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Howardena Pindell

Howardena Pindell: Artist, Teacher, and Social Observer

Getty Trust Oral History Project
African American Art History Initiative, Getty Research Institute

Interviews conducted by
Andrianna Campbell and Amanda Tewes
in 2018

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Howardena Pindell, c. 2017

Abstract

Howardena Pindell is a painter and mixed media artist, as well as a professor at State University of New York at Stony Brook. She earned a BFA from Boston University in 1965 and an MFA from Yale University in 1967. Pindell worked at the Museum of Modern Art from 1967 to 1979, where she held several positions, including exhibit assistant, curatorial assistant, and associate curator. She cofounded the A.I.R. Gallery in 1972. Pindell has taught in the Department of Art at State University of New York at Stony Brook since 1979. In this interview, Pindell discusses: her early life and education; facing discrimination; attending Boston University and Yale University, including professors, colleagues, and curriculum; working and traveling internationally, and facing racism and sexism; working at the Museum of Modern Art, including efforts to unionize and racism in the art world; cofounding A.I.R. Gallery; inspiration for and creation of artwork, including *Free, White and 21* and *Hunger*; relationship with Garth Greenan Gallery; teaching at Stony Brook, including discrimination, students, and teaching philosophy; and working on pieces for future exhibitions.

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Interview 1: November 15, 2018

01-00:00:02

Tewes: This is a first interview with Howardena Pindell for the Getty Research Institute's African American Art History Initiative in association with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. The interview is being conducted by Andrianna Campbell and Amanda Tewes at CUNY Graduate Center in New York on November 15, 2018.

01-00:00:25

Campbell: Hi, Howardena.

01-00:00:28

Pindell: Hi.

01-00:00:29

Campbell: This is such a pleasure to see you again. So exciting. The last time we spoke was in your show that was here, at the gallery which you walked me through, and it was really such a success and the work was really engaging, and—

01-00:00:45

Pindell: Thank you.

01-00:00:46

Campbell: —well studiously planned, and then well executed. You just totally did it all yourself. And then—

01-00:00:55

Pindell: I have assistants help me.

01-00:00:55

Campbell: —and then you have assistants. But some of the early work you did yourself, which you told me about, like sewing with the sailing thread, and the punch-out cards, and so those all seem really, really—it was such a sophisticated show. And then also I was privy to the catalog for the show that went on in Chicago. So you've had a very, very busy few years.¹

And I want to say from both Amanda and I—Tewes—we're very excited to have you here. You're the first person we're interviewing for this project, and it's such an exciting—you were at the top of my list as someone I really wanted to see make this happen.

So, going off on tangents, I want to tell you how amazing you are, but I want to also say, I want you to describe for me the process of you becoming an artist. And we're going to start off with some biographical data. We want to talk to you about: how did you go from kind of being a young person to making paintings, prints, and collages? So the first question is: when and where were you born?

01-00:02:02

Pindell:

Okay. I was born in 1943 during World War II in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. And I always like to [say] that it was when penicillin was first being used and jet airplanes were not used for commercial flight. So that gives you a sense of the kind of dinosaur I am. It's been—

01-00:02:24

Campbell:

You're not a dinosaur. And what date was it, just so we have it?

01-00:02:26

Pindell:

April 14. It was the day that the *Titanic* sank and Lincoln was shot.

01-00:02:34

Campbell:

Oh no, that's terrible! Why?

01-00:02:37

Pindell:

Oh no, I'm just interested in things, congruences, yeah.

01-00:02:42

Campbell:

Yeah, I always look at birthdays. Also, what was it like? You grow up in [Philadelphia], which for me, it's a wonderful city. It's very walkable, buildings. Would you talk about your experience? What was the neighborhood like? Set the scene for us—

01-00:03:02

Pindell:

Well—

01-00:03:03

Campbell:

—what it was like.

01-00:03:03

Pindell:

—the neighborhoods, we were in different homes. When I was a baby, we were in an area called Germantown. And at the time, things were very segregated—they probably still are, in a way—and so there were a couple of blocks that were of black homes, and they were like two- or three-story homes, and my parents rented an apartment on the top floor. Actually, it was big. And the local church was just around the corner, and then Miss Annie's, the [local] candy store, was across the street.

And I remember I went to different schools. They put me in a kindergarten at—I think it was called the Stevens School. I know there's a white private school called the Stephen School, but this was a public school. And this is where one of the teachers—and I think it was because of the time, because of segregation, but it was *de facto* in Pennsylvania; it wasn't *de jure*. I was in kindergarten. I think I may have been the only black child but I can't remember—there may have been one more—and we were told to "raise your hand if you have to go to the bathroom," which I did. They had cots [for] naptime, and the teacher came over in a rage and tied me to the bed. And the only thing in later years I could figure was that she did not want me to use the same facilities. And I remember how angry I became. That sort of started the

activism side of me. And what was confusing is my father, I told him about it, and he just said, "Well, you have to follow authority." Well, I did. I did what she said! Anyway so, that was kind of a breaking point for me.

01-00:04:50

And when I was in the third grade, my teacher, Mrs. Ozer, told my parents that I had a talent for art, and suggested that they take me—I was eight years old—they put me in a Saturday program for children, and that they take me to art galleries and museums and to meet other artists, which they did. And I met both black and white artists, both female and male artists. So it was a big shock for me when I came to New York, finding how segregated it was, the profession, and also that women weren't necessarily welcome. And if you criticized a white male artist, that was considered censorship; but having no people of color and very few—if any—white women, was not considered censorship.

So, I went to Temple University at Elkins Park, the Fleisher—no, Fleisher Art Memorial was the first place I went to, to draw. I remember I was the youngest kid in the class. And then I went out to Elkins Park. Temple University had the Tyler School. Again, they had Saturday classes for children, and then I think it's now called the College of Arts, something like that in Philadelphia—it had another name—and I went there also on Saturdays. And then there was a school program; I think it was the Scholastic Art something or other, which was a public school program. I went there also.

I learned to draw very young, so I think my drawing was fairly strong by the time I got to Boston University. I don't know if you knew Richard Yarde; he was there as a graduate student, so the two of us were the only black students. And then many years later, he told me that Boston University had a quota of one black student a year, which they seemed to do while I was there; there was only one black student coming in. Boston was kind of a tough place to go to school because they could tell you, if you went into a restaurant, that they will not serve you. Without any guilty feelings, they could tell you to go away. I don't know, it was just very oppressive.

I lived with a family for a year my junior year, and I ate very well when I was with them. They lived in Cambridge, and I would ride my bike to Boston. And depending—well, the weather didn't bother me. I was young, and I would go through the snow, the sleet, the rain on my bike.

01-00:07:31

And then when I got into Yale, the teachers at Boston U were very upset about it because I was a very good figurative painter and they felt I would become abstract, and that that was not a good thing. When I got one of their distinguished-in-the-profession awards—I can't remember the exact wording—the art teachers didn't show up for the ceremony. They were critical

of the fact that I had gone to Yale, and I wasn't painting traditionally academic paintings anymore.

So anyway, that's kind of like a summary of what I went through as a child.

My parents were very supportive. My mother and I didn't really get along that well, but she never put down my art until I started to become well known. She didn't put the art down; she put me down, as opposed to the actual work. And I remember there was a woman who was in charge, or whatever you call it, the director of a black orphanage, and my father was on the board. And she brought me a whole bunch of art supplies in the high end [store], Winsor & Newton, with those little porcelain trays, watercolors, and she brought me a drafting table and a Tensor light. And it was all this top-of-the-line [material]. In fact, I just gave one of my assistants the table because it's sitting around, I don't have room for it. Anyhow, so I got a lot of support from them.

01-00:09:11

And Mrs. Ozer was supportive. And then I had another white—a female teacher. Her name was Mrs. McCullough. She would put paint in the back of the room and paper, and she'd say, "Just do your art," you know, during class. "Yeah, you're a great artist," whatever. So, I did get some support.

And then I remember something I ran into in college. The teachers—okay, I'm going to say it was the teacher's fault that the—I had friends and I had white, female friends, and their parents were outraged by that. One of them, I remember her father—and I found this out through one of my teachers—came to BU and said, "You know, you have to get rid of this black student. I don't want my daughter going to a school with the black people," and they wouldn't do it. Thank God they didn't do it. And then I had another friend. I remember her name was Susan Hess. We both played guitar, and so we would give little concerts, mainly at Hillel, of all places. I mean, it's interesting because my DNA shows I have two Ashkenazi, one Sephardim, one Palestinian, but also I have Inuit—which is, the slang would be Eskimo—Zulu, and so forth. Anyhow, and when her parents found out I was black, they made her leave BU and moved her to Rutgers. So I would run into these crazy things where, as soon as someone found out I was black, they would want to take their children away.

01-00:10:45

Tewes:

How did that make you feel?

01-00:10:46

Campbell:

Oh!

01-00:10:47

Pindell:

Hurt. I felt hurt. I probably felt angry. And I remember there was a Finnish student, a grad student, and we became friendly. She wanted to invite me to the home where she was staying, and they told her to—[she] invited me there

for dinner. They said, "No, she cannot come here." I remember she told me and she was crying. She came from a whole other culture. She had no idea that this was there. {I never saw her again. I assume they demanded that she not see me again.}

01-00:11:14

Campbell:

Well, there's that kind of segregation that comes up a lot, we notice, in the period, where artists say that they were able to transverse different boundaries and go to certain events publicly or do certain things, but there was always the sense of being apart or there was this kind of inner circle. And I know I've read this over and over, that sometimes you weren't able to get invited over to dinner, you just weren't able to penetrate into the kind of echelons of power. It's surprising to me because I haven't heard you talk about this yet, but I'm curious about how that relates to you. But before we get too far into your career, I think you really wanted to get some meat and potatoes kind of questions in before we get too much into the later years. So, what did your parents do? What were their professions?

01-00:12:08

Pindell:

Okay, my father got his degree in mathematics from Morgan State University, and he was also trained in the sciences. And my mother's degrees were in history and something we don't have anymore: geography. My mother taught reading, young people in reading. She was a public school teacher, third grade. And my father became a court administrator. He was very involved. He was also principal of the school in Frederick, Maryland, and he was very involved with—he started a teachers' union. He and Thurgood Marshall put forth a court case about the pay of black teachers, which was the equivalent to the pay for white janitors. And so, my father decided to be the person that put himself out front, because at that point he wasn't married. He felt that the other teachers had families and that if anything went wrong, he was alone, it would not affect anyone. Well, they were very clever, the white administration. What they did was they promoted him. And as soon as they promoted him, they fired him.

01-00:13:35

Campbell:

Wow.

01-00:13:35

Pindell:

Yeah. So he came to Philadelphia, which is where—you know, and he worked for the Quakers for a while. But the case was won about four or five years after he left. Thurgood Marshall won the case.

01-00:13:48

Campbell:

Well that was an exciting time, and because there were those shifts that were happening that kind of made it seem like there was a positive direction that the country was going in—the appointment of Thurgood Marshall to the court, and the fact that you could take a Supreme Court to a certain place and win a case like that. And the Quakers, of course, in Philadelphia were very active.

I've stayed there. I don't know if you know Ruth Fine, who's seen so much work in the field, but she's an amazing mentor for me. And she put together a Norman Lewis show there, and Romare Bearden at the NGA [National Gallery of Art]. She's been very forceful. But she actually had friends who were Quakers who took me in when I was there, and they told me about the history of the Quaker village and how they work, had meeting houses, and they were very open and did a lot of work in the city.

01-00:14:38

Pindell:

They were very positive. A black person could go to a Quaker school without any hesitancy on their part or any attempt to have quota.

But my parents wanted me to go to public school. I went to public high school, a girls' school. It's called Philadelphia High School for Girls, and it was for people who were strong academically. And then I went—no. The school opposite it for guys was called Central High School, and we were located nearby but we really didn't interact all that much.

And that's where I found—it was strange—art teachers, the women, I always had problems, it seemed, with white women teachers. But Ozer, that's not the case; McCullough, that's not the case. But the art teachers, I remember going through when my mother died, going through my possessions, getting ready to put them in storage, and I found artwork that, from my eye now, was very good, and I would get a D. And then I would find artwork that to my eyes now, with my training, was really not that great; I'd get an A. So, either they didn't know what they were seeing or they were not as sophisticated visually, but there was always this sort of snippy—can't explain it—not warm and friendly. And I remember one of the teachers, a Mrs. Cartwright. There was a competition in the city for one of the local banks for a poster, so as an assignment we all did a poster and she submitted them. And then I found out she did not submit mine. The way—

01-00:16:25

Campbell:

That's so sad!

01-00:16:26

Pindell:

Yeah. Well, the way I found out was—and I think she wanted me to know—is she asked me to get something in her office and there was my poster; it hadn't been submitted. So, I ran into a lot of unpleasant things as a child, in terms of my art, but it didn't stop me. And even, like, when I was working for the Museum [of Modern Art], I ran into things, too, in terms of my just being black, never mind my being an artist. I mean, it just seemed to—like a tumbleweed. [laughs] It was like you'd go from one thing to another, but there was always somehow a mentor that was very staunch and helped me.

01-00:17:15

Campbell:

Would you talk about your involvement with the church?

01-00:17:18

Pindell:

That's interesting. I wanted to be a Catholic, and my parents said no. I can remember the day my father dragged me to the Presbyterian church. And the church, when I think about the church, the people were really sweet, and it was Presbyterian. There was a Presbyterian white church about five blocks away with stained-glass windows, soaring Gothic arches, and we had, like—it wasn't a storefront, it was like a small church. I kept thinking, like, Christ, it's okay to have this segregated religion? And so it always made me skeptical about religion and the position that people would take that I felt—the positions they took that I felt were not honorable. Like all the evangelists or whatever they call them, but—

01-00:18:19

Campbell:

Evangelicals.

01-00:18:20

Pindell:

—thank you—evangelicals supporting Trump. If Obama had done one millionth of what Trump has done, he wouldn't have had a chance. And Trump just seems to go from one awfulness to another, but they stick by him.

So, the black church was the first place where I showed my work at a little exhibition. And again, I remember just incredible support, warming support.

The minister was a bit of a crumb. He was very good looking, and so he was kind of grazing the female population. And eventually, he was defrocked. His wife was gorgeous; she looked like a black Marilyn Monroe. And he would double lock her into the house, so once he left she couldn't get out.

01-00:19:07

Campbell:

Wow.

01-00:19:08

Pindell:

Yeah, I found that out because sometimes she would babysit me [if] my parents had something to do. She had a little son. And it was a deadbolt; there was no way she could get out. I understand eventually she literally ended up in a mental institution. That's just so sad, so sad.

But the people in the church were great, yeah. I really enjoyed them. Just, they were nice people, yeah.

01-00:19:35

Tewes:

Was this the same church your parents were attending?

01-00:19:38

Pindell:

Yeah, that's how I got there. I can remember sitting next to my mother, and my mother had—in those days it was not forbidden—she had a black seal coat, and I just loved the way it felt. And then I would hold my father's hand. My favorite part was Communion, because I liked the grape juice. [laughs] They didn't serve wine; they served grape juice and little cubes of bread.

I would say I'm kind of spiritual, but I'm cautious about spirituality anyway, as well. Partly because of being aware of cults that take advantage of people who want to be spiritual, like the Moonies [members of the Unification Church] and Jehovah's Witness and all these different cults who try to control people and take their money. I don't see any divine intervention [laughs] at all, but I'm a little skeptical about spirituality, as to whether it's a positive thing or not. Some people say it is totally positive, and I personally have mixed feelings about it, yeah.

01-00:21:02

Tewes:

I'm wondering if you think that sets you apart from other artists, who maybe see spiritualism as inspiration, in a way.

01-00:21:10

Pindell:

No, no, I don't think we even talk about that. And also, I respect boundaries. Like, a friend of mine meditates using TM [Transcendental Meditation]. TM is not a good cult, and heavy meditation is not really advised, also. I don't criticize him about it; I feel that's his choice. But I wouldn't do it. I did a lot of meditation, and it can really make your head weird. [laughs] Very careful with meditation or hypnosis, stuff like that.

But I've just seen how people have been taken advantage of through spirituality. Like, you remember years ago there was that guy who had a sweat lodge, and he had all these people going through this sweat lodge and they got very sick. He lured them into this, like, what would you call it, like a retreat? And this was part of raising their spiritual level. I don't think anyone died; they just got very sick. I think he might have gone to jail.

Or you remember that cult where they believed that there was some kind of spaceship in the tail of the—I can't remember the name—

01-00:22:36

Tewes:

Halley's Comet, I believe.

01-00:22:37

Pindell:

Halley's Comet, yeah. And they all committed suicide thinking they would all go to this—I mean, that's where I think spirituality can really be—people can go overboard with it and risk their lives and not realize it.

Thing that I'm interested in now is critical thinking, being able to think critically and to evaluate rather than emotional thinking, or feeling that I have to think spiritually in a positive way—how can I explain it—that I expect things that are spiritual to be positive when they're not in some cases.

01-00:23:19

Campbell:

Will you talk about—do you have any siblings?

01-00:23:23

Pindell:

Oh, I'm an only child.

