreational drawing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, or literacy, gentility skills that people—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, sort of the things that ladies did. They did watercolors.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But Turner did watercolors, too. [Laughs.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, he did. But when he did them he was important.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, right. Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: It's like when women took care of children, they were mothers. When pediatricians took care of children, they were professionals. They were doctors, they were practically all male.

Think of cooking. Who cooks the—you know, who's supposedly Mother Earth providing the soup and the—cooking for the family? Women. But who are the great cooks?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Men.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Men. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. I see.

LINDA NOCHLIN: They're all doing the same thing, but—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, it's the same glass ceiling that everybody's hitting, but—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. Well, it's not just a glass ceiling. It's an opposition. Amateur, lower-level specialization.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's interesting because you spoke about Rosa—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Bonheur.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Rosa Bonheur, who had to apply to the police to wear trousers, and—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, and men had to apply if they wanted to wear women's clothing, too. Any kind of dress-up, male or female, you had to find the police.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, interesting. You know, I know that everybody was—or that it's widely known that she was interested in male clothing, like George Sand, you know. But that she had to apply for a permit in order to

be seen in public wearing trousers with a frock coat.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. But in all official occasions she wore women's clothes. She said it was just for her work among the animals and such. True.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But it does seem like that period of the 19th century, from, you know, the '40s through the '70s, there was a lot more openness, and then it got more—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, clogged up.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The Gilded Age, as it were. The late Victorian age was very oppressive.

LINDA NOCHLIN: It was.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So was the women's liberation in the 1960s and '70s—was that kind of a revival of that period? Or do you think there was much of a connection?

LINDA NOCHLIN: To what?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, in terms of the awareness of –

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, no. I mean, it was a very different thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I mean, they were really out there fighting for women's rights to express themselves, to be recognized, to become professional, to do their own thing and not to be bound down by catering to men's needs and desires and professionalism.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Whereas, you know, the women in the 19th century were more working the system, the women in the 20th were changing the system.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. But I mean, the suffragettes were doing a lot of the same thing. I mean, in terms of voting, still.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So at what point did you go to Yale from the Graduate Center?

LINDA NOCHLIN: It must have been around '89 or something.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, so you were at CUNY for about nine years and started to commute to New Haven. How long?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Only two years, and I had two terms off. That was part of it. So I really only taught there for two terms.

I liked it. I mean, I had wonderful students, again. I only did, you know—I did undergraduate and one graduate seminar. I liked it. But I didn't want to be stuck in a place where the university is it, you know. I wanted to be in New York. The Institute was perfect.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how did you find Yale compared to CUNY, compared to Vassar? You're going from a private college to a public university to a private Ivy League university.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, in some ways Yale was more like Vassar. I mean, that was it. Your social life, your—at least for me—was all under the aegis of the university. But unlike Poughkeepsie, it was a very dangerous town. I was mugged.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where?

LINDA NOCHLIN: And practically everyone on the faculty had either been robbed, mugged or whatever.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where were you keeping your apartment?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I had a pied-à-terre in a nice neighborhood. But you were told not to go out without escort everywhere.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What area of town was your pied-à-terre?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, it was in—on a nice, you know—right across, near Chapel Street.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Edgewood or Howe? One of those?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I can't remember where it was. It was an apartment-house, you know. It was a very lovely apartment, nice. But going out in the streets, there were—it was terrible—it was all racial, part of it. And New Haven was one of the worst slums and drug centers in the country at that time.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's got two interstate highways intersecting it, and a seaport.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, that's what happened. They had a beautiful Italian neighborhood, where I used to go to dances there, as an undergraduate. It was a charming city, and it was just adorable.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So eat pizza, Worcester Square?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, I mean, it was just darling. But when they put through urban renewal over what's-his-name's dead body—you know, in that department there—it ruined the whole thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Scully?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Scully. I liked it. But I still felt it was really male-dominated, even though women—you know, women were very much a presence. They were already teaching there. And certainly there were women as students. But I felt all the traditions of Old Eli. I mean, just—it was not pleasant.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The street school, the Yale School of Art—the head of it when it opened was John F. Weir, who was the son of—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Alden.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, the drawing academy head at West Point, who also had a couple of daughters who became artists. I think I read somewhere that women were able to enroll there from the beginning.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, probably. Probably. But you just felt—I felt that spectral presence of—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Skull and Bones and secret societies.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. Well, they still were there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how were your students there?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, brilliant, naturally. Very selective. I've always been privileged to have absolutely marvelous students. So, you know, they were terrific. Some of them are my friends now. I know them and see them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A few names?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, Marty Kessler, who is now a professor at Kansas.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Lawrence?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, and Lawrence. I mean, I was only there for two terms, so it's a little hard.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, just anybody who, you know, comes to mind.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. Oh, a young guy whose name I can't remember exactly. But they were all smart as hell and very good. What the hell is his name? He's a friend. Well, it'll come back to me. I'm not too good at remembering things. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you know, like Harvard and Yale have the advantage of having on-campus museums. So you can just walk—like, you know, when I studied at the art school at Yale, you know, in the MFA program you could just walk across the street and see stuff.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Right, yes. Yes, well that's a really good art gallery, too. I mean, not on that level. And of course the Institute students have the Metropolitan Museum, which—[laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, who can top that?

LINDA NOCHLIN: [Laughs.] And the Frick and MoMA.

But I mean that is a really a good thing. I gave the Norton Lectures at Harvard a few years ago. I was back on

campus. I didn't stay there. I just couldn't bear to be in the dormitory anymore, though I had a nice apartment picked. And it was nice, yeah, having the fog right there.

But I wouldn't want to be in—a residential college is not for me. In New York you had friends from all over, all different fields, all different areas.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I read recently that there are 800 dialects spoken on the island of Manhattan.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, really? Well—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: If you include all of the languages that are—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I don't speak them, but—

[They laugh.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: —it's nice to know they do, right?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, perhaps we should pause—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, we should.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and try to continue this at another time.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I would love to. Okay, this is fun. I'm just talking.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. Well, I think—I was hoping today to just sort of have a chance to get to know you and for you to get to know me, and just sort of have a preliminary conversation. I'm sure a lot of this we're going to cover in more detail in subsequent conversations.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Fine. Okay. And if you would like, I can give you that thing called *Not Far from Brooklyn*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I would love to read that. That would be great. Thank you.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, let me see. It was—

[END OF TRACK AAA_nochli10_1760.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking with Linda Nochlin at her home in New York City at 875 West End Avenue, on Thursday, June 24, 2010, 2:30 in the afternoon. Hello again.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Hello.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, you just returned from Santa Fe?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How was that?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, it was terrific. I mean, it was a very interesting show. The catalogue is over there. But it was mainly video animation, all kinds of video and animation. A lot of it by fairly young, fairly unknown people, some by established artists.

It was beautifully laid out by a very prominent designer of exhibitions. And it was curated by, well, one of my doctoral students and the other one who sat in on my class. So, all in all it was one of the—I guess we enjoyed the whole occasion.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I thought perhaps that's—last time we talked about kind of your life in general, just—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —sort of a sprawling overview. I thought it would be interesting to explore a couple of things today. Perhaps we could talk about art history and your scholarship of art history. How, you know—how the practice of art historical scholarship has evolved over the years that you have been active, and how you have been shaped by those changes and how you have, in turn, shaped them yourself.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then perhaps when we talk again, we could speak a little bit more about teaching and audience and the interaction you've had with readers, colleagues, other people responding to your scholarship either in the classroom or in a collegial environment.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How does that sound?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Fine. Sure, that's fine. Ask away.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you came to art history sort of, as you described last time, through the back door.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You were obviously a very artistic person. You wrote poetry, you were a voracious reader, well in advance of your years. You drew, you painted, you evolved a love for the piano, which you still have, and for Bach. And, you know, so you were always sort of—always had your hand in artistic practice.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then you went to Vassar, studied philosophy—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and were hired there to basically teach an art history class, and then came to it via that exposure.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, how did you begin to develop your own scholarly practice?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I took art history in the college.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I mean, I don't think I knew it existed before that, even though—I did, because I told you my uncle went to Harvard and majored in art history, so I knew it existed but only peripherally, kind of.

And I picked up more or less what my teachers taught me in the books we used, which would—I mean, I was very involved, I think, in some of the people who were at the forefront there. Panofsky mainly, I guess, was one of those people, and Meyer Schapiro. I would say those two, as far as major scholars.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: And I got to know both of them. And I eventually, I think, even sat in on lectures of Meyer Schapiro. And my first year of graduate school I knew Bill Rubin, and I took notes in a class by a marvelous classicist, who was the third of that triumvirate of influences, a guy named Karl Lehmann. I took notes for Bill in that class, and he took my Schapiro's class, and we both had our notes typed up—a big deal in those days [laughs]—and we exchanged notes.

So, I would say the three people who influenced me the most were Panofsky, Meyer Schapiro, and Karl Lehmann. And there were others later at the Institute who did, but those were three primary forces. They both had large visions. They were not pipsqueaky. Not that they avoided the formal in any sense, but they were clear thinkers who could involve a lot of the self and the world in their art history. And they weren't pedantic. They were, to me, wonderfully open and adventurous, and, you know, I could read either of them. And the lectures of Karl Lehmann were brilliant.

I took late antique. I didn't know what late antique was. I had taken a lot of ancient Greek in college, but I wasn't sure what late antiquity was. But it was the most fascinating course. I still have my notes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Late Roman and Byzantine?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. But all over the entire Roman Empire. He went all over the Empire. And I wrote poetry about it. I mean, I just loved this idea of these Roman bastards going and conquering all these—and his idea was that late antique, the change from classical beauty, elegance, grace, et cetera, to these formidable pinheaded, lopsided, spiritually intense kinds of figures. He said it was all the impact of the common people's art of Rome. In other words, he saw it as a class thing. He didn't see it as regional or, you know, people from the Eastern Roman

Empire.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, you mean the evolution from the classical, from the naturalistic—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —to the more iconographic.

LINDA NOCHLIN: He saw it as the rise of the common people—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I see.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —along with Christianity somewhat.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Which was a grassroots kind of religion at that time.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, it was, but it, you know, came from the—you know. Anyhow, it was a fabulous course. It was just wonderful. And since I didn't know much classical work, I had really had to scramble, but I got the point right away.

And I wrote a very important paper, which was about realism and hyperrealism, and how if realism gets exaggerated, then of course it turns into a kind of Surrealism or hyperrealism, in the sense that early Christian art involved that sort of thing.

Anyhow, all three of them were big, big influences. And I found art history a fascinating field. I mean, it was still developing. I mean, sure, there were a lot of interesting formalists and people who really looked at form as a major thing, and I was very interested in that too.

And I was very interested in the way that historic art and contemporary art, you know, either interacted or rejected each other. I was very much interested in what was going on then. You know, "now"—the now of then, when I was young.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, certainly at that period when you were in school and when you were starting to teach, that was the rise, or the—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Of Abstract Expressionism.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —of Abstract Expressionism.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Which became the official art of the free world.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Which was hot stuff, yeah. Right.

