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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Jim Shaw on April 1, 2016. The interview took place at Jim Shaw's studio in Altadena, California, and was conducted by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Jim Shaw and Hunter Drohojowska-Philp have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: This is Hunter Drohojowska-Philp interviewing Jim Shaw at the artist's studio in Altadena, California on April 1, 2016, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number one. And are we recording? We are recording.

JIM SHAW: All right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, Jim, congratulations on your very successful show at the New Museum, your retrospective in New York City, garnering rave reviews. But today, we're going to talk about the beginnings of Jim Shaw. So, when and where were you born?

JIM SHAW: Midland, Michigan in 1952. It's the home of Dow Chemical Corporation. Born into—I was the youngest of four siblings. I have three older sisters, all of whom are better academically than myself, and I think it's important to note because, if you're raised under those circumstances, you know how to behave like a girl, not like a boy.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You mentioned that before. So they were apparently nice to you?

JIM SHAW: Oh, yeah. There was nothing—it's like how fucked up you can get by a nice situation. It's like, once I entered the world of boys in—you know, normal boys in school, I'm—I was a wimp, and you're always cursed by that. Also, I was probably the youngest in the class for the most part. They—because they switch over in September, and I was born in August.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And now they find that kids that go into school born in August are way more likely to be given ADD drugs, to be, you know, diagnosed with—what do you call it? Because they're literally 11 months younger than the next group of people.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's so interesting.

JIM SHAW: So they're like—at age five, you know, that's a fifth of your whole life. That's a huge difference.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It is, and I want us to make sure this is—I'm getting levels on this—

JIM SHAW: Okay.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —so—

[Side conversation]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, just to back up a little bit, what are the names of your parents?

JIM SHAW: Mark and Dorothy Shaw.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: M-A-R-K?

JIM SHAW: Yep.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what was your mother's maiden name?

JIM SHAW: Douthitt.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How do you spell that?

JIM SHAW: D-O-U-T-H-I-T-T. I think there's two Ts.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: D-O-U-T-H—

JIM SHAW: I-T-T.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —I-T-T. And what were the names of your four siblings, those women?

JIM SHAW: My three siblings.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Three siblings.

JIM SHAW: Katie was the oldest. Her real name's Kathy. Nancy, the middle—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: K-A-T-I-E?

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Nancy, the middle one, and Ellie, the one the closest in age to me, so there was a gap. Nancy's six years older, and Katie's eight years older, and so they're sort of—the real siblings here would be Ellie and I, but still, a bunch of older sisters.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And so what year—what was your actual birthdate?

JIM SHAW: 8-8-52.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] And—so here you are in Midland, Michigan. Did you—how were you raised there? Did you always grow up in the same house?

JIM SHAW: We moved when I was about four or five years old, from sort of crappy little houses near the high school, to a house from the '20s that was sort of in the middle of nowhere, so there were no other—there were no other boys within easy walking distance. There was a busy street between myself and any, you know, playfellows from the school. That also was an alienating factor. If I weren't schizoid enough to begin with, these would all be among the alienating factors. And we got a TV around that time, so, of course, I could watch TV, not that there was anything much to see on it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So where did you go to school? Where was your first grammar school?

JIM SHAW: It was—God, what the hell? I forget the name of it—something-or-other Street School.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And it was the—also, there was a class of developmentally-disabled kids that went there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So if people wanted to mock me, they'd say, "Oh, you go to the one with the retarded kids!"

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh.

JIM SHAW: And people always want to mock you. That's part of being a boy, is constant jest.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So when you're at this grammar school, were you already drawing and painting or trying to make art of some sort?

JIM SHAW: Oh, yeah. I was drawing and sculpting dinosaurs and, you know, comic book things. My grandfather was a commercial artist, and my sister used to put out this—in high school, a literary magazine called *Despair*, or something like that.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Which sister was that?

JIM SHAW: Nancy.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: She was a beatnik, so I was encouraged—I did a satirical map of Middle Earth when I was in junior high. You know, it wasn't really very satirical. I remember once there was a—and my cousin was very creative, he's a writer, too. Cousin Craig Gardner, Craig Shaw Gardner. We did this thing every summer. We'd go to Grandfather's cottage, and I did this one that was a—this cartoon of a shoe with a hole in it with a match lit, and they asked me why it was funny, and I tried to explain that it was funny because that was a funny thing. I was too young to know what exactly was funny. But then my sisters, at one point, were mocking a rock-and-roll song because it used the word "ain't."

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Now, who—what was your grandfather's name?

JIM SHAW: Walter Mark Shaw.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And he was an illustrator?

JIM SHAW: Oh, no, Walter Shaw. I'm sorry, Walter Shaw. My father's name was Walter Mark Shaw, and he dropped the Walter, so he didn't have the same name as his father.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I see.

JIM SHAW: He was always in some competition with his father, who was a very accomplished watercolorist.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Accomplished watercolorist and illustrator?

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Was he also—when you say watercolorist, was he also a practicing fine artist? Did he exhibit his work?

JIM SHAW: Probably. You know, he had friends—he had a friend in Rochester. They lived in Rochester, New York, and he had this one friend who was—whose big claim to fame was that he regularly was featured on the cover of *Reader's Digest*, which ties me then to Tony Oursler, because his dad was the editor of *Reader's Digest*.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, that's cool. So he was—you were connected through *Reader's Digest*. [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: Yes, subconsciously, yeah. Somewhere we had one painting by this guy.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And—but you had—where was this cottage that you went to? Was it a summer thing?

JIM SHAW: Yeah, it was on Keuka Lake in upstate New York, one of the Finger Lakes.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Keuka?

JIM SHAW: Yeah, K-E-U-K-A, I think. And I—later I found out that the local corner town—I mean, it was literally a little, tiny grocery store, basically—which was known as Branchport, was originally called New Jerusalem, and it was the home to this woman who was sort of—subtly called herself the rebirth of Jesus Christ, also known as the Universal Public Friend Jemima Wilkinson, who was one of the great examples of an American self-made religion.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And so you were accidentally exposed to this from an early age?

JIM SHAW: Well, I didn't know at the time, but I remember reading about American religions and going, "Well, that is really interesting, that's a swell story," and having no idea, because it didn't say Branchport, it said New Jerusalem. Because, at one point—she died, and since she was supposed to be immortal, her second-in-command, who might have been her lover, hid her body from the other, communally-living adherents of the religion.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And this is, like, almost the origins of, you know, so much that you end up being interested in.

JIM SHAW: Yeah, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So it was right there in proximity.

JIM SHAW: Right there under my nose at five or 10, if I'd only known.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But—so your grandfather was—must have been encouraging to you because—

JIM SHAW: Oh, yeah, I think that's why I ended up being able to go to art school because, you know, my father kept saying, "Well, you know, you could sell insurance or be a pilot or something." I couldn't possibly sell anything.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Hang on a second, Jim. I just need to—it looks like it's recording, but it's really—hang on. Just let me put it on—

[Audio break.]

[Side conversation.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Volume is at 100 percent, so it should be picking up what you're saying, even if it doesn't seem to be showing it on the—here, so ignore that part. You were saying your grandfather—

[Side conversation.]

[Audio break.]

JIM SHAW: —as a teenager, as a boy.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So your—I like the story. Your grandfather came to your rescue in a way—

JIM SHAW: In a way.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —and let you go—made sure you went to art school instead of selling insurance.

JIM SHAW: Well, in another way, because my parents inherited half of his stake in the company that he was in.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what was that?

JIM SHAW: It was a high-end printing company that specialized in annual reports.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And at some point, they contacted my father, saying, you know, "We'd be glad to buy your shares in the company from you," because they knew it was going to be bought by Canadian Telecom, and my father never got around to selling them the shares. So circa the time that—just after Collette was born, they—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Collette being your daughter?

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So, 15—about 15 years ago, it went through this paroxysm where they were going to split into two companies, and this was during the dot-com bubble. And he felt that, if he held onto his stock, which at the moment—at this—it started out being worth like \$300,000 back in 1979 or 1980 when my grandfather died. It was now worth \$6 million, and it was going to go up to being worth 12 million, and so he sold it for like \$8 million, rather than have to pay the taxes on a paper increase in value, which he wouldn't have had to pay if he'd been a Canadian citizen. So I said, "Well, you could become a Canadian citizen," but it turns out selling the stock at that moment was exactly the time to do it because of the dot-com bubble. It went into not being worth very much. Unfortunately, they reinvested it in the stock market, so—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: —anyway, but—so the reason why Marnie could make a movie and why I could spend money beyond what I was getting from the galleries in the last year was because we finally inherited a quarter of what was left of this piece of this printing company that—okay, it no longer existed. It got run into the ground once it became part of Canadian Telecom. You know, it was like—all I can tell from investments is that you're either lucky or just manipulating things. Like anything my father actually invested in, I don't think turned out at all.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: You know?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Do you remember your father—the actual name of your grandfather's company?

JIM SHAW: It'll come to me.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

JIM SHAW: It's—it was [Case Hoyt -JS]—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It's a great story, though.

JIM SHAW: Well, there was a similar one where I worked at this special effects company called—oh, there's a—okay, two different—in terms of value, et cetera. I was working at a place called Robert Abel & Associates, earning a living doing storyboarding and animation things for TV commercials, and they were in competition with another company called Digital. They were like the two main companies.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And Digital was started by the kids of the famous inventor of computer graphics who did the titles for *Vertigo* and some other things, whose name escapes me right now [John Whitney -JS], but you know, very important figure in experimental film. Anyway, so they were doing all of these—they had these Cray computers, and our company had to have a roomful of other computers to keep up with them. Basically, they kept going into debt, and Abel's adoptive father kept bailing him out. They were being bailed out. Eventually, they were bought by this Canadian company owned—whose president was a guy named J.C. Pennie, and then, six months later, our firm was bought out by the same Canadian company, because we were all—they were all going out of business on a regular basis, because they were being asked to produce more by their clients—Madison Avenue—than they were getting paid, kind of like the art world.

And they had a Christmas—the first Christmas party after they were formed—after they became part of this big conglomerate, and J.C. Pennie came out, and he gave his vision for the future of computer graphics, which was that, "In the future, you'll go—you'll want to watch your favorite movie, but instead of watching it as a science fiction film, you'll watch it as a Western or a musical." You know, they'll just punch the actors into different outfits. And I thought, "This guy does not know what he's talking about." Anyway, six months later, the whole thing went under. Oh, and for the Christmas gifts, instead of giving a nice coffee table book or something, everybody got \$25 worth of scratchers and—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Lottery scratchers?

JIM SHAW: Yeah, lottery scratchers, and one or two people got \$5 out of the thing.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, my God.

JIM SHAW: So that's tale number one. After I stopped working there, we bought a house, and I was living off art world stuff, and then the art world stuff died in the early '90s, so I had to get various jobs at various places, and one of them was at Hanna-Barbera where I was storyboarding for *The New Adventures of Jonny Quest*, and they were kind of forced into doing computer graphics, so they brought me in to do some storyboards. And at this point in time, Hanna-Barbera had been bought by Turner using junk bonds, and he had turned their back catalog into the Cartoon Network.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: They were just beginning to do new cartoons like *Dexter's Laboratory*. Pretty much all of it was the old stuff at this point. Later, they spun that off into Boomerang, which was a separate channel of just old cartoons, when their new cartoons—but it's like following the MTV, kind of, gambit, of getting free material to start a network. Turner had already done it with buying the MGM library.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So, eventually, he became part of Time Warner through AOL.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Right.

JIM SHAW: Time Warner/AOL.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Right.

JIM SHAW: Okay. So Hanna-Barbera was basically the source of the most successful cartoon channel on TV, but the people—the good people at Warner Brothers said, "Why the hell do we need to have a second cartoon [company]—we got Warner Brothers cartoons, we don't need Hanna-Barbera." So they just shut down Hanna-Barbera. At that—by the time I joined, it was a shell of what it used to be, because of a union contract negotiation that had failed miserably back just before I started working on *Tron*, and I asked the ink-and-paint ladies if I should join the union, because they were bugging me to join the union. They said, "No, forget it, they

just lost this thing." Basically, all they had to do was have one union employee doing ink and paint and one union employee doing backgrounds, and everything else was done in Korea, or—no, in that case, it was Japan, and then it was shot in France, and I couldn't—I scratched my head, trying to figure out how they could possibly save money going to these extraordinarily expensive places, but it's because of union rules, basically. So, anyway, so in the long run Hanna-Barbera was something that was bought for junk bonds and then scrapped because of this AOL merger, and of course, AOL is worth nothing, relatively speaking, but at the moment, it was absurdly overvalued.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And you—so your personal experience—it's interesting because your work—you have a history in your work of being very—I would say your work is politically oriented and socially oriented in a way that most people don't necessarily see, and also, because of its relationship to popular culture, comic book culture, illustration culture, I think the focus is often on that, but not really being able to understand the complexity. So this is actually a very personal—these personal experiences you've had watching companies be taken over, run into the ground, and run—and made bankrupt, those kinds of personal experiences have an impact, what you're—are they impacting what you're painting and drawing?

JIM SHAW: Oh, yeah. They're impacting everything. I don't think that there'd be a Trump presidency if there weren't a bunch of people my age trying to figure out how the hell they're going to survive the rest of their lives after they've been let go from their job at Dow Chemical or one of many companies. When you're in your 50s or 60s, if you lose your job, it's the end. Really, Walmart greeter is about what you can hope for, or being a consultant, and it's—and in special effects, it was a young person's game. You just can't devote your every waking moment to making special effects when you're 50. You don't have the energy. You can't use cocaine like you did when you were in your 20s.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] So, I mean, it seems like that—I noticed, really at the retrospective at the New Museum, how—and I want to go back to your earlier life, but I was really struck because it seemed to me to be an extremely clear representation of your work as a political statement. First of all, you're using all these figures from different, you know—figures, recognizable figures who are associated with war, going back to, you know, before the Spanish Civil War. But also, there is a lot of—there is a lot of emphasis on financial corruption, and of course, that is—those are the times in which we live. But I'm interested that this is so personal for you.

JIM SHAW: Well, when I started working on the giant, old backdrops, that's when I had to revert to more overtly political things. And that particular piece was also tangentially related to, historically, a specific thing of the art world, which is to sort of forget the past, because there's some new person who's come along who's doing a variation on what people have done in the past, because there's only—I mean, ever since Modernism—well, back—just something to backtrack—back in the '20s, the teens, the '20s, you could do something new in painting or sculpture.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And you mean in the 1920s and teens?

JIM SHAW: Yeah. You could do something new, because things hadn't been done yet. Basically, after 1950—something, almost everything had been done that you can do of interest in terms of a picture plane or a sculpture. I mean, you know, there's slight variations, and that's why, in a sense, you had to have Postmodernism. But you just had to come up with new—you had to sort of—the art world had to sort of forget that somebody had already done X because somebody else had come along that they were all interested in and invested in. And for me, I sort of thought that I had—my emergence as a guy who drew his dreams and made artworks out of his dreams led to a forgetfulness about my predecessor, my specific predecessor, who was Jonathan—I'm so bad with names—hold on that tape for a second. Jonathan—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Borofsky?

JIM SHAW: —Borofsky, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So—

JIM SHAW: And he had been a teacher of mine.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —to pause for a second, because that's a very interesting point. Your dreams drawings really did come out of your association with Jonathan Borofsky?

JIM SHAW: No, they didn't, but he did dream drawings—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yes.

JIM SHAW: —before I did them.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yes.

JIM SHAW: And of course, Surrealists utilize dreams occasionally—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yes.

JIM SHAW: —although not as much as one would expect.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And he was your teacher?

JIM SHAW: And he was—well, he was a teacher there. We—a number of us attended his first class—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Let's pause for a second, because we're talking now—we've locked forward in time. We'll go back in—

JIM SHAW: CalArts.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —time, but right now you're at CalArts.

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what year do you enter CalArts?

JIM SHAW: '76.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: 1976?

JIM SHAW: He and Laurie Anderson came in as visiting artists in '77—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

JIM SHAW: —both very important figures there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And—but for me, not so much important—as important as teachers, as they were important as I saw their artwork, and I thought, Oh, here's somebody doing something interesting that isn't boring shit, because that's mostly what I saw. And so—thus, you can go, "I can relate to that." When you're an undergrad, you see people doing sad reversions of Abstract Expressionism badly, and you go, "That doesn't look good, I don't want to be part of that art world," you know. So then I would see—it was always the stuff that I didn't fully understand. I can't say that I fully understood Lawrence Weiner.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Nothing against him, but I did not fully understand it. But when I saw Robert Longo and Cindy Sherman, I went, I fully understand this! This is—these are terms I was thinking in. And when I saw Laurie Anderson perform, I went, I get this, I understand what's going on here, even though she's extremely tasteful, and I'm not. And when I saw Borofsky's work, I was all, Wow, this is great! I really like this work," but as a teacher, we all kind of ran in the opposite direction, because the way he taught was very hippie-dippy and they were like—the first class was trust exercises that we'd already done in junior college English class. You know, closing your eyes and letting yourself be caught by somebody, and that sort of thing. So, on top of that, he had—his students who were undergraduates started doing these murals around the school, which were often political and kind of inept. I mean, not always, but often.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Inept in terms of the way they were executed?

JIM SHAW: They were clunky, just—and this was a time when, you know, we were dealing with the fading aspects of the counterculture.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

JIM SHAW: We had—you know, you would see a caricature of Nixon, and he wasn't president anymore.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: They did this—there was this one painting of the Night Watch where everyone was wearing gas masks, and, you know, the Vietnam War was over. The draft was over. The draft was what solidified the youth culture into a common political unit, cohesive unit, and when the draft was over and the war was over, that

dissipated. The music was still there, sort of. There were still people with long hair, they were getting to be embarrassing, or they were getting to be successful, God forbid, and other factions between women and men, between gays and straights, between blacks and whites were starting to fracture this thing that had been unified by fear of being drafted and sent to Vietnam.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, it's a very interesting thing, your saying this, because it really is this—you are part of this generation that makes the transition from '70s to '80s, and it is—you know, you're talking about turning your back on the dominance of conceptual art—

JIM SHAW: Well—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —in particular, at CalArts.

JIM SHAW: We didn't turn our backs on it so much—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah?

JIM SHAW: —because it was dominant.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

JIM SHAW: It was dominant. I just tried to work my way into it in a way that I could deal with it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And how did you do that? How did you do that at CalArts, in particular, from your earliest work?

JIM SHAW: Well, I—at CalArts, I—well, let me just backtrack—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

JIM SHAW: —slightly, to say that that sort of political art had kind of died, but by the time of the [George W.] Bush presidency and the reelection of George Bush in 2004, the reasons had returned for it, and I was faced with all these backdrops. So that's why I started working in more overtly political ways, although it was usually utilizing imagery out of the past, not the present, to maintain some level of not being outdated and obvious.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: I mean, sure, I—you know, I could do paintings of Donald Trump's hair right now if I wanted to, but I don't want to. But—okay, CalArts. I—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, I think you were right to go to—we'll pause for a second because—I keep jumping back and forth, but you know, here we are, we were actually at the New Museum, at your retrospective with this huge statue where you recreate Jonathan Borofsky's *Molecule Man*.

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And you're talking about the forgetting of the past art. Carry on with that a bit.

JIM SHAW: Okay. Well, we are going to have this painting photographed at the moment, so maybe we should—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh.

JIM SHAW: —stop. We've got to let the dealer see—

[Audio break.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So this New Museum installation, I think what everybody was so surprised to see was a contemporary artist, such as yourself, with this huge kind of an homage to Jonathan Borofsky. You have the ballerina with the—that is part of the—

JIM SHAW: Which was George W. Bush, in case you didn't pick up on that.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: The George W. Bush ballerina?

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I didn't pick up on that.

JIM SHAW: Who was kicking Joe Six-Pack in the ass, and a lot of the imagery in there came out of this, like, the prominent political cartoonist of the 1950s, Herblock, and he had Mr. Atom Bomb, which was transmuted into the giant vacuum cleaner, and the ballerina clown was kicking his John Q. Public figure in the ass, and there was a, you know, six-pack of beer there because that's the—that's representing the basic body politic of George W. Bush and his being able to get elected in the first place. You'd rather have a beer with him than with that stuffed shirt Al Gore.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: But there were also references to political art throughout the ages, and part of it was in researching—I enjoy the research part. This was sort of the first piece that I did in which I was commissioned to do something and you know, when I started realizing, Oh, hey, that's right—not only was *Guernica* a commission, but so was the—you know, Stravinsky's great pieces of work were commissioned. I didn't feel—it's sort of an abnormal thing to do commissioned art in the present.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And that's—that was commissioned by the New Museum?

JIM SHAW: No, that was commissioned by this—I think it's annual—show in Toulouse where they do things in different places. Fabrice Stroun and somebody else got the idea that it would be interesting for me to do something in front of this Pablo Picasso backdrop that they had in the Abattoirs, and I didn't know much about it other than that there was a tarot figure in it. So I started coming up with ideas that related to the tarot deck and the strange relationship between Jimmy Page and Aleister Crowley, and then I found out that it was sort of a people's musical, because all the text about it was in French, so I had to dig until I could find something in English. It was a people's musical. The title of it was the date of Bastille Day, which, me not being French, didn't register. It was about the power of the people to effect change and—but it's actually a painting of a—well, I should probably find a picture of it. It's—there's this boy on a horse, which is sort of the reference to the tarot deck because it's from the Sun card, but there's also this sort of slightly evil-looking bird figure, who's holding on to a dying harlequin, is that the way it works? Something like that. There's—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And this is on the backdrop, or is this—

JIM SHAW: This is in the actual Picasso theatrical backdrop, and it's surrounded by destroyed buildings, clearly symbolic of war, and most likely civil war, even though it was the year before *Guernica*.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And the destroyed building, of course, has its most recent popular incarnation on the cover of Led Zeppelin IV, and the inside cover is another tarot deck reference, The Hermit. So I was lacing tarot references throughout, and then I—then they announced to me there was going to be a Salvador Dali painting catty-corner from it, from a different theatrical presentation, and this one was of a slightly surreal—it was either a mansion or a mill, and it was from a thing about a cuckolded miller, and so there were bags of flour up in the air, because it was Dali, but you know, the fact is Dali was—enjoyed being cuckolded, so I don't know how that figured into the whole mythos. So when I thought about that, I realized that really what was going on in between these two was different sides of the Spanish Civil War, and that led me to including as much reference to the Spanish Civil War as I could, but updating it and retroactively moving backwards in time to the anti-Napoleonic etchings of Goya.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I'm looking on your CV, trying to find this show in Toulouse. Can you—

JIM SHAW: It was—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Can you find it for me so I can put it—

JIM SHAW: It's the *Springtime in*—let's see. Maybe it would be a group show.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, I only printed out your—it probably is. I only printed out your—

JIM SHAW: Well, here, I can open up my catalog—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

JIM SHAW: —here, that should have it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Maybe I should also be looking at that piece. There's—I also discovered that there was—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Is this the first time you were involved in the backdrops?

