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Oral history interview with Arnold Lehman, 2015 March 30-April 20

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Arnold Lehman on March 30-April 20, 2015. The interview took place in Brooklyn, N.Y., and was conducted by James McElhinney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

Interview

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney. On Monday, April 20, 2015, I sat down with Arnold Lehman in his office at the Brooklyn Museum to conclude a three-part interview for the Archives of American Art of the Smithsonian Institution. We began our conversation the minute I entered the room, and as I was in the process of setting up my recording equipment, this recording joins us after I had shared with him news of the launch of VOCA, the Voices of Contemporary Art. Its artist initiative gathers interviews with contemporary artists about their studio practices for use by conservators. I wondered if this was echoed by the development of new interpretive strategies used by museums. Was it necessary to continue putting tombstone labels next to works of art accompanied by wall texts, or is it more useful to develop apps, chat labels, and more interactive displays to make the encounter with a work of art more exciting for the visitor. Objects and situations that, 20 years ago, were not embraced as works of art are now widely accepted. Still, many people may question whether or not something is a work of art, so how can a museum help them to accept it, engage it, and value it?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —that the best definition of art is if the artist said it was art, the person who made it said it was art. And then, you can have your arguments, but they made it; they called it for what they believed it to be. Coming up now to your question about the viewer and the interaction that the viewer has with a work of art, has to be on a very wide spectrum, and I don't believe everyone needs to be at a certain place in that spectrum. They don't have to be all the way, literally, having some telepathic communication with the artist, understanding every nuance of what the artist had intended, nor is everyone at ground zero where there's no comprehension whatsoever. Part of what a great work of art does is to trigger a whole variety of insights, emotions, meanings, stories that, one way or another, can engage the visitor's mind.

I don't know if I'm right in saying this, but perhaps the more engaged the person is, perhaps the better they are —the closer they are in knowing what the artist intended. On the other hand, there are people for whom an explicit story, written out, is still not enough. Then, there are those people for whom that's much too much. They want there to be a mystery. They want there to be a romance in the old-fashioned sense of that word. So again, I come back to this spectrum of viewers' response, and there is also, to a degree, a spectrum of what the artist would anticipate the viewer to get from the work. Some artists don't care. Most museums do care, and it goes to that question. For instance, in a number of museums and for a long time, in contemporary galleries, there were no wall labels at all. The viewer was encouraged to experiment, to open up their minds.

A lot of people just walk through a gallery and never give it a second thought, just walk out. I believe that people need a little bit of connection, and that's what we offer in our galleries. We don't bring out a testament to each work, but we do provide what we call chat labels that give, maybe, a hint as to what's going on in the artists' world and creating this work of art. We have a very varied audience, from the most sophisticated to the least, and I believe that the most sophisticated viewer can simply ignore the labels if they choose, while someone who is not as well versed in the world of art can positively avail themselves of a sentence or two that might allow for some additional insight on that viewer's part. So we, here, provide some assistance. We will soon be announcing an app that will provide a great deal of assistance, but you have to ask for it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You spoke about that last time, and actually, before the public program yesterday, my wife and I toured the museum and saw the *Basquiat* show and the *Director's Choice* show, and also the *Connected Cultures* show, where, if my memory serves, there is a screen that sort of explains the app and how it will work and how you can—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We're sort of rolling it out—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —a little bit. But little bit by little bit, but you know— you're not using this for a newspaper story, so—basically, it's to communicate in real-time with the viewer. If you or I have a question and we're standing in front of a work of art, we have a question, we can simply text that question, and it'll be answered by

real people in real-time, and even associated with the works of art surrounding it because we will know where you are in the gallery. I hope people don't feel that—a little bit of an NSA [National Security Agency] approach or big brother approach, but it helps us to help the viewer by knowing, if he's looking at this impressionist painting and standing next to another, how to make that connection or why they are different. But it's going to require the viewer to ask. We're not going to be out there peddling answers.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No. But do you think it's more challenging or more urgent to provide that kind of option in a museum that lives inside of Beaux Arts Temple of Art and Science.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: [Laughs.] I think it's important for every museum—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean, as opposed to—yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —to provide that kind of option.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You mean as opposed to something like a repurposed, mass mocha, industrial space that's been repurposed for exhibitions, or a purpose-built space like the Liebeskind-Hamilton wing of the Denver Art Museum, which is a zany, angular, signature object.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: My question is, do people repurpose their brains when they walk in the front door? I think there is a need for subtle support; if you don't want it, you needn't take it. But it's very hard to get a question answered in most museums about a lot of things. I think our colleague institutions are coming along. We hope we're in the forefront of a lot of that. But we're actually retreating a little bit from technology and going back to a, kind of, a live format. So it'll be interesting to see what happens. If it doesn't work, we'll figure out something else.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Something else will work.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Eventually.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Maybe.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Last time, you spoke about being perceived as having a, kind of, populist agenda, trying to be more inclusive, trying to make the museum, you know, good citizen in the community, as it were. And what museums around, you know, the country do you see as being peers? I mean, people who are kind of on the same vector, people who are—or institutions that are trying to move towards the same goals that, you know, the Brooklyn Museum is.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, I think the good news is that most everyone is. And that is, I think it's long overdue, but I think it's pretty much universal at this point. I'll start with my local colleagues. You know, I think that the Met is moving in that direction under its new leadership and is doing a really good job. I think that places as disparate as the Walker in Minneapolis, the Oakland Museum in California, and many others, in different ways, are making themselves, part of a, kind of, a cultural opportunity that's not limited to certain people—however you want to describe those people—then or now. I think each institution, in its own way, is adapting more technology, if that's the course they're going in; they're looking at making their galleries more accessible, or at least less threatening.

I used to speak for—I gave many, many talks in which one of the prominent part of my discussion was to talk about what I call "the other." The other was comprised of the tens of millions of people who don't visit museums, who don't know anything about art, don't want to visit museums. When they get into a museum, they're shushed, and they're shunted, and I went through a drill with audiences. I told them to close their eyes, and pretend to be all sorts of things: pretend to blind, or pretend to be handicapped, pretend to be black, pretend to be and look poor, pretend to not speak English, and just think about the barriers that are both physical and not so physical in institutions to prevent any and all of those people of having a reasonably good visit. I must say, I think I sold a lot of people in my audiences about how different it would be if they were not who they were. Not everybody, clearly, but you know, how many— it's hard being the other, but it's useful in doing some roleplaying.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what models—when institutions began to track in this direction, what models were they having a look at? I mean, we have the Temple of Art, you know, the Metropolitan we talked about last time being closed on the days when the working people would be unable to—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Now they're not closed ever.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Now they're not closed ever, which is wonderful. But do you think that there was some kind

of awareness of what was happening in places like, the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, which was, really, kind of a theme park environment. And the deal with Ripley to sort of, you know—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, you've also, I think, very, very appropriately pinpointed one of the aspects of what's helping American art museums change, and that is the science museums. All over this country, the science museums, who have, in many ways, an equally difficult—as a range of subject matter to engage their audiences with, have found many ways of doing it that no one calls dumbing down, and no one says is nonsense or ridiculous, but have really come to terms with being democratic institutions, and they've taken a real leadership role in that. I'm not sure how many of my colleagues or my colleagues boards of trustees have understood that or seen it or read about it, but it's evident every time you walk into a museum of science or a natural history museum, you have a sense that something different is going on there. That's certainly in the last 20, 25 years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So the parallels are that art was perceived as being sort of the bailiwick of the rich and the cultural elite, the moneyed elite, and science was inaccessible to a lot of people because you had to be smart to understand it. But at what point did science become fun and did art become, kind of, a form of entertainment?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I wouldn't go as far as saying or agreeing that, at one point, science became fun or art became a form of entertainment, but I would say that how the various subject matters are presented, how people are simply welcomed into an institution can change everything. It goes back to what I told you, how we changed the front entrance.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I mean, you take away five, 10-ton, bronze doors, which are clearly marked or not clearly marked, but are marked psychologically "do not enter." And you replace them with glass, revolving doors. It's not rocket science.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: The science museums figured that out a long time ago, much more quickly than we all have. As soon as you provide some, even an iota, of common sense about welcoming somebody in, you have to keep welcoming them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You have to keep saying, "This is for you. You belong. You understand. There's nothing off limits. There are no stupid questions; there are just lots of questions, and there are equal number of answers." Ask them in any language you like to ask. Be adaptable. I mean, the institution being adaptable to tall people, short people, people who are in wheelchairs. The whole thing is really common sense, and it makes it a little harder to understand why it's taken so long. There's another aspect, which I talk about; very few other people talk about it, and again, so obvious. Whatever the institution is, whether they're a public institution receiving funding from the city like we do, from the city of New York, the state of New York, or they're a totally private institution, the bottom line is that they are a public institution because 99 percent of the so-called private institutions avail themselves of one of the most wonderful parts of the American tax system. Their donors get write offs—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —in the federal tax system, the state tax system, and sometimes, even municipal tax system for given works of art, and a lot of other things as well. That immediately makes them, in my mind, a public institution. They cannot go back to say, "Oh no, no, no, no, we're private. We don't need— we don't need to do that."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, it makes sense. So the tax forgiveness, basically, makes them a public institution.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It's cut across—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —every layer of every museum, every cultural institution, every educational institution in this country, and to different degrees, they respond with a, more or less, public orientation. But there are no truly private institutions. I shouldn't say that; there are a few, but they accept no funding from any municipality, and they don't get donations of works of art or works of whatever. But there are very few of those. I don't even think I could even think of one today. You know, when there are princes and archdukes and cardinals and popes who established institutions, and they were fixed, and what they had and what they showed, and you were allowed in one day a week, or even, you know, the—where is my mind?—now in Philadelphia, move—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Barnes.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: The Barnes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You know, the Barnes was as private—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —as it could get because they, in fact, didn't do any of that stuff. But now, they're a public institution, and so we all have to behave differently. I mean, give me a break; it's the 21st century; it's a period of time where this country is diversifying at a very rapid rate, and we have to go along with that, and if we don't, institutions like museums will be out of business, either figuratively or literally. I'm sorry to be such a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, no, no—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —proponent of this point of view, but it's what I believe in.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, there are places that one might assume would be public institutions, like Mount Vernon, which is, in fact, a private—I believe it's a private foundation. But I don't think they turned down contributions, and I think they've got some kind of a membership structure and—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And if you make a contribution to Mount Vernon, they accept it, and you give them $1,000, and you deduct it from your federal income taxes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Makes them a public institution.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Just check that box right off.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The Norman Rockwell Museum—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh no, no, they're a public institution.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Totally public.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Absolutely public institution, and do great work. Absolutely great work. Norman Rockwell, of all people, would be sitting on my side of this table proposing exactly the same ideas.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, absolutely.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So, yeah, but there are definitely private institutions, but they're few and far between.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There's some hybrids sort of hitting the radar, like George Lucas's proposed museum on the Chicago—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: In Chicago, right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Waterfront, and—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But what property are they getting?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, this is—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: City property.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: City property, right. There's a law—there's a hubbub about that; a lot of people don't—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I'm not involved, and I'm not even interested in that hubbub. But it's still city property.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: My wonderful friend, Alice Walton, and her gigantic generosity to create the museum there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Crystal Bridges.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Crystal Bridges. They have poured hundreds of millions of dollars into doing that. I don't think they consider themselves a private museum. They take—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Not at all.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: They take contributions; they take works of art, and they really work hard in going after visitors and encouraging visitors. I haven't been, but I've been told by many people that the experience that you have at Crystal Bridges is a very positive and very thoughtful one.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, I would encourage it. I was very surprised. My wife was Tyson Scholar there last year, Kathy Manthorne.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh, I didn't—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A lot of the prejudices against the south, against the west, against the idea of Arkansas being like a dog patch type of place with—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Gave us a great president.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, indeed. And—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Or, at least, I think.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But I was very impressed with it, and I was stunned by their educational programs, where the museum will actually pay to bus students in from an hour away, buy them lunch, even pay for a substitute if the school needs them to, so that these kids can have this encounter with art.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: What more could you ask for?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The docents, a lot of whom are, of course—admission is free of charge, thanks to Wal-Mart—it's on the wall there that they're paying everyone's admission—but the minute you walk in the door, a person greets you, like at Wal-Mart, and asks, "Is this your first time at Crystal Bridges?" But I think for a lot of people who are not used to the culture of the museum environment, this is extremely welcoming, as you said.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, the good news, when you start a new museum, you don't have to have all the baggage of what has come with all the old museums. You can start fresh. You can look at the world around you and say, "This makes sense; this doesn't make sense," and that's a great, great advantage. Most of us can't do that; most of us have more baggage than anyone else in the world—it's called a collection—and you can't do much to change that. You can just talk about it differently. I mean, you could have the most anti-democratic collection—I'm not quite sure what that might be—but you can talk about it in an engaging, inclusive way that explains so much of why it's there. One of the brilliant people who do that in the museum field is Fred Wilson when he excavates through a collection and talks about it in ways that people even never thought about.

I remember so well—one of his first excavations of a museum was in the Maryland Historical Society years ago, 25 years ago, 30 years ago. They had, in the collection, all of these objects that refer to, or came out of, conditions where there were slaves. Fred brought them all out of the storage where they had probably never been seen before, put them on view, showing us a real spotlight on them, both literally and figuratively, and talked about them in ways that, whether you were black or white, or rich or poor, or had ancestors who were slaves, made a difference to you. So there are ways, and one of those good ways—I'm glad I brought up Fred—one of those ways is—or two of those ways is to have two writers who understand that need and/or artists who come in and help to move an institution forward. So—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How does that occur here? Artists.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, we have artists on our board; we have a very active contemporary program with artists where—it's very rare that we don't have a major exhibition that's contemporary, related to Brooklyn, focusing on an artist of color. So that interaction, in and of itself, through our education programs, through public programs, make certain that that kind of new voice is heard in our galleries, in our lecture halls, in our classrooms, and it's important. We have artists who do exhibitions. Hank Willis Thomas did a fabulous exhibition with a group of colleagues two years ago—more or less two years ago—which focused on the black male and how the black male was perceived. So it does happen, that—we don't have artists constantly working in the collections, but it's not a bad idea.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you think about the Robert Dover and Burchfield at Whitney, and Barbara Bloom at the Jewish Museum, and things like that where they come in, and they either organize an exhibition with the in-house resources, or in the case of Barbara Bloom, she basically used the objects, reconstructed a dialogue—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —with objects in the collection. So not dissimilar, in a way, to the *Connected Cultures* idea,

where unlikely pairings, based on portraiture or based on some other unifying concept, invites the viewer to compare, to consider.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, that—and you've again gotten to the heart of that exhibition was done for two reasons. One was to almost as soon as you get in the door, to provoke people to start thinking a little differently. Then before you walked in the door. The second part of that exhibition has a really practical implication, and that is, because our collections are spread out on five floors and because the way-finding—that's the right word, I guess—the way-finding in this institution is not easy. I keep saying put yellow feet going this way and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's easy to get lost.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —green feet—it's very easy to get lost—green feet going that way, and no one wanted to do that. Neither did I really, but to push the discussion; it's to tell people—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —that the museum is filled with all sorts of things, and you have to search it out; it's a little bit like a—unfortunately, it's a little bit like a treasure hunt here. But, we haven't really found the remedy for that as yet, so we figure, can't find the remedy, just put it out–ALl out there, and hopefully, people will find the remedy on their own.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it becomes like a movie trailer at the multiplex. You walk in there, and you say, "I want to see more of those," then you can ask—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: May I use that line?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Because that's very much what it is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just like the previews at a multiplex.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's walking around to each screen and like watching all the different previews.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It's absolutely true. Absolutely true, so. I think part—actually, I don't know if we're off subject or not, but I think one of the best things you can do in a museum is to get lost. Not on purpose—well, maybe on purpose because we most often go to museums for two reasons. We go for special exhibitions, and then we leave, and that's absolutely the fault of my colleagues and myself over the years thinking of ways of how to get more people in the door. They don't look at the permanent collections, so they don't look at the heart of what a museum is. And—where was I? I just missed my whole thing. Now you have to remember; you're the interviewer.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, yeah, you were talking about the—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I'm so upset—oh about—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You're trying to get people in the door.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And so, the permanent collections are stepchildren, most often, and so it's getting lost and finding things in a museum is not a bad—it's not a bad thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I think the *Basquiat* show here is an excellent example because, right now, because you're installing a new show in the Sackler galleries, you can't just walk into the *Basquiat* show; you've got to go up to the fourth floor or the fifth floor and walk down—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And come down and go around and, right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, you've got to walk through; you've got to go on a treasure hunt to find the show. Then, it's a question of if you take the elevator, which we tried to do, vast line; took the stairs, door's closed; go downstairs, upstairs, downstairs.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I'm sorry.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's okay, but by the time you get into the exhibition, you've seen a lot of stuff that you hadn't planned on visiting.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right. Even if it's subliminal.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: When we have giant crowds for exhibitions, and it's on the fifth floor, for instance, we'll run the lines—we start in the lobby, and then we move them from the lobby to the elevator lobbies, and then from the elevator lobbies, we move up, and let's say it's on the fifth floor. We will start a waiting line within *American Identities*, and sometimes, it stretches all the way around *American Identities*, and we often get responses from people who say, "Oh, this was wonderful, you know, we never saw that. We've never been in American art; we didn't know you had all these treasures." And so, I used to joke by saying, to people who were nervous about people standing in long lines and all that—and I would say lines are good; lines are your friends for two—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's where you meet people.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, for two reasons—well, many reasons, meeting people is not quite one of them, but you have an opportunity to talk to other museum goers: why are you here, what's important to you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, okay. The other is, unless you're put outdoors to stand on line, which we've also had to do from time to time, you're forced to see things that you might not otherwise do. I remember so well—and perception and interest change. When I worked at the Met a long, long, long time ago, my offices were—you had to go through arms and armor to get to my offices. It was like going through a funeral parlor without there being a wake. It was never anybody there. Never. And you could stop and admire whatever you do. I just go through and pretend it was me up there on the horses, and never anybody. But I got to see all of that material. Today, of course, it's mobbed with the people. Not always, but mobbed, but then you go to places like musical instruments, the most gorgeous things in the world.

Or you come here and you see the *Arts of the Americas*, and again, some of the most fantastic works of art ever made, and you can often be alone there. It's part of why I keep saying that we have done ourselves a huge disservice relying so heavily on the special exhibition. That's why we always call *American Identities*, and even our *Arts of the Americas*, we give them titles, as though they're going to go away in a three months or six months time. And just because it's been here 10 years doesn't matter. But it does say to visitors why—this look — we spend so much money on making special exhibitions look fabulous, and then we often don't spend anything on the permanent collections to make them look great. So we tried to reverse that and spend a lot of money, within the context of what we think is a lot of money, and it really does work; people pay attention.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Have you ever intentionally had a special exhibition somewhere where the visitor would have to move through the collections in order to discover?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We have. We have. For instance, we had a great crowd for—off the top of my head, that I can remember, we had a great crowd for our crowd-sourced exhibition, crowd-curator exhibition called *Click*. It was in a small gallery—smallish gallery on the second floor near the Asian collections. Well, you've never seen—people had to drag through Islamic, which had fabulous things in it, and hopefully some people saw it, but they had to go through the Islamic collections, or they had to go through some of the Asian collections to get there. Or if they were really smart, they came up the west elevator and came through what was probably some other permanent collection at that time.