So, I found art history a field in which I could use all my—you know, I could use the writing, the English, the history, the aesthetic part, the art part. I mean, it really could involve all the different fields that I was interested in, if I made it broad enough, which I did. I was very narrow; let's put it that way.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, as a younger person you were very hands-on. You were making paintings and drawings.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You were performing music or playing music.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, I was.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Writing poetry. Didn't sort of the art historian at that point in time—most people, I think, think about art history as it was practiced before the Second World War as being sort of more connoisseurship and—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, that was at Harvard.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Delectation?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, not in my books.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Though I was—I have always been very close to the object and work from the object. It always was connected to larger ideas and bigger directions, but I am a very precise and object-related person. I'm not at all a goofball.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So instead of having looked at a model in a pose and making a graphic idea on a page, you would read a painting and translate it into a verbal—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, something else.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Something else, okay. That makes sense. But because I think some people might wonder—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —there is this direct engagement in the process of—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —making, and then they're stepping away into a process of scrutiny and analysis.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. I think they're totally different.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. And how would you describe the differences?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, one, you know, you slotch [ph] around, you look, you do—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —and the other—I am a very analytic thinker and very precise, and if I can spread out, I spread out on the basis of precision, or I go back and look at the larger idea through very precise concepts and so on. I mean, my models are Panofsky and Meyer Schapiro.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, in other words—

LINDA NOCHLIN: They were.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I mean, I had my own, you know, ideas, too. And a lot of literary models, too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, for you, artistic practice was more empirical and the history of art was more—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —inclusive, analytical—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Intellectual, analytical. Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Okay. So what did you learn from—what did you take away from Schapiro and Panofsky in terms of methodology? What was your starting point?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, Marxist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Marxist.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I mean in the most general sense.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But how were you using it?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Analysis, dialectic, all that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: But I never—you know, you don't sit down and say, "Now I'm going to do analysis; Oh, no, I'm going to do a little dialectic." I mean, you do it –

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you were using like Marx and Hegel as tools, not as doctrine.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, absolutely. I never, never, never had a dogma, you know, that it has to be this way or that way. I once wrote an introduction to one of my books, which was called *Memoirs of an Ad Hoc Art Historian*, and ad hoc is what I mean. There is a problem or an issue—and I really think more in terms of articles or essays rather than, you know, long-term narratives. There is a problem. There is an image that I'm going to begin with at the start of my problem. And then where it leads, where each thought leads—I mean, I make an outline, of course, and I have something in view. But it is—I'm a dialectical thinker. You know, I sort of answer myself, or I critique my own thoughts and then I go on from there. And I'm a bricoleur, too. I mean, you know, like—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're a process person.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —either way.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You're a process person.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, very much. Very much. And I do not base it on any conscious—I do not squeeze things into conscious categories: "Is that a feminist or anyone else?" I like the unexpected. I like ideas that sort of come along when you don't expect them. That's how I like to think, ad hoc.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Ad hoc, not polemical, not with—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I was often polemical.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But post-facto. You find your position.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You don't start with your position.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I always start with a position. But I don't start with a coherent, fixed dogma, let us say.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I guess that's sort of the challenge for everybody is how to support what they believe is important, yet remain open to new evidence and the influence of that new evidence.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Right. I mean, I'm not going to change from a feminist to a, you know, misogynist. [Laughs.] That's for sure, no matter what evidence is offered to me, because—and I don't think feminism is a methodology. I mean, that is a lot of crap. You can't have a feminist methodology.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, let's speak about that a little bit because since the late '60s there is a—there have been a number of programs instituted in women's studies—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —in gender politics—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —gender studies. And there is a museum in Washington, a National Museum of Women in the Arts. Was this effective, do you think, in leveling, you know, the playing field?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I think it was. I think absolutely, but I don't think it's a methodology. It's a politics. Feminism is a political position, but it is not a method. There are a lot of methods that feminists use. I don't think there is a methodology which we call feminist. That's ridiculous. How could there be?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I don't know that anybody is advancing that idea.

LINDA NOCHLIN: People sort of suggest there is, but I don't think they're very good thinkers.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's a—

LINDA NOCHLIN: I mean, gender is always there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Either in one's own position or another. I try to be a sharp and careful and unsloppy and undogmatic thinker, but I do believe in justice based on gender. And a lot of my thinking is in some way conditioned by this, which doesn't mean that I'm going to pretend that a third-rate woman artist is better than Michelangelo, whom I don't like anyway, but I know he's good.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: I mean, I don't think—but I think nowadays we're not so interested in greatness, which was the subject of my—or we think of greatness as somewhat different from the way people thought of it before feminism.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How would you define it today?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I think today, it's interesting artists. Artists that raise issues, artists that make you think and wonder and delight and so on, but we don't necessarily think of them as great in the sense that they're like patriarchal law-givers in the arts and we have to follow them and so on. I think the field is more open now. It's that Postmodernism is a much more open field.

For example, I was down in Philadelphia for the Scholar's Day of the *Late Renoir* show. I have been very interested in Renoir, and I gave a course in Renoir, which only four people signed up for, but we did have a wonderful time. We took field trips in a white stretch limo provided by an auditor of the course, and we went down to Philly and we went to the Barnes and we looked and talked and thought.

I don't mean to reassess, to rescue Renoir, but I do mean to look at him otherly. For example, my most—my biggest essay on Renoir, which I have redone once or twice, is "Renoir's Men." Interesting; nobody ever talked about Renoir as a painter of men.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There are a lot of males in his pictures, though.

LINDA NOCHLIN: There are, exactly. And I took them as an entity to kind of show that, in a sense, even when he talked—and Robert Herbert is my great supplier and supporter in this, and I saw him—we were old, old friends and I think a lot of his work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I had a class with him at Yale. He was great.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, he's the greatest, isn't he?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. I would say he was another influence, except, you know, we're the same age and et cetera.

But, I mean, he pointed out—or I pointed out, on the basis of the material that he discovered that Renoir had written: Okay, Renoir didn't think women should be, you know, politicians or great writers or stuff like that, but he didn't think men should be either. He said, "Women have common sense. They take care of their homes and their children and their senses, and they don't want to be a bank president or the head of the German army." And he felt men should be more like that. That is the way men should be, closer to nature.

He was a total reactionary, complicated. He didn't want people using, you know, modern business or modern military things or the—he hated modern life for that reason. Very much like Ruskin, I think, whom he had read, I think. Or there must have been people writing the same way in France against modern life. D.H. Lawrence is absolutely at one with him. In the beginning of *Sons and Lovers* he writes about how pitiful, how miserable modern men were, especially factory workers, you know. He describes them.

So, I mean, you have to see *Late Renoir* as part, not just of an individual crotchety old guy, but as part of a whole group of people who are against modernity, who are for flesh, the soil, blah, blah, blah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Like Courbet, Millet.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, Courbet and Millet, that's a little different.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But even, I think about—

LINDA NOCHLIN: A little. A little.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —somebody like William Blake. You know, I think about—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, sure, but—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the song "Jerusalem": "And was Jerusalem builded here?"

LINDA NOCHLIN: Exactly, but I don't think—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then you start to—

LINDA NOCHLIN: I don't think that Renoir was that educated, but he did know much more than we think, and he knew of some of the artists of the past and so on. So, I think when you look at his men, they were also lovely and rosy and handsome and well-built and enjoying—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They're all so pretty, aren't they?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Pretty! And they're enjoying dancing and they're enjoying pleasure, like women, and are pleasurable to look at. And his early work, *The Boy with the Cat* is about as big as my boy, but he's a naked adolescent seen from the back, sensual, and nuzzling this beautiful cat.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I know the picture.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. You know?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

LINDA NOCHLIN: So, let's look at his men too. I agree his—I mean, a lot of those intermediary *Bathers*, I guess lack—what I love are the late *Bathers*, huge Michelin-tire *Bathers*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Those real coppery—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Those real coppery tones, yeah.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I mean, over the top, excessive. Excessive in their fleshiness. Think of Cézanne's late *Bathers* who were excessive in their hideousness. I mean, they make you think otherly about what beauty is, and so does Renoir in his way.

So I think he's much more interesting than people think. I don't say "I love it," you see. I don't say, "Oh, these big bulbous"—the real big bulbous ones, I love. But, you know, those pretty, pretty ladies with the hair and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think a lot of those pictures at the Barnes is sort of spun cotton candy—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Horrible.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

LINDA NOCHLIN: They're so boring. But when he's good, even when he doesn't know how good he is—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —because, you know, he has this wonderful utopian ideal and classically short little legs. They're really as monstrous as Cézanne. Short little legs, hanging backsides, rolls of flesh. They're almost baby-like in some ways. And they're an invention. You know, they're some kind of pictorial invention that he's meaning to say: plentitude, largeness, the earth. All things I can't bear but I think they're wonderful in pictorial form.

And it's no accident that Picasso owned how many big Renoirs? A lot. More than any other artist, and that Matisse said, "He's the greatest of us all." Why was the vanguard so interested if he was so terrible? Were they stupid? I don't think they were. They were getting what they needed out of him. So, I mean, that's what—[laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What is your opinion of Jeff Koons collecting Courbet?

LINDA NOCHLIN: He's very wise.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: And, in fact, one of the pictures that he has is this calf, this—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —furry, slow-eyed, glorious—I mean, it is one of his great paintings. I saw it at a Swiss dealer's when I was doing my Courbet show. It was superb. He has very good taste. One of his—the last show of his that I had to speak at, at the New Museum. But if he's picking those Courbets, he's doing the right thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He's got an eye, yeah.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, absolutely, in this case. Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, let's go back to, sort of, your early work as an art historian before you had the St. Paul "on the Road to Damascus" epiphany about that.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Okay, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And how would you—let's say how would you identify a piece of work you were going to do, and then how would you organize yourself to do it?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, what did I do? I don't know. Well, I worked on Courbet for my dissertation.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Often it was people asking. I very much write on request if I like the subject. For example, there was a Millet show in—where was it? Where is the Walker? In Minnesota.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: In St. Paul. They just brought over *The Gleaners*, and they did some relevant work around *The Gleaners.* It was a brilliant show: Millet's *Gleaners.* And they invited me to speak at it. And I did this long lecture and then left.

[Side conversation.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: Okay. When somebody gives me a project, I do immense amounts of research in all directions around it. For example, I found a doctoral dissertation from 1904 from the south of France. I guess it was from—where was that? Anyway, from a university, big university in the South of France on the *droits de glanage*, the rights of gleaning, which was so illuminating about, I mean, what gleaning was.

This was before that wonderful movie by Agnès Varda on gleaning, but—it was way, way before—but, you know, it was how the poor, the poorest of the poor, got their grain to make bread after the fields were cleared. And this was after enclosures. These often were huge fields watched over by a supervisor on horseback. A sort of bell would ring and all the poor women of the village would come in with their sacks and pick up what had dropped. This was after—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: After the harvest.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —the harvest.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: After everything had been carried off the field.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes, and in the background—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The scraps.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —there were all these heaps of beautiful golden grain. And there, you know, bent over trying to fill their sacks with what had dropped. And it was a very carefully regulated procedure. If you jumped the gun and went in to glean beforehand, or stole in overnight or something like that, I mean, you could be criminally prosecuted and have your little—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You could be Jean Valjean, right?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, you could really get it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: And there were all sorts of laws about this, and it was later stopped. I mean, all these customary laws were stopped later on.

