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Oral history interview with Robert Pincus-Witten, 2016 March 23-24

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Francis Naumann on 2016 March 23 and 24. The interview took place in New York. NY at Pincus-Witten's home, and was conducted by Francis Naumann for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Robert Pincus-Witten and Francis Naumann have reviewed the transcript. Robert Pincus-Witten has heavily edited the transcript. His corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. In addition, 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

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Speaking is Francis M. Naumann, and I'm interviewing Robert Pincus-Witten at his apartment in New York City, on March 23, 2016, for the Archives of American Art [Smithsonian Institution]. Are you ready?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I'm ready. Thank you, Francis.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Anyway, when did your interest in the arts begin? Was it in childhood?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes. It was a [childhood –RPW] fascination. I remember, even as a child, I would cut out the reproductions of the art page from the *New York Times* every week. I would save reproductions in art magazines. I came from a [strongly –RPW] artistic family. I had an uncle who was a painter—not a remembered representational painter [but a good one –RPW]. But my mother was a musician; my grandfather was a great singer and a musician. So there was a good deal of art consciousness, despite the fact there was a great discrepancy between the art consciousness of the family. My mother was a wonderful pianist; I played the piano, that kind of thing. [My great-aunt was Jeanne Grönich, a member of the Berlin Opera early in the century. –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But there was—the economic differentials between the artistic aspirations of the family and [our –RPW] actual poverty of the family [. . . –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: So—but there must have been some point where you decided to draw or to become an artist, as opposed to being a pianist or—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: As a child. When I was 12, I realized that was—you know, at camp I would illustrate, [with] mimeograph machines, on the stencil of the little camp newspapers, and then I went to [Fiorella H. Laguardia High School of] Music & Art, which, of course, was the tremendous revelation. Completely transformative. I'm one of the few people I know—not few people, but many people—who realize that the great intellectual experience of their life was high school, and particularly the High School of Music & Art. But [laughs] Léon Hecht, my companion, went to Industrial [High School of Art and Design] and had the same experience.

So suddenly I was—my first year, well, I went to French class, and there were kids who could translate the first sentence of a French primer. I thought it astounding. But nonetheless the whole experience of [attending –RPW] Music & Art was—made college and graduate school virtually beside the point. It was so enormous. And I was always illustrating in publications in the high school, and then eventually I went to Cooper [Union].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah. But back up just a little bit.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: So you went just to high school, to Music & Art. So when you were 14 years old.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And before that though, were you drawing actively? I mean, did you think that you had a natural gift as a draftsman?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, yes. Not as an Ingres, but as the person who was very gratified by painting at home and doing arts and crafts, and I pretended to be an arts and crafts counselor and that kind of thing. But the idea that one could actually—it was just a tremendous gratification as well, so that the—I thought, Okay, I'll go to Cooper. After I finished high school [. . . –RPW], I applied to Cooper. I had cousins and that kind of thing

who had gone there. They loved it, and I thought, I'll do it too. And I would apply, too, and I got into Cooper Union, and I was a sort of flashy young Abstract Expressionist painter, and I began to exhibit, actually.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: While still in high school, did you have any special teachers who helped promote you or push you in the arts?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I wish I could remember the painting teachers. I really can't, but I do remember one ceramics teacher. Her name was Yole Zaino. I once actually went to visit her; she lived in upstate New York. She was extremely inspiring. [. . . –RPW] And I learned French. I conquered French sufficiently to actually be able to use it as a second working language. I learned it in high school, and I'm very grateful for that detail, because it transformed my life. And so again, and then I can't remember the names of the professors. I'm sure teachers at school, if I sat with—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —yeah, the yearbooks, you probably could figure out.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah, I could figure out who particularly was helpful.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Because someone must have written letters of recommendation and helped you get into Cooper Union. Because, by the way, it was hard to get into then, too, or not as hard as now probably.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Actually, [. . . –RPM] I do remember the interview, and I brought things for them to see. And I chatted with them, and I could form sentences. [Laughs.]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, it was exceptionally difficult to get into, because the tuition was free.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, [. . . –RPW], it was [terrific –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: So you must have stood above and beyond the other art students.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, I created extremely intense young friendships, which continue to this day. People in high school and a young—for example, we had eight orchestras [. . . –RPW]. You know, it was unbelievable. And I had a very dear friend called James Kurtz, who eventually ended up being the head of the art department at Fordham [and still teaches at Juilliard. He's a composer. He wrote a song cycle to a batch of my pretentious adolescent high school poems –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: He was a friend of yours at Cooper U?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, at high school, high school.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, high school.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And I had a great friend; his name was Scipio Africanus Wallen, whom I worshiped.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Who already was a professional dancer with Jean Léon Destiné. So I would go—Scipio did dance concerts, New Dance Group, and the opening of the experience of high school was, here was this little [. . . –RPW] virgin, but meeting these astonishing people, through these great people—and I still, my first high school girlfriend—I still see Cornelia [Hartman –RPW], who lives in Woodstock and whose husband was the director of the Long Wharf [Theater, up at Yale –RPW]—but eventually these friendships were, remained in some sense essential to the formation of my mind. [Cornelia was a painter in the tradition of Chagall. –RPW] When we were kids, I was a painter.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Right.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: In a kind of Picasso tradition. I had a Blue period, I might say. So these people were very, very instrumental in my life, in giving me a track.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Did your mother and father support your pursuit of the arts?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, my mother. My father, too. My father died very young, at 52. I was 16. My mother certainly supported my interest. My mother was an extraordinary woman. She was the first woman telegrapher for the Kaiser, I might add.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh. Quite the contact.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: She was born in Germany, and during the First World War and shortly thereafter, she

worked—well, he was no longer the Kaiser, but she worked in the Kaiser's office. And then she came to this country in the 1920s, fortunately before Hitler. My grandfather was the chief cantor of Düsseldorf. I came from a cantorial and rabbinical family.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: This is really—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: No, it's important, and especially because I think it feeds into the way you think about art.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Okay. Anyway, well, in that sense I came [from an] immensely distinguished family in Germany, but we were displaced here.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: The religious appointments [in Germany –RPW] before the First World War were confirmed by the Kaiser. You couldn't be a cantor; you couldn't be a minister. These were appointments that were doubly confirmed by the Kaiser. With the loss of the Kaiser, you lost your position. So several German Jews asked my grandfather, [who] was the leading cantor in Düsseldorf, to come and be the cantor in the German-American Jewish Society. So I was raised in a kind of Jewish cantorial household, which is somewhat different than an Eastern European cantorial household, but nonetheless very—he was a very wonderful singer, and rather handsome, and his wife, Rahel [Cohen] came from a distinguished rabbinical family.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: They had [four children, all girls. My grandmother's –RPW] younger brothers—she was the eldest—her two younger brothers went to learn English in London at the end of the 19th century. [Eventually, they became chief rabbis in London and Leeds. –RPW] She went with them as the *dueña*, as the—what is that called when you look after the kids, don't misbehave?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: A chaperone.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: A chaperone, precisely. She loved the music hall. I mean, it was like English painting of the late 19th century [like Walter Sickert –RPW]. She loved the music hall, and she picked up a cockney accent, this German woman. [Laughs.] And so when I was growing up, she would correct my English as a child. So I've always spoken this weird sort of semi-Atlantic English [. . . –RPW], but nonetheless I attribute it to the fact that my speech was being corrected by my grandmother, whose English she had learned in the 1890s in the English music hall.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I have heard people who remark about your speech patterns as being unusual. I frankly had never heard them, or I didn't notice them, but that does explain, I suppose, the way you—your cadence of your voice. But what it doesn't explain is why you have such an incredibly rich vocabulary.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Francis, so is your vocabulary; it's very—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: No, not like yours.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: We just read. We're readers.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Then we're writers.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, yes. I suppose.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: We're just osmotic sponges. That's part of it. It's a funny thing you point out, is that stylistically, in the degree that I once wrote art history—the kind of art criticism [if by –RPW] another person is not quite the same. The research issues are quite different, but the writing of, let's say, a casual art history, in my case, is not governed by reading art history so much as reading English literature. Particularly 19th-century novels, that kind of thing. There's a very strong literary value that I attach to—it pleases me. I don't necessarily say it pleases my readers, but it certainly pleases me. So there's a certain pleasure I have, and you have it too. It's forging a gratifying sentence for myself, even in the degree that it also is meant to convey certain kinds of information. I think that's true virtually of everybody who writes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, of everyone who writes, yeah. I'm going to ask you a little bit more about your writing later, but I'm getting a bit ahead of myself if I do that.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: We're already back in the 19th century. We have to get—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, you also mentioned in another interview that your—I think you put it that your university in art history was MoMA.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Absolutely.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Going to exhibitions there in high school.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, I mean, it was a genius of a high school. For example, in addition to getting transportation passes—I mean, I was first coming down from the Bronx and then coming in from Rego Park in Queens. I step up [laughs].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, you lived first in the Bronx?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And then you moved to Rego Park.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah, I lived in the Bronx. [Léon, my partner –RPW] lived on the same block. [We went to kindergarten together. So today I know him more than 76 years. We've been living together for more than 50 years. –RPW] You know all of this.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, I do.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [Anyway, at home there's a –RPW] certain conflict between [Eastern European and German Jewish values . . . –RPW]. In conflict with another tradition, which is a rich tradition, but one that I was not feeling very comfortable or secure with. That's all. Yeah.

So there are certainly two traditions. I mean, this is now getting very personal in the degree that, for example, the Pincus-Witten—Pincus is my father, and I simply couldn't abandon the notion of not being a Pincus, though wanting to become a Wittenberg, my mother.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But it became crazy, Pincus-Wittenberg. Had I known about Pincus-Warburg, I wouldn't have been quite so shy.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Or all the other "bergs."

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah, exactly.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: [Leo] Steinberg [laughs], yeah, and [Clement] Greenberg. Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I didn't know about that yet. Precisely. So the loss of his family was traumatic for him. The experience of the Holocaust was—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: For who?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: For my father [who lost much of his family during the Holocaust –RPW]. So to drop "Pincus" would be in a sense a terrible denial of that fact—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: You did that, or your mother? [. . . –RPW]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: She did.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Your mother did? Right after you were born?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, she actually had done it when she came here, and—her skills as an international telegrapher, she went to work for RCA. She supported the family. My father was quite dysfunctional; or, that's unkind to say, but he was a challenged person. She was the breadwinner; he [tried as best –RPW] he could to be the breadwinner, but she was the breadwinner. And through all of her telegraphic skills, working for RCA, and then during the war she was a censor for the government, that kind of thing, reading German documents. So her role was much more unusually powerful in my household than the kids I grew up with, who had a much more conventional profile of their mothers as homemakers. So they stayed home. [My parents were poorly matched. –RPW] My mother was a highly unfamiliar [type of person –RPW]. Musical, and extremely talented and extremely intelligent.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Did the move from the Bronx coincide with the time of your father's death, or did that happen before?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, Father's death, certainly, it's not terribly long after. I was 16, so I forget exactly—did we move when I was 13—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But you were in high school when you moved to Rego Park?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: All right.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: We had a little house on Eliot Avenue. But the, okay—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I also, if I get the chronology straight, you met Diane Kelder when you were in Rego Park in high school still.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Precisely. Yes, because I was an arty, a creative kid who knew about arts and crafts, which is to say I would read these little articles and pretend I could do it. And I didn't have much money. I had a very modest allowance, to say the least, and so I didn't have the conventional amounts of money that kids have going to high school. So by the time I was 16, I would look at the back of the *Times,* and I would see there were camps to—I loved going to camp when I was a kid, the settlement house camps. So I would say, "Do you need an arts-and-crafts counselor?"

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And there's a very funny story, I guess. And I'm like 16, at a camp in Maine, in Wells; it's just above Ogunquit. I was 16 and 17 in Wells, so I said I was in college. Of course, I looked like a 12-year-old, but I said I was—I completely lied. I said I was in college, that I would like to teach arts and crafts, and I could be a counselor, and that kind of stuff. So they hired me. I went up there into Wells, and in Wells, I fell in love with Flossie, Florence Ettenberg, who—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: No, I don't know the name.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I know. You know her as Florence Janovic of Janovic Plaza. [Laughs.]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I certainly do know that, but—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Anyway she married the heir of Janovic paints. [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: So that's a girl you fell in love with at camp?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: At camp, she was a counselor, but she was a year and a half or two years older than I was. Flossie was wonderful, terribly intelligent, and very funny, and she was very New York. She was a little Park Avenue and that kind of thing. And we got on. I wonder if I still have things—like if somewhere I met Flossie, where we'd pick up stones—we were very romantic kids.

Anyway [laughs], Flossie was in Queens College [CUNY], and in the group that she hung around with at Queens was a young woman called—one of her friends—called Diane Kelder, who was at Queens as a student. There was a whole set of young women who were very intelligent and very droll. I met her at that time; like I said, I was still in high school. And then because of the split years, graduation years from class, there was a six-month interim between [before] I could begin Cooper. But I had to kill it somehow, and so I applied to Queens to go—so I went to Queens for six months at that time. It was very influential, that particular six months.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: You were a student at Queens?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I was a student there, yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And is that where you met all of the old guard at Queens? Like Louis Finkelstein.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Louis Finkelstein wasn't there yet. There was a completely different faculty at the time.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Actually, some of it was distinguished, but I'm forgetting who was really distinguished.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And in several interviews you mention John Ferren, but he was at Cooper, wasn't he, at the

time?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: He was also at Queens, John Ferren. He taught in both places.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh. So you were taking art classes?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, I was a general liberal arts kid.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, okay.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Who—but—because I had this interest in the arts and hanging around Diane, who was already very locked into the art department, so I was very locked into the art department.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, I see.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And so there was Franzi Godwin; there was Edith Porada, the keeper of the seals of the Morgan Library. [They're on view there, in a special display case. Very beautiful! –RPW] [Laughs.] Edith, who—these are incredibly distinguished art historians; well, certainly Porada was, and she was at Columbia eventually. Porada needed an artist—I don't know why they didn't photograph them—and she would have the Sumerian seals that she was the keeper of. And so she wanted the images. She would ask me to draw the images of the seals. So suddenly I was hanging around with—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: It's Edith Porada, right?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Edith Porada, yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And you mentioned Franzi Goldwin, was it?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [Frances] Godwin, G-O-D-W-I-N.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Godwin, oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: She—Franzi was, again, [a Viennese –RPW] refugee. Rather witty, [. . . –RPW] and comfortable, and she led an interesting private life. I met her husband; we hung about; and so Diane had already been absorbed—Porada was German, perhaps Austrian woman. She was very brilliant, and [Diane –RPW] learned German in college. So we started doing—talking German, that kind of thing.

I didn't learn German, though I came from a German household. I was the youngest of the grandchildren, and [owing to the rise of fascism –RPW], it was very badly seen to speak German [in my childhood –RPW]. So my cousins who were older than me, obviously, and my brother, learned to speak German, but I came along and I didn't learn to speak German. There was no German spoken, so I had to learn it in college as part of [my] master's and Ph.D. [requirements –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Right.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Anyway, Diane [pretended to be –RPW] very Central European, with a slouch hat and smoking [Sobranie Black Russian cigarettes –RPW]. I adored her. It was a completely adolescent identity-probing. So we got on [famously. Of course, my mother hoped we would someday marry. But, no, it was not to be –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I think you mentioned also that Robert Goldwater was there.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Robert Goldwater was one of the distinguished members of the faculty. And I met Robert Goldwater, and he [would talk –RPW] with me. And even though I wasn't a student there, my relationship to these people—because I started hanging around the department, I was sort of taken in. It was a much different, kind of, home-for-waifs kind of thing, wayward young people. At least the department saw me somehow as very comfortable, that I would be very comfortable there, so they—particularly the people who had much longer European experience, like Goldwater and such people.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: So through him, you didn't by chance meet Louise Bourgeois then, did you?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No. Louise eventually—she's somebody that I did come to know quite well [and wrote several catalogues for, not to mention articles –RPW]. Louise remembered that I was somehow a Goldwater student. That she assumed, but since I was never at the Institute [of Fine Arts, NYU –RPW]—as a result, he obviously had spoken highly of me, because he had left a book [on Symbolism –RPW] unpublished at the time of

his death, and my doctoral work was in Symbolism. She said to me would I complete the book for him. Frankly, the task seemed so far beyond my early graduate studies skills, I was overwhelmed with the request and turned it down. But what struck me then is that she actually remembered that he had spoken about me as somebody who was a Symbolist comer, as it were.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Wow, and that's interesting for me. After you went—well, I should ask a little bit more about your days at Cooper, because—do you remember any other teachers there, not in high school but there at Cooper, who might have—who fostered your career? Aside from—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Fostered my career—was somebody, but he didn't tell me the most important thing. At Cooper I met a lot of people, like [Nicolas] Carone [. . . –RPW]. Very important was the dean of the art school. His name was Ray Dowden. Very, very nice. [. . . –RPW] He was kind of a straight shooter, very, very nice, design-oriented person, [. . . –RPW] very sweet, his wife. Ray took an interest in me and in my painting, very much, and as a result I was the first—Cooper then did not offer a degree; it offered a diploma; and Ray—I was the first art student to ever get a fellowship to complete the degree [rather than an engineering student –RPW]. It was called the Emil Schweinberg grant.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And I got it; I was awarded the Emil Schweinberg grant. It was $3,000.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And with it you were supposed to also go to another art school to complete your degree? Like to Yale or something?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Precisely. In fact, they had registered me in Yale. [. . . –RPW] I was supposed to go to Yale, but Ray never told me that I was supposed to go to Yale. So Diane at that time was working on her doctoral work, or completing her—no, because she was in Chicago at that time; she was already on her doctoral work. Diane was in Chicago, and Diane said, "Well, you don't need a degree to be a painter, so come with me to Chicago, and you'll use the money; you'll go to the University of Chicago." Which I hated, by the way. But I took the money and did art history at the University of Chicago.

