



Smithsonian
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Oral history interview with Catherine
Murphy, 2017 March 21 and 23

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Catherine Murphy on March 21 and 23, 2017. The interview took place at Murphy's home in Poughkeepsie, NY, and was conducted by James McElhinney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Catherine Murphy and James McElhinney 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

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney speaking with Catherine Murphy on March the 21st [for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Oral History program]. Is this the first day of spring?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yesterday.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yesterday was.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They're pulling our leg; there's snow everywhere.

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.] My kitty's coming to say hello to you. She's usually very unfriendly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, the 21st of March, Spring plus one, 2017, at Ms. Murphy's home in Poughkeepsie, NY, or nearby. And it's a pleasure to see you again.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Thank you, same here.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Can you share with us when the first time was when you were in the presence—mindful of being in the presence of a work of art?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, that's an interesting question. Not precisely. I mean, I grew up—oh, I could tell you a story, though. I grew up in a pretty middle-class [home -CM]. My father worked in the post—was a musician, worked in the post office. My mother was a housekeeper. No, like, a cleaning lady, and she went out on jobs. I'm going to tell you; it's a long story, but it's going to get there. And she was at one of her jobs in Cambridge, and she found, in the garbage, two small paintings. We had no paintings in our house. It was at—in Lexington, MA. We had no real paintings. We had a couple of reproductions up on the wall and nothing else. And um, she brought them home and she hung them up. And I loved those paintings and I used to look at them all the time. I don't know—they feel slightly—you can see them from where you're sitting; they're right over there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah. And—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Snow scenes.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Snow scenes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly. I should have known it was my future. And I was—I lived in them. I mean, I didn't know that I—anything about what I was going to be or what I was going to do, but I lived in those paintings. And they're not great paintings. But they're charming paintings. And I proceeded—I did a drawing of the painting I loved best; it's in the back of this. [She opens a book.] I'll show it to you. It's called *Early Influence*, which is a title that I love, and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, there it is.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes. So, I would have to say that I wasn't—I declared I was going to be an artist long before I saw paintings. But my sister, who was a woman—you know, a woman always improving herself, and she's wonderful that way, and she's always curious and does these things, sent away for John Canaday's mail-

away art history course, and they would come to our house, and I would pour over them, before I saw any of these paintings. I hadn't seen any of these paintings, but I knew this was so beautiful, and I loved looking at them. I didn't get to see a real—a real painting until I was probably in junior high. And then I—by that time I had declared to Cardinal Cushing, when he confirmed me, that I was going to be an artist when I grew up.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And what inspired you to do that?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, he asked—he got in—he did that at confirmation for my parish in Lexington. And he'd get up in the front when it was all over, and he said, "Do any of you have the vocation?"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: And I sat there going, "I think I know what vocation means." He said, "Young lady," and he's so happy, and I said, "Going to be an artist when I grow up."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: And he—my friend Terry Reardon is sitting next to me, and he said, "I'm going to be an airline pilot when I grow up." And he went—[laughs]—"No, no, no, no, no, that's not what I meant." And then I found out what he meant, but that's when I declared. But I knew before that. I mean, I—the first time in third grade that I did a drawing, and the teacher put it up on the board, up on the blackboard, I knew something gigantic happened, and I don't know what it was, but something—I went, "Oh, I like this."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: So, long time. And then the first real painting up in a museum I saw, I couldn't tell you. I have so many memories of the paintings at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. That, and so many—yes, I—we were just in California, and I saw the Diebenkorn-Matisse show.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: And there's a painting that they borrowed of a nude sitting on—sitting up high. You see, you see her—he's down here; you see up at her legs, and she's got braids, and I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is a Diebenkorn?

CATHERINE MURPHY: No. No, no, no.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It was a Matisse.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's a Matisse.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It was a Matisse.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, that's the exhibition that opened at Baltimore [Museum of Art] last year—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, yes, yes. And it's—and I hadn't seen it in a long time. I hadn't been in Boston Museum of Fine Arts in years, and I went, "Ah, hello, old friend," and so, I do remember that well because I went home and did a painting of a nude sitting on my desk. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I know the painting you're speaking of. It's called—

CATHERINE MURPHY: You do, it's a famous painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —*Carmelina* or *Carmelita*.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I don't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's got a yellow ochre background—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I can't—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: She's on a table.

CATHERINE MURPHY: She's on a table. It has a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, it does, it does. It has some yellow behind her head—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's an early—it's an earlier piece.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, it's an early painting. They had a lot—at the Diebenkorn show, it was a lot of early Matisse's because I—I don't know, maybe that's what he was looking at; I'm not sure. Or that's what they could get.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Latin-looking, dark haired woman—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, but she has two braids hanging down, like this.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, that's right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And I was—I was just—when I was a kid, I was just really struck.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There's that red accent, that red—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I can't remember the red, but—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think—yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's a—it's a lovely painting, and it's a—you know, it's a painting that just struck me when I was a teenager.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think it's one of those paintings that painters are drawn to.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, there are a lot of those, and I think when I was—when I first started teaching at Yale, I saw so many paintings of Diebenkorn up on the walls behind—you know, kids tacking them up, back in the early days of teaching there. And I said, "You know, you should be looking at Matisse," [laughs] because I didn't even know he was looking at Matisse at the time, but I knew that, I knew he had to be somehow.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, there was that early Ocean Park piece that looked like the Matisse painting of the window.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, there are many more than that. When you see the show—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It is, like—it is, like, a—I didn't—I actually didn't understand how meaningful all this was and it was—it's—you know, really, sometimes, you'll go bing, bing. It's almost like he did it from the Matisse, but not. Different enough.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But it was a very interesting show. I thought—at first, I—when someone told me about it, I just felt pity for Diebenkorn, and I said, "Never do that to me. Don't make me show with Matisse, no." But—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you meet him ever?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Diebenkorn? No. Nope, I just had lunch with Wayne Thiebaud, which was a lot of fun, but no, I never meet Diebenkorn.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I hear he's a great tennis player.

CATHERINE MURPHY: He is. He's in his 90s; he plays tennis four days a week.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow, well, that's why he's still in his nineties.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's why he's in his nineties, exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But I did meet Diebenkorn.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Did you?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I spent the summer of 1993 in Ocean Park. I taught in UCLA and house sat for a movie director on Fraser Avenue—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Wow.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and if you looked east you could see this big, gray structure with a barn door—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And behind the barn door was Diebenkorn's studio, so—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Wow, so you were staring at his studio.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: One of my neighbors, who was one of his former students, arranged an introduction.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Very nice.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Told me to go take a pack of Camel Straight cigarettes.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Non-filtered.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And a six-pack of Henry Weinhard beer.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I've never heard of that yet.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Which is a, I think, an Oregon or maybe it's Washington State beer, and ring the doorbell at four o'clock, and I did that, and we had a lovely conversation, but then I realized—and a few beers and a few cigarettes—but I realized that, I mean, up until that point in time, I guess it hadn't really dawned on me completely that what he was doing was just harvesting elements from his environment—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and reassembling them, so they really were landscape paintings in a sense.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Aha. That—I always knew they were; you mean the abstract paintings?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, the Ocean Park.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely, and someone told me that, in fact, he had upper story windows in his studio—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yup.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And he was over and over again, he was using those upper story windows as the structure for his paintings.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, if you look out of the barn door that he could slide to the side—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —you'd be looking west towards the cottages of Ocean Park with the little angley windows.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, he did a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: There's one beautiful—that beautiful landscape—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean rooftops.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That beautiful landscape that goes down and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, that's a glorious painting. And that's in the show. I mean, I prefer the figuration, not because I'm—not because I'm a figurative painter, but because what Matisse gave him was

muscle. He gave them—those paintings had such tremendous courage, in so far, the relationship with dark to light.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: And I always think that takes courage to actually say, "Let's see how far between"—"Let's see how much I can go—how big I can go from lightest to darkest." I always think that that's difficult to do. It's easier to gray down a painting. And in the Matisse—well, maybe it's for me, it's easier. But from—in the Matisse has made him make a kind of muscular painting. And they show his early figurative paintings—early abstract paintings, and in those, there's a kind of flaccidity in that I went, "Yeah, these are young paintings." If I'm—then you see the paintings he's influenced from Matisse, the figurative paintings, and then you go to the abstract paintings and the flaccidity is back. And I'm like, "You didn't learn the most important thing Matisse taught you."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: And it was—I—but when you go from light to dark, it makes a kind of space and he was trying to avoid making that kind of space. I understood that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: But when Matisse made abstract paintings, they still had muscle; you know, they still had kind of Matisse muscle. You know, he loses the musculature that I like so much.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: But you know, it's a very interesting show and some of the figurative paintings are. And I was very influenced by them when I was young, and my paintings looked like California paintings when I was very young and I was in college. And I had Elmer Bischoff for a teacher in Skowhegan.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: At Skow—didn't he teach for a while at BU?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, he might have, but he didn't teach me—I didn't go there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But he was—he was at—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I don't know if he did. Did he teach at BU?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was at Skowhegan.

CATHERINE MURPHY: He was at Skowhegan in 1966, and I believe he was in—he went again sometime because somebody else had him in Skowhegan. He was a wonderful teacher. Great. And you know, all of them, the thing that they really helped me with, all, looking at Diebenkorn and having Bischoff as a teacher, was drawing. And they would—I will—I—somebody should do a show of the Bay Area drawers, in drawings, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A lot of people didn't—don't know because I think for a while, I think art education was corrupted by polemical—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —nonsense.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It still is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It still is.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It still is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And it's completely—as you know, the real art world could care less:

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right. And I always tell my students, "You got to know everybody. You got to know everybody." I said, "It's a big art world. And it's been big for a long time, so you have to know everybody."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There's a wonderful pamphlet that is a couple of years old, I guess, called *I Like Your Work*. It's a guide to etiquette in the art world.

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's—the first thing you don't want to do is start arguing about polemics of style at a

cocktail bar.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, also I find artists almost never do when they're grown up. I mean, once they're grown up, I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But when I was young, the first time Robert Ryman told me he liked my work, I almost started to weep because I loved his work, but I assumed he hated me. And, you know, "He wouldn't be interested in my painting," but it turns out he was interested in my painting. And you know, it really, it taught me—I learned—you have to learn so much in life.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, and it—you don't come out—you don't come—you don't hatch, maybe, until about maybe half an hour before you die.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There you go.

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, people forget that, I think, de Kooning, for example, didn't—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, I don't. [Laughs.] Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Didn't have one-person show until he was in his forties.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And now, people are coming out of graduate school and—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —they want to move to Williamsburg or Bushwick and they want to become—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the next big art star and they're going to—

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and they're going to be done by 30.

CATHERINE MURPHY: One of the things I always say when I'm giving a talk on here is, when I started, you figure I graduated from Pratt in 1967. I never thought that I would get any attention at all. I never imagined I would be anything other than below the poverty line. I just—I didn't—it wasn't like, it wasn't like, I'm not even—I'm not lying—I wasn't—I didn't think I was a bad artist; I thought I was a good artist. But I thought, I don't know what will happen to me, because I don't—but I was a woman, and I didn't have many women around me that were doing anything. I didn't want to teach; I didn't. I wasn't interested in teaching, and so it was really—I said—so, everything that happened to me was like, "Whew. How about that?" Honest to God, I mean, I wrote poems about being nothing, about being this invisible person, this invisible artist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: I did nothing but do my work, but I didn't expect anything from it. And you know, I—it was a real shock; it was a real shock when things started happening. But it was nice. You know, it's not—I did go to galleries and I saw that people were showing work that was representational. I said, "Geez, maybe I can get a gallery someday," but I knew all those people were teaching. I knew Philip Pearlstein was teaching.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: I knew Gabriel [Laderman] was teaching. Everybody was teaching that was showing. But they did have—I would love—my dream was, maybe someday somebody will show will show this work.

[Phone ringing.]

Can we—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're going to pause for a minute. Let you take—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —that phone call.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, I'm just going to look and see who it is.

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JAMES MCELHINNEY: So we're resuming.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you were saying that everybody you knew who was a working artist who was an artist you looked to for inspiration, Gabriel Laderman, Philip Pearlstein, who I saw recently at an opening of a friend—

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.] I love Philip.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —at Betty Cuningham's.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And nearly everybody else; Elmer Bischoff—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —even Diebenkorn, all of these people were teaching.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And do you think that the fact that this is how these artists were conducting themselves inspired their students to think they could do likewise?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Sure. I mean, also it was kind of—it was—they—it inspired—what it did was it set a tone for expectations, and expectations were low. But it set a tone for—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —you do your work anyway.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: When you say expectations, you mean—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, not artistic expectations.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —material rewards.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Material reward, exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Material reward.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely. And on the contrary, that we were supposed to aim for the world and the stars, but, in fact, nobody was going to care except for a very small amount of people. We were poets back then.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I know—you know it's the same as poetry now. We thought—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —I thought the audience will be—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or jazz musicians.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Our audience would be other artists. I'd go to the shows [laughs] there were no—I never

saw a patron [laughs] I only saw other little, bedraggled souls in the—in the—in the galleries looking at things. And those were the people I looked up to. I mean, I looked up to the people who were—who thought about art and who did art. And it wasn't—it wasn't people who were going to buy art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, I—I mean, I just didn't know anybody.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's a bit shocking today to look at the degree to which art schools are promising students a career because of the degree.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I don't think they are. I don't think they really are. I think that—I certainly—I know Yale isn't. I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, not Yale but—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Not Yale. And I think that anybody who is that—that's—it's too heartbreaking. I mean, honestly, there'll be a couple of kids who will instantly go out there and make some money. There will be.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: There are—every class. But most of them know that that's not going to be how it's going to—how it's going to happen.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The problem though is that the—that the cost of an education now is—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, it's ridiculous. Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —so much more even proportionally, even adjusted for inflation, cost of living.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I don't see how they ever pay it back.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean I went to Yale in the mid-70s and—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —it was I think \$2,800—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Wow.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —my first year.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I mean I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Every time I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —now, it's—I mean, it's—

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —got to be \$50,000.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It is \$50,000.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah. So—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Every time I [laughs] talk—

[They laugh.]

—to them—I'm—in my head, I'm going, oh honey, this isn't going to be worth 50,000 dollars [laughs] no matter what I say to you [laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I've got to say there was an AI Held story. One day we were all hanging around the pit—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —having coffee and smoking cigarettes when people still did such things.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, exactly when you could do that. You can't even bring coffee into your studio anymore [laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No. Well, that's—

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's unthinkable, exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You can smuggle it in.

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Can you have a coffee maker?

CATHERINE MURPHY: I never tell—I never tell. You can't have a coffee maker, no, no. You can't—you can't have a poisonous substance next to a substance that you're drinking. And the poisonous substance is going to be [laughs] turpentine. And—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —that you're not allowed to do that. And you're not—and so it's just banned but people have it all the time. I mean, I just don't tell them I'm going to, you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's a presumed infanthility of the—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —of the student that they're—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I don't know [laughs]—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —they can't tell a cup of coffee—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —from a—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, but everybody's drunk a little bit of their turpentine. It's—that's a rite of passage.

[They laugh.]

I mean, you know?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's why some oil painters like Retsina.

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.] No, I don't [laughs]. Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But the—a group of us were hanging around the pit, and Al showed up in the morning, as he would, with a cup of coffee. And—from Mary Cave's up on Eight Plus [ph] at the cafe on top of the A&A Building.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yes, I used to go there.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And he was asking us. He said, "Well, why the hell are you here?"

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: "What are you doing here?" I mean you could—you could—you could take Bob Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns and you name it, Jim Rosenquist, you could all buy them lunch at Lutèce—

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and they'd come and they'd spend an afternoon in your studio and have a look at all your work and give you a crit. And then it's the same as here, right? I mean, that was his—meanwhile he was—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —our critic and he was being paid to be there.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And biting the hand that fed him a little bit.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Actually what he—you know of course—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: —the secret to graduate school was not the teachers.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's the fact that you're meeting other painters.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You're talking to—I mean, really that is it. And I know that I couldn't have had the life I had without a partner who—[without Harry -CM]. In fact, we talk about art all the time. I mean we are each other's sounding boards. We—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: —we could—we could go to Alaska, and we could still be artists—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —because we are—it's—to find somebody who is going to tell you the truth and really tell you the truth, even though you're going to fight through it, and it's going to be awful, is very valuable [laughs]. I mean, I—he's not going to pull any punches, I'm not going to pull any punches. You know. It's kind of remarkable. And I think a lot of marriages don't survive it. But we are each other's biggest fans as well so—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's rare and wonderful when you have a union between two artists.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It is. And my best friends are Bob and Sylvia Mangold, and Thomas Nozkowsky and Joyce Robins, and Gary Stephan and Suzanne Joelson, all people who, in fact, have found the same thing. And it's kind of—it's kind of amazing when it happens. It's like very lucky. I'm always happy when my students get together. I'm always happy. I don't—I don't—I don't—I don't—I don't involve myself in it, but I'm like oh, that's good. They'll help each other, you know. And you—and but sometimes you don't help each other. Sometimes you hurt each other, but it's—that's how it works.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I mean any sustained, intimate relationship is going to be complicated.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly. But—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It has to be periodically renegotiated.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

[They laugh.]

But it's—but the—nothing—the thing that never changes between Harry and I is it's always going to be the whole truth, nothing but the truth. And it's—I tell my students—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No alternate facts for you.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly. Well, no.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: And I always tell my students when they're chafing from a bad critique. I'm like in another year nobody's going to be saying anything to you at all. So try to enjoy the critique [laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's another—

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —that's another thing that AI told us.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And well, it's a very good thing to tell them because it's like, really, what you're going to miss is this conversation, is what you're going to miss.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, he said, "Here you are you've got," according to at least the committee of selection, "the"—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —"Twenty most talented"—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —"Twenty-two year olds"—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —"in the country."

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you're working together; you're living together. Sometimes you're socializing; you're critiquing each other; you're interacting with older artists. And this is a very special kind of time.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's a laboratory, the very special, sheltered environment; it's an incubator." I forget the words he used. But then he said, "A couple of years from now, nobody's going to give a shit who you are."

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.] Exactly right. And it's like—that's really—that's really worth a lot. So I think that they—I also say to them, "I'm not the smartest person who's ever going to look at your work. But I'm not the stupidest."

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The other line I like is, "They don't pay me enough to lie to you."

[They laugh.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, honestly, the reason why I finally did like teaching is because I've done some—I've done student teaching at Pratt and I've done Saturday school and stuff like that. But the reason why I finally—and Yale was the great place for me, was that I find that I, for the most part, lie my way through life. And, in fact, I have never lied to the students. I don't lie to them. I always—it gave me a chance to tell people what I thought about painting. And I tried very hard to give it to them with a—with kindness, you know. But, nevertheless, I got to talk about painting and say what I really thought about it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This is beginning to reveal, to me, the structure of this conversation that we can follow, the architecture of what's going to happen in the next hour, and in a couple of hours on Thursday. And it seems like this is a great opportunity, maybe, for us to leap ahead in the chronology from junior high school—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes [laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts to your teaching and how you came to be a teacher and how you think that activity supported, challenged, nurtured your own studio practice as an artist.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So how did you come to Yale? How did you get—

CATHERINE MURPHY: David Pease called me up and asked me if I could teach—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How—

CATHERINE MURPHY: —a few days and to do Bernie's class and teach drawing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And how did you know David?

CATHERINE MURPHY: I didn't.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He just called you out of the blue.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It was under Bill's [William Bailey] recommendation. I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you knew Bill already.

CATHERINE MURPHY: No. He knew—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You didn't know Bill.

CATHERINE MURPHY: He knew my painting and I knew his—I knew his paintings.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's it.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I never—I don't think I've ever—I didn't—I don't think at the time I ever met him. I—maybe briefly in that I don't remember. But no, I don't think I'd really ever met him. He—I think he liked my paintings.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: And they were trying me out. I mean, they had a very good—they would—they would—they were trying me out. I was there with Gabriel and like they—so it's a few weeks of, if she's an idiot, it's okay; Gabriel's not an idiot. And George McNeil will be interesting, and so it'll be an interesting class for these kids. They thought they were having—going to have Lester [Johnson], but they're going to have these four—these three people instead. So then they liked me and they asked me to come back and teach one day a week and I said yes.

And then it was too much; it was too much teaching for me. And—because in order to do my paintings, you understand, I have to be here. I mean, I—not just like other people, they all have to be there. But I have to be able to say it's a sunny day; I'm going to work right now. That—especially back in the day when I was working that way not—lots of times now, I'm working within a controlled light source. And so I can—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: —work when I need to work. But back then, it was like it's a sunny day; I—am I missing a sunny day? I'm going to shoot myself. So—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —I said, I can't—I finally, at the end of the year, I said to David, David, we've got to think of something else, I said. because this is too many times. I'm having to come too many times. And so I believe I was one of the first people that started this thing, which now a lot of people do, which is I went every other week for one semester a year. Then—at first, I didn't do final critique, but then—and they added on final critique. But it was only one semester a year, and it was every other week.

And I taught a seminar; for a number of years, I taught a seminar that I loved doing. I got to make it up. But you see, it's a very limited amount of teaching. It was just at a very good place where I could—and what I say, and I mean this from the bottom of my heart, I learned more than I taught. I really did. It made—I opened those doors, and it was like Christmas. It was like there's—anything could be in this package. And it was so much fun to talk to the students, especially the students who had the least amount to do with what kind of art I made. And it was a complete education. My joke is it took me 23 years to get my graduate degree, but I finally did.

[They laugh.]