So we did that, and we also had an exhibition of Art Smith jewelry. Art Smith was the great African-American jeweler in the West Village. I remember going there as a teenager to buy a present for my mother, who made me return it, but that's another story. Yeah, I bought it because I didn't have any money, so I bought it in copper. He made things in copper and in silver and, very infrequently, in gold. And so, it's another story. A lot of people wanted to see Art Smith, and they had to wind their way—this was really crazy—through spaces with period rooms to get there. So it was the only space we had, but we often talk about doing more of that. Just recently, had we put *Killer Heels* someplace on the fifth floor or third floor or something, people would see a lot.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it seems like a good way to move people through the static exhibitions, the more permanent exhibitions, and get visitation to—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yeah, totally. It happens very frequently. Well, it happens once a month during First Saturdays when we have so many people in a shortened five hours' time, six hours' time, that we do have lines. We have lines for almost everything, and we have to route people through other galleries, and that's good.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you see any collaborations down the road between the art museums and the science museums? Do you see any kind of hybrid?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I know there have been some; I can't tell you what they've been, but not with us. I don't really know. I do think everyone is so busy in their own worlds today working out the problems that they all have that I don't know the answer to that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, what about Lucas, which is a museum of narrative art? It's film and painting and photography.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yeah, but that, in fact, is going to be all about storytelling. I don't know how they're going to blend in the scientific parts of filmmaking into that; I have no idea, but they do have subject matter. All those rockets and whatnot that they could use very effectively to show that information. George Lucas was just here a couple of weeks ago. He was here for dinner for one of our exhibitions. I don't remember which one at this point, but listen, if he can't figure it out, very few people can. And he also—the new director there was the founding director at Crystal Bridges.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Don Bacigalupi.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Don Bacigalupi who hails from Brooklyn, so we want to give him that accolade. I don't know. I don't know the answer to that question, and it's going to have to be my successor who will be figuring that out.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What about partnerships between longstanding museums? Like I just heard—and I don't know if it's true, but I think it is—that the Breuer building that the Whitney occupied for a long time, still owned by the Whitney, is going to be leased to the Met. Going to use it until they build a new wing, and then they're going to give it back to the Whitney?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Something like that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Something like that? There was something that brokered with Leonard Lauder and other people.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I'm sure it was and that's a good thing. That's a very good thing for that community. Even if everyone surrounding them on Madison, Park Avenue, and Fifth Avenue didn't go to the Whitney, it would be awful if that museum just laid dormant there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And no one was going in. That's a big piece of property.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It is, and it's a very special place, and I think the majority of us—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —I mean, we're excited to see the new Whitney.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Which I'm seeing tonight.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, you are? Oh, is that the—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I think the opening dinner is tonight.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow, we lowly members will have to—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I'm only there, believe me, because of my position. I'm certainly not there because of me. It will be very interesting to see. I've watched it as it's gone up. But there have been a lot of museums. I mean, tons of loans back and forth from museum to museum. There've been lots of coordinated movement of staff, especially from European and Asian museums to American museums and the other way around. I'm almost sure I mentioned the last time we spoke about our huge collection, sharing with the Met costume collection, going to the Met, or having, kind of, first nation status in terms of borrowing things back, and recognize that there's going to have to be more of that. There may very well be, in the future, depending upon the economy and what people are able to do, I can envision museums merging to not just to save money, but to better serve the public.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So one of the things I've been hearing about the new Whitney is that they've enhanced, bolstered their educational programs, that they're expanding their educational programs. They're going to be much more involved in, sort of, events and classes and workshops and that kind of thing. Do you see that as a trend in the museum world, especially as in the world of higher education? The whole, BFA, MFA-culture, post-

war, art-school culture is sort of in a contracting mode now. Sort of a lot of colleges, universities are losing their studio programs and even art history programs. Do you see the museums maybe being able to take up the slack there?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You know, I don't know. I don't know what their plan is. I think it's a very good plan going into a young, vibrant neighborhood like Meatpacking District.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I'm sure there are families there who are crying out for programs for their kids, for adults as well, for all sorts of opportunities, and I think it's very smart. First of all, I think it makes good sense. Then, it's very smart for the Whitney to do that because providing that kind of service encourages more people to become members, become donors. It becomes more of a major player in that community with very little competition. You've got across town–ALmost literally across town, you've got the New Museum. You've got the Tenement Museum. Downtown, you have the Museum of Jewish Heritage and, of course, you have the 9/11.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you have the Museum of the American Indian.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Museum of the American Indian even further downtown. But they've got that whole West Village, Chelsea, well, the Rubin Museum is there. But the West Village, Chelsea Village, SoHo, Tribeca audience, even the northern tip of the—well, all the Financial District because it's a different kind of museum than the Museum of the American Indian, so they have all those people. Lots of singles, lots of young families. It's a terrific—I know when I was first told about it or asked about it, I actually said, if you don't do it, we should do it. But, when there was some talk about not going in there—it makes total sense, but you can't move into that neighborhood where there's such great expectations and just hold a glass and stainless steel and stone around you like armor, and just sit there for people coming in to see you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's also a highline.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You took the words out of my mouth. That highline is like a feeder, like a pipeline right into the Whitney, and the number of international visitors. It's a perfect, perfect location, and I'm sure they will do a glorious job with it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I guess, the reason for my question about education is that a lot of the art schools in America began as, sort of, annexes to museums: PCA [Pittsburgh Center for the Arts], the Layton School in Milwaukee, Art Institute of Chicago.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: The Corcoran.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Corcoran, sadly, now, no more.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: The Museum of Fine Arts Boston.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Exactly.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Carnegie.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Carnegie.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And us.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And the Brooklyn Museum, indeed.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But we took a different direction, and we simply said, when we gave that up, we did it because, at that moment in time and continuing, Pratt was doing such a great job in Brooklyn that it was more competition. They were doing a great job, and we were doing a good job, and it was at a certain period of time. It was a time when—I still hear from scores of people—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So '70s.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, earlier, from the late '40s, '50s, '60s, '70s. Max Ernst taught me at the Brooklyn Museum, or this person taught me, naming all of the great, very, very—not primarily, but heavily all of the refugees, the immigrants from Europe, the great artists, who settled—mainly settled in New York and looking for job. Brooklyn was all too eager to employ them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Someone made the comment that New York became the capital of the art world because Hitler scared the bejesus out of everybody; they left Europe, and the boats all came here.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Not a bad—not a bad way of looking at it. A large degree, it's true. I mean, certainly, European artists who were Jewish or who held socialists or communists views or just did degenerative art in general, they all left, and most of them did come here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: George Gross, Hans Hofmann.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: All of them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: All the Bauhaus guys: Ernst, Max Beckmann, Mondrian, they were all here. Léger.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It was a huge boost for New York City, huge. The people who created the art capitals in Europe started, you know—rebuilt it here in New York City.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So can you foresee the museums—now that that golden age of the post-war art school is kind of over, do you think the museums might expand their involvement in training artists via project spaces and other things—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: First of all, I don't really think it's over. I think that Pratt's doing better than it's ever done before. SVA [School of Visual Arts] has great enrollment. Parsons is doing a great job from what I understand. You know, whether it's—Columbia University with its studio program is doing well. I think that—and I don't know this, and I'm surmising—there's a kind of a different approach than the approach that was the approach that so many art schools, both pre-war and then many after the war for 20, 30 years took, was the very—the ancient approach of artist-student, mentor-mentee.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And that very direct relationship. You wanted to be in the class because this great artist was teaching it. Forget your own abilities or not. I think, today, I think it's become more environmental. The idea is that you learn about more than just painting or just sculpture. There is—and I think that's why places—and I'm not—Pratt just happens to be a neighbor, and I know a little bit more about it than any place else, but I think that's why they're looking at it as an all-over education. I mean, plenty of people have done that. Yale's done that for years. Harvard's done that for years, but more places are looking at this as, we're not just going to turn out a painter. We're going to turn out a painter who knows about urban planning, and he's going to know about —

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sustainability.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —sustainability, knows about environmental studies, knows this and that. I mean, they may have been all minors, but they're turning out a more complete person because I think the competition to be an artist, to become a successful artist, today is greater than it's ever been, much greater than it's ever been. With the number of people, the population—and I think some people are lured by—no one talks about poor artists anymore.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That used to be the ideal, right, this sort of—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Starving artist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: That garret now is in South Hampton during the summer and is on, maybe the Upper West Side. Maybe it's not Park Avenue. It wouldn't succumb to that, but that's a lure, too. We started talking about the difference between value and price, but that's a lure, and it's probably a lure that's very elusive to most people. So you come out of training to be a painter. You can't get a job. No one's buying, you can't sell your paintings, but at least there's a little bit to fall back on.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The problem is, I think, also that because of the cost of an education, the BFA—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: That's another issue.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —is a quarter of a million dollars, you have to promise a career at the end of it; otherwise, no one's going to buy it. Of course, that's a lie. You can't promise a career.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You cannot, you cannot. In all the areas of education where that's most elusive is in the visual arts or many of the other arts as well, the theater arts. But I guess, even in theater arts, you could always be part of the chorus, or in the opera. You don't have to be front and center.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hold a spear in *Aida* and be part of the—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Exactly. Visual arts is sort of like, in sports, sort of like being a wrestler. You're out there on your own.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You're a star or you're nobody.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right, you're not on a team sport. So I never even thought about that before.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, here's a question because we're talking about how—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: How we're doing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How the museum environment—it's entirely up to you—how the museum environment is creating these new vectors and pathways to connect different kinds of artworks, high art, low art, craft art, ply arts, decorative arts, fine arts, ethnographic arts, no more ethnographic arts. It's something else now. Narratives that are used to create shows like *Artists of Earth and Sky* at the Met, the Native-American show, or indeed, connecting cultures downstairs. If an artist has to look at that, a young artist has to look at that and says, why did I have to be a painter? Why can't I just do that? Think about the Rosemarie Trockel show at the New Museum where she did exactly that. Do you think that could be—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yeah, I think there's a very small percentage of aspiring artists who don't want to—I think very few artists, at the beginning at least, aspire to be installation artists, or performance more so because those artists are—generally have—I shouldn't talk about what I don't know, but I think very few aspire to be installation artists. They get there, but they don't start that way. That's as difficult to get that right as is difficult as painting any great painting, as creating any great play, as difficult as producing the finest poem. It's really tough, so even if that's where the aspiration is, by the time you try to have a gallery show of what you do and that doesn't work, you're never going to get to the museum stage.

The great thing is that, for centuries, in my mind at least, the community of artists have really been tough. They've gotten through it; they've worked during—they worked through all sorts of horrific circumstances, no money, eighth-floor walkups, no paint, nothing to sculpt on except maybe an old table in the attic. It's all about what's in their hearts and in their minds. That's going to make things happen. If it's not there, it's just not going to happen. I don't care what art school you go to. I think artists—and I'm sure there are a lot of people who would argue—I think artists are born. They're not made. There's a big difference there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, the motivation to make art comes from within, perhaps, but you have to know that there's a thing called art. And that's—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Totally, totally, but I think that separates. I once said that artists are like alien creatures, who need to be treated with the most respect and the most hospitality we can. But they're not like you and me. Well, maybe like you, but they're not like me. You know what happened to my art career. I told you. They are, they're different. They're different, and I think we're all blessed that they are different, and they need to be supported, and they need to be protected, and they need to be helped whenever possible. And that's, to a large degree, what museums should be doing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Have you ever explored the idea of a partnership with a place like Pratt to develop some kind of environment for—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Over the years, we've had a lot of different programs with Pratt from internships to—nothing directly that speaks to the art side itself, but they've had involvements here for years: some years on, some years off. I think everyone has always felt them to be very productive, to have their students here, and we have—of course, we have curators and educators who teach there, teach all sorts of places. But, I think we're going to see more of that happening moving forward.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I know they had a plan on the books for a while to acquire or lease a building in Garnerville, New York in this calico factory that now houses studios and offices, kind of, incubator space—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —near Haverstraw, about half an hour above the city, and that never happened. But they were exploring ideas of art science, nexus, or art sustainability, trying to design for a more humane society.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, they do that. I mean, they have— it and other art schools of similar level to— we just think of Pratt as a—I think we inappropriately think of Pratt as an art school. It's so much more than just an art school because it's a major school in engineering; it's a major school of architecture; it's one of the major schools of library science in the United States, but no one even thinks about that, so they already have these intersections that go on there. I'm a big proponent of that. It's hard these days to be an artist in a total vacuum.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's harder to occupy that specialization.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: In anything.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In anything. You, sort of, become the age of the new polygraph.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right. I learned—I'm not quite sure why I did—but Pratt was nice enough to give me an honorary degree I guess a year ago, so I learned a lot more about Pratt than I ever knew before, and it was fascinating. It's a fascinating place. But I'm sure I would think the same of—I used to know a lot about the Maryland Institute, but I'm sure I would—they're very—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Comparable.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: On the outside, they're very uni-dimensional, but inside, they're very, very complex, and I think that's a good thing. I think it's a good thing for artists to be in that kind of complex environment like we just spoke of a couple of minutes ago.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, a writer I know said once that, "Art is the standard equipment for any civilization."

ARNOLD LEHMAN: That's a great—I wish I came up with that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's what Oscar Wilde said, I guess, in that exchange.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Can you just substitute who you ascribed that quotation to?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: James Howard Kunstler, who is a fiction writer and an architectural critic.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Related to Bill Kunstler?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No. Wrote a book that's taught a lot of architecture and urban planning programs called the *Geography of Nowhere*, which is basically an attack against sprawl, and it's attack against the automotive culture that created, post-war suburbs and all of its attended problems. He's also a voice piece, a mouthpiece for the Congress of the New Urbanism, which I expect you're aware of people like Andrés Duany in Miami and so forth, they're friends. But, so if art is the standard equipment for a civilization and a museum is a place where the muse abides, and we're in an age of great change. Technology is, not only the gizmos, but how the use of them is changing how people interact with each other and how people interact with objects. What do you see as the number one priority that all these museums should be addressing now? Sort of the one thing that maybe, you know, everyone has to catch up to.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: One thing?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, a couple. We said you can't have one thing anymore.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I understand, understand.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But yeah, the priorities. Top, you know, your Letterman top 10.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I think we have to—we're an institution that gets hundreds of thousands of images out there on the net, and we believe in that. We believe in sharing all that, but I think we also have to get to an understanding that, for us to do the best job we can do, we have to continue to do all we can to bring people inside. For instance, our new app, unworkable outside the museum. It'll give you some standard information about exhibitions, about collections—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's just becomes the website outside the—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It only works—and we tell me people that: "This is only going to work for you 100 percent, 110 percent when you're in the museum." I think we have to lure people back inside because I think that's where we do our best job. We can do another kind of job outside. We can provide a worldwide library of images, but it's not the same thing as being there and seeing the real thing, and I don't mind being thought about as old fashioned in that way because I do believe there's a balance, but I think we can do a better job inside these walls.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that's like watcher the movie trailer on your device as opposed to inside the Cineplex

to the—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I've always like that ad, which I'm sure you've seen, where, on the big screen, they have a little television, and they're showing this great action movie, and they're saying something like, well, this can't be contained in that little box, and the whole thing explodes on air. I just love that because it does speak to what the difference that so many of us can make in people's lives, but that difference has to be more personal. You can hear great, in terms of the ability to record and replay symphonic music today. My God, you can have as good an experience listening to symphonic music at home as, almost, you can in the great symphony hall, but is that all you get when you're in the symphony hall, just listening? The only time I really enjoy going to any orchestra is sitting as close as I can and listening out of an ear and watching them produce that music. To me, that's when there's magic. So you have to be there for that to happen. I know people love, love, love, love the film version of the opera. The Met is all over movie theaters.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Simulcasts.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Simulcasts and so on. I have very close friends who are great opera fanatics. Not even fans, but fanatics, and they actually—while they still enjoy being at the opera, they actually do enjoy those because they zoom in, and if you don't have good seats, they zoom in, and you can see everything about the opera. Then they'll back off, and they'll say, but it's still not the same. It's still not the same because it's an experience, and this is a simulated experience. Simulation is good up to a point.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Some of the people who might know—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We should stop in a couple of minutes. So you have a big, final question.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Technologically, I just wanted to add a, kind of, PS. A lot of the people I know who are really into the audio technology, privately, will tell you there's nothing like vinyl because it's physical.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Of course, of course, of course. Instead of electronic, digital. Excuse me, not even electronic, digital today.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, digital. So a needle, in a groove on a disc going around and round is physical because of that. It's sexier than—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yes, but the problem is, of course, is when recordings were first being made, some people had no use for them either. The physicality of the painting, the sculpture, whatever object there is, the physicality and the sense of being with the people who are making the music, with the people who are singing, with the people performing on stage, all of that is an experience that, in a way, needs to be protected. One day, it may be viewed as archaic, but hopefully, 500 years from now, there's still those kinds of experiences that get, you know, protected by whoever is around. We won't be here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you're about to move into a new adventure of some kind. I won't ask you about that, but I will ask you, what is your Laertes-to-Polonius advice to your successor?

[They laugh.]

That'll be the last question.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I have two lines about that. One is something that I don't really do well; I don't think I do well. I think I do it well peripherally, and that is to listen. Spend a lot of time listening. The other is to believe that—in what they're doing and that they can make, personally, a difference in what they're doing. That personal engagement, that personal touch, personal involvement, and not to let it just all be done by, here, 400 other people. What I am doing is—well, I've been appointed a fellow of the Ford Foundation, and one of the things that the 13 of us—I'm the lowest on the totem pole when you look at the creativity of that group. It's kind of intimidating, actually—we're all going together, work with the Ford Foundation, and advise them how to make what they do more global, more significant in people's lives. But I have my own project, and my own project is to work on expanding/creating a pipeline that will allow more young people of color to arrive at more leadership positions in the arts, primarily in the museum world, to get them into director's positions, deputy director's positions. It's so critical; it's not happening, and that's what I'm going to spend some time on. I'm also going to write a book on *Sensation*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I can't wait.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Neither can I.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thank you so much.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You're very welcome. Thank you. You are a terrific interviewer. I enjoyed every minute that we talked.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you're kind to say so. Me, too. Thank you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking with Arnold Lehman in his office at the Brooklyn Museum on Monday, March the 30, 2015. Good morning.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Good morning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You're a native of the Borough of—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I was born here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, you were born here.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right. I didn't live here, but I was born here, and I spent very early infanthood here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: When did you leave? When you were—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We left—I was about, I think, four, three or four. So I was born in 1944, and I think we left here in '47, something like that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: When were you mindful for the first time of being in the presence of a work of art?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It's a good question. Probably very early on in that my mother— since my mother was very interested in earlier furniture, painting, and I was often taken with my mother to look at things for our home. She had very good taste, and so we looked at lots of things. I was probably—the first time I remember doing that is probably five, six.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I don't know if that somehow transcended into an appreciation of art, but I was always interested, and I think that—well, let's say I always behaved, and at least that encouraged her to often take me with her, which I don't think many of my friends spent—did with their mothers or fathers. I think that was the beginning, and I continued to be very interested in actually the making of art, and I started to paint, actually, in my—or I attempted to paint. I want to, modify all that— by the time I was 10, 12 years old. I spent a lot of time painting, and had—that's when we were living on Long Island, and I had a small studio of sorts—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —in the basement. I must say, my parents encouraged that in any way I wanted. I had all the paints, canvasses, easels; whatever I asked for, they supported immediately. And there's a funny story, which I'll tell you. I was probably 14 and 15; this was during the summer because I was away in boarding school, and I decided, because I had seen museums, and wherever we went, I'd see a lot of sculpture. I decided I was interested in being a sculptor. Of course, I had no time for classes, but I mention this—and I'll start by saying I'm an only child, so this helps to understand this a little bit. I mentioned it at dinner one night, and a few days later, I had four or five big hunks of marble and a sculpting table that turned—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and all of the tools necessary were delivered. My father says, "Here's what you need." The funny part of that story is, I couldn't make a dent in these pieces of marble. I mean, no matter what I did, I had no idea how to approach the marble; I had no idea, at all, how to work with all of this. So my next step was to buy some books on sculpture and the making of sculpture—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —which didn't help very much. I was very frustrated. Paint, you know, anyone can paint. Anyone can put paint on the canvas. Not anyone can create something of value, and I use "value" in a broader sense. But to be a sculptor is not necessarily harder, but is required—there's some skills that are really required, even to make the first dent in a piece of marble or stone. I think you should start in a different way.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Like, perhaps with clay and perhaps with—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Perhaps with clay, perhaps with clay. That would have been a much better sense. But, I didn't say that. I said I was so taken with carved sculpture, and that was all my father heard.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: After a while, I assume you learned that people like Canova didn't actually carve the stone themselves?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, I did, but that was a long time afterwards. But he and many others who came before and after, certainly, they didn't carve later when they had success.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But they certainly were dealing with the stone themselves when they were working their way up.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: As young artists trying to prove their virtuosity of technique.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Or even trying to prove that they knew what they were doing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Right. So was there artwork hanging on the walls at home?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Mostly not terribly important, but my mother liked English landscapes and still lifes, and at some point, when I was in the middle of my teens, works by me hung on the walls as well. So it was a mixture—not a mixture; they were never in the same rooms, but they were very, as you can see, very supportive—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and pleased, and I don't want to use the word "proud." I mean, they would have to do that, but they're not here, so they can't. But I think they thought that what I was doing was important.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So did you come into the city to—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I did. I went to the galleries.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —explore the museums and the galleries?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I was in the museums all the time from very early on. As I was born here, I had a pediatrician just on the other side of Prospect Park. I can almost see where he was. Even though we didn't live here, my mother would take me to that pediatrician until, probably, I was sort of beyond the age of a care of a pediatrician. There were two things that were very important. He had an extraordinary library of art books and an extraordinary library—he was very interested in birds—and an extraordinary library dealing with works by Audubon and others. While everyone else sat in the waiting room, the receptionist would always take me into his library to wait there. I sat there sometimes for an hour.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Sometimes afterwards, I'd ask if we could just go back, so I could continue. So that was one thing. The other is we often made a trip of going to see Dr. Rosenblum and then coming to the Brooklyn Museum. So I must have come here in my childhood—I don't know—20—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: 20, 30?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No, no, 20, 30 times, easily, with my mother; I mean, not on my own—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —but with my mother at that point. Interestingly, I knew the museum very well in the '50s, the early '50s and middle '50s, and so that was one part, in Brooklyn. The other is that by the time I was 16, 17—you might remember the Greenwich Village Art Fair—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: –ALong 6th Avenue where everyone sort of rented a little stretch of cyclone fencing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You can't do that anymore because there are all these high-priced condominium and whatnots along 6th Avenue. I used to carve out a little space for me between two other people who—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and I encouraged them to let a 16 year old have a little lot space and never paid for. I showed things there and sold things, so that was very encouraging, to say the least.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I would say. Where did you go to prep school?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Worcester Academy, Worcester, Massachusetts.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. So there was a museum there, too—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: There was the Worcester Museum, which is a great museum—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —which is terrific.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —which I used to go to all the time. Small but—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —but still had quite an extraordinary collection, especially old masters—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and, you know, related material. I'd go there on trips from Worcester— trips from school, and I'd often go there on weekends on my own. So it was not being out in the countryside someplace; that was a very positive thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So did you—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: They also had a museum of arms and armor.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, the Higgins Armory.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Exactly. Why do you know all that about Worcester?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I have some acquaintance with the place myself.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Were you born there?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, not at all, but my wife is from Boston area. But I've been aware of the Higgins Armory for years. I've got many—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I could never—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —friends in the—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I could never—I've never pulled out the Higgins, the name.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But thank you for reminding me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, not at all, but a number of my friends, or I should say, a number of the curators at the Met and the Arms and Armor Department are old friends of mine, so I was aware of the place at an early age. Being a male of a certain inclination, I was fascinated by armor and swords, and cross bows, and—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, the Higgins, I've learned later, of course—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —not then, had an extraordinarily competitive collection—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —in terms of quality, not in size, necessarily, but in terms of quality. It was probably as good as most of the major museums.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think so. I think that a number of the pieces that were in the collection were not equal to the quality that began to emerge at the Met, certainly, or at the Art Institute of Chicago or Cleveland. As they began to acquire superior pieces, I think Higgins began to lose quality.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Because they stopped collecting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They stopped collecting, and, actually, last year or two years ago, they auctioned off the majority of the collection. The—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I remember that. I forgot that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The Museum closed, and the sort of high-end core of the collection is, now, I think, in—under the care of the Worcester Library or—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Really?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —some such other organization.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Okay. Well, I'm continually interested. I'm a little off in terms of the timeline, but I continued to see Arms and Armor every day because, when I worked at the Metropolitan Museum—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —to get to our offices, I had to walk through the Arms and Amor hall. So I watched thousands of children—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —oohing and aahing over the mounted and armored horses, and so on, but we're on a different timeline.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. It's a wonderful art form in a lot of ways. I was curious, when you went to college, did you pursue the study of art actively or—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, not right away because my interest, initially, was—I intended to be, or wanted to be, a psychiatrist. I read what I could of Freud and Jung and others—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —in high school, and that interest—I didn't know what I wanted to do, but that interested me a great deal. I should backtrack for a moment. I learned—as I looked at more art, I learned the hard way—no, not the hard way. The hard way would be to have continued as an artist and to have been unrewarded by either good reviews or people collecting the work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So I actually learned the easy way. In looking at art more and more, I simply discovered that I wasn't up to the task. I wasn't competitive; I didn't know enough; I didn't also spend very much—as much time. I mean, you have to be full-time—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —at almost anything you do. And so, I actually destroyed almost everything. I couldn't get back things that I had sold because I didn't know who I sold them to. It wasn't a very professional transaction in Greenwich Village.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But everything that my parents had was turned into garbage. I actually got back some paintings I made and gave to friends, or sold to friends. Once in a while, something appears that I'd totally forgotten. We were at a dinner party about two or three years ago here in New York, in Manhattan, and with friends—with a friend and his wife from college, who I hadn't seen for a very long time because they lived in the Midwest. He pulled out of his storage closet one of my paintings that he had purchased from me; I didn't give it to him.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And said that there had been a leak and some water had gotten on it and ruined part of the

surface. He said, would I take it back and see if I could do something to repair it. I immediately said, "Of course." And he's never seen it again, but I gave him back his 50 bucks.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So why this purge of old artwork?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It's a good word, and that's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, it wasn't good. I didn't want it to —I mean, certainly, lots of people have skeletons in their closet. This happens to be my skeleton, and I wanted to make it disappear because it wasn't very good. I wanted—as I got further into art history, I wanted people to know that I had good judgment, and seeing these things, even though they were from my childhood and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —I could easily explain—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —I figured just, why? So—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Barbara Novak, paints and—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: There are a lot of people who paint and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Went to Belfast to paint an orange lily for her husband's Catholic friends. [Laughs].