Diane was in the Committee on Social Thought, which was a fantastic experience. So then—Philip Roth, everybody. Allan [Bloom], the conservative social thinker, [the classicist –RPW] David Greene. I mean, it was astonishing and brilliant people. So I would go to her Committee on Social Thought lectures; so I was getting this kind of amazing sociological education. But I actually was a student in the department of art history. So I'm already—that's how I got there, thinking—no one ever said I was supposed to go to Yale. So [at times I –RPW] sort of wonder what my life would have been had I actually been a Yalie.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It could have been—I don't know that it would have been—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: You never know how these things, obviously—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah, but you can imagine, Francis, if—well, you know, Chicago. If someone suddenly said, "You're registered and we put you in Harvard, and now you're going to Harvard instead of the Graduate Center [CUNY]," you might sit and reflect what your life might have been. It would have been radically altered.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, for the worse, I think, in my case. Yeah, you don't know. It could have even happened to you.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [. . . –RPW] I think in the end it's an imponderable, but it's certainly something I think about [from time to time –RPW]. Or not all the time, but often.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: So there you officially completed a B.A. degree? In Chicago.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: In Chicago? No, I made up the—what I did is I arrived and—the program was such that if I did certain remedial courses, I could work directly towards a master's degree. The remedial course, which was, of course, my nightmare, was doing advanced calculus and [stuff –RPW] like that. I take that back; other people might love it, but I had actually no gift [for math –RPW]. It was the only [course –RPW] in my life I've ever flunked, because I have no head for those kinds of things.

But they said to me, "Well, you don't have to do it. You [substitute Symbolic Logic for it –RPW]." Which was, the way it was taught there, was so incredibly easy that—as a matter of fact it was taught by a Viennese [woman –RPW], and I was the only one in the class that understood what she was saying, because she spoke like everybody in my family. [Laughs.] So she adored me, and so I became the class attendant as it were, and I didn't have to do math. So suddenly I was this brilliant kid who could do As in math by doing symbolic logic.

Anyway, that was how that worked out.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But then did you apply and go automatically into the master's program?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Then I was—at the same time that I did this remedial stuff, there was chemistry and that sort of stuff. I did this remedial stuff, two semesters of it. Well, I was doing [fine –RPW]. I mean, I learned a lot. I'm being a little bit harsh on it. I could be harsh about the guy who at that time was teaching modern art history. His name was Jerry Rothlein, who came out of Buffalo.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: My teacher, from Buffalo.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: From Chicago.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: He was my teacher in Buffalo.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, there we have this [also in common –RPW]. That's extraordinary. That must be 40 years ago, 50 years ago.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That's 50 years ago that you were studying with him.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Forty for me, yes; 50 for you.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [No, 60. –RPW] Well, I don't mean to be nasty about Jerry. Jerry was kind of a funny guy to hang around with and have a beer with, but he knew [absolutely –RPW] nothing about—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: He was pure entertainment.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Pure, and nothing, absolutely—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: The most flamboyant art historian probably I've ever come to know.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, I don't know that he was flamboyant; I thought he was just—I said, "You're kidding; you're the guy?" Because Taylor was on holiday or sabbatical.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Joshua Taylor?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Joshua. So [Jerry –RPW] was the replacement, and fine, I don't mean to be harsh. I understand that he might have been inspiring for extremely uninformed people, but I would say, "Jerry, you know nothing."

FRANCIS NAUMANN: He knew the name of the artist, the title of the work, and the date. But he could present that information in such an entertaining way that that was the strength of him as a teacher.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I'm willing to accept that my characterization's a bit harsh, but then again.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Anyway.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: It's remarkable that we had the same teacher, but how was Joshua Taylor, now that you bring him up, as a teacher?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Brilliant. Inspiring. I wish he had had one of Jerry's [qualities –RPW]. Jerry, as you remember him, was this kind of embracing personality. And I would have loved Joshua to have been more loving of the students who admired him, and who worked with him and finished graduate degrees, that did their master's and the Ph.D. [with him –RPW]. What you didn't get from him, and which I try to give to my students—I hope you felt it—was a much more loving, avuncular concern. Because certainly many students—in your case—so far—your competence and your skills were so far honed, but the—I wish he had had more of that. [. . . –RPW]

[Taylor –RPW] had many students, by the way, who were ahead of me, and so many of them finished, and who had strong, you know—[Peter Selz –RPW], Shirley Blum, and Max Kozloff. All sorts of people, Dennis Adrian, who you might remember from Chicago.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, I know them all.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah, exactly. Obviously, we had different—Dennis and I were, [age-wise, our –RPW]

levels of research [were] at the same level. Max was already [ahead –RPW]—but these were people I met professionally and had to work with after I'd finished. I'd come back from Europe—and I had all those years in Paris. All I had to—was still post this experience.

But the point about Joshua was he was, apart from this reticence, which marked his personality—and I'm really not even sure why, what the origin of his reticence was, and perhaps there was this terror of being found out, [but –RPW] of what? Because we could all speculate, but I have no idea, I've no—apart from speculation. He was an inspiring, brilliant—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Was he known then already as the great impresario of Futurism, or did that come out later?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, it came out when I was there, and that's why I have such a powerful interest in Futurism, among other things. He was then working apart—he'd done American art history. I can't even think of the American work that was already very distinguished. I can't think of the biography, but—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Joseph Stella? Did he—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, no. I was thinking about a 19th-century figure [William Page –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: He must have been, at that point, working on Futurism and, obviously, his teaching on Futurism was sensational. I learned a tremendous, tremendous amount—not that I did Futurist art history [apart from a doctoral seminar in Modern Italian art –RPW]. But he was then doing what still remains a very great exhibition for the Museum of Modern Art—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, it certainly was.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —which is—I mean, that catalogue is—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, it still remains.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Still, I would say my feeling is that I don't know that it's ever been supplanted, with all the honor to all the Futurist historians who have emerged. It's a bit like—like he's the [John] Rewald of Futurism.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, he was the first—the first major book on that subject, in English anyway.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And it's [. . . –RPW] still tremendously helpful. Anyway, so—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But what got you—wait a minute. As an undergraduate, was that when your interest in Symbolism began already?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: My interest in Symbolism was marked, but only because it was like a French culture thing. It's like, when I was in high school, [we read –RPW] Verlaine and Rimbaud. We were very affected in high school, and so the interest in French poetry, Impressionist music and art; we're talking about high school.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I wish I could think of the French teacher. She was one—there's one French teacher I can think of, early on, who was an incredible taskmaster [. . . –RPW] who—[inaudible]—I'm confusing—this was [more than –RPW] 60 years ago. [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: [Inaudible.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And we had—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Music & Art.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Music & Art. All I'm trying to get to is that this interest in Symbolism was there, percolating, because it tested out on religious issues and gay issues and all that stuff that was percolating in my own life at that time. So it was a very natural fit, and very importantly because Rewald hated it.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Rewald, and quite correctly.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, for him, yes, I understand his position but—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, I mean, here he's fled France, and conservative, reactionary France and Catholic France and [*la France profonde*, anti-semite France –RPW] and deep France; everything that's made him hate Old France. [Laughs.] I don't know if you see what I'm trying to get to.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That incredible Salon Symbolism. It wasn't Gauguin. It wasn't—Gauguin was already a far too radical, great figure. Need I tell you? I mean—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, no.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mean, but it was like, [. . . –RPW] Alphonse Osbert. You know, Alexandre Séon, [Armand Point –RPW]; artists that were essentially conservative academicians, everything that the Impressionists fought against. I was only interested in it as a cultural phenomenon. I never once propounded the significance of the art, but it certainly was significant culturally, as a cultural phenomenon. [Rewald –RPW] loathed it.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, but you were the first to point out to me that it was actually the Symbolist exhibitions —the Salon de la Rose + Croix exhibitions were more popular and better attended than anything the Impressionists ever did.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Anything, exactly.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And it's almost as if that one particular chapter of our history got written out, but—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Now, it's not written out now. It's—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Not now, but it was then.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It's a staple of our history today, but the—it got written out then, and I realized, Well, that would be a great, ultimately a great subject, even knowing that it was everything that would cause Rewald to puke. By the way, I never studied with Rewald.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But he was a reader of your dissertation.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: He was a reader of my dissertation. He was a member of the faculty.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I was a Taylor student, and Rewald and Taylor were a very unhappy salad dressing. The oil and the vinegar did not [mix –RPW], though they were professional, obviously, correct towards one another. But so—but, nonetheless, I came to know Rewald quite well at that time, and, okay, so that's the story there.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But when you were in Chicago, I presume you also—when you went to the Museum of Modern Art, went to the Art Institute of Chicago—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Of course, I lived—I taught there.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, you taught at the Art Institute?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: At the same time you were a student?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, I was a graduate student and they needed—so many people I know were students of mine in Chicago. Unfortunately, not you, but—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I wasn't there yet, but did you know, get to know Whitney Halstead, for example?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Of course. I mean, Whitney was already a retired legend though—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, not quite retired. He taught me still 10 years later.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But he was—he was considered a very correct.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: A very correct figure. My first class, for example—so the one student, obviously, I most remember would be Michael Hurson. Michael was my student.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And it was [seen –RPW] that I taught very well, so the classes were jammed. You know, there was the big hall in Ryerson.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, yes, I know it well.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And so—so I taught there once or twice a week, and there were 300 students, or 200 students, and maybe this is the Rothlein in me, but I certainly taught, conveyed a lot of information, and it was well attended. And so I taught there for [the years –RPW] coincidental with my working on my graduate degrees.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: If you have anything in common with Rothlein, I think it's the enthusiasm for the subject matter, as you present it, and that is always contagious, it doesn't matter who's teaching.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, I think that's a large part of it, but also I got embroiled with Michael [Hurson's degree –RPW]. It happened several times while I was with Queens, with Michael's getting graduation, because Michael chose me to be his art advisor so that he would—at the end of his—he would work on a project, that kind of thing, and I would work it out through him.

But I was considered—Michael was considered much too eccentric, much too nose-thumbing of the great Modernist traditions, particularly of the German Modernists that were teaching in the faculty at the Art Institute of Chicago at the time. So Michael would make fun of Mies van der Rohe, and he would make a papier-mâché Barcelona chair, and that kind of thing—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —and this was considered an outrageous affront, maybe even a desecration of the altar. [After all, Mies came to Chicago when the Nazis closed the Bauhaus. –RPW] I thought it was terrific to see that kind of thing. Anyway—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But how about the—did you become familiar at all with the other artists? The Hairy Who and the ones that were famous—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Sure, but they were coming—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —in Chicago then?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Sure, yes, they coincided with the end of my [studies –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Stay there.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: The emergence of the Hyde Park Art Center and the Hairy Who and Phyllis Kind, and that group of artists who were [around –RPW] Jim Nutt.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Did you get to know any of them personally?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I did, but I—basically, I got to know Phyllis [Kind, their dealer –RPW]—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —[laughs] more than, more than the artists.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: You seem to have gotten along with dealers all your life.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: All my life. I never—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Is there something that accounts for that, that you can think of?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, yes. I never had a—I thought that there was something [. . . –RPW] attractive about being an art dealer. Indeed, I suppose, in my heart of hearts, though I had no access to being becoming an art dealer, I wanted to be an art dealer, which explains a lot of my post—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —my post-professorial life, and even part of my professorial life, when I was still doing doctoral research and living in Paris. I mean, I can show you the things that I would buy for nickels and dimes, and I would bring them back to New York, Lalique, and also things from the flea market which cost you five bucks or 10 bucks, which I would then sell to the dealers here. I would sort of sell it so I could—and even important dealers, Lucien Goldschmidt and all sorts of wonderful—I really loved these people. [. . . –RPW] I admired them. I thought they were extremely reasonable. I thought being an art dealer was deeply underappreciated—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Artists also have an agenda. You know, they want—they're promoting themselves and their work, and the dealer doesn't specifically usually have the agenda. I mean, he might if—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Look, I was raised in the left wing, and it was always like, artist good, dealer bad, artist good, dealer bad, artist good, collector bad.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Exactly.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mean, the dichotomy—it was so dichotomous, and so false. When you think—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah. [. . . –RPW] On that level, I'm the perfect person to interview you, because I agree with this. Maybe—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I—an artist has an agenda—maybe—okay, so there we are.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, that's another—you brought that up, going to Paris regularly. Was it just to do research on your dissertation? Was that the reason you went?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Diane plays a role in this. [Laughs.]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, she went to Paris too?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, my first experience in Europe was that Diane had won a fellowship to the University of Vienna, because she was a Central European personality, and she said, "Robert," you know, "What are you doing? Because, you know what? I'm going to be going to the University of Vienna summer school. You apply to the University of Vienna," so that was really it. I loved the university. "And we'll go to," you know—"we'll go to Salzburg together," and so [laughs] Diane—how really, tremendously influential she was in my life.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, of course.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And in so many ways. So Diane applied to the University of Vienna. She'd already done it, and so the next year I applied to the University of Vienna summer school. I got in, and we were off; we were off to Austria together. So there were two years of this kind of Austrian life, and then I had finished my master's degree.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Was your master's also on Symbolism?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah, [gesturing to library shelves] it is up there, yeah, bound in red. It was also on Symbolism. It was a general—and, you know, general essays on three aspects of Symbolism; synesthesia, and the religious question, all that kind of stuff. And I haven't looked at it—I see it there, but I haven't looked at it in 50 or 60 years, and but it prepared the way.

And so that's when I said—I realized no one had written about the Salon de la Rose + Croix. I had read an extremely influential book. I had not finished Cooper, and I had not been accepted to the University of Chicago. There was an interim year. I wonder if Karl Schrag at Cooper was very—he introduced me to [William] Lieberman. Karl Schrag was a [notable –RPW] printmaker. Okay, I'm getting too many stories here.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, no, okay, but—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Too many stories. What I'm trying—I'll clarify this. I'll clean up the story quickly. [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, you're jumping subjects. But it was about your master's thesis—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah, it was about—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —and how—what channeled you into the Salon de la Rose + Croix?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: My master's thesis. [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, you read a very important book.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That's it. Thank you. Thank, whew, thank you.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mentioned Karl Schrag, and he was then the director of Atelier 17 [founded by William Stanley Hayter in Paris, but transferred here during the war –RPW], a graphic artist, very skilled, [. . . –RPW] a very German figure, and his wife, and they liked me and he took me in, that kind of thing. And the—not that they took me in, but they liked me because I was kind of [German –RPW]. And so I met Lucien Goldschmidt [Belgian émigré –RPW], a wonderful rare book dealer, and Karl—I had to get a job. So Karl said, "Well, I'll introduce you to Bill Lieberman." So I went to Bill Lieberman and said, "My friend Karl Schrag said that there might be something here at the Museum of Modern Art for me."

Then it was a very different—it was a very different place, the museum. It was very much smaller, that kind of thing. It was sort of like filled with all kinds of original, cranky people, and he said, "Well, the director [of architecture –RPW] could use an assistant"—[Arthur Drexler –RPW] who was then head of the department of architecture. You know, [laughs] it's so funny, and so I went to speak to Arthur, and he said, "Sure, you could work here." And so my first job was at the Museum of Modern Art, for 50 bucks a week, and I'm working with a woman called Kathleen Haven, who was then a kind of design consultant in the museum, and I worked with her [. . . –RPW]. And Kathleen was a great favorite—I would [say –RPW] a great friend; I wouldn't suggest beyond that—of Captain Steichen. [It's about 1954 or '55. –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, Edward Steichen.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Edward Steichen. So I became Kathleen and Steichen's assistant. It's [amazing –RPW], when you think about it.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I'm trembling in remembering this, and she was rather wonderful and warm, and she was painted by Bernard Karfiol, and luscious and buxom. And [Steichen –RPW] was a great figure. I mean, I was well aware of his greatness. So my interest in [the history of photography began. But the name of the book I've been trying to remember –RPW] was *The Romantic Agony* by Mario Praz.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And that—I read *The Romantic Agony*, and there's this incredible section on Sâr [Joséphin] Péladan, and Praz is a great, great cultural historian about these kind of offbeat marginal things, apart from Symbolism, like the décor of 19th-century German houses and that kind of—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Boy, he wrote about existentialism.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: He's a genius.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [. . . –RPW] And of course, I had figured out that I was [perfect –RPW] for this kind of stuff. So [I read –RPW] *The Romantic Agony*, which I had for years, the paperback edition. I just can't believe this stuff I read. Anyway, so—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And it had a chapter on Sâr Péladan?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Absolutely [. . . –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And all that stuff was in it and all that stuff about the wives of [Franz] Liszt and [Théophile] Gautier and, I mean, all of this kind of cross-dressing; the best, anyway, so I said—I found the missing chunk of the art history of which the great, first book is Rewald's *The History of Impressionism,* which, by the way, [was] the first art history book I ever read cover to cover.

