Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with William H. Bailey, 2012 October 10-December 5

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 William H. Bailey on 2012 October 10-December 5. The interview took place at Bailey's studio in New Haven, Conn., and was conducted by James McElhinney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

Interview

JAMES McELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking to William Bailey at his studio in New Haven, Connecticut, on Wednesday the tenth of October, 2012. Good afternoon, sir.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Good afternoon.

JAMES McELHINNEY: How are you today? And I just want to make sure—we didn't actually do a sound test for Bill. You want to just—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Can you hear me all right?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Okay. Now we're good to go. So, transcriber will ignore everything up until this point, after my introduction.

Okay. So. How are you this afternoon?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I'm feeling well, thank you, Jim.

JAMES McELHINNEY: That's good, because this is going to be an arduous process.

One of the questions I like to open with is to ask you when you were first mindful of being in the presence of a work of art? The first time you remember being in the presence of a work of art.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: That's very difficult. That's a very difficult question. Because I remember making things—drawing, depicting things—for years and years. Way back to my earliest memories. But as far as looking at art goes, that was much later. Being aware that something was a work of art—probably not until I was about 14.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And where did you grow up?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: That could take the afternoon.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, we have all the time you need.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I was born in Council Bluffs, Iowa, in 1930. And I grew up in cities such as Chicago, where I lived three different places—Chicago South Side, North Side, Evanston, and Wilmette.

I lived in Muskogee, Oklahoma; in Shenandoah, Iowa; in Omaha, Nebraska; in Detroit [MI]; in Pontiac, Michigan; on a lake outside Pontiac, Michigan, and finally in Kansas City, where I went to high school and then on to the University of Kansas when I was 17.

And that was the end of my boyhood, I guess. At 20, I quit school and joined the Army. I went to Korea. I was in combat in Korea, and my unit was pulled out in the winter of '52—sent back to Japan, where I remained until January '53.

Should I keep going on this?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Let's return a bit to your earlier life. When did you begin making things, drawing?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, as you know from my description of all the places I lived, we spent a lot of time on the road. And because we were moving frequently, I had very few friends.

I think because of that, I spent a lot of time drawing and making up stories. Drawing things from my imagination. Drawing things from recollections of movies, from history.

For some reason, I was very interested in history when I was a child. I did pictures of the Civil War. And the First

World War, which was at that time known as the World War.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Or the Great War.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: The Great War. Those were my subjects. Then when Pearl Harbor happened, I did drawings of the bombing and imagining everything that was going on. I did a sort of illustrated history of the early days of the Second World War.

In fact, I had a little neighborhood newspaper. Our paper broke the story of Pearl Harbor in the neighborhood before most people had known that it happened. So they were quite shocked to find that we were actually right, and that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor that day.

As I recall it was in the afternoon that we learned of this, and so we went out, started our little printing press, made a little one-sheet flyer, and went around the neighborhood.

JAMES McELHINNEY: That would have been pretty quick, because the bombing—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It was about—what was it? Eight hours difference.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right. Yeah. Early morning attack. I imagine that you must have spent a lot of time in the movies as a kid. Saturday matinees.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I did. I did. And growing up in the Depression, the movies were somehow terrifically important in our society. I wasn't alone in going to the movies a lot. It cost ten cents.

We would go to the movies mostly on Saturday afternoons. And there would be a double feature and a newsreel, and usually short subjects, which would be Robert Benchley, or—I'm trying to think of the other short—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Cartoons or *The Three Stooges*, or whoever.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. Yeah. But I don't remember those as clearly as I remember the serials, where someone would be going off a cliff at the end of the episode. The next week there'd be no reference to that, and it would keep going along. You don't know how the hero miraculously escaped.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Usually about some kind of great hunter in Africa or something.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes. Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Or Westerns, *The Lone Ranger*.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: All the "B pictures" that I saw, that I remember, were Westerns. Lots of them with Randolph Scott and Tom Mix and people like that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It was the visual culture of the time. The popular—there was no television. And I guess you must have had a subscription to *Life* magazine.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: *Life* came along during that time. I can't remember exactly when *Life* started, but—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mid-'30s.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: —the whole Second World War, we knew it through *Life* magazine and newsreels. And the other magazines, earlier, were *Colliers*, and *Saturday Evening Post*, *Liberty*—a cheaper magazine, but there you saw illustrators, who were riding high in those days. Some of them were very, very good. There was, of course, [Norman] Rockwell, who everyone knows. But there were a host of magazine illustrators who were extremely talented.

: This was pretty much prior to your first encounter with a work of art, either at the Chicago Art Institute or at the Nelson-Atkins [Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO].

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I had been taken to the Art Institute when I was very young. But I can't say that it made a great impression on me. I was much more impressed by the Museum of Science and Industry [Chicago, IL], where you could go down in a coal mine, or one of many interactive things they had.

Also, I hid out in the Museum of Science and Industry, when we lived on the South Side. It's a very tough neighborhood. As a new kid, one got beaten up on the way home from school. So my route on the way home from school was indirect. I went from my school into the Museum of Science and Industry, and out the other side, and on to my parents' apartment in the Cornell Towers, South Side of Chicago.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And what did your parents do?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: My father was in advertising, and he was in broadcasting in the early days. He went from being a sales manager or a manager of one small station to another, and then larger stations in Chicago, where he was really doing broadcasting until, I would say, the early '40s, when I was entering high school. And he moved to agency work then.

In 1945, my father went on a business trip. We were living in Kansas City. My mother got a call saying that he was in the hospital—that he had appendicitis, and was in the hospital. They were going to remove his appendix. She went from Kansas City to Omaha. I was in high school at the time. And word came from Omaha that I should go bring my little sister and join her in Omaha.

I thought we were just going to see my father. Arrived to find that my father had died. We went to the funeral, and so on and so forth. Fantastic shock. Because I had no inkling this was going to happen. I was thinking of funny stories to tell him when I arrived.

When we did arrive, we were shown in to some friend's house. My mother was upstairs, in a dark room, sobbing. That was a terrible shock.

I don't know what that has to do with my early exposure to art. But I suppose it has something to do with it.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It is a shocking thing to lose a parent, especially when it's sudden.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, I think it also focused me a bit. Because I realized that I had to be more grown up. I had to think of what I was going to do. And also, I think—to think of what my father would want me to do.

By that time, I had already declared to both parents that I wanted to be an artist. I didn't know quite what that meant. And they had been encouraging. But their encouragement had to do with their limited sense of possibility. And the culture that we were living in—middle America and so on. Being an artist meant being a commercial artist, and working in an agency or something.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Illustrating the weekly magazine.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Illustrating magazines and things like that. Painting was not really seen as anything that was—it didn't have any weight, really, in the culture. And I don't think it had any weight in my family.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Where were your parents from? What were their backgrounds?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: My mother was from a family in a small town in Iowa—a county seat, Glenwood—where her father had been a banker and one of the local powers. He'd been on the County Board, and was a very highly regarded figure. She had a brother who took after her father. She went to Stephens College, a women's college in Missouri, and then on to the University of Nebraska, where she met my father.

My father lost his father when he was 15, the same age as I was when he died. I know very little about this. But I'll tell you what I know.

His mother then remarried. The man she married was a man named Ernest Buffett. Ernest Buffett was a grocer in Omaha, Nebraska. He was the grandfather of Warren Buffett. So Warren Buffett's father and my father grew up, for a period of their lives, as stepbrothers.

And I don't think they got along particularly well. I think there was a good deal of competition. The grandfather of Warren Buffett was a very strict man. So everybody worked in the grocery store. They were on a fairly tight leash.

When they went off to university, they went to the University of Nebraska, and I think both of them did very well, in their different ways. I don't remember what Warren's father studied there, but I do know that he went on to become a politician and a Congressman and so on.

And so our families had nothing to do with one another.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Even though there was some—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: So, what I wondered was, what happened to my grandmother?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: She died shortly after they were married. There was no mention of my grandmother that I

could find. I didn't look very hard until recently. I mean, recently, the last 20 years. But when I was growing up, I never really thought much about it. Mr. Buffett was talked about all the time. But she wasn't.

I believe that she died a few years after they were married. But it's an event that's unrecorded.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So your dad was raised by the grandfather of Warren Buffett, basically, or was his high school years—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, no. He had already left, probably, by the time she died. Because I doubt if "Old Man Buffett" was going to be much interested in my father if his mother wasn't around.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, that's right. You said that he lost his dad at the age of 15, so he was already off to Lincoln by then, to study. Or was it University of Nebraska at Omaha?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. Lincoln. He lost his father at 15, and then he lived with the Buffetts. His mother was married to Buffett. Went to high school, finished high school in Omaha. Worked in the grocery store, and then it's—I don't know. He went off to university, and met my mother.

I do know that they for some reason eloped. And it wasn't my arrival that caused it, because they were married two years before I arrived. So that's a bit of a mystery to me.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Some disapproval of parents, or just impulse?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Perhaps. It may have been just impulse.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Did they just wake up a JP [justice of the peace] somewhere, and—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. They went to Maryville, Kansas.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Wow.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: You know, there's no reason to go to Maryville, Kansas that I can—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, there was a JP who was up late, and they knocked on the door. Great. Great story.

So I'm curious to visualize the places where you grew up. Whether there were any pictures on the walls that accompanied the family from venue to venue, or if there was a Currier and Ives print, or if there was an engraving of some kind, or some heirloom that—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. No, I can't think of a single visual representation that followed us. Along the way, I remember there were things on the wall, but they were fairly anonymous. Decorations. I couldn't describe one for you.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, having to move that many times must have really—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah, and also we moved from city to small town to city, from apartment to single-family dwelling—so the moves kept our possessions at a minimum.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I remember you recalling the "peanut man" in Muskogee. Was there a peanut man?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. That was the black-eyed peas man. The black-eyed peas man would come around. Muskogee was the oddest place I ever lived.

JAMES McELHINNEY: How long were you there?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: A very short time. But that's a lasting impression. First of all, because they thought I talked so funny. And I thought that they all talked funny.

That's also where I—the only time I ever failed in school was in Muskogee, Oklahoma. And that was because we had moved from Omaha, Nebraska, where I was in a progressive school, where they didn't teach reading until later. I guess they started reading in second grade. In Muskogee, they started right away. So, I was a year behind in reading. If my mother hadn't taught me to read a bit, I would have known nothing. But my mother had taught me to read.

But I was slow. And so, since I was slow, but could read, they thought I had problems with my eyes. So they sent a note home with me to my parents saying, "Billy has vision problems, and he should go to an ophthalmologist and have his eyes checked."

So I did. They took me to the doctor. And he said, "No, his eyes are fine." It didn't occur to them what was actually going on in school was that I was being asked to read at a level ahead of myself. And I dreaded school because I would have to stay behind. I was really in an unhappy state there.

Fortunately for me, my father got a job, and this is when we moved to Shenandoah, Iowa. He worked as a station manager in a small radio station there. There were two rival stations run by two rival feed company barons.

Anyway, in Shenandoah, I was a year ahead. So having failed in Oklahoma, I was put ahead again in Iowa. And I didn't fall behind again because of any moves.

JAMES McELHINNEY: When did you first seek instruction? When did you actually first receive any instruction in drawing or painting or anything?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: When we lived in Kansas City, when I was in high school, the art teacher there was a funny lady who was really scatterbrained, and must have been delightful as just a character. She was the worst art teacher you could imagine. Terrible taste. Her idea of a successful career was to work for the Hallmark greeting card company.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Of course. This was the big employer of artists in Kansas City.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And so we did not get along. So I just didn't take any—I took art for one year there. She said, "Well, you have talent, but you have to follow through." Her idea of following through had nothing to do with anything I wanted to do. So I didn't do it.

I enrolled in a weekend Saturday class at the Kansas City Art Institute, where they simply gave us pastels and told us to go out into the park and do drawings. And that didn't interest me at all, so I didn't pursue that. I don't think I had any formal instruction at all until I went away to the University.

When I entered the University of Kansas, I was 17. I enrolled in the School of Fine Arts. I declared myself, I guess, as a major in commercial art, which was called Design.

So my first courses there were in rendering things for ads, and doing the lettering. I thought it was awful. I didn't want to do that. And drawing.

The drawing course was taught in another department, called Drawing and Painting. And the course I took in drawing, I loved. The teachers were terrific. For the most part, they were young painters who were just back from the war, and who were very excited about the work they were doing, and communicated that excitement. The whole idea of being a painter came at that point. I didn't know you could do that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Now, did Lawrence have a museum at that point?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I thought so.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It had a museum. And the director of that museum, John Maxon, was later the director of the Art Institute of Chicago.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So that museum was organized early on as part of the University.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. It wasn't a city museum. It was the University museum. I believe it was called the Spooner-Thayer Museum.

And if I'm not mistaken, they also had Custer's horse from Little Big Horn, stuffed.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, that's a treasure.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: What's his name? I can't remember.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, you're thinking about Myles Keogh's horse. Comanche?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No.

JAMES McELHINNEY: The only horse that survived the battle I know of was Myles Keogh, who was—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, this would be that horse, then.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Comanche, I think was the name of the horse.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It wasn't Comanche, but it was something like that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Something like that. Because I know at Fort Riley—maybe that's it. They've got Comanche at Fort Riley. There must be another stuffed horse in Lawrence.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Anyway, the museum there has expanded, and I think it's quite a good art museum.

JAMES McELHINNEY: A terrific works on paper collection there. A terrific collection of drawings. We know a person who used to be involved with it, Charles Eldridge—

But so this was your first real encounter with rigorous drawing instruction.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Who were your teachers?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And, it was a serious introduction to the history of art.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Who were your teachers? Who were any of the people who really inspired you at that time?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: The most inspiring to me was Herbert Fink. Herbert Fink, later, was the head of the department at Southern Illinois University, until his retirement, I guess, when he moved to Maine, where he worked the rest of his life. And he just died recently.

I think his life in art—the career part of it, was a disappointment. Nothing much happened for him. But he drew—and especially when he was young—he drew beautifully. I was inspired by his drawing. And I liked his painting, as well. I was very influenced by him.

Then there was Robert Sudlow. Herb Fink had been an infantryman in France, and had been wounded in France. Bob Sudlow had been a Navy fighter pilot. He did very beautiful landscapes, and developed during his lifetime a local following, a regional following. But I think he had a life as an artist, and had a lot of success and respect from those who knew him. He was a very gentle, very sweet young man. I knew him when he was probably still in his 20s.

And then Robert Green, who was a little older, who had gone to Yale, taught the composition course. He was encouraging. An encouraging, mild-mannered man, very sweet, whose work I didn't think much of.

Then there was the chairman of the area of Drawing and Painting, Raymond Eastwood, who I thought was a monster. Couldn't stand him. And he couldn't stand me, because I was a disciple of Herb Fink, who he couldn't stand. There was this political thing there.

I remember, when I left school to go to the Army, I had gone to see each of my teachers to make sure that my work was in, so that I would get my credit for my first semester's work, because I left in the middle of the year.

I was assured by Eastwood that since I was in his composition class, that everything was fine. And I finally got my grades. I was in a bunker in Korea, and I got this little card with my grade, which was "incomplete." And I was enraged.

Years later, I was asked to go to the University of Kansas as the Hallmark Visiting Lecturer. Big deal lecturer. Filled this big auditorium, huge crowd there. And after my talk, I was asked if Raymond Eastwood, who had since become a sort of "grand old man" of the department, beloved by all, if he had been an influence on me. I said, "No, not at all. I couldn't stand him." He was sitting in the audience. I loved it.

Anyway, that was the University of Kansas.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Let's pause for a minute. Chelsea, could you just have a look at the—make sure that the counter is moving. Okay. Technical. Just making sure the equipment's working. This is the kind of banter we can always edit out of the conversation.

What motivated you to join the Army?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Two things.

JAMES McELHINNEY: You were in school, right? So you had a deferment.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I was in school, and I had a deferment. But I had decided that—the University of Kansas had

given me a great deal, and one of the things I had gotten there was the knowledge that it wasn't the best place, for someone with serious ambition to become a painter, to remain.

I took every drawing course they offered. I was doing well in the school. And I wanted to get out and go to an art school, or a university that had a critical mass of art students. There weren't any serious art students to speak of. I was very much alone there. So I decided to leave.

But I had no money. I was going to have to work, and get enough money to go to New York or to Boston or Philadelphia, which were my three choices of places to go. The Korean War had started the previous summer. And this was very much on my mind.

Photographs of people my age freezing in Korea—I remember vividly the period when the Marines were fighting their way out of North Korea. This was also a period in my life when I was reading a lot of Hemingway and a lot of things, and the idea of what you had to do to prove yourself as a man.

So I think all those things came together. First was the idea that I couldn't get a job, because I was draftable. I remember going to the draft board and asking a woman there when my number was coming up, because I wanted to make plans with my life. And she said "Oh, you boys, you're always bothering us."

So I went across the street and joined the Army. Rather than bother them anymore.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Stole a march on them, as it were.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes. I was still feeling very strongly that this was the right thing to do, whether I'd been drafted or I'd joined.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Were you feeling patriotic?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: You see, if you were brought up during the Second World War—and for my generation, people who were on the cusp of having to go to the war—this was an extension of that. To not go seemed not only unpatriotic, but disloyal to your own generation.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Your gender. It'd be a betrayal of your gender, that as a male you had to do certain things.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, there was that, but there was also the idea that this was a country invading another country—and the injustice of that, however propagandistic our understanding of that was. I was not in the majority in this feeling, I found out soon, as I was in with a whole bunch of draftees, mostly from New York City.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Who were there unwillingly. They were compelled.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Very unwillingly, yeah. And then I felt guilty for having been there voluntarily, in a way.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Where did you first report for duty, report for your induction?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I enlisted in Kansas City, Missouri. I was sent to Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, which was just for assignment to some place to do basic training. And I did my basic training at Camp Cooke, California, which is now the Vandenberg Air Force Base right there on the coast, in Lompoc, California.

When we arrived there, they didn't have clothes for us. The army was in—they'd gotten rid of most of what they had for the Second World War. So we were freezing cold, because it was a very chilly place to be in February.

So we had half summer uniforms, half winter, and no field jackets. Anyway, did basic training there.

Met a friend, Stuart Mansfield. He was from St. Louis. He was an aspiring writer. We met because I had a book of Old Master paintings with me. I was on my bunk looking at the paintings, and he noticed that, and he came over to talk to me. And we became fast friends. We went through most of the assignments together, and had similar views on things.

When we got to Japan, we were in the 45th Infantry Division, which was in occupation of Japan. The Korean War was going on, and we were in northern Japan doing some cockamamie training exercises. And so Stu Mansfield and I decided that we were going to go to war, and we volunteered to go to Korea.

We were sent to a replacement depot, and assigned to—this is what we hadn't counted on. He was sent to the 45th Infantry Division, and I was sent to the 24th. He was sent to an infantry company, and I was sent to an anti-aircraft artillery.

We corresponded during that period, and he had a terrible time. He was in the thick of—these mass charges of

the Chinese, with bugles blowing in the middle of the night, and all that.

I felt guilty. I felt that I was partly responsible for him being there. And I was, I suppose. The unit I was with, we were on half-tracks. You know what a half-track is? With four 50-caliber machine guns on it.

Both Stu and I had been in intelligence before that. When I was to report to this anti-aircraft unit, he asked what I had done before, and I said intelligence. I remember this major said, "Well, son, we don't have any of that shit here." He said, "Gonna send you up on the line, and if we ever get any of that, and need you, we'll let you know."

What these half-tracks did was—there was no anti-aircraft, so we were primarily a support for infantry companies. And went with tanks and so on, on armored patrols.

During that time, I was in several actions. And one in particular, which I will tell you about, because nobody knows these things. I might as well put them on the record. I have a piece of shrapnel that I keep. I have it.

We had been in this valley firing up at the Chinese who were up on the hillside up above. And they had caves. They'd bring their guns out of the caves and fire down on us. So we were sort of sitting ducks in this. But if we could keep them pinned down, then they couldn't fire on us. But we weren't doing a very good job at that, and so the fire was coming in on us.

And the first thing that I did wrong was—the barrels on these guns would overheat. We had an asbestos thing—net—and you'd unscrew the barrel, and put on a new barrel.

So one of the barrels burned out, and so I changed it. I threw it off—we were in the middle of a cornfield. I threw it off, and the cornfield set on fire.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: The squad leader was screaming at me, "The fucking cornfield is on fire!" So I jumped off the track to put out the fire. He said, "Get on the track, you idiot! There are land mines!" So I got back on the track.

Later, when we drove back out of that valley, I went to open the ammo can, which I'd been hiding my head behind. An ammo can is a metal can with belts of ammunition. And the top is a round thing with a reel on it. So where the reel is, it's double thick.

I couldn't open this thing. And I looked around. A piece of shrapnel had come through it and—this close to the edge of the reel, had been slowed down. So the piece of shrapnel was in the can there. A quarter of an inch, and it would have been in my head. I kept it ever after that, because it was like, how close you can be.

Anyway, after that, when the unit was sent back to Japan, my friend Stu Mansfield was still there. I didn't see him again until he got an R&R leave. He made it through all right. And I made it through all right.

In Japan, we trained replacements. Because the 24th had been the first unit in Korea, and it was badly disorganized when I was in it. It needed to be replaced. Ironically, it was replaced by the 45th, which is the one that I had left.

JAMES McELHINNEY: What was your rank at the time?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, at the time—

JAMES McELHINNEY: When you left the Army?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: When I left the Army, I was a sergeant.

During the time in Japan, I had a chance to be by myself and do some work. I did some drawings. Some works on paper with watercolor, and so on. Most of them, I would say, they were socialist—Social Realist kinds of things, with a kind of Surrealist background, if that's possible.

Think of people who influenced me at that time, artists who sort of bridged the gap. People like Ben Shahn.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Not like [Thomas Hart] Benton, or [John Steuart] Curry?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, I never liked Benton. I didn't like his stylizations. And I wasn't interested in them as painting. Nor Curry. Neither of them.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Nor [Grant] Wood.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: The people that I admired at that time were Shahn, and people who were teaching at the [Art Students] League [of New York], like—

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Philip] Evergood?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Not Evergood.

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Yasuo] Kuniyoshi?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Kuniyoshi, certainly. And the Soyers? I can't even remember the names, now.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Marsh, he was around still.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Reginald Marsh, I admired.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So when you were in Japan, and you had a little time to yourself, were you able to get into museums, or see Japanese works of art? It's a little bit later in the conversation when you went to Indochina. That was years later.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I did. But it wasn't just—I did visit museums. But for example, I never went to Kyoto. And now, I can't understand why I never went to Kyoto.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Have you been since?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. But I was very aware of Japanese traditional culture. I spent a lot of time—I rented a space with a farmer who also ran a whorehouse. I rented a space to use as a studio where I could leave my stuff with him. And I accumulated some art supplies, and was able really on weekends to spend some time working.