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You know, that's a little perverse.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's a sign of peace and tranquility in a troubled land.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It doesn't matter. You know, I'd rather be known for other things—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —than being an artist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: When you were in high school—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and during the summers, did you ever take any formal instruction?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No. I'm trying to remember where. I went to a class and said that I might not be able to get there regularly, but could I pay to, sort of, audit it. It was a painting class, but I can't remember where. It wasn't one of the formal— it wasn't—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Like the Art Students League?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No, it wasn't the Art Students League, and it wasn't at the Academy. I can't remember. I observed the class—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —for a day—you're bringing out things that I barely remember—I observed the class for a day, and I never went back. So that's not exactly—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —formal training.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —formal training. But I did, very early on. I was 17, and I went to Europe on my own by myself, and I spent an enormous amount of time in museums in every city in Europe. I was there for a couple months. That was, in a sense, some formal training. Again, to reiterate what I said before, enough to ensure that I would never pick up a paintbrush again.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I mean, this is supposed to be an honest oral history; is it not?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Correct. Correct.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So I'm trying to be honest and not too embarrassing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Establishing the foundation. Were there any teachers at your prep school or any other people, apart from your mom, who were mentors, or who inspired you?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: There weren't. There weren't; I mean, there were art classes that were taught. I didn't take them. I'm sure that there were discussions about art in other classes, in literature—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —in history, but I certainly don't remember any focus. There was no art history taught, which I would have taken. But, I continued just on my own. I did encourage fellow students, from time to time, to come with me on a Saturday or Sunday and go out to lunch and go to a museum, and I didn't get a lot of takers. But I went, so that was all that was important.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So where did you do your undergraduate work?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: At Johns Hopkins.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: For the one, the express purpose—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Because I wanted the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Instead of going—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I wanted to go to medical school.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Had you—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: That ended very quickly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Had you been ever in analysis yourself?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No. No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you just had become interested in—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Very interested, and since I didn't have, by the end of high school, have a—what's the right word?—a calling. Very few people, then, did; fewer now have. I thought this was among the most interesting things that I had been exposed to. But what I found at Hopkins was that, in those days, Hopkins was very oriented towards graduate students. The undergraduate school was —I think it was a second thought. But the positive part of that was that there was a very small undergraduate body, and the faculty was the faculty that was teaching—it was a superb faculty—that was teaching really good graduate students. I think that was an allure as well, that there wasn't an intermediary, a line of what I became myself: graduate assistants, and so on. I mean, you really dealt with the faculty.

At the very beginning, in my freshman year, I took the prerequisites of introduction to art history, and I have to say, maybe it's too strong, but I fell in love with the professor, who was Phoebe Stanton, who was a 19th century specialist, particularly in Pugin. She was incredibly dynamic and—dynamic and engaging teacher and lecturer. I know that I annoyed her, no end, by always sitting in the front row and always having my hand in the air asking questions.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I ran into—weirdly enough, because of the timing of this conversation, at the CAA, I was presenting a paper, and—[laughs]—this is only a month ago—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —not even—maybe three weeks ago—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and the graduate instructor in that class, who's Gabriel Weisberg, who is a professor art history at the University of Minnesota now—I knew none of this—came up to me after it and said, "You were the obnoxious"—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —"student in the class who always asked questions, who never allowed anybody else to ask a question." I said, "Thank you very much. That's a very nice introduction. How are you?"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We had a very nice talk. And he was a very good instructor, I have to say. It was a giant class, the introductory classes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They all are.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But then I went on to take more and more classes with Phoebe Stanton, and they had a superb, absolutely superb, art history faculty, and the minute you got out of the—as with most places—the introductory courses, you then went into a course where there were six students.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I got to know them very well, particularly Phoebe Stanton; Adolf Katzenellenbogen, who is the head of the department; and all the others. That still did not set me on a track, without any hesitation. I graduated much earlier than my class because, again, as I mentioned, Hopkins wasn't particularly interested in its undergraduates, and so there was very little oversight. There was so many classes that interested me, really interested me, that I took—instead of four or five, I took nine, 10, 11 classes—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —a semester. In those days, you didn't pay by any— I hear people pay by—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Course hour, yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —course and what—you didn't do that then. And so, sort of, like, I graduated in two and a half years, and stayed on, again, not really knowing what I wanted to do. I stayed on for a master's degree. In a year when everyone else was finishing their bachelor's degree, I stayed on for a master's degree in writing because I became very interested, also, in poetry, particularly in poetry.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I spent a year, basically, writing poetry and rewarded by a master's degree, interestingly enough.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do any of your poems exist?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: They do. They do.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So they didn't—they didn't share the dustbin experience of your paintings?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No, no, no, they exist. I tried to keep them. I tried to keep them quiet, but they were published in a number of tiny magazines—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and actually, most recently, about a year or so ago in a magazine here in New York City.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wonderful.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So they've appeared, but I stopped.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you continued to write poetry?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No, no, no, these are all. I didn't continue. I said, this is a strange world for me, then. I had no idea what I wanted to do and applied to every sort of area. But finally, I decided that art history made the most sense, and I went to Yale because they seemed to be the most open. I was primarily interested in the 20th

century, and many of the other major art history graduate programs said, very clearly, that they were not interested in the 20th century. You have to remember, we're looking at almost 50 years ago—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —more than 50 years ago. So we were— the 20th century hadn't existed for a very long time by then. But Yale was very—it was very encouraging. Even though the coursework was broad, and it went from the ancient world to the modern world—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —they were very encouraging in terms of whatever I wanted to do, even if it dealt with the 20th century.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who did you work with there?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh, my God, my master's degree there was with Bob Herbert.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I wrote on the Nabi. I worked enough on the Nabi for the master's degree to strongly suggest to Bob that, no, I didn't want to work on Maurice Denis, who he strongly suggested—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —that I write a dissertation on. I sort of had enough. You know that group of artists?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of course.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, the artists are fine, but when you start dealing with the families one or two generations later, and you get—I spent a lot of time in Paris, primarily there working on the master's degree. You start having to spend time in theosophical meetings and such that I decided I knew all I needed to know about the Nabi. The other person I worked with and really enjoyed—and it was a real change for me—was Vincent Scully.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And Vincent was with a bigger audience—was kind of a new Phoebe Stanton—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —the same energy and dynamism and belief in what he was doing, and that's why he had 500, 600 students in his introductory classes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because they were legendary, and the lectures were always entertaining and—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Fantastic.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I'm not sure I should tell you this story or not.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I've got a few Scully stories.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I'll tell you one anyway. [. . . –AL] I forget where he had to go to lecture. He was really—for a major presence, both in art history and in the university, Vince was really good about keeping to his schedule.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But something occurred. I was the senior teaching assistant.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And he three days earlier, or maybe four days earlier, he said, "Arnold, I'm going to be away next week." On—I forget—Tuesdays and Wednesdays is when he lectured, and then it was Tuesdays and Thursdays, maybe, and there was one section, and so it was three times a week. He said, "You're on." I sort of sat there, not so much that I didn't know the material—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —that had to be covered, but I never stood before 400 or 500 students, and at the law school auditorium was where he taught. This was the only place big enough to accommodate his class. I guess I must have closed my eyes and envisioned me standing in front of that group. I said, "That's fabulous. That would be so great." He said, "I'm sure you'll do very well," you know. "Just stick to the, you know—stick to the facts."

So this was—it must have been, like, a Thursday or Friday before the Tuesday. I spent the entire weekend holed up, going over everything for that—for those two classes. And nine o'clock rolled around on Tuesday morning, and they were all, sort of, filed in. I went up to the podium, and the lights—did you ever take one of his courses? No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I heard him speak often. I didn't actually take one of his classes, but—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —but I was at Yale, too, so.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Anyway, I walked in, and I went up to the podium. I said, you know, "Good morning. For those of you I don't know, I'm Arnold Lehman. Mr. Scully is out of town, and I'm going to present the lecture this morning." At which point, almost everyone in the room got up and left.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You didn't know that was coming, did you?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I didn't, no.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I stood there, and I simply watched them all leave. Now, if that's any way to destroy an interest in teaching, that's one of them. Now, my sections stayed because they knew that I know who they were, probably not even all of them. I had two sections. I could see them scattered around the room, deciding whether or not they should leave, and could I see them from that far a distance. But once everyone else left, I would know who reneged.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So most of them stayed. I stood at that podium as though—I didn't know what to do. I couldn't yell at them; I couldn't sit down. I just stood there and thought, "How am I going to explain this?" Anyway, on Thursday, I thought, "Well, this can't happen again." I asked the teaching assistants to get the exits and have their attendance list—he never took attendance. I mean, you could always tell; if the room was full, they were there. I kept the lights on. The lights were always dim. I kept the lights bright on, and everyone was seated. I never said that I was going to be there on Thursday as well. And I walk up—you have to go up to the podium; it's on stage—and again, people, almost immediately, started to get up. I said, "Wait a minute. This session is going to include a quiz, and the quiz is going to be worth"—I forget—"a third or a half of your grade, of your entire grade. And so I suggest you better stay." And still a huge number of people left—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: — not like on Tuesday, where everybody left. Unbelievable. And then, of course, we did the quiz, and I brought it to Scully, and I told him what had happened. We failed everyone who didn't take the quiz. Scully said, "Come on, Arnold, you can't do that. Let's forget about this quiz."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So there you have my introduction to big time teaching.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I see it was inspirational.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It was very inspirational. Anyway, Scully was amazing, an amazing teacher, and who wrote beautifully, and who was very persuasive. I decided that I would switch and, for that time period, become an architectural historian. And I did—but I didn't want to leave art aside. I lived here, and I—not here, there—and so I wrote my dissertation on—in a way, the application of art to architecture, dealing with the skyscrapers from 1916 to 1939. So I crawled around every major skyscraper in New York City, every major grille, every major application, to the facade. I was, you know, that far away from those giant birds on the top of the Chrysler building.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And that was the dissertation.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: When you left Yale, what next?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I went to the Met.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You went to the Met?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I went to the Met as a Chester Dale Fellow, and I have to say that Yale wasn't entirely happy about that. That was a very prestigious fellowship. Their preference would be—not just for me, but for everyone at that time—to continue in the academic world and to teach. I wanted to, sort of, break out of that. So they had worked, I think, pretty hard on, not securing, but introducing me to some major teaching posts. I think they finally figured out that I wasn't entirely crazy, from both the—from the Nabi to my dissertation. But I went to the Met as a Chester Dale Fellow, and as luck would have it, I was assigned to Henry Geldzahler.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And that was an incredibly interesting—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I can imagine.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —time. The good news is that Henry was asked by Tom Hoving to do an exhibition on Art Deco. They didn't really have a part of decorative arts at that point—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —a modernist decorative arts division, as such, or if they did, there was no one there who was willing or able to deal with that material.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So there were no patrons who were interested in—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I don't believe there were at that point, although there were certainly people collecting—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —Moderne and Art Deco. And so, it was wonderful. Henry sent me off to Paris. I knew Paris very well from my Nabi time spent there. I spent months, on and off, in Paris. I had a great opportunity while I was there. [. . . –AL] Henry was lukewarm about it—

So I was to look for material that I could present as accession material to be a core of the exhibition. They would borrow other things, but they wanted at least an important core that would be owned by the Met. Every time I saw something spectacular, it was sold. After a few of these times—I didn't bother to ask to whom it was sold at the beginning, but then I did. Every time I asked, it was sold to Madame Sonnabend. I said, "Madame Sonnabend, who is this Madame Sonnabend?"

So Ileana had recently opened the gallery in Paris, and in addition to showing contemporary work, she was collecting, for herself, this material. She went through like a vacuum cleaner, a vacuum cleaner with expertise. So the great thing that happened during that time period was that I became friendly with Ileana. That friendship continued until she died, a very close friendship. I came back, really, empty-handed— I have a lot of photographs and whatnot—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

[. . . –AL]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Finch College.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You remember Finch?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Vaguely.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: That's because you're not as old as I am.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Finch. Okay.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So they scooped the Met. I wonder how they knew, or did they know?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, I don't think they scooped the Met. I think they were just planning to do this little show.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was in the wind. It was in the air.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yeah, it probably was. I don't think it ever got onto the Met's schedule in that time period. This was 1969, 1970, 1971, something like that. At that point—and now, I'm really going to be lost. At that point—who was it? Ted Russo? It may have been Harry Parker or—so I reported—I reported to Henry, but sort with the dotted line to Harry Parker, who was vice director for education at that—do you know Harry?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, I don't know him.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I doubt that he would remember, either, but Harry Parker or Ted Russo or someone asked me if I'd like to, sort of, redirect my energy towards administration, fundraising, and take a look at a different aspect of the music. So I honestly can't tell you if they thought I'd be a lousy curator—[laughs]—and they thought, because my personality, whatever, I'd be a good fundraiser and a good administrator. I don't know the reason, but they were interested in my, sort of, moving in that direction, and I wasn't.

I don't know if I particularly— I enjoyed my role, my brief role at the Met. I did at least one big article for the Met's bulletin, at that point, on the subject matter of my dissertation. So that's around somewhere. I think I did two. What was the other one on? I can't remember, but, if you look up the matter— you don't do any research for this, do you?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. This was in the bulletin?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: In the bulletin Met. Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I'm sure it's in Artstor or someplace like that.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh, probably. In any event, I wasn't disenchanted with the Met or the museum work, but I think I had an interest in reaching beyond the museum audience. Even then, the issue of the one percent versus everybody else—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —I was very much on the "everybody else" side.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I was still at the Met, but I was trying to figure out what was next. And just about then, and if 12 people ask me exactly how it happened, I couldn't tell you. I met with someone from the Ford Foundation.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: They were starting up a—they wanted to start up an organization that helped physically, tangibly change what New York City looked like, supporting every neighborhood. If you may recall, the Ford Foundation, clearly, as a not-for-profit, doesn't pay taxes. Doesn't pay real estate tax.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But they felt very responsible about that, and one thing that they did was to set up the fund for the City of New York. It was through the fund for the City of New York that the program that I ran, called the Urban Improvements Program of the City of New York—big title for a very small organization—and I was really fascinated because I was interested in urban issues; I was very interested in politics; I was interested in the city that I very much loved. I thought, "Sure. Why not? Why shouldn't I run this organization that was just beginning, you know?" I could help mold it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I could help do a lot of things that would be dealing much more with the public, and I was still very much—part of me was still very much all that I learned about the city from doing my dissertation, so I became, in 19—must have been 1970.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So when I was at the Met, must have been '68, '69, something like that. I don't recall exactly. So 1970 to 1974—I remember that date because we left New York City then for the first two years, I was the director of the Urban Improvements Program of the City of New York. The fund for the City of New York wanted

us to be aligned with another not-for-profit since we were just starting out, since we were small, so that we could collaborate and use their offices, all of the—you know what I mean.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So, we took space in the offices, then, of the Parks Council of New York City, which is now—there still is a Parks Council, but a lot of those issues have morphed, both into the Central Park Conservancy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and I think a number of other people were enthusiastic and supportive.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: More like the friends' organizations.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Support Prospect Park, Central Park, Municipal Arts Society.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But the Parks Council was really an ombudsman for all of the parks and how—what was happening budget-wise, usage-wise, and so on. So, there was a good alignment, but I didn't have anything to do with Parks Council, except as we were there. Their offices weren't too big either, so we were very close together. I must say, in those two years, I learned an amazing—the amount I learned was truly amazing about New York City in general; about how to get things done; about, most importantly, how to deal with people from every part of the city, from every background; and how to try to make things work for them. In those two years, we did everything from vest-pocket parks; now, that was something we were associated with the Parks Council. We did a lot of street enhancement, street furniture. [. . . –AL] We planted tens of thousands of trees. We did street lighting, much higher intensity street lighting in neighborhoods where there was a lot of crime.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We built one or two small libraries. We did a lot of playgrounds in the city, and what we had, we had matching money from the Fund for the City of New York, so that I could go into neighborhoods and say, "Let me work with you to help you raise X together with the matching money from us. We'll be able to do something." But we needed and wanted community engagement in that.

That was every place from Bed-Stuy [Bedford —Stuyvesant] to the Bronx. The only borough that we really didn't work in very much, at all, actually, during my tenure, was Staten Island for some reason. But I was all over Brooklyn, all over the Bronx, all over Manhattan, all over Queens, and we did—in a short period of time, we did sanitation programs. In a short period of time—oh, and in addition— I helped organize endless numbers of neighborhood associations because that was the way they could come up with enough money to match Ford.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just out of curiosity—well, a couple of things; where were the offices located?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Offices were located on 68th Street right off of Central Park West.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. And then, how would the money flow? Would the money flow to you? For instance, if you were working with a neighborhood organization, they obviously wouldn't form their own 501(c)3.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No, no, no. They work through us.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So the money would come to you earmarked for them.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: They work through us, and then—yes, and then if there were vendors, we hire the vendors; we pay the vendors.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Got it.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We oversaw the projects, and some were very easy, and some were really difficult. We did a playground adjacent to Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx. Well, I'm talking about 1971, '72.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Interesting times there.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I mean, with every building, totally graffiti, which we love today, but with a lot of gang problems.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So I was up there a lot, meeting with everybody in the neighborhood. Lincoln Hospital was

famous for having gang members burst into surgeries when one of their people had been shot by a policeman or whatever, and they were in the room—let me say—encouraging the surgeons to make sure they did a good job.

[They laugh.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: How they did that, I'm not sure, but I'm glad I wasn't a surgeon. We had rough times.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. Yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Really rough times. I never felt in danger because I was the guy with the money.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I was the guy who could help. I used to come out to East New York or Bed-Stuy, or you name it, and I would come out of the subway, and there would be three or four neighborhood people to escort me to the meetings. They didn't want anything to happen—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —to me. Sometimes, they would come to the office, and we'd ride all the way to wherever I was going on the subway, so I was safe. It was probably—I don't think we could get a better understanding of New York City during those years—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —than literally traveling to all of these neighborhoods and seeing the really awful conditions and disarray of a neighborhood. So one of the things I felt proudest of was to bring people together in the neighborhood. There're a couple of stories New York Post and others—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: — covered stories when we were planting trees or what not. So, I did that, focused on that for the first two years, two-and-a-half years, and then the head of the Parks Council left. I'm talking about the paid; I was paid. The paid head of the Parks Council left, and the board of the Parks Council asked me to take over and to, kind of, to unify the two organizations, which I did for two years. As a person who doesn't know a maple tree from a petunia, I had a lot to learn very quickly. Most of that was political: what we could do, what we couldn't do, what we could get the city interested in, what we could get the borough presidents interested in, and—are you a New Yorker? More or less?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. Yes, I am.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Then, the city was heavily—what happened to the city was pretty much determined by something called the Board of Estimates, which was when the mayoral power in NY wasn't as great. So the Board of Estimates, which is made up of all the borough presidents—the mayor, the speaker of the council, and the controller; there was no public advocate at that point—and when you look at that, you see the borough presidents outnumbered the mayor, they outnumbered the city-wide, elected officials, so if the borough presidents wanted to get something done, there was a—it was a—kind of a handshake. So if Queens wanted to get something done, Brooklyn, the Bronx, I mean, they figured out that, if they stuck together, they could do what they wanted. And so, we spent a lot of time with the borough presidents, and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: These are the outer boroughs, right —not so much Manhattan?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, I never call them the outer boroughs.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Brooklyn is the center borough, and everything revolves around Brooklyn. Yes, the outer boroughs.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thanks for clarifying [Laughs.].