Rewald was tremendously influential. The very first book that I studied seriously when I was at Cooper, and, in fact, [it was Charles Gwathmey who said, –RPW] "You've got to read this, Robert." And [since –RPW] I was a very terrible show-off kid in Music & Art, and we would have art history classes, when they were called "art

appreciation" classes, and the teachers would show slides of—and, you know, like a miracle, I would recognize a Cézanne. None of the kids—I mean, we knew that when we were six years old. So like, they kind of disliked me. I remember once [a high school teacher –RPW] said, "Robert, you've got to stop showing off." He actually was a very nice [fellow –RPW], and he said, "So you're such a show-off; so who is Pissarro?" he says. So I could do the whole Pissarro number for him. I knew every salon, every Impressionist salon, and then I said, "Did you know that he became a neo-Divisionist," or something incredibly snobby like that. And I remember, instead of pleasing him, he was furious.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Because I was still showing off, and he wanted it—okay, that's the end of that story. These are silly memories—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: No, but they all add up, I think, at any rate.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It was nice, Francis—the connection, the Chicago connection, because when you're—suddenly when you're—I was thrilled—[laughs] this young person in Chicago is writing to me about, like my thoughts about Duchamp mattered somehow. He wanted to come to study at the Graduate Center. I thought it was astounding.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Not that it was astounding that you wanted to study at the Graduate Center, but that you would write to me to do it. Okay, let it pass.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Anyway, when you were still at Queens—maybe you could tell me something about some of the other people you met while you were at Queens, because you were still coming back to Queens, even though you were studying in Chicago, right? Weren't you coming back to Queens at all or no?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, once you went to Chicago, Queens was finished.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Once I went to Chicago, I was finished. I never went back—that was all—[except as a visiting lecturer –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, oh, oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Queens was just this little bridge from high school—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —to Cooper.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But in another interview, you listed all the people you met there, so I was—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Did I? I can't—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Suzi Bloch, you said?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Oh, that's something else. [. . . –RPW] Suzi Bloch was a friend [of mine from high school who came to know Diane –RPW]. I met Barbara Rose [. . . –RPW]—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I had already—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, those are the people—those are the women you mentioned earlier that you had met with Diane right in the beginning.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That's right.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I see, okay. Because the other people later—maybe you listed them—you got to know when you were teaching at Queens, like Tom Doyle?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Tom was teaching there.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, right.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That's when I was already teaching there.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, when you were already teaching, okay. I'll mention—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That had to do—the reason I got to be teaching there was, again, my life in Paris was, as it were, imploding, though I was already working for Ileana [Sonnabend]. And I wanted Ileana—I hadn't finished the big book report. I had my master's but—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But that's—when you went to Paris, you introduced yourself to these dealers like Iris Clert?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I introduced myself. I just knocked on the door. The [gallery –RPW] was as big as this table—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: In a little window there were Ives Klein sponges, so I knew who that was. I was interested in contemporary art, and I went in and I said, "Bonjour, Madame Clert," that kind of thing, and I said, "Do you need—I need to earn a little money," and she said—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —she took me on as her [assistant –RPW], as a result.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: So this was in the mid-'60s, like around—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, it's not the mid-'60s; the '50s still or the very early '60s. It has to be the late '50s because I had to be around 24. Before—it would be like—I was 22, around then, something like when I was 22.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, you graduated from Cooper Union in '56—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —so you were already—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That makes me 21.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Okay, yeah, all right. But did you officially work for Ileana? You were the director of the gallery, weren't you?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Officially, absolutely. I officially worked for Ileana. But I had already worked for three galleries.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, what were the others?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Iris Clert, and there was a gallery called the Galerie Internationale d'Art Contemporain, the International Gallery of Contemporary Art. It was owned by a certain Baron d'Arquian, who was the head of this ring of contemporary artists. They supported Mathieu—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —and Degottex, artists of considerable interest. I even have the magazines here that he himself—he could not come direct to Paris.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Who, he himself?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: The Baron d'Arquian.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, okay.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [. . . –RPW] He was a very mysterious character. The gallery itself was run by his cousin, Jacqueline de La Coste. She was very proper, a kind of spinsterish Frenchwoman with a kind of ironic sense of humor. He couldn't come back because it turns out that he had been the lover of the wife of the Nazi commandant in Paris during the Second World War. So he was judged to be a collaborator. I learned all of this later. So he was forced out of the country and, for all I know, he may have been a Nazi sympathizer and left [for Brussels –RPW].

But anyway, the Baron d'Arquian couldn't come back, though he was sponsoring the artists of the gallery. In the meanwhile, the gallery, that particular gallery—it's very interesting; at least I think so—the gallery, [in order –RPW] to sponsor the artists whom they were interested in, chose to publish a magazine, *Ring des Arts*, a ring of arts. Can you—the editor in chief was a wonderful [critic –RPW] called Julien Alvard, A-L-V-A-R-D, Julien, who was a very delicate, thoughtful, sensitive, original [. . . –RPW] guy who had been very close to the French sort of Modern art movement, and had been a prisoner of war with the French intellectuals of that 1940s period. And so he began to sponsor art exhibitions, people with the Louvre [like François Mathey –RPW] and that kind of thing—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Sure.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —and sponsored the artists that he was interested in [. . . –RPW]. He was interested in the artists he called Les Nuagistes, the cloud people, and, clearly, he was in love with the chief one of them. Suddenly—Alvard was the editor in chief, and he needed an assistant in this gallery, so the gallery itself—my job was actually already in art magazines, to help Alvard publish the two issues that ever existed of this magazine called *Ring des Arts*. But, very importantly, [. . . –RPW] I met Pierre Restany, who confirmed my relationship to Yves Klein, because I had worked for Iris Clert. So that—I already had this funny magazine life. [I even commissioned an art piece for the magazine from Jasper Johns. –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And were other artists—through these connections, what other artists did you meet? You said—I think you said Arman, you knew?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Arman, very well. That was actually through Iris Clert.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I worked in the gallery before I worked for Ileana, before—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —the first gallery was Iris Clert.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: The second gallery was the—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —Galerie Internationale, and I met a certain range of the French art world of that time, and I also met Tàpies—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —at that period, and the third gallery was with Ileana. But—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And who was she showing then?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: She would show—she became the American outpost of the Pop artists that she had worked with and discovered when she was the mother of the Pops, with Leo. But the reason she had heard about me [was] because I was the American who had worked for Iris and worked at the Galerie Internationale, and she needed assistance, she and [her second husband –RPW] Michael. [She] knew me because I went to high school with her daughter.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Nina and I—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: With Nina, oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: At Music & Art.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mean, it's—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: It's a small world.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It turns out to be a curious—Nina was one year behind me, but because it's kind of very highly Europeanized American, she talked funny, I talked funny, and we had no interest whatsoever in

sports or—but we had—we had all this kind of—she—Suzi Bloch was there. Suzi Bloch was this kind of Austrian—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: She was also in—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —Music & Art, yeah.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Music & Art, wow; wow, in high school.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So it was incredible. So Nina sat right next to me, my best friend in high school, and one year behind me. She shared the row with Jimmy Kurtz. So it turned out to be this strange conflation of people who had an unusual resonation—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mean—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: So, you must have gone to see Ileana, and, of course, knowing that you knew her daughter —

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Of course. I went to the very first show at the Castelli Gallery. From the very first, I was aware of what they were doing.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, here in New York.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Here in New York.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Precisely, I didn't know her when [Ileana –RPW] was cleaning up after the "artists" [at the artist's club –RPW]. I didn't know her when they first showed up, but—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But you must have also gotten to know the artists who came to those openings, I mean even in Paris, because Lichtenstein went there and Warhol went there.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: One of the first I showed—I remember because I saw a picture the other day of Jim Rosenquist, now who looks—like I'm old now, so I can't avoid it, but Jim looked [old, though very handsome, and –RPW] I thought to myself, I was—I was the kid that worried about his first show in Paris. There's a very odd sensation of kind of time filling in.

Anyway, all of that world was, in some measure, the world that I was interested in because of my life at Cooper and my life going to Europe. I first went to Paris on a fellowship. I was [a Sorbonne fellow. The next year, Alliance Française gave me a scholarship. –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I had two fellowships: one was at—either the Alliance Française fellowship—it was so funny. You know, we would go [to the Institute of International Education –RPW]; you'd read in the paper there's a fellowship. It's not at all like that today. [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: There was a book that said the fellowships available, so I would read the book, and I said, "Oh, here's a fellowship in Paris." [. . . –RPW] And you'd talk to people and they have a French fellowship, and these people can't speak a word of French, and to the degree I learned French in high school—so like, [Here's –RPW] this American kid who can speak French. We'll give him the fellowship. I mean, it's like—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mean, it's just so different. The world is so profoundly [difficult and expensive, when you consider the struggles that young people –RPW] go through today. [There is one more word I would like to add about my Paris years. I had a great friend, a Danish designer. A Dane, Sven Legind Gravesen. He had come to Paris for work for Jacques Fath, eventually owning his own house on the Avenue Matignon, backed by the ill-fated American heiress Mme Biddle. Through Sven I got to know much of the Paris fashion world, Balmain, Erik Mortensen, who eventually directed the house of Balmain, Jacques Fougerol of Jean Dessès, many figures. I came to know Sven's family in Denmark, even lived there. He was immensely influential on my thinking. The dissertation on Péladan and the Salon del a Rose + Croix is, in part, dedicated to him. –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I have written down that in 1964 you joined the faculty of CUNY, which I—at Queens. But you said it was a replacement course when Libby Tannenbaum—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Libby Tannenbaum.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Right.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Libby Tannenbaum, she was a tough [lady –RPW], but I respect [her pioneering work on James Ensor –RPW]. She's not likable in an easy way, not like Franzi or—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But you didn't—you were replacing—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I was replacing.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: [. . . –RPW] But what course was it? Do you remember? Was it just—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Modern art.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: The big modern art survey. Actually, I was already teaching in the evening school.

Diane had been calling [me –RPW] back from Paris, and [my –RPW] life was at sixes and sevens [at least romantically –RPW], and she said, "Look, I'm in charge of the adult continuing education. I'll get you a job at Queens at night." I needed something to get back; it's absurd, Francis. It's not like Yale offering you a job. This is like adult continuing education, teaching drawing. Okay, but I did it for one semester, and then Libby takes [a sabbatical –RPW], something like that, and Diane replaces her one line with three people [. . . –RPW]. One of them was Barbara [Rose, the other, Suzi Bloch –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But fine arts, right?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: History of art.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, history of art, oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Libby, her course, her—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I see, her art history course.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Her survey, yeah, survey, Art 101, I guess.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Modern art. So Libby—Libby's replaced by Barbara Rose and Suzi Bloch and me—and I, whatever the correct grammar is. It turns out, by the end of the first semester—this is a terrible thing to say because Suzi is dead, but Barbara and I have remained friends. They were terribly snobby teachers. They were not [really –RPW] snobby, but they didn't quite recognize the fact that they were teaching in a public city university where the kids simply don't sit around [chatting with –RPW] Jasper Johns—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Or [anyway –RPW], they were not thought to be [instinctual –RPW] instructors. So Louis was then the—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Louis Finkelstein?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —the head of the—Finkelstein was the head of the department then. So Louis comes and sits in [my lectures –RPW], and then he says, "Listen, would you take the whole year?" He didn't ask the other two. I said, "Fine." [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So when you—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I see. That's how you became a full-time teacher.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Exactly. Now once I become a full-time teacher, [CUNY –RPW] had responsibilities towards me. [. . . –RPW] So they're figuring out the next year's schedule, and they write me in. I'm actually a full-

time, junior faculty member, on an instructor level, with a contract, and then I simply worked my way up, you know. Eventually I finished the big book report, and then, so I was a professor there.

Then comes the [Queens College –RPW] master's degree. I was then committed to develop the program at Queens College. So I took up [the battle for –RPW], first, a master's degree in art history.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Great.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Then comes the possibility of [. . . a CUNY –RPW] Ph.D.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: At the Graduate Center.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: At the Graduate Center.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: The Graduate Center had already existed?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [Not quite –RPW.] And Milton Brown is a remarkable man, as you remember very well. And also very locked into the left wing—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —political life of this city university, as it developed from a generation of people who emerged from immigrant life and the tragedies of the Second World War, and the military, being soldiers, and all that kind of stuff. They had a tremendous camaraderie. Milton convinced them of the need for—and because of his own work—of a doctoral program, basically, focused on American art history. At that point, Creighton Gilbert said—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Who was also teaching at Queens?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, he was teaching, but he was already—had replaced—maybe he hadn't replaced, but he was teaching at Queens. Excuse me, he had to have replaced Finkelstein, who was a very wonderful guy, too, in his [supremely understated –RPW] way. Because he said, "Look, Robert, they are forming a doctoral program at the Graduate Center, but I'm a Renaissance historian; I don't know any of this stuff." And I'd only written, like, for the College [Art Association's] *Art Bulletin*, and that sort of thing.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [. . . –RPW] Creighton had made me write, like, on [Henry Ossawa] Tanner and people like that, more or less official reviews [. . . –RPW]. So he said, "They've asked me to sit on the committee, but I don't want to sit on the committee; you sit on the committee for me." That's how I sat on that committee.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And we would meet, and then it was Milton Brown, Bill Gerdts, myself. Now, Rewald may have been already asked by Milton to join the faculty, but he would never have sat on a committee. He wouldn't—it's not his character.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] No, he would never do it.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: He would never do it. And Leo Steinberg. Now, I do remember Leo showing up, but we would—these deliberations went on for a semester, or something like that. And then we founded the Graduate Center. That's why I was a little—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, I didn't mention that you were part of it. Because Milton Brown, basically—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —explained, whenever anyone mentioned, that he, John Rewald, and Leo Steinberg started the Graduate Center.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes. It is quite a triumph, a very glamorous triumph.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But there were lesser fry there [and I was one of them –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes. But right from the beginning, they wanted it to be just the American arts.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Exactly.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Would that not have even excluded you, if they're teaching just American art?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: My first semester—I gave the very first semester of the thing. God, I can't remember, what's the word, my—when you give the first—seminar. The first seminar was on Abstraction Expressionism.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, oh, okay. Oh, you mean at Queens?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, at the Graduate Center.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, at the Graduate Center. Oh, okay.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Anyway, so that was—then I did a Symbolist seminar, and that kind of stuff.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But I just want to clear up one real question that I had, only because I can't figure this out. I have written in several places, where you had interviews before, that you started writing for *Artforum* in 1965.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Is that correct?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: No, I can't find any article until 1969. The first major article is on Richard Serra in 1969.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, no.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But there must have been something earlier that I don't—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: There's a book on the history of *Artforum*, which must be on the shelf there.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, we can take a break; you want to take a break?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Anyway, there it is. *Challenging Art*.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And [Amy Newman –RPW] identifies the very first thing—[. . . –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Anyway, one of the essays that I read that you wrote—so, when you first came to*Artforum*, you were a reviewer.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: How did that happen?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Because, though we were never particularly friendly, I knew Max from Chicago, Max Kozloff. [He was also a Taylor student. –RPW] Max Kozloff had already been writing for *Art International*, although I'd written for *Art International* too. And for *Ring des Arts* and other little funny magazines that I did with Julien Alvard, French and English.

In any case, Max said, "Would [you] be interested in writing for the reviews, that sort of thing?" I said, "Sure, I'd love it," and so to Max's credit—[. . . –RPW] he brought me to *Artforum*, when it moved from California to New York, and to Phil Leider and those people. To Barbara Rose, et cetera, et cetera. Max read with me for the first few reviews. It was a very interesting experience; no one [had] ever sat down and read with me.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: You mean read your articles, your essays?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: They're like little essays, and Max would read it. And it was an amazing experience. You'd type the thing up and forget about it. [. . . –RPW] Max made them better, but for the first time I actually read the damn things out loud, and they read better when I was correcting them with Max, not—we can't do it the way we do it today, by just erasing on a laptop.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, on a computer, right.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So the process of typing—but it was an English lesson. I'd never studied English. That kind of thing was a kind of lesson in how to be a writer, and I appreciated that terribly much from Max. Now, it

was Max that brought me to *Artforum*. [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes. But do—but when you were writing, you just wrote reviews at first?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: At first, just reviews. But then what happens—it was much more like a club. It was not all—I mean, I admit that there were power folks like Roz [Krauss] and Michael [Fried] and such people. But I'd go there, and I liked to have a cup of coffee. My sense was—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I never had the feeling that I was there because this was Fleet Street and I was going to be writing. It was much—for me it was a much more casual experience. There was a certain kind of clubby bonding, particularly with Phil Leider, who I liked tremendously. I think he rather liked me. So I would just turn up, and then eventually, because I would turn up, and because I would write six—you know, I'd write one now [. . . –RPW]—but I would write six or seven reviews at a shot.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: So did they assign you, or did you just—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So then suddenly I was the "New York Reviews" editor.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And then, of course, it gave me another identity. Suddenly I was being phone-called and [asked to show up at –RPW] dinners.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, how did that happen when you went into galleries? After a while, they knew who you were? They must have—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, they don't remember, so it's perfectly okay.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: No, well, they must have treated you in a special way, one would imagine.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, it was [highly regarded –RPW]; it was a very hot magazine, which, by the way, I did know it from before I showed up in New York, returned back to the city, because I would read it when I was in Chicago. "This is a very interesting little magazine," you know [then out of California –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It was just kind of—it had a lot of character, the first issues. Anyway.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: [John] Coplans, was he there already?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Coplans—Coplans takes over—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —two or three years down the line. Not my favorite person, but we got on. I didn't realize how much he disliked me. But in the end, he had something to do with the early years of the magazine in California.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, in California, before it came here.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, but anyway, Phil came here with the magazine.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Phil Leider?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Phil Leider, yes. L-E-I-D-E-R. But there was—who owned the magazine? Charlie Cowles.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, Charlie Cowles.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Who—I thought he was a very deeply underappreciated guy.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: There was a certain intellectual disdain of him. And I thought, Jesus, he's paying for this.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So there was this kind of moralistic—not Phil so much; Phil was very correct. But from other critics' quarters, there was a kind of disdain of Charlie. They thought of him slightly beneath their exalted states. No names, please.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, you don't have to give any. So what was the first major article? Not a review. Do you remember? Was it—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I think it probably could have been—it could have been—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: The Richard Serra piece?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I think it was the Serra piece, yes. The Richard Serra piece. And then there was all these other things on Post-Minimalism.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah. Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: A lot of stuff on Post-Minimalism, Eva Hesse—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But Richard Serra you knew already from Queens?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: From Queens, yes. [He was teaching there. –RPW] And as I recall—thinking back, how many years? I forget how many years now. But it opens with Richard—walking with Richard through the Guggenheim.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Through the Guggenheim.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And he's talking to me, and I'm realizing this guy is an extraordinary teacher, and I was learning from him. So I tried to just get some sense of that conversation as the opening to the piece, as a lead-in to what he was doing. I forget what we were talking about.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Carl Andre.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Carl Andre [and Robert Morris –RPW], yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And he gave you, kind of, his view of the history of sculpture, which made you think about it, and it comes out in the article as well.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, he becomes actually—he becomes an important figurehead. I mean, I do think he's a tremendously important artist. Eventually, I find his being this super-artist oppressive. But nonetheless, I certainly—I learned a lot from him.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Were you aware of what kind of a sculptor he would become, or was that just an instinct, or —

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, because he seemed totally, totally experimental at that time. And dropping things, and the lead pieces.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, the lead pieces.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But very quickly I grasped it was [extraordinary –RPW] material.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes. The reason I ask that is because you are quite possibly the first to put him within a larger historical context.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I think that's the case—and thank you. But I think there was a—I think it led to a certain amount of curious, unexpected repercussions, some of them negative, in so far as the people who did pick up on him—like Rosalind Krauss—didn't want me to be the first person.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: They wanted to be the first. So there was a kind of—what's her early sculpture book? I can't think.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: *Early Modern Sculpture*? [*Passages in Early Modern Sculpture* –RPW]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I forget what it is. There's a kind of introductory—"I'd like to thank my colleague, Robert Pincus-Witten, for bringing my attention to this work." I was very startled that that kind of acknowledgment is there, because I know that there was a desire for her to be—I don't know, I think—to be the

great Admiral Perry.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: He ended up being—I don't know how—I was not around at the time in the late '60s, so I don't know what a name he was at the time.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Very quickly. And he became very quickly the great paternal figure, or the great masculine figure for abstract sculpture. And I think he is; I don't—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, no, I don't think anyone would disagree.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: If I had to point to a great figure, I would point to, you know, post–David Smith, I would definitely think it would be Serra. But the—there's also, there's a certain, If you don't see it my way, kind of, you're going to get stamped out. Kind of Thor with the hammer.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: There was a kind of that aspect. And that was eventually—that oppressiveness was picked up by people who saw it as a kind of anti-women stance, or a kind of hyper-paternalistic, masculinist art.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So eventually, when women's consciousness became important in the second wave of feminist thinking—or the third wave—then he was ostracized in great measure, partially because of it.

