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Oral history interview with Allen Ruppersberg, 2017 October 27-2018 January 15

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Allen Ruppersberg on October 27, 2017, November 30, 2017, and January 15, 2018. The interview took place at the studio of Allen Ruppersberg in Brooklyn, NY, and was conducted by Avis Berman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Allen Ruppersberg and Avis Berman 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

AVIS BERMAN: This is Avis Berman interviewing Allen Ruppersberg for the Archives of American Art oral history program on October 27, 2017, in his studio in Brooklyn.

I start the same way with everyone. Would you please state your full name and date of birth?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Allen Ruppersberg. January 5, 1944.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, thank you. Imagine the form of this interview—that of a hand, or a tree, or an algorithm. We're going to start basically back around in chronology, and then, as we kind of hit your work and other people and influences, we'll go out, and we'll go on from there.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Okay.

AVIS BERMAN: And I always do an interview [as if –AB] someone in 30 or 40 years wants to either do a biography or a monograph, so I try to emphasize both, because you may be here in 30 or 40 more years. I won't, so—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: [Laughs.] I don't think so either.

[Brief side conversation, audio break.]

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. I think your family had something important to do with Cleveland, or surrounding Cleveland, founding it or something. But I want to start with your grandparents. Again, as in a future biography, that's about where people start with artists, their grandparents. And where did the Ruppersbergs come from on the maternal and paternal side?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, the Ruppersberg name comes from my father, his side of the family, which came from Germany somewhere in the middle of the 19th century. [00:04:05]

AVIS BERMAN: From the Revolution of 1848, do you think?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I don't really know.

AVIS BERMAN: What were your paternal grandfather and grandmother's names?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: The grandmother, I knew. The grandfather was gone by the time, I don't know, maybe I was five or six or something like that. He was John, and his wife, my grandmother, was Lucille. And he was some kind of a traveling salesman of some sort, and this didn't sit well, I guess, with Grandma Lucille. And so that side of the family is pretty vague to me.

AVIS BERMAN: Do you know their birth or death dates?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No. I mean, I certainly could look it up. But like I say, he was gone probably around 1950 or something. And she lasted until maybe the early '80s or something.

AVIS BERMAN: Were you close to her at all?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No. I'm not close to that side of the family. The side of the family that's important is my mom's side.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well, let's talk about that. First, your maternal grandparents, and we'll be talking about your mother and father and all eventually, too. [00:05:58]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, that side of the family, my mother's side of the family, is—my mother was a DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution]. I don't know exactly how far it goes back, but—

AVIS BERMAN: What was your mother's maiden name? What was her full name, and date of birth and death date?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Geraldine Martha Bourne.

AVIS BERMAN: B-O-U—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —U-R-N-E. She was born in 1912. And so my grandfather—in this case, I didn't know the grandmother, because she died early. But the grandfather—I really liked him. I was very close to him, and that side of the family became very important, both to me and my sister, because we appreciated the historical relevance of us being one of the first settlers in the town.

AVIS BERMAN: And was that Cleveland itself?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, no, this is Brecksville. This is Brecksville, Ohio—

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —which is a suburb of Cleveland. It's about 20 minutes south of Cleveland, between Akron and Cleveland. And so at the time that we were growing up, it was essentially a kind of semi-rural area where people from Cleveland would buy cottages, because it was mostly farms. And my grandfather and everybody before that were farmers or, I don't know, local people. [00:08:04] And so being a founding family, that history was important.

AVIS BERMAN: Were your grandparents farmers? Would you go out and be on their farm or—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, they specifically, before my time, they grew up being farmers. They lived on a farm, which was—I don't know. It's too bad my sister's gone, because she's the one that knows the genealogy and who is who and all of that. I never was very good at it. But they lived on a farm, which is still there, and they lived in one of the first houses built in Brecksville.

It's one of maybe a dozen or two dozen houses of the early settlers that are still there. And so they lived in one of them, which was on this farm. My cousin lives on the farm now, but don't ask me to explain how the cousins and all of this works, because I don't get it. But the farm is there, and that's where we would always go for big family reunions, and it's all my mother's side.

You know, it's all these early settlers to Brecksville. And so we would spend time on the farm, off and on, all the time, because that's where the grandparents lived, and that's where the reunions were. And we would go there and ride horses and swim in the lake. And it was real kind of farm country. [00:10:03]

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And in your adult life, which seems to be very urban, were you ever interested in going back and spending time in an area like that? Or do you do that?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I own a place in Brecksville.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I've had it now since 2006, and the reason that I have that is because, when my mom was still alive, she lived in the house we grew up in until she was in her late 70s and—mid- to late 70s—and then she moved to an assisted living [facility] in Brecksville, in the same town. It's where they have their own apartments, so my sister and I could always go there and stay. But then when Mom died, then there was the question of, Well, do we ever come to Brecksville again? And both my sister and I thought, Well, no, that's not what we want to do.

And so in the meantime—well, there's kind of a little in-between story there in that my mother had Parkinson's [disease], and so at the end, after she was in this apartment, in the assisted living apartment, once the Parkinson's got too far gone, then she had to go to the next stage, the nursing home stage.

[. . . –AB]

So we found a place in Brecksville after checking out other places that were maybe down further south in Ohio where my sister lived. [00:11:58] But we found a place in Brecksville which was nice, and it was just—nothing was more than three miles from where we grew up, or where my mom had lived her entire life.

And so for five years my sister and I took turns going back there to take care of her, or we would go together and spend a week or two days, whatever. And so eventually, after a year or so of staying in the Motel 8, I thought, This is awful, and so we found an apartment. We rented an apartment. And so then, after having the apartment for a couple years and—I had to move out of my studio that was on Broadway and Houston [Street, New York City], and so everything had to go in storage.

And it was before I got this place, or it was right around the time I got this place [in Brooklyn]. And so eventually, I was paying so much money to keep everything in storage here in New York—and it was in Dumbo. When I first put it in Dumbo, there was nobody around, and it was very cheap. But then Dumbo started to gentrify, and it got so expensive that I thought, This is ridiculous to pay all this money to have all of my stuff in boxes that I can never use.

So I moved it all to Brecksville, because I thought, Well, here I've got this great, giant apartment that costs nothing. Why don't I just move everything here? And at least I can have it out and use it. And I'm going to be here taking care of Mom part of the time anyway. And so I just moved everything from Brooklyn that I didn't need that was kind of, you know, storage stuff. Moved it all there. [00:14:00] Then when Mom died, we kept the apartment for a couple of years, just because we didn't want to really leave Brecksville entirely. And then one day my sister happened to come across this condo that was one that we had always gone to. It was a condo complex, an early condo complex with little cottages attached to two-story building kind of things.

So it was a little, early complex of condos in Brecksville, and we used to go there anyway, because my high school art teacher, who I really liked, she lived there. So I was familiar with it. And one day my sister called up—I guess I was here, or I was in LA, I don't know. She said, "Well, I found one of these condos that's for sale. It's a two-bedroom, little cottage-type—it's nice. And it's for sale. Do you want it?" And I said, "Okay, I'll be there."

And so I went the next day and took one look at it, and there was a couple other people in line to buy it, because they were—people want them because they're ground-floor, and it's good for old people. And so I said, "Okay, I'll give you cash tomorrow for the whole thing."

And so that was done. And then I had it, and that's what I still have.

AVIS BERMAN: And this—and all of your material's in there now?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, all the archives, all the collections, everything that I don't have either here in Brooklyn or in my two studios in LA. And my apartment in LA, and the apartment in London Terrace [Gardens, Chelsea, New York City]. Everything else that I don't need to have at my fingertips is—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —in Brecksville.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that was interesting, because it was actually something that I was going to ask you a lot later about collecting and all, but we've sort of done it now, through that. [00:16:05]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It was all very organic.

AVIS BERMAN: And when was your mother born, and when did she die?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, she was born in 1912—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, sorry, you told me. All right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —and she died in 2004, I think. 2004, 2005. She was 92 when she died.

AVIS BERMAN: And what was your father's first name and his birth and death dates?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: John Lee Ruppersberg.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: He went by Lee. It was J. Lee Ruppersberg. He had a degree from Case Western in Cleveland. He was born in Lakewood, which is also part of Cleveland, more real, geographically part of Cleveland. Brecksville, like I say, is a little further south. So he got a degree as an electrical engineer from Case, and then he worked in a business in downtown Cleveland as a kind of—I don't know exactly. As a kind of a salesman type for electrical motors and distribution and that kind of stuff for a company that was run by three brothers. So he went to work every day in downtown Cleveland. [00:18:00] You know, it's kind of classic '50s. You're not quite sure what your father does. He goes off to work downtown. I went to the place once or twice

with him, but I really didn't have any idea what it was.

AVIS BERMAN: And when was he born, and when did he die?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I think he was born in 1907. He was a few years older than my mom. And he died early. He died in 1971, at age 65. So if you trace it back, you can tell exactly what year he was born. But he died at age 65, just as he was going to retire. That was the fall of 1971.

AVIS BERMAN: Must have been tough for your mother.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: And you have—you had one sister, is that right?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: And what was her name?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Martha.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And was she older or younger?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, she was five years younger.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, I just wanted to get a little bit of housekeeping out of the way.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AVIS BERMAN: It sounds as if you were very close to your mother.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yes. I probably took a lot from her.

AVIS BERMAN: Was there anyone in your family who was artistic or talented or creative in any way?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I think they were both kind of creative in their own way. You know, my father being creative in the kind of world of electronics or whatever that is. Electrical engineering? I have no idea what it is. But he also was a classical—not just classical, but a music fan. [00:19:57]

And so there was always classical music playing in the house, I mean in a real '50s way. You know, the music would play while we ate dinner, and he was musical in that way. Because that seemed to run in that side of the family, in the fact that his two sisters—my two aunts—were big-band singers in the '40s.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, great.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And one of them spent her entire life being musical. They sang together as sisters in the big bands, and my uncle, my father's brother, played in the big bands. He played with, basically, Charlie Barnet. But he played with Tommy Dorsey. He was a musician, a trombonist. The three of them actually were in the musical world, and my father kind of loved it, too.

So he would listen to the radio whenever they knew that my aunt was going to be on the radio that night, and he has all the records, which I still have, of my uncle either playing with Charlie Barnet or something. And so that, of course, is the creative side there.

And then my mother was a great reader, you know. She read kind of mainstream historical novels and just mainstream fiction, basically, and poetry. [00:22:06] She would read me poetry when I was little. And so there was that kind of—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it was a very cultivated home.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Relatively speaking, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And would she take you to the library to get books out?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I always would go to the library with her, but when they discovered that I liked to draw, then she would take me every Saturday morning to the Cleveland Museum to drawing classes. I guess I was eight or nine or something like that, going to the Cleveland Museum, and we would go every Saturday. And I would have my classes, and she would sit there and wait while I had the classes. And then afterwards we would go to Howard Johnson's for lunch. And—

AVIS BERMAN: It was a good day [laughs].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It was a good day. Right. And I remember that very distinctly about going to the museum and drawing. The Cleveland Museum was a good museum, not for contemporary art, but—

AVIS BERMAN: It's a great museum.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —for other stuff it's really—for other—

AVIS BERMAN: They don't have a lot, but each piece, as they say, is "cherce."

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yes. Well, they were known for their—I guess it's their Chinese collection—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —for one thing.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But I remember drawing the suits of armor. You know, they had all these suits of armor lined up, and we would draw those. That's not the only drawing class that I took when I was little downtown, but that was one of the first ones, I guess.

AVIS BERMAN: And were you interested in walking around the Cleveland Museum and looking at the paintings, looking at the Chinese collection, looking at the contents, or was it more just focused on what your lessons were? [00:24:09]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I think it's mostly what the lessons were. I mean, I remember the suits of armor and things that we were drawing. I don't remember walking around looking at paintings or any of that. I was probably maybe way too little for that.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, and you said you also had other lessons, other art lessons.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, there was the—I believe it was called the Cooper School of Art.

AVIS BERMAN: When did you attend that?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I don't know exactly, but, you know, when I was in high school or something, I would go after school, as far as I remember. Or maybe it was like summer vacations. Somehow, I wound up going to the Cooper School of Art, because I remember doing figure drawing. And I would bring these figure drawings home, of course, of nude models, and this was like really weird, of course.

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.] Oh, so was this—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But they accepted anything that the school was doing. So—

AVIS BERMAN: Was—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —it was fine.

AVIS BERMAN: Was this the first—your first experience of seeing a nude, in art school?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Probably.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I mean, certainly we had them when I went to Chouinard.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, that's what I meant, but as a—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But probably before that, I'm sure it probably was.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. What were the classes there? I mean, what classes were you taking? First of all, was it a children's class, or were there adults in there, too, or teenagers or whatever?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, that I don't remember. I would imagine it was just people my age. [00:26:00]

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And was it life class or what? Did they put still lifes—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, there must have been a life class; otherwise I wouldn't have had the figure drawings. But at the time—and maybe this is why I wasn't looking at the famous paintings at the museum either, was because my idea was to be a commercial artist. And so what I studied, whether it was at the Cooper School or wherever else I might have gone, it was commercial art. I had illustration classes, and I saved illustrations out of magazines. I was going to—first, I was going to be an animator because of Walt Disney and watching all the cartoons and everything on TV. I wanted to be an animator. And so it was either cartoons or illustration. It was some form of commercial art.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, were you aware of what we might call a fine artist—of what at the time was—I mean, was that a distinction for you?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, when I got to high school, and when I had art classes in high school, then that was presented. The high school art teacher was very good, and would introduce us to fine art, but not in an overbearing way or anything. It was just, you got introduced to it somehow.

AVIS BERMAN: I don't know if she or he showed reproductions from the Cleveland Museum—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, I'm sure she—

AVIS BERMAN: —or—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —did, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: —you know, the Metropolitan Museum. Did you have field trips to the Cleveland Museum in your art class?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I don't remember field trips in high school, no.

AVIS BERMAN: [00:28:00] By the way, the reason I got very [interested] about the Cooper School is that I work on Roy Lichtenstein, and he lived in Cleveland in the '50s, and he taught there for a while.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, he did?

AVIS BERMAN: Right. But that's why—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Hmm.

AVIS BERMAN: —I wondered when you went. It would have been—you went a little bit after he was gone.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, yeah, I would have gone in the late '50s.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And he left Cleveland in '57.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, so it's probably—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —not—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. But that was a school—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —didn't cross paths.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. It was a school really well known for cartooning there, because Hal Cooper was a cartoonist, who founded it.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, that I didn't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I don't know if it's still there or not, but—

AVIS BERMAN: It's not.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It's not?

AVIS BERMAN: I'm always looking for people who went to the Cooper School, so [laughs] I'm interested to—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I can show you a catalogue that has a grade card from the Cooper School, of mine.

AVIS BERMAN: How were your grades there?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, the thing I like about this card is that it only says—I have to get out—look at it exactly. It's in one of my catalogues, which I don't even think is here. But it says, "Life."

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: That's all. And then it says, "A."

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Or, "A-plus," or something.

AVIS BERMAN: Perfect.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And so I think that's a really great object.

AVIS BERMAN: It is. Really, you knew you wanted to be an artist from—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —day one.

AVIS BERMAN: —day one, or pretty early on, or your parents saw you drawing, and it was okay. And in school, were you the class artist? Did you do—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, sure.

AVIS BERMAN: —the decorations—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, sure.

AVIS BERMAN: —on the chalkboard?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But even before that, in grade school, the next-door neighbor, who I also liked a lot, was an older guy, and he was a commercial artist, or

some kind of commercial artist. I don't know exactly what. But he had a workshop out in the back of the house, and he made me a horse's thing to ride on. You know, a stick with a head. And the head was all painted the way he—he did a lot of that kind of stuff. And I was always over there looking at what he was doing, and he was very, very encouraging, I guess.

AVIS BERMAN: He was a mentor.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm sure he was. Mr. Anderson. And so apparently, one day I guess my mother came over, because they're right next door, you know. And I had been doing something with him—I don't know, maybe making a drawing with him or something—and my mother reports this story that he said, "Oh, well, you look like you should be an artist," and I went, "Well, natch."

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And so I was eight or nine or whatever, and I said, "Of course, I'm going to be an artist." "Natch" was the word that we—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —the vernacular at the time. And so there was no question in my mind that that's what was going to happen.

AVIS BERMAN: You had interest in art, of course, and reading. Were there other things that interested you? I mean, in terms of school, or outside of school?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, almost nothing in school interested me at all. The only class that I really cared about was art, and I liked the English classes. Because I liked books, and the house was always filled with

magazines. [00:32:02] My grandfather was a big reader. The whole family on my mother's side were big readers, so there were always books and magazines and everything to read all the time.

AVIS BERMAN: And just—and blended in as part of a life and—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —the things were around. So—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: And were you looking—in all of these magazines, did you used to look at the illustrations in them, or, you know, anything like that? I don't even know if they read the *Saturday Evening Post*—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, yes. Definitely. The *Saturday Evening Post*, all of them. *Collier's, Life*—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Because—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —all of them.

AVIS BERMAN: Because—now, that's the other question, is that I—we'll get to this trip to Disneyland, which I know was important, but I wondered if you ever thought about being a magazine illustrator.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, eventually, yes. When I was still in high school and during that period, I would save cartoons out of the *Saturday Evening Post* and the rest of them. I would cut out the cartoons and save them, because I was going to be a cartoonist or an animator, and then I would also save the illustrations. And to this day, I love those illustrations.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But anyway, I would go through the magazines and save things out of them that were art.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And did you put them on your walls? I mean, did you put them in files, or did you paste them up on the walls?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I had a closet, kind of a walk-in closet, where I had my record player—because there were always lots of records and music around, too. [00:34:06] So I had my own records, the story records that they would buy me, or whatever kind of records I had. And so I had a little walk-in closet where the record player was, and then I would paste up the pictures of Gene Autry or comic book covers or whatever, you know. I had tons of comic books, and I was always encouraged to read and be an artist.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So they didn't censor comic books or anything. They—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No.

AVIS BERMAN: —saw it as reading.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: [Inaudible.] Just briefly, to go back to music, did your parents take you, or did they used to go, to the Cleveland Symphony?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I'm sure they went periodically. I don't think I ever went with them.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And also in terms of your art education, did you ever go to the—now it's called the Cleveland Institute of Art; I think then it was called the Cleveland School of Art.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I did take some classes there, yeah. I don't remember exactly when,

but I do remember taking something there.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. I think you went to most, probably all, of the major art schools in the area on some level. You took something there.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, even before that, just in Brecksville, not only the neighbor

next door, but my first art lessons were from a local artist who decided rather than having—he could have been

an excellent illustrator. [00:36:00] That over there is one of his works. And he could have been a very good illustrator, but he apparently decided to teach and to live in Brecksville and have a different kind of life. And so when I was even probably in grade school, you know, he would teach me things.

AVIS BERMAN: And what was his name?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: His name was Roy Schraff.

AVIS BERMAN: S?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: S—what is it? Roy Schraff. S-C-H-R-A-F-F, I believe.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Roy Schraff. And so those were probably the first things I ever did, was to, you know, take lessons from him.

AVIS BERMAN: And just when—because you pointed to an image. It's a portrait of a woman. It looks like it's in pastel—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: She's a dancer with the Cleveland Ballet.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Okay. Well, she certainly has the carriage for it. You can see it in the posture. Okay, I just wanted to describe it since—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right. Sure.

AVIS BERMAN: —you really had a loaded background, if you know what I mean.

Now, why don't we—because you mentioned it, and I don't want to—sometimes I do have to ask you questions you've answered in other interviews, because we have to have it for this one. But was it when you were eight years old that your family went to California and to Disneyland? Or was it—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, I was 11. We went in 1956. Disneyland opened in '55, and that's when Walt Disney had his program on TV, and we had a TV by then. [00:38:00] And so I got—well, it's a combination of things. But obviously, I watched all of that, and I learned about the fact that Disneyland had the Art Corner [store], where it was all about animation, and it seems to me I sent away for the books. But the idea of going to Disneyland was going to heaven.

And also my father's brother, who was the one who played in the big bands, then he went in the service, of course, for World War II, and when he came out of the service, he said the music had left him. And if you know the history of jazz, then it went from swing—he was a part of the swing generation—then, when [he] came out, it was bebop and more modern jazz, and so he didn't get it. He missed that link there. And so he got out and said that the music had left him. Which is a very common story about musicians in that period. And so he settled in San Jose, California, and met somebody there, and she already had some kids, and he took a job selling water—you know, the water conditioners or—

AVIS BERMAN: Water coolers or—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, not water coolers.

AVIS BERMAN: —purifiers?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: There were called "conditioners," water conditioners, or something. [00:40:00] They were like some kind of new—what's the word? Some kind of water heater that, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —that—

AVIS BERMAN: Water heater's fine.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It's just some kind of water heater, conditioner, something. And so he lived out there in San Jose. And so the trip was first to go to LA and to Disneyland and all of that, and then to go up to San Jose to see him. But the primary thing was to go to Southern California and go to Disneyland and see LA and all of that.