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right. This is the biggest borough, the most people, the center of the cultural world.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, I mean, everyone says New York, New York is the—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Is Manhattan.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Manhattan, and that, I know, historically, has always been, sort of, assumed a kind of

haughty role in relations.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Only for 100 years—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —because in 1898, Brooklyn—before that, Brooklyn was its own city.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I'm surprised Marty Markowitz didn't try to secede during his reign as borough president.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Unintelligible.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: That's another story. So it was all politics. It was meeting constantly with the Board of Estimates. It was meeting with the various council members to get things done, not only for the parks, but I was also speaking for the Urban Improvements Program at the same time.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: That was, I think, an enormous eye opener and incredible experience that could not be duplicated. It was, in a way, you got things done a little easier. You got the approval a little easier.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: To get the things done was much harder.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You're a young guy at that point in time. You're in your late 20s.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: My mid-20s.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mid-20s.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: My mid-20s.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Seventy-four, right mid-20s.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It was really fascinating. I know my wife, from time to time, was nervous about where I was going, what I was doing, who I was seeing. I became active, and not just as someone with their hands out for money, but I became really actively involved in New York City politics at that time. I was elected to the Democratic State Committee unopposed. I, at that point, lived on the upper west side.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: There were no Republicans, or none that you knew of. I mean, there were probably more communists than there were Republicans on the Upper West Side.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I was elected to the State Committee Board of Estimates, and I became very involved in politics at a grassroots level, not only because I found it fascinating, but because it helped in everything else I was doing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And that ended in 1974, and I think, probably, if you ask my wife, she was very happy about that because I was, sort of, being asked and moved to run for office. Just then, we moved to Miami, which, we had two kids and my wife, and we were very comfortable, and I had a job that fascinated me.

We were in Miami; we had cousins who lived in Miami, and almost as coincidental as the thing with the Urban Improvements Program and the Fund for the City of New York program, we went for a holiday with our kids, and my wife's cousins, they lived in Coconut Grove, and they had a cocktail party. At the cocktail party were friends of theirs who happened to be the—many of them, trustees of the, then, Miami Art Center, and they were looking for a director and a director who could build a new building, expand what they were doing, and sort of become the center of the art world in Miami. By the end of the cocktail party—I don't know what was going through their heads—but they called me the next day and asked if I would be interested in talking with them about being director.

And sort of, I thought, "Aren't there any people, sort of, people around there who might be interested?" But they offered me the job in, literally, a couple of days. And then, when we went back to New York—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. We're resuming. Before we talk about Miami and your work there, just to do a little housekeeping on the urban improvements, you spoke about the borough politics and how one hand was washing the others to prioritize these various different improvements and make sure everybody got what they needed out of the program; at the same time, you're interacting with neighborhood organizations that are informal, pro-bono organizations, I assume, of people within the community, who are working through your organization to improve playgrounds, parks, et cetera, and so forth. Did you ever get any kind of blowback or resistance from the bureaucracy of the city like the licenses and inspections, permits, that kind of—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, one of the things that was a major priority for us was to really be the advocates, and we spent a lot of time—or, people who worked for me spent a good amount of time working within some of the departments. The Department of Buildings—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —the department structure is a little different than now. The Parks Department, for instance, Buildings Department, I'm sure transportation was involved, so we could be, in a sense, the ombudsman—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Got you.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and make that permanent process and the inspection process faster and more sensitive to the needs of these communities. I think, honestly, even though we met with a lot of the commissioners and the deputies who actually make things work, I have to believe a lot of it was good luck—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —because there's a lot of hit and miss. But again, I only experienced it for four years. And in those four years, because NY was in such disarray—well, you know, in 1974, they thought NY was going bankrupt—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. We remember.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and leading up to it, in '71 and '72 and '73, it wasn't much better. So, anyone who actually had the money to help get things done and the energy to do it, was seen as, kind of a knight on a white horse.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And not by everyone.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: There were a lot of people, as there are today, who don't care to make things easier or —"easier" is the wrong word—to better streamline the process and to make people who are trying to improve where they live, not to thwart them—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —but to support them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And so, we spent a lot of time in that— I always make it more glamorous. We planted trees. We built parks.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But much of the real work was in getting a certain degree of transformation in the—in the various departments. It was difficult, and I'm sure that we were part of the—[. . . –AL]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We had money, and we would say, in the various departments, "Come on. We are going to make this happen. We have an interested neighborhood or an interested corporation." We went from Gucci to do planting outside Gucci on 5th Avenue. I'm not suggesting for a moment that all we did was in the outer

boroughs. We had to get permitting to put those big [planters on Fifth Avenue –AL]—you might remember. Oh, not Gucci. We did something for them. But a very famous spa, one of the first places—Elizabeth Arden, and Elizabeth Arden's color was this beautiful red, sort of a purpley-red, but really beautiful. I don't know why I'm remembering this detail—we talked with them. We wanted to use them as an example to put two big planters on the sidewalk—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —outside their 5th Avenue salon. The planters had a big, circular seating area around them, taking up a good bit of the sidewalk. The trees—I mean, we planted thousands of them. So, it didn't matter, but the planters were a big deal because nobody had planters like that outside of 5th Avenue. So, we had to work really hard with multiple departments to get the permissions to do that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And we did. We also–ALthough, there were many in New York City—one of the things that we encouraged neighborhoods to do was to put in the iron fencing around trees to stop dogs from doing their thing on the trees and killing the trees.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We must've put in thousands of those. We had to work, again, with the–ALl the—you know, in the neighborhoods, they didn't care as much. But on 5th Avenue and Madison Avenue and Park Avenue, we had to go through a lot of red tape. I had to deal with a lot of people. But the minute we started doing this and others saw how wonderful this was, other people picked up. They didn't come to us, but started doing it themselves. We had a sanitation project that ran from on 3rd Avenue, from 42nd Street, up to Bloomingdales, so up to 59th Street or 60th Street, and I got all of the—not all—many of the big corporations from that stretch to put money into hiring private sanitation people. It, sort of, in a way—it's like the dough fund—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —now that—but it didn't employ people with disabilities. It simply employed people to go out, clean the sidewalks, clean the gutters, and at that point, we had the total commitment of the sanitation commissioner because a stretch of 15 blocks was kept sparkling clean, primarily through the support of Mobile, which was on 42nd Street. Their world headquarters—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —was there, and Bloomingdales gave us a lot of money, and somebody else in between.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Got a little bit of money from the restaurants, from the shops. We put it all together, and I was in the sanitation business—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —for a short period of time. We gave awards, or they were kind of, reverse awards to people who didn't do a good job because they were all—they lent—the property owners were supposed to pitch in. Those who didn't were given the Big Brush Award. So, they knew they weren't doing—and we announced it, that they weren't doing their job. This is a far cry—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —from working at the Met and being an art historian, but, in a way, it made me, sort of, even more committed to the issues of community, the issues of diversity—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Got you.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —the issues of how people can work together and create something that just a few people cannot. So, it was very—I have to say, it was very—I was really, really committed to this.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's easy to understand how you might be able to get corporations and big merchants in Manhattan to underwrite initiatives like that, but where did you get the funds in the boroughs in—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Door-to-door.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Door-to-door.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And not actually door-to-door. But the neighborhood associations that were either existing, and then we helped to enhance, or neighborhood associations that we created.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We found people in the neighborhood and we supported them. We helped to organize some meetings, and we got $10 from this person—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: — 20 from that person—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —a dollar from this person. I mean, no one was interested in the tax deduction.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was it interesting because wasn't it also at that time that you had organizations sprouting up like the Guardian Angels and—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Curtis Sliwa, and the red berets?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It was a little later.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A little later, but there were still neighborhood watch organizations.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: There were.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: There were. People were— I'm not suggesting Manhattanites didn't know what was happening in the rest of the city.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But, if anything, the city was even more Manhattan-centric then.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Certainly, it is today. The last few mayors have really tried to not focus everything on Manhattan. If you speak to people in the boroughs, they don't believe that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But there has been a gradual shift. And certainly, Bill— he is really interested in the neighborhoods. I mean, he's from Brooklyn. He's been on the council. He knows what the problems are, and no, I know there's a lot of blow back. Believe me because I was on his transition committee, and there are people prepped not to be supportive. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But I think time will tell.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We shouldn't—this is a subject that comes later, not—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Well, when you were with Urban Improvements, later, parks, did you share ideas with other cities that were involved with comparable—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No. No. We barely had time to breathe—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Got you.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —to be honest. We had so many things going on in so many places that— two of my staff members were district leaders, and that's how this all actually worked. One of them was the creator, and I was

briefly—because I didn't want to be, but she made— she just put my name on it—I was briefly the chairman of an organization called SCOOP. Did you ever hear of SCOOP?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I have a vague idea what it might be. [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It was about cleaning up after your dogs, and the SCOOP stood for "Stop Crapping on Our Premises."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Paula Weiss, who was fabulous—now deceased, unfortunately—came up with this idea and again, helped to improve the environment. She was pretty rigorous about this. She was known to yell at people, and I think, one time, was known to pick up the droppings and throw it at someone.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Spirited.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: "Spirited" is the word.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But, there was so much interest on the part of both individuals and small groups, who had to do something because the city was falling apart.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And it was disheartening to say the least. I know it was saved, but the—you had no sense of what the transformation would have been in '73 and '74, especially if the city had really gone bankrupt at that point. It was pretty bad.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And that was when Felix Rohatyn—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right. Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —stepped in and—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I forget the name of the acronym for the little— not the agency, but for doing this. It was a, R-something or other. It wasn't "resuscitate New York," but it was close. He, reorganizing financially did a fantastic job. I had a little bit of involvement at the very end of the 1973, 1974 because I was very supportive of a candidate for mayor and thinking about what else I could do. But instead, sunny Miami—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sunny Miami. So, let's talk about Miami. So, what was the transition like from Urban Improvements to Miami? Was there a dead-end wall here and then—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —or did you just pack your bags and leave?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, no. No. Well, one thing is that I was pretty familiar with Miami because for many, many years, as I was growing up, I spent the winters in Miami with my mother. She didn't like cold weather, and I decided I didn't like cold weather either. So, I went to school. I went to elementary school in Miami, and so the city was very familiar to me from a child's viewpoint. It was beaches, classrooms, warm temperature. None of that is bad when you think about a place. So, I was intrigued because what they wanted to do was they were in an old building—sprawling, but old building, very much the south of Miami. They were in Dade County, and although this—I think almost the center of population has now moved to that area. Then, it wasn't on the fringe, but it was—in a way, it was somewhat like Brooklyn is to Manhattan.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: There was one museum—public museum—semi-public museum, the Bass at Miami Beach, which was pretty sedentary, and their goal was to take the Miami Arts Center and to make it countywide, build a new building, and become the center for the visual arts. I thought, sounds, to a degree, what I've been doing—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —because there were politics involved. There was working with a lot of bureaucrats. There was fundraising. There was neighborhood development. Plus, there was a tiny piece of so-called art, and I thought, "This is very appealing." And I'd have a chance to really do something, really, larger and tangible. It was

—as I said, it was a small museum, very small collection, not very good collection, few things that were terrific. We had a big art school attached to it with thousands of students. It was—I don't remember, but probably 2,000 students—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —so—and non-matriculating. So, we did two things in the five years that I was there, two major things. We opened branches in Coconut Grove, in North Miami, and Miami Beach. They were small branches that had small exhibitions and that had teaching areas for the art school. And most importantly, it was to broadcast the name. Now, I always think here, why does Chase have so many money machines—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: ATMs.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —ATMs. It's not to have all the ATMs. I think they could care less about them, but it says "Chase" on all these corners—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: –ALl over the city, and we wanted more public recognition. So, I thought the best way to do that was to go into these communities—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and do something that would be attractive and hopefully not draw away from coming to the home building. At the same time, we started looking at opportunities to build a new building. I don't remember exactly all the details, but then it was very difficult. At the same moment, we looked at a building that existed—I don't know if you know Miami at all or—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A little bit. Not well.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: In Coral Gables, there was something called the Biltmore Country Club. It was really a big hotel and a huge country club building next to it. Well, not—you know, 300 yards away, something like that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —maybe 500 yards away, all done in a faux-Spanish style. The Biltmore is a huge building with a big tower; you can see it from all over Miami, which is what they wanted. But it failed as a hotel. It's primarily empty and the country club building was entirely empty. And so, we negotiated a lease with Coral Gables to take over the country club building—which was this great, sprawling, beautiful building with a great courtyard in the middle and huge flights of steps, very grand, and with an amazing amount of space inside—as a museum and as the center for the art school, which I wanted it to become more museum and less art school. But many of our people were there because of the art school. So, it was, kind of, a feeder for the museum. At that point—oh, my God—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What was the name of the art school?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It was Miami Art Center or School of the Miami Arts Center at that point.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. No name?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No. No. I don't remember at which point—it was before we opened the new museum building, but at some point along the way, we changed our name to be the Metropolitan Museum and Art Centers of Dade County. Pretty big name for a small—[laughs]—for what it really was, but again, we wanted a, kind of, a heightened credibility and a sense that it was countywide. And we were. There was— what comes to mind, heavily, is there was a big, federal government program called CETA. Do you remember that? [Comprehensive Employment and Training Act –AL]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Vaguely. Yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It was a major employment program that not-for-profits and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's S-E-T-A, right?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No. C—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: CETA.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: There was a huge amount of money in CITA in Washington, and it was for employment. It was for job creation and employment. I'm going to say—I don't know if this is true—I think all—just not-for-profits. So, working with the city of Coral Gables, which was in Dade County and not part of Miami, and working with our state representatives and our congressional representatives, we got a ton of CITA money, which helped to redo and renovate this building. So again, I spent an enormous amount of time—I know, this is so uninteresting to you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, but I think that—no, it's extremely interesting.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Is this what you are interested in for the record or—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's the story you're telling, and that's what we're interested in. But I think it's interesting, too, because what I'm curious about—and I'm sure researchers consulting the oral history in the future will be interested in—is your perspective on the evolution of museums and cultural institutions like them in relationship to communities.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, I haven't gotten there yet, anyway. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, but this is the preamble.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right. Okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: A long preamble. So, I did a lot of what I was doing in New York and what I like to do. We made great progress on the restoration of this building. The part of the problem— we had all the CITA money. Part of the problem in Miami, then—and I have to say, 40 years later—is that in raising money in Miami, you run into the very, very widely spread program—problem that everyone says, "Well, you know, I'm really from Boston. I'm really from Chicago. I'm really from New York. I'm really from St. Louis, and I support my institutions there. I'm only here couple months of the year." Whether they were there for two months or they were there for 12 months, they were from someplace else, and since Miami has really been—except for a handful of families—really been a place with great turnover—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: — people enjoying it, but not adopting it as its home turf, raising money was really difficult. But we did, eventually, put together enough money to do this. On the day that Joan Mondale and my wife were cutting the ribbon opening in the new building, I was being presented to the Board of Trustees at the Baltimore Museum as its new director. So, I never—we didn't do a good job on the calendar.

[They laugh.]

And—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A little overbooked. [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yeah. Exactly. So, late in, I imagine, '78, early '79, I was approached by the Baltimore Museum, who, at that point, was searching for a new director, and my connection, of course, to Johns Hopkins made me very interested. It was a museum I used all the time. It was literally on the Johns Hopkins campus. Although, it was separate property.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I used it all the time and very much in the way I used the Wooster Art Museum.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I was intrigued, and intrigued enough to spend time in Baltimore with the trustees and the search committee and, sort of, going around Baltimore. Again, in a very strange way, it was, kind of, home like Miami was to me. I said, "Why not?" That was both a step forward and a step backward because I went back in to museum work, which I had been out of for, really, nine years. When I left—let's see. It was 1970, and I went to Baltimore in 1979 or eight years. Maybe it was '71 to '79, and I think they were also intrigued with the fact that I had had, sort of, so many tangible results—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —in what I was doing, both from the point of view of community, fundraising, and the

management of large projects that made up for the fact that I had never been a curator; I had never been an educator; I never had any kind of curatorial role in a museum except on a—kind of a Henry telling me, "You do this. You do that."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So, I thought, again, here was a great opportunity. The museum was in an expansion mode.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: They wanted to build a whole new wing for contemporary art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is late—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: '79-'80.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —'79-'80. Okay.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I went there in 1979, and I thought, sort of home turf and things I like to do, particularly if it involves a community and getting more people involved with the museum. And so, I said—again, I said yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It would seem that moving from Met Museum Art Center, Dade, to Baltimore, there would have been a different kind of dynamic in terms of the relationship you had with the board. So, was there a board at the Miami Arts Center?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh yes, very much so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's a—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Very much a—, it was—everything in Miami is new, no matter what or when it's from. It's a place where things change overnight, and that's part of the energy of Miami.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It's a new city; it's kind of the Wild West, even though it isn't in the west. There aren't a lot of precedents for things. There isn't— there's this, kind of, cycle of rebirth and, not continuity, new things, new things.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's also a portal to Latin America.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It is. It is, although not as much then, although we had a lot of influx—the big—the influx of Cubans—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: That was the big deal in Miami then. The rest of Latin America was represented; they were there, but minimally, but all of the refugees from Cuba were coming in, and that created a very different and separate society.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So in Miami, you had the Miami Ballet, and you had the Cuban Ballet. You had the, all of the various charities, not-for-profits were duplicated in the Cuban community as they were in the Miami community, the Anglo community in Miami. So it was a fascinating—towards the end of when I was there, it was really fascinating. And so we began—I worked very hard to do projects and to get more of a Latino, Cuban—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —/Latino response to the museum, and that worked. That started to be working by the time I left. We had a board that was made up of a few very old, entrenched Miamians. Chairman of the board for many years was Deering Danielson, the Vizcaya—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —family— have you ever been to Vizcaya?—which was a kind of a Venetian palazzo where the Deerings lived on Biscayne Bay. And so, there was a small group, sort of, surrounding Deering Danielson, who was very committed to this institution, although nothing really happened for many, many, many years. The only other institutions who were interested in art— they had a small museum at the University of Miami and the Bass,

and that was it. What's very interesting—and, again, looking backwards—our outpost in North Miami kind of morphed into the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami, which has had a lot of—I don't know if you've been following this—a lot of turmoil because of the way North Miami, as a city, was involved or not involved. That whole facility now has been abandoned by the Museum of Contemporary Art, and they're building a new building in the design district in Miami, and it's been taken over by the city, and who knows what's going to happen? I was involved in starting this, so during this recent battle about who owns it, who owns the collection, the lawyers from both sides called me because I was there when the first coat of paint went on.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I said, "You know, I've been gone for 35 years; I'm not the person to give you any opinion." The last thing on earth I wanted was to be embroiled in a trial of some kind, and I don't know the answers; I haven't been there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So I had lawyers from both sides not very happy with me. So anyway, we have a board of this —

