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Oral history interview with Barbara Bloom, 2012 October 18-2013 January 31

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 Barbara Bloom on 2012 October 18-2013 January 31. The interview took place in New York, N.Y., and was conducted by James McElhinney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

Interview

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, we'll begin. Put this a little closer to you. This is James McElhinney speaking to Barbara Bloom at her home and studio in lower Manhattan on Thursday the—what's the day, the?

BARBARA BLOOM: 18th.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: 18th of October, 2012. Good morning.

BARBARA BLOOM: Good morning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You're from California?

BARBARA BLOOM: I am.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where?

BARBARA BLOOM: Los Angeles. West Los Angeles.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: West Los Angeles?

BARBARA BLOOM: That means something for people who are from Los Angeles.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Which sort of stylish borough, Westwood, Brentwood—

BARBARA BLOOM: If I say it—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Beverly Hills?

BARBARA BLOOM: —if I say it now it sounds different than when I grew up there, but I'm from Brentwood.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, Brentwood, okay.

BARBARA BLOOM: And it was, when I grew up, a very, very nice, very quiet, very unpretentious, not rural, but certainly not city, beautiful, treed, quiet, safe, and neighborhood where a lot of very interesting people lived.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was the years before O.J. Simpson?

BARBARA BLOOM: Way before O.J. Simpson.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, right.

BARBARA BLOOM: And it was the years—and it was, you know, it was—well, should I go on about this—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

BARBARA BLOOM: —before you even ask me a question? You know, I talk about a lot, because it's so radically different than it is now. It was a neighborhood where a lot of people who were from—you know; Los Angeles is and was a company town. So there's a lot of people from the film industry there. But they weren't the movie stars or producers. They were the writers. They were the composers.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Editors, composers.

BARBARA BLOOM: Editors, composers, some more prominent people, you know. Some producers were there. Some actors lived there. But it was also quite left-leaning. So there were a lot of people who were blacklisted

lived there. So, you know, I went through that whole thing with friends of my family who were blacklisted. And so that was a really—in retrospect, a very privileged place to have grown up in a lot of ways, very privileged, because it was such an interesting place, and such a lovely, safe, beautiful place to grow up.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it still is a beautiful—

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, it's Beautiful, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —area. The tree-lined streets sort of at the top of the ridge there—

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —right below the hills?

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, you have above Sunset and below Sunset. So.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. I'm below Sunset.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, below Sunset.

BARBARA BLOOM: Below Sunset. They were [inaudible], yes—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Not that far from UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles] and Westwood—

BARBARA BLOOM: Not far. Very, very close to it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So fairly close to the Palisades?

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, a lot of university people lived there. And, you know, a lot of refugees lived there and it was a very interesting place to grow up. And, you know, it wasn't a city. Los Angeles was at that time really not a city.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It sort of just kept growing until all of these little hamlets sort of merged together—

BARBARA BLOOM: Merged together.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —just like New York. Although—although—

BARBARA BLOOM: Right. Although New York is—the hamlets are much closer together. And you can walk from one the other.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's an island. It has its limitations.

BARBARA BLOOM: You know, I went back a few years ago and did a residency at the Getty. And the place where you lived was basically on the street where I grew up. And it's unrecogni—I mean it's completely the same. You know, the trees are still the same. It smells the same. But it's unrecognizable in terms of—

[Telephone Rings]

BARBARA BLOOM: —oh, boy. Lemme just do this.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We'll just pause for a minute.

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JAMES MCELHINNEY: So your neighborhood has changed a lot over the last few years.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And one of the questions I like to open with is to ask you when you were first cognizant of being in the presence of a work of art.

BARBARA BLOOM: Ooh, that's a really interesting question.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's what everybody says.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's a very interesting question.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: For instance, was there art in your home?

BARBARA BLOOM: There was. There was. There wasn't anything that I would still particularly be interested in. But—well, my dad drew. He was quite a skilled draw—he's 95 and still drawing. He drew kind of abstract, geometrical patterns, and still does, all day long, sits and draws. He's not an artist. He was a lawyer. I don't know. I don't know how I would answer that. I was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What kind of kid were you? Were you a tomboy, a bookworm? Did you play with dolls?

BARBARA BLOOM: Hmm.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs]

BARBARA BLOOM: I was—you know, when I go back and I see friends who I've known my entire life, I'm still in touch with some of those people, they say I have not changed at all, except I'm not as shy as I was as a kid. But I think I always made art. I think I always was interested in how things looked and how you read things visually and how to understand the world in terms of how you can read it visually. If I would talk about the first memory I have of something artistic or close to how I think now, maybe that would be—give more insight as to—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes. What was—perhaps I should rephrase the question and ask you, what was the first work of art that sort of knocked you out, that sort of made you say, wow, I want to do that?

BARBARA BLOOM: I would say maybe that there were friends of my family and parents of a friend of mine who I grew up with who were collectors, Monte and Betty Factor, who were really quite early on very interesting collectors. And so they were very close friends with Kienholz. And so they had in their living room, they had a Robert Irwin painting, one of the dot paintings. And they had a very early—I think they had a very early Baldassari. When I was a teenager, they had a Warhol balloon that they had gotten at some gallery. And there was the house if a new Rolling Stones album came out, we'd buy the record and go to their house and listen to it. Particularly Monte was very generous to me, even when I was very young, like maybe 10 or 11, in talking with me about what the work was. So they had a Duchamp there. And I sat and had a conversation with him about this multiple and what it meant and what's a multiple. So I was very curious about I guess those sort of philosophical questions. And that happened within the art world. But I mean I could draw. but I was never really interested in that. And to say I never was really interested in that is not completely true, but I was more interested in these kind of various—I think I knew about these from the age of maybe 12, that there was another kind of art being made. Maybe I'd say that was the most, kind of shocking—incredibly privileged to have that at a young age—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, absolutely.

BARBARA BLOOM: —to see that. I mean, like, how amazing. And I'm always amazed by people who come from Iowa and have, you know, and that they end up being interested in really particular esoteric kind of art. Because I sort of feel like I was handed this, in some ways.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was just part of your world as a child.

BARBARA BLOOM: In some way, yes. And that's—but I think, I can't—you know, did I see a Van Gogh show when I was little and thought, oh, that's cool? Probably. I don't remember. I don't really remember being really excited until I found out there was this kind of stuff that wasn't—it was more philosophical and strange and perverse and witty.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So did your parents take you to the LA County Museum?

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did they take you to the Huntington Library?

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, yes. Yes, but I don't remember those. I don't remember that, other than going there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thinking, when did they organize the Norton Simon collection? It was later.

BARBARA BLOOM: That was a little bit later.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: '60s.

BARBARA BLOOM: That was later.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Seven— '60s, yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: I was already by then.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But, uh, and of course the Getty was much later.

BARBARA BLOOM: That was much later.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But, uh, so the Factors were friends with Ed Kienholz and he was—

BARBARA BLOOM: They were friends with Ed Keinholz. They were friends with Walter Hopps. They were—you know, when you see pictures of—you know, those early pictures of the first Duchamp show when they're sitting at the table, they're at the table. They were really very advanced kind of radical thinkers and concentrated on buying this kind of complicated art. And Monte, until last year when he died, I still was in touch with him. And it was really important to me that—mostly because I was taken seriously. Here's this little kid who's asking you probably very naive questions about this stuff, and he just talked to me like I was—probably didn't have that many people who were interested in what he was interested in and stuff. But it was really—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How did Monte Factor make a living?

BARBARA BLOOM: He had a men's clothing store. He had a men's clothing store. But I know that he was—I think it's from the same Factor family as Max Factor. And that his wife had—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where it's cosmetic.

BARBARA BLOOM: —Arden Dairy. So I think they came from wealthy families, although they were not pretentious at all. But they had a very large house and cool, very cool things.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Old wealth is seldom showy and pretentious.

BARBARA BLOOM: No, not at all. It was very—but it wasn't, you know, it wasn't like their house was considerably larger than our house, but it wasn't in any way ostentatious.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It wasn't blingy.

BARBARA BLOOM: No, it was not blingy. Things were not blingy in those days. You know, I had no idea that I was growing up in a wealthy community. I had no idea, because it was not—you know, there weren't maids. And it was kind of a middle class attitude.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So did your dad cut his own lawn?

BARBARA BLOOM: He's cut his own lawn? Let me think. Don't think he cut his own lawn. Although—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He must have had some chore that he liked doing other than—

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —drawing.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, he did. That's a fun, interesting question. Did he cut his own lawn? I don't think so. In those days we had a house, which was not enormous house, but a nice size house. But it was on almost two acres of land with eucalyptus trees. It was enormous. And now there are five houses there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The eucalyptus trees, it's a wonderful perfume.

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh my god. And then running down the hills and taking sleeping bags and sleeping in the forest. It was just like, you know, we grew up in the middle of a city, but with that much land around you. It's really—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that sort of northwestern corner of LA is very different than the rest of it.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Very different.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right. You know, but I had friends who—one of my best friends in high school was Ron Kappe. And his dad was Ray Kappe, who was an architect who built this incredible houses. And I was over there helping them build their house. I mean, they were really incredible people who lived in that neighborhood. And they're composers and there were many artists who lived in the neighborhood. And so it was—and I guess it's sort of comparable with the Upper West Side, what was the Upper West Side.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But like you said, LA's a factory town. A lot of the people were either employed by the University or working in the, quote, "industry," unquote.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. That's who lived in that neighborhood.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The industry, as they call—like they call New York "the city."

BARBARA BLOOM: The city. This is the industry.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The industry. Um, so when did you begin? You said you began to make art almost immediately, just as a kid, right? Like every kid makes art.

BARBARA BLOOM: Like every kid does. But everybody has their two or three stories about their youth that kind of come—they kind of resurface. The earliest one for me was sitting on our porch. It was a brick porch in front of our house that had potted jade plants, which are those succulent plants that have a lot of water inside of them. They're quite, quite sturdy. And I would pluck off the leaves of them. I wasn't really allowed. I was told several times not to do this. But I would go and I'd sit out there. I was a little tiny kid, maybe three, four, five—and then take the juice of them and fill in the bricks, very meticulously water, you know, would like paint the bricks. And they would be wet. And by the time you got to the end of the brick, it would be dry and a little bit green. And I would do it again. And I would do it again. It was really, really satisfying. I loved to do that. And I remember that one day my grandmother, my mother's mother, came to visit. And she came and she handed me a silver dollar while I was doing this. And she said, "Well, this is for you from me." She's a very weird lady. "This is for you—" very old-world, very unhappy, weird lady. "And I gave one to Amy—" that's my older sister—"but I know you're not going to squander it like she is. You'll save it or spend it wisely." I'm thinking, okay that's heavy. I already felt that, wah. And, like, everything she said was kind of like—lot of subtitles in everything she did and said. And I thought, well, what does she mean? Amy wouldn't spend it any differently than I would. In fact, she would probably spend it—and I remember, like, I'm coloring in the bricks. And I'm thinking about—the silver dollar's right there. And I'm thinking, what does she mean by that? And why would she say that? And then all of the sudden it occurred to me, she's wrong. And then, dah-dah-dah-dah-dah—grownups can be wrong. And here I am, this little four-year-old kid with this—the act of filling up this brick with this color of green is sort of completely connected to me with the thought process. I remember exactly the thought process, and how I got to the conclusion that an adult could be wrong, which is earth-shattering for a child. And when I think about that moment, it's almost like I could have that thought today.

Just the process, the kind of meticulous way I went through it, and connecting it to some kind of visual activity, is so much like—I get chills from it, because it's exactly how I am. It's like that's the first memory I have that completely maps on to who I am. Unchanged in terms of bullshit monitor. It's like an alert signal for any kind of bullshit. And then how I then meticulous—probably everyone has a moment like that. So that was like a really early one that I kind of went, that—and then somehow connecting it to a visual, something visual. I guess it's sort of my madeleine, sort of the Proustian moment where you have this kind of—but really strong. I go back to that very, very often. Like that's who I am.

And then another one was, I must've been maybe, I'm going to say eight, in school. And then after school there was an art store near our house. Zora. Zora was kind of a bohemian woman. And she had an art store there on San Vincente, which was an old house, which is completely unrecognizable now. There were old houses there. And the library was an old house. And she had this old, old house. And it was an art store. And upstairs she had sort of a gallery there. And she had a kids show. And it was juried. And I won second prize. And I know exactly what my painting was. It was on newsprint, and it was a girl with blonde hair in the wind. And everything was blowing in one direction. And I won second prize. And I was really proud. But Robbie Robe won first prize. And Robbie Robe—I don't know what Robbie Robe's doing these days. But Robbie Robe had this meticulous kind of speed freak Rube Goldberg drawing of—like filled up the entire thing. Weird-ass. He was a weird little pixie kid. Just total freaky, weirdo kid. And then he had this drawing. It was just fantastic. It wasn't of something. Maybe that was the first artwork, Robbie Robe's abstract drawing. There you go. That's the first artwork that I went, wow!

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it was just a tangle of unrecognizability.

BARBARA BLOOM: And it was also his mind working, and how it was machine parts and, you know number—what's the hard pencil? Number one pencil, like really—or ballpoint pen. You know, like speed freak. You know, [high pitched noise]. And I was like, whoa! That is incredible! Because I realized it wasn't of something. That was the conclusion I came. Like I thought about it, like this little analytic mind, like, why do I like that so much? Oh, it's not of something.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It is something.

BARBARA BLOOM: It is something. It doesn't have to be of something. And it wasn't something that somebody

explained to me. It wasn't something that you went to the museum or you got an art teacher. It was something. So he deserved it. He totally deserved—Robbie Robe, I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So who provided you with guidance? Did you have like a mentor or an art teacher or a—other than—

BARBARA BLOOM: Other than school?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Other than Mr. Factor and—

BARBARA BLOOM: Well, that was later. Um, yes. Woman up the street from us was a woman named Catharine Heerman, who was an artist. I was friends with her kids.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hairman?

BARBARA BLOOM: Heerman. So it's H—I think it's H-E—I don't know if it's H-E-E-R-M-A-N or H-E-R-M-A-N, but Cathy Heerman. And her kids were friends of ours, Vicky Koenig and Johnny Koenig. They're a story in themselves. She was married to Lester Koenig who had been a producer. A producer. He worked with Billy Wilder and then he was blacklisted and started a jazz record label. And they were divorced. And I took art lessons with her. And she was wonderful. They had this really eccentric house for at the time. It was the barn of the west gate of the—or the house of the barn of the west gate of the farm. The street was called Westgate, and they were the west gate of the farm that was there. And, um, you know, there were beehives living in the walls. And it was a trip. It was a trip that place. I loved going there. And so we'd make things with her. And she showed us how to do stuff with gold leaf. Like, she'd throw this beautiful material, and I was gold-leafing my hand. It's just these incredible materials. She'd have stacks of newsprint paper, these stacks of large—and we'd grind sumi ink. And she'd have us—these little kids—she'd have us drawing lines, just standing there controlling the ink and drawing lines. She was wonderful. So, you know, a sense of some—she's a painter.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it seems like she was more stressing process than image.

BARBARA BLOOM: Absolutely. Yes, absolutely. I don't remember ever drawing anything or doing—I just remember the materials, um, and lax. I don't think I was really care—yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sounds kind of like, uh, Mickey Mouse and the Sorcerer's workshop, you know? Sort of playing with all of this magical stuff.

BARBARA BLOOM: Uh-huh [affirmative]. It was interesting, because Matt Mullican is from the same, uh, neighbor—he's a little bit further west than I am. But he took classes with Cathy, too. I didn't know that until many years later. And he said, oh, yes. She was—remember drawing? You could make the ink! So it was a remarkable thing as a young kid.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you've got kids with these ink stones grinding ink—

BARBARA BLOOM: Grinding their own ink.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then drawing lines.

BARBARA BLOOM: What a good thing. What a good thing to have children do. What a good thing to—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it connects them to an activity. The art becomes an activity, not a product.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right. I don't remember making stuff that was take-it-home. It wasn't an ashtray kind of a place.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: An ashtray, camp lanyard kind of a place.

BARBARA BLOOM: No, it was not. You know, I don't remember the blob that you took home or the—I'm sure there were blobs that we took home, but I don't really—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, the parents had to see some outcome other than a little fleck of gold on the palm of your hand.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right, no. That's what I remember of it, anyway. That would be fun to talk—because I still am in touch with some other people who did those classes. I should ask them—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How old were you when you were taking classes with her? Teenage?

BARBARA BLOOM: No, no. Grammar school.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, grammar school.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. So 10? 9, 10, 11?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So when did you sort of—

BARBARA BLOOM: Maybe even younger.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —begin to think of yourself as possibly becoming an artist at some point? I mean actually having the thought that—

BARBARA BLOOM: That's something I want to do?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you talked about being handed the silver dollar, advice, and realizing that adults could be wrong.

BARBARA BLOOM: Was I handed the—handed the paintbrush?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: At which point did the idea occur to you that not only could adults be wrong, but that, uh—

BARBARA BLOOM: This is what I do?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That Barbara Bloom might be an artist?

BARBARA BLOOM: You know it's such a strange thing to say. It wasn't even in question. I think I kind of knew it. It wasn't like, um—it didn't dawn on me one moment.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So there was not a fork in the road where—

BARBARA BLOOM: It was more I was interested in what I was interested in. I was lucky enough to have, you know, incredibly supportive parents who basically said, whatever it is you want to do, you should do. So I think that was a lucky one. There are kids now who have really specific take on things. They have a particular taste. They wear particular clothes. I have an 11-year-old daughter now. And I can see those kids now. It's the kids who have really particular way they carry—what does their backpack look like? What does their handwriting look like?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Cell phone.

BARBARA BLOOM: How is everything tricked out? What books are they reading? What music are they listening to? They're kids who are really sophisticated. And it's not like they're sophisticated like they're doing the—but they have their own—I was one of those kids. Somebody showed me E.E. Cummings. I thought, oh man, that's so cool. You don't have to capitalize. Or—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Punctuate or whatever.

BARBARA BLOOM: I think I was a little sponge for weird shit.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And so what kind of stuff were you making? And what kind of stuff were you looking at? Because obviously you get to be a teenager, you get to go to the museum on your own, or galleries, or whatever. Were you interested in that at that point?

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, I'm just trying to think. I don't want to get it wrong and say some kind of mythologized version of my—I don't remember. And there's also, I don't really remember what I was looking at or what I know when I was in high school, I think through Cathy Heerman, who taught at Barnsdall Park, which was the Frank Lloyd Wright Hollyhock house. They turned it into an art center there. And I think she taught some classes there and somehow or another said—I know she was there. I don't remember the conversation, but Eric Orr was also teaching there. And Eric Orr was one of the very first sound light first-generation, together with Robert Irwin and Doug Wheeler and that generation. And he was teaching a class there. So I had to be in high school at the time. Because a couple of my friends and I drove to Hollywood after school, or maybe on the weekends, and went to his class. And he was smart and had cool kids help him build what he was building, which was useful for him and useful for us. And so he's building some kind of sound tunnel, or—he was a really interesting guy. So that's in high school.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So this is like the mid-late '60s, right?

BARBARA BLOOM: This is the mid-late '60s.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you've got all of these people experimenting with installation aesthetics and environmental art.

BARBARA BLOOM: And phenomenal logical art, stuff which is about the nature of hearing or seeing. And that was very import—because it was kind of philosophical, phenomenological practice that was about experiencing something and not knowing the name of it and not knowing what it is. So I think that's the first time I heard about Robert Irwin, was from Eric Orr, though I hadn't seen his work. I was too young to go off— although I don't think I knew about the Ferus Gallery. I was too young for that. I knew about Kienholz from the Factors. I wasn't that interested. It was too goopy for me. But it was interesting. It was radical, but too goopy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You think too poppish, or too—?

BARBARA BLOOM: In your face. Maybe too narrative.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Like the piece with the lovers in the back of the car, that kind of stuff.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. It was really in your face. And though I thought it was really interest—it was really shocking. But I think probably the word too goopy, too much blob.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, in the '60s there was this whole revival of the collage aesthetic. And a lot of high school art teachers were using collage.

BARBARA BLOOM: I had that art teacher.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And it was because no one was teaching, like, design anymore, or drawing. They were teaching art because it was a civil rights movement. And art became a medium of social reform and social therapy. And in a way, collage was very accessible. Anybody could do it, if you had paste and—

BARBARA BLOOM: And a magazine.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And a cutting tool and a magazine, yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right. Well, I had that teacher.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think we all did.

BARBARA BLOOM: We all had that teacher. Mine was Claire Steinman. I was singled out as being good at art. I was good at art. That was clear. My older sister Amy was also good at art. But—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You're working with these artists, helping them fabricate their pieces.

BARBARA BLOOM: That's what I remember, although it could have been wrong. But we were helping them build stuff. It was a sound work. And I don't really remember much about it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I've got to ask, what was your intersection with the youth culture at that time? It was the same time as the sort of psychedelia, San Francisco becoming sort of this magnet for a certain kind of subculture, counterculture, political activism.

BARBARA BLOOM: You know the little microcosms of the world. I had the friends who were SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] friends. And then I had the friends who were a little bit older who played music with Taj Mahal at the Ash Grove. That doesn't mean to you if you don't grow up there. But it was the music—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I remember Taj.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. So he played at the Ash Grove. And there were people who played with—so it was like the music friends. And my whole life I've stayed pretty much with people I've always been with. And that's my world, is people who make music. That's always been my preferred area to live in, in some ways. My husband's a composer. That's continuous. So I had my music. Then you had the kind of hip surfer friends. They were little tiny microcosms. And then the good student friends. And I'm kind of like—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So socially you're crossing all of these different—

BARBARA BLOOM: Then you've got the kids who were dropping acid. And that was—everybody smoked pot. But it wasn't—I was a good enough student. I was a good enough student, and I wasn't crazed. I wasn't crazy. I was serious. I was quite—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're hanging out with the brainiacs, the freaks, the surfers, whoever happens to be

around.

BARBARA BLOOM: But there were so many cool different—when you grow up not in a really small place, that's the cool thing, is that you've got the hipster surfers who are reading Gary Snyder and the Beat poets. And then you've got the art kids who were hanging out with James Lee Byars, who was a friend of—James Lee Byars was enormously important to me. Because he'd just talk with you like you were—he said, "You should read Gertrude Stein." And I said, "What's that?" And so he just gave me Gertrude Stein to read. I'm like 15 years old. I don't know anything. And that way of—the permissiveness to like whatever is that you're interested in, just follow that is what I learned. And it's served me really well. Not afraid to go in somewhere to find out about it. Certain areas are not owned by someone. You can mix it up. You can hybridize it. That's really what I took away from all these little places you can go in and out of.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Curious, were you traveling? Did your parents take you to Europe on vacation or to Hawaii or to Mexico?

BARBARA BLOOM: My parents traveled. But we took one trip to Europe, after I graduated from high school, between high school and going to college. Is that true? Maybe it was the year before that. We took one trip to Europe.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Where'd you go? Was it one of these, if it's Tuesday, it must be Belgium type experiences? Or were you in one place?

BARBARA BLOOM: No, we did a lot of traveling. I remember most the driving in the Pyrenees. I don't remember so much about the trip. I remember some museums. I don't remember so much about it. Funny that I don't. I'm still not a big museum-goer. I don't love to go to museums.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, they've changed so much, I think, from the time when—

BARBARA BLOOM: Where you could just go in.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: When we were in high school, that mid-late '60s, you'd go to a museum and there'd be two people in the museum. Now you go to the Met—and I remember the Met. You'd go into the museum. In a gallery there might be one person. There might be nobody. Now you've got the lowing herd moving through this, multitudes of people. Which is, I guess, a good thing for the institution. But the museum atmosphere has totally changed.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. When I go to the Met now, I'll go and see two things and then get out of there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that's the only thing you can do.

BARBARA BLOOM: I can't deal with it! I just can't. I'm claustrophobic. I've got to get out.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Half a million objects. You didn't go there to see them all. You went there to see one or two things, or an exhibition. You go, you do it, and you get out. That's the way to do it.

BARBARA BLOOM: I go get a hit. I've got to go see the Vermeers and get out of there. That's what you need to do. Everybody needs to go to the Vermeers and get out of there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think that anybody who is in the arts as a visual artist or working in an art-related field, most of us have this attitude towards museums.

BARBARA BLOOM: You just go in and see.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You just can't absorb more than what you can absorb. And if you give all your attention to one thing—

BARBARA BLOOM: That's it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean two paintings will wear you out if you really pay attention. If you really pay attention.

BARBARA BLOOM: So did I grow up in a museum culture? No. I grew up in a film culture. My mom was an actor.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, really?

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What kind of roles was she doing?

BARBARA BLOOM: When I was growing up, she would be the—on *Dr. Kildare* [series] she would be the mom of a sick boy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, okay.

BARBARA BLOOM: Got it?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did she do a lot of ads? Did she do a lot of TV?

BARBARA BLOOM: She didn't do ads. She did TV, but it was more like the mom of a sick boy. Dennis the Menace's next-door neighbor. And she was in plays. She was in some movies, sort of before my time. But by the time we were kids, she wasn't doing it as much as she was.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What name did she go by?

BARBARA BLOOM: Frances Rey.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Frances Rey.

BARBARA BLOOM: R-E-Y.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: R-E-Y. Sort of Hispanic.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. She was very beautiful and very kind of fancy, kind of a boho fancy. She's a character. So movies were a big part of growing—if I had to choose, like you could only do one thing, would I go to a gallery or a museum or a movie, I would go to a movie, any day. Even a bad movie. I don't really come from—I come more from film or from literature, or maybe even music in the way of thinking. I'm not a still, stay-put image—that's not what I come from. Although, that's what I make.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Although art's changed a lot, even painting. You think about the difference between somebody like Gericault and somebody like Vuillard, your Whistler—you've got this large spectacle, which was really like the IMAX movie of its day, social commentary, destroy the government with this scandalous painting. And then you have this intimate, sort of aesthetic object 80 years later. So I think that a lot of people today are just realizing that film really was the narrative painting art form of the 20th century, and are starting to have a look at it in that way. But you think—well, here's another question. As somebody growing up in an industry town, do you think people in the industry were aware of the artistic ramifications of what they were doing?

BARBARA BLOOM: I'd be too young to know that. I was a kid.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or was it just a job?

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, no. I don't think it was just a job. I'm too young to even speculate about that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because everyone in LA's an actor. I mean almost everybody.

BARBARA BLOOM: Bruce. They all hold hands full of Bruce.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Bruce, and—

BARBARA BLOOM: I'm going to be your waitperson today. Or a screenwriter. Everybody's working on a script.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Everybody's waiting for a call from their agent. Every waitress at—what's that restaurant called? Fred Segal or whatever? Or wherever. The guy who's at the gas pump is an actor, in between parts.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. It's an odd place.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But it's a real place. It's a real place about make-believe, a make-believe world. I know a lot of people in the industry too, and everybody's always comparing LA and New York. But they're both very much sort of connected, in a way. The money's here and the factory's there. But now we see the trailers all over the streets of New York making *Law and Order* or whatever movie.

BARBARA BLOOM: They're making *Law and Order* outside my door in that alleyway every week. And when I walk by there and they're shooting commercials or something, I can't help it. I just go, cliche, cliche. I just walk by there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's a good location.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's almost every day they're shooting something there. It's like find another street, would you? This is really ridiculous. I just felt like giving them the list of everybody else who shot there. My daughter was really little she said, they're shooting another movie here? Rather than, "Oh, wow," she's going, "Another movie?"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why don't they go to another neighborhood and annoy those neighbors.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right. They're like all the women—they're models on that block, in that alleyway, every day. And when you walk out, I swear to you, you'll see them. They're models being photographed there, with the graffiti behind them. I guess it's the only place in Manhattan you can see any graffiti anymore.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Let's talk about your decision to go to art school. I guess as you stated earlier, it was a foregone conclusion. You never questioned the fact that you were going to be an artist.

BARBARA BLOOM: I didn't go to art school right away. I went to Bennington College. Here's Los Angeles, and here's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Interesting choice.

BARBARA BLOOM: —Bennington, Vermont. Far away.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How did you—?

BARBARA BLOOM: Several people I—Like Cathy Heerman had gone to Bennington. Another very close friend of my parents who was this really interesting woman who was a harpsichordist, a concert harpsichordist, but she had polio as a child, so she was in a wheelchair her whole life. And then later on which she had really a lot of pain, she changed her profession from being— she couldn't really be a harpsichordist anymore. So she went back and got a Ph.D. and was a therapist for people in pain. She was just this phenomenal woman. Carol Rosenstiel had gone to school. So it was kind of a place like, that's far away. Got to get out of Los Angeles. And also it was a women's college. And there was something interesting to me about—although I couldn't have formulated any kind of feminist ideas about it, I like the idea of—it was bohemian, but smart girls went to school there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But also somewhat unconventional. It wasn't Smith. And it wasn't Vassar. It wasn't an Ivy League school. And so it sort of falls into that category of college like—

BARBARA BLOOM: Like Antioch.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Antioch. Hampshire. Sort of self-directed—

BARBARA BLOOM: Goddard.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sarah Lawrence.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right. Those were the schools. Those were exactly the schools. And this was because it was more interested in the arts and music and dance. The art department was not so interesting at the time.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who was teaching there then?

BARBARA BLOOM: Sidney Tillim.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sidney Tillim, narrative painter.

BARBARA BLOOM: That's who taught there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Philip Wofford was there at that point?

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't think so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He came later.

BARBARA BLOOM: Sidney Tillim was there. And there was a woman who taught ceramics. And I'm going to forget her name. Sophie somebody. I was only there for a short amount of time. Because then I dropped out of college. Anyway, that's a long story. But it was really useful to me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, we have lots of discs if it's a long story.

BARBARA BLOOM: We have lots of discs if it's a long story?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We can hear it.

BARBARA BLOOM: A long story's a good thing?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, sure. I mean, this is your life story.