So I found out all about that, who these people were, and then I compared it to Courbet's *Grain Sifters*. You know, for a very different kind of view, and I examined what the machinery was. The kind of the machinery that these women were using. And they weren't exactly gleaners. They were picking out the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They were already in the processing of the harvested goods.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, the harvest. But, anyway, I found out a lot about agriculture in the 19th century.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's great.

LINDA NOCHLIN: So I could figure out—but that wasn't the whole point. But you have to know things like that, in a way, to make a picture three-dimensional in your thought, you know? Not that that explains the picture or the attitude for the involvement of either of the artists, because that's something very different. But they chose this. It's interesting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it sounds like a cliché. I mean, in any great work of art there is always an element of mystery, if you will, that something that is unknowable—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, totally.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —that makes it great.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Totally.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But you wanted to learn—

LINDA NOCHLIN: I just wanted to know, yeah, what was going on.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —what Millet knew about gleaning.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

LINDA NOCHLIN: And why he chose this subject, and Courbet likewise, in a way. Because in this kind of mainly realist work, it counts. You know, you can't just eliminate it and say, "it's nothing but formal elements." It isn't. It isn't. You have to know what's going on, as far as I'm concerned. I mean, you don't have to when you just go into a museum, but if you want to talk about it, you've got to know what's happening.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, were there tensions between scholars who preferred an approach that was more formalist and someone like yourself who was looking to bring more ideas into the—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, but for those pictures not so much.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I mean, they almost ask for that. I mean, it's very different, for example, maybe going to Manet or Cézanne or even Degas. And for all of that—I guess you might call me a social historian. I certainly am in most cases—I really feel it is necessary to know something about—I don't ever reduce a painting to its social content, or any kind of content.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or formal content.

LINDA NOCHLIN: No. But, I mean, the two work together. I mean, the form of a painting produces its meaning. You can't possibly think otherwise. The trick is to see how form articulates a certain kind of meaning. And that is why, say, Degas is different from third-rate painters of ballet dancers of laundresses and why Manet is better than fifth-rate, you know, producers of nudes. And I think—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or toreadors. [Laughs.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: Or whatever, yeah. And I think that people who try to reduce art to its contents are totally off-track and are totally useless, just as feminists who say any nude is all the same. Of course, any nude is not all the same. I mean, there are all different kinds of nudes with different kinds of ideological implications.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, yeah, you had spoken in your essay about being a young person and sort of intrigued by the Vargas pictures in Esquire. [Laughs.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, yeah, well, that's for sure. I was eight and nine. I loved them. They were so smooth and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it was like admiring an airplane or something.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I knew it was something to do with something else, but I wasn't quite sure what that something else was. But I was eight or nine. I mean, I didn't feel in any way implicated, and I never have. I mean, I have nothing to do with Vargas girls except to enjoy the curves of their lovely feet and so forth.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So that's a formal consideration?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I suppose, like airbrushes are a consideration.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] So, you would do a lot of work in the field and—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. I was curious. I don't know whether I knew that I would use it all, but I was really so curious—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you actually go where he might have—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —where he might have painted *The Gleaners*?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, I never did that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But you did go to where—

LINDA NOCHLIN: But I would go to France a lot and I would go into Fontainebleau. There is a fabulous book by a sociologist. Not a book, it's a two-part essay, really, about the social implications of Millet's choice of subject, some of which are very intimate personal bits of land owned by small farm or peasant families, and then others are these huge, like, mass production deals where the people in them are paid workers. They're really very different. Those sociologists really did the best work of Millet, quite frankly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, was this—he was basically working at a time when France was moving into, if we will, industrial agriculture.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: ADM.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Absolutely. If you read Zola's *La Terre*, one of the most horrific novels ever written—even now I don't think people write things that are scary and bloody and bestial and so on. I mean, if you look at the notes—he did research on every one of his novels, and he looked up—how people in the United States, when there are huge farms like in Kansas, you know, all the—to find out how that was done. And the French were beginning to move in on that model, kind of more mass production—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Absentee corporate landlords, right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Capitalist agriculture, really. And the little farmers were left—I mean, partly due to the system of inheritance in France, I mean, the farm would often be divided up among six sons, so each would have a little square that big. There was big agricultural trouble and economic disparity between these enormous farms and the little peasant.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They couldn't really earn enough for—

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, I mean, it was very difficult.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, did your heroes change after about 10 years or five years? Did you stop reading Schapiro and start—

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, I never stopped. I never stopped reading Schapiro.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I still think he's terrific. I like Panofsky, though now of course I shifted to Aby Warburg about 12 years ago, and I've read every single thing Aby Warburg ever wrote. And a friend and I were going to do a music drama based on his life.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, really?

LINDA NOCHLIN: But we never got around to it, but we kept planning it and what scenes we would have—mad scenes. But I liked—you know, Aby Warburg was less definite and less —and then there were other, you know, kind of Structuralist, Poststructuralist people that I got interested in.

Yeah, so there were some additions, absolutely. T.J. Clark was certainly one of them. My friend Tamar Garb, who is one of my closest friends. I thought he was pretty wonderful. But then I've always read people in other fields that are equally—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —important to me. It's not all art historians.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what other things were you continuing to read outside of art history? What kind of literature, what kind of—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Everything. Well, I read all the French *Nouvelle Vague*. Nathalie Sarraute. Who were all the other French *Nouvelle Vague* writers? Who else do I love? I just read universally. But I also like—I like some of the literary writers. And I read, you know, the—and write for—the London Review of Books, the New York Review of Books.

I just read the most fabulous piece by Jacqueline Rose, who I find a very convincing and wonderful writer on everything, on the Dreyfus affair, which I myself have written about. I wrote about Degas and the Dreyfus affair. And there again, I had to read enormously outside art history to write that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, reading trial transcripts and all the—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, everything, everything, all the people that she met.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Zola.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, Zola. I mean, what a hero.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: My god. I mean, Jackie Rose writes about that in the latest *London Review of Books*, the most wonderful piece on the implications of the Dreyfus affair, its aftermath now. So things like that. And then I did *The Jew in the Text* with my friend Tamar Garb, which was an anthology, but with an introduction. So, I've been interested in that, in the Jewish aspect too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It seems like a lot of your work, all of your work, is involved with European artists, a lot of it.

LINDA NOCHLIN: A lot of it but not—I've written on Hopper.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I've written on, you know, on Pasant [ph], on—who else? Americans?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But do you think your Jewishness makes you feel more American or European? Or is there —

LINDA NOCHLIN: I don't feel European. I feel New York.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: New York, okay.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I'm from New York. That's my home. Brooklyn, Manhattan. I mean, I'm a New Yorker. That's who I am.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How do you define that? How does that shape your thinking?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I grew up in a neighborhood which was totally Jewish but mainly atheist. I mean, nobody was—they were all socialists or to the left of Roosevelt anyway, and they were all—or most of the people I knew were deeply implicated in one aspect of the arts or another. Some in painting and some in writing, like my grandfather, and some in theater and some in, you know, music. But it was always the things of the mind and the arts were treasured.

[Side conversation.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, you were talking about, you know, the neighborhood, what defined you as a New Yorker.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, I mean, I thought everyone was like that until I got to Vassar and I saw these girls who went to football games and knitted.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: I had such contempt for both of—I mean, knitting? My grandmother knitted. I mean—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We talked about faculty wives and how they were an object of high opprobrium.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, they were abominations. They made brownies.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: I mean, I just loathed all that. I hated it. It annoyed me terribly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why were you so contemptuous of knitting and brownies?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I thought it was great for my mother and grandmother.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Don't mistake me. My grandmother was a great baker. My mother adored me and took care of me. She wasn't—she made chocolate chip cookies. That was it. We had maids. [Laughs.] You know, we had money.

But because these were boring, dull people who lowered the tone in any discussion. They were bores. I mean, I still remember when I was a grownup with kids and we were with a group at the lake in the summer sometime in the '50s, and there was this horribly dramatic storm, and lightning, and there was a shelter, and it was the most exciting thing.

One faculty wife said, "Do you know I get onions much cheaper at so-and-so than I get them at such-and-such?" And the other would say, "Yeah, and I like their canned peas too." With this dramatic storm coming down and you're all huddled there and it's just so wonderful and sublime. All she could think of was the price of fried onions. Please. Awful.

And, you know, it was particularly degrading—since of course I was one of them, even though I was faculty, too—was the fact that they thought they had to be genteel despite the fact they were making a workman's salary.

And the pretentious gentility instead of protesting or saying, "Jeez, I mean if they're going to pay me so little, I'm going to look like, you know, Tobacco Road and wear jeans and smoke a corncob pipe." They would be all, you know, in good little Middle-Western tweeds. And I just couldn't stand that. It was appalling.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, when you first went to Poughkeepsie it must have seemed like Kansas to you.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, in a way but, I mean, it was near New York and we would come in all the time, and there were great people on the faculty and some—I made wonderful friends there. Yeah, it did. It seemed more like the suburbs, you know? I mean, I didn't think of it so much. The campus was beautiful.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Kansas is lovely.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, Kansas is. I agree. But, no, it seemed suburban, which it was in a certain sense. And I was—I sort of knew about the suburbs. And, you know, we had wonderful visiting orchestras. I was interested in ancient music, too, and I joined a recorder group and we sang madrigals. Anything you were interested in you could find another person who was also.

No, it wasn't like Kansas in imagination. It was very exciting and interesting once I got used to the non-intellectuals who were there, who were not my friends. I mean, we all found each other, the political-intellectual people. We were on the magazine. We were on the newspaper above all, with the politics. I know I made my political position felt on campus, along with that of others. I mean, you know, you found your people.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, after your St. Paul epiphany "on the road to Damascus," and you discovered—

LINDA NOCHLIN: [Laughs.] Well, sort of.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, this is how you described it.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, I know, but I had it obviously—it built up as we talked.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We've got this great Caravaggio image to think of.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes, of course. I couldn't help but think of it that way, but I know it was a more gradual thing, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But once you established—

LINDA NOCHLIN: But that was fairly along in my—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I was already, you know, 39 at that point.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I was no kid.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, you know, you're saying that it was a gradual, cumulative, evolving process. How did you begin to move in that direction?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I always disliked any regime which said women were inferior or made women be the aid or the helpmate to men. I mean, I just loathed that. I think I describe some of that material in there—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Absolutely.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —how I put the compass point through Tinkerbell's eye.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, I was going to ask you about that—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes. I hated cute little curly blondes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and like the decapitation of Larry, the decapitation of—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, the decapitation of Larry and stuff like that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's not Larry Fine from *The Three Stooges*, but another Larry.

LINDA NOCHLIN: [Laughs.] No. No, but I mean I constantly felt this sense of the injustice in every realm toward women, and I thought my friends were different from the people—the women I admired were different, and they were.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was that partly because you were a person who had been from—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —a position of advantage and—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —that often that was—

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, partly because my family was that way.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I went to the Brooklyn Ethical Culture School, which kind of based itself on equality. The head of it was a woman. The principal was a woman. Boys had to do cooking. Girls had to do shop all the way through, all the way through. You know, boys and girls were not considered, you know, one better than the other or one more likely to do this or that. It was a very egalitarian school. So I was brought up that way.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: And, you know, I was very close not so much to my father, but my grandfather, who was a great intellectual light in my life, and also he took me to Coney Island and places.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He's the one who was in New Jersey in the sort of—

LINDA NOCHLIN: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That was a great-grandparent.