When I left the Graduate Center, I was replaced by—I never know how to pronounce her name—Anna Chave.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Anna took that particular line of resistance to Richard's work, because she felt it was [oppressive –RPW] to women.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I was never aware of it going quite that deep, but it's very possible. That brought me to a question. You were writing regularly. Like every two months there was an article, and sometimes every month. Sometimes two in one issue.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, because I would love it, I was just writing. And, you know, there wasn't much that got published. I was not the editor in that sense—not like the kids are today; they actually edit.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: They have people and fact-checkers and stuff like that. I mean, it's not what you published. Phil made me very aware, it's not what you publish this week; it's what's in the drawer to be published.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah. But you were writing on such a regular basis. It baffles me, because I don't know how you can find the time to do it and teach at the same time. You were teaching at Queens, simultaneously, and at the Graduate Center?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Eventually at the Graduate Center. Then, I was certainly at Queens.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Because to write major articles like that, it usually takes people time. And by the way, how do you write these articles? In longhand, back then?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Back then—actually, then I had—I got a student assistant. One of them was Leslie Cohen, who was a Jerry Rothlein student, oddly enough, at Buffalo.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh. And she was also at Queens?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, she was in the first master's class at Queens.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: We're still in touch, Leslie, for all sorts of very amusing reasons. But the—anyway, I would just sit there, [dictate –RPW] to her, and then she would bring it in, and I would then correct it, and we'd type it up. And that was one of the ways.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: You mean, you'd talk out the article to her, and she'd type it?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Not always. I mean, there was always a typescript. I mean, I would still have sheaves and sheaves of them, and corrections. There used to be typing services in SoHo, and I would bring it to them, and you would pay them $12 an hour, and they would just type it up.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh. Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And then we'd correct it, and they'd just type it. For $8, I forget what it was.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And they could read your handwriting, presumably?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: They'd already got it typed.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, I see.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Or whatever, and then we'd bring it in. But the question was not what you'd written; it was what was left to be published.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: What do you mean, what was left—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mean, what's in the drawer.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, what—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Never mind the [already published magazines; I mean, it's what's in the drawer that matters –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, what more do you have? [. . . –RPW] The articles themselves are not—they always seem to be linked to an exhibition or a show, or something of that kind.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: They would usually be linked to an exhibition.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But even some of the articles were, like—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I can't remember.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Like, say, the Man Ray one that was at the New York Cultural Center, it was a major exhibition.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That was the—that came out of the—that was a fantastic exhibition, and I learned a lot from that show.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I still have that—I wore Lynda Benglis's dildo polo shirt there.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: You did? That is something I actually want to ask you about too. Actually, I may as well ask you about that, now that—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I also wrote about the Homonymic Pun, or something like that. Strange articles.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, that was the Man Ray.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And then there was one about the symbolism of thought, or something like that. I'm sorry.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Anyway, I listed out all of the articles that you wrote. It's quite a phenomenal list. Because they involve all of the major figures today.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I know. It was very prescient.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And all the people eventually come under that rubric of Post-Minimal, but some—and I'm wondering to what extent you actually got to know the artists themselves. Like Mel Bochner, I know you knew him, him and Dorothea [Rockburne].

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: We were very close. Very close, yes. We were—people have said it was like we were gay lovers; it's not true at all. But I mean—we liked hanging out [together –RPW]. He was very intelligent, and I admittedly learned a lot from him. We were just—we'd have lunch in a Chinese restaurant, strolling over; it was that simple. But he was living with Dorothea then [dozens and dozens of years ago –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And you witnessed their breakup?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I witnessed it. Yes, and I—I had realized then, a lot of the affection, by the way, that affection has long since evaporated. We bump into one another occasionally, and certainly we have perfectly correct hellos. But Dorothea, who I think may have been wounded in divulging the aspects of their life, had cause to be more greatly wounded. We have still a lovely [. . . –RPW] "How have you been?" all that kind of stuff; it's very affectionate. But nonetheless, I got to—particularly them. And then I was aware that that affection also didn't come free, in the sense that I was not being just merely liked because I was likeable, but that I was also being used. And I had not really had that experience before, the sense that I was somehow a lever—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —that could jack one level to another level. That sense of being used as a lever began to—I began to gain consciousness of it, and then I thought to myself—my belief in the [. . . –RPW] altruism of artists faded.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Nearly all of these artists that you write about were either associated with the Castelli gallery or with Ileana's gallery.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Were they?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, not all of them, but a lot of them.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: One of the books I wrote, it's dedicated to Ileana, but even—I've never yet—"I haven't written about her artists," something like that; it's a funny dedication [how I didn't write about her artists –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh. Well, I guess I only had in mind people like Mel Bochner and then Vito Acconci, and—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, that's true, Vito.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And Bruce Nauman was with Leo Castelli, and—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, they were also the best dealers; put it that way.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, all the best dealers and the best artists.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: As I recall, you worked for Ileana too?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I did, thanks to you.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, well—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: That's how it happened, so. No, I'm just—it's interesting that these aren't just any artists—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: How did you get on with her, by the way?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: With Ileana?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes. Because that was one of the great disappointments in my life. I worshiped her, and then I realized that I was also just—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —being used.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Being used, yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, I ended up pretty much the same way. But this isn't about me. Someday, someone may be willing to interview me; then I get to tell my story. But anyway, I just thought I'd mention the one thing, that you write an essay for an exhibition, *White on White*, for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: In Chicago, yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: In 1972.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That's correct.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And I don't know if you're aware of this, but I hadn't yet met you in 1972. This was in December 1972, when the catalogue came out. Did you, by chance, go to the opening of the exhibition? It was—you would have a reason to remember it, because—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [Stephen] Prokopoff was the curator at the time.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Right.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But am I confusing a show that he did in Philadelphia with the show? Because he went out to Chicago from Philadelphia. He was the director, Stephen Prokopoff, but he's dead.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But the reason I thought you would remember—because everyone was asked to wear white to the opening, since the exhibition was *White on White*.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And you wore?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I went wearing white, but I had not yet met you. So I thought it would have been interesting if we'd brushed shoulders there. Because what you would never have any way of knowing is that I was in that exhibition, because I was—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Are you mentioned in the catalogue?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: No. And you'll know why in a minute—because I was a preparator at the [Museum of Contemporary Art –FN], and I painted the walls of the gallery white. And since it was called *White on White*, I signed every gallery wall in the lower right corner. But no one ever saw it.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [That's –RPW] fantastic.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Whenever I list my resume, I list that as my first exhibition.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Oh, that is fantastic.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Because I was a conceptual artist at the time, so.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Rauschenberg's White Paintings.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, well.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: In a way. Shadow paintings, anyway.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Anyway, right after you wrote that, the Eva Hesse article comes out in the Guggenheim catalogue, who you had written about before.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, with Linda Shearer.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: In—I think you write about her first in 1971, a year after she died. That's when your essay in *Artforum* came out. But did you know her personally?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, Music & Art and Cooper.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh. And married to Tom Doyle.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I was—my awareness of Tom Doyle really comes much later.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I was not so aware of her marriage to Tom Doyle, who she'd been married to in Germany. Though her—I related very much to her German life, because of my background as well. But eventually, I meet Tom Doyle, through Queens. We eventually end up being neighbors, actually, in Connecticut. But the—I don't know why, but I always had a certain guilt about Tom. Perhaps somehow that I felt that maybe I had disparaged him in the article, or had overblown, or ignored his existence, or something of that kind.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Was he an artist too?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, he was a sculptor.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, I don't know his work.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: He's a sculptor of some note. He's actually a very, very good—in the generation of Abstract Expressionist sculptors. Tom certainly would be considered a little bit—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —who's a great figure, someone I love completely? Isn't that crazy? He has a studio in Long Island City.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, Noguchi?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, no, no. I'm thinking an American sculptor who does Constructivist—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mark di Suvero?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Mark di Suvero, exactly.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Right.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: In a way, Tom is a kind of homespun, wooden version of Mark di Suvero. There's a significant point of overlap stylistically. Anyway, the point I'm trying to get to is that I don't know what the origin of my guilt is about Tom.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, if you didn't write about him, and you wrote about her, I can—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, eventually I wrote a first piece on Tom; I wrote a long piece on Tom, trying to locate places where to—anyway, that's—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But did you go visit her at her studio, Eva Hesse?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes. She was [working on –RPW] the squashed, crushed, plastic-and-wire towers.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: The big L-shaped?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, precisely. Those are the ones. But she was recognized; she insisted she had already begun to succumb to the brain tumor—brain cancer. She was assisted by somebody who helped draft kind of the first full book of her sculptures. The name has escaped me at the moment; it's 60 years ago or something. And, yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: In that essay, you had privileged access to her journals?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes. I still have them on the shelves; they're right there. They were mimeographed copies; I still have them there. But they're faded; I'm sure you can't read them. But they're very significant, because journals mean a great deal. They meant a great deal to me; I read them. And she made them accessible, and I remember being granted permission to publish [passages –RPW] of them in *Artforum*.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, you did there. And in the catalogue.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And there was a certain amount of bad feeling caused by that, by—it was felt that somehow I was the wrong gender to publish such privileged information. Perhaps it wasn't regarded as such privileged information back then. I'm thinking of Lucy Lippard, certainly felt that—I mean, she's mentioned early on in the article [on her *Eccentric Abstraction* show –RPW]. I certainly admired her thinking and her work. But I took all of this much more casually. I mean, it was all—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —I don't want to say it was fun, but it didn't—and maybe incorrectly—it just didn't have this oppressive weight of history, that every word had to be so guarded, and we couldn't have personal relations with people, that kind of thing. [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And unless I'm mistaken, of all the artists that you write about, she—that might be the first time that the biography of the artist enters into the picture and seems to inform much of what you say about it.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [. . . –RPW] Because I do feel that biography is part of the meaning of a work of art. Unlike the theoretical purist of the formalists, who say that biography doesn't enter into the creation of a work of art.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I don't know how you can even avoid it.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes. But in this period, obviously, it was considered bad form. At least many people considered it—probably today, still consider it—bad form.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: The biography is very important, particularly its dislocation from such profound roots.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: About the time when that Eva Hesse exhibition was held at the Guggenheim, that was when the Ph.D. program in art history started at the Graduate Center.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It was in 1970, we finally opened.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, was it opened in 1970? Oh, so it was a little bit—well, the Eva Hesse article—she died in 1970, but your article was in 1971. The first one, and then it comes up that the Guggenheim exhibition is 1972; so anyway, that had already been in.

But among those people that you knew at the Graduate Center, I didn't ask you about any of the students. I realize you had a whole roster of very influential students. Or not influential, but at least they became art historians in their own right, and well-known ones after. Like Lowery Sims, I remember.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Lowery Sims. Lowery was actually—Lowery was—you know, it's funny, because right back in Queens College, in the summer, I had to earn a living, so I taught American art history in the summer, and Lowery Sims—this would have been in the '60s or the '50s.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: So she was your student at Queens?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Queens.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, I thought it was at the Graduate Center.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, she does come to the Graduate Center, but then, it was highly unusual. So then we got her into the—she graduated from Queens College with an art history [degree –RPW], as an undergraduate. And then we got her into Johns Hopkins, then a very good graduate school—still is. And from Johns Hopkins, she came back to do a Ph.D. at [the Graduate Center –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Lowery would be one. I mean, the person—apart from you, Francis, obviously.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes. You interview me later.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Okay. The student I'm still in touch with, and means a tremendous lot to me, is Manuel Borja-Villel.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Manolo, [who comes from Buriana in the Catalan provinces, was –RPW] then a young, married man, very poor, living uptown in Washington Heights, with his wife and a newborn baby. Léon and I, we would try to get him jobs, and give him clothes. Now he's the director of the Reina Sofia.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: This is an interesting thing. He was—he was going to go out to the Midwest. He had come from Yale, suddenly, and he was going to go out to the Midwest to—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: You were talking about Manolo?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, he was going to [the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana –RPW]. "What are you going out to Illinois for?" He's Catalan, strong Catalan accent, though he'd conquered English amazingly well. And, "Come to the Graduate Center," you know. And so he became a student. You might have been in a class or two with him. He was a wonderful fellow, and—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: What did he study? [. . . –RPW]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: He said he wanted to write on Miró. And I said, "You're not going to be able to get to Miró, or even the daughters," that sort of thing. "You're not going to be able to write the dissertation you want to

write, because even if they allow you into the circle of Miró scholars in Spain—which is very, very unlikely—you're just not—you don't carry enough weight yet to wade into those waters." I said, "But there is somebody that I know that you might be interested in. His name is Tàpies."

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Wow

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: This goes back to Paris. I said we should contact Tàpies and find out—and, "You have to go visit him"—whether Tàpies will—and he said, "No, Tàpies is right wing." [Laughs.] So he's giving me all this stuff about how, at that point, Tàpies was politically incorrect for the kind of thinking—he's isn't very subtle, sociologically oriented. I said, "No, what you're saying is true [. . . –RPW] of Franco's Spain, but he's not what you think he is."

Anyway he gets to Tàpies [. . . –RPW]—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —[. . . –RPW] and he became the first director of the Tàpies Foundation.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: They founded it around him, and he spent his whole life with Tàpies, and then from there he becomes the head of the [Reina Sofia in Madrid –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Anyway that's [how –RPW] extraordinary the students [were . . . –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, I wrote some of them down.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Sandra Phillips, she went out to—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Sandra Phillips, that's right—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: She went out to San Francisco and did the history of photography.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Thelma Golden.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Thelma, actually, yes, she was in the classes. Thelma is an ABD [All But Dissertation], as it were.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: She came, she sat, and she participated; she's smart as a whip and charming; but there's no big book report.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, okay, well.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: What happened is that she moved very quickly from the Whitney. I mean, she was taken—I think she came out of the Whitney program, actually. And she was absorbed into Whitney life, and from the Whitney went to the Studio Museum, which had been founded, and then Lowery Sims was [its first director –RPW] there, and Thelma was absorbed into the Studio Museum uptown, and then she became the director.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Right.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: She's remarkable. She certainly was a student of mine.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Right, Eric Silver.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Eric became [Mr. –RPW] Channel Thirteen.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, yeah, he's the *Antiques Roadshow*.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Eric was one I'm glad you remembered, but Eric was—it's a story; like, suddenly here's this kid out of this nice, middle-class Jewish family in Queens, who's suddenly shown [Grueby ceramics and Vorticist posters –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —you know, Comfort Tiffany and academic [American bronzes –RPW], and he actually has a kind of feeling for this eccentric stuff—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —that is one foot in the decorative arts and one foot into modern, modern academic art. And eventually, he moves into [such merchandise –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Right.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: He goes to the Institute, as I recall; he was at the Institute. But his life becomes one of introducing [art –RPW] at a much more popular level [. . . –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I admire these people on the *Antiques Roadshow*, I have to say, a lot of them. Douglas Dreispoon is—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Douglas Dreispoon, yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I don't know him.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Oh, he's now a curator somewhere; oh, forgive me. Buffalo? I've lost touch with him. He went to Buffalo. He was a student who did work in American sculpture; did a lot of work in American sculpture. Theodore Roszak. He was then working for an important American dealer, Gerald Peters. [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, yes, it's possible.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But as a scholar figure behind the scenes, and eventually moves into museum life. And now he's an important curator [. . . –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: One of the earliest articles of yours I read then—not now; back when it was written—was the one on the Theater of the Conceptual. I read it while I was still in Chicago. And I remember that part of that footnote that I wrote [in] the issue, in the back of my mind, or what I had written about, though I don't remember specifically in any detail now. But I do remember that it was about when you compared the *Wedge of Chastity* to Bruce Nauman's *Wedge Piece*.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And in turn, Vito Acconci's *Seedbed,* and you were challenged by Jane Livingston, who wrote a piece on Nauman, and in that piece she says he reported never having heard of Duchamp? At the time when he made the piece. And then Acconci later told another critic he never endorsed the interpretation.