BARBARA BLOOM: What is so interesting to me is about when people—how did I—in order to be an artist, I think it's different now than it was when I started out, it wasn't a profession when I started to be an artist. It wasn't something you could—nobody made—it wasn't a money-making thing. It wasn't a profession. I would say, for lack of a better—maybe a calling. And it was like, this is obviously what I want to do. And I had parents who were very supportive and said, if this is what you want to do, do it. I was a pretty smart kid. And I did math. I could have easily decided I want to be a mathematician. Theoretical mathematics and that kind of abstract thing of problem-solving, easily could have done it. But the people weren't as cool in math. Kind of nerdy, weirdo people.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The pocket liners and the horn-rimmed glasses.

BARBARA BLOOM: Maybe there are hipster mathematicians now, but in those days—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, there absolutely—well, the theoretical physicists are definitely into jazz, the late Richard Feynman being an excellent example.

BARBARA BLOOM: But at Bennington, to give you the perfect example, here was this kid. I graduated from high school when I was 16. And so I went to college. I turned 17 over—so I was 17 years old when I went to college. And I didn't know—from public schools in California, I didn't know shit. I hadn't learned anything. I had faked my way through the whole thing. It was so easy. I didn't know anything. I really had not learned anything. And here I am at a school where you make your own curriculum. That's what I wanted. That's exactly what I do. I make my own curriculum. That's what I do. Fine. No problem. I had read in some art magazine or another something about Wittgenstein. So there was a class about Wittgenstein's philosophy. I want to take that class. I've never read any philosophy, ever. Teacher says, "Great, come on in the class." Not, condescending, not dumbing it down—he was a really good teacher. Most the people who were in the class were like seniors or in their third year. And here's this little kid from California who was just like, wow! I'm a California kid. I was like, wow, this really interesting. And he would just basically say, I think you should just read this of Plato. And I think that you should read—I think you want to understand certain—and he just basically would spoon feed me certain things that I had to know. And I was sort of in the conversations. I was sort of like the—what is it, like the canary in the mines?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The canary in the goldmine.

BARBARA BLOOM: If I didn't say something, there was something wrong with the argument, or there was something—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wrong with the pedagogy.

BARBARA BLOOM: I had to understand. It was incredible. That was the kind of level of teaching. There were like six kids in the class. We would read a passage. I had no—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So different than today—

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh my god, it was fantastic.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —when people want the classrooms to be bulging with students, because they're all clamoring for tuition dollars.

BARBARA BLOOM: And they have the reading. And you have to do this and you have to—this was all student-led. It wasn't so much that I don't remember anything from it at all, except for the excitement of reading a text that I didn't quite understand and just like trying to get it, and like just being at the edge of understanding what it was that was being talked about. That was just—ugh. And then the other—it was a women's college. So there was the really dykey couple who did Beckett at 4:00 in the morning and you had to go off to some bar. First of all, I had to kind of figure out, oh, those are lesbians. Got it. You know? Like, oh, they look so manly. Oh, got it! I was trying to figure out everything. Everything. And there were all these discussions—this is in 1968. So there's all these discussions about whether the school should stay co-ed. I mean stay what women's college—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Gendered.

BARBARA BLOOM: Gendered and all these feminist discussions. And I had barely an understanding of what they were talking about. But I'm like listening to the conversations and figuring, like, oh, those people have that, think that about it. And I'm trying to figure out what's going on here. What are the arguments. And it was an

environment that was—women were taken really seriously. No one was condescended to. You could do whatever. You'd make your own curriculum. It was a really good place to learn self-confidence.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How did you feel about being wrenched from this sort of coastal moderate climate—

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, it was horrible.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Moderate-to-warm climate—

BARBARA BLOOM: I couldn't take it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and being thrown into the sort of hills of—

BARBARA BLOOM: It was freezing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Vermont.

BARBARA BLOOM: I only lasted a year and a half. I couldn't take it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why did you abandon it?

BARBARA BLOOM: First of all, everybody dropped out of school then. I don't know if you dropped out of college, but it was really much more common that people dropped out.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I tended to be a bit more of a nonconformist. I stayed in. I knew a lot of people did drop out.

BARBARA BLOOM: That was just sort of like, I just did. And I don't know whether it was a smart thing or not. Anyway, I did. And then a year later CalArts [California Institute of the Arts] started, and I went there. But it was a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So the year hiatus, you went home?

BARBARA BLOOM: I went actually to stay with friends who were at school in Santa Cruz. Because UC Santa Cruz, most of my friends who stayed in California went there, which was the kind of hip school at the time. UC Santa Cruz was another one of those schools.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, they still have sort of that reputation, where they have—

BARBARA BLOOM: They have the garden and the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the History of Consciousness program and so forth.

BARBARA BLOOM: I went to a lecture Norman O. Brown when I went there. So Norman O. Brown, I think he started that department, the History of Consciousness.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hiscon.

BARBARA BLOOM: Hiscon, right. So I went to a lecture of his where in the middle of his lecture—let's get his name right. Cotton. Paul Cotton came in. Paul Cotton was the guy who dressed in a penis suit. Remember him? An artist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Vaguely, yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: He came in, in the middle of the talk, and took over the entire class. That was the one Norman O. Brown lecture that I went to.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What a dick.

BARBARA BLOOM: And Norman O. Brown, who's all about sexuality and duh-duh-duh, couldn't handle it. It's this kind of anarchist pink dick suit guy, and Norman O. Brown, the lecturing pedagogue. You kind of knew where that was going and how to read—if I was going to choose one kind of lecture to go to, I got the right one.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's like one kind of dick arguing against another.

BARBARA BLOOM: Another kind of dick. No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's funny.

BARBARA BLOOM: Education was very different. If you were privileged enough to be privy to that kind of understanding of liberal arts education at the time, it was really different.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think you're making a really great point. I think that maybe some people who want to hear about your career will see this as sort of a digression, but I think that preamble is important. Because you're absolutely right. In those days, and I remember myself, because I had a pre-college experience at an art school in Philadelphia. I went to Tyler. I went to Skowhegan. I went to Yale, which were all very good schools. But the ethos was not professional. It was not career-oriented. It would've been anathema to talk about money and to talk about career. I mean, it would've marked one as being not serious, mercenary, superficial, and shunned. And of course, now things have really changed. It's almost the opposite. So it's important, I think, for people reading this, god knows when, in 100 years, to sort of see there's such a sharp contrast in such a short period of time, from the values of education in the 1960s and 1970s to 2012.

BARBARA BLOOM: We can get into that later about teaching. Because I don't think I've given up, but I kind of have. Because I sort of feel when I get into the—I taught at Columbia for a number of years. And I sort of felt I'm the lone voice of doubt up there. I'm the lone voice of like, I think maybe, you know what you could? Just do nothing for a while. And maybe you could even travel or read a book or maybe go work at a hospital. Like, get a life outside of this art world, because it's really boring. And then they say, no, because I have to do my something something show, because this is going to be juried. What a sick education.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's cloisters and burrows.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's just terrible.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's cloisters and little wagon circles of sort of stylistically or ideologically homogeneous posses that may or may not have any real power or influence in the world, but do in that environment. I mean, this is everywhere.

BARBARA BLOOM: But it's also so—particularly when you see someone who's really gifted and fantastic, you just kind of go, don't—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, could kill them with that experience. Could absolutely crush them.

BARBARA BLOOM: I just say, "You don't have to finish this. You don't know how to finish this yet. It'll take you 10 years to figure out how to— just leave it. Don't finish it for next week. Or if you finish it for next week, know that's not the final resolution of this problem." I'm the lone person who's saying that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, remember Al Held told us once at Yale, just hanging around the [Crit] Pit, having a smoke and a cup of coffee, he said, "You know, you're going to get out of here. It's going to be 20 years before anybody cares a crap about what you're doing like we care about you here." He says, like, "You're going to have to pay a lot of dues. You're going to do a lot of bad art. And most of you won't still be making art in another 20 years. It's tough. It's hard."

BARBARA BLOOM: Right. Excel then that you've got these kids now who while they're still in school have people from galleries coming through. And it's just not good.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, but if they don't catch a rocket ship from the sort of emerging artist scene to some big-time career, then it's over.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. It's not—anyway.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Anyway.

BARBARA BLOOM: That's a whole other subject.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think that artists who worry about the art world and say, oh, the good old days, that's just another kind of avoidance. And you just do what you do.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—

BARBARA BLOOM: All right. Back to this.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You went to Santa Cruz and you were just hanging out there?

BARBARA BLOOM: I just hung out there. And I don't know who told me about this. It was maybe through, again,

possibly through Monte Factor, or another friend, that I heard they were starting an art school in Los Angeles, CalArts. And Monte was friends with Paul Brach, who was the first, I guess he was the dean of the art school. And I don't know who told me about this school. I thought that's interesting. It sounded like they were really interesting people who were going to be teaching there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But you weren't attracted to Otis or—

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, no. I wasn't even attracted to art school.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Pasadena? Chouinard? Any of those places?

BARBARA BLOOM: No, no. It was more this was a school that was starting up that was all the different arts together. It was an art school. It was a music school. It was a dance school. It was a theater school. It was a design school. It was a critical studies school. All together. And you could take classes in all the different schools. And I thought, ooh, that sounds— and there was going to be really radical people teaching there. Buckminster Fuller was going to be doing a class there, and this person. So I heard the buzz around this. I don't know how exactly I heard it first. Another friend of mine went there at the beginning too. Barbara Howard. It's possible that she told me about it. And so I thought, I'm going to apply to school there. And I remember I had to get a portfolio together because I didn't have anything. I didn't make stuff. I never made stuff. I didn't make— I didn't have drawings or paintings. That's not what I did. So I probably faked some kind of portfolio, made a portfolio of whatever that would be. So, I don't really remember what it was. I remember writing something about wanting to take classes in different fields and wanting to do electronic music. Who knows what I wrote. And got into the school. They opened the school before the building was finished. And they opened it in a Catholic girls' school in Burbank, a Catholic girls' school that had been abandoned or that they'd bought or something in Burbank for the first year before, because the building wasn't done. The CalArts building wasn't done. And that was really fun. That was actually, I'd say, that first year, it was just complete anarchy. That was really—I'm skipping forward now to CalArts.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But I think it's also probably, for somebody reading this transcription in the future, that there were quite a few arts programs available in Los Angeles back then.

BARBARA BLOOM: But I wasn't living in Los Angeles. I didn't want to live in Los Angeles. The fact that it was in Los Angeles was not a plus point for me. I'm like out of there. That was the last place in the world I wanted live, was Los Angeles.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But you're going back to Burbank, which is—

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. I'm sure my parents were ecstatic about the fact that I was going to go to school there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But there were a lot of choices you had. The arts programs were Otis, Scripps, there were a bunch of—

BARBARA BLOOM: I never even considered those. I wasn't even interested in art school. I never thought about— I was interested in—it was sort of like when I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're more excited about media, in a way. You talked about electronic music. I'm just remembering, oh yes, that was the time that Moog came out, the synthesizer. *Switched-On Bach* was in the Top 40.

BARBARA BLOOM: It was more that I was interested in a crossover. That was what was interesting to me about that school.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you see that show in LA County, about that time, the LA County Museum organized by Maurice Tuchman of Art and Technology—

BARBARA BLOOM: Absolutely saw that show.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That was a very important show for a lot of people.

BARBARA BLOOM: Very important show. So that was there probably in '70—1969, '70?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, I think so.

BARBARA BLOOM: That's when I went to CalArts, in 1970.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I just remember the catalog had a sort of olive cover.

BARBARA BLOOM: I think I probably had it or have it. I don't think I have it anymore. That's when James Lee Byars did his philosophy of questions. That was, for me, the most interesting thing in that whole show, was that he made this whole computer program that could spit out questions.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oldenburg worked with Disney.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right. No, it was really important. Maybe I just wanted to hang out with inter—you know. Just sort of like you knew this was going to be really cool place. This was really going to be a cool place. It was going to be all these really interesting people, all come together in this. The Disney people didn't know what they were getting themselves into. They'd given free range to all these people, and they hired really radical people. And it took a couple of years before they—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This was something outside of the enchanted kingdom.

BARBARA BLOOM: Completely outside of it. Very outside.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, how was that experience? How did it unfold?

BARBARA BLOOM: The first year I took mostly classes outside of the art school. I took design. I don't know if I took a class with John Baldessari then? Probably. Yes. Yes, I did. Design stuff. I did some music stuff. There was a class in critical studies, a class about witchcraft. Maybe that was a little bit later. So Cultural Anthropology, but it was like build your own cult and see what happens there. It was a fantastic place. There were really interesting people there, all kinds of—here I am again. You've got the surfer poets and you've got the eggheads and you've got—here you have all these radical design people, and you had the conceptual artists, and you had world music. And I was like sifting my way through these things and seeing what's of interest to me, which is exactly what you're supposed to do. And I don't remember making stuff, that many things. I made some—yes, I did make some things.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what kinds of activities were you engaged in?

BARBARA BLOOM: Besides taking drugs?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Besides all of the sort of typical youth stuff?

BARBARA BLOOM: I was friends with all the people. There was a whole group of people who were kind of the Fluxus people. So it was Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Nam June Paik, Serge Tcherepnin, who was a composer and was building the Serge, which was the other, more radical version of the synthesizer. They all lived in a house in the Hollywood Hills. And I hung out there with all those people. Emmett Williams. So that was, I would say probably that first year, even more so the area that I—because it was all this—Nam June Paik, Nam June was fantastic. He would pretend he didn't speak English if he didn't want to do something.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's convenient.

BARBARA BLOOM: He was so smart. Oh my god, he was so smart.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well he, and what about Charlotte?

BARBARA BLOOM: Charlotte Moorman? She didn't teach there. She came through there. She came through there, but she didn't teach there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: She and her cello.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, she came through there with her stuff. But that was that whole—it wasn't so much the whole silly aspect of Fluxus, because it does have a kind of a silly aspect to it. But that was an interesting group of people, very interesting group of people. Because it was the whole performance, non—

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BARBARA BLOOM: Why would one let someone else choose the location? It seemed way too prescriptive to me and way too pedagogical. Like make your own fucking happening.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're saying, if you're going to do this, why define parameters? Why not—

BARBARA BLOOM: Or why call it a happening? Why not just say we're going to go there and figure out some stuff.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that was his rhetoric. That was his brand.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, but his rhetoric was so restrictive, in some sense, in ways. Although he's saying it was not, I found it really—I wasn't interested in whether it was calling it art or not. Is it an interesting activity or is it not an interesting activity? I don't care what you call it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're not talking about it as neo-Dada, or as sort of some kind of more art school, like love-in or be-in type equivalent.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right. There were a lot of people there, who were making performances and doing them. It was a very interesting aspect of what was going on.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That whole level sort of aesthetic of chaos, the love-in, the be-in, *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-in*—

BARBARA BLOOM: The in.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The in, the sort of hyphen in, event, that you have a TV show that's just chaotic.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And it's enormously popular, but it's of that moment, too.

BARBARA BLOOM: These were not chaotic. And then cut to John Baldessari, where, I didn't even know he was teaching. He hung out. You know, like you said, you had a cigarette or something. You hung out, you talked about stuff. He had friends of his come in, they presented what they were doing. You talked about it. You went out for dinner. He suggested you might want to read a book. You read the book. We talked about it. There was no hierarchy there. He was insanely generous. I mean, I don't know how he did for many, many years. And he was a phenomenally generous teacher. And there was no discussion of when are we going to call it art. And if there was a discussion, it was a discussion about that. You know, how do we know when we call it art? That's what his whole thing was. Look here, look here. It was a philosophical practice. And much, much, much more attractive to me than—there's something so—I shouldn't. Without having thought it through, there's something so silly about the whole happenings, Fluxus. It's the naming of—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, what we called now the brand, branding. And that becomes part of marketing. And then it's no longer a pure activity. It's defined by a market.

BARBARA BLOOM: I remember going to some concert, a Fluxus concert. And you had Philip Corner eating a carrot into a microphone. I thought I was going to pee my pants if I have to stay in this room. You've got to be fucking kidding—no, this is really ludicrous.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you've got a lot of people. Not only somebody like Yves Klein, by then deceased, but Carolee Schneemann, Yvonne Rainer, other sort of people involved with other sort of un-defined activities. Some people who were defining their activities as sculpture, one of the people I knew as a young student was Italo Scanga who was working with Dale Chihuly, and Dan Graham, and all these other people to make stuff. And was it art? Was it not art? So there's a period of questioning, and not sort of packaging and selling.

BARBARA BLOOM: And so at CalArts, Simone Forti was there. And so I did numbers of dances with them. You know, there were seesaws. I wasn't a dancer, but they were—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Movement.

BARBARA BLOOM: She was really interesting. That's somebody who's still a friend. The number of really—Charlemagne Palestine was there. I don't know if you remember Charlemagne, he was a composer and he was a really eccentric, interesting guy. I remember La Monte Young coming through there and doing his performances, and how interesting those were. There was so much going on there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, the conversation—we could expand it to include people like John Cage. And out of this comes another generation of people who are borrowing from that sort of openness to create things like operas, like Wilson and Glass, et cetera. It's interesting to ponder sort of the germ of that seed that was CalArts at the beginning?

BARBARA BLOOM: Well, I think that what it was was that they just hired really interesting people.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Are you still in touch with the school? Are you active in alumni activities?

BARBARA BLOOM: I'm still in touch with—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you mail them a check every year?

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think it's become much more of mainstream art school.

BARBARA BLOOM: It has. I'm in touch with a lot of people who I knew from that time, from a lot of different places. From the art school, I was very close with David Salle, and I was very close with Eric Fischl. Those were my really close friends there. And we're still—David and I really close friends. We don't see each other often, but — that's an unlikely combination. But there was a lot. We had film in common, we had kind of an interest in reading of images in common.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And what were you reading at that time? What was—novels, nonfiction, philosophy, poetry? Ken Kesey, Tom Wolfe?

BARBARA BLOOM: Probably.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: All of the above? *Moby Dick*?

BARBARA BLOOM: No, not *Moby Dick*. Not *Moby Dick*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was in Santa Cruz.

BARBARA BLOOM: *Moby Dick*?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, with the other Dicks.

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, the Dicks, right. Yes, the Dicks were in Santa Cruz. I had completely forgotten about Paul Cotton. Paul Cotton was still—when I was at CalArts, he was then in LA, and hanging out with Eugenia Butler, who had a gallery there. He was, I think, Eugenia Butler's boyfriend. So he would be there in his bunny costume, been there, done that. His been there, done that bunny costume. You know, the—coming back, I was thinking about John Cage, because when I was at Bennington. John Cage did a concert at Williams College that I went to. And I remember going there with some people. That was the first year I was going to school there. And he did *4'33*. And I that was really important to me, without exactly even knowing what I was getting myself into or what it was. You knew that experience of that, the sense of not knowing—you can't hear *4'33* now, not knowing, not us. But as a 17-year-old kid, not knowing what you're going—just knowing, this is a really important composer and we're going to go to this concert. And drive over there, and here you are. I don't remember what the other—there were probably some prepared piano pieces or something. I don't remember. But all of a sudden, there's *4'33*. That's one.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Key moment. So Williams, at that point, was still a men's college.

BARBARA BLOOM: It was.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So I guess there were a lot of mixers, and sort of—

BARBARA BLOOM: Boys named Toby.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Boys named Toby. Lots of frolic across the Massachusetts border.

BARBARA BLOOM: Boys named Toby. I think Toby took me to the John Cage concert. I don't think Toby liked the John Cage concert nearly as much as I did.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you went from the land of Bruce to the land of Toby.

BARBARA BLOOM: Toby. There were lots of Tobys up there, Tobys and Brads.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Brads. Of course, that was a big name.

BARBARA BLOOM: Write that down, would you please? Tobys and Brads.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who were the men in Santa Cruz? What were they named?

BARBARA BLOOM: What were they names? They're all named David.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: David.

BARBARA BLOOM: They're all named David.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So can you recall a particular process, or activity, or thing that you organized, while you

were at CalArts that was really sort of your thing? You supervised the creation of something?

BARBARA BLOOM: Hmm, that's the question. Two things, I'm going to say. One of them was—I'm reminded of it very often, because Eric Fischl reminds me of it, as being his picture of me—was that one time I went the paint store and bought color swatches, or took color swatches from the paint store. And dropped acid and walked around the school color coding the whole place. And then it was a whole day process, because the light would change and I'd have to come back and change it again. And it was this whole—and I must have run into Eric. He asked, "Well, what are you doing?" I explained the whole process, of what I was—color coding this entire catholic, you know, the shadows of the palm tree on the cement ground. That was one activity I would probably not remember unless Eric reminded me that I did that, which I found a very kind of typical little activity. It was of the moment, definitely of the moment. And then much more—maybe it's the same thing, but further along after the school opened officially and there was a silk screen center or something. I made these posters that were based on this poster that I had seen in some book about 1920s design, or art deco design. And it was the picture of a modernist house. And underneath it said, "Crittall metal windows, Manor Works Braintree," and then something about the factory that made these windows. And so I re-printed that poster. I took away all the signage that would tell you what it was. And it just was an image of a modernist house, and that kind of design, very '20s, '30s design, deco style letter, Manor Works. Crittall metal windows, Manor Works Braintree. And then I printed it, 10 different versions of it, with 10 different houses. And I put them up everywhere, sort of like advertising corporate—almost like you'd see that the president of the corporation, everywhere around. And with that idea in mind, you wouldn't notice that the design. I was interested that the design of them was so of a type or of a particular thing that you wouldn't even notice that they were ten different houses. They were radically different. They weren't slightly different. There were ten different. And it was kind of going from the phenomenological background I had from, Robert Irwin, or these people, from this California thing of looking, and what do you see, going into a more psychological, cultural, or critical sense of it. Moving into using of images. So I made that probably in 1971, '72. I was really young. That was probably the first real artwork I made.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And so you did 10 images, but how large an edition of each? And were the hung just everywhere? Were you stapling them onto telephone poles?

BARBARA BLOOM: In the school. I just hung them in the school. They were indoors, so you would notice them. Then they got lost. And I reprinted them, like maybe 10 years later, I reprinted them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Interesting, too, because I think probably an art historian reading this, or a critic reading this sometime in the future may not have realize that at that time, the whole idea of the psychedelic concert poster was also such a popular thing. Not that that's what you were doing.

BARBARA BLOOM: I didn't really think about that. Postering was definitely—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Postering was big.

BARBARA BLOOM: Postering was big. That's interesting. Thank you for saying that. Postering was big, but this was about advertising. And I was interested in the mechanics of getting an image into someone's mind. How you place something there. That's what was interesting to me. And it was pretty sophisticated for somebody. Sometimes you stumble on something, but I look back and I go, that was pretty sophisticated. I didn't really know what I was doing. But sometimes you stumble into something that was pretty sophisticated for somebody who's like, 20 years old, 21 years old. So that was the first time I kind of thought, ooh, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You kind of art directed this thing, in a way.

BARBARA BLOOM: And it was not a singular image. It wasn't about the singular image. It was about the experience of coming across this thing and remembering and forgetting what you'd seen before.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So the legend underneath, the words underneath, the Braintree—this was the same and the houses kept changing. So you would go from one to the other and you would be wondering if it was the same house you'd seen before.

BARBARA BLOOM: You wouldn't even notice it. You would not even notice it. And it was only maybe—they never hung next to each other. So it was just more—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're not giving anyone a chance for comparison, like with Warhol hanging the same head of a cow.

BARBARA BLOOM: It was an odd way of making a serial work. It wasn't a serial work. It wasn't even a physical thing. It was just a trigger.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it was a serial work presented each in a unique setting. So you were not presenting it in a serial context, which was very popular at the time, too. You would have the same image with different colors. Everybody, you look at Warhol, did this over and over again. Other artists like Robert Indiana. So it was all this kind of one image, change the palette. But it was a serial image presented in an individual way. And not within eye shot of each other, so the person encountering it would be able to compare.

BARBARA BLOOM: I think I wasn't even so concerned being a visual work. I was interested more in the phenomenology of seeing, remembering, forgetting, how you construct, how you remember. It was much more like what people were doing in advertising.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Changing one element of a message, almost imperceptibly.

BARBARA BLOOM: How do you imprint a message into someone's head that doesn't make any sense? And not only doesn't make any sense at all, it didn't make any sense. Crittall metal windows. But you didn't even notice that it didn't make sense. The design of it was really good, and the design of it took over. I have this—that's really the beginning of my whole love and hate of design.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You have to find some way to get people to accept the image, to get their default templates, the Jungian templates, to accept it. And then move them. And

BARBARA BLOOM: Then mess with it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Then mess with it, right.

BARBARA BLOOM: There you go. I think that again, cut back to me coloring in that. The story of Barbara Bloom, we just keep cutting to this little kid.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The jade plant leaf, and the mortar and the bricks.

BARBARA BLOOM: And the thought process, like how do you know something, how do you work through something. I think that remains to be of more interest to me than any of the rest of it. I'm not really a visual artist. I sort of feel like I'm doing some kind of weird-ass philosophy, and I happened into it. It's so funny, because it's almost like when you asked me when did you know that you were an artist? I'm actually not an artist. I kind of stumbled into that one because it was available to me, and easy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But you're using the codes to explore ideas.

BARBARA BLOOM: But I've never actually—it's sort of like I'm in drag.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You're not actually somebody who said, well, I want to be a sculptor or painter. And I want to use—

BARBARA BLOOM: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —like performance artists who sees themself as being part of a sculptural activity, historically, but they're engaging it in some kind of unorthodox way.

BARBARA BLOOM: That's why, when somebody writes a book—somebody's actually sat at their desk and wrote a book, I go, oh my god, how do you do that? That's what I want to do. Basically, I'm actually probably a novelist. I'm a writer, or I'm a filmmaker. But not actually doing that. I'm doing something else. But I have too little respect for the art world. I don't really like it. I'm not really interested in it. I find so much of it just so ludicrous and lame. Like, who cares? And it's disturbing to me. Because I wish I loved it. I wish I love the arena in which I'm choosing to show work. I don't know if you feel that way about it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I think it at some point one has to define their own commitment to whatever it is they do, based on that and not the marketplace, or the critical world, or whatever. How the academic world understands it, or how the marketplace understands it. Or how the art magazines understand it, but rather just how you understand it, and how it leads you to the next idea. And in the meantime, you're able to pay the mortgage, and eat, and enjoy your life at the same time.

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't even know if the market, of course, is—we don't want to go off on the market, because that would just take hours and hours.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oceans of ink have been spilled already on the market.

BARBARA BLOOM: Not even that. There is so much work that I really, really love. But I don't even know—maybe it's just getting older. I don't have the nose, anymore, to know what I want to look at.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, here's a question. What kind of art do you own?

BARBARA BLOOM: Very little. I mean most of the stuff I have here—I have this kind of Marcel Broodthaers, which is—he was a really, really important artist. And it came to me through—I lived in Europe for many years. We missed that whole part. We haven't got to that. This was given to me through someone who died, and her family knew that I was interested. And they gave me this print after she died. So that was really a very important thing. And I have a beautiful photograph of Tim Maul, who is a fantastic photographer. And I have—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Lots of books.

BARBARA BLOOM: I have a lot of books around the corner. Books, books, books. I have—it's not like I wouldn't want to have art. Then I would have to arrange it, and I would have to figure out where would I put it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean environment here is sort of interesting to describe, because you have this shelf system.

BARBARA BLOOM: System, right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it could be a system, or it could be just a kind of apparently orderly mayhem. But you have these sort of orange and celadon and turquoise file boxes that are sort of stuffed neatly into these cubicles. And this becomes a kind of peace. And on the other, over here—

BARBARA BLOOM: All the kids' stuff.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Kid's stuff, boxes, gift boxes covered with different colors of foil. Plastic pails, different colors. It's almost like toys. A ukulele—do you play the ukulele?

BARBARA BLOOM: No, my daughter does. Those are kids' things.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Those are kids' things.

BARBARA BLOOM: Those are kids' thing over there. And they were kids' things. You know, that area, when I have time, should be gotten into. That's actually a little bit younger. So maybe next summer when I get around to that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what does she like to play on the ukulele?

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, she's a musician. She plays piano. She's a serious piano player. She's been doing it for a long time.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's a school of hits every now and then.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, we'll pull that out. She's got electric guitar in there, too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, right. How old is she?

BARBARA BLOOM: 11.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Good for her.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, no. She's got hipster friends who play. They want to do a band.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hey, there's a great alley across the street.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right, exactly. Play the bass. Girl bass players are the coolest, you want to say. I've talked with her about girl bass players. You don't really have to play the bass. You just have to look like you play the bass. And bass is really cool.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that's the thing you should play if you want to be the lead singer, I think, is the bass, because it requires the least effort.

BARBARA BLOOM: You don't need to do much.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You don't need all of that.

BARBARA BLOOM: If you just want to be in the band, and you want to be part of the band, and you don't want to give it that much thought because you have other things that are going on, you play the bass. Because it just doesn't take that much. But it's really important. Bass player is the hippest. Not just girls—bass players, it's the

hippest.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it drives the whole sound. Look at Johnny Cash. Look at the Rolling Stones, whatever. It's always—it drives the whole band.

BARBARA BLOOM: Anyway, so, yes. I have a thing about the stuff around me that I like to be a certain way.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There is a kind of logic to it all.

BARBARA BLOOM: There is a logic. My husband, who just stuck his head in, he just teases me. He says it only looks organized. He says, when I first met you, it's like, oh, my god, it's all so organized and you have all these file boxes. And you come a little bit closer, and they all say miscellaneous on them. I never, with the exception of one time, have I ever had a studio. I've never had a studio. I work at home. There we go.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is an interesting idea. Because as, you may know, there's been a lot of discussion in the digital age about the post-studio era. At the same time, in the digital age, there's been the return of life drawing, because of animation and the game design industry. So some of the old-timey studio skills are now back in a robust way. And then artists are also enjoying options to create art without a studio, because they have these electronic environments that they can inhabit. And so the post-studio idea goes back to what you were saying about people like Kaprow, or Baldessari, artists in LA. You know, the Fluxus artists, as well. Did you know there's a Fluxus museum in Potsdam?

BARBARA BLOOM: I did know that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It has very—I tried to go there, and it was closed. Its hours are mysterious.