LINDA NOCHLIN: He was a doctor. No, that was a great-grandparent. My grandfather was a doctor, but he was a member of the Theater Guild and he knew writers, artists, people like that, and made me—and talked Russian literature with me when I was 12.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, you wrote about that, too.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I was expected to read that, you know. So, I don't know, I think everything in my life led up to the fact that I was going to be a feminist. It's true.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, but what was happening around—I mean, obviously you're teaching at Vassar, which is, at the time, a woman's college.

LINDA NOCHLIN: A woman's college which was going coed at the time, oddly enough, but which has a great history. You know, when I started teaching my first "Women in Art" course, which was the first of the country, I had lots of books, you know, to back me up because the head of my department had always been interested in women artists.

We did everything, you know? We did the electricity for the plays. We did the editing of the newspapers. I took it for granted that was how the world worked, but when I got out, boy [laughs] I was quite surprised to see in other places it didn't work that way at all.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you find that in the '50s that the inequality between the genders was partly a function of class, too?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, I don't think so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, not really. I think it was in every place.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just a systemic—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was a systemic—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, systemic, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —condition. So, what were the first steps that you took towards raising awareness—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I changed my course—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —to be "Women in Art," and then I wrote, "Why Have There Been No Great Woman Artists?"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: So those were the first things that I did, and I started being interested in women artists.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: If you were to do that essay again today, what would you add to it?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, I think that we've come a long way, baby. I did, in fact. There was a rehash at Princeton, you know, reconsideration, I think. And I wrote a kind of—another version.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Update.

LINDA NOCHLIN: An update. I think we have come a long way. I think in other countries, when you look globally, there's still an infinite amount to do, but they have a harder task in some way because they're starting from a different viewpoint.

I am totally against any religion, group—it could be Jews or it could be Islamicists or anybody—who oppresses women and makes women into second-class citizens, and I mean citizens in the polis, in politics. So, I am not a relativist. I don't just say, "Oh, well, that's their culture and their beliefs." I think it's just wrong. I'm not a relativist.

So, I think there's plenty to do, and I think a lot of women from many of those countries are producing very interesting art now partly because of that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Can you cite a few examples?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, yeah, Mona Hatoum or Shirin Neshat or—oh, I mean, I could read you the list from *Global*

Feminisms, which I co-curated.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. Right, we can refer to that.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, absolutely—incredibly interesting, and there were a whole lot of interesting artists here, like one of the most interesting is—let's see, what was her name? I can't remember—Bernie [ph]—we can find it in here. But, I mean, they're major artists and they're women, but they're also talking about other things in their art and expressing other things.

It's the brilliance of their art and their visual command and their visual inventiveness, too, that's so extreme. A lot of them were in video and working in animation, working in installation, you know, a lot of new media going in very different directions. But they are conscious of their role as women from somewhere else, at the same time, and totally contemporary.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In some of these societies—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —which have a systemic oppression of women, how do these women find their audience?

LINDA NOCHLIN: They don't. They find them in their places. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Here? In Europe and—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Europe. In Europe. In Britain, in France, in Berlin, et cetera, and there still remains a cultivated, sophisticated, anti-oppression, anti-inequality bastion of people. The more educated people of course, for the most part, in all those countries. But basically they have to show outside, or somewhere.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You talked in your essay about—just to return to your sort of influences and interests.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You talked about a love/hate relationship with Hollywood.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We've talked about pictures, we've talked about storytelling, poetry—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —drawing, painting. But one might argue that the painting of the 20th century, or at least the history painting, you know, the narrative painting, happens on the big screen in a dark room, a lot of it.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, of course.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, how do you—

LINDA NOCHLIN: I mean, Cecil B. DeMille actually looked at a lot of those academic paintings, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of course, yeah.

LINDA NOCHLIN: How do I—I don't know. I mean, you know, there's a realm of crap and there is realm of great stuff. I mean, I have no desire to cut myself off from popular culture. I don't like a lot of it. I really don't like most of the music, I have to say, that comes right into my head. But I like some of it.

You know, I love Marianne Faithfull. I'm like a mad woman for Marianne Faithfull and I sing a lot of her songs. I also know like 400 folks songs in every language. I could sing to you in Basque or in Catalan or anything. I love rhythm and blues. I love playing blues. You know, Ed Bell and Bessie Smith. But most of the stuff that comes whining out of the supermarket things I really want to kill. I want to shoot it down. I hate it so much.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: Hollywood. I mean, I love movies. I watch *Law and Order*, I watch *House*, I watch all that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you do Netflix?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I can't get it to work right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, dear.

LINDA NOCHLIN: But that's okay. I've got movies, but most—you know, they're pretty good. But I have a friend named John Lukim [ph] who was one of my students. We have a certain kind of movie we like, which usually involves older British lady actresses, sort of campy movies. The one we're looking forward to next is Joan Rivers. We can't wait to see her at the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh [laughs].

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, she went to school with me. Her sister was in my class.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

LINDA NOCHLIN: But I love—and I just saw this interview with John—I adore John Waters, of course. I think he's fabulous. But I love films. I love great films. I love Russians. What's his name?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Eisenstein.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, but I mean later, much later.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Tarkovsky?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Tarkovsky. Tarkovsky is great. A lot of the French. You know, I've seen a great deal. And I love—you know, a good Hollywood movie is fine with me. I love it. I mean, I don't think everything has to be all the same level. I think the spirit needs a lot of outs of different kinds, if they're good, you know, if they get you. If they have something.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, do you look at, you know, the cinema as an art form equal to painting now?

LINDA NOCHLIN: It depends. I mean, there are some films that are much better than some paintings, let's face it. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's easy to—everybody would agree with that.

LINDA NOCHLIN: It depends.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. It absolutely depends.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, what would be your top five?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I don't compare them because they're totally different. One you stand still and you look at it—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —and the other takes place in time, and I think they're very different. I don't think they're—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Time-based media—

LINDA NOCHLIN: I don't think—that's why, you know, it's sort of hard to do a show like this one, you know it's the same effect.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: You know, which is time-based, which is namely—what's it called? Dissolves or something like that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, people like—

LINDA NOCHLIN: It's hard to sit—I mean, it's hard on the audience because you go there expecting an exhibition, but you think of how long it takes you to look at a painting when you go, even a very important, good painting. If you look at it for five minutes—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —that would be—analyzing—that would be a long time. You have to sit and watch some of these for 25 minutes apiece.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: And it gets a little boring.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But were there artists there like Bill Viola and—

LINDA NOCHLIN: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No? This was all just—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Before animation actually, and new stuff.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What do you think of Kentridge?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I love him.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wasn't that a great show?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes. I've loved his work for a long time. A long, long time. I love his work. I mean, that is so inventive and so—there is a narrative quality but you want to sit through it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Some of that is not meant for that. I mean, there's the wonderful raindrop piece by—who's that guy? Demun [ph], Alex [ph] Demun [ph]. It's just artificially produced raindrops. It was hypnotic and wonderful but, you know, three minutes is fine, four.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: So it depends. If there is some—like in animation, there often is some kind of narrative *impôt*, right, that you will sit for. On the other hand, you cannot expect somebody to spend 15 hours taking in an art show, you know, which you might to see completely every one of those.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that suggests another question, which is, when you are interacting with a work of art, either a single painting or an exhibition, how do you pace yourself? How do you measure the experience? I mean, some people—I know a lot of studio artists will say that, you know, you don't work for more than three, four hours at a time. Then you take a break. You know, otherwise it starts heading the wrong way.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But, so, what's your—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Going to a show?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

LINDA NOCHLIN: An art show.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How do you go through an exhibition?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Okay. If it's a Courbet exhibition, carefully. I mean, I really spend a lot of time on almost every single piece there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you—

LINDA NOCHLIN: I mean, I'm totally into it. I also like going with—

[END OF TRACK AAA_nochli10_1761.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —beginning and follow the curators.

LINDA NOCHLIN: That very much depends on how well I know the artist. Courbet, I mean, I don't have to run through. [Laughs.] I kind of know what's going to be there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I've probably seen the catalogue.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But if it's an artist you don't know, let's say.

LINDA NOCHLIN: If it's somebody—yeah, I often do like to kind of size it up, go through it. Sometimes. Sometimes I like to go slowly and just—it will take me wherever. But I do—you know, if it's a big retrospective or something like that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, how much time do you think you can spend in an exhibition without going cross-eyed?

LINDA NOCHLIN: About two-and-a-half hours.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, sounds about right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: And that's a lot because I have a bad back and that makes it a little—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But that's a good, long time and it can be very exhausting. If you're really—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, that would be—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —reading the pictures and really interacting with them.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. But, you know, if I go to a foreign country and I'm in a city for only a certain length of time and they have a lot of museums, I can keep going all day.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I just go from one to the other to the other. I'm a hard looker. I mean, I can really—if I have to keep going—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So in those days were you a big espresso drinker?

[They laugh.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: Maybe, somewhat, or I take NoDoz. There's an easier way of getting it than that.

But I can look—if I'm interested, I can really look for a long time, but it's not like looking at a play or looking at a movie with a story, you know? You really have to know what you're looking for.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, do you think scholarship is actually an art form? When you approach, it, do you approach it with the same kind of zeal and passion that you approach a piece on the piano?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, but differently.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But differently? How would you describe the difference?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I have to think carefully. I have to be self-critical. I mean, in piano, I'm such a lousy pianist, I have to let go of, you know, criticism and sort of relax with it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: In writing art history, you have to be—you know, sure, you can let yourself go and write about something or other, but you always have to be self-critical and analytical. At least I think so. And take a distance, even if you're being very involved. It can't sound like gush.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I mean, you know that. And, I mean, I've had philosophical training, so I know something about critique. And it's a different—different. No matter how effusive, it's still a choice of words. You go, alright, correct and correct and change.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How do you feel about the drift in some art history programs, and even some studio art programs, into theory informed by linguistics?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Right. I think it's very helpful. I think it's very helpful in your analysis and thought and so on. I myself, I've taken a Lacan seminar and I certainly know Freud's work. I think that Freud is of the utmost importance. I don't mean the silly stuff. I mean like Leonardo da Vinci. I mean Freudian, in a way, ideology, methodology, et cetera, in more general social terms.

For example, I mean, the whole idea, also Simone de Beauvoir, that you weren't born a woman; a woman is made, it comes into being—which is true equally of men, I might add, but that any of us, as human beings, we have our gender, so to speak, thrust upon us in many ways, formed. And that, as Freud said, it's not easy to

become a woman or a man. There's all sorts of glitches along the way.

I think that's an enormous insight. Enormous, the degree of self-consciousness, unbelievable.

[Side conversation.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: Anyway, I think theory is absolutely an enormous aid in thinking about art, but I don't want a reason to dissolve in theory. I'm not a theoretical person, but I find it self-corrective. And I've read Althusser, I've read Derrida, I've read Malcron [ph], I've read all of these.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you think it's more useful as a kind of way to build mental rigor, a discipline?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, a way to relook at things—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —and rethink about them, certainly. As I say, that is the direction that I end up in. But I have respect for aspects of it, and that certainly has been useful to me, very useful.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, certainly to deliver a message or an idea to a large audience, that would seem to be a daunting way to do it because it's so inaccessible to—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Most people.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —to most people who are not trained.