So that's when I was probably—I was 11. That was '56. Eleven or 12. And that never left. That stuck, you know. That stuck in there forever. And so from that point on, there was never any question in my mind what exactly I

was going to do as soon as I could. And as soon as I could get out of high school, the better, and get out there.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. In other words, you were taken not merely with Disneyland but with Southern California—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —with Los—I mean, as an 11-year-old, what—I mean, can you reconstruct the greater environment that swept you away?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I have a scrapbook that I made from that trip, which I still have, which was of great interest to the curators at the Walker, because I saved everything, from the airline ticket to the sugar packet, to the Disneyland postcards, to the pictures of Grauman's Chinese [Theatre]. I mean, everywhere we went from that trip was preserved in this—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well—so, of course, it's a great historical document of LA at a certain time.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: But it's also—I mean, I'm sure they just loved it because it sort of bears out what you just said about staying there, but it's also—I mean, I haven't seen what it looks like, but I imagine they can find the DNA for a lot of later projects—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: —in that scrapbook.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I'm sure they could, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: Because that is how art historians think.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Well, no, it's definitely in there. And you know, I was focused on being a commercial artist and—

AVIS BERMAN: Your grades were clearly good enough to get into a school. Now, your parents were okay with you going to California? Did they want you to go elsewhere? How did they feel about you going away across country and all?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I think that they probably already knew that that's what I was going to do, because at a certain point in high school—I don't know, junior year or whatever—then the parents have to sit you down and say, "Well, what are you going to do now, son?" And so at that time I said, "Well, I'm going to California." And they said, "Well, I guess we kind of knew that."

And so there was no—I mean, obviously, they were a little freaked out about it, I suppose. That's 2,500 miles away, and I knew nobody out there. But I got accepted at Chouinard, thanks to the high school art teacher who turned me onto either the San Francisco Art Institute or to Chouinard. And my grades were good enough. [00:44:01] I never had good grades. I had probably a C average or something like that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I guess we should record this art teacher's name since she does loom important, really, retrospectively at least, since she helped you get into schools—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Mrs. Ruth Wagner.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. Well, I mean, you must have told her, "I want to go to California"—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —and she supported that.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, she said, "Well, there's these schools out there," you know. And so, yeah, I'm sure that she was a big help, because every time I would come back home to see the family, a lot of times I would go and see her, or I would go with my mom. And like I say, we went to this early condo where she, when she retired, moved into. And so I kept in touch with her.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Nice imagery there. So you got in there. Did you have to support yourself? Were your

parents going to help pay for this? I'm always interested—and this will be a leitmotif as we go along—how artists survive, because, especially in the work you were doing, you know, it wasn't about—a lot of your work would have inherently been unsalable.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AVIS BERMAN: So I'll be asking you that—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AVIS BERMAN: —a little bit as we go along—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AVIS BERMAN: —because it's just—you know, how people make do in this world—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AVIS BERMAN: —and artists are not necessarily wanted. So anyway, you were going there.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, one of the great advantages, outside of the fact that I got accepted—you had to make a portfolio, and you had to have something that you did here and there, and then they gave you a little assignment to do. [00:46:02] You know, draw your favorite thing or something like that. And so it was really not much, but it was, I guess, good.

AVIS BERMAN: What was your drawing style before you went to Chouinard?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, it was kind of half-animated, half-commercial. If you look at early cartoon styles, you can see how they draw trees, and *Mad* magazine—I would copy things out of *Mad* magazine and comic books, you know, so it was half cartoon drawing and half illustrational style. So anyway, we had to complete this portfolio, and I got in, no problem. But one of the advantages was that at that time Walt Disney paid half of your education.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, how fantastic.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: So for every semester, what my parents paid was matched by the Disney Foundation, and so it made it doable, although even that was a kind of a stretch for them even though [tuition –AR] was nothing, really, compared to what it is today.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, no, that's true, but just a lot of times—I mean, so many people went to OSU [Ohio State University] because, you know, the tuition was so low for in-state—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —and it was—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —a good school.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, there was never any question of any of that stuff, because I would have had nothing to do with it.

AVIS BERMAN: Well—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, high school was bad enough. The idea of going to college and what it represented was just out of the question.

AVIS BERMAN: So I guess I should ask you, when you were in high school, did you feel—did you rebel?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, sure.

AVIS BERMAN: [00:48:00] Let's talk about that for a minute or two.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Sure. Well, I mean, "rebel" is [laughs]—you know, I didn't steal cars and wind up in juvie or anything.

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But there were incidences. And, of course, I had the Elvis ducktail haircut, and the clothes, and all of that that they didn't quite appreciate. Smoking cigarettes and—

AVIS BERMAN: Sort of the James Dean, Brando model.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: James Dean was the model.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: James Dean was the big hero. Oh, I loved James Dean. And to this day, *Giant* is one of my favorite movies, and also *Rebel Without a Cause*, of course. Or all three of them—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —*East of Eden*, too. But, no, James Dean was the model, and so

I ran around with the greaser types, and also I ran around with kids who were older than me, because they could already drive. And we would go [to] downtown Cleveland at night, exploring and going to clubs or whatever. We had fake IDs; we could get into burlesque shows and dance clubs and drink 3.2 beer and—you know, so we did all of that, which they knew nothing about—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —of course. And then I got my own license, and that's a whole other—that's the next step after that. But even before, my older friends from downtown Cleveland and from neighboring communities, neighboring towns—you know, how I met these people I have no idea, but, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —I did.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, if you want to hang out, you will find those people.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: That's true. [00:50:00] That's true. And so I did find them, and I found a few of them in my own class, too, not too many, but there were a few. So that was my side of the tracks, to rebel. I did have to go to court one time. The police came to the door and said, "Your son was doing this, and here's a warrant for him," and blah, blah, blah, and that really did not go over.

AVIS BERMAN: Did that scare you or stop you?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No. Uh-uh [negative]. No. I mean, it was just—it's just part of the game.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I mean, it was no big deal. My father was not happy, of course, because we had to go to court. And I don't know, it had something to do with stealing tires and wrecking somebody's backyard or some—just kind of suburban, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: Kids acting out.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Kids acting out. And rock and roll and James Dean and all of that. So my father had to go to court, but it really showed me something, because they tried to really kind of pin stuff on me that really was not correct. And my father stood up for my side of the argument, even as far as not getting my hair cut. You know, "Well, if that's what you want to do, you have to be aware that this is not going to go over well," and all of that. But so they really stuck up for me.

And I think that that's a very important thing. They always supported my idea of being an artist. "If that's what you're good at, and that's what you like to do, then we will support that." [00:52:01] And I had a very disciplined regimen. You know, I could not go out to play until I spent two hours doing something around that, either drawing, reading, something serious.

AVIS BERMAN: Was that imposed by you or by them?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: By them. And particularly Dad, I think.

AVIS BERMAN: Was this before or after your arrest, or was that just your routine?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, no, it was before.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. This was—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: This was much before.

AVIS BERMAN: —your routine?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: The arrest—that came, like, in the late part of high school, you know, when you're 15, 16.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Fifteen is the age where it all starts. You know, up until 15, at least in those years, you were still kind of in between being a kid and—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —trying to negotiate high school and all of that. But I gave up on all of that when I was about 15, and I didn't have to do much. I could breeze through the classes without really having to do much, and that's all I cared about, was getting through them.

AVIS BERMAN: Was there a general urge to conform in high school? I mean, did you feel that? Was that a particularly onerous thing?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, I just ignored it. I had no interest in what they were doing, nor did I care. And so whatever they were doing was [laughs], you know—I was not part of them, and they knew it, and I knew it, and I didn't care anyway.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, so we're back to art school. And you sort of—you have a half-tuition grant from Disney. And how—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Not just me. I mean—

AVIS BERMAN: Every—well, right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: [00:54:00] I think everybody had that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And did you have to enter, almost as a major, commercial or illustration or animation? Or I know from Pratt, because my sister went there, that originally—actually, she went in as painting, but eventually she changed and became an illustrator, so she—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Hmm. Well, the way that Chouinard was organized was that the first year, you took a variety of classes, a little bit of everything. My first class that I had was a drawing class, and then we had a design class, and then we had a materials and methods class, which was playing with plaster and stuff like that. And I don't know, maybe there were some art history classes thrown in there. So you had to take this general assortment of classes, and then the second year, you could have a little bit more choice. I don't remember exactly how that part worked, but after the second year, then you could declare a major, and they evaluated you after the second year, that either you should go or maybe you should just leave school and do something else.

So you knew that that second year was a big deal, because they could say, "Well, you know, you should—you can stay, but you should have an extra drawing class," or whatever, or, "Just forget it." And so then, after that, you decided on what you wanted to do. [00:56:01]

AVIS BERMAN: And were you enjoying Chouinard?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, I loved it. I thought I had died and gone to heaven, not only because of Chouinard, but because I was in LA, and LA at that time was ground zero for everything that came after, you know. As far as countercultural stuff, LA was it, LA and San Francisco, which I went back and forth between all the time.

But somewhere in the second year I was required to take an illustration class. I don't know if I'd really decided to be an illustrator, but I had to take this illustration class, because drawing was the most important thing at the school at the time. You had to know how to draw. And so I took this illustration class, and one of the things in the illustration class was a plein-air painting class. So we would go out into, I don't know, Santa Monica Canyon or somewhere, wherever we went, and paint, and that was the first painting class I ever had. And once that started, that was it. It was like, Okay, this is what I really want to do. I want to be a painter; I want to be an artist, this

kind of an artist.

And so then, at the same time, I began to meet other people in the fine arts department, other artists or other students in the fine arts department. And so it was a kind of a turning point right there, even before I got to the second year, where you made up your mind. [00:58:02] And so by that time, I already knew that after that painting class—it was all laid out after that.

AVIS BERMAN: So you thought you would be a painter.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: You had two choices at school at that time. You either were a painter or you were a sculptor, and I wound up doing both, actually.

AVIS BERMAN: Of course.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And so that's what I thought I was going to be when I came out, was a painter. I mean, there was a lot of stuff in between there, obviously—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. We're going to—yeah, let's talk about some of the important teachers that you had at Chouinard.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, the drawing teachers, like I say, were so important. And those drawing teachers came from two areas. One of them was the Jepson School of Art. Herb Jepson was a well-known local artist who had his own school for a while, I guess simultaneously with Chouinard. But by the time I got there, his school was gone, and a lot of the teachers were then at Chouinard. But he was an incredible draftsman, and so a lot of these drawing teachers were in that style of the Herb Jepson, kind of Surrealist, Abstract Expressionist kind of drawing, but all focused on the figure, realist stuff, basically, and not so much Abstract Expressionism. Mostly he and his school of people were kind of more realist-oriented, figurative people. [01:00:05]

And then the other side was ex-Disney animators, people who used to work [there], and taught drawing, or actually were animators or something at Disney Studios. So we had all kinds of drawing, but the focus was really—you didn't get out of there unless you knew how to draw. And so that was important, those drawing teachers. And then the design teacher was very influential.

AVIS BERMAN: And who was that?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, I don't know if I can remember his name. But the design class was really—that's in the commercial side.

AVIS BERMAN: Was it like industrial design, or was it—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, it was graphic design. And I really liked that class, but it was extremely difficult. All the classes were difficult.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It wasn't easy.

AVIS BERMAN: No, because I think they really—it was a professional school.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right. Exactly, yeah. So you learned it. And then when it came to the fine art part of it, the person who probably was most influential, in a number of ways—because they had some basic painting teachers, kind of just hacks to teach basics and stuff like that, but then we had Emerson Woelffer as a painting teacher. [01:02:00] And so when I got into Emerson Woelffer's class, that's where I really learned what it was to be a painter and how I wanted to be a painter and my influences and all of that. So you would put down Emerson Woelffer, for sure.

And then there were other people that came and went, you know, like Frederick Hammersley, who was a hard-edge painter. And then we had contemporary art history with John Coplans, and he would bring local artists like Joe Goode and other people to give talks, and he would introduce us to contemporary stuff. So you had a real kind of cross-section, and of course, you had a good library and—

AVIS BERMAN: So I should just check—you entered, what? In September—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: In '62.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Okay. So you're also beginning to, shall we say, be exposed to, or think about, what we really would call contemporary art.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right. Right. After a couple years at Chouinard, or a year and a half, or whatever, I realized a couple of things. One is that I realized, I don't like these teachers of commercial art—because they had people who were professional art directors and things come and teach classes.

And I realized, I don't think I really even like these people, and I certainly don't like the kids that I'm in here with. [01:04:00] And then when I began to kind of find out who was in the fine art department and what this was about, then I thought, These are the people that I like. These are people who are like me.

AVIS BERMAN: So even the commercial student sensibility was alien to you, too?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah. I didn't have any, really, relationship with them. And one of the standout events was—like I say, these were art directors who came in and gave classes. And one class, the teacher would take us to his studio where he worked, or the advertising agency. We would go around to the agencies and see these things and everything.

And one time he gave the class an assignment for an advertisement for a bank, and so I did my little advertisement, and he just raved about it. He thought this was just the best thing he'd ever seen, and he showed it all around the class and talked about it all the time. And then, months later, that idea showed up on a billboard in LA. He had taken it.

AVIS BERMAN: He had stolen it.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: He had stolen it that idea and used it in an ad. And I thought, Okay, if this is the way it is, I don't want anything to do with this. And I don't think I'm exaggerating.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I suppose you didn't confront him or—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, no. No, I just—

AVIS BERMAN: Was it—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It was enough.

AVIS BERMAN: No, it was pointless.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It was clear that this is the way this world worked, this commercial world worked. [01:06:00] And also that the students—I remember one student that I guess I became kind of friends with, he said, "Well, I'm going to New York over the summer. I'm going to be working in this club in Greenwich Village, and why don't you come by? If you're in New York, you come by, and we'll do stuff," and blah, blah, blah.

So I did happen—I went back to Brecksville, and one of my high school friends and I drove to New York. And I said, "Oh, well, I know this guy, you know. We'll go down and see him in the Village, and we'll see what goes on." And so we went down there, and I found him, and he was like "Oh, hi, how are you doing? Bye." And I thought, Oh, fuck you. You know? I mean, if this is what it's about—so that just kind of—those events just opened up the picture of who these people were and what kind of world they lived in, and I thought, No, thank you.

And then, at the same time, I began to see artworks in the Chouinard gallery that I thought, Well, what is that? You know, what are those things there that they're making? And there was enough curiosity to then make me go and start to find out who these people were that made these sculptures and paintings that were in the—

AVIS BERMAN: Who were they?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, one was Doug Wheeler, who became a friend of mine.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Is still a friend of mine to this day. Doug was a couple years ahead of me, or a year and a half or something ahead of me. And I remember seeing his sculpture exhibit in the Chouinard gallery and thinking, What on earth is that? And so that's one of the things that I remember that started me looking somewhere else. And then, ultimately, we became friends.

But there were many other people who were not in the commercial world or were in the kind of transition like me. [01:08:02] One of them is Terry Allen, who is still one of my best friends. Terry came from Lubbock, Texas; the only thing he knew was commercial art too.

So there was a number of us there that were kind of finding our way, and then there were other ones, more sophisticated kids from Beverly Hills or other places in LA, that were already painters and that you got to know.

You know, there was such a mix of people there that it didn't take me too long to figure out that I didn't belong with these commercial types. And Rick Griffin was there, the poster artist, Rick, who became one of the premier poster artists in San Francisco. Rick was there. And there were just all kinds of people, but they were in the fine art department. They weren't in this commercial—

AVIS BERMAN: And by the time you graduated, what did your painting look like?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I was pretty much in the Minimal, stained-canvas kind of world.

AVIS BERMAN: So, color fields?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Color Field, kind of, yes, the Morris Louis kind of—a cross between Color Field and Minimalism.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But with paint on canvas.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And so when I got—

AVIS BERMAN: So you were a nonrepresentational—an abstract painter?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right. I was an abstract painter. [01:10:00] And we opened a gallery. Because the last year or so at school nobody ever went anyway, and one or two of the faculty helped, basically, Terry Allen and I and a few other students open our own cooperative gallery, as a transition from school to the real art world. Because that is the hard transition, from school to out of school.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And what was the gallery called?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It was called Gallery 66, because it was opened in 1966. And so we ran this cooperative gallery with the blessings of a couple of the faculty.

AVIS BERMAN: And was this on campus?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, no. There was no campus. It was just a couple of buildings by MacArthur Park. I mean, the campus was just the streets of LA. Campus being, essentially, MacArthur Park, I guess you would say. Because Otis was on one end of MacArthur Park, and Chouinard was on the other end. And so that whole area was the campus for everybody, I guess. And then we opened the gallery in Hollywood. It was on Western and Melrose. And we ran that as a way of our last years, our last periods, of being in school. We were running this cooperative gallery, and so it was a good transition. We ran it for, I don't know, a year, year and a half, something like that.

And we each had a couple of shows. I had my abstract painting-slash-sculpture works, because it was kind of—I was influenced by the painted sculptures coming out of London at the time, and also the kind of painting, that New York School kind of—you know. [01:12:02]

AVIS BERMAN: What did the sculpture look like?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It was painted wood sculpture. Very much in the kind of genre of what was going on then, in the '60s, as far as that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So that's—I mean, as it would. Because you were a student, it would kind of look like other people's art.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, sure.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. You know, you were trying to emulate what was going on, to try to arrive at something that was yours.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: So—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: But it's interesting, though. Was it—"wrenching" might be too strong a word, but here you were,

always tied to the rendering of things, of realistic things, and then you not just went abstract, but you expunged, possibly—I mean, because I haven't seen the work—traces of—you know, you didn't make recognizable things in this work.

Was that difficult for you? I don't know if you've thought about it, or just something you were trying, but you really went from one way to another. I mean, you did in your life, and of course, that would be reflected in the work. But I was curious if you ever had a kind of a—you know, in which there would have been objects or figures, but done in a more abstract way?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I think it comes from the early plein-air painting class, where I'm not trying to render trees. You know, I'm painting. I still have that painting, because I gave it to my parents, and it's in Cleveland now. And it's not the same kind of drawing. It's drawing with paint.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. [01:14:00] No, you were [painting –AB] direct.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And so it's a very easy transition, because then I began to paint kind of Rauschenbergian style and paint license plates and, you know—so I never thought of that before, actually. I never thought about that transition before, but I can see that it probably began right there at that first painting class, and then just, as you go through into Emerson's class and you get thinking about color and him being a very good Abstract Expressionist—and we knew that. We knew he was a real artist, as against some of the other ones who were hacks, and so he had a particular influence.

And he told me later, after I was out of school, or just at the end of school or something—because I kept in touch with him, and we would go to his house periodically for dinner and whatever—he told me one time—he said, in the classroom, in the atmosphere of the class and what we were doing in the class, "I just left you alone, because I thought you were doing just fine. I didn't really need to do very much. You were just over there doing your work. You were doing things, and so I didn't really—I just kind of left you alone."

I would listen to everything he had to say, of course, but I knew what I was doing at that time. [01:16:06] And it was a transition between more painting landscape to a kind of world of Rauschenberg and—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. In the LA art world, I don't know what you're going to see there. Are you going to Ferus Gallery? What are you seeing—what's being shown that maybe had an impact? [. . . –AB] In other words, maybe this is also the first time you're seeing Abstract Expressionism or Pop or—you said Minimalism. What were you seeing?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, Ferus was a little bit before my time, because I was still in the commercial mindset. So I went to the later Ferus, but not to the early Ferus. Because I wasn't in that world yet. But once I was in that world, then we had the Pasadena Museum—the new Pasadena Museum, the Pasadena Museum of Contemporary Art—where they had a big Warhol show, and they had—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, they had—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: —the big Duchamp show, too.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: That was in the old Pasadena Museum.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, but that—well, that didn't—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: That was before my time.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well, yeah, because I thought that that was in the mid- to late '60s.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, it was '63, I think.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: [Inaudible.]

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, and you wouldn't have gone to that show.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah. See, maybe it was even—I have the poster from it. I think it was—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —'63. Some of my friends remember going there; like Terry Allen went there, but I was not there yet. So I didn't see that. But in the new Pasadena Museum, the kind of turning point came at the Pasadena Museum during Frank Stella's show. [01:18:00] Because that's when I had been out of school for, I don't know, six or eight months and was continuing this painting, trying to figure out how to be a painter and what you should make, et cetera. And then—I've told this story a number of times, of going to Frank Stella's show at the Pasadena Museum, which was the Protractors [series]. And it was a fantastic show.

I mean, those are still great works. They just had them at the Whitney, and they still look just as good as ever. And I looked at those things and realized that I'm in the wrong ballgame here, that this is his ballgame; he knows what he's doing, and I do not. I can appreciate that these are really great paintings, and this is a mark of somebody who knows what they're doing. And so I'd better go back to myself, and all of these influences of being a painter are just not what I should be doing.

That's a fairly typical thing, that when you get out of art school, you have to unlearn everything. You learn everything, but you have to then get rid of it. And so that was the point where I had to—essentially, you begin again, and you can't really do that when you're in school, although now school is a very different story, and I don't think a very good one.

AVIS BERMAN: Why is that?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Because they're taught how to be professionals. [01:20:00] And it's [a] big, long kind of discussion about what's wrong with them. But you were not taught to be a perfect—you were taught to be a professional, but not in the way that they do now,

where these kids expect to have shows and everything the minute they get out of school. They start working on who they are and what kind of art they're going to make years before they even get out of school. They're so overexposed to this idea of being a professional artist.

Part of it is the problems of the art world that we all know. They don't do the same thing that we did, where you go to school, you learn all this stuff, and maybe it continues on, and maybe it doesn't. And so in my case, it didn't. It was very clear, looking at those Protractor paintings that—because I was just on the verge of making kind of a sculptural painting object, and just made sense to me that this was not me.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Okay, so you're out of school. Now, where are you? Where were you living? I'm guessing your—do your parents keep supporting you once you're done with school, or like what—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No.