JIM SHAW: No, I had been using the backdrops. That's why they sought me out to do this piece. You know, my first reaction was, "Well, who am I to stick my own artwork in front of Picasso?"

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah. That's a good reaction.

JIM SHAW: That also brought to mind the famous *I Dreamed I Was Taller than Picasso* piece of Borofsky.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And then I started thinking about the relationship between myself and Borofsky, and how I'd noticed that, you know, people had sort of forgotten that he also did this thing that I was getting famous for doing.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Meaning?

JIM SHAW: Drawing dreams and making artwork from dreams.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, oh.

JIM SHAW: Okay, "Selected Group Exhibitions"—shit.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It was only in the last five years or so, yeah?

JIM SHAW: Yeah, it's a fairly—it's relatively recent, but it was before that one, and maybe it goes back a little further. I can always ask—Printemps de Septembre à Toulouse, *Where I Am Does Not Exist*.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What?

JIM SHAW: That's the—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

JIM SHAW: —the title.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So it's 2009. Was this a—this sounds like an important exhibition for you in terms of a lot of things you realized—

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —that have come into your art since then.

JIM SHAW: Well, another thing about it was it was the kind of thing that people traveled to see.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Because before the New Museum, I had shows like this fabulous show in Bordeaux, but if you didn't go to Bordeaux, you didn't see it. I had a retrospective, another fabulous retrospective, two years before—maybe more than two years before, at the BALTIC in Newcastle, but if you didn't go to Newcastle then you didn't see it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So this one—people actually went to see this one in France?

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And this was 2009.

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And this is—but it sounds like it was also a big transition—an awareness that putting your work in front of these backdrops by Picasso seems to have created a shift for you, and certainly that shows up—

JIM SHAW: Well, to be thinking about art history—I was never that big of an art history person.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: I mean, I've done other—I did another mural that related to the *Etant Donnés*—if that's the right term for it—the last piece of Duchamp's, but, you know, art history, you know, it would make its way in in various places. I discovered that, to me, the ultimate piece of political art was by [Jacques-Louis] David when he

was in the service of the Revolution.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] oIC

JIM SHAW: They were falling apart, and they decided they would produce a thing to celebrate the Goddess of Reason, and so that became this earth work that they created in some park in Paris, and that's what this form here is. This whole thing is related to that, with a little bit of, you know, Zep thrown in, a little Thomas Nast political cartoon thrown in.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It sounds like after 2009, you integrated not only your political beliefs, but your political beliefs as they manifest in art history, as you discovered them in your research.

JIM SHAW: Yeah. But it's also, you know, a sort of a kitchen-sink sort of situation. So I'm throwing in to this thing that's based on the Dali landscape with boiled beans.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: I'm throwing in—as a replacement for the hell of—the German bombing of—sorry, I'm getting old—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: *Guernica*.

JIM SHAW: *Guernica*.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: I decided what would be the contemporary version of that, would have to be our use of unmanned drones, so this form, which is taken out of the Dali, is a drone, but it's been—there's all sorts of forms out of *Guernica* thrown in to the background. And you know, a little—there's an element of Borofsky, the falling man. This is a figure from an anti-war cartoon during World War I, the face of a prostitute representing both syphilis and war, and this is a variation on The Tower from the tarot deck, but it's also the tower from the fourth Led Zeppelin album cover that's in the background. This is—this Borofsky-based thing is based on The Fool that's about to step off into the abyss, and this all is from Goya, but also crossed with Ernst's *The Fireside Angel*, and *The Fireside Angel*'s sort of demonic bird is also crossed with one of Herblock's favorite things to satirize, which was—what's his name, the dictator of Spain?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Franco.

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And there's elements from Chicago '68, political actions of youth strewn about this, and this is where the Dali backdrop would have been. So there are all these testicular things that are based on the floating bags that were there, but also on his interest in being cuckolded in the process.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So this piece was—this piece that was at the New Museum had been shown in Toulouse—

JIM SHAW: Yeah, and then in Bordeaux.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —and then in Bordeaux.

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you alter it to put it into the New Museum?

JIM SHAW: Well, I had to make a new background.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: I didn't alter it otherwise. Well, it's compacted. There was a lot more space in Toulouse and all the other places, so there wasn't as much space between the elements, so I made new backdrops.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And when you say "made new backdrops," you alter existing backdrops—

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —correct?

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: By the way, we're talking about a piece called *Labyrinth: I Dreamed I Was Taller*

than Jonathan Borofsky. The piece is enormous, it filled the entire—you say it was bigger in Toulouse, but it was quite overwhelming at the New Museum.

JIM SHAW: Well, it's as big—you know—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Hmm?

JIM SHAW: —in terms of depth, you make it as big as you feel like.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: This was an amazing space in Bordeaux, so you can see it—it was a spice factory for shipping spices from the colonies, but it looks like a cathedral with all these arches.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, I was very struck—I was obviously struck by the theatricality of it, in terms of the fact they're all—many of the elements are—they're essentially the kinds of things you used in old—in theater, where there would be a wooden construction supporting a figure and then the sandbags in place—

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —so you were actually walking behind the flats for a staged situation.

JIM SHAW: Yeah. Well, that was—I think that was my first interest in that. Well, it was dual: one was, there's a scene in Scorsese's remake of *Cape Fear* that takes place during a high school—in a high school theater, and I loved the imagery of the theatricality in there, and I had wanted to do—when I first came up with the religion, I had wanted to do little stage sets that had videos projecting in them, but I kind of feel like Mike pretty much did that in *Day Is Done*—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: When you say that, you mean Mike Kelley?

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: But I think that we were both also being inspired by Catherine Sullivan, who, for her graduating thesis show, did a theatrical presentation done in three different theatrical styles based around a bear attack.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So I did two different murals—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Based on what?

JIM SHAW: A bear mauling.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: A bear attack.

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Is she— isn't she younger than you are?

JIM SHAW: Yeah, she was a student—she was my TA at Art Center, and she worked as Mike's assistant for like a decade before. I mean, I was shocked, because she was like the smartest person I have—I was surprised it took so long for her to, you know, take off, but eventually she did. This one took the place of the Picasso backdrop, and it was a Capri mural, and I integrated into it a couple of different things that I dreamt of pre-9/11 that were—that went to a show that was opening in London. And I was supposed to fly on 9/11 to go to the opening, and obviously couldn't. Then I realized, "Oh, this thing is about two towers that have ghost yuppies and a turban-headed monster flowing forward from it." That was sort of where this whole thing came from.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And these are sort of the two destroyed towers, which also relate to the Picasso backdrop, and these are sort of the traditional image of the destructive power of World War II especially. And the other one was about a sort of a chicken monster that was threatening a coastal city, and I had to gather my loved ones, and it was being inspired by a sort of a "chickens coming home to roost" effect of American policy. And I was—I didn't know exactly what it was, but it was an encroaching doom. The whole thing formed into this chicken monster, which was related to the Jimi Hendrix song "Third Stone from the Sun," which features something about "your fantastic cackling hen" and "to this world I must put an end."

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Could you repeat that, please?

JIM SHAW: Okay. Well, you know, there's this Jimi Hendrix song, "Third Stone from the Sun," and it has one couplet about "your fantastic cackling hen" and "to this world I must put an end." So, basically, this backdrop did not have two destroyed buildings, it did not have that stuff. It didn't have these things, it didn't have that stuff. I threw in the Dick Cheney as the dog's penis, which is a reference to a political painting by a guy whose name I can't remember off the top of my head [Peter Blume's *The Eternal City* -JS], but someone who was an important artist in the '30s, but forgotten after the conquest of the world by Abstract Expressionism. He had one of Benito Mussolini—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

JIM SHAW: —as a Jack-in-the-Box—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And you and I are both equally brain-dead at the moment, but we know exactly who you mean.

JIM SHAW: And I—so I—and this is all based on the tarot deck card of The Moon, which has the moon with two towers, a wolf and a dog baying at the moon, and a lobster-like figure coming up out of the water. So here you've got these sort of souls of dead yuppies that form the teeth of this thing coming back up as this monstrous thing, and I really do feel like we're in sort of the contemporary civil war of the world.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And we're—you know.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So when you got these backdrops—we'll talk more about this in a second, but you make substantial alterations to—

JIM SHAW: Yeah—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —this, so—

JIM SHAW: —especially these ones where I'm doing—the ones that I'm earning a living off of, the small ones.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Let's go back to this for just a moment, because I—when I saw this originally, I didn't realize the buildings weren't there. These deteriorating buildings weren't there.

JIM SHAW: Everything else was there, but not—this hung here.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Right.

JIM SHAW: This was here—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And the—

JIM SHAW: —the dog was not there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: The moon was not there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah, I figured the figurative elements were there, but you actually substantially altered, also, just the buildings in the backdrops.

JIM SHAW: Yeah. Oh, and then this is me and my family of circa 2001, hovering, worried, in the top of a building, which occurred in the original drawing that was a prescient, if possible, 2001 thing.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: So you have to kind of match the—I had to go back and scrub the surfaces. Also, this was painted in this room here, so—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh.

JIM SHAW: —I couldn't see the whole thing together.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And so while it was in the museum, I was scrubbing surfaces and repainting little things to age it correctly, you know, and it's—I wanted things to be transparent, you know, where it was important for them to be transparent, which means, you know, you have to get it right the first time. If you're solidly painting on something, then it's different.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So these ideas you had—when they—in the New Museum show, it's almost the culmination of ideas you've had for, gosh, seven years, six years.

JIM SHAW: Or more.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You know?

JIM SHAW: Going back to, yeah, 2000.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: This one, which was in the place of the Dali painting, was more specific to the American Civil War.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And this was the one with Casper the Ghost on the bottom—

JIM SHAW: Yeah. Well, this one is—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —and the little—

JIM SHAW: This one is based on another tarot card, which is—what's it called? You know, it's about the bodies rising from the grave. [*Judgement* -JS].

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: But in this case, it's the bodies of the American South. There was a tradition of burying bodies in Haiti in crossroads, so they couldn't be dug up and turned into zombies, which I sort of related to slavery. Then there's also another African-American notion of a skin-walker—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Peter Blume.

JIM SHAW: Peter Blume, yes, was the—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: The missing artist of the Mussolini Jack-in-the-Box face.

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So you know, I'd been reading a lot about slavery, and I just—I was working the Dali fantasies about the grasshoppers and such—this being a praying mantis, which is the female which bites the head of the male after being impregnated. So, this is sort of like the slave owner over here buried in the ground, and the slaves—because the slaves' children were slaves also, being buried in the crossroads. In the background, these sort of KKK figures are emerging from the graves, as they do in the card, which is—I forget the term for it—and emerging towards the sun. And these are also kind of mirroring the bags from the Salvador Dali backdrop. This is —

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Then this Liberty—

JIM SHAW: Okay, the angel is taken from—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —the angel.

JIM SHAW: —a monument to the African-American soldiers in the Massachusetts regiment that fought in the Civil War, but it's been reversed, and there's a little KKK emblem on the trumpet there which also forms the sun. So, you know, this is added in in order to create a crossroads that—you know, things like the still was added, and the gun was added to this hillbilly's lap.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, when you were re-conceptualizing this for the New Museum, what was your thinking process by which you were updating, as it were?

JIM SHAW: Kitchen sink. That's it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Kitchen sink?

JIM SHAW: Everything that you can stuff in.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah?

JIM SHAW: Everything that can be put into it, that's tangentially related, could be of interest.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what is the research process by which you decide—

JIM SHAW: I read a bunch of books.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Well, what—and when—and how do you choose what books you read to create something like that?

JIM SHAW: Well, I just felt compelled after—you know, living now and having a studio in an African-American neighborhood for the first time because, usually, I would be having studios in Mexican-American neighborhoods, to try to understand how we got here and how people who, in my home town, would probably have been marginalized, basically. Alcoholics were a normal part of the community, because my studio was right by a liquor store.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And where was this studio?

JIM SHAW: It's two blocks away. It's—you know, the liquor store still is there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And I would be experiencing loud—loud conversations would be occurring from people across the street to other people, and I was getting, you know, obviously a distorted view of African-American life in the present by—because of the liquor store. But there are, you know, along with churches, a lot of liquor stores in this neighborhood.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: It also was Rodney King's home area. And so I wanted to understand how we got here, and I figured slavery was the beginning of it. Really, I think that's minor compared to the effects of post-Civil War racism in the South in which people were re-enslaved at a lower value, because you're just paying a 50-buck fine or something to turn someone into a person you didn't care about. Whereas at least the slave owners cared about the health of their slaves, because they'd pay \$1,000 for someone. They wanted to keep them alive and have them have children, so they could have future slaves.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now, I get the point of that. So you're—when you conceptualize this extremely complex, theatrical installation, and you say "kitchen sink," at what point do you create these narrative threads, or do you create narrative threads?

JIM SHAW: Well, I do my best to create narrative threads, but it's something that Duchamp says. I believe fully that, you know, really the audience makes up their own minds about things.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So, in a sense, *The Large Glass* doesn't really have to have a real meaning. Or it has a meaning that isn't as profound as we think it is. Or it's more autobiographical, that he sees the world through a glass because he's schizoid, and he'd rather play chess than actually be on his honeymoon with his new wife. I can identify with the schizoid thing and seeing the world through a glass. I think people always reinterpret things, you know. Like I was reading an interview between David Bowie and Brian Eno where they started talking about Chris Burden, you know, being shot in the arm, and their version of it was not the one that Chris Burden would want them to understand, you know? It was the popularized version. And these are not dumb people, these are very smart, like geniuses, you know?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: David Bowie had a—like the—he was the definition of a genius. He had a photographic memory. But they still weren't getting it the way that Chris Burden wanted his work to be viewed, and I realized you cannot force anybody to view your work. You know, the art-buying public is different from the art-going public. The art-buying public sees things through a glass of value and, you know, whether the thing's going to go up in value, because it's so fucking expensive to begin with.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And the critical view.

JIM SHAW: And the critical view, which is—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: If that means anything anymore.

JIM SHAW: Well, it does, but it's like, in a way, you've got a—I mean, I realize that my stuff wasn't letting critics do enough, because there was so much information in it. Because the typical artwork of the present is artwork that is so blank that you have to, you know, go in there with your advanced degree in art history and dig out meanings from it, and mine, they're a little more forwarded, these references.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But your free-associative powers are extraordinary. Is this something that you've developed intentionally, or is this just Jim Shaw's mind?

JIM SHAW: It starts there with my mind, but I think that you can develop it. I mean, to me, after, you know, viewing my dreams and writing them down and then drawing them, and seeing that there were visual puns everywhere, along with verbal puns, I realized that the pun on a visual scale is an important aspect of subconscious associative thinking.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So I let myself run with those things. I mean—and in reading about Duchamp, he's like—it's all about puns, bad, dirty puns, but they're verbal puns for the most part, not so much visual, although, you know, there are some.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And there are relationships between the *Nude Descending a Staircase* and *The Golden Stair*, a painting by an English pre-Raphaelite, which I've dreamt of, and then I tried to—I did a morph between the two paintings, and I found that the forms did co-relate, at least for the upper half of the staircase.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So it's something that you actually—so when we have a—when it finally comes time to do this installation, you—how much preparation do you do for the way it's going to look when it's installed? I mean, do you make elaborate drawings of, like, where everything's going to go with all of these backdrops and these freestanding flats and all of these sculptural elements? It really is quite complex.

JIM SHAW: To some extent you do, but every space is different.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Right.

JIM SHAW: You know, the Picasso backdrop space was much deeper than any other space it had been put in. It all changes from piece to piece. Well, I did another piece at MASS MoCA that was very specific to the space, and it involved my father's artwork that he had—that I'd discovered after he died, in this sort of hallway space, and if you got to the end of the hallway, you'd find that the image of Superman's groin that was on the far wall was actually a hole in the wall and not a painting, and that there were these glowing rocks of kryptonite inside there. And I realized I have made this too far away from where it's visible, because your average museumgoer may not even bother walking into the space.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So I had to shove them further up, so they could be visible at the halfway point rather than two-thirds of the way through, because a lot of people were not even going to see that, and that was when the place was already partially open to the public.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: This is *Entertaining Doubts* in 2015?

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That show?

JIM SHAW: Yes.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And I think that's an extraordinary observation, but it's true, at that show and the New Museum, now, operating on this very large scale, you have to think about how viewers are going to be able to absorb and comprehend your work. But you have thought of it.

JIM SHAW: Well, also having been on the sidelines during the—putting together the Mike Kelley retrospective, and seeing how so much stuff was crammed into the Stedelijk that you couldn't really, you know—unless you were a Kelley scholar, it was mind-numbing, you know? It was a necessary thing in the sense to do an

encyclopedic show, but his work was so full of stuff that had to be paid attention to that there was no way to pay attention to it, and you also had soundtracks that were echoing into the space. You know, it worked much better in the last couple of venues because they were already cut-up spaces. It's one of the funny things about a museum, is if it's a big, open box, it kind of sucks. You know, you're better off with having this labyrinth-like setup. And I was lucky to have a show in which I could cram gigantic artworks in MASS MoCA already in the pipeline before I was talked to by the New Museum, because I would have tried to cram everything into that little museum, and it would have sucked.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So this is the—this is experiential. I mean, there's no way to really understand this kind of approach to your work without living it, which is what you now are doing at this point in your career as a successful, mid-career artist. But what I'd like to go back to is how you got here.

JIM SHAW: Okay.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And to do that, I have to, like, reel it back to even, like, high school and junior high school, when you're talking about being feminized—[laughs]—by your sisters, and being a lonely boy with all these—with sisters—being raised with all these sisters and feeling isolated. Did you—you said in another interview you didn't read comic books.

JIM SHAW: I didn't say—no, I did.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, you did. Okay.

JIM SHAW: I read comic books for sure.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You read comic books.

JIM SHAW: I didn't read art history.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you have this father who's an illustrator—

JIM SHAW: Well, my father was a package designer—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Package designer.

JIM SHAW: —who was jealous of his father, who was a commercial artist, and he would do cartoons for the, what-do-you-call-its, the fez-wearing Masons [Shriners -JS], of which he was a member. I found out my father was a Mason when he was in his late 80s. He never—there was no evidence of his Masonry in the house, whereas he was a member of other men's groups.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So your grandfather and your father were Masons?

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And—

JIM SHAW: Weirdly enough.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Not Shriners?

JIM SHAW: Yeah, he was a—my grandfather was a Shriner, which is like the fun-loving, hard-drinking aspect of Shriners—of Masonry.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And my father was a Mason which was the not-so—which is the more sober side.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So this comes to you—[laughs]—quite honestly. Your father was working as a package designer for what company?

JIM SHAW: Dow Chemical Corporation. Saran Wrap and—I think most of what they did was, you know, packages for fertilizer, and not stuff that you'd find in a supermarket.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Not stuff that would be fun for him to design.

JIM SHAW: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But he was obviously successful at it.

JIM SHAW: Yeah, but they were having a thing during some sort of a late-'60s, early-'70s recession, so they were offering early retirement packages, so he became an accountant at that point, and then he really—his workaholicism shifted into high gear, especially around this time of year, tax time. And my workaholicism didn't really hit until I started working in special effects, but it stayed there all—ever since.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Where did you go to high school?

JIM SHAW: I went to Midland High School, which was, at that point, the only school for our grade. It was the last year that everybody in town went to the same high school.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How far is that from Detroit?

JIM SHAW: Two hours north.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you go to Detroit very often?

JIM SHAW: No, we went there a couple times. One time my sister went to see the Beatles. Another time—we had a preacher in our church. We were Episcopalians, and we had this guy, Father Tom Vaughn, the jazz pianist, jazz priest, so he was performing at Cobo Hall or some place, so we went down for that. You know, we'd pass through there every once in a while, but mostly, we'd go to Ann Arbor, where my sister went to school, or Saginaw. We never—like, we went to Flint. I went to see Jimi Hendrix in Flint with the Soft Machine and this sort of predecessor to the Stooges, which was the Fruit of the Loom, and that was my experience with Flint.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Mostly went to Saginaw, Bay City. Midland was a small town without much going on, but lots of PhDs in chemistry, so it's similar to Stanford or—you know, it was a highly cerebral town with a lot of schizoid personalities, if not Asperger's or shit like that going on.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, were you raised in what you would consider an upper-middle class environment?

JIM SHAW: Middle class.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Middle class?

JIM SHAW: I mean, if we'd only—if they'd only had two kids, then it'd be a little more upper. But, no, middle class, absolutely.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] And who was your partner? Was it your sister with whom you would share your discoveries of music, your youngest sister?