- 01-00:23:25
Campbell: I think I remember that.
- 01-00:23:25
Pindell: My mother was in her forties when she had me. I only have one kidney, I think, because of that.
- 01-00:23:31
Campbell: Oh—
- 01-00:23:32
Pindell: Yeah, I had one kidney that was hard and necrotic and it just shriveled up, and my other one's fine. You can live with one kidney.
- 01-00:23:40
Campbell: Would you discuss your—I think one of the stories you've told about childhood is going on this trip with your parents in going to the South and seeing the red circle on the glass. Well, you don't have to tell that story, but maybe some other, any other. I mean, you can tell that story because we have it—
- 01-00:24:00
Pindell: I have a red circle—
- 01-00:24:01
Campbell: It's in—
- 01-00:24:01
Pindell: —in my pocket.
- 01-00:24:02
Campbell: Oh yeah? [laughs] It's in various books. I know it's influenced the work. But any other stories also from childhood and about what your art-making practice was like?
- 01-00:24:15
Pindell: Well, I traveled—here we go.
- 01-00:24:19
Campbell: Oh wow.
- 01-00:24:19
Tewes: Hold it real high.
- 01-00:24:23
Pindell: I traveled with my parents to visit my mother's sister and mother—or sisters, really. And while they were hanging out, my father, who loved to drive, we drove down to Northern Kentucky. He loved root beer, so we went to a root beer stand. And they gave us the same amount of root beer they gave everyone else. The mug was chilled, but at the bottom was this red circle at exactly this size, exactly this color. I don't know where I bought this. I must

have gotten it in an art supply store. It is a sticker; you could peel it off. In those days, someone may have painted it on the bottom. And so that would be on the bottom of all dishware, utensils, glasses, whatever. If it was to be used to serve someone of color, that is what they would have to have at the bottom of the plate and/or glass. I remember I was shocked. I don't even know.

01-00:25:30

Well, the catalyst for my starting to use the circle: There was a woman in Yale Graduate School, Nancy Murata, and she started playing with circles. And it was like a light came on, and I said, "Hm, I want to"—because I was figurative—"I want to try playing with the circles." Also, I was exposed to Ad Reinhardt's painting, which I believe was at the Yale Museum, which was [a] close value [painting], so I kind of played around with that also. And then the circle just moved from being a circle I would draw using templates or ovals, to my punching holes and saving them and spraying through the holes to do a whole field of color. I saved the holes and started numbering them, as a result of Carl Solway. I think his gallery is in Cincinnati. He came to my studio and he said, "Oh, how many circles are on the canvas, how many dots?" So I thought, oh, let me count. So I just started numbering with a Rapidograph, very fine point. I didn't put them on the graph paper in order; it was all random. And what I found was sometimes they would cluster and create a geometric form, a flat form. If they were circles that had, like, three numbers opposed to two numbers, it would create certain kind of visual densities, and it just turned out that way. I used eighteen-by-twenty-four graph paper. The whole, I think, grid thing was what was—[clears throat] excuse me—in New York. The artists were interested in grids.

01-00:27:19

Campbell:

Yeah, that is a big subject for the period. And I can't help but think of the Yve-Alain Bois book, *Painting as Model*, which deals with the history of the grid, and especially with Mondrian, with Piet Mondrian's work. Was that something that was of interest to you when you came to New York? Were you thinking through kind of De Stijl [art], like that period—

01-00:27:49

Pindell:

Well, I have, I've loved—

01-00:27:49

Campbell:

—of design and—

01-00:27:50

Pindell:

I love this field, yeah.

01-00:27:51

Campbell:

Okay. So, that was an interest—

01-00:27:52

Pindell:

But, I don't know if I was thinking of De Stijl. I think the person I was thinking of was [Larry] Poons.

01-00:27:57

Campbell: Oh wow.

01-00:27:58

Pindell: Yeah, Poons with his ellipses. I think he did circles, too. I can't remember. I didn't like the stuff where he just layered massive amounts of paint on the canvas. I liked it when he had these points, these circles. But I think that that was another catalyst for me.

01-00:28:18

Campbell: Yeah, I wouldn't want to go in a circle thinking about that earlier work because I guess you're thinking more perhaps about what was happening in the sixties and seventies. Also, I just did a catalog piece for Stanley Whitney. I don't know if you knew him.

01-00:28:37

Pindell: I know; I didn't know him, no.

01-00:28:38

Campbell: Yeah. But just thinking about his way, that his work was influenced by what was happening with grids in the period. So we can think of Agnes Martin—

01-00:28:48

Pindell: Yes, I was aware of them. At that time, I was at the Museum, and so I was seeing a lot of work.

01-00:28:54

Campbell: Yeah. Well, was that the first time you became aware of them? Because you've talked so much about your color theory classes at Yale. Would you kind of back up and tell us a little bit more about the Boston years, I think? What was the transition like from being—

01-00:29:09

Pindell: Oh, they were very—

01-00:29:09

Campbell: —in Philadelphia to—

01-00:29:10

Pindell: —traditional, very. We worked from models. I called it the "Brown Sauce School," because they did not encourage the use of color. Mainly, it wasn't photorealism but realism; you had to do realism. That was almost like trompe-l'oeil realism.

Trying to think of the people that—I don't even remember thinking of any. Well, I remember. Because I'm not that crazy about Monet; he's just out there, and so he's very familiar. The only thing I can remember seeing at the Boston Museum [of Fine Arts] that stuck with me was one of Monet's *Haystacks*. And also, going to the Isabella Gardner Museum and seeing the Vermeer before it was stolen. It was a very safe place, the Isabella Gardner. I felt very at home

there, very welcomed, whereas the Boston environment in general was kind of crummy or unwelcoming, and it's still somewhat like that.

01-00:30:27

Years later, I got an award from Mass[achusetts] College of Art, an honorary doctorate, and my father wanted to go to see the Boston Pops [Orchestra]. Someone that I grew up with played first harp; she's been with them for many, many, many years. And so my father wanted to get box seats, so we had box seats that people—there were no people of color in the audience, and people were staring at us, like, what are you doing here? This was probably in the 1990s. My traveling show was going to be going to Boston but to Brandeis, and Brandeis is a much more liberal environment.[It went to Rose Art Museum.] And apparently Boston [Museum] did buy one of my paintings from Garth [Greenan], but I've never felt welcomed in Boston. Even though I've gotten awards and stuff, I just have never—and it could be just post-traumatic stress syndrome. I don't know, I don't feel comfortable there.

01-00:31:24

Tewes:

That's interesting because you said growing up in Philadelphia there was segregation. So, I wonder what the main differences were for you in moving to Boston, experiencing that?

01-00:31:35

Pindell:

I think because, okay, in Philadelphia you had people staring—excuse me. Let me have water.

01-00:31:42

Campbell:

Oh, of course, yeah, go ahead. Does anyone have a pencil? I didn't bring one, but—

01-00:31:49

Tewes:

I have a—

01-00:31:52

Campbell:

It's just a pen? It's okay, I'll just continue on. It's okay, I'll have access to this video, of course. Oh no—yeah. [break in audio]

01-00:32:10

Tewes:

Okay, we were talking about the transition from Philadelphia to Boston.

01-00:32:15

Pindell:

Yes. Uh, trying to think. Philadelphia, there were tons of hate stares. No one tried to physically attack me or anything. And no one told me I couldn't go anywhere, you know what I mean? You were just not welcome, you knew you weren't welcome. There was a store that was sort of like a mini Bonwit Teller in Germantown. It was mainly a white store, and if you walked in to look around, you were like, hated. People would stare at you with just utter hate. But with Boston, they would tell you to go away. That was the difference. No one in Philadelphia told me to go away, except the woman who tied me to the bed, and all that was very extreme. But in Boston, when you went to

restaurants, you just didn't know whether or not they would serve you or not. And then what my father and I ran into in the nineties—I don't know.

01-00:33:25

I would never live in Boston. I mean, Roxboro is—Roxbury—Roxboro. Roxbury is where the African American families lived. And what I found was, when I was living in the dorm, most of the students of color commuted to Boston, yeah; they weren't necessarily in the dorm. But I did meet in—I can't remember which dorm I was in. I think it was on [Marlborough] Street. I might be wrong, but one of the—I should say really, the other person of color there was a young woman named Marquita Jones [Pool-Eckert] from Chicago, and we've been friends forever, friends for years. She ended up being a producer for CBS's morning news, years and years ago. She's retired since, but she was a generally good friend who, we stayed in touch for years. But I don't know, I just don't feel welcome in Boston, you know? I've—

01-00:34:28

Campbell:

Yeah, I know the feeling.

01-00:34:30

Pindell:

Have you been to Boston and felt that?

01-00:34:31

Campbell:

Yeah, I haven't spent much time there, but I've felt that. It's—

01-00:34:36

Pindell:

Yeah, it's unpleasant.

01-00:34:38

Campbell:

Yeah, it's a town. Actually it's far more—what am I trying to say—yeah, far more segregated than you would think because the state is so liberal—is that the word—or progressive, and then it's—you know, and they had that black mayor or governor. Deval Patrick was his name.

01-00:35:00

Pindell:

They have a black governor?

01-00:35:02

Campbell:

They did. He was very progressive, and I think he might run for president, I think, at some point. But, there's talk of that at some point that he was going to be the next Obama.

Anyway, it's a strange city because it has this emphasis on the kind of constitutional, egalitarian, founding stories of our nation, and then it also has—you go on the T, and then you notice that the train is segregated, in strange ways that we see in so many cities across the US. But it's hard to see it here in the Northeast, and you realize how much wealth and cost play into those kinds of bifurcations.

01-00:35:46

But, I guess to get back to the questions, some of them were kind of very basic but I think they're pertinent. Do you want to talk about your first art class, and—

01-00:35:58

Pindell:

I don't know if I remember my first art class.

01-00:36:00

Campbell:

—or just maybe your art classes at BU—

01-00:36:03

Pindell:

Oh, at BU?

01-00:36:04

Campbell:

—Boston University, and your friends?

01-00:36:05

Pindell:

I don't remember my first art class at BU.

01-00:36:07

Campbell:

Or what your friend circle was like there and what—

01-00:36:10

Pindell:

Well, I didn't really have—

01-00:36:11

Campbell:

—your community was like.

01-00:36:13

Pindell:

Okay, my first art class, I remember strongly, [my teacher] was a man named Conger Metcalf. And we had to draw eggs, boiled eggs, to try to be able to handle value, train the eye and the hand.

The person that really taught me how to teach was a man named Walter [Tandy] Murch. He was a wonderful teacher, and he treated all the students equally with respect and love. I've just never seen anything like it. And so I try to be that way with my students. I try to be respectful, I try to be kind. And I see in my mind his sitting with a student talking to them about their work, and it was one-on-one, even though it was a class. He was just wonderful.

Then there was one guy who was, like, really mean. I learned a lot from him, but he was mean to everybody; it wasn't like he singled me out or anything. But he taught basic painting techniques, so we learned how to do gilding, including bole and gold. And we had to copy, I think, a Fra Angelico angel. We learned encaustic. We learned how to grind our own paint. I don't know, just basic stuff that schools aren't—they just aren't teaching. They aren't teaching that anymore.

01-00:37:46

Campbell:

Do you remember the name of that gentleman who taught those?

01-00:37:50

Pindell:

Yes, Reed Kay. He's in the National Academy of Design. I sent him a catalog for the Chicago show. I'm in the National Academy, too, and I have all their addresses. Not a peep. [laughs] Not a word. Oh dear.

Anyway so, I would say, Conger Metcalf, not as a person, but in terms of teaching us to really see, was very good.

And also Lloyd Lillie. I remember he took me aside, because at that point there was this family where the father wanted to get rid of me [because I was black] and was—whatever. And one of my teachers did lower my grades, so I have, [something] like, all As and a C.

01-00:38:36

Campbell:

Ah!

01-00:38:37

Pindell:

Yeah. But I remember Lloyd Lillie said to me, "Howardena, you'll be with the big boys. Just keep going. Don't let anyone stop you. Just keep going." And he was a white, male sculpture teacher. I'm trying to think what other teachers there.

There was a man named Kramer, Harry, I think, Kramer, taught painting. And I think what I learned from him was to not put your ego on the students. In other words, the students will paint the way they paint in terms of figuration, but try not to—don't bully them into painting like you. He was very peaceful. He walked around the room. He would help everyone, but it wasn't like—as I have seen where I teach, examples of—and especially the male teachers trying to force the students to do it their way. Give them instruction, and explain how I might do it, but it's not personal. I don't take it personally if they don't do that, and I don't take it personally if they just kind of reject the suggestions. And I tell them, "You have your own opinions to form and your own experience, and this is from my experience. This is what I would suggest."

So I try to combine the Walter Murch approach, the respect, with the Harry Kramer approach, which is non-intervention, I'll put it that way. You can help, but it's not about the teacher, it's not about me. The students are paying to learn, and it's not about making them clones. I don't want them to be clones of me.

And one thing, actually, I've been finding helpful is, I have a lot of Asian students, and to really learn their names, try to learn to say their names in their language; or if they prefer to take a Western name, use that if that's what they want. But I think I was mentioning that in the car coming over. I have two students and I learned to say their names in Korean, and [laughs] they were shocked, oh my God. One of them is a young woman who's a good painter. Her name is Ioek, and it's I-o-e-k. And the other young woman, her name is Yung Gyeong, Yung Gyeong, so it's Y-u-n-g G-y-e-u-n-g, something like

that. And she said, "Oh my God, how did you learn to say Korean names?" And I want to get the face recognition, because my classes are in some cases 50 percent Asian. I have a photo roster, and I learn their faces and I learn their names. And I think, in a way, that's something I would get from Walter Murch: just respect for them and their culture. And patience, being patient.

01-00:41:52

What I find interesting in general is, usually they have more women students than men, but the men have a hard time. Like, the women will sit down and they'll work. They'll come in early to work, they'll want a key so they can come in later. And the guys, generally, they're the first ones that want to leave, they want to leave early. Not true of all of them, at all, but the guys seem to flounder in a way that the women don't seem to. I always find that very interesting. Just, I don't know.

01-00:42:28

Campbell:

I think so, too. It's always, I think, in my classes, the men speak more in the classroom, and then the women really pull through in the group activities. I think that might be just be socialization, but when you see those patterns—I mean, you've been teaching for as long as you have, I'm sure—

01-00:42:49

Pindell:

Yeah, forty years.

01-00:42:50

Campbell:

—yeah, you start to see those.

01-00:42:52

Pindell:

It has changed a lot. Long Island is really Trump country. I have Jewish friends who live there, and she was head of the art gallery. And her husband always warns her, "Watch what you talk about in public." They had a Klan rally planned. I used their Access-A-Ride on campus, and the driver said, "Oh, there was a Klan rally—was being prepared, and the police said to their policeman, 'If you attend the rally, you're fired.' They had to cancel the rally because so many police were Klan."

01-00:43:36

Campbell:

[gasps] In Long Island? Well, you know, it's happening in Connecticut, too. I heard that people—

01-00:43:41

Pindell:

Really?

01-00:43:41

Campbell:

—were getting, yeah, like, flyers in their driveways.

01-00:43:44

Pindell:

This is before Trump. This is before Trump.

01-00:43:47

Campbell:

This is right afterwards. My friend, my sister's husband got a flyer in his driveway that was—oh, he told me someone in [South Hampton, Long Island, New York] got a flyer in their driveway. I was really devastated to hear that because I didn't even know that they were active in Connecticut. I was just really, really shocked.

01-00:44:09

Pindell:

I hate going to the Hamptons. It's the worst.

01-00:44:12

Campbell:

Really? I always like going out there, but you think that there's, like, there are issues out there? Yeah.

01-00:44:16

Pindell:

Well, I did. Let's see, there was a panel: Jack Whitten, myself, and I can't remember—one of these famous, white, male artists, whatever. It was a memorial panel for a white, male artist whose name escapes me, and the family wanted to have this panel to talk about their relative. The family was very respectful and kind and all. It was at the Parrish [Art] Museum. At the time, I was using not a walker but a cane, and I wanted to find a place to sit down. And Jack and I were the only black people. Jack was in the back with the family, in the gallery. Alan Shields, Alan Shields—Shelter Island I think is where he was living, but he passed away. They said, "Well if you go out to the lobby, there's some chairs there." So I went out to the lobby, and they had this desk, kind of in the middle of the lobby. It was like a champagne reception, and then there would be the event. And the woman at the desk said, "Are you a member?" and she wasn't saying anything to anybody else. "Are you a member?" I said, "No." She said, "Well you have to go. You have to get out. Get out." Well, the poor woman who ran education, who had planned the event, was, like, mortified, because she could see it coming. And it was like, no! Don't do that! And she explained to the woman that I'm the program for the evening. But I mean, no black person should be program for the evening to get access to the museum, you know? Like, I was forgiven because I was—she was, of course, embarrassed, and said, "Oh, do you want to sit up here?" or whatever. And I just went to the back. But any normal family wants to go—or individual artist who's of color may run into someone who'll say, "You have to leave." This was maybe five years ago.

01-00:46:15

Campbell:

Wow. This is such a big issue, because I've been asked to leave places times, and we don't usually talk about it, but we don't really think about it as much as happening here. I think that since so much of what you've done is that you were so active, especially as a young woman, politically, and then you've seen the shift in the arc of it and how they've joined it in a way and how disheartening it is—

01-00:46:39

Pindell: Well I'll tell you, I'm grateful Trump is not interested in culture. He is not appearing to use culture as his platform.

01-00:46:50

Campbell: That's good, yeah.

01-00:46:51

Pindell: Well, I mean, because Hitler was an artist, and so he went after the artists and did the degenerate art and all that business [pushing pro-Nazi art]. But no, I think Trump, I don't think there's a cultural cell in his brain. And fortunately for all of us, he hasn't focused on our profession.

01-00:47:10

Campbell: That's so good.

01-00:47:11

Pindell: Because it got better with Obama.

01-00:47:13

Campbell: It did. I mean, there—

01-00:47:14

Pindell: It got—

01-00:47:14

Campbell: —was this bridge. All of a sudden, they weren't just using figurative artists, that you say come out of the academy system. Which, there's nothing wrong with that; the academy is very—[produces] a lot of wonderful artists and we need those. But they started looking at Kehinde Wiley, they started looking at Amy Sherald. And all of a sudden you felt like it was the Kennedy years or something where there was this moment—

01-00:47:36

Pindell: He had his—

01-00:47:37

Campbell: —a Camelot where you could, say, walk into a museum and see an Elaine de Kooning painting of the president and {inaudible}. It felt like a renaissance, and—

01-00:47:47

Pindell: I think, though, Trump being so extreme, there are conservatives who do not believe in Trump. They're so embarrassed by his racism that they're—whether they're doing this anonymously or what—are supporting diversity. For example, my university, [State University of New York Stony Brook], is on Long Island. We've had black professors who have left, either they won't live there—or we had a young man, Carl Pope, a wonderful photographer. He was on a tenure track, and he couldn't get an apartment without using someone white to get the apartment for him, and he couldn't go to the gym without

being harassed. So he gave up a tenure position. He left; he did not want to stay.