And so it was—it was—it was so much fun. And I taught with Frances Barth, and Mel Bochner, and Rochelle Feinstein, and a whole bunch of people. Bill at the very beginning but he didn't—he wasn't there very long after when I was there. He wasn't—only there for a short time. Bernie almost not at all. And—but Andrew Forge. You know after first—after the first final critique I went up to Andrew Forge and I said, if I never come back here, I want to thank you for what you just taught me. Andrew Forge was one of the great teachers of all. I mean, Andrew Forge—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: This is what Andrew Forge could do. He could look at a miserable piece of crap, I mean so that you'd want to go, I have to run out of this room; my eyes have just been poisoned.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: I can't bear looking at this for one more second. And he could sit there and be—everybody else would be talking, and Andrew will be in the back of the room. He'll sit there and he'll look and he'll look. And then he'll say, and it won't be a lie. I mean, sometimes people stretch the truth. But Andrew will have found the three-inch square of something that looked a little like Matisse.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: And say, "You see that corner up there? Well, you know,"—and you'll go yes, it does look like Matisse. But Matisse is in shit. But, yes, it does. And Andrew could see what was most promising in a painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Even a horrible painting. And I will say some paintings [laughs] are too horrible, and you really want to run from them. But he didn't run from them, and he looked and he helped people a great deal. But he was also very funny and could say very pithy and [laughs] wicked things, too. But he was a wonderful teacher, and I really, just for the few minutes that I taught with Andrew, it was worth teaching. But Mel taught me a lot. Mel—Frances taught me a lot. Everybody did. I mean, it was—everybody was patient with me and made me into a critic and I got better at it. So I always—I had a great time there. I never—I never—I never didn't have a good time, even if I hadn't slept, no matter what, that was a day where time didn't exist and it was just, boom; it was fantastic.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think a lot of people think about Yale and in the age of marketing and brands, they—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —all they see is the brand. They don't—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —understand that it really is a very different kind of culture from most art schools. I think a lot of—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I—absolutely. And I've had a lot of experience now. I've gone to a lot of art schools now.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you're teaching at Rutgers.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I did. I'm done.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You're done.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I'm done at Rutgers.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, so—

CATHERINE MURPHY: That was finite.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But that was—okay. That was—that was a distinguished chair, right?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—

CATHERINE MURPHY: And I had to leave Yale. I didn't want to. I mean—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —I honestly didn't want to. When I went to Rob and, he went, "I can't pay you that." So I mean, I was heartsick. I didn't—and also just getting through the State of New Jersey to get to Rutgers was more than I could bear. But Rutgers is a good school.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh no, yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's fine, but it's—what happens at Yale and what I loved about it was when I did admissions a number of times. And what they were looking for is the scope of the art world. I mean what they were hoping to—they wanted to get the best of the best, but in that—in that mix, you went from—like I was talking about Matisse and Diebenkorn, you went from white to black. I mean, you went—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —you went—you did the spectrum. And so when—I mean I'm sure—maybe at—when [Josef] Albers was picking the class I don't know if that happened that way. But when the—we were encouraged to have that happen. You'd go, oh, we need one of these kids in this mix. I mean, this is—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: —this will be interesting. And it always was. I mean, it was always—we were never teaching—we were never teaching one idea, never. And that's—that is very different from most art schools.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think a lot of them do rely heavily on cults of personality and polemics and things like that.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then the other thing, too, is that the schools expect the professors, or the artists, the—or the professors, actually, to teach three classes a semester.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh yeah, well—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And, of course, that's going to kill your studio practice.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, absolutely right. And that's the—one of the reasons why this little every other week thing then started—people—what happened was, and this isn't all good, but it's not all bad. They lost a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: —line—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: —that like there's a tenure line, or it used to be, that isn't in the art school anymore. And for—since I've been in academia, Harry's been—Harry is a full professor at Vassar. I know that that's difficult. But what it's been replaced with is lots of people coming in, in this way. And my joke is, and it really was true, there was plenty of me. They don't need any more of me—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —than that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I got to see—I made my rule. My rule was everybody in this class is going to see me once. Everybody, all 40 kids, they're all going to have to see me. And I did at least 10 critiques every time I went, and so I got to see the whole class. And then anybody who loved me could make a special request, and they could see me a couple of times. And that's—when I was teaching class, that was very interesting, actually. I couldn't see as much—many kids, but it was interesting to teach classes. I taught a class on subject, and I taught a class on still life and stuff like that, that really—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: —interested me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you could pick the topic.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I could—oh well, that's the other great thing about Yale. They hire people they can trust. They say, "Go do what you want to do." And then nobody's watching over your shoulder.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, they also seem to respect an artist's need to remain an artist.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And not to become—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —some kind of paper pusher.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely. And that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And that happens.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —even if you're full time—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —it's not—[laughs] we have a poor friend who is this historian, not an artist or anything, a regular historian. And she could get—they are a dime a dozen; they—really, they have one of—they're the highest rate of not getting a job, worse than artists. And she—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: —had to take a job out in [laughs] Michigan in like a state school. And her workload is 5/5.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's ridiculous.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's [laughs]—and then they—she finally got out of teaching in the summer. They wanted her to teach summer—they made her teach summer school for a while. But now she got—I'm like a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You'd almost rather—

CATHERINE MURPHY: —Vassar is just—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —flip burgers—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, that's right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —than do that.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Vassar is about to go—I keep on saying, well teach in high school; I think it will be easier. But Vassar is about to go to 2/2, and it's like [laughs]—it's like soon it will be 1/1 [laughs] it's like—but it's—it was—it was really good for my work to teach at Yale for the—but to teach any more, even another day, would have killed me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So that's interesting because a lot of people—a prominent dealer whom I interviewed recently, I won't say who, but big, big, big superstar gallery.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: When asked what advice would you give to a young artist [laughs] he said, "Never teach" [laughs].

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, a lot of people feel that way. I mean—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —my friend Bob Mangold thinks that you can teach, but then you have to stop. You know you can't teach too long. You don't hang on there. But he makes a half million dollars for each painting he does, so it's easy for him to say. But it's—it is—it's difficult, in some ways, because this is what teaching does, and this is why it's hard: it makes you think bad paintings are good because you see improvement, and then you think, oh, that's a good painting. But really and truly, it's not a good painting, and so something happens to your critical eye. I mean, what we're teaching is to have those kids have a critical eye. But something happens when you—when you say, oh wow, look at the improvement. Look at the improvement in this. This painting is much better. This sculpture is much better. But really, it's a piece of crap. It's just better. And that's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's a better piece of crap.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's a better piece of crap. And that's very difficult. And they're also—I certainly—and this did not happen to me. I mean, I didn't teach enough for the other thing to happen to me either. But what did not happen to me either was I never—I don't have one—I don't have a precise set of rules to get anywhere. I don't—A, I don't know how to do anything. And I don't—I don't believe in technique. I think technique is just armament. You have an idea and then you learn how to do it; you don't learn how to do things.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, how do you butter a piece of bread, right?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, you butter it the way you like [laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you know what the knife's for and what the butter's for and what the bread—

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's about all you need.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That and that's—and it's like I don't—and so I can't teach them that. And they say things like—they ask me questions about material. I can't teach you that. I don't know anything about material. I just—someone told me, "Okay, this won't fall off your painting." Okay, I'll do that. I don't know how to glaze. I don't know how to do those things. I don't want to know how to do those things. I just never—I don't want to know how to do those things. I just—I wanted to plod through this and finally satisfy my own desires.

And so I'm—I don't—I don't have a set of rules to tell them. So that—it's bad when you believe your own shit. I mean, it's bad when you believe you're the—you're the arbiter; you're the seer; you're—you know how to do things better. And that—and that's one of the things group critique is good for, too. Because you can figure out, you hear other people who your—are your peers actually critiquing work. And you say, oh, where am I in this—in this? What do I actually think of this apart from what I think of this kid? So it's good.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, is it—would you agree that in higher education, like one of the problems is that, because it's so obsessed with accountability and outcomes—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the goals and outcomes—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —that they have to create some way to measure the immeasurable—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —that they ultimately dumb it down to the point where it isn't really worth—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, one of the things I see that I find to be most—that I find most distressing and depressing is I think the thesis show should be outlawed. And I—

[Phone ringing.]

No, not again.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're pausing [laughs].

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CATHERINE MURPHY: Do away with the thesis show, because it does—you know, I always walk into their studio and I go, "Please stop thinking about your thesis show, it's really ruining you." I said, "Just do your goddamn work, and you'll find a few paintings you want to put up, and you'll be done, there's your thesis show. You cannot fail. You're not getting a grade. You're fine, you know. You get to your second semester at Yale; nobody's kicking you out unless you don't work. Just do your work." And so I do this all the time, and I say this all the time. It is the one thing I say to every school I go to everywhere. "Please stop thinking about your thesis show," because what I find is I walk into shows in Manhattan, and I go, "Oh, my God, this is a thesis show."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Isn't that the truth, because—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —a lot of artists get out of graduate school; they go—

CATHERINE MURPHY: They don't know what else to do.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —they go right into a teaching job, and they reenact their thesis show every two years.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's true. That's true. I honestly think if I could just never see a kid doing this again. But this is unlikely. This is one of the things that school does, and I don't—they're used to going to school; they're used to doing what their teachers say; they go—their teachers say, "You're going to have a thesis show."

They go, "Oh, a thesis show!"

Maybe they could call it something else. It's that word, thesis, that sounds like they're going to do a piece on Heidegger. You know, it's like, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Well, it's to try to make—it's to try to invent some kind of measurable outcome for a discipline that really doesn't belong in a university, maybe.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, it's absolutely true. And you know, I always think that we're the antidote, and, or—either we're the antidote to the university or the poison to the university. I'm not sure which, maybe both. And—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or a virus [laughs].

CATHERINE MURPHY: The virus, exactly. And I always say to Harry, when Vassar is complaining about something, I go, "Well, you know..." [laughs]. But I think it's important to have it there, I really do. There's some—we get all the freakazoids, and they need to go somewhere, so it's good, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, but Yale, again, is unusual because it has great respect for an artist's need to remain an artist.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's because it was formed by an artist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah. I mean—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who grew up at West Point.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Albers?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, John Ferguson Weir, but first—

CATHERINE MURPHY: But Albers was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, Albers, Albers, yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, I mean, Albers used to pick the—Dick Lytle talks about Albers picking the class. There wasn't a panel of people. Albers—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, Albers, Albers—

CATHERINE MURPHY: "I want you, and you, and you, and you, and you, and you; you can come," you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Bailey had a great—or was it Bernie Chaet, was talking about Bill coming back from Korea and being this sort of combat-hardened vet, and going to talk to Albers, and Albers said, "Oh, sure, you can get in, no worries," you know. So—

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.] Wow.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because he was so intense and intent on doing this.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And he was not that—recently reentered into civilian life and still sort of had this—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right, this military—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —this warrior persona.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly. Wow, that's amazing. I don't know those stories. That's a good story.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I don't know if that's true or not, but that was what—that was sort of—

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's a good story. I'll ask him.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's an apocryphal—

CATHERINE MURPHY: What I don't—what I've never heard about was Bailey's time as a student at a Yale. And I've had many conversations with him, and I must ask him. I haven't asked him that question. I'm going to ask him that question.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He did tell me one thing Albers said to him, because he was—as everyone was trying to understand, he said everyone in his class was cursing the fact that they had to compete with this guy named Picasso—[inaudible].

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.] Yes. Well, it was a whole generation of artists that did just that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And it's like, "How the hell do we get away from this?"

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then the other thing was, "What do we do about all this Abstract Expressionism?"

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, well.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And he said Albers turned to him and said, "Oh, forget all that *Schmeerkunst*."

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.] *Schmeerkunst*, that's fabulous.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: *Schmeerkunst*.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's fabulous.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I was taught by—I mean, when I went to Pratt, it was—I was supposed to have Gabriel; he went to New Orleans the year I was supposed to have him, and I'd never had a teacher that was interested in representational painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was in Queens, though, later, wasn't he?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, later he was in Queens. That's why I went to Queens. I went to Queens for a month. And this is because I'm an idiot, and I went to Queens for a month, and I didn't read the catalog. I just figured Gabriel taught there. And Gabriel didn't teach in the graduate schools, so I went—I visited Gabriel's class, and I said, "Gabriel, you don't teach in the graduate school." And he said, "Yeah, I know." And I went, "That's why I came." And so I—it's only one of the reasons I quit.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who was teaching there?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Louis.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Louis Finkelstein, right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And he was wonderful. I mean, I love Louis. He was crazy as a bedbug, it was like—he was wonderful. He's smart, and he asked great questions. Charles Cajori was teaching there, Robert Birmelin. It wasn't that it was bad teachers.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It was I was out of school for two years. I was painting, and I was painting a very disciplined—and I was painting on my own; I painted all the time. I got to Queens; they gave me a scholarship; I was going to have to do work to have that scholarship, and I was going to have to go to classes; they had classes. And I realized after a month that I wasn't doing any work. And I said, "Shit, I'm not going to do any work if I go here." I said, "I know that I just need to—I know where I am. I know what I—need to do this work. I need to do work." And so I knew I was just postponing what I wanted to do. And so I went in to talk to Louis, and I was like, shaking all over, I'd never quit anything in my life. And you know, they told me I was going to do—I thought I was going to do something; I always did it. I was shaking, and Louis said, "No, don't worry," he said. "Don't worry. Don't worry. People quit things all the time, you know. We were—of course, we're glad to have you, but you know, you'll be fine." And I went, "Okay." [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: And I also—they didn't make you pay for a month, so I had, like, I'd saved up a little bit of money, and I knew I could be dead in six months. I could spend that time in graduate school, or I could paint.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And so I chose painting. I couldn't think past six months.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And see, you lived; you survived.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I survived.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it was the right choice.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It was the right choice, but it was—it could easily have been the wrong choice. But the teachers were wonderful. I loved Robert Birmelin; he was terrific, and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Are you in touch in with Bob still?

CATHERINE MURPHY: No, I'm not.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I saw him recently, doing very interesting work still.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, he's still painting and working hard in his 80s.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's wonderful. Yes, I know he has to be in his 80s.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And drawing like a madman.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's excellent.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And a very, very productive guy.

CATHERINE MURPHY: No, I've always thought the world of him. He's a really great guy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, lovely guy.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah. So my own graduate school was—that's why it all fell apart. But it was good to be taught by Abstract Expressionists. [You know, it was one of the reasons why I was making paintings that looked like Diebenkorn. -CM]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But Laderman was very interesting, and I think it might be appropriate to talk about him a little bit.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: To sort of read him into the canon—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because I think that in the age of sort of, starchitects and superstar artists, and our artists as art directors, and it's all about money and celebrity—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Artists as curators [laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and branding and so forth. Laderman, whom I met when I was just a freshman at Tyler, was one of a handful of people at that time, and you can probably speak to it with more authority, because you worked with him. But I'm thinking about Gabe Laderman, and Sidney Tillim.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Both big influences in my life. Sidney Tillim taught me art history at Pratt.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Really?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Brilliant.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Really? Oh, of course.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Brilliant.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But they proposed not only a return to figuration, where, yeah, you have people like Alex Katz, and Bill Bailey, who were treading a fine line between formalist and even, dare I say, yourself—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —treading a fine line between formalist abstract imagery and having to look at, which

happens with a lot of your paintings, you go, "Oh, you see a thumbnail online," and you look and say, "Oh." Steve Martin, whom I interviewed a couple years ago, said he quoted Ed Ruscha, saying, "There are two kinds of art," obviously, there are more, but this is like—

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.] Yes, I know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —a polemic. "Art that makes you go, 'Wow, huh?' and then art that makes you go, 'Huh, wow.'" [laughs].

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.] That's pretty good.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's pretty good.

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.] That's pretty good.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But so there's that "Huh, wow," in your work, where you think, "Okay, this is like, color on the edge, you know a red field with a green—oh, I see it, it's sheets on a line. It's landscape." So there's a kind of time-release.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And Laderman just didn't—He just said, "No," and it's like, "I'm going to take the Death of Marat, and I'm going to make a still life that basically reprises this composition."

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: "And I'm going to pack my wrap full of pre-Socratic thinkers, and other"—Spinoza, and whoever else he could weave into the narrative.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And when this seemed like it was being polemical about style, then all of a sudden, he ended up going head-to-head with people like Paul Georges, who—They hated each other.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, Gabriel went head-to-head with almost everybody.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of course, but that—everybody did in those days.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, yeah, but Gabriel and Philip were very good friends at one point, and they stopped talking to each other. And Philip has told me that the reason why Gabriel stopped talking to him, although we never know. I don't know Gabriel's side of the story, is that Philip talked to people that Gabriel thought he shouldn't talk to. And he's very—Gabriel was very definitive about what was right and what was wrong. And you know, he—I never worked with him. I just loved his paintings. And his paintings opened a door for me, that just—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In what way?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, I was being taught by Abstract Expressionists. Nobody talked to me about any kind of figuration. I never saw any—I was, like a, freshman in college, and Gabriel had a—But, so as a freshman, I wasn't walking around New York looking at paintings. I was too young, I was only 17 years old, so I was, like, staying, having my foundation paint, and doing my foundation, 2-D, 3-D, color, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Color-aid paper.

CATHERINE MURPHY: All that stuff, and I was very good. You know, I loved doing it, it was really good, and it was really wonderful. But I think I went—and we went to maybe the Met, maybe the Modern once. We didn't go to look at galleries. And so I walked into our library at Pratt, and Gabriel was having a show at the library. And I went [gasps], and it was honestly, it was like [gasps]. And I went, "Look what people are doing." And I just went, "Oh, I'm very interested in this." And I got very interested in it. And one of the most important things that ever happened to me was, when I went to Skowhegan, Gabriel came up as a visiting artist. And Elmer was there, Elmer Bischoff was there. And they had a big fight about one of my paintings. And I realized that argument was everything.

That unlike Gabriel, I did not—I thought that this argument that we're all having is the meat. It's not which side is right; it's the argument. And I thought they were both interesting, both of their arguments were—they both made good points in their arguments. And I said, "Look at that. I get it. I get it." And so I feel like the West Coast and the East Coast, both representational, were fighting for some kind of turf. I went, "We're both fighting—we're all fighting for the same turf, you understand? We're all talking to the same idea. And we're just talking about

particulars. We're deciding to make our fight between each other." And I said, "I'm not making my fight between each other. I won't do it. I want to see how wide I can open the door. Not, I'm going to only open it this far, and I'm going to let these few people in. I'm going to open it this far, and see how many people I can let in and how many people I can let in to my life and what I'm looking at as a painter."

And Gabriel had real rules about what we were supposed to do, and what are—exactly how you're supposed to paint. Well, he had a—when he taught painting—I mean, I have lots of friends who took him as a painter. And when he taught painting, he had a real system about how you put paint on. He had a real system about how you organize information from life. I mean, you know, you did a three-tier system of how you make the foliage, how far you go, how you mixed color. It was all very specific and particular. And I had no use for that. I mean, I really had—my foray into how I painted, I kept on thinking about, really and truly, how I looked at the world, and how I looked at painting. And I wanted to think about time in a different way than Gabriel was thinking about time. But I was very influenced by his paintings.

I mean, my early paintings and Gabriel's paintings you know, are very close together. And I was also influenced by Sidney Tillim's conversations about narrative. And that really struck home for me, and I went "Yeah. What are my favorites paintings in the world?" My favorite paintings in the world were in the Renaissance, you know. How do I—you know? And Sidney was always talking about the fact that there's no great stories. And I said, "Well, that's bullshit." The stories are essentially the same stories. Just because we don't believe in Jesus, there are still ways that we can use figuration the same way they used figuration.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And tell a certain kind of story. And so finally, what I came to realize was that all painting was abstract, and all painting was narrative. It just depends on where you want to—it's like one of those things you open up, like, here's the one side, and then you turn it the other way, and here's the other side, and you have all these choices to make. And I look at a Bob Mangold ellipse painting, and I see those two ellipses leaning on one another, I said, "If that's not narrative, I'm a monkey's uncle." And before I taught that course on subject at Yale, I had a dinner party here, and I had—[all my friends were here, Gary [Stephan] and Suzanne [Joelson], and Tom [Thomas Nozkowski] and Joyce [Robins], and Bob and Sylvia [Mangold] -CM]. And I said, "So," I asked them all, "Does your painting have a subject?" And I asked all of them; every person said yes. Every person, from the most abstract to the least abstract, the most figurative; every person said, "Well, yes, my painting has a subject." And some of them wouldn't tell me what the subject was, but, in fact, it had a subject. And so I said, "Well, that's very interesting."