JIM SHAW: Well, you'd get—it would come from different elements, like my middle sister, Nancy, was a beatnik and an intellectual, and so, you know, I would listen to folk music and—I remember, though, like I wanted to buy—one of the first times I saw "Freak Out!" by the Mothers of Invention I wanted to buy it, and my sister said, "Oh, you don't want to get that, that's just noise." I mean, eventually I got it. But then another time, I had bought the first Velvet Underground album because, you know, Andy Warhol and all.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And my sister Ellie said, "Oh, this is just a bunch of noise." And I listened to it a couple of times, and then I traded it for an album I never actually took a hold of, which was the first Vanilla Fudge album. But then, like a year later, I was at a party and listening to "White Light, White Heat," and I just went—you know, a bell went off in my head, and I went—I switched my allegiance from the Incredible String Band to the Velvet Underground at that point. But, you know, it was all this older—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But it's a huge—obviously, music was a huge influence when you were—

JIM SHAW: Well, that's all you had.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: I mean, at that age for my daughter, it's like you haven't had any real experiences, but you've got all these emotions and hormones. And music is where all your emotion can be poured into, especially if you're a schizoid like myself.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Were you—would you—how would you listen to music? Would you be in your

bedroom with your headphones on?

JIM SHAW: I didn't have headphones, but I would have these speakers. In order to hear the stereo separation on Jimi Hendrix or the Beatles, I would have, you know, one ear on either side. And we also had classical music playing in the house on a regular basis, so I loved, you know, *The Rite of Spring* and Prokofiev and things that.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Was your mother artistically inclined?

JIM SHAW: She was intellectually inclined, but she was from an era in which women didn't really get to work much, and this is stuff that's come out since her death that I didn't really know, that her father was in a banknote company in Pittsburgh, and they were very well-to-do. But her oldest brother was, I guess, selling insurance. I got these things in bits and pieces. In the Depression, he was selling insurance, but he wasn't putting the money into the company, so the father found out. He borrowed money from the banknote company in order to keep his son from going to jail, and then they did a surprise audit on the company, so her father committed suicide. And she was like 12 at the time, and much younger than her brothers. And, you know, this brother that was being saved from jail, we never met with him. We didn't go to Pittsburgh much. I also found out later that her mother did not think—thought that my father was beneath her.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: But because of the suicide of the father, they didn't really have the kind of money where she could have gone to school for a career, but also, at that time, women weren't getting careers. It was very hard. There's this book on Wonder Woman, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* by Jill Lepore, where they said that one of the colleges just stopped—I don't know if it was one of the Ivy League colleges—stopped giving graduate courses to women, because no one was giving them any jobs.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now, did they have—as you were raised—did your sisters end up having any careers of their own?

JIM SHAW: Yeah. Well, my oldest sister studied to be a teacher and found she wasn't good at it, so she raised a couple kids, and she's worked as a wildlife—she worked at wildlife centers, and she and her husband are birders, and they're—they—he was a—all my sisters married engineers.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, funny. What did your second sister end up doing?

JIM SHAW: She went to Harvard for grad school again, thanks to Grandfather's money, I assume.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And she is a successful children's book author. She did the "Sheep" series. *Sheep in a Jeep* was the first one.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: *Sheep in a Jeep*?

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And Ellie got a degree in nutrition. So she's a nutritionist. She married a nuclear engineer from Algeria, and they got—he got a job at a Norwegian company in Switzerland—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Good Lord.

JIM SHAW: —and eventually she said, "I've got to move out of here because I can't work here," being, A, a woman, and B, not a citizen. So they moved back to the States, to Maryland, and the other two live in Michigan.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: At the end of the day, you sound like it was a fairly close-knit family growing up.

JIM SHAW: Yeah. I mean, there was a distance with the older sisters because, you know, Katie was eight years older than me, so she was out of the house from the time I was nine.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And—but then things happened, like my sister had—Nancy had roommates who were among the founders of SDS [Students for Democratic Society], and she had a protest poster printed in *Life Magazine* when I was in the ninth grade, so that set me on the left wing, you know, for sure. My parents were like—my father had been a socialist in the '30s, but by the time I was born, he was an average Republican and he would knock on doors. He was a ward something-or-other. And my mother was an avid history buff. And you know, she was obviously, you know, frustrated in her intellectual level. She became the head of NOW in my hometown for a couple of decades, I think, and she was an inveterate letter-writer until she just couldn't hear and see any more enough to compound or, you know, watch TV or watch Rachel Maddow anymore.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: When you were in high school, did you—were you already—did you know you were going to be an artist?

JIM SHAW: Yeah, at that point—well, when I was younger I had a big interest in science, but I was terrible in math, and in eighth grade we started doing science things that were, you know, experiments that were all based on math, and I just lost my interest in science and switched over to art.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And in ninth grade, they asked us all what we were going to be. I said, "Well, I'm either going to be a comic artist, a special effects artist, or an artist." So I found a way to be all three, kind of, and that year, I had—a thing that's part of *My Mirage*, was that they had this annual window-painting contest, and I had this design that was based on the poster for the Roger Corman Poe film of the—what's it called? *The Mask of the Red Death*, and it's Vincent Price's face composed of all these suffering people, so it's sort of like finding images in faces, or the Arcimboldo effect, which I later revisited in a giant mural that was based on Duchamp's *Étant Donnés*, which is based on tangential art historical writings about the Black what-do-you-call-it murder.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Dahlia?

JIM SHAW: Black Dahlia murder, which may have inspired *Étant Donnés* perhaps, possibly. You never know. Well, the year it was, you know, worked on, was basically the year of that, and there were relationships between friends of Duchamp and the possible murderer, one of the main suspects.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now, you're growing up in—you're in high school. Do you—did you already have a band in high school?

JIM SHAW: No, I did not have a band. Friends of mine—we went to see—this was another important moment in high school life, was going to the Delta Pop Festival, which featured pretty much every important band of Michigan rock and roll including the MC5 and the Stooges, as well as the SRC and lesser known people like Bob Seger.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And where was that?

JIM SHAW: Delta College.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Delta Junior College, where I ended up going after I freaked out trying to live in New York City at the age of 18 in 1970, because I got into Cooper Union, but there was no place to live there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No place to live at the college?

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: They had no setup to fund housing for anybody because, everybody lived in the New—their parents were all in New York.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh.

JIM SHAW: Anyway, okay, so this was a year or so before that. And they had—the experience of seeing the MC5 inspired my friends to create this thing called the Steadman Price Brothers, and they had all these people who would come out and talk before they played. But they were an electric jug band, and it was—and they started by raising money by having a fan club, before the thing started. It was all a very strange, cynical, late-hippie joke on the MC5 and their use of, you know, Minister of Defense and a Minister of Culture, et cetera.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So, I was sort of friends with them, but I was not a performer. But one of the recordings that I made in high school made its way into the Destroy All Monsters box set, because Mike was just going through all these things I had saved. So it's just some people talking during this teenage rock and roll venue. The other really important thing was, when the Stooges came on, they were playing, and at some point, Iggy walked into the crowd, and he had this haunted look on his face, and he kept walking until he found this girl, and he picked her up and put her over his shoulder, and then she started kicking and hitting him, and they both fell down. And at this point, everybody was sitting on the floor of the gymnasium, and they all stood up. So as a moment of theater, it was amazing.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And it later turned out to be the dean's daughter who he picked up because of the utter look of horror she had upon viewing him, and then I discovered like a year or two ago that you can find it on YouTube.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: This was, you know, the most obscure place on earth, but they had—there was someone there with a camera. I—that was a well-documented period.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So—but that was an influence—not an influence, but an important moment because it—what did it do for you in terms of your interest in music?

JIM SHAW: Well, it certainly made me understand—I mean, going to see—I realize, when I go back and think about all the music I saw as a kid, which was mostly all these Michigan bands, but there'd be other people—you know, there'd be Jethro Tull or a lot of—there was—Saugatuck was one, Goose Lake was another. There was supposed to be Alice Cooper along with the Stooges and Rare Earth at a fundraiser for Pun Plamondon, but also featured Jane Fonda, and all I could remember of all these was what the Stooges did, what Iggy did and one of the things that he did was, he would, like—at Saugatuck, he said, "Oh, we've got an album coming out," and everyone started applauding. He started saying, "You're all so lucky, we've got an album coming out," you know, he was mocking his own audience, and that was very important, to feel that on top of this kind of dumb music was this intellectual presence.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: That was important, and it was important now for Mike. Mike was a much bigger Stooges fan than I was. He went to see them in their second-to-last performance in a biker bar where Iggy would just keep saying, "Oh, you want to hear 'Louie Louie,'" and they'd play "Louie, Louie" over and over again, so everyone was, you know, trying to kill him when they left.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Yeah, I always think of Mike Kelley and Iggy Pop being sort of like, not exactly separated by birth, but that—I always could—you could almost feel that being something that was in Mike Kelley's heritage—

JIM SHAW: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —on a number of levels. So you hadn't met Mike yet. You didn't meet Mike till you went to University of Michigan, right?

JIM SHAW: Yeah. If I'd gone to Cooper Union, I wouldn't have met Mike until—if I ever did, till much later because I would have been—I would have had a great, rent-controlled, shitty apartment in the Lower East Side, but—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But you wouldn't have had the influence of being an L.A. artist.

JIM SHAW: No, but I would have been under the influence of Hans Haacke, I suppose. I don't know. I would have been a painter. I probably would have been gay. It's—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You—tell me about the—going to the University of Michigan.

JIM SHAW: Well, that was the best—that's—I was always going there to look for underground magazines and psychedelic posters and music.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And how far is Ann Arbor from your hometown?

JIM SHAW: An hour and 45 minutes maybe, give or take a few. Except when the Mothers of Invention were playing, and there was an ice storm, and it was an infinity away.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: Couldn't get to see them in their prime. That was the saddest moment of my teenage—I cried and cried.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But you—so you knew Ann Arbor? When you went to the University of Michigan, it was a comfortable place for you to go. What was the art department like?

JIM SHAW: They had Gerome Kamrowski, who was an important American Surrealist.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Gerome Kamrowski?

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

JIM SHAW: And they had a bunch of other people who were, sort of, to my impression, sad refugees from New York City, you know, failed Abstract Expressionists. There was—Mr. Wilts was the drawing teacher, who could see that I had a perfectionism in me that he could force. He would have us draw things like burned Styrofoam, and his own paintings consisted of either paintings of the moon or paintings of sunflowers, so there was a lot of detail.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And the print teacher, whose name escapes me, was a nice guy who you could have normal conversations with, and then, at one point, a woman named Jackie Rice came in, and she had been at—I think she ended up going to RISD, but she was sort of a Pop Art ceramicist.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And so she and Mike got along very well. He was a much better ceramicist than I was, but you know, I did a bunch of drawings that were like a personal study under her, and Kamrowski was the main influence. But you were also in this place that had given birth to the Stooges and to hippie and radical subculture. And my friend Tom was in—was taking psychology classes, and one day, the same time when that concert with—the Pun Plamondon concert—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What is it called? Pun—

JIM SHAW: Pun Plamondon. He was the Minister of Defense for the White Panther Party.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, Pun Plamondon. Okay.

JIM SHAW: Anyway, Jane Fonda showed up with her boyfriend, Tom Hayden, who had been a psychology student there, while he was waiting to see his advisor in the building. So it had that history.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And you're in this art department, and you go to—when you go to the University of Michigan, do you have to—did you have to take general studies as well? I mean—or did you—

JIM SHAW: You did, but I had taken a lot of those when I was at Delta and other places.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How many years were you at Delta?

JIM SHAW: I was there for a year and then I went for one semester to Saginaw Valley College, and then I transferred to U of M. I probably couldn't get into U of M today, and it would—it is way more expensive, which is absurd, because it's not even a private school. It's like 10,000 a year. It was like 1,200 a year then.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, it's just—and—so you get there and—how are—it's a big campus—

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —a lot of people. And how did you and Mike Kelley find each other?

JIM SHAW: I saw this weird-looking guy in the hall, and we started talking about music.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: At the art department?

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: In art classes?

JIM SHAW: Well, in between classes, because he was younger than me. But he was probably a newcomer there, and I was a newcomer there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: I'm not sure if he was there the first semester, because I'm two years older than he is, so it was a year-and-a-half between that I wasn't there, so—and I guess Niagara was there for one semester, but I never

remembered seeing her there. So we were the two weirdest guys. There was an insane girl there, who was the daughter of one of the teachers, who was much more insane than we were, who Mike dated and—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] What was her name?

JIM SHAW: It might come to me. There was one party where she was wearing a coonskin cap and wearing roller skates, and she was roller-skating around this open space that we, at one point, had played in, and she was waving an actual sword as she roller-skated around. And there was also the dregs of street people, so you had this sort of version of—it was like this transition from when the hippies were the—in the late '60s, were this vanguard culture to, then, they became the accepted norm, and they were mutating into this disgusting thing that began with—for me, with Woodstock, because once they became acceptable to all the people who wanted to beat me up—you know, suddenly, what I had been trying to attain to, you know, feel different from the creepy boys that were mean, suddenly, they wanted to be what I had chosen to be, and I didn't want to be that anymore.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So, punk didn't exist yet, but we were just these weird cynics who—I wore pants that had codpieces sewn into them, and I had a jacket that had a kid's jacket—letter jacket, like a small child's baseball jacket on the back of it. I would wear women's sunglasses. I wanted to be as weird as possible, and I think I scared a lot of people away.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Were you dating anyone yourself at this point?

JIM SHAW: I was no longer a virgin, thank God, but actual relationships—I think the first real relationship I had in Ann Arbor was like two weeks before I left town. You know, in other words, I was too fearful of such things, but also being a weirdo, you know, I had—the occasional one-night stand would be as much as I could get.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you have a girlfriend in high school?

JIM SHAW: Briefly. I got—this is somewhat complicated. It was—maybe it was a month, but it seemed a lot longer. I got mono from her—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: —and for my first long-term girlfriend in Los Angeles, as opposed to short-term girlfriends—the first person I lived with, I got the clap from. So if I had a fear of sex from my mother, it was exacerbated from actual—you know, by the time AIDS came along, I was already afraid of—what was that? Herpes. But herpes, you know, is nothing compared to AIDS, so I think I was partially ruled by a fear of sex, but also I had this, you know, bizarre thing about me, you know, wearing ridiculous clothes.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, why did your mother make you afraid of sex?

JIM SHAW: There was just something about her. It was just built into her, I mean, she was a fearful person in some ways.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: She didn't want any of her kids to have sex? It's common to not want your daughters to have sex—

JIM SHAW: I don't know.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —I think, probably.

JIM SHAW: My girlfriend—my briefly—brief girlfriend, Ann Jennings, she lived out in the country, and so my mom was giving her a ride home, and we were making out in the backseat, and my mom was so angry. She was just fuming without saying anything. And, you know, it hadn't occurred to me that that wasn't something I should have been doing, because I was just discovering, you know, boners and French kissing and all this wonderful stuff. Anyway—now, Ann Jennings—the other major art thing that happened in Midland besides the annual art fair or the, you know, contest for the Watercolor Society, was that they had this Dow Corning Christmas card contest. So when we were seniors in high school, and I was dating her, she won the Christmas card contest, but it was with a woodcut of a peace symbol that had the Virgin and Child within it.

This was, you know, in Midland, Michigan, home to the manufacturer of Agent Orange and napalm, and it—Midland had a very active John Birch Society, just in terms of letter-writing and shit like that. So there were these letters to the editor about the—my girlfriend, who wore Trotskyite granny glasses, and about how the peace symbol was actually a—was the devil's foot, a witch's—or the witch's foot. And so I felt, you know, "Oh, yes, I'm involved in this important thing," you know? I felt like there was something to fight against. That was how I felt.

But then she dumped me pretty quickly because, you know, I was just this really immature—I mean, I was a 17-year-old whose experience was not aggressive, just did not know how to behave in any—you know, I hadn't been socialized into the world in any way that boys are socialized.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So your father never told you, "This is what you're supposed to do."

JIM SHAW: No. If you had a big brother, they would beat you up and do stuff, and you'd learn how to do the whole, Fuck you. No, fuck you. Fuck you. Fuck you. That's like male interactions.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: I didn't have that, so I was left a wimp, and wimps—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What was your father's relationship with you?

JIM SHAW: He was a workaholic, you know. He was gruff. He would show up at night and, you know, this was a time when you would mock your father because of the generation gap. He was straight, and I was a hippie, so we didn't—you know, I had much greater appreciation for him after that because he was kind of put upon by this all-female household, or mostly female household.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And you had long hair then.

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You grew your hair long like a peace flag.

JIM SHAW: Yeah. Also—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Let your freak flag fly.

JIM SHAW: My mom worked as a medical secretary, so she wasn't gone nine to five, but she wasn't there when I got home from school, so my sister and I were latchkey kids, as they say, which was abnormal then, but now it's like everybody's a latchkey kid. Everybody's mom has a job, pretty much.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But you would come home and watch television after school?

JIM SHAW: Yeah, or put on Top 40 radio, which was so much better than commercial radio today, because they'd play Frank Sinatra, or "Love is Blue," or The Who, or blues songs. They had everything on the same channel. It was strange. Now it's all—it's part of that youth culture becoming commercialized. It all got pulled away from everything, and so that's the beginning of the atomization of culture that ends up with, you know, Fox TV, and even more so, people finding their own niche-things to believe in on the internet. They can believe whatever they want about Obama's birthplace.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Let me change the disc, because it may—thank you for that, and we'll carry on in a moment.

[END OF DISC ONE.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: This is Hunter Drohojowska-Philp interviewing Jim Shaw at the artist's studio in Altadena, California on April 1, 2016, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number two. Well Jim, carrying on from where we were. You just, briefly—

JIM SHAW: Well, where were we?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Briefly, we're going to say—you just said that you were—you just showed me pictures of your friends from junior high school who—

JIM SHAW: High school.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: High school, but they were—but you didn't know them in junior high school, so you actually had—you said you kind of went to a junior high school, Central Junior High—

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —with sort of more working-class kids. And then—but you—through rock and roll, actually, through a Jimi Hendrix concert, you got to meet some of the other kids who then you would—you would befriend in high school.

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: The hippies.

JIM SHAW: Our clique.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: A clique. I have a picture of you here with your hair down— that's a little later though, where you have your hair all the way down to your waist, practically.

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How was—how were your parents with that, then? Well, tell me about your friends, your clique of friends.

JIM SHAW: Well, I had a friend who—all—most of the girls we hung out went to the Catholic school.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: We didn't—for the most part, we didn't socialize with the girls in the actual high school. I don't know why that was. But it was probably because one of the girls who didn't go to the Catholic school had a stint in the state insane asylum, and so her mom, single mom—I think the father was dead—wanted her to be happy, so she let her friends hang out at their house. And they were next door to this large, Catholic family, the Black family. So two or three of those Black girls—they were all mostly girls—were part of that group, and their friends, like Leila, who was—Leila Raley, who was the person who sort of introduced me to going to thrift stores and rummage sales for old, weird shit.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Leila Raley.

JIM SHAW: Leila Rally. These were the girls we hung out with and I'd have crushes on.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And go to thrift shops—and go to thrift shops with.

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I didn't know that it had started so early for you.

JIM SHAW: In high school.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: High school. And what would you buy when you went to these sort of thrift shops?

JIM SHAW: Clothing from the '30s, '40s, and '50s. Old, weird things, salt shakers, cups in the shape of Bob Hope, giant paintings of—based on Breck advertisements. You're old enough to remember Breck Girls—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yes, of course.

JIM SHAW: —which were already an archaic form when they were still popular.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: I mean, it was weird that they were still having ads that looked like that, because it was really the aesthetic of the 1940s, in the 1970s. Anyway, I had to find a bad painting of one on a four-by-six-foot piece of Masonite. That was the first noticeable thrift store painting I got. And the first thrift store record that really took hold was "You're My Girl" by—what's his name? Did—*Dragnet*, you know, the lead guy in *Dragnet* [Jack Webb - JS].

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I know.

JIM SHAW: He spoke these music—he spoke the words to romantic songs over a full Nelson Riddle orchestral background, so that was one of my introductions to weird music.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So this all started—this all started really early. All your interests that have continued to be your interests right up till now, started right then in high school.

JIM SHAW: Yeah. And one time, my father came back from a convention, and I think it was when he was first starting—when I was a senior in high school, he went to Toronto for a small business accountants convention. And he brought back this record called "Reggay," spelled R-E-G-G-A-Y, by Byron Lee and the Dragonaires, because they were playing at the hotel, and he thought it was interesting, odd music. And it was interesting for

a number of reasons. The cover was sort of like a pseudo-Peter Max drawing of teenagers dancing. And then the label of the record was divided up into quadrants, one of which was tiger skin. So that was like a pre—it was a very Pop Art sort of thing. But there was a song on it called "Pum Pum on a String," which featured music from some entirely different place, like strings that weren't even in the same key. And the song itself was totally "The Little Drummer Boy," and "Pum Pum," it turns out, means "pussy." So it was basically a song about sex to the tune of "The Little Drummer Boy," with these string interludes in a different key and rhythm. And to me, that was like, "Oh, my God, you can do really weird shit with music," before Roxy Music.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So here you are at the University of Michigan, so you have found your clique of weirdos in high school, and now you've gone on to University of Michigan and found another clique of fellow types—

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —at the University of Michigan. And that's when you meet—Mike Kelley becomes a friend of yours. Who else were your friends at that place?

JIM SHAW: Well then—Kalle Nemvalts and his beautiful sister.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What's the name?

JIM SHAW: Kalle Nemvalts. He's from Freeland, which is next to Midland.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And there's an association between the Freelanders and the Midlanders that goes down to hippie communes and stuff. And he's a jazz musician, so we get to know all these other jazz-oriented people. It's like—Gerhard Schlanzky was another guy from the art school who's a jazz musician. He ended up being the chief installation guy at the Museum of Natural History, I think. And Susan Morningstar, who was a very close friend of Mike's, who is still around in New York. She's like a Zen nun. She ran a—she ran this hostel or something for Zen monks, and she said, "You wouldn't believe the amount of tension there is here."

[They laugh.]