But, anyway your response was—I loved your response, because you wrote about it in an essay; you said, "An artist does not necessarily have 'to know' Duchamp to know Duchamp's ideas"—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —because the ideas are in the air and floating around.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I must say I was crazy. I never read Freud [*à fond*, but only casually –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But it's absurd to say that, like, every single word in popular conversation comes, derives from some [identifiable sources. Also true for Freud, Duchamp, Marx –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, just after that, in November of 1973, you actually hired me as a reviewer at *Artforum*.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: My gosh.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And I lasted only three months; at the end of it, my reviews were generally negative. And I remember you said that this will eventually catch up not only with me but with the magazine, and it would be better if I wrote articles. It was the best advice that anyone could ever have given me, because from that point onward I never wrote another review.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Can you remember any of the reviews?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, yes, I remember them. And I remember the artists I wrote about, and I still try to avoid them. Because they were not—Rosemary Castoro, for example, she—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: An interesting figure [. . . –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And what's his name? Now I've forgotten his name, but a couple of artists who would probably prefer if I didn't write about them at all. Jacqueline Gorevitch.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, I wrote about—yeah.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But not in a particularly positive way. So it's—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: You mentioned Jackie Gorevitch. I haven't thought about her in a hundred years. Because she's in that very first set of—you know when you mentioned the first set of reviews? She's in that first set of reviews too.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, she is?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I don't know why I remember that. I obviously had a kind of affection for the sense of the Central European, Austro-Hungarian, Germanic, refugee-formed American woman. [We may have met back in Chicago. –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, apparently so from the people—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That was another thing—also I wrote about Jackie Winsor; I wrote about—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And so I remember something rather droll; at least it strikes me as rather droll. There was a very important early feminist meeting in New Orleans that was being chaired by Lucy Lippard, [when] they created the Women's House.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, I know, I remember that.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, they wanted [me to talk –RPW], because I was apparently [though the Guerrilla Girls didn't think so –RPW] one of the few writers that wrote consistently about women artists—not exclusively, but consistently. Though the statistics stacked up in terms of general art criticism against us. Not that we set around saying that this guy's a man and I'm going to write about him, and this person's a woman; I'm going to write about her. Nonetheless, I was invited because—I guess because of Eva Hesse and Jackie Winsor stuff.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And Lynda Benglis.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And Lynda Benglis, et cetera. [. . . –RPW] So for me to address them [in the Women's House –RPW], I had to be made an honorary woman.

[They laugh.]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I told you there were certain things we wouldn't talk about.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It was sort of like when people are sanctioned and marry friends, they're allowed to be justices of the peace. So for my addressing the women's house people, I was made an honorary woman by acclamation. [Laughs.]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Do you think it was totally coincidental that you wrote about so many woman, or were you attracted more to their work? Or was it the work?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I was attracted to the work.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: By the way, when you were reviewing for *Artforum,* was there some kind of hierarchy of who could pick what show to write about? Or did you just—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That was what was so wonderful. Ultimately, I wrote [a piece –RPW] called "Naked Lunches" that was published in, of all places, in [the first issue of –RPW] Roz's in *October*, which was journal excerpts from the—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —because I really believed that it was important to sit and make notes about the meetings—meetings and diary notes; so there are diaristic notations about the *Artforum* editors getting together once a month or so to talk about what we [might –RPW] write about. I never understood what—I thought everybody was so incredibly smart; and I was so incredibly dumb; but they would—I mean, I'd try to sort of—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —glean whatever.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Glean whatever; because the theoretical premises on which they would build their writing seemed to be so obtuse, particularly the Harvard critics—Michael Fried and Roz particularly, and Jane Harrison Cone.

And I said, I'm so out of my depths, because I had really still a very naïve world, and doors kept on opening to me in a way that I realize now was terribly fortuitous and not at all like the difficulties that face people trying to get jobs and that kind of stuff. [Just think, my doctoral dissertation was published along with those of Robert Rosenblum, Linda Nochlin, and Leo Steinberg, and Diane Kelder's—and everyone wondered, Who is this kid whose dissertation was chosen for publication by Horst Janson? It didn't ease my relations with John Rewald, even when we became colleagues at the Graduate Center and Joshua Taylor had become the founding director of the Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C. –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So why am I remembering? Oh, yes, I kept on in my thinking that—it's not that anybody would say, You've got to write this, but when picked adrift out of the conversation, there was a strong Minimalist thrust and the kinds of things that we're saying. And I would say, Well, I don't feel that exactly; I feel something else that I like more. But no one said, You can't write about that stuff. There was no list that was given to you.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Was it not like if there was a major exhibition and you go to see it, someone is already writing about it? Or is there anything—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Because that is now the case.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Meaning, there was an editor I [am–RPW] very fond of [a quarter my age –RPW], Lloyd Wise; he's the reviews editor; and so I'd say, "Lloyd, I think I might cover this show," and he'd say, "That's fine." [Or, –RPW] you know, "You can't cover it because it's already spoken for"—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, right. I see.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —or, "He's appeared in the last three issues," that kind of stuff.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But it wasn't like that back then?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, it was much more—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: So all of the artists you wrote about, you wrote about just—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Just because I wanted to.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: No one to ask.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, they seemed to be, from Barry Le Va—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah. Or Mel Bochner or Sol Lewitt or—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It just was stuff that I felt, This is very interesting and [I liked –RPW] it, and ultimately because I could. You know, it still was graspable; the profile of the art world was still graspable. [. . . –RPW]

As a kid, I grew up in galleries, and you know, and the art world was really [small –RPW]. I'm talking about when I was 10 or 11, I would go the galleries and the museums. That was my world. But it still was possible to know about everything in the '50s. [When I went to Cooper, the artist's club, Abstract Expressionism, I already knew the Castellis. –RPW] Now it's [. . . –RPW] impossible.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, 350 galleries—there weren't anywhere near that back then.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Every generation says that, and there's also reasons why. Decentralization has taken place. I mean economic largely, but obviously, if you have to pay $3,000 a month to live [in Alphabet City –RPW] —

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —between Avenue C and Avenue D in a tenement flat, that's Malthusian. It's just a

different world. It was once a world where, you know, apartments were under $100, and they were crummy in some sense, but you could shower there and you could sleep there. [When I went to Cooper, I shared a place near McSorley's bar. It was $24 a month split between three guys. I painted murals all over its walls. –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, sometimes you showered in your kitchen; that was the only difference.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, exactly.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But you could back then.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It's just that the world has become so complicated.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Now, I don't know how far I should go into this because I can ask one, maybe, last question.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Okay.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: From 1965 to 1975, almost exactly 10 years, you write so regularly for *Artforum,* every other month, and then suddenly and totally—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —there's a break; there's a rupture, yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: In 1975.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Two reasons.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Okay, I'd love to hear what they are.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: One is I was aware that Coplans had arrived. [Coplans replaced Leider as editor in chief. –RPW] Coplans and I in some measure got along; he saw me as useful. But at that point, the sense of the place [for me –RPW], it was like going to a club.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: To me, it was like that sense had been lost. John was an exceptionally politically driven, obsessive personality, rancorous, often charming. And he and [Lawrence] Alloway formed a kind of intractable store of resistance, particularly, I mean, to me eventually, but certainly to Roz and Annette [Michelson]. And I adored Annette. She was so colorful; I knew her from Paris, and you know, she was the first woman who would speak about movies as "the cinema." [Laughs.]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mean, there was a sense of higher calling and sort of highly intellectually enriched, and I admired that. And I thought she was great. By the way, I admired Roz because Roz also had that sense that this is a significant intellectual [achievement. . . . –RPW] Barbara Rose, too, when you think of [her] very useful books and works [. . . –RPW].

To make a long story short, the intractability of that nexus of Alloway and John [Coplans –RPW] was a kind of paperweight. It just held things down. At the same time, *Arts Magazine*—which is long out of the picture—contacted me. [In the '50s it really mattered, when it was edited by Hilton Kramer. –RPW] It's a dying sort of magazine, very obviously; it looks sort of inelegant, [like magazines –RPW] published today. Look what has happened to *ARTNews* and what's happened to *Art in America*. [They look –RPW] crummy. But that's neither here nor there; it was—Richard was a kind of very richly intelligent—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Richard Martin?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Richard Martin [editor in chief of *Arts Magazine* –RPW] came along and said, "Would you write this for us?" So I said, "Sure"; I mean, you know. And Richard [also differed from –RPW] the oppressive nature of John and Lawrence; Richard was very open to everything.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, to whatever you wanted to write, I know.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And it was great. Because now I thought they're never going to pay anything [anyway . . . –RPW]. Part of it had to do with, there was a lot of air there suddenly. And I got on very well with Richard, a very original, difficult person. A Philadelphia blue blood, banker, not at all conventional. [Very dandy. –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: He was a Quaker.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: He was a Quaker, yes. But he was very dandy.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: That explains a lot.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, he was great dandy too. [. . . –RPW] He never appeared in the same clothes successively.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, no, he was always impeccably dressed.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [A professor at the Fashion Institute of Technology. –RPW] Eventually, it brings him to the head of the Fashion Institute of the Metropolitan Museum, where he dies, at the Met.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mean [literally –RPW] dies; I went to the funeral. Anyway, so Richard and I got on well, and Richard was an original person. He taught at FIT, not exactly a great center of scholarship, but he was very serious in his teaching. And so we would go to the College Art Associations together, which I haven't been to in decades, but it was once a very, very important [art faculty –RPW] flesh market. And we gave papers and it was fun. That's a terrible thing to say; people don't want to hear that your work was fun. But I loved giving the lectures.

Anyway, so you know, we would split a room [during –RPW] the College Art Association [meetings –RPW] and became friendly because of, you know: you share a room; you have meals together. So we became very good friends. And we were very good friends during the period of his time at—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: You said there were two reasons for—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: The first is the John Coplans.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And for having stopped writing at *Artforum,* and what's the second one?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I went to *Arts*.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, I see.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I published—I went to *Arts*.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But it had nothing to do with Lynda Benglis advertisement? I thought that was—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: That happened right at that time.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, again I loved it. I thought here was a very talented young artist doing very talented, original work and I would want to write about it, so I wrote about it. It turns out that she also wanted to publish this very important [photograph –RPW]. And of course, I said, "That's great." Maybe I had no sense of what the proper confines of discourse and imagery could be. But it seemed to me I could live with this.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So, you know, maybe I just—look, I write about Acconci's *Seedbed.* Here he is masturbating under the floor. So I just didn't have the same sense of how "wrong" all this was. Of course, the next day there was all this highly overwrought reaction. [Even from the editors of *Artforum*. The intellectual as Puritan. –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: It was right around that time when you started writing for *Arts* that I actually took your course at the Graduate Center on New York Dada and its affinities.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That was a wonderful course.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: It changed my life. I was at the time really deeply immersed in Renaissance studies—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [With Leo Steinberg. –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Leo Steinberg, working on the *Last Supper*. But it was in your course that I made the decision to really change my focus—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And begin Man Ray at Ridgefield.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, Man Ray. It was first New York Dada, because that's what I was studying with you—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah, it was New York Dada.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And I declared the subject of my dissertation to be Walter Conrad Arensberg and New York Dada, just added him as an important missing chapter in the history. But then I narrowed it down to Man Ray. That's what happened.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I remember discussing this with you. I said, "Look, [you'll never finish –RPW]; this is too much, particularly with your"—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, "finding every needle in the haystack" is how you put it.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Exactly, particularly with your determined research skills.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But I don't know if you realize how unbelievably—you certainly were tremendously influential in my life. But you were probably equally influential in the lives of a lot of other students, I would imagine, at the Graduate Center.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I guess so; yes, I hope so.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, what do you say to that?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But you did remind me of something important. It has something to do with this moment, the break at the time Richard—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Richard Martin you were talking about.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Oh, I know what it is. This idea that somehow this experience had moved from my experience to Cooper and to graduate school; and you won a fellowship; you were anxious to go to the university [. . . –RPW]. You walk in and tell people you can speak a foreign language, and right away that world is so different. And it was not a world based on technology. My dissertation is written on five-by-seven index cards; copying—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —the chapters of *La Plume* by longhand and sitting and wondering if people will help me in Paris. [Pierre] Lambert and the, you know, Huysmans Society and such things. Anyway, the point I wanted to get to—I had wonderful comrades at Queens College, among them H. Barbara Weinberg—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —who I shared an office with at the Graduate Center [with Bill Clark and Ellen Davis –RPW]; these were wonderful scholars. There was a camaraderie.

Anyway, Barbara, with whom I'm [still –RPW] very friendly, we'd sit around, and we still tend to laugh very easily, even though the subject may not be significant other than to us. Barbara, who is an incredibly trained Columbia [University –RPW] Americanist, very much in the great tradition of unbending scholarship. Certainly it's true in her exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum, where she went after she retired a professorship. Barbara would say, "So what are you teaching today, Robert?" and that kind of thing. And I'd say, "Well, I'll pick up a book and the preparation, get the slides together, get the idea and talk it through and convey the information, and a half a dozen facts, and that was fun." And Barbara would say, "You can't do it that way. You have to get every single fact down." [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: You once told me that after you had finished your dissertation, the most research you do is standing in the aisles of Barnes and Noble.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [Laughs.] Yes, that's right.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And in the remainder section—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And the remainder, what happens is, they're all over the floor in the library. I mean, look at these walls; they're all here.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes. At the Graduate Center, did you get to know any of the other teachers well?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Bill Gerdts I did.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Bill Gerdts.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [He may be an easy target, but –RPW] he's not an easy target as a scholar; he's an easy target in his manner [. . . –RPW], that kind of thing, [. . . –RPW] but he's a very distinguished scholar.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: He certainly is.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And also I admire—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Extremely academic.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, that's the point. But what I also admired is that he understood that there's an intense relationship between his scholarship, the kind of scholarship that he does, and the fetishization of the kinds of objects that he's interested in.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So that his scholarship, for better or worse, is not necessarily an introduction but a ratification to the value of the things that he's interested in. [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: You once characterized for me much of 19th-century academic painting as kitsch. Well, it is, but it depends on—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But I love it. Look at Robert Rosenblum.

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FRANCIS NAUMANN: You're right; there's no one—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: At the same time, among those academicians are several of the greatest painters that ever lived.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Notably, Ingres.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And Gérôme [for all the distasteful Colonialism –RPW] and even Bouguereau, I mean.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Even at some level, but the point is that's the stuff that eventually turned into academic kitsch, and that's the stuff that Rewald despised [justifiably –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Despised, absolutely.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And that's the thing that Rewald never could see, that if you think about it as art historical material, it was to deny the self-evident superiority of Cézanne. He's right; not even for one second would I even dream, you know, of knocking Cézanne off [his pinnacle –RPW]. He's like [one] of the greatest painters; perhaps for modernism, the greatest painter. But it's that inability to allow—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I think his idea is stimulated by this idea that he has to take on the same fight that those artists had.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, he's Manet in poverty.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Even for them, in Cézanne's time the artists who were getting attention were artists like Ingres and Gérôme and Bouguereau, who [except for Ingres] were almost exact contemporaries with Cézanne. But I guess he feels like he has to continue that fight. But to do so and ignore the other people running simultaneously is to ignore real history. And I think to understand the work, you have to place it within context.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That's true; I agree with you. There's no point in—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And of the other people, how about Rosalind Krauss at the Graduate Center; you got to know her well, or not?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It was a very tender friendship. I mean tender in the sense that it really wasn't tender

romantically, but it was tender; she was certainly aware of my admiration. While she may also have been aware of my resistance to her desire for prestige.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: She's certainly one of the most prestigious figures; so was Linda, who was much easier; I mean Linda Nochlin. But it was an amazing faculty when you think about it.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: There was, [but of Rosalind, a –RPW] need for a kind of absolutism, this puritanical aspect, the Cotton Mather aspect, and *October* became that vehicle. And by the way, her influence with a whole group of students, some of whom I did teach. Doug—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, Douglas Crimp.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Doug Crimp, [Benjamin Buchlow; I'm not sure about Hal Foster . . . –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But did you have any resistance to their approach toward art history, because there was a very different—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I couldn't have a resistance to it because, in fact, it was learned. If I could have been an art historian [flying –RPW] by the seat of my pants, why can't they be an art historian by the seat of their pants reading different things? And the kinds of things they read were French structuralist material.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, and linguistics.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah, and linguistics. And I'm trying to think of Benjamin Buchloh. Benjamin Buchloh studied the history of photography with me, and he did wonderful work. And, fine, it doesn't mean that—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Because you yourself never seemed to have embraced that theory-driven art history.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, because I don't. I don't, because art for me comes from art and from [art-making –RPW]. It always seemed to me an artifice. I remember—I can't think of her name; she's a very skilled painter [Laurie Fendrich –RPW]. But once she took issue with a wonderful art historian who taught in Stony Brook [University].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Donald Kuspit?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Donald Kuspit. Once she took issue with Donald, and she said—the idiom she used stayed in my mind—she said, "I can't take all this intellectual table-hopping."

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And the idiom she used stayed in my mind.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And she said, "I can't take any of this intellectual table-hopping." I always felt that there was something that the elements of the jigsaw puzzle didn't mesh. [. . . –RPW] One tile was malformed, that kind of thing, is what I'm trying to get to.

So if I took issue, I was aware of it. Eventually—I had already been teaching [for 28 years in the CUNY system—and more before that –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So the possibility of my retirement arose, and I—suddenly, there was no pleasure. Look, Francis, I [remember –RPW] your paper that you wrote. We were talking—maybe it was a Symbolism course, with the severed head or the—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —decapitated heads.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Decapitated heads is an important iconographic [link –RPW]. Well, you came up a paper [in which] you actually did an accounting of the number of heads that fell into the basket. I mean, this is fantastically interesting. No one's done this before. What I'm trying to get to is that the material was germane.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But I often felt that the [structuralist –RPW] material was not germane, and [it certainly –RPW] was not fun to read.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Exactly. Well, it drove me out of art history about the same time you, I guess, retired.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, well, I'm happy to say I stayed with every student that was working on their Ph.D. until each one finished their Ph.D.; that was like 11 students.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [Even though I retired, –RPW] none were abandoned. I stayed with the reading and writing through every one of their cases. Be that as it may, because I'm not such a hero as all that, but the point is the, kind of, what passed for what is readable was not readable.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, I know. And it still isn't. I know, I felt it too.

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FRANCIS NAUMANN: This is Francis Naumann. I'm speaking into the recorder on the 24th of March, 2016. I'm speaking with Robert Pincus-Witten in his home in New York City [for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution].