One of the girls, who was too ugly to be a whore—she told me. She said, "No, no. I can't do. Too ugly."

I liked and trusted her, but unfortunately, she took off with all of my art supplies.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh dear.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And so I left. I paid the rent for that by doing some drawings of the farmer and his race horse. He had, before the war, been a horse breeder. And he had some photographs of himself with his race horses. He wanted to know if I could do drawings from those photographs. So I did. That paid the rent.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Where were you stationed in Japan?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: When I was first in Japan, I was in the north. Really in the sticks.

JAMES McELHINNEY: In Hokkaido.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, no. Not Hokkaido, on Honshu. But the northern sticks, inland from Sendai. The closest town was a little place called Genmachi.

Then when we came back—I was only there a few months before going to Korea. When I came back, I was stationed at Camp Fuji, which was right at the foot of Mount Fuji.

So most of the time I spent away from the post, there wasn't that much time. Very short passes. So I couldn't travel a lot.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Do you remember the name of the nearest town?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I think the nearest town there was Gotemba.

[END OF TRACK AAA_bailey12_1920_m.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: —get our legs going fast enough that we didn't kill ourselves jumping off the train. But we used to both jump on and jump off of that train.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So what was your job at that point in the army as a sergeant? Were you like a drill instructor?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, first I was a squad leader. Then I was a section chief, which was two squads. I also did visual aids and things, because what I didn't tell you is that I never told them in the army that I had training as an artist, because I figured they'd have me busy doing signs for latrines and things like that. And I didn't want to

do that.

But in the last days in Japan, I did a Christmas kind of creche thing. I did a lot of the charts and things that we used. And for that I got a huge box of drawing stuff from the army—it was actually for mapping and technical drawing. But wonderful inks and papers and so on.

And they gave me a place to keep it, and a place to work.

JAMES McELHINNEY: When you were in the field, were you able to carry a sketchbook?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. No. I drew—I did drawings on things that were available, with paper that was available. But I didn't have a sketchbook.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Or keep a journal or anything like that.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. In Korea, a squad was five people. It was a driver, the gunner, a squad leader, and two cannoneers. I started out as a cannoneer. Cannoneers each had two guns to take care of, keep loaded, and so on.

And in Korea, out of those five people, you had to have somebody on guard all the time. And usually—quite often, if you were on the line—you had to have two people on guard. Which meant that you were either on guard or you were asleep. Sleep was very hard to come by, and guard duty was incredibly—at night you'd just stare. And we didn't—there was no other activity. There was nothing else to do.

JAMES McELHINNEY: To just be on watch, and waiting for something you hoped would never come your way.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, I remember one time. I was on guard, the half-track was dug in, and for some reason we had a foxhole out in front of the half-track. And there was a bombed-out house of some sort, a building—very little of it left—with barbed wire going through it. Now this was the main line of resistance. In front of us, maybe a thousand meters, there might be an American reconnaissance patrol going out into no-man's-land, or Chinese coming the other way.

So, this Mexican soldier—Mexican-American—Pancho Herrera and I were in this hole. We had these hats with ear things that came down over your ears—so you couldn't hear very well—and then a helmet over that.

So Pancho and I were in the hole, and we heard this noise. *Bling! Bling! Bling!* And I said, "Pancho, do you hear that?" He said, "*Si*, yeah, I hear it." I said, "What do you think we ought to do?" He said, "I don't know. Listen."

We listened, and it kept going. So I said, "Pancho, what do you think?" He said, "Let's shoot the bastards!" So we started firing—firing in front of us—because it sounded as though people were cutting the wire and coming through. And there's nobody there.

Reflecting on the event, the whole Chinese army could have cut every strand of wire and all the cutting that was going on there. So it didn't make sense that they were cutting the wire, that that was what we heard. It was a branch that was blowing against the wire and doing that.

And then the infantrymen, who are on either side of us, abused us for weeks after that, because we started a whole war. When we started firing all up and down the line, everybody started firing. So, they said the next day, and the day after that—he says, "Look out! They may be coming at ya tonight!"

JAMES McELHINNEY: When did you leave the army?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I left in February of 1953.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And you were still in Japan, were you?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah, I'd been in Japan then for quite a long time. I was only in Korea for four months or so.

So in Japan—or when I left Japan—after getting off the boat in San Francisco, went to Fort Collins, Colorado. Had a great train ride because, as a sergeant, I was the ranking person on the train—the troop train. And we had regular porters and regular people. I had a compartment with another sergeant, an Armenian guy, who I'd known a little bit, but from a different company. So we shared this compartment. Because we had all the meal tickets and all of the stuff, the porters would bring us sandwiches whenever we wanted, and—"Would you like coffee now?" It just a rather grand trip to Colorado.

And then I got out. What I remember being notable when we got out was the Armenian sergeant and I, we had a three-day pass or something like that, while we were waiting to be discharged.

So we went to Denver. I said, we'll go to—we had money, because we hadn't had to spend any money. So we'll go to the Brown Palace. We went to the Brown Palace, and check into a room there. And the desk clerk said, "Sorry, we have no rooms." I said, "Oh, that's too bad."

Just then, an officer came in and asked for a room, and—"Yes sir! Of course!" So I said, "Wait a minute. You told us there weren't any rooms!" He said, "Listen. Soldiers usually stay in the so-and-so hotel down the street."

Anyway, so we went down to the street and stayed in the so-and-so hotel. Can't remember what it was. It was a perfectly good hotel.

So my Armenian friend immediately started going through the phone book. I said, "What are you doing? Do you know somebody here?" "No, no!" He said, "I'm looking for Armenian names." I said, "Why are you looking for Armenian names?" He said, "Because, if you're an Armenian—you stick with me." He said, "I will take you to the Armenian—they will invite us. And then we'll meet girls! And we'll have a wonderful time!"

Well, I turned him down. I didn't want to intrude on an Armenian homecoming. But he did, I mean, I saw him when he came back.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Had a girl on each arm?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Not exactly. But he said he had a great time, and people were wonderful to him, and so on—and had a great meal.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So how long did you stay in Denver? And try to think, Denver in 1953 must have been—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Oh, I didn't stay long.

JAMES McELHINNEY: —pretty different from the way it is now.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: You were in Denver, right?

JAMES McELHINNEY: I was for five years, yeah. And actually, Chelsea here is a native.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Are you?

CHELSEA: Yes.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I worked in Denver before I was in the army. A summer job, which is another story—not really worth telling.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And what was your job?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: My mother remarried—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mister Buffet—no. Your mother remarried—right. That's your grandmother.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: —after my father died, a man named Fred Baker. Fred Baker was in business with a man named Lear B. Reed, who had been an FBI—the number two to J. Edgar Hoover at some point. And they started a detective school. The detective school started in Kansas City where Lear B. Reed had been chief of police, or replaced the chief of police during the cleanup of the Pendergast regime.

So they opened a branch in Denver. I had a job working at their branch in Denver. I had a friend, Bob Carver, who had a job someplace else. We went to Denver and worked that summer. And I liked it, really good time. I didn't make any money, so it was a very limited summer. But it was fun.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's a pleasant place. Their cultural offerings have improved considerably. [Laughs.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I'm sure they have, because there weren't much at the time! [Laughs.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: So where did you go when you left Denver, and you left your Armenian friend with all the girls and relatives?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I went home to Kansas City. My mother and her husband had moved to Eureka Springs, Arkansas. They were supposed to meet me at the train when I came in, in Kansas City, but somehow they didn't make it. So I had to call somebody else to find out where they were, and they'd made a mistake on the time or something. It was a rather sad homecoming for me!

And we went down through St. Louis, where I bought some clothes, I remember, and went on to Eureka Springs,

where I stayed about a week.

I had heard that there were jobs in Wichita for artists working for the aircraft company—working for Boeing. I was in touch with a couple of classmates from University of Kansas who said, why don't you come down and do that and make some money. When I got there, I met another friend, named George Christopher, whose family were in the steel business, and had a steel company. George said, "Work for us. You could work doing drafting for us." So I did. I worked there for several months, and then went to New York.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And what year was that, that you came to New York?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It was still '53.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Still '53.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: So in late '53—in the fall of '53—I moved to New York. I moved to Brooklyn, where I moved in with a friend and another guy. Both of them were aspiring actors. And we lived in Brooklyn Heights—two different places, first on Hicks Street, and then Grace Court.

I looked for a job. I had a couple of beginnings of jobs, but nothing really turned out. I had a job with the Columbia Metal Box company, doing drafting—doing what I had done in Wichita. But I really didn't know how to do what they needed done. So I got fired—right away, almost. And several jobs which I almost had, but didn't. One was in Times Square running a poker machine.

JAMES McELHINNEY: That's a job of the future.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: The guy said, "You don't know how to play poker, do you?" I said "No, not really!"

[They laugh.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: You didn't acquire the skill in the army, again.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. No. And the other was—a doll factory had an ad in the [*New York*] *Times*. I went on endless, endless subway rides to reach this place deep in the heart of some part of Brooklyn that I've never seen since. I had just a little portfolio of drawings, which I thought would convince them that I at least could make dolls.

So I finally arrived at this place. And the guy looked at my drawings, and he said, "Yeah, you can draw, but what makes you think you can make dolls?" I said, "Well, it's not that hard, is it?" He looked at me as though I'd stabbed him! "You think it's easy?" I said, "No, I didn't say that, but I think I could do it." He said, "No, I don't think you could do it." So I didn't.

Meanwhile, I was looking at art schools. I'd gone to Columbia [University], and they are talking about "Mr. [Peppino] Mangravite this," and "Mr. Mangravite that." First I went to the League, which is where I had wanted to go. But they didn't have the G. I. Bill, so I couldn't. I went to Columbia, and they were very nice to me. And we talked about Mr. Mangravite, and so on and so forth. But I was absolutely underwhelmed by the people that I talked to. I don't know who I talked to, but it didn't seem like a place I wanted to go.

I went to Cooper Union. At Cooper they said, "Well, you would have to start all over again if you went to Cooper, because we don't take people and give them advanced placement."

JAMES McELHINNEY: There were no transfers that are so common now.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. Couldn't transfer. I was in the second half of my third year. I didn't wish to start all over again. But at Cooper, I think it was Dean Shaw—but I'm not certain now who it was that I spoke to—who told me about Josef Albers and Yale. He said, "You might try going up there, because this man Albers has just arrived, and he's changed everything there. And it should be a really interesting place."

And so, I took a train up to Yale—to New Haven [CT]. I was told that I couldn't see Albers because I didn't have an appointment. Just then Albers opened the door to his office and said, "Do you want to see me, boy?" I said, "Yes." I've told this story so many times!

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, tell it again for all the others now and in the future who haven't heard it before.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I had this same little envelope of drawings, and a few black and white photographs of paintings that I had done. He showed me into his office, which was a spartan room with a door for the desk, and sawhorses holding the door up. Plain straight chairs, a huge plant by the window, glorious light coming in through the window, and this little man dressed—various grays, I remember. A gray suit, another kind of woven

gray tie—probably woven by Anni [Albers]—and a white shirt. Silver hair coming sort of Hitler-like across his brow.

He looked at the things, and he proceeded to give me the most ferocious critique I'd ever had in my life. I was stunned, because people had always been very nice to me. They'd all agreed—whatever other things that were against me, yes, I was talented. He wouldn't grant me even talent! He just ripped into things! And then, here and there, he'd say, "But this is—here you see something! And here."

So I was in this stunned state, when things calmed down. And he asked me about my life, and about the war, and what I'd been doing, and my ambitions and so on. And finally he said, "Okay, I take you!" I hadn't been applying. I mean, I just was there to find out about things. He said, "I take you." I said, "Wait a minute! How much does it cost?" He said, "I don't know—ask the secretary!"

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Laughs.] Irrelevant!

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And he called in Bernie Chaet, who was in his first year of teaching there, I believe. Bernie looked like a riverboat gambler—the mustache, he had a string tie and a small cigar. He came in, and Albers said, "I think I put him with you." He said, "You have room?" And he said, "Yes, yes,—yes, okay." And Chaet taught the third year of painting.

So I thought this was all going nowhere. I couldn't imagine that Yale University admitted students in November this way. I went back to New York, and a few days later I got a letter from the then-secretary—I can't remember her name now—saying that Mr. Albers thinks you should come immediately and begin work.

So that's what I did. I went, took the train. I spent a night at the Duncan Hotel. Then I found a cheap room way out on Elm Street someplace—attic room in a house there.

Oh! And I got a job at the Winchester factory on the night shift, where I was told that I had a weak back. The doctor—I'd just gotten out of the army, I'd been carrying all these stones—said, "You have a weak back. We'll put you on something." So I ran the tool shed in centerfire draw at the Winchester factory, which was quite a walk from where I was living. I had to walk through the projects over to Prospect Street.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It was over behind Hammond Hall, where Hammond Hall was. That would've been quite a couple miles.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And so I was living this sort of a split life between the Winchester factory and Yale.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Art and firearms.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Art and firearms. And getting very funny satiric letters from Stu Mansfield about my working in the arms industry.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, Connecticut was for many years a center of small arms in America. Colt, and Winchester, and others.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: You want to take a break?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yeah, we could. Why don't we do that?

[END OF TRACK AAA_bailey12_1921_m.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: James McElhinney speaking with William Bailey, resuming our conversation on the tenth of October, 2012, in New Haven. Thanks for the coffee. That's a good cup of coffee. Thank you.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: You're welcome.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Now, when you came to New York in 1953, had you been there before?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes, but just briefly. And not importantly. I'd been there in 1949, and I was not at all interested in seeing contemporary art when I went there in '49. My big drive was to go to the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC]. And there were certain paintings I wanted to see in the Met, and I saw them.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And which were they?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It was so thrilling. Well, one that I remember distinctly was the El Greco portrait of the cardinal. And let me see. I was so thrilled to see the Rembrandts, and to see Titian, and to see—probably as far as I could go toward modern art would be Cezanne and Van Gogh. Although it doesn't seem to me that there

was that much at the Met at that time.

But I do remember it as one of the really thrilling revelations of my life. Seeing those paintings that I'd looked at so closely in reproduction and seeing them in the flesh and seeing them in their true scale, being able to see the touch, to have them there, was such a different experience.

And I suppose it's common to all provincials to—when you have been studying things secondhand—studying and studying them secondhand—to finally see the real thing is an almost overpowering emotional experience. So that was the big thing in '49 when I first went to New York.

When I went back years later—seems like decades later, but it was actually only four years. Four years later. Seems incredible to me now. I was a different person.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And I was so thrilled to go to the Met, but I also was thrilled to go to the [Museum of] Modern [Art] and the Whitney [Museum of American Art], which was, in those days, down on Eighth Street [NYC], where the studio school is now.

And I can remember almost exactly what was where in those days, because I hadn't seen some of these guys that I'd read about. I hadn't seen [Willem] de Kooning, and I hadn't seen [Robert] Motherwell, I hadn't seen [Jackson] Pollock. Those are three that I remember at that time. I didn't know [Arshile] Gorky until later, but he wasn't in that show anyway, because this was after—

JAMES McELHINNEY: He was gone by then.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, he wasn't gone yet, but—yes, he was.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yeah.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: What was it, '46? '48?

JAMES McELHINNEY: '48.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: '48.

JAMES McELHINNEY: The book you had in the Army—was that a book you bought in New York at the Met?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Was that what?

JAMES McELHINNEY: You talked about having a book of master works.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. No, that was one of those popular big paperbacks, *The World's Master Works*, or *Found in America* or something like that, *… in American Museums*, I don't even remember what it was, but it had all the usual suspects and a few unusual ones.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Do you still own the book?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. No. I had it through basic training, and after that, not.

I remember being impressed also in New York by what I had hoped to find, and which I did find, was the presence of art as an urgent issue for a large number of people. Which nowadays is a small number of people. I mean, there weren't that many, but people took painting seriously—painting and sculpture.

And even going to the museum, the number of people who were there seriously looking at things was astonishing. Not huge crowds like today.

JAMES McELHINNEY: No.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: But museums were, I suppose, more like libraries, in the sense that people went there to really look at what's there, rather than to have their card punched. But we always romanticize the past, and so there may be as many serious people today in a museum.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, actually, what you're saying—I recently interviewed a painter I think you know named Gillian Pederson-Krag.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah, I know of her. I admire a lot of her work. And I admire what I know of her from her friends.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Very interesting woman. And it was a good conversation. I'll have to find a way to share it with you.

The reason I bring her up is that she was raised around the corner from the Met, and one of her comments was how one would go into the museum, and there would be a few people in each of the galleries having a look at pictures. It was not this great crush, this great milling throng that you now see at the Met.

But, how else does New York today contrast with what you found?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, after I was at Yale, New York meant a lot more to me, because I was in contact with artists there. One of the things that strikes me now as being so, so different, is that if you went to the opening of a show, people would—I remember all of us going downtown, and everybody paying for his own meal at a cheap Chinese place.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And galleries didn't give dinners. Galleries didn't—except for Sam Kootz, nobody had drinks, even. Eleanor Ward used to have a paper bag with a bottle in it in the back room at the Stable [Gallery], and if you were favored by Eleanor, you could have a paper cup with Scotch or bourbon in it. You had no choice. Whichever it was, Scotch or bourbon.

[They laugh.]

The artists that I knew were much more open about their opinions, in their opinions of other artists, both in being supportive and in being critical.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Often at the same time.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Often at the same time. And then there was certainly a stratification. There were the big guys, and then there were the regulars, who were vying to be big guys. And then there were young guys.

Very few women. And the women who were there were either girlfriends or very tough and serious survivors. I think people, like—what's her name? Joan Mitchell.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Lee Krasner, who I got to know in those days. I didn't know Jackson at all, but I knew Lee because I used to spend time around the Stable Gallery because my friend Conrad Marca-Relli showed there. He had been my teacher, and was later a sort of mentor and friend. We spent time in Italy together.

And through Conrad, I met most of the people that I knew in New York. Some of them became more famous, some of them disappeared from sight entirely. That was the other thing about that period—occasionally now I'll see a name of somebody showing that I'd forgotten. It's good to know that they're still working, when that happens.

Obviously, there was no sort of "youth requirement." The most advanced painters were among the oldest painters that one met in those days. They were all middle-aged or getting beyond middle-aged.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, de Kooning, I think, famously had no one-person show before he was in his early or mid-40s.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: He was in his 40s, and it was 1947—something like that, when he was first showing - Egan [Gallery] -

JAMES McELHINNEY: So he's '04 or so. Yeah.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And I remember reading about these things. In those days, there were three art magazines which purveyed all the news we had of contemporary art. When I was still at the University of Kansas, I was reading avidly about what was going on. But—

[Telephone rings.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: Pardon me. Sorry.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: You want to take it?

JAMES McELHINNEY: No, no. It's fine.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: In those days, *ARTnews*, *Art Digest*—and actually, there were only two, I guess. Nothing else counted very much. But for some reason, and I'm happy they did—in the drawing and painting department office, all the magazines were sort of lying around on the table, I suppose for the faculty to look at. God knows the students weren't interested.

And so every show was reviewed. Every show in New York was reviewed, including the vanity shows. They were in the back, but still, everybody had a review.

[Telephone rings.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: Not important.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: The sort of mainstream galleries were all reviewed with a small reproduction—just a thumbnail-size reproduction in black and white. That's what we obtained our information about what these painters were doing. And I remember a little paragraph—reading a little paragraph about Pollock, a little paragraph about de Kooning along with everybody else.

Nothing had emerged, really, in the larger world outside the art world, until I think much later—whatever year it was that the piece in *Life* on Pollock ["Jackson Pollock - Is he the greatest living painter in the United States?", *Life,* August 8, 1949] appeared. What year was that? Do you remember?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, if I was around, I was not reading *Life*. But I think it was probably '52 or '53. We can look it up.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, it was before that, I think.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Maybe it was late '40s.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I think it was maybe around 1950, '51.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Okay.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I think it happened when I was away in the war. But the headline was, "Is This the Greatest Painter?" "Greatest American Painter," or something like that. And that was a really big deal for everyone. There was an American painter who was in a major article in *Life* magazine. *Life* magazine was the thing that more than anything else would validate someone's work.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So there was never before any excitement about any painter to equal it, in your experience?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I don't think so. Well, they had features on people like Benton, but they were always tied to something, you know? Being an American, or being a regionalist, being from Iowa or Kansas or some place.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Missouri, yeah.

How did you feel years later when you, having had this sort of rush of excitement that painting was front and center in America's most popular weekly magazine, to learn, in the '80s, when all of that stuff was declassified about the USIA [United States Information Agency], and how Abstract Expressionism was sort of juiced as a Cold War weapon? And how it was promoted behind the Iron Curtain as kind of "the art of the individual."

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, I know that that was used. But it wasn't an issue for artists.

JAMES McELHINNEY: At the time, no. It was—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And later on, when I was in Southeast Asia as a cultural exchange person, I know being used by the CIA and by everybody else, I was quite conscious of the fact that they had their agenda and I had mine. It didn't really bother me at all, principally because I believed in the mission, whatever it was, most of the time. I'm getting ahead of myself.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It sort of gives the reader something to look forward to—whets their appetite a little bit.

What kind of pictures were you making at this time, when you came to New York and came to Yale and began to interact with other artists in the city?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I was making the most confused—I had no idea what I wanted to do. It all disappeared. It had all gone up in smoke, in a way.

Drawing was another thing. I did lots of drawings, most of them on kind of social themes. Lots and lots of drawings. But I didn't have a big painting idea. I didn't even have a little painting idea.

So I was struggling to find what I now realize was a stupid thing, but it was very common, I suppose, at the time. I was looking for some sort of style to carry me through. So I would work in one way, one style, and get to the end of that, or what seemed like the end for me, and realize that there wasn't anything there for me. Then I'd do something else, and work from that.

I realized later—years later—that during that time, I was probably more concerned with what paintings looked like than what paintings really were. In other words, the sort of stylistic look—the immediate first impression—had to be with it. Gestural abstraction was the prevailing idiom, and so I tried to adapt anything that I did to that.

Later I realized that, first of all, I'm not a gestural painter. That isn't the way I approach painting. And that this was causing me to go through all kinds of contortions to make my paintings look contemporary.

It wasn't until 1960—which is not an awfully long time, but it is a long time if you're working through all of these things—that I got to the point where I didn't give a damn. I decided to follow my instinct with what I wanted of a painting. And I have to go back, also, to people that began to show me the way. From 1955 on, I'd been very influenced by Marca-Relli, and the idea of a figure painted as an abstraction.

And so that was part of it. That required a kind of Cubist structure, which all of contemporary painting really held to at that time. No deep space, no violation of picture plane, and so on and so forth.