BARBARA BLOOM: I just remember that when I was in Europe, the first time that someone was doing his PhD on Fluxus, and I thought, oh, no. That scene, just so antithetical to this kind of—throw some sand on the ground, call it something that somebody's writing their PhD on, and has a museum. But I understand. Anything is of a moment, and of a time, and can be preserved.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I guess the problem today is a lot of what happens is not what you were describing from your student days of the sort of exploration of experience and phenomenology of whatever, inhabiting a process that you might not choose to control or have the ability to control. And using it to discover something, whether it was the sort of the color of the shadow of the palm tree at whatever phase of the chemical processes.

BARBARA BLOOM: Of the day, of the chemical process.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That it now must be accompanied by some kind of tract, some kind of tract informed by linguistics and semiotics and critical constructs. That it can't just simply be what it was. So that would be, like you were talking about, Capra imposing.

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't know if I actually—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It becomes a product, too. The verbiage becomes a product and it undermines, it actually undermines the process.

BARBARA BLOOM: It undermines the sense of wonderment in what it is that you're doing. If you go to a supermarket to make a happening, as opposed to, let's go there and see what kind of activities could come from where we are. But to go somewhere to make a happening seemed already so antithetical to the wonderment of—if what you're trying to do is break down some kind of barrier between the every day experience and what you call an art activity, why would you go somewhere to do an every day activity calling it an art word? It just seemed the wrong way to go about it. I don't know if I'm articulating that clearly. Here I am, again, with my allergy to the kind of logic of the dislogic—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think the desire for that kind of experience is very strong, still. I mean there are certain institutionalized activities, almost institutionalized activities like the Burning Man thing every year. Which is sort of a free form, show up, it happens. Whatever happens, happens. Some of it's interesting and a lot of it isn't. In the end a big effigy gets consumed by the flames and everybody goes home until next year. So I mean—something to ponder. We should probably take a break.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because I think we want to hear about how you moved—

BARBARA BLOOM: From there to—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Netherlands, right?

BARBARA BLOOM: Uh-huh [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then afterwards Germany?

BARBARA BLOOM: Berlin.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And what you were doing in those years.

BARBARA BLOOM: This is perfect. Because I just this moment started feeling like, oh that's about enough for now. That's enough. You're good at talking, aren't you?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's why they keep asking me to do these things. I've been also teaching in art schools and universities for years. So, as a friend of mine who is a B director in Hollywood, he's done a lot of movies with Chuck Norris. He said, "Babe, you've been doing stand up for 35 years."

BARBARA BLOOM: All right. So what—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Are you—

BARBARA BLOOM: What time is it now?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's 12:30. Do you want to take a break and resume for a little bit longer? Or do you think you're pretty much talked out?

BARBARA BLOOM: I think it might be good to stop, if it's okay with you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure. And we can continue another day. Perhaps another day we can plan to do, maybe a slightly longer conversation with a break in between.

BARBARA BLOOM: That would be good. That sounds good. With a break in between would be good. You kind of get to a point where you go, I've [inaudible].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Get a sandwich or whatever.

BARBARA BLOOM: I'm tired of hearing myself talk.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You're a good talker yourself.

BARBARA BLOOM: I like to talk.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I know. I can tell.

BARBARA BLOOM: You could tell, right? It's fun to talk to somebody who's a talker. Next Thursday I can't.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's fine.

BARBARA BLOOM: So shall we figure out a time right now?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: Probably smart.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why don't I do this. Why don't I turn off the recorder? And we'll check calendars.

[END OF TRACK bloom12_1of4_sd_track03.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking with Barbara Bloom at her home and studio on Harrison Street, Tribeca Manhattan on Thursday the 8th of November, 2012. Let me check my calendar. Good morning.

BARBARA BLOOM: Good morning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, the last time we spoke, you had just moved to Europe. You just moved to the Netherlands.

BARBARA BLOOM: So in the last—in the last episode—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In the last episode, the last installment—

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, yes. I was—I finished at CalArts and didn't feel like I wanted to go to graduate school there. I didn't feel like that was going to be—although several of my friends decided to go to graduate school there. I didn't feel like, well what am I going to—what more am I going to get from this—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Another two years.

BARBARA BLOOM: —another two years. And I've think I've gotten the best of this place anyway. I need to move on. And decided I was going to—

[Telephone rings]

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, boy. Let me think, I'm just going to—does that bother you if it's ringing?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's fine. The transcriber can ignore it.

BARBARA BLOOM: Just turn this off for a second. I'll just down the sound of the—

[END OF TRACK bloom12_2of4_sd_track01.]

BARBARA BLOOM: Okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So resuming.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. So I, not knowing that I was going to stay for a long time, decided to go to Europe for a while. I went to London. I stayed there for a couple of months.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you have an apartment or were you just—

BARBARA BLOOM: The wonderful thing was that in those days, I think John Baldessari gave me— went through his phone book and gave me the list of friends of his to call when I was there. And so I called someone in London. And they said, "Well, we have an extra room come stay with us." The difference between that world—I don't like to call it the art world. Kind of reminds me of Jerry Saltz. I shouldn't say that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's okay.

BARBARA BLOOM: Strike that. It reminds me—I don't like the term the art world. It's like, what is the music world. Anyway. But the community that was composed of people who were interested in contemporary art. At that time—in the early '70s—was like a few—I don't know. How many hundred people was it? If it was a couple thousand, that would be exaggerating. It was very few people. And so if you had a friend and a teacher gave you someone's phone number—Ike gave me Caroline Tisdale's phone number, who was a critic in London. And I guess that that—those days there was an introduction. And you say, oh, well come and stay with us. And it's sort of like a like-minded soul. I guess it's sort of like a missionary in the world. There were so few people then.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You were kind of like a Mormon—except you weren't, right?

BARBARA BLOOM: Exactly—without the underwear. Without the magic underwear. I can't even describe the difference. There were so few people who had any interest in any of this. So I stayed with some people in London. And some people then were leaving. And they said "You can stay in our apartment while we're gone."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Housesit in effect. Yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: Basically, we're going away. Would you like to—it was very friendly and very generous. And so I think I was there for a couple of months. And then, I had written to somebody else in Amsterdam, who—it was Doug Wheeler who's an artist from Los Angeles. And John said, look him up. And so I did. And he said, "Actually, we have an apartment that's right across from the Stedelijk Museum, that is a—the whole building's a squatted house. But we've been living here for many, many years. And we're going away. Would you like our apartment?" So I said, "Sure." And I went there, and had this beautiful apartment across from the Stedelijk Museum for nothing. So it was—to say that it was a different time is sort of a radical understatement. It was a very—I didn't know anyone who had a real job. He had small jobs, which was enough to stay alive and keep things going. And then you did your work, and—So that was the—it wasn't as radical as it might sound right now, moving to Europe or whatever.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, but I— yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: It was a different time. It was just sort of like I didn't quite know what I was doing. I didn't plan to go there. There wasn't— anyway, so I ended up staying in Amsterdam for quite a long time.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think we talked about this last time. But the sort of expectations that one had from art school in the 1970s was not that it was leading you to a career. That it was leading you to income or a job. That it was a choice that you made—

BARBARA BLOOM: It was not a career. It was maybe a calling, or a membership in a community.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. You were drawn to this for some ineffable reason you couldn't necessarily describe. Nor were you expected to. And the schools didn't promise you anything except to put you in an environment with like-minded people. And so I think that what we now call the art world—which I think—is it safe to say that there really is no art world, but there are many art worlds?

BARBARA BLOOM: Many. Many.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Have you seen there's a thing called the Arts Fund, which is all contemporary art from India. And it's basically investment tracking. And it's very bizarre. But this kind of thing was totally unheard of, this kind of nexus of art and commerce was completely—

BARBARA BLOOM: No, it didn't.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We were allergic to that. The training was allergic to that, I think.

BARBARA BLOOM: No, there was really no—there was no commerce. That didn't come until the '80s. Anyway, so I went to Holland. I had this place to live. It seemed to be a very sane and civilized place to be. So I ended up staying. And I actually, in retrospect, kind of stayed too long, and also stayed a really perfect amount of time, because it afforded me, in some ways, a long time to figure out what I was doing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how did you sustain yourself when you were living in Holland?

BARBARA BLOOM: Little jobs. And then, of course, I worked at a printer's office, doing an offset printer, doing all kinds of things in offset print. I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Always under the table, right? You were you a legal alien?

BARBARA BLOOM: I became legal after maybe four years or five years. It just became easier. It's sort of like when you went to get a passport stamp. I learned Dutch, which is a very strange thing to do. Like, why would you do that? But I seem to be good at learning languages. So I learned Dutch. And so I would go to the police. And they would stamp my passport. And the guy would say to me, "Well, why don't you get married? Even for a short amount of time to get papers." I said, "What was this? Are you proposing?" It was like such a radically—like a white woman, highly educated, who learned the language. And they were just very—it was very—I wasn't a Moroccan. I wasn't a Moroccan guest worker.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or East Indian.

BARBARA BLOOM: Or East Indian. That wasn't so much—the integration of the Indonesians is very long history in Holland. It was—they basically said, "Well, you just should get married and then after half a year, get divorced." Which is what I did. A friend of mine—I got married. Got my papers. I have permanent residency in Holland any time I ever want to live there. I didn't become a citizen, because at that time you had to give up American citizenship. I didn't want to do that. But it was kind of seamless, and easy, and a nonevent.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, the country does have a reputation for being very open—what some of the critics of how it operates would call permissive.

BARBARA BLOOM: I think at that time, very much so. It's quite changed now. It's quite changed since a lot of really, really bad racism, and very—It's definitely not what it was. And it was extremely—the government, the national government, and the city government in Amsterdam were leftist governments, and making all kinds of—it was quite a radical time, an interesting time to be there. That said, Holland is—although some of my best friends in the world live there, and I love to go visit them, it's not my favorite place on the planet. It's a kind of little bubble a privilege. And that privilege has made for a kind of complacent, and not a kind of complacent people, and people who are not good at improvising, and not good at figuring things out for themselves. They're accustomed to having things taken care of for them. So they pass the buck. It's not a really inspiring place. Although the theater world was really fantastic at the time. And so most of my friends were—or a lot of my friends were in the theater world, or writers, or something. There were not so many artists at the time that I was close with. Few exceptions. So I ended up staying. And then I—staying is a big word. Because I would move back—I had a place in New York. And so I would move back and forth. I would rent my place here. And then go back there. Back and forth and back and forth for over 10 years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how often were you here? How often were you there over the course of a year?

BARBARA BLOOM: Let's say 50-50. But probably more there than here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So were you making art over there? Were you—

BARBARA BLOOM: I was. It took me a long time to kind of figure out what I was doing. I had done some early kind of performance pieces that involved putting up kind of an extension from Crittall metal windows. There was a—I'd put up a poster of something. And then, people would—they were about visual memory. I don't want to get into details. But they were kind of about visual memory. How much do you need to see of something? How do you remember something? If you—One time I had people sleep overnight in the gallery. Middle of the night, I woke them up, and gave them an image for a few seconds, and then turned it off. And so how do you implant an image? Visual memory and perception was what I was thinking about. So I did a lot of performances at the time. And I then went on and made these pieces where I would show a movie in a movie theater but cut things into the movie. So cut—I would— I showed *The Big Sleep*, for instance. And I shot a movie that was sort of a meta-movie about what was going on in the movie and cut that into the movie as a sort of commentary on the narrative that you were seeing. Sort of like the commentary, the notes, the questions that come to mind as you're watching the movie. And then I made a number of pieces that were—I made one piece that was—I was quite involved with the place that's called the Apple, which was a performance space in Amsterdam. And I did a piece there where people came into the room, came into the space. And there was a so—it wasn't quite sure. But it was as though the performance space—there was something going—there was something wrong. We had to wait. So there was tea for people to drink and cookies. And there was, like, magazines. And there's the TV was on. And what I had done before is I found out what was going to be on TV that night. In those days, there were two channels. There were no video recorders. And as you just had real-time TV. So this is got to be—I guess it would be later—mid-, late- '70s. And so what was on TV that night was another one of these World War II love story movies— another one of these crappy made-for-TV movies. And so I got all the actors—several of the main actors in the movies to come that night and basically scripted this entire sequence of occurrences that coincided with what was on TV. When the main actress would ring the doorbell or knock on the door in the show—it was an escape route so she could go through the people next door and come in. She would ring the doorbell there and come in. When the phone rang there, the phone rang in the room. It was just scripted down to the minute of—when somebody was—something got spilled there. Something—it was just so ridiculous slapstick. And some people saw absolutely nothing. They didn't catch- it was like it's—It was a scripted synchronicity.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So did you document it in—

BARBARA BLOOM: No. I mean there's some photographs. Then you have the funny experiences that—I don't know if you know the artist James Lee Byars—who was, for me, very—I think I talked about him before. But very important—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, you did last time.

BARBARA BLOOM: He was there at the time. And he saw everything from the very moment I started—he completely—and then the people who saw what was going on just didn't say anything. They just kind of went along with it. And then Marina Abramovic, who also lived in Amsterdam at the time, just yakked her way through the whole thing and didn't—She just didn't notice anything. So it was like such a different—Can I tell him? No comment. No comment. So I was again working with what you see, what you don't see. How do you show something—visual innuendo, which is what I came to call it later is how do you show something to somebody without letting them know what they're seeing? How do you take—how do you have somebody take it in without letting them know that they're doing that? So that's the kind of stuff I was doing then. And I think I wasn't particularly prolific. I didn't have a gallery. I ended up doing stuff more in museums and stuff like that. Because without even directly going to the whole gallery circuit. And then, it wasn't until—And then I made a film, which was—I made in the early '80s, which was called *the Diamond Lane*. And *the Diamond Lane* is a trailer for a film that doesn't exist. So I shot it in 35mm. Which is another thing in Holland is that if you had a project you wanted to do, and you applied to the government for money—I never got no.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So did you meet any of the people from the movie business there in Holland? People like Verhoeven, or—

BARBARA BLOOM: I think I met all those people. It's a tiny place. So I met them.The person who—I 'm not going to be really bad with names. I'm blank on his name right now. Yes, I met all those people. I wasn't friends with them, though.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So about the time he made his first film—

BARBARA BLOOM: Spetters. Spetters was earlier.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: *Soldier of Orange* is the one I'm thinking of.

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, yes, *Soldier of Orange*. I think it—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Which was late '70s.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, late '70s. Yes, that came out when I was there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That was sort of his—Interestingly, he's after a sort of a disastrous sort of commercial—*RoboCop* and all that in Hollywood, he went back to Holland and made a World War II film. Sort of interesting, World War II. It's sort of completing the circle.

BARBARA BLOOM: That's what they do there. But the trailer was the idea for the trailer was that you could insinuate, again, some whole entire narrative with just those five minutes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: When talked about this last time, you talked about your sort of—the dream home posters, the architectural images and creating a kind of a—I don't know—like a concatenation of different experiences. And this seems like a kind of logical extension.

BARBARA BLOOM: It does, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But was this kind of an intuitive, empirical process? Were you sort of seeking help from intellectualism reading criticism, or reading philosophy, or—

BARBARA BLOOM: That's a good question. I'm a dabbler, as probably all are. So I'm not a thorough reader. I'm not a student. But I did read some. I read. I was reading some. I was reading something. I read some of a lot of stuff. But it doesn't begin with that for me. So, like, it begins with a kind of—incrementally, from one thing to the next. Like what didn't I take care of the last time? Or what I don't know. What I would say that I was interested—maybe I would say if it's coming from anywhere, it would be—I was interested in—I come from Los Angeles where that kind of visual phenomenology: Robert Irwin, Doug Wheeler, or the people who were doing things that had to do with visual perception. But I was interested in perception. But maybe even more psychological aspect, or the more—perhaps even the more narrative eyes. So it's like if you take that and you put it into—take it. And you spin that off in the direction of literature, or of film. I always sort of say, I ended up a visual artist working in that area. But actually, in my heart of hearts, I'm probably a novelist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, so it must have been—if I'm understanding you correctly—that an idea for a piece would come from, perhaps, you beginning to notice sequences, things that— something that becomes a leitmotif, like a color, or an object, or something that shares something in common with other things that are hitting the radar. Or things are unlike each other in the same way.

BARBARA BLOOM: I guess I would say, at the time, I was really interested in Robbe Grillet. And so this kind of narrative nouveau roman where you don't quite know what it is that you're—what the story—the narrative is only enough there to hold you in some kind of suspense. And you don't quite know the name—the characters aren't even named. And then there's a long description of a cup of tea and the way it touches the table. And that sense of the importance of the details and the way that a number of details would follow each other, forming some kind of a narrative. Again, innuendo was what I was really interested in.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But you're talking about a kind of sensual construction within the memory, too.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, so if you'd say what was I—I read Proust. Or that I read—But I wasn't a thorough reader. I didn't read all of Proust. I would snoop into Proust and kind of go, oh, man, this is fantastic.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was all a buffet to you. You wouldn't sit down and sort of, like, dutifully, each course in the proper order.

BARBARA BLOOM: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You would just walk from table to table and eat whatever—

BARBARA BLOOM: Would eat whatever looked—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Struck your fancy. Right.

BARBARA BLOOM: And also the kind of combinations of things. So if you're reading Carl Jung on synchronicity, and at the same time, you're reading Proust. And you're reading—how does one—how does one—I always say, I've never been interested in singular objects or images. I just don't think that way. And I'm interested in the way that if you combine an image and an object, and the way you place them, and how you place them, and the timing that it takes to get from one to the other, the way that you kind of choreograph the looking at something, that meanings sort of ricochet off of each other. That's what I do. So it's really— takes place in time. And it takes

place—there's always this time element. And then I'm stuck with these fucking objects that don't move. They're just, like—And so there was a long time in which I thought I should really just make movies. And I spent time writing a script, and worked with other people to write a script, and I'm really bad at it. I had to face after, like, two or three years just slugging away at writing a movie, that I just did not have that talent. I could have been a great art director. Like, I know how things should look and how that means—I didn't—I don't—I can't write dialogue. I can't—other things I just don't know how to do. And I was not good at.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But film has, apart from its wonderful, expressive, and exciting possibilities as a form. It is limited to sort of virtual experience that you have to put somebody in a dark room for two hours. And they have to sit there and watch this—

BARBARA BLOOM: That's my favorite place in the world to be. So I have no problem with that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, it goes somebody once compared that to cave painting. There are images on the wall in a cave—

BARBARA BLOOM: Exactly. That's the whole—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The film is the new cave painting.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, there's that whole argument there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Your catalog here—what struck me immediately was, there's a kind of not only metaphysical aspect to the work, but meta-scientific. It's almost Linnean. You're creating these kind of—there's a construction of, like, taxonomies of not objects, perhaps. But experience that the— that the works become devices that create these experiences.

BARBARA BLOOM: Well, this is—cut to places. For years and years, I would be flattered by somebody who said that they would like to make a big work of my work. And I say, yes— [telephone rings] Hold on. Let me just—it might be a delivery.

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JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you said that people have told you they wanted to do a big—

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, yes. To go to back up—yes. You know, there's the whole problem of the catalogue resume or the big, freaking coffee table book. And I just never—the image, image, image, and then you've got some art historian who gives you some kind of context for it, and then dot, dada, it just was, always just seemed so dull and so, you know, uninteresting in terms of what I wanted to do. And so I thought a long time about what I wanted to do with the book. And then I, one day, saw the catalog for the Jackie Onassis sale up at Sotheby's. And I just flipped. I mean, I just thought this is just—it's incredible.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's the inspiration.

BARBARA BLOOM: That was the inspiration for this book. It was just big, big, fucking book, coffee table book. And it's got—but what it had was not just all of her stuff. And she, you know, she didn't—it wasn't that interesting, what she had. And she's a rich lady who lived on Park Avenue, who had kind of relatively good Park Avenue taste. And there's nothing of interest in itself of the objects. But you know it's the whole thing of who touched it and who had it. That is of interest. But more of interest was the way that they made this book was that, you know, here's a pair of glasses. And you know it's this gorgeous photograph of this pair of glasses. And then there's a picture of Jack wearing the glasses or holding the glasses. And everything is so fetishized. But it's fetishized in a way that these implied narratives, the implied importance of everything was so ridiculous and at the same time, so gorgeous. And I just kind of went, "Oh! Now, that could be really an interesting way to deal with all of these objects that I've made over the years." Is to kind of—And then I also, because I sort of feel—like we were talking about, I sort of, I feel like, well, what is it that I'm doing? Am I actually—maybe I'm, maybe what I'm doing is philosophy, but that it's actually grounded in all this stuff. So I have all these things. But I could care less about I don't really care about the things. I care about how we imbue them with meaning, and how we do that personally, and how we do that as a group, and how then that meaning can then disappear, and how we give value to things, and how that value could be taken. That's—I'm not interested in the things. I'm interested in the way the things can hold meaning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you construct a dialogue between these objects, these relics, these icons, these—

BARBARA BLOOM: I call them stand-ins.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Stand-ins, surrogates, whatever—and you put them in the path of people whose expectations, and assumptions, and knowledge collide with this conversation in, like, whatever way.

BARBARA BLOOM: Well, I just sort of feel like what my job—you know, I remember in the '80s where there were these whole discussions, this Postmodern discussion about, you know, that we're coming to a place where things no longer have meaning and that, you know, that images no longer have meaning. And you have Baudrillard writing about, you know, that meaning is being drained from images. And I'm kind of like this is just complete, utter bullshit.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: Images and objects are full of meaning. And my job is—maybe, you know, maybe we're deluged with images. And we no longer trust ourselves to know how to read them. Or that we're being manipulated so much into terms of how we're supposed to read them. But I'm sort of saying my job is to give someone an opportunity to look at something, be confused by something, even get comfortable with their confusion. Sort through it, come to some conclusion on their own, feel like they were in cahoots with me and the object. To kind of slow down the process of how and give somebody an opportunity to find the meaning, own the meaning, question the meaning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Invent the meaning.

BARBARA BLOOM: Invent the meaning. That's my job.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well there's a quote. I'm sure I'm going to do misattribute it. But I think it was Marcel Duchamp who said something to the effect that art is a process which the artist begins and the viewer completes.

BARBARA BLOOM: Absolutely, you know. You know, I've always grappled with the whole idea of the audience, because I always sort of feel like I don't ever think about an audience. I think about an audient. I think about a single person. And I don't really fill in—you know, sometimes, when you're, you know, we all have these demon voices. Like that person's going to say it's too stupid. And this person's going to say it—you know, we always have these demon invoices in our minds of these people who we don't—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Second guessers

BARBARA BLOOM: The second guessers, exactly. And we know who they are. But I don't mean those people. But I mean the kind of thoughtful, anonymous audient who's going to come see my work. M y job is to engage them and to—you know, I could never make something that would be so opaque that a completely unsuspecting audient, somebody who knows nothing about what I do, would not somehow have access to coming in and be titillated somehow. Be made curious. Be somehow— It would just not be, it's not my nature to make that kind of —and then, if you ask me anything, that's the kind of work that really infuriates me, a kind of work that demands the footnotes. And demands a kind of insider knowledge that—You know, I love the ladies on the Upper East Side who go to museums, and are intelligent, and are trying to, you know. And they have a whole other vocabulary of what it is they're looking at. But somehow or another, it should be possible to enter in some way or another. So there's one part of the mission, the mission statement. But you know I sort of do feel like I have a kind of philosophical and kind of a cerebral practice that takes place in the realm of stuff, all these images, and objects, and things. And it's not a particularly efficient—you know, writing a book or, writing a book would be more efficient. Because then, you know, publish it online or whatever, it's much more efficient. But it seems to be the way, it seems to be what I know how to do.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it would also—to do that, to make a film, to write a book, and have that be the forum, would exclude a lot of the sort of mayhem, and chance, and excitement, and sensuality of working to create, to construct these dialogues between these—

BARBARA BLOOM: It's a different. It's a different, you know. It's what I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Different sensibility.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's a different sensibility. Or it's a different—I don't know. It's a different way of working. It's a different—I mean, I do, [Sighs] I love the moment when people see my work. Where it's not, aha. It's not like, there's not something to get—but where they sort of feel like, oh. This is dadada dadada da. And then they realize that I've given them all these possibilities, that that's built into it. I've done this, this, this, or that. I've constructed a possibility for them to have a thought. And there's like some, that we're in cahoots with each other. And then we're with each other. We're each in cahoots with the object. And the object is the transmitter of our—what's the word—cahootsness. You know, our—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Good. Cahootsness.

BARBARA BLOOM: Cahootsness.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That won't stand up to spell check, I'm sure.

BARBARA BLOOM: No, that will not. So when I was at—one of the last things I did in Holland before I left is I did this piece which was called *the Gaze*. And it was done in the Stedelijk Museum. They had artists, several artists. Or I think they had a series of artists who came and did a piece in a room, particular room, in the museum, in these classical, beautiful, turn of the century, beautifully proportioned rooms. And what I did was in Holland, you know, is that if you walk around, like on the canals or something, is that many, many of the houses have this kind of walled, translucent curtains. You could see right through them into people's houses. I mean, it's the most strange, voyeuristic sense of privacy/not privacy. We can go on with the whole Calvin—I mean it's a very particular thing to Holland. And so what I did was I lined the entire room with these curtains. And I put photographs, hung photographs, behind them. And all the photographs were either film stills from movies that were shot—they were all kind of voyeuristic images of people looking at people, images of people in museums looking at artworks of surveillance kind of imagery. And they hung behind these curtains. And then there was a railing in the middle of the room that normally keeps you away from works. But it was reversed. So it was about a meter away from the wall. And so you couldn't walk into the—I mean you couldn't step over it. But you couldn't walk into the room. You were forced up close to the works. And you know, people came in there. And first of all, there's a guard in the room. And then you realize if you go to peek, the guard doesn't ask you to stop. So you're allowed to look. And then this kind of sensuous, subversive sense of peeking and looking at artwork—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Undressing the wall.

BARBARA BLOOM: Undressing a wall and then at the time, what I was interested in was I had read this review of Robert Irwin's *Dot Paintings*. And his *Dot Paintings* were these tiny little dots; most of them were red, on a white surface. And then when you looked at them, you'd get an afterimage. It would start to glow and get—it's a visual perceptual thing that happens. And the writer described them as blushing, which is not exactly accurate, but a really interesting way to think that they would start to take on the color. And I thought, oh, there you go. There's that moment for me where I realize that's what I want to happen. I want an artwork when you look at it, that it blushes. Not that it would make you blush. That's relatively easy to do. You do something that is not within the realm of what you're allowed to do. And then it makes a person blush, literally or not literally. But if you could make an artwork—that you could be aware of the fact that you're affecting that thing on the wall by your looking at it, such that you become self-conscious about the fact that if you're looking at it was what— I thought that's like the ultimate thing you could do. And so that was probably the moment I sort of realized what the difference was between what I was doing and what people in Los Angeles, some of those people were doing there, with this kind of phenomenological understanding of looking. So I was actually really interested in the psychological aspects of looking, being looked at. And there was, of course, all this feminist stuff going on at the time about *the Gaze* and being looked at, but I actually only read that after I make that piece.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You're talking about the book by John—

BARBARA BLOOM: About Laura Mulvey and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Like John Berger?

BARBARA BLOOM: John Berger—actually, it was after that and people told me about those things that I read those things. So I was sort of like, maybe you're sort of snipping in the air. And there are certain subjects that are there. And maybe that's sort of the answer to the question. Because very often, I'll read something after I've made a piece that's really similar to what I'm thinking about. But it wasn't really based on that. It wasn't like I read those things about looking in *the Gaze* and something, and made that. I made it. And then the chronology is a little—I don't realize sometimes what I'm doing while I'm doing it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You know, they talk about pigeons having some kind of—

BARBARA BLOOM: Morphological resonance, is that what you—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Morphological resonance, but they talk about pigeons, going back to avian topics, having some kind of sense in their brain of where north is.

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, wow.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And so they have a kind of ability to—because nobody really understands why a pigeon knows where home is. There was a television show about this last night on PBS.

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh! Someone told me about this.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And yes, it's very interesting. There is a lot of interesting avian science about memory. Like a bird that's isolated from other male birds, a male bird isolated from other male birds, won't learn a proper

love song, so thus won't find a mate easily. But within three generations of isolation, the love song is retrieved from deep within its genetic memory. And so there was some speculation that a pigeon knows where home is because it can sense the Earth's magnetic field. I don't know. I think perhaps people, especially if someone is involved with an activity that's so focused as what we call making art in all of its manifestations, I definitely feel, and perhaps you agree, that people, like you were saying, sense that something's in the air.

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, yes. Or at least you're interested in something. And you know that it's something timely because you can't be the only person who's interested in this. Because for instance, you know, when I did this piece, went there with the veiled curtains, I knew it was really—there was something so freaking girly about it, and kind of underwear, and the petticoats. And there was something like, oh, my god. This is just—it's hard to even describe how it seemed kind of radical to me to be doing this in a museum and making it so femme. It was so femme. It was so femme. And there was something about it. You know, I was recently reading some stuff of Rosemarie Trockel's. And you know she played with that enormously, like about the expectations of feminine stuff. But you know, years later, I redid that piece, I guess in the, I want to say probably in the—[sighs]—I'm so bad at timing, but probably in the '80s.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is it Parrish Art Museum?

BARBARA BLOOM: I redid it there. No. But I did it at the Margo Leavin Gallery in Los Angeles.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, sure.

BARBARA BLOOM: And so I probably did that in the—probably in the '90s, I did it at Margo Leavin's. And she had a very big space. In the other half the space, there was a Robert Grosvenor show, the big, heavy, kind of curvy metal pieces. And I just remember they had to take a wall out of the space in order to get his big sculptures in there. And I just—that completely took over half the gallery. And we're ironing curtains and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs]

BARBARA BLOOM: —putting up ironing, you know, ironing our petticoats. And here he is, this big, macho guy that had moved—you know, they had to take out the door and that wall. And I just sort of was laughing to myself, like how femme this was. And it was cheeky. You know, I knew I was onto something. That it was interesting. That there was something about a female voice there. It was femme enough and tough enough. There was something it was kind of relentless about. It was using that femme material. But at the same time, it was rigorous in what I was doing. It wasn't fuzzy in what it was a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But it wasn't polemical either. It wasn't like Judy Chicago or Miriam Schapiro.