And she moved to New York after graduating, which we didn't do. And—who else did we know there? You know, other people from the art school, various—one of them was a girl I had a crush on, and she came to the show at MASS MoCA, she moved back to Massachusetts, where her parents had gone to. There was another woman who went to U of M who was teaching at Smith and—whatever the college, just across the Vermont border from MASS MoCA. She was teaching there. So I had a sort of a get-together with former female students from our era at the University of Michigan. That was interesting.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So did you—were there any other artists who came out of that moment except for you and Mike? Any other people that went on to have careers as artists?

JIM SHAW: Well, there was a couple that went to New York, and one of them was sort of an East Village artist. I can't remember his name. And, who else? There was a guy that came to visit Kamrowski one day who I think became a well-known comic book artist, because he was showing a portfolio of comics he'd done. I think it was Craig Russell, but I could be totally wrong on that. Before our time was Commander Cody, of Commander Cody and his Lost Planet Airmen, and what's-her-name, who was—did a lot of performance work with costumes, I can't remember her name. She lived in New York [Patolesko -JS]. Oh, George Manupelli is another teacher who was there. He was a Fluxus artist and had associations with people like the Velvet Underground.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Could you tell me his name again?

JIM SHAW: George Manupelli. He was a filmmaker.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How do you spell Manupelli?

JIM SHAW: M-A-N-U-P-E-L-L-I.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

JIM SHAW: I think.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And so, when you're taking art classes at this point, you still are taking what we'd call core classes. You take drawing, painting—

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —sculpture, things like that. Or did you have experimental classes at the University of Michigan? Did you have any kind of classes that were a little bit more of—reflective of what was going on in the late '60s, early '70s, in the art world?

JIM SHAW: Not much. I mean, occasionally, Kamrowski would bring an old friend of his to talk, like somebody who had written a book on Surrealism came and talked. He—I think he had this one Spanish Surrealist, you know, current Surrealist come and give a talk once. You know, you had a lot of leftist radicals doing stuff, you had—but I remember there was—when I came to CalArts, Doug Huebler was a graduate of University of Michigan in the late '40s. He was on the football team, he was a former Marine! And he had just given a talk at Eastern Michigan, which—we always get the posters for talks, and they always seem to get more interesting artists there. And I said something about his talk at Eastern Michigan and having gone to the University of Michigan. And he said, "Oh, fuck them. None of them came to my talk."

So you know, we learned about this stuff through, you know, art magazines and art history lectures. Oh, there was an art historian who had been the girlfriend of one of my favorite Pop artists in London and had written the first book on him. Eduardo Paolozzi [Diane Kirkpatrick -JS].

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And there were always these Eduardo Paolozzi prints that were for sale in the hoity-toity bookstore in town. And I could never afford them, they were like \$45. And I'm so sorry I didn't buy them all. I bought a synthesizer, a guitar synthesizer instead. But—so she was a person you could talk to about art, because she was a contemporary art historian.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What about going to museums? Did you guys have trips—

JIM SHAW: We'd go to the Detroit Institute of the Arts, you know. There was a thing where everyone got on a—in a van and drove to New York to see things. And I didn't go because I didn't feel adventurous enough. I think, actually, I might have graduated already, because—well, anyway, Mike went, and he managed to track down Öyvind Fahlström, and invited him to come and give a talk. And I know that the talk was given after I had graduated from CalArts.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So—I mean, from Art Center, from—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: University of Michigan.

JIM SHAW: University of Michigan. They all blend together.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So it's—

JIM SHAW: So that was an influential thing, to have—to go out for drinks with—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Öyvind Fahlström.

JIM SHAW: — Öyvind Fahlström, who, A, was incredibly young-looking for—whatever, he was an older artist to us, but he was an artist whose work was very interesting. He was very interested in politics, and—for one thing, he said to us—to Mike and me, "You know, I'm jealous of you because you've got a real art education. You know, I didn't have that." And then he also said, "You know, my favorite artists are the EC horror comic artists." And to me, that was like, whoa! Something I actually like is respected by this important person, who is an actual adult. And then the next year, he died.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Saw his obituary in *Art in America*, and I was shocked, because he seemed so alive and young. He was in his 40s.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Could you—so at the University of Michigan, you're kind of—you and Mike have become friends, and how much time—I mean, were you really friendly there, or did you get closer after you went to CalArts? Because he is younger.

JIM SHAW: Well, we were friendly there. We lived in the same house, "God's Oasis Drive-In Church."

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay. Let's see, okay, so you've moved—you're friends.

JIM SHAW: Yeah, I—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Then what happened?

JIM SHAW: I graduated, he was still a student.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What year did you graduate?

JIM SHAW: '74.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And so for the next year-and-three-quarters, I graduated a little bit late because of transferring. And so, that was after four-and-a-half years. And so I was in Ann Arbor for a year-and-a-half before going off to grad school. Mike went, I think, directly from undergrad to grad school. And we went at the same time to CalArts. But in the interim, we formed a band called Destroy All Monsters. We played three times. We—I mean, Cary [Loren] and Niagara and their friends were much scarier than we were. Like, there was this guy, D.B., who we'd be walking along with, and someone would be singing a song in the distance, and he'd start screaming at them to shut up. That was just so weird, and he became a well-known figure in the magazine publishing world.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And would hire Niagara to write columns on Zodiac and stuff.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So where did you have a—so when did you—you and Mike were living together?

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: At what year did you start doing that?

JIM SHAW: Probably '74, something like that. The first place I lived was in a frat house with my friend Tom, the one who met Jane Fonda in the psych department. And so Tom was kind of like my—I would always have these best friends who were smarter than me. Tom was sort of the first one. And then we moved out of there, and I was living in this rooming house in a nice-ish part of town, but there were these junkies who lived upstairs without ever paying any rent. And eventually, the city shut down the rooming house, I think, because of the presence of junkies. Technically, it wasn't zoned for that.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So I got like \$750 for it, for being forced out of this place, and that was enough for me to live for a summer. I quit my dishwashing job at the Holiday Inn, because it was the worst possible job you could ever have.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So your parents didn't pay for your school?

JIM SHAW: They did, but it was so little, you know, I could pay for other things. I paid for a synthesizer. Or, you know, I got a job working at the school store, in the art department, after I graduated. And that gave me a taste of the post-graduation life, and I decided I didn't really want to stay. I didn't want to move to San Francisco, like many of my friends—our friends did, because to me that seemed like another college town. I kind of liked the idea of L.A. And I liked the idea of going to a school that had the possibility of taking music classes and film classes, and I was mostly inspired to apply because of Pat O'Neill's films, and other films like Daina Krumins', and—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Who was the other one?

JIM SHAW: Daina Krumins and Kathy Rose were also experimental filmmakers from CalArts. Daina Krumins did a movie called *The Divine Miracle*, which was all special effects in the sort of Catholic style of, you know, Christ's resurrection, and there would be these little *putto*, *putti* flying around with just flapping wings flying around him as the sun was setting in fast motion, all kludged together on an optical printer, it was kind of amazing. Kathy Rose did all these crazy animations.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well you must have known—well, let me back up a little bit. You and Mike have been—you thought—after you graduate, but Mike is still in school, you form Destroy All Monsters. And you play, and did you have any aspirations of becoming—you know, being in a rock band that would travel and tour the world?

JIM SHAW: I had too much stage fright, and I was totally unsecure of any musical abilities I had, because I just don't have the patience to learn songs.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: But I was playing weird guitar, and, you know, listening to the guitar solos albums that Fred Frith put out. There's also a guy named Hans Reichel, who built a double-ended guitar, so he would play—he could play eight notes at once with this double-ended guitar. So I did a lot of sort of double-ended guitar with a single guitar. I bought a 12-string that I never tuned, so I was always coming up with new tunings! But on the other hand, Cary really wanted to have a functioning rock band. And when we left town, it was upsetting to him, he had a nervous breakdown.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And how was Mike in all this?

JIM SHAW: He regarded it all from, you know, the mountaintop, you know. He was interested in Kraftwerk because they were working with no real instruments. And you know, it was all—it was all about mocking the whole rock and roll thing. It was also—to me, it was sort of like bringing the Stooges back to Ann Arbor, because everything that was going on there was all roots rock, and, you know, bar-band stuff.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, he told me once—Mike Kelley told me once that he went to CalArts to study with Morton Subotnick. But then when he got there, they wouldn't let him do that.

JIM SHAW: Well, there were limitations. I wanted to take the classes of Pat O'Neill, but A, Pat O'Neill was no longer teaching there, and B, the previous year—what's her name? The important sculptor [Lynda Benglis -JS]—had told the students they should, they could clean Portapak with—like you do with a regular tape deck.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And you can't, so a lot of Portapaks were destroyed by art students, because of the advice of—what's her name? Oh shit, what's her name? She was a very important artist at the time, the one who had the plate of dildos advertisement in—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Lynda Benglis.

JIM SHAW: Yeah, Lynda Benglis.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: She told them they could—she destroyed all the Portapaks? [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: Yeah. She just figured, you can do that with a tape recorder, why not with a video tape recorder? So they wouldn't let us art students take any of the film classes unless we went through a whole rigmarole of—and what I did was use the video synthesizer. That's as far as I could get in the film department, but I hung out, to some extent, with some of the film people. I got to know people in the film cage. I had friends in the film department. And when Laurie Anderson came, she hung out with people from the music department more, I think, than the art department, to some extent, because she was starting to record with—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So wait—you and Mike are a year-and-a-half apart in education, correct?

JIM SHAW: Two years apart, in age.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now, what I can't remember is, did you go CalArts at the same year? Did you start the same year, or did you go first?

JIM SHAW: We started the same year at CalArts.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay. Did you come out to L.A. together?

JIM SHAW: Yeah. We lived in a house in Sylmar.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you drive out?

JIM SHAW: Yeah. He drove before me, and for some reason, he decided to do that. So I was busy having this relationship with a girl I met, you know, two months before leaving town—or two weeks before leaving town. It was really intense.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Then carried—tried to carry it on as a long-distance relationship, but me not being Jewish didn't help, and me not living in the Ann Arbor-Detroit area didn't help. She was a cab driver, and she was part of—one of our roommates was this humongous guy, and he was a cab driver. And he was on this film—one of the student film co-ops, which she was on.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What was her name?

JIM SHAW: Her name was Sue Klein

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you were kind of—you delayed your departure for L.A. because you thought —

JIM SHAW: Because I was madly in love.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —you were madly in love with Sue Klein?

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But you come out anyway. Did you drive your own car out?

JIM SHAW: My father and I drove out in the car I inherited from my parents, the Gremlin, which had its first problem driving out. It's like I said to my brother-in-law, the auto safety engineer, [Should we do something about it? And he said not to worry -JS] That sound, that's really loud, the engine is really loud, and it turned out that the muffler had decoupled from its source. And so we were driving in the middle of nowhere in western Illinois, and it just—the muffler fell off on the freeway, and was like—by the time we pulled off, the next exit a mile later, had just ground down the frontal part of the thing. Anyway, so, I was resilient enough to wire it together, to drive it, so it wasn't scraping the ground. And we found a motel and miraculously found an open place to fix it, in this coal mining town, on Sunday, and just kept going.

And then we were driving through the Rocky Mountains, and this Gremlin had vacuum wipers that only functioned when you weren't putting your foot on the pedal. So we were driving uphill in a rainstorm, and I was having to pull the wipers up out the window, and we had to rig them, from then on, with a string to have them work.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: This was with your father?

JIM SHAW: With my father. And I think at this point, the fucking Rocky Mountains were—there was, you know, a thousand-foot drop to one side and no guardrails to speak of. There was no freeway. It was just like a two-lane, or maybe four-lane, but no freeway. When we—another trip I went on with Mike and this Mormon guy from San Diego and we got stuck in the middle of a truck convoy in that situation. So he would be going really slow uphill, and then you would be sandwiched between these trucks going downhill, and it was very dangerous. We basically gave up driving through—I'm sure they've got a freeway now, but the—70 I think it was, at that time, was hell. And we made it out here to this little—shitty little house in Sylmar, which was still recuperating from the '72 earthquake at the time.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, really. So how many people lived in this house?

JIM SHAW: Just me and Mike.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And who found the house?

JIM SHAW: Mike.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: It was next door to a big, fat biker named Tiny. And at one point, Mike got sucked in to having to bail Tiny out of jail by his girlfriend, who was coming on to Mike the whole time. It was a total white trash neighborhood, and it was next to Pacoima, which was a suburban black ghetto, in San Fernando, which was a suburban Mexican ghetto. So we were in the white ghetto, and we would go to the San Fernando swap meet every weekend, which was right down the street, and occasionally find some treasure trove of shit like—the Pacoima church group was selling clothes from the 1940s, got a whole wardrobe for 20 bucks.

And I'd sit around—oh, and I had a job. The first summer, I got a job working at a mask factory, the Don Post Mask Studio. So I was, in fact, working at the Post Studio, having graduated from the post-studio program at CalArts. Mike had this most horrible job as an assistant to a guard at a public housing project. At one time, there was a violent incident, and the police came, and they wanted Mike to be the first person to walk into it. And he said, "I don't have a gun, you guys have guns." You know, because there was all these delinquents in this place. And that guy who headed up the thing was basically illiterate, and he was in love with a 16-year-old girl. So he wanted Mike to write letters for him, pleading with the parents of the 16-year-old. And this was—I never met the guy, but I assume he was like 40, trying to get permission to hang out with this 16-year-old girl.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You were raised in this basically middle-class environment. Was Mike's

background similar to yours?

JIM SHAW: He was from a working-class—I mean, his father—I think it was probably similar, this is just a guess. His mother, probably, was smarter than his father, just like in my household. And his father was the head of the janitorial department in—so it's like being a janitor, but a high-level janitor. So Mike worked as a janitor as a summer job. And he was very—you know, he considered himself to be from hillbilly stock, whereas I'm from, you know, college-educated stock, and you know, my father—my grandfather had a nice, upper-middle-class house in a nice—no longer nice, I'm sure, since Rochester now has like two failed companies.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But would you—was there an awareness of class?

JIM SHAW: Yeah, subconsciously. I mean, I went to a school that everybody from every class in my hometown went to.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: But all of the classes that were for mechanics and people who were going to work in the factories, they were all in the basement. Secretarial classes were all taught in the basement. And stuff like chemistry and civics, et cetera, they were all taught on the second story, so there was—the basement was dangerous to go into if you were a hippie with long hair. They might beat you up or something. So luckily, I did not have a locker in the basement, but I did take typing classes in the basement. That was the closest I had to—and I was the worst typist in class.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You have to talk more loudly.

JIM SHAW: Okay. I was the worst typist in class!

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] And my—what—here you are, and Mike is also—but Mike did not go to your high school.

JIM SHAW: Oh no, he went to—he was from Wayne, Michigan, which was near Ypsilanti. And he had a bunch of friends who were just like the scariest, Detroit hippie-type—one time they showed up, and they were lit up on speed or something. And they had this liberated lawn jockey that they had added a large penis to. And—it was a weird group of people. And also, one of his best friends from high school was another roommate at our house, John Reed, who was this excellent acoustic guitarist. And he would play with Destroy All Monsters as well.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: But he was—he was super working class, and he had a job at an insane asylum.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Could you tell—I mean, here you are, young people, so you—could you tell that there was a difference between the way you and Mike were raised?

JIM SHAW: Yeah, well, he was Catholic, also.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But more in terms of—I think more in terms of class difference.

JIM SHAW: Yeah, I went to his house, and I could see that it was this sort of sad, little place. But it was mostly what I'm talking about, Oh, my dad, he just reads books that, like, This is a bestseller. He'll have a box full of books that he bought at the thrift store, and he just goes from one to another. It was just like his descriptions of stuff. And I went over to—I think we were at Niagara's house once, and that was more like upper-middle-class, Jewish household. And Cary was wearing this jacket that said "Cocaine" in the Coca Cola lettering, and I thought that was a pretty weird thing to wear to your girlfriend's parents' house. But he adopted this sort of juvenile delinquent look, a long-haired juvenile delinquent. They also—Cary and Niagara—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You mean Mike?

JIM SHAW: No. Cary. Well, Mike did too, to some extent, you know, the greasy kid. And when we came out to CalArts, one of our advisors was an actually influential person in some ways, just because she had an interesting show at LACE, but—I got to remember her name. She [Judy Pfaff -JS] was from Detroit, and she—we later heard she was kind of afraid of us, like we actually were juvenile delinquents.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Not the intellectuals, what we were hiding. God, what's her name? She should have been in that show at Hauser Wirth & Schimmel. Sculptor, she was a girlfriend of Joel Shapiro's, and she would do these great accumulations of things. God, what the fuck is her name?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I should know this.

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It will come to you.

JIM SHAW: Yeah, it will come to me. She was my advisor, but she dropped me because she was scared.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You know, well, knowing both of you, I would—I can see—you could almost feel Mike's—

JIM SHAW: Judy Pfaff.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, Judy Pfaff.

JIM SHAW: Yeah. She could have easily been in that show.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Judy Pfaff. You're in the house in Sylmar, you're at CalArts. How do you—how much do you see of each other? Do you start making art together? Are you performing together? What is your friendship like at that point?

JIM SHAW: Well, we were starting to diverge. I no longer wanted to make music with other people because I realized I couldn't hear what I was doing, and that's the only way I could tell what I was doing. I still continued to make music by myself, and sometimes we would do duets together. And I was a guest performer with the Poetics. But I wasn't a core member.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] The Poetics being Mike's band?

JIM SHAW: Yeah. Well, it was Mike and Tony Oursler, and later John Miller joined, and this guy Bill Stobaugh, who was in the film department, who later became sort of a member of Thelonious Monster and good buddies with the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What was his name?

JIM SHAW: Bill Stobaugh.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Bill Stobaugh.

JIM SHAW: He worked for six years—he was an undergrad and a grad student, which means he's from a rich family—and he worked for six years on one piece of film, which ended up being merged into a chunk of the movie *Tron* that Abel's made, where the—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Where you were working?

JIM SHAW: Later. That was something they did before I got there, but Kenny Mirman, who also went to CalArts when I went there, was a major Abel's director. And he'd done that thing, and he knew Bill, and he said, "Can I just use that film and solarize it?" So basically, it's, like, footage of trees being driven under foliage that's been printed over four times. So why that took six years, I was never sure.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So he's got this band, the Poetics, and sometimes you would play with it.

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what was that—where did they perform, and where did you perform?

JIM SHAW: Parties.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Private parties.

JIM SHAW: I just performed in my studio or at home.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: In Sylmar, I would set up multiple tape decks, and I would put a giant tape loop through all of them, and I would play these things with feedback and guitar synthesizer. What other things would go on?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you share—were you in the same class track? Were you taking the same classes?

JIM SHAW: Well, definitely we were both in grad seminar. So—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And who was teaching those?

JIM SHAW: Baldessari. So in that way, Baldessari was the most influential teacher, because everybody—I never took Michael Asher, because I didn't have to. And I would have been terrible in the class, but that was where more theoretical shit got spewed. Baldessari basically let the students run the thing.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And he would occasionally tell jokes, and he would bring in something, he would bring in people. One day, he brought in the Ad Reinhardt cartoons. So that was my first exposure to those.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How does your work evolve out of this experience?

JIM SHAW: Well, I was doing stuff that was really doing still-frame versions of what Pat O'Neill had been doing by multi-layering imagery. Using—initially, I was using Xerox machines back in Ann Arbor, and at CalArts they had this big blueprint machine. So I would go into the film thing and do big, high-con blowups, which I have lying around here somewhere.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And I would layer them in that machine. So I would do multiple exposures where I would use the same positive and negative as one image and then other things together. And that became my art for a little while, and—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And you can—one can even see that to this day.

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: The sort of—the multiple exposure aspect.

JIM SHAW: It's the schizoid thing. I thought it was a schizophrenic view of the future, but I now think it's—schizoid is the proper term. And I think it's the future we face. I think being a divided self is preferable for corporate culture.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] But just in terms of your personal—your formal—your actual formal evolution, I mean, that really—that layering of imagery—

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —starts right then.

JIM SHAW: Yeah, I just missed the chance to see a Pat O'Neill new film yesterday, because I didn't have it in me to drive to Hollywood. And the last time it was shown was during the opening of Hauser Wirth and Schimmel.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Let's see, we shared Laurie Anderson's class, and probably some other—there was a film—a Super 8 film class we both took. And we diverged in different ways. He was probably out there having affairs with students, I never managed to have an affair with a single student while I was a student there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: I did after I graduated, but that was different. I was working on the grounds crew.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So he was having his many girlfriends, and you were not.

JIM SHAW: I was not.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] But were you taking in—and what is happening at this point with your drawing technique? Because it seems to be something that you were so interested in.

JIM SHAW: I was still using it. I mean, basically, at the midway point of my—my first year review featured Richard Artschwager. Who had a student girlfriend, as all teachers did at that time. And he was not one of my teachers, and I found out through the student grapevine, from his girlfriend to another friend, that he was considering flunking me, but he just decided to say nothing, instead of flunking me. And so that gave me the impetus to go ahead and work in a more coherent nature in my last year there. So that's when I put together my

first fake religion, which was *The End Is Here* magazine—was the magazine of it. I made a video, I made objects, most of which got destroyed by rain, being stored out in Canyon Country at the house that I shared with—originally, Mitchell Syrop and Mike were there. And I moved in with Mike. Tony was there. Mike moved into Hollywood with Don Krieger. And so we had this weird, little enclave in Canyon Country after the Sylmar house.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So Canyon Country was Mike, Tony Oursler, and who? Oh, Mitchell Syrop.

JIM SHAW: Mitchell Syrop and myself. And Mike moved out in this—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And Mike moved out to go into Hollywood. He moved to Hollywood.

JIM SHAW: He moved to Hollywood, and this other—this other undergraduate friend of Tony's moved in. And his girlfriend moved in and brought him these giant dogs, who shat in the living room. I think he went on to New York and became one of those sort of new painters for a while that did deliberately clunky artwork in the '80s. But I can't remember his name.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] So let's go back to you, so you hear it through it the grapevine that Richard Artschwager was thinking of flunking you, so you get—when you say you get it together to do your first religion—

JIM SHAW: Well, my previous—what I showed in my first year—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Louder.