LINDA NOCHLIN: It is, but it can be threaded into other ways of thinking and make them, you know, maybe not easy but will get closer to what one wants to think about and say.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But, how would it inform scholarly practice, per se? Would that—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, you don't think everything is a given, it's just all laid out—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —simple and you just put it together like, you know, dumb students. That's not how it is. It's not—I mean, total empiricism without any self-consciousness is not what I do either. As I said, I'm sort of a Marxist or a dialectician or whatever you want to say.

But, no, I think one has to be aware of one's own position. One has to be aware of the doxo [ph] on who's been given you. I think self-consciousness about what you're doing and what you think is essential. And I'm empiricist. You know, I work close to the object.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There is an empirical component to what you do.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Absolutely. Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And there is an expressiveness in that.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes, there is that too. There is. And there is a theoretical, intellectual, dialectical component.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, how have you evolved as a writer?

LINDA NOCHLIN: How do I evolve?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because if scholarship is an art, then the artistic form is manifested mostly via writing.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, and I think, when I look back and my earlier work, it's more conventional in its writing. Even though—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How so? How do you mean?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, it's more—like other people's scholarship is more—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Even academics—

LINDA NOCHLIN: I don't let myself go. I don't permit myself emotion or personal comment or so on and so on, though it seems to be more so than most of my other contemporaries, but it's much less so than—now I feel no

compunction about putting in a bit of poetry or "I feel" or stuff like that.

I'm much more heterogeneous about how I write now. I don't—I think I'm less traditionally scholarly in my writing than I was in the beginning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was there perhaps, in the beginning, some kind of a competing pair of desires—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I just thought that's how you did it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —be academic and scholarly in a proper way—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and be literary, because you love literature?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I always did, yeah. I always like to write. So, I mean, compared to a lot of other writers, I was much more readable, I think, than a lot of other.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes. Yes.

LINDA NOCHLIN: But I was still a little more controlled. Now I let—you know, I got much more looser.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, when you write, you think about the pleasure of reading as well.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes. Well, the pleasure of writing and reading.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The pleasure of writing and reading.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Being the first to read it.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, and the difficultly. Oh, that is hard work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you wrote poetry as a young person. Arthur Miller told me once that he sometimes wrote his plays in verse and then made them into prose. Do you read aloud what you write, or is there anything else that you do to vet your work?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Never. I don't think—I mean, I read it aloud because I have to lecture—if I lecture, I read it aloud, but I never think of reading them aloud.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Not as a self-critical part of the—

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, it's all visual. It's when I lecture that I read or talk it aloud. I don't think—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You rehearse, you know, the writing at home?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Read it, see how it flows?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. Well, only read it. I don't ever do it aloud. And my talks are—though they're written out, you know, I can be very spontaneous, very different from an orator.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, as a lecturer, you also extemporize a bit.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Sometimes, yes. I think of new things while I'm—I do a lot of lectures.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, of course. So, at this point you have a lecture you—do you always write it out, or do you use notes?

LINDA NOCHLIN: It depends. It depends. I usually write it out loosely, let's say, and now that we have PowerPoint, you can put your notes underneath and pray that they're going to have the right kind of [laughs] projector, that doesn't show them. I do do notes, much more. And then when they come to me with the bad news that it's got to be an article because they're having a publication, I use those notes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Are there any other tricks that you use? Like, for instance, one of the tricks that I have learned is 18-point type, double-spaced, two minutes a page, that kind of thing.

LINDA NOCHLIN: No. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No teleprompter tricks? No.

LINDA NOCHLIN: No. I mean, I can sort of tell how long something is or if it's too short. I always say it's sort of like meatloaf: You put in some more—

[They laugh.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: —a little more bread, spread it out, you know. You know, by now, after—how long have I taught? I started at 22 and I'm going to be 80 at my next birthday.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So that's a while. That's a while.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. I mean, I kind of know how long it's going to be.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But you were never—at any point in your life, you were never learning these kind of—

LINDA NOCHLIN: I don't remember, no.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —tricks or the performance tips?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No. I was always so nervous when I was going to read, I just don't think I ever bothered with that. I worried about what I was going to say.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, how do you think the practice of art history has changed over your lifetime?

LINDA NOCHLIN: How? I think theory plays a larger role. I think interest in modern and contemporary has quadrupled, I would say, at the Institute of Fine Arts, which is one of the leading places. But you could say that about Columbia, probably, or Harvard, Yale, anywhere. The number of students intending to major in, or ending up majoring in, as graduate students, modern or contemporary is more than a third or half.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: To what do you attribute that?

LINDA NOCHLIN: And when I went, there was no such thing. You didn't have any contemporary.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was all hindsight.

LINDA NOCHLIN: You were supposed to find out about that yourself. They were your contemporaries; you were supposed to go out and look.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, to what do you attribute that trend?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, important people in the field pulling in that direction. A kind of exacerbated interest in the contemporary art world itself. It seems more exciting, fresher. You don't have to know foreign languages, they think. They have to if they go to the Institute. Being "with it" as taking precedence over scholarship.

I'm not saying—I mean, we have the smartest people who will do research down to the bone. At the Institute you must take older stuff. You must take non-Western stuff. You must have a lot of variety, and you have to write qualifying papers. So you've got to learn other stuff, not just—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, they have to write in a global context now.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, they have to write in a more global context. They always had to do ancient. But it used to be that, you know, the Renaissance was the be-all—the sort of center of scholarship. Now it's just another field, you know?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just another field.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. Nobody is particularly more interested in that than, say, medieval or Baroque or Chinese or whatever.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, are people less interested in the past, or is there just—

LINDA NOCHLIN: I would say they're less interested.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —more people interested in contemporary?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I would say there are more people not as interested in the past. Alas, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, because if you say people are interested in non-Western art, global art—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, they are. We have a huge emphasis on Latin America, too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: There's a whole coterie of people who are doing that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that's on the rise.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, mainly 19th or 20th and 21st. But Chinese is very hot. What else? Middle Eastern. But contemporary-contemporary? 20th, post-World War II.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, do you think it will keep trending in that direction?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I don't know, but it sure has trended that way so far.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And what do you think the prospects are for all of these people? If everybody is cramming into the same field, it's—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —going to make it a little—

LINDA NOCHLIN: I don't know. That I cannot predict. I think museums, I think galleries, I think academic fields, somewhat. You know, for our students there usually—there is some job anyway.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Maybe not, you know, what they had hoped, but they usually end up getting what jobs in the area that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So, how do you think you have shaped scholarship with your own work?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, wherever I go they all [laughs]—former students come running up to say, "Hey!"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that's a good point.

LINDA NOCHLIN: You know, I mean, they're everywhere! In museums, in universities.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're involved—

LINDA NOCHLIN: I mean, when I go to something like SITE Santa Fe, people come rushing up. One woman said, "You changed my entire life."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's wonderful.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I didn't want to say, for the better or the worse. [Laughs.] I assume she meant for the better. But, you know, they all remember me. Of course, it's easy to remember your teacher. You don't remember your students as much. But, everywhere. I mean, they're all over the place. So, they went into the field, a lot of them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: When we spoke last time you indicated that you were still in contact with a lot of your former students.

LINDA NOCHLIN: A lot of them. A lot of them are my friends.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

LINDA NOCHLIN: True friends.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: At this point they're colleagues.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, colleagues, friends.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's great.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. I really like them. What I like in people is that they're interested in the things that I'm interested in, but in an interesting way, and a lot of them are. I mean, they're really my close friends.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, this might be a good time to take a break. It's been almost an hour-and-a-half. You said you've got another engagement.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, I've got to get myself pulled together.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Perhaps we could do another exit conversation—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and talk about a few other things.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Absolutely. You think of it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Like audience, publishing, stuff like this.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Absolutely, with pleasure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, all kinds of good stuff. Yeah, this is really wonderful. I'm really enjoying it.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I mean, once you get me started, of course, I won't stop. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you're a great conversationalist and loads of—

LINDA NOCHLIN: I have so much to say, not always totally connected.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's a wonderful thing.

LINDA NOCHLIN: It's okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thank you so much.

[Side conversation.]

[END OF TRACK AAA_nochli10_1762.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking with Linda Nochlin at her home at 875 West End Avenue in Manhattan on Wednesday, June the 30th. Good afternoon.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Good afternoon.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We've had a really amazing, far-reaching, wide-ranging conversation on many, many topics, and I thought that perhaps it would be useful today to, you know, take an hour or so and just try to sum up in large strokes what we have discussed.

Is there anything that you can recall from our prior conversations that you wanted to talk about and touch on?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No. I think if you would map out an area that we might want to concentrate on, I would be happy to concentrate there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I thought that the important realms where you have had an impact—scholarship, teaching and publishing—it would be interesting to sort of, one-by-one perhaps, to explore ideas like how scholarship or the practice of scholarship has developed and changed since you went into the field of art history.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Right. That's [laughs] a many-pronged question.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, how did you find it when you were a young person starting out? What kind of a field was it then, in your experience?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, it was arduous but fairly clear-cut in some ways about what the objects of investigation were going to be, how one went about investigating them, what the conclusions were going to be.

Partly, I suppose, I'm talking about the mere technology of scholarship, too. I think that has changed enormously, and with it has changed ideas of what you can do with scholarship. I mean, in my day, there were no Xerox machines in the early part of my career.

I remember when my father got one of the first, you know, Xerox machines for his office, and I was on my way to Europe to finish off my dissertation and take the manuscript with me. And he stayed up all night in his office making a copy of my manuscript so that I would have it. I mean, I thought that was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's a great dad.

LINDA NOCHLIN: [Laughs.] He was terrific on that score. But what I did when I initially went to Paris to start research on Courbet was I did just what medieval scribes did, basically. Nothing had changed. I had a yellow legal pad and I got archival material from the Bibliothèque Nationale, for example, which had a great deal of the information I wanted, or from Estampes. That was my main place of research.

There were seven boxes of Courbet materials, mainly in his handwriting, and I transcribed a lot of that material from the green boxes to large yellow pads, and that was my research. And, basically, as I say, medieval scribes did that. [Laughs.] That was the way you did it. I mean, sure I had a typewriter and stuff like that, but it was—just simply collecting the material was arduous. And I think one tended to cherish the material a lot because, you know, it was what you went to dig out. That was the basis of it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There's a tactile aspect to it, too.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The smell of the index cards.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes. I mean, it was—I mean, the Bibliothèque Nationale had to be experienced at that time. The bathroom facilities were primitive. They were very strict about certain things and very helpful in some ways. But everything was handwritten. I mean, all the cards, the numbers on them and everything, it was all handwritten. It was all totally—very orderly, but I think that gives you a different way of looking at what scholarship is. It's more material. It's more like handcrafted, and it has a certain humane, personal touch that's very nice.

Now, to get the stuff out of Estampes—I like to go there, sure, not that you are ever allowed to touch the actual material. Everything is on microfilm. That's what you're getting. And to be totally truthful, I can just go onto Gallica, which has conserved everything in the Bibliothèque Nationale. I mean everything: books, manuscripts, documents. You just sit at your home computer, and I can get practically everything I need.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's all scanned and searchable online?