BARBARA BLOOM: No, not at all.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It wasn't being polemic. It wasn't trying to connect itself to the polemical—

BARBARA BLOOM: It wasn't like Barbara Kruger either.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —or Barbara Kruger, yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: Although you know, I was aware of and appreciated aspects of particularly Barbara Kruger's work. But it was not finger-pointing. It was not. You know, there's always—I sort of feel I have certain, we each of us have certain tools, certain things that we kind of fall back on. Because we, in our deepest sense, know how to do them or we can rely on them. And one of them to me is beauty. I know how to make things beautiful in a kind of classical sense of beauty. I know how to play with that. I know a lot about color. I know how—people can count on that it looks good. I know how to do that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's kind of ballsy to bring the B word into a discussion of Postmodernism. And sort of —

BARBARA BLOOM: At the time, it was like, and particularly in Holland, there were like discussions. Every interview was about, you know, you seem to embrace beauty. And I'm going, what's the problem? What is the freaking problem? You know? I was absent from school the day that they told you you weren't allowed to do that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs]

BARBARA BLOOM: I just don't get it. There's not a problem.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, also there seems to be a lack of irony. There's a lot of work that is out there that was utilizing a lot of the same codes and strategies, was also being consciously ironic.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. No, I don't—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And that you didn't seem to care about—

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't care. I mean, there's humor. There's a lot of humor in what I do.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of course.

BARBARA BLOOM: But it's not really ironic. I kind of—irony is sort of a simple one, as far as, you know. It's more—you know, people describe what I do as witty. And then I kind of look it up. And then I go, "Ew. I don't want to be witty. Witty is so light."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or droll.

BARBARA BLOOM: No. They don't ever say droll. They say witty.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Witty.

BARBARA BLOOM: And I kind of go, ew. That just sort of makes me seem like I go to a salon. I'm a member of a salon in London or something. I'm going, "I don't want to be witty."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs]

BARBARA BLOOM: But I think I do have certain things. Beauty is one of them. I guess wit, or humor is another one. I mean sometimes I think that the more I kind of sort of—remember dials of stereos, when they used to have dials? You had to like dial them up?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of course.

BARBARA BLOOM: That the dials are completely in sync with each other? I turn up difficulty. I always turn up beauty. You know, that they go—the more difficult it gets, the more beautiful it gets. The more difficult it gets, the more there might be some humor in there or something. That I up the ante in difficulty, but I would never do that on its own. It needs to be gorgeous. I mean, how else am I going to get somebody to stay there and look at it? You have to seduce someone to stay there, to even want to look at it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you're constructing environments in which you are creating an opportunity for someone to remain, to discover the dialogue between the elements, the curtains, the work on the wall, the railing that keeps you—

BARBARA BLOOM: You know it looks completely normal. And all of a sudden, you go, oh! That's not doing what it's supposed to be doing. It's keeping me close to it. Do you know what I mean?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So the guard rail—

BARBARA BLOOM: It's a flip. It's a flip.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes. The guard rail in *the Gaze*, it keeps you out of the middle of the room and up against the wall.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes. It does exactly the opposite of most guard rails, which is to keep you away from the work. This is to keep you nearer.

BARBARA BLOOM: And there's very often a kind of a flip. There's a kind of a little flip moment where it's something doesn't— it looks like it's doing what it normally does, but it kind of flips. There's several times I've kind of noticed. Oh, yes. That's that kind of guard rail moment. I'm doing that again.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I guess accused of being witty is a compliment. Because it—

BARBARA BLOOM: Please don't.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But like witty is dark, too. Because you think about whom do we think about as being witty. Oscar Wilde.

BARBARA BLOOM: Oscar Wilde. Oscar Wilde. Then that's where I'm going—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Dorothy Parker.

BARBARA BLOOM: Dorothy Parker.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who are both tragic—

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. That's where I kind of say, well, they say Oscar Wilde is witty. So that's not bad company. So I kind of go, I don't feel like I'm—I'm not dark.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No. But they both had a self—

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. No. Those people were dark.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —destructive hubris. He was, you know, Irish, of course, and gay. But there's this underside too. There's the wit. And then there's the dark side of wit. Which is the—

BARBARA BLOOM: No. I'm not deep enough for the dark side of wit.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I think there's a lot to be explored on the surface of things too. And that's what you're doing.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. I don't— somebody said that the joke of it is like some of my best friends are depresses. But I just, I don't have the, I don't, I suffer from other things. That's not my—I don't really go in there. And when I feel that way, I have no patience for it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, the—

BARBARA BLOOM: You have to be more patient to be depressive.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean, I remember in the '80s, it was very hard to be neutral on topics that were at the moment like what the objectification of the gays, or the sort of appropriation, and irony, and all of these things. Everybody—and there was a lot of pressure, I think, on artists to try to sort of connect whatever they were doing to these other conversations. And you seem to just know just exactly what you wanted to do. And you just did it. So there's a kind of confidence in that.

BARBARA BLOOM: I think it's a kind of confidence, but I think also, I didn't live here. I was here and not here. There you go. There's my whole thing of being here and not being here. I didn't place myself in the middle of the argument. And so if you don't place yourself center stage, but you're over here, you can do whatever you want to do. So you're not getting the attention that people who put themselves center stage—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But you have more liberty to do as you please.

BARBARA BLOOM: But you have liberty to do whatever you want to do. And I think I'm slow. I'm not a quick worker. I don't quite—but I'm not fast in understanding things or making things. So I think there was some kind of psychological intelligence on my part not put myself center stage, but to put myself someplace that allowed me a lot of time to figure out what I'm doing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Good self protec—

BARBARA BLOOM: Self-preservation—you know I think in retrospect, it's not like I loved living there, that I had a fantastic group of colleagues who understood what I was doing or something. No. I just felt kind of alienated, but not so alienated, and somehow supported. You know there were enough people around who I could talk to. But it wasn't a hotbed of interesting dialogue there. And so I just sort of feel like I didn't—I needed time to figure out what I'm doing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, as you characterize sort of the culture of the Netherlands at the time, that sort of a laid-back environment must have been a very, in a way, a very easy place to be ambitious on your own terms.

BARBARA BLOOM: On my own—well, but yet ambition is not at all embraced there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Exactly.

BARBARA BLOOM: You know, so you're not allowed to—there are not, people were not, you know, I don't even know if it still exists.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's the Calvinist—

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. You're not allowed to be ambitious. You know, if somebody is ambitious, that's a real, that's a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: On the dark side.

BARBARA BLOOM: That's a swear word. You've gone into the ambition. But I think it allowed me a lot of time. I kind of think of it like a sanatorium. Like it gave me a lot of time—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Big rest home with a lot of tulips.

BARBARA BLOOM: Big rest home with a lot of tulips and a lot of support that was not—that was really easy. And so I could really—[gasp sound]—make a movie in 35 millimeter, make a trailer in 35 millimeter that took me like a year to sort of work. I mean, you couldn't— how would I have done that here? I wouldn't have been able to do that here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No. You would be—you would have to make money for somebody in order to—

JAMES MCELHINNEY AND BARBARA BLOOM: [Said in unison] —be able to do that. Yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: So there were things that it afforded me in terms of—plus you know, living in Europe, I lived in Europe for 15 years. I left from Amsterdam and I moved to Berlin, and I mean, for longer than 15, what? 17 years—and so I'm sort of like I'm an ex-expatriate. So you know there's a lot about living in another culture. You know, I sort of feel like for very many years, I was sort of stuck in between that kind of a European mentality about more literary, more historical thinking about things, but with an American subject matter or use of materials. So it was like the Europeans were like going, what the hell is this? And the Americans are going like, what? There was like somewhere. I sort of feel like the person whose work I absolutely love, kind of embodies that, is Ed Ruscha. Ed Ruscha is a European in his thinking. He's not—it's a complete American vernacular. But it's the kind of doubt and the kind of Catholic levels of understanding. And it's not a quick read at all—very slow read, very odd, peculiar, melancholic, not at all Californian in its subject matter. But then, it's All-American. It's like you're overhearing conversations. And it's— the vernacular is completely American. So these like—and I felt that for years and years. Why doesn't everyone understand that Ed Ruscha is one of the most important artists to ever live? And of course, slowly, it kind of came. You know, it's not Pop Art. It's like, what is this guy? It's so brilliant what he does. And over the years, people kind of understood how fantastic it is what he does. But I sort of feel like, I guess you could say he's my favorite artist. Yes. Maybe, not maybe favorite artist, maybe most inspiring artist, the one that if I don't know where I am, I could always just sort of sit down and look at an Ed Ruscha book, and just feel so totally inspired. I don't know. Do you have those artists who are the ones you go back to you because you just can't believe?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think so. Yes. And they change over time.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. But there are certain golden oldies of, you know—Godard is one of them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You did a piece in 1981 called *Homage to Jean Seberg*.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: You know, here I was, this American girl. And I was trying to think at the time—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A striped maillot, a picture of the *Herald Tribune*, a canvas chair—

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. She—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: She'd killed herself, hadn't she?

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. So she—you know, I read in the *Herald Tribune*—because I read the *Herald Tribune* every day—that Jean, no. No. I read in the local paper that Jean Seberg had died, that she had committed suicide. And I thought, oh, my god. It's going to be in the *Herald Tribune.* And then that whole thing of her first movie, or her first important movie, where she plays the American ingenue in Paris who sells the *Herald Tribune* on the streets, and falls in love with Belmondo, the gangster, and dies at the end—you know the whole downfall of the innocence of this young girl. And she had this really, really sad life where she was hounded by the FBI. And she kind of had these kind of Leftist leanings. They had rumors that she had the baby of Bobby Seale from the Black Panthers. And they really hounded her and gave her a horrible time. And it's not ever as simple as like they drove her to suicide. But she was sort of driven, she was sort of driven to this dark, unhappy life.

And I just realized, oh, my god. If you—I made this piece that has, at the time, I was making these pieces that took place on backdrop paper. And they were sort of, okay. So if I don't think of what I'm doing as permanent, and I want to have a sense of taking place in time, and I want to have them, and I want to have objects nothing, nothing is highlighted more than something else, well, if you put it on a backdrop paper, then it implies that it

has a photograph being taken of it or will. It doesn't take place in present tense. It's either in the past or the future. And everything on that thing, on that backdrop, is given some kind of place in some kind of narrative. I thought that's just like the perfect—if I want to make sculpture, let me see if I can make something which exists as a so-called sculpture. And so I thought, oh, that's this perfect format for that. Because—and I made a number of them. And then, when she died, I thought, oh, my god. I have to. So I went and got the newspaper of the day that she died. And there's a picture of her. But what I did is I reprinted it. I reprinted the front page of the paper and had the image of her selling the *Herald Tribune*. So I kind of closed that loop of the public life/private life, our public image, how it's— you know, anyway, blah, blah, blah, without having to go, anyway. But what are we going to do about Godard? I did another piece, an homage to Godard. Because when I moved to Berlin, in the first month of being there, I happened on a show of photographs of this fashion photographer. And he had a photograph of Godard taken on a backdrop paper. And you could see the backdrop paper. And I thought, oh, my god. This is just insane. I'm doing these pieces of background paper. And I just did one of Jean Seberg. And here's this photograph. And I had never in my life ever bought anything. But I bought the photograph. I think it cost 300 marks. I just like thought I have to buy this photograph. So I bought the photograph. And then I decided I was going to make an homage to Godard. And so I used the photograph in that. And so there's a backdrop paper. And there's the chair from the photograph on the backdrop paper. And then there's this— next to it is a yellow backdrop paper. And there's a yellow area. And then this photograph is on this yellow area, kind of like where the reference point or the— it kind of goes, ricochets back and forth. And I had for the first time in my life, I had a gallery. And the gallery took that each piece to an art fair. And I got a phone—this is pre-electronic messaging. But I got a phone call saying, you know, Mr. Gundlach, the man who took the photograph, just came and saw your piece. And I thought, well, now I'm screwed. I didn't ask him if I could use it or—and he bought the piece.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs]

BARBARA BLOOM: He turned out to be a collector of work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: One good purchase deserves another.

BARBARA BLOOM: Exactly! I just thought that, what is this? And I you know, I wrote him a letter and said, "This is wonderful. We should keep this going." And I realized that's what's capitalism. That's capitalism right there. You have the piece. And then you buy his piece. And then he buys your piece. And then I said, "You know what? Use my piece in a piece of yours, and I'll buy it." We can keep—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs]

BARBARA BLOOM: —this going for a long time. But that was one of those happy—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: To get bigger and bigger studios.

BARBARA BLOOM: That was one of the very first purchases of a work of mine, was to this man who re-bought his photograph back again.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So can you share the name of the gallery that represented you?

BARBARA BLOOM: At the time? Yes. Isabella Kacprzak. She no longer has a gallery.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Cust?

BARBARA BLOOM: C, Z, R—oh, god. It's a Polish name—C, Z. C, Z, P—I don't know how to spell it. I have to look it up.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay.

BARBARA BLOOM: Kacprzak—C, Z, C, A, Z, P. I'll look it up for you. Just send me an email. How do you spell the Polish name? And I'll give that to you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay.

BARBARA BLOOM: She had a gallery in Stuttgart and then in Cologne.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, you're getting it. Okay.

BARBARA BLOOM: Very interesting woman.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And the name of the gallery where you purchased the drawing, do you remember that?

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, I don't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay.

BARBARA BLOOM: It was like—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But where was it?

BARBARA BLOOM: In Berlin.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But what neighborhood?

BARBARA BLOOM: Charlottenburg.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh! Yes. Sure. Great neighborhood.

BARBARA BLOOM: Charlottenburg— I think it was like near the, I recall it—I don't remember. I recall it being near—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: On the—

BARBARA BLOOM: —near Savignyplatz, but I don't remember. There was a gal— it was a show of his photographs. FC Gundlach, F-C Gundlach, G-U-N-D-L-A-C-H, is the photographer. And he was a quite renowned fashion photographer of the time. I didn't know his work at all. Since then, I—and he's a quite impressive collector of art. I didn't know that either. So that was a—anyway, a good moment.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So tell us about your move to Berlin. How long were you there?

BARBARA BLOOM: I moved to Berlin in '86, '85, '86. I received the DAAD [Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst] stipend. Which is the Artists-In-Berlin grant where you get a house and money for a year. Which is fantastic.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you were living in—

BARBARA BLOOM: One of these beautiful—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Charlottenburg?

BARBARA BLOOM: I was living in the Kreuzberg 61.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, Kreuzberg, sure.

BARBARA BLOOM: There's two parts of Kreuzberg. That was the part of Kreuzberg that wasn't like the funkier part. It was more a little bougier part of Kreuzberg. I lived right next to the Hebbel Theater in a beautiful, enormous apartment with a winter garden. And I mean, it was just like I felt at the time like if I don't behave like a grown-up now, I'm never going to. You know, beautiful staircase and the glass doors—it was incredible.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's a tony neighborhood now.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's a tony neighborhood now. Well, you know, I lived two blocks away from the Wall. And it was a really—you know, I think three weeks after I moved there, the explosion in Chernobyl went off. And so that was a very odd.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And somewhat vexing, I would think because—

BARBARA BLOOM: Very confusing, because I couldn't really speak German yet. I mean I could understand a lot of it. But I didn't really speak German well enough to understand what was going on on the radio. And I turned on American Forces Radio. You have to remember at the time, it was still the East and West Berlin. And they had some kind of program on about how to clean something with silver polish, so some like completely unimportant, blobbity-blah talk show. Well, I'm cleaning my something-something with furniture polish. And that's when I freaked out, and drove to the airport, and left. I just thought there's like no information. It was May Day. It was May Day. So this happened just before. So it's May 1. They have a program on TV that I can't really quite understand about maypole dance in Russia. In the markets, they have—and in the newspaper, they're having the becquerels. They're telling you how many becquerels of something. And I'm trying to understand what's going on. On America Forces Radio, they have some kind of program about how to do something with silver polish, how to clean your something with silver polish, giving you no information at all about how dangerous this was.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There's this big radioactive cloud heading your way.

BARBARA BLOOM: And the radioactive cloud at that point was actually moving toward Southern Europe. But all of the produce came from the south. And I'm thinking—and then you go to the market and the chanterelles cost $1 a pound. And I'm kind of going, I'm out of here. You know, it was so—to have a disaster be invisible was very frightening to me. It was more sinister than, it was much more sinister than Sandy. Sandy is like, you know, you watch it. You can see. It's going to make—we don't know how far it's going to come up this time. But at a certain point, we're going to be underwater here. You can see it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that was what was so weird about Chernobyl. Actually, my stepbrother worked for a consulting firm that was hired by the World Bank to assist in the clean-up of Chernobyl. He ended up with horrible cancer from which he survived. But you know the prevailing winds are always from the west. But with Chernobyl, because of the cloud, because of the altitude it reached, that it actually—

BARBARA BLOOM: Moved south

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It moved south and then north—

BARBARA BLOOM: And again, and it just—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and covered Scandinavia and parts of northern Europe, Poland, Germany, and—

BARBARA BLOOM: It was scary.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes. It's invisible. Sandy, you could see it coming.

BARBARA BLOOM: You could see it coming.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You can see the waters starting to get agitated, the winds starting to pick up.

BARBARA BLOOM: You know, at the time, I was thinking, you know? When I'm going to go, I want a tidal wave. I want to see it. I want to see it come right at me. You know, I found it so sinister and awful, particularly also because you're not getting information. So I left. And I went back a few—you know, I went back a while. Like I think about—I went Holland. I figured that I can get out of Holland if I have to, you know, right? But Berlin, like Berlin at the time—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was West Berlin

BARBARA BLOOM: West Berlin.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —was surrounded by East Germany.

BARBARA BLOOM: And—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

BARBARA BLOOM: —you know, I'm out of here. I have no reason. I have no family here. I have no need. I have no, I'm not—I don't need to be here. So I left. But it was Berlin, you know, Berlin, I barely even know it now. It's kind of unrecognizable. It was one of my favorite places in the entire world at the time. It was so large, forgotten, the crust of some kind of cosmopolitanism that no longer—it was really provincial. I mean, there was nothing going on. And just filled with markings of history everywhere, you know? Literal pockmarks on buildings, and it was such an odd, interesting place.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's not—as a city, it's not much older than New York either, you know? It's got a medieval root.

BARBARA BLOOM: Well, there are parts of it that are much—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But parts of it, you know, like Alexanderplatz is the old gate and so forth. I mean, it was basically a little town. But as a big city, it was not until the 18th century that it really got to be a big city. So it's a relatively new city in Europe. And it is intriguing.

BARBARA BLOOM: But then, you know, it was a fantastic place to when I lived there. I mean, I lived there from '85, '86 to '91, '92. So I watched the Wall come down. I watched the shift. I mean, it was just being at the right place at the right time.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The whole time, you were in Kreuzberg?

BARBARA BLOOM: I lived in Kreuzberg.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what inspired the move? Was it you just like tired of Holland?

BARBARA BLOOM: The minute I got that I never going to come back—you know, it's like I sort of like, oh. Well, why would I ever go back to living in Holland?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But what inspired you to go to Berlin?

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, I got this grant.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, this— Okay. That was it.

BARBARA BLOOM: The DAAD grant.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: And so I was ready. I was ready to leave Amsterdam.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How did you feel about—I mean, a lot of people's obvious question a lot people have about, how do you feel about being in a town that was so closely associated with the dark history of National Socialism?

BARBARA BLOOM: I sort of feel there's Germany and then there's Berlin.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

BARBARA BLOOM: You know it's like that's sort of the United States. And then there's New York.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

BARBARA BLOOM: [Laughs] You know, we're like, we're an island off the coast of America.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: True. That is true—a Dutch island.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right. A Dutch island of the coast of America, a colony. It was not a cosmopolitan place when I lived there. It was a very small place. And so, and that kind of provincialism or something—[sighs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was an occupied city.

BARBARA BLOOM: It was an occupied city. It was a very interesting, complex place to live. And how do I feel about that, living in Germany?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean—

BARBARA BLOOM: There are certain aspects of Germany that are—at the time, you know, the people who were my friends were much more politically engaged, historically conscious, understanding the relationships between what's going on now in the relationship to history, and discussed that far more than anyone I knew here. I mean, everyone I knew was very politically engaged and very—you know, there were arguments and fights, and people furious with each other, and how can you think that. I mean, it was very foreign to me. You know, when was the last time you were involved with a conversation, a political conversation, where people really went at it? They don't do that here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well—

BARBARA BLOOM: Not among friends.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think a couple of nights ago, you could have found a few—

BARBARA BLOOM: Well, but not among friends.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —a few tussles.

BARBARA BLOOM: Not among friends.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

BARBARA BLOOM: Not among friends. You know, we talk about a movie. Or we'll talk about something we read

or an article. We don't—they don't have political, there's no political debate. And so that was an interesting part of living in Berlin, the amount of political dialogue that was going on. And I found that very interesting, the way that people, you know, were grappling with cultural guilt. And I would say to friends, you know what? I'm opening a Swiss bank account. And for a small fee into my account every month, I'll just take away that guilt. I don't even notice it. You know, like they're just guilty. And they're just, you know, just have that—that's the generation, the generation of people who are now in their late 50s, early 60s, who are just—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who are the children of—

BARBARA BLOOM: The children of the people who perpetrated all that, all the stuff. And so I found that, being involved with those people, quite consoling in some ways. And then again, here I am, this Jewish woman from California, no religious upbringing. Not even like, I'm not lapsed. I never got it. My parents were—they don't believe it. They didn't care enough to be atheist. They're agnostic. They're just like, d'oh! They just, you know, really dislike religion, just really. And that's how I grew up. So I didn't know anything really about Jewish religion. Or you know, ask me a question. You know, I remember my boyfriend at the time, his parents were from, he's from Hamburg. And his mother was actually quite, you know, kind of a good Lutheran. They ran a lot of the stuff with the underground at the time during the war. She wasn't a—no hero, but good, solid, ethical woman. And when I first met her, I went there for Christmas. And Christmas dinner, we went to the Mass. And I'm thinking, oh, we're going to go to Christmas Mass. And the people are going to be singing. And this is going to be—I'm thinking like gospel church.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, it's right there.

BARBARA BLOOM: No. No. They're mumbling. That's [mumbling sound]. No. There's no singing there. There's no catharsis there. There's like not any, what the—? What the hell? What's the point in going to Christmas Mass if you're not, you know. It's not going to be like—and I'm thinking, you know, incense. And I'm like, you know. I'm so naive. I'm not realizing what Lutheran is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So Lutheran Mass.

BARBARA BLOOM: Lutheran Mass—it's everyone [Mumbling Sound].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You have listen to—listen to Garrison Keillor. He'll—

BARBARA BLOOM: He'll tell you all about the Lutheran—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs] Yes, right. Exactly.

BARBARA BLOOM: —about Lutheran. Lutheran is scary. It's a scary thing. Anyway, we were coming back in the car. And she turns around. She was such a lovely person. She said, "Barbara, I have to ask you this question"—and very proper. "So do you and your family really believe in an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth?" And I have no idea what she's talking about. And he goes, Matthias, my boyfriend, he goes, "Mom, leave her alone. She doesn't even know what you're talking about. She's like from California. They don't even know what—"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs]

BARBARA BLOOM: "She didn't even go to temple. She doesn't know anything. She's like—leave her alone." And I'm kind of like, it's like this is like—and I felt like it's like it's a current like of a guy going, oh. Got it. Like oh. An eye for an eye—yes. That's the Jewish thing. Like I'm like the other side. So it was very funny for me to be in Berlin. And then all these kind of intellectual people, publishers in something. And I was invited everywhere. I was like, I'm the person. I sort of embodied the intellectual Jewish woman who they want—they got rid of.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who is forgiving.

BARBARA BLOOM: Who was, like, you know, who— I was invited. I was like— I was invited everywhere. You know? There's this and there's that. I mean, there was like a—I'm the person who they all want to befriend. And I'm just kind of going, leave me alone. Come on! There was something that was the part of it I really couldn't take. Just leave me. Give me a break. I'm not that interesting. I'm not, it's not—that's your problem. It's not my problem.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it was about their guilt.

BARBARA BLOOM: Their guilt and interest—like you know, they all want 1920s Berlin back. And here I am. I brought red lipstick and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Seeing an exotic species of, like, woman that they had believed had been extinct.

BARBARA BLOOM: That's the extinct. I am the embodiment of Jewish, intellectual Berlin life that they want back. They, like you know, they've got—plus I'm from Hollywood.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's like, oh, jackpot!

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you know Hitler's favorite movie was *King Kong*?

BARBARA BLOOM: No. But—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes. It's a piece of trivia. But—

BARBARA BLOOM: Thank you. Thanks for sharing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, just a little sorbet to interrupt the meal here.

BARBARA BLOOM: The meal here—that's a good one. I should have told them that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's a little—

BARBARA BLOOM: Hitler's favorite movie was *King Kong*. Leave me alone.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs]

BARBARA BLOOM: It wasn't like I was being—there wasn't like, they weren't, it's not like they were like grabbing at me. But there was a some—there was a level of interest, kind of prurient interest that was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, by—

BARBARA BLOOM: It was like a whole culture of people, intellectuals, hitting on me. That was sort of what it felt like. It's like, meh. I'm not that—actually, you know, it's not that interesting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You were not going to be the poster child for this trope that they were longing to—

BARBARA BLOOM: It took me a while to figure it out.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Interesting.

BARBARA BLOOM: I thought either—you know, it took me a while to figure it out. Like wow! People are really nice here. And wow! I like the DAAD. You kind of get all this—you know. Like I'm invited here, and there, and there, and there. And you know. There's a film party. And then I kind of realized, you know, you kind of realize. I guess it was sort of like if you were a really beautiful woman who gets invited to a lot of places because you're beautiful. And then you realize. What does that have to do with me? I didn't do anything. You know, there's some kind of disconnect.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's like a dinner party. You've got the regular guests. And then you've got two or three empty seats at the table. And who are you going to fill them with?

BARBARA BLOOM: Me. You know, that was me. And I had a very funny—I can put a really good one. Susan Sontag was in Berlin at the same time I was. She did—I guess it was sort of the [Speaks German], one of those places where they invite people. At the time, you know, they imported an intellectual life there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was this down at the university?

BARBARA BLOOM: I think—I don't know. They had a science colloquium, a literature colloq— she was a guest for a year there. So she was there the same time that I was. It was probably late, before the— probably before the Wall came down. I can't remember.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just late '80s?

BARBARA BLOOM: Late '80s anyway. And at that time, I was starting to get this gray streak, just like Susan Sontag. I had the Susan Sontag gray streak. And so she was—you know, I think probably for many women, she was kind of the embodiment of this beautiful, intellectual. You know, and not just for women but particularly for women, here's this role model of this incredibly beautiful, intelligent—who made a lot of things possible for women. You know, Yvonne Rainer would be another one—or these incredibly powerful women. Anyway, so I had a dream at one night. I very rarely do this, think in terms of a dream I have. But I had a dream that I was talking with her. And I said, you know. I'm starting to get gray pubic hair the same way. Do you have that, too? [laughs]

So I told my boyfriend. And next night, we're at a party with her. And he's like egging me on.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Ask her.

BARBARA BLOOM: Go on. Ask her. You know, like, and everybody's drinking. And I'm not a big drinker, but he's drinking. And then there's this whole thing. And it's like she is humorless. She really did. She was not a crack-up. I had another friend who was saying, "She's such a bad dresser. Could you go out shopping with Susan and help her get better clothes?"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs]

BARBARA BLOOM: So like, I had this whole thing with—but anyway, so that was a funny thing about Susan Sontag. I didn't ask her. I was too shy. I didn't think that she would appreciate my—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That would have been probably a conversation killer.

BARBARA BLOOM: That was not going to—it would have been wrong.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The old turd in the punchbowl.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, it was really. I had a very funny thing. Because I had met her one time earlier. This was probably in the '80s here. And I was in New York. And a friend of mine had a friend who was a film critic, something from her college days in St. Louis. And there was a film showing up at New Yorker Films. And he invited us out. And he said, do you want to come to this screening tomorrow of a Straub-Huillet film. And I had never heard of the Straub-Huillet. But it sounded interesting. And so some Sunday morning at 9 o'clock or 10 o'clock, on a cold, windy day, I found my way up to the New Yorker Film. And I came in. And I got there late because I couldn't find it. And I come in a dark room. And that screening is already going. And it's this dense film with just talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, and subtitle, subtitle. And I had no idea. I mean, this is like so beyond anything. And I'm like trying to understand what it's about. And it's about history. And I think it was *Moses and Aaron*. I'm not sure which movie it was. But it was like I had zero—like you know how we were talking about. I had 0.000.0.1% like do I understand what's going on here. And the lights come up. And there's Susan Sontag, and Richard Roud, and all these intellectual film people talking about the film. And I'm like, you know, deer in the headlights. I have not a fucking clue what. And they're talking about the history and the dadadada. And I have no idea even what they're—and here I am, like 20-something years old. I have no—like how did I even get in here? Like I opened the wrong door. And there's the friend of a friend. He's like wave. "Oh, hi, Barbara. And this is Barbara." And he probably didn't even know my name. "This is Patsy, or something like that." And then Susan Sontag turns to me and says, "Well, what did you think?" And I said, "Well, maybe they could have dubbed it." And then they went on for half an hour about the relationship, the difference between dubbing. And to think, that's the only—where I said, maybe they could have dubbed it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That was a good way out of—

BARBARA BLOOM: It's like I had no idea. I had—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There will be a quiz.

BARBARA BLOOM: There will be a quiz.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs]

BARBARA BLOOM: Anyway, that's the only other time. Of course, she didn't remember that I was the person with, well maybe they could have dubbed it. So I wasn't going to into gray pubic hair with Susan Sontag. So no.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that will just have to remain an unanswered question.