JIM SHAW: —what I showed in my first year review was just whatever I had made. Which was going from one thing to another. So it wasn't a coherent thing, so I felt like I had to actually create something with a narrative thread. And that's sort of been my *métier* ever since. I also, as a young—youngster in my hometown, I experienced art through magazines and books. And so for me, for there to be publications was important. So I did—my first publication was *The End Is Here*, the second one was the *Life and Death* book. And the third one was the, sort of, *National Enquirer Distorted Faces* things. And when I did those two books, I was working with Danna Ruscha.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh.

JIM SHAW: Who I met Ed through—I had a huge crush on Danna.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Back then they were divorced, at the time. And I—he told me who printed his books, so that's who printed my first two books. At that point, after two books, I realized, gee, the cost of paper is going way up. And I was working in color, so I never could afford to do anything myself after that.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So this—just pause. The first one, you created your own religion in—as your—the second year you're at CalArts. What was the response of the teachers and students to that?

JIM SHAW: They were much more enthusiastic about it. I mean, like, Michael Asher was on my review committee, and he was enamored of my way with type. And they both asked—I think Baldessari was the other one, and they brought me a thing that was an ad looking for recruits for the CIA. They thought, as a joke, that it would be good to show me that, because there was a lot of conspiracy stuff in my work.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what's inspired that work? That's the first approach—

JIM SHAW: I had just been looking in thrift stores and used bookstores at weird shit. And there was this TV show on Sunday mornings, the Universal World Church, Dr. Jagers and Miss Velma. We'd watch fairly religiously, and there was just weird stuff in there, and I wanted to get some of that weirdness in. There was also the era of things like the Bermuda Triangle and "Chariots of the Gods." And there were documentaries that were filled with conjecture about those, so my video was in the style of one of those things. The aesthetics of *The End Is Here* were taken from the aesthetics of that thing you find dropped into your door and into various washaterias around town.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Which was the—*Awake!* and *The Watchtower*. And also there was the theories about the middle—the hollow earth, from Richard Shavers, that I was learning about—Richard Shaver. And I was learning about Unarius. They were another local cult. The first actual quack literature I found was by Spaceship Ruthie's husband. What his name? Merle Norman or something, I forget his name. Norman something. When I was in

high school, I was looking for old books with engravings that I could collage á la Max Ernst, and I found *The Voice of Venus* by the male founder of Unarius. So I was trying to work all this stuff in.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what—you were interested in it as a bizarre manifestation of culture, or was it—

JIM SHAW: Yeah, American culture. The paranoid underbelly of American culture, which we now see brought forward into mainstream politics. When I was a kid, we would go and we would mock the John Birchers as they were gathering to promote the presidential aspirations of George Wallace, and now that's the fucking mainstream of the Republican Party. Ayn Rand is everywhere and, you know, Ted Cruz and—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It's a scary thing. But it wasn't from your own religious upbringing that—or was it from this—

JIM SHAW: No. I was jealous of anyone who had such crazy, like—we never—I didn't know anything about the Book of Revelations from my upbringing.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And you know, that's where all the cool stuff is, along with the, you know, the—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you go to church?

JIM SHAW: Yeah, I went till I was 12, and then I decided, ah, this was bunk. You know, you couldn't fit all those animals on that ark. The insects alone would statistically outweigh the entire ark.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] So your parents were not religious?

JIM SHAW: They went to church. You know, they got—actually, they're religious to the extent that their ashes are in the church wall that we went to. The Episcopalian church, but it's, you know, a church created so the king could get a divorce.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What was the name of the church?

JIM SHAW: St. John's Episcopal, designed by Alden Dow, the son of Dow Chemical Foundry. Pretty great architect who had free reign in my hometown. Now that Dow is probably laying off thousands of people, you can buy a Dow—our Dow employee house for a bargain now.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, tell me about this—when you were pursuing this—was this your graduate show? It was, was it not?

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Where did you stage that?

JIM SHAW: Just at one of the small galleries. They had one, two, three, four galleries. There were two big ones by the cafeteria and two smaller ones up above the big, open space. And it was in one of those.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And at this point, are you still living with Mike, and you're still friends with Mike?

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But he's gone—he's gone in a slightly different direction, hasn't he?

JIM SHAW: He's starting to do performance pieces. He did a piece while we were in college that was reviewed in *Artforum*.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And that was, you know, we were all jealous of that, I tell you. But what happened was—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It was a performance.

JIM SHAW: Yeah. I think so. It was at LACE. But prior to that, he had his show of birdhouses up at CalArts when this guy who was a curator from San Diego came up, who was also, you know, related to the Whitney, and *Art*—he was a writer for *Art in America*.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Richard Armstrong.

JIM SHAW: Yeah. So he saw his work, and understood there was something interesting there. So, he's the one who reviewed it, whereas I—you know, we were all looking at the art world, even Mike, and going, "Well, no chance to earn a living here."

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So, you know, some people tried to get teaching jobs. I didn't want to teach. I didn't know what I was going to do. Some people got CETA jobs, because Reagan was not yet in power. And you could scrounge a living in L.A. in those days, which was the good part about it. We also clung together, you know, other people that were—I mean, Mitchell was a big deal. When we got there, there was a group of women students who basically controlled the discourse. And God forbid I should remember all their names. The first one to sort of get a career was Jill—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Giegerich.

JIM SHAW: —Giegerich. And I think she was the first to abandon her career. But you know, her main gallery was someone who didn't really show outside of L.A., so—but she sold a piece for \$10,000, and that was a lot of money back then. And she was married to one of the teachers there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

JIM SHAW: And he was bragging about it. "My wife—she sold a piece for \$10,000, [do I know how to pick'em? - JS]." I remember one point when Huebler was talking about how he had to ship some work to a show, and they said, "Well, what should we insure it at?" And they said, "Oh, we'll insure it for \$10,000." He said, "Oh, that's a lot of money," and—you know, because there just wasn't any money in the art world back then.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now, is it true—my memory of that time is that you—it's that you were encouraged—that CalArts students were encouraged to be supportive of one another. Like from my memory, it's as though—

JIM SHAW: I didn't know that you were—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —whenever there was an opening, like they all came to support each other.

JIM SHAW: You lived out either in the dorms or near there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] In Valencia.

JIM SHAW: In Valencia, and the other art programs were so-so, you know. UCLA was over here. Art Center was over here, and they didn't even have a grad program, and it was almost entirely dedicated towards commercial stuff. And we'd hear these rumors that, "All the teachers there, they throw your stuff on the ground, they wouldn't let this fat girl in because it would screw with their hiring record." You know, it was like this serious place, not like our place.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And Otis was sort of a poor cousin, but it was also affordable. But we had—we had friends who went to Otis. Like, well, Jim Isermann was the year after me, and he and a group of people came up from Kenosha, Wisconsin. And the others went to Otis, and he went to CalArts. So we got to know them and their friend Jeffrey Vallance, who was going to Otis at the time. And Mike, I think he was teaching, I guess—somehow, Mike became friends with the Yonemotos, and he worked with them, and that was our first sort of entrée into the world of UCLA and UCLA artists.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And Mike got to know Paul McCarthy, got him a job teaching at UCLA eventually. At one point Mike went off to Minnesota and taught there for a year. And I think Tony was living in his apartment during that time period or something. He was sharing an apartment with—what's his name? Another member of the Poetics, Don Krieger. So Don Krieger was associated—was tapped into the bohemian gay underworld of L.A.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did he die?

JIM SHAW: He died a long time ago.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yes.

JIM SHAW: He was switching medications.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Not from AIDS.

JIM SHAW: Well it was AIDS medication, but it was much later. [. . . -]S].

JIM SHAW: To get back to the social circle.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Back to the social circles, how did—

JIM SHAW: You just hung out with the people that you knew—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

JIM SHAW: —from CalArts, because that's all—that's all the people you knew.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: You didn't know anybody else in town. And so eventually, we'd start to meet other people, like the Yonemotos, and hang out with them.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So when—who has—Mike's been reviewed in *Artforum* to the—but who has the first show of your group?

JIM SHAW: Jill Giegerich.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Jill Giegerich has a show, is that a—where is it?

JIM SHAW: Margo Leavin's.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Margo Leavin Gallery. And after that, who has a show?

JIM SHAW: I don't know. Those were—you're asking more than I can answer, as far as that goes.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Are you—what year did you graduate?

JIM SHAW: In '78.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: '78, which is—

JIM SHAW: I was still working there at the school. An incoming undergraduate at the time was the extremely handsome—what's his name, who became a huge '80s star in New York? Ashley Bickerton.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And I was—I had a girlfriend who was younger than me, who had gone to CalArts. And her best friend and neighbor was Ashley's girlfriend, at the time, at CalArts. And when Ashley Bickerton bought a building in New York, all of his classmates went, "Oh, maybe being an artist is a possible career path for me." And people who didn't study art were selling artwork and showing as artists. So that was like a beginning of something. There was also—there was a clique of—there was a wolf pack of sorts. Mike Kelley, Benjamin Weissman, and our former best friend, who sort of sequestered himself off from the world, Tim Martin.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, Tim.

JIM SHAW: Tim Martin came in the next year, as did John Miller.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: John Miller would have been one of our friends after graduation, but he moved back to New York. Tony also moved back to New York fairly shortly, but we remained pretty close. I mean, I'm still pretty close with John, but not as close as I am with Tony.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Who—you said your girlfriend was friends with Ashley Bickerton and his girlfriend. Who was your girlfriend?

JIM SHAW: Her name was Judy Bryan. And she was studying design there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: B-R-I-N?

JIM SHAW: Y-N—Y-A-N.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And how long was she your girlfriend?

JIM SHAW: Six months, the usual. That's as long as anyone could stand me.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Aw. Was she your first girlfriend at CalArts?

JIM SHAW: No, that was later. Ann Bobco, who is married to B. Wurtz, was my first girlfriend at CalArts. She was an incoming student while I was still working. I was working out there, and then Tony and I—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Ann Bobco?

JIM SHAW: Yeah. Tony and I worked at the hospital for a while before he moved in with Mike in Hollywood. We were still living out in the sticks.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what were you doing at the hospital?

JIM SHAW: Delivering meals and washing, you know, cleaning shit up.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Wow.

JIM SHAW: Drudge work.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And Tim Martin and Tony and I moved into this house in Echo Park, when it was the most dangerous part of Los Angeles. We got broken into three times. And one time, I can't remember, he had—Baldessari's fluid head—fluid head—what do you call it? Tripod, and I think that wasn't stolen. But he had a show that opened in a week at LACE, and his tape, master tape, was in the video camera that was stolen.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Ooh.

JIM SHAW: Which happened to everybody.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Ooh.

JIM SHAW: It happened to Nina Salerno, it happened to everybody. Nina was Tony's girlfriend at CalArts. So, we got broken into three times, and one time my tires were slashed, and I didn't lock the car. There was nothing worth stealing, so they felt, "I've spent so much time rifling through this car, there's nothing in it. I've got to slash the tires."

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: And that house got sold, so we moved out of it. And at that point, I was—I had a roommate who I had been in dances with. She was a—I knew dancers from CalArts, because Mike and I were the weirdest dancers at CalArts. And so she had curated me into some of her dances. And through her, I got to know this guy named D'warf, William Warfield. And he was Anita Pace's first husband, that's how I met Anita. There was another clique of people that included the Asherettes, as they were known.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: That would be—and we knew them all, and we're all friends. Chris Williams and—who were the other people? What's his name? Shows occasionally at Rosamund Felsen, who was, early on, a conceptual painter, but then became a—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Tim Ebner.

JIM SHAW: Tim Ebner, became a normal painter.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And another guy named Mark Stahl, who moved to New York and dropped out of the art world. But he was part of the CalArts *Skeptical Belief* show. And, most prominent, teaching at Harvard—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Steve Prina.

JIM SHAW: Steve Prina.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Who, unlike the other members of, most of the—that first group I was talking about, they all went to the same junior college in the valley. And Rea Tajiri was among their friends, and so was Benjamin Weissman. And also there was Benjamin's girlfriend, who moved to New York and got involved in the "No New York"-type scene, i.e. used heroin. And I can't remember her name. So they were all buddies, and then Benjamin became the head guy at Beyond Baroque.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So we got to know all these Beyond Baroque people, like Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose, and Kirby Dick. So our social lives began expanding through these various venues. You know, I met a girlfriend through Donna West [Beyond Baroque -JS]. She died a couple of years ago. She had a studio there at Beyond Baroque. And another one of our classmates also showed at Rosamund Felsen, what the hell was his name? He was running LACE after getting out of school.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Marc Pally.

JIM SHAW: Marc Pally.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Now it turns out his daughter is part of the Clinton world.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I know. It's amazing. She works for—Hillary's right-hand girl.

JIM SHAW: Yeah, what stories she could tell.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It's just amazing that this group of people, who were your friends from CalArts, mostly, and their friends, almost all of them went on to have substantial careers.

JIM SHAW: Well, not all of them. And it depends on your definition of substantial.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well—

JIM SHAW: Mike had a substantial career.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

JIM SHAW: The rest of us, you know, trailed in his wake, sort of.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, they all had some career, anyway. What happens is—it's interesting, they all actually continue to make art. I know, because of—we're the same—we've known each other for such a long time, I know all of those names. And they all—almost all—if they're alive, they mostly continue to make art.

JIM SHAW: Yeah. It also depends on when they had a kid, if they had a kid. Or when they died of AIDS, if they died of AIDS.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But I want—

JIM SHAW: Because once you have a kid, then you're—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —but it's a substantial group—

JIM SHAW: —forced to be a teacher, if you weren't already.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —oh, lot of those.

JIM SHAW: And then your showing as an artist, it becomes—I mean, in some ways, I wish I had that career, because I'm dependent on selling art. And that's not something you can at all depend on.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, in terms of what you did, when did you start then—well, just to pause for a second and talk about this early—or the early recognition of the early '80s, when it's really about showing with Rosamund Felsen. It seems to me—I don't quite remember how that even—for all of you, how that all—who goes and gets recognized first?

JIM SHAW: Probably Mike.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mike.

JIM SHAW: Well, the first was Riko Mizuno, was interested in his work, and I think showed him. And she had a gallery that later turned into the Earl McGrath Gallery for a while. And she was interested in showing me.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: But some—I think she closed the gallery before then. And there weren't too many places to show. There was the—what was it called? Gallery on Seventh, Vanguard Gallery. That had interesting shows. They showed Mark Mothersbaugh's prints. I think that Devo played there early on, and, you know, they showed Roger Herman. And then there was—Ulrike Kantor had a gallery for a while that showed people. But you know, they come and go. That was in the days when, typically, a gallery was something that was a tax loss thing for the family income.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: You know, it was open for the five years you could get away with not earning a profit, and then it was over. So only Rosamund and—what's-her-name—survived for any period of time.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Margo Leavin.

JIM SHAW: Margo Leavin.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, you have your first solo show at the Zero Club.

JIM SHAW: Yeah—oh, another important gallery in that era was—what the hell was the name? It was in that building on Wilshire and Los Altos.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, yeah. Richard Kuhlenschmidt.

JIM SHAW: Kuhlenschmidt.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Or Jancar/Kuhlenschmidt.

JIM SHAW: Jancar/Kuhlenschmidt was the first place to show significant numbers of weirdos. There were also—there was the loft of—God, what's his name? Shows with Ace, but—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: David Amico?

JIM SHAW: David Amico, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So he was a very interesting artist, and he also was the first person to show—what's-her-name, who did all the posters of phrases—important '80s artist, you know, typically does things that run along a ticker-tape sort of—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Jenny Holzer.

JIM SHAW: Jenny Holzer. Yeah, he had a Jenny Holzer show in his loft. That was the era of theoretically getting a loft in downtown, but when I started looking at them, the prices were going up, and a lot of the buildings were empty from the second floor up because of earthquake regulations. You would have to earthquake-proof the entire 12 floors in order to rent anything above the second floor.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: So finding a building—it was starting to get—there were already, you know, sharpies involved in it, and they were going to jack up your rent, so I just stayed in my apartment.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And where was that?

JIM SHAW: Silver Lake.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So this is where you stayed—this is back—

JIM SHAW: Where I moved after—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —after Echo Park?

JIM SHAW: —after Echo Park. The choreographer and I moved to this place in Silver Lake, and then she—she was

very psychologically unfit, and I think, when her father died, she went into a tailspin, so she moved out. And then I somehow found this French guy as a roommate who was studying—he was an architect, and he was working as a waiter. So he was my roommate for a couple of times, and we had a love of the Velvet Underground in common.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: The second time I ran into him was when I went to see John Cale at the Whisky after he'd moved out, and he said, "Can I move in again?"

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: And I said, "Sure, why not?" So I had a two-bedroom place in Silver Lake when it was somewhat dangerous.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what years were those?

JIM SHAW: It was like '79 through '91.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, a long time.

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And so did you not have a girlfriend during that time?

JIM SHAW: Oh, I had several girlfriends.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

JIM SHAW: I was a serial monogamist.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And who were you—so you stayed in that apartment for a long time, and did the French guy stay? [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: He moved out again, and then it was just my place, because at that point I could afford 500 bucks a month rent. It was—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What was the address of that place?

JIM SHAW: I don't remember.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] So you had been doing—

JIM SHAW: It was across from the grade school on—it was a Spanish name, you probably know what it is. It's, like—my daughter's hair salon is on that street.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: Micheltorena.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, yes.

JIM SHAW: It was on Micheltorena. And we had a friend from CalArts whose parents bought her a house up the hill that had been redesigned by Schindler.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So the second story was a Schindler, and the first story was a Craftsman.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: You know, there were a lot of people that lived in the neighborhood. El Vez lived around the corner.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And where was Mike at this time?

JIM SHAW: Mike was still living in Hollywood at this time.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So after graduation, did you stay friends or just in touch?

JIM SHAW: We were friends, yeah. We'd regularly go see—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Hang out? Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: —you know, action films and things. Go to see shows. Drive places. Mike hated driving, for one thing. So when he moved to Los Angeles, he had to go in and get a barium enema because his digestion was so upset by the fact of driving. And he refused to drive on freeways if he could get away with it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's hard in LA.

JIM SHAW: Yeah. But he did it. But mostly, he'd have a girlfriend or an employee or someone to drive him.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Who were your girlfriends during—well, after Donna West?

JIM SHAW: Well, before Donna West, the first one that I can remember the name of was Ann Bobco.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Ann Bobco.

JIM SHAW: And then there was Helen Jewell, who I met through Don Krieger and was a poet. And then after her, there were some one-night stands. The next real girlfriend of any long term was an older woman named—her nickname was Shatzi and her actual name was—God.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: Ellen—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: Ellen Kauffman was her name. And she—we were together for four years, but after six months, I felt like the whole thing was a mistake.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: So the next three and a half years were kind of a devolution into hell.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How much older than you was she?

JIM SHAW: Twelve years older than me, which was, you know—when you're 29, she was like—you know, she had her 40th birthday while I was still in my 20s, and that was like, I'm 40! But, you know, she had experienced a lot of culture and, you know, was an education of sorts for me. All these women were an education for me, because I was severely undereducated in terms of—you know, under-socialized. I didn't know how to behave, you know, in relationships, in the world, how to be clean enough for the world.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: I was too messy for most of them. That's why the—I wasn't too messy for Ellen. That's why that relationship lasted longer than six months.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] And after four years, you moved on.

JIM SHAW: Yeah. Well, a friend of ours from Michigan had moved into her apartment, which was in the Scientology ghetto of Hollywood. And she said, "I can't move out until I find a place to move to." So it took her, like, six months to find a place in Santa Monica. Her name was Diane Piepol And she became a special effects person. But she was an artist who went to Ann Arbor—who was from Ann Arbor, who was an ex-girlfriend of Mike's, and she's still around. There's another guy that was friends of us—ours in Ann Arbor, who got the—who I got his first job in Los Angeles when he came out, working on—I was working on *The Forbidden Zone* along with this woman who I worked with in a special effects company. Her name was Philomena Winstanley. She was from a famous anarchist family, but she was a former '60s swinging London groupie-type, who was the girlfriend of Kickboy Face—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: —Claude Bessy, the editor of *Slash* magazine.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Amazing.

JIM SHAW: And also the ex-girlfriend of Gary Panter worked there, along with Gary Panter's best friend. So Gary Panter would come by, and Phranc, the Jewish Lesbian folk singer worked there. And Mike was very, very excited

by her.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: He really wanted to give her a ride home one time when he came to pick me up because my car was dead. And—what else?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And you were all working where?

JIM SHAW: At Midocean Motion Pictures.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Midocean Motion Pictures.

JIM SHAW: Which was a—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How long did you work there?

JIM SHAW: A couple of years, I think. Before I started at Abel's and other places.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But what year?

JIM SHAW: '78 through '80. They collapsed because—you know, all these ventures died with—because it was too expensive. But, oh, my first job—my first real job out of CalArts, which I actually got, I think, through CalArts—was working on Terrence Malick's next movie, which was *The Tree of Life*. Which didn't actually get made until it was the Brad Pitt film that came out a decade or so ago.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yeah.

JIM SHAW: And it was in pre-production at Paramount, and I was living in this horrible hovel in Hollywood, this rooming house, and I was drawing endless drawings, I can show you some in my special effects drawer later. And then the plug got pulled on it because what's-his-name moved over to Disney to head up Disney. He was the person who decided, "Oh, we're going to get Oscars out of this filmmaker."

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Because they had just made—his film *Days of Heaven* was up for various things, and I had already seen—what do you call it, his first film? *Badlands*.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Much impressed by *Badlands*. And then I went to see—when they hired me, I went to see *Days of Heaven*, which seemed like a more tasteful version of *Badlands*.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: They have the same motifs. Anyway, so—I was sworn to secrecy, and—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you were working in some version of film special effects from, what, '78?