And Robert wanted to mention a few things as follow-ups to what we were discussing yesterday.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah. Can I start now?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Go ahead.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Okay. In some sense we think it's unusual—when we we're speaking of art dealing, we didn't—we never had this sense of—somehow that there was something wrong with being an art dealer. [Laughs.]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So I wanted to finish up. I mean, your trajectory has something of my trajectory, in so far as your academic credentials are sterling, and you have been sought after by institutions to assume a fully academic life. But in the end, you abandoned that, those options, and became, yourself, a notable art dealer within the highly specific area of Dadaist material—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —Duchamp, particularly. I wouldn't say my life—it wasn't to that trajectory, as I—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —always had, like, an interest. I never had this negative feeling about being an art dealer, so that in fact, when I retired from my professorship after 30 years, essentially, I—again, this very fortuitous situation—I was offered a gallery position at Gagosian, which is, certainly today, an enormously influential gallery. And so for six years I went with—I work with Larry Gagosian arranging his historical exhibitions. I might add, [laughs] one of them was an important Duchamp exhibit to which you contributed an excellent—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh. The Jasper Johns—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: In the Johns—exactly—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —exhibition.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —yeah, as well, yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: The *According to What?* material.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I thought that was interesting, and from—after leaving Gagosian, I then spent 11 years with [Robert] Mnuchin, who himself is a great—a major collector [of Abstract Expressionist art –RPW] and then,

himself, turned dealer. So my life as a dealer had some sense. At least they're affiliated with art galleries. If something which occupied six years and 11 years is—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —17 years, which is almost—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —as much time as you [might –RPW] spend as an academic.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: As an academic, exactly.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Again, in terms of these aptitudes, this broad range of aptitudes, I also, even as a kid, thought it would be great to be an art critic. I thought—I mean, I remember saying, "That's a very glamorous thing to be," to be an art critic. So part of my sort of mental profiling as a kid was empathy, an empathetic relationship to being both an art critic and an art dealer.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Did you have the same attitude about art dealing? Did you—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —admire that from a distance as a kid?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, obviously, because the glamour—I was very aware, even as a teenager, [of] the glamour of the Castelli Gallery and Ileana Sonnabend [. . . –RPW]. When I got back from living, basically—working—living and working in Paris, and that whole Paris experience is an art—in art galleries, almost the first person that I [had] a strong friendship with was Ivan Karp—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —which is—who plays an important role, at least in the emergence of the significance of the Castelli gallery. And we became very close, certainly for a short period of years, so that, again—because, again, the whole experience of being an art dealer at that time was very difficult. It was a very small art world, and Ivan would give away these lithographic sort of infinite editions of Lichtenstein and Warhol. They'd sort of give them to you for coming into the gallery, oddly enough, even Lichtenstein.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: He gave away Pettibone paintings to some people, which irritated Richard Pettibone, I know, to no end, of course.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, these were the lithographic whatever they're called. They're not fine lithographs. They're sort of [basic offset –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Right.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But I have—I did, as one had to sort of put money aside to make the real estate moves that Léon [Hecht] and I made, I had to sell these things. I mean, I was—like, I'd get $12,000 [laughs]—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, for something he just gave you as a gift.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah, yeah. It was, like, it was a set, or—which was simply the enticement into the gallery that he would simply distribute at that time. [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —but that's—[. . . –RPW] there has always been traditionally a kind of disconnect between academic students and the art world and dealing and money—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —as if money and art can't mix. And I actually was lectured to on that subject once—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —by Milton Brown, who told me that you can go ahead and deal, if you wish—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —in whatever you want, but don't make it your specialty. And I thought to myself—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: What's—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —Well, what else would I deal within except my specialty?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: [Laughs.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Precisely. And I mean, and the truth is that there's—to support my studies, I mean, I would find things in the flea market, and Mucha posters [and Lalique glass –RPW] and stuff, that I would bring back to the States—and I was back and forth between Paris and Chicago—and I would sell them. And I mean, I would—today, the sums that I would sell them for [were] modest, but they represented a kind of income [. . . –RPW]. Occasionally, I was able to sell something for a hundred dollars, say, which kept me going for a while.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It's an entirely different scale of expenses granted the years, but nonetheless, you'd find things. I would find Toulouse-Lautrec prints, and I would sell them to Lucien Goldschmidt, who was a great Toulouse-Lautrec scholar. [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yep. Usually, when people see this problem, it's a perception of a conflict of interest rather than an actual one, but have you ever been in a situation where there—where you even experienced what you could consider a conflict? Because I had one, but—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, people have accused me of it—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —and I—because, for example, I have a very strong interest in American academic sculpture. I'll admit it's quite different from my support of avant-garde art. Nonetheless, I did the seminar, for example, in American academic sculpture, and it was partially because it always made me a bit crazy to know that the kids who were simply unquestionably accepting the Modernist tradition as if it was [always –RPW] there, as it was always there and there was no trouble attached to it, and they had no idea what the—the baby had been tossed out with the bath.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Whatever, so I thought, Well, it may be a good idea if they knew the people who were supporting, you know, Tony Smith and David Smith and Richard Serra, et cetera.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And those who came before

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Mark di Suvero—yeah, exactly.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yep.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But they had no idea that in some sense they were—is this Augustus Saint-Gaudens, and there's, you know, et cetera. But to know about those figures, let alone 20th-century academicians and et cetera, et cetera, I would—I think it was important to know that what had—what was abandoned. In that sense, the paradigm is, again, it was important to know [what –RPW] was abandoned when we recognize the significance, the primary significance of French Modernism, Post-Impressionism, for example, vis-a-vis Rosicrucian material.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I think the problem is that students make a decision early on what they're going to support, and then they end up being in these situations, like if they're writing about Impressionism, they don't want to really see the academic side of things going on at the same time. But I always commend art historians who have the breadth of—like Robert Rosenblum did—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —to be able to see and appreciate everything that was being produced at any given moment in time.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I worked for a period, academically, of high theoretical polarization. Rosenblum was horribly condescended to—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —by the "Rosikraussians." [Laughs.]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah. Or by the [*October* magazine –RPW] establishment. I mean, I know that—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I know he wasn't terribly solicited; he was also profoundly—but he was very nimble in terms of art society—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —but there was a lot of condescending—I mean, by people who have absolutely no claims even remotely like his intellectual claims.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah. Anyway, now I—it's going to be out of chronological order, but I—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Doesn't matter.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —want to bring up the—you once said, even in an interview, that you'd probably be remembered for having coined the term "Post-Minimal."

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, right.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And even though you've taken—gone at great lengths to define it—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I don't know if I can do it again. [Laughs.]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: This is, well, it. I can't seem to find it in any of your writings before your book on Post-Minimalism came out—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —because you called it "Anti-Minimalism" for a while, and then you—but I'm wondering whether or not you came up with that term, because when your essays were being grouped for publication, then you had to look retrospectively at the things you had written about for the previous six years, and was it then that you saw a trend, a stylistic trend, that differed from what had come before it?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, I think we actually saw it as [I was writing. . . –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: As well, when we were writing the anthology, one was—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Anthologically, the consciousness of that condition was there in the first essay.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It was not the cumulative effect of six or seven or eight essays.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: You know, there's sometimes—there are moments in which I think a single word grabs the zeitgeist—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —and that was a very fortunate zeitgeisty instant where it was both recognizable and sounded right, partially because it—the paradigm was Post-Impressionism. So that it hit the ear with particular relevance at that moment. [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, you hear it. Yeah, you hear it used—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It's, like, because if you do it, this is [. . . –RPW]—it's reified into something people think they know what it is, but they don't examine it very closely any longer, which is very fortunate for me because as a result, I suspect, if there is going to be some posthumous curiosity, it will be around that term. It'll be around the artists of that term; it'll be around that term. [. . . –RPW] It will—it is going to be something like that that's going to—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —to stick.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, it might in some absurd way draw people to keep looking me up still in the future years. By the way, I'm not living for posthumous celebrity; that's not the point. I live—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But you don't decide that anyway.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, exactly. One doesn't get—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: So, anyway. But in that essay that you wrote, the "Introduction to Post-Minimalism," you did say that it was through the example of artists like Judd and Andre, and Bochner and Dorothea Rockburne, that you—and I can quote you; you said, "Something else was in the air. Minimalism was moving somewhere else, and it was going. Where it was going I came to call Post-Minimalism, but before that, Anti-Minimalism." So you were keenly aware of this happening while it was happening, not—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: You see, that was [just –RPW] the good fortune of being amid the artists. Like every moment, essentially, if it has some kind of vitality, it's not just artist-making things. It's a constellation of conversations and production, and it's this network, and I'm not the only person to observe this—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —but it's if—if within the artists themselves that there's a kind of sense that somebody is going to become the spokesperson. Not only critically or theoretically, but also—within that group, there's going to be somebody that's going to actually take it upon him- or herself to be the dispenser of this material, become the dealer, as well, who will create the exhibitions, who will create the advances—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, the infrastructure.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: The infrastructure, precisely.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So I was very fortunate, because, in the sense of the art world, that I was really getting —that I was drawn to—this extremely progressive sense welcomed my presence.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: At least, in some sense I thought [laughs] I was welcomed—I was a welcomed presence. And I think that's true. I might, as for even today, when it's an extremely atomized art world, the various sectors will have—whatever the phenomena are that are economically related—some kind of the Bronx crowd, or the Brooklyn crowd, or Hanoverian Dadaism. [Laughs.] I mean, or—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —then, within it, the voice of that sensibility is also discovered. It's not applied after the fact. If it's applied after the fact, it's, like, history. It's like—it reads like—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It's, the vitality of the original voice gives it a certain credibility or intensifies its credibility.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I can't prove that, by the way. [Laughs.]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, but to push it a little bit further, to figure out exactly what Post-Minimal is, you did, in fact, touch on it in that same introduction, because you said this tendency peaked between 1968 and '70, and you said that it was marked by an expressionist revival of painterly issues. And you then went on to say the specific artists who were affected by this: Eva Hesse, Lynda Benglis, Barry Le Va, Keith Sonnier. And you said they were often marked by, quote again, "the eccentricity of the substances they used," which you called "signature substances." And this is the best part: you said, "in the case of Serra, lead; Sonnier, neon; Benglis, foam; Le Va, felt." So is that, then, basically the essence of what you've come to define as Post-Minimal?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Oh, yeah.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Okay.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It's certainly a tangible—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —because of a tangible aspect, I guess. I don't know that's the essence, but it's—that observation is part of the tray on which—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —Post-Minimal elements reside. Clearly, there, the idea of signature substances, I think, was a critical [. . . –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, maybe not just that you were making, but others were, too. They noticed—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —that these things were happening.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And also, the eccentricity—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes. That—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: The eccentricity, Lucy Lippard said, "eccentric abstraction."

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yep.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: The eccentricity was important because the eccentricity became, at least back then, gender signals.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —for the use of wool, for example.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: As this thing would—it was really ignoble substances compared to paint, which would be a noble substance, in terms of academic usage, but the kinds of uses of those materials were associated with, craft processes, and the craft processes were associated with knitting and weaving and tapestry and a whole set of highly conventional signals today. Everybody knows that. That's all about—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —feminist art theory. Then, that was pretty fresh observation. Today, it's in every single classroom, but it wasn't back then.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It didn't exist; that whole range of subtlety of gender hints didn't exist.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: You did also go on to say that part of the cause for this shift, this change that you noticed, was due to two factors. You said, in emergence of feminist studies—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Three.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —but also the Vietnam War, which, of course, was raging—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah, yeah.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —in those very years.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, how I can forget that? But the truth is that there was an official abstraction, which is a kind of tolerated abstraction which didn't threaten the status quo. I hate to say this because I admire the artist in question, but, I mean, Stella got used as a kind of—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —straw man here.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Right.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Because, well—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: The whipping boy.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah, exactly. But then, in principle, part of this was to make an art which was unsalable. And it—at least back then, they thought they were making art which couldn't be absorbed by commerce. Since the commerce had been tainted, the larger give-and-take—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Issues of supporting the war.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —of supporting the war.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: In a way, I'd forgotten, but in fact, that was both a tremendously significant—an artwork or coalitions and all kinds of sell-beautifying visions of the artist-is-on-the-barricades emerge. But all this dates very quickly, because they're—such paradigms are conventional to art history, I mean [inaudible]—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —from, you know, from—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah. [. . . –RPW] And also writing about—you did an essay for the '70s catalogue [*A View of a Decade: 1967–1977*], again, for the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: This was in '77, when you talk not about the term "Post-Minimal." But that's where you made the observation about women's rights and the Vietnam War influencing the art of the period. But you also did make a point that didn't seem made yet in the art that was produced, but seems to have been part of it in the future in the art of this period, where you said that you had to apply the word "biography," and I never—I didn't really understand how to take it then, if you meant the biography of the artist, or your own personal autobiographical view of something, or—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, I didn't mean it in the latter mode, but I did mean it in the sense [. . . –RPW] that one's personal life as an artist—one's body, and one's relationship to other people, and one's disappointments, and one's satisfactions—are built into the process of art-making. And to somehow assume that—when I was teaching Symbolism and that kind of thing—it's critical that—and I remember that I hadn't even thought of this in 60 years, but [for example, –RPW] Redon becomes a coloristic artist at the death of his child. Before then, he was a black-and-white artist. Clearly—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —that biographical detail should be noted, because there has to be something beyond its—red, orange, and blue is pretty.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [Inaudible.]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Or amongst death of his sister, or whatever—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Or the—yes—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —there are many—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —it's simply absurd to look at a work of art as if [. . . –RPW] it's a neutral—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, that it exists—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —bottle of—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —in a vacuum—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Exactly.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —on its own without—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Anyway, that's what I meant. However—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: However, at that very moment—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, no—at this very moment.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: However, it seems to me also absurd that the capacity to recognize that is a projection of one's own biography.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And so the issues that, you know, occupied my life in some serious way, you know, were critical, and so it's just so that I was able to make—what you generously perceived as an important observation—was because my own life has its own—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —autobiographical content, which makes one sensitive to that in another person.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Is it realizing that that caused you to start publishing your entries? Or diaristic views of—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well it's, [. . . –RPW] after all is said and done, I'm teaching, and I'm heading east, and I'm professorial. I have a private life, and I'm creating my life with my friend, and we have family obligations. One just doesn't have time to—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But you seemed to have had it before; in that period at *Artforum*, you were writing feverishly.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I know, but I—but there's—the journal entry, two courses that sit there, trued and faired, and fizzled and just not—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, correct.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —but the journal entry is a fast way to synth—or to make small, the subject of a big, extensive essay. And it's more interesting.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And it's more immediate.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It's more immediate. So that—it's also like, you've only so much time that's apportioned to you. So this is one way to get an essay written, by lifting it out of the journal. And particularly when you put them sequentially, you begin to get a whole sense of a body of an artist's career, of the evolution—evolution of the artist, of the larger relationship with the artist who—the context in which he or she finds himself or herself. Okay, that's—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And the extent to which you're privileged to that information—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —and I—exact—that was a moment of being; I was extremely privileged to it. I mean, I recognize the fact that I was—it was part of this easy entry that marked my youth.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It's not the case of the certain moment that—you know, in one's life, one's obligations change, that one's possessions become possessors. So that the—that kind of experience, I don't have and—or at least I don't—I kept on telling myself, Well, when I retire, and when I'm old, I'll start painting again. And I'll go through the journals, and I'll rewrite—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, of course.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But the space, it doesn't—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, we don't—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —it doesn't occupy the driven space that it once did. I mean, I used to think it couldn't be more important than to get down an idea in a journal—couple of times a week, or once a week, or once a—I haven't written in my journals in two years, three years. And I don't feel—I felt liberated, curiously, from them.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah. But in writing about art, there's always a disconnect between the object you see and what you write about it. If you write about it quickly, whatever you say has to be different from whatever you would say if you gave yourself two or three weeks, or a month, or a year to think about it.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It's perfect—it's exactly true. I mean, it's perfectly true.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So these—it's very philosophically distant. I mean, look, you know, the short journal entry is looking at an object right in front of you right now.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [You're looking –RPW] at an object as if you're in outer space. You're seeing the earth from the moon.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: You're seeing the object from the moon.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah. But the minute you talk about it, there has to be a disconnect, because you aren't the object. You're interpreting it, no matter what you have to say about it. It's an interpretation.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And particularly if the interpretation is months, years in the making.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes. And there are so many people who, in the end, don't any longer even see the object—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —because their thoughts took them so far away that, in the end, it's got nothing to do with the object at all.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Are we—we agree with one another.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: No—well, on that level—yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But anyway, I also am amused every time the subject of realism comes up, because you set it up like an argument between abstraction and realism, which of course, it is. But you sometimes reluctantly declare that realism is the winner. And you do that sometimes with some condescension. At one quote you said, you quoted the old adage that "the realists, like the poor are"—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —"are always with us." [But I added the phrase "was also class-indicting." . . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I think it was that I made it as a joke, and somewhat self-deprecatingly.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Because, in fact, that is the platform from which most people dive into the arts.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And so, I still am admiring—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —of great realist paintings. I don't know that we have that many great realist artists, but it's—also let's take an artist who we regard as an absolute central column of Western culture, somebody like Cézanne. The work is so immutably influential, overwhelmingly influential, it's hard to think of him as realist. I mean, he's so generative of everything across Picasso, et cetera, the Constructivists, and what have you. But there is something about—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, I think he's not trying to simulate the world in the traditional form of a realist, of course. But going for the essence of what something is—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Or creating a world—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —and that's a different attitude.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It is a different attitude. But the point I wanted to make is that when we encounter that kind of realist painting, we're aware of how minor the "wet paints school" [the Sunday parents, are –RPW]—how minor, and how charming in its naiveté, [. . . –RPW] most realist painting is.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, almost—I would say 99 percent of the general population thinks that art is the ability of an artist to simulate the real world.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Nature—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And in whatever particular medium he happens to select.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —and mirror—exactly. [Still, I submit that it –RPW] is a 700-year-old tradition.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And it's probably one that will never go away, but I guess—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It's certainly not going to away because, as a political tactic, it's also very desirable.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: If you [have] here the culture that values the affirmation of the cultural values, then realism is [a] very, very easy thing. But I mean, I still—when I look at an Ingres [or a Vermeer –RPW], and it—still my jaw drops.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mean, like, it's jaw-dropping.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah. And some great academic sculpture—not just American, but of the 19th century—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —19th century. Yeah, exactly. It's so—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —is staggering—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —staggering. [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But there is a tendency for people who are art critics, and people who are, let's say, knowledgeable in the arts, to look at realists, realism, especially that which is successful, and look upon it disdainfully—like, say, Norman Rockwell.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, I totally agree with you. It's—I've seen spectacularly impressive Norman Rockwell pictures.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: So have I.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And I think to myself, Well, admittedly, the genre quotient is extremely affecting. But the sheer manual, optical and manual, dexterity is mind-boggling.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes. Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I agree with you. But we would be laughed at in our capacity to include in our spectrum that appreciation, because theoreticians of contemporary art—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —as if it were "by fiat" paintings, that kind of thing, now that's no longer a service. That the only art of significance is camera-derived.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It's a slightly different focus, but—well, the only art of significance is—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, art that reacts to the invention of the camera.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, or that in some sense, the originating camera has supplanted the hand as the