BARBARA BLOOM: There you go. Now, it's for posterity. I've got it. I'm very relieved. All right. So—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I would— yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: Living in Berlin, so what it afforded me again is to be—while I was in Berlin, I'm very bad at dates. But in the late, maybe '88 or '87, '88, I had a piece in the Venice Biennale. And I'm not going to describe the piece. The piece is called *Esprit de l'Escalier*, which is literally the spirit of the stairs. But I think this is a wonderful expression. Which is something that you think of too late, anything that you think after the fact that you didn't say at the time. Like that woulda, coulda, shoulda thing, that "Oh, my god, I should've said that" is esprit de l'escalier. And so there's this piece which takes place in several rooms. But it's all about these kind of UFOs, and floating things, and paranormal images. And anyway, it's this piece that I did there. And I didn't even know that there was a prize to be given. But I got a prize at the Venice Biennale for artists under 40. I thought

my friends were kidding me when they told me I'd won a prize. Because I didn't even know there was a prize. So I got a prize. And the best part of the prize, that it was given by Octavio Paz, who was like a—you know, like my knees are shaking. And I'm shaking his hand going, "Well, gee, Mr. Paz. I'm very happy to meet you." Like I couldn't say a single—so it's like, you know, what about dubbing? I'm like, who am I? This little podunk, you know. So like, and he was very gracious and talked with me about my work being a kind of a new kind of version of Surrealism. And I thought, that makes sense to me. But after you win an award at the Venice Biennale, you get kicked up to being on the A-list. And so, here I was, living in Berlin, doing my work, connected enough not be having someone who was curating the Biennial to put me in there, doing what I'm doing. And all of a sudden, I'm on an A-list. And I didn't like being on the A-list. I didn't like—I didn't know. I don't think I handled that well. You know, when you get on the A-list, you get invited to be in—hey!

BARBARA BLOOM: Now, he's going hear. Like he always comes at the time where I'm talking about something that's embarrassing. Hurry up and get out of here. Close the door.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: That's me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's okay. [Laughs]

BARBARA BLOOM: He's going to think I'm talking about careers.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: Timing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Timing is everything.

BARBARA BLOOM: Timing—he's a musician. So—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Let's actually—we need to probably change discs. This is a media moment. So we'll—

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JAMES MCEHINNEY: Okay. So now you're an A artist.

BARBARA BLOOM: Now I'm an A art.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: You've got your prize from Octavio Paz.

BARBARA BLOOM: I got my prize. You know you get asked to be in different galleries, and you get to be in a lot of museum shows, and I didn't know how to speed up a process so I could make enough work to do that. I'm of slow. I've lived at the periphery and kind of involved myself with it and then go back to being non-center staged and then all of a sudden, you can do a show here, here, here, here, and here. And this gallery doesn't know that. And I'm going how would I do that? How would I produce all this work, and I don't even know what I want to do. I'm not being coy either. I'm not trying to say I'm so true to myself and can't go the way of the commercial. I just didn't know how to do that. I didn't know how to change a practice that I knew how to do, kind of my slow kind of my dum, dee, dum, dee, dum. I didn't know how to do that, and so I didn't do it. I didn't step on the A list and do all these shows and be a member of all these international galleries. I didn't do it. And in a way I didn't realize, well it goes away. You get this short little window of opportunity, and if you don't just do that. It's fickle and like a half year later, who are you?

JAMES MCEHINNEY: So if you don't play the game, if you don't all of a sudden say I will produce 50 new pieces every year and whatever.

BARBARA BLOOM: And not even know what it means but just sign up, sign up. You just sign up and that's—sign here on the dotted line, and I'm kind of going like, I don't even know what I'm signing up for. I don't know if I can do this, and every time that somebody says, would you like to do something, I have a split reaction which is, ooh great. I'd like to do that, and oh, my god, now I'm going to have to do something. Because I sort feel like I didn't I don't know what your practice is like but I don't have a practice like a studio practice where I go and I work on paintings and I know basically what I'm doing. I go in there. There's some kind of solace in doing it. There's some kind of routine involved.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well you have to stop dabbling.

BARBARA BLOOM: I'm a dabbler. I don't know what I'm doing. I don't really know. I have to remake it up every time. And I'm I can't make it up that quickly. . I don't even know what I'm doing. I don't even know what I do. People ask, you know—I don't even have an answer. I don't even know what I do. Like what do you want the short version? I'm an artist. You want the long version? You're going to be stuck here for hours. So I didn't sign up for it. I didn't sign up for that.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well, it would have required you to produce.

BARBARA BLOOM: Get a studio

JAMES MCEHINNEY: To produce.

BARBARA BLOOM: Get studio assistance. Get with the program. I don't want to have people around me. I don't want to have to tell them—I mean I do have people who help when I know what I need to have done. I need to have this made, and can you help me figure out, or I think we could do it this way, and they just take it and do that. But I don't want to be a grown up.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well, you know, that's why they don't hire alchemists to work for NASA.

BARBARA BLOOM: That's a nice one. I'm going to tell them that next time. If I ever get on the A list again, I'm going to say, well, James said to tell you they don't hire— that's a very good one. Yes. I don't know how—I'm not like naive in the garret kind of a person. I'm like in this world and I understand product, and I understand all. I'm slow.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well that's the other thing. I think that to make clear that it doesn't seem like you're ever really a bohemian.

BARBARA BLOOM: No. We have five minutes. I got about five minute stints.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well, back in the whatever early '70s, art school, whatever. Everybody flirts with having holes in their jeans.

BARBARA BLOOM: Also I had holes in my other stuff. I'd like to have a life too. You know? Like I have friends. I like to cook. I like to read. I like to think about things. I like to follow what's going on in politics. I like to have time when it's necessary to make phone calls for moveon.org. I'm not only doing one thing.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Right.

BARBARA BLOOM: And it just sort of seemed like to me if I signed here, basically I've signed away my time for everything else that feeds the work, and then how would I do that? It just didn't make sense to me to sign up for that, to sign up for that kind of a production schedule. And so I didn't, and then I thought, oh, then I got the A list. But I'm sorry that you're no longer on that list because you didn't signed up and then you're not on that A list. And then so I've sort of like been on and off various lists for a long time. And then I'm not in the fancy gowns. To say that it doesn't matter is really not true. It does matter. We all want to be invited everywhere, but we don't necessarily want to go. We all want to be invited everywhere to everything. You just don't necessarily—

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well, when you have to accept every invitation then it ceases to be fun.

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't to go out for dinner with collectors unless they're really interesting people.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: It's on the record. You heard it here first. Barbara doesn't want to go out to dinner.

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't want to go out because I don't want somebody who bought something, and luckily people who buy my work, you have to be a little bit odd. There's something a little bit perverse about what it is that I do. It's not just pretty. But I just didn't want to do—am I wrong?

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Obviously not. You're still doing it You're convinced it's the right thing to do, so it's the right thing to do.

BARBARA BLOOM: I'm not like a hero, like I refuse to—my disposition is sort of like, I didn't say no. I just like didn't follow through. There you go. I wasn't like standing up to them going, you know, I really don't want to do that, just sort of like didn't follow through.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: You don't want to be a wit because there isn't a dark side there, and you need a dark side in order to be witty. And the thing is that your—

BARBARA BLOOM: This is cheap shrink, man.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: —lack of engagement with feminist polemics was not out of disdain or contrary point of view, it was just that you were more interested in other things.

BARBARA BLOOM: And that's one of the interests.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Right.

BARBARA BLOOM: Or interest in that among many other things.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: But you didn't feel like you were obliged to be interested in it in the way that the polemicist would like you to be interested in it.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's sort of like why didn't the whole *October* magazine crowd embrace what I did? There was a time like several of my friends—

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Krauss.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. It's just like, you know, I don't exist to those people.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well, you weren't helping them pay their dues.

BARBARA BLOOM: It was too slippery. They can't hang something on.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well, your work isn't—

BARBARA BLOOM: It's not polemic.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: —isn't verbal.

BARBARA BLOOM: People who write about work say it's a pleasure to write about my work because it calls up wanting to be—

JAMES MCEHINNEY: But your work is in bed with the verbiage.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's not. It's not.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: And that's the thing. And a lot of work from a lot of artists at that period in time did romance the word awfully hot and heavy.

BARBARA BLOOM: A friend of mine worked at Marian Goodman at the time, and she said there was like one day, this woman, one of those art—what are those ladies called? They were not art collectors. They were the ones who bought—

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Art consultants.

BARBARA BLOOM: Consultants.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Oh, god, help us.

BARBARA BLOOM: One of those consultants came in there, and she's looking at the show and she goes, "Oh, my god, this is so *October*."

JAMES MCEHINNEY: So *October*.

BARBARA BLOOM: So *October*. It's so *October*. This is so *October*. Thank you. I don't how they're going to translate Octobah. B-A-H.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: B-A-H. Probably O-K.

BARBARA BLOOM: O-K-B-A. Octoba.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: That's a funny story.

BARBARA BLOOM: That's very good. That's very *October*.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: So do you ever feel— has anyone ever kind of described you as a bruja, as the kind of sorceress, as a person who sort of brings these objects together?

BARBARA BLOOM: Never.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Never? When they shut the light off in the museum that they all start dancing around and having parties and stuff like that?

BARBARA BLOOM: No.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: I'm being silly.

BARBARA BLOOM: No. No, that's not my territory. You know, I'm not teaching now, but I have taught a number of places in a number of years, and people usually want to know how you do it, how do you get to where you are, what's the trajectory, how do you do this. And the only thing I can say is that is A list, B list, D list, Z list, you've got to like what you're doing. You've got to be engaged in what it is that you're doing because none of the rest of it either matters or is going to sustain your or is going to continue. It's very fickle. Like I didn't know you e supposed to have a show every two years until two years ago when someone told me, explained to me that that's the ground rules. You're supposed to have a show in a gallery every two years. I said, "You're kidding. I didn't know that."

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well, that's because you go to graduate school, and you don't feel compelled every two years to reenact your thesis show, which is basically the model.

BARBARA BLOOM: Okay. Got it.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: That an MFA program lasts for two years. You have to produce a body of work. You have a thesis show.

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, thank you.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Now this is just my opinion, but the thing that I've observed—

BARBARA BLOOM: Chrysalis to something is two years?

JAMES MCEHINNEY: As a graduate of one of America's noted MFA programs, I have noted, my colleagues and peers, every two years having a one-person show, and it's very much sort of like, what's the next show, and what's the next show, and what's the next show?

BARBARA BLOOM: That's where it comes from.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: And my theory is it's based on the MFA thesis show, that you have two years to produce a thesis show, and what happens is they come out of school and the rest of their lives, they produce new thesis exhibitions. And for the galleries, it's very easy because it helps a lot with scheduling, and they could kind of calculate how much incrementally they're going to be able to increase the prices.

BARBARA BLOOM: See, one of the great mysteries of the world has just been revealed to me. I didn't even know this.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well, I can't prove it. It's just my opinion.

BARBARA BLOOM: No. I understand.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Makes sense.

BARBARA BLOOM: I have a very bad sense of time or very elastic sense of time. So I don't really know how long anything—I'm not keeping track in the right adult way. I'm not doing that. When I'm doing a talk about work, I don't remember the year, or I don't remember all that stuff. I don't have a good sense of the timing thing.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well, that's why I keep sort of asking here and there about sort of alchemy, whether you see yourself as having some kind of meta scientific—

BARBARA BLOOM: Maybe meta-scientific, but it wouldn't be alchemy. It wouldn't be alchemy.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Sorcery.

BARBARA BLOOM: No, I don't see that. That's interesting that you keep saying that.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Alter planning.

BARBARA BLOOM: That's all too yucky for me.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Yes. I don't know, but something that requires—

BARBARA BLOOM: I would guess if there was going to be—so go ahead.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Like a kind of empiricism and a kind of finding these resonances or sequences.

BARBARA BLOOM: Well, I guess if I have a model.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Similarities. Differences.

BARBARA BLOOM: Maybe a model would be a lesser of kind of a sorcerer's model. Maybe I would say I'm in the Magritte school, like I do it in my own house. I'm dressed with a tie and a suit. I'm more like a—he's not a sorcerer. He's a—

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Trickster.

BARBARA BLOOM: He's witty.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: He's witty without being dark. He's Belgian.

BARBARA BLOOM: Belgian. That's a whole story right there.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Yes. If he were a detective, he'd be Poirot.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. But there's another model for me. Like there's another artist I'll go back to constantly, like oh, it just slips in. It's just very normal that it slips into something very strange, not—

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well, there are all these tropes of what artists are supposed to be, like the sort of artists protean hero, the domestic goddess.

BARBARA BLOOM: You're putting me in the sorceress thing. Get me out of that category.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: No, not sorceress. I'm just being provocative that's all.

BARBARA BLOOM: Okay. I would say maybe molecular physicist.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Metaphysics.

BARBARA BLOOM: Maybe more metaphysicist.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Metaphysicist.

BARBARA BLOOM: Metaphysicist. Yes. The alchemist is concerned about materials.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't have a concern with materials.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: No, but the alchemist also sees the materials as the embodiments of divine and natural principles of forces.

BARBARA BLOOM: But it is a material-based practice. Mine is not. The material comes after the fact or alongside. They're the backup singers.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: The "and the Pips."

BARBARA BLOOM: They are the Pips. All the materials and all that images and all the stuff is just, they're the Pips.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Gladys Knight is—

BARBARA BLOOM: Gladys Knight I guess is the metaphysics or the—let's get our metaphors straight here or is the story that is and is not being told. When I made this book, I said that the objects are the characters. It's not the story of my life. The objects are the characters. The objects are the protagonists in some story or stories that tell something about life, but it's told through the objects, but they're sort of stand-ins.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Stand-ins.

BARBARA BLOOM: The're stand-ins for thought.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: The conduits for some experience from which your audience can invent meaning.

BARBARA BLOOM: Experience or thought, for me there's like no difference between a thought and an experience. Thinking is an experience.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Of course it is.

BARBARA BLOOM: There's the mind-body thing. What is the mind-body thing? I don't get that one. That's sort of like the day I was absent from school with beauty, I don't get the mind-body split thing.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well, there is this traditional, I think, Western plural dualism, the idea that there's good/evil, light/dark witty/tragic, these paired opposites and your point of view seems to be much more pluralistic.

BARBARA BLOOM: Or like just missed the day of dualism when I was out sick that day.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: You were not in school that day. You had a lot of sick days, really good sick days.

BARBARA BLOOM: Really good sick days where I didn't know that you're supposed to have a show, and I think I'm paying attention. I'm a grown up.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Right.

BARBARA BLOOM: You can count on me if I say I'm going to show up, I show up on time. But maybe in the same way that I don't understand all the rules about art stuff and therefore, I'm not— I don't get the rules. I don't understand why you're supposed to do it that way.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Like have a show every two years?

BARBARA BLOOM: Why do you have to have a show every two years. You're supposed to make in edition of something. It has a certain number, but if you want it give something to friends, do you have to number those or something. And a few years later, I actually made that work and I made it that way, but actually it would have been better if I make it that way. It's actually more interesting if I made it that way, I'm going to remake it. You make it better, an improved work. You're not allowed to do that, or you are allowed to, all these rules that are about how you're supposed to do all of it and—

JAMES MCEHINNEY: It's all tied to commerce.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's all tied to commerce.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Basically. It's all about money and sales.

BARBARA BLOOM: You know I made an edition which was—I made this piece, which was based on partially on the Titanic, the stuff that was found under the water, and all the space garbage that was found out in space, all this stuff, these invisible debris fields of this, and it's called, *the Tip of the Iceberg*. And I like making editions, gift shop items. I really like that. I like making there's the piece and then there's all this stuff that you can, if you like it and you want it, there are these things that you can buy. I love the kind of commerce involved with the process of making— the umbrella. And so I made this broach and I designed this broach based on the broach on the Apollo. When the Apollo went up in space, they left this olive branch—

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Oh, yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: —this thing, this olive branch design thing up in space, this metal thing of the olive branch as a symbol of peace. What the fuck. That was the most anthropomorphic thing I've ever heard of in my entire life. Oh, yes. Well that obviously stands for peace. This is absolutely ridiculous, totally absurd gesture to put this thing. So I made this little facsimile, this little broach, and then I had for the stone to go into it I bought uraninite, which is a radioactive stone. And so I made them, and I had them with larger stones and smaller stones, and the larger the stone, the cheaper the broach, because it's more radioactive. Now, that was not an item that was particularly easy to sell. It's like I love playing with—

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Buy this for someone you really dislike.

BARBARA BLOOM: It was like why would you ever buy this? It was really beautiful and witty, but people bought them. And I love that I made a whole series of things, some things that had been broken and repaired. So because I'm going to talk about that, I can talk about something which is sort of like really an important thing to talk about. In 1995, on a really ordinary Saturday afternoon, I was going to go somewhere in the evening and this is May, and I had some plants growing at my window. I lived across the street at that time from here, and I had some window boxes, and I wanted to get some morning glories growing, and I want them to grow up over my windows. It's like one of those Martha Stewart moments. And I wanted to get some strings out there. And I went out and step on the window box, which was not attached to my window and went out the window onto the ground from the almost the fourth story.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Four stories up.

BARBARA BLOOM: Three and a half stories onto a parking lot.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Ow.

BARBARA BLOOM: So that is not a thing that I would recommend anybody ever doing, but it was a really— if you have moments in your life, you have them before that and then you have after that. And that was one of those moments in my life where four weeks later, I was supposed to have a show with Leo Castelli. I never saw the show.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: It was *A Floating World* show?

BARBARA BLOOM: *A Floating World*. I never saw the show. My dear friends went and installed the show for me. And I was in the hospital for a long time and had many surgeries and miracle of miracles, didn't hit my head and broke hip, arm, back, badly got bashed pelvis, knee. I mean I got bashed up really badly. But I got really good care and had surgery on my back, and I had surgery on my elbow, and I had surgery on my hip. And turned out I'm really good at getting better, like insanely good at focusing all that energy back. Learn how to get from A to B in some really weird way. I figured out how to do that in terms and got better. And one of the things that I have spectacularly good friends, dumped a horrible boyfriend, and didn't have anything to do with anybody who I called air sucks, people around you who suck the air out of your existence. I just had nothing to do with any of those people at all from one day to the next. Like I just called them, that person is an air suck. I don't want to have them around me. So anybody I just never see those people ever. It's just like the most essential sense of survival, like you only want to be around people who help you be alive and well in the world. And so from one day to the next, everybody who's an air suck or an asshole or too this or too that, just like that, I never see them again. Pretty interesting. And one of the things that was really like Allen Ruppersberg, who's a dear friend of mine, he said, who knew what people would say things that were really helpful. But he came to visit me in the hospital and he said, you know, you're going to be really good at this because basically your job for your entire life for years and years is sort of figuring out to get from A to B in a way that is not a line.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Not a straight line.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's not a straight line, but oh, well, we can't do that. Okay, well, go around that. He said you're going to be spectacularly good at getting better. And he was really right. And he just called it. It's like oh, well, that's not going to work? Oh, well, we'll just go that. That kind of training that we all have in a non-linear way of solving the problem is really useful. Really useful. And then certain things happen, like you think that feeling of, oh my god, I'm so happy to be alive. You think that's going to go away. It doesn't go away. It never goes away. The rest of your life, I wake up every morning happy to be alive. What a gift.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: What about fear? When you stepped on the flower box and found yourself in mid air—

BARBARA BLOOM: I thought to myself—it happens very fast. Like you slip and I don't remember the fall, like I just remember being on the ground. It's just so fast, like, oh, fuck, and then you're on the ground. It's fast. And I remember thinking to myself, this is a real New Yorker, somebody who's like really, does this warrant calling out help. I think this is bad enough to scream help. You know, you don't call out help unless it's something really bad, but I think this is bad enough to scream help. And I've yelled help and people said, we've already called the ambulance. So people saw it. It was visible to people when I fell. It's in the middle of the afternoon on a Saturday afternoon.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Wow. That's lucky.

BARBARA BLOOM: Very lucky. Very lucky. And then a friend came down, and she came up with me. But can you move your head? Can you blink your eyes? Oh, I can't. I don't want to think, I can't move that. I can't move that. I'm thinking, ooh, this is not good. This is not good. But I was conscious, and so we went up in the ambulance, and a friend of mine from the building came out and came with me. And I was saying, don't take Hudson Street because they're working on Hudson Street and it's really bumpy. And the guy turns to me and says, "This is not a taxi. I'm like telling you the best way to get—"

JAMES MCEHINNEY: I'm in pain. I don't want to hit potholes.

BARBARA BLOOM: Basically, I'm telling you how to do that, and I said to them can I have a pain— this hurts and I was in shock, so it doesn't really hurt. And he said, no, I can't give you anything.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: It's like a fuzzy kind of a—

BARBARA BLOOM: You're conscious, and I said to the people, I want you to call my doctor, and I want you to call these three people, and I want you to call my sister, and I knew all their numbers by heart. I was like completely —

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Clear.

BARBARA BLOOM: —clear. Like these are the people write this down. These are the people you have to call. And I knew my doctor' because the doctor of my doctor is a really good friend of mine. I said call him, and call these three people and he'll tell them. And call my sister first and tell her to tell my mom and dad and da, da, da, da. It was just like I was the director. I was completely lucid.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: And where did they take you?

BARBARA BLOOM: St. Vincent's. Spectacular hospital, which is no longer with us.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: I know. What a tragedy.

BARBARA BLOOM: Spectacular, spectacular place in every way. Spectacular. Spectacular people who work there, compassionate, funky, funky enough to allow people to do things the way they don't normally do it, people with a great sense of humor. I mean, it was great and great practitioners.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: How long were you in the hospital?

BARBARA BLOOM: Not quite two months.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: A lot of PT afterwards?

BARBARA BLOOM: A lot. Years. I mean, I was just like, it was my job. For a long time, it was my job. Focused.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: So it was '90—

BARBARA BLOOM: 5. '95. So I never got to see my show with Castelli, which is a weird thing, like you get to have a show and Leo was really lovely. He called and he was just absolutely lovely.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: How did you come to join the gallery?

BARBARA BLOOM: I didn't join the gallery. I was with Jay Gorney who I shared with for 20 years until he closed his gallery and went with somebody else. Leo liked Jay very much, and they had a nice relationship. And Leo liked my work and said to Jay he'd like to do a show with me. And Jay being a mench that he was said, "This has got to be bumped to first class, so I think that's a good idea. You should do this." And kind of knowing me that I wasn't going to jump—

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Ship.

BARBARA BLOOM: Ship. I wasn't going to do that. It's also because I didn't know that people change their galleries. That was another thing I didn't know. Like you get a better offer, then you change your gallery. I thought why would I do that?

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Another school sick day, right?

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't do that.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Right.

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't do that. Jay is my friend. We've worked together. It's good. I don't want to make more work. I don't want to sell more. I don't need more. I don't want more. I just didn't.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: So you really didn't have any interest at all in playing the game or even knowing how the game was played.

BARBARA BLOOM: I kind of if I knew about it exactly, and I'm not stupid. But if you do that, then you have to think about that. Then you have to calculate, and you have to be involved with that. And you have to know what's hip, and you have to—that's what you're doing. You have to spend time with that, sort of like I can barely brush my teeth. I don't want to think about that stuff.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: It's risky because if you're trying to throw yourself in the path of a dollar, you're probably going to come up off the ground with $0.10 anyway. So nobody really knows how things are going.

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't want to spend my time thinking about that and calculating and working and working the system.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Yes. I understand.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's not that I don't want to do it, I don't do it. It's like here Barbara. I don't want to mention like galleries who have like bad stuff, I don't want to do that.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: It's not in your nature.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's not my nature. Sort like it's not my nature to—I'm kind of loyal. I could be disloyal. I could easily be disloyal. It's not like I'm not, I'm not that ethical. Kind of ethical-ish. There's another word there, ethical-ish. But it's like it would take too much of my energy to figure it all out and calculate it.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: And that, of course, is all energy that you would have to divert from doing what you do.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. And I would have to think about those things, and I'd have to wallow in it. And then they're people who I don't like. I did a show with Castelli because I like him. He was very likable and very interesting and smart and classy. But I liked Jay Gorney. I liked him. He's a good friend of mine. I showed my work with him. He was really smart. He represented me well. I like the way he talked. He said stuff to me like, "People are going to want to steal your work, but I'm not sure they're going to want to buy it." That's the first thing he said to me.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: That's a great line.

BARBARA BLOOM: I thought, what the hell. This guy is so smart. They're going to love it, they're going to want it, but they're going to want it in a kind of a surreptitious way. Like it's covetable, but do you want to pay for it. So this is going to be a challenge. He liked it.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: It's not like what you do can be just slapped in a frame and hung on a wall either.

BARBARA BLOOM: No. But he liked the challenge of it. He liked that it was—he's a wonderful—I enjoyed the way he thought about what I was doing. Anyway so that's how it came to be and Leo Castelli likes what I do. That an honor. This man's been around. He knows what he's doing, but he was already quite old in 1995. And by the time I was up and around and back at work, he was almost gone. So I still have a really nice relationship with other people who worked in the gallery. So what I was going to say, the reason why I talked about this is that I had written a piece many years before my accident, maybe 10 years before my accident about a trip that I took to Japan. And in going back to what we were talking about objects, but I went to Japan about time like in the mid '80s when I was thinking about changing and making a movie instead, making films instead of making art. No, it was earlier, early '80s. And so I'd made the trailer, and I thought I wanted to make a movie, and I took a trip to Japan, and I don't speak the language. And I don't if you've ever been to Japan, but at that time, it's really foreign. It's very difficult to understand anything about what's going on. And I had to do a couple things with some book dealer there that probably paid my trip, and I had no clue. I couldn't read the clue. I couldn't read anything. But the objects were like my best friends. And I realized I love objects. I can read objects. I don't want to move and practice away from objects in the beauty of objects and the way they tell stories and I kind of went back kind of going, no, I'm okay in the world of objects and images. I'm okay. But one of the things I wrote about after coming back was that these objects that I was given. I went to have tea with someone, and I was given a cup that had been broken, and it was repaired with gold. I was just like oh, my god. Large glass, forget it. How many hundreds of thousands of years, no thousands of years had this existed, and I was thinking what a reversal of the way we understand value. What a reversal of the way we understand youth and age.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well, the whole aesthetic of tea-related objects too is completely different from the sort of extravagant refinement of like Gingashi in Kyoto or the momoyama splendor. It's this—

BARBARA BLOOM: Raw.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: —rugged, raw pit-fired stuff. And it's very low fire earthen ware and easily—

BARBARA BLOOM: Breaks.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: —easily broken. And to repair it with this gold lacquer.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. This wasn't actually even one of those kind of—it was just a regular up.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Just a regular cup.

BARBARA BLOOM: It wasn't a regular cup. It was a tea cup, but it was porcelain. It wasn't raku. It wasn't one of those. But it was just for me unbelievably beautiful and touching. And while I was in the hospital, I kept thinking about that, and kept thinking about that is a metaphor. It was so helpful and such a solace to think that something which has been broken and repaired is more beautiful, has more to tell about the world, and I kept thinking when I'm ever out of here, it's like one of the quick—here give me a goal. That's the thing I'm going to do when I'm out of here. That's I'm clearly going to make that. And so I did it, and I made this show. I collected

all kinds—there were things that I owned but I bought them and I just decided to tie them all together and they would all be solid on color. Just didn't matter if they were valuable or something I bought in Chinatown or something, but just give them all the same color, and it'll make and be a body of work.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: That's a pale olive color.

BARBARA BLOOM: We went ahead, that kind of pale, light greenish, grayish greenish—

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Let me put this—

BARBARA BLOOM: That's all right. And from the glaze that's a celadon color. And I had somebody help me. We broke them, and then we learned how to repair them then. And you do the research, you find out that the real urushi and kushku materials that they use for this are really toxic, and you don't want to be using those kind of materials.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Poison ivy, kind of sumac actually, poison sumac sap.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right. It's a lot of stuff that you don't want to be actually touching and doing. So I found out about that kind of this is all pre internet, so there was some lady who through the Sackler Gallery—

JAMES MCEHINNEY: —in Washington.

BARBARA BLOOM: —in Washington, got to a conservator who knew about this particular kind of breakage and they got me to this Japanese woman who lived in Pennsylvania somewhere, and I corresponded with her, and I talked with her on the phone, kind of elderly lady, and she told me how it was done and what materials were. And then she said, but you shouldn't use these materials. And I asked her, well, are there other— and she said basically, it's not a traditional material that's used anymore, but you could use this, and you could use this kind of gold leaf. And so I kind of made up a new way where we're using combinations of resins and apoxies and things—almost kosher version of doing this. And so I did that, and then I made gift boxes for each one of these objects, and that's when the kind of occupational therapy of— ow, I never had a practice where I make stuff. There's very little making of stuff Involved with this, but I got involved with making these insane, baroque, over-the-top, complicated starting from the Japanese paper folding but moved into some kind of insane version of particularity. Because I made papers based on kind of traditional papers, Japanese paper design and pattern design, but I took photographs of the objects and x-rays of the objects and put them into the original paper design and made these insanely-complicated boxes that the objects go into. And then I had x-rays made of all of the objects. And then I took an x-ray of my back with all the surgery that was done into it because they did this incredibly beautiful thing where one of the vertebrae was completely smashed, and so what they did is they made like a little noticeable finger puzzles where you stick your finger from both sides of it like a little cage around that vertebrae, and they connected—

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Oh, those woven tubes.

BARBARA BLOOM: Those tubes. They basically put that surround it with some kind of metal. I think it's titanium metal around that vertebrae like about that big, and then they connected it to the vertebra above it and below it with these strips that move. And then they put bone from other part of my body into that area and basically built a vertebra for me around my spine.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Amazing.

BARBARA BLOOM: Incredible. Guess what? It doesn't hurt. It's a little bit weak. It's a little bit stiff, but they didn't even slit the open very much. It's like amazing, amazing surgery. Fantastic, amazing, surgery. And so I have that x-ray, and there's a seal that I have which is a 19th-century seal, which is a cloud with a sun behind it. It says in Latin "There's light behind the darkness." So I just sealed those boxes closed. So if you buy the object, you get it sealed into a box, this handmade box with this very personal kind of seal. And so you have to decide if you're going to break it and open it and lock at it. Anyway, at the time when I showed that work, I had to decide, I mean, this is like a few years later, when I talk about the work, how can I not talk about the fact that I had this accident? But I'm not one of those kind of—I'm not Sophie Calle, and I'm not Maureen Abramovich, and I'm not Anais Nin.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Frida Kahlo.