01-00:48:34

Now under Trump, our [university] president, President [Samuel] Stanley, had a day of diversity training, where everyone, the staff, 3,000 staff, they took the arena where they have games—indoors, thank God—and 3,000 staff in the morning were given—it was like a four-hour program about diversity and sexual harassment. And then in the afternoon, the faculty—there were 900 faculty—went through the same training. I want to write him a note. I should've done it a while ago, but I'm going to write him a note and thank him for it.

But I'm also going to tell him that my driver, who's African American, Brian, when he comes to pick me up, there is an Access-A-Ride van from Disability Services. They've taken away all the—what do you call it—handicap access points to my building, and you have to go to the loading dock, which means stairs—and fortunately, thank God, I can do stairs—and the guy parks his van. Let's say this is the entrance to the loading dock, and he parks it right here, so no one can come in that way or that way. But if a white trucker shows up, he moves; when Brian shows up to pick me up, he won't let him in. So, I'm going to write a note to the president saying, "This has been happening. I'd like to complain about that. And also, did you have the police attend the diversity seminar?"

01-00:50:05

Campbell:

Well, that reminds me of that story you told me when we had our meeting at the Brooklyn Museum, our conversation. But maybe I won't jump ahead yet, because I really want to talk about that. I love that, as a research topic.

I wonder, do you want to discuss—I think we should kind of get in some nuts and bolts. You talked a lot about this idea of being paid. You talked in one of your questions about being paid. And even though I'm not necessarily a Marxist art historian, obviously, the ways in which we're compensated contribute somewhat to like the studio space we have or what access we have to certain galleries. So what was that like as a student? Were you able to work jobs or get funding that led to from one position to another or, like, for at B—

01-00:50:58

Pindell:

As a student?

01-00:50:59

Campbell:

Yeah, at Boston University. I kind of described—

01-00:51:00

Pindell:

Well—

- 01-00:51:01
Campbell: —your circumstances as being very middle class, I think, for African Americans in the period.
- 01-00:51:07
Pindell: Well, in terms of jobs, I can remember being a cashier in one of the cafeterias. I'm trying to think. Did I have any other jobs?
- 01-00:51:18
Campbell: What year did you go to Europe for the first time and how were you able to—
- 01-00:51:22
Pindell: Sixty-four. Yeah, I went through a group called the Experiment in International Living.
- 01-00:51:29
Campbell: Oh, okay.
- 01-00:51:29
Pindell: Yeah, they were excellent. I lived in Sweden. I had applied for India, but thank God they turned me down for that, just—mm, long story. And I lived with a family in Malmö, Sweden. I don't remember whether I was there two weeks or a month. It's kind of blurry now. There were three children in the family—four, four children. And they were kind of well off. They had a large home, which was on—I don't know what body of water it is; it's that body of water between Sweden and Denmark. I remember the hostility that the Copenhagen Danes had for the Malmö Swedish, because they would—okay, the Swedish Malmö Southern dialect was offensive to [those in] Northern Sweden. And then when we would go to Copenhagen; you did not speak Danish. They would push me ahead and say, [whispers] "Speak English, speak English." [laughs] They would take all their animosity out in some sort of annual game, some sport, but they had this kind of blood hatred for one another. It was very weird to me with my—I guess this would be a kind of prejudice, in a way—they all looked alike to me! [laughs] Why—
- 01-00:52:56
Campbell: Well, I know!
- 01-00:52:57
Pindell: They're all blond and they're—not all of them are blond.
- 01-00:52:59
Campbell: Yeah, it's very homogenous. Before immigration, I went there and I noticed that it was very, yeah, it was very, very homogenous. So, I wanted to know—
- 01-00:53:13
Pindell: Did they treat you okay?
- 01-00:53:15
Campbell: Yeah, they were all very cool, so they were very cool with each other, and it was definitely not discrimination. It was just very—everyone was doing what

they were supposed to be doing, the cities were very clean, the lunches were very delicious, I saw art. Yeah, I was just—

01-00:53:41

Pindell: I'm just curious.

01-00:53:41

Campbell: —thinking of the Isak Dinesen House, but I don't know if you went there.

01-00:53:45

Pindell: I don't think I did.

01-00:53:45

Campbell: [Karen Blixen] wrote *Out of Africa*—ⁱⁱ

01-00:53:46

Pindell: Oh, I remember, yeah.

01-00:53:47

Campbell: —and a bunch of other things. I'm going off on a tangent. But yeah, so I was thinking that, like, for an artist in that period, it was such a big deal to go to Europe. Do you want to talk a little bit about that European sojourn and what—

01-00:54:06

Pindell: It was the first trip to Europe. I remember we landed in Copenhagen, and then we went there as a group but we were separated among different families in Sweden. The first thing I remember seeing was a vending machine which vended flowers.

01-00:54:30

Campbell: Oh!

01-00:54:32

Pindell: I was like, oh my God, this is incredible. And Malmö was really—I wasn't in the city per se; I was in the suburbs. So it was a daily routine of just getting up. We didn't do that much. We'd kind of hang out.

And then the whole Experiment group, when our home stay was over, then we traveled to Stockholm. We traveled around. There's one thing I remember. I started remembering it months ago. We went to one place, and instead of my being in a hotel room, they put me in a bed in a ballroom. And then I was thinking, was that prejudice? What was it? Why wasn't I in a regular hotel room? Anyway, I could only remember being in the ballroom, and I wasn't feeling left out. But as an adult, I thought, that's very weird. Why would they do that?

And I remember one of the daughters from the family; she was a couple of years older than [me] maybe. Then it was another young woman who had one of the transfer—what would you call it? One of the other Experimenters lived

in her family. We were walking in the country. This was during the trip. We would stop in different places. There were these two German guys, and they had two Doberman pinschers and they let them loose on us. And I remember—you know, I'm afraid of dogs still, but what I found interesting: the response from both Mäten and—I think the other woman's name was Margaret—was to push me in front so that I would get the attack. And I saw that as a kind of racist thing.

01-00:56:25

Campbell: What are their names?

01-00:56:25

Pindell: Mäten, I think it's M-a two dots t-e-n. I believe the other young woman's name was Margaret. They were both from Malmö. Mäten is the name of the woman whose family I stayed with. In fact, they got in touch with me about ten years ago when their mother died, which I thought was really nice that they remembered.

But their reflex was that I should take the hit, and I found that kind of racist. It was so unconscious and so fast.

But I remember also they saw me as very exotic. They saw me as very beautiful. They said, "Oh, you look like Elizabeth Taylor."

01-00:57:12

Campbell: [laughs]

01-00:57:13

Pindell: That was my reaction.

01-00:57:14

Campbell: I think so, I think so, back, you know—

01-00:57:16

Pindell: No, maybe back in—but the group that they focused their animosity towards, not only just the Danes, [but also] the Gypsies. So if the Gypsies came into town, they would literally run. They would say, "Oh my God, the Gypsies are here, the Gypsies are here," and they would scatter.

01-00:57:38

Campbell: Wow.

01-00:57:39

Pindell: Yeah, yeah.

01-00:57:41

Campbell: So from there you went to Paris.

01-00:57:44

Pindell:

Paris. Paris, I thought, was the most beautiful city I've ever seen, and we stayed there in a kind of—I don't know whether it was a youth hostel or it was like a—because it was summer, it might've been a dormitory for a school which was empty for the summer. And I decided to stay an extra week or so in Paris by myself, God knows. But anyway, and then I decided not to fly back with the group but to stay and take the boat back. Big mistake. [laughs]

01-00:58:17

Campbell:

I had a friend in Houston, one that did that, yeah.

01-00:58:19

Pindell:

Yeah, I was in a—we had a Category 3 hurricane in the middle of the Atlantic, with sixty-foot waves and a 125-mile-an-hour winds, and I can't even begin to tell you what it felt like. You were going in all directions at the same time, and it's amazing we didn't capsize. It's amazing. I went into terminal euphoria, just laughing. It's like, oh God! [laughs] We were blown off course three days, and the captain—I don't know how he did it—but we got through it, and it took us eight days to cross the Atlantic instead of five. And I remember the night before the storm, it was getting a little rocky. They had a social event where they gave out hearts with numbers. They would cut the heart in half and you had to find your other half. I remember this white guy came up to me in a suit and he looked at me and just tore the heart [into] tiny pieces on the floor at my feet. [laughs] God, it was when Goldwater was running or was being considered, yeah. And so there were young white guys on the boat who were trying to start fights with black guys, and then the Turks and the Greeks wanted to fight. But the irony is, when the storm hit, a lot of those guys who were tough guys, they ended up in a padded cell in the basement or—the basement—the bottom of the ship, because they went nuts and they had to confine them in a space where they wouldn't hurt themselves.

01-00:59:54

Campbell:

Wow.

01-00:59:56

Pindell:

But apparently, all that kind of storm is what some military—people on military ships use it as a kind of initiation, to see if someone can get through the storm without cracking up, yeah. It was very scary. I don't like boats, particularly now. My father, who—he died at ninety-eight, but when he was around ninety-five he wanted to go on a cruise. And of course, he failed to tell me that the cruise was to the site of the *Titanic*.

01-01:00:27

Campbell:

[laughs] Oh! That's so depressing. I thought you could go to the Caribbean or something fun.

01-01:00:31

Pindell:

Oh my God, yeah, you know? And—

- 01-01:00:35
Campbell: {inaudible}
- 01-01:00:36
Pindell: Well, he felt ill after we got on the boat. He was having heart issues, heart failure. So I wasn't thinking, I'm on a boat, I'm on the water, whatever, and I had to take care of him because he went to the infirmary. As soon as he was back in the room, it hit me: I'm on the ocean. And then PS—whatever it is, PSTD—PTSD hit me. I was sitting in front of the TV set in the room that showed what the wave height was: four feet. I was hysterical. I was like, "Get me off of here. I don't want to be here. Get me out of here!" And I just was so happy when we docked in New York. [laughs] Oh God.
- 01-01:01:20
Tewes: It's a—
- 01-01:01:21
Pindell: It was just—
- 01-01:01:21
Tewes: —interesting end to a big trip.
- 01-01:01:24
Campbell: Yeah! Should we—
- 01-01:01:26
Tewes: I've just one more question before we take a break here.
- 01-01:01:28
Pindell: Oh good, I'll eat lunch.
- 01-01:01:28
Tewes: What kind of coursework were you doing on this trip to Europe?
- 01-01:01:32
Pindell: I wasn't doing any coursework at all. It was just one of these exchange programs. I don't remember doing any art. I remember the family was saying, "Why do you want to be an artist? You can't earn a living. You should be a designer." Design furniture, that's what the Scandinavians saw as useful employment. Designing something, whatever, interior designer, furniture designer, whatever. And I can't remember if I even—I might have sent them some announcements for shows and all. I kind of lost track of them until I heard that the mother had died. Would you ask me the question again?
- 01-01:02:16
Tewes: Oh, if you weren't doing coursework on this trip to Europe, I'm wondering what kind of exposure you got to European art and artists there.
- 01-01:02:23
Pindell: Oh yeah, no, I went to the Louvre. I went out to Chartres. I think I've been to Chartres two or three times; Notre Dame—*Notre Dame*, rather; Sainte

Chappelle, which is gorgeous. Trying to think. Where else did I go? Oh my goodness. I don't know. I spent a lot of time in the Louvre. And then when I was working for the Museum [of Modern Art], I was introduced to the woman who was head of drawings at the Louvre. When I was in Paris once, she let me go into the museum when there was no one there, to wander around [in the drawings galleries]. That, I felt, was really thrilling, really thrilling. But no, basically, I was a tourist. I did tourist things.

01-01:03:11

When I went with my father, we took my cousin and my father and a family friend, took one of those boats up the Seine. We had dinner and all of that stuff, and we went to the site of where Princess Diana's car had the accident.

But I hate flying a lot now. I'm really afraid of it. I'm supposed to have a show in London in [June 2019] and I'm, like, ugh, terrified. I had a flight from Rio to New York, and one of the engines was loose on the wing, over the Amazon Jungle, and that kind of freaked me out. There were a bunch of us that saw the engine [moving] like that. And then I had another flight. There was a women's show at the Louisiana Museum in Denmark, and we were hit by lightning as we left [John F.] Kennedy [Airport]. And I was sitting—you know, those long seats in the middle, but the window for the wing was right here. There were two people and then the window, and all you saw was this big flash of light and boom. I thought, we are finished. [laughs] But the plane just kept going.

01-01:04:22

Campbell: Wow!

01-01:04:22

Pindell: Yeah, yeah.

01-01:04:24

Campbell: That's good to know. [laughs]

01-01:04:26

Tewes: You had some harrowing travel experiences.

01-01:04:28

Pindell: I know!

01-01:04:28

Campbell: But I'm sure they were formative, I don't know, just seeing all that art in the museums.

01-01:04:33

Tewes: Did anything stick with you from all these experiences? You got to see some behind the scenes at the Louvre. Anything that you—

01-01:04:41

Campbell: Like any artworks?

01-01:04:43

Tewes: Yeah, or style or display even.

01-01:04:45

Pindell: Let me think about that. I think in a way, the Louvre, it's so chock-full of incredible things, incredible paintings. I keep remembering there was a *Coronation*—huge painting, huge painting—of *Napoleon* in the main long gallery. And apparently—and I don't know if they did that then—instead of newspapers, people would come to see a painting of a historic event. I think that's what they did.

01-01:05:23

Campbell: Yeah, like at the Salons.

01-01:05:24

Pindell: Yes. I remember seeing that, and it wasn't that I liked the painting, but it was huge. I just thought, Oh my God. And the *Mona Lisa*, I remember I was shocked it was so small, and they kept people away from it, but it was so tiny. One of my favorite artists, I don't remember seeing Vermeer in the Louvre at all. I love Vermeer. I think he's incredible. Trying to think.

I don't know, I was taking in the whole experience of being in this city that is so historic, and yet it was interesting. On the boat where we had the dinner, we went beyond Paris and it looked like anywhere in the US with gas stations and homes. It was like Paris is this little jewel that they've—you know, it's in perpetuity, whatever the word is. And then when you leave the boundaries, then it's like anywhere else in the world that's in the Western world. So that was a shock.

And when I went to Chartres, I loved that blue, the blue windows. But apparently that recipe died with the family. Yeah, it was a secret recipe for the Chartres blue, *bleu*, whatever you say.

01-01:06:51

Campbell: Oh no.

01-01:06:51

Pindell: Yeah, yeah. So, I think of Paris and I think of being very lonely. One trip there was a member of the curatorial staff at the Modern—this was when I was still at the Modern—oh God, let me try to remember her name. [Carolyn Lanchner] And so she asked me if I wanted to go and visit [Joan] Mitchell, and I said, "Oh sure, I'd love to." So I spent a day with [Joan] Mitchell. She—

01-01:07:20

Campbell: Oh, nice.

01-01:07:21

Pindell: Yeah, she had one of Monet's homes. She kept the gardens the same, and she had another—I think it must have been something she built for her studio—

but it was hard to deal with her in a way, because she's a heavy-duty alcoholic, I mean—

01-01:07:38

Campbell: I heard.

01-01:07:39

Pindell: —day-and-night alcoholic, and a heavy-duty smoker. I can't remember her husband. I don't think they were together.

01-01:07:49

Campbell: She had two partners during her life: one in New York, and then when she moved to Paris she had another partner [the artist Riopello]. And she was drinking the—yeah, she was just—

01-01:07:56

Pindell: Oh, heavy drinking, heavy drinking. And she wanted me to stay over but I was kind of intimidated by her being so drunk, so I just came back. I had a studio in the Cité [Internationale] des Arts. This was when I was in the Paris Biennale when they had it, and they offered any of the artists—if they wanted to stay for a couple of weeks—a studio. It's really an apartment studio. The only problem with it—oh, the woman's name was Carolyn Lanchner. She was one of the [curators at the Museum of Modern Art in New York].

01-01:08:31

Campbell: Oh, she's an art historian! Yeah, I know her work.

01-01:08:33

Pindell: Yeah, she's passed away.

01-01:08:34

Campbell: Oh no!

01-01:08:35

Pindell: Yeah. Yeah, I wanted to get in touch with her, but she's passed away. The only problem with this space [in Paris] was it had albino cockroaches.

01-01:08:49

Campbell: Albino what?

01-01:08:50

Pindell: Cockroaches.

01-01:08:50

Campbell: Ah!

01-01:08:51

Pindell: And they were little, tiny things, and they were all over. So, I remember Carolyn and I, we would go around and she would say, "Une bombe des petites insectes," a sprayette for small insects, and I don't even know if we got a bomb. I remember getting cans and putting the bed legs in the cans with

water so they couldn't—a little moat so they couldn't get into my bed. And it had a kitchen and everything and a bathroom, but it was just roachy, and the roaches were coming up through the heating vents. The space itself was nice, and I faced Île Saint-Louis. The subway stop I think was Île Saint-Louis. But anyway, and there was water, I faced the water and not the buildings. But I couldn't really relax in that space because of that.

01-01:09:47

Campbell: Because of the cockroaches. You were across from the Louvre. Were you on the Marie side?

01-01:09:54

Pindell: I think I was on the opposite side.

01-01:09:56

Campbell: You were on the opposite side, yeah, I think that's what I was thinking. And you could just cross the bridge, right, and go—

01-01:10:00

Pindell: Yeah—

01-01:10:00

Campbell: —to the museum.

01-01:10:01

Pindell: —the opposite side.

01-01:10:02

Campbell: Did you see any—we haven't asked you about gallery—do you want to stop here, and then we'll come back and talk about galleries? Because we could talk about galleries in Boston and galleries in Paris.