AVIS BERMAN: —are you doing to maintain yourself here, or—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, even when I was in school, I had a job—at least one job, anyway—to help. And so I would go and process checks at the Bank of America at night for a while or—I don't know what other things I did, but then when I got out of school, then I had to try and earn a living. I mean, they would help me a little bit. "Okay, well, you need to buy a car. Here's a couple hundred dollars."

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: "Go buy a car." Stuff like that. But when I got out of school, I took a job as a night janitor at Chouinard. I thought it was a pretty good job, because I didn't have to be there until four o'clock in the afternoon, which gave me all morning and afternoon to work in my studio, and then I could go hang out at Chouinard and tell the work-study students what to do, and so that was a pretty good job. I had that for a year or two, a year and a half or something like that, and then I worked in a nightclub in Hollywood, where I would go in at four or five in the afternoon and clean the place up. And there was nobody there; I was just there to clean it. You know, vacuum and whatever. So I had that job for a while, and—I don't know, you just make it up as you go along.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I'm just curious, because I don't think that you—maybe I missed something, but you didn't teach ever—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No.

AVIS BERMAN: —that I could tell. That's what I was looking for. You know, sometimes people get teaching jobs. But—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, later I would take visiting artist jobs.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I would take visiting artist jobs, which were actually quite good. Because they would take you to different parts of the country, and it was—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, usually they treated you pretty well, too.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And you got paid pretty decently, and you didn't have to work too hard. And so eventually, after I had some kind of a beginning reputation, then I would be offered these visiting artist things, which was—that was really the only way I taught until 10, 15 years ago. [01:24:06]

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Now, you have realized your—okay, post-Frank Stella. You're going back into yourself. Are you aware that there is such a thing, say, as Conceptual art? When does this swim into your [ken –AB]? Did people know what they were doing? I know Sol LeWitt, I think, coined the term, but when that happened, I don't know. You begin to think about doing something else, and are there other people doing this? I'm trying to see how it happened that you began. I think maybe—do you consider your first significant piece *23 Pieces*?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I would say, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So I kind of want to get you from painting to doing that in which, even though you're making this, somebody—whether purposeful or not, you have someone else take the photographs, too. So—but let's talk about Sol [LeWitt]—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, even before *23* or *24 Pieces*, you know, when you start over—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —like that, there was no such thing. I mean, Sol LeWitt's Conceptual art statements are part of what we were all learning at the time, and so you began to meet people that were trying to do the same thing as you, because when you say, "I'm not going to be a painter," then you have to think of what you are going to do. And Conceptual art comes out of being a sculptor. [01:26:00] Bruce Nauman is a sculptor—I mean, you can name everybody pretty much.

It was a big umbrella at the time, and so whether you were kind of a Post-Minimalist sculptor, whether—these were all names that came later, of course, all of this kind of Post-Minimalist, Conceptual, performance, Earth art, blah, blah, blah—it was all being germinated at the same time. And so in my own development, it was like, Okay, I'm not a painter; I'm not a sculptor, in the traditional sense anyway. So you begin to invent other ways of thinking about art.

And you go back to early influences, whether it's—your influences change. Like, if it's not painting, then what is it? And so then you find out about Fluxus; you find out about Allan Kaprow; you find out about early Rauschenberg, *Erased de Kooning Drawing*. You go to the galleries, and you see if there's anything there. And so we had—not Ferus, but—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, there was—not Nick Wilder?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, Nick Wilder was a very big influence on me.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But, no. What's the other one? They just had a big show of a history of her.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, Virginia Dwan?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, the Dwan Gallery. The Dwan Gallery, in Westwood. I would go there, and I would see things that I recognized as the kind of Neo-Dada work that it had or whatever. [01:28:06] And Pop art, and it was all a mix. It was all a huge mix of Pop and Minimalism and Post—what became known as Post-Studio. And so it was all a very organic kind of evolution that you and your peers were doing at the same time. And so then I would meet Wally Berman.

You know, I would meet Wallace Berman, and that was a big deal, because I had discovered his work and loved his work, and he was the first artist I ever really went up to and said, "I really like your work, and I think you're—a big fan of you." I saw him at a party and went up to him. It was—and he was a very gracious man. You know, he was so kind and decent about that. That has stuck with me all these years.

AVIS BERMAN: And—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: So you begin to find these people. And so it maybe isn't necessarily Conceptual, but it is

in that it's neither painting nor sculpture. It's more literary; it's more influenced by Dada and other things that then became what really was a starting point.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, of course, because you have to find something—if it's something recognizable, it means that somebody else already made it, so—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: You're looking for a way to make something that nobody knows.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And it's my generation also that really picked up where Duchamp left off. [01:30:03] He had not become the godhead that he is now, with five million books out there. It was really kind of a pick-up of not just Duchamp himself, but him being a leader of people and work that was done in the '20s, 40 years later, and then you follow the trail from there up to where you are, and these things just open up.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it seems to me—and correct me—is that when you also at some point decided or learned that in making this new synthesis, that your subject matter—besides being autobiographical—that your subject was going to be LA.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, it was a combination of when you're starting over, what's the first thing you think of? You think of, Well, who I am—where did I come from? Who am I? You know, what did I do as a kid? And then you're looking around at where you are, and LA was fascinating for all of us who came from somewhere else. And so LA became a subject for a lot of people. And so it's a mix of autobiography and growing up in Ohio, in the Midwest, and this transition to LA, and what LA was, and—

AVIS BERMAN: Where does the Midwest come in in your work? [I think Allen Ruppersberg misheard "Midwest" and thought I said "Minimalist." –AB]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, even before the *23*, *24 Pieces*, or at least simultaneously—and you will see these at the Walker; they've rounded up some of them for the Walker—they were aquariums that they kind of looked like Larry Bell boxes at the time. [01:32:05] They had chrome sides, a chrome top with a little light in them. They were very much a kind of Minimalist object. It's kind of clear how it went from sculpture into these things when you see the works lined up and you see the trail.

And so I started using these aquariums, because they looked like Larry Bell boxes, and they had a finish to them. They had a kind of industrial look to them, which was Minimalist in context. But at the same time, when I was growing up, I always had aquariums that I kept frogs in. I would go and catch frogs and make little houses for them in aquariums, and make drawings and put it on the back so they had a background. It was like making dioramas. I essentially made little dioramas with live frogs and turtles and all kinds of animals. And so then I began to fill these Larry Bell boxes with things that I was finding out in nature, because those were the days of psychedelics and going onto the desert and out to the world and looking at nature.

But it's also the whole Robert Smithson thing, and all of this Earth art. It's all in this big mix. [01:34:00] And so I kind of took the childhood aquariums and turned them into Larry Bell boxes with the outside in, rather than making things in a studio and presenting them. It was the reverse, you know. And so those then led to the *23 Pieces*, because I was constantly traveling all around LA, looking at things and finding things.

I guess I've always collected things. Even as a kid, I would go out in the woods and collect things and bring them home, and collect comic books or—you know, so it's a form of collection and saving things and putting them in these Minimalist boxes.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: So those are the earliest works.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. So the *23 Pieces*—it's almost as if you were collecting these pieces of hotel rooms and maybe Griffith Park or other things in there. Actually, it's almost as if you frame them—I mean, the photographs look like set pieces, or that they're framed. And it looks as if you try to make it conspicuously not art, or not arty —

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, absolutely.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, I think that was—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That was part of it. You were not making art. You were doing something else that you called art.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Because, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, also you were an artist, so vis-à-vis Duchamp—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —what you say is Art, is art.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Exactly. But nobody else thought it was art.

AVIS BERMAN: No, no. But—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But that's what made it attractive. That's where the rebellion comes in. That's where the real rebellion comes in. But the rebellion starts when you're a kid. Most everybody I knew at Chouinard was completely rebellious. [01:36:00] Not in the commercial side where I was, but when I got into the fine arts, where I found my real peers, they all were the same.

AVIS BERMAN: Of course.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It's all really rebellious types.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, especially if you came from a middle-class background—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —and this is what society—society expected you to be A or B, and you were going to be X, at the very least. I mean, rebellion was a natural part of creativity—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: That's right.

AVIS BERMAN: —from what you're talking about, especially because, in some ways—I mean, you had an encouraging family, but let's face it, roles were a lot more set for people in those days, male/female. Now, meanwhile, Chouinard—are there any women there?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, there's women there.

AVIS BERMAN: —are you—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Sure.

AVIS BERMAN: —friends with any of them?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Sure.

AVIS BERMAN: And are there any, then, that you have a significant personal relationship with?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, lots of them, yeah. I just saw a show by Mary Corse that was in town here last week, or a couple weeks ago. Mary was there at Chouinard when we were there. And we've been friends. You know, not close friends—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —but associates, peers, colleagues over all these years, and so it's nice to see Mary's show there. I see her here and there periodically. And the fashion department was always a big part of Chouinard, so you were always aware of—

AVIS BERMAN: Just because so much feminist activity was going on. That was part of the foment when you were there, too. Not so much at Chouinard, but what—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: A little bit later.

AVIS BERMAN: But I meant, right, '69, '70, you know, in California—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —at the same time.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, the Women's Building actually was in the old Chouinard building. [01:38:00] When I first knew Judy Chicago, she was still doing the painted sculptures. She was still doing painted wood sculptures, and then she started the more performance kind of things, with the clouds of color and I forget what all. You know, some of that kind of stuff. And then she went into the hardcore stuff. But she was always around.

AVIS BERMAN: Did that interest you? Did that threaten you? Not her, per se, but the feminist art movement?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I wasn't particularly interested. I mean, it was fine. It was all part of what was going on, but it didn't particularly interest me. I mean, I never cared for *The Dinner Party*. Or—most people didn't [laughs]. So I was not alone there. But, no, that was kind of a separate sphere. I was more in the crowd of the performance, Conceptual—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Had you met Kaprow or seen any Happenings? Because you were certainly moving toward art as an event.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, one of the first projects that I did in that way is, of course, what everybody knows as *Al's Café*.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And that's where I met Allan Kaprow. He came, and Rauschenberg came, too. And so I got to know both of them by doing *Al's Café*. And so it was very much influenced by those people, and that's where I got to know them. [01:40:01]

AVIS BERMAN: All right. Well, that was great that they came and supported you.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Absolutely. That couldn't be better.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I think I want to wait till the next time, because once we start doing *Al's Bar* and the *Grand Hotel*—I mean, that's so big that that's going to take awhile—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: —to talk about. But I want to ask one little thing, and then I think we should probably just break.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Okay.

AVIS BERMAN: Which is that, at some point, are you feeling an inferiority complex because you're not in New York? Are you ignoring it? Or what is the pull of New York, and when do you begin to think about wanting to go on a regular basis? I know you got there about 1970, but I'm just wondering. Is this something that's in the back of your mind? I mean, that—because you're not—you're worried that you're not in New York. Is that something that's happening when you're a young artist?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, yes and no, in the fact that, as a young artist in LA at the time—two things. One is that you're beginning to meet people of your ilk. Like I met Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner and Bob Barry and Doug Huebler and all of these people that were coming out from New York, and Seth Siegelaub. And I met all of these people when they came to LA, because you were peers here. You were working on the same ideas.

And so they would come out and do a show in LA and be around a little bit. And you're aware of what is going on in New York, and it's all the same ballgame, and also in Europe, too. [01:42:03] And so there's that aspect, where you're converging on a similar kind of art idea, and then, at the same time, you knew and were aware that careers were made in New York. And so it's not till much later, until the mid-'80s, around the Mike Kelley era, the CalArts Mike Kelley era—the later part of Cal Arts—where it became viable to stay in LA and have a career. My generation knew that you had to go out and make it yourself in New York. You could not stay in LA and do that. So whether it was Michael Asher or myself or Jack Goldstein or Baldessari—I mean, all of us who knew each other—and Barry LeVa, et cetera. Barry had already moved to New York.

We knew that that's what you had to do. And at the same time, having grown up in Cleveland and explored Cleveland as a city, when I first could get away from grade school and take the bus downtown by myself and explore Cleveland as a city—then I became aware of New York City and always was interested in that as a place. But also because it's important [to] a career. [01:44:04] And your other artist peers are there, so there's something going on there, and you want to find out about it, so you go there.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, I think this is a good place to stop for today, and to be continued after Thanksgiving. So, thank you very much.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Sure, sure.

AVIS BERMAN: So I hope this wasn't too torturous.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, it's not torturous.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, so now we have to stop this.

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AVIS BERMAN: This is Avis Berman interviewing Allen Ruppersberg, for the Archives of American Art on November 30, 2017, in his studio in Brooklyn. Al, we left off about 1969, '70 last time, so we'll do the '70s and '80s today.

And I also want to go back; I have some housekeeping about things I didn't ask you about before. When you spoke about your ancestry, you pronounced your name—their name Ruppersberg [pronounced "Roopersberg"]. So are you—how do you pronounce your name?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Ruppersberg [pronounced "Roopersberg"].

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, because I did not—because, of course, in English a double P—I said "Ruppersberg," so I'm sorry. I mispronounced—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, well—

AVIS BERMAN: And, you know, you—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —[laughs] that's all right.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Okay, well, I just think we should have it on tape for—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well—

AVIS BERMAN: —what is correct.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, that's true. It should be correct. No, it's Ruppersberg, always has been.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Fine. You know, I just went according to English pronunciation with the double P, that it became short.

Now, we didn't talk about some of the people you interacted with in those years in California, and I want to kind of know what the relationship—what you did together and all that. And a name that came up is William Leavitt, and I don't know too much about him, Bill Leavitt.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: [00:02:00] Well, Bill Leavitt is one of my oldest colleagues and friends. He's an artist. He also shows at Greene Naftali. We both show at Greene Naftali, and we have been showing together in the same galleries since 1969, when we both showed with Eugenia Butler. And so Bill is, you know—in style and content we're in the same ballpark. And so I guess we met probably—I don't know, '68 or something.

It was a group of four or five of us that spent a lot of time together. It was Bill, and it was Bas Jan Ader from Amsterdam, and Ger van Elk from Amsterdam, who were both living in LA at the time. And so the four of us basically spent a lot of time together and discussing ideas and thinking about what we were doing, because we were all starting. And then Bill and I had our first shows at Eugenia Butler Gallery, which didn't last too long, but it was a very international gallery in its time for LA. And so Bill and I have been going along in tandem all these years, and now both lined up at Greene Naftali together. [00:04:00]

Margo Leavin closed in LA—I don't know, three or four years ago—we were in that gallery together, too. Now we're in two different galleries in LA, but that's the first time, really in a long time.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, was that sort of purposeful, or because Gallery A would take you, that Gallery A would take him because of these similarities or—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, no. It's because we chose those galleries, because, particularly in the early days, they had the program that you were interested in being a part of. Eugenia Butler had an international Conceptual program, and so that's where both Bill and I fit. You choose the gallery that fits, and so because Bill and I work in the same vein—you know, not only are we friends, but we choose the same places to show because of who the other artists are in the gallery.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It's not so much true anymore. There's not those kinds of programs in galleries anymore. Now it's just a mix of everything.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. What were the most important ways, if any, that Bill influenced or shaped or contributed to your work or your ideas?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I don't know. That's really hard to answer after almost 50 years of being friends and stuff. [00:06:00] I mean, there's other people that influence you in the same or similar or different ways. So all I can say is that we just kind of formulated ideas that were similar and worked towards similar goals.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Okay. You can't answer everything, but I just thought it was the next logical question to ask. But tell me about Eugenia Butler. Who was she, and what was she like? Because she was, obviously, important on the scene.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, she let's see, how do I describe, really? She had one of the first serious galleries of new work. I mean, there was Riko Mizuno and Eugenia Butler, and at one point they were—I don't know if I remember correctly or not, but they were either working together or going to work together or something. And at first, I was going to maybe work with Riko, who was a little bit more—I think she had had a gallery a little bit before.

But anyway, Eugenia opened her own gallery, and Riko said, "No, you'd be better off to show with her." And so for about three years, she ran a really good gallery, and before that, she and Elyse Grinstein and other people that were involved in the LA scene through LA County [LACMA]—there was this group of collectors, people who came around to your studio. [00:08:02] And there was—what did they call it?

There was a—I don't want to use the word "prize." What did they call it? It was a New Talent Award, I guess is what they called it, and the LA County Museum gave the New Talent Award every couple of years, or every year. I can't remember. And so this group of—I think it was basically women—came around to your studio, and they were the committee that worked on this. And so that's how I got to know Eugenia, because she was on the committee, and Elyse Grinstein was on the committee, and they were my closest friends there. And so then, when Eugenia opened the gallery, then it was natural for me to kind of work with her. And, actually, it was the first show that she had; mine was the first show.

And previous to that, Elyse Grinstein had organized a show at the West Side Jewish Community Center in '68. It was the first really kind of serious show that I had been in, and that had other people that were my peers, like Michael Asher and Bruce Nauman and Ed Ruscha. And I can't remember who all was in it, but it was a serious show. So Elyse Grinstein was working, and Eugenia Butler came along, and she was married to one of the big collectors.

AVIS BERMAN: [00:10:00] Well, Stanley Grinstein—are you talking—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Elyse Grinstein was married to Stanley.

AVIS BERMAN: —to Stanley. Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But Eugenia Butler was married to Jim Butler, James Butler, who, as far as I remember, he was a lawyer. I can't remember what kind. And they were big art collectors, and like I say, she was on these committees from LA County. And so I'd gotten to know also him through his collection, and they were friends with, you know, European artists. Like James Lee Byars would come through town and he would always be there, and they would have big parties, and you got to meet a lot of people through Stanley and Elyse and through Jim and Eugenia Butler. And so the gallery kind of was a natural extension, I guess, of their relationship to the art world.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So—

[Brief side conversation.]

Okay, so we were talking about the networks of collectors, the Grinsteins and the Butlers. So Eugenia Butler, besides wanting to do something new, because her husband was a lawyer, she could also keep the doors open, and she could show work that wasn't necessarily salable. In other words, she was a little bit—she was comfortable enough that if she didn't sell something—I mean, not that she was a dilettante, but the galley could survive a little bit.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I guess so. Hopefully things sold. But I guess so. I don't know. I mean, everything in LA was so cheap at that time that I'm sure that they could survive.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And what—she was okay? What was her reaction to your *Location Piece*, which was what

you showed there?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: She bought it.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That's terrific.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, so that was a big deal.

AVIS BERMAN: And did the Butler collection eventually go to a museum or a public institution, or is it still—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, it's a very long and complicated story, but you know, the family was a mess. [00:14:04] And there were nine kids, and so there's a long, messy family history there. But the piece that she bought from me was donated to what was then the Pasadena Modern Art Museum. What did they call it?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it was the Pasadena Museum of Art, I think, then, and then it became Norton Simon.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, yeah. Before it became Norton Simon—first, it was the old Pasadena Museum, and then it became the new Pasadena of Modern Art or something, or maybe it was just the New Pasadena Museum. But anyway, it was a new building. And it was a contemporary museum. And so she donated it to them, but then that museum didn't last very long and became Norton Simon. And so all of the collection that the Pasadena Museum had essentially went into storage. I don't know what happened to the rest of it, but my piece stayed there for 35 years or something, in storage, until they got it out for Pacific Standard Time or—it wasn't actually part of Pacific Standard Time, but it happened at the same time at Orange County, and so they finally got it out.

But she had donated it to the museum, the museum went under, and all of that collection—I don't really know what happened to it. But my piece now, the *Location Piece*, will be in the Walker show. So it's out again. [00:16:00] But I guess, technically, it still belongs to that collection, whoever owns it. I don't know whether it's Norton Simon or what.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, but I think enough time has passed that those pieces, whether or not they're in storage, the curators—new generations have come along and probably taken a look and realized what is there, as opposed to just, when the change came, the pieces were ignored for a while.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah. Yeah, no, they were ignored for a long time [laughs].

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Yeah, exactly. You mentioned the two Dutch artists, Bas Jan Ader and Ger—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Ger van Elk.

AVIS BERMAN: Elk. And where did they kind of fit into the mix? Were they at school with you, or—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, they fit into the mix because they're early Conceptual artists also. I mean, both myself and Ger and Bas Jan were all in *When Attitudes Become Form*. I knew them before this because Ger Van Elk's father worked at Hanna-Barbera in Hollywood—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And so Ger came to LA. He—and Bas Jan came also. Bas Jan went to Claremont, and that's when he got to know Bill. I don't know exactly how everybody got to know each other, but then we all became friends more or less at the same time [00:18:00].

AVIS BERMAN: Well, what I was also going to ask you was, early on when you showed in Europe, I believe the first time, it was in Amsterdam, and I wondered if that was through them.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, it was definitely through them, sure, because we all showed—again, we all showed at the same gallery. Bill, I, and Bas Jan, and Ger, and all the other international Conceptual artists that showed with Eugenia or showed here in New York or wherever—we all showed with Art & Project. Because Art & Project was one of the premier early Conceptual galleries in Europe, and to this day probably one of the best. And so I guess I was introduced to them maybe through Ger but maybe also because I was part of that international group of Conceptual artists.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, when did you start considering yourself to be international?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: When I was included in *When Attitudes Become Form*. So the year that I had my first show with Eugenia was also the same year of *When Attitudes* happened. But previous to that, I had met and become part of other shows organized by Seth Siegelaub, and already knew Lawrence Weiner and Joseph Kosuth and Bob Barry and—they all came through LA, and we all kind of knew each other from being in the same shows

and working with the same galleries and—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. You were sort of a loose-knit coalition or fraternity or whatever you want to call it. Or, you know, freemasonry, international freemasonry.