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay. So you—the bad jobs are behind you. You don't have to work as a janitor or a dishwasher, rather, a dishwasher or something like that? You've already gone—

JIM SHAW: They have their own forms of badness.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] But—

JIM SHAW: A tendency to abuse cocaine on the job, or long hours for which you use the cocaine to continue, and a lot of people like this friend of ours from Ann Arbor, who I got that job working on *The Forbidden Zone*, as I started this little thread—he ended up winning the Oscar for special effects for *Gladiator*, you know?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And he wanted to be an experimental filmmaker, but you know, he got kind of pulled away from it, but, you know, he reached the heights of Hollywood, you know? That's as good as you can go. Other people that worked at Abel's—a couple of other guys got Oscars for special effects. One guy did *The Titanic* and also that sort of children's film by Scorsese. I think he got the—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: *Hugo*.

JIM SHAW: *Hugo*. He got the award for that, or he was up for that. And another guy—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What made you—why do you think you ended up staying close to your art and not just continuing in special effects like so many of your peers?

JIM SHAW: Because I knew it was what I wanted to do, and as I, you know—there was one guy who came in to Abel's from Art Center, and he had no background in liberal arts at all. He was just educated in computer animation and animation. And so his work—you know, we kind of looked down on him because of this, but, you know, he was good at what he did. And, you know, we were thinking—when—the effects animation industry kind of formed out of people who didn't have a background in it, because it didn't exist yet.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And there was another guy—this is totally tangential, except that his son was living across the street from us, where we live now—who was best buddies with Paul McCarthy in college back in Utah. And he's the guy who created the Abel's look, and he was one of the main art directors for *Tron*. That whole thing of what we would call "glints and glows" was something he came up with, so Richard [Taylor -JS]—I can't remember his last name.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But these guys, really—I mean, if money's a consideration, which I think it was for all of the artists starting out—

JIM SHAW: Yeah, because there was no art world. No paying art world.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —there was no art world support particularly. How did you feel that, you know—why did you feel, and how did you feel, that you would carry on in this kind of hopeless art career, as opposed to just cashing in with the people who made quite a lot of money doing special effects?

JIM SHAW: Well, one of my models was Clovis Trouille—I don't know if I'm pronouncing his name correctly—the janitor who exhibited with the Surrealists and never sold any of his work. And I thought, "This is a good model," except I realized I couldn't earn enough money as a janitor.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Clovis Trouille?

JIM SHAW: Trouille. T-R-O-U-I-L-L-E, I think?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Right. So you were just committed to doing this—to continue to make your art. And let's go back to, like, your first solo show. *Life and Death*, Zero Zero Club, Los Angeles.

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What was that show?

JIM SHAW: It was the—some of the drawings that were in the *Life and Death* book, which I believe you must have seen. If you don't have, and some of those probably made it—did they make their way into *The End is Here*? And this was the first stuff that—I had gotten out of school, and one of my teachers—I took a design class from the most important psychedelic artist of L.A., John Van Hamersveld, and I tried to put together some kind of a design illustration portfolio. And I never got anywhere with that.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: But as I was working on these portraits, these sort of noir-influenced portraits, I got to learn the airbrush a bit better. Because I'd learned on the job at the mask factory. People I worked with at the mask factory went on to be makeup artists of varying renowns. I would do these airbrushed portraits, these ones.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

JIM SHAW: This is one of Mike's ex-girlfriends, who later married Jim Hayward.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] What's her name?

JIM SHAW: Oh, God. I can't remember her name! Beautiful girl, whose sister was a model. She didn't want to pose for photographs. [Sue Curry -JS].

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, the one who did—open the gallery?

JIM SHAW: No.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Different one.

JIM SHAW: Entirely different.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Different one. [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: Totally different.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

JIM SHAW: Absolutely. They're not married, I don't think.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And so I was—I started with the noir things and I started seeing—since I was using a grid to create the face, I thought, "What happens if I bend the grid? If I make it different?" And so they would be sort of randomly rearranged, based on that grid.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And at the same time, I was doing these little airbrushed noodles that turned in, you know—I would interpret—I would find figures in them and create drawings that way. And in the case of both of these things, I didn't consider them to be art because they didn't have a concept, per se, behind them. But I did them while I was working in special effects, and they all got more and more disparate as they went, you know? An early drawing would be fairly geometric, and then they would just get to be—more disparate.

[Side conversation.]

[Audio break.]

JIM SHAW: Okay. Lunch is the only meal I can eat anymore. Bad stomach problems.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: We were just talking about the black-and-white airbrush drawings that were—then they were shown at Zero Zero.

JIM SHAW: Right. Well, I'd done those two as series, sort of at the same time, although I completed the *Life and Death* one first and printed a book, so we had this opening. As I worked on these as series, I realized that I was never going to be someone who could be a producer of generic Jim Shaw art, you know? I could never be a signature artist, which was what all artists were at the time. So that sort of led me towards *My Mirage*, which was a series in which everything was different. And it was also my more conceptual sort of thing.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And just before we go to *My Mirage*, you showed the black-and-white airbrushed drawings at Zero Zero, correct?

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: In 1981. And what were the—what was Zero Zero?

JIM SHAW: It was a place that moved from place to place. Originally, it was in Hollywood in a small building, and that's where I first saw Pettibon's drawings beyond seeing them on punk fliers. So I met Pettibon there, and one of the guys that ran it was a former CalArtian who was in a band called the something-or-others. And it was basically an excuse for an after-hours club. So then when I had it, it was sort of behind where Guitar Center is in West Hollywood. And then it was in places around Hollywood, various second stories, and at some point, it was a place that what's-his-name [David Lee Roth -JS] from Van Halen would hang out, due to its status as an after-hours place to drink.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did it—now—

[. . . -JS].

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah. Was it called—I couldn't remember if it was Zero or Zero Zero.

JIM SHAW: It was called Zero Zero and Zero One—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Zero.

JIM SHAW: —and I can't remember which came first.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay. And it ultimately ends up on Melrose.

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Near La Cienega.

JIM SHAW: Which then turns into an ill-fated Patrick Painter Gallery.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's right. I had forgotten that.

JIM SHAW: Yes.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So it becomes—it's the same group that ends up being Zero One—is a big Zero —

JIM SHAW: Well, I think [John] Pochna—I believe Pochna took it over.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, I know John—that's when I remember seeing—going there. I may have seen your show there. I certainly saw Raymond's show there.

JIM SHAW: Show was up.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: While your show was up—

JIM SHAW: There was a party celebrating the overdose death of—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Darby Crash?

JIM SHAW: —no—what's-his-name—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: The other one. [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: —no, the guy from National Lampoon's *Animal House*.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, John Belushi.

JIM SHAW: Yeah. And the police raided it, and some of my pieces got stepped on. And so it was definitely an underground—it was literally in a basement back then.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So is this—I just want to make sure this is the same place I was thinking of. But then there was a long haul, '81 to '86, you don't have a solo show.

JIM SHAW: Well, I had one that was very small at this place—yeah, okay, The Nuclear Family [a West Hollywood video production space -JS]. Yeah, I was in group shows. I showed the *Distorted Faces* at LACE during—what would you call it? I had a couple shows at LACE and all that. I can't remember if *TV Generations* was before or after the one that had the *Distorted Faces*, which had Robert Williams and Raymond Pettibon and Georganne Deen, that Mike curated [*Social Distortion -JS*]. So, I mean, those were group shows, but, you know, I had a whole chunk of space devoted to my work at home. There weren't any galleries to be a part of.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I know!

JIM SHAW: Rosamund didn't care for my *Distorted Faces* so she didn't really want to show them. Although I had been curated into a group show by—what's her name? Meg Cranston.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, let's take a break, and we'll hope this is—

[END OF DISC TWO.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: This is Hunter Drohojowska-Philp interviewing Jim Shaw at the artist's studio in

Altadena, California on April 1, 2016, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number three. So, Jim, we—

JIM SHAW: But I'm not done with the Samantha story yet.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Okay, hang on. We'll put it on. Jim, we were just talking about—you just used the word—I liked the word you used. Huddling together with your fellow CalArts students after graduation because you said there was no one else to talk to, right?

[. . . -JS]

JIM SHAW: Just in that group of Tim, Mike, and Benjamin that would—you know—I would be like the fourth wheel, because I was nowhere near as aggressive as they were in critiquing, "Blah, blah, blah, this sucks. Blah, blah, blah, that sucks." You know? I was the milk toast, wishy-washy guy. And, so then that came to an end. And so there were—there were clusters of people, like Mike lived in the same apartment building as Nancy Evans, Mitchell Syrop, and what's her—Nancy?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Nancy Dwyer.

JIM SHAW: Dwyer lived there for a while, and so did Jim Isermann. And probably some other people. And it had such bad fleas from somebody's cats that Mike had to wear flea collars on his legs.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: And that was in the Armenian part of Hollywood, and Benjamin and Amy—Benjamin and Dana lived the next block over in an apartment. And we'd all get together and go to the bowling alley, Star Lanes, the one that's featured in *The Big Lebowski*. I think it's torn down by now. There were a few others, like a Mexican restaurant around the corner. That's—that was where we hung out pretty much. Parties in other people's houses. Nina Salerno lived in the same building as, I think, Sherrie Levine. Or maybe she just went to parties there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: We talked a little bit about the—also the influence of New York, in that CalArts was probably—at that point, anyway, the place where—most likely place—where artists—big artists or up-and-coming artists would be brought in from New York to give talks or be visiting artists.

JIM SHAW: Yeah, they'd come for an entire semester or an entire year.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So that would be Sherrie Levine, was one of those artists.

JIM SHAW: I'm not sure if Barbara Kruger ever was, but somehow she became part of the social scene. And, before that, I suppose that what's-her-name—that's the sculptor who helped ruin all those Portapaks, was a visiting artist.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, Lynda Benglis.

JIM SHAW: Lynda Benglis, I think, was—probably the first year we were there, was probably a visiting artist.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Other artists that went to CalArts—taught at CalArts for a time being. Judy Pfaff. I'm not sure if—what's-her-name, who did the giant comb and—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Vija Celmins.

JIM SHAW: Vija Celmins, if she's an L.A. person or a—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, she was then.

JIM SHAW: —well, she taught at CalArts at the time.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But did you feel—did you feel as that gave you a leg up in terms of your relationships with New York?

JIM SHAW: No. We just knew these people socially.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: She didn't socialize much, but what's her name, the painter of horses?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh—

JIM SHAW: And apparently wife or girlfriend of the most important artist in the world.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Bruce Nauman.

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And—

JIM SHAW: But she was a very important—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Susan—

JIM SHAW: Susan Rothenberg.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Susan Rothenberg.

JIM SHAW: She was teaching at CalArts. So, it was a conduit for people to get to know people. When you get to know people, they're not as intimidating. Their artwork isn't as foreign, and stuff like that. I mean, some of them, like Laurie Anderson, had a sort of a screen in front of them of tastefulness. This was before her new haircut. She went to—she did that Berlin thing, and then some guys in Berlin gave her the spiky haircut. Before that, she looked like the most recent Charlie's Angel.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: The Charlie perfume girl who's a model.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] But if you—once—but when you—when you—I don't know when you started. When did you start showing with Helene Winer at Metro Pictures?

JIM SHAW: Oh, many years later, after I showed with Hudson at Feature.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh.

JIM SHAW: I was showing with Linda Cathcart at that time, and Linda leaned on me to suggest, "You really should be showing with Metro Pictures."

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And, you know, I was dissatisfied with the fact that I didn't get to have the whole gallery at Feature, but I did like Hudson a lot, and—you know, he was hard working, and I was very regretful just because I didn't like to leave a gallery, not because I, you know, didn't like Helene and Janelle. It was just I felt guilty about the whole thing.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, and what year did you go to Metro?

JIM SHAW: It was around '90, '91. Something like that. Almost a decade later.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And I would think that all—at that point, it's—that Metro had been supporting a lot of your fellow CalArtians and, you know, supporting—

JIM SHAW: Well, John Miller and Mike Kelley and Tony Oursler, later. I think Tony was also brought in—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Speak up.

JIM SHAW: —Tony was brought in by Linda. And Linda had seen his work somewhere and asked me about him. I said, "He's great, he's—you know?" So Tony—Linda started representing him. And so then he started showing with Metro.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And at what point do you start going to New York on a regular basis?

JIM SHAW: Never. I mean, I just go for shows. The one time I went for not a show was when Mike had his show at the Whitney.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Barney and I came out for that. But otherwise, I would just go for—when I had a show. I mean, I

would go and visit, before I had a gallery there, once every two years or something. I knew people I could crash with. Mary Jones was one of them. There was an architect friend of a friend of mine from Ann Arbor. I stayed at her place. When I was showing with Feature, I would stay at this place up by the Whitney called the Pickwick Arms, which has now been turned into a hipster hotel. But it was sort of near the U.N. And it was, like, \$59 a night if you didn't have your own—if you had to walk down the hallway for a bath, and 69 a night if you shared a bath with the room next door, and 79 if you had your own bath.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: You had to be prepared to jump out of the shower at any time because, if someone started using the hot water somewhere else, it would get cold.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you had no ambitions? It never crossed your mind, "Oh, I'm going to move to New York if I want to make it?"

JIM SHAW: No.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And why is that?

JIM SHAW: Well, A, in the '70s, no one was making it there anyway. I mean, the thing to do would have been to move there right after school. But we didn't have any inclination to do that, most of us.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And why is that?

JIM SHAW: Because of the lack of an art world there. And for me, having experienced the idea of living in New York in 1970, I mean, it was an unfriendly place for a small-town boy.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So, did you have any sense—you, Mike, your friends, did you have any sense that at this point—at that point in time in the early '80s, that you could make it on some level? You could stay in L.A. and still have a career?

JIM SHAW: I didn't, but I think Mike did. But Mike made, you know, his way into Germany, and so did Steve Prina. I mean, Germany was the place to succeed financially. I never made in-roads there. I had one group show with Mike called *The Kelly Family* at Esther Schipper. But, for some reason, Linda demanded to have the artwork back.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Linda Cathcart?

JIM SHAW: Yeah, within a short period of time, and that kind of soured the relationship with the—Tim Neuger was one of the curators of the show and this other guy who—Tim was working for one of the big dealers, and the other guy was working for the other. He was working for Mike's dealer, and his name was Wolfram, Wolfie. I can't remember his last name.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] This is when Mike had already gone to Patrick Painter? Or is he still with Rosamund Felsen?

JIM SHAW: He's still with Rosamund Felsen at this point.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: I think—yeah, this is—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So your sense that—at the time, the sense was not that you were going to make it in New York, but that you were going to get into Europe?

JIM SHAW: Well, that was their sense. My sense was that I'm never going to make a living from art. I mean, I'm going to just keep doing special effects for as long as I have to, which is what I did until I couldn't afford it, when I finally did get a career kind of by accident.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, and then tell me about the special effects and the relationship. How many hours a week were you working at Midocean or at Robert Abel?

JIM SHAW: Well, typically 50 hours a week, until I realized, "Shit, I'm not getting paid for more than 40," when I was on staff at Abel. So then I would make sure that I quit at 40 or worked into the 60s because you got overtime after 50. But another thing that happened was that I always wanted to be busy. So, if I didn't have anything to work on, even though I was on staff, I would go and bug people and say, "Is there anything I can work on?" They would all come due at the same time, and then I would be horribly overworked, so I stopped

doing that. And that's when I started really over-rendering the *Distorted Faces* because I was working there, and I had spare time.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: It's also when I started amassing the ideas for *My Mirage* and started working on that.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, that's one of the places we left off. Let's talk about *My Mirage*, which is really your opus. And connect it for me to the idea of doing books, which you say at some point—in one of the interviews, you talk about how you always thought of shows as being like books with fully realized—

JIM SHAW: My intention was for there to be a book.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So I've been very lucky. Lately, I've got a lot of books, you know? Even ones I didn't know I was going to have, like *The Hidden World*. Just like they called us up a week before the thing went to press saying, "Well, we've got the catalog together." I didn't know they were going to do one. "Can you approve it?" And I had to make sudden changes because I felt they weren't—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And who published that?

JIM SHAW: That was Marc Olivier and the Chalet Society. Also, they don't care as much about copyright over there. I mean, I've been contacted by someone who's doing a book for Taschen, and he wants to know about, can I release the copyright on this cover I did for Ann Magnuson? I can—my artwork, yes. The actual thing itself? I think not.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: It's her work. And we—well, Ann Magnuson is someone who was through the New York conduit.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, what about the—so, you were doing your special effects, you're working on your work, and you're starting *My Mirage*. So the whole time you're doing *My Mirage*, which is 1985 to 19—

JIM SHAW: No. It starts earlier, but—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It does?

JIM SHAW: Exhibiting it in '85.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: When does it start?

JIM SHAW: Like '82, '83, I start having—writing down ideas, researching. I start working on the logo, and the pieces that were shown in LACE at *TV Generations* had been created over, you know, a year-and-a-half, two-year period.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And so, tell me about *My Mirage*, and this is—this is Billy's story, and it's often written about as though it's autobiographical.

JIM SHAW: Parts of it are. Parts of it aren't. It's, you know, based on research and incidents that occurred to myself or friends. The earlier incidents pretty much were all me. Later incidents could have been anybody I knew, or things I congealed together, because I had to integrate, you know, psychotic death cults and things like that that I hadn't personally experienced. But I did know a lot of people who became born-again Christians, like Shelby's parents. Shelby's dad was one of my high school friends, and he became a born-again Christian, and that became part of the storyline.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Shelby who works here now as your assistant?

JIM SHAW: Yeah. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] She was our babysitter in Midland.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: That's how we met. So, I wanted it to be a narrative, but I wanted it to be a disparate narrative in the spirit of William Burroughs, sort of a cut-up from thing to thing, and to work in all these different aesthetics. And I sort of thought of it as being like a postgraduate dissertation, you know, in aesthetics. And I was also hoping to learn as much as I could. You know, I'd learn how Norman Rockwell did his paintings. And then that sort of became how I did oil paintings after that. I learned how to do Hanna-Barbera animation from Danna's

stepmother's boyfriend who worked at Hanna-Barbera. He said, "The eye blinks are the key. You have to insert eye blinks at a—fairly often, because nothing else is moving." So it keeps—makes it seem sort of alive.

And so, eventually, I ended up working with someone else for the prints because I just didn't have the facilities at home to silk-screen or whatever, but everything else I did myself, until I hired—my first assistants were Jory Felice and—God, what's her name? [Susan Wiggins -JS]. My first assistant was an assistant to Linda Cathcart. Then she started working at—after the crash, she started working at LACMA. I don't know where she is now. And they were tracing for me. And then I had Jory do some of the—some of the work on the toad pool table piece, because I'm a terrible carpenter. And it's either tracing or carpentry that I generally had assistance with.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How does—so *My Mirage* goes along and along, and how did you end up exhibiting it as it went along in time?

JIM SHAW: Chunk by chunk.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: I would do—you know, try to keep it by chapter as much as possible. The first thing at LACE was in most of the first chapter, but not all of it. And at some point, as I was working on it, I took a solo trip out to Sequoia National Park, which became my favorite place on earth. I took Ecstasy while I was on a long walk in the woods, and I started having ideas for videos, which I cursed, because they're a lot more time, energy, and work than a 14-by-11—or a 14-by-17 small painting or work on paper.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And took Ecstasy a couple more times, and that was—it was less interesting each time I took it, so I gave away the other two hits I had.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So the hallucinogenic references within *My Mirage*, which are multiple, are partly, entirely, or not your own personal experience?

JIM SHAW: I had some experiences on mushrooms. I took LSD once in my 20s at God's Oasis. And it didn't really do much for me.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what's God's Oasis?

JIM SHAW: That's where we lived in Ann Arbor.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh.

JIM SHAW: It's sort of a post-hippie commune of crazy people.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So I was walking around, and the only visual thing that happened was I saw everything, sort of, fisheye-lens. I think when you see all your periphery—peripheral visions. So I wasn't interested in doing that again. And I took Ecstasy a few times, and I took mushrooms a few times. And that was pretty much my experience of psychedelics. But one thing that was important that happened on mushrooms was that I got to the point that I lost my ego. I experienced ego death, and that's followed by the reassembling of your ego. And I believe that puts you into a state of temporarily thinking you're in control of the world, which is the Manson-type state.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And I think that was an important insight to have. Mostly, I'd used cocaine as an employee of a couple of different special effects firms, because everybody did it until their nose broke down, or they decided they didn't like it any more.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But the hallucinogenic references in *My Mirage*, are they then—in addition to being partly yours, are they more a reference to the culture of the times?

JIM SHAW: They're both. I mean the power battle thing was something—my friends who took LSD all the time in high school would have power battles, and I wasn't allowed—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What's a power battle?

JIM SHAW: They would go *whoosh, whoosh*. You know, they would be hurling—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh.

JIM SHAW: —imaginary, wizardly things at each other, and I couldn't do it because I wasn't on LSD. I was too chicken in high school, unlike some of my friends. So—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So it's multiple. It's your own personal—it's your friends, your personal experience, and the presence of hallucinogens in '60s, '70s life.

JIM SHAW: Oh yeah. Absolutely.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Is that correct?

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] But it's infected by the imagery of psychedelic posters and all of that. So, not everybody experienced psychedelics in the same way. Some people became minimalists, you know, rather than maximalists. I was more of the maximalist bent. Years later, I decided I had to take ayahuasca because I really wanted to come close to experiencing that talking-to-God thing that people who create religions have. And if I was working on my own religion, then I had better—damn well better have some kind of a religious experience, even if it's an artificial one. And it does have effects on you that are very much like a religious experience. Haven't taken it in several years, but I was also working with friends who were adherents of psychedelics and ayahuasca in particular. And I would take it again, except I'm always going out of town or something, or Marnie's going—you know, the next ceremony I've heard about, Marnie's going to be gone, so I can't go travel or having people die around you. Or in my case, I had an operation that made things like throwing up seem like a bad idea.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh. What was that?