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you went to Baltimore—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —small group. Then we had a group of people that, more or less, I helped to bring onto the board: younger people, people who had either been there or just arrived, people with collections, people interested in moving our museum forward.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But the opportunity to run a major, important museum that had some of what I'd been doing all these years was very intriguing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. What would be the motivation for a person to come on the board of the museum like that? How would they see—was it because they were art collectors or because they were interested?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You mean in Miami?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, in Miami. Were—often—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I think they were interested—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —a social nobility of some sort?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I think not so much social nobility, as I'm sure you were thinking, but I think kind of the mobility of the place. I think they wanted to see more opportunity, and they wanted to see action.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So community spirit, basically.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Community spirit, but sort of melted down into 20, 25 people—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —representing different parts: North Miami, Miami Beach—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —Coconut Grove, Coral Gables, South Miami, and all, sort of, coming together to build something. II think that's a very attractive thing for—in a community like Miami and in a moment when there was the beginning of this expansionist phase for museums. I'm really sad to say, and as —believe me, I don't take credit or not credit—the whole thing fell apart when I left. I don't quite know what happened, but they went through a series of directors and nothing—no one, sort of—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I guess, this is a question I could ask you later in the conversation, too, but you feel like your leadership style is more motivational, hands-on, participatory?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, I think people would say that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That that somehow is—affords you kind of—like a charisma that lets—that attracts people to you because it looks like there are exciting things happening and—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, I thought about it. I was very upset for many years about what was happening there, and I felt, to a degree, a little bit of guilt. I was there for five years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Today, when I talk about the role of a museum director, I always say that people need to stay at a place for 10 years or more to have a better sense of the community, to have a better sense of where the institution's going and where you're helping to take the institution, and I always joke that, these days, the problem is no one—they do stuff, and they don't stick around to get the bill, whether it's a financial bill, or it's a bill in terms of community, or it's a bill in terms of the intangibles of an organization. You know, they don't stick around. They do sort of what they've been asked to do sometimes, and then they look for a more important role, a bigger institution, and people move— you can't blame them, but there has to be a commitment—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —for a longer period.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We see this a lot in higher-ed., where somebody arrives as a chancellor of a university, and they build a new college, or they build a new building—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Or a whole campus.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or a whole new campus, but they don't raise the money for its upkeep, and then they end up in another lofty position—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Bigger.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —bigger, leaving the institution with higher operating expenses. So, it's a plus and minus sort of. I'm hearing you say that, if you were to have it to do over again, you might have stuck around a little bit longer—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Stuck with it for a number of years to make sure that the board that was in place—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —matured. I mean, I was still in my early 30s—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —but I had a sense—I had a lot of energy, and I hope I use that in practical and positive ways, but it takes a long time to build an infrastructure—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —that's going to stay, particularly in a place like Miami where everything is new every day. That's its great power—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and that's why Miami is becoming such an important city today.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But the smaller pieces of it also need that–ALso bred on that kind of "tomorrow's going to be better than today" and the "you don't really need to know what happened 10 years ago or 20 years ago." It's amazing to me when I go back—we still have a place in Miami, and when I go back and I see old friends and as—but particularly, newer arrivals to Miami, and we're talking about whatever from 1975, 1980, 1985, no one knows; it's as though the history has disappeared because tomorrow is more important than yesterday.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And I mean, not that that's not true in many, many places, but it's very true—it seems to me, very true in Miami. Anyway, it was a great—another great part of my life; our kids were very young then, great place to raise young children, and then we just snatched them up and went to Baltimore.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Moved to Baltimore, and how did you find that? What did you find needed doing?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean, there was an expansion—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —I know. You know the Baltimore Museum?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of course, yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yeah. It is a great museum, great museum, incredible collection, and it's far from being just Matisse.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh no.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: There's so much, so much greatness in that collection and a really beautiful building, John Russell Pope building.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I mean, couldn't ask for a better architect at that period if you were doing classical work. But there were two things going on: one was the building of—well, three things going on—one was building of this new wing because, at a certain point, everyone agreed that contemporary art was really—a major commitment to contemporary art was really necessary.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Although we'd been doing exhibitions—but a really major commitment was necessary. The second thing was building endowment; the museum when I arrived, had a tiny, tiny endowment and—someone once said and I agree with them, "If you spell out 'endowment,' the word you get is 'freedom.'" You have the ability to do what you need to do, what you want to do, what's expected of you because a good degree of the funding is there; you don't always have to go to people on the spot and ask, "Can you help?" The third thing was building a better community base for the museum. Starting with that aspect, the one thing that was very clear was that, in years past in Baltimore, the museum was one of the few places that was always open and welcoming to the black community, where—you know Baltimore is a southern city.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You know, whatever people talk about it, it's still a southern city, and during the '50s and '60s when there were riots in Baltimore like every place else—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —the museum still had a very strong relationship with the African American community.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I saw that in talking to leadership in the black community in Baltimore, and so it held a position slightly different than many other of the large cultural institutions, and a lot of—part of that disappeared during the—sort of the terrible times of the 1960s. But innate in the leadership of the African American community was the fact that they'd been to the museum; they went to the museum; they celebrated things in the museum, and there was that connection, even though some of them might not have been there for years, and their kids or grandchildren may not have been there, probably weren't there except on school tours.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So that's part of the work that I did to connect—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: To try to bring—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —to that community. Right, and unlike New York, where the breath of the various communities is astounding and rich and wonderful, Baltimore basically was a white and black community.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And rich and poor.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And very rich, rich—big golf—poor and very poor.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We were right on the edge of a community that was white, but very poor, and it was no different. We couldn't get those people into the museum either. We were literally a quarter of a mile away.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] About the same time though, weren't there some new, contemporary arts spaces like School 33 and Maryland Art Space opened up—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —down in, kind of, sketchy, harbor-side neighborhoods?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No. They were all in and around the area of the Maryland Institute, the area where the Maryland Historical Society was, so they were sort of in the heart of the old downtown.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: School 33, wasn't that—South Light Street, down near—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I don't remember. Maybe that was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the harbor? Yeah, I think so.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —maybe that was, but I can't remember.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Poor white neighborhood, working class, yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But there was a contemporary— many years after I got there, there was a group that began a —kind of a contemporary, not space, but a contemporary program, and they used different spaces.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Even a place like the Maryland Historical Society—I remember Fred Wilson—the very early show of Fred Wilson *Mining the Museum*, and he was invited to come to the Maryland Historical, so there were things going on, but not quite when I got there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Probably—so I arrived in '79; that probably all began closer to 1990.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: God, this feels like we're talking about 1790.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: That's what happens when you are doing the same thing for so many years, and you don't really recognize that things are so far in the distance. In any event, for my own perspective, I thrived; I loved the collection at the museum; great people were there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It had a very solid board. You know, it was an institution, and it had been an institution for many, many, many decades. It's very different than Miami, very different than the Parks Council and everything that I'd been doing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It was the Met on a very small scale.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You also have the Walters in Baltimore, right?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And the Walters Art Gallery.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: At that point, the Walters was a very quiet, very inward-looking institution. That has changed radically—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —over the past 35 years into a much, much more engaging and important institution from the point of view of serving the public. We had at the beginning, very little relationship with the Walters, and I'm sure—I'm trying to remember the name of the director, then, who was very well known, who retired soon thereafter. Gosh. I'm sorry. [Dick Randall –AL]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's okay, we can—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —go find the name.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: From what I remember–ALthough we became friendly, and despite the initial comments that I had heard, was that he was not particularly enamored of this youngster, hotshot, non-museum person who had come to the Baltimore Museum.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And you can understand that. No one could count Miami as an important museum experience; at least, I don't. I count it as a growth experience for me, but I think, until I got to Baltimore in '79, there was a decade where no one would count any of that as a—no one who's entrenched in the museum community would count that as any experience for a museum.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Not a museum, at least in the kind of waspy, Anglo, kind of, Cockeysville horse ranch. [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: [Laughs.] Well, no, for any— it doesn't matter that it was Baltimore, but I do know that, when it was announced that I got the position, there were a lot of museum directors and aspiring museum directors who said, "Who is he?" They were right to say it, so—[laughs]—A lot of people said, "Who is he?" and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what was the demographic of the board at that time?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: The demographic was like every other board: almost all white, one or two—one woman, particularly, who was African American, who became a very close friend of mine, Mrs. Hammond [Mrs. Earl Hammond, Marie Hammond –AL]]—but almost all white, dominantly male—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —dominantly old-line Baltimore. But what they did have is they had a very aggressive, in a very positive way, new chairman of the board; not new, but had been there just a short time. His name was Buddy Zamoiski, who was a dynamo, and he—not talking on the programmatic side, which I talked about before—the reasons that I felt good about coming there—one of the reasons I felt good about coming was because of Buddy Zamoiski. A dynamo, absolute dynamo, who wanted to get things done, was willing to work very hard to get them done, and I looked at it as a great partner in moving forward. You have to partner with the board; you can't do things just on your own—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and have the board in the background, which is pretty much the way Miami was. I never was able to partner with Deering Danielson; I wasn't the appropriate person to be his real partner, and it was a very cordial—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: — standoffish—he watched and saw what was going on, didn't interfere, supported things quite well, but change—I think he accepted change, but I don't think he liked it very much.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Buddy was all about change; Buddy was all about growth; Buddy was all about enhancing the institution in all the right ways.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So who had found you? Was it a head hunter, or was it a person on the board, or?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: They did have a head hunter, but the person who suggested me was a woman by the name of Eleanor Rosenberg and a member of the Jacob Blaustein family—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —who were very major figures in Baltimore—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: — founded American Oil, and she was married to Henry Rosenberg, who was the—let me do

this correctly—who was Jacob Blaustein's nephew. His sister, Ruth Rosenberg, married Henry's father, and so—how—you know, weird connections. We spend—my wife spends and I do slightly, much less than that, until quite recently—the summer in Maine, and our home in Maine—my wife's family's home in Maine—was down the shore of a lake where there is a resort camp called Bald Mountain Camps. We always joke that it's a place to go to do penance.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: They've got terrible hard beds, light bulbs hanging from the ceiling—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —bathrooms built in 1927, this is not luxury; this is roughing it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I always joked—we all joked—that it was a place to do penance for bad things for rich people. Wonderful people, and so we were down the lake, not slumming it, very happy, and Eleanor and Henry were there for—I mean, so I got married in 1969, so I knew them for a decade before I was appointed director, and every summer, when we saw them, Elly spent a lot of time—she was on the board of the museum—and spent a lot of time with me, talking about what was going on at the Baltimore Museum. She knew what I did; she knew my background, and she said, "You know, what are your thoughts about it?" So, we talked a lot, and I got this call from Baltimore —from a head hunter, actually, who said that, "You'd been recommended" and that, you know, "The search committee would like to talk to you." And that was that —I don't know if for sure, but I always had a sense that Elly said, "I've got this young guy who you should see."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So there had to be some agreement because I did get hired.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: That generated the "Who's he?" comments among my colleagues.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So up to that point, what had been your proudest achievement?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Of going to Baltimore?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Anything you'd done up till that point in time. Was there a particular exhibition? I think that the Urban Improvement work must have been very satisfying.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I think up to that time, it was generating so many important steps forward, for so many people, in so many communities in New York City through the Urban Improvements Program, the Parks Council, that—I know that's not tangible, but I think that that—it was more than rewarding; it was exciting; it felt good every—not every day. I'm sure I came home very frustrated many, many days, but youthful exuberance combined with actually getting something done—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —is a high. I mean it's a big high.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: In those days, if I could have planted four square blocks in Bed-Stuy and put things round the bottom of the plants and do a little vest-pocket park, I couldn't ask for anything better. I have to say, except for some of the gang members, who were really difficult to deal with and frustrating and kind of hard to understand what they wanted, I met so many wonderful people—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and from every corner of New York City, who wanted better lives, and that was—to me, that was as big a high as you could get, when you could do something, even minimally, for them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So when you came to the Baltimore Art Museum, they were in the middle of an expansion or they were embarking, or they were in the midst—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yes, they were. No, they were in the middle of expansion; they had just were working on

finishing the east wing of the building and the first sculpture garden. They were—they were sort of halfway there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So —more than halfway, two thirds—and so that was my first major priority.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: To make sure that that all got done properly and that we were doing it the right way, and what was being done was meaningful, and so, here I was, another construction project.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It was exciting; it was very exciting because an old-line museum—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —was changing its face, and to me, that was very good.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Were you also beginning to launch initiatives, like to reach out into the community? Like, you were saying that you were very proud of the enfranchisement of the African American community. I mean, there's a lot of that. I recently interviewed Robert Meyerhoff, who told me that his proudest achievement was the Meyerhoff Scholars Program at UMBC [University of Maryland, Baltimore County] and then that that's now expanded beyond African American students, but there seem to be, like, in Baltimore, there does seem to be—for a southern city, it does seem to be more progressive.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh, well there's no question. There's no question about that. But it was then in very small nodes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Understood.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Trying to get those nodes working together was not easy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So what was the first major initiative other than shepherding the construction through to completion? What programs were brainstorms of yours?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yes. What we started to do—working with the curator of contemporary art there, Brenda Richardson—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who I also interviewed.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You did?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I did.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh, fabulous. Brenda is —she's a figure unto herself. It was working with her for almost 20 years was an enormous pleasure. I learned so much from her about contemporary art, and I hope, in turn, she learned a little bit about management. But we remain close friends, and I think it was looking at how we could introduce more contemporary art into the museum, not only in terms of exhibitions, but in terms of acquisitions, and in terms of programs within the education division that could help bring everything together. The curators there, like the curators here, were very inward-focused.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Siloed.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Siloed. Doing projects, in many instances, for their peers, doing projects that, you know, satisfied their own academic interests, and I consider that all good, but not in a public museum. In a private museum, do what you want. Even today, that's not a good idea. But in a public museum supported by tax dollars, you have to understand that everybody who's paying taxes deserves to be recognized in what you do. That's very much part of what we were trying to do, along with providing a more contemporary arena at the museum. Brenda did spectacular work, absolutely spectacular work. After that, we did the expansion. I forget the year. We did the expansion to the west wing of the museum, which was all contemporary.

We did major renovations inside of the building, as well, in terms of the American wing and many other parts. So I think that making the museum's program more accessible and more interesting to, certainly, a younger group of people, to artists, and also to start—through contemporary art, to start bringing collectors to other cities from Baltimore—because we were doing things that weren't being done in New York or in Chicago or in L.A. It's

amazing what I got here; so many collectors that we met when we first did Gilbert and George in Baltimore. "We came down for that," or, "We came down for this," or, "We came down for that." So I think that was the principle achievement, I think, that took place there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What was it about that community that made it possible for you to do these things? That made it possible for you to look more outward?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, there's a very complex answer to that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you have the Walters. I'm going to just frame the question a little bit more. You've got towns nearby, like Washington, Philadelphia; New York's not far away. And you've got a couple of very contemporary art spaces. You've got Hopkins; you've got MICA [Maryland Institute College of Art]; you've got the Walters, which is sort of the more introspective, old-school treasure house—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Except for the fact that my friend Bob Bergman was there for a period of time and was also interested in reaching beyond their walls of the Walters. And that was—it wasn't stopped, but Bob had a grander idea, a grander-with-a-small-G idea. He went to Cleveland and then died shortly after that. A tragedy—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —tragedy for Cleveland and, in a way, a tragedy for Baltimore because we had talked a lot, and at some point, we would have been able to be active collaborators because he and I really—I believe, at least—had a lot in common about how we served communities. And—what was the question? [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, the question was, how did you rally—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh, I know the question. Again, the support came from a handful of people. It wasn't widespread support. It was having to take the lead and not really looking at all of the challenges and problems in changing course a little bit—more than a little bit because if we had to engage a lot of people in that discussion, we would have never changed course. But enough members of the board and a few people outside felt strongly that we could develop into an important center for contemporary art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was it because also that you were willing to do things that other people were not?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I've always wanted to do things a little differently.

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But, the idea that somebody wants an exhibition to happen. They can't make it happen in Washington, Philadelphia, or New York because of the patron politics or whatever. Then, all of a sudden, you get this venue that's nimble and open to things.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And timing. We talked a lot about not being overly committed, so that we had space to do things, or we could change things around.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Smart, yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And I don't know if we could call, during my tenure there, that we were nimble. Nimble implies a little more "nimbleness."

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Flexible.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We were flexible. Flexible. I'd love to be nimble, but we were flexible, and that helped. That helped a lot. After Buddy, we had a number of chairs who were incredibly supportive of the institution, of what the institution wanted to do, and of me personally. And I felt that. I knew that if we were doing something crazy, like Gilbert and George, they'd be there to be supportive.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Baltimore is, after all, a town that does pride itself on a certain tolerance of eccentricity through some of its—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Through Edgar Allan Poe and whatnot.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Edgar Allan Poe, John Waters.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yes. John would love to hear that Edgar Allan Poe and he were the two examples of

eccentricity that one could call on from Baltimore.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I'm sure there are others—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Many others, many others. But John is a good friend, and actually, with Brenda's help, I got John to chair—he was on the board—to chair our accessions committee.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And you may find that odd.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, not at all.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: People from the outside certainly found that odd. He was so terrific. He has a really good knowledge of art. He's a big collector of—I think now of a lot of things. But he was a wonderful chair, and nothing was too quirky or too outside of the market place for John to consider and to encourage other members of the accessions committee to encourage.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, his early films sort of crude that he put together partly from MICA and partly from the Fell's Point.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We did—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He knew a lot of painters and sculptors.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: He knew everybody, everybody in the arts community. Everyone adored John. Strange to say—we did a retrospective of John's films at the museum in mid-'90s, I guess, and we had people outside scalping tickets.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, I have no doubt.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So it was really wonderful having John involved at that point because he always had some difference of opinion. But no one is more gracious or more—I mean, he's involved—more contemplative and thoughtful about what he's doing than John Waters. It's the kind of thing that if you tell somebody who just sees the films, they would say, "What?" But it's very true, it's very true.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And loyal to his hometown, as well.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Very loyal. Very loyal. Anyway, it was also very nice to have him involved. At the same time, I did do things that people told us were a little odd. We had Brooks Robinson on our board. Brooks was a good friend and was able to appear at some of the things that we were doing. Of course, you had Brooksy there, the whole world would turn out. Brooks was followed, when he retired from the board, by Cal Ripken. So my approach to the nominating committee— you had to think about the whole community and how we could involve people who had their own universe of followers and visitors, and if you take that today to the kind of Facebook and Instagram world and whatnot, we would have had—if that were existing at that time, we would have had an incredible ability to reach out, even more than we did. Some troublesome moments is when—I don't know if I did it with Brooks? I must have done it with Brooks—we got a very crazy—I shouldn't say crazy. Very unusual. Huge fan of the Orioles, who appeared in these really crazy costumes at the games—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and he was the person who, if you ever saw the Orioles play many years back, he'd be out on the field going—in the most incredible Baltimore accent—"Give me an O, give me"—and it'd turn into an R, "Give me an I, give me an O, give me an L, give me an E, give me an S. Orioles!" And we made a commercial with him.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] Wow.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I got hell from many board members because the commercial was made in the museum, and the first thing he said was something like—it was in one of the galleries, and he said, "You know, I love pitchers."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] "I love pitchers."

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right, pictures.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I got it. I got it. Ballmer, downey ocean [Baltimore slang; "downey ocean" means going down to the beach –AL].

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Exactly. So we went through the galleries, and we filmed him.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Galleries. [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yeah. And it was a great commercial. I got hell from a number of board members. But, you have to try those things. Baltimore is a very tight-knit community, and you have to break through and we did. We broke through so many of those barriers.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's historically insular because it was WASP-y [White Anglo-Saxon Protestant] and Catholic. And—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right. It's a weird combination.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: After the Civil War, a lot of Jewish people from Charleston ended up moving to Baltimore, and it was that whole contingent, which was sort of, at that point, quasi-aristocratic.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Not just from there, but from Tennessee and all over the country. Because it was a very mercantile place and a place where you could cultivate success.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A major seaboard. Right, right. And it was not as entrenched as places like Philadelphia, which was even more so. So you had the flexibility to work with the community, to cross barriers, but there was a precedent for what you were doing if you look at what was going on with the Smithsonian with people like Dillon Ripley, *Washington Magazine*, and Air and Space Museum, and the Hirschhorn deal and, you know. So it's not like you were a total maverick. It was there was—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No, but, you know, they were doing it with federal money. I was doing it with no money. It's a difference.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But, yeah, a lot was going on during the '80s for sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: When you said that, it just triggered a memory that during your tenure there was when the whole Mapplethorpe-Helms thing blew up, Janet Carden—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You're telling me, you're telling me about that? [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, no, I'm just remembering, but Janet Carden organized that show at ICA [Institute of Contemporary Art], and of course, it was basically the end of the NEA [National Endownment for the Arts] for artists.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: For the time being.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: For the time being, yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: When the whole thing exploded—now I have to get the times sort of—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: '89—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And Corcoran said, "No, we're not doing the show," and Cincinnati, so you've got—you've got Cincinnati exploding and me as the new chair of the Association of Art Museum Directors, and that was a very tough period. We were in Cincinnati working with the director there, such a good friend of mine.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I remember who played him in the movie; was it James Woods played him in the movie? Anyway, there was a film about—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh, I know the film because I appeared in the film as well in a cameo —a real cameo.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I'll look that up too.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh, this is awful, absolutely awful. I was just thinking about him the other day. Anyway, it was a horrifying time. Second only—and I'm not going to talk about it. I'm aware—well, when I talk about talking about it—second only to *Sensation*. But we were really embroiled in that. I was certainly embroiled, so were the other—many of the trustees of the AAMD, trying—and Dennis— [Barrie –AL]

[. . . –AL]

The great thing that came out of it is the art community talks so much about organizing, about being organized,

about being able to be there, amassed, when an explosion like this happens. And it never happens, they're not organized. They're disorganized, even with very, really good—the AAMD itself is run very well. And you simply have people for whom this kind of political—because that's what it was. Just political explosion—we'd never been ready for that. The good part of that is that the whole Mapplethorpe thing helped bring people together. It was a rallying point. A lot of people got hurt in the process: Christina at the Corcoran, of course, and lots of other people, Dennis Barrie—

[. . . –AL]

O-R-R, hyphen, C-A-H-I-L-L. I was very friendly with Janet, and I knew Mapplethorpe from my days in New York earlier, and there I was in the midst of this whole thing, having to comment. We were waiting for the decision in Cincinnati, and I will never forget CBS or ABC—it wasn't NBC. I think it was ABC. I was in New York doing something at some gallery—and the other thing in Baltimore that was great—I'm sorry, going back and forth—is that I was two-and-a-half hours away from New York and would come to New York every other week by myself, with Brenda, go through all the galleries. I happened to be in New York, and one of the—ABC or CBS tracked me down and—early in the day—and they said, "We want a comment from you when the jury comes in about the Mapplethorpe case and the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati."

I said, "I'm only going to comment if the verdict is a good one. I'm not commenting if the verdict's a bad one." They said, "Well, you have to. You have to; you have to comment." I said, "Why?" And they said, "Because"—you know, the same lame excuse, "Because this is the news, and you have to be able to comment on the news." So you said, I have to do a kind of a happy face or a sad face when this comes out? And I said, "I won't. I won't do—I won't comment if the news is bad—if the verdict is bad. What good is it going to do? I don't like the verdict; I think it's ridiculous. You know? I'm not commenting." Anyway, so we finally—I got agreement that I'm done; if this is not a good verdict, I'm not talking.