[They laugh.]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I don't know. [00:19:59] The *When Attitudes Become Form*, as we know now, was the first introduction of these kinds of ideas, before it was even called Conceptual art, as far as I can remember. And at that time, that's a very big umbrella, and you wouldn't necessarily put all of those people together now, although at the time they all belonged together. Bill Wegman was in it, other people that I knew in LA. So it was rounding up the artists in LA that were working in the same way, along with the artists from New York and elsewhere—San Francisco—and that's [the] beginning of the international movement of what became known as Conceptual art. So because I was included in that, then that's where it starts.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. When you first showed in Amsterdam, did you go to that show? You were aware—did you think of it as big to have to be [. . . –AB] in Europe?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I missed out on going to *When Attitudes Become Form*—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —because I had never been to Europe at that time. And I was only 25 and busy working in LA and just getting my work started, and so I didn't go to that. But I did go to Amsterdam. That was my first trip to Europe, to do that show.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Were you just in Amsterdam, or did you travel around?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, I traveled around.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Can you remember from that first trip to Europe what, you know, was memorable, what really struck you that tugged on your sleeve?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I guess just being in Europe, you know. Coming from the Midwest and all the way from California on Icelandic Airlines—

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —which was cheap. [00:22:03]

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I guess just the whole experience is what would register. But I stayed with Ger, because he would travel back and forth to Amsterdam, and he was married at the time, and so I stayed with him and his wife, and then I just took off and went to Paris and Germany. I'd go to see the other galleries that were involved in this network of Conceptual-league things. So I went and saw Konrad Fischer in Germany, and I went to London, and I saw—oh, what's his name? I don't know, just—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Just going around and meeting people and being in Europe, period.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So when you say Konrad Fischer, you met him, or you went to a show or some of the [inaudible]—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, I met him. I think maybe we even had met before somewhere. So I don't know, I just went to see him, and we had dinner and talked, and it was all about, well, maybe we would do a show. It didn't ever happen, but you just go around, and these are all new people that are—you're all involved in the same thing, and so you all know the other artists, and you get to know everybody.

AVIS BERMAN: Did you think that—I mean, to me—and please correct me, because you were there and living it—but it really seemed for artists, who were doing something new in various media, that Europe was always more hospitable, or a lot of artists have had a lot bigger careers in Europe than in this country who were doing things that were a little bit more out there at the time. [00:24:06]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: That hasn't changed at all. It's still the case.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Why do you think that is?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I don't know. You've thought about that over the years. You don't—you can't say for sure. But, of course, Europe has a long history of art, and we don't. And Americans never really liked art anyway, and so the Europeans are more open to certain kinds of ideas about art that don't exist here. And so—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. It's—they were able to move beyond the idea that art is an oil painting in a heavy gold frame.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right. I mean, you didn't even have to discuss such things. And you saw in New York here in the early '70s—you saw some European art, but once you go to Europe, you really see European art, or contemporary European art, and you see all kinds of art that you've never seen before. And my sensibility comes from that anyway, and so it was much more receptive to the history of where I came from than anything here in this country. I'm certainly not alone in that category.

AVIS BERMAN: No, you're not, because several other artists have said it to me who, you know, work in—I mean, Keith Sonnier told me that, that Europe was absolutely much more hospitable to his work.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I could make you a list as long as my arm of those artists.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And then those sensibilities and those groups of artists [00:26:02] then gather around certain galleries that are trying to do that. And in LA that didn't last—

AVIS BERMAN: Uh-uh [negative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —none of the galleries lasted too long. But after Eugenia, then there was Claire Copley, who followed in the same footsteps—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —had the same kind of a program. New York, Europe, and American artists. And she was there for three or four years; Eugenia was there for three or four years. And then, later on, other people pick up and try and do the same thing, but it's—it was difficult.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I guess that's the other question, then, in LA and that area. Why could these kinds of galleries only last about three or four years?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, there was no support structure. You know, whatever support structure for art there was small, and it was not New York as far as that issue goes. And so it's just financially too difficult. First of all, it's all brand-new work that people know nothing about, really, except a certain group of people, international group of people. And so the critical and financial and all the support systems are just not there. And people try, and there was lots of activity, but there wasn't much to support it.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. In terms of the art writing or the art reviewing, what were the typical—well, there would be the two newspapers, like the *Times* and the—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And the *Herald-Examiner*.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And then there would be—*ARTnews* would come out, or *Artforum*, but that would be months later, I guess.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: That would be months later, yeah. And then there was *Artweek*, which I don't know where that came from. San Francisco or something. It was a California paper. But it was just the beginning of things. So there wasn't a lot.

AVIS BERMAN: Do you feel that the newspaper writers were equipped to write about the new art?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, not at all.

AVIS BERMAN: If they—or if they did.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, they did, but it was so minimal anyway that it wasn't until Christopher Knight came on the scene that there was any really kind of serious contemporary criticism. The local critic from the *LA Times* was just an old failed poet, and so nobody paid much attention to that. And the magazines, Peter Plagens was out there at the time, and so Peter wrote for *Artforum*, but like you say, that came out much later, after the

show. And after I had my show with Eugenia in '69, then in '70 I had my first museum show at the Pasadena Museum, and it was all [the] same kind of work. And it's not painting, so it's not for Peter Plagens.

And so at that time, I came to New York also for the first time to spend any length of time, and that time, the review in *Artforum* came out about my Pasadena show. And I've told this story before, but the first review in *Artforum* I ever got was for this show at Pasadena, and Peter Plagens wrote it. [00:30:01] And the opening line was, "This is the worst exhibition I've ever seen."

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And I was in New York at the time, and people said, "What is—what, does he hate you or something or—why is this so like that?" And I said, you know, "Who knows? He's a painter. He doesn't like this kind of work, and he doesn't know anything about it." And so that's what existed at the time.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, of course, Peter went way the other way and changed his mind later on.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: He went and changed his mind about me later on.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I read a good, you know, a very positive article later on that he did.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: He did one article later on after he heard me speak at a UCLA lecture series. And that's where I talked about *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and this—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —lecture that I had written about *Dorian Gray*, and that's what impressed him. [It] was that I had written this lecture, which he really appreciated as a wordsmith. And then he began to understand some other ways to look at the work or something. I don't really know.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, because in that other article—I was just rereading it last night; we will get to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*—but he called that a masterpiece.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yes, but that was after this—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —lecture.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, yes. You had to teach him.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I guess. I don't know what I could have said, but I guess he read or he watched the video and was impressed with the writing and the way it interacted with the image or the story. I don't really know. I haven't read that in 30 years, so—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, right [laughs]. Well, as I say, I'm just—since I've been focusing on this, I've been going—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —through a lot of paper, shall we say. [00:32:00]

Well, I should ask you—you mentioned William Wegman. So was he doing something at the time that was much closer to what you all were doing, or—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, sure. Yeah. Bill was doing his early videos, his early drawings, little sketch drawings with the words, and so it was all the same thing.

AVIS BERMAN: And was he at school with you at Chouinard or—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No.

AVIS BERMAN: No?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, Bill moved to LA from—he went to Madison. And so he found out about what was going on in LA and the artists that were out there—Baldessari and myself and other people. Bob Cumming was out there, too, at the time, Robert Cumming, who was a friend of Bill's. Bill and Bob Cumming were friends. And so then they were both in LA, and we got to be friends. I'm still friends with Bill to this day, the two Bills, and so I see both Bills all the time. But myself, Bill Wegman, Bill—Bob Cumming, and the rest of us were all in the same camp. LA had different camps, and we were in that Conceptual camp.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right. Well, I'm going to do two more of these, because what I'm trying to do is just kind of differentiate some of these friends from the others, too, because obviously they were close, and one was Terry Allen.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, Terry and I went to school together and were two of the group of people who started Gallery 66. So Terry and I have been friends since Chouinard. The rest of the people didn't go to Chouinard. [00:34:00] They came from other places. And so as far as friends from Chouinard that are still really close—I mean, I still see Terry all the time—it was Terry, at that point.

AVIS BERMAN: And in terms of the two of you, could you have—from what he does, could you have seen where his career was going to go?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Pretty much. I mean, even in the days of Chouinard, Terry was writing plays, putting on plays, writing music, playing and singing, and making visual art.

And the drawing that he was doing at Chouinard is very much a part of what you can see in the work now. So you could see early on that he was going to be doing all of these things.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think it's true with many artists. You can really see the DNA of the later work in the early work, but every once in a while, you'll see someone who makes the shift. I mean, [. . . –AB] it's the same person. He or she just becomes more himself or herself when you—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I think that that's probably true of almost anybody I know. Or at least the artists that I feel or felt close to or were friends with or whatever. I mean, when Terry and I had Gallery 66, when I had my first show at Gallery 66, there was a work in there that was kind of what was to come. Some of it was left over from school, because we were still technically in school when we were running the gallery. [00:36:02] And so one of the first shows was a mix of art school ideas and things that I was working my way out of, but there was also something of the future in there, too. And I'm sure Terry was the same.

AVIS BERMAN: And then we should also mention the person sort of responsible for why the two of us are sitting here today, which is Allan McCollum.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Allan McCollum. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, Allan was one of my early friends outside of Chouinard that I met through other means. Allan was working for Cart & Crate, and he came over to my studio to pick up something, and that's where we met, and we've been very close friends ever since.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, so he said he was an artist, I assume, when he was picking the stuff up from you?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: He was deciding that. He didn't go to art school, and so Allan came by being an artist in a very different way. But at that point, when he was working for Cart & Crate, that's what young artists did. They could get a job packing and crating and picking up other artists' work, and so Allan just fell right into that. And that's how we met.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, most artists still do that today. Tons of them are art handlers and—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Sure.

AVIS BERMAN: —preparators and all of that.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Sure. Yeah, that's one way to get in the system.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Because Allan, in that wonderful essay that he wrote about you—now, maybe I've got this wrong—he thought that you—I'm sure you're right—met in '69 at a performance at the Living Theatre.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: We knew each other before that.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [00:38:01] Okay.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah. No, it would be slightly before that. At least, as I remember anyway. I mean, maybe it was simultaneous—

AVIS BERMAN: Or close—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It was very close, one way or the other.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think also he was talking about the dramatic moment of watching you take a rope and—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —swing across the room or—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I know for sure that we met when he came to pick up something for Cart & Crate. But that might have been at the same time as the Living Theatre thing, too, you know. I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Okay, just wanted to make sure that we kind of—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And when Claire Copley opened her gallery in '73, then Allan was in that gallery, too, along with the rest of us.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Okay, so I'm going to move into about 1970, because I did want to ask about these people. And in about 1970, you are in a show called—this is at the La Jolla Museum of Art —*Continuing Surrealism*.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AVIS BERMAN: And I just wanted to ask a more general question. How do you see your work in relationship to Surrealism?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, my original influences come from Dada and Surrealism, so that began in art school, identification and the love of that art. That begins when I'm in school, and then, when you get out of school and you begin working, it just connects up.

But also because at that time, Surrealism in LA was probably much more thought about than it was here in New York or in Europe, because it came later to LA [00:40:05], and particularly, I guess, because of William Copley and his opening his gallery and showing the Surrealist people. And, of course, Ed Ruscha you can put in that category, and the assemblage and literary aspects of Surrealism in Wallace Berman, you know, [that] crowd. And I don't know, it had probably more resonance in LA at that time and after the war, in the '50s and '60s. So it just was part of my DNA at that point.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, there was also—and this was, of course, before your time—but there was also the famous [Walter and Louise] Arensberg collection—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —out there.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: And that—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And Duchamp had his first retrospective there, and Man Ray lived out there, and Copley and Man Ray were best friends. And there were a lot of connections, and certainly, the work around you, that I'm growing up with, whether it's the assemblage people or Ruscha or whoever, it's just in there.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. And maybe, you know, there was a certain surreal quality to California life at the time that was—which I think one tries to pick up within, you know, the film noir and the industry, not just film but the earth —you know, the great expanses there. I don't know, I think—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, everything. I mean, LA certainly had that, as does Mexico to this day. So California, Mexico, you know, are breeding grounds of Surrealism, just in the air. [00:42:00]

So, no, the general feel of LA has that in it, and that's part of its attraction, at least at that point. Now it's probably different, but at least at that point it was there.

AVIS BERMAN: Was Surrealism a thread or a vein that you felt, that you feel, keeps going through your work?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, I would say, sure. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I've investigated it more consciously years ago, when I was beginning my work, but I still find it fascinating work. The Picabia show at the MoMA was fantastic, and still just as vital and alive as the day it was made. Which you can't say for a lot of work.

AVIS BERMAN: No, no. Because he was somehow continually in rebellion, continually outrageous, and a lot of times, it's pretty hard to remain outrageous and/or angry as you get older. It's a hard thing to maintain.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AVIS BERMAN: Now, let's go into the first really big things that you did, which is—let's begin with *Al's Café*. Let's talk about three really major works that you did, the *Café*, *Al's Grand Hotel*, and then *Where's Al?* I mean, I don't know, you couldn't just have a bad idea at that point, so—

[They laugh.]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: You wouldn't know about them, so—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that's true. [00:44:00] This is what history is; these are what have remained. And on the *Café*, you were photographing, and you were doing sorts of theater, but I'm just wondering—were there Happenings? I'm just wondering kind of how the first one, *Al's Café*, how that idea came together, and what you were going to do, and if you enlisted other people, and just sort of the genesis. What do you—you know, whatever you were doing before, and you're thinking like, Oh, I think I'll do a café or—what happened? Because it's a big step from what you were doing before.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, not really.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, well, you tell me why it's not a big step.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It's too bad that [laughs] you're not doing this after the Walker retrospective and have that catalogue in your hand. Because there is so much information in that catalogue and that will be in this show that lays all of that out in a—you know, I have all the essays now. I've read all the essays. They're very complete and very insightful. Plus they have a lot of historical stuff in them. So you'll get a lot of this just from that when it comes. But—

AVIS BERMAN: I'll have it in your words.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, my words are in there, too, but it's not a stretch at all from one thing to the other, and maybe it's hard to lay out, but it certainly, in my mind and the way I was working, was not a big stretch at all. If you look at all the early work—even before the *Location* piece—but if you just take the *Location* piece and break it down and put all those elements into a café, then you have it.

And before that, doing these aquarium sculptures—I called them sculptures anyway—they were essentially a kind of part-assemblage, part-Surrealism, part-Minimalism, part-Conceptual in the Post-Studio idea that the outside comes in and the inside goes out and those kinds of ideas. That's what the *Café* is also. So you have the books; you have the *23, 24 Pieces* that are photography of settings or whatever; and then you have the aquariums, which are physical versions of the photographs that are in the books; and then you have the *Location* piece, which is just a big, giant, blown-up aquarium where the idea's not so different than things [that] were going on in New York—where the viewer was required to do some work and think about what was outside, and why it was inside in the gallery, and all of those classic ideas at this point.

So you had the *Location* piece, and then, after that, you have a café for a variety of reasons. [00:48:00] One, because you didn't have art bars or any of that kind of stuff in LA, and once you're through with school, you don't have any kind of gathering place in LA for people to hang out and talk and have fun. And so we would hang out in cafes and coffee shops. I think it's a culture of LA, is the coffee shop. It's disappeared now because of Starbucks and those kinds of dopey places, but when I first came to LA, you just hung out in coffee shops. And I always liked mom-and-pop coffee shops across the country, coming from the Midwest anyway, and so, I don't know, it's just kind of an evolution there to invite people into a giant assemblage.

AVIS BERMAN: Was the audience an art audience, or would there be walk-in traffic or anything?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, it was primarily an art audience, because that's who you knew. And so on opening night, the first time I had it, it was probably almost all artists, and nobody quite knew what to do anyway. But then, because it was next door to some kind of halfway house or something, and there wasn't a lot of—there's never a lot of street traffic in LA anyway—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —but there were people that came in from this halfway house, or who happened to be in that rather rundown neighborhood, and they came in because there were other people there, and there were girls there, and you could have a beer and hang out. And I thought that was fine. I wanted anybody to come. [00:50:00]

When it came to doing the *Hotel*, then transplanting it to Hollywood, on Sunset Boulevard, is a different deal, because then it [was] purposely in a much more central and tourist-oriented and traffic-oriented and Sunset

Strip—or—wasn't actually on the Strip, but was on Sunset Boulevard—then more people would come in off the street. But essentially, it's basically an art audience, but an expanding art audience.

So, in other words, when I got to be friends with Paul McCarthy years later, Paul said that when he came down from the San Francisco Art Institute, where he was, then the first thing that happened, [was] that his friends took him to *Al's Grand Hotel*. So it was that kind of a thing, you know, which is also part of its period, too. It's part of LA in the fact that you have a gathering place that's part of the widening art world of artists that are doing things like that. And Paul was doing performances and—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right. I mean, I very much see the performative aspect of this in the café and all, because you actually had to serve/make things on the spot, or people would be brought things that were not edible, but I guess you did have drinks that were—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: We had drinks.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, you had drinks.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I didn't think of it as being a performance at all. It was much more related to Happenings, in my mind, than it was the idea of performance. Performance was a separate world in LA and was not part of what I really paid much attention to anyway. [00:52:04] So that's one reason I didn't get to know Paul until in the '90s, really.

But Chris Burden did performances. Chris and I were colleagues, friends. It was a very small world. But Chris was the one that was doing performances, not me.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That would be true, but you're moving around in the space—let's put it that way—within certain confines of "This is what you're going to do." It was sort of a Happening, but it had certain hours. You were going to have—you might be able to serve things. In other words, you operated within the boundaries of a restaurant.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, definitely. I mean, obviously, I couldn't keep it open. Keeping it open one evening a week—I would have to spend the rest of the week driving from the desert to the sea to collect everything to bring it back in there so that I could make these things.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And so it was all I could do to keep it open that one night anyway. But it was meant to be run as a little mom-and-pop café.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And were you able to store and hold onto the café or the things or—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No. Once it was done, and it was—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It was done.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —you know, gone.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And then let's go on to the *Grand Hotel*, which I do find kind of—you know, I do find that fascinating. And I want to ask you how you came up with the choices of the seven rooms and what they would be. [00:54:04] [. . . –AB]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I don't know if I can answer that, how I did that. Again, it's just an extension of—it was the next step after a café. "What else are you going to do?" is what people said, and so I decided, Well, what else do I like to do? What's similar? And it's a hotel. And so then I just decided, Okay, well, after the café, let's do the hotel. But how I came up with—

AVIS BERMAN: —those themes—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —those themes in the rooms, I don't know. I mean, obviously, the Ultra Violet room, I know where that came from, but—

AVIS BERMAN: Why did you pick Ultra Violet? That particular Warhol superstar, that particular personality among—as opposed to others, when I would have guessed you would have picked some '40s actress, shall we say.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, first of all, I was very much a fan of Warhol and of his whole world. I was very interested in the work, of course, and I had met him a couple of times, just very casually, at parties or something. And then I got to know Ultra Violet, and I stayed in her apartment for a couple of weeks. [00:56:00]

She had an apartment above the Guggenheim, and so I stayed with her at her apartment there for a couple of weeks. And so then when I opened the hotel, I just kind of mimicked what I had seen in her apartment. I had these posters that she had given me, and we did a work together. And then when I was here in New York and staying with her, we would go around to

wherever she was going, the different Warhol this or that or—

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well, no, that's great. So it was sort of an homage to her, and kind of a turnaround of when you had been there, that—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, it was, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Something like that.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. Okay. Because in the literature—and maybe this will be in the Walker catalogue—but in the literature, nobody ever asked you—there's a list. Well, the bridal suite is an obvious idea for a hotel, but—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —nobody said, "Why'd you do a Jesus room?"

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah. [Laughs.] Well, I don't know. I have no idea. Somehow, I thought it would be something that would fit in with all these varieties of rooms, but where the idea came from, I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I don't know about the idea, but—from looking at this enormous wooden crucifix bisecting the room and making it almost impossible to get to the bed without a lot of effort, I would certainly talk about it—I don't know if you consider your art ever political or anything or social, making social comment, but—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well—

AVIS BERMAN: —it certainly seems—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —it's pretty hard to avoid in that case. But the juxtaposition is also important in the fact that that's the only room that had rented furniture. That has official rented bedroom furniture. [00:58:05] And so that, in juxtaposition with this big handmade cross, has a kind of Conceptual underpinning.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Because the other rooms don't have that.

AVIS BERMAN: No, well, also, it looks like it would be easier to relax and have fun in the other rooms.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, that was not the way it worked, though.

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.] Really?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I mean, I got the best stories from that room.

AVIS BERMAN: When you say you got the best stories, people were just saying things to you, or did you make an effort afterwards to record or, you know—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No.

AVIS BERMAN: —some type—take notes on people's reactions?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No. No, this was just the morning-after stories.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, were you visiting these guests, or did they—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No.

AVIS BERMAN: —close the doors?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, I didn't—I took my own room, whatever room was available, and it just went on way into the evening anyway, and people would just eventually go off to their rooms and—I don't know. I don't remember.

AVIS BERMAN: Just looking at this picture, this hotel looks like a house that somebody—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, it was. It was a house.