As I look back on it now, I went from that to reducing the shapes that I was using to little marks, through a series of big shapes to smaller shapes. And I found myself back reinventing Impressionism or something, with little marks building larger forms, and they were getting increasingly naturalistic and figurative.

I did a couple of paintings that were not bad that way, and then it just became a mannerism that I couldn't tolerate. Then I went through a kind of crisis, and I almost stopped painting entirely. I was doing sculpture, because I could hold on to something. Whereas in painting, I'd sort of paint right past whatever it was that I was interested in.

Then in 1960, I was invited to go to Southeast Asia.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Before we go there, could we do a little housekeeping on the narrative and just go back to Yale?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Sure.

JAMES McELHINNEY: We have your acceptance at Yale. What was your time? How long were you there?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I was there a little over a half a year, working with Bernie Chaet. Then the following year, I was in the advanced painting. At that time, the advanced painters almost all worked in a big room at the top of Street Hall with little stalls going around the outside edge and a skylight in the top.

And in that room, Albers would come through every morning, every evening, unannounced. Sometimes he would stop and give a crit. Sometimes he wouldn't. Sometimes he would gather everyone together and do a critique that everyone sat in on.

Next to me in that big room was Neil Welliver, who was painting abstract paintings at that time—geometric abstract paintings. Other people in school at that time were Robert Slutsky and Richard Anuszkiewicz, Julian Stanczak. That's all I can think of right now. But it was a very, very intense and exciting time.

Whereas my first year at Yale was not terribly exciting, and I was rather confused and didn't find my classmates particularly interesting. When I moved to the advanced painting area, it was a whole different ball game, and people were back and forth, very engaged in what was happening in New York, what was happening in the world in general, and arguing with Albers—not arguing face-to-face. No one did that. But arguments about what he had said—about the truth and usefulness of his advice.

People taking defined positions on things. I myself was not so certain, as I told you before. I was still very confused. But I was very much interested in the debates. And I had my own slot, because I could draw better than they could—most of them. So I had a certain status through that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Were they offering a degree? Did you earn a degree at that time?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah, but nobody talked much about it. Nobody ever talked about it. I was still getting a BFA

degree. Neil was getting an MFA degree. We were all in the same course of study. The only difference was that you had to write a thesis, and you had to do that for both of them, which was a big waste of time.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So like today, was there an exhibition as a sort of coda to the experience?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. You didn't have an exhibition. You did your thesis, and you were graded on the work you'd done in the studio. There was no real public face to these programs. This was all internal.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It was a laboratory environment. So there was no exhibition of students?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: The only exhibition—there was an exhibition for the traveling prize. I think three painters and three graphic designers were nominated for the traveling prize. I was one of them in '55, and I won, much to my amazement.

And I went to Italy. I went to Rome for a year. When I was in Rome, I got a letter from Albers, saying that—because I'd graduated and took the prize, went to Italy—I had also gone to the Yale summer school at Norfolk that summer, after graduation. So I had no idea what I was going to do when I came back.

I got a letter from Albers saying that if I would like to come back and work on an MFA, he could offer me two drawing courses as a teaching assistant, which would pay for my tuition, and that I could earn the degree in one year—that they would count the year that I was in Italy. So I did that. I went back.

It was a very difficult year, because I was both teaching and working on this thesis, which had to be turned in, and going through a very difficult time in my own painting. I think I was getting enough from this financially that I didn't have to have a job for the first time that I was in school, and I didn't have to be working all the time.

JAMES McELHINNEY: What kind of jobs had you held previously?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: The first job I mentioned, which was at Winchester. Then I had a job working for the *Yale Daily News* as a paste-up guy, which meant that you went to work when all the copy was in. The paste-up people would go in and paste up all the stories for the morning paper. And a lot of people got their stories in late.

So it was an all-night job. I'd go home at 5 a. m., sometimes six, and try and be back in the studio at nine at the latest. And that was a terrible, terrible job.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But you weren't also working in the tool shed at Winchester at this point. You'd left that.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I'd left that. No, this was another thing.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So that must have been a relief, to be able to keep relatively normal hours.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Absolutely. No, it was a sleepless period in my life.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And who were you assisting? Who were you assisting as a T. A.? Were you with Bernie?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, Albers.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, Albers.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I did the drawing course. I did a section of that with Albers. He was gone a good deal of the time, so the principal instructor was Sy Sillman, who I didn't get along with at the time. Sy was religious about following Albers' routine.

And I wasn't. I'd never taken the course, and I didn't agree with some of the things. Albers was the kind of guy who—I mean, he demanded discipline and so on, but he was also very interested if you had another idea. And also, if a problem that he gave didn't seem to be working out, I noticed that he would always shift right away to another problem. Screw it—we'll do something else.

Sy, on the other hand, if it wasn't working out, he would dogmatically continue until everybody was out of their minds and not getting anywhere. So I had run-ins with Sy. I did that for three years, I think.

Then I taught with Bernie in his advanced drawing class. He let me—I just did free-range crits, going around the class, helping people with their drawings.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Just easel crits?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Hmm? [Questioning.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: Just easel tutorials, right? Just walking—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. Well, he had them drawing shoes, or drawing paper bags, or all of those problems in his book. And I would just go around and help people see what they were doing.

At a certain point, we had the model, which Albers was always against. I taught a lot of that, with the figure. I learned a lot from Bernie in teaching the figure.

For the last two years that I was at Yale—that would be '61 and '62 or '60 and '61, because I left in '62—I started teaching life drawing, because Albers had retired by this time. He felt that was betrayal, and he was very angry about it for a while, but he got over it.

And so I had this life drawing class. I had some good people in it, and I really enjoyed teaching it. Learned a lot from teaching that.

And so where were we?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, I'm a little curious now about Albers feeling betrayed because you chose a slightly different trajectory. How does this reveal his character a bit?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It has to do with his whole crusade against the tradition of drawing from the nude, as the way you learn drawing.

JAMES McELHINNEY: The academic tradition.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Going from the antique casts to the *Académie* drawings.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. But he didn't make that distinction.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Just that there was a naked body in the room?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: "You don't have to draw naked ladies!" And he'd do absurd things. Like one year, he had them drawing—he always had people draw the figure clothed, but they had to just sort of scribble it so that they'd get the volume and the gesture of the figure. Which was fine. It was a kind of "Nicolaïdes" exercise.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It was really about capturing the rectangle, not just the figure.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: At another time, he said, "Okay, we have the model." He said, "But she's got to wear underwear." This was the most ridiculous thing, of this model wearing—I never witnessed this, but I was told about it.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It was, like, a lingerie session?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes. And everyone was embarrassed. The model was embarrassed, because it carries it to a whole different area than the nude.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Absolutely.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And so he didn't do it again—ever again—and I never witnessed such a thing.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Why did he insist on that?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, we all have our biases, and Albers had very little tolerance for the idea of representing things. He said, "We present, we don't represent." And sometimes that got in the way of his better judgment. That's why he was always surprising, because sometimes his better judgment surprised people.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's interesting, because—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: He could see through his own biases and see what they were keeping him from seeing. I remember Bob Engman was saying something about Louise Nevelson—saying something disparaging about Nevelson, thinking that he was playing Albers' song. And Albers said, "Bob, the trouble with you is you have no soul." Where did this come from? [Laughs.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: I remember you told me during a prior conversation interview—the webcast we did—that there was a problem. Albers had a problem with students imitating his style.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And he would say, "Don't paint like me. Be like me." That's not the right quote. What was the—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: "If you want to follow me, follow yourself." It was something like that. He also would say things like—

There were these two painters from Cleveland, both of them excellent painters. One was Anuszkiewicz and the other was Julian Stanczak. And Julian Stanczak did kind of late Cubist style paintings. Very beautiful, very delicate and sensitively done.

And Anuszkiewicz did big Social Realist paintings. Heavy figures and so on. One day, he stopped. He had a ruler, and a panel, and he was making a geometric painting. Albers came in and looked at it, and he said, "If you want to fool me, never use straight lines. I know too much about them!"

[They laugh.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: So he had a good sense of humor.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yeah.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: But you never knew when it was going to be humor, or wrath. There was a girl who was in the class who was a friend of mine, I remember. She was destroyed by him. She, in a way, deserved it, but she was vulnerable and he shouldn't have done it to her. If it was a guy, he could have done it.

He said, "And what are you doing in here?" She said, "I'm painting emotional space." He said, "You know, you have scrambled bags for brains." He said, "Emotional space…"

JAMES McELHINNEY: So he could be unkind as well.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Unkind in the extreme.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Do you recall her name?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Mm-mm. [Negative.] She's dead now.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I'm sorry.

Should we move ahead now to your trip to Southeast Asia? How did you—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, what it probably was, was—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Was it a Fulbright, or a—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, no. It was something that in the Eisenhower administration they invented called the "American Specialist Grant". This was a grant to people in any field who were—if somebody in another country—one of the countries we were wooing, I guess—uncommitted countries—requested an expert in hematology or something, they would have doctors who would be willing to go, or artists willing to go, or any field. And they had artists willing to go to various countries.

So I got a letter from the State Department asking if I would be interested in such a grant. This was because of Yale, I'm sure, and the connection of—

JAMES McELHINNEY: How did they find you?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Because I was teaching at Yale.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I see.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And I'd been showing in Boston. And I'm, you know, a young guy.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Who were you exhibiting with in Boston?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Kanegis Gallery. No longer exists. So I filled out the thing and forgot about it. I didn't think anything would come of it at all.

A couple weeks later, I got a letter saying, would you be able to go be in Rangoon on such-and-such a date, and then for the next three months in Manila and Taipei? And so I said yes, I would.

I had just gotten married, and there was no allowance for taking your wife. That presented a problem. I said, "Well, maybe you could take a boat or something." "A boat? That takes three months. I'd never catch up." Which was quite right.

So I got this grant, and I was to fly first class the whole way. I said, well, if I don't fly first class, maybe my wife could use the rest of the ticket. So they allowed me to do that. So she came too. She had the better part of the deal, because she was a tourist the whole way, whereas they worked my ass off.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So you got to go to work, and she went shopping.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. I went first to Manila, where I taught and lectured at the University of Santo Tomas, which was the place that the American civilians had been interned during the Japanese occupation.

There was another school called the Ateneo [de Manila University], which was a prep school, really, more than anything else. It was sponsored by a man named Fernando Zóbel, who was from an important Spanish colonial family that owned half of Luzon. And this is a funny thing. I had known him. He'd gone to Harvard, and then he'd taken courses at RISD [Rhode Island School of Design].

He knew a friend of ours named Nancy Stetson. We met him through Nancy. He'd come down from Providence [RI], where he was taking courses at RISD. And Nancy was at Yale. She had gone to RISD.

We called him "Ferdie." He was a nice guy. Funny.

So when I was arriving in the Philippines, the first person to meet me at the gate was a very worried-looking embassy official. He said, "I hate to pull this on you, but one of the most important men in the Philippines you're going to have to see for lunch today. Are you up to that?" I said, "Well, I suppose so." He said, "His name is Fernando Zóbel."

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I said, "Oh, that's Ferdie!" The guy turned white. "Ferdie?" I said, "Yeah, I know him!" So we had lunch, and I saw Ferdie several times during our time in the Philippines.

His family had a great collection of Spanish paintings—in Spain, not in the Philippines—and Ferdie was trying to avoid taking over the family estates. He really wanted to be an artist.

We were going to have dinner one night, and Ferdie showed up at the hotel with his driver to pick us up and have dinner. When I went down to meet him, he was lying on his back in the middle of the lobby. I went over, and he said, "Sorry! I seem to be having a heart attack."

I said, "Oh God, that's awful!" I went to the desk and I said, "My friend, I think, is having a heart attack." They said, "Is he a guest in the hotel?" I said, "No, he's having a heart attack, for Christ's sake!"

He said, "No, no, just get my driver." So the driver came in. He said, "I'm afraid I'll have to cancel. I feel better now, but I imagine we'll have to cancel."

So we didn't go out to dinner that night. We did a few nights later, and he was quite okay. He said, "You know, I get these things. I think it's psychological. I'm trying to find a way out of taking over the family affairs."

What he finally did, Ferdie, was to go back to Spain, where he was known as an artist, and—opened the family collection to a small museum someplace. I wish I knew where it was. I could find out, but I haven't. Anyway, on through the Philippines, where I worked very hard.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Again, teaching and lecturing.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Teaching and lecturing. And there was nothing there of much interest. I mean, it was so Americanized. Everything was trying to be American, it seemed to me. Either that, or it was trying not to be American. Both things were happening at the same time.

The next place I went was to Burma, which was absolutely fascinating. We landed in Rangoon, and it was like landing in a Victorian English city that had been struck by a tropical blast of weather that had lasted for a long time. Everything was falling apart. Everything seemed covered with mold or falling apart.

We stayed in the Strand Hotel, which was the grand hotel of the days of the Raj. All the servants there were Indians. They all seemed to think it still was the Raj, because they would come take their brooms and do a "present arms" as we walked by in the hotel. There were only five guests in the hotel, I think—Sandy, my wife and I, and three Russian engineers who were there because the Russians were building a technical institute and a resort hotel.

And anyway, the embassy people that I found spoke Burmese. Everybody was low-key. No big embassy cars. A beat-up Ford came to pick us up, and so on.

The things that I had to do and people that I met were fascinating. One day, the embassy called and said, "Would you be willing to go with the Russians and a Burmese delegation on a jury to select sculptures and mosaics for these Burmese institutions?" I said, "I don't know if I'm qualified to do that or not, but I can try."

So I got there, and what they had done was they had all of these mock-ups, all of these models for the sculpture, and models for the mosaics. The mosaic models were little watercolors in the English academic style.

I said, "This is very nice, but I don't know how it would be as a mosaic." They would have a little figure this high, carved in teak or something, and say, "Now, this is going to be 18 feet high, and this is gonna be in front of so-and-so." So there's absolutely no way of judging any of these things.

I was sort of tiptoeing through, helping the Burmese have their way in this, and the Russian was doing pretty much the same thing that I was doing. We got through the thing, and everybody was happy. The end.

It's the only jury I've ever been on where everybody was happy, I think.

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And so then the embassy guys—they called us and said, "You were so wonderful and helpful to them." They said, "This was terrific. This really helped us out here in relations with Burma."

Anyway, we went up to Mandalay. The USIA guy in Mandalay, who was probably a spy, because there's no reason for a USIA post in Mandalay at that time. I took it that he was a CIA guy working principally with the uprisings around the Shan people, and so on.

But he gathered together the notable artists of upper Burma for an evening. They arrived, and he had a film on Rembrandt which he was going to show that he got from the USIA library. A very good film—a Dutch film. And it was beautiful.

These guys all watched it, and they looked, and they nodded. When it was over, they said, "He's quite good, this Rembrandt." We talked, and they said, "Yes, it's very good technique, don't you think? Yes, very good technique."

They'd never heard of Rembrandt. Never ever.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Did any of the artwork that you encountered on your travels in Asia influence you, or—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It was attitude. It was attitude.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Attitude? How would you characterize that?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I think the Buddhists in Burma had a great effect on me, in the sense that they valued—I mean, it was a whole other thing. I'll give you an example.

I was teaching a little bit of anatomy in the art school in Mandalay, which was really a bunch of little huts in a field. These students would ask if I would correct what they were doing. I said, "No. If you're going to be an artist, you don't want correction. You want to say, 'I have something here, and would you look at it and tell me what you think?'"

They looked at me very questioningly, and I realized later that all of my aggressive Western stuff was wrong there. I mean, it had nothing to do with their values at all. And learning that lesson and watching people who would say things like—

Well, another example. You'd see a bullet car with somebody driving it, going up the dusty main highway past the palace in Mandalay, and the driver is asleep. And across the way, in the moat of the palace, there are people who are playing in the water, splashing and laughing.

[END OF TRACK AAA_bailey12_1922_m.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: [In progress.] —Tape. So maybe—tape. Maybe the next time we could resume with the Burmese Buddhists in the life drawing class in Mandalay. These conversations, as you can tell, they sort of take on a life of their own. The Archives has a sort of bulletin list of, you know, what you're supposed to ask people. And if you read it, you think, you can't have a conversation interrogating people like this. You have to just sort of know what the content generally has to be, and just try to steer them over the topic somehow. But we can—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, I'm afraid we haven't been too close to the—

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's what it is. It's the story you want to tell. And that's what they're going to get, and they better be darn well happy with it. I think they will be. But maybe next time, we could start with that and talk a little—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: The next part two will certainly be a lot more about the career.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, this is the back story. And I think it's important. Because I think somebody who doesn't know anything about you, who just has a look at your pictures and has a look at the last 20 years of your activity, is not going to have perhaps the same insight as they would have with more of the back story. So going to Italy as a young person, going back there, a peripatetic youth, you know, "manhood forged in battle," whatever. You know, it all adds up to something.

And we don't know how scholars are going to use this in the future. We don't want to prejudice it. I just worked with a man who—I'm working with a person on a memoir, helping them shape a memoir. Because like it or not, I'm sort of slowly turning into a writer too, or a storyteller, whatever.

But at one point, he was saying, "I'm worried about details. I'm worried about dates. I'm worried about facts." And I said—I quoted the John Ford film, "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence." You know, "This is the West, sir, when the truth becomes the legend, print the legend." So really, a memoir is nothing more than a work of fiction we create to organize our memories. And that's the only—honestly, that's all it can ever be.

And so yeah, the career to follow. But I think the back story is important too. Because it gives people a way behind all of the critical writing and the sort of—whatever the Bill Bailey canon is, it gives them a different way to frame it. Other ideas to use as lenses to look at it some 100 years from—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, I suspect that it's quite different than the generally held view of my back story, whatever it is.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, it's more—it has more volume. It has more dimension. And it has more complexity. I mean, you certainly—your career took place in a period of history that was addicted to inventing new taxonomies for everything. This movement and that movement and so forth.

Which is a desire to explain what's going on, but at the end of the day, I mean, is the explanation that valuable if the work is that compelling? The answer is no, you don't need the explanation. So oral history is kind of an interesting process because it raises more questions than it answers, and I think that's healthy. I like doing it.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: So how about Gorky. What do you do with—

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: The Foundation is building a—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: What does the Foundation do?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Well, right now it's just putting together the catalogue raisonné. I mean, not "just." The Jim Jordan out of D. C. was working on about—

[END OF TRACK AAA_bailey12_1925_m.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: How's that?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Yep. Now it's good.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Hear it? Okay. I have the notes here. I guess start with the intro. This is James McElhinney speaking with William Bailey at his studio in New Haven, Connecticut on Tuesday, the sixth of November, 2012. Good afternoon.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Good afternoon.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So you survived—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Have you voted today?

JAMES McELHINNEY: I did, yes. Thank you. And hopefully our candidate will win.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So, I want to resume by going back to where we left off at our last meeting, which I believe was at the point where we were having spoken about your travels in Asia. We were going to start with a Burmese life drawing class today.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I didn't get that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Burmese life drawing class.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Oh. Burmese life class. The art school in Mandalay was really just a series of small—I'd have to call them huts—individual classrooms with wooden benches. Not drawing benches, but the kind of benches that you saw in grammar schools at the turn of the century. The students were very, very serious, and very humble.

I made the observation to them that if they were going to be artists, that they perhaps shouldn't be quite that humble—that they should exert a little ego. I only realized later that it was entirely against the whole Burmese Buddhist code of behavior. They would ask for you to correct their drawing. "How can I make it better?" Or, "Can you see what I'm trying to do?"

It was always as though there were some objective standard. I would say that the work that was done—official work in Burma—all came from the colonial period, which ended in, I guess, '48, and was a kind of genteel tradition of British watercolors—academic watercolors.

What I got from Burma—and impresses me still—was a sense of connection with nature, connection with society that, although it was passive, the people were still energetic, and going about their business. It was nothing like I had ever experienced in the West.

I had spent time, as you know, earlier in Japan—quite a long time. And it was totally unlike the Japanese—as much unlike the Japanese as the Japanese are unlike the Swedes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: In spite of them sharing a common religious—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. There's no other Buddhism in the southern Buddhism. And the Burmese were southern Buddhists. There were monks everywhere with black bowls to collect offerings from people. This was so that the people could gain merit. So there were lots of saffron-colored robes.

Of course—not in Mandalay, but back in Rangoon—we visited the Shwedagon Pagoda, which is part St. Peter's and part Disneyland. Small shrines and stands selling religious objects. A sort of marvelous place, very beautiful. But always with a kind of grave, holiday atmosphere.

I truly loved that time that I spent in Burma, although it was the most uncomfortable time that I can remember in my travels, because it was terribly hot. Most of the population suffered from amoebic dysentery, so one had to be very careful about the food. It was terribly uncomfortable. The infrastructure in Burma was completely falling apart. I don't know what it's like now, but at that time, it was like a Victorian English city that had gone terribly wrong. Paving falling into the sewers running beneath.

JAMES McELHINNEY: This is just a little over a decade after the British left.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes. But the British made such a profound impression on, I think, every society that they colonized. The courts were British in custom and in the way they operated. All of the formalities of government came from the British. The architecture that was being done—even the post-independence architecture, to be up-to-date, had to be British. And British architecture was not in good shape at that time. Lots of flat-top, jerry-built institutional buildings had been put up—exactly the wrong thing for a place with the kind of rainfall they have in Burma.

So it was still very, very British. In fact, in the Strand Hotel, if one walked down the corridor, and there was an Indian sweeper there with his broom, he would come to present arms as you—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Really!

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: —went by. Yes. Absolutely.

I was locked out of the room one morning. I had gone to get something, and went back, and Sandy was in the room. So I was knocking on the door, and this sweeper came over and said, "Lady, lady! Master is here!"

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Which we've repeated many times over the years. "Master is here."

JAMES McELHINNEY: You see the movies where people are called *sahib* or—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: *Sahib*, *memsahib*, yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: *Memsahib*. So I guess once upon a time it was all true. How did the Burmese understand the process of life drawing? Did you have a nude model?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, no. No. Not at all. They had a very demure, fully-clothed model in the typical Burmese dress, which was a long wrap-around skirt, which both men and women wear, called a *longyi.* And a little short jacket, sometimes with precious stones for the buttons. Women were quite liberated in Burma. And they could own businesses and do a lot of the things that women couldn't do elsewhere in Asia. But no nude models.