LINDA NOCHLIN: All, totally.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's like a lot of the oral history interviews at the Archives.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Sure. They're gettable online. I got a lot of mine when I went down to—I gave the something-something lecture at the Smithsonian this past year. I can't remember what it's called. It's a big-time lecture. And I gave it on American women artists. It was fascinating doing the research. I could pull up everything. I could pull up journals, documents, photographs.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, it's amazing.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Almost everything. There was very little lacking that I had to actually go to an [laughs] actual library for. So, already, both for better and for worse—and in many ways better—I mean, it's wonderful to be able to pull this stuff up. And it's scholarship, alright. It's stuff you didn't know before, and you can get it, you know, in volume, and at the same time, and you don't have to cope with, you know, nasty librarians. [Laughs.] It's really amazing and it's right in your own home.

But of course something is lost in the material substance of what scholarship was then, you might say. And it gives you a different attitude toward what you're doing, at least in the 19th century. I'm not saying there probably aren't still archives in private hands or that require discovery or that you don't find new things all the time. But in a way it's the ideas that you have about the material, the way you put it together, the "we" discoveries.

For example, Renoir is one of the big no-no's, or was, of 19th century scholarship. I mean, it's habitual to sort of sneer at him, to disregard him, to hate him for his so-called misogyny and the sort of almost kitsch quality of a lot of his female nudes, his general sort of old-fashionedness and sugariness, et cetera. But he is being revisited and revisioned and looked at differently.

There's a big show out in Philly now. There's Bob Herbert's brilliant work on Renoir's writing and publication. There was a very interesting show in Rome. He's being looked at afresh. And, I mean, this is a work of

scholarship too: revision. It's not that we're necessarily discovering undiscovered works by Renoir, but we have discovered writing by him and it's been published brilliantly by Bob Herbert.

And we may be thinking differently about him, because each generation or each art movement makes us look at the past differently, obviously. The Postmodern generation is going to have a very different view of Renoir than the Modernist generation. And it doesn't mean that I don't think that some of his nudes are absolutely corny and—not offensive but, you know, uninteresting in many ways, or repetitious.

But I think in many ways he's a challenging and interesting painter, and especially in his later years when he does these, you know, enormously fleshy, pinheaded [laughs] kind of nudes, which, you know, I'm interested in comparing with Cézanne's late *Bathers* too. And I'm interested in the whole context in which the late Renoir is working, why Picasso thinks he's one of the greatest painters and buys him and all that, and Matisse as well. So, obviously artists were looking at him very differently in the early 20th century.

So, I think that this sort of revisionism, reinterpretation, recontextualization now—now that it's so, so to speak, easy to get the raw material, I think a lot of the work of gathering and collecting and so on—it must always go on; I'm not saying it should stop at all, but I think there's no question that it's easier to get your hands on the basic material. So I think there's a lot more tendency to reevaluate, reinterpret, reshape, rethink in general the art of the past, and the past itself. And I think of course that always had be done. It's always been a task, but I think now especially.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So the mobility of information has transformed, you know, the canon into a fluid thing.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes, I would say that, into much more of a fluid thing, and much more put the emphasis on putting together an interpretation.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Although that's always been true, to a degree.

LINDA NOCHLIN: It's always been true. It's always been true, but you don't have to spend as much time doing that [laughs]—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —that kind of basic copying from one document to another, and I think that frees up your time for something else.

Now, I'm talking very much in terms of the 19th and 20th centuries, you know, where we have almost [laughs] too much material. I mean, I have friends who are classicists, and of course they are—their priorities and what they have to do and how they—what always amazes me with classicists and so on, is the tiny amount of material in which they base enormous ideas. They have hardly any documents at all.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, is it this nexus of technology enhancing the speed at which information is able to move?

[Phone rings.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, I think so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Could you excuse me for one quick second?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure, I'm going to pause the—

[END OF TRACK AAA_nochli10_1763.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. So in a way, art has always been a global phenomenon.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, to some degree. But not—I think it's—certainly in Europe, people traveled all over the place. I'm not sure there was that much East-West, and so on. Some, but not always.

I mean, French and English artists always went to Rome. I mean, that was understood that you would go to Rome. You weren't finished until you've been to Italy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But the Asia trade went to Acapulco. And, you know, the galleries and—

LINDA NOCHLIN: That was a little more complicated.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. But then the East African—the slave trade, you know, the Atlantic—the so-called triangle trade with slaves and sugar and all that.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, but I'm not sure how much impact that actually had on art production.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, not on the art that we study as art at this point from that period. But I had a colleague at University of Colorado who was an Africanist, who was working on a project to actually identify by name the makers of different pieces in towns and villages that had oral histories. And there were oral historians who could actually have a look at a piece and say, "Oh, yes, 12 generations ago, this was made by—"—and have a name to assign to the piece, as opposed to just like an ethnographic, tribal identifier.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Right. I mean, you know—I know I'm sure there were changes in those fields.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How did you feel about, you know, the debate at that time during the exhibition *Les Magiciens de la Terre* accusing you of, sort of, neo-colonialism. I remember that was—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Everyone has accused me of colonialism if they dared look at or interpret or think about the art of former colonies. It's inevitable. It's inevitable. And I think, you know, to some degree, it's probably right. But I also like to look at the other side of it, which people like Homi Bhabha and so on have been exploring, which is: What do the colonialized do with the culture of the oppressor? How do they manage it? How do they transform it? How do they use it to their own purposes?

Is there just a one-way street? And I think many of the ex-colonized themselves, the intellectuals, understand this without forgiving or excusing or whatever. They understand this reciprocity that isn't simply one culture imposing on the other and eradicating it, but that a shift takes place within the oppressed culture itself, which transforms it into something quite different.

And I think it's no accident that we have, you know, all these great writers in the English language coming from non-English—I mean, from India, for example. Some of our best writers, I mean, come out of India. Other previously—some of the best French writers, I'm sure, come from, you know, a former French colony, et cetera, et cetera.

So, I think there's too much of a tendency, again, to apply simple either-or, black-and-white standards toward those relationships.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And assign it a moral value, as well.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Whereas I think it's much more complicated and, in a way, insulting to the former colonials, to act as though they're totally passive things, objects that another power has totally imposed on them, as though they could be erased or as though they didn't have agency, too. So, I think that has been rethought in very interesting ways.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And assigning it a moral value based on a Western paradigm, a code of—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. Which—yes, okay. Whatever.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So that's—

LINDA NOCHLIN: I think it's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wrong-headed in your view?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. Yes. And I think it's more complicated than that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So looking forward with this global village, as some people like to refer to it, that's interconnected instantaneously through IT and searchable archives online in more and more places, more and more societies, more and more different scholarly traditions and artistic traditions, how do you see scholarship evolving? You know, the methodology, the outcomes, goals?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I must say, okay, as far as I'm concerned, I am totally of the Western tradition. I make no pretenses of being anything but. Yeah, for contemporary, sure. I do global feminism, so I'm interested in what women artists are doing all over the world, et cetera, et cetera.

But I make no pretense of being able to master in any meaningful way other cultures beside the West. That has not been my training. That has not been my involvement. And so I believe in opening it up, but I think a lot of

this openness to other cultures, blabbity-blabbity-blah is a lot of nonsense in terms of deep scholarship. You can't know everything about everything, nor can you feel the same way about everybody. I don't love everybody in the world. I'm not even interested in most of the people in the world [laughs], let's face it.

I have a tradition, an inheritance. I don't prize it above all others, but it happens to be mine. That's who I am. And what I'm interested in in the 19th century very much is, you know, a Western tradition. And mainly I focused on France, for better or for worse. I like to branch out from there, true. And I have. But that's the direction my scholarship is going to take. But I'm investigating different things with different objects in mind. So let's put it this way: I mean, I was always—you know, I was interested in the Dreyfus Affair. And I was interested in Orientalism in art. I was interested in everything to do with gender in art, and so on. In other words, my range within Western culture is a pretty broad one.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And expansive.

LINDA NOCHLIN: And it's rather expansive. And that's where I'm going to stay. I mean, that's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Good position to be in.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I'm not going to pretend to worldwide knowledge. I mean, that's impossible. I couldn't do it, and I don't want to do it. I don't have the languages, I don't have the skills. Why should I? I mean, it's ridiculous. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Somebody else can do it if they feel so strongly about it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: If you had a crystal ball, what would you say—what would you think—let's say you have a crystal ball in the mail. You're going to be able to have a look into it in a day or two. And you're going to be able to see how the utility of art-historical scholarship is going to change over the next hundred years. How do you hope it will change? What do you hope you see in the crystal ball?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I don't know. It's hard for me to think that way. [Laughs.] I never think that way.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's a challenging question.

LINDA NOCHLIN: It is, but I can't really address it. And it's for other people to figure out, not me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that's an answer.

[They laugh.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: I don't think like that. I know what I want to do. And I see what some of my students are doing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you want to evaluate the evidence as you meet it, as you find it?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. I'm not—I don't speculate in those truths, really. Right now, I see the interest in modern and contemporary has, within the last 25 years, exponentially grown. So there are many, many more people working in that realm for better or for worse. I'm not so sure it's always better.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And to what do you attribute that?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, the contemporary has been made very exciting. It seems like rejection of the old stuff. I'm not sure that people aren't going to come around, you know, find, "Okay, enough," right? That we've looked at enough installations and video. But you know, I think video is a very profound—moving images.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So this means you have to change your critical lens in order to understand the difference between novelty and real invention.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, exactly, which in a sense, one always had to do. But I think it's profoundly affected scholarship. And now, I really emphasize the need for people to know history, the history of art, what it helped make for. Because I think without it, you're just, like, floating in a kind of vacuum.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you feel that in a way, some kind of diligence dealing with historical artwork is a necessary apprenticeship—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —in order to get the skills and—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Absolutely. Yeah. And at the Institute, we do that. So, I mean, it's necessary. On the other hand, I think it's very important to study the art of other cultures. Again, a requirement of the Institute. You know, ancient Near Eastern or Chinese or Japanese or so on.

I mean, in a funny way, you don't get a grip on your own culture and see what it is until you see other cultures which don't take for granted what your own culture does. That's what wakes you up into the fact that you're taking certain things for granted about art in general just based on your own experience, whereas there are other ways of looking at it.

I mean, the idea of originality, for example, which is not at all cherished in traditional Eastern cultures like China or Japan. They are following a tradition as closely as possible. It's primary. And to us, that's just wild [laughs], I mean, that originality isn't necessarily treasured.

So I think there's nothing like being immersed in the art or the thinking of a very different culture to make your own stand out, as though it's dipped in a photographic bath and suddenly everything about your culture comes out as something specific to it, not something about human beings in general. I think that's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So are a lot of these classes that deal with non-Western art dealing also with the difference in scholarly methodology?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I don't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How Asian—

LINDA NOCHLIN: I don't know what they do. I've never taken them. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. I'm just curious.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I know. My friend who teaches Chinese art at the Institute is a very theoretical person. I mean, he has some kind of theory that he teaches along with the art. But sure, you have to teach the fact that it's valuable to be an original, to immerse yourself in tradition as much as possible, I think. I mean, I don't know. That's a feeling I get about it.