AVIS BERMAN: And then there were people on the other side.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: There was a restaurant on the other side.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, because I wondered about—I mean, you must have had to have chosen this so the neighbors wouldn't have been complaining about noise or parties.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I didn't even think about that. I found it because it was available. It was in the neighborhood. My studio was two blocks up the street, and so it was in my neighborhood where I already had my studio, and it was in the neighborhood where I wanted to be, which was the heart of Hollywood. And so the house was available, and that's why I took it. I mean, who was next door, I can't even tell you. It was almost on a corner, and then there was a Famous Amos cookie shop on the corner also. But who was on the other side, I don't even remember. I mean, nobody ever said anything. I never had any problems at all, so I think it was just because it was there; it was the correct building; and it was doable.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So, well, let's get you to New York, because I guess, as you say, you first got there about 1970 or so. At one point you had this—now, it's really fashionable, but it used to be a real dump. You were in the Marlton Hotel?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I was in the Marlton. I drove across the country with my girlfriend at the time, and somehow wound up in the Marlton, which at that time—you know, Eighth Street was really great at that time. The Eighth Street [Bookshop] was still there. And there was a real kind of just lively New York neighborhood. It was the West Village. And somehow, I found this Marlton, because it was cheap. It was $35 a week. And it was a seedy, junky, hooker hotel, which I thought was just fine. I thought it was great. It was cheap, and it was interesting, and it was right there in the middle of the West Village. [01:02:01] And so that was my first residence in New York, was at the Marlton—

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ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —which now I have been to a few times for recent drinks and—

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —and I want to spend the night there sometime just to see what it's like.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right. It's greatly changed. But it was definitely down market for ages. I mean, appealingly so, not dangerously so.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I didn't know if it was dangerous or not. I would come at night sometimes, and there would be no lights in the hallway because the junkies would take the filaments out of the bulbs to clean their needles. And so I thought, Okay, well, that's fine.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. That's—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I thought it was interesting.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So but when you originally—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It wasn't dangerous. You know, people think, Oh, that was so dangerous then. Not at all.

AVIS BERMAN: No. It was kind of like the way even Amsterdam Avenue was. It was dingy, but it wasn't dangerous. Even parts of the Bowery. They just might have been depressing, but more interesting, but they weren't dangerous.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No. Obviously, there were dangerous neighborhoods. You didn't go over to Alphabet City or places like that. Like today you would not walk around East New York either. But you weren't in those neighborhoods.

AVIS BERMAN: No.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I wasn't in those neighborhoods until the 1980s. So this is 1970, in the fall of 1970, and that's the West Village. So even though it's junkies and hookers or whatever—

AVIS BERMAN: It was—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —it doesn't feel dangerous. I had hookers outside of my studio on Sunset Boulevard who would come up to my room and hang out.

AVIS BERMAN: In the 1970s and into the early 1980s, Sixth Avenue, around the Plaza Hotel, they would be all—they would be hookers. They'd have fur coats on, but they were hookers.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: They were out because, frankly, pre-cell phone, you know, they had to be on the street more than they have to be now.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: They were in the Plaza Hotel. They worked the Plaza Hotel. [00:02:00]

AVIS BERMAN: Right. All those hotels on Sixth [Avenue] in the [West] 50s, the Meridian, all of them.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It's not dangerous in that way.

AVIS BERMAN: No.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I suppose if you went maybe over to the far West Side, at some of those piers over there at that time—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —that probably was a little more dangerous, but then, you know, that was not my—

AVIS BERMAN: No, that wouldn't have been a place you would have necessarily been at.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No.

AVIS BERMAN: So you drove for the summer. Was there just an idea of visiting briefly or staying for a while? Or how did you—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, it was for staying for a while. That's why I found the Marlton. Because I could stay there as long as the money held out.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And did you stay there the whole—or did you find a loft or another place?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, I stayed there the whole time. The loft came later in 1975. That's when I got the first loft. That was in Chelsea. But that was 1975. So after the Marlton, then I went back to LA for a while. And then after that, I would just come and sublet places.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And how long were you here that first time, about?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, three or four months I guess.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Some of it, I'm sure, must have been exploring the city and just taking it in or going to shows, but what were you looking for when you were here that first time?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Just to be in New York. Just to explore New York. Of course, I wanted to see the galleries, and like I said, I already knew a number of the artists and people who were around. And so it was just an extension of the art scene, but it was also just sheer joy of being in New York at that time and just doing something that was different than being in LA.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. [00:04:00] Of course. Well, do you think the *Where's Al?* came out of this rather fluid back-and-forth-ness, although that wasn't manifest as much as it would be a little later on? But it just seemed from looking at that—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, it had already started. And if you read the text of what goes with the photographs of *Where's Al?,* it already lays out that groundwork. That's where the title comes from. People don't know where I am at that point. Are you in LA? Are you in Amsterdam? Are you in Ohio? Are you in your studio? Are you doing this? Are you doing that? And so it's pretty evident that that defines what had already been started.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, right, because New York was before. I think the dates on *Where's Al?* are 1971 to 1972.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It's 1972.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It's 1972.

AVIS BERMAN: In 1972 is when it's finished.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, it's when it took place, was 1972.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. So was that—I mean, so were you doing that as you went along or moving around to create the piece?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No. The piece comes from—it was Terry Allen and his wife, Jo Harvey's, 10th wedding anniversary. And so they decided that they would spend it in Pismo Beach, and they invited all their friends to come and join them. And so we all went up there and stayed in the same hotel. And everybody came from—mostly from LA, I guess it was. It was close enough to Chouinard that we still knew a lot of people from school. [00:06:07] And their friends, whoever they got to know, because Terry had moved to San Francisco in 1970 or 1971 and was teaching up there. So there were some of those people too. But it was just general art world friends. And so I don't know where I got the idea to do this, but that's where it begins anyway. And they still do this. We just came from Marfa last summer for their 55th wedding anniversary—

AVIS BERMAN: Wow.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —party. So—

AVIS BERMAN: Good for them.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, it's so rare.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I don't think I know anybody else, well, maybe one or two other people, but pretty rare. And so that was already their 10th, and I think that's when they first started to do this idea that on certain wedding anniversaries they would invite all their friends to go somewhere. But that was the way it started. And Pismo Beach was far enough away to be different and cheap, and we could all get into this run-down hotel—and Stanley and Elyse Grinstein—and it was part of what had become this circle of people in LA that were all friends.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, the Grinsteins seem to be very steady patrons of yours.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Myself and most of the other artists in LA.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. And also even though it was a profitable concern, obviously, Gemini had a lot of artist-made prints and projects and other things there.

Yeah, as a matter of fact, this [is something] I was going to ask you about. [00:08:00] There was something you made called *Greetings from California,* and that was about 1973. And that was like an oil painting [of] a book floating in the middle of the sunset, which was—now that was the view from their back[yard].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: Actually, you made a painting. So I'm—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It was a plein-air painting made in their backyard. But I had published my—well, the photo books were the first artist books. And then shortly after the photo books, then I did this novel, *Greetings from California*, or ultimately, it was *Greetings from L.A.*, I think. But the painting says, *Greetings from California*, I think.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And so the book in the painting is the same as the book that I published except with a different title. So it's orange like that, and then it has the California sunset and the mountains behind, the mountains looking out over their backyard. But, no, they were very, very close, very close second kind of family.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. And did they buy the painting, or was—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No. I don't know what happened to the painting right after I did it. I don't remember. Now it's at the Whitney. I don't remember what I did with it afterwards. But no, they didn't buy that. They had other

things. You know, they would buy things. But also Stanley paid for the rent on the *Hotel*. He paid for the rent on the *Café*.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, that's wonderful.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: I'm glad you're saying this, so we sort of know where they—I mean, they really did things that counted, that made something possible.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: That was their whole program. [00:10:01] They wanted to do things that—it's not just buying work, which they did. They had a great collection. But it was to enable people to do things. So I'm not the only beneficiary of that. But I was also very close friends with Stanley, too, with both of them. But I would drive down to Stanley's office, and we would have lunch together in South Central. So they were very close.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right. Because, I mean, I know of the Grinsteins through Gemini G.E.L. and all the print projects—and then those—I would say on the East Coast we know about that. But we don't know about—and this is why it's important, these smaller but crucial acts of patronage. So I am actually interested in —because they never talked about it.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, that was the last thing that they wanted to do, was to bring attention to themselves. And, of course, they would have these great parties that everybody now remembers—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —as being these really fantastic 1970s parties, which they were. But no, they were just part of the crowd. And, Stanley's and Sid Felsen's adventures in Gemini, that they started, that was separate from Stanley being a member of the community and supporting these other things. He ran a forklift company and made good money doing this. He took over his father's junk business after the war and turned it into this very profitable forklift business, and turned it around. The art world was very small, and they were a major part of it.

Jim Butler—Stanley and Elyse, Jim Butler, Eugenia, Sid Felsen, Rosamund Felsen when she opened her gallery, but we all knew Rosamund anyway because she was married to Sid and she worked at the Pasadena Museum. Betty Asher, Michael's mother, and Nick Wilder, of course, and that pretty much was it. And New York knows nothing about any of this.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And that's why it's important to do these kinds of interviews, to get some of—like this is, you know, this is what happened.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: This is what happened, and they know nothing about it. Maybe they know a little bit about Billy Al Bengston, but they don't know what Billy's role was and which crowd Billy was part of, and which crowd—you know, Peter Plagens's crowd, or what part Bruce Nauman played or, you know—they don't know any of it.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, is there someone who's like the great historian of Southern California art who's writing anything about this? Or will this come out in the Walker show, some of this?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, it won't come out in the Walker show in that way, because it's only about me.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But I don't know if there is anybody that's really doing that.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, because, you know, someone like Cecile Whiting is really smart and she could do it.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I don't know who she is.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, she's written several—she's written on LA Pop, and she lives there. And she's done articles on various aspects of—she could pull it together.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, there is an interest in it, for sure. [00:14:02]

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: There's a couple of books about Bas Jan Ader, for instance, because he's become such a mythical figure.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And so Bill and I and a few other people are always being questioned about Bas Jan, and so a lot of it comes out in these Bas Jan books. I have one right here that is one of the better ones. And so there's all these figures now that people know about. They know about Bas Jan. They know about Jack Goldstein.

Jack and I hung around together in Chouinard and afterwards. And the fact that Jack took over Ron Cooper's studio, who I met at Chouinard as an early artist. And where does Doug Wheeler fit into this? And the different camps and who—

AVIS BERMAN: It's dense.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It's dense. It's a very dense, small network. But Ed Ruscha shot his *Crackers* movie in my studio. And all these kind of events and crossovers. And it was small, and there was no support structure anyway. And so everybody could do everything. It was much more open than anywhere else, and still is today.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, yeah, exactly, because there's a fluidity there. So we should discuss this event of having that movie shot in your studio. Why was it shot in your studio as opposed to his place or, you know, anyway?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I guess, it probably was about 1968, I think, maybe 1967 even, where I had rented these offices on Sunset Boulevard. And they were pretty just basic offices. And somehow Ed knew about that, and it was the perfect setting that he wanted to—he could create a hotel room in there, or whatever it was. Because I just cleaned it out. It was just an empty old white-painted office that Ed could turn into this kind of—I don't know—I haven't seen it for so long, I don't know what *Crackers* was about really anymore. But he made the book out of it too. But he somehow got to know that it was there, and we got to know each other, and he used it.

AVIS BERMAN: Were you on the premises when it happened?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, sure. I lived there. I mean, I wasn't supposed to be, but I lived in the adjoining offices. I had a suite of three or four of them anyway at that point. And so I was living there, and Ed had his cameraman and all his stuff. And Tommy Smothers was part of it. And that model from the time that did the—you know, the bathing suit model, famous—

AVIS BERMAN: Peggy Moffatt?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Who, you know, there's photographs of her in this Rudi Gernreich—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, right. That's Peggy Moffatt who [wore the Mondrian dress, the topless bathing suit –AB].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: That's her.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, Peggy Moffatt.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: So she was there, and Rudi Gernreich was there. And all of Ed's crowd was there. And Larry Bell, of course, because he was in the thing. But that was when I was just getting to know them all anyway.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So you could just watch it [inaudible].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I was just there. [00:18:00]

AVIS BERMAN: Well, maybe also having the offices, that was sort of a—this wasn't arty. Or it was the opposite. It was a "no environment."

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: So it was—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And it was right in the middle of Hollywood. So I'm sure that was good for Ed, because his studio was down on Western [Avenue], and he had all—these are Hollywood people anyway. Ed always had his Hollywood crowd. And so—

AVIS BERMAN: Does Dennis Hopper intersect with any of this?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: He comes to the *Hotel*. Dennis was at the *Hotel,* and then we were at Dennis's ranch in Taos at one point, too, with my friend Ron Cooper, from Chouinard, and other people. We all drove out to Taos,

because they were getting started out there getting their own places in Taos or Santa Fe. And so one time we drove out there in somebody's truck. I don't remember. And that's when Dennis Hopper had his ranch out there, when the acid cowboy period was on.

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: You know—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —the period of, you know, what's the movie that he—

AVIS BERMAN: *Easy Rider*.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, no, after *Easy Rider*. The one where he went down to South America somewhere and shot that western.

AVIS BERMAN: I'll look it up.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I can't think of the name of it now. But that's when he was in that period, in the kind of swami period. And then he came to the *Hotel* later on. And then later on in the '90s or something we went around together for some interview or something. So he's a part of the crowd in a way. Not close to me that way, but—

AVIS BERMAN: But he bought art or helped out artists a lot.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: He bought stuff. And, of course, he took all those photographs. But he's more Ed's generation than mine.

AVIS BERMAN: [00:20:01] Right. Yeah, he's more of, like, the Ferus Gallery group.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right. So that's just a little bit before my time.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, but it was—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But ultimately, they all come together anyway.

AVIS BERMAN: It was possible to meet him, let's put it that way.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, for sure. Yeah. He was around.

AVIS BERMAN: Now I want to move from the—which was interesting because you did mention the, I think it was —it was *Greetings*, yeah, *Greetings from L.A.*, which was the pseudo-detective novel. And then, even though you're beginning—maybe "beginning" is wrong, but there's a lot more focus on the idea of the book.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And so I think it's important to talk about Thoreau and copying *Walden*, hand-copying, and why did you pick—you know, let's talk about that piece and why you picked *Walden*, and what you were thinking about when you were doing that.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I suppose it comes out of the interest in doing—well, there's a couple of ways. I have to go and do this talk at the New Museum on Sunday as part of their anniversary. And so Massimiliano [Gioni] suggested to me what he might be interested in talking about. My panel partner is Elizabeth Peyton, who I got to know here in the 1990s. And so Massimiliano said that maybe they would like to talk about how literature intersects with both of us, I guess. And so that's part of the story here. It's not just books themselves, although the book as object is—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it's—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —an interesting thing.

AVIS BERMAN: It's words and reading too.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It's words and reading and looking, and the difference between these things. And so I think that probably, outside of the early photo books, which were made for reasons to be making something that was accessible to anybody, and could buy reasonably, not big fancy artworks—but when I started to include words and text or language in works, then, of course, I began to think that, Well, I better know what I'm doing

here, because a lot of that kind of work was just so bad because the language was so bad. Then I began to take classes in, or sit in on literature classes and try and incorporate that into work, because I wanted to make work that slowed the viewer down. There's a number of reasons for slowing the viewer down.

So I did the photo pieces that had text with them. There'd be a series of photos, and then each would have a text. You couldn't just look at it like a painting and walk away. You had to stand there and read and compare the words with the pictures, which was also done in the early photo books in a different way. And so part of it is about slowing the viewer down. [00:24:00]

But it's also a part of being able to incorporate a different kind of content that you get from reading and from novels, where they are multilayered and you can incorporate all kinds of ideas and emotions and everything else that you couldn't really do in painting. Painting is a different genre. So I was just trying to combine the reading and looking that goes into these photo-text pieces into a kind of idea of the book as object, and I guess it just went on from there. But those are the two initial things anyway, to insert a different kind of context in here.

AVIS BERMAN: Did you ever think about becoming a writer or spending more time as a writer? I mean, you do, but you know what I'm talking about.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, no. I always knew I was a visual artist. And I knew that I was not a writer [laughs]. I mean, yes, I write things, but I find it—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, because they're well written. They're better than what most artists do. That's really good.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, that was one of the original goals, was to be a better writer, if I was going to use text. And that's why I studied stuff. But at the same time, it's the most difficult thing that I have to do. And I know that I'm not a writer. Annette [Leddy] is the writer. I'm not.

[Brief side conversation.]

AVIS BERMAN: So you copied the entire text of *Walden*. Is that correct?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: So on some level you had to make it visually look right, too, because you were framing the words, shall we say, or you were setting the words into a place.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, the basic thing is that I turned it back into a manuscript. And it's not that you just choose any book and decide to do that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, that's what I wanted to find out, why it was the—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, because *Walden*, because of the nature of what that book is, not only did I read it at some point in my life, but it was influential. It's a discussion about this way to live. And so by sitting down and essentially translating it back into me, into my handwriting, and turning it back into a manuscript, I'm sitting there day after day after day having this discussion with Thoreau, which is really what the book is. [00:28:01] And so that's why the choice of that book was—this is a book that you have a discussion with. And to translate it back into a manuscript and to take three months to do it is essentially what the book is. So it's not an arbitrary choice of the book.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, were there rules in terms of how the pages would be, with design or anything else?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No. It was just sitting down with a stack of paper in front of you and just writing it. So it just came out, just the way I would sit down and write anything. And then it was re-bound in this fancy manuscript and boxed and—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, did you pick art paper? Did you pick—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No.

AVIS BERMAN: —good paper?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No.

AVIS BERMAN: Or did you pick—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It's just typing paper. It's just ordinary typing paper.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Oh, I was just trying to see how much art object, or how precious, it became.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, that's afterwards. I sought out this old German bookbinder who made this fancy—not fancy, but just really great-looking—pigskin manuscript box. So once the manuscript was done, then I found the person to make this specialized manuscript box. And then that became the object. So the object is made after the translation, essentially.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. What I was wondering is if—and I'm going to ask this also for *Dorian Gray*—if you felt you used any systems. That's probably what I was trying to get at. [00:30:04]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, *Walden*, there was no system. It was just the idea of sitting down at my desk every day having this discussion by rewriting his words, and thinking about them, and being in tune with Thoreau there, in the *Walden* sense.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Another *Walden* question, but it will also relate to the next [piece], which, of course, that was on paper, versus painting panels. I understand presentation and the media are very different. But what happened if you were writing and you made a mistake? Did you cross it out? Did you begin the page again?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, *Dorian Gray*, I crossed it out.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, yeah. *Walden*?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: *Walden*, I don't remember. I probably just crossed it out.

AVIS BERMAN: You didn't just start a new page?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I don't think so. I think I probably just crossed it out. I'd have to go back and look at it. Which I can do at the Walker. It will be there. But as far as I remember, I probably would just have crossed it out.

AVIS BERMAN: Does Transcendentalist philosophy in general engage you?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, *Walden* did. And I read some of the other stuff that came out in the 1960s. You read that Gurdjieff stuff, and, I don't know, part of what was floating around in the culture around you—and Hermann Hesse and all that stuff, '60s stuff.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But the *Walden* thing was different because that had a special place, for me anyway, growing up wandering out in the woods and that kind of isolated situation. You know, the whole idea of *Walden* is different.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And remains so.

Well, I want to go on to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and why you chose that book, and how you thought you were going to figure out the project in terms of copying, but not doing it as a manuscript and what—if Wilde had been a hero of yours, or why this was the next book you were going to engage with?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah. It was making another kind of book object.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But I think, first of all, I probably saw the movie, which is really fantastic, with George Sanders.

AVIS BERMAN: And, of course, Hurd Hatfield.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And Hurd Hatfield and—

AVIS BERMAN: And Angela Lansbury.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right. And then the painting at the end was—is done by Alvin Albright.

AVIS BERMAN: Ivan Albright.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Ivan Albright.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And so maybe I saw the movie first and then went and picked up the book and saw that it seemed to be a natural to make a painting out of. So essentially, I just made a painting out of the book.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Okay. So you saw the movie first. Okay.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I think so. I mean, it's possible I read the book first, but in my mind, I can still see the movie. I still remember reading the book. So I don't know which came first, but probably the movie. Just like in the Houdini works, probably the Houdini works came out of seeing the movie, the Tony Curtis movie of *Houdini.* [00:34:00]

AVIS BERMAN: God, I've never seen that one. Now I have to.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It's okay. But there's enough interest in there of Houdini, at least for me at the time, to kind of set it off.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, well, Houdini is like an evergreen. I mean—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: —how can you not be interested in Houdini?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right. Yeah. [Laughs.] Right. Anyway, again, it's not just picking any book to translate onto 20 canvases. It's because of what the book is that naturally defined the form if you're going to do that. Like, *Walden* could only exist in the new manuscript, and *Dorian Gray* can only exist—

AVIS BERMAN: Right, as a picture [laughs].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —as a picture. And yet the picture can be read from beginning to end, and you will have read the novel. So there's that kind of translation in there that is really the core of it.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. Well, now that you tell me that you saw the movie first, maybe this answers the question, but I was going to ask you why you drew the illustration—you know, you drew Hurd Hatfield in kind of [an] illustration style as opposed to Oscar Wilde himself.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, that comes later. Those Hurd Hatfield drawings, that comes later in the '90s, or the late '80s.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, you—that—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Mid- to late '80s, I guess.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, you drew—excuse me, I thought you drew—I guess I'm confused. I thought you drew that image of Hurd Hatfield as sort of a coda or a piece of the—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No.

AVIS BERMAN: —of the—okay.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, no, no. Those—no, the *Dorian Gray* was done in 1974. [00:33:58]

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And those Hurd Hatfield drawings were from the late 1980s, early 1990s.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, because where in the '70s of—Hurd Hatfield was living in—you know, all those people were living in LA then, too, when that—you know.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I don't know if they were. That I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, yeah, Sanders I think was dead by then because he committed suicide. But Angela Lansbury and Hurd Hatfield—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, she was around, but—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I guess she was around, but Hurt Hatfield I don't know. I always know that his career was kind of ruined after that because—

AVIS BERMAN: He was—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —he became—

AVIS BERMAN: —typecast.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: He became *Dorian Gray*. And people say that even when he used to get in cabs in London, they would say, "Good evening, Mr. Gray"—you know, things like that. I've seen him in a few other things before that. But no, those drawings—I wasn't drawing at that time at all.