JAMES McELHINNEY: That's really not a part of Asian culture. Although in India, which—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, there's all that great erotic sculpture—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Exactly.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: —in India. And in Japan, of course, you have the tradition of erotic art. I didn't see anything like that in Burma. I'm sure it exists somewhere in a substrata. But not in a high art that one is shown.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, not like in a religious way, like in Hindu art, or in a humorous way like in Japanese *shunga*. It didn't exist.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. They had a curious style for contemporary art, which I think they patterned after French painting, in that these things had outlines like certain Matisse's drawing. But the figures and things were stylized in a way that they looked like Disney characters. Everything looked slightly inflated, boneless figures. That was called the modern style.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Did you get a chance to go, while you were there, to Cambodia or any place like that?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, no.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Have a look at any of the Khmer art, or—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. In fact, I didn't see nearly as much of Burma as I wanted to, because I wasn't there as a tourist. I was there working. I went where I was scheduled to go. And most of my days were very full there. Whereas Sandy got to see quite a bit more during the days.

JAMES McELHINNEY: How did you come to return to the States after this experience?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: We decided when we went, that since we were going to be that far away—half a world away—that we'd come back through Europe, instead of coming the way we started across the Pacific.

I should say something about Taiwan, because that was the last place that I spent time. Taiwan was very militarized. Chiang Kai-Shek was still a presence there. Madame Chiang was certainly there. They would sell things like *Time* magazine. And if there was a picture of Mao, there would be a stamp on his face saying, "bandit" or "murderer," "bandit," whatever.

The artists there—I met a lot of artists. They were banded together in small clubs. They would show together, and they would meet for discussions. Some of them were very serious, and very aware of the rest of the world, and thirsting for knowledge of what was going on in the U. S. and in Europe.

The American Embassy and the USIA—the information service—I think did a very bad job of connecting with artists and intellectuals in Taiwan. I made a point in my report of suggesting that. Whereupon the cultural affairs officer in Taipei said he thought I should modify that a little bit. I said no. He said, "Well, you can't expect another grant from the United States government if you say things like that." And so I said, "That's all right."

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: [Laughs.] I didn't have another grant, nor did I seek one. But I did feel that we missed

important chances. It's one of the reasons that—this was just on the cusp of the Kennedy era. And it's one of the reasons that I was so thrilled when John Kennedy was elected, and we had a whole new—another generation in government.

JAMES McELHINNEY: You know, I'm thinking we might want to get away from this blower.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I can just turn down the heat.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh. Okay. Because it—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And it will go off.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It might be—are you hearing a lot of white noise from this? Yeah. It might be a bit challenging for the—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: What we'll do is turn it down to 70 degrees. And it'll come on a while later.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Or we can at least close the circle a little bit, so that it's less of a hindrance to the transcriber.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It'll shut off in a minute.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So you came back through Europe. What route did you take?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: We went to Athens, and from Athens to Rome, Rome to Paris, Paris to London, then home. Then we spent a few days in each of those places on our own nickel and our own time.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And home was here—New Haven?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Was New Haven.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And when you returned to New Haven, did you return again to teaching at Yale?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. I was actually a bit late. The fall term had started. I think we started later in those days. I got back the first days of October, I think.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It used to be after Labor Day. It's August now—end of August—that we usually start the—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. It was way after Labor Day in the '50s. I think it didn't start until the very end of September.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So at this point at Yale, if I recall correctly—it's been, obviously, years—years prior to my involvement with Yale. But this had been nineteen-sixty—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: This was 19—

JAMES McELHINNEY: —two?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. '60.

JAMES McELHINNEY: '60. Okay. So Albers is still teaching there.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Very much, yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And still a strong presence. Now, I understand a couple of years after that—two or three years after that—he retired.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes. I believe it was—well, I have to take that back. He may have—it was just about the time I got back. He may already have officially retired, although he was still doing some teaching. Then the following year Rico Lebrun came, and Albers was very unhappy about that, and really broke off his ties with the school.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Albers did. That's right. And why was he so unhappy about working with Rico Lebrun?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: He didn't admire Lebrun. I think he was offended because he thought it was all about depth and things that Albers didn't really want to deal with in art. Also the emphasis on drawing, the graphic nature of Lebrun's work. Lebrun, on the other hand was very anxious to meet Albers. He was curious about color—what Albers had been teaching, and so on. But that didn't work out.

I liked Lebrun. Lebrun was an eloquent, marvelous artist. I wasn't a great fan of his paintings, but he drew incredibly well. I remember his coming to my studio to draw, and so we were both drawing from the model. He never sat down. He was always standing, drawing, moving around the model. He would do these drawings and he'd drop them on the floor. He just kept drawing. They were all terrific. Just beautiful drawings.

JAMES McELHINNEY: How long was he teaching there?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Just one year.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Just one year.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And we used to go there for spaghetti dinners. He was lonely at Yale. He only had a couple of friends.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Did he come from California at that point?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Because I knew he had worked for Disney and he—Claremont.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: He was in L. A., and he was rather influential there. And his student Howard Warshaw was also very influential, and when Richard Serra came to Yale, he had been a student of Howard Warshaw. I remember talking to him about that, because I was curious about Warshaw. And Serra's first work—he was in my first year painting class. The first work that he did there was very Warshaw-like, rather sentimental drawing. I remember a little bird's nest or something that he did.

The school that I came back to changed gradually. Bernie Chaet was the acting chairman for two or three years before Jack Tworkov was appointed. During that time, I was allowed to actually start a life drawing class, which was the first life drawing that had been taught at Yale since Albers had abolished it years before.

And so I taught life drawing, and the first year painting—or actually, I taught life drawing and the Albers basic drawing course, which was a good course, but not the way that I would have chosen to teach drawing. I had never taken the course. So I was always suspect in the eyes of the true believers in the Albers method of doing things.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And what were you painting these days? How had your time in Asia influenced you?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes, well, up until going to Asia, I had been trying to reconcile abstraction with figuration in some meaningful way. I kept running into the problem of finding myself making grotesque and stylized versions of the figure, which I was not satisfied with. Then I broke it down into shapes—a figure into shapes. And then I broke the shapes down into smaller shapes, and finally into just brush strokes.

I found that I had sort of reinvented Impressionism, in a curious way. I was not satisfied with that, although I did a couple of pretty good paintings in that style.

The problem I had, which is the problem a lot of young painters had at that time, I suppose, is that I was always looking for a style that was going to serve me and give me some identity. Instead of really being involved in the problem that I could get my teeth into, I always seemed to be working with style. I'd wind up with a painting that I didn't want. I could do it, but I didn't want it.

And so what happened in Asia, is that all of the frantic search that seemed to be going on here, was off my shoulders. I didn't have to deal with that. I noticed that when I went back through Greece, and Italy, and France, the things that I sought out—I've said this before. But in Athens, I remember going into the Acropolis museum, where they have rooms full of just the feet from sculptures that have been taken off of their bases. And those feet were so clear and so beautiful, and yet so mysterious.

I was thinking, yes—the mystery is coming from the clarity, whereas I'd always been trying to get at some sort of mysterious ambiguity. Then in Paris, I went just instinctively to the *Grande Odalisque* and the *Bather of Valpinçon*, and paintings that I saw as being very clear, including paintings by Bruegel and Bosch—Flemish paintings.

So when I got back, I didn't have to think about what I was going to do. I just started some paintings of figures in measurable space. But there's another ingredient that I should mention, and that is that the early de Kooning and early Gorkys were inspirational. I hooked up with them, and through them to Picasso—a Picasso which was what they were looking at, not the Picasso that was on everybody's art—

JAMES McELHINNEY: The early Picasso. The Blue and Rose [Periods].

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah, the early Picassos, when Picasso was looking at Raphael. And then I looked at Raphael. Or Picasso was looking at Ingres and Ingres was looking at Raphael. I had a whole lot to study and a whole lot to do in my work at that time. I didn't think about influences, and I didn't think about originality, or any of those things that had plagued me before.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Or inserting yourself into some kind of genealogy of style.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, I didn't even think of the genealogy. I was just trying to get it right. I'd started these figures, and what did I have to do to get these better? They were awful. It took quite a long time before they got at all better.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's a good chance that somebody reading this is not a studio practitioner. And so what you mean by better, is not more correct anatomy, or more correct description, but something that you could actually believe as a part of the whole construction of the painting.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Exactly. Exactly right. And off to the side of those, because they were, in a way, very psychologically demanding, also. As soon as you start painting a figure that looks back at you, you have a relationship with another human being, even one that's fictional—that you've invented. You believe in this.

So I was working—I'd had a conversation with Marca-Relli about purity, and he had just commented in passing, "You can't purify an egg." And I thought, no, that's true. It would be very hard to purify an egg. So I did a painting with a couple of eggs. And they interested me. I did a couple more with a series of eggs, almost as modules in an abstract world. Simply lined up on the shelf, where I would be able to find rhythms through changing the degree of luminosity or the hue very subtly.

Those paintings started looking back at me, and reminding me of the quiet that I'd felt in Burma and in Eastern art. Over a period of time there, I stopped having just eggs. I'd add an object. And pretty soon, there were more objects than eggs, then sometimes all objects. I still include an egg occasionally, as a reminder of—

JAMES McELHINNEY: A touchstone, a kind of a—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It's a touchstone, and it's also a reminder to myself that I'm not trying to do a "still life" still life. That it's a fiction that comes from my own imagination.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's not a *vanitas* either.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. No. Not at all. At this time that I was going through all of this—there was a period from 1960 to '62, and I was getting very restless being here in New Haven and teaching at Yale.

I should explain that several of my classmates were also teaching—Neil Welliver and Bob Engman in sculpture. The senior person was Sy Sillman, who was not a classmate, but who had studied with Albers at Black Mountain [College, NC], and was a genuine disciple. The others weren't. I wasn't, and Neil Welliver certainly wasn't. Engman in sculpture was a bit removed from the party line.

But I thought, I've got to get out of a place that I went to school. So I wanted to move to New York. In '61, I started looking for a job elsewhere. I went down to Philadelphia, I remember, to be interviewed for a job at Philadelphia College of—was it the Pennsylvania College or Philadelphia—?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, there's the Pennsylvania Academy of—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: PCA.

JAMES McELHINNEY: PCA—Philadelphia College of Art.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes. That's where I went. Louis Finkelstein was teaching there. George Bunker was the head of the painting area. I believe I'd known Louis a bit—slightly—before that interview. They could give me a day's work a week, I think, which meant that I'd have to get another day's work in order to be able to make a living.

I had a chance for a job at Pratt [Institute, NY], which I didn't follow through on, because it seemed clear to me that I was going to be spending all my time on buses and trains, and I wasn't going to have the time in the studio that I was used to in New Haven. Just then, I had an offer from Indiana University, where Rudy Pozzatti, a printmaker who I'd known at Yale and Norfolk, was the head of the printmaking department. And Jim McGarrell was teaching there.

So I put myself up for an opening they had in the painting area. Henry Hope, who was a great character and was the chairman of the department, was a wonderful collector. He was an art historian, PhD from Harvard, who had written the first Braque catalog for the Museum of Modern Art. A very sophisticated and generous man, who

interviewed me. He came to Connecticut to interview me, and offered me the job.

I was a little leery of moving to Indiana. But it seemed like a good place to sort of hide out and develop the work, and not worry about what was going on in New York.

JAMES McELHINNEY: You learned to love basketball, right? [Laughs.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, I didn't know about basketball. What I did know about Indiana was that it must be a very good school, because I'd never heard of their football team.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh. [Laughs.] Yeah, their very good basketball team.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. Then when I got there, of course, we all became big basketball fans.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Of course. It's the national sport of Indiana. Hoosiers. What was the condition of the museum in those days?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Which museum?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, the one at the University.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: At Indiana?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yeah.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: They had built a new fine arts building there. So there were studios for graduate students, there were studios for faculty, and there were classroom studios down below on another floor. Then on the first floor, half of it was devoted to the museum. And the museum was not particularly distinguished.

What happened after I left was that the Hopes gave their collection, which was a very important contribution. Tom Sully, who was the director of the museum when I left, made a big contribution. I was on the museum committee. In fact, I remember in the late '60s, just before I left—I'd been in New York, and I saw two Balthuses that were for sale. I guess that was at Pierre Matisse [Gallery]. One was *Cathy Dressing*, which is now in the Museum of Modern Art in Paris. The other was the woman at the window who was falling backwards over the window [*The Window*].

Anyway, Jim McGarrell and I proposed to the museum that they buy this. The painting was, I think at that time, about $60,000. And the *Cathy Dressing* was $80,000. Or there was maybe not even that much of a difference between them. Maybe it was a $5,000 difference. But they got the window painting instead of *Cathy Dressing*, which I always thought was too bad, because the other is a far more—not a better painting, I don't think, but a far more important painting.

Anyway, it was a very, very nice situation, because the artists who taught there had some input both in the museum and a relationship with the art historians, which I haven't found elsewhere. Albert Elsen, who was the Rodin expert, died recently—or not too recently—was there. And several interesting people. We didn't always get along. We had big arguments and so on. But it was fun. Very lively.

I didn't feel at all that I was in exile when I was in Bloomington [IN]. Everyone there was busy pursing their own thing. I didn't sense any bitterness that I had seen at other Big Ten schools and in art departments, where people felt that they were left out of everything.

JAMES McELHINNEY: To what do you attribute that?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, the art people were all connected with New York in one way. After '65, I was connected with the Stable Gallery. Jim McGarrell for years was with Allan Frumkin Gallery, as was Robert Barnes. And Ron Markman showed for years at Terry Dintenfass [Gallery] before she closed. So everyone was involved in their work.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So it was not a jealous environment. Everybody was—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, no.

JAMES McELHINNEY: The way you described Yale before, as being a combative, mutually supportive environment, where people would argue about concepts and principles, but they were more or less—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, it wasn't as broad-based as Yale. We had developed a reputation as a figurative center. And so we were drawing students from both coasts—graduate students. We were one of the central places that

was a figurative graduate school. There weren't that many at that time. The arguments that raged were fairly parochial. McGarrell and Barnes were involved in a kind of, almost Surrealist—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yeah, expressive, painterly—yeah.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Painterly, expressionist world. And Markman was very involved, not in Pop Art, but in popular imagery. I would say he was devoted to artists like [Joan] Miro and [Paul] Klee. And I was devoted to more classical artists. I think we had a pretty good spread of different interests and sensibilities there. We had some good arguments.

Nothing like Yale. Yale was—and especially Yale after I came back in '69, when we had Al Held, and Knox Martin, and all the different people—Bernie, Gabor [Petardi].

JAMES McELHINNEY: What precipitated your return to New Haven?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I had shown at Schoelkopf in New York in 1968.

JAMES McELHINNEY: '68. Schoelkopf. Robert Schoelkopf Gallery.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Robert Schoelkopf Gallery in New York. I had a Sunday review in the *New York Times*. Big review. Just before that, I had been one of the artists featured in a piece in *Artforum* by Gabriel Laderman called "Unconventional Realists." So I had a sort of burgeoning reputation in that small world of figurative art. And also, the art world wasn't that large at that time.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Who wrote the Sunday review? Do you remember? Was it—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: In the *Times*—

JAMES McELHINNEY: John Russell? Or—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, no. It was—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Hilton Kramer?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Hilton Kramer. And so I guess one summer I had been acting chairman of the department. Indiana—the only summer I ever spent staying there. Through some confusion, I was put up when Jack Tworkov was going to retire—I was on the list of people who they would be interested in replacing Tworkov. So Howard Weaver, the dean—I had heard a rumor of this. I remember I had spoken with Bernie Chaet on the phone. I said that I'd heard that I was on the list for chairman of the department. He said, "Don't hold your breath."

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Laughs.] Sounds like Bernie.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Which is funny, because later, it was viewed as a conspiracy of Bernie's to bring me here. And Bernie hadn't known anything about it. So anyway, Howard Weaver came to Bloomington to interview me. We spent a pleasant day. He looked around, talked, and so on. Then he went back to New Haven. Then I got an invitation to come to New Haven and meet with Kingman Brewster, the [Yale] president.

So I came, and I was put up in one of the colleges. Wore a suit and everything. Went to the Brewsters for dinner. We had shad roe. George Langdon, the deputy provost, was there, and his wife. We had a long conversation about the art school, and about what an art school should do, and about the relationship of the school to undergraduate education, and so on. I just told them what I thought.

I didn't think there was a chance in hell that I would be offered this job. And the truth was, I didn't want that job. I'd like to come back to Yale, but I didn't want to be chairman, particularly. But if that's the job there was, then we'd see. So I was offered the job. And I accepted.

Then I was in a poker game in Bloomington with a diverse group—the first violinist from the Berkshire Quartet, the associate director of the Kinsey Institute, and a biochemist by the name of Henry Mahler, and another painter, Harry Engel. He was a pal of Motherwell's at the Cape. Harry always was fighting the battle of modern art against these young whippersnappers who were figurative painters. Lovely man who tolerated us, I don't know how. And we tolerated him and his, to our eyes, a rather cliched modernism.

Anyway, I was playing poker with these people. There was a call from New Haven—it was Kingman Brewster. He said, "We're having some trouble here, and I'm wondering if—" Because I had been promised a tenured position. "Would you be willing to come as an adjunct professor instead, with the guarantee that we'll straighten this out when all of this is past?" And so, I was giving up a tenured position in Indiana. I said, "All right." He said, "Believe me, I'll take care of this."

So before I left, I got a letter from a group of students and faculty urging me not to come—that this had been done illegally by appointment. This was a time of—

JAMES McELHINNEY: A lot of unrest. Wasn't this the same time that there were all of these protests when Abbie Hoffman and all of these people were—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Absolutely. Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: —camped out on the green?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: This was a time when they said, burn it down, tear it up, whatever.

JAMES McELHINNEY: As I recall—Bill Coffin told me once that Brewster defused the whole thing by offering them a place to live—offering them the hospitality of the university—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, he did. He did.

JAMES McELHINNEY: —which immediately shot their credibility with their followers. And so the thing just—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, it didn't really defuse it, but completely—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Hindered it, anyway.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It kept it from exploding into what we were afraid was going to happen. That was in—when, 1970?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yeah. Age of student radicalism, and all the protests against the Vietnam war.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: On my way to New Haven, I phoned Howard Weaver, the dean. He said, "I have bad news for you. I've been up all night. The art school just was burned—art and architecture."

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, this was the attempted arson by the—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, it was—no one has ever come up with the solution to that. What we do know is that the whole building was burned out from the inside out. When I arrived, they had had students—they had a huge school—way more students than they should have had. They had a building down on Orange Street or someplace. They had a couple of other spaces.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I remember it. Yeah, Orange or Crown, or over that way. There were random buildings.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And then when I arrived, we had to find spaces for the whole school. So we were camped out all over the place until they restored the building. When they restored the building, the art school was able to find reasonable studio spaces. And so the part of the building that you worked in when you were a student, which had been all architecture—drafting rooms and so on—was made into studios.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But the "Pit"—the so-called Pit on the fourth floor.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And the Pit was established. We had an unfriendly building, but it worked for us—those two floors and around the Pit.

JAMES McELHINNEY: The gallery on the third floor and offices throughout it.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: The gallery was an ugly place. But those years were—the first two years I was there were absolute hell. I'd walk into studios, and in some studios, a student wouldn't acknowledge my presence. Like, "Oh, fuck this." So I concentrated my efforts on undergraduate drawing, and doing crits, and so on. But I spent much more time with—I think I even taught a basic drawing course during that time.

Then it suddenly was over. During that first year, Al had been on leave—Al Held. He came back and he wouldn't speak to me. We'd pass, going around doing crits. He never even would speak to me. Then one day, we were having a group critique, and we got into it on some student's work. I somehow—what I said interested him enough that we went out and had a drink. And then, although we were often on opposing sides, we became friends.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's hard, I think, for students today to imagine the kind of genuine rancor that existed between artists of different convictions regarding medium, or form, or style. That these were real battles. They weren't just recreational. They were real battles.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Looking back on them now, they become somewhat more recreational.

JAMES McELHINNEY: We'd like to remember them in that way, but—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: But no. And there were students who were convinced that the only way was toward Minimalism and conceptual art. My rival for that job, although I didn't know it, was the student's candidate—was Robert Morris. I didn't know why they didn't hire Robert Morris. But I never felt in competition with Robert Morris. He wasn't teaching there. He had taught there as a visitor. He was considered a revolutionary figure, I suppose.

JAMES McELHINNEY: He was a basically conceptual artist, and a performance artist, and was a big star.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And actually, I think some of those felt pieces, and some things that I'd seen of Morris, I thought were pretty good—pretty interesting. Then he just—I don't know what happened to him.

JAMES McELHINNEY: All the Auschwitz stuff?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. It was terrible stuff.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, people keep evolving, and or developing, and not always in a forward direction.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It's true. It's true.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So this would have been the early '70s that you and Al started sort of having conversations.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: We had conversations up until the week before he died in Italy. What people don't realize about Al is that Al was a very right-wing Republican, politically.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Doesn't surprise me. Doesn't surprise me.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And what we were arguing toward the end of his life was politics most of the time. But I think, because I was supported by conservative critics like Hilton Kramer, who wasn't all that conservative in the beginning, but became more conservative when he left the *Times* and went to the *New Criterion*.

And his support was both a blessing and curse, because I didn't share his political views. It was taken as a matter of course that I probably did, because we were on the same side aesthetically.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I can recall those arguments in which a lot of the detractors of representation—what had been branded, quote, "the new realism," which included everybody from Chuck Close, to Robert Cottingham, to you, to—

[END OF TRACK AAA_bailey12_1924_m.]

—to fall apart or began to lose value.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, I think that there was a sense that developed at Yale. I don't know outside of Yale.

But between people like John Walker, Jake Berthot, Al Held—Mel Bochner, even—and the rest of us, there was something called high art, that included all serious endeavor, that brought us together with a sort of unspoken sense of quality, where you could find it in any kind of work, that overshadowed all of the more primitive battles of abstract, figurative, and so on that had raged from the late '30s and '40s.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So the idea that there could be some kind of construction of material, or of ideas and sensations that had this—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, the word was pluralism, which was a nasty—a dirty word for a lot of people. But it worked, at Yale, in the coming together of these artists who believed quite different things about what they were doing, what they were meant to do.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's true. It's one of the things that I and, I think, a lot of people who were attracted to the school and were lucky enough to be able to study there—enjoy its resources—found that no one was actually seriously trying to persuade students to paint one way. In fact, the whole emphasis on the critiques was to sort of interrogate the individual decision-making process—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Right. Exactly.

JAMES McELHINNEY: —and to grow individuals and not a brand.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: The idea—one of the things we talked about was that it's one thing to judge a school on whether the work looks good or not. It's not very important because you can make good-looking work come out

of them.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Especially when you're a student. That's a time to make horrible pictures that are going to teach you everything.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Exactly. And it's the time for people to be encouraged to do that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I think there was general agreement on that. Albeit, one or another of us would say, "That's awful—what are you doing?" But there was an acceptance of that also. I think the expectation of students, at that time, was different than today. I don't see anything like the—maybe I was naive, but I didn't feel that the students were one step away from a gallery and a career.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, that was absolutely taboo. One would not dare to pollute the serious kind of discussion—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah.