Fortunately, it was a good verdict, and I spoke about it [. . . –AL], and it was a good verdict, but the trailer—everything that happened afterwards was—it just was so mixed up. It was a period of—in a couple years with still a lot of leftover stuff from the Mapplethorpe. And people were really afraid—my colleagues—with the whole issue of self-censorship and there was a lot of retrenchment, a lot of feeling that we don't want this to happen to us. Even though Dennis was acquitted; the museum was acquitted; there was a positive response from a jury, there was this negativity about how do we face this? What do we do to avoid this? It wasn't, "Let's rally on the basis of this very positive news. First amendment rights are affirmed, and let's go forward." It was a sense of, you know, "careful."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was there a sense also that the access to government funding for cultural initiatives was going to change, and then you'd be at the mercy of private individuals?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, I wouldn't use the word "mercy," but I understand what you mean.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, right, "largess."

ARNOLD LEHMAN: There was a lot of discussion about the NEA, NEH, even before Mapplethorpe, about its access to them, what they were doing. Well, you know, they weren't—the NEA wasn't funding Mapplethorpe.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: They were—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was the exhibition, right? Was—received some help—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right. That much. That much.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But Helms and his people exploited it because they wanted to snuff out government support for the—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: All creative government support for the arts, and it was tough. It was tough. So, I learned, at least that the road is not always a straight one or an easy one.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What was the most valuable lesson that you, personally, took away from that whole experience?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I'll tell you. Very easy for me to say this. Despite the fact that there were some up and downs, I really felt that Dennis Barrie was a hero. The barrage of horrible personal attacks on him, on his family, on every aspect of anything he had ever done—to me was just horrifying. So what I took away was that Dennis stood his ground. He believed—and I don't care what any people say, that it was all—that people said the whole thing was, made up to commit—there are people who say that somehow they were creating this furor to get this

explosion of support for the Contemporary Art Center in terms of people visiting and some people supporting it—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sounds like a grassy-knoll scenario to me. Kind of—conspiracy—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yeah, yeah. I don't think—there's not a word true in that, not a word. So what I took away was, if you believe in something, you stay there because first of all, where are you going to go? There's no place to hide. If you were at the center of something and you believed it was good to do to begin with, why would you change your story? If you believe in an artist—you believe in whatever—you stick with it. And in terms of that, becoming part of the whole first amendment issue, is really what museum directors and curators, college presidents, and teachers of all kinds, and reporters—I mean, they all have to believe in that, or we're done. We're just done. And—from time to time, it's very scary.

You know, reading the newspaper or watching FOX News, which I do once in a while because my wife always likes to see the other side, what they're saying, listening to them on the radio. It's a very scary world out there because I think, during Mapplethorpe, despite the horrible press, and during *Sensation*, again, despite the acrimony and the attacks, there were still plenty of people, plenty of public officials, who believed that the first amendment is the first thing you read in the Bill of Rights. And that's become sacred. I'm concerned that that number of people are going to be outnumbered.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: By people who are more easily intimidated or lack the moral courage?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Not just intimidated, who believe that it's not true. It shouldn't be—I mean, that kind—first amendment doesn't apply to things they don't like. Rudy Giuliani, right?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think we should stop for the day, and we'll resume on Wednesday.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Okay. Was this good for you?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Excellent. Excellent.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking with Arnold Lehman on April 1st, 2015, in his office at the Brooklyn Museum. Good morning again.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Good morning again.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, before I turned the recorder on, we were talking about Baltimore, and you were saying that you still return, from time to time.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I serve on a corporate board in Baltimore and have for many, many years. So, I'm in Baltimore, probably, at least four times a year on business, and once in a while, more than that for other reasons. And it's a remarkable city and quite a unique city and it enjoys its uniqueness. I'm not quite sure why it was ever named Charm City, but it was an enjoyable place to live for almost 20 years, 19-years-plus, and I think that, if it weren't for Brooklyn calling, I would still be in Baltimore. It's a city today that I think is much more lively, particularly artistically, than it was two decades ago or three decades ago, and I think also interestingly situated between Washington, D.C. and New York City, so that you can have—whatever you're interested in, you can have your fix.

I certainly went back and forth to New York when I was at the Baltimore Museum, either by myself or with our curator, Brenda Richardson, and in two days we did 45 galleries, maybe 60 galleries, and she and I both always joked that we loved the galleries the most who had very large windows on the street, so that we could, from time to time, see the exhibitions. I know this is a terrible thing to say, but from time to time, see the exhibitions from the sidewalk, so that we didn't have to go into the gallery, and we knew to pass on because once a museum director goes into a gallery and acknowledged by the gallery director, it's a much longer stay than you would otherwise have enjoyed. So, I never felt that we were apart from the active art world because we were so close. The museum itself was a great, great opportunity for me, being so young when I first went there and with such a very special and important collection to work with. I don't think anyone can complain with working with, perhaps, the largest Matisse collection in the United States.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: *The Cone Collection*.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: *The Cone Collection* and with magnificent American works of art from painting to furniture and an extremely important works-on-paper collection. I think the paper collection of a collection of about 90,000-plus, maybe 100,000 objects, probably 80,000 of those works on paper, and that was a rich trove of material for exhibitions and a wonderful basis, in terms of a loan network that we had in order to collaborate with other institutions and for them to send us important things for exhibition.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's interesting.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So, yeah, museums don't exist separately from a network of museums because we're so dependent on one another, or most of us are so dependent on one another for loans—at least those of us who have a very active exhibition program—and that collaboration is always facilitated when you're able to, not only ask for loans and be the—I don't think "loaner" is the right word here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Lender?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: "Lendee," instead of the "lender."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So, to have the kind of extraordinary collection, particularly works on paper, that Baltimore was fortunate to have gave us a lot of opportunities and a terrific group of curators at the museum and trustees, who provided ongoing support and advocacy for the museum. I think, as I mentioned to you earlier, the history of the museum, being such an open and welcoming place for many decades, put it into a special position, and also, in terms of the exhibitions that we did, we had a particularly close and supportive working relationship with the political network in Baltimore. I remember very vividly going to a city council meeting to debate the budget cuts that were coming down because the city had financial problems, and the city always had financial problems, and unfortunately, one of the targets of budget cuts was the museum and other arts grants that were being given, and I spoke, and there was always, perhaps not a majority, but maybe often the majority, but not always—of the council were African Americans, and what was truly rewarding was that the ferocity and advocacy of a number of the African American council members to make certain that the museum's budget was not cut and that it was, as they said, "So important for their community," and when you work hard to present exhibitions and programs that have a wide and broad appeal, it is, as I said, incredibly rewarding for people to stand up for you, especially in a governmental setting where that doesn't often happen.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Which exhibition that was organized at the Baltimore Art Museum had the greatest draw from tourism that you remember?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh, my God. I frankly don't.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The reason I ask is that, as you were talking, it seemed to me that there was a relationship between the museum as a tourist attraction—it was going to bring money into the city. I mean, you have the inner harbor, which was the Rouse phenomenon.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right, but I think I need to go backwards for a moment and maybe, sort of, redefine.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: In that period of time, we're talking about—I was there '79 to '97—tourism was a very limited part of our audience. Tourists were a very limited part of our audience, unless you want to call Washingtonians tourists. So, it was never—I think there were two goals, but they were very much separated. The first goal was to broaden our local audience, and that was, by far, the most important, the most important goal that we had, not only broaden in terms of numbers, but broaden in terms of who was coming to the museum. The second goal, which was always in our minds, but truly secondary, was to establish the Baltimore Museum of Art as a major center for contemporary art in that region, certainly in the Middle Atlantic states region. But we never—except in two ways did we ever think about the museum, or did I ever think—I don't want to include anyone else in what, perhaps, is a mistake on my part—ever think of the museum as a tourist attraction, except, first, for *the Cone Collection*.

So then, we used *the Cone Collection* as actively as we could as a magnet for people to come and see this incredible trove of works by Matisse, and second, when we acquired that major group of Warhol's from the Andy Warhol Foundation and set it up as one of the most—the museum as one of the most important places in the country that you could go to see a Warhol, probably one of the three most important. You have the Warhol Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and then the Baltimore Museum. That was pretty good to be in that company. So, Warhol, in a sense, we thought of as the new *Cone Collection*. And it did; I think it did have an attraction for people well outside our region. I can't tell you the numbers, but an exhibition in and of itself probably would not fit into the definition of a heavy duty tourist draw.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A lot of people talk about Monet, Van Gogh, King Tut, these big exhibitions that are guaranteed to just draw huge attendance.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Nothing is guaranteed anymore, but—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In those days, there was this assumption—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah, for sure, the blockbuster was a major part of everyone's thinking. I would have to go through the whole list of exhibitions that I did over two decades to think of what I could really pinpoint as a blockbuster, and just by not having it at the tip of my tongues would indicate—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Says it all.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —would indicate that, you know, we didn't quite think that way. And sometimes, we were very surprised, sometimes in both directions. I certainly remember we did at exhibition—a great Henry Moore exhibition; we focused on mother and child. What could be more appealing than an exhibition of [. . . –AL] Henry Moore's focus on [the mother and child] in his oeuvre? A disaster. No one came to see it, or almost no one came to see it, and one of the reasons, I think, even though in Baltimore we weren't as focused—and it was the times also, but we weren't quite as focused, or maybe not focused on at all, on what we are focused on now, and that's the kind of—that's the branding. How do you make an institution fit into a branding? How do you work all the pieces together, so that exhibition, after exhibition, after exhibition falls into a brand that people can rely on, that people are interested in—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: — that people come to see, even if they're not interested in that work because it's not the work alone; it's how it's presented.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's the environment, too.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: All of that and we were working towards that. We were working towards becoming probably more and more of a contemporary institution, and in that vein and certainly years later here, working towards presenting even traditional work in a more contemporary manner. You know, our audience was getting somewhat younger; times were changing; people were really starting to look at contemporary art. You and I both know that, 30 years ago, the way to make sure you didn't have an audience was to do a Robert Ryman show.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, Agnes Martin or—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right, we did Agnes Martin. We did a fabulous Agnes Martin show that was magnificent. A core of people came, and we were very happy with that core. But that's changed dramatically, and today, audiences, while they're still attracted to a King Tut exhibition, it depends where it is. A King Tut Exhibition today in New York, I don't think—and it's a guess—I doubt that it would have half the number of people that it had when Tom Hoving did it in 1975 or—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —'79 or something.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think the last time Tut came to town, it came to Times Square.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: That's correct.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And it was also a Leonardo show, too, in Times Square.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, we are always approached with those kinds of exhibitions because of our Egyptian holdings, and during my tenure, we've done major exhibitions. We curated—our curators organized the major exhibition called Eternal Egypt using the British Museum's incredible collection. We organized it and curated it; it came here, and it traveled to I can't tell you how many other locations, and it definitely was a draw, but it was nothing on the scale of what happened with King Tut. It was new; it was remarkable that that material was able to be in New York. I remember it very well, but it was of a time. My first exhibition in Brooklyn, and I don't mean to skip ahead because—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's fine.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —we're still in Baltimore, but when I was appointed, I remained in Baltimore for about six months because I had a lot of stuff to do there, but I also ran the Brooklyn Museum. It was an interesting situation of six months. And one of the major exhibitions that had been committed to by Brooklyn was the exhibition *Monet and the Mediterranean*, and that was organized by the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth. I had no hand in getting it to the museum, but it was presented to me as a fait accompli, and the plans were presented to me, and I thought, here are among the most magnificent Monets you could possibly have. Now, this is 18-plus years ago and it was the beginning; it was the first show I did— beginning of 1997. It was planned here in a manner that would have allowed for a smaller audience than I felt we should anticipate, and what I remember most is that the plan was for a 300 square foot shop, which is a reasonable size.

It's a 15 by 20 foot space, and I said, no, no, no, no, impossible. And so, I got the museum—and this is long distance, of course—to do a 3,000 square foot shop, which I felt was more at keeping with the kind of audience that we were going to get, and indeed, I think almost to this day, that exhibition shop was the most successful exhibition shop we ever did. It was an enormously—and probably one of the biggest audiences we ever had. I think, in general, those kinds of exhibitions have become so prohibitively expensive that only a few museums are able to do them. That, the expense side, coupled with the disappearance of major corporate support for exhibitions has become a kind of a near death knell to exhibitions of that kind because it's very difficult to depend solely on the price of admission. The costs of these exhibitions have gone well beyond being able to be supported by that alone, and it's very difficult to look at projects like that unless you're the Metropolitan Museum, and everybody else—maybe Houston—everybody else at a smaller scale.

I mean, we, in Brooklyn, participate in those exhibitions, but one step down. As I said a moment ago, we're offered or have been offered, not recently, major Egyptian treasures, exhibitions by the Egyptian government, by other organizers, but the price of those exhibitions, by the time you finish, is $5 million, $6 million, $7 million, maybe $10 million, and it's a question whether there's an audience for that. Interestingly, if smaller museums throughout the country, not the big, sort of, costal museums or in Chicago or Houston, but smaller museums are often the site for some of these major exhibitions because they have an audience that hasn't had a chance to see that. So, I'm not quite sure how they balance their budgets, but—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They must have the donors who are interested.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yeah, I think much more exhibition support these days is coming from individuals, meaning trustees, or great friends of the various museums. There's some support from foundations, NEA, NEH. These are the very major grants that were given by, especially NEH, in years past; they've all dwindled—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —into more grants of smaller denominations. So, museums have to be even more intelligent about what they show. My belief, of course, is that more and more focus should be placed on permanent collection, turning permanent collection into exhibitions, and creating a kind of a niche for things. We're opening our second Basquiat exhibition in 10 years. Our last one was in 2005, which was an enormous success. It was right in the heart of what our branding is all about, and I'm hopeful that this exhibition—which is, as you know, on the notebooks that have not been seen by audiences—a little more specialized and I think, in a way, equally rewarding. It's more work for a visitor to do because they have to read a lot. And that—you're smiling—that may not be as appealing as the opportunity to look at a painting for 10 seconds and move on.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, the other thing, too, that's an interesting idea because we've noted the Native American show, *Artists of Earth and Sky,* at the Met now. A lot of the major exhibitions, Turner, Courbet, a lot of the major exhibitions—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Our Sargent's exhibition.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —are featuring notebooks, sketchbooks, often with animations, the futurist exhibition at the Guggenheim; it had a lot of touch-screen exhibits to enormous effect. The difference is, if you have to look at a painting on one of these tablets—I'm holding up a mobile phone—if you have to look at a painting on one of these, it puts you at a distance from the experience that totally changes what the image does; whereas, if you're looking at a notebook on this, it's not so much of a jump, and there is, I think, a migration in a lot of artistic activity today among contemporary artists on a smaller scale in more intimate environments.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You know I agree with you. The issue becomes a more difficult one when, in our new Basquiat exhibition, you're looking at notebook pages and major paintings at the same time.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that's great though; that's an exciting—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No, no, it is very exciting, and we're very proud of this exhibition, but it is more work for the visitor.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But I think you also get more back.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Are you planning to do any facsimiles of the—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —notebooks because—oh, at the Schiele—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh, yes, we have a catalog.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We have a catalog—every notebook page is reproduced.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wonderful.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And it's really wonderful to see, very exciting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, at the Schiele exhibition that is currently up at the Neue, there is a reproduction of one of his pocket notebooks and at rather a dear price, and also, the Van Gogh Museum, a couple of years ago, came out with—in collaboration with a publisher, I think, here in New York with faithful facsimile reproductions of four of his notebooks in an elegant, silk-bound box, et cetera, at also a very dear price.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, in keeping, again, with Brooklyn's brand, we have a book of facsimiles, and it's $29.95.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Great.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It's in, what looks like a high school notebook.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, a composition book.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: A composition book and just the way Basquiat did it, and we want everyone to see these. So, but again, I'm ahead of myself. We're still in Baltimore.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're still in Baltimore, sort of. So, were you able—and I remember at one point there was a governor there named Schaefer?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: William Donald Schaefer.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who was seen as, kind of, a friend of the arts? Am I correct in assuming that?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yeah, you are, you are. I mean, in a totally untutored—he was a great personal friend of mine as mayor and then as governor. My wife was one of his devoted volunteers and organized all sorts of fundraising things for the governor's interests and activities, and he was enormously supportive, and you would never have imagined, but he was very thoughtful about how important the arts were for young children especially, and that's really where his interest was: young children and school children of every age. He was very instrumental in helping to create the School for the Arts in Baltimore and was incredibly helpful to the Baltimore Museum in terms of our capital projects, and indeed, the central court of the Baltimore Museum is named in honor of William Donald Schaefer.

He was a—politically, having been in the political arena before, I loved talking to the mayor, and we had a lot of private time together, probably because he liked my wife, and she was such a great volunteer. And I say that in—he had this amazing ability to—he created his coterie of fierce women, who were extraordinarily capable in their various fields, and they were really willing, and did, almost anything for him. They were almost like a shadow government. There was this women's group, and if they needed to get out the vote for something, or needed to change people's minds about something, or do a specific project, he had all this women power there, and he knew exactly what he was doing, and a group of women who you couldn't say no to, so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who were they? Who were they apart from your wife?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Sally Michel, for instance, who was one of the leaders of that group; Lainy Lebow-Sachs, who was involved with him in many different instances. She was chief of staff; she was head of—she was communications when he was mayor, chief of staff when he was governor. Sandy Hillman was another person; now you're really pushing my memory. But a great group, all of whom were friends, as well as coworkers for the mayor, and it was a group that we spent a lot of time with. Baltimore's a very small place.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: A very small place.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you have a lot of truck with the art scene in Philadelphia?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No, no.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: With the museum there or—

[. . . –AL]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: The same thing is true in Washington. There was very little call. I spent more time than I should have or would've liked to, but because we did a lot of international loans, I went to a lot of diplomatic dinners and more than I should have, but that was also at the beginning when I first got there. Coming from Miami, or even coming from New York, there was a great allure to have dinner at the British Embassy, and the French Embassy, and the Indian Embassy, and the Italian Embassy, and the Chinese Embassy. It grew tedious after a while.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And I imagine you—were you ever called before Congress in relation to—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Very often.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the NEA and all that.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Very often because none of the directors of the congressionally funded—of the federally funded institutions, the National Gallery, I mean, you name it, the Hirshhorn, or others—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —they could not testify.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So, the option was to call upon the Corcoran, the very closest, or to call upon me in Baltimore, and since I was very active—I was a trustee for years, and then president of AAMD, vice president, president—my active relationship went on for many years, mostly when I was in Baltimore. I was always called upon to testify. So, whether it was an artists' rights bill or anything else, I spent time there in hearing rooms, and the positive side of that is that I had some very good friends who were some long-term, re-elected members of Congress from Baltimore and the Baltimore area. So, they were always helpful in getting me higher up on the docket for the day, and I also spent an incredible amount of time testifying in Annapolis because, as opposed to many municipalities, such as New York, where both—I mean, fortunately—where both support for the operating budget and the capital budget comes from the City of New York. In Maryland, or in Baltimore at least, only operating support, and very little of it, but only operating support came from the city. Capital support came from the State.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: From the State at Annapolis.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: In Annapolis. So, I spent a lot of time in Annapolis testifying before the various budget and finance committees, but thereto, the good news is, since Baltimore dominated the state very often, the leadership of those committees were Baltimore legislators, and having become extremely friendly with many of them, it was easier for me to testify because they, too, looked at me. I got there, and I was 57th in line to testify, and all of a sudden, I was second. So—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It helps you organize your calendar a little better.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It does; it does, and I must say, the legislature in Annapolis, both on the Senate side and on the assembly side, was very supportive of the Baltimore Museum. So, that governmental experience, whether it was with the mayor's office, or the city council, or the State legislature, was a very positive experience and helped me evolve more in how to deal with governmental entities.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How did you deal with acquisitions when you came to Baltimore, and you decided that you were going to do more with the community outreach and try to be more inclusive and were working with the Orioles and the African American community? How did that change the direction of the museum in terms of acquisitions?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It changed very little. First of all, the museum had quite limited funds for acquisitions, and we were pretty highly focused on certain areas. Certainly in the area—which interestingly, today the cost has gone down dramatically—but certainly in the area of acquiring American furniture, what people often call highly polished, brown furniture.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Because the museum had an astounding collection of that material where we were, and we wanted to make sure that, when really fine objects appeared on the market, we were able to support that collection. So, our acquisitions were, in a way, sadly, but there was an appropriateness to continue to support the collections that we had because we had very little money to make, sort of, in roads in different directions,

certainly not to create new collecting areas; modern was one of the few areas that we were—we could be a little more creative in, and we tried all the time to put money together to buy major objects, for instance, by African American artists when we could. What we didn't do and were—and probably appropriately—chastised for was not spending our acquisitions money on contemporary Baltimore artists, and we—or the museum, like most museums, had had regional exhibitions, and I ended that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You mean, like juried shows or invitational shows?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Exactly. And so, instead of doing that, we did a number of invitational shows, often focusing on the regional artists—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —but those regional artists were Grace Hartigan, Morris Lorris, you know. Unfortunately, names then that were at the top of—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —anyone's list, maybe not Grace, but certainly Morris Lewis, in terms of the Washington color field painters.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You know, today, you talk to a young collector about color field, he doesn't know what you're talking about.