AVIS BERMAN: You made square canvases, and I wondered if you recalled the reason for that. I thought that was unusual, because a page is often not square.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, well, a classic painting, in my mind, was about six foot square. And that probably comes from my early days of being a painter, coming out of Chouinard—and the transition work that went into making other works, when I did use canvas.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you make—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It's the perfect size.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And did you make a grid or lines on that? I haven't seen it, that's why; so I have to ask. I've only seen reproductions, and I can't tell.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, when you look at it really close, you can see the scheme that I had. Because I just had a big—I made a special drawing table to work at. And so it was a big, giant piece of plywood, set up at the right angle. And I had a big roll of canvas at the top. [00:38:01] And then I would pull down a six-foot square, or a six-foot piece, on this big piece of plywood. And then I would take push pins with thread on them, and put them —I would make the dots on the side of the canvas. And then I would put the push pins with the string on there.

AVIS BERMAN: And then you would almost snap it to make it—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I would just hold it. You know, it would be in place there.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. As a line.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And then I would just move it down to the next dot, and the next dot, and the next dot. And so if you see the canvases and you look on the side, you can see the points where I had marked off—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, this—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —for this way of doing it.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, the string, or the twine, was brilliant, because then you didn't have to put any visible lines in it.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. So there's no lines. There's only dots on the side.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And was there a reason you picked the kind of pen—I mean, it was a felt-tipped pen, or a pen—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It was an early Pentel. It's just what was around at the time.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Excuse me for being so technical, but I'm just trying to figure out how this would look. Was your canvas primed or unprimed?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, it's raw canvas.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And the pen, did it sink into it or did it—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: —stay on it? Or, I mean, in other words, how did it work on the—did it blotch? I mean—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, no. The Pentels—a pen would not—

AVIS BERMAN: —work.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —go over the grain of the canvas. But the Pentel, those early

felt-tipped things—

AVIS BERMAN: Right, except they were felt. They were finer. But they were like a flowing ink pen.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Except there was no ink in them. It's not liked you filled them up or anything.

AVIS BERMAN: No, I know what it is. [00:40:00] But it's different than a ballpoint.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It's different than a ballpoint. A ballpoint would not—the texture of the canvas would be too tough for a ballpoint. But the Pentels, those worked perfectly well, and they didn't blot, and you wrote. You could actually write with them on this kind of weave of the canvas. So it's very fine canvas, good canvas. And then afterwards I stretched them.

AVIS BERMAN: And how did you figure out that you got exactly 20 when you came to the end. I mean, did you calibrate numbers of words?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No. It just worked out that way. Well, the last one is only—has about this many lines on it anyway.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Yeah, as I say, I've seen a couple of [them], you know, in reproduction. They just put a couple in there—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —so I can't tell.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: And I guess the Museum of Modern Art owns that?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: So when did they buy that?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Just a few years ago. They bought it from collectors in LA.

AVIS BERMAN: And so the piece was shown at—that was Claire Copley, right?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: And was she able to show all of them?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, we had them all in the gallery. There were a few that were stacked up. You laid part of them out, and then you stacked two or three of them up, and then you lay more of them out. But, no, they were all in there. So, theoretically, you could have read the whole book in there. Which is—that's the way it's always shown. It's never been shown unless they were all there.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it would have to—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It would have to be. I mean, it's one work. People thought they could come and buy one canvas, and that's ridiculous.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it's great that both of you had the strength to keep it together too.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right. Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Because then they'd just have scattered to the wind anyway. [00:42:01]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, that would—yeah, that—it made no sense [laughs].

AVIS BERMAN: No. But sometimes, certain gallery people will push you to do that.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah. Well, Claire was not like that. Claire understood what it was, and I'm the one that made it anyway, so there's no gallery dealer that's going to sell off part of it. Although there were gallery dealers that would sell off parts of photo narrative pieces that were supposed to stay together. But, no, that was never going to happen. And then the collectors who bought it, they're very good people and—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, were they—I have this name and they also seem to be—was it Mr. And Mrs. Spence?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Stuart and Judy Spence, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And who were the Spences?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, they were somewhat younger than Stanley and Elyse, a different generation, more or less my age. I think they're pretty close to my age, maybe a couple years older. And they just appeared on the scene. I think they initially saw me give that same talk that Peter Plagens was in, and got interested. And then we got to know each other somehow, and they became fast friends. They own a lot of work. And they had a really great collection.

AVIS BERMAN: Do they still have it?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: They have some of it. But then they built this big fancy house in Pasadena that became a disaster, and sold that and moved into a small, little ex-bootlegger's house—

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —in the San Gabriel mountains. [00:44:02] And so most of the collection at that point went into storage.

AVIS BERMAN: And did they have work by other artists?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, yes, for sure. They had quite a wide range of people's work of all kinds. But they were particularly interested in the kind of Concept[ual work]. They were good supporters, and bought early Baldessari stuff too. So they were starting their collection and their interest in art in the late '70s, early '80s. And then I think they got *Dorian Gray* just about 1985 and paid it off over a year's time, or two years' time. I can't remember.

AVIS BERMAN: It's amazing when collectors or people can make a commitment to an artist like that.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, that's very much the kind of people they are. No, we're still friends.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Let's see.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: So that's how that came to the Modern, because they decided that they needed to have some retirement money, and they set a price on it. And they would not take anything less.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it's terrific that the Modern saw it for what it was, or its importance and—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, that's basically Christophe Cherix and Connie Butler. Previous to when Christophe showed up, I knew Christophe when he was the director of the Cabinet des Estampes in Geneva for some time. But when Christophe arrived at the Modern, the Modern had no Conceptual art. And now they have some of the best of any museum because of him. [00:46:06] It takes a European to understand this and get it into the proper place.

AVIS BERMAN: I can't believe you're telling me that they had—I believe you 100 percent that a museum like the Modern would have no good representation of this before.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Zero.

AVIS BERMAN: Zero. Because they had the famous, or notorious, pattern of what Modernism was there, and it ended in about 1970 for a lot of them.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: [Laughs.] Even before. But somewhere in there. Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, they kind of went a little into Pop and—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: They went into Pop.

AVIS BERMAN: —a few Minimalist pieces.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: And then there wasn't —

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: That was it.

AVIS BERMAN: That was it. But maybe they have video or anything like that, or things that look narrative, that look like it wasn't almost Greenbergian?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah. No, it wasn't there. I mean—

AVIS BERMAN: No.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —if you know the history, it really wasn't there—until a European got in there and acquired the most incredible collections from Europe, where it was, and brought it into the Modern, beginning with Fluxus. And so he's only been there, at the most, maybe 10 years, I guess.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, that's why [they have –AB] Christian Marclay, *The Clock*, which was amazing. I think he bought that.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Maybe. I don't know, but I know the collections he bought, and they are the best collections of Conceptual work. And he got to know the owners of Art & Project, and acquired their archives and their collection, which was just phenomenal. And then he did that *In & Out of Amsterdam* show. [00:48:02]

And that's the beginning. And then the other collections that he managed to get from Europeans: he got Seth Siegelaub's archives. He got the—I forgot his name now. The Belgian collector that had 60 Broodthaers pieces [Herman Daled]. You know, none of this was at the Modern, zero. And it certainly doesn't exist in other museums either, really.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. Well, you know, Jon Hendricks and the Gilbert [. . . Gilbert Silverman –AB]—there was a Fluxus collection or two—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yes, there was.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Maybe the Whitney got that but—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, the Walker has one too.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, but maybe also once you started collecting, you still have that name: Museum of Modern Art. Everybody still wants their stuff in there, so he was able to—besides being able to acquire it because there were funds, he had the prestige of that museum behind him. The two.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And it's also his personality. It's who he is. And it's the persona that he developed at the Cabinet des Estampes in Europe, and the shows that he did there, and the catalogues and books he produced. It's really him.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. Oh, no, this is astonishing. I never—because again I just haven't focused on this, and also they never really discuss it per se, so it's really—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, they don't [laughs].

AVIS BERMAN: It's not that I'm so ignorant or so [un]informed or this and that, but you just don't hear about everything and—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right. No, you don't.

AVIS BERMAN: —so it's really great to kind of have this on the record so—oh, you're absolutely right as I think about it. But it's really a huge hole that had to be filled. [00:50:00]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, it was a huge gap.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It was a huge gap. I mean, maybe they had one or two things, but they certainly didn't have what they have now.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. Well, now, as you say, it's a great collection. I mean, but they should have had at least a respectable collection before, and it sounds—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But, I don't think so. Like I said, they might have had one or two, or three, four pieces, whatever.

AVIS BERMAN: But not enough.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But not enough to really say that they had anything.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, those—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: You know, maybe they had one of Lawrence Weiner's or maybe they had one of Joseph Kosuth or something. I doubt—

AVIS BERMAN: That would be more likely.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, I doubt that most of those artists had appeared at the Modern before. I had my *Projects* show at the Modern in 1978 [1977], and so some of that work appeared there. Not work that was shown in Europe but work I was doing at the time—which is photo-text and things like, you know, that period. But they didn't buy it.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Kynaston [McShine] tried to get them to buy it and they wouldn't. And so they didn't get any of that. And the Guggenheim got a piece from the late 1970s, which is still that literary kind of work. But that's because they had that Theodoron prize at the time, and I got the Theodoron prize. And that means that they get a work. So that's how come they got it. But I don't think they've even shown it outside of the initial show, when they used to do these Theodoron prize shows. That was also in the late 1970s. [00:52:00]

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. I don't think the Guggenheim has been much on Conceptual art either, in terms of big shows.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, no. They did the Josef Beuys show—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —which is closest they got, I guess. Well, they did the famous show where Daniel Buren had his big thing, his project where the stripes went down through the middle and where the other artists complained and where Hans Haacke had his real estate piece. They did that show. That was a famous show. That was a famous early Conceptual show.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. Now, when you said Daniel Buren, it just reminded me of a—this is just going back very briefly to the *Café*. Were you aware of Daniel Spoerri and his eating, and his restaurant pieces in France when you did that?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I guess I must have been. I don't know. I don't think that they played any particular role in it.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, he served real food. He cooked.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: But it was [as] an artist. He had a restaurant open once a week or so in Paris.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah. I don't think I knew the real history of it. I mean, I'm sure that I had seen pictures of some of the dinners. But that really didn't—I mean, obviously, I liked that stuff. I liked that work.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But I don't think it had any real influence. California Assemblage probably had more influence than that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. No, and also kind of the absurd quality of serving the leaves and stones—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AVIS BERMAN: —and, I mean, it was different. Well, I think what I—since we've touched on it, I would like to talk a little bit about [*A Lecture on*] *Houdini,* because that seemed to be such a complex piece in terms of writing and videoing, and just how you kind of—it somehow really does seem to be a real outgrowth of *Dorian Gray*, whether it was or wasn't. [00:54:01] But somehow, I see them in my mind as linked.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I suppose they are.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It was a performance made for video. It was when people first got their hands on the Portapaks. And so I had access to a Portapak. And it's the only video I really made. It was not made to be performed in front an audience. It was made to make the video.

I had done a number of photo pieces using Houdini ideas, or ideas about Houdini. And I had read all these books about his life and made these magic pieces. It was a combination of thinking about magic as art. And the literary aspect, I don't really connect it to that, although I did write this. But I don't really connect it into the kind of ideas about books and things that generated *Dorian Gray* or *Walden* or something.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. I was just thinking about the two—between *Dorian Gray*—it was about the idea of transformation.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, the content is there, but not the formal—

AVIS BERMAN: No.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —not the formal ideas. And the Houdini interest generated lots of different works over the years or during a certain period. And I was interested in Houdini and in magic there for a while. [00:56:06] And I think that preceded *Dorian Gray* to some degree.

AVIS BERMAN: Why was it dedicated to Terry Allen?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, because he gave me a suggestion about something—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —that I was doing with it. I don't remember even what it was. But I remember he set off some idea in my brain about it. And so I thought, Well, okay. It's for Terry.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. What about the idea of performing it in the straightjacket or the kind of restraint—it's the same kind of thing that Houdini would use to get out, but—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Was that—were you going to do that from the beginning? To be wearing that or?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, sure. That's an integral part of the piece. Because as I'm reading the text of his life that I wrote, I'm really trying to get out of this thing. It's not like I'm faking it. I'm really trying to get out of it, and I can't. And so the fact that that's what is visible on the screen, is that I'm really trying to get out of here and read this text at the same time—that's the piece.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, the struggle, which he could do seemingly so easily.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, and in the text of the piece, there's the struggle of him trying to contact the other side.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And so it's kind of all woven in there together. And the existential idea of trying to get out of that thing, and how it relates to what he did, it's all mixed up in there. But I don't think of it as [the] product of interest in the literary world. [00:58:06]

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: That was the magic period.

AVIS BERMAN: I see. Somehow to me Houdini and Wilde could understand each other.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: I just see them—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Probably [laughs].

AVIS BERMAN: —like laying on of hands of different periods—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No—

AVIS BERMAN: —of reinventions. The two personalities have some real similarity.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, that's probably what drew them to me in some subconscious way.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And you never did another video like this at all?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, I never did.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was it too much, or you just felt you'd said it all? I mean, there are always affinities, but I realize you don't repeat yourself.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I think I just probably did the best video I could possibly do, and that was that. It just didn't seem that there was anything to do anymore after that. You know? I had kind of found the perfect solution, like translating *Dorian Gray* or *Walden* or something. You don't go and do that again. That was the only way and perfect way to do that idea, and then I moved on.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Okay. Well, I think we have talked long enough for today, so I'm going to stop, and I'll turn that off by hitting it twice.

[END OF rupper17_1of2_sd_track03.]

[Brief side conversation, audio break.]

AVIS BERMAN: This is Avis Berman interviewing Allen Ruppersberg for the Archives of American Art oral history project on January 15, 2018, in his studio in Brooklyn.

I don't know if you have thought about anything or not—if there was anything that you had wanted to say or add from anything that we've done so far?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, I don't remember where we were anyway, so—

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well, okay, where we were, we had finished the Houdini video. So that was where we were. But, I wanted to ask you if I missed something in your bio. Have you ever taught?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, I taught as a visiting artist adjunct here and there over the years, but never full-time.

AVIS BERMAN: [00:02:00] Was there any interlude or any of these teaching gigs that you found memorable or brought you to some development in your work, or something that would have—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I don't know if you would say that it brought development into the work, but it certainly had its benefits, mostly when I was at UCLA, because that was more of an extended time.

I taught, what, one semester? Well, they did it in quarters. So I probably did two quarters per year for maybe four or five years, something like that. And so I used to always think that I got as much out of it as the students. But, being an adjunct, I didn't have to do all the normal faculty stuff. So that kept me away from all the bad parts: the politics and all of that stuff. And so, no, that part was very beneficial, but whether it's good for the work or [not], I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, what was exactly beneficial, besides getting a paycheck [laughs]?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, the paycheck was the motivating factor, but it's just the interaction with the students.

AVIS BERMAN: And did you have any who entered the art world or became professional artists later on?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, they enter the art world, some of them, yes, in different ways. Of course, maybe they all start out to be artists, but they don't wind up being artists, but they wind up being involved in one way or another.

[Brief side conversation, audio break.]

But I also, you know, did Skowhegan. I lived in different parts of the country as a visiting artist, for a semester at FSU, and a visiting semester at UNC Chapel Hill. So you get these visiting artist jobs, and you go and learn what it's like to live in those parts of the country.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And a lot of it was beneficial in ways that I never could have imagined. When I was UNC Chapel Hill, I wound up finding an archive of film that was going to go to the dump. And I managed to save it and bring it back to New York. So you get all kinds of experiences that aren't necessarily related to the school.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Those kind of jobs.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, but adding texture to your life.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, for sure, yeah. Absolutely.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, I just wanted to make sure we covered that.

Now, we are sitting here in your studio in front of what probably was the—not so much the sign because it's a relief, and it says, "Colby Poster Printing Co." And I think we need to start talking about your relationship with posters, which will become *The Novel that Writes Itself*. [00:06:00] So I really would like to know, when did you start making posters? What was the impetus for posters, especially fluorescent posters, and the rest?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, it's not fluorescent posters; it only happens to be one. The Colby Poster Printing Company, which is where I did all the work, they have a variety of colors that they change all the time. So at one point, there was a couple fluorescent posters, but that really isn't—that doesn't define it at all.

I think the first poster work was in the early '80s, probably '82, '83, something, when I had a show with James Corcoran in LA. And these Colby posters were something that—well, there's poster printing companies all over the U.S. at a certain point. And all of the early R&B posters and all the rock-and-roll posters and all of that stuff, you know, all the use of circus posters, all that kind of stuff. These printing companies existed all over the U.S.

But the one in LA, which was still in existence at that time and had been started just after the war—you saw them advertising all kinds of things all over LA for dances or carnivals, or whatever, on telephone poles. That was the way these things worked. [00:08:00] And so maybe I started grabbing a few of them off the telephone poles, or they're just so ubiquitous that you see them, or you used to see them, all the time. And, at one point, it occurred to me that, Well, maybe I should use this as a vehicle for something else. And so then I go down to the company and get to know them, and used them for, well, 30-plus years.

The dad was still running the company when I first approached them. And then the sons took over, and so I had kind of carte blanche to go down there and rummage around and find and use whatever I wanted, and they would print it up.

AVIS BERMAN: So in the beginning, were you just taking something that they had done and adding to it? Or were you composing—when did you start composing your own?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, they were composed right from day one. Whatever text, I would invent the text and I would just give it to them, and they would print it up in their manner. I mean, I didn't design the texts. I just wrote the texts and then used their images or their colors or their format.

AVIS BERMAN: Did you have to have large editions? Because normally, you're doing those kind of street posters [in] thousands or hundreds, and so they were like mailings. I mean, were you able to do them in small editions? Or what happened?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, well, I mean, normally, the edition was a hundred. But they were so cheap. You know, it was like maybe a dollar apiece. And maybe even less at the beginning. [00:10:00]

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And so either I would take a hundred, or they would let me do 50. I don't think I ever did less than 50 because it does—you can barely stop the presses. So mostly they were done in editions of a hundred or 50.

AVIS BERMAN: And would you come in with one text? I mean, would you make one at a time, or were they normally serial, that you'd need 10 or 12? In other words, I'm trying to figure out what your process was for these.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, it's all different. Sometimes I would have a use for five different texts together. Sometimes, it would be 10 different texts together, maybe one or two texts, but it just depended.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it's just that in pictures and when I've seen it, it's just there were so many different ones, and they're always realigned, [so] that if it looks—clearly, there's an accumulation, but it seemed that you couldn't just go in there and say, "Here, I want—here are my texts. I want one, you know, one poster 50 times."

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, you could.

AVIS BERMAN: Good, right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, sure. I mean, I don't think I ever just did one. Maybe the first batch was four or five. But, then, ultimately, it grew to when I did the *Allen Ginsberg's Howl* work, which was, what, 200 and something, 230 or something like that. And I wrote the entire text out the way I wanted it, and broke it down so that it would approximate one poster per—I would gauge which part would fit on a poster. [00:12:00]

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But then they did that; it took them a year to print that. So they would do 10 or 20 at a time. I would go down and look at them and make sure they were okay. And if there was something I didn't like, they would just do another one.

But basically, I just gave them the time and warrant to design it any way that they wanted to. And I just gave them little hints, "Well, just do whatever you want, you know; be wild about it," or whatever. Because it was only three brothers who ran the company. And the one brother was the typesetter. And he was the more kind of creative type. And so I would just basically work with him.

But they did the cover to my first retrospective for MOCA. I asked them to do the cover for the catalogue, and it was one of their stock images. And so they did that, and I just took things out of their stock that had been sitting there for 40 years that I found interesting. And so when you see photographs of installations, it's not only the text that I had them make for me, but it's all the leftover commercial jobs that I would save. Because they would just throw them away. But they were a different kind of language that was unique to that company. So I kept all of them, and I always include them in installations. So that it's not just my language. It's their language, too.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So in a certain way it became a collaboration? [00:14:00]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: All of those things are always a collaboration. Whether you do prints with a fine art printer like Landfall or other people like that that I've worked with—Gemini—it's a collaboration.

AVIS BERMAN: Did they just regard this a commercial job, or did they enjoy doing this as kind of a respite? I mean, obviously, you paid them; you had an account. But you mentioned that one of the brother[s] was the typesetter. Did they ever get a kick out of this? Or was it, It's a job?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Eventually, if there was an article in the paper, or I had a show where there was a review and there's a picture of their posters in it, then they got a charge out of that. And they would be proud of that and put it up on the bulletin board. And then, ultimately, other artists started to come down there and work with them. And so I was kind of a gateway, I guess, to younger artists thinking, Well, maybe they could use these things, too. But that came much, much later.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, actually, I was going to ask that question a little bit later, but it might be, we could digress briefly. Is that, who are some of the younger artists that you feel have been influenced by you?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I don't like to say who's influenced by me. I can only report what they have told me.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And so, if they tell me that they've been influenced, then I can say that.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, well, why don't you tell me some of the artists who have told you that they felt that you had influenced them or shown them a way—the way, or—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: [00:16:00] Well, I think it's different with different generations of artists, too. And so a generation that's directly under me would say—oh, well, like Jim Shaw, for instance, or Mike Kelley, or people like that.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: They would all, you know, Jim has said it specifically, but I got that feedback from them.