01-01:10:09

Pindell: I don't know much about galleries in Boston.

01-01:10:12

Campbell: Or in Paris? Did you go to any contemporary shows?

01-01:10:13

Pindell: A place called Gallery [Entre] wanted me to do a show. I had everything crated, shipped. They wouldn't pick it up; they didn't want to pay the duty on it. So then, customs put it in storage until I could come over and find somewhere to put it. So, [Sonnabend Gallery] stored it for me, then I had to come back to the country later and get the crates—crate, rather—and pack it as overweight luggage and bring it home. I was just so frustrated. And the lawyer for the gallery was also the lawyer I hired, and I did not know he was working for them, too. I've run into so many dicey things in France—

01-01:11:08

Campbell: Oh, so frustrating—

01-01:11:09

Pindell: —professionally that I—

01-01:11:10

Campbell: —it's so frustrating.

01-01:11:11

Pindell: —I kind of stay away. And I think the Modern was also cautious about France. They always sent a courier with the show, yeah.

01-01:11:23

Tewes: All right. That's probably a good place to stop. We'll pick it up after lunch.

01-01:11:26

Pindell: Okay. [break in audio]

01-01:11:28

Tewes: All right. We are back from a break. Andrianna, won't you pick us up?

01-01:11:33

Campbell: So, I'm just curious about coming back from Europe, and I want you to discuss your time at Yale because I know that you went right before. So you were in Europe in '64, you say, and then '65 to '67 you were in graduate school. Would you talk about that process of coming back to the United States and why you decided to apply to school there? Was there something about the program that attracted you?

01-01:12:02

Pindell: Well, I had heard it was a very good program. And I didn't know, as a figurative artist, if they would accept me because the program was heavy, or as the students say, heavy into abstract expressionism, pop art, and hard-edge painting, and not figurative at all. But I was a very good figurative painter. I also applied at Columbia, but I think—I can't remember. I think I might have gotten in, but it was kind of for probation; I mean, they would try me out. And then I applied at University of Pennsylvania. God knows why. I don't think their program was functioning, whatever. My father had gone to Columbia and that's probably why I later—Teachers College [at Columbia University].

So I was really amazed that I got into Yale at all, because of knowing that they were not figurative. And another woman in my department at BU—but she was in graphic design—she got into the graphic design section of the Art Department, so two of us from BU were in the same class. It was very different than BU, very patrician. There were very few women on campus. It was when only graduate women are on campus. Considering the kind of studios we have at Stony Brook for our grad students, they really had a few studios that had doors. The rest of us were in, like, cubicles. They weren't tiny cubicles, but they weren't huge cubicles. But it also meant that we socialized more, because we're walking back and forth past the studios. I never felt bad about it or insecure about it.

01-01:14:01

They also would invite critique artists who were pretty well known to come and critique the grad students. And I remember Richard Lindner. He was really very kind. I would put him on the same level as Walter Murch. But then Frankenthaler came around, and I remember she came into my studio, and she just looked and said, "Ugh, this was done in the Renaissance," and walked away. Well, the students kind of started making fun of her, saying, "If you do a painting that looks like a Frankenthaler, she'll love it." But anyway, I got my revenge years later when I was at the Modern. I was assigned the Frankenthaler show that was supposed to happen as a joint venture between the Whitney and the Modern. And I showed up to see her, representing the Modern. I thought she'd faint, poor soul. But anyway, the only thing we had in common was we hated flying. I know that sounds—Aretha Franklin wouldn't fly either. Oh God, I lost the train of thought on that. You were talking about Yale.

01-01:15:15

Campbell: So, the question is, like, why did you apply, and were there specific people—

01-01:15:18

Pindell: Well—

01-01:15:18

Campbell: You told me about some of the color classes and how in the past—

01-01:15:21

Pindell: —that was—

01-01:15:22

Campbell: —they would say, "Why are you using glitter? Why are you using pink?" and you were like a—

01-01:15:26

Pindell: It had very—

01-01:15:26

Campbell: —feminist statement to kind of move—

01-01:15:29

Pindell: Yeah, I did—

01-01:15:30

Campbell: —away from—

01-01:15:30

Pindell: Well at the time, I was not using glitter. I was slowly eroding my kind of traditional painting style, and I kind of floundered for a while trying to figure out what I wanted to do. And then I found the skeleton. I know that sounds weird. But I would come to New York for the anti-Vietnam War marches. And one of the pieces in the traveling show, there's a skeleton almost life size

that I painted, and I used orange. And I realize now it was about Agent Orange. There were all of these things that were coming into the work.

01-01:16:07

I had a job. I was in Helen Hadley Hall, which was the only women's dormitory, and of course the men called it "The Bay of Pigs." I was running the switchboard, and I have a nice voice and I don't necessarily have an African American accent. And so I remember there was this one guy who had called, and he wanted to come over and meet me, and I'm like, Hm. And then once he saw that I wasn't white, he went away really fast.

So, I was aware of the kind of social life and being one of the few black women on campus. I remember there was one black guy who was in law school, Stan Saunders from California. I don't know what ever happened to him, but he had political ambitions. I just don't know what ever happened to him. And I would eat in the law school, and I have a friend for life actually from there. His name is Joel Fadem. We weren't lovers or anything, but he was going to Oxford to finish his degree, so I would go to England and hang out with him. We went to one of the Stonehenge midsummer ceremonies, whatever, at Stonehenge, and we'd go travel around together.

I don't know. I learned a lot. The class I always talk about is the color theory class, which we took with the architects who had a whole other mindset. I've just forever learned everything I know about color, even though the projects were kind of annoying, because you had to get color paper and cut out these tiny little squares. You had to be very accurate in the way you cut things. And I'm one of these people that doesn't draw a straight line. But I enjoyed the classes.

There was one drawing teacher that was quite good. God, I can't remember his name either [Nicholas Carrone]. Let's see if I can. He teaches now, I think, at the New York Studio School. And it was pretty much, you're developing your work on your own. There were no grades, you had no idea what your standing was. Some people were held over, like Judith Bernstein—the hairy screws, if you know her work.

01-01:18:32

Campbell:

Yeah, yeah.

01-01:18:32

Pindell:

She was there and they kept her another year. But I did graduate after two years. I was mainly friendly mostly with the gay men in the class. I don't know, it was kind of a lonely time. It's hard to explain.

I got two marriage proposals, and they all involved my either giving up my work or minimizing my work so that the other person who was the artist would shine. And the other was from a guy I had grown up with who went to Harvard when I was at BU. He had perfect scores in his SATs. He was really

smart, but he didn't seem to grow, which was weird. And then he went to Yale Law when I was there, and he basically said, "Howardena, I'd like to marry you, but there's no room for two egos in the house. You'll have to give up your art," and my reaction was laughter. [laughs] I don't know why but I just started, like, [laughs] "Are you kidding?" And my poor father, I know he wanted grandchildren. At one point he said to me, "No one wanted you, Howardena?" I said, "The deal was not a good deal for me." [laughs] I was not going to give up my art, period.

01-01:19:44

So it was intense. Because at the time, I had art history as a minor, painting as my major for the MFA. And Jules Prown was my teacher in art history and he was head of the Garvan Collection, and so I worked in the Garvan Collection. And at the time, there was a man from England named Graham Hood, and he became a mentor for me in terms of museum work. He was the one that encouraged me to go into museum work. He later became the director of the Williamsburg Museums in Virginia.

The social side of it was tricky, because you would have some white friends who, when their parents were on campus, they didn't want you to show up. So I ran into that kind of thing where someone might cross the street to avoid me, because they were with their parents. You'd run into weird things.

I remember one boyfriend I had who was really a good guy. He was from Australia, and he was part Aborigine. I can't remember his name. Gary [Watson]. He was a really good guy, and I think he was from Melbourne. He went back and I never really heard from him again. But he was very respectful. He would take me to all the Australian parties. The Australians are funny. In those days, the women are on one side of the room, and the men are on the other side of the room. It was strange.

It was strange, but I learned a lot. And the work made huge shifts and changes. And then when I graduated, I started working at the Modern and I was working five days a week, and I was used to having natural light, and I didn't have natural light. So, it was my final year that Nancy Murata started playing with the circle, and that's when I saw it and it was a catalyst. And I started working on circles and ovals on drawings, and then eventually on paintings, yeah.

01-01:21:55

Campbell:

And just to be clear, when you say "the circle," you're talking about the red circle that you showed us.

01-01:22:02

Pindell:

Yes, yeah.

01-01:22:04

Campbell:

And when I said "glitter," I guess I know you used glitter in more recent work, but I was thinking about the unconventional materials. You mentioned something about the fact that you were using unconventional colors and materials, and that for them, for your professors who were kind of even of a previous generation—the students that were there, they were more maybe exploring conceptual art, or other kinds of art—it seemed that they were drawing a kind of correlation between your use of this kind of paint and the kind of that feminist-like theories that you—

01-01:22:37

Pindell:

Well then, there was no—

01-01:22:38

Campbell:

—espoused.

01-01:22:38

Pindell:

—real feminist theory at all. And it was during the Civil Rights movement. It's just that I found in their critiques, if I—well, I shouldn't say just me—if I used or someone else used—a woman—a red and white, it was called pink, and that was frowned upon. And the guys, they would just say it was red and white. The critiques were very terrifying in that you were in a room with all the professors—all the professors were men—and one woman, the secretary, Callista Clancy—I remember her name—and there were no graduate students there with you. You were there alone trying to defend your work. And I don't know how I got through it, I really don't, because I wasn't that articulate about my work at all. I just did it.

And it was after I graduated that I started to work with unconventional materials, like using manila folders, file folders, punching them out. Now I use YUPO, I use archival stuff, but those things held up, which I find amazing. I think partly because there's no air that gets to them; they're all framed.

I don't know. I think of my years at both BU and at Yale as being very lonely, I think because I was usually the only one. And when you had friends that were being taken away from you because you were considered—what's the word—an untouchable, I'll put it that way. Having Susan's family move [her] to Rutgers, having—can't remember her name, but her father—Joan, that was her name, I can't remember the last name—tell the school he'll pay them if they would get rid of me. Running into that kind of stuff was really very upsetting, and I felt very alone with it. I don't know. I mean, and that—

01-01:24:51

Campbell:

So it wasn't this kind of—because I hear so many talk about Yale and they say that it's this enthusiastic place where they have these lifelong companions. You didn't find that to be the case because of the systematic racism that you encountered.

01-01:25:05

Pindell:

I think it's the systemic racism. I remember there was one architect that I was going out with. And when his brother, who was a famous filmmaker, Tony Conrad, was going to be on campus to do a presentation, he told me to stay away from him. And for me, that was a normalized state. There was another guy, James Terrell, who was also an architect, and I think he's the one who was with his parents and he crossed the street. There's something about him that had to do with parents where he didn't want me to meet them. I didn't feel that at all with the Australian guy—Gary Watson was his name—I didn't feel that way at all. He was just very generous. He wasn't sexually invasive. I didn't even sleep with him, but he was like a buddy and a friend. And that time it was not lonely.

But you felt, as a woman kind of—because you would take classes. I don't know whether that we had undergraduate classes that we took, I don't remember. But I remember being in one class—I think it was Robert Rosenblum—and I was the only woman in the class. So he would say, "Lady and gentlemen." I didn't see that that's entirely hostile—I thought it was funny—but you had to [deal] with issues of ladies' rooms, and just sort of like you were like a sore thumb as a woman in this environment.

And also there was a lot of wealth on campus then. I remember this one white guy who was an undergraduate who had a gold cane; it was a cane with a gold top. And then if he had a party coming, he'd have an interior decorator come in and redecorate his dorm room.

01-01:27:01

Campbell:

What?

01-01:27:01

Pindell:

Yeah, there was a lot of conspicuous wealth then in the 1960s. In the Art School, you had more people who were on scholarship. There wasn't that kind of conspicuous wealth at all.

01-01:27:15

Campbell:

So you got your MoMA [Museum of Modern Art] job directly out of the Art School. Did you have any other jobs when you moved to New York?

01-01:27:21

Pindell:

Well, I wouldn't say it was direct. It was like two months after I graduated.

01-01:27:28

Campbell:

Oh, that's pretty close, yeah. That's really lucky.

01-01:27:31

Pindell:

Yeah, because Victor Smythe, who used to be a curator at the Schomburg [Center for Research in Black Culture], was working there as an assistant to the director of Circulating National and International Exhibitions, and they had a Personnel [Director] who was Asian. And I just by chance used the

bathroom in the museum and I thought, Oh, maybe I'll go up to Personnel. Because I was going all over trying to get a job, and I got a job at a place called J. Pocker and Sons. They sold posters. And I took—I think I took the test but I can't remember it clearly—for the welfare case worker, because that's what some artists did. I think [Romare] Bearden did that for a while.

01-01:28:16

Campbell:

Mm-hm, he did. Yeah, he was a social worker.

01-01:28:19

Pindell:

Yeah. But the woman who was in Personnel was very nice. She said, "Well, I'll send you up to this department," and Victor was there, first one to interview me. And he said, "Well someone just quit a job. I think you might like it." And so he sent me to the next in line, Inez Garson, who later on became a curator at the Hirshhorn [Museum], and she was wonderful. She said, "I'd love to hire you. We have to, by law, put this out in the public. And if you can wait a month, I'll let you know." And within a month, she said, "Okay, you have the job."

So I ended up working with people like Bill Agee's wife was in that department. I'm trying to think who else. I guess maybe she was the one that Mo—oh no, no, Lanier, Mary Lanier. Her husband was part of the Rockefeller Foundation.

01-01:29:16

But the thing that I always tell people: here I am in this upscale, fancy museum, the pay was 5,000 a year. And in two years, you got this lovely letter saying, "You've gotten a raise of \$5." [laughs] It's like, wow!

But I met a lot of friends there, and we did unionize. I was on a picket line twice. In fact, my department gave me a party at Garth's at the gallery. And John Trause—he was in the library then—has stayed in touch, and he came to the party. It's been forty years since I left the museum. And also Larry Kardish, who was in the Film Department, one of the Film curators, I was in touch with him. And it's just that there were genuine friendships that developed there.

I got as far as associate curator [and acting director of the department when the director was absent] and I knew the union stopped there, that I would be in big trouble [laughs] after that, and then I decided to leave.

Plus the whole business with "nigger drawings" that happened in March, where Artists Space getting, you know, line item money and money also for diversifying had an exhibition by a white male artist who did [abstract] charcoal drawings in black. And if you called up and said, "Well, why the title?" and you were told, "Well, the drawings are in charcoal, charcoal is black, and black is nigger." And so that—

01-01:30:54

Campbell: Whoa!

01-01:30:54

Pindell: —that turned into a whole big thing. Lowery Sims; Lucy Lippard; myself; Elke Solomon, who was at the Whitney; and a lot of other—David Hammons [came to my loft and we made protest banners]—a lot of us got together and went to Artists Space and we had banners. Camille Billops eventually gave a teach-in at her space. And they had called the police and locked us out, and we went back a second time. They let us in, but one of Helene Winer's supporters said to us, "How dare you come down here and tell us what to do? This is a white neighborhood." [There is documentation of the protest in the African American Archives in Atlanta in the Emory University Archives (Library) (Hatch-Billops Collection).]

01-01:31:30

Campbell: Wow.

01-01:31:31

Pindell: So, I was always shocked to see how racist the art world was.

01-01:31:35

Campbell: I know, one of the problems: it's not very diverse, and so it tends to—

01-01:31:38

Pindell: It really isn't.

01-01:31:39

Campbell: —reinforce certain power dynamics. How did that segue into your work with A.I.R.?

01-01:31:46

Pindell: Well at the same time, Artists Space but not under Helene—it was under Irving Sandler, I think, who started it—they started a slide bank. And the women who wanted to start A.I.R. went through the slide bank and they saw my work and invited me to be a member of the gallery. Now, I bet my being at the Modern helped. In other words—I'm saying it in almost a sarcastic way—that would also attract them to me because maybe I could help them. But most of the women in A.I.R. were married, and so they didn't have to work. And I remember at one point, a group of women picketed the Modern, and they called me up at my office and said, "You have to come down and picket with us." And I said, "No, I am the only one who pays the bills. You're basically—have families and your husband pays your bills. So I can't, I can't do it." But I did go on strike when the union went on strike.

But some of the women were kind of cranky with me because they felt I was bringing them unpleasant issues such as the racism in the women's movement. There was one member of A.I.R. who, to this day, is always saying that I don't know I'm black. And I'm thinking, She happens to be Jewish; how would she

feel if I said, "You don't know you're Jewish?" I mean, really? And this person continues to say this. Because there's one African American woman, Carolyn Martin; I know she's still a member of the gallery. But she was a member of the gallery, and she heard this woman say this at some kind of gathering, an event, to the public. It's a different place now. It's a different group of women, and it seems somewhat friendlier. But I don't know if—I think they might have one black artist, maybe two. And then they have an associate program, so there are, I think, some Asian artists who are associates. I think the associate program is for people who are outside of New York. I don't know when they get shows or how much they have to pay in dues and stuff. But it's still going, it's still going. That was the first time I really got to show my work. The white women's movement did help me show my work for the first time, and it was at A.I.R. I first showed the number pieces.

01-01:34:19

Campbell:

And speaking of A.I.R., would you discuss—because at the same time you have some major shows going on at the Whitney for black artists, and we can think about Faith Ringgold and others showing in that period. What was your—because I know that you talk so much about being a curator at MoMA, and you're in the Ephemera Department, like books—

01-01:34:44

Pindell:

I was—

01-01:34:44

Campbell:

—and—

01-01:34:45

Pindell:

I was in—it was Drawings, Prints, and Illustrated Books—

01-01:34:48

Campbell:

—Drawings, Showings, Prints—

01-01:34:48

Pindell:

—and then it became—

01-01:34:49

Campbell:

—and Illustrated Books.