[. . . –AL]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But then you also have Gilliam.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And we had work by Sam.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then you had the MICA crowd, like—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We did.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Raoul and Middleman and all those guys.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: The only relationship that—well, we had a friendly relationship. I was very friendly [. . . –AL] with Fred Lazarus for many, many years, and Fred was retired. The only relationship I had with Raoul was, for years, he wanted to do my portrait, for years, and so finally, I couldn't say no anymore, and so he was painting a portrait. If I remember correctly, he was doing Grace Hartigan and doing a portrait of me. I've never sat still for so long on so many sittings. On, and on, and on and on, and on and on, and to this day, I've never seen the finished portrait.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There's a book called *The Painter's Chair*, which is about all the tortures endured by George Washington at the hands of painters.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh, well, I think I could come in second. I've never seen the finished painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Really?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So, I have no idea whatever happened to it, but you know what? Please don't inquire.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay. [Laughs.] I bet I could find it, if you want.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I bet you can.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We'll just leave that one alone.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And then it became an issue of, if I remember—this is a long time ago. So, you're pushing the cerebellum here to places it can't go. I think Raoul might have stopped because, then, he got into the conversation of, well, the museum is going to buy this, isn't it?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I said, "Why would the museum buy a portrait of me?" I mean, we don't do that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's not a law firm.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We don't have a gallery of paintings of my 42 predecessors, so he might have stopped, but I don't know. Please don't ask.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I won't, but 100 years hence, someone will try to put the conversation together with a portrait.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You think?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who knows? Maybe.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So, we had a friendly relationship. I was asked to jury some shows. I had a wonderful, wonderful working relationship, and still a friendship, with Leslie King-Hammond and a number of African American artists, with whom I was very friendly, and some of which we acquired, but very minimally. We just didn't have the money to do it. We had a number of gifts, but it was—every other—you were really right to ask that question because every other programmatic way, we were working towards a younger audience, audiences interested in the creativity, an African American audience. I think one of the areas that we didn't do as well in, in that direction, not in terms of collection building, but in that direction, was in acquisitions. Did I mention to you that I got John Waters to be the chairman of our acquisitions committee?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, you did, Monday, yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No one is better than John.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you know—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No one is better.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You try to build a national identity.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And so, you're only going to get so much traction towards that serving the local artists, but at the same time, you want to be useful to the community. But as I recall, Baltimore did have, like, a Maryland Arts Place and School 33, and other places like that that could serve that role.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And they have the Arts Tower.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: What was it–ALka-Seltzer? Bromo-Seltzer Tower.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Bromo, yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: The world changed so dramatically, coming to Brooklyn—I mean, dealing with the local art community in Brooklyn is dealing with the most recognized art community in the world. It's a totally different experience, and in a real way, that was one of the reasons that I thought coming here would be very exciting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, why don't we talk about how that happened, how you came to Brooklyn? Here.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Here? I was head hunted. My only connection with Brooklyn is having come here 100 times. I often came to the museum to see exhibitions, probably more so than any of my colleagues. As I expected from childhood, I knew the museum quite well. I was—again, to be very candid, when the museum in the late '80s announced its master plan and got a lot of press for it, I was extremely skeptical that such a behemoth of a project could be built, not just because it was in Brooklyn, but because it was just so expensive at that time.

I did think, and I was one of them, that this international competition drew a lot of attention to the Brooklyn Museum, for which I thought it was a great idea to do. They didn't do it for publicity; they did it because they wanted a great design. But what happened is they got great interest, and so, I was—you know, I knew my predecessor quite well through AAMD, and I was actually, in a number of instances, in the process of working on organizing in Baltimore exhibitions that included Brooklyn as a venue, and I probably was as aware as anyone of the problems, the economic problems in the community, the incredible breadth of the East River. You know what I mean?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I do know.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: That's why talking with you is really a pleasure because you know all of these things. You don't come to it, like, what?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, I'll tell you a story quickly. I don't want to interrupt, but years ago, probably in the 70s, I was here—I was in the old cafeteria, and there were two very—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Here?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —elderly ladies, yeah, with lace gloves and the hats with the lace over the—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Now, were you in Baltimore? Because the same thing existed in Baltimore as here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, it was here.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: At the Brooklyn—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Museum and they were eating their lunch, and they were comparing each other's husband's illnesses, and one was saying, "So, how's Irvin doing?" "Well, you know, they took his brain out last week, but he's playing golf today. He's much better." It's kind of back and forth, and—[laughs]—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I'm sorry; you said that just as I was—

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, they continue talking and, "How is Cy?" "Oh, Cy, you know, his gall bladder"—or whatever, this whole—during lunch and I'm at the next table, of course, very appetizing. One turns to the other, or she looks across the table at her companion and says, "You know, this is a very nice lunch." The other one says, "Yes, it is. You couldn't get a nice lunch like this at one of those—for this kind of money at one of those museums in New York," so that was the mentality, that New York was somewhere off there to the West.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, everyone says, "Are you going to the City?"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You know, everyone says, "Are you going to the City?" I always correct them; I say, "This is the City."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Since 1898 or whenever it was.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right, and then an equally amusing story is, when I first got here, one of the things I did was the promotional tour. I spoke at every women's club in Manhattan. I was hoarse all the time because I spoke, and I spoke, and I spoke. So, I spoke at the Colony or the [Cosmopolitan Club –AL]—I don't remember which one—the Colony Club, and I'm out on the sidewalk trying to get a cab and with my wife, I guess, and this woman, an elderly woman, comes up to me and says, "You know, Mr. Lehman, I loved your talk. I especially loved all of your discussion and slides dealing with your very wonderful Egyptian collection." She said, but you know, "And I'd love to visit it, but frankly, it's easier for me to go to Cairo than it is to go to Brooklyn."

[They laugh.]

Now, I know the woman's name was Margaret because a friend of hers, who was standing next to her, said, "Margaret, that's a very stupid thing to say. Your driver lives in Brooklyn. He knows how to get there." At which point, Margaret and her friend get into their car and driven away, and I'm left just standing there thinking, Cairo? Okay, and taking it back, a totally different day, but it reminds me of a story about Baltimore, also when [. . . –AL] I spoke at the Mt. Vernon Club, which is the pinnacle [for –AL] Baltimore women, and the hostess for that lunch that day, two or three martini lunch. I should never have spoken after lunch. I should've spoken before because I'm sure there was a haze that, I mean, I could've been—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Good martinis then.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I could've been, you know, an industrial engineer; it didn't matter. So, I got up. The hostess was one of our senior and most wonderful trustees, who I loved. I got up; she was seated next to me; the podium was right there. I got up, and I introduced myself, and I said how wonderful it was to be at the Mt. Vernon Club, and I was coming from Florida at that point, and I said, "And it's particularly wonderful to be, once again, north

of the Mason Dixon Line." At which point, Rose Rumford, who was the hostess, goes like this to my jacket, and she's whispering, "Arnold, you're not north of the Mason Dixon Line," and I really couldn't quite grasp what she was saying, but I got a lot of laughter in the audience. In fact, the Mason Dixon Line is 40 miles—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: North.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —north of Baltimore; it's around York, Pennsylvania.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, it's the border, the Maryland/Pennsylvania border.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right. So, between that and my—the Cairo mention, I thought that was—it put me in my place. They both put me in my appropriate place, and that was, indeed, the mentality here. The City was Manhattan; everything else were the outer boroughs.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: The river was un-crossable for anything other than business purposes, and speaking of silos, Brooklyn and Queens were the biggest silos on the planet in comparison to Manhattan, and one of the very first things that I said to all the curatorial staff, and the educators, and the public information people was that we're no longer going to worry about that. We're not going to be concerned with the folks over in Manhattan. The key principle here, for so many years, was, how do we attract Manhattanites to come to Brooklyn? We even had buses in front, at one point, in front of the Metropolitan Museum and one to bring people to the Brooklyn Museum. I mean, nice idea, but kind of insane. So you bring 120 people, three runs during the course of the day. If the bus was half full—what is that?—maybe 60 people?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think they still do that at BAM [Brooklyn Academy of Music], if you're—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But that's different.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No, that's not—the BAM bus?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's done?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Finished. But at least at BAM, there was a rationale, which I always said, because there was an event; there was a play; there was an opera—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: There was a set time for something. So, if that was at—the curtain was up at 7:30, people got picked up in front of Bloomindales or 72nd Street or wherever at 5:30, and they made it to BAM, but this, sort of, bus waiting to take you on a non-existent schedule when you certainly could get here much faster on the subway.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We did do a number of ad campaigns that tried to place the museum in the context of, well, it's, sort of, easier to get here if you're south of 14th Street in Manhattan than to get to the Met or the Whitney.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's actually as easy to get to as the Battery. A lot of people take the one train to the Battery, and the two and three come right to your door.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right to our front door and—but going backwards, it was not just a campaign to have people of Manhattan—and a lot of our trustees lived in Manhattan, maybe half—to think about coming to Brooklyn, coming to the Brooklyn Museum, and we did. As I said, many of our trustees were always concerned that their friends didn't see exhibitions here and that, while they talked about them and how wonderful they were, there was no—the cocktail chatter was never about Brooklyn, except maybe Peter Luger's. So, I think started to change internally with the notion that you don't have to worry about that anymore. Worry about a borough of two-and-a-half million people as though we were the only museum for states on either side. Think about who lives here, how we're going to best serve them, how we're going to best use our collection and that, and if we do that job really well, people will come. People will come from all over.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Plus, you're as close to the major airports as, you know, you've got LaGuardia up north, and you've got Kennedy.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And they have to go—more or less, had to go through Brooklyn.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But the issue still was how to attract, starting with, literally, our own, sort of, catchment area, how to attract it from the Prospect Heights, Park Slope—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —Brooklyn Heights, Crown Heights, how do you attract that part of Brooklyn, and then draw the circle larger, so you get Williamsburg and Bed-Stuy? I mean, Bed-Stuy's right here and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Little Odessa.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: All of those.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And that's how we started to totally revamp our exhibition program. I mean, we did—you remind me of Little Odessa. We did an exhibition called *Jewels of the Romanovs,* and for Brooklyn audience, the two things in that title that were attractive were "jewels" and "Romanovs." I'll never forget, we had a wonderful trustee at that time, and she still is a wonderful friend, Iris Cantor, and I got Iris to—Iris and, at that point, it was still called—it was no longer Brooklyn Union Gas Company, but it was the next iteration. Anyway, I got them to support the exhibition, but Iris Cantor's foundation was the primary support. Iris got up to speak at the opening, and she said, "Well, there are—there are several reasons that I'm supporting this exhibition," and she said, "You know me," she said, "jewels, there's nothing more important." No, she didn't start with that. She said, "I was born and bred in Brooklyn, one. Two, you mention jewels and you've got me. Number three, Bernie," her late husband, "always called me his little Czarina."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So, she said, "How could I not support this exhibition?" And we had so many Russians, Ukrainians, I mean, so many people here. I would say 95 percent had never set foot in a museum before. I went on Russian radio; I mean, it was local Russian radio. We were in all the papers. It's hard to continue that. We then did an exhibition, and that was enormously successful. We then did an exhibition a number of years later, which was a different look and take on Scythian gold, *Gold of the Nomads*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What is now Ukraine or Kazakhstan? Yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Exactly. Done—here's how the world gets very small—done by, then, the curator of ancient art at the Walters Art Gallery, and we were the major thrust because we had that community. No response whatsoever, and she actually, ultimately, came here after the show, ultimately came here as the curator, Ellen Reeder. She was a great curator and extraordinarily persuasive person. And she did; she persuaded us, but there was no traction, no traction at all, and it was—well, it was also—the problem was it was right smack in the middle of 9/11.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But it was an incredibly gorgeous exhibition that she had put together, and so bits and pieces where we continue to work towards that audience.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But now I've forgotten where we were.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, there was that Fabergé exhibition, too, that was very popular. I think it was organized at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yes, but we didn't do it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, no, but it—that's one of those other small blockbuster, like a mini—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —blockbuster.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Actually, we did—in Baltimore, I was reasonably friendly with Chris Forbes. And at one point, the Forbes family had an extraordinary collection of Fabergé.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And we showed it at the Brooklyn Museum. This is, again, where you don't really think about it, and this was my fault this time. Where you don't really think about—you think about the objects and how best they look, but you don't necessarily think about, you know, you learn your lesson. You don't necessarily think about how to cope with visitors in touch and interested in those objects, how much space you have to leave. So, unfortunately, we—and it was a last-minute exhibition, so we had another problem. Unfortunately, we had to put the entire collection in a smallish gallery. We had lines three hours long because people—everyone came with little magnifying glasses. We had placed—now I remember—we had actually put magnifying glasses on every case, you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —attached.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So people could use them. We finally decided take them away because people would stay in one object for five minutes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And the lines got longer, and longer, and longer, and longer, and longer, so we took the magnifying glasses away and, of course, then people brought their own.

[They laugh.]

So, I mean, something like Fabergé is, indeed, going back to our conversation with blockbusters, always, certainly in the past, always pulled out a specific, but large audience. Today, it's not that—it's not that we are running out of creativity or the—or ideas, but I think, as I said a moment ago, the museums have to be smarter.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And lenders, Fabergé lenders, for instance, or any other lenders, are much more concerned about how their objects are treated. You know, will they be returned to them in the same condition that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —they loaned them? More and more lenders are saying no to loans today, no matter what. The loan —you can commit to one truck per each object. An Airglide truck completely filled with foam, five couriers surrounding one little object, never to be touched with human hands and no oxygen except that provided by a special tube. I mean, you can swear to everything, and you still won't get the loan.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: One of the things that you're known for, I guess, is trying to re-contextualize a collection in the museum and try to present it in new ways that uses it in other ways to construct different conversations at—between the pieces. Like the American Collection, the way that it was restructured, re-installed in dialogue with, you know, the decorative arts, furniture, and other things like that. You see this, too, like there were some of the contemporary artists like Rosemarie Trockels' exhibition at the new—yeah, at the New Museum. And Barbara Bloom's show at, you know, the Jewish Museum that used objects—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Even more—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —from their—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, even more so. And very, very intelligent ways of using the collection to present a new idea with the same old objects.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well, I've always— there's no question I've always been an advocate—well I've always said that we created a problem for ourselves. We created the—both the genius and the villain of the special exhibition.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: To the complete denial of permanent collections. That created this, sort of, wheel—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —more and more and more and more special exhibitions because that's what the public became engaged with.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: They would come to a major museum at—where is this special exhibition on so and so? See that. Maybe go to the shop, maybe have lunch and leave. And not—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —look at any permanent collection whatsoever. I talked about this all over about how we had to rethink the use of permanent collection, how the permanent collection was really the life of the individual museums, and why the permanent collection, shy of contemporary—because, in so many museums, the contemporary collections look exactly alike—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —but the uniqueness, the idiosyncrasies of permanent collections pre-1940, for instance, or pre-1950, had a uniqueness and a distinction—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and a relevance to those institutions and that museums had to start going back and, somehow, better using their permanent collections. What I encouraged all of our curators to do was to make special exhibitions out of permanent collections. Turn the permanent collection into a special exhibition by, not only creating what we did in *American Identities*—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —but rotating objects through there all the time, moving things around, creating new conversations, so people had a reason to come back.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There were ideas like that in the wind back in the late 80s with shows like *Le Magiciens de la Terre* at the Centre Pompidou, which—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yeah. I never saw that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Which had to juxtaposition of like Anselm Kiefer in a voodoo temple or something. It was condemned by, and still is, as a kind neo-Colonial, you know—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —whatever. But—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But that's different. But that's a different issue.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, but what they were doing was trying to construct different ways of—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Of seeing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —of seeing, exactly. And so you had, let's say, people like the Arensberg's or the Cohens, or the Cohen collection, which, you know, were these very specific visions and tastes of these individual—or Barnes certainly. And then now, today, you've got the—your-name-here art patrons who have one of these and one of those. They've got a Jeff Koons; they've got a Richter—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And that's why I said most—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —contemporary collections look the same.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. I've interviewed a number of dealers who privately, on tapes—[laughs]—said that, to them, those aren't collectors. They are people who are assembling portfolios of art; doesn't necessarily have a point of view. That, at some point in time in the future, will look like a collection of this era.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: As opposed to a particular taste based on aesthetics or whatever. But yeah, we're talking about—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Barbara Bloom or Robert Gober, who curated the Burchfield exhibition at the Whitney. This mixing artists up with curators, letting curators be artists, letting artists be curators.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: All of those good because, if it delves into the permanent collection and brings things out that —

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —people, have never seen or seen once, 35 years ago—that's what makes each museum special. And if you don't show the permanent—I mean, it's a perfect point. The Whitney, I just read an article about the new building, which I'm—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —sure it's going to be spectacular. The Whitney had, I think, allocated 20 percent—it was the top floor of the Whitney—20 percent of their space, permanent collection. In the new building, they're going to be able to show four or five times that amount of the permanent collection. Things that made people go to the Whitney—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —because they were so special. Now, we show, I think, under 1 percent of this collection. We have 6,000 objects on view, and I think that's under 1 percent. I don't want to do the math, but I mean, there are lots of objects—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —in storage that no one wants to see. That somehow in the foggy past when we accepted a lot of restricted gifts—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and either because at that point, they looked good, or in order to get exactly what we wanted, we had to accept a much larger group of gifts.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: All of the permanent collection, all of what's in storage, no one wants to see. But there are very good ways of not only looking at permanent collection as a particularly important thing for the public to be made aware of, but in terms of a new approach to the entire world, and you mentioned globalism before.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Having the opportunity to look at the world as a unit, as a kind of collaborative sphere where people traded with one—again, forgive me for talking to you about this; I'm talking for the tape.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of course. No, no, no.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But ways in which you have a collaborative creative globe.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It's so important today because the visitors today, as opposed to visitors even 20 years ago—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —think of the world globally.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: They don't think of it in a more nationalistic or local way. How they think and how they react and how they get their information is totally different than it was 20 years ago. It's a different universe entirely the way it was 40 years ago. And it's going to be different in 10 years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So when we did *American Identities,* now, 12 years ago—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —or so except—I'm going to give her credit—except for Roberta Smith, who wrote a glowing article about this was a breakthrough and how important this was, we were condemned, not only by the general media; we were condemned by our colleagues. People wrote to us, curators and [unintelligible] said, have you lost your minds? What—why are you putting a ceramic—a Native American pot next to a, you know, a 17th century—not—early 18th century piece of furniture. I mean, why are you taking all the collections and mixing them up like this? And, you know, my answer was multi-faceted. One, we got to show more of the permanent collection. Two, all the things that we show were happening at the same time.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So you have a much better—and I'm only talking about America. You have a much better understanding of the world in which we—of which people lived then, and things that they saw at that time, and then also comparing North America and South America. We show Spanish Colonial painting—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —next to American portraits. And there's—you understand the vast difference of what was going on—just south of Texas. Also furniture; there are things that were—they held in common.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Because it all looked to Europe. But you could see the eccentricities also of a cabinet from Argentina or a writing desk from—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —Venezuela or from Mexico or Peru. And then, of course, we have our own specific goals, and that is to really start to acknowledge what went on in the African-American community, and how that needs to be introduced to the story. Where were women in all of this? And so, that's one of the reasons we call this *American Identities—*

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —rather than American Identity. And today, I mean—I mean, we can—I think it'd be very proud that if you walked into any museum that had a broad-based collection, their exhibitions of American art look just like ours now.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Which tells me it's time to change.

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, there was a moment, too, when—

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JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hank Luce gave "open storage"—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Historical Society.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Historical Society and at the Met, too, and the internet and online galleries are becoming more ubiquitous. So there are many— you can have the same objects being experienced in multiple ways, even these apps where you could walk through a museum with your phone, with your handheld device, and use a museum application instead of the audio ear paddle to add information to your experience.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right a different—many, many more layers.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Many more layers.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: You mentioned—you mentioned the Luce centers.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We were the last, and the great thing about that is we learned from both the Historical Societies and the Met. We were blessed with the fact that we had space Contiguous with our American galleries. We had space that was storage, and we were able, with the Historical Society, for instance, and with the Met—at least at that point, their Luce storage areas were on different levels—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —than the galleries. So they made a good point in terms of getting people, some people, to go to see open storage—I mean, not open, but a better—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Visible storage.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Visible storage. But in our case, we were literally next to one another, so you could see the very great difference between how you look at objects in the gallery and how you look at an object in [storage —AL]: selected carefully, associated storage, but nonetheless, a vast difference. An even better experience would be if you could go from gallery, to visible storage, to storage, but I think people would be horrified.

[They laugh.]

I mean, not with the quality of the storage; the quality of the storage is the same.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But the vastness of what they're not seeing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So, to me, one of the most important things for museums to do—and I've now said it 12 times—is to go back and spend a lot of concentrated effort on their permanent collection because that helps to provide identity.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It provides variety. When I'm looking for a new suit, my wife always says to me, "You know, shop in your closet. I mean, you've got a"—

[They laugh.]

"You've got a ton of stuff in your closet."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But when you're shopping in your own closet in a museum, you make them fit.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: They fit in different ways. The cost is so much less. We are in two years, a year and a half, going to open our new galleries of Asian art and our new galleries of Islamic art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: In totally reconstructed space and those galleries, while the cultures will have a central area for each. Whether it's Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Southeast Asia, Korean, Chinese—did I say Japanese already? The interstitial spaces will start looking at what happened between these cultures.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: There will be an entire gallery devoted to exactly that idea: trade. How did Chinese blue-and-white porcelain end up in [England –AL]?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: One—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: What was that relationship all about? But even more so, looking at the weirdness of—we're doing it in an exhibition that's honoring me, an exhibition that I've chosen 125 objects out of about 12,000 objects that came in during my tenure. I looked at two objects. One object from Iran—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and one object from Persia. I mean, sharing a border. You could see this cultural influence, how—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Hybridity, yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —the hybridity of these objects. And if you, then, push a little to the right, you get the same thing between India and Iran to—you do.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And of course, coming the other way, the Chinese influence is vast. And, of course, India, exported Buddhism, and that became a driving force of so much of what Asian art was about. So we also devote and entire gallery to Buddhism and how that became an important visual aspect of what Asia was all about.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's very pertinent also to the City of Brooklyn because it was, at one point in time, the world's capital of sugar refinery, which made the Kara Walker piece especially appropriate.