And so I realized that that the—someone told me a story about Merce Cunningham. And Merce—his pieces are quite abstract, or we think they are. And someone said to him, and they were friends with him, and they had a conversation with him, and he said, "No. This is about when I was in love when I was a kid." I mean, it was like these dances that looked entirely abstract had a narrative going in his head when he was making them. So that interested me a great deal, and how do I mine that? How do I get there? Took me a long time to get there. It took a long time for me to finally say, "These are the paintings that I mean to make." Because much as I love Gabriel's paintings, especially his landscapes, and my early landscapes, they were the heroic model. I mean, they were a composition based in diagonals coming to heroic conclusions.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: And I realized that, philosophically, I really reject that. I reject that notion that we—I reject the notion of heroic conclusions. I mean, I'm an Existentialist, because we all are. And where does that philosophy come in? How do I make a composition that talks to that philosophy? How do I make a narrative that talks to that philosophy? So the paintings have to change. And change they did, so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it's a difference between what's happening in the painting, and who's looking at something. Or—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, it all—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the painting becomes a structure or a reflection of this act of looking, discovering.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, it does.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: As opposed to constructing—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —like, historical analogy would be Claude Lorrain, you know.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who creates his *Liber Veritatis*, and it's a kind of compendium of different spatial—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —phrases.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But I always thought of Poussin. You know, I always—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Very close, yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely, and I admire Poussin. He's not my guy, but I admire him, and how he makes it through a painting. And finally it was Minimalism, actually, that helped me the most, because it was one muscle, you know? I mean, you could say that's one muscle, but I always think the minute you think of the painting as this journey you're going on, I think it's more complicated than that. But then, how do I think of the painting as one muscle like one—how do I think of the painting as a Franz Kline, or how do I do this? How do I just make one? It's much more complicated, but you can get through the painting with one stroke. And so I started making different kinds of paintings, and I started making paintings that some people like, some people don't like. But I'm closer to my own vision of what my experience is in the world.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: So like, I always think of the—and particularly the landscape has taught me a lot, because at first it was—the model, of course, is Hudson River School and Europe before that. And I always think, "They had God standing next to them." I mean, those guys—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's true.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They were not just working for a guy who runs a hedge fund or for a gallery owner. They—

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.] But even so, I was—All of a sudden, I said, "Who the fuck am I? I'm this girl who's afraid. I'm afraid all the time, so how do I make a landscape, you know?" And then the first one I made, should I show you in this?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

CATHERINE MURPHY: The first landscape I made—I hope it's in here; I think it is. The first landscape I made that kind of talked to that—it wasn't that; it was much later; it's just wrong in here. Oh, I don't know where it is. It's called *Scrub*, and it's a landscape of, a snowy landscape of—oh, I think it must be before that. Maybe it's not in the book. Anyway, it's a snowy landscape which has no horizon, I took the horizon out. When I took the horizon out, I went, "Oh, yeah, this is closer, I need to be there, I need to be here."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And so it was—and I said and my joke about my landscape paintings then became where they found the body, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.] You know?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A little chalk-line on the ground.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's exactly right. There were no chalk-lines, but it was like I sort of wanted you to understand that I wasn't this person with a god standing next to me. I was this person alone, afraid, and had all the stuff—I didn't want them to be fearful. I just wanted you to know that this is where I was in this, you know. So it's hard to figure out. It's hard to figure that out. It's hard to figure out that if the painting reflects that, it might still be a good painting if the painting reflects a kind of unmasking. When you're young, it's hard to do that, it's hard to figure that out.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, when you're young, you're trying to do a good painting, and you're trying to figure out what that is.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly, exactly right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you have to get past that in order to actually do a good painting.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You have to get past other people's paintings, finally. I mean, you never get past them entirely. My favorite thing—the craziest thing is, I'll be working on a painting or having an idea for a painting. And it'll be good, it'll be something I think is good. But then I get—I almost always get haunted by this kind of feeling that I've seen it somewhere. And I say to Harry, "Think. Where have you seen this? Where have you seen this?" You know, like, at first, when I was a young painter, I would completely do a Cezanne, and not know I was doing a Cezanne. I mean, oh my God, that's a painting of my father that is exactly a Cezanne painting. Oh, now 20 years later, I went, "Oh, that's a Cezanne. I did a Cezanne," you know. Unlike Gabriel, I didn't want to make Cezannes; it wasn't my intention. It was just, from looking at Cezanne so much, you know?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, I think these influences just kind of come out.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They just pop out of nowhere.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right. And they do, and sometimes it's good, and sometimes you go, "Oh, no, I didn't mean to do that," you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But with your work, I mean, as you're talking, I'm remembering seeing this Arshile Gorky retrospective, where he gets to America. And his early paintings, he's really trying to be Cezanne, and then he tries to be Picasso. And then he tries to be a Pompeian artist, and then he tries—you know, he sort of—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —adopts, like an actor, different persona.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then finally just evolves into Gorky.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You know, the watery mill [*Water of the Flowery Mill*] type stuff, Surrealist. But what was your—in hindsight, retrospect? I mean, how was your evolution, how did you—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, one of my great educations was Xavier Fourcade. I mean he was my dealer, and he—I was showing at First Street Gallery.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative], which is a co-op.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Co-op, absolutely, nobody would take me. I mean, I went around to all the places that I thought might be interested in me, everybody said no. A friend, a guy who was in the gallery came to me and said, "You want to be a member of this co-op?" And I went, "Oh, yeah, sure." Because one of the great pieces of advice I got from my teacher Frances Hewitt, who was this teacher in Pratt.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How do you spell that?

CATHERINE MURPHY: H-E-W-I-T, might be another T in there someplace at the end. Hewitt. He was married to Twyla Tharp, but I didn't know that at the time, I didn't know who Twyla Tharp was. Anyway, but he said, "Just show it, show it anywhere." So in my head, I'm going, "Okay, I'll show at this cooperative gallery." And people started—you know, I got into a show, and you know, I got—nobody came. I thought nobody came but bums. My friends came to the opening, and then—you had to sit, so I thought it was just bums.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, that's right, you would have to—

CATHERINE MURPHY: It was on Bowery and First, right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's right. Ergo the name.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Ergo the name. And honestly, it was just bums who were hoping that wine would be served throughout, and they would come into the gallery.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: And so I said, "Well, nothing will come of this." But then some nice person put me in a show, and that person was very, very zealous, and she got Vincent Canby—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Vincent Canby.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Canby to come to her show. And he reviewed it for the sections, and he used my painting as a reproduction. Scott Burton, do you know who Scott Burton is, sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And he was the editor of Art in America at the time, decides he likes my paintings. And I think, "Wow, this is good." And I'm still with First Street, and Scott decides he likes my paintings. And he decides, I don't even know him, never met him in my life. And he decides—at the time, I'm gone to Massachusetts to do some paintings of my family house and their backyard, and I did that repeatedly. So there were paintings I really wanted to do there and would escape to Massachusetts because it was the country, and it was summertime, and it was lovely. And so Scott calls me up, and says, "I'm interested in your paintings."

I don't know who he is, and I'm stupid enough to not—there's no Internet for me to go "Scott Burton," you know, I don't know. And I say, "Okay." And he said, "I want to bring some people over to your—I want to see your paintings." I said, "Well, I'm in Massachusetts right now." And he said, "Well, I want to see your paintings, do you have paintings somewhere?" And I said, "Well, I have a lot of paintings in my apartment in New Jersey." And he said, "Well, how do you get there?" And I said, "I don't know. I'll talk to my brother-in-law. Maybe he'll give you a lift up there."

My brother-in-law Neil, he's like, he just has his license for—he's like 18, 19 years old. Picks up Scott, Donald Droll, and—who's the guy who was at the Modern at the time? It was—what's his name? He died. He's an African-American guy; he's very famous. Oh, he was a curator at the Modern forever [Kynaston McShine]. He picks them up in his little red Toyota, and brings them all out to New Jersey. They get there late, they have a late start. They have to look at my paintings with flashlights. And Scott—so Scott calls me up, and he said—Oh, his name almost came to me. It'll come to me. He said, "My friend Donald is opening up a gallery; he said he wants to represent you." And I said, "Maybe." I said, "What about this?" And he said, "It's a good gallery, they're opening it up on 75th Street." And I said, "Gee, I don't know, Scott, should I do this?" And he said, "de Kooning's in the gallery." And I said, "Okay, I'll do it."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Good move.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly. So Donald called me up—Donald Droll was the nicest man, honestly. He was the nicest man in the art world, he was—didn't like working, but he was so kind. And he knew everybody, he went to Black Mountain with all the guys, and you know, he knew everybody. So he calls me up, and I said, "Okay, Donald, but you know, I don't want to leave my gallery mates in the lurch." I said, you know, instantly these were my comrades, you know. And he said, "Okay, you can be in that, too." He said, "Don't worry about it. I'll just give you your commission if I sell anything there." I said, "Nothing ever sells there, so don't worry about that; that won't be a problem."

And so I was a member of both galleries for a little while. And so that summer, I finish at Massachusetts, and I come to visit the gallery for the first time. And I walk into this gallery, which is a palace, and I have on my paint shoes and my paint—I'm a mess; I have little braids; I'm a little girl. I'm in my 20s still, I'm really young. And I sit down, and Xavier's sitting there thinking I'm an idiot. And then Donald left the gallery eventually, and Xavier he knew he had to educate me. And you know, he had he showed everybody. And you know, he'd bring Gorkys for me to see, you know. He had these wonderful Gorky drawing shows that were—and I had to learn—I mean, I knew a couple of Gorky paintings. But you know, he educated me, he taught me how to be a mensch in the art world. These people were—he was unimpressed by anything. And I remember, I had my first show there, and he said, "It's by appointment only." And I went, "Xavier, my friends won't come." I said, "They just simply won't come if it's by appointment." If everybody's got to call up to come to my opening and my show, I said, nobody'll come. So we opened up the gallery. He didn't want to because of insurance, he didn't want to open up the gallery.

And so my opening happened, and you know, all my friends came. And he only came downstairs once, because he heard Rudy Burckhardt was there, and he wanted to meet Rudy. I didn't even know Rudy was important. You know, Xavier taught me my friends were important; he taught me which ones I should pay attention to. And you know, and it was like, he was so remarkable.

[. . . -CM]

Donald and Scott put me in shows; he took care of me. Donald Droll and Xavier. I did two paintings a year. They

could not sell them for enough money to cover their costs of a show. And so they couldn't even come close to selling them for enough money to cover costs for show. And yet they did. They never said, they never said—they never even said, "Work faster." [They never said things like, "Oh, I cannot make a career out of this, or I cannot show this. We cannot show you anyplace else, you only do two paintings." And he could sell everything I did, but that would not give him back his investment -CM]. But he never told me, "Only do these paintings." He never put any kind of pressure on me. Honestly it was all ethical. And you know, they educated me about what should happen in the art world. And without them—certainly they were after money. But they weren't going to get it from me. And it always impressed me that people who in fact could make nothing from me invested in me, invested time, and effort, and space on me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: To what do you attribute that?

CATHERINE MURPHY: I think they were interested in art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They actually cared about what you were doing?

CATHERINE MURPHY: They cared about art. I mean, Xavier, when he came to America, taught French literature at Harvard; that's why he came to America. He knew all of them, he knew Sartre and Camus, he knew all of them. And he knew he could never do what they did, and so he thought, and he told me this, he said, "I decided my job was to take care of artists." And you know, "I decided my job was to make sure that they were okay." And he really took care of de Kooning. I mean, he was—he put up with a lot of shit. And he got a lot of money from de Kooning, mind you. But not from—I mean honestly, by the time Xavier died, as he would say to me, "I am trying to get you to a living wage."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: And you know, by the time he died, I maybe was almost at a living wage, you know. But it was like, he never made any money from me. When those guys died, it was like—that's when I feel like AIDS was the beginning of the end, you know. It was like—it might have been coincidence, just the beginning of the end was coming anyway. But when all—there was a bunch of people that died in the art world, and I was like—for me, that was, you know—when Scott was the editor of *Art in America*, he was really interested in art, you know. Scott was only interested in art. They didn't think they should get famous off of us.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it wasn't—what you're saying is that—and this is very interesting, actually because you could argue that three important things happened in the 1980s. One was there was this shift from, sort of, connoisseurs and people who were interested in critical thinking, and interest in aesthetics, and interested in what—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —how the art was forming culture.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And it became highly monetized during the go-go '80s, as they were called.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And the art market sort of created the prototype that exists now.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right, because in fact all of a sudden, in fact, there was so much money—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —there was a reason to buy art that nobody knew about before.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, exactly.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, they kind of did. You know, they knew if they were sitting on a Monet, they had some money, you know. But they didn't know if they were sitting on a Rauschenberg, they had some money, you know. So—but then it all blew up. So the money all blew up.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So that happened, and then you had the end of the Cold War.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And whatever exertions there were to try to promote avant-gardism as the art of the free

world.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then you had AIDS.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it was a perfect storm, in a way.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, it was, it was.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And the casualty, you're saying, was the people caring about art more than money.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right. I mean, I really think that there's always been money involved. I'm not an idiot.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

CATHERINE MURPHY: There was money involved in the Renaissance; there was money involved; there's always been money involved. But there were also—these were people. I mean, Donald, having gone to Black Mountain, Xavier having been friends with Camus; he was friends with Duchamp; he was friends with—he was a French intellectual, you know. I was just remembering the other day how he said to me something that stuck with me so hard. He—I was reading a book on Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein, I was reading a book of their letters. And I get to a part after Gertrude has died, and Alice is talking about how these young men are trying to help her. And this young man, Xavier Fourcade, is trying to help her. And I'm like, "Oh, I didn't know that Xavier was there then." And I didn't know that how invested he was in the whole scene. And I went to him, I said, "Xavier, I was reading this book, and there's your name." I said, "Is that you?" And he said, "Oh, yes, yes." He says, "They wanted my letters, but they are not for publication." And I went—And I keep that in my heart, you know. "They are not for publication." You know, he was—I don't know. He's a gentleman; he was a gentleman. He was a scoundrel, but he was a gentleman, you know? He wasn't out for—it wasn't the days when we all bared our soul and decided to be forgiven for it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, a gentleman used to fight duels.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's true, that's true. [laughs]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it didn't mean that you just—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —hold the door for ladies.

CATHERINE MURPHY: No, I meant in the best sense of the word.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right [laughs].

CATHERINE MURPHY: Not the worst sense of the word. No, I just—I hope someday I can say, "My letters are not for publication. I don't have any letters" [laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So I'm just curious, I mean, what kind of—

[Phone ringing.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay, here we have a natural pause coming. Okay, phone ringing.

[END OF murphy17_track03_r]

CATHERINE MURPHY: —If you'd like some lunch.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, thank you. Okay, let's resume for a little while longer.

CATHERINE MURPHY: All right, sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And, so, one of the things that I'm curious about is how, as a woman, you felt participating in this, in this art world. I mean, I understand First Street Gallery and others like that, like Blue Mountain and others.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Which still exist.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yes indeed. I go and see—I just saw a really nice show at Bowery.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, and Bowery is another one.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And that are very collegial.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And actually, a lot of the people who—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I didn't tell you the rest of that story.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, well please.

CATHERINE MURPHY: The rest of that story at First Street Gallery is I tried to stay in the gallery and Xavier was always mad at me because he'd have to send collectors down and then the gallery wouldn't be open and it was a pain in the ass, but I persisted. And then, there was a gallery meeting, and someone in the gallery decided to put forth a motion that the paintings couldn't sell more than a certain amount of money. That was the rule. These—it was entirely directed at me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Self—well, it was—

CATHERINE MURPHY: It was to—I mean, nobody else in the gallery were selling for any money, but I was giving away 40 percent of my money. So, I had to not—you know, I promised Donald and Xavier that if I showed there they would get their percentage because I did so few paintings and so my prices were going up because I was showing there and Xavier could get decent, you know, some money. And so, I went "Sayonara." I mean, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Petty jealousy, yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I mean, you know. It was just stupid.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It was so infuriating. I was like, "Oh."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean, you would think they would want—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the association. The, sort of, imprimatur of—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, people are coming to the gallery and see my painting, they might see their painting, you know?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Exactly.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, it was like, it was so sad, and I went, "Oh, you people are stupid. I'm out of here, you're not my comrade." I mean so—[laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's the, kind of, wagon circle, tribal mentality.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's just—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And so, common among—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Pitiful—[laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —painters, alas.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You know, I never tell anyone I'm a painter if I'm introduced to them the first time.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Really?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I always wait until I'm sure I'll be forgiven.

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.] Well, yeah, I can't tell them anything else, I'm afraid—[laughs]. Anything else, I'm just—I could be a faculty wife. You really don't want to be that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, dear, that's—

CATHERINE MURPHY: But, being a woman is interesting. I didn't—I knew that, of course, I would be—it would be difficult, but since I never thought I'd get anywhere, it didn't, at the beginning, matter too much. I thought I'd just do this.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I had one woman teacher. Nan Benedict, she was my teacher at Pratt. I couldn't say that I really admired any women painters. It was male painters. It wasn't because they were women, I just—it just didn't happen at the time. It wasn't—those weren't the painters I was interested in. I mean, subsequently, now I'm very interested in Lois Dodd, she was back there then. But I hardly knew her paintings when I was young. I became interested in her later, but after I was showing and everything. And other painters while—you know, in my—when I was more grown up. I mean, Sylvia Mangold, for instance, I loved her paintings.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: And Yvonne Jacquette and people like that, they were a little bit older than me. They weren't that much senior. Maybe not even quite 10 years. So, I didn't think about it much, but, you know, of course, there's still discrimination in the art world—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: —about women, but I just don't let it—I mean, I'm painting my feminism. It's in my paintings, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's, like, there. I just—I tend my own garden. You know, I just stay to my own. I get what I get. I mean, I also—Rudy was my Buddha and Rudy told me—that he said—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Rudy Burckhardt?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah and "Painters can't be satisfied. No matter what we get, we want more. We can't be satisfied" and at first, I didn't believe him. But now I know very famous people and they mostly worry about what the other famous people are getting, and they think the other famous people are getting everything. So, I know that, in fact, there's no satisfying us. You know, no matter what we get, we can't be satisfied, because the only thing good that happens to us, happens to us in our studios. That's what happens. The other stuff is bull and it doesn't make you feel happy, it makes you feel sad. You can get sadness from the outside world, absolutely, but you can't be given—you can't—nobody can take away our feelings of worthlessness.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's, you know—we can't. You know, we think, we know that we fail every time we do something. We always get very close, but then it doesn't—it betrays us, and so, it's always there. It's always that and that's, you know, the hole we're trying to fill and that can't fill it, it can never fill it. So, I know that, maybe, I haven't gotten as much as I might have gotten, but maybe I got more than I deserved? I mean, I have no idea, and I've been very lucky, and so, whatever I get I'm grateful for, and, of course, it's not enough, but Alex once said something wonderful—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Alex Katz?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, Alex Katz once said something wonderful. You know, he said, "This is—" you know, Alex is such a curmudgeon, but he said, "This is what you want, this is what you need. You need just enough. You get too much, and it's just more than you can handle, and you get too little, and it's too painful to handle. You want just enough." So, since I've continued painting and I haven't jumped out a window, it must be just enough, and I should—and Rudy—my favorite story about Rudy is when the Modern came to him near the end of his life and said, "Rudy, we want to give you a show of your photographs." And he said, "Okay, okay. That'll be nice." They said at the same time, "We want to do your films." He says, "That's too much. Do one or the other. I can't handle both." [. . . -CM]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, there is a zero-sum sense of competitiveness, where people feel like, "I'm not getting

what they're getting."

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: "They're getting what was due me."

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But you're quoting Katz and you're quoting Rudy Burckhardt. You know, I think about something that Bill Bailey said in an interview—in an article, I think it was in, like, the L Online Magazine or something. It was a profile. He said, "You know, success to an artist is being able to go to the studio every day and to do what you want to do."

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely. That's exactly right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And—

CATHERINE MURPHY: And nobody telling you what to do and you do what—and when you think about that, that damn well is success.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I mean, what most people endure in their lives are people telling them what they want, and people telling them what to do, and having to spend a life in the drudgery of other people's gain. It's just unthinkable, that's horrifying, and we are so lucky. But, on the other hand, we face—the demon is ourselves—[laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, human nature.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Everything that goes wrong, we did, you know? So—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But with that success of being—there must be, as Arthur Miller said, "The divine discontentment."

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, indeed.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That pushes you from—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —one painting to the next painting.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely, and, you know, sometimes there are days where it's me and Apollo.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's like me and—all goodness is sitting on my shoulders, and I have days of such—you know, people always ask you, "That must be a lot of fun being an artist." Well, I say, "No, it's not fun, sometimes it's so glorious we're embarrassed to talk about it, and some days it's so bad—"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're embarrassed to talk about it—[laughs].

CATHERINE MURPHY: —we're embarrassed to talk about it." Exactly—[laughs]. But, it's true, it's really true and sometimes you do a painting you don't hate too much. You know, sometimes you go, "That's not that bad." You know, and sometimes, at the same time, I love my paintings. I think, "Look at that, I did what I wanted to do. I mean, look at that." But then, I see something and I go, "Yeah, but, you're not Gorky."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: How do you respond to people who try to read your work in terms of gender?

CATHERINE MURPHY: I think it's fine. I have—I think the reading of my work—I want every painting to be *Las Meniñas*. I want every painting to be a gift to the people who look at it and go, "Oh, I see that's about losing a child." I mean, I want—if my paintings can bring up that kind of engagement—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: —and the engagement that people are most determined to make it, I think—and be the most specific paintings I can make? I mean, my God, my paintings are—you know, I feel like my paintings are like road maps to what I want to say.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: But, nevertheless, when people come to me with what they think my paintings are about, I go, "Fantastic, that's wonderful." If they actually read it as something it isn't, like, they think it's a shoe and it's a fish. You know—[laughs]—I go, "Really? You think that's a shoe?" But to read the meaning in the painting, it's probably in there somewhere.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: There's probably a kernel of something in there that you're latching onto, and if the painting can be so big as to hold that kind of energy that people need to do that to—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: —for me, that's the kind of painting I want to make and I really mean that. I'm not saying that to be nice to the people who've read my paintings insanely—[laughs]. I go "go for it, go for it." One of the things that is in my painting is everything. I think my paintings are political, I think my paintings are religious, I think my paintings are abstract, I think my paintings are all those things. Not every painting, but there's—I'm just painting, you know—I want to try to understand—my goal is to try to understand what painting is and who I am. So, everything's going to be in there, you know?

And sometimes I'm angrier than other times—[laughs]—you know? I mean, the painting of the smeared lipstick, which people know, is part of a trilogy. And it starts with the painting of the apple, it goes to Eric with his hand over his face, and it goes to the smeared lipstick and it's a creationist trilogy. I mean, it's, you know—this is completely ripped off Masaccio.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I mean, this is absolutely Masaccio and I'm like—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The original sin.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's exactly right and that's—I mean, you know, but at the same time, each painting was thought of separately and each painting they were very close together in time, but they were not thought of as connected to the other. But, I do these three paintings and I went, "I can't deny the connection between these three paintings." That someplace in—there's a kernel someplace in my own head and so, I think of them not as a triptych, but as a trilogy because they happen one, two, three, and I went, "Oh, look at that. Look what I've done." And, you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, but your painting is teaching you what you're thinking about.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely. Well, paintings, that's why you make paintings. You make paintings to learn and my paintings are smarter than me, you know, and when they're not smarter than me they're, you know, those aren't the good ones.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I think that line ought to be carved on a wall somewhere.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: —I mean, honestly, when you're a young painter—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —one of the things you do is you deny what your paintings are teaching you. I mean, that's—you look at them and you go, "But I didn't mean that. That's not what I was thinking," and then you figure out, "Oh well, it is what you were thinking. You did this thing, let's learn from it."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: "And you get better." You know, you get better, that's how you get better. You get better by watching for the good things in your painting, and what it's trying to teach you, and that's why the advice from my teacher was so important to me, because you don't start learning that until you come out of your studio and you become public. You start learning that when you look at your paintings with other people.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And it's very important to do, and my joke is, "I want to get you out of your bedroom and out into the world. You know, you've been having a lot of fun, come on out and see these paintings standing next to somebody else."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's like, I once had a show and it was right around AIDS, when the AIDS crisis, we also lost my brother-in-law Neil, which always makes me cry, sorry, and who was a wonderful man, and I had a show, and I didn't even actually understand what I was doing. But someone came into my show, some man came into my show, he said, "This is like a murder mystery." He said, "This is like—I feel like this is this tragedy, this thing, these paintings are clues" and I went [demonstrates], and I actually hadn't known that I was painting this thing. You know, they added up to this moment in my life. You know, this moment.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, your paintings actually are how you excavate your own mental backstory?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely, and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And they're, sort of, telling you what I was really thinking about for the last few years. Wow.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's right, it's like being on a psychiatrist's couch. Oh, my God, there it is. You know, it happens over and over again. So, you know, one of the things, I was talking to somebody about this recently—I mean, one of things that painters are obsessed with is where the stuff comes from. You know, I think, in many ways, I'm a formalist and one painting leads to the other through form.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And then, I think, you know, and then I find out, you know, oh my God, is it about my dead father? How did I think this was about this and this became about this? And, you know, you don't know how the brain works, and we don't know how the brain work; I, you know, suspect we never will, no matter how many times they tell me that someday—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Not enough.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Not enough, not enough.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It doesn't work enough—[laughs].