And then a generation or two under them would—the younger ones now that are in their 30s have actually used some of my work in their work, and then have told me about it and showed me what they did with it. And they've used it terrifically.

AVIS BERMAN: So how do you feel about appropriation?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I appropriate myself, so I think it's fine.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, self-appropriation is different from other—yeah.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, no, I mean, I appropriate from everywhere. And so the whole appropriation movement is something that I think comes from my generation of Conceptual types, anyway.

AVIS BERMAN: I would argue slightly that it certainly would; you could see it in Pop art as, you know, Lichtenstein was always accused of copying comics.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

AVIS BERMAN: Some of the Pop art, I would say the germ of it was in there. I mean, artists have always looked at—stood on the shoulders of other artists. So appropriation, and with people getting angry about it, didn't seem to start until the '60s. [00:18:00]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, the official appropriation generation from the '80s, when it really became a genre or a style or a way of working, those people, that generation, comes directly out of the '60s Conceptual people.

AVIS BERMAN: Yep. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And then it becomes an established form. So now nobody thinks twice about appropriation. You can be an assemblage artist or an appropriation artist or a this artist or that artist, but that wasn't true until a certain period.

AVIS BERMAN: You know, that's true, it wasn't; it didn't really have a name or a term, or it looked like just individual artists, say, in the '60s were doing things. And, of course, Duchamp was doing it right from the beginning. So there were always individuals, but anyway.

All right, let me get back to the posters. By the way, how did you get this sign that must have been on their building that we're looking at? "Sign" is the wrong word because it's—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, it's—

AVIS BERMAN: —it's like wooden letters or something that must have been on their building.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: This is the original sign that was put up when the company opened, right after World War II, so, yeah, they're wooden letters. And when the company closed, I got down there right away, because I was sure somebody else would try and get it before me. But I got down there, and I said, "Do you want to sell that?" And they said, "You want it?" And I said, "Yeah, sure." So we made a deal, and then I took it away, and I had an assistant who was a woodworker who kind of restored it a bit. [00:20:00] But it's the original sign off the building.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, that's terrific. Yeah, it's restored, but slightly; it still just looks—it looks worn, as it should. It looks distressed.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, he just cleaned it up. And maybe reinforced part of it or whatever. But, no, it's essentially what was on the building, same color, same everything.

AVIS BERMAN: So, yeah.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But because I was the one that had done the most work with them over such a long period of time, I took a lot of stuff when the place closed.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, when you were saying in the posters you would give them the texts and then they would go on from there, did they choose the colors? I mean, sometimes they're pink; sometimes they've got multiple colors; sometimes they're yellow.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, like I say, they have a range of maybe 12 colors at a time, some which they rotate, some which they keep all the time. So they would invent new colors; I would just say, you know, "You have to use all of them." Or, "Use as many as fits." I never made a choice.

AVIS BERMAN: I see.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Because it was never the same. Even if the text repeated for 50 times, the background colors would invariably be different. So I never stipulated anything other than giving them the text. And if they didn't quite get it on the page right, which was very, very rare, then I might say, "Okay, well, let's change this a little bit." But—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —generally, I just let them do it, because that was what they knew how to do.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, and I just—[in] 1983 the show was *Art Rolls/Head Rolls/Painting and Sculpture by Allen Ruppersberg,* James Corcoran Gallery. So that was, you know, you had said when you had started. [00:22:05]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, no, that—it was a show before that one.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It was a show, I don't know. There was a show at Jim Corcoran before that.

AVIS BERMAN: All right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Where I had the logs and the collaged fake book covers. I don't know if that show had a title or not. But, anyway, it was a little bit before the *Head Rolls*, I think.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well, I think I can probably look that up; this just was—but I want to know how making the posters and maybe that initial installation or two, how did that morph into the larger concept of *The Novel That Writes Itself*?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It didn't. *The Novel That Writes Itself* started in 1978. And I had no thought; I hadn't even started the posters at that point. I didn't start the posters until '82, you know, something like that. And so *The Novel That Writes Itself* is an independent thing.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, because in the literature, they seem to be the same. So I'd like to then untangle—so when you began in '78 with *The Novel That Writes Itself*, what did the work consist of at that—I mean, what was it?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It was just a proposal. I mimicked a kind of a corporate proposal and sent out the proposal to art world types that maybe had been at the *Café* or the *Hotel* or something like that. [00:24:00] Whoever was on the art world list at that time that I knew was connected in some way. And so I sent out a proposal, and in the proposal you had your choice of which character you could buy and all of that kind of stuff. And so it got rolling that way, but I had a very different idea about what I would eventually produce.

And then, ultimately, a few years later, I didn't like the original idea, and so it just kind of sat there for a while. And I would do a little something once in a while and send it to the people who had subscribed.

But it just went on and on, and I didn't really know where it was going, but it was writing itself, as I see [it]. And so ultimately, in about '95, when I did a retrospective in Europe at the Magasin in Grenoble, I wanted to use *The Novel That Writes Itself*, and at that point I realized that it had, indeed, been written by all of these posters that I had made with Colby over the last 25-plus years at that point.

And so that's when the two worlds came together. So that was the first time that I put up all the posters that I had made over all that period, along with the commercial ones, the ones I had found, and blah, blah, blah. And then that became *The Novel That Writes Itself,* because I realized it had written itself; I just didn't know it. [00:26:00] And so all of these texts then added up. And then I made a bunch of new ones with the idea that, now, this is the novel.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, even though many of those posters and texts are very—they seem to be very autobiographical or that they have—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Some are; some aren't.

AVIS BERMAN: The subject seemed to have personal meaning for you.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, specifically, ones that I made after I decided it was *The Novel That Writes Itself*, that's what it was. They were more specifically addressed to that. But the ones previous to that, they would have one reason or another for being made. Sometimes they were made for a museum show; sometimes they'd be made just because these were texts I wanted to have, [and] so on. So there is many, many different, kinds of

texts in there besides the ones that are, specifically, personal about the novel.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And, of course, you had been working in this a long—I mean, working with text, working with words, all of this, but, you know, some of these have very pithy and kind of acerbic and interesting aphorisms in them. And I wondered—I'm sure everybody asks you this, and I plead guilty—but did you have any connection to either Jenny Holzer or Barbara Kruger, or anyone who was really making posters and texts like that?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, nobody made posters like that.

AVIS BERMAN: No, well—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Jenny Holzer made her LED signs.

AVIS BERMAN: —right, but—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Barbara Kruger made her kind of blown-up advertisement pieces. And I knew Barbara. I didn't really know Jenny Holzer, but Barbara I knew—but I don't see much connection between that. [00:28:00]

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I had wondered if, actually, if Barbara had—if you knew if Barbara had seen your work earlier and what—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, I'm sure she did. But it's not necessarily the posters. I mean, she knew the work. I knew her from way before the posters started. So it comes out of early Conceptual work. The posters are just a small part of it.

AVIS BERMAN: It's just that you were such a pioneer in Conceptual work that I was just making—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: That's where it comes from. The posters are just an adjunct to that original work, which, on that generation, Barbara is in that generation that was just coming out of CalArts, and aware of the work that was being done in LA at the time by some of us there.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And did you ever want to kind of publish this in some conventional, printed sort of way, like a large, almost loose-leaf notebook?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: We've done that.

AVIS BERMAN: You've done that? Okay.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, *Michèle Didier* in Paris. Well, she's actually in Brussels, but we showed it in Paris; she has a gallery in Paris. She produced the definitive *Novel That Writes Itself*, which will be in the Walker show. It was a multiple. I don't know, a small edition, a big, giant book, but more than a book; it's a sculpture and an object. And it has every single poster that I defined as part of the novel. [00:30:00]

AVIS BERMAN: So that would have maybe—that was done in 2014? Would that have been correct?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Something like that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, because the show that I saw at Greene Naftali, I think that was kind of when it ended. And it seemed, I mean, in general in your work, part of this is maybe natural, as [you are] getting older, but it seemed to be that your work has become increasingly elegiac over the years. Was that something you were conscious of or that you've thought about?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, it's something I've always liked. I've always been attracted to that kind of idea, or that kind of poetry. I'm sure that it's become more pronounced. But, no, I've always been drawn to that anyway.

AVIS BERMAN: Certainly, I mean, from the early work when you're taking pictures of old things that were about to disappear, there's the architectural preservation aspect, or the cultural preservation. But it just seemed also, when I saw the show, there were so many obituaries in there.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, yes. The last show at Carol's [Carol Greene, of Green Naftali] was a big use of obituaries, but the show before that had the big, giant Rauschenberg obituary, which was made in the same way, with the pegboards and the xeroxed letters. I used the Rauschenberg one for that work because that was such an amazing obit; it was the largest one I'd ever seen. It went on for pages in the *New York Times,* and so not only was it because it was Bob Rauschenberg, but because I had known him and [been] influenced by him and all of this other kind of stuff. [00:32:00] But also because it was such an amazing piece that was written, and we know that obits are a certain genre of writing anyway.

And so I have been collecting obits of artists and writers and poets and kind of cultural icons for—since the '90s. So now I recently thought, Well, I should really start using these. It's an archive that I have built now; it's time to use it. And so a lot of those pieces that were in Carol's show were beginning to use—I'd begun to use the archive in the last few years. But it was more specific in Carol's also because Bill Berkson was a friend of mine, and I wanted to honor Bill's passing, and then Bruce Conner and Jess were influences on me and the kind of art that I like to make. So it kind of was an honor for them, to use their obituaries. And it was just that Bill died that last year before anyway.

So that's why there was so much of it there, but the show before had the giant Rauschenberg, and other shows going back maybe eight, 10 years had different kinds of presenting obits.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it was a fascinating format that you devised, almost like Chinese checkers or crossword puzzles, and I'd like you to talk about how you figured out that format with the names, I mean, and the words, and—anyway, it was fascinating to both read and look at. [00:34:00]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, yes, that's what it really is; it's reading and looking. But the Rauschenberg one was just straight. It was just one word after the other across one panel, and then picked up on the next panel. But then when I wanted to do the next set, I didn't want to do the same thing, and it occurred to me that I could use the same format, but do it in a spiral, so that it had a different kind of visual form to it.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And so they just go on however long that they go on. You start up in this corner, and you start going around laying the letters out until you come there, and then you start on the next panel. And so these were also—the Rauschenberg one was an enormous work. I think it was, I don't know, 15 four-foot-square panels, maybe even more. I took up the entire wall at Carol's big gallery. And I wanted to make smaller ones here, but the obits were also smaller; like I said, the Rauschenberg one was enormous. So I knew that these would be smaller, and I wanted to make them in a different way.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, they were also very colorful. They were bright. And what was great, you also got a real obsessive quality to them. Then it's almost, I don't know, when I was at the show, there was something about some of them that reminded me of Alfred Jensen.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I always liked Alfred Jensen, for sure [laughs]. But there isn't really much difference between that obsessiveness and copying *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. [00:36:00] Or copying *Walden*. It's the same thing. It's putting one letter after another; it's one word after another, until you've finished the book, or the obit, or whatever you're writing. So I think it's all of a kind. Or whether it's the posters—whether you make one poster and then you make 10 and then they go together and—so I think it's all pretty much the same thing.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, well, "obsessive" may be wrong, but it was just like constant—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, obsessive is a good word, but—

AVIS BERMAN: That concentration on, like, each square was really—it was very manifest. And on each unit, you know?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, of course, my assistant does a lot of it, too. But [laughs] there's really no difference between her doing it and I doing it, or me doing *Dorian Gray* and me doing that. I mean, it's all just, you want to get out whatever you can get out, however you can get it out.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, absolutely, because you had the idea and the concept and the vision. What is your assistant's name? Or have you had a lot of assistants?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No.

AVIS BERMAN: Or has this been a long-time one?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: This is only the second assistant I've ever had. Her name is Augusta Wood. And she's a very good photographer in her own right. She went to CalArts. She's a CalArts grad and she is a photographer, so she knows all of the techniques and the things that I don't know, or don't have time to know, like how to do Photoshop and all that stuff. And she says, "You don't need to; you have me." I couldn't learn it anyway if my life depended on it. Oh, I suppose I could if I wanted to spend the time, but I don't. And so she knows all the things, and we can work together, and that's a collaboration, too, in a way.

AVIS BERMAN: [00:38:00] We were kind of going into this elegy and memorial—what was the memorial, the piece on Allan Kaprow, about? Was that in that almost, shall we say, like a board game form? Or was that something different?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: The Allan Kaprow piece, which one is that?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it said—there was a memorial that you did, or homage to Allan Kaprow in 2008.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, that's when MOCA did the Allan Kaprow retrospective. They invited, I don't know, four or five artists, maybe there was six, I don't know. But they invited some artists to do a work [to be] included in the show that was influenced by, or an homage, or something to do with Allan Kaprow.

And so that was the way that came about; it was made because he was a big influence on me and we knew each other, and so I wanted to—I was happy to be invited to do this. And so it was a work based on his early happenings, environments. But his influence is scattered throughout the whole body of my work anyway. I don't even remember the name of that now, but—I did it at MOCA and then we showed it at Carol's a few years—well, a couple, I guess it was the second show I did. First or second show, I can't remember.

AVIS BERMAN: Given your interest in books and writing and words and texts, I had seen in a couple interviews you said to people, "I hate artists' books." [Laughs.] [00:40:00] And I wondered if you could elaborate what was meant there.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: [Laughs.] Well, I do hate artists' books. But not the artists' books that I like. But as a genre—there's a lot of crap that gets made in the what's called "artists' books" [genre]. But they usually have nothing to do with what myself or people that I like do. It becomes almost like a home craft or something, that people make these things that entertain themselves. But it gets called artists' books, and they do whole shows of things called artists' books which I don't think have anything to do with what myself or [laughs] other people I admire were doing.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, well, are you thinking of these luxurious editions that they used to do in France with various artists like the [inaudible], in which they would [do –AB] these very expensive pages and bindings, and there'd be an image by an artist in there, I mean, one artist?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, it's mostly kind of home craft kind of stuff. Or just, I don't know, just amateur bookmaking.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, I guess, the reason I'm trying to pin you down is it's obviously there's something specific you didn't like, so I was trying to figure out if it's those big—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It's the idea of the genre of artists' books, that it's just too broad.

AVIS BERMAN: I could be wrong, but you had that show *The Secret of Life and Death* that was at the New Museum and MOCA, and you had all of these panels of books that were sort of opened, and photos in sort of an organized chaos that you had done. [00:42:00] And that was not on artists' books per se, but it was certainly, you were looking at books, and you also had *Honey, I Shrunk the Collection*. So—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, that's later, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: —yeah, but books are on your mind, there's no doubt about it.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, well, yeah. I mean—

AVIS BERMAN: Your interpretations.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —it's using them in much different ways.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. Right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: This is a later—this is not the original version.

AVIS BERMAN: No, but that's the reproduction I could get of the—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, this is something specific; the real thing is, you take the Post-it notes off of it.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, that—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I don't even think this is right.

AVIS BERMAN: No, that's, okay, these are—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, this is not right at all. This is one work; this is another work.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And neither one of these is what these pictures are.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, well, I'm a prisoner of the book I could get.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I don't know where this came from, but this was something I did with Christine Burgin.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, this is the *Honey, I Rearranged the Collection*—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —*While You Were Gone*, 1999.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right, but the image behind there is reprints of the photos from an original piece in the early to mid-'70s. And then this one is the same. But these are two different works.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, that certainly could be true.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But we put them together for Christine's show. And then I put the Post-its on top of it. This is from, like, 2000-something. So it's using the old works that are underneath, remade, and remade into a new work about *Honey*.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, okay, well—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But the original works underneath there are about something entirely different.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, well, this was not in the caption, clearly.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I don't know where you got that from. [00:44:00]

AVIS BERMAN: A book on art and text that was published in England.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Never saw it.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, really. Well, you were in it like crazy [laughs].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: [Laughs.] Well, I never saw it.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: So, but that's interesting that they used those photographs—rather than the original works that they came from. But that was because it was maybe shown in London; maybe that's why.

AVIS BERMAN: This was an enormous book, a compendium of various artists who had used art and text. So—they probably, putting it together, I guess they made some mistakes, or they didn't consult the artist.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, they probably only had access to those photos anyway, rather than the original works, because it's more contemporary anyway.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, yeah, okay.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: But that's fine, because I mix up old work and new work all the time anyway.

AVIS BERMAN: Does that mean you recreate the old work and put something else in it, or are you—I don't know how much, what your storage is or what you could do. This is very pedagogical/pedantic; does this play havoc with any kind of cataloguing system of what you've made and done?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Probably, but I don't think it's that much of a problem because the original works exist as the original works, and then if I—because a lot of them are photo based—I go back, and I look and, Oh, there's a good negative; maybe I'll use it for something entirely different 20 years later. It isn't the same work. And it has a new date on it. So I don't recreate the old works in any sense. It's just there's a lot of good photographs that, 20 years later, look like material. And then as you get different series going, then, obviously [they] relate to things you've done in the past, and maybe you bring some of those ideas into the current work. And I think mixing it all up is a good thing to do anyway.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, well—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It's fun.

AVIS BERMAN: —right. Well, many artists, most do; they go back to studies or ideas that engage you, and if you haven't really finished the idea, you—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —or you want to—or you look at it differently many years—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: —later, so—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Exactly. Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, many ideas are certainly worth quarrying over many years, too.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I always thought I was doing that anyway. That there was a lot of ideas that I would do some works from, but then move on to something else real quickly; particularly when you're young, you move through ideas real fast. And you think, Okay, well, I can come back and there's other ideas here. So I kind of always thought that that was a possibility.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. Also you did a number of memorials in Europe, and I wondered if you would select the one that you felt was most pivotal, or richest, and speak about it?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, there's probably two of them.

AVIS BERMAN: Two would be fine [laughs].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, if you don't want to select one, that's—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, two of them stick out in my mind as being the kind of really important ones and ones that I liked best anyway. One was done for Sonsbeek '93, when I was invited to be in the Sonsbeek exhibition in Arnhem in Holland. [00:48:00] That was one [*Stop Traveler (Siste Viator)*]. And then, a few years later, in '97, when I was invited to be in Münster, Germany, then that was—that's where the second one came out.

The first one, well, both of them, I do an enormous amount of research. And so first of all, you go to Arnhem to see what Arnhem is and see what you can learn about Arnhem. And so I spent a lot of time in Holland. I was in Holland a lot anyway because of my friend Ger Van Elk being in Amsterdam and doing shows in Amsterdam, in and around Holland.

So I just spent a lot of time there. And just filled up all these books with research ideas and photographs. I don't know how much I can explain, because both of them are very long periods of research and gestation, and then a lot of work to make the stuff on top of it. And I don't know how to go back.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, let's start with Arnhem. What did you decide to end up memorializing there?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I knew nothing about Arnhem before I went there. And so the thing that I remember coming up first, and maybe the way I make other things, too, is that I saw that the Battle of Arnhem, they had made a big Hollywood multi-international star movie out of it. [00:50:00] And so that's where I first kind of got a glimpse of what put Arnhem on the map.

AVIS BERMAN: The movie was, I assume, *A Bridge Too Far*?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It was *A Bridge Too Far*. And so once I saw the movie, then I began to learn about Arnhem, and started collecting books and things, and focusing on the Battle of Arnhem, because that really is what the town was about, and then when the final piece came together, also including this aspect that it really is memorialized in what turned out to be a very successful and a very accurate, movie.

I mean, the more I learned about Arnhem, the more the movie was really correct in the way they portrayed what happened, as much as it can be. And so the piece became a memorial to the Battle of Arnhem. I can describe the piece, but it's quite complicated.

AVIS BERMAN: That's all right. That's what we're here for [laughs].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: When I was looking around Arnhem, I rented an apartment. I had a great apartment overlooking the Rhine. And a lot of the statues and memorials to the Battle of Arnhem were, at one point, moved to the cemetery. [00:52:00] All of the soldiers are buried all around Arnhem. All the different nationalities have their own specific cemeteries for each nationality that was involved in the Battle of Arnhem—maybe not the Americans, but certainly the other nationalities.

And so these are the facts that you're confronted with when you spend time in Arnhem. You see these enormous cemeteries and these enormous memorials, and so the impact of this is pretty strong. Then you can go and see the bridge, you know, the bridges there. And so I discovered in going to the cemetery, not the cemetery that is specifically for each national group of soldiers, because those are sometimes outside of town, but the main cemetery in Arnhem, which is beautiful, as a lot of old cemeteries are.

And so like I say, some of the statues and these physical memorial sculptures were moved into the cemetery. So I noticed that there [were] these old kind of workman's wagons that were sitting around in the cemetery, or you would see them all around Arnhem, too. And they were kind of small shacks on wheels, you know. [00:54:00] And it turns out that people lived in them after the war, because they were so bombed out, there was no place to live, and people had to live in these trailers.

And so there was an old trailer in the cemetery, and my idea was to take the trailer and turn it into a memorial for many reasons. And so I got access to this trailer, and I spend months restoring it and getting it all cleaned and fixed and situated in the cemetery. I mean, this—I spent days and months there doing this. And then what went into the trailer was a library—I mean, a bookstore. And the bookstore consisted of the four nationalities, not including Americans: the Polish, the Germans, the Dutch, of course, and the Brits. The Brits, the Germans, the Polish, and the Dutch were involved in this battle, because it was one of the last bridges to go—to stop the Germans.