JAMES McELHINNEY: —quasi-monastic kind of purity of that kind of discussion with filthy lucre. No one would dream of doing that.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, toward the end of my time at Yale, I could see the infection beginning with the invitation—inviting a critic from *Artforum* to participate in the critiques, and I thought we would never do this, never.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So it wouldn't become like it is—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I remember—

JAMES McELHINNEY: —a career fair.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I remember a woman—I don't remember her name, but she was fairly prominent in the pages of *Artforum*—who arrived all, you know, in black and fashionable and so on. One of the students, a guy who was doing a still life painting of a skull or something—they weren't very good. But he was working his way through this, and he's making a lot of progress and teaching himself a lot. And she spotted these things. So she was the first one to speak critically of him.

We were sitting around the edge of the Pit. She said, "And what is this supposed to be, 'The Great American Still Life'"? He said, "What do you mean? No, I'm just trying to paint these things." She said, "Well, don't you have any ambition?"—and went after him. And so, one by one, faculty members from different positions relative to one another blew her out of the place. She didn't speak for the rest of the time that she was there.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I have a very clear picture of how that might have come about. It's really a different culture. Infection is a good word because then you're trying to create an environment—an incubator-type environment where students can follow a process, study the form, and learn how to put something together.

Another question I had was, do you think that there's a possibility that the acceptance of pluralism by, let's say, 1980, was also sort of a growing sense of a new kind of a division between art makers and art directors in the Warhol model?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah, I do. I do. I think that's almost exactly what happened—I would call it the industrialization of art.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's okay. Keep talking. Let's check the time here.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I think, half an hour.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Okay. We still have ten minutes.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: The artist, as producer of spectacle, even if his role in this is only being the artistic director of this spectacle, on one hand, and the "studio rat" artist, on the other hand, who's—

JAMES McELHINNEY: The studio rat versus the stunt and clutter impresario.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yeah.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And right now, the art director is winning.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, it's the conventional paradigm. It's the academic. It's the *artiste pompier* of our day—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah.

JAMES McELHINNEY: —is the impresario of stunts and clutter.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: However, they are billed as the adventurers, and—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: the really deep—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, some economists have suggested that it might be the challenge to come up with some kind of a thingamajig for which there's no price point history—thus, you could put any price you want on it, and start gambling.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It's a good observation. That's one aspect of it.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] But so—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I find it so boring. I mean, one of the things that's so depressing about Chelsea [NYC] is the absence of anything that can engage one for more than just a look-around.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, as you know, it's been hit with a biblical deluge. And I think a lot of people are going to have an insurance bonanza.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I'm waiting, now, to hear what happened to Betty Cuningham.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I think your gallery's at least—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It's up off the—

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's up off the—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: —off the street level a little bit. It's further uptown than the galleries that seem to have suffered the most. But I don't get anything but the machine message from the gallery. The last time I talked to Betty, they were closing, because they had to evacuate. And she was going home.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Discouraging, but it's not the first time—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No.

JAMES McELHINNEY: —New York has weathered a storm like this.

It would be interesting to note—since from almost the beginning, from the end of your student years at Yale, you were involved in some way with teaching. How do you think that process has served you, or inspired you, or challenged you in your own studio practice? What's the reciprocity between teaching and being an artist?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I've thought about it, since it's been now, I guess, 17 years since I stopped teaching. And the first thing I could say is that I don't miss it at all. The years that I was teaching—well, I should say that for my generation, there were almost no artists who made a living on their work. So almost everyone taught.

The people who were lucky enough to have worked in New York during the days of the WPA were the only people I knew of who had been able to be artists full-time, unless they were hacks or unless they were doing it out of promotional work, or portrait painters or whatever. Very few serious artists. So teaching was part of the package—part of what you took on if you were going to be a serious painter.

After a certain time—or I should say—knowing this, or feeling this, I wanted to be the best teacher I could be. I took it very seriously. I did not take seriously the academic life—the idea that it was a safe haven. It was something that I had to do to buy my time in the studio. And as long as I was doing it, I should do it seriously and as well as I could.

Now, what I got from that varied, from a lot of tiresome babble to some serious contacts with serious young people who stuck in my mind, and many of them—not always the ones who gained fame and fortune—they weren't always the most interesting of the people that I dealt with. I think back on my first-year painting class, just before I left for Indiana. I had in that class Rackstraw Downes, Richard Serra, Nancy Graves, Harriet Shorr. I

am missing a couple of others, I'm sure.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Janet Fish?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, Janet was in Neil's class.

JAMES McELHINNEY: In Neil's. And what about Mangold and—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Sylvia Mangold was in my drawing class.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And Bob [Mangold], he was—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Bob was off doing his Mangold thing.

JAMES McELHINNEY: —thing. Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I don't think Bob knew what was going on in the school at all. He was always doing that. And the same was sort of true of Brice Marden. But in that group, there were a couple of people who I thought were better than any of the ones that I've mentioned, and more promising. So you can never tell. But they were.

You know, I was very lucky because the places that I taught, I had very good students to teach. Also, I didn't have the whole load. There was a community of really respectable artists teaching with you, who sometimes confirmed their teaching, and sometimes were antagonistic toward it. But it was all on a high level. And so I miss some of that.

One of the things I miss most about not teaching anymore is the contact I had with fellow teachers. Some of the discussions that we had were more meaningful, more profound than anything that I've had outside of Yale. I remember Al Held saying, "I can say things here that I can't say anyplace in New York. So I'm able to be freer in my debate and discussion of issues." I think that's so.

JAMES McELHINNEY: In a way, the sort of studio incubator environment worked both for the teachers and for the students.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: But that's the part that I remember. And as soon as I say that, I think of, for example, Chuck Close's recollections of Yale. Chuck and Serra and a couple of other people—Steve Posen, I guess, and maybe Rackstraw.

During those two years—the final two years—there were, off on Crown Street, in a separate house—they developed a kind of esprit and critical environment, among themselves, that they count as the most important thing they had. And that's grown into—perhaps it's been mythologized by Chuck more than it deserves to be.

But still, that was another mode. That took place also. You had people who felt that they did it with one another and the faculty was pretty much irrelevant, forgetting that the faculty allowed them to do that and encouraged them to do that. That was during the period I was away and during the six years I was at Indiana. Jack Tworkov had a very different view of things.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But it's also at a time when there was a growing sense of student activity in things political, and a kind of feeling of having to openly mistrust authority.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. Yeah. Well, that was true. And it was probably a proper time for that to happen.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yeah, that's what I meant. Yeah. It makes sense. We should pause and insert another disc, if the transcriber will bear with us.

[END OF TRACK AAA_bailey12_1925_m.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney resuming conversation on November sixth, 2012 with William Bailey in New Haven. Thanks for the coffee. Nice coffee. Delicious. So—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: During all that time, I was also involved in New York, with other painters that I knew that had nothing to do with Yale. And in 1963, I think, my friend Varujan Boghosian, who was a wonderful sculptor and collagist, who was represented by the Stable Gallery, told me that Eleanor Ward, who was the director of the Stable, kept inquiring about me, and that I should send her some photographs. This was before anyone used slides, really.

So I sent a pile of black and white photographs to Eleanor, who I had spoken with before about the possibility of being represented by the Stable. Which I wanted to do, because first of all, it was a vanguard gallery, it was not

known as a conservative gallery, and I wanted my work seen in that context. A little mad it seems to me now, but that's the way I felt at the time. I had known Jim Brooks and Conrad Marca-Relli and Nick Carone and Enrico Donati and a lot of people who were connected with the Stable. And Pollock's widow, Lee Krasner, and I'd known Eleanor for years.

So I brazenly sent these with a note saying, "This is my work. If you are interested in it, contact—I'm going to be in Philadelphia." I was in Philadelphia for something. I got a telegram from Eleanor Ward saying, love the work, want you in the gallery, and let's talk.

So I went to New York and I arrived at Eleanor's apartment. She had moved. Her gallery was—what's the block that the Whitney is on? 74th Street?

JAMES McELHINNEY: 74th, yeah.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: 74th, isn't it? She was at 74th Street, just off Madison. And she had an apartment downstairs from the gallery. You went down a little circular staircase. I arrived there, and Nick Carone was there. Nick and Eleanor were going through what remained of a fifth of Scotch, and Nick was once again telling a story of a particular fight between Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock. Nick was full of stories, as everyone knows, and I heard a great number of them over the years. But he stuck around and the conversation got loopier and loopier as the evening went on.

Finally, Nick was poured into a taxicab, and I said to Eleanor, looking at my watch, "I should go, it's very late. But I would like to talk business for just a minute." She said, "Bill, I never talk business, I only talk about art." I should've taken that as a hint that I should be with another gallery.

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: So anyway, there I was. I was with the gallery, but nothing happened. No show was planned, nothing was going on.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Anything on the wall, anything in the back room?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Nothing. I sent her a whole bunch of stuff. Actually, I had applied for a Guggenheim [Fellowship], and after the Guggenheim looked at the work, it was to be sent to her. And it was. So she had five paintings, I guess, major paintings. Well, I got the Guggenheim, and I went to Paris the following year. So there was no real pressure on having a show or anything. I was out of the country. When I got back, I said, "Eleanor, don't you think I ought to have a show?" She said, "Well, Bill, yes you should, but timing is everything."

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: "And trust me, leave the timing to me." I said, "What kind of timing are you talking about? Are we waiting for people to do paintings of eggs and girls in empty rooms?" She said, "No, no, no." I said, "Well, I really think it's time to have a show." And we left off with that thought.

Meanwhile, I had gone back to Indiana after Paris. Leland Bell and his wife and daughter were in residence there as visitors. I knew Leland 's work, and his wife Ulla's work less. They became good friends. Leland was represented by Robert Schoelkopf, and I knew Robert Schoelkopf's gallery as a gallery not particularly in the news, but a gallery that was very solid and had some interesting figurative artists. People like Milet Andrejevic and Gabriel Laderman and Leland and Ulla Bell. He said, "Let me send some things to Schoelkopf and see what he says."

I had known Schoelkopf at Yale—not well, but he bought a drawing from me when I was a student—but I hadn't been in touch with him for years and years. So Leland sent the things saying, "I can't do anything for you. If he likes something he'll say so, but don't count on my influence." So I didn't. Then I got a charming letter back from Bob Schoelkopf saying that he loved the work, and he would like to give me a show, next season. Since this was the spring of the year, that looked terrific to me. So I went with the Schoelkopf gallery.

I called Eleanor and said, "Eleanor, I've decided to go to Robert Schoelkopf." She said, "Oh, oh that's good. Yes. Yes," she said, "anyone who shows Joseph Cornell is good in my book." And that's one of the people that Schoelkopf showed. And she said, "I'm so happy that you didn't go with that sadistic man." I said, "Who's that?" She said, "What's his name? Frumkin."

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: She said, "He's a nasty man and he shows sadistic art." So she wished me well, I wished her well. I had the show at Schoelkopf, which as I've told you before, Gabriel Laderman had been very generous in throwing a party for me after the opening at his apartment on the Upper West Side. We got a good turnout at

the opening. Then I had this terrific review by Hilton Kramer and the Sunday paper after I had gone back to Indiana.

So I showed with Schoelkopf, well, until he died in 1990. The date escapes me now. I think it was 1990.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Early '90s or 1990.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Or the early '90s. That was a great loss for me. Bob had leukemia and he was going downhill for quite a while before he died. His wife, Jane, was also a good friend. We were like family. So that was very tough.

During that time, I was lucky enough to have my own stock going up, in terms of—there was a *Time* magazine piece by Robert Hughes, in which I was featured along with Philip Pearlstein and Al Leslie. Then the younger ones like Chuck Close and so on. Called "The Realist as Corn God", a little ironic title.

But later, there was a *Newsweek* cover with *Portrait of S*, which is a story that might be interesting to know. I had hired a Yale student by the name of Sarai Ribicoff to pose for me. She had posed in my class, I think, and so I had her pose privately. And got to know her, and she was a marvelous, intelligent, sensitive person. And funny. I just thought the world of her.

I did a whole bunch of drawings from Sarai and, also, I started a painting based on the drawings. Not really looking at her, but based on the drawings. And yet they weren't copies of the drawings, the drawings were inspirational. I worked on that painting for quite a long time, and showed it at Schoelkopf in a show. It was purchased by the University of Virginia art museum—oddly enough, the Bayly museum.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right, Bayly. "A Y." Yeah.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Spelled differently. Sarai graduated from Yale and went to Los Angeles, where she had a very good job as an editorial writer for the *L. A. Times*, I think. Maybe it was the [*Herald*] *Examiner*. I can't remember which.

She was, apparently, doing a story on the economy, and she was having dinner with an economist in Venice, California. They had dinner. Coming out of the dinner, they were held up by a guy who wanted their money and jewelry, and so on, which they turned over. Somehow in a moment of panic, he shot her, point blank, and she died, which was a terrible, terrible tragedy.

Well about, I guess it was five months after—yeah, five months after that—what's his name, what's the critic's name? Mark. He wrote the de Kooning book.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh. Jed Perl?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. The biography.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, yeah.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Then he was art critic for *Newsweek*.

JAMES McELHINNEY: After John Ashbury was—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. I think I have the book. You can hold that just a second.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I have that book.

[END OF TRACK AAA_bailey12_1926_m.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Are we on?

JAMES McELHINNEY: We're on. But the transcriber will ignore all of this chatter. One hopes.

[Laughs.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's interesting having an iPhone. You can just retrieve information right—suck it out of the aether. Mysteriously. Could never do that before.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: I think it's part of why people forget things so much now. Because you don't ever have to retain anything.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, it's like GPS. People no longer know how to read maps, or—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Do you have one of those?

JAMES McELHINNEY: No. I am GPS, Bill. I refuse to use one, because I find it to be an intriguing mental exercise to visualize terrain and, you know—as a kid I used to do hiking and orienteering and map reading and all that stuff.

And, actually, a whole other conversation—in the '90s, when I was involved with all of those, you know, the pictures of battlefields, I actually—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I remember your—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yeah. I taught myself how to make maps using 19th century equipment. It was quite—it's drawing in a different space. And interesting in a different way.

We are running. Okay. So we're going to resume the conversation.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah.

JAMES McELHINNEY: The article written in *Newsweek*—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes. Mark Stephens came up to New Haven, and we had lunch. He was doing an article on figurative painting. This was an interview for that piece that he was writing.

I don't remember whether he brought up the cover at that time or not. I have a feeling that it may have been later. But it may have been at that lunch. They wanted to use that painting of Sarai for the cover of the magazine.

I said I didn't think that was a good idea. First of all, because Sarai's family didn't know that she had been posing. She had told me that they didn't know that she was posing. Her uncle, Abe Ribicoff was a famous politician.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: A senator from Connecticut, and so on and so forth. So I remember talking on the phone with the editor, and he said, "We want to use that. That's the cover we want."

I said, "But what if I don't want you to use that." He said, "Well, it doesn't really matter. Because we can use it anyway. We have the rights to use it." I hadn't really thought this through. But he didn't actually have the rights, as far as I know. Legally he couldn't use that image without my permission. But I didn't know that at the time.

So they used that image. And then I started getting calls from people saying, "This *Portrait of S*, is that Sarai Ribicoff?" I said, "No. It's not Sarai Ribicoff. It's fiction." I mean, it's a work of art. It's not a portrait, even though it's called that.

I had threatening calls from—there was a woman who worked for another paper on the West Coast, who said she'd been a classmate of Sarai's at Yale. She knew that that was Sarai. And that unless I admitted it, she was going to go ahead and print it anyway. So I said, "You'll have to do what you have to do." This is fiction.

Well, then—it was just all getting out of hand. I have a whole folder of clippings from papers around the country. The other aspect of that, of course, was that here was a bare-breasted woman on the cover of *Newsweek* magazine, which had never had anything like that before.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: So it was banned in certain states in the South. Pasties were put on in certain supermarkets and so on. Taken off the shelves in various places.

I remember going to Grand Central. In those days, they had—I guess it was Kodak—had these big blow-ups of *Newsweek* covers. On four sides of Grand Central—way up high—I walked into Grand Central and there was my painting, four times, up on the walls in big transparencies of the painting.

And what it said to me, really, was—and I never was able to express this clearly when I was asked about it—well, didn't you feel good having your painting on the cover of *Newsweek*? It's like, well, no, not really. I couldn't for a number of reasons. One of them, of course, was out of respect for the privacy of Sarai and her family.

Another was that it had to do, really, with the way I felt about painting. Whether painting was, finally, something—certain dimensions of a physical object that drew its presence from being a physical object. That it wasn't

about just this image. That it was a distortion. And that I felt very vulnerable as an artist in these crosshairs.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, the image was appropriated from the painting.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yeah.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: So that was that. Except that I finally talked to Sarai's mother. She's a very sophisticated woman. Very worldly. She said, "Don't worry about it. Sarai would have gotten a big kick out of it." And she said, "And I know it's a work of art. It's not anything for you to worry about."

So I was much relieved. And, in fact, they brought me back a poster—a Piero [della Francesca] poster from Italy the next trip they took.

JAMES McELHINNEY: How nice.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: They were nice about it. So that's the end of that story.

But I do think that one of the things that's happened besides this art directorship we were talking about before in art, is that there's a kind of industrialization of art that I see in producing spectacle in the galleries. That a painting—the kind of attention a painting draws to itself—doesn't have a chance competing in that world. And it shouldn't compete with that world.

But the focus on what we call art—or I should say, what we call art now as a society, seems aimed at that spectacle. A good example is the production of Jeff Koons.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Or the production of Andy Warhol.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Damien Hirst.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Damien Hirst. Of—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, I remember in the '80s there was an artist named Mark Kostabi—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: He's still at it.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Who's still at it. But his work was so obviously, transparently, happily bad. He didn't really care.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It was not about that. It was all about creating these sort of—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: But he had 80 artists working for him at one time making Kostabis.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, he was an employer.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And—well, Andy Warhol, all after, didn't call his studio a studio. He called it a factory.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes. Well, he was the most honest of all.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I think so.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: He was also, I think, a brilliant businessman. He knew how to merchandise and how to make it a brand.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And then about how to profit from that brand. Because think of all of the Marilyns, all of the Elvises, all of—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Mao.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: All of that stuff. And it goes on and on. You'd think that they'd run out of work. But, no. They

just—it just keeps coming.

That's what I think of as being industrial. Imagine, you have a major artist like Vermeer. How many Vermeers are there in the world? How many were there ever?

JAMES McELHINNEY: 40. Less than.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. Less than 40.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, the word "art" has been expanded to include things—to encompass territories that were unoccupied in the past, that now are being occupied by art directors, not art makers. And the idea that a work of art could inspire meditation, could lead to reflection and some kind of a sustained—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Contemplative.

JAMES McELHINNEY: A contemplative—yeah. Some kind of a sustained condition of attention from which something else—some other kind of experience would arrive. And instead, it simply becomes another kind of stock certificate. Or sports car. Or fur coat. Or a consumable. Or a device for investment, or moving money around.

So we talked about this a little bit before, that the plurality that began to develop at Yale out of these rancorous quarrels over style may have actually been sort of intuiting this new bifurcation.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I don't know. If you view it as offering permission to extend the bounds of art, yes. But I don't really think that's what it was about. I think it was about trying to identify the parameters of quality that one could find in different kinds of activity that all still remained within the confines of our ideal for art.

Because the claims made were pretty much the same. The claims for de Kooning were the same claims that were made for Cezanne, in a way. The claims for a Pollock were the same as the claims made for, in a strange way, Hopper. The American-ness, all of that and so on. But it was all viewed within an area of personal engagement, vision. The discrete object, the individual object.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Or to try to be acrobatic. You could say, spatially, it would have a lot in common, formally, with the *Paradiso* by Tintoretto at the Palazzo Ducale in Venice. So that kind of matrix of space.

But what is it, do you think, that actually defines what was the condition of quality that everybody could agree on? What was it that is absent from the directorial art impresarios of today?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It was elusive. Like jazz.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So feeling?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. It was the kind of investment that was put in it. It was what the expectation was—that if you made something, and you sought a certain quality in it, what did it have to have? It had to surprise you in ways. It had to have its own life. A whole bunch of requirements that art doesn't have to have anymore.

I mean, to take Warhol, again—because it's so blatant and so obvious, his position. He was making those things—those images—and he didn't ask any of these questions. They were irrelevant. And I think, for most of the art world now, they are irrelevant. Most of the art world.

As soon as I say that, I'm reminded of how many young serious artists I know that are working. There are probably as many now as there ever were. But they're almost invisible in the official art world or the commercial art world. You don't see them in museums. You don't see them in the galleries. They're working.

One place you do see them sometimes is on your laptop. But then you don't see the real thing. You're only seeing this exchange of information—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, you're seeing a distortion, to use the rhetoric that you used to describe your painting as a transparency. That a reproduction is, by virtue of being not the thing itself, is a distortion of the thing itself.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So there's a joke I heard Sting tell once, which is, "How does a jazz musician end up at the end of the year with two million dollars?" And the punchline is, "Start it with three."

[Laughs.]

So the point is almost to not even think about commerce. To not even admit that. And—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, you have to. You have to really—

JAMES McELHINNEY: —the cynicism that can lead to.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. You have to really almost forget it. And certainly forget it in the studio. I mean, it's a parlor game for artists to talk about prices and galleries and so on and so forth. That's best left in bars or cocktail parties or whatever.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's just talking shop. It's basically boring.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. Yeah. But the world of the painter is so privileged, so free of that other thing. And that's kind of miraculous in our society that that continues.

JAMES McELHINNEY: There's a quote by de Kooning from the Tom Hess MoMA catalog that showed many, many years ago. The yellow catalog—the ubiquitous yellow de Kooning catalog—where he quotes de Kooning saying—there's some great quotes by de Kooning where he says, you know, "Good painting is like yogurt. You've got to start with a little culture first."

And then there's another one, which is—he talks about it being the responsibility of an artist to actually live in a free condition. That the work is not just the sole object of the activity of painting. But the painting is something that hopefully is going to transform the viewer. But you can't worry about that at the moment you're working on it. And that it becomes part of your working towards a free condition as a human being.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I'm not sure that I understand what that means.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, maybe I'm not expressing it properly. But anyway, he said it's the responsibility of the artist to be free.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes. I think that's right. And I think most artists who are serious about their work are free. But that freedom also takes on severe limitations. Because you're only free within your world.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And you have to work.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And you could be free from wealth and from fame and from comfort from security and all these other things that many people desire.