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.] That too. It certainly doesn't work at our convenience. It really does do something else that we don't understand.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're not in command of it.

CATHERINE MURPHY: We're not in command of it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's in command of us.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And so, I'm always saying and people say, "Where did this painting come from?" And I'm like, "Well, I was really interested in this idea about line, and how, you know, line and space, and how line becomes form because there is, in fact, no line in nature."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: "So, how is line becomes form and when does it become form" and then I end up with a painting of a cracked window that looks like a great violence has been done.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: But, in fact, I know my initial impulse was this, but I think in the meantime, you know, I also have to make it so that I want to paint it, you know? I have to give it, you know, I have to give it a reason. What I often say to my students is, "What's the story and how are you going to tell it?" You know, the story can be abstraction. The story can be anything, but how are you going to tell it? You know, so, I guess that's it, but I don't know. I mean, I actually don't know, you know. So, many paintings come out of dreams now, that painting

is a dream.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, and the dream is usually very vague, and then I have to understand what it means to a painting, and how would the painting work? You know, I was having a dream about opening packages that had tissue paper in them, over and over again. And so, how do I make that work?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: What do I make it say? You know, so it's, like, it takes sometimes ten years for those things to evolve, kind of. So, it's not just slow when I do them—[laughs]—it's actually slow when I think of them too, you know?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, they reveal—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —they reveal what the painting is about.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly, but I don't know—I'd love to understand how the genesis works, but I don't. I don't and I try, a lot. I really try a lot, to be honest about it. You know, when I'm talking about my paintings, I want to be honest about—especially in front of students about how this painting happened, and honestly, I can't be honest about it—[laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But they, obviously, come from a very deep place—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, well that's true.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and there's an intuitive selection that goes on.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And that you're thinking about, you know, one thing or another that might strike you visually and then, somehow, one of these memories—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —or one of these glimpses becomes, like, a recurring image—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and then you decide you've got to drag that out of your head—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and you've got to put it on a canvas to figure it out. So, let's talk a little bit about your working process.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And we can explore that again on Thursday, but do you generally start with drawings?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, I will do—I had a show, last year, of my painting drawings, which are my drawings for paintings at, not Gorky's Granddaughters, Sargent's Daughters.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sargent's Daughters, that's right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Sargent's Daughters, and I will start with a drawing, but sometimes I have to start with making the event—you know, I have to find the object or I have to find—you know, I have to—like, to do the polka dot dress painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I dreamt that painting and that came full blown, that was the whole painting, exactly the way it looks. I went, "Oh, look at that." And I went to bed thinking about the cosmos and I couldn't do the cosmos. Vija had done the cosmos and I went, "Oh God." So, I went to bed and it turned into a polka dot dress on a bed and I went, "Ah, that's my painting." I said, "That's not Vija's painting, that's my painting." And so,

anyway, I had to set up the bed. I tried to find a dress. I asked all my friends, "You got any polka dotted dresses?" They all gave me their polka dotted dresses. No, no, wrong, wrong. [Laughs.] Not what I dreamt and so, I had to go and find the pattern, I had to have someone make me the dress.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I had to, you know, set the bed up so I could sit at—it could be at eyelevel. So, I had to set a bed up on my studio, you know, a high bed so I could do the dress and find all the accoutrements. And so, then I did a drawing, a quick drawing of that, but when I say a quick drawing, it's an accurate drawing but it's not—I do finished drawings, I do major opuses and these don't take me longer than an hour, but they're accurate. You know, I make sure I check the coordinates and I make sure it's very accurate. Then, and this has been such an important thing, can't talk one student into it, but it's such an important thing—[laughs]. I make this drawing and then, with geometry, I make the exact replica of the drawing in the size of the drawing, and have a canvas—a stretcher made, and then I stretch the canvas and I make the painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, the drawing is made in the same ratio as the canvas.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly and I put a line through it, I do it diagonally, and I get it down to the quarter inch and I absolutely—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you just do, basically, a matte transfer.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, I do—and then—but before I give them, you know—I know how big the drawing's going to be.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I often draw it on my studio wall. Just quickly, just really quick, to know what the scale should be, because one thing I really learned when I was a young painter that I had to look for my first show. I went, "Look at that, I think it's life size, but I'm in the Whitney Museum of Art right now."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: "And this painting looks like a postage stamp, but, in fact, it's life size."

[Radio playing.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's one of those things. I hate this, I hate this.

[Brief interruption.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: So, I put the drawing on the thing, and I put the diagonal through it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And then, I make the thing, and I make the rectangle, and then I would quickly draw, not always, but very, very often, quickly draw the composition. Like, the very basic bones of the composition.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Big vectors.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Big vectors, exactly, and so, I'll go too small or I'll go too big, and I'll bring it down or I'll bring it up. And then, I have the c—stretcher made to the exact proportion of the drawing. How many times, with a student, have you seen they've done a fabulous drawing and they've found a canvas that somebody's not using and, of course, the thing that won't work—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] To different proportions.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —the proportion won't work and I go, "You understand the only thing wrong with this painting is that if you'd actually gone to the trouble of making the canvas according to what your drawing was, you would have made a beautiful painting. But, as it is, you've fallen apart." Because they're attached to the drawing because they liked it, you know? They said, "Oh, this is good. I'm going to make it good on this." They can't make it good on this. They would have had to go back and do another drawing, and then they would do that. Anyway, and so, I put a dot on the drawing, in the middle, and I put a dot on the canvas, and I just, with brushes, no pencil or anything, I just go to it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And what color do you use? A light color or—

CATHERINE MURPHY: No, usually it's something in blues. It's usually ultramarine.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I think about—now I'm leaping backwards in the narrative, back to Laderman, and his method of how to construct a composition, and how to put the paint on the canvas. And another contemporary of his that just had a show at the Studio School used to teach that method exactly, which was the blue line, and that was Wilbur Niewald.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, I don't know about the blue line. I mean, nobody taught me to do that. It was just—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: All I knew was when I was at Skowhegan there were about four or five people who were drawing on their canvases with blue lines, and I think it was cobalt blue, not ultramarine. And then I realized, "Oh, they're all from the Kansas City Art Institute."

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, my god.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And they were all painting Niewald's style.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, wow. Well, I think it's probably closest to pencil color and I only use, except for viridian and Windsor green, all the rest are primaries. I don't use any—I use two cadmium yellows, two cadmium reds, ultramarines, cerulean, and white.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And how about your blues? You use cobalt and ultramarine?

CATHERINE MURPHY: No, just cerulean and ultramarine.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, still, you've got an opaque blue and a transparent blue.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, that's another way people set up their pallets, is they'll have primary colors.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Let's say, yellow and they'll have three kinds of yellow.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or two kinds of yellow, one being a more transparent yellow, the other one being more opaque yellow, the cadmium—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —being opaque.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right. Both of mine are cadmiums.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They're all cadmiums.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But cadmium lemon is more transparent than cadmium yellow medium. But mine just happened. My pallet happened, when I went to art school we put up many more colors, and I just didn't use them. So, I took them off my pallet. I mean, one by one they came off my pallet, but at one point there was black and I took black off, and I never put a tint on the canvas. I wouldn't consider it, I love the white canvas, and I—you know, it has to be—and in one day you see what the image is and there's no white on the canvas. You know, it's one day's work and then I work on the drawing for endless months. I mean, that's what takes so long. It isn't the detail, it's the drawing. It's the drawing. It's getting the image on the canvas the way I want it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, what you're talking about, if I'm hearing you correctly, is that it's not the meticulousness of description—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Which takes so long.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —which is easy. It's easier than the drawing.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Than the drawing. The drawing is the hard part.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But what you're talking about when you're talking about "the drawing," is you're not talking about the descriptive aspects of it, but making sure that a form breaks a certain way—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —or turns a certain way.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That this edge is in the correct trajectory, that is precisely where it needs to be.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And not merely the optical description of the object.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay.

CATHERINE MURPHY: No, absolutely, I mean it's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —how the form talks to the rectangle. It's as simple as that. It's like, this rectangle needs this to satisfy it and I will do anything. I have worked on certain paintings, like, for six months, on the drawings, not being able to get it the way I wanted it to be.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that is the music of painting, isn't it? It's the composition.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I think so. I think so absolutely. I mean, the detail—I know what the detail is now. I used to call it—the detail was, for me, I once told Philip Pearlstein. I said, "For me it's the slag heap of the mining, you know?"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's like I've got to like [demonstrates].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's the tailings.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly, but really what it is, is the proofing. It's, like, I can convince you of a shape and form. I can make it in—I can honestly—I can convince you to understand what this is in an hour and half, two hours.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But to draw an ellipse, and then find the means to proof that ellipse from the inside. So, that I'll make the line, and then what I'm doing is, I'm using ellipse as a point of reference—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: —because, in fact, it's everybody's difficult thing. You know, I will somehow use the shimmer on that ellipse and everything that's happening to it to the scintilla of what's happening, but it's mostly to check the form. It's, like, is this the ellipse I'm seeing? Is this the ellipse I'm seeing? And if I can finally, do that, I know that's the ellipse I'm seeing, and it's sort of like when you proof a math problem. And that's, you know—I'm understanding the ellipse not just from the outside in, but from the inside out.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The inside out.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And that's why—and that clarity is the clarity I yearn for, and it must be the clarity I yearn for in life, it must be what I need to have happen, because, you know, that investigation is what, you know, it's the coal that drives the train. It's like that investigation is what keeps me happy. Happy is the wrong word, but keeps me satisfied.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You spoke about fear earlier and that painting was a way of letting you confront your fear. One could almost say that the role of art is to organize the terror and mayhem—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —of human experience into something that one can interact with—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —without peril.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly, exactly. Although sometimes I think it really is peril—[laughs]. I mean, I did a painting of a tablecloth once. The tablecloth, it's called *The Windsor* [1999], and it's the leavings of a dinner party. And it was a damask tablecloth with French curves throughout.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: And it was, simply, one of the hardest things I've ever painted in my life because it was a circle—an ellipse, and in this ellipse, I was describing another ellipse, and these French curves had to be in perspective.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, on the surface.

CATHERINE MURPHY: On the surface of the thing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: On multiple surfaces.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It was like [demonstrates]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You had the tabletop—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and you've got the drape hanging down.

CATHERINE MURPHY: No, no, there was no drape.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There was no drape.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It was actually, it was the first time I hung an ellipse, it had no bottom and just hung it from the top.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, I see.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And I dreamt—I screamed—and I woke up screaming in the middle of the night.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Because I was being chased around the room by three dimensional French curves and I knew it was killing me. I was like, "I can't do this, I can't do this, I can't do this."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: And I would go back the next day, and I would try again, and finally I got it somewhere so that it looked like something, but it was like, it took my breath away. I'll show you the painting. [. . . -CM] See, that's my palette painting, there's my palette [Showing reproduction in a book.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You see my palette. This is the palette for this painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I love how you've organized—because it's from light to dark.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And from warm to cool.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, exactly. And this is palette for this painting, and this painting—in order to make this painting, it's called *Getting Set Up* and this is *Cardboard Palette*. And in order to make this painting I had to separate—I had to really keep the blues separated from the white.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, from the whites, from the greys, you know. I had to keep it separate. I couldn't like, what you do when you're painting, you borrow.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, you dip in. I couldn't dip in, I needed those colors, I needed to keep them mixed and needed to keep mixing—keep mix from the wet, from the wet, to the wet, to the wet. And so, I had to keep it clean, and I'd loved my palettes forever and I always wanted to do something to them, but I went, "This one is beautifully—this one is organized, you can understand that these colors, made these colors, made these colors."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And so, I said, "Even if you come from outer space, you can figure this out." And so, I finally got to do my pallet painting because of this painting. And so, I think it's only true—only good that I put them together.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's interesting too, just to note—we'll have to refer the reader to the book and also to the plate, but that you're using a buff. Is this titanium buff? Are you using that?

CATHERINE MURPHY: No, no, I'm mixing white, and yellows, blues.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You're mixing—[inaudible].

CATHERINE MURPHY: I'm mixing all the colors.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because this was one of the exercises I know that Bill Bailey did.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yes, he was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: When we were in school and, you know, you're in graduate school—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right and you don't want to be doing this, right?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and you think you're all grown up.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right, exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, you take a painting class.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And it's like, "This is like kindergarten."

CATHERINE MURPHY: I know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And we think we're all above it, until we start trying to do it.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's amazing, it's amazing how much he taught people in those days.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He had a class where you were not allowed, as I recall, to have white on your pallet.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Ah, that's a good thing to do.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You were using, like, a Naples or titanium buff—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, that's interesting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and you had to organize all of your color so that Naples yellow became the white.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right, became the white. Because, what's wrong with a lot of student paintings is too much white in them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, what he would do then is he would take us over and show us a Courbet, and if you were to hold a white card up against a Courbet—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Sure, there's no whites.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the thing that reads white in the painting is actually not white.

CATHERINE MURPHY: There's almost never—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —here it is. You see this is damask.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, my God.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And I had to get these curls right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, these crumbs, and stains, and wine stains.

[. . . -CM]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We'll provide a reference to these images.

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.] Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, the reader can understand what we're talking about.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, good. That's good, but you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Since this is audio only.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's right, it is confusing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's hard to talk about a painting on radio.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly. I once had a show, what did I—I was part of a show at the Walker, and I came to visit, and I had a friend who worked for Public Radio, and she wanted me to do an interview in Public Radio and I said, "It's not going to work." And she said, "No, I'm going to talk to you now, and I'm going to bring the tape in, and they're going to see. It's going to work." They said, "I can't understand anything she's saying, what is she talking about?" And I said, "I knew they wouldn't like it." I said, "It's very difficult to talk about paintings on the radio. You have to have something to look at."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It helps.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It helps.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah. Picasso can because everybody knows the paintings, but uh—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, if you know, like, why is the ear next to nose.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly—[laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This would probably be a good time to take a break.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, good, I'll have Harry come over and we'll have some lunch.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because we've been talking for two hours.

CATHERINE MURPHY: All right, cool.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, we'll—

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's made already, we bought it at the good deli.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Look forward. Signing off.

[END OF murphy17_track04_r]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Just testing to see—this is James McElhinney speaking with Catherine Murphy at her home outside of Poughkeepsie, New York, on Thursday, March 23, 2017. Good morning.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Morning.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And it's another beautiful day.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Of course.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Another snowy day, freezing cold.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, and then it's going to get warm. It will all go away. By Monday, there'll be hardly any snow.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You'll have a day of mud and then—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, absolutely. We'll, no, we'll have a month of mud. You'll have a day of mud.

[They laugh.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: I have a wonderful Cornell story I'll tell you. I will, since we were talking about Cornell.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, we were talking before we started the recording. We were talking about connections to Joseph Cornell and Harry Roseman. Your son worked for him.

CATHERINE MURPHY: My husband, my husband.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, I'm sorry, whoops.

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Freudian—your husband.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I'll tell him. He'll be thrilled.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Your husband. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

CATHERINE MURPHY: He'll be thrilled that you thought he looked that young. Yeah, well—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Gosh, I should flatter you, not him. Your father, Harry Roseman.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, all right. That's better.

[They laugh.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: No, so Harry worked for Cornell when I had my first show at the First Street Gallery.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And because he was the only famous artist I knew, I sent him an announcement from my show. And he got the card and he said, "Oh, these look very good. I like them very much." And so, nice, huh? That's nice. And then, Harry goes back another day and he said, "I want your wife, Catherine, to pick her favorite painting and I'm going to buy it." And I said, "Wow." I mean, I was floored. And I didn't—I said, "Wow."

And I—so I did that. I picked my favorite painting from the show and Harry schlepped it to Utopia Parkway and Cornell looked at it for the day, and then he said, "That's a beautiful painting. I want you to take it back to her and tell her to keep it." Because one of his great regrets, that his favorite boxes disappeared when, you know, got sold when he was young and he got no money for—it wasn't the money. He just, he missed them. He missed them. And I—when people ask me what my young painting life was, you know, it was rough. I had no money. I was always broke, but such kindnesses. I mean, people like Scott Burton, the other day I was talking about—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: Showed me such kindness for no reason other than to show me kindnesses. You know, you have to—they taught me. They gave me a great lesson about how to be a grown-up artist, you know. To be as kind and giving to people as you can be, especially artists, because it was so, it was the most important, meaningful thing that had happened to me at that time. I mean, I'm showing at the First Street Gallery. You know what that's like. And, I think, nothing, nothing, nothing, but this happens. And I was very pleased, and so then I went to Fourcade. I had this painting and he sold it to a museum, so I was very happy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well done.

CATHERINE MURPHY: The whole story—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, Cornell had a—

CATHERINE MURPHY: So Cornell—[laughs]—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Had a good, he actually—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I don't know why he did it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Did you a favor.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I don't know if he really liked my painting, so he was just being kind to Harry and I. We were church mice, so, you know, he was, perhaps he was just being kind. But he lived like a church mouse too. I mean, he—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: He could have been very wealthy, but he chose not to be. I mean, he truly chose not to be.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You mean lifestyle. He chose not to—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, and he wasn't—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Live in a splashy way.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Not just that, but he stopped being represented. He wouldn't be represented by anyone. And he, Harry was constantly having to bring boxes into Manhattan. He would only deal with, what would you call, curators of—independent curators that would sell his work privately, because he was infuriated by the whole system and how much money the dealers got. I didn't agree with him about that, but he, you know, he hated that. And he also didn't need much money. You know, he knew how much money he needed to live. He didn't want to live extravagantly. Harry, at the same time he was taking it in, you know, to sell a box here and there, he was also bringing boxes and boxes to the Lighthouse for the Blind, you know, the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Because he was very generous to them as well. So he chose to keep his life at a certain level, entirely, entirely. It was entirely his choice. The minute he died, you know—I think, what was it? You know, Pace got the estate, you know. They flooded the market with his boxes. You know, it was just—it wasn't that people weren't asking. It was, in fact, that he decided he didn't want any part of it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He didn't, he didn't want to be part of that scene.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right. He didn't, he didn't. He was—

[Cross talk.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What year did he die, again? Was it the '80s sometime?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Harry would have to tell you that. Probably early '80s.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Early—that's what I would think.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But that was just when the art market was—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was sort of turning into this frolic of investment and—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And money laundering and whatever else they do, you know.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right. But I think that it was his—he needed to have a certain kind of sanity in his life, and he really wasn't going to participate in that. But as Harry said, all of the waitresses at the, at the five-and-ten in Queens knew him and knew his name.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sure.

CATHERINE MURPHY: The guys in the hardware store called him Joe. And, you know, they all, he was, he didn't go to Manhattan, but he was, they had days of—what did Cornell call them? I forget, like luxury days or something in Jamaica, Queens, going around and going to the five-and-ten and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: Places like that for him to collect things.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It draws somewhat of a comparison with somebody like Charles Burchfield.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I don't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He lived in Buffalo, you know.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right. Oh, that's right, of course he did. I do know what happened. I know that he worked for a wallpaper company.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's right, and he was, he was not interested in being part of the scene.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was just doing his paintings.

CATHERINE MURPHY: God, that show the Whitney had was so beautiful.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wasn't it? Well, you were saying something about curators, artists as curators.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But that was, that was Robert Gober.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's right, and he did a spectacular job.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That was a great job, yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: When I say, "artists as curators," I'm not talking about them curating somebody else's work. I'm talking about the idea of curating your own work, which is, you know, very hot in graduate school right now. And that for me is, you know, it's fine. Everything's fine. It's all good.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Don't you find, though, that the vision of an art world that students are presented with in graduate school or undergraduate school even, for that, and art school in general is very different than what really happens? That it's—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That it's almost like—

CATHERINE MURPHY: But I—

[Cross talk.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A monastic cloistered realm angels—[inaudible], yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But you know, they do that to themselves, because I will say that every person I've ever taught with in graduate school has not, has done their best to tell them that isn't going to be what your life is. I mean, I don't know, I don't know a single—maybe a visiting artist might give them the wrong impression, I don't know. But I don't know a single person that I have ever taught with that gives them any idea other than the fact is, you'd be lucky to get a job teaching you, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I mean, that's pretty much what—and I will say that there's a kind of glut of artists now that they're very aware of. I mean, they're very aware of how many too many artists they are.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: And one of the things that they're really trying to do, many of them, is to make a life for themselves that they can find interesting, which they do by making their practice more complicated, by writing, by, you know. I mean, I have students who have formed magazines. I've had, I've had, you know, students that have gotten together and done things within their own community.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, they're very well aware that—they see the couple of kids that get chosen. Most of them know they're not going to be chosen. They keep on making work. Some of them make work in complete obscurity for their whole life. I mean, so long ago I started teaching, I still have students that get in touch with me that I had 20 years ago and, you know, they have a job someplace like in, you know, Kentucky or something, and they're still making work. So, I will say that by the time they get to, by the time they get to graduate school, by the time they finish graduate school, they're pretty much, they don't think that they're, most of them don't think that. I mean, the star might think so, and even the star I try to tell, you know, some people peak early. Some people peak late. You know, you never know what's going to happen to you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, and the art world's very fickle. And I always tell them the story of when I was at Skowhegan. The Skowhegan was given, at the time when I went there, they were given like somebody's lifetime of Art News—not Art in America, Art News. And so, the library had stacks of them. I mean, I'm saying the, half of the library is filled up with Art News. And I didn't recognize anybody on the cover from ten years before that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's interesting.