But that's—you know, it's true also if you study art history of your own world. I mean, if you study early Netherland-ish painting, it's obvious that very different values are at stake. You know? But there, you always feel you can feel the futurity happening, you know? You see a little bit of this that's going to happen much later, too.

But I think history wises you up to the fact that your values, aesthetic and otherwise, are not everybody's at every time. There, it's temporal. You see—I mean, just look at a Titian nude. Inglorious, yes, but surely everyone, when they first see one, thinks, "Isn't she a little overweight?" [Laughs.] You know?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that's –

LINDA NOCHLIN: Et cetera, et cetera.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. That's a shift in—

LINDA NOCHLIN: —the ideal. But even—you know, it's kind of blurry. It's very different from the way we would conceive of doing a nude, except the tradition carried on for a long, long time.

But you look at a Titian nude and you look at *Olympia*. *Olympia*, I think, you can get right away because it's part of modernity. I mean, it's part of your own values, in a way. The Titian you may love, but you see that it's different. That it's a different sensibility, it's a different way of applying paint, it's a different way of thinking of the naked body.

Even if it's your own tradition, you have to get in line with those values, you know? You have to sort of see the difference. I am much more interested, let's put it this way, in difference than similarity.

You know, we were always taught, "This is influenced by that and this looks like that." What interests me is: Within these influences, what is the difference? Now, that's the interesting part of art history. Difference, not similarity. So I think, you know, there's still a lot of work to be done within our own culture. And I don't know why I should say "our own culture." I mean within the West and the canons of Western art and so on. I think there's still a lot.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And as somebody once remarked, the past is a foreign country. I guess to that extent, so is the future.

LINDA NOCHLIN: It is. It is. The future is even more of a foreign country. I think predicting the future is a totally futile and boring and airheaded operation.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I don't mean to predict.

LINDA NOCHLIN: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I just mean—I mean to be open to it. So I guess you—

LINDA NOCHLIN: I'm not open to it because I don't know what it is. What if the future is we all have machines in our heads and, you know, we're like pencil sharpeners?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're there. You know, we're already—[laughs].

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, not quite. No, but I mean I don't want to predict and I don't want to be open to it. I might be closed to it. I might hate it. I probably would. I mean to me, that's sci-fi and I'm not into that. I just don't want to think about it. It doesn't interest me. I'm not a futurist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're more interested in what might—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Now.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —occur in this moment.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Now. Now is what I'm interested in. And the past—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, you mean a moment ago.

LINDA NOCHLIN: —in relation to that. Well, now. Now, now.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, you mean a moment ago. [Laughs.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, whatever it is. But you know, the present.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, now.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes. I'm interested in being at the present and looking at the past. That's what I do as an art historian.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, we were earlier speaking about how IT has put the canon into a state of flux and change and all these influences.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, yeah, maybe it has. It has, indeed. But this happens periodically anyway. It may happen more quickly and more easily now, if possible.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is there another time in history that you think is—not to ask you to draw a similarity, but is our moment in history today different from other moments in history like the late or the early 16th century or the middle of the 19th century or any other period in time?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I don't know. I don't think any period is like any other, really. [Laughs.] I don't see it. I don't quite see that. I don't think history repeats itself, really. You know, there may be certain elements that are taken over. But I don't think so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Teaching. Let's move on to teaching. When you first started teaching art history, when you returned to teach an art history class at Vassar, what kind of students were you dealing with then versus their counterparts today? What do you think has occurred?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I was teaching all women students.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: All women students. So it was a highly gendered environment, anyway.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, yeah. Sure. And they came mainly from middle-class and upper-middle-class and upper-class families, although others were mixed in. But, you know, they were a highly selective group. They were not open enrollment.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was privileged.

LINDA NOCHLIN: They were privileged and they were highly educated. You know, in a very traditional way, most

of them. You know, they knew a language. They knew how to write English, though I doubted sometimes to read their papers. You know, they had had all the advantages, many of them.

And many of them were really intellectually interested and perceptive. And in fact, some of the male teachers who had taught at male colleges said that the women were much more interesting to teach because they weren't out to make careers, you know. They really could get involved in ideas and issues. You know, they liked learning for its own sake, and a lot of them did. You know, they really wanted to know what this was. And they were involved. Good students, a lot of them.

There were bores, too. And I won't say they were all that way. But there were certainly some very, very bright, interesting, interested young women there to teach.

So, I mean, it was a good experience, in a way. It was a good first experience.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you feel that the students at Vassar were like students elsewhere except for the gender context and maybe, you know, the socioeconomic—were there a lot of other schools like—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I think they were like students probably at Smith, Wellesley, et cetera, but they were probably in some way more sophisticated. Vassar students had more connection with New York and were more open generally and had a history of some radical teachers and radical groups. You know, people like Mary McCarthy had gone there, and Elizabeth Bishop. And there had been suffrage activity there. Some of our older women professors, you know, taught summer school for the Women's Garment Workers Union and were very, you know, active, left-radical, politically.

So there was this contrast between some very right-wing Republican, you know, good-girl debutantes, and this other kind, and a lot of people in between. They're more varied than you would think, actually, but intelligent on the whole.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Were there a lot of students at that time who were attending on scholarship or were from less—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yes, there were.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —privileged backgrounds?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I don't know "a lot," but there certainly were. A lot of the people I knew were, yes. Yes. Or whose parents had made big sacrifices.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how did your teaching evolve over the course of your career?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I got more confident. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean, how did it inform your scholarship? How did it evolve as a craft?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I don't know. I mean, I worked very hard at it in the beginning. I prepared 12 hours a day, every day. And I was very nervous about it. I mean, you know, I was younger than—I graduated at 20, so I was younger than a lot of my students. I knew of a lot of them as friends before. I mean, some of them, anyway.

And my colleagues had been my teachers, so it was a slightly equivocal—and I had no graduate work in the field I was teaching. That was the other [laughs] thing. I had only had four undergraduate courses in art history.

So I had to work hard. I had to prepare. And I worked like a demon the first year. And I was very frightened, I must say, very unsure of myself.

But I learned. I learned. I mean, I just learned on the job, as it were, you know? And I was evidently a very good teacher right from the beginning, scared or not scared. I mean, my students would say as much. And they still do now. I mean, "L, you're the best teacher I ever had," you know, "I remember what you did or what you said," or what you whatever. So I—even though I was so full of doubts and terrified and all that, I knew I was a good teacher. I just knew it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But how did your pedagogical goals kind of evolve or become refined?

LINDA NOCHLIN: They never did. I never thought of that. I just did it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just did it.

LINDA NOCHLIN: [Laughs.] I never—I would never ask myself such a question.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, this is exactly, as you know, the kind of auto-interrogation that's happening everywhere now.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I haven't the vaguest idea. I just—there was material, there were students out there. I wanted to engage with it and talk about it. And I would get interested into it, and they would get interested. I am a true intellectual, whatever we want to say. My life's blood is thinking, looking, explaining, talking. I would have been a chief rabbi if I had been a man and stayed on wherever it was.

That is my life. I don't know how else to say it. And it's not something I put on or something I take off. I mean, I can kid around and fool around and have fun. I was a big dance—dance parties and drinking and other things, all of that. But my life is about this. It's about thinking, imparting dialogue, talking, writing, the things of the mind, visions, et cetera. Morals, justice, et cetera. That is my life. It's something I do. It's who I am.

So it's hard for me to say to you. How did this evolve? As a human being, as I evolved, the world evolved. That's how my teaching evolved.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that's the answer to that.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I can't even tell you. I'm not lecturing. I used to do more of it. Now I very much more—I prefer dialogue. I mean, I am a dialectical teacher now. I teach seminars and colloquia.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Small groups of students?

LINDA NOCHLIN: In interchange. Absolutely. To me that is what advanced learning is. Maybe in the beginning you need somebody to lecture. But even there, you know, with all the books and all the stuff online and all the information, do you need somebody standing up there telling you? I mean, I resent doing that now. You can put that down. I mean, that's a change.

I thought the lecture was how it was done in art history. Though we always had discussion groups, too. More and more.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Even in undergraduate classes, you did?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. But now I don't like this very authoritarian-ness of standing up there and telling them how it is. Even if I lecture, I do want some feedback.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How have students changed?

LINDA NOCHLIN: How have students changed? Well, again, it's hard to say because I taught only undergraduates for so long. But they change. You know, the '60s—they did become more radical and more outspoken and more questioning and more, you know—we related to each other with less authority on my part and more activism on theirs. Let's put it that way, especially when I started teaching feminist courses and so on.

But teaching graduate students is quite different from teaching undergraduates. And I taught at the Graduate Center of CUNY, which was a fascinating place to be at the time. It was a program in just modern and American. And Rosalind Kraus was there, and Pincus-Witten, and Gerdts, and Milton Brown, and a few other people too.

But it was hot. I mean, it was just wonderful. The students were tremendous. They were just the most interesting, the most creative, the most rebellious, the most disparate and wonderful. It was wonderful teaching there. I loved it. I absolutely loved it.

And, you know, a lot of the people I taught became very close friends. And the Institute, I mean, I have excellent students who I can talk to as, you know, fellow scholars. We share ideas, we argue things, we talk. You know, it's good. It's very stimulating to be with them in every possible way.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I was wondering specifically if, looking over 60 years of teaching, whether you've seen significant changes in students' goals, in how they regard scholarship, what their expectations are?

LINDA NOCHLIN: It's hard to say because I think the goals shift between graduate students—undergraduates and graduates seem quite different. I mean, graduates are preparing to go out into the world.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In the field.

LINDA NOCHLIN: In the field. And they're preparing for that, you know. So they're very directed. You don't have to tell them to work harder or something. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right.

LINDA NOCHLIN: And they all write well. There's not one—maybe one or two—they may be dyslexic or something or other. But usually they write very well.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I guess I was curious if there was any—

LINDA NOCHLIN: What?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —trend that you've observed that sort of parallels what many describe as the sort of the rise in the last 20 years of the corporate university. Moving towards more—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, sure. It's a little hard at the Institute of Fine Arts to see that. But yes, there is emphasis on more public relations or, you know, letting the students know what you've done and so on.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, the 12-page syllabus, for example.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, me?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, no, no. I mean in a lot of schools.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Twelve-page syllabus? I should say not.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I know a lot of

LINDA NOCHLIN: If I get out one paragraph—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I know a lot of professors who had a contract on the back. And they asked the students to sign, say that they've read it and agree to it. I mean, it's become very—

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, nothing like that at the Institute, I can assure you. Never, never, never.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You're lucky.

LINDA NOCHLIN: But I am—I can see it. And also the dumbing down of courses at state universities. I hear—not at graduate school, but in undergraduate school, you know, because the students mark you down if you make them do too much work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So in order to keep the classes—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, dumb enough for—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, happy and full.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I mean, that is, I find, awful. But in a lot of cases, the liberal arts are just sort of icing on the cake. And they've got to keep running to stay in place. I mean, that is certainly true. But at the Institute of Fine Arts, this is not an issue.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, this is a different environment.