01-01:34:50

Pindell:

—Prints and Illustrated Books. And our director then had the drawings, and then we had a separate curator who was kind of mean. She was awful. [laughs] Anyway, you'd have to sign out to go to the bathroom, that kind of thing. [She eventually had dementia and cancer. I understand she became very nice when she developed dementia.]

01-01:35:03

Campbell:

Wow, yeah. So I was thinking about the fact that you were in this department and you talked so much about being kind of inside and outside the art world.

Did you know these other artists? Were you aware that there was a kind of tide change happening and that this—

01-01:35:19

Pindell: Yeah, well I would—

01-01:35:20

Campbell: —exhibition was, these exhibitions that were happening with these women—and some of them black women—that they were really going to be really changing the landscape here in New York in terms of what kind of art was being shown and what kind of practices—

01-01:35:35

Pindell: Well, it's—

01-01:35:36

Campbell: —an artist could have?

01-01:35:37

Pindell: —complicated because you had the African American men. Oh, how could I forget his name? Benny Andrews.

01-01:35:46

Campbell: Benny Andrews, yeah, and BECC [Black Emergency Cultural Coalition].

01-01:35:48

Pindell: Yes, and it was complicated because Benny and Bill Williams were telling people not to show in Doty's show, to not show. And one of the things I did was: I was acting director of the department. I was the highest ranked below the chairman or the director, and I would go to department heads meetings when she was traveling. And in one of the meetings they announced that they were purchasing, and it turns out they were purchasing a Benny Andrews and a Bill Williams. And I thought, They're telling us not to show our work, not to push ourselves forward, and that had limited the competition. So they took the opportunity with that open door to get the museums to buy their work. So I became really angry about that and I decided that I would participate in Doty's exhibition, but I think a number of artists regretted that they hadn't.

01-01:36:52

Campbell: I know, it's such a shame. Because I was looking at the artists list in the announcement in the *Times*, the *New York Times*, and how they had this huge announcement of the people who had walked out. And I was like, Oh, I would love to see images of that, even though what they ended up with was quite spectacular in terms of the quality of artists and the number of artists that he ended up showing.

01-01:37:14

Pindell: But there were some very good artists who, this was one chance for them, and they decided to back off because they were told, "Don't do it." And then the

people who said, "Don't do it" were taking advantage of the fact that they didn't have that competition. They had the voice and we didn't.

01-01:37:39

Campbell:

Yeah. Would you talk about—I think that led to you—I mean, they had the voice and you didn't implies that—obviously there also was a voice here in New York for black artists. This is the period that we see people like Jack Whitten getting his first—people were getting seat at a table, he was getting his first show at the Whitney. So many instances where this is kind of the birth of a lot of very good exhibitions here in New York that they didn't end up collecting from, which is a big issue for them, I think now. But they did so many years ago and I think that's really—I don't know, I think of it as just kind of like an exciting time to be in an art scene, because of these many different shifts that were happening. I guess my question for you, moving on to *Free, White and 21*, which has gotten so much play—

01-01:38:39

Pindell:

It really has. I'm totally shocked, that it had legs. It had so many legs. It's amazing.

01-01:38:46

Campbell:

Yeah. And I wanted you to—because you've spoken to me about this wedding that you went to in Maine, and I kind of—

01-01:38:53

Pindell:

Kennebunkport.

01-01:38:53

Campbell:

—wanted to talk about how you came up with this, such a crazy [laughs] idea, *Free, White and 21*. But if it has to do with the racism that you encountered, and this idea that people could say to you, "Well, you don't know you're black," which is so weird when you're just like—well maybe I've—for me, it's, like, maybe you have a certain accent or something like that, but of course every day you're reminded of your blackness. That's who you are; you're socialized that way. So I guess, yeah, what made you put on white face, is the ultimate question.

01-01:39:24

Pindell:

Well, I think a lot of things. I think the white women's movement. One of the white women came to me and said, "Please be cooperative," i.e., shut up about race. I remember with the Guerilla Girls, I was aware with their posters that they had left out race completely; it was all about white women's issues. And I pestered them, and they finally changed. Yeah, brings up sort of emotions that are unpleasant.

01-01:39:57

Campbell:

Yeah, of course, but it's important to document for archival reasons.

01-01:40:02

Pindell:

Yeah well, there was another group called PESTS—

01-01:40:04
Campbell:

Historical reasons.

01-01:40:05
Pindell:

—and there's an archive that Clive Phillpot, who was librarian at the time [at the Museum of Modern Art], contacted me and he wanted the archive from that group. That group was Asian, Latino, and black, yeah. And so they had like a newsletter and all kinds of things that one can see. I'm sorry if I'm wandering because, again, it brings a lot of emotions.

There was a Byars committee at the Modern where—probably an outcome of Benny Andrews and Bill Williams, an outcome they wanted. I don't disagree with what happened, but it didn't last long. Byars was one of these extremely wealthy white men. And so a man named Green was—it was like they couldn't have a black man as the head, they had to have a white man as the head. The white man was totally uninformed, and the black man—God, I wish I could remember. I know it was Green, something Green. And I had to pester them to let me be on the committee. Betty Blayton Taylor, because she had the Carnival in Harlem. Oh, I'm trying to think who else was on that committee. All of this would be in the archives at the Modern. And they then put on two shows. I think I might have it right and I'm not clear, I think it was [Richard] Hunt and Bearden got one-person shows, and then nothing. The guy who was head of the committee, [Byars], killed himself. So I don't know whether it was an issue in that he got so much negative feedback by whites for being in that position or just that his own life took him to kill his own, to kill himself.

Oh God, let's see. There were the women's groups, black women's groups. And then, I was kind of seen as the enemy because I hadn't opened the doors at the Modern. It was all I could do to get up and go to work. I was dealing with a department head who had her problems. And I remember Jim Dine came to the department, and he was talking to the staff and all. He came to me; he said, "Oh, I hear you're an artist," and blah, blah. And then he went blank, like it dawned on him: she's black; I can't help her. So he just dropped midsentence and turned away, and started talking to someone else. And Grossman, who was head of, I think it was Universal Limited Art Editions, Tatyana Grosman—

01-01:42:52
Campbell:

ULAE, mm-hm.

01-01:42:54
Pindell:

—invited all the other curatorial staff to come to ULAE, but she wouldn't invite me.

And then, I remember there was a phone call that came in. Oh, God, I wish I could remember her name. Oh, she was Israeli, and her artist—Benni Efrat was Israeli, and Mrs. Urdang, Bertha Urdang called, because I was involved

with the acquisitions end of it—I mean, just simply standing there holding a piece. Maybe I might have to defend it, but my department had made all the decisions as to what would get into the meeting. And I remember she called and said she wanted to ask, "Benni Efrat, was his work purchased?" And I said, "No." And she said, "Well, who did they buy?" and I mentioned Mel Edwards, and she started saying, "Niggers, niggers, that's all the museum is interested in are niggers."

01-01:43:47

Campbell:

Wow.

01-01:43:47

Pindell:

I'm serious. And I said, "Benni"—not Benni Efrat, what's her name—"Urdang, you're speaking to Howardena." And she got really quiet and hung up. So, [laughs] I ran into that a lot. [A white South African male artist came to the department to show his work...and he had to show it to me. I thought he would have a nervous breakdown.]

Or when I first started working there was a woman there by the name Marie Frost in the Traveling Exhibition Department. And actually, that's where I met Lucy Lippard, because I was assigned a show, to work with her on Max Ernst. They did traveling shows for college art galleries, and they were nice. They just used a collection instead of it just sitting there in a box. They ended that after [René D'Harnoncourt, the director of the Museum of Modern Art] was killed, hit by a car, and they became more corporate and they just lost interest in real education stuff.

Oh God, what was I going to tell you? Ooh, I can't remember.

01-01:44:40

Campbell:

Well, we were talking about, yeah, the community that you were involved in and—

01-01:44:44

Pindell:

Oh, Marie, okay. Marie Frost would go to South Africa during the Apartheid for vacation, and she would come back with pictures and she'd have a little party, but she would never invite me. I would run into that kind of thing. Or, once a year the staff was invited to Rockefeller's house in Tarrytown, wherever he is, and I was never invited. And then finally, near the end of my leaving I was invited, and Rockefeller kind of treated me like I was like a piece of dessert. He came forward like, "Oh, hello!" [laughs] You knew what he was about. I have run into that.

Other times, I—this is sort of going off the point, but I really want to talk about it because I want people to be aware. The Modern got a request for someone to come and judge a show in Florida and just to represent the Modern, so they sent me down there. And the woman who ran the show raised Arabian horses, and she didn't put me in a hotel. I stayed in her home with her

family and her horses, and I did the job. I remember at one point, one of the—I'll get back to Kennebunkport—but at one point someone said, "Oh, I thought you were the maid." You would get all these offhanded comments. And so when it was time for me to leave, she said she wanted me to sleep with her son. Her son was, like, fifteen maybe, sixteen years old. "He will come in to visit you in New York. We travel with the horses around the country." And I said, "No!" You know, this was from the plantation days when the young males were sent in to the slave quarters to have sex, and I just—she was furious. She was—

01-01:46:36

Campbell: She was?

01-01:46:37

Pindell: —furious that she couldn't get me to do that. It's like, what? [laughs] No.

01-01:46:45

Campbell: I know! Exactly, yeah, you're not a prostitute or a—

01-01:46:48

Pindell: Isn't that bizarre? But that's how she could see me, or was the only way she could see me. I ran into that in Japan. When I was living in the international house, which was like the Rockefeller Institution—

01-01:47:00

Campbell: Well, let's not jump ahead because that's in the eighties.

01-01:47:02

Pindell: Okay.

01-01:47:03

Campbell: [laughs] So what was your studio practice like in this period? Did you keep a studio and what—

01-01:47:09

Pindell: When I first came to New York, I worked in the living room. And I eventually ended up being one of the first wave into Westbeth [Artists' Community]. And that's really when the work started taking on life, because I had the grid, that soft grid I made at Westbeth. Trying to think what else. Oh God, there's a piece that I made that actually—I think there's a museum buying it now—where I, like, with a soft grid I use canvas, but I use one by twos. It's in a weird piece, it's very strange. But it's where I started spraying the dots, okay? So the piece that's at the gallery now in the back room—although they probably took it down already—is where I had punched holes, put the templates together, and sprayed. That's where I started.

That is where I would say I made a complete break from figurative art. Because at first, when I was in the apartment I was trying to paint what I saw out the window. So I have a very kind of abstract painting of houses, which actually, it was not that bad of a painting, but I was struggling, really

struggling with it. I would say the turning point was probably—hope I'm not contradicting myself, but Carl Solway, when he said, "How many spots are on the painting?" that's when I started numbering things. Prior to that, I was just punching holes, saving them in a bag, and they were basically not stretched. The gallery has stretched them. I think they look better stretched, but in a sense I couldn't afford to stretch them. And my painting now is not stretched, it's just free-hanging fabric.

01-01:49:10

Campbell: Yeah, so, the paintings aren't stretched, I guess. Also, were you painting—this is very important—were you painting on the wall or were you painting on the floor? In the past, you've talked—

01-01:49:20

Pindell: Both.

01-01:49:20

Campbell: —about on the floor with, you have bags, and in some of those bags you have—

01-01:49:25

Pindell: Glitter.

01-01:49:26

Campbell: —punched circles.

01-01:49:27

Pindell: Oh, the punched thing, oh yeah.

01-01:49:28

Campbell: Yeah. Or you have prints that you cut up and it's like a matter of collaging. So I'm just cu—

01-01:49:33

Pindell: Yeah. Oh, for the painting?

01-01:49:34

Campbell: Yeah.

01-01:49:34

Pindell: Well, I had a loft. After Westbeth, I had a loft, a big one. It was like 2,300 square feet, pretty raw, Twenty-Eighth and Seventh across from FIT [Fashion Institute of Technology]. I would do certain processes, like when you [paint the canvas] on the wall, and then I would—when I was sprinkling paper [dots], I would put it on the floor and paint. Now I put it on a big table.

01-01:49:58

Campbell: Nice.

01-01:49:58

Pindell: Yeah, and sprinkle it that way. Because when it's a vertical, there's no way it'll stick.

01-01:50:03

Campbell: Yeah, yeah, that's good, yeah.

01-01:50:05

Pindell: Yeah, but I did. This space was raw and big enough that I could nail it to the floor. There was nothing to damage; it was very raw. And I had a lot of wall space so I could hang my work and see how it was progressing. The space I'm in now, I can only work on—I'm working on one nine-foot painting for The Shed, and a painting which will have glitter on it. The one for The Shed is really depressing, so I need something pleasant that I'm working on at the same time.

01-01:50:37

Campbell: And what was the critical reception like for the work?

01-01:50:40

Pindell: Oh, then?

01-01:50:41

Campbell: Yeah, because I when I interviewed you before, I found some early reviews and then I was just—and you said—

01-01:50:46

Pindell: There were—

01-01:50:46

Campbell: —that there weren't that many.

01-01:50:47

Pindell: They weren't friendly, they weren't friendly.

01-01:50:49

Campbell: Yeah.

01-01:50:50

Pindell: They weren't friendly, because I remember in the *New Art Examiner* [Chicago], there was a review of a show that was in Chicago, I think at The Renaissance Society. Can't remember the name of the curator. But anyway, it was about thick paint. And I believe at that point, I must have been using glitter because he wouldn't have said what he said. He said he saw my paintings as a lightshow and he wanted to have sex under my paintings, and that's the kind of response—

01-01:51:17

Campbell: What? [laughs]

- 01-01:51:21
Tewes: Did you feel like—
- 01-01:51:21
Campbell: How is that—
- 01-01:51:22
Tewes: —you were getting different—I don't know—graded on a curve, in a way, as a woman? Did that feel different for you?
- 01-01:51:31
Pindell: I don't know. I think it was about my being a black woman. I think that's what it was about. Carter Ratcliff was the curator.
- 01-01:51:41
Campbell: Oh yeah, Carter Ratcliff, yeah.
- 01-01:51:43
Pindell: Yeah. Yeah. I would get really offhand comments like that, and I remember the Whitney had kind of an open call, and a number of black women including myself went to the Whitney with our things. I remember Vivian Browne. She died years ago.
- 01-01:52:03
Campbell: Yeah. I've seen her work because I'm working on Norman Lewis, and she did a series of interviews with him. She was very thorough.
- 01-01:52:10
Pindell: She was wonderful.
- 01-01:52:11
Campbell: And, I really—
- 01-01:52:12
Pindell: She died of cancer.
- 01-01:52:13
Campbell: —enjoyed—
- 01-01:52:13
Pindell: They thought it was her supplies—
- 01-01:52:14
Campbell: Oh!
- 01-01:52:15
Pindell: —because she was living in a loft but she didn't have a wall that went up to the top of the ceiling, so she was smelling her solvents. At least that was what some people felt had happened.
- 01-01:52:26
Campbell: Yeah. That's a shame.

- 01-01:52:27
Pindell: Yeah, it is. It is.
- 01-01:52:31
Campbell: Well, looking at the time, should we stop now or—
- 01-01:52:35
Pindell: What would you like to—
- 01-01:52:35
Campbell: —should we talk about Japan and then stop?
- 01-01:52:38
Pindell: It's up to you.
- 01-01:52:38
Tewes: Up to you.
- 01-01:52:40
Campbell: I think we can just talk about Japan tomorrow.
- 01-01:52:45
Pindell: Yeah. That's good because that's a big topic.
- 01-01:52:48
Campbell: It's a long topic and there's a lot about geography that I would like to cover.
- 01-01:52:52
Pindell: I did a lot of traveling.
- 01-01:52:53
Campbell: You did a lot of traveling. You were there, and then it kind of informed the work that we were—
- 01-01:52:58
Pindell: Yeah.
- 01-01:52:58
Tewes: Sounds good. Is there anything you'd like to finish up with today, in talking about your childhood—
- 01-01:53:03
Pindell: Well—
- 01-01:53:03
Tewes: —or education or your early years?
- 01-01:53:05
Pindell: Well you know, I'd rather say something about Kennebunkport.
- 01-01:53:08
Tewes: Oh!

01-01:53:08

Campbell: Oh yeah!

01-01:53:09

Pindell: Yes. I developed a friendship when I was at Yale. She was on the same floor as I was in the dorm. Her name was Marcia Madeira, and she and her boyfriend decided to get married. So they invited me to the wedding, to be in it, actually, to be one of the bridesmaids. And then I remember I saw a picture; I was really beautiful then. We all made our own dresses and everything. I was the only black within miles, miles. And I remember one white woman came up to me and said, "What are you really doing at the Museum of Modern Art?" And I got all these offhand comments. Then, one of the friends—I think he's a football player, [Fran Tarkenton], I don't know if you know—I don't follow sports. One of his aunts gave a luncheon for the maids, bridesmaids and the best men, whatever they're called, grooms, I don't know. And she was seated at a distance because maybe there were twelve of us or something, and so she moved her chair and her food over to sit right in front of me, and she just watched me as I ate. I mean, just, ugh!

01-01:54:34

Campbell: That's so creepy.

01-01:54:35

Pindell: Very creepy. And then at the end when everyone—because the guys stood on one side, the women on the other, she came down between us and shook hands with everyone. She shook hands with everyone except for me, and then came to me last. I have that in the tape, yeah. Plus, the minister was propositioning me. [laughs] I mean, it's like—

01-01:54:55

Campbell: Oh wow! [laughs]

01-01:54:57

Pindell: It's like it's endless. God almighty, oh God. I mean, now that I'm old and plump, thank God [laughs] that's not on the menu.

Yeah, I have other stories. But anyway, no, we'll do Japan tomorrow, yeah.

01-01:55:16

Tewes: Sounds good. Well, thank you for your time today.

01-01:55:18

Pindell: Sure!

Interview 2: November 16, 2018

02-00:00:02

Tewes: This is a second interview with Howardena Pindell for the Getty Research Institute's African American Art History Initiative, in association with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. The interview is being conducted by Andrianna Campbell and Amanda Tewes at CUNY Graduate Center in New York on November 16, 2018. So thank you for another session today, Howardena. I'm going to hand this off to Andrianna.