CATHERINE MURPHY: On the cover! And I learned then, I went, "I don't know this person."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I had the exact same experience at Yale, because I would go over—I had a girlfriend in Jonathan Edwards College, which was convenient. It was across the street—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I don't know what that is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —from the arts—it was right across from the arts school.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, I'd eat in the dining hall there, and then I would wander over to Cross Campus Library, and I would go through old art magazines—

[Cross talk.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah. Who are these people?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —after dinner. And I would look at—[laughs]—these names of people who were all over the magazines for two years, and you never heard of them.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you'd go back to the '20s.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you think, wait a minute. And there's like, in the back page, there's something about Marsden Hartley.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right, right.

[They laugh.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: No, it's true. And you also find that out, and what's interesting is, students usually know the people who are showing when they're students.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But my first class at Yale, I, when I was teaching that little drawing class, I said, I talked about Donald Judd. Nobody knew who he was. And that was crazy, that nobody knew who he was, was crazy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, especially now since there's the big foundation—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, that's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There's Marfa, all that, I mean.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But he had—had he died yet? No, I don't think he'd—maybe just. And he wasn't in obscurity. They just didn't know that generation. They didn't know, they didn't know the minimalists, but they

would know, I don't know, somebody who—David Salle. They'll know David Salle, but they wouldn't have known right before that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Who? [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly. I mean, exactly. It's so, it's so amazing. It's so interesting, you know. You just, I think that, I think that it is a different art world now, and it's much harder, much harder.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I had—I won't name the person—the controversial former director of a big New York museum, who is now doing all sorts of things in China and the Middle East. You know who I mean. And I found him at my elbow at a dinner table—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Mm [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: About a year ago, and we got talking. And you know he had been a basketball player and all this stuff, hearing these great stories. And I think his wife is running a museum now in Connecticut, or girlfriend or somebody.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I don't know who you're talking about, so I don't know who it is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I'll say it, Thomas Krens, so—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yeah. Is that what he's doing now—[laughs]?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, he's doing all sorts of things.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He's got all kinds of—it was a brief encounter at a dinner party, and where, ironically, nobody knew who he was because—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Wow.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The hosts were, the host and hostess were collectors of 19th-century American art—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, no reason to know.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But, you know, and I was talking about being an artist and the kind of education that doing these interviews has given me about—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Different points of view and how many art worlds there are.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, there really are.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And I said, it occurred to me after a while, that the art world doesn't exist. It's a joke perpetrated on people who want to believe that one exists.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly. Well, especially one—[laughs].

[Cross talk.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That one, that one exists.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly, yes exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And I said, in fact, there are hundreds now. Now, you've got people like El Anatsui and William Kentridge—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right, exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And people no one, in parts of the world people were not even looking at—

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thirty years ago.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And he said, "I got a better definition." Apologies to Mr. Krens if I misquote—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But to the, the gist of was that it was a fiction constructed for the, for the consumption of culture in pursuit of different priorities.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, it is, and it's been going on forever.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's always been that.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's always been going on. And it's like—I kind of think that there are lot of fictions going on. I mean, there are a lot of fictions going on. There's—I mean, I'm not just talking about art world fictions. There's lots of different fictions about different ways to be an artist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And that we perpetrate those. And I, you know, like I—you know, my husband is a sculptor. So, he's had to do—"he's had to do." He's honored to do lots of public sculptures.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: A number of very large public sculptures. There's another world, and nobody knows about that world unless they make public sculpture.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Very different, very different.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Literally. And it's like you can be—we have a friend or, well, an acquaintance who makes public sculptures all over the world. Nobody's ever heard of him. I mean, nobody has ever heard of him. He makes a living. He goes to Australia. He goes to this place. He goes to that place. He makes these public sculptures. That's how he makes his living. So, you know, there's lots of ways to construct a living in the art world. There's, however, one way that, you know, will get you in all the festivals and will, it will put you on the map but, you know, that's a different—that's a construct that I couldn't participate in. I'm not talking about because I'm a moral and fabulous person.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: I'm talking about the fact—and, you know, this is what, you know, I learned early on, is that I can only produce X amount of work. I cannot participate in the larger art world. It's always, my career's always going to be small. My career's always going to be located in—you know, when we had to do the research for the book, it was sort of like, most of the things happen in New York. And then we had, I mean, a few things throughout the country, two or three things in Europe.

But it's like, I can't have a bigger life; I can't have a bigger life in the art world, because I cannot produce the work to do it. So, I am perfectly happy with what I can do. And people say to me, "Are you unhappy about it?" And I go, "You know, the thing's that made me happy is that nobody has made me compromise this thing I do, that I, you know, I have made a life making X amount of work and that's miraculous to me." The thing I'm most worried about was protecting my desires. Why did I become an artist?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I became an artist, so that I could construct the world I wanted to construct. And I know so many artists who are put in a situation where, or will put themselves in a situation where they have to hire other people to do their work. Not just to help them, you know, build things—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But in fact to sit and do the paintings. And I would puke. I mean, I would die. For me, that would be hell. I mean, to be, a, to have to manage other people, you know. I can't do that. I can't manage people. Like, you know, I would just say, "Do what you want." You know, I couldn't—I don't want to manage people. It's not in my DNA, as they say. But you know, I think it's very interesting how accommodating the art world can be, so—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The art worlds.

CATHERINE MURPHY: The art worlds can be. So, that if you need to be a certain kind of artist and you want your life in art to be a certain kind, to be defined a certain way, it's up to you to construct a life around that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: So, that it's not, you know, it's not, you're not a victim of whatever's going to happen. In fact, you know, like, you know, you're going to make a certain like—let's say you choose to make a kind of work that you know nobody's going to like. You know, I have to make this work. This is the work I have to make. This is the work that it's going to make me happy to make. You know, I don't expect anything to happen from it. You make that work.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And then you get a job at Kresge's. I mean, you know, you don't—it's a difficult thing, but the world is the world. My favorite quote of all times is from a rock and roll singer named Elliott Smith, and it's so good and it's: "Here's what you get, the things that haven't happened yet." And the world is not going to, the world is not going to change for you, in other words. You're going to have to either do what you want to do and take the consequences—you know, you pay your money and you take your choice.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: And you're going to have to, you know, construct this life that you need to construct. You know, that's—I admire the fact that the art world is a horrible Darwinist place. I admire the fact that they have no respect for anyone. I don't—I mean, if I start making bad work and people say, "Oh, she's old. Be nice to her." Boom. You know—

[Cross talk.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] Holding a finger to your head like a pistol, for the visual effect.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, I mean, the thing that was—I was so horrified. Jasper Johns had a show at Matthew Marks, I don't know, a few years ago. It has to be at least three years ago. And I thought it was a beautiful show but a lot of people didn't like it, and everybody said so. And it's like, you know that if they're going to come down on Jasper Johns's head, who's not just, who's not just, you know, an American master but in fact—in quotes, like Donald Trump, in quotes—[laughs]—an American master, but in fact beloved, you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, absolutely.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, he's beloved. So, you know, that's what the art world is. The art world is going—it might be wrong. I thought it was wrong. But it's going to fall—the chips are going to fall where the chips fall.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It doesn't matter. I mean, a lot of—as we were talking the other day, on Tuesday, I mean, artists can very bitchy.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Mm [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And they can be very argumentative, and they can be very zero-sum in their thinking.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And so, they're looking at Johns' show and they think, well, that ought to be my bad painting on that wall, right?

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But he's an easy target.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, he is indeed.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He's an easy target because, you know, ultimately, at the end of the day we all know that —

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's not going to hurt him—[laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The critical value—again, fingers in the air—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right—[laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Quotes in the air—Dr. Evil, Mike Murphy, right? Not Mike Murphy. You know who I mean. [Mike Myers].

CATHERINE MURPHY: I don't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The Canadian comedian.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yeah, I know who you mean.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wayne's World.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But you know, critical issues, at the end of the day, don't really matter.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Not very much.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

CATHERINE MURPHY: They used to matter more.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's right, now—

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's interesting, and that's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Here's something I want you to talk about.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because when you got into, sort of backed into the gallery scene—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because you were showing at First Street Gallery—and this is maybe something you could describe, because I'm sure that at some point in the future, you know, people are not going to be as clear about what a co-op gallery was.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In the same way that people are not exactly clear about, how did the Impressionists work out with Nadar to have an exhibition in his salon, right?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And with the details of that.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But co-op galleries were something that did sort of pop up in the late '60s, early '70s, and you were part of that.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But even—yes, but even before that, there was the Tenth Street—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, so that, you know, it's been going on for a long time. And I was part of it. It was, you know, because—and it came—I think it came out of the Alliance. I think it came out of the Figurative Alliance because, you know, there was, you know—people got together to talk about making representational painting and then they realized that most of them couldn't get galleries and couldn't show anywhere.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Because the fashion was—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, the fashion was Abstraction.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: So, nobody was—you know, there were, there were a number of galleries, mind you, but

there weren't that many. There was a few.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, there—yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I mean, there was Tibor de Nagy. There was Schoelkopf. There were galleries, there were a few galleries that did—Graham showed representational painting. But, you know, we needed a place to show. So, I wasn't there for the beginning of it. I was the second, you know—people had formed the gallery. I didn't form the gallery with people. I just joined. But it was, it was an interesting time. I loved the Alliance. I loved going. I loved the fights. I loved it all.

[Cross talk.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: It was really interesting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: This was at the YMHA on East Broadway.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I always thought it was called the Educational Alliance.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or the Educational Alliance.

CATHERINE MURPHY: The Educational Alliance.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But it was associated with—and it's now not far from the Lower East Side.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, well, now it's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The new scene.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Now it's in the middle of everything.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But yeah, it was the YMHA on East Broadway.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was the Educational Alliance.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Okay, and so people got together and talked and fought and it was—I saw that, you know, this was a big conversation. This was a really big conversation that couldn't even come to an agreement within themselves, but that was okay. I mean, that was all right. You know, people got very angry.

You know, people—I remember, my favorite one was a giant fight. People almost came to blows about the picture plane. And I was like, I love this. I mean, these guys. I mean, you know, it was like—but it was brilliant. It was, like, wow, the picture plane's really important! And the picture plane really is important. But, you know, it was like, to have that much passion over—

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: About the picture—

CATHERINE MURPHY: —about the picture plane.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, what was the point of dispute? Do you recall?

CATHERINE MURPHY: To break or not to break.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Ah, to break or not to break the picture plane.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I think that was, I think it would come down to that. I think it would. I think finally if other people may have thought the point came down someplace else, but the point for me came down to, to break or not to break.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, people talked about cropping too.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, cropping was a big deal.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That if you, if you were to crop—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of course, Titian cropped.

[They laugh.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But there was a whole debate. I remember—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Whether to violate the integrity of the form—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —or to crop.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And if you were to crop it, they would say you were pandering to—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Abstraction.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —photographic—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, that too.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —photographic convention or abstraction.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But, you know, like, you know, people always miss the point. To crop means, it's just a different relationship to time. And that, you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's not—about these things, I never came down on one or the other, because I thought they were all interesting. I really honestly—I feel wishy-washy, but I went, "Oh, this is just stuff I needed to know about painting." I didn't actually break the picture plane. Who knew I could do that, you know? I mean, who knew one could do that?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: So, but—I was at the Academy, the American Academy, and an old figurative artist stops me. We were walking on stage, and he stops me and he makes me sit down next to him. He will remain nameless. He stops—he sits me down. He said, "You're not an observational painter." And I went, "Huh?" He said, "No, you're not an observational painter. You call yourself an observational painter. You're not an observational painter." And I said, "How come?" And he said, "Because you don't make—you make things that are larger than life size. Thus you are not an observational painter."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: And I said okay, patting him. He was very old. I patted him and I said, "Just don't call me late for dinner." And I went on my way, you know—[laughs]. It's like, it's like, you know, as I said yesterday, some people's job in life is to close the door and some people's job—[laughs]—is to open the door, you know?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, here's an interesting point. When I interviewed a woman who is also a critic and an art historian, whose name I won't mention, but who was very prominent in the late '60s, married to a famous artist at the time, asked me did I have any idea how people like Rothko and Gottlieb and Barney Newman were able to stay home and paint all day.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Mm [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And not—you know, they did teaching here and there—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But a lot of them didn't really—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's wasn't really earning a living. And the answer she provided was that they were, because of their Eastern European Jewish shtetl roots, that their wives became sort of librarians and schoolteachers—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And they were People of the Book and the men were staying home and doing God's work, even though they were atheists and Communists or whatever else they were, that the debate came out of that culture, that passion for sort of arguing an infinitesimal point. And the Catholic equivalent would be—

CATHERINE MURPHY: The Jesuits—[laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, the monks in the cloister—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Arguing on the number of angels who could stand on the head of a pin.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly. You know, as I said yesterday, the argument is everything.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I mean, I actually think that, you know, the energy lies in the argument. And the, and the, you know, the argument, the dialectic in fact is this thing that—you know, Susan Sontag said, very erroneously, and since I've read both her, both her essays, which are wonderful, and her fiction. [. . . -CM] And she said that, you know, art doesn't contain a dialectic. I disagree entirely. I think art is always—there's always, in good painting, there's always an argument. You're always arguing with someone.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And that's, you know, that's what makes it interesting. And, you know, and so you set up systems where there's an argument. And but she did say, in one of her essays she said, art says, "This, yes. Also that." And so I don't know what the hell she's talking about, because if you say, "this yes and also that," it very well might set up an argument—[laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's right. Make up your mind.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Make up your mind.

[. . . -CM]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's not bad for people to try to build new muscle.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely not.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And that's good.

CATHERINE MURPHY: No, I completely agree with that. I think it's great she tried to write fiction.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But they were human beings. They were not saints.

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Edmund Wilson's essays are even better -CM].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: So you know, what are you going to do, you know?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Patriotic Gore.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, oh, Patriotic Gore is one of the great books.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Magnificent.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's such a great book.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Magnificent.

CATHERINE MURPHY: So is Upstate. So, they're wonderful books. They're just, you know, nobody comes close to him. Nobody knows who he is anymore, though. I will say that. I say Edmund Wilson—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: His daughter was a painter.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I know her. She's a good friend.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, yeah.

[Cross talk.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: She's a good friend.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: She's a good painter.

CATHERINE MURPHY: She's a wonderful painter actually, yeah. No, she's great.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Friend of mine from Yale was dating her at the time.

CATHERINE MURPHY: She is living—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Tim something-or-other.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —in Wellfleet, Massachusetts.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, no, she's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Out on the Cape.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, she does. And she, and her gallery just closed. [. . . -CM]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, this is happening.

CATHERINE MURPHY: No, it really is happening.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: One of the, one of the things that is interesting to ponder, and I'm sensitive to this myself, having abolitionist Yankee roots—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Ah [affirmative].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And people who have lint on the lung from chewing the rag and addicted to arguments around the dinner table and being right and so forth and so on—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is that—and a lawyer told me this. He said, he said, "Winning a case is everything. Being right is the booby prize."

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And I thought about that, I thought—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I don't know if that's true but—[laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, this is a lawyer.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right, exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But then, it occurred to me, yes, those cultures, societies which have endured persecution and powerlessness do seem to put an enormous amount of importance on the outcome of a debate, even though—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It produces nothing of material value.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right, it's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's the only thing they can win.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right, I know, it's true. I—it's—I mean, you know, I have picked a side. You know, I, politically certainly I've picked a side. But at the same time as I picked a side, I recognize the fact that without the other side, you know, there's, you know, you need the argument. You have—you know, we need a society in which an argument can be sustained and, in fact, nobody die. I mean, you know, we need, we need—that's what a successful society is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's what a successful, you know, thing is. That's the definition of it. An argument can exist and nobody gets killed, that's you know, that's for it. Nobody dies for the argument.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Politically, you want a loyal opposition.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You do.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You want a dynamic tension and—

CATHERINE MURPHY: You do indeed. But I think so many things work that way, and it's so interesting. And you know, like I don't—I can't participate in a binary system of art-making. I refuse to.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's too simpleminded.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's too simpleminded, exactly. Art this, also that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, describe your experience. You're in graduate school—or you're not in graduate school.

CATHERINE MURPHY: No, not in graduate school.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You were there for a week.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right, month—[laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Anyway, you found—a month, okay. And Louie [Finkelstein], not too pure to schmear. I remember him at Norfolk with a T-shirt that said, "Not Too Pure to Schmear." And he was walking around singing, "I am the monarch of the sea, the ruler of the"—you know, Gilbert and Sullivan.

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.] Gilbert and Sullivan, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was hilarious.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That must have been wonderful. I wish I could have heard Louie singing Gilbert and Sullivan.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I can't get it out of my mind and wish I could.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You never.

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Anyway, but so how did one in those days get invited to join a co-op, and then what was expected of you and how often were you able to exhibit and so forth?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, I can't remember the guy's last name who invited me. His name was Henry, and I don't know whether or not I had to go through a vetting process. I don't remember bringing my work in. Later on, we had people bring their work in and we voted on them. I only had one show, in, the one that was at First Street and Bowery. And then the gallery moved to Prince Street and I was in a couple of group shows, but I never had another one-person show. And then I moved on. But I think I explained that—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, you talked about it.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Why I moved on. And but that was my whole experience. Did I make any good friends? Yes. I'm still friends with Altoon Sultan.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And, but that's it, she's the only person I made friends with.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: She was exhibiting there at the same time?

CATHERINE MURPHY: But then, Helen—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Helen Wilson?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Helen came in just as I was leaving.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And so, I met her and I since just—and I remember I voted on her. I go, "Yeah, she's good. Take her." And then, I kind of left and then I just followed her and then we became friends, you know, later on we became friends. And, you know, we have many friends in common, and she's wonderful actually.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, what was expected of you as a member of the co-op?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Not much. I mean, you had to mind the, you had to take turns minding the gallery, and that was pretty much what was expected. And, you know, rent, but I can't remember what it cost—the cost to rent. You had to pay the—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Everyone had to pay dues every year, as it were.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You had to ante up, but I can't remember. It wasn't exorbitant. It wasn't exorbitant. The rent wasn't that much money, but it was—I mean, it wasn't more than I could afford, and I had no money at all. So, it had to have been pretty reasonable. And, you know, I didn't think anything. I got, you know, a review in Art News because at the time, if you sent your stuff into Art News, everybody got a review. And that magazine really did do that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, you just sent your stuff in and somebody would show up and review your show. And they did and it was lovely, and I was very pleased. Nothing else. I mean, like I say, somebody put me in another show and then things happened. And then, before I went to Fourcade, around the time when Scott got interested in me, Marsha Tucker—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Was a curator at the Whitney.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And she said, "I'm taking slides. Anybody can send their slides in." She got, you know, everybody I knew sent their slides in, everybody. I got in the show. And I, you know, I thank her to this day. You know, everybody got one painting in the show, not two. It was one painting in the show. And I said, how did this happen? And then, you know, then that was part of me being seen out in the world, and it was a miracle. I got to the opening and I was horrified. I hated my painting. I hated who I was. I spent most of the time in the bathroom crying. I just—not because anybody was being mean to me, just because I hated them, hated them. I go, "I'm terrible! I hate my painting!" You know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Can you recall what the painting was?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Of course. It was the painting that Joseph Cornell bought and gave back to me. I mean, that's not—it didn't end up at the Whitney, but it was that painting, because, hey, you know, Joseph Cornell thought it was a good painting so—[laughs]—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, just to clarify—he bought it from you?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, he bought it. He gave me the money, and then gave it back to Harry. I'm sorry, did I not say that?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, no, that's makes—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, no, he bought the painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And the check cleared.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, God, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then, and then he gave it back to Harry.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That all happened in one day.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You get the check and the painting back.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow, that's quite a sale.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, it was a miracle. You know, I was perfectly willing for Joseph Cornell to have this painting, mind you, but I was even happier to get it back, so, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then, unhappy to have it in the Whitney.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, only because I hated it. It wasn't, it really was a good painting. I just—it was the first time I ever hung in a show with, really, other artists. [I'd barely been, you know, other than the First Street Gallery, I'd barely been in a show, and never in a museum -CM].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, and you know, maybe—I didn't even see that show in Long Island that I was in. You know, I delivered it, but I couldn't go back to Long Island for the opening.

[Cross talk.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Too far, too poor.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, can you remember the image or the title?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Of the painting? It's Jamaica. It's *Sunny Day, Jamaica*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Okay.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's in the book.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's in the book.

CATHERINE MURPHY: In the book. And I just, you know, at the same time that I love and I cannot have any choice about who I am, you hate who you are. You know, you hate—I mean, I don't know. I think all artists feel this way. Showing in a group show is always—it's still horrifying in a very profound way. Unless the walls are all yours, you know, you're not happy. You have your own wall, you're okay, but you have to hang next to somebody else and you're not okay. And so, I was just horrified. But I did meet Sylvia Mangold. And I was thrilled to meet her, because hers was, other than mine—finally mine was the favorite painting—but finally Sylvia's was I thought the best painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was it one of those floors?

CATHERINE MURPHY: The floor with the laundry on it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And I love that painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Later she got into landscape.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, now she makes landscapes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But those paintings of the floors were wonderful.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, they were, they were just wonderful. Last year, Artforum asked me to pick a favorite show and I picked—she had a small, little retrospective at Craig T. Starr [Craig F. Starr], and it was the most sublime show I saw last year. I'd only seen three shows last year. I'd spent most of that—I saw it in a wheelchair, so it was a bad year for me. But to see that show was—I knew that even if I'd seen a hundred shows, it still would have been my favorite show.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you'd just had knee surgery, right?

CATHERINE MURPHY: I just, but then I was suffering through an infection in my knee, so I couldn't walk.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, yeah, sorry.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It was very bad.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Everything seems to be healed up now, though.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I'm—it—you know, after three operations in one year, yes, I'm—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: My God, that's like being hit by two buses at once.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It was brutal beyond belief. It was, because—[laughs]—what's really irritating is, I have the first surgery, and I go through physical therapy. Now physical therapy for a knee, for a knee replacement is truly horrifying. And then they discover the infection. I went, "You couldn't find it before I went through physical therapy?" [Laughs.] So, they take the knee out. They put in concrete. You lie in bed.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh!