BARBARA BLOOM: I'm not Frida Kahlo. Exactly. And it gave me the total heevy jeevies to do that. But then I thought, you know, it's too coy. It's too— it's the punch line. You can't leave that out if you're talking about the work, And there's other levels about it that are interesting, but that's important to say about it. So I did that, and I did the article. I did the article in the *New York Times* and of course, what do you expect? And I'd even said, I don't want to be the artist who fell out the window, and that's not what I aspire to here. But that's what you get.

You don't have a choice in the matter. It's all made-for-TV movies, and I'm the artists who fell out the window, and it's the Phoenix that rises from the ashes. You don't have a choice, and that was really hard. That was really, really hard. That lack of nuance that you know I'm talking about is a metaphor and that you could understand this work without that, but that was really hard. That was really difficult.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well, for you as you said, it was a milestone in your life. It was an event, this traumatic event that empowered you to make decisions that had been probably that you had wanted to do for a long time, but everything was still just limping along in a default condition so that once that happened, then you could—

BARBARA BLOOM: A different sense of time.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: —banish all of the air sucks, and you could change your life, right? Yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: Radically change my life.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: The different sense of time that you've already said that you work very slowly, that you follow a kind of intuitive timetable. I mean, I think that a lot of the things we assume to be so, like we were talking about possibly the idea that one-person shows happen every two years is based on the two-year MFA thesis exhibition, which I believe it is, but also the whole idea of valorizing work based on time comes from organized labor and the industrial era, the 19th and 20th centuries where you calculate the value of an object based on the man hours and the materials required.

BARBARA BLOOM: I still kind of go like, wait a minute, this piece cost more because it's bigger? I have two photographs and this one is this amount of money and this— First of all, the photograph I take cost different than the photograph that I found and done something to? The photograph that's bigger cost more, and I go, why? Why would that be? It doesn't make any sense to me. How about the one that I like more cost more?

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Everybody is trying to find some argument to support their price logic, and it's based on other economies like real estate, the bigger the land the more expensive it is. You're going to buy an acre a hectare of land, that's one hectare, two hectares, three hectares acres, is going to cost more because the price is based on the unit. And since they're trying to find some kind of unit especially with prints, let's say you were talking about editions of prints, numbered editions and then you cancel the plate and you have artist's proofs, and you have other things are kind of in the murky realm of—

BARBARA BLOOM: As far as I'm concerned, the whole thing that I have, I luck everything within the realm of artists proof. It's not quite numbered. Recently they've been trying to get me to organize everything, and how many were there of this? And I say I have no idea. How many were sold? I have no idea. You know, there are people who keep track of all that.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well, here is a question, when is one of your works of art finished?

BARBARA BLOOM: Well, when it leaves, it's finished. I kind of let it go. Here's a perfect example. I did a piece that's called *the Seven Deadly Sins*, and each sin was a chair, particular style of a chair, an object on the chair, and a photograph behind the chair. And one of them was *Envy*, and that's two sort of 17th century French-styled chairs that sit in a corner. There's a reproduction of a painting on one of these twin sisters who look very, very similar, an oval frame. And on the other side, is a mirror that reflects that, and on one chair is a handkerchief that says envy, and on one chair, there's nothing. It just has a light on it. I made one of those and it was sold. That was really my first gallery show, which was with Jay right after I won the thing at the Venice Biennale, and he's like calling kind of going, well, we have three people want *Envy*, but nobody was interested in *Sloth*. So it was like—

JAMES MCEHINNEY: How about *Lust*? Did *Lust* sell?

BARBARA BLOOM: *Lust* did very well. *Lust* did very well, but *Sloth* no one ever bought.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Poor *Sloth*.

BARBARA BLOOM: Poor *Sloth*. And it was like *the Producers*, like all of a sudden, we're in like he had become Zero Mostel. It was hysterical. But *Envy* I realized, like a number of years later, I'm making another one. Fuck them. I'm just going to make another one. You know, the person who bought *Envy* that there is only one? Ha. I can make another one.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well now, of course, in the wake of the Damien Hirst auction where—

BARBARA BLOOM: You can do whatever you want.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: —where reproductions made by him of his old work sold for much, much more money than

the original sold for a year after his Damien sale.

BARBARA BLOOM: But I thought at that moment, you can own your own production, and I said, "You know what? I'm not going to remake all of them, but I'm going to remake *Envy*, because conceptually how beautiful can that be?"

JAMES MCEHINNEY: That's perfect because the person who owns the original—

BARBARA BLOOM: They own the original.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: —is going to be envious of the person who owns the knockoff that the artist herself did.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: That's great.

BARBARA BLOOM: And so that was really important moment for me when I realized you know what? There are perverse—

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Maybe you're not a wit, you're a smarty pants.

BARBARA BLOOM: I am a smarty pants. I'm a smarty pants or too smart for my own good, as they say. Should we stop at that moment?

JAMES MCEHINNEY: I think it says this is a good high, happy moment to take a break and we'll resume.

BARBARA BLOOM: Smarty pants. I have to say this is—I'm sure everyone says the same thing. This is very, very enjoyable.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well, I'm pleased you're pleased.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. I know. It's very enjoyable to talk with both of you, and the worst is lots of stupid questions that you get a lot of—

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well, there is a script, but I've memorized it, and I just try to steer the conversation. It's like pin ball. You try to hit all the little things that light up, and—

BARBARA BLOOM: Make sure that I sound really like a smarty pants.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Well, you don't need any help with that.

BARBARA BLOOM: I sound like a smarty pants. You reflect back and when you reflect on your life, you make sense of it. It doesn't make sense at the time. There are moments when things make sense.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: I think if it had to then you might be standing in your own way in some way.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. I think so.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: And as I observe to a person with whom I'm working on a memoir, who's very concerned about checking facts and dates, I said, really you have to think about a memoir being a work of fiction you're using to organize what you recall of your life and how you understood it. It's not journalism.

BARBARA BLOOM: No. We had a very, very interesting thing happen. My dad is 95.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Oh, good for him.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. And he's quite lucid. He lives in Los Angeles. He's quite lucid. And my mom died a year and a half ago. Actually now it's almost two years ago. After she died, we thought they had almost be married 70 years. I thought this guy needs some activity. He needs something to do. He's very active. He's the kind of person who needs something. So we thought, okay, let's try to get him to write his memoirs, and he's a really great storyteller and he's lived these incredible— he's got stories to tell about everything. Let's get somebody to record that and we'll make that into a book.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: What a great idea.

BARBARA BLOOM: We'll make that into a book, and then he'd call these people and they do is first of all, it's insanely expensive and then so we just thought, you know what, let's not have them. Let's just have them do the recording and the transcription, and then I'll take that and with my sister, we'll turn that into a book, and I did.

And turned out, it was really nice.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Terrific.

BARBARA BLOOM: We've got like 100 pictures in it, and do this self-publishing. It's a real book, and he had his book-signing party, and it was great, and it kept him busy. But what happened is that he told the stories to this woman, and she got him to tell certain stories, there was a lot of stuff he didn't talk about at all and tried to get him to tell those stories as well. We filled it all in. There was enough of a coherence there, and got the story out. And then he's read the book several times. He only tells the stories now that are in the book, and he tells them for verbatim as they are in the book.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Interesting.

BARBARA BLOOM: So as he's losing his memory, he is losing his memory, and it's all getting kind of pattern something, but he's a bit of an entertainer or something. So now he's got his script. So you can't get him to talk about anything that's not in the book. So he has these lovely people who live—he still lives at home, and so there are these people who are fantastic because my dad has a great sense of humor, there are these fantastic people who have like two people live at the house. They spot each other, and they take care of him. And he'll be telling a story and Kathy's behind him like doing verbatim, she's going—and then blah, blah, blah. And he's lost his hearing so he can't even here it, and it's hysterical. And it is so perverse. She goes thanks so much for the book, Barbara. She's like really, really, really horrible now. So basically he just goes into script. Isn't that interesting? Who would have thunk.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: It's terrific.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's like you would think that it would be like a tool to spur his memory so he could think without a script. So my daughter had to do something about the oldest person she knew from school, so she's interviewing him on the phone, and she'd already read the book. So she's going, grandpa didn't tell me anything that's not in the book, and I go yes. That's part of the problem there anyway. So I hope it doesn't have the same effect on you that you're going to do your memoirs and that's going to be the limitations.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: On me personally?

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: Gee, I don't know.

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't think so. I thought that was a really interesting one in terms of written language and anyway. All right.

JAMES MCEHINNEY: We'll turn the recorder off, and we'll have a look at a calendar.

BARBARA BLOOM: Okay.

[END OF TRACK bloom12_3of4_sd_track01.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I have to do the obligatory introduction, okay? Transcriber will ignore all frivolous banter. This is James McElhinney talking to Barbara Bloom at her studio on Harrison Street in lower Manhattan on a bright, sunny Thursday morning, January 31, 2013. Good morning, and thanks for the tea.

BARBARA BLOOM: Good morning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, we've explored a lot of aspects of your interest in a polyvalent career. And at this point, I think it would be really useful to kind of investigate, as it were, the anatomy of your working process. And sort of how you embark on a particular concept, how you pursue it, how it unfolds, how it morphs, and changes, and evolves, and how it finally is realized. We're now a few weeks away from the opening of your show at the Jewish Museum, and perhaps you could just regale us with an account of what was the first spark that led to this idea, this exhibition?

BARBARA BLOOM: The phone call from the new director, Claudia Gould, whom I've known for years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, you've know her for years? And how have you known her, from just around?

BARBARA BLOOM: Just around. She used to do *Tellus Magazine*, which was an audio magazine. I've just known her for years and years. She is the new director there, and wanted to start a program of artists making exhibitions using their collection, and asked if I would like to do that, and be the first person to do that. And I said, "When is it?" And she said, "Very soon." And I said, "Ow, how soon?" And she said, "Too soon." And I said,

"Let me see if I can shift everything around in my schedule, and throw some things on the back burner, and do this." And I like working with someone else's content. It's almost as though that part of it has already been done by someone else, and then you think about the presentation. I like the presentation of material. And I had done that exhibition of Nabokov's library. I had done a room at the Mak Museum in Vienna with their Thonet chairs. I like the challenge of taking someone else's collection or objects and thinking about an interesting way to present them. That is a given. I had a first period of kind of a cringey aspect of having grown up in an agnostic, atheist Jewish family, the whole cringe of dealing with Judaism. I just thought, dealing with hundreds of Menorahs, who cares. It's not only uninterested, disinterested. I have a kind of allergic reaction to a lot of religious material.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So not just Judaica, but any kind of liturgical ritual objects?

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't know if I told you this, but when I went to Vienna to look at their collection, to do this, they had the artist come and install a permanent collection, the first ones they gave me were their altar pieces, these fabric altar pieces. And I go in the basement, and they have all their gloves on, and they're showing me this stuff. And I'm thinking, I have not a clue, 0.00 percent knowledge or interest. And I called my boyfriend at the time, I thought, this is really. And he said, "Just tell them that your rabbi won't let you do that." So in Vienna, that goes a long way. I did actually say to the director, I really can't, I think I can get in a lot of trouble. Immediately, they're like, let's change. Which objects would you like? I said, well, how about the Thonet chairs? And he said, fine. So I have a, what's the opposite of affinity? Allergy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: An allergy.

BARBARA BLOOM: No, that's not entirely true because there are some. I have no connection to that. So I kind of was thinking, oh my god, what do they have there? And they said they have 25,000 objects in their collection. So I thought, you know what, let me just go look, see what they have there. And so I started to go look in their databases with their wonderful curator, Susan Braunstein, who's an archaeologist who's their chief curator, or head of curatorial affairs there. And she's just this absolutely smart, lovely woman who's worked there for many, many years and knows the collection. And so we started. She said, "Where would you like to look?" And I said, "I have no idea, what are the categories?" And so I said, "Okay, let's just start with," I think I said, "What do you have with hands?" Just riffing. So she typed in "hands," and up come 50 objects that have hands in them. Hands from the Torah Arc, hands depicted on scrolls. And they're, one after another, fascinating images. Like, whoa, okay, those are interesting. We just started to get categories of things, things where things are missing. I just went through this whole, making it up as we went along. And then, I knew from someone that they had one of the rings that Freud had given to his acolytes, and I was very interested in that. I had done work around this whole Freud gave to his disciples, and his most trusted students, acolytes, followers, an intaglio ring. He had them made, he had this collection of antiquities, and he had these rings, and he gave them to these people who he trusted. And it was a sort of inner secret circle of his group. And I'd read all about this, and of course, it disintegrated, and went into in-fighting, and he didn't manage it well. Anyway, the whole interest of psychoanalysis and this very kind of secret, kind of perverse little thing that went on there, that history of that. And they had one of those rings, and it was given by his daughter, Anna Freud, to a psychoanalyst in New York, who then had given it to the museum. And then in looking at that, then they showed me, they said, "Well, we also have a cigar box that had belonged to Freud." And it's inscribed "Christmas 1903." A cigar box that had been a Christmas present. Doesn't say "Weinachten," [German for Christmas –BB] doesn't say "holidays." It says "Christmas 1903." There were certain ones that got flagged like, how good can an object be? Freud's cigar box. And then at some point or another, I don't know how it came to be that she showed me this, but they had a game board that was published in turn of the century, 19th century, of the Dreyfus affair that was from a magazine or a newspaper. It was a pro-Dreyfus game board where you could play a game of truth about the Dreyfus affair. I thought that was unbelievable, really unbelievable.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That is really interesting.

BARBARA BLOOM: Really interesting. They had this game board, and I said, "What other games do you have?" And they have dice from the first century, and then they have anti-Semitic playing cards that someone had made out of a sacred Hebrew document. And I just thought this is interesting stuff. I kind of went, okay, I'm signed on, and started to sift through the material without really even knowing what I was looking for. That's why you can't really have people do research for you if you research the way I do because you don't really know what you're looking for. You just start looking, and then that leads you to something else, and then that leads you to something else. And before you know it, you've found all the things—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're trying to find some kind of dialogue between these objects, some kind of conversation.

BARBARA BLOOM: Not even that to begin with. I was just trying to find objects that were of some interest. In themselves, have some kind of intrinsic beauty, oddity. And then I asked about stuff about marriage, and they said, there's this really interesting marriage contracts, she should look at those. They have hundreds of these

amazing marriage contracts from all over the world, beautiful things from 17th century Spain, and from Persia, and from New York City in the 1940s. Just amazing. And then they said, "Well, you've seen these divorce documents?" And I said, "No." And then they'd bring out these divorce documents, and they were written, and then there's a knife, like a Fontana painting, x'd out. They're knifed through, and that's a ritual that when you become divorced with someone, the documents get x'd out with a knife. And then you kind of go, those are amazing. They were just amazing. I was just going, "This is just an incredible document." So we started to amass kind of interesting stuff, and at the same time, I'm trying to think, what am I going to do with this stuff? And the spaces in the museum, the museum is on 92nd and Fifth Avenue. Us It was a neo-Gothic home of the Warburg family, Aby Warburg's younger brother, Felix Warburg. Built in 1893, 1897, or something. Not a particularly interesting building. And the only floor that hadn't been, I'll call it "ruined," renovated, is the second floor, which is the floor that I'm using. Not only do I have the allergy to the whole Jewish aspect, not just the religious aspect, but the whole, very honestly, the whole moneyed, Upper East Side, Jewish, pro-Israeli, conservative politically, aspect of the Jewish museum. It just gives me the heebie jeebies. And I was kind of going, "Can you even be part of an institution like that?? How do you do it and be critical, do I want to do a critique of that, that's not the kind of work that I make. I don't know how to handle it. It gave me the shits for a long time. How am I going to do this? And then one night in the middle of the night, I kind of realized—and then what I was going to also say, is that the other part of it is that we all are blessed and cursed with our talents, or our what we know how to do. And I have good taste. I have this blessed, cursed good taste where it comes pretty close to, sometimes, to interior decorating. There's this aspect of what I do which is just good taste, which who fucking cares that I have good taste. It's not interesting to me. And the whole aspect of what I do, which takes place in the home, and the decorating aspect, it's just like, let me leave that please. Don't make me do that again. And yet I know that the director asked me to do this because she knows that I know how to do that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That was going to be one of the questions I ask. If you've known the curator for so long, she must—

BARBARA BLOOM: She knows that I know how to do this.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of course, but she also must know the reticence with which you regard, or perhaps she doesn't.

BARBARA BLOOM: I think that some people just think, oh, that's what she knows how to do. It's the Meret Oppenheim fur teacup. How many times can you do that, how many times can you be known for that before you're ready just to punch somebody out? Like, leave me alone, I don't want to mention that again. So I have that piece which is the reign of narcissism, which is leave me alone, I didn't mean it, I didn't do it. So I think that there's another reticence there, there's another allergy there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, perhaps, we could gain a little insight into the thinking of the curator who obviously got a green light from—

BARBARA BLOOM: No, it's the new director.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or the new director, sorry, who got a green light for this from the people who control the purse.

BARBARA BLOOM: I think this is sort of like she's the new director. She wants to change the institution. How is she going to change the institution? She's going to get people in there who are going to radically change what it is that they do. Who do I call to do that?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So that would make you an excellent choice.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. Who am I going to call who's going to know how to do that, who's going to be deliver on time, who knows exactly how to go about doing this. It's not boasting to say that, I know why she asked me to do this. Because she knows that I know how to do this. But I have the reticence about the Judaism, and I also have the reticence about the girl with the good taste decorator stuff. So I'm kind of going, why did I sign up for this? Oy, why did I sign up for this? But, what I was going to say is that one night in the middle of the night, I just thought, why am I fighting this? This is a house, it looks like the house. Why don't I—and I kept coming back to, I keep interrupting myself. What I did keep coming back to is that there is this absolutely fascinating aspect part of Judaism, which is always interested me, which is the Talmud. And I don't know anything about it except I know what the pages look like. And I don't know if you've ever seen a page of the Talmud, but they're unbelievably beautiful graphically. So they'll have a center text, and then around that center text will be commentary boxed around it. And then around that is another commentary, and they move in and out of each other. And by the time you have a whole page, you have a text and commentary. But the commentary takes place over hundreds of thousands of years. So somebody can have a text, and then 150 years later, somebody makes a commentary. And then 700 years later, someone comments on that. So it's this living conversation that takes place over time, that's atemporal. And I just thought, that is so interesting, that you could have

conversations, dialogues, arguments that don't take place in the same room at the same time between people who don't know each other. I started thinking, now that's interesting to me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it negates the limitations of time.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, absolutely. And so I started to think, well, what if we go back to the house, something which I know how to do, and what if we were to think about who could have inhabited that house? But all at different times, as though time didn't exist. And they were guests in the house. And what if I were going to then furnish the house with something which is in between Donald Judd sculpture and furniture? And these things would be display cases for the objects. And so you would walk around, and I kept imagining it in this kind of gray, green, blue, nonexistent color that would change depending upon where you were in the house, and what kind of light you would have. And it would be this kind of ghostly space where you were both there and not there, and these conversations would be there and not there. And you would kind of overhear, like you're at a cocktail party and you're overhearing. And so I started thinking, what would the objects be? Well, there's a grand piano, and then there's a sofa, and there's some chest of drawers, and then there's a bed, and there's a dining table, and there's a card game going on, and there's a library. I just thought, okay, what are the things that would be in a house like this? And so then I just started thinking, okay, what are the objects that could go in there? At that point, it starts to be a list of objects that I found that are interesting, that they have things like Torah pointers, I've never seen a Torah pointer. They're these silver staffs that are used for reading the Torah. You don't catch touch the Torah yourself, you use a pointer. At the end of the Torah pointer, there are little hands with fingers sticking out. They have hundreds of these things, one more interesting than the next. They're all going with these little hands, and some of them are tiny, and some of them are really big. Torah pointers. And I'm thinking, wow. It's partially preservation of the text, but it's partially because you're not allowed to touch these objects. And then you're thinking, the more I read about it, the more I realized there's something very interesting about Jewish religion and culture that you don't mention the name of God. God is something so, it's not a guy with a beard, it's not something we know. It's the unknowable, this whole aspect of being the unknowable, and the unmentionable, and the thing that's left out, the thing that's not said, that I find extremely interesting. In my work, there are parallels, I can embrace that. Then we found, at some point, there were these things they showed me that are called spice, every time we would come upon it, I would say, what is that? Oh, it's another one of those spice containers. Spice containers are these ritualistic objects that are used for the Sabbath for, I guess they have spices in them for, they have certain kinds of lemons, cloves.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In so, scent?

BARBARA BLOOM: Scent that's part of the ritual. But these objects are insane. They are these metal, silver objects that have the most amazing shapes. They're like Brancusi on acid. They're just insane, with a pear-shaped object with a flower coming off asymmetrical with a tower on top of that, and a flag. I mean, they're just crazy, crazy. I'm trying to think like, they're not folk art. They're kind of folk arty, but they're more like weather vane meets Elsa Peretti Tiffany design. They're crazy. I would just look at these and go, these are insane. These things are insane. So as we're going along, I've got all the card stock, and I've got this collection, I've got this collection, and start with the books. And then they've got miniature bibles, these tiny little miniature bibles, and other miniature texts, and they've got the hands. And I think, okay, we're getting there. And when I started putting together the objects together with these places in the house, and then together with the subjects that are of some kind of interest to me. There has to be some conversation between two people of the immigrant community in Los Angeles. And would those people be, would it be, it's got to be Schoenberg. And I started reading up on Schoenberg, and he had this incredible friendship with Gershwin. And what is that friendship, and, oh, they played tennis together, what happened on the tennis court? They're sitting at the piano, and, oh, those Torah pointers, could they be the strings of the piano? And could the fingers come out and play the piano? So all this kind of layers of the objects, the subjects, the places, started to get sifted together, and I don't— list making, have lists, and lists, and lists, and then you kind of try that one. Okay, that combination is really good except that it leaves out that aspect there. And then I started putting it together, and after about two or three, four months, also working together Ken Saylor, who is an architect and exhibition designer, who's a very close friend I've worked with before. He and I started designing what these objects would look like and how they would be built. "What do you mean Donald Judd sculpture meets furniture? How much furniture are you talking about? How much abstract, how much real?" He was very good in getting me to realistically see what are these things going to look like, and which objects are you going to put in each one? And so, pretty much over the summer, last summer, we designed this exhibition. Does that kind of tell you?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, I want to just, I mean, that's a terrific narrative, I just want to ask specifically—

BARBARA BLOOM: What's it going to be?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, no. Back to the beginning when you're doing sort of the research on the objects, how many trips to the museum were there? Just to sort of absorb the possibility.

BARBARA BLOOM: Strangely enough, I never really wanted to go look at the objects. I never looked at the objects until I chose them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you got lists of objects?

BARBARA BLOOM: A database on the computer.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Were there images?

BARBARA BLOOM: Some, pretty bad images a lot of times. But, they were images.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, the Jewish Museum has a searchable—

BARBARA BLOOM: Not for anyone else.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I see, so you got access from here?

BARBARA BLOOM: No, there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You had to go there, okay.

BARBARA BLOOM: So, I was there, I don't know, maybe eight times, seven, eight times. I was there the whole day, every day. All day, looking through this database. And then they would send me print-outs, and I would go through the print-outs.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Were all the objects on-site, or were they in storage off-site, do you know?

BARBARA BLOOM: I'd say many of them were in storage in places in the museum, and they also have off-site. I chose, strangely enough, very few off-site objects.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just intuitively?

BARBARA BLOOM: A lot of times it was just kind of like, is it good enough to make it that much trouble to bring them over here? Maybe not, maybe not. We've got categories, and there are 700 Torah pointers, or 1,000 Torah pointers. I just said, I want to go through them, and then we started going through them. They're all there in the museum.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So of the 800 Torah pointers, or 700, how many are going to be in the show?

BARBARA BLOOM: I think there are 170, or something like that. Quite a number of them because they fill a whole piano, they have to fill a whole, the strings of a piano. It's every third string, we teased it out a bit. That's the practicalities of how many can you find that are within the realms of what you need size wise, and that are in good shape, that have, you know, there's the pragmatics of it all. And I'm kind of insanely fussy, and then on certain points, I can be unfussy about what I care, whether, how many, you know. Just throw a few more in, go choose a few more. I don't care which ones they are, just as long as they're not too long. Okay, go ahead and ask me more questions.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So the shape of the Torah pointer would have been dictated by the configuration of the piano's string board, right? So the number and the shape of the pointer, so you're actually —-

BARBARA BLOOM: We can get the really fat ones, we all got all the thin ones.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thin ones.

BARBARA BLOOM: And then we laid them out from fattest to thinnest so it's sort of the fatter strings to the thinner strings.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: From the bosso to the alto. Okay so, there you've got your choice of object is actually in dialogue with another object. So already you're having that sort of Torah commentary experience between the pointers in the piano.

BARBARA BLOOM: And then, we know that it's Gershwin and Schoenberg sitting at a piano, we know that there's, I imagine them each playing a chord. What's a Schoenberg chord and what's a Gershwin chord? What would b stand for? The Gershwin cord is really easy. It's a particular, harmonic chord that you immediately know it's the chord, that's Summer Time, and you know. Schoenberg is more complicated because it had to be a dissonant chord, but it wasn't as easy to typify something that was his. But I just imagine the two of them sitting at the piano together and there are four notes on one down here, and there are four notes up here, and one of

them is playing one chord, and one's playing the other cord. And then I didn't tell you about the aspects, like how do I give people information about what they're seeing? Every single time I do an exhibition, I grapple with the signage. You can't have these beautiful, abstract cases filled with notes about what these objects are. They have to live on their own. And they can't, I hate wall text.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that's one of the big, sort of academic codes of conceptual art is that you have some kind of piece of typewriter paper with a worn out ribbon, there's some kind of tract, or some kind of verbiage that is often opaque, and describes in some indirect way what is on the floor. Whether it's sort of an imitation of a wall label, or actually a description of the work. That's one of the interesting things, just to hop out of the conversation, Steve Martin, in his book, *Born Standing Up*, said that the epiphany he had about being a performer was when he realized he was not actually a comedian, but he was a guy playing a comedian. So there's this, it's very smart, this whole idea of how does the artist, who has already either created a piece of pictorial wall furniture, like a painting, or who has organized an environment, as you are, how does the artist insert themselves in the interpretive material?

BARBARA BLOOM: Well, that's part of what I do, it can't not be. I've done things where you have a wall text, and you start reading the wall text, and you read the first three lines of the wall text, and it starts to go out of focus. The text really, literally, slowly goes out of focus, and then towards the bottom, there are two or three words that are in focus and that's all there is to read. That's how you read a wall text. You read the first couple lines and it starts to go out of focus, and then it's completely out of focus and there are two or three words that you read. That's how you read a wall text.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Topic sentence and then the conclusion. The rest is sort of—

BARBARA BLOOM: Well, not even the conclusion, there are two or three words in the conclusion. You don't really need the rest of the wall text. So I just took it out of focus. And I had to have long conversations with the people from the museum about, I just said, I'm just giving you the wall text as read.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There were images of these in your catalog, in your book, which were, and I'm happy to have the explanation, sort of I was wondering what you were—

BARBARA BLOOM: What did I use?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But it really is kind of how you experience them, and I think that the question is, you can get in your own way by saying too much about what you're showing.

BARBARA BLOOM: Absolutely. Or, so I said it to the curator there, what do you need to have, what does the museum need to say about these objects? She said, "Well, there's classic tombstone, which is the maker, the year, the material, and who donated it." And particularly—-

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The classic tombstone.

BARBARA BLOOM: They call it the tombstone, and she said, "—and particularly, who donated it. We have to give that information, that it's stipulated in many of the donations to the museum, that if we show the objects, that they need to be—"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, a catalog number, too.

BARBARA BLOOM: Catalog number. I don't know if we need, yes, it does have to have a catalog number. So, I said "Okay, we need to have that. We also need to have this dialogue that takes place between two people, or we need to have a conversation." How do I get this to be there without pasting it on to this object? I don't want anything in these cases. I don't want anything on the walls, the walls are too complicated already. And then we came up with this idea that we would make these pages. They're, I think, 14x22, and they're made out of metal, and they just flowed off the wall. They're the same color, again, this gray, green, blue. And then all the text that we need to have is on these pages.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That was a great idea.

BARBARA BLOOM: And so all of the text, and sometimes the text—they're all laying them out right now—sometimes the text of, we have a core text of conversation, and it just marginalia of what these objects are. Sometimes it's really heavy on what the objects are, with a few little comments about what these people could be saying about them. Sometimes what people are saying has nothing to do with the objects whatsoever. For instance, there's a table, a dining table that has 12 glasses on it. It's a round dining table, 12 glasses from the collection starting from, I think, 5th century BC glass, up until a glass that's from their cafe, Grappa glass from their cafe. And they're around the table, and above the table is a chandelier that I had made that is the same size as the table. And then hanging down from the chandelier, are these glasses that are copies of the glasses

that the light comes out of. So you have this kind of echo of the table. And I actually got photographs today of the chandelier, it looks incredible. It's just amazing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So who fabricated it for you?

BARBARA BLOOM: I have a guy who I work with, a glass maker, he had it made in China. There's incredible glass factories in China.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So did you have to produce drawings?

BARBARA BLOOM: He and I together produced drawings. They can work with him. He's worked with them so often that he doesn't even have to have CAD drawings. He can just give them sketches, and then they know what he wants. So back and forth, back and forth, it has a little bit of amber, it's too yellow, it's too this, this is too long, that's too big, something back and forth. They just send photos back and forth, email, Skype. Amazing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well technology, this would allow you to accomplish in six months what it would take years to have done years ago.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, unbelievable. And then they're shipping it today, and it's here two weeks later. And 10 days later, you have it. It's just, they take it in pieces, and then he's blowing the glasses. He's making the copies of the glasses from the museum.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He's here in New York?

BARBARA BLOOM: He's here in New York, and he has a foundry, a glass place, up in Vermont.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Can you share a trade secret?

BARBARA BLOOM: Who he is? Robert DuGrenier.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Robert DuGrenier.

BARBARA BLOOM: D-U-G-R-E-N-I-E-R.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And where did he study, do you know? Did he work with Chihuly, or [inaudible], or any of the Murano people?