02-00:00:31

Campbell: Hi, Howardena. It's so good for you—

02-00:00:33

Pindell: Good morning.

02-00:00:34

Campbell: —to—good morning.

02-00:00:35

Pindell: Good afternoon.

02-00:00:35

Campbell: It's good to be here with you. One of the things I wanted to talk to you about was your trip to Japan, which I know comes after your time at Yale, after your time at the Museum of Modern Art. Actually, I want to back up a little bit because we never really covered you talking about *Free, White and 21*, and it seems like that's something that you wanted to discuss in more detail. We started talking about the fact that it's been shown so much. Let's start there.

02-00:01:08

Pindell: Okay. Well, to my surprise, the tape had legs. It just has gone on and on and on. And I'm not a video artist, and some video artists get annoyed. It's like, "You're not a video artist!" But no, it seems never to be outdated. I mean just, the women's issues continue. And of course, under our current president, the whole thing about sexual harassment is being dealt with.

It's hard to explain the tape. I was kind of driven to do the tape. It was like an idea, an idea you get and then you're like, I have to do it, I have to do it this way. The woman who had a crew—it was an all-female crew—and the woman who was the, I would say sort of basically the director, producer, whatever, she just showed up from nowhere, and I had this idea and it all kind of meshed. They came up to my loft, and my loft was noisy. You can kind of hear [noise] because I was on Twenty-Eighth and Seventh across from FIT [Fashion Institute of Technology]. We took an hour or more footage. I think I may have some of the raw tape left. And then I remember on the hottest day in New York that summer, we edited the tape, and we just got rid of a lot of footage and narrowed it down to twelve minutes. So, I'm grateful to her because I couldn't have done it alone. There's no way I could have done it

alone. I just don't have the knowledge. And again, I'm very surprised that it's lasted so long.

02-00:02:50

Ana Mendieta had put together a show at A.I.R. Gallery called *Dialectics of Isolation*, and that was the first time that it was shown. And in the original, it was the monitor with a metronome on top, so as you watched the tape, the metronome was going back and forth. And then I just found that to be kind of hard to deal with because it got stolen or broken. I mean, I [would have to] constantly replace it, so I took that away. Although [my travelling show], when it traveled to Chicago, they had an audio metronome. So you would sit down, you'd look at the projection, and you'd hear this tick, tick, tick, tick, whatever. And after [Ana's show], it was shown at Franklin Furnace, and they were charging admission. I thought, For a twelve-minute tape? So, they gave me an honorarium and I just turned it back to them and said, "It's free; people can come and see it, whatever."

And the whites were very shocked by it. It was partially in response to the sort of racism in the white women's movement. I don't know. As a black woman in the white women's movement, it was very isolating. I remember I was in a consciousness-raising group with many well-known white women artists. I was there. I wasn't well known. Lucy Lippard organized the group, and she was one of my mentors. And when I would start talking about anything that had to do with race, they would cut me off and say, "We don't want to talk about this. This is about politics. We want to talk about"—basically what they wanted to talk about.

02-00:04:36

Campbell:

I know it's very frustrating because you think that the two are so intertwined.

02-00:04:39

Pindell:

They aren't. In some people's minds, they aren't.

02-00:04:43

Campbell:

I know. But for everyone, the history of this country has always been about how intertwined they are. We could think about someone like Frederick Douglass, and the kind of crossovers between the women's movement from the very early days and the Civil Rights movement after Reconstruction. It was something he'd always say, it was that the problem of slavery was that it was a problem that is for black people, but also for white people because it turned them into slave owners, which, it destroys your heart if you do something like that. You have to be cruel. So, and then you can think about in even the sixties later, there were crossovers between the women's movement and Civil Rights, as well. I think they've always been intertwined, so for me it's hard to think about them being separate.

But so, you made this video, and in it you're wearing this blonde wig. And I think that one of the things I want to do is move past you talking about this

project because I think it's definitely in the past. One of the things we haven't gotten a lot of documentation of is the work that you did after that, which is, of course, when you went to Japan, and the newer bodies of work that I think very much should be considered.

02-00:05:57

Pindell:

Well, no, I think the turning point was the car accident in October. I think it was October of '79.

However, just before I left the [Museum of] Modern [Art], the Modern sent me to Japan to courier a show of impressionist paintings. And at the time, the Japanese had department stores with art galleries in them, museum-quality art galleries. So, I was bringing a shipment over and I can't remember which—oh, I know. It was the *Japan Times* or the *Asahi Shimbun*. I can't remember. But I did go to Japan and I was treated like royalty, because it was the museum. I was the museum, from their point of view. However, there were things that they did that I now realize had to do with very much the way the Japanese function, in that a closest seat to the door is of the lowest rank. So, when we would go out to eat—and I was always with men—the closest seat to the door, I would occupy. They also took me on a tour of Japan. So I went to Hiroshima. I was there around the time of the bombing, of the anniversary. I went to the Peace Museum, which was very upsetting. Everyone should see the Peace Museum because it's horrifying, ugh. And then they took me as far, I think, as Fukuoka. I think I went to Fukuoka. Anyway, they treated me like royalty.

And then I got an NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] Grant. The NEA people asked me, "Do you want to go to Africa or to Japan?" And I was kind of enamored of Japan. I was being treated like a queen, but it was the Modern that they were—and so I took the option of going to Japan. It was a one-year grant, but with my teaching, I couldn't stay away that long.

So I left in the summer of '81—I think in June or July—and stayed until the end of January when the semester was about to start. I had a really hard time because they don't like women. They don't like anyone who's handicapped, although I wasn't handicapped at the time. I remember going to one of their temples, the base of Mount Fuji and stopped. They had a restaurant, and they put tobacco in my food. It was sort of like the Old South. They basically looked at black women as prostitutes. And white women, there were images of white women. There was a lot of violence against white women. Whites would say to me, "Oh my God, now I know what it's like to deal with racism," because they couldn't get apartments, they couldn't get jobs.ⁱⁱⁱ

02-00:08:52

Campbell:

And what year was this? Because that's not what I found to be the case in Japan when I was there.

- 02-00:08:58
Pindell: When were you there though?
- 02-00:09:00
Campbell: Just last year.
- 02-00:09:01
Pindell: Oh, it's been years—
- 02-00:09:02
Campbell: Yeah, so that was—
- 02-00:09:03
Pindell: —1981, '82.
- 02-00:09:03
Campbell: —in '81, yeah, '82, okay.
- 02-00:09:05
Tewes: World War II was still on the mind.
- 02-00:09:08
Pindell: It could be.
- 02-00:09:09
Campbell: Well, maybe. It seems like by '81, '82 they're dealing with the rise of the auto industry, and the auto wars that were going on between—
- 02-00:09:19
Pindell: Oh, that's interesting.
- 02-00:09:20
Campbell: —the *steel* wars are going on between the US and Japan. At the time, seemed like that's what was particularly on the brain. But you stayed for quite a while.
- 02-00:09:33
Pindell: Seven months.
- 02-00:09:34
Campbell: That's a while. So where did you go when you're there, what cities?
- 02-00:09:37
Pindell: Well I did a lot. I spent about three-and-a-half months in Tokyo, and lived about three-and-a-half months in Kyoto, and I traveled to the *Noto-hantō*, which was the farthest, most western part of Japan, which was beautiful: the thatched homes and incredible landscape. What I would do is, I would take tours organized by the Japanese, and even though I couldn't understand a word they were saying, the Japanese people on the tour generally were friendlier, because they were all foreigners to one another. And so, they were actually pretty decent to me on those tours. Sometimes I would travel with a white person who had a grant, and the two of us would be touring around just by ourselves. And I basically went to festivals, the Gion Festival in Kyoto. I went

to, let's see, Sendai, Aomori, oh, Akita—for some reason that word sticks in my head—and I tried to learn enough Japanese that I could get around.

02-00:10:53

I think the most impressive thing I feel that I did was, through a Japanese artist, I was given permission to go to one of the papermaking villages way off in the countryside. I wouldn't have been able to do it now—I'd be too terrified [laughs]—but I learned how to read the Kanji, so that on the bus, instead of the stop being announced, they had like a thing that would flip and you could see what the next stop was. I didn't run into any problem with that. You got left off in the middle of nowhere and you followed the instructions: a little path. And I found the village. When I got there, there was a group from the Smithsonian touring, but it was very interesting to see the way the paper was made from the different fibers: mulberry paper and gampi and God knows what. And the way the jobs were distributed, the women had the most unpleasant jobs. Depending on the weather, they would sit on their haunches, and they had their hands in water and they were picking out any imperfections in the fibers. And of course, in the winter that would be horrible. The men worked in the heating rooms, and so in the summer that would've been hell. That would have been horrible, because their summers are hot, very hot and humid. So the division of labor, each of them at different times of the year had to suffer to make this particular thing. There was like a canal or something in the town or a little river, and they would hang the strands of gampi or mulberry over like a clothesline. I thought that was very interesting.

02-00:12:46

Campbell:

Did you go to the Golden Temple at all?

02-00:12:48

Pindell:

Yeah, Kinkaku-ji or it's Ginkaku-ji, Kinkaku-ji. I can't remember. One is silver; one is gold. Yes. I went to most of the well-known gardens, and then where I was living in Kyoto, I lived near one of the temple gardens. I can't remember the name of it. [Shisendo. I made a painting after the temple.]

One thing that I saw that I thought was interesting is the way nature was worshipped, and there was this beautiful tree that had turned red. It was gorgeous, and so people would bring stones and put the stones at the base of the tree as a kind of reverence towards its beauty.

I don't know. It was a very lonely time, because again, they were pretty xenophobic. But there was a woman [Mrs. Fukushima] who was—I think she was half white and half Japanese, and she was kind of like a grandmother type and she just kind of adopted me. [Her husband was Japanese.] Her husband was head of the newspaper, the *Japan Times*, which was the English newspaper. They gave her a car, so she could drive me around and I got to see things I would not normally have access to. She would go with me to openings, but the Japanese were openly hostile to her, because they knew that she was mixed race.

- 02-00:14:17
Campbell: *Hapa*, yeah. I don't want to—
- 02-00:14:20
Pindell: Yeah, Mrs.—
- 02-00:14:20
Campbell: —the term that my friend's used—
- 02-00:14:21
Pindell: —Mrs. Fukushima—
- 02-00:14:22
Campbell: —to describe herself.
- 02-00:14:22
Pindell: —was her name.
- 02-00:14:24
Campbell: It's so funny because I found the opposite, and—
- 02-00:14:26
Pindell: I would love to hear about that.
- 02-00:14:27
Campbell: I think I got two marriage proposals in Japan.
- 02-00:14:31
Pindell: Oh my God—
- 02-00:14:31
Campbell: Or, I don't know. I was very—
- 02-00:14:32
Pindell: —that's fantastic!
- 02-00:14:33
Campbell: Yeah! I know. People were very nice, and I think—but maybe it's also because it's been a while. Even though the country's still—they don't see many black people at all. I think that what happened with—they just seem to be more welcoming, and I think maybe there's the changing times, which is really nice to see, [to] think that there might be progress.
- 02-00:14:56
Pindell: Well, I was propositioned by—I don't know whether she was Korean or half Japanese. I was staying at the International House, which is sort of like a Rockefeller semi-hotel, a very good library. Scholars and people in industry would stay there. I remember this one woman would always sit with me when I'd go for a meal. At one point she said I would do very well, they would give me a house, and she was propositioning me to become a prostitute. I was like, "What?" So I was kind of stunned by that. And then, one day—

02-00:15:39

Campbell:

Oh wow, yeah. I've no interest—I've read a book about that, though, a while ago.

02-00:15:42

Pindell:

Oh really?

02-00:15:43

Campbell:

It was about houses of prostitution in Japan and, yeah, these women just ending up in this house. Whereas I think that the Geishas got to wear beautiful clothing and they sang and played the lute—and maybe it's lute-like instruments—and entertained, and they didn't necessarily have sex. There's a book that I read about that was like a house of prostitution, which were kind of more of a boardinghouse.

02-00:16:11

Pindell:

Yeah, yeah. Well, I was like, ugh, *oy*. Anyway, it kind of reminded me what happened with that woman with her son in Florida. This woman didn't become outraged like the woman in Florida became. It was just a matter of fact that I said no. At one point, I remember she had some kind of asthma attack, and her friends took her out, I guess to take her to a hospital. I never saw her after that. Yeah, so I was just—I don't know. I didn't know when I would get a hostile reaction.

One of the young men that had the same grant was a puppeteer, and he was very smart [Bruce Schwartz from LA. He was one of my best friends. I regret I have lost track of him]. He had gotten a MacArthur [Grant] at twenty-eight, and he could perform in Japanese. He spoke Japanese. He was maybe six feet tall, blond. He was Jewish, but how can I say, he didn't look Jewish? Jewish is all sorts of things, in terms of how they look. And he was a foreigner, I'll put it that way. He would go to Kabuki every day, and one of the ushers tried to push him down the stairs. Yeah, and she said whatever she said and he understood what she said, and he could answer her back.

So you just didn't know when you would run into hostility. I also had a very strange experience where, through some contacts here, I met with someone, a woman, and she took me to a wedding party. During the wedding, the groom is supposed to pick someone to dance with, and he picked me, not his bride. I said, "No." Thank God I said no. It was bizarre. I just don't get it. But apparently, they have a system where the husband has a mistress, and the wife has to have a party for the mistress. So in a sense, he has two parallel families, yeah. I was really angry when I was there, because of the treatment, especially having someone put tobacco in your food.

02-00:18:41

And yet on the other hand, I had heard about a scroll called the *Heike nōkyō*, and it was in a place called Itsukushima Shrine, which is kind of well-known because at high tide—I mean now it's probably flooded, but at high tide, the

boardwalk, so to speak, of the temple was level with the water, so they consider it like a floating temple. They had a treasury. What would you call it? Like a museum, but certain objects you could only see every six years, and they would take it out for people to see. It was called *mushi boshi* [It means shaking out the bugs]; I think that's what it was called, shaking out the bugs. And so I traveled to Hiroshima, and this place was at Miyajimaguchi, which was an island near Hiroshima. I saw this scroll and it blew my mind; it's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. A month or so later—maybe less time—I met with the director of the Kyoto Museum, and he was asking me what I liked, and I explained that I saw this amazing scroll. I don't know how they ever did it. It was maybe fifteenth century, whatever, and when you looked at it, it was like you could look down into water. I've never seen anything like that in my life. And he gave me the book of the *Heike nōkyō*, which was sort of like really heavy and big. I have it somewhere at home. He was very kind to me, and I remember he said, "Please, when you get home, please tell the Americans to return our art treasures that they stole." Apparently, I understand that the command was given not to bomb Kyoto because of the tradition, but we did willfully go in and steal some of their screens and scrolls and stuff, but they didn't take, thank God, the *Heike nōkyō*. Yeah.

02-00:20:48

So, I don't know. And the earthquakes got on my nerves, and there were like many, many earthquakes. You could be walking and suddenly the earth would shift under your feet and you thought you had tripped, but it was just the earth moved. I don't know if you ran into that kind of thing: you were lying in bed, and all of a sudden the bed is like you're on water. Did you run into earthquakes when you were there?

02-00:21:14

Campbell:

I didn't experience any that—I think that there were maybe mild, but I didn't noticeably feel like a big one or anything like that. I know that they have many small ones, as well.

02-00:21:28

Pindell:

Yeah. Oh, God help them if Fuji blows, because it's going to wipe the country out. It's very much alive. Gee, I took one of the Japanese tours that took us to the base of Mount Fuji and we had lunch. And the whole time the ground was shaking, and everyone was walking around smiling. Usually when there's something scary, they start smiling. I was thinking, My God, these people live here with this constant trembling of the earth and a pyroclastic flow; they're gone if it has an explosive eruption. Even if it has, like, a Hawaiian style flow, it's still incredibly dangerous. So, I kind of always wonder, When is Mt. Fuji going to blow? But then, they have to worry about tsunamis, also.

02-00:22:21

Campbell:

One of the things I want to ask you about is just the artworks. You've talked a little bit about some of the temples that you saw, but one of the things we talked about in our first interview is how closely you had a relationship to

these geographies, like in terms of your work being about—like made with this stitch that's like sailing wire or fabric cable. So I'm curious about that. And that coming out of the kind of experiences in Japan in thinking about geography, but mostly I'm curious about the works that you saw there. Because I thought that the National Museum—I went there and I was really impressed by the collection they had on view. I had a problem with the fact that they seemed to highlight the Western part of the collection, like the works of Robert Smithson, say, more than the Japanese—

02-00:23:09

Pindell: Really? Yeah, I didn't—

02-00:23:10

Campbell: —made work.

02-00:23:11

Pindell: —see any of that when I was there. It was all Japanese.

02-00:23:14

Campbell: Because I'm interested in that, because I was really—the postwar material that they had on view was really incredible. And I know that everyone wants to think about the Ukiyo-e period or the [Kamakura] period, the Warrior period, or any of those kind of the highlights of what we think about when we think about Japan and the kind of refinement that you can see in that culture, but I'm interested in the kind of the contemporary Japan, the non-exoticized—

02-00:23:45

Pindell: Well—

02-00:23:45

Campbell: —the kind of what is, what's going on there now. So I was thinking about some of the work there and it combines a lot of prewar styles with the exchanges that were happening between the West, and it was more about exchange than, say, it's about one style dominating—

02-00:24:05

Pindell: I think you know—

02-00:24:06

Campbell: —over another.

02-00:24:06

Pindell: —far more than I do about it.

02-00:24:08

Campbell: Yeah, but I was just curious. Did you see anything that kind of stood out to you? Because I saw some things and I was like, Wow, I'd love to—

02-00:24:14

Pindell: The only thing that—

02-00:24:14

Campbell: —see a sh—you know, I'd l—

02-00:24:14

Pindell: —stayed with me was the *Heike nōkyō*.