LINDA NOCHLIN: [Laughs.] I mean, they want to know about art. They want to know about culture. They want to go to concerts with me, they want to go to dance recitals. I mean, you know, I take them with me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's a more rarified environment than your average state land-grant university.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, totally. It's just divine. No. I mean, I have wonderful students. And they're interested not just in art, many of them, but in dance, but in music, but in orchestra and everything.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The arts.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I mean, you know, they can share a great deal. Though I don't think they read the way they used. You know, when I got to graduate school, I had read all the great literature in the world. I mean, from every country. I had read Proust, I had read all of Mann, I had read all the Russians, I had read all the American writers. I had read all of Henry James. I had read every—I mean, I had read everything, more or less. And I'm not sure that they read as much as we did.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Lack of curiosity? Do you think this is a television generation?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, I think they watch the tube a lot. My kids read. I mean, my children read a lot, for some reason. But—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How about the grandchildren?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Less. Less. My children read. My grandchildren, they're very—one's into drama and so on and so on. The others are into art and the visual stuff. And music—what they call music. [Laughs.] But not certainly what I call music! But I have very sharp views about music, so I forgive them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So do you like any of the popular music?

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, I hate it. None. That's because I don't listen to it, either. That's untrue. I love Marianne Faithfull. I like the Beatles. I hate Bob Dylan. I love folk music, what we called folk music, stuff you got from the Library of Congress. English, Basque, Spanish, I know them all. I love that. But I like most—I like music before 1800. That's my thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Let's talk a little about publishing and your audience. How did you encounter your audience?

LINDA NOCHLIN: What do you mean?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I mean, your first major publications. And then how did that shape your scholarship, shape your teaching? Obviously, you're a ferociously discursive person, and so this would be just an extension of that.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, part of it, also, is that I was a ferocious researcher, too. And I was in Poughkeepsie, in New York, so I didn't have too many other things beside my recorder group, my group, my poetry club, my kids, teaching and so on, to distract me. So I had plenty of time to spend in the Vassar library.

The first publication I ever did was a review of a book on Chenavard by a famous guy from Princeton, Joe somebody or other. Joseph Sloane, Joseph Sloane. And I tore that book apart. A famous older scholar, very much beloved. I just ripped it to pieces. I quoted Sartre, I quoted a whole lot of other stuff. I showed her. I think Meyer Schapiro had critiqued an earlier book of his. I didn't even know that at the time. But I knew—obviously, I'm with the side of the angels afterward.

In fact, it was such a devastating review that the then-editor of the *Art Bulletin*, who was my teacher, Janson, said he got letters threatening suits, threatening to sue, and stuff like that. I mean, ridiculously, because it was not ad hominem in that sense. It was just devastating and quite brilliant, if I may say so myself, but challenging the whole paradigm, the whole way of thought of this guy. And I knew my stuff.

Well, I got letters from every art publication in the country asking if I would write for them, did I have anything I wanted published, would you like to join us, blah, blah. It made my name over the dead body of this poor guy. I didn't think of it—[laughs]—when you're young, you're cruel. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What inspired you to take him on in that way?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Because I just loathed the way he did it. He was such a conservative. He might have been a good guy, but it was so narrow and conservative and not seeing the implications of what Chenavard was doing or up to or anything. I might not write like that now. I'm sure I wouldn't be as harsh.

But it got on my nerves, you know? It just hit the place where I got angry, as I think he did with Meyer Schapiro, who had done his book called *French Painting Between Past and Present*, and condemned it for exactly the same thing. It was kind of a Marxist dialectical critique, which had not been too favored in the *Art Bulletin* before that. So that's what got—that he had no insight, this person. He was doing completely conventional scholarship on somebody who needed something very different.

Okay, so that was the first thing I published. And then I got the Porter Prize for my article on Courbet and the Wandering Jew, you know I found the source of Courbet's *Meeting* in a popular image, a very specific one, and then I got the Porter Prize for that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, with him on the road meeting Bruyas?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, yeah. And I was launched. I mean, you know, I was known and then Janson asked me to do *Sources and Documents* and I had just had my baby. So I thought, "This is great. I can do that at home. I can do it piecemeal," and so on. And I did so much of it that he said, "We'll make it into two books." One book is on more conservative art history sources and documents and the other is Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. Still useful books.

And then I was asked by—Penguin heard of me. But, you know, I had—I just made a reputation and people asked me to do things. That's what happened. They asked me to do realism in a series, you know? And that was really

a major achievement, you know, that was really—well, it was nominated for the National Book Award.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What do you prefer to do? Do you prefer to write tomes or essays?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I'm an essay person, through and through. Even—you know, my book on Courbet is a big collection of essays. I don't think too much in terms of long narratives, even if I'm thinking of a subject right now I want to do. The book on misère, which I will probably call—I don't know what I'm going to call it, but it's going to be on misère. But it's going to be a series of essays, really, and different aspects, different moments, different countries.

I think much more in terms of a problem, and then opening out, resolve, opening out a problem rather than in temporal narrative storytelling. I'm more a poet than a novelist. So I'm absolutely an article, essay person.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What do you see as your legacy? Not that I want you think about—

LINDA NOCHLIN: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —abandoning your work anytime soon, but yeah.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, okay. Yeah, I think it's in social history. It's 19th-century social history. Thinking about contemporary art, too, a kind of openness, but attention to specific detail. New ways of thinking about old material, let's put it that way. A critical way of looking at art and art history, new ways of thinking about gender in the context of visual art. But I always like new ways.

I mean, I think that's—Orientalism was certainly that. Degas and the Dreyfus Affair. How does an artist's politics intersect or not intersect? Everything I've done is kind of a new take on whatever it was. I mean, I'm not interested in sort of conventional, "whoopee," you know, "this is great, let's show how great it is, and it was influenced by that." That doesn't interest me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you're still teaching?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I'm still teaching.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The merits and the nobility of teaching, or usefulness.

LINDA NOCHLIN: I like teaching. I don't see it as—you have to work at it, that's for sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's useful to you, though.

LINDA NOCHLIN: It's useful to me and I enjoy it. I mean, I get a lot out of it. I like conversation with people about what interests you most, once a week.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So in a way, it's a backbeat to your whole career.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Very much so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: If you had another 80 years, what would you do differently?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I would love it. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We'll keep working on it, might—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, yeah, I don't think I'm going to have another 80. What would I do differently? You probably realize I'm a very unselfconscious person in some ways. I never really look into myself. I never think of myself as having an "in." I always think of myself as a totally external person. And so I don't scrutinize things at all.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You don't spend a lot of time in reflection?

LINDA NOCHLIN: I reflect, but not about myself.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But there isn't, like, one project that you—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Something I would do?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —that you took a pass on years ago, and you say, "Yeah, I should have done that"? Anything like that?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, yeah. I would have to think. I really couldn't tell you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, maybe you would hold the question for the next interviewer.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. I just don't know what I would do otherwise. I've sort of done an awful lot. I mean, I've done everything. Not everything. What would I do? I don't know, I got married kind of young. I've had children, I have grandchildren, travel, good friends. I would probably try to write more poetry. I write some, but I would try to devote myself more to poetry.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Advice to a young art historian?

LINDA NOCHLIN: Do what you want. I know it's hard to—jobs are so tough now, I can't maybe say that in good conscience. But I always believed in doing what you want to do. That is primary. Don't do something because you think it would be good for your career, ever. Never. That's bound to be bad for your life if you do that.

Don't be—I have never in my life curried favor or said something I didn't think or—well, I have shut up when I should have.

[They laugh.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: And frankly, I don't think it ever hurt me. I wouldn't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You haven't noticed if it has.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Well, I'm sure it did in some ways, but not—I think I've had a perfectly successful career. I can't imagine wanting anything better. And I've never—I think planning and plotting your career moves, and so on, rather than focusing on the work is a terrible mistake, for anyone. And my good students don't do that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's not about them, it's about what they're doing.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah. And I think that is important. And you do get recognized. If you're really tops, you can see it. I could tell you right now who the ones who are going to be something, do something. I mean, it's clear. Everything they do is shining and brilliant, and people notice it. The people who count do, whereas the ones who are making the career moves or snuggling up to somebody or other, maybe they'll get ahead a little bit in the beginning. You know, I'm not saying, "Oh, perfect justice," but they don't rank, they don't count, ultimately. I know.

I mean, good people. Tim Clark. my student Ava Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, professor at Harvard. Really brilliant people, and you can see them. I mean, they're not always the nicest people, but they're the smartest. You know, they mostly end up where they should be. And they don't get it by being nice or cool, populating their career moves. People should not waste their time plotting career moves.

And I'm saying this during hard times, when I don't blame a student for doing anything to get a job. It's really hard, really, really hard, even for people from the Institute, the crème de la crème. There just aren't that many jobs in art history.

And I would have to say, go into some other field, but if you love art and art history, do what you want. That comes first, if you're privileged enough to make choices. I'm not saying to some street cleaner, do what you want. There are not too many things around for them to want.

But you know, if you're privileged enough to make choices—it's interesting, we have quite a few students who were lawyers who couldn't stand law [laughs] and came back to get a degree in art history. They just hated being lawyers. I mean, you know, don't wait. [Laughs.] Just start right out doing what you want to do, because you'll figure out some way, probably. It's not necessarily the most practical advice, but it's still the advice I would give.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Anything you would like to add?

LINDA NOCHLIN: To what? [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: All of this.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, all of this?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, we're approaching—

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, I've got to –

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —a convenient time for you to make your exit before the traffic.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Oh, I'm not going to that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, you're not going to that. Oh, I'm sorry, I misunderstood.

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, I have to have my nails done. Absolutely a must before I can do anything else. I look a wreck. Look, I'm too—and these are not so good either. So I'm going to get my nails done and I'm going to an opening at the Whitney. I'm not leaving until tomorrow.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Are you going to go see—is it the Burchfield show that's opened? Yeah, he's a wonderful painter.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Doesn't that sound—well, you know, he's sort of weird. Come on, do you think he's—I'm not sure, I'm not sure how he's going to do. But, you know, I know Robert Gober, and I think—I wrote about Gober. And he curated this show, isn't that curious? I think so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, American art is full of individuals, and he certainly is a highly individual—

LINDA NOCHLIN: A high – yeah. Well, that's why I want to—I'm dying to see what they got—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This guy from Buffalo, you know? [Laughs.]

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, what they got together. There are so many, sort of, scraggly-looking paintings, though. You know, those scraggly trees and wispy—but I just want to see what they got together and if I'm going to change my mind, and so I'm anxious to see it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, maybe seeing a multitude is different than seeing one, yeah.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, it would be different. Yeah, you always see the same one somehow. You know, it's sort of the Burchfield, yeah. Well, this should be good. That's what I'm going to see today. And then off to the beach.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, enjoy.

LINDA NOCHLIN: With a satchel full of stuffed manuscripts to read.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The work never ends.

LINDA NOCHLIN: No, it doesn't, and you know, you think you're finished and more pours in. That's how it is, isn't it?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I guess that's why you're Linda Nochlin.

LINDA NOCHLIN: [Laughs.] I guess so. The endless stream. Though, no, not—anyway, I'm looking forward to a week in the country. Everyone's going to be there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, thank you so much for your time. I appreciate it.

LINDA NOCHLIN: You're welcome, you're welcome. And look, the cat did not attack.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The microphone remained unmolested throughout this conversation.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, that's great.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thank you again.

LINDA NOCHLIN: You're welcome.

[END OF TRACK AAA_nochli10_1764.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]