BARBARA BLOOM: No, he's been doing it as long as they have. He's in 50's, and he used to live right down here, and he had a glass place on Elizabeth Street in what's now NoLita, which was Little Italy at the time, and I've known him for 30 years. He's done engraving, and he's just a fantastic guy. And he loves it when I come up with stuff that, Robert, can we do this? And he goes, "Yes, we can do that. Let's figure out how to do it." And so we figure out how to do it, and great, just great. So I said, "Can we take a chandelier that already exists and do this?" And he goes, "You know, for a little bit more money, we can probably have them make it exactly what you want." So that's really exciting. And it's based on a painting that, it starts to get really complicated to describe because it's a painting that's in the museum that's called *Friday Evening* by Isidore Kaufman who is a Viennese painter. And he's a kind of a poor, Jewish Vermeer. It's this woman sitting alone at the table, and there's a mirror behind her, and the mirror reflects the room, and it reflects the candles that are on the table. And it also reflects a chandelier, and so I had the chandelier based on the chandelier from that painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So there's a third object in the conversation. You've got the table, you've got the chandelier, and you've got the painting.

BARBARA BLOOM: I've got the painting, and then I've got the mirror, which hangs over the mantle piece in the real room, which is the mirror from the painting, which is being made now on a mirror, which is both a mirror and a painting. So we're doing it on a translucent surface that gets put on to the mirror so that everything that's white in the painting becomes clear in the mirror, and everything dark becomes the painting. So that's fun. I actually just got the decal yesterday. As soon as you leave, I'm going to try it out and see if it works.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who is the, there was an Italian, Pistoletto, who was, years ago, who did these figural groups on mirrors.

BARBARA BLOOM: On mirrors, you're right, he did.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Photographic or photo realistic.

BARBARA BLOOM: I completely forgot that, but also with kind of a dot pattern.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, dot matrix, black and white, Pistoletto. So you would see yourself in the image. I have some more questions, which would be, I mean, you would come back from each foray to the museum, each expedition up to—

BARBARA BLOOM: The Upper East side, the other version of the city?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That whole stretch of Fifth Avenue, from the Guggenheim up to the Museum of the City of New York, and like, El Museo de Barrio, and the Jewish Museum, is not as well known to a lot of the visitors to New York as the Met, and the Frick, and even Noya gallery.

BARBARA BLOOM: Well, and then you've got Cooper Hewitt.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Cooper Hewitt also, which is—-

BARBARA BLOOM: I think the Jewish Museum is going to try and place itself within that mile, as a place to go. I mean, the Jewish Museum, historically, has had very interesting exhibitions.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Absolutely, and people like Modigliani, who I think a lot of people didn't realize was Jewish and from Livorno. But no, it's a terrific institution. I also think that in the collegial sense, they've got other institutions up there like the Museum of the City of New York, which is trying to become more active and more visible. And also El Museo de Barrio, which under the leadership of Julian, who's now out at the Nelson Atkins, really kind of flowered from being a neighborhood art museum to being a major venue. So it's good. Well, whenever you walked out of the door of the museum, what was in your bag? You had, you know, the Xerox's of, were there lists? Did you come home, do you keep a journal?

BARBARA BLOOM: No, no.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it's all in your head. What were you carrying out of the door with you, what kind of documents? Were there lists?

BARBARA BLOOM: Lists with tiny, little, tiny images on them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thumbnails?

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, little thumbnails, and then descriptions. Not even descriptions, just lists of tombstone texts, not even very good ones. Inaccurate little ones with tiny little images, just sort of reminders for me, what have I seen. And then I would go through them, or not go through them. Leave them for a while, or go through them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I'm just wondering, how you process these expeditions?

BARBARA BLOOM: How do I do this? I've got to sift through it. But it's not really even physically, I'm not, it's not as though I physically sift through the papers, although sometimes I do. I think I just sort of go through it in my, I go through it—I know, I'm obsessive, that's what it is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That explains everything.

BLOOM: That explains everything. We can go, obsessive, thorough, obsessive, thorough. I kind of sift. It took me years and years to realize that when you do work with an institution larger than a gallery, they want to have drawings and plans of what it is that you're doing. And I'm going, you don't need that, I'm going to be there to do it. I know what it's supposed to look like, and I know the color it has to be, and I know how big it is. I have in my mind. But they want to know what it's going to look like, they don't get it in their minds.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's not in their minds.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's not in their minds. So whatever it is that you know how to do, you know it's there. It's in your mind, you can see it. So I know what this exhibition looks like. I know, probably, I mean things will have to change because it's going to move over because the light won't work there, and therefore have to work that over. And if we have to move that over, then that's going to move over. Oh, yes, there's a shadow there, I didn't think about that. There's those things, but pretty much I see it. And so, when they started doing those 3D renderings of walking through places, I'm going, that's bullshit, that's not what it looks like. I have the, and also it's part of how I make things. It's sort of like what do you see first. I have the dramaturgy of what have you seen first, and then how long into the space before you've forgotten that, that you've seen that. So that you can be reminded of that by something else that you've seen.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you just described one of your wall texts. So there's a narrative of things becoming engaged, things being lost, things being ignored, things being noticed. So it becomes a cumulative grasp of

whatever it is, whatever kind of conversation you're trying to orchestrate between all of these elements. But knowing, of course, that each person who comes to the museum or to your exhibition may not notice it all in the same way that you did.

BARBARA BLOOM: You can't. But that's the whole point, that's the whole task at hand, is that how do you get it so that, in a not heavy-handed, didactic way? You give people the opportunity to notice things. And in noticing them, that they notice that you've given them, that there becomes a kind of quiet, whispering, intimate relationship between you and the viewer. So that they know that you're in charge, and you've given it there for them to notice it. But that they notice it themselves and can own that kind of connection.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Well, this gets back exactly to what we were talking about before, which is the problem of didactic verbiage in a show, or not. You can't not have anything.

BARBARA BLOOM: Well you can, you can but then there's so much confusion there. I don't mind some confusion and some not, I don't mind somebody, somehow, a little bit of frustration of not knowing something. But you don't want them to be frustrated to the point of turning off and going, this makes no sense to me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, if you try to control somebody's response, you've tried to anticipate it to that level. You're getting in your own way as an artist. So I guess my question regarding what you took away from each trip to the museum was an attempt to discover whether you've created journals, or took notes. Or, a lot of artists do this, they keep a sketch book or a journal, and you could excavate verbiage from that.

BARBARA BLOOM: I buy books to keep things in, and I start them and I don't use them. I use 8 and a 1/2 by 11 pieces of white paper folded in half, so that those become little books for me. That's what I do. And then I copy them over, and they're sort of lists. So I had a list of people. Proust, and Einstein, and Copernicus, and Emile Zola, who were the people on the end? And Rosa Luxembourg, Captain Dreyfus. The guest list. That's what I'm going to call it, the guest list. Who are the guests? And I had maybe 100 people on it. They're not going to get all in there, and I would add people to that. And then I had the subject list. The subjects were absence, marriage, the people of the book, arguing. I can't even remember what they are, but those are the subjects.

And then I had the objects. Torah pointers, spice containers, games, marriage contracts, divorce contracts. Oh, and then I started to look at cases. I said, "What kind of cases do you have here?" Custom cases for objects. So then we did a search for case. So we'd say, Torah pointer in case, let's take a look at the case. Oh fantastic, custom-made, velvet-lined. Take the Torah pointer out, there's the case. Circumcision sets. 35 circumcision set cases. The objects are gone, and then they have these object things, you know, the scissors, and knives. And then I thought, okay, we'll have a chest of drawers, like when you buy an Apple Computer, it comes in. We're going to have custom cases made for the cases. So these are the cases, the absence of the things that's not there. Made with a custom case that's made just for that case. So there's the cases and then there's the things that are not there. And so that's, it's almost as though I have to rewrite them over and over and over again. So I can't keep a diary because that would be sequential. It's linear. I can't do it that way. If I did it, I would be tearing the pages out immediately. And then I would have these pieces of paper, and I would have to glue them down.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So do you keep these folded—

BARBARA BLOOM: I have hundreds of those Ikea folded paper boxes that when I work on a project, I always say, "I'm going to go through them." I throw everything I've done into these boxes, and it all just lives in these boxes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, at some point in time, perhaps the Archives of American Art may have an opportunity to—-

BARBARA BLOOM: Go through my crappy—I mean, I have gone through and thrown away, I have nine versions of that piece of paper that has the fabricator on it. I don't know why I have to keep all those pieces of paper. And sometimes I actually have gone and taken it down from six boxes into two boxes. I do sometimes throw stuff away.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But in the space between thoroughness and obsession, how can you throw anything away?

BARBARA BLOOM: I throw stuff away.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is it cathartic when you do? Do you feel unburdened, or do you feel like you're achieving something when—

BARBARA BLOOM: When I throw away some paper? Minor achievements in life. Now I work on the computer so that I have, for this, I got Dropbox. So Dropbox means you have, and I've upgraded Dropbox, so I have 100 gigs of room that has all—so I have every image nine times. I have it here, and I have it here, and I have it here, and

I have it here. And so I have the Dropbox that's for the designer in me, and then I have the Dropbox for the graphic designer in me. Dropbox is really your nemesis because you can just have so much stuff. And so everything's living on Dropbox, and then all my emails are really very well organized. So everything which is about glass production is in emails, all that. So it's all kind of virtual at this point. I have my little lists, and I have all this stuff in the computer, and I have it all in my head. And if you ask me why I can't remember to bring my phone with me, it's because I have too much living in my head. If you live in your head, it's hard to remember your phone. It really is hard to remember, I lose stuff constantly. You'd think somebody who cares about objects would care for—I could have my glasses that I would have a particular pair of glasses that I would take off, forget it. I can't ever find anything because I just, I'm just a nutty professor. I'm just like so, I don't think of myself as spacy, I think of myself as kind of in the world. But partially because I'm my own producer, I do have to be in the world because I have to be able to know that on Tuesday, I'm going talk to the glass guy. I am my own producer, which I really like to do. But I am also so spaced out.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, but you're also, it seems, focused on the process, and not the stuff as much. I mean, the physical realization of a concept is necessary.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's necessary, but also I do love the physical thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, of course.

BARBARA BLOOM: But could this exist only as a book? Maybe not.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, this is the thing. A lot of conceptual art, arte povera, all that very exciting thinking going on in the '60s and the '70s, and people like Mel Bochner, and so forth. At a certain point in time, one becomes sort of hungry for something a little more sensual, a little more physical.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. Well, there's also the aspect of that this is just drop dead gorgeous. It's just, it is. And it's intentionally, the spice containers are going to live behind a wall with little windows. So you don't see the object, you just see shadows and strange shapes, really weird shapes. So there's a whole wall in the room that's in front of a window. So it's sort of a window wall, and you just see these, I think there are 15 of these really strange little objects. There's a point at which I went, "This is going to really look good, this is going to really look good."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So there's a pleasure aesthetic?

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: See this is the thing, if you think about classic conceptual art.

BARBARA BLOOM: But I don't think that's existed for quite a while.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, it hasn't, except perhaps in art schools or art departments, in the hinterlands who are having to look at the old *Art Forum* magazines. But there was almost a kind of denial of any kind of a pleasure aesthetic or the "b" word as a mark of seriousness. That if it succumbed to that, it was a sell out. It was pandering to the audience it was appealing to. But how do you respond to that? I mean, how would you describe your own aesthetic of pleasure, the delight in the experiences?

BARBARA BLOOM: I think we talked about it. I think I was absent from school the day where they taught me you're not allowed to make things beautiful. It's like what's the problem? Things can be really rigorous, and really complex, and very beautiful. It doesn't seem to me to be a problem.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You were off watching a sunset or eating an ice cream sundae.

BARBARA BLOOM: Exactly. I don't know what I was doing that day, watching cute surfers, or something like that. Hanging out, watching cute surfers. I liked the kind of beat poet surfers.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh.

BARBARA BLOOM: There was a group of surfers that were more—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Literary.

BARBARA BLOOM: They were the zen surfers, I liked the zen surfers.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, they were not the Beach Boys.

BARBARA BLOOM: The metaphysical surfers. Well, they could have been the Beach Boys because there were kind of metaphysical Beach Boys, too. California has a lot of little niches there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So just sort of moving forward from the research stage of the process, which I'm sure continues.

BARBARA BLOOM: It continues. I worked in a different way on this exhibition. Because basically, I had to design the entire thing, and get the objects into production to be made, these cases, into production to be made, and figure out everything, and what the object was going to be before I got the content into them. So usually, it comes together at the same time, or the content, if I make an object which is a gift exchange between Sartre and De Beauvoir, I have that first, and then what would that object be? And I start to play with, what would they give each other for Christmas? And then I start thinking about what that would be, the delight in thinking about that, and then make up some kind of—and then the object flows from that. Well, in this case, I had to have the object. I had to have the design of it. I had to have the display of it. And then, I had to go back and say, what do Schoenberg and Gershwin say to each other? And then, I think, well, I want it to be something about the assimilated experience, and the not completely assimilated experience. I wanted to have some kind of that image, some of the thing of Hollywood in the 1920s and '30s, and what that was. I had it in my mind, and then you find out that there's this incredible description of a tennis game between Gershwin and Schoenberg. And then you kind of go, well, that's it. So that's the perfect metaphor. And the description of their game was all about them as composers, and them as people. It's an incredible description that [Albert] Sendrey, this Hollywood composer, wrote about their game. So I edited that down to a much smaller text, and then Oscar Levant takes a little starring role because he's like, Oscar Levant was on the guest list in the very beginning. Do you know who Oscar Levant was? What an odd character to have been embraced, he was on the *Tonight Show*. He was really weird, sort of like Andy Kaufman before Andy Kaufman. He was such an odd guy. I could go into the whole Gershwin and Schoenberg thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Please do, please do.

BARBARA BLOOM: Well, that's a really interesting one. I started having conversations with Anthony Coleman, who is a composer. I called Anthony, and I said, "Meet me for lunch, I need to know everything about Gershwin and Schoenberg, and what was their friendship, what was that about." We know that Schoenberg sort of stands for modernism and a difficult, difficult person. There's letters from him where he didn't talk to that person, he didn't talk to that person. He was furious at Adorno, and he didn't speak to Thomas Mann because he wrote him into *Faustus*. Just like a really curmudgeon, difficult, and didn't in his lifetime receive—then he was a Jew. Then he wasn't a Jew. Then he was a Jew. Then he wasn't a Jew. Complicated character. And then we've got Gershwin, the quintessential, totally assimilated and classy, light-touched, beautiful, almost like dripping with talent.

And so, but Gershwin moved to Paris and wanted to study with Nadia Boulanger, the piano teacher of all of the great pianists. And she didn't take him as a student. And then he wanted to study with Ravel, and Ravel didn't take him as a student. And he wanted to study with Schoenberg, and Schoenberg didn't take him as a student. And their reasons were they almost treated him almost like a native. Like we don't want to turn him into a classical. They were fascinated with his talent and his thing as being a pop musician. And he wanted to cross over and be a classical musician. And they basically saw him as being like a native, don't touch that. We're going to ruin it if we touch it because he's got this gift. Apparently, he was just insanely gifted as a composer. But he had opulent houses in Beverly Hills and on the Upper West Side, and he was a popular artist. And it's clear why he would want to befriend Schoenberg, and wanting to have the connection. And he funded a lot of Schoenberg's, having a lot of his pieces played, having them recorded.

But then also there's an aspect of Gershwin that, when he writes *Porgy and Bess*, he goes then over to black music and deals with that kind of like, native stuff. So he doesn't really, I don't think, truly understand that that's where his position was for these classical composers. That he's the nigger. So it's a complicated place of assimilation. Like when you become a pop thing, his aspirations were different. And then, does Schoenberg befriend him only because he's befriended him, and he's going to fund his stuff because that's what this pop person wants with him? I think not. I think, what Schoenberg says about him—Gershwin died very young, he was 38 when he died. And he said, "I lost a really close friend." I think they were really friends. They were, what he says about him, because Schoenberg gave a eulogy on the radio, this very moving eulogy about that this person, he embodied music. He was a real musician, he was a real person. No matter what the music was, he was a real composer, and that Schoenberg really valued his musicality. So I don't know. And then the whole Hollywood at that time, really fascinating. The salons of that time, and the refugees, and the home movies, and being in Malibu at some party, and they're all there. There's Aldous Huxley, and Thomas Mann, and Charles Laughton. They all knew each other.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Fritz Lang.

BARBARA BLOOM: Fritz Lang, all these people, they all knew each other. And then when Gershwin wanted to, they were going to contract him to do the music for, what's that movie about China? I'm so bad with names.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: *The Good Earth*.

BARBARA BLOOM: *The Good Earth*, exactly. And then he's going to do that, but then what they wanted actually him to do, and he had Salka Viertel, who, she wrote all the screenplays for Greta Garbo. She was in on the negotiations. So they all knew each other. Also, where did you become interested? I grew up in that part of Los Angeles. I grew up sort of on the outside, like I was talking about. There's that whole intellectual community, but it was so hidden. It was hidden, and they all knew each other, and it's fascinating to know that they lived three blocks from me. The Schoenberg's lived right there. Thomas Mann lived there, and Bertolt Brecht lived there, and this whole map of where all these people lived, and it was, it must have been very isolated and very complicated for those people to live there. It was so beautiful, and there was nothing, there was nothing there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, especially if you think about somebody like Bertolt Brecht whose work dealt with realities that were absolutely miles away from la la land, and palm trees, and beautiful sunny days, movie stars, and what have you.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, that was an impossibility. Anyway, this personal fascination is sort of like, oh, those are the people who lived across the street from those people? Oh.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You also had people like William Faulkner and F. Scott Fitzgerald, sort of real heavyweights in literature out there writing screenplays that had to make a dollar. It was either that or teaching university or something. But it would be more exciting to be part of shaping a new industry and a new art form, really. I mean, in a lot of ways, painting, narrative painting, and history painting, was replaced by movies, I think.

BARBARA BLOOM: So you know, to go into this, it's like, I'm not a scholar. And I do not profess to know enough about any of these things to say anything more than, you know. But I have a sense for what are the conversation topics, who could those people be? You have a bed, you have a bedroom, so you have the marriage contracts and divorce decrees. Well, let's make a Donald Judd sculpture that turns into a bed, and will put a quilt of these, a pattern of the marriage contracts and the divorce decrees on the bed. And so there's two night tables, there's two of these pages. Well, who was in bed? Who's in there, and what are they talking about? Well, what's something kind of sexy, thinking about the Rosenberg's. That's not a sexy story. It is a marriage, but that's not. And I start thinking, oh, *the Song of Songs*, *the Song of Solomon*, that's sexy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Definitely.

BARBARA BLOOM: That's definitely sexy. Okay, we've got the text, but who—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you've got the spices.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, we've got the spices. But we've got the sexy text there, but who's in bed? And I'm kind of going, let's go back to the guest list.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In a temporal—

BARBARA BLOOM: Doesn't matter.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They're all there.

BARBARA BLOOM: They're all there. They're all in bed together. So I thought, okay, well—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But not all at the same time.

BARBARA BLOOM: Okay, so I go, okay, Lou-Andreas-Salome, she's incredible. So here's this sexy woman who was one of the first psychoanalysts. Do you know anything about her?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

BARBARA BLOOM: She was a person who Freud corresponded with, was very, very close to Freud, had her picture on his, he had a picture of a few women, one of who was Lou Andreas-Salome. She was a lover of Rilke. And Nietzsche was completely, totally in love with her. Brilliant woman, gorgeous Russian, free spirit, married to a man who lived in Göttingen. A scholar. And she was a psychoanalyst, writer, kind of emancipated spirit. She's one of the characters. So I thought who could be? And then all of a sudden, I thought, Leonard Cohen. Leonard Cohen and Lou Andreas-Salome are in bed together, it's perfect. He's sexy, he's sensuous. And I'm going, is that good enough? And probably if I had another year, I could do better, but that's good enough. That gives you the idea that they're—that people know he is, and no one knows who she is, but she's really sexy. She's just, she's great. Anyway.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're a matchmaker, too.

BARBARA BLOOM: I'm a matchmaker, too. So, as I say, "I am not a scholar, but I love the research." And I love

enough research until you kind of get to some little tidbit of, I don't know, you're probably a bit of a researcher, too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, I do a lot actually, in relationship to a lot of different things. But also in relationship to my own work, which is landscape based, and has to do with history, and so forth. But yes, you've got to read a lot, and you've got to study maps, and all that kind of stuff. But the process, yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: At the Jewish Museum, I said, "First of all, I'm going to need several hundred dollars, I don't know, $1,000, for books." And they said, "Okay, fine." I said, "I'm not going to read them, I'm not going to read them cover to cover, but I'm going to read in them." I'm going to sniff at them, and bind them together, and read them for ideas, and I need to know what Schoenberg's letters look like. And I need to know, Emile Zola, what were the things he was doing at the time he was writing Dreyfus Affair kind of text, what was he writing at the time. I need to go back and read the part of Proust where he's actually talking about The Dreyfus Affair. Enough to remember, oh, yes, that looked like that. I'm so unthorough, I'm just kind of—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But you need to handle the papers that the letters were written on.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's almost to the point of that kind of fetishism. I need to stack up the books next to each other. That all of a sudden I pull two books out and I realize, oh, obviously. The kind of chance part of it, too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's a very empirical kind of process.

BARBARA BLOOM: Tell me what you mean by that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's sort of trial and error. You go in and you sort of notice things, and make note, and that leads you to notice another thing. And trying to sort of apprehend some kind of previously undiscovered order in—

BARBARA BLOOM: Or connection.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or connection.

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't know if that's so much order as—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I think a better word is "connections."

BARBARA BLOOM: Then I get to like, who's at the game table? Who are the four people sitting around playing cards or games?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: With the anti-Semitic playing cards.

BARBARA BLOOM: Well, anti-Semitic playing cards, The Dreyfus game, the game pieces pre-500 BC game pieces that are just like archaeological bones. Guys from the first century. So Emile Zola has to be one of them. And then, then I wanted some ancient person, maybe a woman. So I thought Cleopatra—no, no, Nefertiti.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or Hypatia.

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, that would have been better, but it's too late for that. Thank you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh well.

BARBARA BLOOM: He's already found a press. I got Nefertiti, and then I wanted some contemporary person, really unexpected, like—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Henry Kissinger.

BARBARA BLOOM: Amy Winehouse.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, Amy Winehouse?

BARBARA BLOOM: I was so happy when I got to Amy Winehouse.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Perfect.

BARBARA BLOOM: Amy Winehouse. I just wanted something like really, red herring. Who was the fourth person? And then, Chris, my husband had to help me write this because they go around the table making bids, they're playing a game, but they're each playing a different game. So one of them is playing bridge, and the other one is playing chess, and the other one's playing Dreyfus game, and the other one—so they're all, and Amy's always

lost and saying, "I quit."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I fold.

BARBARA BLOOM: "I fold, I quit, that's not fair." She's always complaining about something. But, that's the little dialogue.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: She has to excuse herself to have another dose of whatever it is.

BARBARA BLOOM: So I was really happy when I got Amy Winehouse. And it ends with—I can't remember how it ends. Oh man, I'm so bad, I have it here. Then each of the texts had to be written, not necessarily in a different style, but somewhat a different style. Like around the table, what do I have there that people—first I had a game of telephone. Like, they're going around the table, and they start with somebody saying something, and it goes around, and it comes back as something else completely different. So I started that, and I was thinking, no, that's not quite it. And I thought, oh, maybe 12 really bad jokes, really bad jokes. And I started reading bad really bad, really bad jokes, some really good jokes and some really bad jokes. And I thought, no, no, no. Then I thought, toasts. So I have 12 toasts. But I started doing research on toasts, and there's really interesting things on Irish toasts, and there's the—and then, so I got 12 toasts.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There's George Washington's 13 toasts at the departure of the British.

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't know that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: On Evacuation Day in New York, they gathered all of his officers, and they all had a big party, at the end of which he resigned from command. But they all raised a glass with a different toast.

BARBARA BLOOM: Wow. That's interesting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They reenact it every year down at FrauncesTavern.

BARBARA BLOOM: Really? Do you go to that?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I went once.

BARBARA BLOOM: Was it interesting?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was interesting.

BARBARA BLOOM: Interesting enough?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Interesting enough to go once.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's very affecting. In fact, they're like, here's a warning to tyrants, you know, here's for the defense of liberty, here's to whatever. And Washington, when he rose to give his toast, which was supposed to be, here's to the United States of America, he raised a glass and he said, "Here's—" and choked up and couldn't continue.

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, wow. That wouldn't happen today.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, our politicians are far too, they've got coaches who would help them get past that.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. Oh, Jesus is the other one.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, Jesus? Well, how can you leave him out?

BARBARA BLOOM: And the last thing he says is, go fish.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Go fish. Very good.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, it was a very good one. Emile Zola—and it's sort of like a Jew da-da-da walk into a bar. Jesus, Emile Zola, Nefertiti, and Amy Winehouse are sitting around a card game table together. And that's like, that's a perfect set up for a joke.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It is, absolutely.

BARBARA BLOOM: I was so happy when I got Amy Winehouse. I was just like, she has to be somebody who is

Jewish who nobody even thinks about as being Jewish. She's obviously a nice Jewish girl, but she's so messed up and so talented. I wanted her to be tragic, some tragic figure. It could be like Marilyn, but who would be like Marilyn, it can't be Marilyn. But who would it be?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sort of 21st century, sexy, glamour, troubled. She's more like Janis Joplin.

BARBARA BLOOM: She's more like Janis Joplin.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: With tattoos.

BARBARA BLOOM: With tattoos and really talented. Just like crazy talented. So Jesus, Nefertiti, Emile Zola, and Amy Winehouse. There you go, go fish.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How about if we take a quick break, and just confirm that we got this all?

BARBARA BLOOM: I think we could end the whole thing with "go fish."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We could end it with "go fish."

BARBARA BLOOM: There you go. You're not going to get a better end to it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's quarter of 12. Do you want to talk a little about just the actual exhibition itself, how it was put together?

BARBARA BLOOM: How it was, physically?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, I mean like, how you—

BARBARA BLOOM: Well, I haven't done it yet.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, but you've made certain choices, like about the wall panels and the color.

BARBARA BLOOM: Do you think I've covered that, or do you think I should say more?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I don't know. How do you feel?

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't know. I have it all in my head, so I don't know whether it, I don't know. It's really more like you feel like I should say something more about.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, let's take a break and then we'll wrap it up.

BARBARA BLOOM: Okay, good. I mean, it's really up to you as to whether you think that—

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JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're resuming.

BARBARA BLOOM: I forgot to tell you. One of the early things I saw early on is that they have at the museum hundreds of portraits. They're important people in the community. They then bequeath these—they probably don't take them anymore, but at some point they were taking. And there are a lot of really god-awful paintings, just a lot of portraits of people. Who are these people? Why are—and I started looking at these painting going—they had one room in a museum where they had a lot of those portraits. I'm going—I'm thinking, "Oh, would be interesting if we just saw the eyes of these painting." So I imagine—there's a lot of corridors. There's a lot a doorways. That's nice. Every time you go through a doorway if you had the paintings behind a mask. And the mask had and all you saw was the eyes, and the eyes looked like—went through these conversations that these people looking at each other, these kind of ghostly. And so I started then getting into the conversation with the people and the curators of museums, well—what is it— "We can't really do that to those paintings." I go, "Well, I'm not really doing anything to the paintings. I'm just masking out and just showing you one aspect of the painting." "Well, what would—is that disrespectful of the artist?" And I go, "No different than putting Torah pointer"— "Well, those aren't made by artists." And I'm going, "That's kind of different—"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, oh, this is getting into a bit of—

BARBARA BLOOM: Getting into those kind of conversation. And these are done by artists. And I said, "Well, what are you worried about? These people are dead." "Well, maybe it's the people who gave them to us. They're actually depictions of people. They're depictions of people that existed and maybe that would be"— [Bang sound] So finally we came up with the idea, I was like "Why don't you just give us painting that are by anonymous people." I'll just—by anonymous Jewish—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Unidentified.

BARBARA BLOOM: Unidentified painter, unidentified person. You can deal with that. I'll just use those paintings.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Unidentified, anonymous gift, of an anonymous person, by an anonymous painter.

BARBARA BLOOM: Every time you go from one room to the next, you pass through a hallway that you have these eyes, and they look incredible. They're just incredible. They turn these god-awful paintings into something really interesting where you are—the soul of the inhabited body. Anyway, when you come off of the elevator, I just—when I'm still in my really bad, I can't handle the Jewish thing, da, da, da, I thought. Okay, you come off the elevator and you hear Jews arguing. You just have from television, movies, political debate, you just have Jews arguing with each other. Or a slightly—just, a certain tiny little area you get, and I just thought, that's so cheeky, that's just so bad, that's just in such bad taste. It sort of feel like the nigger can say nigger, and I can say Jew—what if people—they—Jews argue. They argue about everything, all the time. That's the whole Woody Allen thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's mode of interaction.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's the mode of inter—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's disputation.

BARBARA BLOOM: That is the mode.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mental exercise.

BARBARA BLOOM: That is the mode, is argument. That the mode. You argue with God. You argue with each other over the Talmudic step. You argue through every ritual, everything. That's what you—Jews argue. So I have somebody who's gone through all this pop culture and all the debates, and something that has Jews arguing, so we have this little soundtrack of Jews. I'm about ready to start editing that with somebody like anybody would listen to what we actually have here. That's my little naughty—that's a bit naughty. That's the introduction to the shows. I sort of think that's the naughtiest thing I did.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you think people might object to any aspect of your show? Do you think people might find—

BARBARA BLOOM: I think they might object to a lot of it. That's what Susan Braunstein said to me. She said, "Do you want to have a guest book?" And I said, "Nah [Exaggerates, Prolongs Nah] nah, maybe not." She goes, "Well, good because then there's just all these ladies, they complain about everything." This—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You what you could do, you could have an online guest book.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then you could use whatever comes as fodder for another—

BARBARA BLOOM: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —enterprise of some sort.

BARBARA BLOOM: Well, I don't know if going to do this one again. This might be it, but—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, but it could be interesting.