02-00:24:17

Campbell: What?

02-00:24:17

Pindell: The *Heike nōkyō*, the scroll, the scroll. It was extraordinary. There was Nikkō, where you could go and see all the different temple styles. But I was really angry, and I think part of me shut down. It's almost like I just stopped looking. [I was forbidden to enter the temple at Nikko and could see there were whites inside. A woman came out to shoo me away. A sign on the steps clearly said in English—"remove your shoes."] The *Heike nōkyō* was so extraordinary, there was no way I could block it. Also the dry gardens, I remember I liked those, I liked seeing them. And let's see, *Bunraku* and *Noh* and—oh, I can't remember how to say it. But anyway, the theater. I found the Japanese theater very interesting, probably because I was friendly with a puppeteer, so I was interested in it in terms of, like, puppet stuff. I think I was more impressed by the fifteenth, maybe sixteenth century, the festivals, like the Gion Festival in Kyoto where you have everyone in traditional dress and you have floats or whatever. There was one we went to—oh God, a lot of it, my memory has kind of wiped away—but where they have these giant floats of handmade paper, and they were all molded to the form of warriors. They had it lit from within, and it might have been half the size of this room and maybe as high as this room, and men would be carrying it on their backs. They, apparently, were to celebrate victory in war.

And what I found, too, was there was an untouchable class. I don't know if you knew about them, the—

02-00:26:12

Campbell: I've heard about it in India—

02-00:26:13

Pindell: —*Burakumin*.

02-00:26:14

Campbell: —more than Japan, but tell me some—

02-00:26:16

Pindell: Well, it's in Japan, too, the *Burakumin*.

02-00:26:18

Campbell: I've heard a little bit about them because the Buddhists in that book *Shōgun*, they talk about that, because there are people who are meat eaters and handled meat or handled fur and things like that, and—

02-00:26:29

Pindell: Yeah, tanners.

02-00:26:30

Campbell: —and they had to be separated from their—

02-00:26:32

Pindell: They were. Yes, and apparently, in order to be made a *Burakumin*, your family, if it had been vanquished in war, the losers would become untouchables. So it's not like a racial thing; it's a clan, depending on which clan vanquished which clan. They also had a book to make sure that you didn't, in quotes, marry someone who was Korean. So there was a book of names, and if someone wanted to get married, their family would check that book of names to see if that person was listed as an untouchable, yeah. I didn't know anything about it until I went there.

I don't know, because we're so used to thinking of them as this very polite group of people, and there were so many taboos. Like, if you write a letter to someone, you should use white paper. Even if you don't use the second piece of white paper, you should, out of respect, enclose two white pieces of paper in the envelope. And that was new to me. Yeah, so, if I had to write a person a note, I would put two pieces of paper in and write on one of them.

And the whole thing about women sitting near the door. I remember going to one of the corporations, and there was one woman in the room and she was right by the door. They introduced me to her.

I know there was the museum in Hiroshima. The contemporary museum [Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art] had just opened, and it had a moat around it. This would be the first trip to Japan in '79, but in the summer. Because the moat commemorated the people who jumped into the water, the boiling water, trying to get away from the burns [from the atomic blast], and they ended up being boiled. This new museum was in honor of their deaths. It was interesting. When I went into the museum, they directly took me to the director, who was very pleasant.

02-00:28:48

So, I have to be careful because the people that were not very nice seem to push away the memories of the people that were very nice, and there were some people—I remember going to a remote temple when I was living in Kyoto—I can't even remember the temple's name—and there was a very old lady, and she tried to explain, "I want to help you, but what are you looking for?" I pointed at the map and the temple, and so she took me by my hand and walked me to the temple.

So you would run into these contradictory behaviors. I remember one thing. I went to Arashiyama, where they have traditionally the emperor and his mistresses and whatever would be—in boats going up and down the river.

There was a trolley car ride there, and I remember there was a young woman—I think she was pregnant—and there were schoolboys on the trolley. Traditionally, they don't give up their seats for women, period. One of the young men gave his seat up for her and he was chastised for doing that. I remember being in the subway, and a woman with packages and children got on. The guys wouldn't move an inch. They let her just struggle.

02-00:30:10

So, I was just very pissed off at them. People here were saying, "God, Howardena, you're writing us hate letters; [laughs] you really hate them." Well I mean, at least when I went, they did not like it if you were handicapped, and if you were different. I found out about the handicapped not—I didn't have a cane or anything like that then. But I remember there was one young woman who was a studio assistant for me. She was half Japanese, half white, and she had had polio, which means she had some distortion in her body. She hated the Japanese. She hated living there, because of the way they treated her.

And I even have now, where I work—I don't even know if I should talk about it, but one of our faculty is from Japan. And one of my students and her students—same one—she treats her like shit—excuse my English—and there's no reason for it. But it's her upbringing, her generation maybe. Where I'm seventy-five, she might be in her fifties, and the woman who is the student is probably in her forties or fifties, and it's like, this one faculty member kind of pounds on her. So I told this young woman to please go to Disability Services and get a letter, because she is disabled. She has chemotherapy, she has cancer, and her son is autistic and difficult autistic. And so, sometimes she can't show up. She doesn't drive, and to get to Stony Brook by public transportation is horrendous, or you have to spend money to get there. But this one particular professor hounds this woman constantly, and even came into my office and said, "We're all on the same page about this." I said, "No, no, we're not." So—

02-00:32:07

Campbell: But it's a good thing that it seems that—I mean, I think that might be what one professor is like, one Japanese professor, but—

02-00:32:17

Pindell: Yeah. I shouldn't—

02-00:32:17

Campbell: —I really found—I mean, I travel—

02-00:32:19

Pindell: Oh yeah, tell me.

02-00:32:20

Campbell: —all over and I—

02-00:32:20

Pindell: I would love to hear.

02-00:32:20

Campbell: —found the experience to be very different than what I had read about in [the work of Haruki] Murakami, and also just very different than, yeah, than what I had read about even or heard from friends, in terms of the ways in which people are to be treated and cleanliness. People were so friendly. Same thing: people leading me to a temple—

02-00:32:42

Pindell: Oh, that's nice.

02-00:32:42

Campbell: —taking time—

02-00:32:43

Pindell: That's nice. I was told not to go into certain temples.

02-00:32:46

Campbell: Really? No, people were like, "Go in."

02-00:32:48

Pindell: Yeah, or they would just say, "Stay out." I would see the whites inside but I would be told not to go in, yeah.

02-00:32:53

Campbell: Yeah, the security guards would be like, "Go. Oh, actually, don't miss this art installation. Go around the corner. Go down there. Go into this cave. Go check this out."

02-00:32:59

Pindell: Oh my God, that's fantastic!

02-00:33:00

Campbell: Yeah, it was, really. This was in—

02-00:33:02

Pindell: I'm glad to hear that—

02-00:33:02

Campbell: —Hiroshima. It was—

02-00:33:03

Pindell: —as it wasn't friendly when I was there.

02-00:33:05

Campbell: Yeah, and I was really worried about not speaking any Japanese because everyone said it would be a hindrance. And then traveling all the way in the south into the countryside where—the countryside anywhere, the countryside in Brussels, the countryside all over—and people can be very just not educated and not used to seeing people of color, if you're in a foreign country.

But I found there and I found in Cuba, too, actually, in the mountains, people were just really generous and nice. It's not true the way over. Sometimes it's just luck, but when you find enough people who are like that, you start to think, Well, this must be part of the culture here, rather than just being an anomaly.

02-00:33:48

I guess I want to talk more about making art. Did you make work while you were in Japan?

02-00:33:53

Pindell:

Actually, no. Well, I shouldn't say no. I made these small paintings of still lifes, that were perfect, and I gave them to people as gifts, to the people who had been kind to me. I may have a slide of one of them. It was a grapefruit and a whatever, but I'm a good figurative painter. And what I did was, I went to—I think it was called the Itoya—it's their main art supply store—and I bought Japanese paper which was over a cardboard that had—I don't even know what those images were. They weren't images. They were just like texture, visual texture, 2-D visual texture, and it was rice paper. I would do these very careful paintings using their paint, which was called I think *honga*, which is really gouache. I gave those away, I gave them away.

And then when I came back, I did a whole Japanese series. I don't know if my dealer, [Richard Lerner of] Lerner-Heller, was going to give me a show. But he owed me money so I took him to an attorney, and he promised to pay me before the show, and then he killed himself.

So, it was like being in Japan, coming back and feeling really weird, the body language and all. My body language had changed. And then I was working on this body of work, and then next thing I knew, my dealer kills himself. The A.I.R. Gallery—this is interesting. I needed a place to show my work, and Dotty Attie's husband had passed away, so she said I could buy her show time. But since I was a former member, they said, "Fine." And so I did my whole Japanese show there, instead of at the other gallery, yeah. Those pieces, I think most of them are—I don't know where they all are. Garth [Greenan] may have some of them. Some of them are in private hands, yeah. But there was a specific series, and I—

02-00:36:03

Campbell:

What was it called?

02-00:36:05

Pindell:

I don't really have a name for it, except that they were—

02-00:36:09

Campbell:

And what years?

02-00:36:09

Pindell:

—conical.

02-00:36:10

Campbell: Yeah? What years were these?

02-00:36:12

Pindell: Eighty-two is when I got back, so it would have been '82, '83, that I was working on them. I'm trying to think. Yeah, I went to Japan the summer of '81, came back at the end of January of '82, so I would have been working '82, '83.

02-00:36:31

Campbell: And what were they about exactly, these—

02-00:36:33

Pindell: What I did was I collected. That's those split postcards that I do. I was collecting postcards. And of course, they made beautiful published—their imagery, their way of reproducing images was really quite wonderful. I had a stack of postcards and I cut them in strips and put them on conical shapes representing Mount Fuji and painted in between, connecting the images. They're very nice. I must say, when I look back at them, they look pretty good. But I could only do that work. I couldn't have easily gotten that work back with me unless it had been flat, and I wanted it to be conical. Any other artwork I did there that was flat I left as a gift to someone who was kind to me, yeah.

02-00:37:22

Tewes: I'm curious if you think there is anything from your time in Japan that you still carry today, in terms of aesthetic or—

02-00:37:29

Pindell: I was totally influenced by the color, asymmetrical shapes, a kind of reverence they had for creativity—I haven't quite seen that anywhere else—and the sort of amazing beauty of their art from around the fifteenth, sixteenth century. One of my favorite things is, there's something called a *shō*, and it's Japanese court music, and it's wonderful, with whistles, and [hums] *mm-mm*, and it's weird. It's not a harmonica, but it's very beautiful. So I found the culture just amazing. I've just never seen anything like it, ever. Just through and through, everything visual was amazing: the Kabuki with the—you might have a limestone—lime-colored robe with then a lavender inside silk, and then the way the colors would flow as people moved across the stage—or those amazing masks, the white masks with the little eyebrows. I don't know. I just found the visual culture amazing. So that's what I took back with me. I tried to forget about the people who had been unkind, and to thank, through giving them my art, the people who were kind to me.

02-00:39:09

Campbell: Would you talk about coming back and what did you work on next after this?

02-00:39:17

Pindell: That's a good point. It was after the accident. I think I started working on an autobiographical series after I did the Japanese series, I think, and then my

memory is really hazy. I'm getting so old. I think I worked mainly on the postcard pieces, but also paintings about issues.

02-00:39:49

And another place I've lived is India. I've spent about maybe four months in India. I wouldn't say the visual culture there influenced me so much, but the fact it was so different influenced me. And then I found out I have two markers for New Delhi, in terms of my DNA. I have friends who live there, and the husband is a movie star producer and all, but he's not the Bollywood; he's very serious art film. I think he went to college at Oxford; he's very well educated. And his wife, my friend, is a medical doctor. I would go and stay with them. Or at the time, I was interested in one of those gurus of the cults, and that turned out to be a total disaster. The guy was a pedophile—

02-00:40:39

Campbell:

Oh no!

02-00:40:40

Pindell:

—like in the Catholic church. Yeah, so, I think the thing that influenced me was dealing with heat that was beyond measure. I couldn't stand it. It was 123 degrees.

02-00:40:53

Campbell:

Whoa.

02-00:40:54

Pindell:

Yeah. Always having to worry about the water that you drank, always having to worry about the food you ate, whether you'd get sick. I don't know. I don't really ever want to go back to India. I don't ever want to go back to Japan. I'm not saying that people in India were necessarily cruel to me. When I went with my friend's family to a particular temple—this was on tour, in a government bus—when I was traveling with them, I could get into the temple. When I was traveling with another African American, they wouldn't let us in. And one of the priests would stay out with us. I guess he didn't want us to go in. So the whites could go in and the recognizable Indian people could go in, but they would not let us enter, even though I could enter with my friend's family. So I would run into things like that. There's so many things that were so—just the intense poverty. I don't know. I really can't explain it.

02-00:41:58

Campbell:

Did you get a chance to see any of the either manuscripts or—I didn't get a chance. When I was there in the summer, it was really hot and it's the same thing. It was hard to get to—a lot of the galleries and museums were closed, actually. So I checked on it, and then I found that out and I was like, Okay, well I guess I'm to go shopping then. I don't know what to do with myself.

But I was just curious if you were able to collect supplies there. I saw that there were a lot of pigments for sale, like you'd walk through these markets and there would be piles of colors—

- 02-00:42:36
Pindell: No.
- 02-00:42:37
Campbell: —and it was like an explosion of color—
- 02-00:42:40
Pindell: That's interesting. There's—
- 02-00:42:41
Campbell: —that—
- 02-00:42:41
Pindell: —Diwali, I think it is. There's one—
- 02-00:42:43
Campbell: —like a primacy of color—
- 02-00:42:45
Pindell: —yeah, where you throw—
- 02-00:42:45
Campbell: —and that was nice.
- 02-00:42:46
Pindell: —colored powder at people. I didn't. Yeah, I don't know whether that's Holi or Divali, what—
- 02-00:42:52
Tewes: Holi.
- 02-00:42:52
Pindell: Hm?
- 02-00:42:52
Campbell: Yeah, it's Holi. But I also saw where you could just buy this outside of the regular temple days, and you could just pick up the—I don't know. That was just my impression.
- 02-00:43:03
Pindell: I didn't see any of that, no. I think my friend's world was more that of an MD, and her husband was not. He was in the cultural arena, but as a producer of film and actor in film, yeah. [His name is Girish Karnad. My dear friend's name is Dr. Saraswathy Ganapathy Karnad.]
- 02-00:43:20
Campbell: So you were back in New York. This is the eighties we're talking about, mid-eighties. And you go to India what year?
- 02-00:43:29
Pindell: Over a period of time: '75, and then I think maybe '82, '83, something like that.

02-00:43:37

Campbell: We can think about India—they're not diametrically opposed because they're similar in so many ways. But then in terms of some things like cleanliness, we've talked—

02-00:43:47

Pindell: Well they have their caste system.

02-00:43:49

Campbell: And that, yeah, the caste system is the same, which I think has really changed in both countries. We've seen a lot of progress in Japan, and maybe some in Southern India, less so in the north. But, I'm just curious. So in this period, you're working. Where is your studio space when you come back to the US?

02-00:44:11

Pindell: Okay, I had moved. I had a loft on Seventh Avenue and Twenty-Eighth Street for ten years, and I did something stupid. I met someone, and he didn't want to live in the loft. I had paid such a low rent. I had 2,300 square feet, and it was 125 a month. When I left, it was about 600 a month, but I never could find a space like that again. We broke up within about a year or so, and here I was without a workspace. So, I finally found something in SoHo. I think it was 431 Broome, near the paper place, Dien, Donne, whatever—I can't remember the exact name—between Broadway and Crosby. It had a second floor, and it's very small compared to my other space. They kept raising the rent \$200 every year, so that by 1987 it was 2,000. So, my parents were very helpful, they helped me. They cosigned a loan for me. And so I'm in the same apartment on Riverside Drive, up near the Cloister Museum. It was a three bedroom, so I can manage to work. I don't have enormous space, but I can work and it's legal. [laughs] It's a co-op. Fortunately, Garth being so good about selling my work, I'm able to pay off my mortgage. There's not much of my mortgage left anyway, but I don't know. I've been there—

02-00:45:57

Campbell: So you're working at home.

02-00:45:58

Pindell: I'm working at home, yeah.

02-00:45:59

Campbell: You're working at home, and that's—

02-00:46:01

Pindell: And the ceilings are high, which helps.

02-00:46:03

Campbell: Oh nice.

02-00:46:04

Pindell: Yeah, I think ten-foot ceilings.

02-00:46:06

Campbell:

Nice. So you're working at home; you're getting supplies. What's the process like of you just picking up supplies? What does that look like? Do you—

02-00:46:15

Pindell:

Well, I can go sometimes to Michaels, or one of my studio assistants can pick up things for me. I can mail order things. I have two assistants: Jasmin [Sian] and Ko [Smith], both artists. Ko is very kind of gung-ho, "Do you need anything? I'll pick it up, whatever." So, it's easy for me, because I can afford to hire. The gallery partially pays for one of my assistants, and the other I pay completely. They take care of everything for me. Right now I'm in the midst of punching holes, so that's something I can do very easily, and it's something. I can't get up a ladder, so things that require crawling up a ladder, Ko can do that, or Jasmin, yeah.

02-00:47:10

Campbell:

This is one of Amanda's questions. I don't know if you want to jump in, because I know I've been talking for a while.

02-00:47:17

Tewes:

Oh! Sure. Howardena, you mentioned to me that you feel like your work goes through stages, and I'm wondering if you can explain that a little bit more.

02-00:47:28

Pindell:

Well, I think with each new piece you discover new things, and so the work goes through stages of, frankly, looking at nature—I'm very influenced right now by that blue that you see in glaciers and icebergs; there's that kind of weird blue. So right now I've been working with that color, and then using, like, foam. You can buy sheets of foam and what you do is you encase them in Jade glue so they can't deteriorate, and then you can attach them to the painting with that same glue and it dries transparent—it's an archival glue—and then I can paint over it, so the canvas can have high relief on it. I like that. I like the fact that there's almost a tactile-like surface. In fact, I was looking at one point of trying to do a painting in Braille, but I just don't think I can do it. I'd be speaking gibberish, [laughs] in terms of someone running their hands on the canvas. I don't know. I was discovering new things to work with.