JIM SHAW: I had a hernia operation.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh.

JIM SHAW: It was concurrent with Mike's death and my moving out of my giant studio. And my father died before Mike. So, I just sort of had to say goodbye to ayahuasca for a while.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Now, *My Mirage* is still—to this day always seems like the underpinning or the undergirding of a whole edifice of your other work. Is that correct?

JIM SHAW: Well, I guess I've got four edifices. One I didn't intend, which is the *Thrift Store Painting* group, because it was a big deal when it showed at Metro Pictures, which I wasn't really expecting, I got to say. I just thought I had an interesting collection of weird Americana. And, you know, perhaps an insight into the subconscious of America. Another one is *My Mirage*. Another one is the dreams, you know, because people would come up to me at a party and say, "Oh, you're the guy who draws his dreams." And then now my—the Oism is the fourth one. And probably, there won't be another one, although *Left Behind* kind of took over from Oism for a while.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I want to go there for a second. First of all, let's take one moment on *Thrift Store Paintings*, which is, I know this is, like—obviously, you said this is something you were collecting for a long time.

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What led you to sort of want to put them together even as a book and an exhibition? How did that come about?

JIM SHAW: Well, Nancy Barton, another part of the CalArts, you know, tunnel of people, was running the LACE bookstore, and she asked me if I wanted to do a show there, and I—so I did a show of the First Ladies paintings.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And, around that time, I was asked by someone who was at the Brand Library if I wanted to propose a show for their exhibition space. And I thought, you know, all I had seen there were the Watercolor Society's, so I thought it was an appropriate place to show *Thrift Store Paintings*. So, I put them together. I borrowed some from friends, and they were going to hang them without me. So I affixed little legends to them like titles, just so I could give credit to the artists if they'd signed them and the people I borrowed from. So the titles came about by accident. And then they put them on the little placards.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So, that was up, and Danna took Ed to see it, and I think talked Ed into doing a book version of it. So it was kind of Danna's idea and Ed's idea as much as it was my idea. And, Paul had—took all the photos that Fredrik didn't take.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Paul?

JIM SHAW: Paul Ruscha.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, Paul Ruscha. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So, it was part of the family business there. You know, so that book would not exist without, you know, Ed Ruscha having put it together. And it was—originally, he wanted to do a hand-tipped plate, so you have an old-fashioned art book. But we stuck it into normal plates.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So then it went on to a few other places and ended up going to Metro Pictures, where the influence was a lot bigger than I would have ever imagined. And so it sort of took on a life of its own. And I gave all these interviews where I said, "Oh, I would never sell them," partly because I wasn't intending to. But—and then they had a buyer who was Saatchi. Not my former assistant, but the collector. And I said, "No, I can't sell them. I've already given these interviews where I said I wouldn't sell them." It was more that, than—I mean, the fact that it was Saatchi was a little weird because, you know, he had a bad reputation, even though he's just the model collector for today.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: You know, the collector manipulator. He's no worse than the rest of them. He was just the first. And—but eventually, they came back from one too many shows, and we had this house, and they were, literally, spilling out of the basement into the yard in these big containers. So, Bruno found a buyer, who was my first real collector.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Which Bruno?

JIM SHAW: Bruno Praz-Delavallade.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Bruno Delavallade. So, I ended up selling them to this Belgian collector, who also had bought major works of mine from Bruno. So now the vast bulk of them are in his collection, although I maintain a small number that you saw on the back porch there, which made up about a third of what you saw at the New Museum.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It it's an amazing trajectory, as it were. And so this is—we have *My Mirage*. We have the *Thrift Store Paintings* going on. You're working in the special effects industry, and you are—and tell me about your exhibition evolution then.

JIM SHAW: Well—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: When do you feel like you're starting to make it? What year is that? A little bit?

JIM SHAW: '89, I realize I can't afford to keep working in special effects. I have to quit because the time being put upon me to have more shows is too much.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And whose—which galleries are doing that for you?

JIM SHAW: Mostly Feature. I mean, I was showing with Dennis Anderson, who chose the time of my show to flip out and reveal his true self, which is a coke-addicted con artist. Every once in a while, there's someone who comes into the art world, who finds the con aspect of it appealing, and he was one of those.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: But I didn't know that at the time, and I think that the success of my show, along with Richie Lee, was the first financially successful show that he had. It made him flip out, because he had always been told that he was a loser, and he was going to be a failure all his life by everybody he came across, because he was a little guy. That's my theory. I'm sure the truth is somewhere else. So, I moved over to Linda Cathcart, and Linda Cathcart was selling work, but she was a very aggressive person, and she kind of forced me to move over to Metro Pictures, and so I moved over to Metro Pictures. But I had to keep finding other places to show, because I

could never sell enough to make a living. So I started showing with Praz-Delavallade in France, and they kept us alive during the '90s because, if they didn't have collectors, they had museums to buy the work.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] As you leave special effects do you feel any mixed emotion about leaving special effects behind as you go about your art?

JIM SHAW: Well, I kept having dreams that I had special effects projects that were overdue. Because I always did. And it was an extrapolation of the old, "I got a test today, but I haven't studied for it," which lasted past the time I was a student. Oh, this lasted past the time I worked in a special effects office. But a lot of my dreams took place in offices. And you know, I would be there, and I would be naked or something, you know? Something was wrong. I still have those fucking dreams.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] When did you start doing the dream drawings?

JIM SHAW: It was when I first started showing in Europe at Ursula Krizinger [. . . -JS]. Anyway—because back then before the wall fell, that was the ends of the earth, Vienna.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And I showed with Massimo De Carlo, who I still sometimes show with. And both of them said, "We need something inexpensive for European collectors, because your work's too expensive," at whatever cheap price it was then, you know, 10,000 or something for a *My Mirage* piece. So, I started doing the dream drawings in order to fulfill some of the shows in these places.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But you'd been having the dreams?

JIM SHAW: Oh yeah, I had been having the dreams for a while, and I had been keeping track of them for a while, because I had this idea that I would have a show where I just piled up all the stuff I've dreamt of. But when I first had that idea, it was other people's artwork. And oh, Baldessari. Or, you know, Peter Max or whatever. But, the more I worked in art the more I dreamt of my own artwork. And then by the end of the '90s—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Do you—do you want to get some more water?

JIM SHAW: I've got some here.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

JIM SHAW: By the end of the '90s, I was so busy making dreamt-of artworks and researching Oism that I realized I couldn't continue drawing the dreams anymore. So, in 1999, I stopped the dream drawings. And I produced an awful lot of them. And I had sold them initially for \$200 a pop. And the price went up to \$600, but when you've got all these people who buy your stuff for that price—you know, Linda warned me. "People aren't going to want to buy the more expensive stuff because they can buy the cheap stuff." And the same show that I was selling the dream drawings, which were, at that point, somewhat simpler than the later ones. They were \$200, and the fake dream drawings, which were larger and more precisely drawn, were \$2,000. And so we sold lots of the dream drawings and hardly any of the fake dream drawings.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: She was right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Well, when you say you kept track of them—tell me about the process of keeping track?

JIM SHAW: Initially, I tried to write them down. I realized that was hopeless because I couldn't read my handwriting in the dark—I mean, when it was light. And so, I started tape-recording them. So I have bins of tape—cassette tapes of all my dreams that I could remember.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You still have them?

JIM SHAW: Oh, yeah. And I keep a journal of ideas and dreams in my Day-At-A-Glance book. You know, if there's something—now that I'm not drawing the dreams, I have to do a quick sketch and a quick writing-down. I've kind of given up on that. If it's really interesting, I'll start thumbnailing it on a piece of paper, but usually, it would start off being written in this thing. And, when I—I noticed, when I went to teach at UNLV, I was dreaming a lot more than I was back—when I was back home in Los Angeles. And I realized there's no dogs waking me up in the morning. And I've got no reason to get out of bed. So I just lie there, and I have more dreams. And then I had a daughter, and when she started having to get to school on time at age five or four, whatever it was, I stopped

dreaming very much. So this is, like, 2004. So, for the last 12 years, I just don't dream like I used to, except on spring break and summer vacation and things like that.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, let's talk about the fact that you got married to Marnie.

JIM SHAW: Yes, that's all in this same time period.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, before Marnie—last time—I think the last girlfriend we left off with was Klein. [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: Oh, that was much earlier.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah. I know. Or maybe it was later. But, you know, it wasn't—it was Ellen.

JIM SHAW: Ellen—Ellen Kaufman.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Ellen Kaufman.

JIM SHAW: And that was circa 1983, '84, let's say.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And after Ellen Kaufman—you were with her for?

JIM SHAW: Four years.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Four years. So, after Ellen Kaufman, who did you date after that?

JIM SHAW: Well, let's see. There was Ilene Kramer, who I worked with, who was a special effects person. And that didn't really turn into a relationship. You know, there were people I dated and people I actually had relationships with. So, Judy Bryan was one, and Martine Tomczyk, who you might know. She used to be the head of F.A.R. for a while, was one. These are all the six-month relations. And there'd usually be like six months in between one or the other. I dated but never got very far with the woman who edited *Spectacle* magazine. But that's as my relationship with Shatzi was breaking apart. Somehow that fell apart. I dated Donna West for a while, until I talked to a friend of hers about our relationship, and I realized she got very angry with me because she hadn't actually officially broken up with her other boyfriend who lived in San Francisco. So, she was—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh. So, when you met Marnie, what was your state like? Were you just ready to be settled down?

JIM SHAW: I was always ready to be settled down. But she was the only one who could tame me into being neat enough to settle down, or something. I mean, I—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, she's a fellow artist.

JIM SHAW: Yeah. Well, a lot of these people were sort of artists. I mean, Martine hadn't really pursued making art. Janet Jenkins was another one. She was an artist.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

JIM SHAW: And there was another women whose name escapes me, who was the last person I dated before Marnie. And I could never figure out why she wasn't available, even though we were sleeping together, and turns out she was the West Coast girlfriend of a very famous artist. And I didn't know this. She was a kept woman.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: So that was kind of frustrating, and then I met Marnie after I failed to ignite with her.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So—and Marnie—what's interesting about Marnie is you seem to have so many similar interests, at least in terms of music.

JIM SHAW: Yes.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And in terms of figurative, narrative structures in your work.

JIM SHAW: We met through Jacci Den Hartog, who I met through Linda Cathcart. Marnie was working at Otis for—what's her name?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Anne Ayres.

JIM SHAW: Anne Ayres. And so she kept that job until we got our mortgage—[laughs] —approved, because we needed to have at least one job. But it was kind of a not fun job. It was weird, though, going to Otis at that time, because there were all these people dealing drugs at the park.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, yeah.

JIM SHAW: Because it was—it was part of the—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah, MacArthur Park then was very druggy.

JIM SHAW: Yeah, it was part—we realized, in retrospect, it was because of the corruption in the police department there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: They were just paying off the police department. They just looked the other way because they were out on the edge of the park, making this little needle motion to sell you drugs. So, it was strange and depressing. And then we were there during the riots, and she had a house in Eagle Rock—well, actually Highland Park, near where we live now, a few blocks away.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And I should say, all the time we're talking about Marnie Weber. And how long were you married before you had Collette? What time—what year did you get married?

JIM SHAW: We got married in, like, '90—it's hard for me to remember exactly. It was '92 or '93.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: We bought the house in '93, moved in in '94. I mean, we were in—during the big quake, we were in escrow, and we were still living in the house during the riots. And the riots were in '92, is that right?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah. I think so.

JIM SHAW: So, we were living in the house that was co-owned with her ex-husband, another member of the Party Boys that she was in—a member of the band. And, anyway, we were going to buy him out, and he bought us out instead. So we had \$40,000 from her sweat equity to buy the house that we bought. And as soon as we bought the house, the art market crashed, and I was like, What the fuck am I going to do? I need to. We were on one of those sliding mortgages because I was an artist and couldn't qualify for a fixed thing. And it was \$600 a month when we first got it and then it climbed up to 900 and then to 1,200, and it never went back down.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: So, we refinanced for a fixed interest and then finally paid the sucker off. What else can I tell you about?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And then Collette was born in 1990—

JIM SHAW: 1999. So we were together for six years, but we had a couple of pregnancies before that, one of which was stillborn. Which was the worst thing that ever happened to us. But it also affected Collette's pregnancy to the point, you know, Marnie was worried all the time, and Marnie is a worrier to begin with, so Collette worries a lot, too, and I'm sure that it's either genetic or just in utero that that happened. And also, when you've only got one, they mean a lot more to you than if you have five. But, by that time, you know, Marnie was, like, 37, and it was a little late for having another kid. Plus, Collette had really bad colic.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And that was, actually, in some ways, worse than having a stillborn child. For three months, having a child that will not react in any way to whatever you do to keep them from crying in the middle of the night is really—you know, you're losing sleep constantly and getting nothing, no break from it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: In the meantime, your career is also ramping up again. And—

JIM SHAW: A little bit.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —in the early—after '99, in the 2000s, in the aughts.

JIM SHAW: Yeah, it's climbing back aboveboard. I mean, I went for awhile, after buying the house, I worked in special effects again, realizing that it was hopeless, that I was way under-qualified, versus people who had now

been taking computer graphics classes at Art Center and CalArts. I couldn't compete. And they're younger and probably could afford to do cocaine—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: —or whatever it took. So I worked on three different projects. One was a video game for Virgin Games, and one was a life history of the guy from the Hollies—Graham Nash.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: A live, computer-generated stage show of Graham Nash's life. So I got to meet—hang out with Graham Nash for a while and work with various people. There was a guy from CalArts actually. His name was Doc Bailey, who was a special effects person, and he got me that job. He died relatively recently. He was an alcoholic, and he was in rehab forever. But, I don't know what he died from. Anyway, what else can I say about—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, that—things that you say—although, now your marital life is—your romantic life is stable. You have a child. And in 2000, you have really quite a lot of—I mean, the exhibitions are, like, you're showing all the time in Europe. You show with Praz-Delavallade in Paris, and you're showing with Blondeau in Geneva. So you're having quite a lot of European action. Now, is this as a result, do you think, of having left Rosamund Felsen to go to Patrick Painter?

JIM SHAW: Some of it. Well, I—Praz-Delavallade, I—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Which I think you do and—

JIM SHAW: —met through Rosamund.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

JIM SHAW: But Rosamund did not do a lot of art fairs. She didn't have a big international—that was one of the problems with being in an L.A. gallery back in the '80s and the '70s, is they did not go beyond the scope of L.A. So, it was through Patrick Painter that I met—I started working with Bernier/Eliads in Athens and working with Emily Tsingou in London. And that's that trip to London that I couldn't make in 9/11. That was my first show there I think. And I was actually happy not to travel to these things. After 9/11, I didn't travel to a show in Italy, and I didn't travel to another show somewhere. I realized I didn't actually have to go. But then again, I didn't, you know—who knows what happened to the artwork? Did I get paid? I don't know.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: The [. . . Huber -JS] thing, though, was weird. That was through Metro Pictures. And they basically said, "You're going to do a show with us and with [. . . Pierre Huber -JS]," and [. . . Pierre Huber -JS] had just screwed Bruno out of a bunch of money, which means he screwed me out of a bunch of money, on the piece that was later resold for \$600,000 to Pinault. And I—he was supposed to buy two pieces, one for 100,000 and one for 150,000, and he failed to sign the piece of paper for the \$150,000 one. So, he got this piece for \$100,000 that I realized I was getting, minimum wage working on. So, I had to also produce this show—these two shows in an extreme hurry, because I realized, from what Metro was showing me, what they were planning on showing, were basically color studies and things for *My Mirage*. They didn't have a lot of drawings. So I had to whip out a whole bunch of drawings very quickly. And that's when I did the first ripped-up face drawing, which was kind of a suicide note to the art market, because I felt like I was being forced in this situation. And it had a companion piece, which was called *Mooney's Square*, which was based on my misinterpretation of a line from "All Tomorrow's Parties" about a hand-me-down dress from Mooney's Square, which was really who knows where?

But in my mind Mooney's Square was a place in New York that homeless people would sell old magazines. And I had a stack of scripts that—in the drawing, that was actually—one of them was a script by Bertolt Brecht, who had written a poem about joining the group of people in Hollywood who've lined up to sell their dreams. And I felt like that's what I was doing in New York and in Blondeau's gallery, you know? And so the irony is that that was the first artwork—the ripped-up face painting, or drawing, was the first artwork I ever had where they had, "You know, we could sell more of those." It was the first thing where there was a waiting list, you know? I, who had never been the maker of signature art, suddenly had a signature piece.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Let's pause for a second, because I want to talk about that signature issue. Where you talked about working at *My Mirage* and all different styles. And I love Mike Kelley's quote about that, that you can work in any style. One of the gifts that you have as an artist is that you can render in a multiplicity of styles, that you actually have a vocabulary of illustrational and art historical styles, to constantly repeat myself. But is that true? Do you do—you know?

JIM SHAW: Well, I can. My goal would be to be more like Jim Carrey. You know, to make that transition from mimic to something of your own thing. I think I have. And I also like to compare it to the Incredible String Band who we were borrowing from—I didn't know at the time, as a teenager, that there's specific hymns and folk songs that they're borrowing from. I guess Dylan was doing the same thing. And you think that it's just coming out of their heads. But in fact, it's influences from all over the place that they are sewing together into something that isn't what it was and becomes a third thing. And that's what I hope it is. And—or even, you know, some bands like Led Zeppelin. Terrible blues bands, but, you know, great at rock and roll. And weaving together disparate elements.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: That's what I would hope.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I think that's probably true. And before we run out of, you know, time, I do want to talk about Oism.

JIM SHAW: Okay.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And after collecting all of this didactic material about weird, alternative, cult-y religions—

JIM SHAW: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —what—

JIM SHAW: And reading up on them.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —what would inspire you to make your own religion?

JIM SHAW: Initially, it was just another—it was sort of a gimmick initially. It was like, "Oh, well, what about making up the aesthetics of a religion that wasn't Christianity?" But when I started getting to the nuts and bolts of such a religion, I realized, "Well, there's this whole history, especially in upstate New York, of self-created religions that's very unique to America," I think, although Russia, I think, has its own share, and there were other, like, sects in Europe that were proto-New Age things.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Should I—?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Keep going.

JIM SHAW: Okay. So—and also, I was teaching at Vegas, and I was in Sweden and Jeffrey was taking over my class and he said, "Oh, by the way, you know you have a lot of born-again Christians in your class?" And I had been talking freely about, you know, my interest in all these aesthetics but—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, and Jeffrey Vallance has always been interested in fundamentalist religion as well.

JIM SHAW: Yeah, yeah. And it hadn't occurred to me that I actually—because in normal art school, you just don't have born-again Christian students. And—or if you do, they don't admit it because they're embarrassed.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: And, you know, it's just not part of the curriculum. So, I realized, "I've got to take this thing seriously." And I—you know—here's another thing that was weird. I used to live in East Hollywood in this crappy little place, and there was this clinic, the Shaw Clinic, that I went to. Okay? And it was a Scientologist-run place. And one day, I was in there waiting to see the doctor, and I could hear him having a heart-to-heart chat with another doctor about a schism within Scientology sometime in the late '70s. And I thought—you know, something clicked in my brain, and I thought, "This would make a very interesting—you know, to have a crisis of faith in a made-up religion," you know, where faith is all you've got because, you know—like with Christianity, the weird shit goes back so far that people take it as somewhat plausible. Whereas, something that's invented today, the weird shit is all implausible if you step back from it for a minute, which is why they're so secretive, or were so secretive about it, in Scientology. So that was another thing that inspired me to want to make a fake religion. And then, years later, I was reading the book that the—on Scientology that was the basis for the documentary. And they were describing the last days, like the last hours of L. Ron Hubbard's life. And they said, "Well, there was a group of elders of the church and his personal physician, Dr. Eugene Denk." And I realized, that was my physician! How interesting and weird that—and I—and I thought, you know, I liked him. I thought he was pretty good. But L. Rob

Hubbard could have afforded anybody.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: So it's clear that paranoia had him bring Eugene Denk out to the desert compound, you know, because he could have flown in the whole Mayo Clinic if he wanted to. Anyway. I liked him. He was a naturopath, as much as he could be, and helped me get rid of the gonorrhea that I got from that girlfriend.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Tell me about the Oism. But yours is a female-centered religion.

JIM SHAW: Well, it had to be different. And I realized, as I was researching these religions in upstate New York, "Oh, yeah, that's where feminism in America was born." And the more I thought about it, I realized it's like California in the '60s. It was the Far West.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: You know, Rochester was the frontier, and that's where the Fox sisters were. And that's where the, you know, Underground Railroad, and the anti-abolitionist movement was there. They were all based in that general area.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But you chose to do a female-based religion just because it was the alternative?

JIM SHAW: Yeah, because I wanted it to be different from Christianity, and because I wanted it to reflect that early history of feminism in the United States. And because I came from a, you know, a female-dominated household. I came from a matriarchy.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And you said also, at CalArts, there were all these really influential female students—female teachers?

JIM SHAW: Yeah. Well, the students really more than the teachers.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: I think that's—you know, teachers were teachers, but the students dominated the discussion. I should try to remember more of their names. I'm so bad with names.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Earlier you mentioned Diane Buckler, who has since passed obviously.

JIM SHAW: Yeah, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Sadly passed away.

JIM SHAW: Yeah, I had mentioned her, but yeah, she passed. She was a dominating force, and she was in the grad seminar, even though she wasn't a grad student. And, also were—the woman who told my friend that her boyfriend had—her teacher boyfriend, was considering dumping me, she was one of them. I can't remember her name—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You mentioned Dorit Cypis at one point.