CATHERINE MURPHY: You have intravenous antibiotics, the max—the most horrible antibiotics. And then, you do that for months, and then they take that concrete out. They put in another one. You go through physical therapy again. So, that was my year last year, so I'm—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Waterboarding sounds like more fun. [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, I'm sure it's less painful. I'm sure it's less painful. You might die, but it's less painful. No, but it was, it was very bad. So, anyway, I love Sylvia's paintings. I think her early paintings are genius.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Can you recall any of the other artists who were showing?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Sidney was in it. Sidney Tillim was in it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Sidney Tillim was in at—

CATHERINE MURPHY: At that same Whitney.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: At that same Whitney.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, but can I recall anybody, no, I can't. No, I really can't, but it was very large. It was an annual at the time.

[Cross talk.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, like 1982 or something, '81 something.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I'm not sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Early '80s.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Probably.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But it was before Marsha Tucker left to form—

CATHERINE MURPHY: New Museum.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The New Museum.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely, absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That was on Broadway.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But I was—it's because it was only one piece from everyone, it was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Huge.

CATHERINE MURPHY: A lot of people, you know. It was in the Breuer building—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: So, it was huge, you know, and but it was noteworthy. It was noteworthy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—

CATHERINE MURPHY: So, then, you know, then everything started happening, but yeah—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, that really propelled you—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —into the public eye.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And people who were looking for painters—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I guess.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Representational painters—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, well, Fourcade was not looking for representational painters—[laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, I know.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But neither was Donald. I mean, they were both amenable but they, you know, they were not, they were, you know, they—at that age, Donald just thought they would show what was interesting in the world. That's, you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, their taste, or what they thought was—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Their taste was totally Catholic. It was just, you know, from one end to the other. Michael Heiser was showing at the time and, you know, he, Xavier was part—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But your work's just like his.

[They laugh.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, I love those guys, so you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right. No, I was just kidding.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But you know, we both work in the landscape—[laughs].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, I'm thinking about that picture of the two red blankets or something hanging on a clothesline—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: With this gap between them, and there certain earthworks I've seen which has—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: A kind of, that kind of—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Space, that sort of aperture that—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely, absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Moves you through. So, how did you, how did you feel about your place in the critical milieu? How aware were you of it and how much—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, because Donald and Xavier were so well connected, my first show at Fourcade-Droll was reviewed by almost every publication out there. I mean, you know, Scott was the editor of Art in America—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: So it was certainly in Art in America. But everybody reviewed it and Hilton Kramer gave

me a Sunday Times review and it was very favorable. And I will tell you that I'm sure the world was shocked, but not compared to me. I was dumbstruck. I was, like, gobsmacked. I was—I had no idea—you know, at every point I had no idea what was happening to me. I was ill-prepared. And I was particularly ill-prepared by hostility from my friends and acquaintances, and that was extremely difficult for me. It was an extremely difficult time. It put a kind of pressure on me so that the next show I had was five years later. And I was, you know, it brought me to a—I don't know, it was just, it was overwhelming. It was truly overwhelming. And I didn't, you know, I didn't think of myself as—I thought, you know, I love—I was doing the paintings I wanted to do.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And, you know, before that time I wasn't capable of doing the paintings I wanted to do. It took a lot for me to actually accomplish what I wanted to make, you know, to have it look like what I wanted it to look like. Before that time it didn't, and then I could get it to a place where, hey, this satisfies me. I get some satisfaction. It might not be everything I want to do. It might not be finally where I wanted to get, but it didn't embarrass me anymore and I knew I could show it. I wasn't ashamed of them—only at the Whitney, you know, but that—[laughs]—was just because I was ill-prepared, again. I was ill-prepared for the reviews. I was ill-prepared for the attention. I also, I was making money but, you know, when you only do two paintings a year, you can't make—you can't be rich. So, we were still poverty-struck.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But we weren't as scared as we were. I mean, before that time I got brushes for Christmas. You know, that was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Got you.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, we were penniless. And we, you know, we, I remember—I mean, Cornell paid nothing. And I remember once, Harry lost his paycheck and we were, we were so scared. And he lost it and it was in cash, and he lost—not the check, he lost the money. And the only way we could have lived is we borrowed money from Harry's father for our rent and for—it was, there was nothing. There was no bank.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, you're married at this time.

CATHERINE MURPHY: We're, oh, we got married in 1968. We get married—we graduate from school in 1967, we get married in 1968. So, and we lived together for a couple of years before we got married, at school, so you know, we were together for a while, long time.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But so, I liked that people liked me. I mean, I'm not an idiot. I went, "Oh, they like me." And like, you know, I mean, people compared me to Hopper. Fuck! I mean, you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: I'm a little girl from Lexington, Massachusetts. I don't—this is really more than I could take in. And I, you know, I get attention but I can tell you, when Fourcade dies—and then I have another show with Fourcade, and then another show with Fourcade. No, do I have two?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Three.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Do I have three? I think I have three, before Xavier dies. And you know, galleries call me up, trying to get me away from Xavier. Xavier dies, nobody wants me. I mean, you know, I can hardly find a gallery.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Interesting.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And then, finally someone was kind enough to tell me, "No, they didn't want you. They wanted to hurt Xavier." I went, "Oh, yeah. That's probably true."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's so petty, isn't it?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you're talking about how your friends, other artists, were overcome with a sort of toxic jealousy.

[Cross talk.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, it was hard for them.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Was it? Was it?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, it was hard for them. And I finally—one of the reasons I love Yvonne and Rudy so much is Yvonne and Rudy both went to my show at First Street Gallery, because they liked the announcement and they wanted to see. And Rudy was always a big supporter of my work. And Yvonne had gotten quite a bit of attention by then, and I finally found somebody I could talk to who wasn't going to be mean to me and who wasn't somehow going to be pissy to me when I said something like, "This is hard." And all my friends would say, "Shut up. You know, this isn't hard for you. You know, you just got all the attention. Stop telling me it's hard. It's harder for me than it is for you, you know." So, Yvonne would say, "Yeah, it is hard." You know, so it's, I just, I found somebody I could talk to, you know, that could be nice to me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's amazing the number of artists who go through their lives really believing that it's some kind of, ought to be a meritocracy—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: When in fact, the art worlds are extremely capricious—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And—[laughs]—

CATHERINE MURPHY: And it's luck. It is. I mean, I know lots—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And persistence.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's luck and persistence and, you know, to be, you know—I was smart enough to stay in New York.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

[. . . -CM]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Anyway, New York is still what mattered, certainly what mattered in the '80s. So, I was smart enough to be here, and I was smart enough to put my work out when nobody wanted it. And I was smart enough to, you know, when Scott said, "No, you idiot, go with them because they show de Kooning," I was smart enough to do that and not be an idiot and say I don't want to do this. I don't want to give away 40 percent of my money." Bullshit—you give away 40 percent of your money. They got me 10 times more.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Make them earn it.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, you know, I have a very wise friend, Michael Mazur. He was a very good friend of mine, and Michael said, "Paintings don't sell. They're sold. Remember that. They're sold. They don't sell."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's a very good point.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And it's a wonderful point. And I, as in, I could not sell a painting to save my life. I couldn't do it. I tried. People came to my house to see my work. I couldn't sell my paintings. I went with Fourcade, he sold all the paintings. So, it's like, I knew—you know, again, instant lesson in how they earn their money, you know, and, you know, the opportunities afforded to me by them. So, you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you're painting because you have a gift, and they're selling because they have a gift.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly right. And, you know, that's exactly right. And I—it's—when dealers say to you, "Oh, it's a hard painting to sell," I feel like going, "Honey, people sell paintings of the sides of beef. People sell paintings of operations. Don't give me that." You know? It's like—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, I know that I'm not making traditional paintings, but you couldn't sell those either, you know? It's, you know, [demonstrates] really and truly, if they're talented they can sell. They can sell the paintings, so—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, what was your first museum exhibition?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, my first—I haven't had very many, but my first and not only, but my first one was

the ICA House in Boston and the Phillips Collection got together and they gave me a show where I showed all my paintings.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

CATHERINE MURPHY: All the paintings—in order to have that show, it was literally all the paintings I had done to that point, and we had to—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Which had to be borrowed from—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Everything had to be borrowed. Everything had to be borrowed.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And was there—I imagine there was a catalogue that was produced.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, there was a catalogue. It was my first catalogue.

[Cross talk.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And who wrote it?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Judy Fox [sic], Judy Fox—Hoos, Judy Hoos, Judy Hoos. Her name was not Fox, it was H-O-O-S. And she wrote it. She was the curator at the ICA House.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: At the ICA in Boston?

CATHERINE MURPHY: In Boston.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In Boston.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, that was sort of the launch point was Boston. They went and got the Phillips to partner with them.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, I believe that's right. I believe that's right. And then, the Phillips came on board.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And what was that process like for you? How would you contrast that with your interactions with galleries?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Xavier handled everything.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, he did.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Completely. I mean, that's the other thing is, you know, he ran a gallery like it was, you know, it was the St. Regis of galleries. You know, everything was done for me. He took the photographs. He arranged all the shipping. He, you know, he did everything. He did that for everyone. When he decided to become a dealer, he said he had to take care, his job was to take care of artists. He takes care—he took care of artists, and so he took care of me.

And so, now I can't—[laughs]. I never learned how to do those things, so now I've got to have a gallery. When they ask me to come on board, I go, "You know, you're going to have to do all this stuff for me, because I cannot do it. You're going to have to take the pictures, you know. You're going to have to, you're going to have to make sure things are shipped and stuff like that." Yeah, so he did everything. He borrowed everything.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, when he passed away—I'm trying to remember what year that was.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Can't remember.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But it was—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I can't remember.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It could be researched.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It was during the middle of the AIDS crisis. And, no, I have, I have, it's all, you know—I don't know if you'll find Xavier's death in the book but when I switch from Fourcade-Droll to Lennon-Weinberg, that's why, you know, so—I would never have left him. Scott Burton had advised me, he said, "You're never supposed to stay at a gallery for longer than three years." I said, "Oh, Scott, I can't do that." He said, "No, you

should move on. Just keep on moving around." And I couldn't have done—I never would have left him.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's like playing the market—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Trying to, sort of, surf the trends—

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And find the right dealer for you as fashions change.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I had the right dealer for me. I knew it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, Rackstraw Downes said the same thing. He said he's been with—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Betty—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Betty Cuninghame forever.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right, right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And when she was with other galleries—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And then, finally, opened her own.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He said something interesting which, again, I'm going to paraphrase. He said that all you need is one loyal critic and about five or six loyal collectors.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, that certainly launches you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But one thing about critics is they give it up before you do. And so you, you know, like, that one loyal critic disappears, and you can be sunk. So, you know, you need to have a continuation of loyal critics.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, the irony is, the story about John Canaday being pushed out at one point and turned into a food critic. Now, of course, art critics have no power and food critics have—

[Cross talk.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Much more.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Enormous power.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly. No, much more.

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So it would be more like if—

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's true.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —if you're on the outs as a food writer—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Food critic.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They would tell you go write about—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Get pushed to the arts scene.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly right. No, it's true. It's a different world. But Hilton had a lot of power for a while.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, he did.

CATHERINE MURPHY: He did.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And I guess, you know, the New Criterion was—

CATHERINE MURPHY: They were the only people who ever gave me a really bad review, so afterwards, you know, I lost Hilton.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, he wrote for them.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I know. No, he started it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It was his magazine. No, no, he started it, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There was some kind of neoconservative—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, it got very conservative.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —aura about that publication.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, it's very interesting. You know, one of the things I—one of the things I refused is to, you know, to fall in line with the people who like me. In other words, Wendy Wasserstein, who was a friend of mine and also my friend—Billy's friend, friend of Billy's—but I knew Wendy well and, you know, she was a collector. She bought one of my things. And she said, you know, she got all great reviews for some play she'd done she said. And I said, "Oh, Wendy, you must be so thrilled. The reviews are wonderful." She said no. She said, "I don't read any. If I have to believe—I have to believe the bad ones if I believe the good ones." And so, you know, you—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Very wise.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, and that's absolutely true. But I once read a piece on Willa Cather, who is a novelist, of course, that I admire.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Of course.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And, you know, Willa Cather was really pushed into a hole. You know, she was pushed into the world of conservative thinking because of how her books were received. She was a—she was thought of as a regionalist, and really her books are much better than that. You know, so was Marsden Hartley. So was Grant Wood.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: All these people were thought upon as regionalists, which was bullshit. But, and it hurt her. It hurt her work. And to think of yourself in—with the narrowness that you are perceived by some people is your own fault. I mean, you know, you can't take that upon yourself. You know, I, you know—I couldn't believe that conservative point of view because I didn't believe it myself, and I only would have believed it because it would have given me solace. And I don't believe in solace. I don't believe I should be given solace, you know. I believe that I should be clear-minded about what I am and what I like and bring my work where it needs to go. And not just say, well, these people like me so I'm going to do this kind of work. So, you know, and I didn't and I feel like it's dangerous to do so.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, in other words, you didn't sell out.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I don't know if that's selling out.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is it selling out?

CATHERINE MURPHY: I mean, I don't know if it's selling out. I don't know if it's selling out. I think it's just pain and suffering and how much of it you can take. I mean—I think it's just, you know, she didn't—she couldn't take the barbs. She couldn't take the barbs. And I love Willa Cather, and I've seen it happen to other people, you know. Just, you just fall in line with the people who like you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: She should have been Irish.

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.] It's true. We're used to being hated. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Like I said, if you want to hit me in the face—if you want to get my attention, you'd better hit me harder again.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's like, it's having a thick skin—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Is very important.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right, and you know, I grew up in a WASP town. I mean, Lexington is no longer a WASP town. It's, you know—it has been infiltrated by all the peoples and—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Dare we use the I-word, immigrants?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well—and my—you know, my mother was the child of immigrants. My father's father—family came over before that, but my mother was the child of immigrants. She, you know, grew up poverty-struck, absolutely in poverty where there was no welfare and, you know—but the church would deliver food to their door—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They were Catholics, obviously.

CATHERINE MURPHY: They were Catholics, absolutely. My grandfather worked on the sewers and my grandmother did many things—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In Boston? In—

CATHERINE MURPHY: In Boston.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —south Boston?

CATHERINE MURPHY: My grandmother was Alfred North Whitehead's housekeeper and so—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, dear!

[They laugh.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, I know. I know. And Alfred North Whitehead had—my family told Alfred North Whitehead stories my entire life. He was a saint; she was a sinner. You know, Mrs. Whitehead was a famous sinner, and Alfred was a saint and who loved all the servants and sat in the kitchen and talked to all the—my whole family would be hired for parties. They would all come and my grandmother—you know, my grandmother was—for a long time she was his housekeeper. And I have—my Royal Crown Derby is a present to my grandmother from Alfred North Whitehead, so I inherited that.

Anyway, so they were poverty-struck. So, I grew up in Lexington and because my father dragged my mother out of Cambridge—because he did not want us to go to Catholic school, and he wanted us to be brought up with other people, and he also wanted to go live—he wanted to live in the country and at the time, Lexington was the country. It became—subsequently became the suburbs, absolutely, but when we first moved there—no, I was born in—I lived in that house my whole life.

But in my grammar school, in sixth grade, there were—we voted for president of the United States by holding our hands up. And there were two Irish kids in my class—no, three Irish kids in my class, including myself—and my friend Janice Potska, who was Polish, and the only hands that went up for Adlai Stevenson were the four of us. And we lived in the poorer part of town and we knew we [weren't rich -CM]. And I knew that the whole time I was living—growing up in Lexington, Massachusetts. So, I, you know, I knew I was a poor girl. I was identified as a poor girl. There were a bunch of us, but there weren't too many.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wrong side of the tracks?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Pretty much.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: East Lexington, which is close to Arlington—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you—

CATHERINE MURPHY: —you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —all were for Adlai Stevenson.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right. And we were the only people in my class. You know, the class of 30; four hands went up so—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, the man who said he found St. Paul appealing and Norman Vincent Peale appalling.

[They laugh.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, it was interesting—what's interesting to me about that moment in my life is that I remember it. It—I'm 12 years old and I—that memory—no, at the time, I'm 11 years old and that memory is, you know, locked in my brain that—because I pretty much thought everyone was going to vote for Adlai Stevenson. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know? It was like, "how can this be?" You know? Really, I was shocked, you know, so—and it was my first moment of understanding my political place in the world.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, that was the height of the Cold War—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —it was post-McCarthy—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —a very peculiar moment.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It was.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Eisenhower was playing golf and having heart attacks.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes!

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, yes, yes. So, it was—and there was this very smart man named Adlai Stevenson.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Too smart—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Too smart—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —for the job.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Too smart for the job, exactly right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But it's—I think his kids went to Harvard.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I'm sure. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But that's another story. So, coming from this sort of Irish Catholic mind, full of poverty and everything, did that condition, you know, the way you handled yourself as an artist in the art market? Do you think that—

CATHERINE MURPHY: No, but it did condition me—you know, I was always—I'm—you know, that's still in my paintings. And those early paintings of me painting my father in the backyard and my mother in the backyard and paintings of my family, I—those are political acts. They were—I knew what was happening in the art world, and I knew that paintings of my backyard weren't what rich people wanted to hang in their offices.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, but garden hoses and—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, that's different.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —like laundry lines and all of that—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, well—but then the paintings changed so that they—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —but it's still there, but it's like—those paintings—those early paintings were me saying, "Okay, you're going to look at this. You're going to look at this." It wasn't so horrible. It was beautiful. I thought they were—I wasn't—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —painting ugliness. I was painting my story. I was—you know, I was painting my story. I wanted people to deal with my story. And my favorite thing is my early painting of my parents' backyard— [laughs]—and the people who bought it was Chase Manhattan Bank. [Laughs.] I'm like "Oh, no, they can foreclose on my parents' backyard!" you know?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: David Rockefeller just died.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, indeed. Yes, indeed. They have a mighty, mighty art collection—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I know.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —which they haven't sold. They're just sitting on it.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's a collection.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You bet it is.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They collected it and they're taking care of it.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I'm—I was impressed. I thought for sure it would go up for auction, but it hasn't.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, did you identify—I know there are a lot of Boston—not that you were in Boston—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I wasn't.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —but there are a lot of Boston artists, though, who—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I didn't really meet them until much later because I went to school. I went to—I, you know —

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —went to school—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You went to school in New York.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —in New York, so that's where I met those artists, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Were you aware of people like George Nick or—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I, certainly, became aware—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —of George Nick—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —and I met him a couple of times and I saw his paintings, but he wasn't an influence on me or anything—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —because I really didn't see his paintings. And then, as I say, I developed a very close relationship with Michael Mazur and his wife Gail. That's, you know—when I moved to—I kept going back to Lexington to do paintings because—for a few reasons—because I needed to do certain paintings of my family.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And also, you know, I had people to pose for me. I made them all. Everybody had to pose for me, you know. It was like there was no—they, a, didn't get paid and b. couldn't—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Fairfield Porter—

CATHERINE MURPHY: —they did what I wanted.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —did that a lot.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, these are the people who will pose for you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Madame Cezanne.

[They laugh.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Hello, Madame Cezanne!

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Longsuffering—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly, exactly. And you know, these people didn't mind how I made them look. You know, they couldn't complain about that. It was fabulous! It was perfect. Anyway, I went home one time during one of my stints at home and Michael found out I was there—I don't know how—and he sent me a postcard and said, "I'd like to meet you; give me a call." So, I went "okay." And I called him up and we became very close friends. And so, I was certainly aware of Michael, but—and then I met his friends.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, but before that, I didn't really know any Boston artists.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But there—do you suppose that there is something about your aesthetic that comes out of this sort of—I don't know what you would call it—the sort of gestalt—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely. I'm an—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the Boston—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —sensibility?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, what—you know, my interest in narrative painting comes out of the fact that the first art I knew was literature. No, probably the first art I knew was music. My father was a musician, and we sang a lot. But the first art that grabbed my heart was literature, and I didn't—nobody—like I said, nobody took me to museums. Nobody—you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —I didn't—I—you know, it was great books that brought me into oh, life is bigger, you know, life is bigger than I see it in front of me. Life can be bigger.

[Cross talk.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: What was your first great book? What was a great book that really—

CATHERINE MURPHY: The first—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —knocked you out?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, I think it was probably Fitzgerald. It was probably Fitzgerald. I don't remember if it was *The Great Gatsby* or *Tender is the Night*, but it was probably Fitzgerald. And—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There's this Irish thing going on here because—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —you've got the literary—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and then, you've got—

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Fitzgerald. [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly. No, it's true. And I—so I—you know, I'm drawn to a kind of narrative because of that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And I don't deny that that is why. But then, the first art I loved is narrative art, one way or the other, but also, as I said before, you know, Transcendentalism was fed to me with teaspoons as a child. We—you know, like I was brought to those houses. I was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —you know, we would—we traipsed around Concord, we traipsed around Lexington with my classes. I—you know, I knew those people were important. I knew those people were people I had to pay attention to. So, I don't know whether or not that's—I think that's in my paintings, too. You know, I really do think that's in my paintings, too, because that was—you know, that was how I was taught in a certain way. The prototype for teaching in the schools of Lexington was Harvard. Harvard is Emerson; Harvard is Transcendentalism, is—Transcendentalism, Pragmatism—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —come directly out of that world. Hi, honey!

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Harvard classics—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

HARRY ROSEMAN: Hi.

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, you forgot to take my picture.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, no, he's not going to forget. For him to forget, means his day is so ruined. I can't tell you.

HARRY ROSEMAN: Should I run out and get some lunch for everybody?

CATHERINE MURPHY: That would be lovely, lambie [ph].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That'll be at a post office near you.

[They laugh.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes.

HARRY ROSEMAN: Yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

HARRY ROSEMAN: It'll make a beautiful poster.