[. . . - AL]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The sugar industry was the single major cause of African slavery. It was all based on maritime trade, and the one thing that has never changed in human history, in terms of how things get from one place to another, is that 80 percent of human stuff moves by water. Now we're seeing a lot more scholarship and emphasis on turning the world inside out. No more land masses. Have a look at water routes, and that tells a whole other story about how ideas move with trade and objects, and—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —it's another way of having a look at the same information in a fresh way.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I did—oh my God, it has to be 35 years ago—and not breaking any new ground. But for a lot of people, sort of, opening their eyes, I did an exhibition with the Royal Ontario Museum, and when I was in Baltimore, called [. . . AL] *Silk Roads / China Ships*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There you go.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: To talk about both land and water transportation. Again, the hybridity of the materials that flowed, primarily, east to west.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But some went the other way, not a lot.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Technology did and—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Not—yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —certainly—in certain things.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It was absolutely fascinating. The only part of that exhibition, or related to that exhibition, which was a failure, was at the board meeting prior—in Baltimore, just prior to the opening of the—[laughs]—exhibition. I had fortune cookies made to distribute at the board meeting, and inside the fortune cookie, it said "Remember Baltimore Museum in will."

[They laugh.]

A lot of our trustees thought that was not funny.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh dear. [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yeah, well, you can't win them all, right?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I see a donation in your future. [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yes, exactly. We had a couple who really laughed and thought it was funny. The person who didn't think it was funny, primarily, was my poor wife, who had to warm up all these existing fortune cookies, so she could open them, slip these little pieces of paper inside, close them up again—

[They laugh.]

—and I had them for the next day—

[They laugh.]

—for—you asked what museum director's wives do; that's one of them.

[They laugh.]

So she was—she was the most upset because it didn't get as good a reaction as she thought, and she had a lot more of them, and she just threw them all away.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I should have saved them. Our board—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Our board here would be much more—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They would love it.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: They would love it without any fight.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In fact, you could market them to all your colleagues around the country.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is what you do—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But going back to—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —the issue of hybridity —in addition to what we do in the Asian galleries, we created a central gallery—I don't know if you walked through it at all—*Connecting Cultures*, which is the central exhibition on our first floor. That was meant to do several things. Because of the architecture of this building, it's fairly still difficult to get around because only a very small portion of the building was built; it doesn't seem that way, but you know the story of—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —the whole building. And we wanted our visitors, who were not as familiar with the collection, to have a better understanding of the fullness, of the breadth of the collection, and also of how we are interested in looking at objects in a different way and looking at it, as I said before, globally and everything else. So our chief curator, Kevin Stayton, who knows this collection better than anyone, created this exhibition called converging—I keep saying that—*Connecting Cultures*. And it is—from some people, it's really a puzzle that they really don't understand why things are—the adjacencies. But you know, it doesn't matter; we've had long conversations about that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: If they think it's a puzzle and they're literally thinking about the objects, great, we've accomplished something. If they understand the puzzle and go on to the next—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —we've also accomplished something. It also allows us to bring a lot of major objects together and serves in a not-directed way as an orientation gallery for everything that's in the building.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So in addition to that, which is semi-permanent, the exhibition that I've created, called *Diverse/Works*, does very much the same thing. I'm hoping that people are not just wondering who gave this, who gave that, you know. Why was this given in Arnold's honor? Why was that not, and so on? That is where I derived the most fun and enjoyment in choosing objects that spoke a lot of different languages—

[. . . –AL]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I think most people learn about art in a kind of like Linnean way; they get the *Peterson Field Guide to the Birds,* and they learn about birds. And then they, like, learn about art the same way, and this is a movement, and this is impressionism; this is a technique, and this is a style. And they are not used to, sort of, making the connection between Ming porcelain Delftware and a painted book or a garment. I think that show at the Met, *Interwoven Globe,* the textile show, made a strong argument about how the textiles were bearers of ideas all the way around the world.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh, and that was a great—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was a wonderful show.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It was a great, great exhibition and one that they should—and one that drew from the collection.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that's the other thing, too, is that when—just to think about art in terms of science, DNA has more or less disproved Linnean approaches as being definitive. But they still are the visible ways of organizing human experience into categories. And then—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well but—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —you mix it up.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right. But most of us, most museums still are in the early groove.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We have to get out of that groove and move to the—skip most of the 20th century—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and go right into the 21st.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is that because a lot of the museums are, sort of, beholding to patrons or friends' circles that have specific interests?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I think, certainly, in a lot of communities, perhaps smaller communities, there are both historical problems, and that is accepting, often, large gifts of—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —works of art that have to be shown together and are restricted, in some instances, from being interwoven in a collection. So you have the historical precedent or restriction, and you might have, in fact, living restrictors because they're used to having the institution done in a certain way. So it becomes—it's difficult for even the brightest and most adventurous curators and directors.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But I have complete confidence that, in 10, 20 more years, those paradigms and those ways we're doing things are going to change pretty dramatically. I don't think there's a choice. I mean, not that wills will be broken, and everyone's going to be in court, but there'll be inroads. So you might not be able to move a collection around, but you can take the collection and put the objects that are interesting on the edges.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And on the edge of the John Smith collection, you might—that is the—I'm saying all-American, you touch it with some Asian art or—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —African or even for us, it was really difficult. When we get a chance to, again, review—[laughs]—our Egyptian collections, you can see more of it in the central, kind of, orientation space that we have. But even there, we need to do better associating, for instance, Egypt and Africa because most of the world believes that Egypt is this country that floats some place in the Mediterranean, and oh, they're kind of near the continent of Africa, but they're, sort of, near Greece. Egypt is this crazy place to most people.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Who you ask, where is it? And reluctantly, I think, many people who have a reasonably good education, will say, well, isn't Egypt some place in North Africa? But it's said so begrudgingly—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —as though, how can Egyptian art be associated with Africa? We need those people who have—those institutions who have major Egyptian holdings need to do even better than we do, and we do pretty well—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —in making that point. But that's the kind of thing we have to break through.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's the Nile. Again, it gets back to waterborne—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Did you say denial?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The—yeah, well—[laughs]—the Nile. [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right. Right. So—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But there—there are moves afoot. I know of a Nigerian artist, Durant, who is trying to put names onto specific carvings because the carvers in the villages know who made this piece or that piece, and yet they still bear an ethnographic label.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But we don't have a vast knowledge of—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —that. But mid, sort of, pieces that have been done in the 20th century—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —even early in the 20th century, there are a number of them have been identified. And when one is identified, curators are often able to associate other objects with that same carver. So it would be sensational—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —if there was more academic work done on being able to talk about the makers of these individual works. But that would lead, clearly, to an even more interesting opportunities, and that is to try to better identify pre-Columbian, for instance, and others. I know we do; we say maker one—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: One.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and you can—so how it—but the more information—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. The master of this or that.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Exactly. But the more information we get, the more fascinating it would be because it becomes personal.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And it isn't— I always say that most visitors come into a gallery, and I think they believe that God created the space, hung everything.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And when changes are made, God comes back in and just—

[They laugh.]

—changes everything again. [Laughs.] That's why I try so hard with our curators and educators to try to personalize the labels and make them speak in a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: — in a way that wasn't—the label wasn't written by god.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But it's not easy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I also—I know this is for posterity, so I'll say it. Again, one of my first meetings here with the curators and the educators was—I spent three days doing nothing but going through the entire building—well, not quite through the entire—I missed a whole floor because I didn't know it existed.

[They laugh.]

I'm not joking. I'll tell you—

[They laugh.]

—a story in a minute. Going through and looking, not so much at the object, but looking at all the labels.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I had this pad that I kept scribbling on, a yellow lined pad. What I should have done is I should have had some kind of a stamp or something to put on the label, so I remembered having read it. I went, and I looked at, I'll have to say, 90 percent of the labels in this building. Part of that, 10 percent are labels that I didn't see. Another percentage of labels that weren't there. So it's not like 90 percent of the labels—90 percent of the labels on objects. And it was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: These are tombstone labels on the wall.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Exactly. More than tombstones, labels that had chats on them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Had the text and —

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Text. I had a meeting with everyone, and I told them what I had done. I said, I was really ready, and I said, I don't mean to be annoying or to come in here and suggest that I'm right and you're wrong. But I was really ready to pull 50, 60 percent of the labels off the wall and leave nothing there. The nothing was better than the labels because some of them are really outdated. Some of them are simply wrong. Not that I credit myself as being an expert in every field, but you can read them and understand that, what are they talking about? And some were just dumb. Some were misleading.

I said I restrained myself from doing that, but I have to say to you today that we would be better to have Post-Its on so many of these. And just—because I understand it takes a long time, not just to do the research for the label, but then go through design; you have to go through editorial; you have to go through, get back to design; somebody has to put them on the wall, blend them with the color. I know all of that. Maybe we should just go to

a Post-It system, and we write, but then we have a different thought, just take it off, put another Post-it on. Give Post-Its to our visitors, so they can put Post-Its on. And get a dialogue going that's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —a little bit more active. I thought my life was in jeopardy at that meeting.

[They laugh.]

And probably for a good reason. Am I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, it's fine.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And probably for a good reason. The curators, plus the educators, put a lot of work into those. And here am I, a stranger, coming and saying, they're not viable. My response is, don't think of me as a new director coming in; think of me as a visitor coming in.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Man on the street, well-informed man on the street.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Reasonably informed.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Forget well informed. Reasonably informed. We have to be able to speak to that person, or that person is never going to come back. So it took a number of years, literally, years, to win over a lot of the people here. I think I won over the educators faster than I did the curators.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Why is that? Because there's less—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Well because the educators—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —academic?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: The educators—no, but the educators see themselves as the interface with the public.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And where the curators, to a degree, are writing for themselves, perhaps for other curators, for the very-well informed. The educators are trying to transmit the information that's here to the public. They need tools—the kind of tools that I was talking about—to do their job. I have to say, I think one of the things that I have not yet accomplished here, and 18 years is a long time. I have not accomplished the kind of integration of the curator and educator, which would be truly the best situation for any museum. I don't mean that they all become curators; they all become educators. But somehow, that there is a closer tie and spirit, and I mean, we do really well in that. But you still see that the curators feel themselves above—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —the educators. And it's their knowledge that translates into authority that the educators don't have. But—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —we're in 2015; the question of authority is something that's up for complete debate. Where —how is it expressed? Is it believable? Is it a viable way of talking to an audience, most of whom only talk to their cell phones.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: I need to get their information on that cell.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So what we're doing, because I don't know how many more sessions we have, or we could have. This might be endless.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think it could be. [Laughs.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: This is may be endless.

[They laugh.]

We are—in June, early June, we are announcing a new app. We've gotten a extraordinary grant from the Bloomberg Philanthropies, a truly major grant, that is allowing us to create an app that—for use only in the building—[. . . –AL]—you'll be told that, as a visitor, ask whatever questions you want, and in real-time, you'll get an answer. So if the chat label doesn't give you enough information, if the tombstone doesn't give you enough information, if talking to somebody next to you doesn't give you enough information, if, you know—[laughs]—getting strange information from the guard doesn't—

[They laugh.]

— allow you—oh, I have a great story about that—doesn't give you what you want, text us, and in real-time, you'll get an answer. If we don't know the answer, you'll get an email when you get home. We will have a group of people fielding all these questions and answering them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: The way our side of the app works is every question they ask and answered is recorded, so that we will begin to see a pattern of questions and our answerers—I don't know how I came up with that word—and those answers will be looked up by the curators as well, and so they can be refined.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: They will start having, and excuse the expression because it's not what I mean, but a kind of a boilerplate, so that we will be better and better and better to answer these questions, and only in the building. We will also have installed throughout the building—I know this is scary—location-aware devices. So we'll know when you're standing in front of *Doge's Palace* by Monet.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We'll know from those locational-aware things, what are the things on either side of you? What does the label say? And we'll then be able to say, look to the left and look at that—that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —painting or look to the right. Or 15 paintings before that, if you go back, we'll be able to better tell you about that as well. In a little bit of what—of the way that a place like Amazon can say, well, if you like that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —you're going to like this, this, this, this, and this.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're profiling the visitors and, you know—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We are profiling them—[laughs]—we're identifying—

[They laugh.]

—them. We're, you know—I shouldn't say this, but, someone already said, oh the NSA is in the building. In any event, the whole commitment here, and it's a major commitment, is to provide—is to be, in a way, the person, a knowledgeable person next to you. I always say don't— unless you need solace and serenity, go to museums with somebody else.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Have a partner with you, so you can talk about something rather than talk to yourself. I go to museums, and I do mutter a lot.

[They laugh.]

You know, sort of, loud, probably hoping that someone hears me and comes over and says, I think the same I had a problem with that, too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: What's going on there? So we are redoing our entire lobby and our entire system of coming into the lobby, how you're addressed, changing the whole furnishings of the lobby so that it becomes more like

what 20-somethings, 30-somethings—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —are used to. We will have vast numbers of plug-ins, so you can plug in your devices and see how that goes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You've got a very active, young friends' organization here, haven't you?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We have several organizations.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It goes everything from junior docents and teenagers, up to director's circle—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —to, then, we have an advisory group. Then we have groups associated with most of the collecting areas—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But like young friends, you know—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We don't have any—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: — people under 40?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We don't have a young friends, specifically, because we wanted both a higher level of that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and we wanted to divide up many others into collecting areas. So we don't have a young friends at this point.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: To support the different—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But those are councils—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —for that area. We have an Asian art council—

[. . . –AL]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Understood.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: — all of that kind of thing. Plus we have a very, very significant group which is called the Fund for African American Art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: They are focused completely on building a collection in African American artists pre-contemporary. So from the beginning of the 20s—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —the end of the 19th century, through to 1950.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Like—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Duncanson, Tanner, those people on up; Jacob Lawrence, et cetera, all those people?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right. A lot of people you've never heard of who are great artists.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But, I can't say, because they are black, they never got any focus. I mean, there are a lot of great white artists who just—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: — fell by the wayside them self.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But Archibald, Moxley, people like this—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —who are not—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —widely known, but ought to be better known.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We just bought an incredible Delaney.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh okay.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Incredible. And what was incredibly nice—and I knew nothing about it—we had an event for the Fund for African American Art, and the Delaney was presented and that it was bought in my honor, and I knew nothing about it. I'm beginning to worry that I'm losing control.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Any artist specifically dealing with any artists, historical, African American artists, with associations with Brooklyn?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Very few.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because most people know about—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Very—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the Harlem Renaissance, Aaron Douglas.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Right. A lot of artists who— for instance, Delaney lived in Brooklyn for a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —while.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: But that period, the 125th Street, was kind of the center of the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —universe. But a lot of other artists who weren't in that—in that group, also earlier—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —artists. So we're working very hard at that. It was interesting; there was an article, I guess it was the *Times* that talked about, I think, Atlanta creating a group like that to—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —support that same thing, and they credited the Brooklyn Museum as being the largest and most engaged group. And we have people come to us; they live in Pittsburgh; they live in Boston; they live all over the place because it's one of the only groups that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —works towards their interests.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So now you have a show on the wall of Kehinde Wiley and recently had a show of El Anatsui. And so, was the El Anatsui show inspired partly by the growing presence of the West Africans in New York? There are a lot of—was it merely his stature—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —as an artist?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: No, it was really—and we've been talking about El Anatsui for a long time, and I really regret not having made—[laughs]—a purchase five years ago.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We bought a major object from the exhibition [. . . –AL]. No, again, it was part of our brand. It was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —again, looking at a black artist—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —not African American, but an African artist—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: African.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —who is creating really amazing work using the most rudimentary material, I mean, using trash.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Recycled—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Reused. Recycled everything. So, we talked about that. We—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —talked about those issues. I can't tell you how enormously successful that show was.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was a great show.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —even people who— many people who I know, who are not interested in contemporary art and not interested in African American art, flocked to this show.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And came back several times and were just truly fascinated with the work. I can't wait until we get our work back and be able to put it up because it's so—in its total blackness, it's unbelievably visually dynamic. Again, we do a lot of exhibitions. And we don't do African American exhibitions just during African American month.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We do—

[They laugh.]

—them all year long and very actively and just this past couple of months, from Wangechi Mutu to Kehinde—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —opening. As I said, opening Basquiat, and then we've become—because of a newish curator here, who is Peruvian by birth, but lived his whole life in the United States, we are doing more and more with our Spanish colonial collection.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: We have one of the great Spanish colonial collection—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A wonderful exhibition of interiors—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —*Behind Closed Doors*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh you got to see it?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh fantastic. So Rich Aste is going further, and now is about to explore this coming fall the artists Francisco Oller.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He's Puerto Rican, yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Puerto Rican—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —but an impressionist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, 19th century.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Gone from realism to impressionism. Lived and worked in Paris—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —with all the impressionists, and then went back to Puerto Rico. We're doing the first major exhibition of Oller.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oller. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.].

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Which will combine his work and related impressionist paintings. Rich has more and more and more ideas about—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —how to go in that direction. And I have to—when I'm speaking of Rich at the moment—and we were talking about permanent collection before.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: To his incredible credit, when I got here and went through all of the storage areas, I think fairly thoroughly—I said I missed a floor; I'll tell you about that—there were a number of paintings, huge paintings, that were rolled, and I'd say, what's that? I probably was with the wrong curator at the time, and this—I don't know; they look at the numbers attached to them, and then I may never have gotten an answer, or maybe I did. So Rich got here and went through all of his storages. He's curator of European painting and found three paintings given to us, I think, in 1909 by one of the most important Russian painters of that time. All three huge.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Two battlefield scenes of Russians against the Turks. One a religious historical scene—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But a realistic picture like—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Oh, they're all realistic. I mean, realist based.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Rapine or one of those?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yes, but the two battlefield scenes, they're on view downstairs on the first floor—are almost impressionist in their—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —in the way they're done. And they're gigantic. I mean, the size of this wall. All right, shown—we were given it as a gift, I think, in 1909. Shown once in 1917 or something like that, probably because the donor was saying, why aren't my paintings shown? Why aren't my paintings shown?

Let's go with benefit of that, 1920. All right. Ninety years later—[laughs]—Rich comes to me and says, you know

what I've discovered? I've had those three paintings opened and two of them are magnificent. One is a very difficult painting because I think there'll be—someone could ascribe some anti-Semitism to this biblical scene—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —I think, showing—I don't remember it at this point—showing Jesus being crucified, and the Jews in the painting looking very—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —caricature-ish.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So Rich said, I'm not going to show this, and we ought to consider deaccessioning it. And here, it's a long process to—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —deaccession something.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: First you you have to get the agreement of all your fellow senior curators.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Once you do that, then you have to get the agreement of the chief curator. Once you do that, then you have to come to me, and I have to agree. After that, it has to go to the executive committee; executive committee goes to collections committee; collections committee goes to the board. So you really have to want to do this. We don't deaccession things lightly. He got all the way through, sold it at [auction — AL], for something that was rolled, forgotten, in storage for, let's say—it got to as 1909—100 years, close to 105 years.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: So we're looking for a lot more in storage—

[They laugh.]

— that we don't know about. We don't have too many of those.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: If you're looking for money, just have a look in your closet, right?

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Exactly. Shop in your closet.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Shop in your closet.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Shop at home. So let me tell you about the third floor. So I'm here six months, and I don't know why —in the elevator, there's a button—only one elevator—there's a button for—on the freight elevator and a rear elevator, there's a button for 3M. Our floors are all double height.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Three, especially, is more than double height. So I'm here on a Saturday with friends visiting from Baltimore; never been to a museum before. They come into the museum, and spent several hours going through the galleries. I bumped into our, then, chief conservator, and I said, well, what are you doing here? He said, well, I'm looking at some objects on some Egyptian, I think, papyri. I said, really? I went through the whole building. I didn't see any. I know we have them but—on Egyptian. And he said, well, they're on 3M. I said, so how —you have a few minutes? Maybe you can take us to 3M and he did. It's an entire floor of storage and a room with—filled with Egyptian papyri, another vast space with all the Egyptian storage.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: And so on and so forth. So I've always thought of it kind of humorous. Six months in the building and I've never seen—

[They laugh.]

— an entire floor in it. But it was my fault it.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —is that, you know, I'm often called a populist. But if you look back into the history of the Brooklyn Museum, the museum was created to be a populist place. In the '20s and the '30s, I mean, Isadora Duncan danced here in the court. In the hallways, we had [Native American — AL] powwows. You name it, the then Brooklyn Philharmonic played in a very informal setting in the building. So many things went on. We had classes for, literally, for immigrant families—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: [. . . –AL] Our education department taught things like, how to can fruits and vegetables. We were in very many, appropriate ways, and probably some inappropriate ways, the epitome of what the founders of the museum wanted. Which was a museum for everyone.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: That's what they used that phrase, "a museum for everyone." It started at the Apprentice's Library to educate working people.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Like, you know, the V&A [Victoria and Albert Museum], right? That kind of an idea.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: It's the same—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —interesting. It's exactly the same idea—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: As the Victoria—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —as—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and Albert.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: As the VNA.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Same idea. Identically. To a degree, Baltimore, it was the same idea because you look at the inscription above the entrance and it talks about workmen, craftsmen. You come to a place where they provide the kind of epitome of what was good and right—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —and appropriate. So, now, we have a different take on that, but so many great museums in this country and in Europe were there. Those that were not, kind of, princely collections—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: —or church-related collections, but were created by the state—in quotation marks—were there for the purpose of enlightening and educating the public.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Improving the public in making—

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Improve and yes a word in—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —a virtuous citizenry.

ARNOLD LEHMAN: Virtuous citizenry. So there. So we can turn this off now.