So in your own work, as your career evolved, and—you lost Schoelkopf because he passed away. And then you went to [André] Emmerich?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I never would have thought of going to Emmerich. It was Jane Schoelkopf who said that she'd be happy to help me find another gallery after the gallery closed. She closed it as soon as Bob died.

She talked to Emmerich. And I thought, what a waste of time. But, no. Emmerich said, yes, he would be very interested.

So the next thing I knew, I was having lunch in André's little—he had a little dining room in the gallery, and a chef. It was his antiquities room. So there was wonderful Greek and Roman artifacts. We had some sort of Oriental food or Asian food of some sort. I don't remember. But it was very elegant.

André and Jim Yohe and me. And so I joined the gallery at that lunch. For the next several years I was with Emmerich. We had, I think, four shows there, at least.

Then in, I guess it was '98, André sold the gallery to Sotheby's. I remember I was in Italy. André called and said, "I want to be the first to tell you before you see in the papers that we've joined forces," as he put it, with Sotheby's. "Which is a wonderful thing for the gallery and for all of our artists. Because we'll have all of the facilities of Sotheby's. Their mailing lists, their spaces abroad, their capital for producing catalogs. And so this is a wonderful move."

Well, what happened was that Sotheby's had bought the inventory and really took over the gallery. André was

supposed to remain as the director. Everything was supposed to stay as it had been. He was moved to some advisory role. People in the gallery were complaining that they couldn't even buy a paper clip without going through the rigmarole of Sotheby's bureaucracy.

Then, Sotheby's hired Jeffrey Deitch. Jeffrey came and I noticed Jeffrey didn't pay any attention to any of us. You'd go in the gallery and Jeffrey would be at his desk—he wouldn't look up or anything. I thought it was me. Then I talked to do Judy Pfaff and she said, "No, no. He doesn't pay any attention to me." And Al, the same.

I don't know about others. But I assume that it was all the same. Jeffrey was on his own—had his own plans. I remember André set up a lunch at Four Seasons with Jeffrey, André, and me. Jeffrey, of course, appeared late and started mumbling things about changing my image to make it more—what he meant was, trying to make me hip somehow. Which is impossible.

[Laughs.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: You know? Ridiculous. And he hadn't had much faith in that proposition either.

And then we had lunch with—who's the guy who's the auctioneer and the head of Sotheby's auctions? An Englishman? Very smart. Very slick. He runs the auctions.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I'm sure I'm getting the name wrong. But there was—in this part of the Taubman scandals. Maybe that was Sothe—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, that—

JAMES McELHINNEY: That was later.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. That was—this guy is there now. The guy I'm talking about now. And he was the liaison with the Emmerich Gallery.

Well, what finally happened was that Sotheby's used part of the gallery—now, this is prime space in the Fuller Building—for their classes in the various specialties.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, they have a master's in Art History, Museum Studies, Arts Management.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah, it's sort of management content. So they used the space for that. They scheduled a show of Tibetan somethings for the gallery without checking the gallery's schedule. And they had to cancel. They completely mucked things up. This is before Dede—what was her name?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Not Dede Brooks? Was it Dede?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Was it Dede or E.E. or—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Dede, I think.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Anyway, she was—

JAMES McELHINNEY: The Arthur Taubman, Anthony Tennant—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah, she's the one who went to jail.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, Taubman went to jail. I don't think she did. Or did she?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I think she did. For a short time. But maybe not. Several of the artists remarked that when Sotheby's took over the gallery, none of us ever heard from the Sotheby's people. We never got a letter from them saying, we're happy to be representing you now, blah, blah, blah. Nothing.

So we all left. One at a time. And the gallery closed. André said he would help me find another dealer.

Meanwhile, Jane Schoelkopf was on my case about another gallery. And she set up a meeting with Betsy Miller, Robert Miller's wife. It was a disaster.

I was supposed to meet her at their apartment on East End Avenue. And she had nothing to say. She was sort of affectless. I spent an embarrassing 20 minutes or so in her presence. When I left I was like, well, it's certainly not going to be the Miller Gallery that I go to.

Two days later—and I may have told Jane that. I didn't say that to a lot of people. Two days later I got a call from Robert Miller saying that he was very anxious to have me in the gallery. And that he wanted to come up

and see me right away.

So he arrived—and Robert Miller was not able to sit down. He had to either be flat on his back or standing. He had a spinal condition. So Robert arrived, his son driving a big SUV with Betsy, his wife, and his daughter Sarah, who is a singer, and the son Chris, who drove the car, who designed catalogs and so on.

He came and looked at the work that was here. And he said, "Let's do a show. Let's do a show just of figures." I said, "Wow, I don't know whether we could—I don't think there's enough work." He said, "We'll borrow. We'll do a big show. This will be different. No still life, just figures."

So we did it. That was the show *Studio Fictions*. Which got a very mixed response, I must say. But they did a very nice catalog. The next thing that I knew, the Coach company was taking over their space in the Fuller Building. And they were moving to Chelsea.

So my next show at Miller was in Chelsea. Bob was not around. He and Betsy were breaking up. So it became Betsy Miller's gallery, really. It looked to me as though there was very little interest in really promoting me, or—

Philip Pearlstein felt the same. Rackstraw I assumed felt the same way. And so I left.

Betty Cuningham had been working for Miller. She went to Miller at the same time I did. She'd been the only one who'd really handled my work when I was at Miller, aside from Bob. And I said, "Look, if you are ever thinking of leaving, let me know. Because I'll have to leave, too. And I want to find another gallery."

So she decided to leave. I knew that she was looking for a space for herself. But she didn't steal anybody from Betsy. We were all on our way out. And so we all landed with Betty. That must have been 2003. It's such a beautiful space. And she is such a sympathetic dealer. Really, that's what matters, after all.

I would say that Chelsea is not to my liking. I think that the expectations in Chelsea are not the same as the expectations uptown—57th Street or Madison. But you get all of the traffic that you don't get uptown. You have a lot people who see your work. They may all be juvenile delinquents but, you know.

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Laughs.] When I interviewed Richard Gray, I asked him about the downtown scene. And his response was, there are always a lot of galleries flailing around downtown trying to do something, which is a real uptown attitude. I realized that there is really a different culture between the gallery scene in the orbit of the museums and out in the wild SoHo, Chelsea frontier.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. I was used to the uptown scene for most of my career. I mean, I love the kind of spaces that are available in Chelsea, and all of that. One has to allow that Chelsea is a happening place. That's the place that gets the press.

But I'm not going to get that press anyway with the kind of work that I do. And the reputation—or lack of reputation that I have.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I mean, it's really, as a gallery neighborhood, it's almost like an outlet mall. It's not like SoHo where there was this integration of commercial, residential, restaurants, bars, boutiques.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. Because there was no residential. It was all trucks and cabs.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, that's Chelsea, yeah. So even now, there are very few restaurants, coffee shops.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: They're getting there.

JAMES McELHINNEY: They're arriving.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: They're arriving, as are the apartments.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Very expensive places.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But still, I think it lacks the cohesion that SoHo had.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I wasn't a great fan of SoHo, either.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I can imagine.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I suppose for me, the ability to be uptown, go to the Met, go to the MoMA, go to the Frick, go see the shows of my contemporaries all in the same area, made it very—I won't say comfortable, but going into

town was an occasion.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Now I'm going into this jungle with lots of big white rooms.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's different. I think the uptown scene, also, historically—and perhaps even now—is just more accessible to the collectors and curators and the museums.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It is. It is.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And so that will always be its advantage.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: A certain kind of collector goes to Chelsea.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And other collectors, I think, don't. I suspect that the people who collect my work, for the most part, don't generally go to Chelsea. Still, in all, I've managed to survive there.

As far as my work goes over the years, for a long time I felt that the challenge in the still lives was never-ending. That however much it looked as though I was doing the same thing, for me, I was never doing the same thing.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I understand that. And I think that if one looks at the work over time, one sees really clear evolutions, a lot of ideas.

A few years ago, you started playing with light effects in your work that brought in the possibility of the element of time, among other things. How did that come about?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I don't know. I don't know. The first painting where that was an overt move was *The Woman in the Window*. A very large painting that just evolved that way.

At a certain point, I saw that the whole thing had to do with that light. The lack of light on her head. And then turning the wall—the outside wall into the picture plane, or the picture plane in the outside wall with the hands—and it developed really out of that one image.

And then I've worked with that with other images.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, let's talk about that. I've got a bit of a question. Because your working process consists of drawing from live models.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. Well, yes. I do that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: At some point. You do it as a discipline, as a regime, as a thing that you do. Like going to the gym, or a musician doing scales on their instrument, or whatever. It's a part of your normal routine.

And then you invent compositions based on what you've digested and absorbed from wherever. You invent—like the compositions that are on the wall, which are—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: That's a fairly recent thing.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Really?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: To do those musings. I did it for a while. And then I stopped doing it altogether. And then for years, with the still lives, I did little drawings like that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Like this?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. Off to the side. But they were usually covered with notes for colors that I use.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I see.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And they were done after the fact. Not as thinking about possibilities.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, that's interesting. That's very interesting.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: These are not preparatory. They're just musing on a subject throughout. There are two girls lying in the grass, in the shade, in Italy. There is a valley and hills on the other side.

JAMES McELHINNEY: See, this is one of the things that I wanted to get into the record about your process, is that the assumption would be if, half a century on, somebody gathers up all of this work, what they're going to do is they're going to say, oh, these drawings are all the same size. They're all done with graphite. They're all related in some way to larger works. Works in color, whatever. They must be studies. They must be preparatory.

Now, I know that this is not the case. And that you do the drawings from life. Like you hired Sarai and you drew her. And out of drawing her came an idea for a painting of a woman—a half-length portrait of a woman—that was an invented work that was—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. Also, I mean, you have to go the whole distance. There was Sarai, there was that famous Balthus of the woman with—who was bare-breasted with the white thing. You know that painting?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right. Canonical. Yeah. Exactly.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Which I didn't look at, but which I know was in the back of my mind doing that. Just as one of the very earliest of the figure paintings is related to the Ingres *Grande Odalisque*, even though it's not the same pose.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Was not an homage.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And it wasn't an homage. It was simply the echo of something that was there.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But these different genres of drawing or paintings, the works you do, sometimes in acrylic on paper, or with the gouache on paper, the paintings on canvas, the drawings—the drawings from life are different, obviously—but each genre of work, as somebody might try to taxonomize them, are just different filters or mental environments in which you digest and explore these different ideas.

So they're devices for not visualizing other works, but for just pondering what's happening within each. And so that eight-and-a-half-eleven sheets offer you an environment that allows you to ponder certain things at large scale. Oil paintings do not.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. Not only working on that size, but working on the graph paper—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right. Like here. Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: —somehow is important.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It sets up a rhythm. It's, like, you think about somebody like—I don't know if anybody's talked about this relationship to Agnes Martin, but there are meditations on the edges of the page. The sort of echoes of the edges of the page.

People tend to look at the grid, because it's been so discussed as a modernest trope that they don't really see that each of the verticals is an echo of the outside of the lateral edges. And each of the horizontals is an echo of the top and the bottom edge. And that's a different way of having a look at it. That's a way of existing in a space and using imagery, not as a goal, but as a way of pondering that space.

I think it's important to understand. Because I think that one of the problems with the computer age, and I think you'd agree—and I think it goes back to your *Portrait of S* on the *Newsweek* cover hanging at Grand Central as a giant photo transparency—is that we see everything today in distortion. And that the imagery becomes the only thing that we can take away from the experience.

It's one of the reasons why, perhaps, abstract painting is in a state of recession. When someone opens up a page of thumbnails, they're going to click on what's recognizable. They're going to find an image. And they're going to have a look at that first.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, I think, also, that you see now—this may be unfair, but—people walk into a gallery, whether it's in a museum or in a commercial gallery, and they sort of scan what's on the walls. And walk out. Or, sometimes, they'll walk to a particular image and become engaged and maybe go on to another.

But so many times, I see people who look in and say, "I've got the idea." And they walk out thinking that they've seen the work. Because a lot of work doesn't demand any more than that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Good point. They're channel surfing.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah.

JAMES McELHINNEY: They're channel surfing. They're just walking down the street channel surfing in real time.

So it's a lack of attention. It's a sort of acquired ADD.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes. And when you're talking about painting, there are so many different things that aren't apparent to you at 50 feet or when you're surfing. The touch, the quality of the paint, the size, the scale of things within that size.

It's a world of effects. This has the effect of being an abstract painting, this has the effect of being a figurative painting. I'm thinking, say, of the struggle to find a single shape. Say it's an abstract painting. And the painter has struggled to fit that shape into that rectangle.

If it's seen the same way as something where the guy puts a shape down, people say, well, it's sort of the same. But it's not. If you look at Mondrian, for example—and all the people who might think that Mondrian's about rulers and straight lines and so on. Look at what's been moved, what's been changed, what's been found. That's what painting is about.

What it is, is that you have to be aware—one should be aware—of how the painting takes place in time. You know what I mean?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yes.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: That it's not just what the finished painting is, but it's what the finished painting says about the extension of one's time and attention in forming that image. Decisions that have been made and then countered. Arguments that take place when you're painting a painting that in a real painting, you see.

JAMES McELHINNEY: We were talking earlier about an idea or an experience having "legs" in the Hollywood sense. It's like, you can go back to it again and again and again. And so a painting may not reveal everything on first viewing. Even if you stand there all day, you may have to return in ten years to find something more.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, how is it that you can go look at a painting, and if you really like that painting, you go back to see that painting.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: You don't say, "Oh, well, I saw that painting." Like I saw that movie last week. No. I saw that painting. Now I want to go back and see—not see it again, but just—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, some films are worth many viewings as well.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: There are films that are worth multiple, multiple viewings. But I'm talking about movies.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh. Entertainments.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Entertainments.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, this gets back to what we were talking about, about how the plurality of style was accepted at Yale. Because you all understood that you were in pursuit of something beyond that.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And that that was something that we can't define. It becomes like you said, like jazz. It's a feeling. So in a way, the painting has to also be a device from which a person who chooses to engage it, open themselves to it, can actually come away with something. Some kind of a feeling, some kind of a sensation, some kind of a way of averring that they can be touched by something, moved by something.

I took students to the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in Venice, which you know well, I'm sure. And, of course, everybody walks around with the mirrors like lunch trays having a look at the ceilings. They all pile up the lunch trays or the mirrors and they all start heading down the stairs.

And I told them, "No, no, no, no. Come back here. Go to the front of the building. On the left there's a little door ." You know where this is going. I said, "There's a door. Go in there. I'll be with you in a minute." I wait five minutes.

And I walk in. They're all weeping. Because that's where the *Crucifixion* of Tintoretto is. The "boss on the cross." That weird surrealistic painting. I said to them, "Now you know what a painting can do to you."

That's so hard to achieve. You can't really teach anybody how to do that, or explain how that's done. So if Tintoretto was trying to blow people away—which clearly he was with that picture—when I think, if we were to

rouse him from his slumber and ask him, he'd probably say, "Yeah, sure. Whatever." And move on.

But what do you think about your work? What are you hoping people take away from it?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I have no idea what people take away from it. Nor am I even concerned with what they take away from it. Really. I mean, deep down, what I care about is whether I get that burst.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, we're all the first member of whatever our audience is. The minute you put down the brush and you say, no more—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. Even during.

JAMES McELHINNEY: During.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: During. Because finding it, you have to be audience and maker at the same time.

JAMES McELHINNEY: At the same time. From the beginning.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: From the beginning. First mark. What is this—what is it telling me? And at that point where the painting takes over—for me, anyway—that's when the excitement really comes. When I'm no longer in charge. When what I've put down is alive enough that it's affecting my next moves.

And I have to argue with it and say, "You want me to do this. But I'm going to do this." Or, "You may be right. I should do this instead of what I planned to do."

It's something that I inherited from, I suppose, "New York School" of painting. From so-called action painting, Abstract Expressionism and so on. That is, the idea that you make a painting from scratch. And you don't know where you're going, really, in the painting until it gets to a certain point and it tells you what you're painting.

Now, if you have some sort of—you know that you're in Kansas and you're not in Missouri—that helps. Because the moves that you make are appropriate to one state or the other.

But the idea of moving along progressively toward an image that you already knew, I've never found possible. I can't draw a thing and then plan my process in painting it all the way through.

I have to be continually upsetting the apple cart. Let's say, a figure's turned this way. What if I turn it this way? And I go through those things. This object is thin and narrow, maybe it should be fat.

But all those changes occur in my dialogue with the painting. And then, at a certain point, things start to congeal.

JAMES McELHINNEY: The painting begins to tell you what to do.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It tell me what to do.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It begins to win the argument.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. Now, we both know that the painting has no argument to make. It's all you, anyway.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, it's like playing chess against yourself, in a way. But you have to create tensions within that conversation to move to the next—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Or you notice that you have certain habits. And you say, why do I keep centering things? So you move it over. It tells you things about yourself. Why is this always the same curve here?

And sometimes you go through a whole series of changes, and wind up back where I started. But where I started isn't the same place as where I started. I thought I was back at the same place that I started. But I could only know that having gone through all of these steps.

It's the journey. The journey is so important, to me.

JAMES McELHINNEY: The circle—the perfect one—is never completely round.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It doesn't arrive at its starting point. It moves you to a different place.

Well, what are your hopes regarding the art of painting? How do you see it evolving in the future? How do you

see it evolving around you—or how have you witnessed it evolving around you during the course of your life? And how do you see it evolving in the future? Or do you see it as a continuum?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, a couple of thoughts on that.

When I first came back to Yale in 1969, I remember explaining to someone who had said painting is dead saying, "It may be. It may be that painting is dead. But I'm a painter."

And so, like a shoemaker after shoe factories, I do what I do. That's all I can say about that.

However, what I deeply believe is—and it's confirmed more and more by—in spite of all I've said about the way people view things—by the museums, by the fact that people do care and that paintings do command attention, and that they do command the kind of extended contact that a museum can offer.

I'm very admiring of [Philippe de] Montebello [former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York] for having that sense of the museum. As a person, he may annoy me in terms of style and so on sometimes. But as a defender of art, I give him great credit.

And I'm sorry to see, now at the Met, to see the shift already with [Thomas] Campbell giving way. But we have these institutions—

[END OF TRACK AAA_bailey12_1927_m.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: [loud fan turns on] —which I think is demonstrably true. Because we had the Museum of Modern Art. And we knew modern painting from that. And all they had to look at was this shit they were showing around Paris at the time. I think that's true.

One of the problems right now for a young painter is—a younger artist, someone who wants to be an artist—is that there's so much distraction and so much shit around. Although there's still the chance to see great work, and to engage with it, it's becoming, I think, culturally, more difficult to do it. Because there's also the connection with fashion. The connection with—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, entertainment—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: —entertainment.

JAMES McELHINNEY: One could say that art is a subset of the fashion world, which is part of the entertainment world. Or pro sports, Hollywood, rock and roll, whatever. And the painting, why painters paint, why people value paintings hundreds of years after the date when they were made has nothing to do with the system of patronage that created them.

It has to do with how looking at the painting, standing there experiencing what it has to reveal transforms you.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And to know that you're looking at the same thing that the guy who made it is looking at.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right. So you're there in the room with Titian. You're there in the room with Cezanne. If you can read it, then you're there with them. You're in conversation with them. And that's pretty exciting.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I think it is.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So we can hope that, somehow, that process can continue to be.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I have some faith that if our civilization survives—I mean, physically survives, as well as culturally, I think there's a good chance that art will survive.

JAMES McELHINNEY: We're approaching, I think, a good moment to draw some conclusions. Has this conversation, in any way, left out anything that you feel—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Probably—

JAMES McELHINNEY: —we should include, or anything that occurs to you at the moment?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, I feel that I've been all over the place in our conversation.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But as long as you spoke to those topics, which were most important to you, then I think we've accomplished what we hoped to accomplish.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Let's see what we have.

JAMES McELHINNEY: We'll wait for the transcription, and hope for the best.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, thank you, Bill. It's been a great—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Thank you, Jim.

JAMES McELHINNEY: —experience.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: My pleasure.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Thanks.

[END OF TRACK AAA_bailey12_1928_m.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: You want to put these on and see if you can hear anything. Is it audible?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: All right.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER: [Inaudible.].

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, this is a rocking chair, too.

It's James McElhinney speaking with William Bailey at his studio in New Haven, Connecticut on Wednesday the fifth of December, 2012. Good afternoon.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Good afternoon, Jim.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's amazing that the Archives has taken 82 years to interview you.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I didn't expect to be interviewed at the age of 12 or even 22.

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Laughs.] Well, it's not infrequent that people are interviewed, perhaps, in their 40s and their 60s. And so often, an interview is just an update of a previous interview.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I understand. I didn't know that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So we have a lot of housekeeping to do.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And in fact, it didn't occur to me even when I was on the board of the Archives. What I should do to catch us up is supply a missing chapter, first of all. That goes back to 1972. I had an exhibition in Rome at the Galleria il Fante di Spade.

The dealer—the owner of the gallery—was a man named Mario Roncaglia. He had come to the United States and was being shown around by James McGarrell's wife, Ann. She brought him to New Haven to my studio. I think he already knew my work.

Anyway, he wanted to see the studio, and he offered me a show. I hadn't been in Rome for—oh, let's see—almost 20 years. Roncaglia offered to buy several works for the show. So it was a very attractive deal.

And my wife, Sandra—who wasn't really crazy to go to Italy—found a way that we could go to Paris, which she was crazy to visit, and get a car rental. This was a time when it was possible to travel for very little money.

We got tickets on TWA for about two hundred-and-some dollars, which included hotels for two weeks, a rental car, and the round-trip ticket. So we set off for Paris with our two children, stayed a week in Paris, and then we drove down to Italy where our friends the McGarrells had a house in Umbria. Then we were going to go on to Rome and leave the drawings that I was carrying.

So we got to Umbertide, which is the town in Umbria where they had a house. It was May of '72. Glorious weather. The broom was in bloom, so the air was perfumed. Sunny skies every day. Big, fluffy clouds. Very green fields of woods and streams, and just absolutely glorious.

And one of the days we were supposed to go some place—I think we were going to go to Urbino to look at the Piero there, with the *Flagellation [of Christ]* and a couple of other things. I had caught cold, which was the only flaw in this glorious visit. So we didn't go. Toward afternoon, we decided to take a drive around the countryside.

When we did, we saw several farmhouses that were abandoned. This was a period in Umbria when, for about five or ten years, people were abandoning the farms and going to town to work in light industry.

They had lived very primitively in the country. They were basically sharecroppers. So when they left, they just left. And the houses were just there, abandoned.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So who owned the houses? Was it a *padrone*?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It was the land. Yeah, there was a *padrone* who owned them. We saw a house—two or three houses—that we were interested in. We hadn't really thought about buying a house in Italy at all. But we had been looking for a house in Nova Scotia and Maine thinking of a summer place to be.