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thanks, Harry.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But you know—so I—what I'm saying about that is that, really, my high school's lesson plans were observed by Harvard. I mean, it wasn't just tangential, it was actual.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, there was that movement in the early 20th century with the sort of Harvard classics —

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and the liberal arts trying to turn all these—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —normal schools and tech and ag colleges into institutions of liberal, higher education.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right, and it was—you know, that's—you know, that was a lovely thing. It was like a present.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The nuns wouldn't have given you that.

CATHERINE MURPHY: No. And my father was a very smart man. My father was a very smart man who—you know, whose own life did not turn out the way he wanted it to with a great deal of disappointment in his life. Those four pictures up there were my father's bands, and you know, his disappointment was huge. He just didn't know that art could have done the same thing to me that music did to him. So, he wouldn't let me be a musician. But the thing that amazes me—my father studied at the conservatory for 13 years. My sister and I both had beautiful voices; I sang in all the choirs. I had voice—I had music teachers dragging me to voice lessons.

My father wanted none of it. He did—my father went so far as neither my sister nor I can read music. We—he—you know, he was determined that we were not going to be musicians because he was so disappointed by what happened to him. But, you know, exactly the same thing could have—[laughs]—happened to me in painting.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, what kind of genre was he involved with?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, he was trained to be an opera singer, but his—you know, he—you know, his voice just didn't pan out for him. And—but then, he became very interested in band music and he was—I think he was a—he had—he was a member of other bands that traveled. My mother said, "No children—you're not going to travel"—

[Cross talk.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Do you mean like—

CATHERINE MURPHY: —"we're not—I'm not going to have children"—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the big bands?

CATHERINE MURPHY: The big bands, [kind of -CM].

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: "I'm not going to have children if you're going to go off on the road." She hated that and I don't blame her. You know, I think that would have been hell for her, and for him in a certain way because he was such a great father. But then—so he had bands of his own, then he did weddings. Every Saturday, my father was gone. Every New Year's, my father was gone. He had his own band called the Metropolitans: music to remember. That was his motto. And he played like four or five instruments and was the singer for the band.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So they're all doing covers of other people's work?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, my God, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—

CATHERINE MURPHY: And, you know—yeah, that was the music he loved and a Sunday wasn't a Sunday without all the cousins—without my father playing the piano and all the cousins singing. So, you know, the whole family

sang. It wasn't just my family. The whole family were good singers.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, did he write his own music?

CATHERINE MURPHY: No. Well, if he did, he didn't show it to me. He wrote poetry. I remember when I had to write an iambic pentameter thing for English class, I went, "I cannot!" My father wrote a—just talking to me [demonstrates], he, you know, he thought it up; he did it. He was very smart and very sad, very sad, but very supportive of me. I'm so glad there were no boys.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, was he—he was not raised in Lexington? He was raised in Boston?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Roxbury.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Southie?

CATHERINE MURPHY: No, Roxbury.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Roxbury?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right. That's not Southie. That's Roxbury.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, that's Roxbury.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And he was—you know, that's when the—the Irish got to Roxbury first, then the Jews came, and then blacks came.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But my father was—the Jews called him a "Saturday boy." He would clean the grates on Saturday for the Jewish people.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I see.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And so when I brought home a Jew, he didn't mind. [Laughs.] You know, he really didn't. You know, that was okay. It was okay.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's like the great novel *Last Hurrah*, you know, and the girl and—what was his name, Curley?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, Curley. My—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Mayor Curley.

CATHERINE MURPHY: My father's best friend was a guy named "Doc" Santosuosso. "Doc" Santosuosso, he got involved with because my father's—all his teachers at the conservatory were Italian and so—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —he finally got to know this guy named "Doc" Santosuosso. "Doc" Santosuosso was Curley's lawyer.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And he was quite the gent, quite the gent. And you know, they were—it was a whole world. It was a world.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was—yeah, I've heard a few accounts of people whose grandparents or parents were in South Boston or Roxbury, and stories of Honey Fitz and—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —a friend whose grandfather was head of the Republican—this is talking about—something to be in South Boston—but a Jewish head of the Republican caucus—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —or something and a mortal enemy of Honey Fitz—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —who ultimately ruined him.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yeah. Well, you know, he did come out on top. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yes, he did.

[They laugh.]

[. . . -CM]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Meanwhile, artists who were jealous of you were—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, they weren't being nice to me either. But—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They weren't being nice to you either, right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: They weren't being nice to me. And I honestly—I certainly understand why. I mean, I was so naïve not to understand why in the first place. I mean, you know, they get—it was just naivete that made me be so dense, you know. I sympathize. I sympathize now, nothing but—I don't blame them at all. I don't blame them at all. I was gobsmacked; they were gobsmacked, you know. They—you know, it was as big a shock to them as it was to me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right, right. Well, I think it's an old trope that sort of artists who feel like they've been cheated by the world—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —their genius hasn't been recognized.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I—you know, God knows, it happens and I don't think it doesn't happen and I understand that it is very hard. But as I also understand and I talked about yesterday, is it can't satisfy us anyway, so just don't worry about it. That's not—I mean, you know, that's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's good philosophy, you know.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But—and also, they didn't make me think any more of myself. The people, you know, liking me didn't make me think that I was any different than I was before they liked me. I truly didn't. I thought—I said to myself, "okay"—but I still couldn't look at the paintings and see anything but what I saw.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's the danger with that whole notion of validation—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —in a marketplace that's so—

CATHERINE MURPHY: There can be no validation.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —capricious.

CATHERINE MURPHY: There can be no validation.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But that's one of the traps of higher education, is that it's all based, allegedly, on some kind of measurable merit—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and performance.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And so, when you get people trying to live in those two worlds, the capricious world of art and artistic success—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and sort of the highly politicized, measured, merit-based world of the university—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —then there's bound to be confusion.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes. There's bound to be confusion and it's—you know, I—yes, there's bound to be confusion.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And bitterness.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And bitterness, absolutely. And there is. But, you know, there's—it can come at any time. In other words, that exact same thing can happen to people who have big careers and then are forgotten in their lifetime. I mean, that kind of bitterness is something we all have to fight all the time. In other words, it doesn't stop when you graduate from graduate school and nobody likes you. Okay, you graduated from graduate school and somebody likes you, and then maybe somebody likes you again. But, eventually, almost everyone goes through a terrible dip and that dip either—you know, you—the dip can come anywhere.

In other words, you can get it when you just get out of graduate school; you can get it 20 years later; you can get it 50 years later. Frederic Church gets a standing ovation when he walks into the opera, when he paints Niagara Falls; he dies in poverty. Not poverty-poverty, but he's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, he was—

CATHERINE MURPHY: He had a nice house, but he has no money. He's not—people were not paying—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was arthritic.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —attention to him anymore.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He couldn't paint anymore.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right. He couldn't—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He was—

CATHERINE MURPHY: And also, people were not paying attention to him anymore.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, he became a landscape architect.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly, exactly. And you know, it—if you—you have to be strong here or here or here or here. You know, you have to not fold, or if you fold, then, in fact, that was part—that's the test.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, the test comes here or it comes here or it comes here. But you're always being tested. You're always being tested. And I'm not fooling; you're always being tested. When Xavier died and I couldn't find another gallery, I thought well, that's it. And this is a good thing. For me, when nobody was paying attention to me, I kind of like that, too. You know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: —you have to embrace that, you know. When you have moments in your life when you're under the radar—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: —use them to your advantage.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's great time for research and growth.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's a great time to just say, "Well, I had that notion. Why don't I"—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: There's nobody—

CATHERINE MURPHY: —"satisfy that notion?"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —breathing down your neck—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Nobody's breathing down your neck.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —to produce—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —stuff they can sell.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, who were some of the artists who—from whom you drew sustenance, either critically or wisdom or—

CATHERINE MURPHY: So many.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —support?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Support?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I mean, moral support.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Not that you needed any.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: —I did. I mean—all my friends—I mean, Rackstraw, my—you know, I became friends with Rackstraw, but much later. I became friends with Rackstraw when I became a member of the Academy because Rackstraw was the person who put me up for membership.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The National Academy?

CATHERINE MURPHY: No, no, American Academy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: American Academy.

CATHERINE MURPHY: The American Academy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The National Academy we won't mention.

CATHERINE MURPHY: The National Academy was much earlier, and I didn't ever participate in that because it didn't interest me very much. They—it just didn't interest me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Arts and Letters.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Arts and Letters.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And so—and you know, a woman who loved literature—when I go up at the Academy to be sworn in—"sworn in" is the wrong word—to be honored, and I'm sitting behind Kurt Vonnegut and John Updike, I go [demonstrates.] You know? And there's Galway Kinnell across the room from me, you know. I'm like [demonstrates.] You know, I'm very excited. I'm very—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: —excited to meet many of my heroes. So, anyway—so, Rackstraw and—but not Rackstraw till later, but like I say, Yvonne and, finally, Sylvia and Bob, both of whom have been so wonderful and supportive of me, and kind to me always, you know. Sylvia's, you know, a mensch and—you know, Tom and Joyce. For 20 years, Tom and Joyce; Tom Nozkowsky and Joyce Robins and Gary Stephan, and Suzanne Joelson, his wife. But—Helen Wilson—I mean, Helen and Altoon [Sultan]. I mean, these are people who were at the beginning and I was friends with, and I didn't just—they just didn't—they didn't just befriend me, but they made work that I learned from, that I—you know, I really learned from a lot of people and I got sustenance from

learning from people's work, you know.

That was the greatest for me. That was—that there's art out there and there's always an artist for you when you need one, always, for everyone. You know, there's the artist you rejected when you were 17 that you woke up to when you're 30. There was—but those artists when you were 17 that now you're embarrassed about. There they were.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: There they were, just sitting there, saying, "Hello, look at Moses Soyer." Yes, I will! I'll look at the Soyers!

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: I like the Soyers! Yes, look at that! Look at that! Look at those people, people making paintings about people, you know. That was very important to me. And—but then, you know, I finally met Raphael Soyer, the nicest man.

[. . . -CM]

And that's the other thing that killed me. The artists that like you—I don't know any artists in New York—in Los Angeles, I met a lot of artists that if they like you nothing stops them from telling you, you know—if they really like you. If they really like you, they tell you. They say—in New York, you know—Phillip sent me collectors before he knew who I was. He never met me, you know. The kindnesses that had been shown to me over and over again by artists, for me, the ultimate kindness is you send me your collector. I love you to death, you know?

[They laugh.]

You know? I mean, because, you know—but you send a critic, any of the above, and you know, that's a true kindness. And so, I got—but you know, I will say that Barnett Newman's paintings, Rothko's paintings—they were there. I got to go to any museum I wanted, and there they were and I—they were mine, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: They were mine for the beholding, you know. I was—they were gifts. All of them were gifts and that's—you know, that's what sustained me. What sustains you is art.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, the artists were the family that understood what you were doing?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly right. I mean, they were—you know, like I—and what I didn't know—Mr. Hewitt was telling me about showing my work—is you have a responsibility to show your work because if you've taken, you've got to share. You can't keep it under a bushel because you've got to put it out there, because you took so much—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —you've got to have it there to be taken. And that's really important, you know. That's really important because this is a community, whether we meet each other or not. We're a real community.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, another way to put it, and I've heard it put this way, is that it's not wine until you open the bottle and drink it.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That the exhibition—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —is part of the process—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —of making art.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely. And I mean, my first show at Fourcade—I didn't learn this at First Street, but from First Street to Fourcade, that's when I—you know, the comment that I wasn't an observational painter because I didn't paint these life-size—it was at Fourcade that I stood back and I went—and at the Whitney, and at that first Whitney—I went "I painted them life-size; they're too small." Nobody sees thing—you know, the

king's seat is never the artist's seat.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: The king's seat is much farther back.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And so, my paintings looked like postage stamps. They did not look like they were life-size. Absolutely and positively, they looked like they were much smaller than life-size. And life—by "life-size," what that person meant was what your size is from where you're standing.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know? So, that's the other thing. It's like, well, you know, where are you standing? Why don't you just change where you're standing? It'd still be—you know, it might life-size again, you know. So, it's—was a very interesting thing to learn and I couldn't learn that until I showed the paintings. I couldn't—that was not for me to learn, you know, because I was, you know, just sitting there in my studio doing this and going outside. And then, you know, going outside and painting. You know, like I always paint from life so I—you know, when it's a painting of outside—and now I've set up things outside that looked like outside, inside, mind you, which was very difficult to do, but I managed to do it.

But many—most of the times when you're looking at something that's outside, it's outside. So, a six-foot painting, seven-foot painting—I'm outside with them. So it was difficult when I was younger to bring—I never would have brought a painting I couldn't carry outside because I was—put myself in situations where I was the only person who was going to do it, so now I have somebody to help me bring it outside, so—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Well, actually, sight size, you know, the—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —size that something is to your eye, if I'm having a look out the window—we're in a sunroom—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and I have a look through this tree across—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the way, which is—

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's big.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —80 feet high—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right, right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and it fits comfortably—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —within the span between—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —the tip of my thumb and the tip of my finger if I open my hand.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So that's—what?—five, six inches?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, that's pretty small.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, exactly. And so—and then, when you put that—you know, you put a painting of that, and it's that size, in any kind of gallery space and—you know, even somebody's house that has a big

house, you know, that it just becomes smaller than I want it to be—[laughs]—that's for sure, you know. So, I—it was an important lesson, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, unless, of course, it's a house in Amsterdam built in the—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —16th century, right?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right, exactly right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: In which case, those paintings were—

CATHERINE MURPHY: They had to be small, exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They were perfectly sized.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Houses changed.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.] Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Again, back to the discussion about painting in relationship to real estate.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Unavoidable, but unpleasant to think about.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's interesting, though.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: You know?

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's interesting that, you know, a lot of the minimalists and a lot of the geometric painters were just responding to architecture. They were making paintings about architecture and about what—how those paintings responded to architecture. That's a perfectly reasonable concept. This isn't just—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's what Rackstraw Downes was talking about, you know, the Dutch townscape painters being such huge influence on his work.

CATHERINE MURPHY: They were indeed, yeah. Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —a lot of artists who only the most, you know, knowledgeable of trivial facts would recognize the names of these painters.

CATHERINE MURPHY: [One of the things I should talk about is one of the things that I recognized in representational painting. There's too much modesty. They were a modest group of people, not by necessity - CM]. It was kind of a—and that, for me, was also attached to class. And it was a kind of aristocracy of the intimate and it was sort of about not being crass. And I admire the crass. I don't disdain it, nor did I then. And I thought that there was so much about realism, certainly not from Phillip—I mean, it's not from certain people who said—[inaudible]—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Pearlstein?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, Phil Pearlstein. "Well, screw this, you know. I don't need to be part of what I call the 'Italian contingent.' I don't need to parade how erudite I am. I don't need to parade that I am part of this class of people," which is the educated, the—I kind of, at the same time, embraced the crass in my paintings and—a little bit—and I let it in to a kind of representational painting that I thought was—it took a long time for me to do that because it was like, I like these people and I don't want to—I didn't want to throw sand in their faces.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But, in fact, there's a kind of society that I ran from in Lexington, Massachusetts, that I felt like would be comfortable with the world I was creating in my paintings. And I did want to upset that apple

cart in my paintings. And it took me a long time to do it, but I did, finally, and I think that that was hard to do. That was hard to do. I mean, and that's why when that old figurative artist took me aside and said I wasn't an observational painter, I said, "Well, screw you, I still am an observational painter, but I just went outside your comfort level of class."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Their definition of class.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Their definition, which was a very elegant, very—in many ways very—again, I say, erudite group of people.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Refined.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Refined is the word I'm looking for. And that refinement is wonderful. I mean, I'm not telling you that great paintings cannot be made within that refinement, but it's not who I am.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I mean, it's just not who I am. It's like—it would be as if the maid's daughter was trying to, you know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Put on airs.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —put on airs.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And I—you know, that can't happen. I can't be that person. I don't want to be that person. I really don't. I really don't. I want to be this other person that I am.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's a very interesting observation because I think it does characterize, for a certain period of time, there were a number of representational painters who conducted themselves with very self-conscious restraint.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And the people we all know who speak in a whisper, so you have to lower your voice to talk to them and they don't let you get a word in edgewise—

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —because they speak in a whisper and they keep this very level cadence—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and they never let you—and this is a tactic.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And I think people who were besotted with Morandi—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Mm [affirmative]. And who doesn't love Morandi?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —who's wonderful—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —but the thing is, I go through galleries and I see people who are doing gray bottles—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and still lifes—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And I'm thinking—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, no!

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —"New idea, please."

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes, exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: "Who are you?"

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right, it's—no, but it's sort of like in this are—you know, in this—you know, they have a point of view. That's great. That's great, but it's like I can't do that. I really can't. I couldn't—it was—for me, it was a slow death. It was a slow death.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's an affectation.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, and it would have been for me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: For you, yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It would have been, for me, an affectation. I do not think it's for them an affectation. I do not say that for them an affectation. I have no idea what it is, but I do not say that. I think that, you know, they are making the paintings they want to make—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well—

CATHERINE MURPHY: —you know?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I'm going to guess that Fairfield Porter wouldn't have liked my paintings, would not like my paintings now, but Fairfield Porter made great paintings. I mean, I'm not saying no to him. I'm only saying yes to something else.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But he was a WASP-y—

CATHERINE MURPHY: My God, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —Harvard-educated—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I spent a day with him—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Did you?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —at Yale.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I only met him once.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And I was the person they picked to, you know, pick him up at the airport—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —squire him around.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I had to buy him lunch at the Old Heidelberg—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and had to deliver him to the lecture hall, the Hastings Hall, at night, where he gave a talk everyone hated because he showed no slides.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But—

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —he was great company for a day.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, I'm sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah—

CATHERINE MURPHY: He was a brilliant man.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I mean, he really was, you know. The only other person I've ever seen do that is Robert Irwin.

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: They would be surprised at each other, wouldn't they? [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They were the opposite—

CATHERINE MURPHY: The opposite.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —then two weeks—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Meet somewhere at the end of the circle. [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —two weeks later, the lecture was Louis Finkelstein talking about Al Held.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yeah. Wow.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And that was, you know, an hour-and-a-half of Louis.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, well—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But—

CATHERINE MURPHY: —he was worth listening to.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: He definitely was.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it was not a dull time—

CATHERINE MURPHY: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —to be a student.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It wasn't.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But I understand what you mean. So, you know, you're talking about the importance of just being oneself—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —of—

CATHERINE MURPHY: And just not, you know, like I don't—I did not—I am not saying I didn't construct my own personality. I mean, we're all constructing our personality. [. . . -CM]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I'm not saying I am exactly the—I am part—I am not just an Irish girl from Boston. I'm also my education; I'm also—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —a girl from New York.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know? So I—you know, I am both of these things so—but I did construct a personality.

But someplace in there, there has to be this other thing that isn't putting on airs, you know. I certainly don't put on airs—[laughs]—and you know, so—but you know, I am also a Vassar wife. I can go to the president's house for dinner and not embarrass my people, you know, so, you know—[laughs]—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, you can hold a fork and you can—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I can hold a fork.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —chew with your mouth shut—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and so forth.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I can do all those things.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: So, you know—but—so, you know, I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But if you were at a dinner table you can also hold forth and argue with everybody—

CATHERINE MURPHY: I can indeed.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and stand toe to toe with the best of them.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I hope so. I certainly hope so. But, you know, so I just think that that's—you know, you just—you're alone in your studio. You face this—you face your crap by yourself every day.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And that's—you know, that's why I say, so, eventually, everything you've got inside of you is going to show up. It's going to—it's all going to show up because you need it. You need all these things that you have been. You know every single bit of information. It's like the great [Philip] Guston quote, which is "you go into your studio and you bring all this shit with you; if you're lucky"—what is it?—"everyone leaves"—"finally, everyone leaves." But—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's great.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know? But it's like you've got to deal with it. You've got to deal with all this stuff and you have to use all this stuff, so, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, there has to be total honesty.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, absolutely, or you go crazy.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's your laboratory, but also, the other thing, too, I think, with artists working in a commercial environment now, where it's so much emphasis on celebrity and—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —money and acclaim and so forth, that people are calculating ways to put themselves—

CATHERINE MURPHY: But do these—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —in the path of this—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Do you think that's even possible?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No, I don't think so because I think—

CATHERINE MURPHY: So, then eventually—I mean, soon enough, if they're calculating, they'll—you know, they're probably going to be very disappointed. I can't calculate anything. I will tell you that I couldn't tell you—my greatest surprises have been what people like and what people don't like in my paintings. I couldn't do—I can't do that. I can't—I couldn't do that and my choices about what paintings I make and what paintings I don't make—I know I have choices, but I don't feel like I do. I feel like—you know, I sit there going, "Oh, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, nobody's going to want this," you know. I—the only thing that nobody consistently has not wanted were paintings of me or paintings of Harry. I've got those.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] Lots of them.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Lots of them. But it doesn't stop me from doing them, and I can't not do them if they occur to me, but I can promise you that's what they don't like. But other than that, my predictions are just "throw it out there; you don't know what they're going to want." So, you know, the people who try to anticipate the market—this was—you know, I always say to my students, "If you're trying to anticipate the market you're already two steps behind because, in fact, if you're trying to anticipate the market, you're trying to do it from the market that you see in front of you. The market that will happen when you get up for bat, when you leave this place and you try to get a gallery, will be a new market"—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —"that is already"—you know, "already has gone past you."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's a mirage.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's a mirage, exactly. So, don't try to anticipate the market. And I don't think the smart ones ever do. I mean, honestly, I will tell you, I have been part of graduating people who now have brilliant careers in the art market and the art world, people who are celebrated, and none of them were calculating. None of them were. They were just mucking around, trying to get somewhere, trying to make honest paintings. [. . . - CM] They really do deserve this. Their paintings are wonderful. I see all their shows. I really admire them to a one. So, I'm less—when—it's kids—I've never had that happen in New York. I've never had that happen in the—I've never had that happen visiting schools who know better. I've had that happen with kids in like Alabama—not Alabama; I've never been to Alabama—North Carolina, kids in California, kids—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Like "what do I have to do to"—right. Like "what do I have to do to get attention?"