And if they'd succeeded in stopping the Germans at the Battle of Arnhem, the war would have been over months, months, months, months before, but they couldn't stop them. And the Americans didn't get there in time, and so it was one of the largest disasters of World War II. [00:56:00] And so what I did in connection with all of these cemeteries was imagine the books that were in the minds of the soldiers who died in this battle, because they're a certain age; they're a certain generation. And so I did the research to find what were the most popular books for each nationality at the time that the young soldiers would have read.

And so then I went and found all the books, original copies of the books. And then we had them reproduced in an edition of a hundred each. And so all the books, each nationality had, like, five books that would have been in the soldiers' minds that were reproduced. And then in the trailer was this bookstore with all the books in it. In the cemetery, the trailer was locked, so you could only look in the windows of the trailer and see this bookstore in there, but then there was a little brochure on the outside of the trailer that said if you were interested, you could go downtown Arnhem to the bookstore [there]. And in the bookstore, then I had also the other half of the edition there for sale. So people could go down there and buy the books. And so that's more or less the dynamic of how the piece worked.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, so it made it more participatory?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yes. First of all, you had to go to the cemetery to find it, and then you saw it in relationship to the other memorials that were made. And just the Arnhem population anyway. [00:58:00] All these beautiful statues from all these different nationalities that had lived in Arnhem, not the official cemeteries, because even 50 years later, or almost 50 years later, the Dutch refused to have the Germans participate in anything. And they hated them, still.

AVIS BERMAN: World War II is so close to all the European countries. It's really—it's not past, in the least.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, that's what you find out. And so the next year after Arnhem, after Sonsbeek '93—it would have been '94. Then they had their 50th anniversary, and they did not invite the Germans to this. I went to that, you know. I went to that anniversary and saw all the ceremonies, and stayed in Arnhem and little towns around Arnhem.

So anyway, the books were there in the bookstore to be sold, and of the five from each nationality—so [of] the five books in Dutch, for instance, only one of them was printed entirely, for two reasons. One, we couldn't afford to print all of them, but also because it left a lot—the books themselves were exact replicas of the books that I found. The antiquarian books that I found, these were exact replicas. But only one of them was printed all the way through. The rest of them had blank pages, but that kind of also was a metaphor for the memory of the soldiers. [01:00:00] Because each book had a, not a bookmark, but a "this book belongs to"—what do you call that? I can't think of the name of that.

AVIS BERMAN: A bookplate.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: A bookplate. So I had original bookplates made for each nationality. And then I went to the cemetery and copied the names down of all of the soldiers, or as many as I needed from that cemetery, and wrote those names on the bookplates. So every book was an original soldier's book. And so that's what you bought; you bought this multiple of this one soldier's book that was in his mind when he was killed in Arnhem. That pretty much sums it up.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I wondered, did you ever hear from the town about feedback if relatives of the dead bought books or saw the memorial or anything?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I got more feedback from the piece that I did in Münster. Because I was more involved with talking to the people, but, no, you get the feedback that they like this. That they understand what it was; they appreciated and—

AVIS BERMAN: Because you did do a ton of work. There was a ton of work and thought. It was a really multifaceted kind of piece. It wasn't like something just plopped down there.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, no.

AVIS BERMAN: No.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Mm-mm [negative]. No, it was—but that's the enjoyable part.

That's the part that's really, really fun, is to make that and find all these things. And then the trailer was filled with stuff that—I would go to the local flea markets in Arnhem, and stuff was still there for sale from the battle of Arnhem. [01:02:00]

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ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: There [were] books. There [were] the ribbons. There was all kind of stuff that was still out there to buy.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. People don't throw away things as easily there as here.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, no. They didn't have very much in the first place, and so then what they did have, they kept. I don't know if you could still do that, but 25 years ago, you could. And so the trailer was filled with not only the books, but all these kind of memorial objects and memorial symbols, like a jar of honey and all the kind of stuff that comes out of your research. And then it also had all the memorabilia from the movie. The Battle of Arnhem was in there—the posters, and the lobby cards, and the script, and photos. And so the difference between the real photos and the photos of the movie, that was in there so that you could play with that idea.

AVIS BERMAN: And is the memorial—is it, as far as you know, kept up?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yes. The city of Arnhem bought it, and it was remade on a slightly smaller scale in order to fit into the library. The local library bought it, but the Dutch were at that time, and probably still are, very generous about buying things—buying artworks for, particularly, the towns, if they're involved. And so the city of Arnhem ultimately bought it, and there were two young Dutch artists that I worked with to help me get it together, and they became responsible for remaking it.

So it was remade to three-quarters scale, and also you couldn't bring the original trailer into the museum because it would bring in the termites and bugs and things like that into a library. So you couldn't do it. It had to be remade over. So I worked with them, and we made it over to three-quarters scale, and now it exists in the museum in Arnhem. It was going to be included at the Walker, but ultimately, we didn't have room for it, and it was too expensive to ship.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Otherwise, it would have come over here.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it certainly represents an important aspect of your work. No, I'm glad we discussed it because I think it's—to get the explanation.

So in 1997, the one that was done in Münster—could we start with that one?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I guess that one kind of starts in the same place Arnhem does—maybe start a little before that, because Kasper König was the curator, one of the two curators. And Kasper came over to my studio here in New York when it was in the Cable Building, and he was telling me about the show, and we would talk about Münster and all of that, because there had been two shows before that. He did them every 10 years, and

so there had been one in '77, one in '87. Now, it was time for '97. And each one is different—they wanted each one to be different in a way that it would represent what sculpture meant every 10 years.

So anyway, Kasper came, and we talked about all of this, and at one point, Kasper noticed that I had a paperback, [an] old paperback copy of *Candide,* on the table. [00:04:00] And Kasper said, "Well, you know, Candide started his journeys in Westphalia." Which is the portion of Germany where Münster is. It's called Westphalia. And I said, "No, I didn't remember that."

And so then later on, I thought, Well, I'll just read *Candide* again, and sure enough, first thing, it starts off in Westphalia. And so I thought, Oh, that's a pretty good place to start, you know? You have to pick up these clues when you're going to a brand-new place like this, and you get clues to what the place is or something—a place to start to make a work.

And so I kind of had that in the back of my mind when I went over to Münster to start looking around. And the first thing you know about Münster is that it was completely recreated, that it was bombed completely to nothing, by a mistake. It was a mistake. It was never meant to be destroyed like that. But the bombers came back, and they still had the bombs, and it was too foggy to drop them where they were supposed to have dropped them, and so they just dropped them on Arnhem and completely blew a—you know, a Renaissance—

AVIS BERMAN: Münster, not Arnhem.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Münster—it completely eradicated Münster. Arnhem was destroyed too, but that was not a mistake.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. Well, that was—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: That was on purpose.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that was through, yeah, also hand-to-hand, ground combat, too.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah. The ground combat made the Battle of Arnhem, but, I mean—Arnhem itself, its city, was bombed and virtually destroyed. It's an ugly city now because the original stuff isn't there. But in Münster, they wanted to recreate what was there, and so they very meticulously recreated Münster. [00:06:00]

AVIS BERMAN: Just like Dresden.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And Dresden later, yeah. But Münster is an amazing job that they did to bring back this medieval city, and I think it's from the 12th century or something like that. Anyway, so that's one of the first things you realize, that this is all recreated here. And so [laughs], it connects to *Candide* in a way, too—and because it's so beautifully recreated, it becomes a big tourist attraction. And so the town is filled with travel bureaus, and the Germans like to go and visit this stuff. And it's kind of like the Dutch like to go to that town in southern Holland that's the perfect—still a perfect medieval city. I can't think of the name of it now. I've been there a couple of times.

AVIS BERMAN: It's not—let's see. Well, it's not Delft or Volendam or—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No. Anyway, that's original. But Münster is a recreation, for the most part, and beautiful recreation. I mean, you read about the time and how they went about recreating this, and it took them 20 years or something to do it. But anyway, so then the idea of *Candide*, and *The Best of All Possible Worlds* kind of comes together with what Münster is today. [00:08:00]

I decided that I would create a tour of Münster, and this tour would—I'm trying to remember how I went about these steps here because, again, there's a lot of steps and it's quite complicated. But I decided that I would open a travel bureau, and the owner of the travel bureau would be Candide.

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.]

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: And so I set up the travel bureau in the same way as all the—it looked exactly like all the other travel bureaus in Münster, except that here was this costumed character from *Candide* running it. And the way that the tour was set up—because you would go into the museum, and in the museum was the travel bureau, and there, Candide would introduce himself and get the visitors to go on his tour.

I devised a tour by interviewing all the Münster citizens that I could gather. I had a German assistant who went with me to interview them and then to translate what they said. We went around to all these different people who would volunteer to speak about their history and ask them the question, Was there a place in Münster that was the best of all possible worlds, where they remembered it being just great, just perfect, or the most memorable part of Münster? [00:10:00] Somehow—I don't know how we phrased it.

But anyway, it turns out that they all had some story about World War II, and so whether it was the bombing itself or some other aspect of, their version of the best of all possible worlds, that would be the spot on the tour where they said, "Oh, I was on the corner of Mullenhall [ph] and da-da-da-da, and this happened to me," or, "My brother—" or whatever the story was, there was usually a way to identify it on the map of Münster.

And then this became a spiral, where you started at the office in the museum with Candide. I made a book that had the map, and it told the story of each one of the stops on the tour. And so you would buy the book, and you would get the map for the tour, and then you could go off and take the tour. And it was a spiral that went from the museum out to the 11 or 12 stops on the tour around the city of Münster.

And so at each one of these designated stops, I had a big sign made, a two-sided sign: one in German, one in English, because I copied the kind of signs that they had for beer—a certain kind of beer I've forgotten now. And so I duplicated these beer signs. But I mean, the way that they hung off the building, they're perpendicular, so then you could see both sides. [00:12:00] And on one side, it has an image of an eye, and it says, "The Best of All Possible Worlds," in German and in English. And so at every stop on the tour, you would know that this was the place, because here was the big, lighted sign that said, this is "The Best of All Possible Worlds."

And so that was the work, and the signs then came down, and the museum kept five of them and the other five or six came back to me, one of which will be at the Walker; they're in different collections. But that was the other memorial that is really the most memorable for me.

AVIS BERMAN: It's sort of interesting that within Germany you can memorialize happy moments within the war for them. And did you say you got a lot of feedback? Did a lot of people take the tour, or what was—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, yeah. They loved it, yeah. But it was very well liked.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And you had no hesitancy with people talking about World War II?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: That's what they wanted to talk about. If that's what they thought was their version of the best of all possible worlds, that's what I wanted to hear.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I guess you didn't ask the question, "What did you do during the war?"

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No.

[They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: That wasn't—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It wasn't framed like that, no. I don't know, I mean, because the girl who worked with me, she did the actual interviews with them, and then we would work on what they said to edit it. I edited the stories down because sometimes they were just too long. But she translated everything that they said, and then you work with these stories, and you edit them, and put them in the book. And then the book is sold not only in the travel office, but sold with the rest of the Münster catalogues and stuff like that.

AVIS BERMAN: And did you use an—was Candide a local actor?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yes, mm-hmm [affirmative]. There were a number of Candides. I mean, I had to have somebody in there all the time. So actually one Candide was a woman.

AVIS BERMAN: Why not?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Part of the office was in the back, where she put her makeup and wigs, and we got the authentic costumes and made a play out of it basically.

AVIS BERMAN: Terrific. Now—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: So those are the two that stand out. There's other ones, but those are really the more major ones.

AVIS BERMAN: No. Well, that's what I wanted to ask you, because I also just think it's important to document at least some of your career in Europe.

We've talked about some of it before, but one other thing that begins to maybe happen later rather than sooner is that you seem to be working with music and sound a lot more in the last 10 years or so.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, yeah. That's kind of a new subject. I mean, I've always been a listener, but it's

become more of something that I wanted to document and use as material in a way.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you mentioned *Howl,* and you had *Singing Posters,* and you also did—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: *Singing Posters* is *Howl*.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. There was another one that you actually did, a sort of a record album with—or, you know, collections of American folk art. Oh, artists—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Music—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, music for—that was for the Athenaeum Music & Arts Library,

Sound of Music. [00:16:00] So—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: *The Sound of Music*? I don't know what—

AVIS BERMAN: That's a catalogue.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, I don't know that.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. All right. That could be entered probably under—as part of *Howl*. Some of that I found a little confusing when I was researching. Well, what do you think have been the most successful things that you've done using music and sound?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, I guess the most elaborate one is *The B and D of R 'n' R*, which was shown at the Chicago Art Institute, I don't know, about three years ago or something like that. It's a giant installation of the birth and death of rock and roll. And so it's—what is it? Oh, I don't know. It's something like 32 running feet of pegboard installation, with hundreds and hundreds of xeroxed images from found photos and ephemera that document the history of rock and roll, and in the five categories that define rock and roll: gospel, R&B, church, and so forth. [00:18:00] It's five pegboards—no, it's more than that. Maybe it's seven pegboards. You know, it's 32 pegboards, each a four-foot square, so it's enormous. And each section—there were five sections: church, home, fun—I can't think of the others.

But anyway, then there's seven albums made to go along with this, which are from my collection of 78s. And it's a recent collection of 78s, which even now, 10 years later, you couldn't duplicate. But I realized that it was just at the end of when you could still find the original rock and roll—because that's what I grew up with. That's part of my DNA, being there at the birth of rock and roll, and particularly being from Cleveland, because that's where it was defined as rock and roll by Alan Freed. And so I'm just a few years younger than when this first rock-and-roll show was, and so then I'm really part of that. And I began to realize that this is now dead, or it's fast fading.

And so I decided that I would try and collect what was still left. [00:20:00] And realizing that by going to Cleveland's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, that stuff that's in there I could still find in thrift stores or flea markets. So I began to collect all this stuff, and then eventually made this work out of it. Some of the albums are right here, I think. So there's a multiple set of LPs that is the soundtrack to the visual installation of these pegboards, with these hundreds of photographs copied and laminated and hung on the pegboards. That's the most major one—

AVIS BERMAN: And—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —so far.

AVIS BERMAN: And also was there music? Was there sound playing in the—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: —gallery?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, not in the gallery, but, yes, in the gallery in a way that you sat down on a couch in the middle of the installation, and there was an iPad there where you could see what all the records were, and then you had headphones.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. You could pick—right.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: You had headphones, and you also had a cone, so that, when you sat on the couch, you could hear it. But it didn't blast all over the whole installation, which is something I don't like, you know? And I don't like headphones either particularly, but—

AVIS BERMAN: There's no way around it.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —there's no way around it. But the cones worked pretty well. So anyway, that was the first installation of this big, giant work, and the record albums exist, and the work exists. Some of it just got sold. So that really was kind of the beginning. I had made a couple soundtrack albums for other installations before that, but this was the one that really focused in on this subject of rock and roll. [00:22:00]

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you certainly are taking the folk, or the popular, experience, and I had wondered if you had done anything with American folk song or, you know—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, that's in here.

AVIS BERMAN: In this, too, right?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yes. It's because rock and roll—that's part of rock and roll, and so it's in there.

AVIS BERMAN: So I guess it's sort of voice of the—it would be voice of the people and—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah. I mean, there's a Lead Belly song in there; there's other songs that are the groundwork, or the beginning traces, of rock and roll. That's part of its history.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, well, you actually taught me something. I never thought about why the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame was in Cleveland, and I didn't know there was a rationale. I just figured cities were vying for it. I didn't realize that there was—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No, it was born there.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: It was born there because Alan Freed was the disc jockey for the local radio station who began to play black music for us white teenagers that would tune into it at night, and he is credited with coining the term "rock and roll," even though it kind of exists in the history of R&B. But the first rock-and-roll show was in Cleveland—and he did it.

AVIS BERMAN: I knew who he was, but I didn't realize that the whole Cleveland connection made—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, he quickly moved to New York after that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. That was when I sort of—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: —became aware of, because I lived in Connecticut and we could get the show from New York—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right—

AVIS BERMAN: —but not Cleveland.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah. No, first he was in Cleveland, and then he moved to New York, and did his shows at the Paramount and all of that. But he first did it in Cleveland, and the first show was at the Cleveland Arena. [00:24:00] So there's a definite reason why the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame was there, although New York wanted to have it, too, but it ultimately wound up in Cleveland.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, New York really didn't need it. They have enough stuff.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, they have enough stuff.

AVIS BERMAN: And normally, I'm such a chauvinist. I want everything to be in New York so I could go to it easily, but I agree.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, they really did quite a good job at Cleveland with this. It's really a very interesting museum, and they continue to do exhibits and are serious about it.

AVIS BERMAN: All right. I have one other little artifact. This was something we said we would discuss. I had pulled it—I asked an innocent question, and this was—I had asked you if you had seen this newspaper ad, which was from October 29, 2017.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I saw that, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, and it's an ad that says, "Gagosian presents LA Invitational," and it really looks like one of the Colby poster pieces that you did in the colors, and there were various LA artists in there, and I realized that it's—you are not in this, although they're mostly—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —gallery show artists.

AVIS BERMAN: It's—right, it's gallery show artists. But I just wondered how you felt about seeing your work used this way.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, it's been used so much that I don't even think about it anymore. Actually, this is basically a copy of what the Hammer did when they did their LA invitational, which is a real show about all their—it's their version of the Biennial, and they used this the year before. [00:26:00] They used this kind of thing, and it's really not even a—I mean, it's like a Colby, yes, but—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, well, right, but it's not the real printers. It's—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: No.

AVIS BERMAN: —more artistically, quote unquote, laid out in—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah. It's just an appropriation of what Colby used to be, and it's a show of gallery artists, basically.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. So it's really not a true invitational. It's people and they get—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: I don't think so. I think it—90 percent of those people show with Gagosian anyway. And so it's just not [laughs] anything to take too seriously.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. It was just funny because it just jumped out at me, and I had been—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right. Well, I'm sure you're not the only one either. In fact, I know you're not the only one.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. No, I'm sure you heard from a lot of people about that.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, but it's going on now, ever since the young artists picked it up. But I had 20-something years where nobody paid any attention, and I didn't have any young artists going down to Colby, picking up stuff.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. Well, of course, that's the question sometimes. Is it better to be paid attention to and appropriated than not [laughs]?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, yeah, I was happy to have Colby to myself. And then, of course, the young artists do it, and then nobody knows the difference between what I did and what they do, because it all looks the same to most people, or they use type, and they use phrases or something, and all of a sudden it becomes a kind of generic thing. But now they're closed, so nobody can do it anymore anyway.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. [00:28:00] Well, you're very focused right now on what is going to be a very important exhibition in 2018, this year, and it's called, if this is still correct, *Alan Ruppersberg: Intellectual Property*—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —*1968*—

AVIS BERMAN: —*1968–2018*.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —*2014*.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. Well, on your resume—so it's 1968 to 2014? Okay, at the Walker Art Center. And you have mentioned several times that it's going to be extremely thorough, and we've mentioned things that are going to be in it, but besides being thorough, what do you see that's going to be in this show that is not been there in other shows—or what's really making it distinctive that you can see?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, it makes it distinctive because it's 50 years worth of work, to start with. And with a museum that is one of the best museums in the country, one of the museums that have done some of my favorite shows, and done my favorite catalogues, and honored the kind of people that I am influenced by.

So it's kind of special in that way, but mostly it's because it's 50 years, and there hasn't been a retrospective in

the U.S. since MOCA in '84, when I was only 40. So there's 30-plus years of work, and work that was done in Europe that nobody has seen here, and a full backing of a big museum to be as thorough as possible, and to want to include every aspect of work and just do it in a complete way.

So MOCA—you know, I basically did that myself. [00:30:00] MOCA was only a few years old, and I designed the whole show, and it was work only up until a certain point. It was mostly done in LA. This includes work from Europe and everything since then. And the book, the catalogue, is done in such a way with chronologies, and fact-checking, and everything else that it will be covering—kind of a go-to book for quite a while, I would think.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I know that you've been working for months and months with them, but they've been intensely working too. So—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Absolutely, for three years or more. So that's different than MOCA, too, and the retrospectives that were in Europe were for European eyes, and weren't this comprehensive anyway.

AVIS BERMAN: Is it traveling?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: To the Hammer.

AVIS BERMAN: Obviously, the Walker has always been very intellectually serious, hospitable to kind of Conceptual work too.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yes, from its inception; yeah, from the original director, Martin Friedman.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. So this is going to be a real summing up?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Absolutely, yep.

AVIS BERMAN: Are you afraid of seeing everything [laughs]?

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Well, [laughs] I don't know about being afraid, but every retrospective always affects artists in that way. It's really kind of like, Now what do I do? So I'm anticipating that.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: —post-retrospective period.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. No, I know a lot of artists, they become anxious because they say, "Oh, is this"—you know, they become very anxious about—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Oh, sure.

AVIS BERMAN: —even though you're happy to have one, but—

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Right. No, no. It produces lots of [laughs] conflicting emotions, yeah. [00:32:00] And you want people to see it and all of that, but then you have to see it, too, and at this stage of your life, it's a lot.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, yeah, it's confronting everything [laughs].

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: Yeah, yeah. Who was the person who made all this stuff, over all these years and why, and what else did you do with yourself? I don't know. It's [laughs]—every artist seems to say the same thing about it, but at the same time, of course, you're happy to be able to have such a thing, and with such a serious place.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well, I think that I am done with my questions, and we are done with this interview, so thank you very much.

ALLEN RUPPERSBERG: All right.

AVIS BERMAN: So I'm going to stop this recorder.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]