generative tool [at least in the present –RPW]. That kind of—that's certainly conventional to contemporary thought.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, so the artists they admire are those who attempt to go beyond it.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Or, you know, you can make a strong argument, but the fact that Fauvism, for example, may never have existed were color photography as good as black-and-white photography at that moment. They were doing what photography couldn't do, basically. And doing it to a heightened degree by infusing the picture with color that was almost garish in some cases.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And as we—since you and I—and we know that everything is clearer when each state of an evolution, its painting and drawing, is put in chronological sequence. The natural evolution towards what is seemingly abhorrent is no longer abhorrent. So, like the Fauves—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: No, but—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —this is teaching 19th-century [art history –RPW]—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, well—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —or 20th-century—if you do it, done that way, we see that it comes out of Divisionism. It's—and Divisionism comes out of some attitude with regards to the touch and to Seurat, et cetera, and Pointillism and the Neo-, you know, Chromoluminarism that is notions of—optical notions that were available and made these choices seem right and avant-garde. It's a bit like Post-Minimalism. It was—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —it hit the zeitgeist, right.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But it has a completely normative relationship to everything that preceded it. It's not abnormal.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: No. But people do have a tendency of thinking of art, in general, as a progression of an interruptive progression where we were bad at one moment. Like looking at Egyptian sculpture, we got better. Look at the Renaissance, and then—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, of course, because we've mastered anatomy or something.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, that. But that's the great fallacy that you have to get untaught in the proper art history schools, I think. Anyway—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Maybe I'm wrong; it seemed to me that kind of naïve attitude is—people don't walk into—well, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe it still is the "wet paints club," and that's where art begins.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, one of the problems that I've perceived over time is that, to go back to what students think when they become part of the art world, they make decisions, really hard-and-fast decisions, about what will be their future. Almost as hard and fast as, let's say, the difference between a Republican and a Democrat.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Today.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And, yes, today. And they can't open their eyes and see the other alternatives. Once they've locked in—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —they're done, and that creates a polarization in the art world. One that continues where an artist—and accomplished abstractionist—wouldn't think twice about admiring the work of a realist painter on any level.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Okay—advanced avant-garde artists discover past art, [see it as –RPW] absolute paradigms. Look, at one point, the re-appreciation of Piero della Francesca is a function, also, of what Cubism taught the contemporary eye—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —that kind of thing. But two things because of the teaching—my teaching was not only with art history majors, but it was with studio majors. And one of the things that I always [hoped –RPW] the studio major, in looking at his or her work, would recognize [is] that what—on one hand, knowing what he or she had done, but knowing what he or she had [NOT –RPW] done. That [awareness –RPW] of the possibility and parameters outside of the achievement. That's one thing.

Now, the second part is—forcing that recognition meant that I would hear [terrific –RPW] things from the studio major. Not necessarily—also from the art historians presenting papers. And so I would go home and [record –RPW] the most amazing observations. So the journal became also a kind of—at least a memorial of some of the things that [. . . –RPW] happen in the studio conversation.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So I think that's—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: No, that's a good point.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, it's your experience, too, because you come out of the studio experience. Your art history grew out of a studio experience. My art history grew out of a studio experience. I mean, I was a painter and then exhibiting, that kind of thing. And your life was also—you came into—your art history was completely, not completely, but largely influenced, too. Where you can, it's suffused.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes. Well, I'm—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —the consciousness of the studio experience.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: When I was teaching at Parsons School of Design, I was so committed to that idea that I proposed that the art historians all teach one studio class, and that all the fine arts people teach one art history class, as an exchange. It didn't go very far, as you can imagine.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That's what I said—at least. But part of it, actually, has gone far, which is the teaching of studio—conversations with studio majors by art history majors. [. . . But this is all rather naïve –RPW]—it's not a common place. [. . . –RPW]

Particularly also because that's the history of the teaching [itself. When –RPW] I went to teaching, it was considered—the history of teaching of immediate, or of Modern art, let alone immediately contemporary art, was already a radical idea in the context of an art history program. [. . . –RPW] No one wants—no one cares very much whether you know about Sumerian art history or that kind of thing. I don't want to—but back then, it was—Renaissance and medieval art history, that was the—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, what you [mostly –RPW] studied and—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —that's what you studied as an art historian.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And John Rewald famously told people often that he was refused the first time when he proposed Cézanne as a topic [. . . –RPW] for his dissertation because Cézanne was too modern.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Too modern, too disputable—exactly.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Can't imagine today, with probably 500 dissertations that have been done on Cézanne.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah, but more like 5,000 or 50,000.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: [. . . One of the earliest articles that you published in *Artforum* was on the African-American artist Henry Ossawa Tanner. *Artforum* was devoted to contemporary art, so it seems like –FN] an unusual place to publish an article about him—but why not?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Why not?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But what was your interest in his work? Did that come before that exhibition you reviewed?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I thought it was—I actually thought [he] was an extraordinary under-, even unknown figure of tremendous fascination, and I might say, a particularly significant [one] to me because of its symbolist content; essentially, he's a symbolist. A realist symbolist—but particularly because, as an African American, he was—the marginalization that was so profound—but even though he was able to find a degree of high reputation in France, sort of, even lead a kind of school, but—on a kind of sociological level, a virtually unique figure. I mean, that he was also a choice student of Eakins's, that kind of thing—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —with an extremely pointed biographic life. I mean, we really know virtually nothing—I mean, that's incorrect now; that's all been changed. But back then, one knew nothing, very little about the assimilated African American of—who was already participating in what was recognizable as ["polite –RPW] society."

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mean, that kind of proper, religious, and even in some sense, economically stable figure. His life was still so close to the Emancipation so that—I mean, it's really extremely rich, but [. . . –RPW] one doesn't think of Tanner and Booth Tarkington [together –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: If they're still trying to get—it's not. So I was also fascinated by that sociological disconnect. That was also intensified [by the fact –RPW] that he married a white woman. So it's—on a biographical level, it's apart from interpreting the context of the painting. But also, he's painted the *Music Lesson*, influenced by Degas, the influence of Eakins; he was [an important –RPW] painter.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Or, at least, he's a deeply underappreciated figure who should be much more familiar on the—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, especially to Americans.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: To Americans. I mean, that's precisely—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, and he is still virtually unknown.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And they're heartbreaking—some of these pictures, in the way that you and I recognize great genre painting, can be heartbreaking.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Anyway, when you wrote—well, there was an article that appeared in 1989, more or less, close to the time when you—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I'm stirred by this—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —retired from CUNY, about you as a writer. You're probably familiar with it, by Jennifer Penrose Borum.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I'm sorry; I'm not familiar with it.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: No. She wrote an article about your art criticism of the previous decade.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: You're kidding—where?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And you've never seen it?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That doesn't mean that—wait a second. Yes. This was a series that Donald Kuspit—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: No, that's not the series by Donald Kuspit where he wrote about different—he wrote that, and it was about different art historians and critics, and you responded to that. No, this is a separate, completely independent article that I cut out when it came out and—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: What—is it—does it decimate me?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Wait, give it back to me. I'll ask you questions about it. No—because she's very praise-worthy. But—because there's a basic idea that she—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Is she praise-worthy, or praising?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: [Laughs.] Oh, no—you're right, she's very—you're right. I'm not sure what the—you're right, she was praising, because she said that you tried to identify yourself with the persona of the dandy, especially as it survives in the writings of Baudelaire.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That's right.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: She said that for Baudelaire, "Dandyism was a moral and heroic option taken by an individual alienated by bourgeois values—which expresses itself as a physical and mental preoccupation with the new."

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I'll accept that.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, good. I wondered if you—anyway, she also says—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mean, that's not all it is, but that's one of the things it is.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But she beautifully describes your previous writings, because she points out that you posit—that there was a built-in art historical genealogy that breaks from Greenberg's story of art that goes from Monet to Picasso to Pollock, and Newman, which she points out, though, that you say that there is a parallel and subversive family tree of artists that goes from, and I quote, "from the Symbolist to the Dadaist to the Surrealist to Rauschenberg to Johns to the Post-Minimalist," and observing quite significantly, to my mind, that all of these artists, quote again, "value personality over paint, content over form, consciousness over the conscious, disorder over order, subjectivity over objectivity—in a nutshell, mind over matter."

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Did I write that or did she write that?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: No, she wrote that about your writing—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I [like –RPW] it.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, because she is basically saying that you have an instinct of admiring these artists who do put the idea over the form.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I see the point she—that you are bringing to my attention,

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —or that she is making. I am stirred. It reminds me of something that I have not thought of in years, which is simply a chapeau to Barbara Rose.

I remember once Barbara Rose saying, Just imagine—these were not her words, but this was the idea—that our genealogy of the Modern did not begin with Cézanne but began with Degas.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And I thought, Now, that is a really interesting idea, Barbara. I did not know if she's ever run with it, but what you just read reminded me suddenly of that, I think, very rich observation.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Anyway, I often say that de Kooning, I always remind people, once famously said that he did not know exactly where he was going, but he hoped it would be on the same train as Marcel Duchamp.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: What a wonderful thing to say.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah. But do you feel that these—do you think that there are these parallels in art history, where they diverge with Duchamp and go into two different directions at the beginning of the century, never to converge again? Because there are those critics, like Greenberg and others, who thought that this—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —this was abhorrent. This wasn't art, whatever it was. The most curious thing happens. We see this divergent—we see Duchamp, who comes out of Cubo-Futurism; we are like, Oh, that even comes out of decorative representationalism at the beginning of the century. Okay.

It moves into a divergent moment in which the thought of painting becomes lost in the found object, the *objet trouvé*, the arcana of the *Large Glass*, et cetera, et cetera. It becomes a highly conceptualized process, and the stuff doesn't look like art. But eventually, it keeps on being looked at. And what happens to the eye is that the eye begins to see, and what it thought was ugly [become –RPW] things that are familiar. And the things that are

familiar do not breed contempt, [they] breed acceptance. And it breeds a new sense of what the aesthetic can be.

So when people today talk about [laughs] Duchamp, that the Duchamp tradition and the—Dadaism—they do not think about it; they say, It is beautiful, because these things have been sufficiently looked at as to be normative in the eye. And once they are normative in the eye, they also begin to become aestheticized. So we look at it and say, Well, this is beautiful, without realizing that some extraordinary radical process of familiarity has taken place.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: You might—it is funny that you say that, because Duchamp said pretty much the same thing, that he fought his entire life to present the ready-made, "Throw it in their face," he said, to remove it from the plane of aesthetics. But he admitted that, at the end of his life, the *Bottle Rack*, he said, "Looked like a *hérisson*," you know the little French porcupine [hedgehog].

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah, I do.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And with that association, he couldn't help but see it as attractive. He had to break down himself that there was an aesthetic component because of looking at it for so much time.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [Inaudible.] I have not talked about Duchamp in—with, certainly, you—in 25 years [laughs], a hundred years. But it is also in the Pierre Cabanne interviews. Does not Duchamp say, "Oh, yes, the 21st century: Kandinsky, Duchamp, it's all the same." Doesn't he say something like that?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Not quite.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, he does. [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: What he did say was that, "After 25 years," which he altered to 50 years, he said, "all art becomes part of art history."

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But that is not quite the same thing.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, it might have been something like that.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I feel like finding the passage. I am sure I have circled it.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Do you want to look for it? We can hit pause.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No. But it's the whole idea that the aesthetic quotation becomes seeable and this—the ugly thing becomes itself a new model for what is potentially beautiful.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That is all. It's a simple—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —idea once you sort of get it out.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: After this nice article, you might not have as good an opinion of this woman after I read you this. At the end she quoted your account of a party that was held to honor Leo Castelli in Zurich in 1982, which you attended. And she remarks, "What is lacking in the entries is the element of sincerity which the entries promised but do not deliver."

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [I wrote the catalogue for that show, *Gentle Snapshots,* but –RPW] I am sure she is right. [Laughs.]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But I have no idea what she is talking about. I think the entries are very sincere; they are your immediate reaction to what happens.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, I think what she is pointing out is that, particularly since she is pointing out the dandyism, is that everything is a mask.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yup.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But there's even a mask of sincerity which [laughs] is insincere. Something of that kind.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, it might have been what she was referring to, now that I think about it, because the whole essay was about being a dandy.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I'll have to read it.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I will give you a copy.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [. . . –RPW] I'm just quite fascinated. [Even though the dandy is a tired critical trope ever since it was invented by Baudelaire. –RPW] What is her name?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Jennifer Penrose-Borum. B-O-R-U-M.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And all the names are interesting.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: [Laughs.] That is true.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mean "Penrose and Borum" is very impressive.

[They laugh.]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I know she's related to the Penroses we know, became far more famous than the Penrose we know, who is Roland Penrose. His, I think, cousin or brother-in-law is a famous physicist.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I did not know that.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, at the mid part of the 20th century. Anyway, okay.

Oh, you wrote for this essay, the big exhibition that was at the Whitney Museum, [*The New Sculpture, 1965–75:*] *Between Geometry and Gesture*, you wrote quite a few—you wrote an introductory essay, and separate essay on Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier, Richard Tuttle, Lynda Benglis, Barry Le Va—anyway you sum up what Post-Minimalism is and then, without acknowledging it, it seems at the time that was exactly coincident with the time when you retired and stopped writing, pretty much. And I wondered whether you were aware of it at the time when you were writing it?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: You know, I imagine people have a very different idea of a smashup. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I just—it has been put to me before—I mean, I warned you—terribly caught up in the sound of shattering of gears, that sort of thing.

Later thinking about it, like writing in the 50th-anniversary issue of *Artforum*, what has been lost and that kind of thing. But at the moment, back then, yes. Lawrence Alloway and John Coplans were animated by a different political and social thinking, and so Annette left and Roz Krauss left and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe left, and that sort of thing. So *October* was founded. Richard [Martin, of *Arts Magazine* –RPW] was exceptionally—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —was very sympathetic to my work. I was really not—I was much more aware—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —that this was five years after all that happened. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] This was when you really stopped writing and worked for the gallery, and I was just wondering; it seems like such—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Was this when I went to [. . . –RPW]—wait a second; if I was in a gallery, meaning I was working with Larry Gagosian—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [. . . –RPW] At that point I said, "It is incorrect to publish." That's a different thing. I said, "No, I'm now working with a gallery. It's—that's bad form to publish," because in that case any support of the artist in the gallery would be read as—correctly read as unfortunate.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But you wrote introductions to—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: To catalogues.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —to catalogues. [. . . –RPW]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, I wrote catalogues and organized exhibitions. That's something I'm very proud of. But that's within the context of the work I was hired to do in the gallery [and only for the gallery –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Can you recall specific exhibitions? You said you were proud of some. Like what were they? And especially the artists you met in the '90s when you were working with Larry, just Larry for now.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I haven't done that. I haven't really thought it through. I don't—but I certainly was—Yves Klein; the first show I did for Larry was the Yves Klein, which I was able to do because I [had been –RPW] a friend of Yves Klein.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Because I worked in the gallery, which is his first—virtually his first gallery in Paris, and I came to know Yves Klein there. So I had access. I brought Larry out to meet—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —his widow?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Rotraut [Uecker]. That turned to be—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —Daniel Moquay [Rotraut's second husband –RPW]. That's the inheritance of the family that we—I played an extraordinary intermediary. I was very proud of that exhibition, but certainly *Beckmann Self-Portraits*.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That was a great show. The Johns—wasn't that for Larry too?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah. Yes, it was. *According to What?*

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: *According to What?*—you did the essay—[. . . and the –RPW] Rubens show, at the very end.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: There's this very curious moment in which, across—one of the [young –RPW] in the gallery—why am I blocking? [Rory Howard –RPW]—who was very well connected socially in London, was aware that there were several Rubenses for sale. [His uncle was a major Old Master dealer. –RPW] And so we built, you know, a Rubens survey—well, not a survey, but a Rubens portraits [show, an –RPW] extraordinary exhibition. I'm still thinking of Larry.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: David Salle, I mean, but that's—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, but you knew him before.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I knew—yes, exactly.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I knew David before, but I didn't know Rubens [. . . –RPW]. [Laughs.]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But Yves Klein, you actually met when you were—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, Yves Klein I actually knew. I knew what he was like; I knew what his family was like. I knew what his conversation was like.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, that informs your writings, I know.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So that Yves Klein was—that was the whole thing, by the way. I became very much involved, because Léon and I [. . . –RPW] would have a summer break. We would—we went to live in Nice. So, rented an apartment on the Cours Saleya, [. . . –RPW] Le Palais Jaune, Matisse, that sort of thing. I became very much involved with this small group of people, again, who—I didn't create it, but this thing [that] emerges in some of my writing is something called the École de Nice, but there's no history about it yet.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So there even eventually—there's a doctoral dissertation on the École de Nice with, you know, Arman.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And Yves Klein at the center of it, but writing about that was tremendously important because again, the same kind of experience with a handful of artists. Five or six that welcomed me into their midst. I'm still connected to the widows, since—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And when the switch from Larry to Robert [Mnuchin] occurred, what was the occasion of that? Was it, you were approached or—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, Robert is an old [friend –RPW]. Weirdly enough, Mrs. Mnuchin, Adriana, had heard me lecture at the Whitney in 19—I don't know, 1980.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: 19—no, probably—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: 1982.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —yeah, oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And she said—she liked the lecture [. . . –RPW]—"Well, why don't you come and have dinner [with us –RPW]." And so Léon and I were [invited, but we met a –RPW], you know, a range of people; I'm sitting with the head of the New York Stock Exchange—I mean, well, you know, Goldman Sachs—completely beyond and outside of the conventional parameters of our experience.