CATHERINE MURPHY: Honest to God, it's never happened, ever. No kid has ever said to me, you know, "How do I make a break in the—how do I get a break in the art world?" And I—you know, never has it happened. They know that either they'll get one or they won't get one. You know—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Like—

CATHERINE MURPHY: —they're also smart enough to—you know, they're smart enough to get a good letter of recommendation from me. They know that, you know—to cozy up to artists who might help them, which is—I don't blame them, you know. I don't. This is what—this is part of the action—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Inspiring confidence in others is necessary.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But you know, I don't think that—I don't—I honestly—honest to God, that is a true story. And so, I think there's less of it—I certainly think that I've been exposed to less of that. People—you know, people tell me that Yale was the school that everybody was on the make. They certainly might have been, but they certainly hid it from me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I never got that sense at all.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I got the sense when I was there, and it was a different school then, obviously—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right. Sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —but it was all about the work and it was all about—

CATHERINE MURPHY: God, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —having to stand fire every day—

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —when a critic would walk into your studio—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and I don't know if I told you the tale about Al Held being tossed out of one kid's room because he was—it was 8:00 in the morning; he said, "You woke me up to look at this shit?"

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And the guy just said—threw—physically tossed him out of the studio.

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And Al walks over to a bunch of us that are having coffee and says, "I like him," you know.

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was that kind of—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly, exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —"let's mess with these kids."

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: "Let's knock them around. Let's see"—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —"what they're made of."

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, it was—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It was not about—this is not a finishing school for the art world.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And if we don't see it, they'll get it from their peers.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I mean, if they're sucking up to the art world, they'll get it from their peers. I've seen it happen a hundred times.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I really have. I've seen us entertain more bullshit than they will, because they won't entertain that bullshit and I've seen them—I've seen kids outed for doing something that they thought was pandering, numbers of times.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But, you know, one of the things that changed in Yale and changed a lot is—it's not the faculty didn't fight with one another. But things I heard that always shocked me was when situations were set up where you couldn't talk to another artist because they were the enemy, according to the artist you were talking to. [. . . -CM]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, the dean's a woman now.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And the dean—the dean is a woman now. I don't know if this is the dean I don't know yet. Yes, she is a woman now, exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Rob Storr left—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly. They had to hire a new dean. [I met her briefly -CM]. They ask me to go back. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know, I think I'm through.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, you don't feel that you would get the same amount of juice and energy out of teaching that you did in the past?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Or is it just a different time of life?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Different time—I feel—I lost so much time. I can't imagine giving them my time. I mean, I can't imagine giving anyone—I lost last year, you know. I lost almost six months of my life to my knee, so I can't—right now I'm just—I'm playing catch-up.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: If I ever feel like I've caught up—you know, I'm 71 years old. How many good years do I have left, you know? So—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Get out of town.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, I—that's how it goes. You don't—you just don't have that many good years, you know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's—shit happens. It's already happened to me, so I know it's true, you know.

[They laugh.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, it's amazing that—you think—plenty of people don't last this long.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —knock wood, every day is a gift.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's absolutely—you know it. And there are still paintings I want to do, so I—when I feel—if I felt—I've been going here and there, but mostly—that's going to stop, too, because, you know, I have to go to Skidmore and give a lecture and then I have to go to—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They have a great—

CATHERINE MURPHY: They have a wonderful—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —program.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —museum, too, so I—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Nice new museum.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Tang Museum.

CATHERINE MURPHY: They're having a show about drawing right now that I'm in, so I said yes, but I had to say no for a whole year between the operation—the first operation to the last operation, it was a year of saying no. And so, I've been saying yes. But I'm about to stop. I'm about to stop saying yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, where are you drawing from these days for your inspiration? Are you just—your environment here or—and like what kind of pictures are you thinking about making?

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well, mostly notions of intimacy, of—I want to—the paintings I've done that I love the most are very intimate and I am very interested in defining—always what I'm interested in doing and have been from the beginning is reality changes as we look at it. I—it—the minute I do something with it, it becomes a fiction and I'm aware of that. I mean, I want that to happen. I think that art is always fiction.

Art is always—I'm not making a real thing. I'm making a fiction about a real thing. But I need it to feel like a real thing, and so it moves. What I think of as real changes. What I think of as not a painting changes. So, what I'm always looking for is not a painting and making it into a—making it all of a sudden become—when what is not a painting can become a painting for me, then I know that I want to work with it and that's—I've always been—what I always—

You know, I always joked with Jill Weinberg, who I love—I love Jill; she's a wonderful person. She was a wonderful dealer. I always joked that my biography should be called Chasing Reality because, I mean, that's what I feel like I'm doing. I feel like, you know, this is a painting already. This is—a thousand people have made this painting. I've made this painting. Once I've made this painting, I—you know, I—people say, "Why do you not repeat?" I go "because I'm trying to find out what's real." I'm trying to find out what strikes me as—what I recognize, that moment of recognition, and it can't come from what I'm comfortable with. It has to come with what I'm not comfortable with. And so, that's always what I'm looking for and it gets harder to find all the time. I mean—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, it's a process of discovery?

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's a process of discovery within—it's like—you know, it's like I love—you know, I've been lucky enough in my life to find morels in the woods and I—you know, people are always very secretive about where they find morels and where they find wild mushrooms in general. I only recognize two, chanterelles and morels. I wouldn't—nothing else do I experiment with. But morels—you know what a morel is. There's only one thing that looks like a morel. And so, I found them—big hordes of them—three times, and I've always left some behind so that they would come back. They never come back. They don't come back. And I always feel like paintings are like mushrooms. Once I find them, they've gone. They're just gone.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: I can't go back to that source. But I can go back to the form. I can't go back to the subject.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But I can go back to the form and I do go back to form all the time. I mean, how many circles have I painted? How many—you know, I'm still obsessed with how the rectangle interacts with the ellipse or the circle or, you know, the true circle or the ellipse. You know, what—you know, that's—the small space that an ellipse makes, and then, in other places, the space that a shape that's an ellipse can make, you know, it stays on. It satisfies me. I can go back to that obsession and be satisfied that I'm going someplace, because I don't feel like I've understood all the nuances of that idea, of that—you know, because it forces you to the edges, and then when that ellipse forced me to the edges, I decided "so, if Poussin and Lorrain—Claude Lorrain—Claude—could not—you know, avoided the edges because it destroyed space, how do I make space on the edge?"

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And that, for me, is worth doing more than once. Because that's really interesting to me. And so, you know, I cannot, you know, that—it seems to be something that feeds me a lot.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well—

CATHERINE MURPHY: And it will continue to feed me.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That puts your work in direct conversation with people like Jules Olitski.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: These big fields of color—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely. Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —with clusters along the edge. And trying to—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —trying to project some kind of—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —energy across the canvas—

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —in that way—

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —right?

CATHERINE MURPHY: So, the properties of the canvas is, you know, magic. You know, the most—one of the most significant things that ever happened to me, ever, in looking at art, was looking at a book. And I'm flipping through a book of stuff from Lascaux. I'm flipping through this book and, you know, I'm hardly paying attention. And there's—and I, of course, I never read these books. I just look at the pictures. I read fiction. I look at picture books. You know, I'm not a great reader of art books. I do collect them. And I do look at them. But I don't read them.

So, I'm flipping through this book. And there's a painting on the wall of a deer with antlers. And I stop, because

what's caught my attention is in the corner of this reproduction on the wall are also a bunch of rectangles that have been drawn on the wall. And I said, so, is this like graffiti on the walls of Lascaux? And so, then I did read that book. And I did do—I did go to lots of talk about cave paintings. And geometry exists in all the cave paintings, all over world. It exists in Australian cave paintings, Aboriginal cave paintings. It exists in African cave paintings, Spain, France. There's geometry in all of them. And in Lascaux, these were just rectangles like this.

Now this is pre-agriculture. This is pre-architecture. And I said, how come, why does this happen? And, of course, they're guessing at everything. But one of the things they guessed at was one of the reasons they made these paintings in caves—well, first of all, they were dry and they were warm. But the lack of oxygen was a good place to go into a trance. And—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh.

CATHERINE MURPHY: So, they—people who do transcendental meditation, what they revealed in talking to them was the first thing that comes up when you're deep—going deep into a trance is geometric shapes. So, they discover—they know now from study of the brain, study of—is that geometry is entopic to our physiognomy [sic]. It's entopic to our brains. It's—geometry is not something that was discovered for no reason. It was in us. It is in our body.

And so, I was like, holy crap, you know. You've got this rectangle and you got this crap that eventually ends up in this rectangle. If that's it, that's what you got. You got variations on this rectangle and the crap that you're going to put in the rectangle. And I was like ah! [Demonstrates.] And that's when I started thinking about the edges.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's when I started thinking about, you know, how do I make these edges so that you're making the space on these edges, you know. So, it was truly a moment in my life where I—it was complete happenstance. I was completely ready to see it, and ready to understand it. And then, it's like, wow, you know, that's a beautiful thing. That's, you know, this is the magic rectangle. This rectangle is frigging magic. This is my body, my self, you know. It's like—it's cool. It's really good. And so, you know, when I get students who don't think that it matters, I'm like, it's all that matters, you know, you know. I want you to tell your story. You can't tell it until you know the story.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, so it's, like, so beautiful. It's so beautiful.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, that's the space that everyone dreams, is that rectangle?

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's right. Because it's [demonstrates]—it's ticking.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So you're—I mean, that's the given, and then you're animating it with vectors and colors—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Sure.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —divisions, and—

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's all more geometry within the geometry.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, there's a way—there's a geometry within this geometry that helps you put the deer back in the rectangle, you know? Like, it's got to be a reason. It's got to be a reason that we do this, you know. So, it's, you know, symmetry is one of the reasons, one of the ways to do it. You know, it's—then you look at everyone differently. You look at everyone differently. My favorite painting in the world—I had to choose a favorite painting, I had to do a talk about favorite painting, twice, actually. And both times I picked Van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross*, which is a knock-out painting that you could die from. It's in the Prado.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's a to die for painting. And then, when you see it in life—it was my favorite painting before I saw it in life. But once I saw it in life, and I saw that those figures were life-sized, they were life-sized, thank you very much. And then, I understand that, you know, he makes a box in space—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: —to talk about a man going into a box in the ground. And he's—and that box in space,

how many boxes in space have we made as artists, you know? But, is this the first one? I'm not sure if it's the first one. But it's a very good one, you know. It's a very—and, you know, when you realize that someone like Van der Weyden knew everything I knew—when you go into the show—you go into the permanent collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Fine Arts—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: The Johnson collection. Yeah, right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You see that diptych, that Van der Weyden diptych and you see those two red cloths. Why did I make those cloths red? You know, those, you know, that's my homage to Barnett Newman and Van der Weyden—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know? So, you know, these, you know, you look at this painting and you say, these two red cloths, you know, these two red cloths in this diptych, how brilliant is this? How brilliant, how modern is this, how—that foolish word, "modern," you know. How contemporary is this? You know, so it's like, you know, so, I'm not thinking of anything new. I think my revelation is, you know—I don't think Van der Weyden had seen the cave paintings but nevertheless, he knew this. He knew about this box in space, you know, so—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, he was a human being, so—

CATHERINE MURPHY: He was a human being.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —he knew intuitively—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —if not—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Exactly. Oh, that, God, that painting is so great. The painting—I thought I was going to get thrown out of the Prado because I couldn't stop crying looking at this painting. It was like, ha, it was truly just a moment. I mean, *Las Meniñas* is there, too, and that's a pretty—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —goddamn great painting. But that painting is like tops and pops for me. So—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, and then the Pendant down in Philadelphia which is also amazing.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Pendant? Why do you call it the Pendant?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, that's, you know, the book end, you know, the Pendant—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yes. Yes. Absolutely.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Pendant.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Absolutely. Oh, yes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: They think about—

CATHERINE MURPHY: The Pendant, the word pendant, I know. Pendant, I didn't know.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Well—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well that's a great museum, Philadelphia is a great museum. I mean it has, you know, to see the Duchamps was like, this is where they're at? They're at Philadelphia? What are the Duchamps doing in Philadelphia?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, he was the buyer for the Arensbergs. They bought his stuff, too.

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's fantastic. And then, you see—you walk down this hallway and there's Cezanne's *Bathers* is in front of you. And you can't believe it, a, you can't believe it's so big. I had no idea it was that big. And then, you turn your head this way. And I hate—Renoir is not my guy. But there's a Renoir *Bathers*.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Oh, that crazy painting.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It's great. But you see a painting that has no sexuality and you get—it's so—I hope they

never change that hanging. You see a painting that is brilliant and nobody's having sex and you turn around and everybody's having sex. Not quite as brilliant but really good. It's a really great Renoir. It is. It's a great Renoir. And you turn back. And you feel like, mind and body, mind and body, you know. Perfectly satisfied. It's a great collection. It's a great collection.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It is. It is.

CATHERINE MURPHY: They're very lucky to have it—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, what sage advice would you offer to a young artist?

CATHERINE MURPHY: If they need my advice, they shouldn't be an artist. [Laughs.] I honestly think, you know, you—my advice is worthless. It's too—it's just—just do—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well what you said is, in other words, is basically to trust your own instinct—

[Cross talk.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: If they have—that's right—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —and have the courage of, you know, to, you know, catch your own trust fall, right?

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, if you—you know, I would have been—if you can be anything else, you would be something else. I mean, I honestly think that, you don't have to be an artist. But if you could be, you know, nobody wants you to be an artist. Your family doesn't want you to be an artist.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

CATHERINE MURPHY: My father didn't. My father was supportive but did he want me to an artist? No. He wanted me to teach school and he wanted me to have children and be happy. You know, that's, he thought that art was a way to get me an education so that I could teach school and be safe and make my own money. You know, he saw that that was important. My mother saw—my mother thought women should make their own money. That was very important to her, too. But they didn't think that I should be an artist. And if you have doubts about being an artist, likely you will not be one. I mean, if you, I couldn't be—I'm an idiot: I can't drive, I can't type, I can barely make a phone call without having to go, "I have to make a phone call, I have to make a phone call."

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: And I was always this way, you know. I worked in an office for six months at the American Cancer Society when I graduated from Pratt. I invented the four-day work week because I was having a breakdown because I couldn't paint. And my paintings were drying. I couldn't stand it because I would paint on the weekend, and they would be dry by the time I would get back to them, and I couldn't make it work. It was horrible. And so, but I worked for a place, the American Cancer Society which paid me no money, I got minimum wage and I said to them, I can't type. And they said that's okay. And I typed the whole day long like this.

And I worked under a woman who wasn't very good. And so, she couldn't give me enough work and so I wrote poetry all day long on my typewriter like this. But I didn't have to do much work. But I still couldn't go to work more than four days a week. I lasted for six months. I thought I was going to have a nervous breakdown. And then, we went home after another six months of me, you know, having no money. We went home to live with my parents because I wanted to do paintings. [Nobody in New York would pose for me. -CM] And I was so broke I couldn't rub two pennies together.

So, you know, I'm incapable of doing anything else. It turns out I can teach. But I couldn't have taught—when I student-taught at Pratt, I was 20 years old and it was so exhausting teaching junior high school, I had to go home and take a nap in the afternoon.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Wow.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Because it was the hardest job in the whole wide world. And I honestly was so exhausted I said I can't do this. I can't get my teaching certificate. I won't ever be able to paint again. I can't do that. So, I took my chances. And I, you know, I got helped. I got grants. I got NEAs. I got—you know, I cobbled together money. We lived for nothing. We lived in Jersey City for seven years. It was horrible. It was like I found the place that was the cheapest place on Earth to live. And, you know, I lived in a little street where there was no one to talk to and just my husband to talk to. So, you know, I—we were poor. So, I can't say that, you know, I can't say that I could've done anything else. I'm incompetent. Now, I learned to cook because we were starving and I had to learn to cook. So, now I could work as a short-order cook in a—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Uh-huh [affirmative].

CATHERINE MURPHY: —bad restaurant, you know. I could do that now. But I couldn't have done that then. I didn't know how to cook then. I couldn't—what could I do? Nothing. As I said to the person who was calling me every week to get money for my student loan that I took out to go to Pratt, I said, "You gave me the money to go to art school. I'm being an artist. It's your fault."

[They laugh.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know? I know, you know. So, you know, what was wrong with you? I finally paid them. But still it was like it was hard. It was hard-going.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: So, you know, one of the questions I think the Archives always likes to ask is, you know, describe how the art world has changed over the years. But throughout our whole conversation—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, we certainly talked about that.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —we talked about—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —that a lot. But then, the short answer to that would seem to be, not to put words in your mouth, but that, you know, the challenge of being an artist hasn't really changed since the beginning of—

CATHERINE MURPHY: No.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —time. And that you—that the only way you're going to do anything that's worthwhile is to do it with a full heart and open eyes and pay attention. Be real.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And—

CATHERINE MURPHY: And, you know, it's like—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —it shouldn't be about lifestyle, or career, or any of that stuff.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I just don't see how it can possibly be. If it's about lifestyle, you could make money easier —

[Cross talk.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Lots of other ways.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —some other way.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

CATHERINE MURPHY: You know, honestly, if you want to, go to business school.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: But, you know, you do have to be aware of how the world sees you. I mean, Davy Crockett didn't wear a coonskin cap until he saw an actor on stage playing Davy Crockett wearing a coonskin—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah, it's—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —cap. He said, that's a good idea—

CATHERINE MURPHY: Well—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —that could be part of my brand.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —my joke about artists is when we go out into the world, we dress pretty well.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And, unlike—writers don't dress as well as artists. We dress better than writers. It's true. It's just true. I now—I know writers. They have to learn in a different way than we have to learn.

HARRY ROSEMAN: Are you guys ready for a break, because—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, we are. We're just—

HARRY ROSEMAN: I had to get something—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: —wrapping up.

HARRY ROSEMAN: —different than I was going to get. And I think it'll be better warm.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Ok, baby.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're just wrapping up.

CATHERINE MURPHY: All right.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: We're just wrapping up.

HARRY ROSEMAN: I ordered an insane—I got much too much—[inaudible.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Did you, sweetheart?

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you—

CATHERINE MURPHY: That's not like you. He always does that.

[They laugh.]

HARRY ROSEMAN: Well, we have a lot to choose from. Okay, I'm going to get the table ready.

CATHERINE MURPHY: So, but I think the art world—there are other ways to be artists now.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Sure.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I mean, there is an international market now that really didn't exist when I was younger. And there is a real scene out there. You know, I have lots of students who move to Europe, move to Germany. There's a whole—

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Yeah, Berlin is hot.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Berlin is hot.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And they go there. And they meet other artists. And they show in galleries. And they make a career that way. So, there are other ways to do it. You don't have to be as stable in your little—it's—there are more artists but it's a bigger art world.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right. Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It was New York or nothing. You know, you had to come to New York. You know, even the Germans were looking at New Yorkers. I mean, everybody was looking at New York for what was happening in the art world. All of the, you know, all, you know—they lost a lot of the artists with the war.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And before the war. And then, you know, it—I'm not saying that America was autonomous in this. I mean, honest to God, if you count Albers and de Kooning and all the people who came from Europe, we owe a lot. So, you know, we didn't think of this ourselves.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: No.

CATHERINE MURPHY: But, it is absolutely true. You might not get a teaching job. You might get a teaching job. You know, you might be willing to travel. You know, it was just a more mobile world. It is, you know, you get a teaching job in Chicago and you say, okay, I'll stay here six years. And then, I'll go back to New York. You know, so it's—if you are careful with your life and you don't expect—life is not going to let you have everything. You can't—I don't have any children, do I? I don't have any children because we were too poor to have children. And I wasn't really interested in having children until it was too late to have children. And then, maybe I had enough money. But I was—it was like it was no big deal. It was like, I'm not going to have children. I don't—I can't—I don't know where my next meal is coming from. I can do that to myself but I can't do that to a child.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And so, you know, you can't—you're not going to get everything. It's just everybody has to make those choices. Women have to make those choices. Men have to make those choices. You know, maybe men didn't use to have to make those choices, but now they do.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: So, that's a better world, too. Everybody has to make those choices. And you're not going to get everything. You're not going to get everything you want.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: And you have to remain nimble.

HARRY ROSEMAN: Beverages?

CATHERINE MURPHY: You do. Beverages? I'll have juice.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I'll have some more coffee.

HARRY ROSEMAN: Okay.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Yeah. And you do have to remain nimble. And you have to remain unencumbered enough so that when it all falls apart, you, you know, you still can pay your bills. Most artists I know don't have credit card bills. Because you never know when your next penny is coming from. I still don't know where my next penny is coming from. I mean, I can't depend on the art world. I don't. I mean, you know, thank you, my husband has a wonderful job at Vassar College. And he's a great teacher. And he's a great artist. But he's also a great teacher. And so, you know, we got lucky. We just got lucky. I made some money. He made some money. I made money sometimes. He made money sometimes.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: It's working for you.

CATHERINE MURPHY: It works. But it only worked because, you know, we didn't think it was going to.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Well, you found your own path because you had to.

CATHERINE MURPHY: I had to. Exactly.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Right.

CATHERINE MURPHY: And it was low expectations. That's my advice.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: That's a great piece of advice.

CATHERINE MURPHY: [Laughs.]

JAMES MCELHINNEY: I knew I got another Boston, John Davenport, Lindsey the Second. It was a wool merchant. "Topper" Lindsey said, if you want to be happy in life, lower your expectations.

CATHERINE MURPHY: —expectations. And I'm afraid that you can't but raise your expectations about what you expect from your art. Art is the whole world. Art is huge. It's huge! Everything you think, every bit of philosophy can be put in a painting. You can put the loftiest notions known to mankind in what you're thinking. There's nothing too big that can't finally get into what you're doing. And that's why it's so great. And art should be huge. And when people ask me doesn't art—bad art, drive you crazy? And I go, no. To quote Walt Whitman, art is—to misquote Walt Whitman, art is huge. It contains multitudes. It is—it can hold bad art. It can hold false art. It can hold great art. It all exists at the same time.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Alternative art.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Alternative—yeah.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

CATHERINE MURPHY: Certainly, alternative art. But anything that anybody wants to call art, I say, go for it, kid. Call it art. We can—we'll take you in, too. We, you know, we are the ultimate refugee-taker of misfits and wackos, you know. So, it's like that's what's great. Think big, you know. Think big about your art. Think less about the rest.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Thank you so much.

CATHERINE MURPHY: Oh, thank you.

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Been a real pleasure.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]