Suddenly we saw these wonderful houses. All of them had some land. And air fares were cheap. We thought, we might buy a house like this. So we found a house that we liked—first sight, without any practical thought at all.

It was simply we loved the way it was sited and the quality of the house. It was a normal stone farmhouse with a hay barn, which could be a studio. And a *porcile*—a pig house—which could be another studio. So we were able to buy this. I had the money from the drawings.

So in three days during our visit, we found the house, decided to buy it, and made the preliminary offer and went back later in the summer to do the closing. And then, the following year, we had people start work—which was a mistake because if you're not there you don't know how things are going to be done.

A lot of things were done in ways that I didn't like, which later we had to redo. However, it was done enough that we could provisionally move in. I had a leave from Yale in the fall. So we took off and moved into the house when we basically had one room. The house had no electricity and no running water.

We lived there until, I guess, February or January. January of '73—or January of '74. During that time there had been a terrible fuel crisis all through the Western world.

So we couldn't get fuel. We had a couple of kerosene stoves. I couldn't get fuel for them easily. Gasoline was hard to get, and I needed gasoline to get in and out of town . My kids went to the local school, which, at first, didn't look good. But it turned out to be very, very good.

At first, because they didn't speak Italian, they had a difficult time. But after that one term, they were speaking. My daughter had learned to write in Italian before English. And they had lots of friends and very happy memories of that school.

Anyway, that was the beginning of going to Italy, which we did for the next 40 years—living there most years four months out of the year. After I think two years, Roncaglia died. He had stomach cancer and died. And I had another connection, another dealer, by the name of Sandro Manzo who was very much a protégé of Claude Bernard in Paris.

In fact, I think I had already met Claude. We had made arrangements to have a show in Paris. Anyway, I met Sandro and he started taking all the work that I did during the time that I was in Italy. That went on until just a couple of years ago.

So I had a career in Italy with several shows in Rome and the galleries out there, and several shows that branched out from Rome to Torino and Milano, and Florence, and Bologna and other major cities. And a very responsive critical mass, particularly *la Repubblica*, critics from there.

And strangely enough, a Marxist critic from *Il Messaggero* always reviewed my shows.

JAMES McELHINNEY: *Corriere [della Sera]. Il Messaggero.*

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: *Il Messaggero.* And it was a very good situation for me because, one, I didn't have to worry about transporting paintings back to the United States. What I did in Italy stayed in Italy. And I had an income.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And that worked for your dealer in New York? You were, at that time, working with Bob Schoelkopf.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes, at that time I was with Schoelkopf. And he wasn't happy about it. But we agreed to have his representation end outside United States. In other words, I was free to do what I wanted outside of the United States.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, there were then—I know there still are—some form of regulations regarding the movement of art made in Italy outside of Italy. And I don't know if that applies only to Italian artists, but the

Belle Arti—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: The *Belle Arti* has to see everything that leaves Italy.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right. That's what I thought.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And that's still the case with me. What I do now and what I've always done to ship paintings back, is to have an art shipper—picks up the work and takes it to the *Belle Arti*. And they see it through that process, which I would not want to go through myself because you have to hang around and wait for them to seal and stamp the crate and all that. Anyway, they do all of that for me. It's expensive but it's worth it because I don't have to spend my time doing that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: There must be just—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Other people I know like Alan Feltus, for example—who shows principally in the US but lives principally in Italy—Alan rolls his paintings carefully. He has them carefully measured. And he has stretchers made in New York so that when he gets to New York he can unroll them and stretch them there, which he does supremely well. He's very handy. I am not handy that way.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, his paintings are also—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: They're thinly painted.

JAMES McELHINNEY: They're well-crafted—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: They're beautifully crafted.

JAMES McELHINNEY: —thinly painted so the worry would be, I think, with a lot of anyone who's working in more painterly—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, I'll tell you.

JAMES McELHINNEY: —way that there would be a loss of paint.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: A loss of paint?

JAMES McELHINNEY: From the surface, yeah.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: When I left Rome earlier when I was a student, I was painting very heavily with some stuff called *cement tita* [ph], which is a white that was like cement. And all the artists used it in those days. I rolled my canvases, and put them in a long wooden crate. And when they arrived in New York, I had these long pieces of canvas with just paint chips.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Paint chips everywhere. Yeah, wow.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: That's all.

[Laughs.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Fortunately, the best work I had done were little studies on paper. And they survived. But the paintings didn't. So that was a total loss. That's one of the things that made me inclined to send paintings by shipper and never unstretch them.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So you find the *trasloco* people and they arrange everything and build the crates.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. There's one company in Rome that's been doing it for me for years. And they're terrific.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So there is a bureaucratic obstacle that one would have to circumvent in order to show and sell the pictures you do in Italy in New York anyway. So it's probably just easier to leave what you did there, and then work with what you did in New Haven in the U. S.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Just a little housekeeping—your studio in New Haven, as I recall, was stuck between the [Yale] Art Gallery and Skull and Bones. Is that correct?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: That is correct. It was an extension of Weir Hall.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I see.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And Jonathan Edwards College was disputed territory.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It was across Wall Street, but it was on the same—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, it was High Street.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, it's on the same—that's right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: High Street.

JAMES McELHINNEY: High Street.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And the master of Jonathan Edwards College wanted me out, because they wanted to use that room.

JAMES McELHINNEY: That's right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: But it had been a studio when Weir Hall was all a school of architecture.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Who had used it in the past? Have you any idea? Prior tenants?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Jack Tworkov had it but he didn't use it. There was a little apartment across the roof there that was attached. And Jack used to stay over and use that apartment. But as far as I know, he never used the studio. The ceiling was falling in. A lot of plaster, dust, and chips of plaster falling in and things. But it had wonderful light. It was a long narrow room. And it was on the fourth floor.

So you had to go up and down four flights of stairs to get to a bathroom, or you could get water if you had to have it. There was no source of water up there. So it was inconvenient in certain ways. And fortunately, I had strong legs in those days.

JAMES McELHINNEY: High ceilings, I recall? Fairly high ceilings?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: High ceilings—the ceiling went up to a peak.

JAMES McELHINNEY: A peak, yeah.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: So it wasn't that high around the edges. It had the look of a medieval castle room.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Kind of scriptorium or something.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes, exactly.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So I do—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And then, when I left, I left it to Andrew Forge. I'd been there 11 years. I left it to Andrew thinking that he would use it. But he didn't like it, so he didn't use it. He left it to Roger Tibbetts.

And Roger—I think because the plaster was falling, and so on—didn't have great respect for that studio. I was a bit annoyed when I visited one day and saw its condition. And then after that, I don't know who used it, but somebody in the art school.

It was a lovely space. I did a lot of the most important work I did in the '70s, was done in that painting studio. I left, I think, in '82. I moved over above the college spa on College Street.

Italy was terribly important to me because—not so much in terms of contemporary art, but because I was so close to the art that I admired most in the world. And that was the paintings of Piero della Francesca, for one. Piero was very close by, with Sansepolcro to the north of us, where probably the greatest of the Pieros is. *The Resurrection*—I should say what it is—and then Arrezo, which is not that much further.

And that's the great series of paintings, *The Story of the True Cross*. Urbino is not that far. And of course, Monterchi between Sansepolcro and Arrezo is the *Madonna del Parto*. So I had those paintings right at hand, and I looked at them a lot.

Also, every year I spent some time in Rome. And although it doesn't fit with Piero, the paintings in Rome that I was most attracted to were the paintings of Caravaggio—the three paintings of Saint Matthew in the—

JAMES McELHINNEY: San Luigi Francesi.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: San Luigi dei Francesi. I still—every time I go through Rome—I go to San Luigi. Those are the most remarkable paintings—in a completely different way then Piero, but every bit as important in a way.

Then there were—later on, starting, I suppose, in the '80s or '90s, when the International School of Art started—it was a school that Nick Carone started, in Monte Castello di Vibio. I started doing a little bit of visiting teaching over there during the summer—never more than a day or so.

But Nick always had interesting artists, many of whom I knew. So there was a little society of good American painters that I saw frequently through the summer months. People like Angelo Ippolito and—Leonard Anderson was there at one time. And Wayne Thiebaud was there, and a number of people.

And about that time I started seeing Alan Feltus and his wife Lani Irwin. And Alan and Lani lived there year-round, and have for 20-some years. And during the summer, they formed a gathering point for the American painters who were in the area and some of the Italian painters.

We often saw them. We'd all go out to dinner after an opening. Then, the last few years since our favorite restaurant there closed, we've been eating at the Feltus's. Lani is a wonderful cook and able to manage a large number of people at a table.

So people like Langdon Quin and Dan Gustin from Chicago, his wife Cynthia. Langdon and his wife Caren Canier, and anyone else who happens to be around. That's made life even more interesting there. Of Italian artists, those that I knew earlier in Rome were mostly older than I. And they were mostly abstract artists.

So I didn't have a continuing relationship with people like Alberto Burri, who I had known earlier, or [Toti] Scialoja—see if you can spell that!

[Laughs.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Pietro] Consagra—do you know him?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Who?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Consagra.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No. I'm trying to think of who else I knew there—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, that whole region—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: —[Emilio] Vedova.

JAMES McELHINNEY: —that whole Umbria was full of American artists.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Not at that time.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Not at that time? But the McGarrells, I guess is another housekeeping thing. You got to know them through your—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah, we talked together in Indiana.

JAMES McELHINNEY: At Indiana, right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. And he was doing very well and decided that he wanted to teach only half the time and live in Europe the rest of the time. He was represented by Claude Bernard in Paris, and had done quite well with Bernard. So his wife, Ann, and their son, Andrew, moved to Europe.

Jim had had a Guggenheim and had been in Paris a year. And Ann had seen a house advertised for sale in Umbria. She saw the ad in the *International Herald Tribune*. And the house was being sold by the American writer Peter Matthiessen.

She was living with her son during the months that Jim was teaching. They had just started on this plan. So they were living in Saint-Tropez. They took the train down to Umbertide and looked at the house, which was a converted barn—quite nice, and it had quite a bit of land in a tiny hamlet, facing out from this hamlet.

They had been there about six months when we went to visit them. They were the only Americans, except for the Abbotts. He was a sort of architect, artist, developer who had lived in Italy ever since the end of the Second World War. He was married to an American woman who was a mainline Philadelphia debutante. They had one

child, and they owned a castle.

John Abbott had been very alert and prescient in buying up a lot of land. But about the same time and a little after us, Robert Barnes bought a house very close to the McGarrells. We were close as the crow flies, but driving we were about 12 kilometers.

JAMES McELHINNEY: He was also an ex-Indiana colleague, correct?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes. He fixed up a big old house—very beautiful house. And he and his wife, Nancy, lived there during the summers and during some leave time for, I suppose, ten years. They're not doing it anymore. The McGarrells are not there anymore. So we're the only ones.

The whole countryside is mostly of foreigners—it's mostly British and German—a little further on, one finds a lot of Dutch people. So there is a kind of foreign enclave, but it's never become a scene. People who have houses there tend to keep to themselves, except for the Brits. They tend to be very—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Social.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: —clubby and social.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, there are many enclaves—like the Dordogne is another enclave of Brits.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Oh, yes. Yes, of course. The Dutch in the Dordogne.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I have a French friend whose family home is in the Dordogne. And we stayed there with him. It's very beautiful. Anyway, let's move on.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So the Italian experience has been part of your life four months a year, every year, for 40 years?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. There were two years that I lived in Rome. In '75 I was asked to be artist-in-residence at the American Academy. And that was a marvelous experience, although I wasn't resident in the Academy. I didn't really want to live in an American community. I wanted to live in the city. So we lived down below in Trastevere.

And I had a wonderful studio—the greatest studio I've ever had in my life—at the Academy, and met some marvelous people and some not-so-marvelous people.

[Laughs.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Ana Mendieta was there during one of my stays. And she was very ambitious for her career and a very unpleasant person, I thought. This was before her martyrdom and sainthood.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Her hotly—still hotly—contested demise, I think.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes, yes. Well, nobody knows but what's-his-name.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Carl Andre.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Carl Andre, who was—everyone thought—perhaps responsible for her death one way or another, was not legally held responsible. And he's remarried. I didn't know Andre at all. And she was not with him. That came later.

When I first knew her, she was very anxious to identify who was who in the scene. And I wasn't very interested in the scene.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So she had exhibited transparently, sort of careerist—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Absolutely, she was.

JAMES McELHINNEY: —traits.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, she was hell-bent on having a career and making a splash wherever she was. But what I didn't like about her really didn't have to do with that, even. She was very rude to people on the staff there and the Italians who were working.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Imperious, high-handed. They were the "help?"

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: They were the help. And I'm trying to think of who else was there. Well, I was there twice. First in the '70s and about ten years later in the '80s I was there.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So were you involved at all, as a consequence of this, with programming there, or as an advisor, because I seem to recall you, also during this period, were involved with the Tiffany Foundation.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I'd been on the board of the Tiffany since the early '70s. And I'm still on the board of the Tiffany. This has to be the last year. I think I'm going to resign.

But as far as the Academy goes, no. I suppose I was there to help in any way I could, the fellows, but I don't think it works out that way. It's really having a senior artist in the mix. And it was just a marvelous time for me.

There were some people who had a kind of sinecure. Francine du Plessix Gray and her husband, Cleve, who was a painter, went every February. And they had a place.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So this way it was a bit like some of the American colonies like Yaddo and MacDowell where people return annually.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah, but only a few.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Only a few.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: So it really wasn't like Yaddo or MacDowell, except in the sense that both MacDowell and Yaddo had their favorites who were always welcome. We'll put it that way.

JAMES McELHINNEY: To what would you attribute this? Why were some people invited annually and others would come and leave and that would be the end for them? They'd move onto other things.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, I think it had something to do with the visibility of the people who were coming. I mean, Yaddo could never turn down—what's his name? A great short story writer.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Cheever?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Cheever. John Cheever wrote. John Cheever was a fellow there, and then he was always welcome. There are still people like that in Yaddo. And at the Academy, there were many fewer people like that. In fact, I can't think of anyone other than Francine who had that kind of situation.

And I think they were also people who could help the Academy by publicizing it one way or another, writing about it. Artists who were celebrities were, I think, probably welcome one way or another.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So who was there when you were there with whom you had a good relationship—a positive relationship? Good conversations and that kind of—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Not many people, because I was in the studio working.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right. So your obligation there was basically to appear every now and then at an opening, or like a reception or an event.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: That's right. Or I would schmooze in the cafe and have a coffee there in the morning. After a while, I didn't go to meals there. I did find a lot of the fellows were interesting and I had conversations with them. But I never bonded with any of them. And most of them were people that you see a couple of times.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So at night, you go down the hill, across the river, over to Trastevere and you're home there.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, the first time, I'd go down the hill, period, when we were down on Viale Trastevere. The second time, in the '80s, we were across the river in Via dei Coronari, a beautiful street.

And I had two children. Actually, I had one child at home. My son had gone off to school by that time. But on the first trip, I had both children at home. My family wasn't involved with the Academy at all. So, it was something that I did during the day or when I was obliged to go up at night for some affair of one sort or another.

It was very congenial. But it was a bit clubby, which is fine if you're a member of the club. If you choose not to be a member of the club, it's apparent to you immediately that you're not a member of the club.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Perhaps reminded of the often-quoted line by Groucho Marx that he wouldn't belong to any

club that would have him as a member.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So—just to return to your home in Umbria, there were other artists there. Like, Al Held was there at some point?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, Al was way later. In fact—

JAMES McELHINNEY: He was later.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: At the end.

JAMES McELHINNEY: At the end.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah, I could talk a little bit about that, because it's funny. At one point when I first had the house and it was just barely livable, Al and his wife Sylvia were going to Europe. And they were going to be in Rome. This was before he had any attachment to the Academy.

So I offered him the use of the house. And Al said, "No. I lived in Europe. I'm not going to do that again. The only way I'm going to be in Europe is as a tourist, a few days in a place at a time."

Years later he called and he said, "I bought this house." Of course, he'd been remarried. And he bought actually two houses and had them joined, and a big studio, and really settled in Italy for a good part of the year. He was back and forth.

He wasn't a summer guy. He would go off-season and on-season. I saw Al—I wouldn't say frequently—but I saw quite a bit of him. As I told you, we'd become friends toward the end of his time at Yale. And we continued to be friends in Italy.

Al didn't speak a word of Italian. He was so inept, he couldn't even get *buongiorno* right.

[Laughs.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: But somehow he had these farm ladies who were taking care of him and, most importantly, a girlfriend who did speak—an Australian woman—who spoke Italian, who handled a lot of business for him and did a lot.

JAMES McELHINNEY: How close to where you lived was he living?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: About an hour. He was about an hour away. There was a huge American colony, I would say, near Todi. And that was because—what's her name? An American sculptor. A woman.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Beverly Pepper?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Beverly. Beverly Pepper had been there for a long time. She had a marvelous place with a pool, and a circle of friends, and she was very, very well-established in that area. When people came to Italy, they would go stay with Beverly. They wound up buying houses all around that area. And Al was one of them.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Do you know Barbara Novak?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I know Brian O'Doherty.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right. Her husband.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah.

JAMES McELHINNEY: The "late Patrick Ireland."

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: What?

JAMES McELHINNEY: The "late Patrick Ireland."

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: What do you mean the "late?"

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, when the British and Northern Ireland stood down, he had a wake for his alter ego Patrick Ireland.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Oh, I didn't know that he did that.

JAMES McELHINNEY: It was a couple of years ago.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: So he doesn't use Patrick Ireland anymore?

JAMES McELHINNEY: No. I think poor old Pat's gone, and late, lamented Patrick Ireland. But my wife was an advisee of—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Of Novak's?

JAMES McELHINNEY: —Barbara's when she was in the doctoral, or history program in Columbia. And I actually interviewed her.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: She's very good.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yeah, very good. He's also—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: He is incredible.

JAMES McELHINNEY: —an amazing guy, yeah.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: He is an amazing person. I knew him. He ran the—I guess it was film and video at the National Endowment [for the Arts].

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: He had also previously run the visual art program. And he was the wittiest, most articulate, entertaining person on the staff there.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, you know, he was trained as a medical doctor.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I know.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And he's a terrific novelist, as well.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I haven't read a novel of Brian's.

JAMES McELHINNEY: *The Burial of Father McGreevy* and others.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Things of art, things that he's written, I think I don't always agree with him. But they're so well written and interesting and well done. And he has such broad taste. I mean, his interest in Hopper for example, making the films that he's done. He is a remarkable person.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So they were also part of that American colony in Todi, right? I believe they had a house there.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I think later on they were. I think they had a house in Todi, as a matter of fact. Brian showed me a piece he'd done with string going around the house. I could never make out was it was really about. He was also a very accessible man. I like him a lot.

Well, then from '92 to '95, I had been appointed by the first Bush administration to the National Council on the Arts, which meant going to Washington four times a year for a few days. And we were supposed to okay the grants that had been decided upon by the various juries.

JAMES McELHINNEY: This is the National Endowment?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. And this was at the height of the culture wars. And it was a nightmarish experience, really. I was on with some wonderful people.

Jane Alexander was the chairman at that time. Sometimes we had a good time in spite of the situation. But it was a sort of hopeless thing, of these right-wing people being baited by left-wing crazies, or not even left-wing crazies. They were just art crazies seeing how far they could go, so they would apply for a grant and people like Karen Finley smearing her nude body with chocolate, of course, would surely set off something with the—

JAMES McELHINNEY: With the Jesse Helms posse.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, when her grant or her award was withdrawn, didn't Lenny Bernstein return some kind of a medal he had received?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah, probably. But it was an untenable position to be put in, because our responsibility was to assure the quality of the grants.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: So what the hell was the responsibility of the jury?

JAMES McELHINNEY: So it became a forum for arguing the First Amendment or whatever, instead of—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I did know a few people on the council who were, sort of, reactionary. But most of the people on the council were on the other side. And I must say for George H. W. Bush, his appointees to the council tended to be more liberal than Bill Clinton's.

They tended to be less doctrinaire and less politically situated. The Clinton appointees—when they came on the council—were, many times, spouses of—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, yes.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: —supporters and so on and so forth. Not all the time. But it was noticeable to me. Maybe George H. W. didn't pay attention enough, and that's how he happened to get the people that he got on the council.

When I was called and asked if I would serve, I said, "Yes, I would serve. But I want you to know that I'm a Democrat, and I've opposed this administration, and I continue to." They said, "That's all right. Thank you for telling us." And then I got a call from Ted Kennedy saying, "Thank you so much for telling them that you were a Democrat."

[Laughs.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: So what do you think the problem really was in the '90s? I mean, obviously, it came to a head with the [Robert] Mapplethorpe thing. It was not caused by that. That was just that—I think, created an opening and opportunity for the people who are opposing the cultural programs to make a head-long attack.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. And in fact, it was not justified because the money hadn't gone to Mapplethorpe. The money had gone to—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Institute of Contemporary Arts in Philadelphia, right?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Janet Kardon, I think, was a curator.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes. I remember her well. Served on a jury with her. It was a grant given to the institute, and this was one of the shows that was listed that she was doing. So finally fork it around to saying, yes, the NEA was supporting these Mapplethorpe photographs.

But even if they were, it doesn't make any difference. It was really just a chance for the right wing to find another way of going against the Endowment and the idea of supporting artists, and the idea that artists were parasites and immoral parasites. I can't say it was all on the side of the right wingers. There was a whole segment of the art world that was trying to foment this kind of reaction.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Just to draw attention to art, period.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: To draw attention to themselves, for the most part.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, individuals?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. I remember there was a photography jury that had passed on some stuff for awards in photography. And one of them was an installation by a rabid feminist activist from Chicago. So we were asked to look at these things and say what we thought. I said I thought it was pretty bad, and I wouldn't give it a grant. That's all.

And that seemed to have swayed a number of votes. This person's grant was turned down after the jury had awarded the grant. And this woman had come from Chicago with an entourage.

One of the staff said, "This woman is outside and she would like to see you," during a council meeting. So I went out to see her. And she said, "How could you do this?"

[END OF TRACK AAA_bailey12_1929_m.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I had to convince her that it wasn't a political thing at all. I really didn't like her work.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So you're not the least bit opposed to her politics, her polemics, the content of her work. It was just that the work itself was not convincing as art.

This seems to happen quite a bit, where people identify either ethnicity or gender or lifestyle as something that's going to intimidate people from actually saying, all right, these are useful topics for exploration and for discussion. But the way that you're organizing these elements is just not ready for prime-time. There are a lot of people hiding behind the content of their work.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Absolutely. It's still going on.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Do you see it more now than before?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I think it's been absorbed. I think that a lot of judgments are made on the basis of the sentiment of—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yeah.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: —what is presented in the subject matter of the work.