BARBARA BLOOM: It could be— yes. And then there's one aspect of it that my husband, who's a linguistic and a composer he's been working on this anyway, and they want to link this to this. He's making this what he calls the anti-wiki, which is you go to a page, which is called 010011.net. There's a little search column. You put in a word, and it comes up from a library of text every references to that word. So you put in "thus," and already you've got 60, 70 references. And you click on the word thus, which is grayed out, and then you get the text. But it's always I think so many characters before and so many characters afterwards, and then you can scroll through the text. And then you can go this thus to this thus, and it tells you—or you can do Maimonides thus, next two lyrics from a Bob Dylan song thus. And then you can click on the thus in this thus to this thus, and you drag an arrow over, and it does a— [sighs] What's the word he uses? It does a kind of compare and contrast. It does a rewrite of those texts as though they were written together, which is something a computer can do.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: With page of the Talmud?

BARBARA BLOOM: It's basically a contemporary, online version of the Talmud.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: With commentary.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's all—and then it gives—at the same time, you can link to wiki, and it also gives you Twitter, everything with that word in it in Twitter at that moment. Then you can go thus, and you want to go therefore. So you can get the thuses to the therefores. The next thing you know it you've got 6,000 words texts written all together because this is how he thinks that you should read, not a single text, but this text next to this text and how do they link. This is completely crazy 010011.net.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Write that down, Chelsea.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, that's very cool. Then he also has a name for it. It's called the machine for making sense, which is the name of a band he used to be in called—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Zero, 1, zero.

BARBARA BLOOM: 010011.net. We've got the anti-wiki.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just in the practical sense and in terms of the installation of the show, has that actually started yet?

BARBARA BLOOM: The cases are being built as we speak. The fake book that have to go into the fake library have been made. All the document- all the art, everything has been—that had to be restored or polished or something, that's been done. The pages are tomorrow is the last run through with the designer to get the pages up and finished. The go next week to be printed. They're being silk screened. Now I live in clipboard. Now I'm just living on checklists. I have my glasses around my neck on a chain. I'm just, who's the girl with the checkboard. I'm just running, making sure that everything gets done. The physical installation starts on the 25th of February. Before that, they have to put in new floors in the space because they're changing the floors, so that's how we—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What are they going to do paint the walls?

BARBARA BLOOM: And they have to paint the walls and build the walls and do all the stuff that they have to do. That happens in those 10 days before that, and we start installation on the 25th, and it opens on the 11th of March, so we have two and a half, three weeks of installation, which should be if all goes as planned pretty good.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You're planning to be there every day?

BARBARA BLOOM: Every day, all day, and then probably the last week all night. I don't know what their teams are like. I don't know how quick they are. I don't know how many people are working at the same time. I've never worked at this institution. They're pretty together.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They must have an in-house.

BARBARA BLOOM: They must have pretty good—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They must have a conservator prepared or—

BARBARA BLOOM: They have all that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: All that.

BARBARA BLOOM: But this is crews—I don't know how big the crew. I don't know how many rooms we work on at the same time. I don't know if you go from room to room and install like that and move—I don't know how—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's like making a movie. You're done all these different pieces and you have to—

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. They said to me yesterday there's a vanity table that has amulets. They have incredible amulets. This is an amulet for guarding you against leprosy. They're very specific amulets, and they're incredibly beautiful. I having them make a necklace that has these ribbons and with this red thread that holds them all together, and it sits on this table with an incantation bowl, which is one of these amazing bowls that has the text written around and around and around. Because they were buried, they were buried in the table. She said, "Well, could there be a preparator in the gallery just sitting and stringing this necklace beforehand?" I said, no—in the galleries while we're doing it. I go, "No, have them do this beforehand because otherwise I'm going to have to sit with them and do that during installation. I don't want to do that then. Can't they just do it beforehand?"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is there a particular—

BARBARA BLOOM: There's an order we already have—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —order you've already determined that?

BARBARA BLOOM: We would have the order of them because it has to be on the page. A lot of this has been determined way beforehand because it has to be on the pages and da-da-da-da. And that can't be changed because those things have been printed and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of course, there will be a catalogue, right?

BARBARA BLOOM: Later.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Later.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. I couldn't do it now.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I'm wondering because if you're stringing amulets you need to photograph that.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, that all happens later. That all happens as soon as the show comes out that weekend.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And how long will the show be running?

BARBARA BLOOM: Until August. It's a nice long run.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, wow, that's a good long run.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. It's a nice long run.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: Installation I love. Installation is—I love the people who make things. I love the crews. I love the actual atmosphere of actually getting this to happen. I love the guy who's building this stuff out in Greenpoint and going out there and deciding how we're going to lay out the Torah pointers. "Oh, we'll just route those things out of wood and then"— I love, "What are we going to do with the chains? You can't take them off." "Oh, they become part" — I love that physical problem-solving, people who are really good at doing that. I love that part, so— yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then it's going to all come together during the installation.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's going to be like kind of an old Hollywood soundstage.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Like running around and things coming together.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, and I imagine that the guys putting the—he's in the other room. He's putting the chandelier together. We've got the people. I don't know if we go room to room. I don't know how we—we'll figure that out. If everything get set up and we do case by case, it gets closed up, and that's done, I imagine so because you have to keep—has to have the glass on top sealed. That's done. But then, uh-oh, what if we have to —I think we set out the cases first. [… –BB] Maybe we start to get the rough lighting. Then maybe you can put the pages out, we get the lightning done, then we start. I don't know exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The whole ops plan you need, sort of paint the wall, change the floor, do the lighting.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So there's a logic to it.

BARBARA BLOOM: There's a logic to it all, and they're pros there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's great.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. That's the fun part. The problem I have is I like to do all of it. I like to do the research. Then they're doing the PR. I'm going, "No, no, no, no. They can't do the PR without me. I have to talk with them,

because I don't want him picking the wrong image."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You're right.

BARBARA BLOOM: I came up with the ideas that the images are these masked eyes. Every ad that they do, every bust ad that they do, everything that they do, it's a different set of eyes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because otherwise, they've got somebody who is the quote/unquote "marketing person" who's going to make the decision.

BARBARA BLOOM: And this is the question they asked me. "Well, if you had a word to describe what the show is would it be provocative?" And I go, "A word to describe what the show is? Well, I'd say more evocative."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Evocative.

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, yes, that's a good. I sat through a PR meeting, and I'm kind of going, "Oh, man, they really need my help." I go, "Okay, this is what it is. Every time you do an ad, it's the same ad over and over and over again, except it's not the ad because there's a different set of eyes." "Oh, wow, that's fantastic." They don't have to think about the images. I've already given them the images. They can go with that. "You realize I would like to do all of it?" Then I go, "Okay, well, the gift items." "Oh my god, we have to do gift shop items." So we've got the—the exhibition is called *As It Were, So To Speak*, which gets the past tense and the speaking. Those expressions are so weird as it were, so to speak. It's the things you say when you're not saying what you mean to be saying or—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: By the same token.

BARBARA BLOOM: By the same token.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: By and large.

BARBARA BLOOM: By and large. By the same token would have been really good. That would have been a very —sorry, you—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Next show.

BARBARA BLOOM: Next show, by the same token. But *As It Were, So To Speak* is all those things that are—you're going to say something. You're saying something, but you're not exactly saying what it is that you want to be saying or should have been saying but sort of are saying but maybe not saying but saying. And then we've got the past tense.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

BARBARA BLOOM: Anyway. Also as the subtitle is "A Museum Collections in Dialogue With Barbara Bloom." I'm not in dialo—it's talking to me, which I had to really convinced them about that. They go, "What do you mean?" I go, "[Sigh]."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But that's why you have to be involved in—

BARBARA BLOOM: You have to be with every aspect of it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —every aspect of it because—

BARBARA BLOOM: You have to have the eraser that says "As It Were, So To Speak." You have to have the postcards. You have to have the—and then I'm going to—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Are you going to have erasers that say?

BARBARA BLOOM: "As It Were, So To Speak."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Have you got ball caps and tote bags?

BARBARA BLOOM: No— tote bags with eyes on them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, good.

BARBARA BLOOM: They're going to be beautiful.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Great.

BARBARA BLOOM: I said, "I'm going to do an addition of the cigar box." "But what's on the cigar box?" Like "What would you put on a silver cigar box that doesn't say Christmas 1903?" [Coughs] And so that I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Quit smoking.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right. [Coughs]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Coughs]

BARBARA BLOOM: I started to do all this research about oh— [Coughs] funny, I started coughing yesterday [Coughs] about his, "Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

BARBARA BLOOM: Which he apparently didn't ever really said.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

BARBARA BLOOM: They just attributed it to him, and he didn't actually say that. There's no place where—it was like sometimes in the 1950s where it says some article about psychoanalysis, and it says, "Yes, as Freud said," and then—so this inscription on the cigar box is "Sometimes an inscription is just an inscription."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, great.

BARBARA BLOOM: But I had to do it in Freud's handwriting. I went through—this is like where you get really bad is that I have all these letters from him, so I went and I forged his handwriting. Like, I'm really good at it. We have the T-I-O-N, but you can't have it be the same each time because then it doesn't look like it's real, so you find three different versions of T-I-O-N, and we stretched the letters out. It's really good, like I really, really got it. And then I'm doing a Dreyfus board. I had a guy over here this morning talking with me about what—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A game board? A Dreyfus board?

BARBARA BLOOM: A game board. You can buy a Dreyfus board. I'm kind of going, I don't really want to do it by hand and have it be really expensive. So I found a board that you could buy online. We're just going to glue that board on top of it, and we'll have a— it's like—that's like—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: On eBay or some place did you find one?

BARBARA BLOOM: A game part stop place where you can buy—It's called The Game Shop. You could buy tokens, and you can buy dice, and you can buy the Clue. I realize we have to have a dagger in there. There's a guy at the museum who's an incredible Dreyfus scholar.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you got a go-to-jail card too.

BARBARA BLOOM: Very good. Thank you very much, a go-to-jail card. Go to jail, stay in jail.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Stay in jail, in tropical Guyana. Yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right. Yes. He's incredible scholar, so he's going to write the directions on how to play the game for me. There'll be a little booklet about the Dreyfus Affair and the game and how you play the game. It's all about truth. But, of course, the truth was at that time was every truth was such a complete fabrication of bullshit. So you get on truth, but truth is never truth. Yes. I think maybe that would be good is that there're only go-to-jail cards.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They're only go-to-jail.

BARBARA BLOOM: That would be very good. Thank you very much.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, get out of jail free.

BARBARA BLOOM: There's only go-to-jail cards. That's very good. I'm going to— I'll give you some go-to-jail cards.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, thank you. I'll treasure them.

BARBARA BLOOM: I have to print some go-to-jail cards. All right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So there's a touch of Gershwin in all of this? You're making sure—

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, that's nice.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —that there's a popular—this is a sort of a—

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —popular, appealing, interactive dimension to this?

BARBARA BLOOM: Well, this is a museum.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

BARBARA BLOOM: This can't be a hermetic—this is not a scholarly—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

BARBARA BLOOM: —hermetic—even a scholar, you have to have some—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

BARBARA BLOOM: —way in.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, the whole high-art, low-art conversation that's been going on forever, why make the distinction, yes, describe what you just did, which was to—

BARBARA BLOOM: Yawn.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —do a theatrically yawn with you hand patting your open mouth.

BARBARA BLOOM: That's a really non—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

BARBARA BLOOM: That's a real non-conversation.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Agreed.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. That's a real non-conversation. Who's the audience there? It's the Upper East Side ladies, those ladies who go to museums, that's who. They have a larger audience than that, but I really loved those—I love—whenever I do talks and those women are there, I love them. They're 80-years old, and they're engaged, and they go to museum.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Their hair is always perfect.

BARBARA BLOOM: Their hair is pretty, scary perfect. All right. There's one aspect that I didn't tell you about, which is about charity, which is they have quite an elaborate collection of alms containers. There's one that has a hand sticking out, which is a really good one. I really want to do something within Maimonides text about charity. Do you know that text? It's amazing. Maimonides eight levels of charity, and it starts with the most charitable. The most charitable thing you can do is to set someone up in business or within an endeavor such that they will no longer need charity. That's the number 1. The next level of giving is when you give anonymously to someone who received it anonymously, and there's never an exchange of who would be—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There are no thank you's.

BARBARA BLOOM: There's no thank you's No one knows who you're giving to or who's receiving.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or obligation. Right.

BARBARA BLOOM: You don't know who's getting if. They don't know who's receiving. The next level of charity is you know who you're giving it to, but they don't know who's receiving it. The recipient doesn't know who's giving it to them. The next level is you know who's giving it. The recipient knows who's given it, but it's given graciously. Next one is that you've given it, but you've given it. The last one is that you've given it begrudgingly. It goes down: you've given something, but you've given it begrudgingly. I've got that on the wall. It's very interesting because it's almost—it's so specific and so true. This is a long time ago.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: And it's so interesting in terms of our understanding of generosity and what it means,

particularly within an institution where you've got the wall, and this is right on the wall with the person who gave money to the room, moved right down to right on top of Maimonides. It's the something, something, Heller Room right there. That right bling, bling, bling, bling, right next to the numbers of these are these pins. I kept calling them horrible trinkets. I kept going, "Oh, my god, the horrible trinkets again." There are these broaches, these pins that you got when you gave money to the UJA, United Jewish Appeal, these horrible gold pins that they're designed by Lipschitz, and there's this modernist—they're this ladies gift shop, horrible 1950s and '60s, horrible things. And they go bling, bling, bling, bling, down Maimonides in terms of giving. In the pages, I found this pattern. I'm kind of going, "Okay, so Maimonides and Michael Bloomberg." They're talking with each other. So who's Michael Bloomberg's? The IRS has eight points for deductions of charitable donations. I'm not kidding you. It is from the IRS page, the eight points of how you deduct charitable contributions. Those are the texts that live next to each other.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Interesting. Terrific.

BARBARA BLOOM: I'm going to have people object to that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of course.

BARBARA BLOOM: That would be objectionable.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This show should draw people from beyond the neighborhoods certainly.

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, absolutely. Yes. Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think that's—

BARBARA BLOOM: I would think so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you know of any other artists who have been invited to—

BARBARA BLOOM: To do this after me?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: I didn't ask. No. I know that Mel Bochner is doing a show there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, great.

BARBARA BLOOM: That's like the next—one of the bigger shows, and I know that they're doing a Jack Goldstein show upcoming very soon, which is interesting. I don't know whether they—I say to them to get me in there under the rubric of "Jewish" is really faking it because I'm—I guess a lot of people feel that way, like how Jewish is it, how Jewish do you have to be to be Jewish?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I don't know.

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is it a cultural thing, an ethnic thing?

BARBARA BLOOM: It's a cultural thing, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is it—

BARBARA BLOOM: Do you have to be interested in Judaism?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Are there eight levels of Judaism?

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I don't know. It's—

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't know. I don't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Eight's an interesting number. I wonder why eight?

BARBARA BLOOM: I don't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because If you have a look at the—like for instance, the grand jury is based on the

Sanhedrin—

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, I didn't know that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —it's actually based on the Judean justice system. A lot of things in English law are taken from antiquity.

BARBARA BLOOM: I didn't know that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: If you serve on a grand jury, which I did last year, you are instructed in all of these historical facts prior.

BARBARA BLOOM: Can you tell about it? I'm interested.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I can say that it was all related to drug sales and numerous cases of police selling drugs to somebody and then arresting them, what they call buy and bust. The stupidity of criminals is just stupefying. You cannot believe the cases we heard. I'm not supposed to discuss any of them, although I'm sure by now they've all been resolved. Just the blatant, just reckless, feckless stupidity of criminals is just beyond belief. Guy Ritchie movies are realistic.

BARBARA BLOOM: And the case was about the legality of?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was the grand jury hears evidence and then indicts or doesn't indict. It doesn't actually hear cases. It's not a trial jury.

BARBARA BLOOM: Okay. This was a grand jury about whether the—?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No. It's that we heard a couple of hundred cases. We heard a couple of hundred—

BARBARA BLOOM: And where there—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —requests for indictment and then— yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: Request for indictment of the criminals?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of the alleged perpetrators, yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: It wasn't about whether the police practices were correct or incorrect?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, no, no.

BARBARA BLOOM: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean I guess that could be a factor. Usually we would just hear a presentation from an assistant DA who would offer the evidence, and it was up to us to decide whether it was enough evidence to indict. That's it.

BARBARA BLOOM: Why had this gone to grand jury? Why were these?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because the grand jury oversees indictments.

BARBARA BLOOM: Got it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That is the function of the grand jury.

BARBARA BLOOM: Got it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's not like a special grand jury convenes to have a look at white collar crime or political misconduct.

BARBARA BLOOM: This goes to grand jury to see whether there's enough evidence to?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Grand juries are under way all the time, and you're hearing evidence prior to indictment so that if you—

BARBARA BLOOM: So they're not going to waste their time going to trial?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes. They're not going to take a case to trial unless a jury. And I think it's 25 people are on

the jury, and you need 13 votes to indict. That was based on that number was somehow taken from the Sanhedrin of ancient Judea—

BARBARA BLOOM: Wow.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —temple law anyway. Yes. It was basically—

BARBARA BLOOM: How does one get on the grand jury?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just good luck I suppose. If you've ever been called for jury duty, you go to the courthouse, and you wait, and they either call you or they dismiss you. In my experience, it's like a courtroom with these pews, these long benches. Wherever you sat, one of the marshals—one of the officers in the court who's like a law enforcement officer, I forgot the title, just said, "Okay, this half of the room, all of you are going on the grand jury. This half of the room you're all excused." It was kind of—

BARBARA BLOOM: It's arbitrary?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Very arbitrary. Once they had all the people in the room, they would call a portion of the room to be on trial juries and then another portion on the room to be on a grand jury. It was an interesting process. I was really inconvenienced by it because you have to be there every day for like three weeks or two weeks. It was kind of interesting. You felt like you were doing your duty as a citizen, and I got to eat Chinese food every day because—

BARBARA BLOOM: There you go.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —it's down right by—

BARBARA BLOOM: Right here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The courthouse— —

BARBARA BLOOM: Is in Chinatown.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Backs up on the Five Points.

BARBARA BLOOM: I know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The worst neighborhood in New York 150 years ago was where all the justice—

BARBARA BLOOM: I know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —centers are.

BARBARA BLOOM: I know. I have this odd the situation is that for the first few years after I had this accident I was not able to sit. I had a letter from my doctor saying that I would not be able to be on a jury, and I've never been called ever since—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You must be on a magic—

BARBARA BLOOM: I'm on a magic—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —do not call list.

BARBARA BLOOM: —do not call list. Sometimes I think I would actually like— it would be— and I go, "Don't mess with that. Keep yourself on that list of—"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: If they want you, they'll reach out.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. If they run out of people that list that they obviously have enough people. They haven't gotten to that list yet. Interesting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No. It was an interesting experience. I would encourage anybody if they have an opportunity to not be too irked by it I think it's an interesting thing to do, and it's part of our legal process. It's part of the legal process of a democracy. In that sense, I found it interesting, and I was happy to be part of it. How are you feeling? You had surgery—

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, I'm fine.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —about a month ago?

BARBARA BLOOM: I'm Okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was a minor thing I hope?

BARBARA BLOOM: Hmm.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Major/minor?

BARBARA BLOOM: It was a major/minor thing. It was much—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was your—

BARBARA BLOOM: Elbow.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Elbow, oh,

BARBARA BLOOM: They had to do much more than they thought they were going to do.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, dear.

BARBARA BLOOM: It was not fun. They said, "Oh, a couple of days." I'm going, "A couple of days. " Three days-two weeks—three weeks into it where my arm is swollen out to here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, my God.

BARBARA BLOOM: It was nothing. Anyway, it not—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You look very, very well, and—

BARBARA BLOOM: Thank you. I actually slept last night, so I'm—yes, I'm—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The idea of having an interview waiting for you the next morning—

BARBARA BLOOM: Right, somebody I want to get to chat at.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So soporific.

BARBARA BLOOM: No. I finally got so tired that I fell asleep at 9 o'clock.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I guess to conclude let's just—

BARBARA BLOOM: Tell that joke. Tell that joke to conclude. Sorry.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But I don't have a punchline yet.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You mean—

BARBARA BLOOM: I do have one—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Nefertiti, Zola—

BARBARA BLOOM: Did I already tell my jokes?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Tell a few jokes.

BARBARA BLOOM: I only have like one joke.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Tell it.

BARBARA BLOOM: Actually you joke that I think is—that I ever remember.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's not the Jesus walks in a bar joke?

BARBARA BLOOM: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, okay.

BARBARA BLOOM: Because I would not remember that one. What's Helen Keller's favorite color?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Tell me.

BARBARA BLOOM: Corduroy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Corduroy.

BARBARA BLOOM: That's a good joke.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It is. Mine's plaid, but that's another story.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's the same joke except—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, basically.

BARBARA BLOOM: What's a Scot's favorite color? Plaid.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Plaid, right. Yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Moving ahead, once you get this exhibition behind you—

BARBARA BLOOM: What comes next?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What are you thinking about? I think most people when they're in the midst of a project always have like a couple of other—

BARBARA BLOOM: I have a couple of things.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —ideas on the—

BARBARA BLOOM: One of them is I'm—what I put on hold was a project at Art Angel in London, which does these public projects. I'm inching up to sort of knowing what I'm going to do there although every time I think I know what we're going to there it turns out that it's not what we're going to do at all. That's been going on for a couple of years. That's one project. One of the things I'm thinking about there is that if you found two buildings that were close enough to each other kind of like the rear window—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, yes, the Hitchcock movie, *Rear Window*.

BARBARA BLOOM: The Hitchcock *Rear Window*. That you could have some kind of a production of some kind of a theatrical piece that would take place in a building, just tiny little bits of things that happened on all the different floors.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Like *Sleep No More*, that kind of—

BARBARA BLOOM: What's *Sleep No More*?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you know about there's—this was a performance of I think Macbeth that was done by a theater company that—

BARBARA BLOOM: Oh, that you walked—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —you walk through and all—

BARBARA BLOOM: You has to walk through it. Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes.

BARBARA BLOOM: This would probably be less obviously narrative and be basically in all the apartments of a building, maybe have to find a building that was empty, that there would be things going on, that there would be some kind of implied narrative that took place. That was one idea.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There was some kind of theatrical performance a few years ago which was held around New York with—

BARBARA BLOOM: Right. You could go there, and then you could go there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Exactly. And it was run through Lincoln Center through the summer.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What used to be the 10th Theater. It was an extension of that.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right. Yes. Then I wanted to redo Harold Pinter's *Betrayal*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

BARBARA BLOOM: But I want to do it where it runs backwards, and I wanted to do it in a version where all the objects stayed on the stage, so you'd see the depiction of the past, that would be a depiction of the future. I mean you'd see the depiction of the future rather than the past. Sorry. I think I got that wrong. You have two glasses that are there, and they'd clink their glasses. Then they stay there. Then you'd think, "Oh, yes, that's when that happened, but that's not the past. That's the future." That's one of the thing. I like these things of narratives that involve objects. We haven't really figured that one out yet.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you see the exhibition at the New Museum, the Trockel

BARBARA BLOOM: The Rosemarie Trockel [*Rosemarie Tockel: A Cosmos*] Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Through our conversation this morning, I kept—

BARBARA BLOOM: Thinking about.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —reminding myself ask Barbara about.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, I actually went to see it. I told—I have to go see that show. She's a very interesting artist, and I like her work very much. I like certain aspects of what she did with the display, particularly putting things together, these disparate things.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The sort of naturalist objects, Audubon.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And of course, the title of the show alludes to Humboldt.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Humboldt holds sort of empiricism—

BARBARA BLOOM: Empirical.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —of nature, and the aesthetic of science.

BARBARA BLOOM: It's going to come back to the whole beginning of notions of the museum where everything is —

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

BARBARA BLOOM: I liked the vtrines, all the objects together whether they were made by her or not made by her.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The kind of shots camera aesthetic.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, but I didn't like the signage. I didn't think that she dealt with the signage very well.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Too didactic?

BARBARA BLOOM: Not interesting enough, not too didactic, not difficult to read, difficult to understand, difficult to get from her what it was that she was putting together, not enough of a—maybe not enough of a personal voice there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I would have suspected that might have been a byproduct of leaving that more to the museum—

BARBARA BLOOM: No. Also she worked together with Lynn Cook, who was a curator, so maybe that part came with Lynn.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Maybe she needed—

BARBARA BLOOM: That could have been fleshed out a bit more.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: She needed to be more involved in it because it seems like with your work the wall panels are—

BARBARA BLOOM: Is a part of that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —regarded as pieces in the show. They're—

BARBARA BLOOM: She could've done that. She could have taken it up that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They're not captioning. They're not captioning. In your work, it's actually part of the experience of the show considered on the same—

BARBARA BLOOM: It's not outside of it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —level as any of the objects.

BARBARA BLOOM: I think that something as thoughtful as that could have had that—she could have bumped that up a little bit.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was a very refreshing show I found because of the diversity of objects, the fact that she's doing books, drawings, objects.

BARBARA BLOOM: Knitted stuff.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Knitted stuff.

BARBARA BLOOM: Fashion.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Those big metal pieces. It was very surprising.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. She's a very interesting artist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, yes, indeed.

BARBARA BLOOM: Very, very interesting artist. And it was too bad that—I should off the record—New Museum, it's so shoddy how they do stuff there, the labels peeling off the wall. It's always just like, "Come on, guys."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is it just lack of money, do you think? They're ambitious for their exhibition programming.

BARBARA BLOOM: Very ambitious. But I think, "Come on, guys, just bump up the production just a little tiny bit and not make it look so"—paint the walls. It seems so shoddy to me. There's something about it there's a little bit too funky for my taste. She deserves something more than a stick-on label that's peeling off the wall.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

BARBARA BLOOM: Or if you're going to do that, then how about be intentional. There's something that always bug me there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's the difference between a Kunsthalle aesthetic and a real museum.

BARBARA BLOOM: But a Kunsthalle can do things. Just buy card-stopping, double-stick tape.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. There you go.

BARBARA BLOOM: That doesn't peel off the wall.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There's another technique which you can use, which is actually you get a card the same size, rubber cement.

BARBARA BLOOM: Cement.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Staple it to the wall, and then rubber cement—

BARBARA BLOOM: Cement.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —on the back, and it never comes off.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In that exhibition that I installed with help from my assistant Chelsea. All of the technical things, I mean it is true that a little details like that could be very distracting in an environment like that.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. I just find that—working with Ken Saylor every aspect I was just going to—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: S, what? S-A?

BARBARA BLOOM: S-A-Y-L-O-R.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Y-, yes. L-O-R. Okay.

BARBARA BLOOM: He'll say to me—I'll just say, "Well, we'll just frame it." He goes, "You know, if we just take a little tiny profile on the frame and run that with a frame, then everything's been touched by us." Every aspect, it's not just generic.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Nice.

BARBARA BLOOM: And he goes, "You know if the table is not 36 inches but 38 inches." I say to him, "Okay, the chairs are not sitting right. The chairs don't have leg, and they're sitting like this." Everything has being considered.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Nothing is left to standard. Every—

BARBARA BLOOM: That's what he says. He says with everything if you bring it up a little bit, bring it down a little bit, do this to it. It makes it so it's been considered. So I think sort of you owe that to your audience so they know that you've considered some.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Even if they're not consciously—

BARBARA BLOOM: Aware.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Looking and comparing what you've done to standard sizes or whatever—

BARBARA BLOOM: They know. They notice it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the resonance of the whole experience is going to be more specific.

BARBARA BLOOM: Particular. Yes. Now I have to get off and check my to-do list.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, thank you so much for your—

BARBARA BLOOM: In a way, I'm embarrassed that it took so long to get to this last conversation, but in a way, I would not have been able to do this a month ago. It would not have been as resolved. I would not have written the text. I would not have made a lot of decisions. So in a way, the good lord of—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Art and recording.

BARBARA BLOOM: What's the name of the recording device?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Zoom.

BARBARA BLOOM: The good lord of Zoom is upon us.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's our fortunately that we were able to catch you today with all this wonderful stuff to share.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. No thank you both. I should give you the correct enough to record this compliment. You're very good at what you do. You know that about myself, but it's a real pleasure to have someone with whom to speak who—it's not only that you have a sense that you understand what I'm saying, but you have interesting questions, and you have your own practice to— I hope that doesn't get it out. You don't edit that stuff out of the conversation?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

BARBARA BLOOM: No. There's a conversation.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thank you.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes. There's a real—you get a lot of really stupid question, like "If there's one word that resonates with this exhibition, what would that word be? Would it be provocative?" What kind of lame ass ques—I mean wait—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why does it need to be only one word? It's a conversation.

BARBARA BLOOM: So I said to them, "Okay, how about metonym?" They go, "What's that?" I go, "Here's a word, metonym."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Metonymic. It's metonymic.

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes, right. Put that on a bust, would you? He goes, "I don't think it's going to call people to the show." I said, "Yes, right. Okay. It would call me."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sexy metonyms.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right. Yes, sexy metonyms uptown.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There you go.

BARBARA BLOOM: There you go.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Uptown sexy metanyms.

BARBARA BLOOM: There you go. You realize when you talk to those people it would be so easy to make money doing PR. It is so fucking easy. It's like the most obvious thought you could have that's what you go with, like the first thought. These people are paid to go with their first thought. That's like you throw out your— sometimes you come back to your first thought, but that's only after five months of agonizing and throwing away the first thought and then going—and then come back to it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you've earned the right to own that thought.

BARBARA BLOOM: Right. These people, that's what they get paid for, the most cliched thought. And you're going like—they go, "Well, the—we're going to tell them that the cigar boxes back on view." Whatever. I go, "Whatever."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You have to meet them part way, but you—

BARBARA BLOOM: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But you want to meet them more than halfway.

BARBARA BLOOM: I just said, "No, no, here's a really cool things. Let's do this." I just hand them the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think it's the role of art to raise the audience to the next level, raise the bar.

BARBARA BLOOM: Of course.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And that's what you're doing.

BARBARA BLOOM: Well, I hope so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thank you so much.

BARBARA BLOOM: Thank you. All right. Go out and talk to—what is—I'm going to give you the name of that book. You know what? Let me just—I'm going to give you the book because I can get it myself.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, thank you. Too kind.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]