JIM SHAW: Yeah, Dorit Cypis was another one. And this woman I was talking about, when I was teaching out in—up in Santa Barbara and I mentioned this other woman's name, the one who, I think, Mike had crashed with when he first came out to L.A. Sally Wells, I think her name was. And I was talking to one of the printmaking teachers who had gone to CalArts, and she said, "Oh yeah, she was my girlfriend." I mean, I had no idea that Sally was gay, but it made sense.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And so, that group of women, sort of—they did shows together, and they kind of dominated the discussion.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you—when you formed your own religion, this female-centered religion, how did you actually go about writing its manifestos?

JIM SHAW: Well, I haven't written it yet, that's the thing. I'm working my way up to it because I've always—ever since I was in high school, I didn't feel competent as a writer other than imitating biblical script or, you know, something that already existed. I can mimic things, but I couldn't just, like, *brrrrh* onto the page what I thought, you know? I can describe my dreams in coherent or semi-coherent run-on sentences. You know, I've got enough

English in me to understand those things, but not enough to go back and help my daughter with her junior high school English. You know? I could not remember what a dangling participle was or any of that stuff. But I think you learn enough that you know when it's wrong.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What about—but you did drawings and videos. Oism has existed as drawings, videos and—

JIM SHAW: Yeah, I had been getting around to it. Well, it started with the aesthetics. The first things were paintings and drawings.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And it hadn't gotten that far because then I came across the old backdrops, and I started working on the *Left Behind* series. But, I had intended to do the prog rock opera that would contain both the prehistory of the religion back—as discovered, much like the *Book of Mormon*, by the founder Annie O'Wooten back in the 1840s, and then also the history of her losing control of her religion in the 1870s, whenever that was, when the Chicago Fire happened, and then up-to-date, the 1970s of prog rock. So there was going to be these four—three different epics in four sides of a prog rock album, with four different apocalypses from different elements. And I had gotten that far with the structure, but I kept on fighting between, "Is this going to be made like "Tales from Topographic Oceans" by Yes? Or is this going to be like "The Plan," which was an Osmond Brothers concept album about Mormonism.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: And I finally, just like a month or two ago, rejected "The Plan," because I just could not come up with a sincere and worthwhile form of, you know, ridiculous lyrics. And I—as I've been reading up on the *Large Glass* and all this shit that was spewing out of Duchamp's head while he was in Munich or wherever he was, I realized I can spew things into this. I can make it a kitchen sink situation, more like "Supper's Ready" by Genesis, or, even better, "Uncle Meat" by the Mothers of Invention.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: As long as I maintain the four sides and the history elements, they can have tangential references. And this would be more like an intellectual prog rock band would do. Anyway. But the other thing that happened in the history of Oism and this, was that, in 2006 or 2007, I was thinking to myself, "I know there's going to be a crash. I don't know when exactly it's going to happen, but I better have a show and earn some money, so I can have money to pay for the opera."

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: I was earning a lot of money back then, but I—so I decided to have a show of large drawings, which was the big thing that people bought. And it was going to be at Patrick Painter's, and he decided at the last minute to move me to the Zero Zero location because Glenn Brown, who was basically leaving the gallery to go to Gagosian, wanted to have a show. So he was, you know, kissing up to Glenn Brown by moving me to this other location. And nobody was coming to it, you know? But on top of that, the crash happened the month before it. So—and Peter Saul had to show up at the same time. And I felt so badly that, you know, Peter got involved in this thing partly on my saying, "It would be great to have a show with Peter Saul." You know, but it was really the crash more than anything, you know, that made nothing sell.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: You know? I had a few things that sold before the crash. And, you know, just crossing my fingers that they get paid for, you know, if they hadn't already been. And, you know, after that, it was, you know, what the hell am I going to do? I had to lay off all my employees, and I held onto the studio for a while, and then finally moved out of there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now, I wanted to—before—I wanted to talk about the backdrops, which I keep—when did you start? How did you find the backdrops, and how did you decide to start working on them?

JIM SHAW: Well, the first thing I did was to work with Mike on the historical paintings for—the Detroit paintings for *Destroy All Monsters*. Which was back—God knows, sometime in the '90s.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And I was kind of—there were points where it had been worked on in different ways. The backgrounds were airbrushed, and so they were kind of filled in, but there were all these figures that were just, traced, and just white forms. And then someone might put a wash in. They were in different stages, and I was

very intrigued by that, and I was—when I did the piece that [. . . Huber -]S] took possession of, because he helped pay for—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: —that was the first piece that had a backdrop and then was painted by hand. And that was inspired by the Christus statue in Salt Lake, which is a Jesus statue that's surrounded by this very florid sunset. So, mine was going to be Donner Pass. And it was called *The Donner—The Donner*—whatever it was called. *The Donner*—[laughs]—oh, *The Dinner Party*. Okay, instead of *The Donner Party*. I would often come up with a pun that was based in switching one letter, which is very similar to, I think, Duchamp's inspiration, which is Raymond Roussel, who would set up whole texts based on switching, homophonically, a sentence from one meaning to another and then constructing a story that went between those two sentences. And to me, that is the origin of schizoid modernism of which, you know, Marcel Duchamp would be sort of the patron saint.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And I feel like, in some perverse way, I'm carrying forward the schizoid modernism. But I think everybody fucking does it. Ever since the—your choice was, once upon a time, kings or the church to pay for your work. And the first effective industrialization was to sort of turn your work into an assembly line, which was Impressionism. And this was another way of going about it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And everybody I know has to have something, some game they play to get started, you know? And someone like Mike would look at these yearbook photos and, you know, it's not quite the same. It's a little better structured but—so the game gets played in your head as to why you're making the work. I have to make the work, but I'd like to have a good reason to.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, the big backdrops, what seemed to me—it seemed to me that the backdrops really scaled your work to a larger—made it—scaled it up quite a lot.

JIM SHAW: Oh, yeah. Yes. Quite a lot. I mean, my—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And that was very important.

JIM SHAW: —ambition had been to work small because I was working against large scale. And I'd work—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Were you consciously working against large scale?

JIM SHAW: In those pieces, yes. When I would see, like, a—you know, an old—a Surrealist painting in a book, it would—it would hold itself better than some giant painting from after 1950.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: I thought scale was a mistake of sorts, when a thing depended upon scale. I mean, some things like Bridget—what's her name? Bridget Riley has to be big enough for you to stand in the field of the piece to really be immersed in it. And Minimalism, yeah. Okay. Minimalism kind of has to be large.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And I guess Pollock and Rothko have to be large. And I suppose it makes sense that Rosenquist is large, because he came from large into medium-sized. But I thought that, you know, a lot of work in the '80s just didn't stand up in reproduction the way that the other stuff. And I also thought—I also think of like, 1949, 1950, as this crux point of modernism, because everything that was building up to Greenberg-ian perfection was, to me, more interesting than everything after that crux point, where all those people found their ultimate thing and just kept doing it over and over again. You know? So for me the buildup to Abstract Expressionism is much more interesting than Abstract Expressionism, what I think of as a dead end. And then, you know, ultimately, it became the moneyed end of things, which was not anybody's intention as they entered into it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, when you found these backdrops, tell me how you found the first backdrop?

JIM SHAW: Marnie was doing a video, and we were looking for something to rent. And Dani Tull said, "Oh, look at Grosh." So we looked at Grosh, and I noticed a "For Sale" section. And I said, "Hey, let's look at those," because renting them was very expensive. You had to put down money.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, he said, go to where? To garage?

JIM SHAW: Grosh.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What's Grosh?

JIM SHAW: Grosh Scenics in Hollywood.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: G-R-O?

JIM SHAW: Or East Hollywood.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: S-H?

JIM SHAW: S-C-H, I think.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: Or maybe it's S-H. That's a good question.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So, I started looking at those, and I realized, "I'm going to have to do something with these." And I was especially attracted to the ones that had Americana aspects to them. And I was attracted to the fact that they were all fucked up, with all these cracks.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So, the whole *End is Here* series was based on my—I mean, not *End is Here*.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: *Left Behind*.

JIM SHAW: *Left Behind* series was based on my notions about the failure of politics to address the decline of the working class, and how it was usurped by Reagan, and then extremely usurped by Bush, Jr., so that they were utilizing Christianity to fill in where labor rights once did. But they were using this false version of American history, you know, this wonderland of the, you know, the '30s or the '20s, of a perfection that was now long gone. Now, in fact, there's so much about American history that is long gone, the reality is that America has been—was bound for decline, because its dominance of the world was based on being the only player left standing at the end of World War II and, you know, being entrenched in anti-communism. So, we had the manufacturing edge over everybody. And all these people who'd come out of World War II and the Depression were, you know, just so happy to have steady work that the wages weren't too insanely high. But as wages finally climbed up, you know, by the end of the '70s, the work was now moving from the Northeast and the Midwest down to the South, where there was right-to-work states. And then eventually it moved to Mexico and finally ended up in China and Vietnam and all these other places, and there's just no way of stopping that, but nobody fucking talks about it in politics.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And—but the part about the backdrops is that this is something you felt like these backdrops could be made to represent, for you.

JIM SHAW: Yeah, I could—I could impose my thing in a sort of updated Rosenquistian multi-image thing, which is—it's always hard to compete against things that already exist. And so for me, Rosenquist is one of them, Magritte is another one, you know, Dali—these things already exist, so you can't just go and do what they did and make improvements on them. You've got to do something that's separate. You know, Lari Pittman did it, too. And, you know, Lari Pittman inspired so many artists in grad schools in the 1990s, you know, but he was bringing back narrative aspects and multiple image aspects that Rosenquist had been, you know, the prime progenitor of. But I guess Picabia, and that juxtaposition that's inherent in, you know, Magritte and some other artists, the Surrealists. So, I felt like I'm painting this thing that's in pristine condition on top of this thing that's in old condition, and it's all sort of editorial comments. I felt like, at that scale, what I was dealing with was editorial cartoons.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And that's when I started getting back into political art, which gets us back to the whole discussion of politics and giant-scale pieces that we started with.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Because ultimately, those backdrops and the *Left Behind* series end up really taking your career to a whole other level, because, I think—it seems to me that you have a lot more big, institutional commitments based on those. Is that correct?

JIM SHAW: Yeah. Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And big scale, you know. I mean, that's why we can only fit one and a half into the New Museum—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How did your work change when you started doing the—doing—working like that on that big scale in this kind of—with those multiple—as you had talked about at the beginning of the interview, the kind of multiple theatrical pieces? How did you end up scaling up to that?

JIM SHAW: Well, one thing that changed was, in that predecessor piece, *The Donner Party*, I engaged a lot of people to work on it, because it was meant to be a commentary, in some way, on—similar to the effect of people forgetting the past in the art world, the effect of *The Dinner Party*, which—the effect that that had on grad students and younger artists. "Well, this is how you make art now." And it just—you know, they kind of forget that it was started by this woman here and she had a group of people working on it, which was somewhat controversial at the time, but it's the only way it could have been done.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And I thought, well, what if the people working on it all did things they weren't supposed to do instead of doing what the artist intended?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you're talking about Judy Chicago.

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So, that was sort of the crux of the beginning of it. And part of that show was that I had, on the wall, a time clock—and I had timecards for all the artists who worked on it, who worked on making the setting, the place settings, who worked on the painting, et cetera. And it was the first time I had a lot of help. Up to that point, I had Daniel Mendel-Black as my assistant. Because my first two assistants I had to let go in the earlier crash.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And he's not even a figurative artist.

JIM SHAW: No, he's not.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's so interesting.

JIM SHAW: And he said he didn't even know how to do any of that carpentry. I hired him to do carpentry because I couldn't do it. So, he was learning as he went.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] So you had all these people helping you on this big-scale piece.

JIM SHAW: But it was something that I knew when I worked with Benjamin on the piece for *Helter-Skelter*, it was hard. I was not a good collaborator because I wanted control, and also, I didn't know that his mother was in the process of dying.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And so that's why he wasn't meeting deadlines, which I knew were important for my work in special effects, because Christmas was coming, and things had to get done. And he wasn't getting done with his part of the deal, which was writing the text. But that's because his mother was dying. So, working with someone was difficult for me. So then I had to have people work on them. And Scott was important to that because he knew how to do stuff on a theatrical scale, he—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What's Scott's last name?

JIM SHAW: Cassidy. So, he knew about pounce wheels. And we didn't do much pouncing because it involves a large amount of charcoal dust, but the giant dollar-bill piece, that was all pounced into place. Finding a place where I could Xerox things up to three-feet wide and, you know, 20-feet long, that was helpful, too. I tried projecting, but there was just no way you could get it dark enough to see anything unless you worked in the middle of the night, and I wasn't willing to do that, so I ended up using Xeroxes and keys and stuff like that.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now, we've been talking about the market and system, and you've got this big—this installation at the New Museum that was previously, you know, elsewhere, and are these pieces sold

individually, the theatrical flats, or is that—is *Labyrinth*—I—is *Labyrinth* a unitary installation?

JIM SHAW: The flats are owned by the same guy that owns the *Thrift Store Paintings* and also owns the Jesus head impact—Jesus' head's impacted with saints piece, and my first sort of big-scale collector.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what is his name? It's okay.

JIM SHAW: Well, your—it's—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It's okay. It's all right.

JIM SHAW: I'll remember it eventually.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's at least in your catalogue.

JIM SHAW: Yeah, he's got his own museum, which I didn't get to see while I was in Belgium for three days prior—just a month—little more than a month ago. There was an all-Euro-wide meeting there. So, every time—Collette and I were there, after helping Marnie start her installation in MAMCO, we had to go back because Collette's school was starting up. I—we'd just go to these places, and there would just be all these soldiers with machine guns on their hips, just walking around, just looking at their cell phones. It was a very strange environment.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Even stranger now. So, anyway—

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —you—so, Scott Cassidy helped a bit. So, all the flats are owned by this one collector. What about the towering Jonathan Borofsky?

JIM SHAW: That's part of it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It is one of the flats as well?

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So essentially, most of that installation must be—it belongs to one person?

JIM SHAW: Yeah, but not the Picasso backdrop. None of the backdrops belong to him. I couldn't make him a backdrop that would fit his—the scale of his museum, but some of the pieces are taller than his stuff is, so he has the installation.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Does—have you heard from Jonathan Borofsky about his resurrection, courtesy of you?

JIM SHAW: Well, you know, his student-girlfriend was Megan Williams. And she had talked to him, and he sort of gave his tentative blessing to the project. But, you know, as I came back to working on this politicized art, I realize, I'm going right back to where those freaking murals were back at CalArts, the ones that drove me away from politics in the first place.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: I have to—I have to point out, this was not Jonathan's art work, this was his students' work. And, so it was a—and as Megan said, "I didn't like that stuff either, but I just wanted to be around Jon—Jonathan." So, I'm coming around back to political—I mean, I really feel like, you know, the ultimate goal of capitalism is to pay as little as possible for labor for anything, if that means slavery, if it means wage slavery, which is what it usually means these days, and it's a lot cheaper to have people turn to religion than to keep giving them raises forever.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: You know, it's just like the establishment just decided to flush all of the newfound, middle-class workers down the drain because it was cheaper, and that's the ultimate goal of capitalism.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, on that note, I want to—because we've gone on so long, and because I'm running out of space here, I think—tell me what else you'd like to add to this that I haven't asked you.

JIM SHAW: Oh, God.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: We could do a whole other disk, I know.

JIM SHAW: Man. It's always tangential things that I was about to say that I didn't get around to because I had to go on a different tangent.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: I mean, I'm still making art, and I don't ever want to work gigantic scale again, but unfortunately, since I've been known for gigantic scale, I probably will. I have a thing I can't exactly talk about yet that might involve backdrop paintings and large-scale stuff, but I want never to spend so much fucking money on things in the future, because I don't want to ever, you know, be in debt to make art, because I can make art with no employees, for free. I mean, I got to eat, right? But in two years, you know, my daughter will be in college. I won't have to worry about all those costs. But if I had no employees, you know, I could almost live on Social Security, which I get in three years.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: Two and a—two and a half years. And I do have a little bit of money saved up. And that's what I have to keep remembering when I think, Oh, but if I had this and this. It's like—it's like the keeping up with the Joneses. I—you know, I—it's weird. I have a perverse version of it. I would love to have solar cells on both of our houses and two plug-in cars. We have one plug-in car. I would love to get another one. I can't afford it right now. I mean, I could, but then I wouldn't have any emergency savings. You know, I'd like to get a Chevy Volt, which gets up to 50 miles on a charge, and solar cells, but I don't know if our roof is strong enough to hold them. So, it's a weird form of keeping up with the Joneses, is that you want to be a good person, but only the wealthy can afford to—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: —drive around in Teslas and things.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what has it been like for you? I wouldn't—

JIM SHAW: Of course, it—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I did want to ask you one more question about Mike. So, Mike commits suicide in—

JIM SHAW: Four years ago.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —2013?

JIM SHAW: '12, I think.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: 2012? And since then, you've had this additional responsibility of being the executor of his estate, and then his—part of his foundation. And that must be so emotional.

JIM SHAW: No, it isn't. I mean, the problem is that it's a drag.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: You know, it's just all—it's sad, but once it went—transitioned from being Mike's personal, sort of, tax-avoidance foundation, to being an actual foundation without Mike, because he wasn't alive, it has to abide by IRS tax rules. And those are fairly specific, and it's kind of boring. And there's a lot of text to read through about this and that, that I'm just not adept at, and everybody else is—who's on the board is better at than me, so I want to get out, but who's going to take my place? I was talking to Mitchell Syrop because I thought, well, Mitchell, he knew Mike very well back then. But then, you know, I realized, you're not going to get paid anything for this. You know, you're going to be dragging your ass down to wherever they have their meetings for free, so what's your motivation in joining them?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: You know? Paul might be good, but I'm sure he's busy enough with his work. The best person, but she lives in Chicago, would be Catherine Sullivan, because she knows the whole period of his life before Marie-Claire started working, and—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Was she his assistant?

JIM SHAW: —yeah. So, she ran the office and knew what his ideas were, what his motivations were.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So—but at this point—initially, it was probably very emotional, but now, it's just become his business. It's like a—not a business, exactly, but it's, you know—what's left is just a legacy.

JIM SHAW: It's a—it's a—it's a thing that has to follow the rules. So, you know, we had our first meeting of people who've made choices to give money away, finally, after four years. But, you know, leading up to his death, it was just let's not let Mike commit suicide.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: So, you know, his friends were on a suicide watch. It failed because, if you're not a relative, you can't commit somebody. And so it wasn't that big a surprise when it happened. I had seen him the week before—I got a call from Fredrik, saying, "You've got to come help me, he's drunk, and we're at this restaurant," and—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Fredrik who?

JIM SHAW: Nielsen.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, okay.

JIM SHAW: And it was just—you know, he kept saying, "What do I got to live for? You guys have kids." You know, that was—us having kids was a blow to him because he knew he was never going to have kids. Anyway.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: He could have had kids.

JIM SHAW: He didn't want to. He didn't think it was the right thing to do. He was smart enough to know that he'd be a terrible father.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

JIM SHAW: And—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, that's something. But he was—he was an—I assume—would you say he was an alcoholic?

JIM SHAW: Oh, yeah. But he sort of willed himself to be, at the end, because, you know, before, he was just socially. He hated going out, so he'd get drunk when he went out, but he didn't drink heavily at any other time.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, how did—so, how did he will himself to be an alcoholic or an addict?

JIM SHAW: Things started going downhill, starting with his Berlin show, and when he first showed the *Kandors*, and this guy hit him—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Wait, what—

JIM SHAW: —and knocked him down.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Wait, who hit—I don't know this story.

JIM SHAW: It was in—he was having the opening. He wasn't happy because he was—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: He was in Berlin having a show, where?

JIM SHAW: Or not in Berlin—Cologne, I think.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Having a show at—

JIM SHAW: At his [. . . Berlin -JS] gallery whose name escapes me [Jablonka -JS], suddenly, even though I almost showed with him.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And this opinionated German artist said something to him, to the extent that, "You just make art for rich people," because it's really—you know, this polished work, and it's shown in a darkened space—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah, the *Kandors* are beautiful.

JIM SHAW: Yeah, but they obviously cost a lot of money, and the guy just—so, Mike said, "Oh, fuck you," and the guy hit him in the face and knocked him down. And you know, that was a couple of years before. I think that's when things started going sour on him, and I think it's partly because he probably agreed with the guy to some extent.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, why would he be upset because—you think it's just because this guy punched him and made him feel that he was doing the wrong thing?

JIM SHAW: Well, at another time, when he and Tony were doing *The Poetics Project*, they tracked down—what's his name? Glenn Branca.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And Glenn Branca was accusing Mike of just making art for rich people. And Mike was denying it, but in his heart, you know—anybody who sells art knows that only rich people can buy it, or pay for a museum to buy it, you know. So if you have any self-identification with your past as a middle-class or poor person—I mean, I realize that the only reason I'm doing okay in this economy, is that I'm tangentially attached to the one percent.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JIM SHAW: And all my high-school compatriots, who are in the age when they can't find another job or they're in a dead-end job and barely are going to have enough for retirement, are not attached to the one percent, you know, unless they're lawyers or professionals.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, you think Mike had guilt about his success that just came up that recently? He's been successful for a long time.

JIM SHAW: It just got worse. There were a lot of other things. I can't really say anything on the record because it's all conjecture, but if you turn that off, I can tell you more.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Well, we shouldn't be going down that road anyway.

JIM SHAW: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It's been a pleasure talking to you, Jim, and we might do more.

JIM SHAW: Okay.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, thank you. If you have more, we'll meet again. But for right now—

JIM SHAW: As a member of the Kelley Foundation, I'm not—they're very particular, like, when that article in the *Fortune*—in the *Wall Street Journal* came out, they were really pissed that she detailed how he committed suicide, and they were all looking accusatorially at other people. We think she just got it out of the police records, but anyway, it's—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It's a sad—it's a sad end to—it's a tragic end to a brilliant career, but you are alive and well, and that's a good thing.

JIM SHAW: As long as I can get my stomach to work.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Thank you, Jim.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]