JAMES McELHINNEY: How do you connect this to what we were talking about a couple conversations ago, regarding art making turning into art directing.

: I think it's all part of the same disrespect for, or lack of interest in, art as art. I think, for example, the subject of painting is always painting. It can be a crucifixion or it can be Cezanne's apples. I mean, the apples are often better than the crucifixion, wouldn't you say?

JAMES McELHINNEY: More pleasant subject.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, but not because it's pleasant. But because it's stronger. Or more resonant. It speaks to us in terms of art. Rather than in terms of religion, or what-have-you.

JAMES McELHINNEY: The form. The form itself is whole, healthy, and credible. And whatever it is—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Sometimes, in the case of Caravaggio for example, the content can be extremely strong. But then so is the form. And it's the form that makes it strong.

JAMES McELHINNEY: This could be a segue to talking a little bit about Balthus, too. Because here's another artist who, I think, imagery tends to dominate the way some people still regard his work. Although the paintings are themselves very abstract and very poetic in a physical way.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I think in the case of Balthus, it's a little different. You can't set aside the subject matter in a Balthus.

What's up for grabs I think, is his intention. Because there are many things where Balthus sees sweetness and innocence. And others see dark, erotic manipulation.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Or both.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And I think that then we go back to the fact that the imagery is formally so beautifully presented. And presented with such conviction. And clarity, really. The ambiguity in a Balthus comes from the clarity of the image.

JAMES McELHINNEY: As I recall, you had some contact with him.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I met him a few times and talked to him a few times. Not for any extended period. I don't know whether I told you about meeting him at the first—

JAMES McELHINNEY: No, no.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I did?

JAMES McELHINNEY: No.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Villa Medici, when he was the director? I'll tell you again in case we missed it.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I don't think—well, it can't hurt.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I went to the opening of the [André] Derain show, which Balthus had selected and organized and hung at the Villa Medici in Rome. This would have been in the mid '70s. I had never met Balthus. I was very excited at the prospect of meeting him.

So I went upstairs—there was a huge crowd, and people were going up the stairs to the director's apartment after the show, which was all down below in the exhibition area. I saw a woman in a kimono. And so I went over. I figured that was his wife. I went over to speak to her.

I said "Madame Balthus." I addressed her as Madame Balthus. She turned on me and said, "His name is not Balthus. That is his first name. And I am Contessa Giovanna Klossowski de Rola." Anyway. "And if you want to see Balthus, he's over there." I made a good start.

[Laughs.]

So I went over to see Balthus, who was standing a few feet away. I congratulated him on the Derain show and expressed my admiration for his portrait of Derain.

I remarked that he had certainly captured the aging voluptuary in that painting. He looked horrified and he said, "No, no. I was a young artist. Derain was a great master. And he was coming to my studio every day for three weeks to pose. I was terrified of him."

He said, "I wouldn't say anything against the character of Derain in my painting."

So we moved on to Miro, I think, after that.

[Laughs.]

Quite a different kind of portrait. But anyway, we talked about Derain. We talked about what he wanted to do with the show, which was to reveal all aspects of Derain. He said, "Mostly Derain is known as a Fauve. Or he's known as a classical reactionary. Or he's known for his stage sets, or for this or that. Primitive things that he did. I wanted to show them all. Show him as a complete artist." So I admired him tremendously. That was that conversation.

The next time was—he had come to a show of mine, to the opening, because he was a friend of my dealer, Sandro Manzo.

What was remarkable about that was that Alberto Moravia had written a small foreword for my introduction to my show. Moravia was also there at the opening. Each of these men had his own sort of entourage. But they didn't mix at all. One of them went in one room. And the other went into another room. So you have their little clusters surrounding them in each room. Anyway, he was very gracious, very nice about my show. We talked a little bit about that. I can't remember even what was said.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, your—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: He signed my catalogue of his show in Venice with a nice dedication.

Then I went to see—this is a marvelous thing about Balthus. He just had no tolerance for show business, except his own kind of show business. But he had a show, a drawing show in Spoleto [Italy], arranged by the Italian critic [Giovanni] Carandente, who's dead now, but was a major critic and was one of the presidents of the [Venice] Biennale a few years ago.

And Carandente had done the catalogue for this, and organized this wonderful show. This was a show to end all Balthus drawing shows. It should have traveled to major museums. Instead it was in this one little town in a palazzo where about 500 people at most would see the show.

Anyway, the day of the opening, Sandy and I climbed the steps to the Piazza del Duomo in Spoleto. We got to top of the steps and looked across the piazza. There are several palazzi there.

And in one of the grand windows in one of them, up above, I saw this man in Japanese kimono standing looking down at the piazza. That was, of course, Balthus. Then, Setsuko, his wife, appeared. And they chatted.

So after we viewed the show—and Balthus didn't appear during the show—we went down to the cafe there on the piazza to have a drink. We had a table outside there. Balthus and Carandente appeared. They had to walk down maybe 50 yards or so from the palazzo down to the bar. Carandente reached over to hold up Balthus' hand, like a prize fighter winning.

Balthus pulled his his hand down, and glared at Carandente. Carandente sort of just stiffened. And they walked down to the bar. But he was having none of that.

That was the only time—you know who. What's his name? Avvocato? The head of Fiat?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, yes.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Most important man in Italy.

JAMES McELHINNEY: At that time, yeah.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I can't remember any names.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well we can certainly—I know who you mean.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I have it just on the tip of my tongue.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yeah, me too.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I can't get it.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Anyway, I—

JAMES McELHINNEY: It's okay, we'll look it up later.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It'll come to me.

JAMES McELHINNEY: This is why we're allowed to edit these transcripts.

[Laughs.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Anyway, I saw this familiar-looking guy crowded with a bunch of very pretty girls and rich-looking people hovering around.

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Gianni] Agnelli.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Agnelli. Agnelli, who's known in Italy always as "The Lawyer." As "L'Avvocato."

JAMES McELHINNEY: L'Avvocato. Yeah. L'Avvocato.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: So I saw this man. He looked very familiar. Then I saw there were people, TV cameramen, and so on, around. And we bumped into one another. I was going into the bar because I had ordered a Bellini for the people at my table. And the waiter didn't know what a Bellini was. I was going in to straighten that out. I bumped head-on into Agnelli. He looked at me as though, "No one has ever bumped into me before!"

[Laughs.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Absolute shock. I said, "Excuse me." And I went on in. I didn't fall on my knees and genuflect or anything, which surprised him as well, I suppose.

He was, you know, not a bad man. But you could tell he was a man who had been catered to in every possible way.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Funny story.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Balthus used to like to walk around Rome by himself. I remember a Sunday afternoon, idly standing at my window in the Via dei Coronari. Our place was on the first floor, which was not the ground floor, but would be the second floor here.

There was Balthus, standing in the street down below. Just looking. Strolling. Looking by himself. He was in remarkably good shape at that age.

JAMES McELHINNEY: In his 80s at that time.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: This was 1984.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yeah, he was around 80. 1904, I think, was his birthday. If I recall.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: So he was.

JAMES McELHINNEY: 80. He was very lean.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Very.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But he was not a tall man.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, he struck one as being tall. Especially because he wore those sabots all the time. So he was always about three inches taller than he actually was.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But a modest person, you would say?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, no, no. Not at all. No.

JAMES McELHINNEY: He eschewed the limelight, though. He didn't like the—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: He didn't think it was fitting for his image of himself. It was a vulgar gesture that he wasn't going to be a party to.

JAMES McELHINNEY: At that time, he was a very inspirational figure. Almost an iconic figure to a lot of younger artists. I think that a lot of younger artists, I would say people my age especially, were very curious about him. In fact, amazed that he could spend years on one painting, when it was a time when artists were supposed to be very productive and have an exhibition every other year. And the idea that somebody could work on a painting for ten years was sort of unheard of.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah, he really didn't, but—

JAMES McELHINNEY: No, I know.

[Laughs.]

He'd start it one year. And then he'd wait nine years to complete it.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I think he had things that were cooking for a long time.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: If you look at the way things are painted, you can see him making a move and then seeing it. Seeing that the painting is finished at that—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: —at that moment.

We went to a show in Switzerland two years ago. I can't remember the name of the town. Matignon? Something like that. It was like an art center building. I thought a terribly ugly building. I couldn't imagine why or how they had happened to have this big Balthus show. But they did. We drove up from Italy to see it.

We went down some stairs into this big room, which was like a concert hall space. Then around the edge, like a loggia going all the way around in this room, were these bays with Balthus' paintings. At first, I thought, "This is terrible. Awful."

But, you were able to see the paintings up close, and back, from a distance you never see them from. It was actually a marvelous way to see some of the paintings. I knew all the paintings. There was only one I think I'd never seen. But it was a revelation, that show, because I was able to see them in a different way.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I'd like to try to connect, or contrast, your long experience working part of the year in Europe, part of the year in the U. S., and also working with the NEA. To just ask you, what's your view on the challenges of art patronage in this country?

Because I think a lot of American artists look longingly across the Atlantic and imagine that Europeans are

somehow more invested in the idea that art is standard equipment for any civilized society. And that we're somehow—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: That's what we always thought. I think we thought that forever. What changed things for Americans was the success of Abstract Expressionist painting. Europeans had their own version in Tachisme. But it didn't have the same allure as American painting. Suddenly, American painting seemed to be the only painting that mattered.

As far as art goes, I think it's probably still true that there's an easier, more comfortable relationship between the general public in Europe and all kinds of art. Literature. There's a respect that one doesn't see here. As far as support goes, there isn't tremendous support. Because people don't—you know, the French don't buy a lot of paintings.

I was really struck the last time I was in Paris, which was ten years ago. I went to the [Centre] Pompidou, the part that's the museum of modern art. For the first time, the glories of School of Paris painting are given their proper place and shown properly. They look wonderful there. Picasso, [Georges] Braque, [Jean-Baptiste] Greuze, [Fernand] Léger, so on. Balthus. Everybody looks good in that museum. They're presented with respect.

But it's taken a long time because the French didn't support any of these people. It was foreigners that supported them. Among the foreigners that supported them, the Americans were, if not foremost, near the front.

I don't know about Americans supporting American art. We've already talked about the fact that, since big money has gotten into this—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: —I mean really big money. You can't help but notice that when people are willing to pay 60 million dollars for a Rauschenberg or for a Warhol, and a big price for an El Greco is 6 million dollars, something's crazy here.

[Laughs.]

Something's really crazy.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, is it merely a lack of discernment? Or is it just that the whole value system has been hijacked by the marketplace?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Arne Glimcher said, when I interviewed him, he said that it was his opinion that the avant-garde had been hijacked by market.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah.

JAMES McELHINNEY: That the art world had been hijacked by the art market.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, he ought to know.

[Laughs.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: He interestingly wrote an article about a month ago called, "Why Art's a Bad Investment." It was interesting, because I think he's wildly successful.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, but I have great respect for Arne Glimcher, especially because of the way he took care of Chuck [Close] after his—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Stroke?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Illness.

JAMES McELHINNEY: His illness.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: On the other hand, last week I looked at Chuck's show. Have you seen that show?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Not yet, no.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It's a sort of flawless performance of his schtick. What can you say? The module, the pixel, whatever unit he uses, he's enlarged it. So it's a little more surprising when you see the surface up close and

back.

Then he has some technical things that I don't even know what they are, with dots and stamps, and things that are made in editions of forty.

Everything is—I can't take exception to anything that he does. It's a product that's completely worked out. And it's there for sale for big bucks. But art? I don't know.

JAMES McELHINNEY: So what are the challenges *vis–à–vis* patronage?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I saw this film on Alice Neel. Have you ever seen this?

JAMES McELHINNEY: I met her a couple of times. But I don't know if I've seen it.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It can't be that old.

JAMES McELHINNEY: No.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: But it reminded me of how good Alice Neel was when she was really good.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: She was fantastic. She should be a major figure.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, I think she probably will be. I think she is—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I think she will.

JAMES McELHINNEY: —for some people, she already is. But I think that—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: But not on the scale that she should be. We'll see. She wasn't a shy person at all.

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Laughs.] No. No, very unconventional in her lifestyle.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Anyway, if you get a chance to see this—my daughter gave us the disc. And it's quite good. Two of her sons were involved in it.

I met her a couple of times. And she was represented by Miller. So there were always—after her death—relatives at every opening and every party the Millers gave. One of them was there.

Anyway, I was thinking about the estimate of Alice Neel, for example, with Frida Kahlo. Alice Neel blows Frida Kahlo away.

JAMES McELHINNEY: As a painter? Absolutely.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: As a painter.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Absolutely. Well I think that Frida, perhaps you agree—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Frida had a very particular quality that I admire and she's wonderful in her way. But very limited compared to—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, she appropriated that language of the Mexican *retablo* painting and made it autobiographical. And it was at a particular time—when Hayden Herrera's biography came out in the 1980s, it was a moment in women's history also where it was the right biography at the right time. It was very inspiring to a lot of people. And I think still is.

I mean, she's become—Frida is almost as canonical an image as Marilyn Monroe at this point. Every time you turn around, those eyebrows are floating above her nose.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I would just award Alice Neel the same kind of canonical—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, maybe the difference is that people don't know what Alice Neel looked like as much as they know what Frida looked like. In other words, her brand. The idea of Alice Neel as a brand—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I think that's probably true. And that's one of the problems in art today. I was just reading this in this Cezanne biography. Someone, I forgotten who it was, saw these two men looking carefully at a Cezanne still life in his memorial show. He had ten paintings—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: —with black crepe at the salon. And this person said he edged closer to hear what they were saying, because they were very insistent. One of them was pointing to the other, saying what it was. And he was saying, "Look at this. This is wonderful. Look at this. How he paints this."

He thought, the observer thought, this is some poor old painter with glasses, with his nose up against the painting. And a rather shabby cloak. And some poor old bastard going on about this painting. It was Degas!

JAMES McELHINNEY: I could kind of see that coming. Yeah. Have you got a copy of the new book on Cezanne?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yeah. I haven't gotten one yet. But I've heard good things about it. Are you enjoying it? Have you read the whole thing?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I haven't read that much of it. I'll withhold judgement—it seems very thorough in certain ways. We'll see.

JAMES McELHINNEY: You can kind of tell after a chapter if you want to read the rest of it or not.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I do want to read the rest of it.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, then.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I thought, speaking of Hayden Herrera, I thought that she did a terrific job. She also did the Gorky book, which I thought was beautifully done. Do you know her at all?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Not personally, no.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: She's very nice. She's [Blair] Resika's wife's sister.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I knew that. I knew there was a connection there with Blair Resika.

We haven't spoken at all about some of your friends. One of the things you told me in our conversation—I think it might have been just an informal conversation—was that the majority of the people with whom you socialize are not painters. You said that your closest friend is a writer, poet—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: My closest friend is a writer.

JAMES McELHINNEY: —is a poet. Mark Strand.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Poet. Yeah.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But you were saying that you weren't primarily socializing with other painters.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I don't socialize much. I was thinking about that, and I suppose I socialize with painters as much as anyone else.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Oh, okay.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: My good friends of long standing—Varujan Boghosian certainly is one of those. Bernie Chaet, who just died, was a close friend. Then a lot of people who were good friends, not particularly close. Like Al, Lester.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Al Held, Lester Johnson.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yes. And Lester Johnson, I didn't even realize that we were friends. I mean there was always a good deal of resentment between Lester and me.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Why was that?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: It seemed to me that when we were doing critiques, Lester was always so damned primitive that he would take whatever content was in what I said out, and offer a caricature of it to the student. And say, "Do something else." That annoyed me. And I probably did the same thing to him.

On the other hand, I had students who had taken drawing with Lester. They all really had something that they must have gotten from Lester. I could never figure out what it was. It puzzles me to this day. But Lester had—did

you take Lester's drawing—?

JAMES McELHINNEY: I did not. I took drawing with you and with Bernie, I believe.

For some reason, I have a memory of being in his class from time to time, either dropping in or whatever. But he had a very—almost innocent, kind of superficially innocent, childlike teaching style, where he would pantomime things. And he would do things that seemed a little silly and weren't sort of pedagogically full of gravitas and seriousness.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah.

JAMES McELHINNEY: But somehow, I think, and as you were posing that question, what was he doing? I think the one thing that he did impart to students was that everything in a drawing is in motion. And you could see it in his work, too. Although it was not just an imitation of his work, it was that everything was in motion in a drawing.

And I remember him actually doing a pantomime from a sort of standing pose to a *contrapposto* pose and saying, "Well, your shoulders go like this, and your hips go like that. You put the weight on one leg." And yet he wasn't a big guy. So he's doing this funny thing that you don't really expect a professor to be doing. And people were paying attention to him because he was acting out this concept of *contrapposto*.

I think that maybe that was it. That he really got people thinking about, how can I make everything move? Not just get it in the right place, measure it properly, find the balance, you know, move things into some kind of resonant structure. But actually keep it moving a little bit. And I think that might be part of it.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I remember him going up to a student and lifting their hair.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yes, yes. Yes.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: "Hair should be like this," he'd say.

JAMES McELHINNEY: That's exactly the kind of thing he would do, I remember.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Anyway, I thought he did a fabulous job. Whatever he did, I was all for it. And also I always admired his work.

Dan Gustin tells this story. Do you know Dan?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Haven't crossed paths with him in about a dozen years, but yeah.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, he's alive and well.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Good to know. Send him my best.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: He's in Italy a lot. He has a house near—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And he was saying that—he was working for Lester at one point—he went into Lester's studio, which you could see into. And there was Lester in a dress! Looking at himself, and going through these motions, and painting.

That's when he was doing those girls—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: —in the dresses.

JAMES McELHINNEY: And the men with the cigarettes. And girls with the dresses. Yeah.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Anyway, I miss Lester. I didn't see him that much, but there are certain people that you knew, they were there. They were painting. And at this stage of my life, I've seen so many of them disappear now, that I'm feeling kind of lonely.

JAMES McELHINNEY: You were close, too, to Neil Welliver.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Who?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Neil Welliver.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Neil was a classmate of mine.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: He was a bastard.

[Laughs.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: Do you admire his work?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: In a way I do, in a way I don't. I admire his engagement with it and his belief. I can't share that belief, quite.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Although I think some of those paintings are really terrific. He had a monstrous ego. He could be a very difficult person. We were always friendly. He used to give me advice, practical advice. When we were painting, he had the studio next to mine. The stall next to mine.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: At Street Hall. And I was trying to paint these sort of grotesque figures. Part Cubist, part—I don't know, Expressionist. They were messes. And he was painting these cross paintings. Geometric abstractions. Beautifully resolved paintings. Color all worked out. Everything was worked out. He said, "Why don't you get yourself a module and paint it? And just do that. You don't have to go through all this."

Then he got—the guy, I think, who sprung him was Alex Katz. And through Alex, Fairfield Porter.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. The Maine connection. Lincolnville, Camden Hills.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I don't know, we seemed to be linked for quite a number of years, as different as we were from one another. Simply because there were so few figurative painters.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Your daughter Alex just opened a show last week at The Painting Center. How does it feel to have another painter in the family?

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, I already had my wife as a painter.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I meant as a child.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yet another one?

JAMES McELHINNEY: Yet another one.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: I only wish she would paint more. She's been very busy with her own family, with her own children. I think that's been a priority for her. I'm so happy to see her have this show. Because she is remarkable, and the show is only the very tiny tip of an iceberg there.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, hopefully—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: No, it's wonderful to have her showing.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I'm wondering if there's anything else at the moment that you think we should—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: There will be only if you leave. And as soon as you leave, I will think of all the things that—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, send me an email and I'll come back and we'll have lunch one day. And we can talk some more.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: There is a lot more that I haven't sifted about life in Italy. And yet most of it's been internal. So, it means drudging up a lot of stuff that I dread—

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, it's hard—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: —mostly about circumstances.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Right. Well, it gave you multiple points of view. It gave you a different place to be a painter or be a father or a husband.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: There's one thing about Italy I can say, is that the time that I've spent in Italy is the time that I've been most deeply, deeply, deeply—what's the word? Completely surrounded by art.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Immersed.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Immersed. Immersed is the word. Somehow the banalities of every day in America are different from the banalities of every day in Italy. Even though my schedule there is not that different from my schedule here. In the morning, I get up and I go to town, check my mail at the post office, I buy groceries. I do a few errands. And then I drive back and spend the rest of the day painting. And since it's summer, usually, the days are very long.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: So I can paint maybe six, seven hours after I get back. And having a schedule like that, every day, just doing that, has suited me very well. At this stage, I feel a little guilty. I probably could've seen more. I could have been more of a tourist. An art tourist.

But I've been inspired by the air and the light and knowing that those paintings are nearby, and that they're accessible. That if I want to drive over to see something, I can.

And also because my friends there—I have more social life there than I have here, at this stage of my life. And our reason for being friends and for getting together is always art. And that's usually what we talk about. And so, I have that immersion in that sense. The social sense, as well.

There were a bunch of old guys in Umbertide, my closest town. Most of them are dead now. But for a few years, they would be gathered in a certain cafe. And when I'd go in in the morning, if I'd have my coffee, they'd wave to me and I'd go over and sit with them. They'd be making jokes about one another. These were people—men who'd lived together all their lives in this little town.

I loved that sense of an ongoing conversation that they had had. There are, of course, great limitations in living in one town your whole life. But there are also the benefits of this.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: And I had a little taste of what they had, and what that small-town Italian culture was about. Ancient bitternesses and ongoing jokes about certain people who would never shed their caricature as long as they lived.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Those benefits of—

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: There was affection. In all of this, there was affection.

JAMES McELHINNEY: The benefits of inhabiting a world you could actually know and understand in a deep way.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Well, that's not unlike a body of work, isn't it? As an artist, you create a world.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah—I think it's not creating a world for anyone else, it's creating a world for yourself.

JAMES McELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Giving yourself a place to be all day long. Trying to do this and that. But the world is still there. Whether it's good or bad, you're engaged in it.

And I suppose it's childlike. You notice children making figures and they're talking with them, and so on. I remember doing that. Then I realized that I still do that.

[Laughs.]

JAMES McELHINNEY: We have a minute left. Not to put any pressure on you.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Well, I have nothing that I can think of right now, in this moment, to fill up the remaining minute.

JAMES McELHINNEY: 40 seconds.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Nor the 30 seconds.

JAMES McELHINNEY: [Laughs.] Well thank you very much. And when we leave, I'm sure other things will come to mind.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: We can get together and have a coffee and lunch, or something.

JAMES McELHINNEY: I look forward to that. Thank you.

WILLIAM H. BAILEY: Yeah. Thanks, Jim.

[END OF TRACK AAA_bailey12_1930_m.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]