We became quite close. Robert was then retiring from Goldman Sachs [and planning to open a new gallery –RPW]. Robert said to me, "I'd love to ask you to join me, but I can't ask a friend, because if I blow up, I can't blow up at a friend. It's an inhibiting experience." I said, "I understand perfectly." I was then with Larry. I said, "I understand. It's perfectly all right." Into his second year—and this, coincidentally, was a very difficult time in the Gagosian Gallery history, which is yet to be written because Larry is [an] extremely guarded personality, but yet [there is an –RPW] extremely important history to be written there, is like Durand-Ruel in a way.

Larry was going through a [. . . –RPW] bad moment. I was not particularly happy, and Robert said, "You know, Robert, this is much harder than I thought. Doing these exhibitions and getting the material and having a historical program vis-à-vis contemporary art." He said, "Would you reconsider whether you might come to join me?" And I said—it couldn't have fallen more naturally—and I said I certainly would reconsider. So I accepted the terms, and I remember the day I [. . . –RPW] had to leave Larry. And I said, "Larry"—Larry was tremendously relieved because I was—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But you were leaving.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —leaving because he had a complicated—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Personal problems?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, no, no. I think it was economic.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, economic problems.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So that—so he—this was a great relief to him. He was certainly quite elegant about it. And I said, "I'm joining Robert." And was, "Oh, that's great. You're perfect. You know each other. [. . . –RPW] It's great." So, I remember [going] down to the—to SoHo that evening. I actually went to a couple of openings to sort of celebrate the idea I was liberated from Larry [laughs] and he—and I—I ran into Bill Wilson [. . . –RPW]—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, yeah, I know who he is.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —who I knew from Queens College quite well. Anne Wilson's husband, et cetera [. . . –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [. . . –RPW] His mother was an artist [May Wilson –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So, I know—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Still around.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I said—I know, knew, Bill in some superficial way quite well because we were [both

professors at Queens College –RPW]. He was in the English department. I was in the Art History department. [. . . Bill eventually directed –RPW] the testamentary estate of Ray Johnson—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —who I knew very well.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And so did I.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: We have to talk about that.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: You have to write then, because that's the—Ray Johnson's souvenirs are important. Anyway, I said, "So, you know, Mnuchin." At that time, [he] was Jim Corcoran's partner. And I said, "You know, I'm leaving Gagosian," and Bill Wilson [laughs], in his gallery, said, "Guess what, everybody? Pincus is leaving S&M for C&M."

[They laugh.]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: He's very witty that way. He comes up with one-liners that are priceless.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mean, I thought it was very funny.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But in your years with Robert was a different work—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Eleven years.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Was it a very different working experience or less pressure or what was the—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Very different, [of course –RPW]. Larry did a great Marden show. I mean, there's—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: He did some shows that—[. . . –RPW]. But to this day, he does shows that are better than most museums. [And so does Robert. –RPW]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —in particular. We have all the catalogues. They're amazing. I'm looking at Picasso. I mean, the John Richardson material for [Mnuchin –RPW]. They're amazing. Okay, what I'm trying to get to is that it was different insofar as I was perceived—I was perceived differently. I was already being perceived as a kind of grand old man sort of thing. [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It was like, I was just not—in both cases, I was just not—I was never seen as a salesman.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Not that there's any low status attached to that condition. At least, I don't attach it to that condition, but I was—there was a certain—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But you were officially the museum—I mean, the exhibition—organizer.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes, I was the official—in both places. Yeah.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Both, yeah, places.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And in certain cases, it's simply identified as such in the catalogue.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And what exhibitions there are the most memorable? There are so many of them.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: There are so many of them. There were five de Kooning exhibitions and they—the first exhibition was of the Matisse drawings, and the first exhibition was Maillol sculpture. There was *Picasso: The Classical Period*, which is a fabulous exhibition. You know, to secure the loans—and it was actually museological. I mean, you know what—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, I know. I know.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And particularly, I have to say—in both cases, particularly in [Mnuchin's –RPW] case, the difficulty of securing the loans was much less because there was—Robert, in his life, as a collector, had been an extremely strong supporter of public institutions. So there wasn't the sense that they were lending [across –RPW] the museum-private gallery breach—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —which was very difficult to cross—was easier to bridge. I would say in 11 years with Robert, and even 12 years—there was an extra year along the line—and we still, we're neighbors and—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mean, well, I just saw him this past weekend [. . . –RPW]. We're also—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: He's a very agreeable man socially, and maybe that's one of the differences, I suppose. Like, did you go to dinner with Larry Gagosian? No. You—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Larry is a very, very guarded—he's [an] extremely guarded—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —personality, but I have to say, there were several of us. Occasionally, would, like I brought Ealan Wingate to the gallery—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —and Raymond Foye, [whom –RPW] I'm very fond of—fond of both of them tremendously. So, like, occasionally, it worked out. [Perhaps if –RPW] Larry didn't have a social engagement following [an opening –RPW], we might have dinner together. But I remember something very vivid, which was our desire to please Larry, because he's so difficult to please. So there was something about our conversation, which was I recognized and remember as kind of stilted [pitched, as it were –RPW]. I never had that feeling with Robert.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Robert has such a profound enthusiasm. A deep love of the objects, deep love of Abstract Expressionism, and when he knows about something, he knows it *au fond*. [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Unequaled.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mean, his Rothko knowledge and his—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —de Kooning knowledge, and his adoration of the Abstract Expressionists is profound, and he created great shows. I mean, Pollock drawings. By the way, I did a [wonderful –RPW] Pollock [show –RPW] with Larry, too, which was late Pollock.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But how about the interaction with contemporary artists in either place?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, the interaction with contemporary artists is much stronger with Larry.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: [Still, a recent David Hammons show at Robert's –RPW] brought a tremendous amount of attention to the gallery.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That's an extraordinary show for Robert. But it's a perfect example of how things which seem aggressive in the eye eventually establish a new paradigm for what's beautiful. So Hammons is an artist who is in that shift [of] sensibility.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I agree. Though he's remarkably reticent. I can't get him to answer questions.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Oh, yeah, incredibly difficult. [. . . –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But like, for example, did you spend any time with Jasper Johns at all?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Only conversationally. We've known each other for a long—which completely—I mean, I visited the studio when he lived in New York City.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Have you visited him in Sharon, Connecticut, because he lived nearby?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I know [. . . –RPW] where he lives [. . . –RPW] on Mudge Pond [in Sharon –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mean, I've driven by a dozen times, and we have friends in common, but we've not invited him, and he's not invited us. I do remember something, however: he was also very well served by the kind of secretarial backup—I think there was a young woman, I mean, who would know about where every drawing is and what—I can't think of her name.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Sarah [Taggart . . . –RPW].

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That's right. She would—so that one worked—he was very, very well seconded.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: For very good reasons, nonetheless. So it would be wrong for me to claim intimacy of any kind.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I went to see him often and—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I had a greater interaction with Rauschenberg.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, yes. Did you organize exhibitions for him?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: For Rauschenberg?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: About Rauschenberg?

FRANCIS NAUMANN: At either Gagosian or—I don't remember any.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I don't remember any either.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But you went to visit him where? In Captiva?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No, here in New York City [inaudible] with the street here.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: On Lafayette Street.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Lafayette Street, exactly. And because he figures [so largely –RPW] in the emotional and intellectual life of Ileana—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: He certainly did.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So that we would have—I would see him through—across Ileana and Antonio [Homem, her adopted son and gallery director –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I got to know him through the same people.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: The same—exactly. That's really a central sort of fulcrum in the balance of her life.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, he was. Yeah, anyway, but how about when you did the exhibition of Jeff Koons?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Oh, that was a [terrific –RPW] show.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes, it was.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And you got to know him at least through that.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Through that, yes, I got him to know through that. I got—and I began to have an appreciation for the obsessive-compulsive character, and I don't think it's mere foppish affectation. I think it's a genuine—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —obsessiveness, and I don't think his gift for semi—how do you say it?—semi-religious interpretation of normative objects is insincere. I mean, I think he is—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, I think he believes what he says.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: He believes what he says, and he is a complex—oh, look, you know, we haven't even mentioned, I have a long, deep affection with Andy Warhol, was very important. We were even an item at one point. But the point is the—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: You were an item? [Laughs.] Okay, let's leave it at that if you want.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: When I first got back from Paris, I was in some measure absorbed into the Silver Factory. As there's lots—two stories here at least I can tell. There's—I mean, I was perfectly—I don't want to use the kind of gross idiom, but I was a kid [. . . –RPW]—you know, there are—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, I know.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: But 13 Most Beautiful Boys—I'm one of the 13 Most Beautiful Boys, that kind of thing. And he made—we played—we looked for an apartment together, all that kind of [thing –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: You and Andy did?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah, really. But it's—it was absurdity. It was part of something that was an afternoon's absurdity, as from anything which was remotely sincere. But that was the period again—then I re-met, in some serious way, Léon, who we—you know, we went to [kindergarten –RPW] together as children. We met as adults, and then a different life occurred. A different set of family obligations, et cetera. But Andy was very much part of—I said—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Did you go to—you went to the Factory. Did you go to dinner with him, too? Things like that?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Oh, yeah. We would have—we would go to have [a] hamburger at the Brasserie and, sort of—I was still just teaching the, sort of, evening classes that I mentioned. That sort of thing, at Queens College, and I would have to call—it's four o'clock—every day and teach him a new word. And there was a certain silliness attached to it which was—look, I was very aware of his celebrity, and obviously, I was then a very superficial person. [Laughs.] [Perhaps still am. –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: So this was in the late—or in the '60s, early '60s probably.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Early '60s, but then at the end of the year, I no longer could bear the squirrels. The people [were] just constantly there all the time, being underground superstars and such. And it was no longer an environment that I felt drawn by, and so the whole thing lapsed. Then [just –RPW]—Fred Hughes came in, people I really [felt little empathy with, and so we became friends, Andy and I –RPW]. We would—we became—and then we would see each other at openings, that sort of thing. But we were no longer part of the same social whirl, as it were.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: When you went to dinner with him, was he—isn't it—speak of reticent, he seems, and interviews that you see, that he never talks or he hardly ever talks.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, part of his—I was aware of his, kind of, deficiencies, as it were, but he was actually—look, there are people who loved him, after all [is] said and done. It's absurd. He fell outside of the parameters of what might draw one towards him, both physically and intellectually, although clearly, the intellectual quotient was of a different order and of a very powerful magnitude. I think it's inescapable not to recognize him as a kind of—however much one may be just disinterested in the [work –RPW]—but not to recognize him as a mighty pillar of a structure of contemporary art.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, yeah. Did you recognize that—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yes.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —when you knew him? I mean—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I wrote about it. I wrote a piece; that's one of the reasons I got to *Artforum*. I wrote a piece about Andy and submitted it to Phil Leider. It might have been my submission piece. And Phil said, "This is terrific." He said, "We're just doing a 'Saint Andy' issue." There's that cover called "Saint Andy," the silver issue—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, yes. Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —"It just came in too late; this would've been perfect for it. But would you review—would you come and be part of the staff?"

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So Andy—Andy is—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: You never thought to—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —I mean, by the way, I love looking at my picture now when I see it. You know the—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Of the 13—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah, he did those outtakes, whatever they're called— [Screen tests –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —these—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, did you also, not just pose for his camera, did you—were you videoed? Was that—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Yeah, one of them.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, that—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: There's a—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —screen—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —screen test. On one of the screen tests.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And do you just sit there and say nothing? Is that what you're—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Oh, yes—exactly. But then 50 years later, somebody did a catalogue—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: A book even—yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: An inventory—yes. And then I remember a very funny thing happened. And there was a *Portraits of Warhol* at a New England museum. And I was invited to lecture there. And as I'm lecturing, they projected onto me my screen test. And so I'm—there are pictures of that somewhere on the shelves here.

But I could say something really very interesting—at least I think it's very interesting—and now it's a matter of public record, at least of historical record. I went to Music & Art; Léon, my Léon Hecht, went to Industrial Art, now the High School of Art and Design. He wanted to be a commercial artist and eventually became a brilliant, important textile designer and founded a company for the Rockefellers, et cetera, et cetera.

When Léon went to Industrial Art, his great mentor was a poet called Daisy Aldan. And I can—I see it on the shelf now that they show it to you. She's a remarkable, inspirational figure who herself founded a kind of Abstract Expressionist art and poetry review called *Folder* magazine. I have to get this for you. I don't want to get off the shelf—anyway, and she [made –RPW] the first important English translations of *Un coup de Dés*, et cetera. She was a remarkable figure. So suddenly Léon was a kind of choice student, is publishing in *Folder* magazine, like with John Ashbery and—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —Pasolini, and I said, "It's astonishing." So now they're, kind of, rare objects—[. . . –RPW]. He, because of the making of the *Folder* magazine, learns how to screen-print, because it's this serigraphic publication of these—and these Abstract Expressionists, Grace Hartigan prints, and Larry Rivers, and all that kind of stuff is in it. It's just wonderful. He's learned it—so he eventually grows up and founds—because he's, like, a 16-year-old, 17-year-old—he founds a textile printing company, uses the same serigraphic

techniques, [printing –RPW] through silk screen on textiles. But he needs, at that point, an assistant, and he's still in touch with Daisy Aldan. And Daisy [says], "Well, I have a wonderful student for you. His name is Gerard Malanga."

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: And, exactly—you can see where this is going. So Gerry comes to work for Léon, and learns how to print through screen-printing on the textiles. Eventually, Gerry enters the Silver Factory, becomes a cherished member of the Silver Factory, as it were. And he—Andy has decided to do screen portraits. And Gerry said, "Well, I know how to do that. I learned it [from] Léon Hecht."

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Wow.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So this particular history—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: What an intersection.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Amazing intersection. So in some curious way, we keep on bumping into highly unexpected coincidences.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, you don't see [it] happening when they do, but—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Eventually this—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —eventually—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: —eventually. Then Léon actually moves out of the studio and is asked to form a company for Rockefeller Textile Printings, the oldest cotton printings in America, et cetera, in [Cranston] Rhode Island, and his life—he moves out of the studio and becomes an administrator of a going financial [business –RPW]—very different—okay, so that's—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, well, I knew nothing about that, and that does fascinate me. That was the other story; you said there were two stories about—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: That was the way—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —the Factory, and that was the other one. Okay. You've gone back to writing art criticism now; so once you left—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Once I left Mnuchin, I was clean again. [I was "halal." –RPW]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: And you enjoy that process of writing reviews?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Immensely. So like, for example, when I'm out of New York, as I am in the winter months, I can't cover the New York scene and I'm very frustrated [. . . –RPW]. But that was partially because I—there is a wonderful—the New York reviews editor is so highly professionalized. It's a real magazine. Research assistants and—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: —photo editors, I know.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It's not this, kind of, flying by the seat of your pants that—I mean, I love—Phil and I would sit around falling on the floor laughing because here was this magazine, so influential in art schools, and at the end we were, sort of, just inventing it out of thin air back then, in the old days [flying by the seat of our pants –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Well, it still remains the most influential in contemporary art.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Well, I just think—we have mentioned this, but I think that the important magazines are now so ugly; it's the last—actually, if you look at it—when I see what's happened to [Milton] Esterow's *ARTNews* [. . . –RPW]—there's a whole history of Tom's [Hess –RPW]—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Because they make the mistake of trying to compete with other popular culture magazines. That's the downfall.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: The downfall is to see the magazine exclusively as a vehicle for selling, it looks like, selling neckties and—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Oh, they've opened it up to not just the art world.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It's just a—and the typefaces and the pages are just so ugly.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: I agree.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: So what was once—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: There's also, you know—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mean, *ARTNews* was [once –RPW] a great magazine.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yes.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I mean, it was a great—

FRANCIS NAUMANN: But *ARTNews* had a rather lax policy in terms of whoever does it—they had the money to advertise; they pretty much put anything in there. But *Artforum* picks their advertisements. They just don't put, you know—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: They actually look at them, and it's one of the reasons that it has a still, kind of, cachet, is because you actually learn something by looking at the advertisements.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, just looking through the reviews. A lot of people I know buy the magazine for the advertisements, because it allows them to make a chart of what galleries they will go see.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: I'm glad you say that, because, in fact, it is—it still is the magazine that gives you a sense of what the range out there is.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: In a serious way, apart from whatever's written in there. That's why the editorial content is quite different. No, quite different, but it's—one can look at the pages of advertising; whereas what I see in *ARTNews* today, and *Art in America*, [strikes me as sad –RPW].

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, I agree. Anyway, I have one last question. We're already at the end.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Oh, we're there—that's unbelievable.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: Yeah, well, we've—

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: It's only 18 hours later. [Laughs.]

FRANCIS NAUMANN: It's three and a half hours, so far.

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: Oh, wow.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: So, anyway—I can personally attest to the fact that you're a kind, great, and generous person. Professionally, however, how would you like to be remembered? You have worn so many hats in the art world—teacher, art critic, exhibition organizer—is there any one activity in which you exceled and gave you greater satisfaction than the others?

ROBERT PINCUS-WITTEN: No.

FRANCIS NAUMANN: That's a perfect end.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]