I think teaching helps me a lot, just so it keeps me fresh, because I can help the younger students—and in some cases, older students—with their work with formal issues. That keeps me informed about how I should think about my work, as well. I try to be really kind, because I know some of the teachers aren't so kind. It's usually the male teachers that aren't so kind. They kind of take it personally if a student's not doing well. I don't know.

When I do my work, I'm in a different head. With Trump, I usually have MSNBC or CNN on, but I'm not looking; I'm hearing, hearing it.

Right now we're putting hands on a piece which will be shown at The Shed in 2020 or 2021. [There are] two [painting installation] pieces. One of them is

about hands being cut off by Columbus, because he told the Indian people, indigenous people that he wanted them to bring him gold, and if they didn't he would cut off their hands. And of course, they'd bleed to death. It's grim; that's why I have to do the two things at the same time. They also would cook people on grills, and they would dismember children and feed them to the dogs. Apparently, according to one website I read, Queen Isabella told him he should "treat the natives well," that was kind of like a quote, and he did the opposite and he did get in trouble about it. But I have to read that website again to get the gist of—it's at school on my computer at school—what did they do about it?

02-00:50:43

Campbell:

I don't know if you guys know this, but when we [discussed this] during this classroom, there's, I think, some documentation not of Columbus, but here in the New World: [phone rings] the contact between Native Americans, and then these prints that were done [by Theodor de Bry].^{iv}

02-00:51:01

Pindell:

I have a problem: my phone is ringing. Is there any way we—

02-00:51:03

Tewes:

Oh sure—

02-00:51:03

Pindell:

—can stop?

02-00:51:03

Tewes:

—let's pause. [break in audio] Okay, we are back from a break, and you were just explaining something, Andrianna, about—

02-00:51:11

Campbell:

Well yeah, and these prints that were made in the New World of atrocities committed against the Native Americans.

02-00:51:17

Pindell:

Where did you see these prints?

02-00:51:19

Campbell:

It was in a classroom with a professor, yeah. But this is a professor who is here, Professor Manthorne, who, she showed us these images and they were very enlightening. But I guess I wanted to think about that, and versus what Rachel [Garbade] just showed me, which is these convex works that you were making in this period, because it seems like—

02-00:51:41

Pindell:

Show me. [laughs] I remember.

02-00:51:43

Campbell:

I really want to see these.

02-00:51:44

Pindell:

Getting old. Yeah, that was after Japan, where I was mixing both East and West. I think the series is called *East/West*, something like that, or *East and West*.

Because I've done a fair amount of traveling, and the images that I got on postcards from Norway were amazing. Norway is a beautiful country. If you go to the fjord areas, you go to the glaciers. Now, we visited the stave churches. It was an amazing experience, just being in the fjords and seeing a cruise ship in the distance that's this big. [indicates with fingers] Your brain can't compute that distance, except that you know that's a big ship and it's only that big, and then you can see the weather coming in towards you. There are, of course, waterfalls coming out of the side of the mountain into—it's almost like the kind of landscape you might find in the Tolkien movies, and yeah, oh my God, *The Hobbit*, that kind of landscape where you have these very dramatic—with waterfalls. I think New Zealand has kind of a bit of a landscape like that, but where I've seen it is in the fjords in Norway.

And so that piece combined both Indian—how can I explain it? I'm saying it wrong. That piece included—that [Rachel] showed you—both images from Japan, as well as Indian—I keep going back to India. Why do I need to go back to India? Can we see that again? Because I need to be reminded, because it was a mixture of all my trips. And it was flat, it wasn't conical. The Japanese [pieces were] mostly like that.

02-00:53:38

Campbell:

But you say the title's convex though, so it didn't sink in, or conve—

02-00:53:43

Pindell:

Okay—

02-00:53:44

Campbell:

Is it like—

02-00:53:44

Pindell:

—it was in here. There's Sendai, then I have some sort of medieval manuscripts, then there's one of the dry gardens in Japan. And that looks like from India, one of the deities in India. There's Holland. I was mixing all kinds of things that had to do with travel. Thank you. Yeah, I don't remember all of it very clearly. Again, I'm just getting old. That particular series was flat. The color of the catalog for my traveling show—not this one, but from the nineties—had an image from that series, and it was flat. But when I was specifically dealing with Japan, I would say 90 percent of the pieces had some sort of peak or a double peak to them, and you can kind of tell. If the catalog was accurate, I would give the information about the depth, that the piece is, let's say, eighteen by twenty-four by so high, yeah. You can't really tell in the picture that the piece has, like, a point at the top, more or less.

02-00:55:11

I have a couple of pieces I'm still working on, and I kind of abandoned them. One was of a, oh, a festival in a remote part of Japan, and it was a combination of people in traditional clothing walking with people with masks—the different Japanese deities, Buddhist deities—to music. They were on a platform that was raised, so I'm photographing them from below. What I did was, I had the photographs printed archivally, and then I used Cibachrome, which is now different—Cibachrome, it's hard to find it because it's so toxic, the chemicals—and then I would just cut them and spread them out. I think there was one that was my breakfast in France that still hasn't been finished, and one that's the Sendai, I think it was—I don't know, I'm not sure if it was Sendai—and the other one is one of the [Thanksgiving] parades here in New York.

So I was kind of interested in processions and parades, but the beauty of the traditional festivals in Japan are unbelievable, just extraordinary. I don't know who the artists were. Were they men? Were they women? I, on one hand, assumed they were men because it's a very patriarchal society, but I don't know. I don't read Japanese at all. I have a few words I can sort of say, but there may be scholarship which addresses that issue, but it's in Japanese. I would really love to find out who actually made that scroll, because it was anonymous, it was presented as anonymous.

02-00:57:17

Campbell:

Do you have a name and the location, because we could always have someone—

02-00:57:20

Pindell:

Well—

02-00:57:20

Campbell:

—contact them and find out—

02-00:57:22

Pindell:

—sure.

02-00:57:22

Campbell:

—because I'm getting things—

02-00:57:23

Pindell:

Oh God, that would be incredible.

02-00:57:24

Campbell:

—translated right now. Yeah, I went to Japan, didn't know the language, hired a translator to tell me what I was looking at, then took photographs, then brought them back, and now I'm getting them again. Michael Rosenfeld Gallery is translating them for me, so that's really exciting.

02-00:57:37

Pindell:

Oh, that's great. Well okay, the scroll was called the *Heike nōkyō*, and that's, I think, [n-o-k-y-o]. *Heike*, I'm not sure whether it was H-e-i-k-e, I don't remember, *Heike nōkyō*. The shrine, the Shinto shrine that has the Treasure House is called Itsukushima Shrine: I-t, Itsu; s-u, Itsuku; shima, s-h-i-m-a; I-t, Itsu, s-u; ku, k-u; s-h-i-m-a, think that's it, Itsukushima Shrine. It's on the island of Miyajimaguchi, and that's right near Hiroshima, and it would be the temple house of the shrine. I think it's fifteenth century—I may be wrong. But it's amazing. Oh, just never seen anything like it.

02-00:58:41

Tewes:

I think what I'm impressed with is that you actively sought to travel and to broaden your cultural experiences in other places and that has seeped back into your consciousness even today.

02-00:58:56

Pindell:

Well, I did a lot of traveling then. I don't like to travel now, because I hate flying, because those trips involve long flights. The most recent long trip I took in 1997 to South Africa to give a paper. I'm not a pro-Kara Walker person, I'm anti-Kara Walker. But I gave a—

02-00:59:22

Campbell:

I know, you wrote that. We're going to get to that, which I want to talk about.

02-00:59:25

Pindell:

I'll give you the books. You know how I think. I'll give you the books. But I gave a paper about the use of stereotypes. She was [not] the only person I talked about. I remember that the white critics were up in arms: How dare I? And then Peter Norton had paid for the travel of a number of museum people, white museum people. And oh, what's her name, the head of The Studio Museum now? [Norton sponsored an event for participants in the Biennale but I was not invited. When my current dealer wanted to show my work, people told him not to show my work because of my opinion about Kara Walker. He refused to comply.]

02-00:59:54

Campbell:

Thelma Golden.

02-00:59:54

Pindell:

Thelma, yeah, Thelma was there. And they walked out in the middle of my presentation, which I didn't realize, but [Emma Amos]—this was in the group I was traveling with. So she said, "I'm going to—" they walked out.

South Africa was sort of an anomaly to me, because I felt that even though [Nelson] Mandela was in charge, you could see how poor the [black] people were and how rich the whites were. And the way they would build a shopping mall but it would be fortified so it would be behind [high] walls, so if there was ever an insurrection they could just close that whole shopping mall off and people couldn't get in. Sort of like Trump's "we'll build a wall," it was the

same kind of mentality. I have actually a marker, a Zulu marker [DNA]. The Zulu people are in South Africa, but I also have a Cape Town marker. And that's all I was told, Cape Town.

02-01:01:00

I was troubled by, for example, our director of the trip, the woman in charge, was brown skinned, darker than I am. And at the hotel, there were a number of black South Africans who worked alongside white South Africans, and the black South Africans would come over and ask what you wanted for breakfast, and they'd bring it to you. They wouldn't serve her. And this was black against black, and I was just like, what? So strange. Also, what I found when I arrived: the customs people were all smiley and friendly and whatever. It turns out that coloreds, the mixed race, vote with the Afrikaners and speak Afrikaaner. And so the feeling was that I was one of them. Then, one of the women on the trip braided my hair, and it flipped. The whites were like, "*Bleh*. [laughs] You're black. You're not colored? You're not on our side?" And I remember in the airport leaving, the person who was dealing with the ticket and all of that was helping me, and this white man just stepped up and said, "No, don't do her, do me first." There was this attitude.

So, I don't like travel because I hate flying. And plus with this [walker], I have to go places where I can get around.

02-01:02:32

Campbell:

Yeah, I noticed your Delta [Airlines tag].

02-01:02:34

Pindell:

Oh right, I just keep it on there, because I'll be using—ugh, I'm supposed to have a show [in June in London], which is wonderful, but I'm just unnerved about the flight.

02-01:02:45

Campbell:

Well, you'll be fine, you know?

02-01:02:47

Pindell:

I know, but I just don't like the sensation. I don't even know if I mentioned it in the last session. I'd gone to Rio in 1978, I think, and the flight back, I remember it was a charter, Braniff Charter. I don't even think there was a copilot, and I remember the pilot was trying to turn the plane on. So it was like one of the old-fashioned ignitions. He was going *eee, eee, eh*, trying to get the plane to start. Then when we were flying over the Amazon, the engine, one of them was on the wing swinging, and that kind of freaked me out. Then I was on a flight going to Louisiana Museum in Copenhagen. It was Laura Cottingham [who] had directed or curated a women's show for the museum, and so all the artists were invited over: Adrian Piper, myself, Janine Antoni. There were many of us, and if the plane had gone down, there'd been a lot of us. We got hit by lightning when we left [John F.] Kennedy [Airport], and I was sitting in one of the rows with many people. Then you have two seats or

three seats and out the window was the wing, and all I saw was this huge flash of light and a boom. And I thought, We are dead. [laughs] It didn't harm it, whatever, it just kept going. Anyway, so I'm really unnerved by flying.

02-01:04:16

Campbell:

Yeah. Do you want to talk about—oh yeah, we'll take an hour break soon. We're still talking about the eighties and you making work. I know that we talked about *Free, White and 21*, but you were also making a lot of video work. And you've gotten reviews just because you had an exhibition—

02-01:04:31

Pindell:

Oh, the *Video Drawings*.

02-01:04:32

Campbell:

—of just the *Video Drawings*. Do you want to talk a little bit about the *Video Drawings*? Because—

02-01:04:36

Pindell:

Well, the *Video*—

02-01:04:36

Campbell:

—then around this period, and I'm thinking about Nam June Paik and the kind of other people who were—and you, as being an innovator in this period, where a lot of men—we can think of a lot of men making work, that video work, but also you were doing this and I think that's important to note—

02-01:04:54

Pindell:

Well, I was in the big loft on—

02-01:04:56

Campbell:

—like Hollis Frampton—

02-01:04:56

Pindell:

—Seventh Avenue—

02-01:04:57

Campbell:

—for instance.

02-01:04:58

Pindell:

—yeah, Twenty-Eighth and Seventh Avenue. I was doing all that numbering of the pieces where I just have the small dots, and it was really a stress on my eyes. So I was told, "Why don't you get something that's at a distance that's in motion, so you change your focal length?" So I decided to get a color television. I got very bored with the programs, so I just started playing. I got some acetate and acetate ink, and started drawing on the acetate. Then the static from the TV allowed the acetate to just, on its own, stick. And then I put—like we have here a camera on a tripod, I used film. I didn't do digital. I haven't tried to do digital. I used film, and then I just took it to be developed and then I chose the ones I wanted. So, everything's on the negative, the arrows and stuff, and the motion in the back. You have to take a lot of pictures

until you get like a few that are really good, yeah. So, I don't know. It was something I developed because of eyestrain, [laughs] put it that way.

02-01:06:05

And then I did a whole thing called *War Series*, where there's text on top of the images. Then I did one—oh my God, do you remember when that child fell into a well? [Baby Jessica] or something like that. And so I did one where the text says, "Apparently, a black child around the same time had fallen into a well. We heard nothing about it." And it's like, "If such and such had fallen, a young child of color, into a well, would it become a media event?" I think Garth has it, yeah, because I know he mentioned it. Yeah, so, I don't know.

For me, it was play. And I'm not athletic at all. I like the *Swimming* series. I liked the ones that came out of football, and also, let's see, the diving. It was swimming, but it was diving. And the tennis, I liked that particular one. There's some with weather reports that I find interesting. Yeah. So for me it was play.

02-01:07:21

And then the more serious ones were the series called the *War Series*, where you have images of like, it says "war," and then a pile of skulls—that's about Cambodia—or one that says "The 'L' Word," for me it was just "liar": the Bush family. Then I had another one that was white phosphorous, and I remember Bush always saying "points of light," something about white points of light, whatever. Phosphorous, of course, you drop it—of course we would drop it on the hospital—and it burns your skin, it burns right down to the bone. This is a weapon. Unless you're an activist, you don't necessarily hear about it, because the government doesn't really want to tell you. So, I would have this image of the phosphorous, and I had taken the imagery from a video that was made by a progressive white person who I cannot remember right now. And the footage, I had never seen this footage before. I believe I must have seen it again and was prepared with my camera. Then I used vinyl on acetate. I would put vinyl letters, put it on the TV, and then when an image would come on, I would [play a clip].

I mean, I haven't worked with *Video Drawings* for a long time, but I think the pieces that are the most striking are these *War Series* pieces, because there's one of a child starving in the Sudan, and it says "hunger" or "starvation," and it turns out that he died very soon after that picture was taken. I think that was part of—in that catalog from the traveling show from the nineties. Everything is in there in terms of who did the original filming, and what I took the images from, yeah. So if you have that catalog—I don't know if they still sell it on Amazon or not, but I know it's out of print, yeah, mm-hm.

02-01:09:36

Campbell:

Well, should we stop here, and then we'll come back and we'll—

02-01:09:42

Tewes:

That sounds good! Let's take a break. [break in audio] Okay, we are back from a break. Go ahead, Andrianna.

02-01:09:49

Campbell:

Were you aware of all these people who'd been working in video? Because video, this is the period that it really starts flourishing as a medium in the art world.

02-01:09:59

Pindell:

I was totally unaware. The *Video Drawings*, for me, started off as a health issue so that my eyes weren't just pinned down to those tiny little numbers I was writing on punch paper. I was totally unaware. The first time I showed them, I think I showed, oh my God, maybe ten of them. PS1, the opening show, that's the first time I showed them. I had a room or a portion of a room over at PS1, and no one else had seen them. I pretty much kept them close to the chest just because for me, they were kind of play. They were seen more in Europe than here. I had I show of them in Oslo at the Sonja Henie Onstad Museum, and then they were shown—I think there's an artist, [Sands Wassick]—oh, I can't remember the last name. He's an American who has moved now to Holland permanently, and he has a husband who's Dutch. He had an exhibition and he invited me to have a room, and I showed the *Video Drawings*. I believe he got in touch with Hannah Wilke's estate and showed some things of hers. Then there was—the thing is, it's all on my résumé—I don't remember. I think it was Cologne, where I showed them in a small gallery there. They never came back to me, they kind of disappeared. Then someone who knew the director got in touch with me and I got in touch with him. He was in Thailand, and he sent them back to me and they were in pristine condition, even though it might have been five or ten years [laughs] since the show.

02-01:12:02

Campbell:

Well, that's lucky because, I don't know if you made copies, but I know that for people—I've worked with people in the past who do video, and they—it's hard to make copies, basically, especially back then. I think it was later on there were machines where you could just make a video copy easily, but I know that it was more complicated.

02-01:12:22

Pindell:

Well, the distributor for the video I did—*Free, White and 21*—is The Kitchen, and they've been very good about keeping it archival.

There's another video that most people don't know I did called *Doubling*, which is about war atrocities. Trump would be perfect for *Doubling*, in that—although maybe not, because he's sort of awful. "Doubling" would be someone—well, it's a term coined by Robert Lifton. It's about Nazi doctors, and how they could go into the camps and do these terrible things, and then when they came home, they kissed the kids, they'd play with the dog like

everything was normal and fine, and then they would get to the camp and become heinous murderers, and then they'd go home and kiss the kid. So, Robert Lifton called that state of mind "doubling," and I think many Americans have that. In other words, to me, it's doubling where, for example, the children, the migrant children, where, if someone did that to *their* child, they would freak out, but when it happens to a child who is, quote, other, it doesn't matter. And that's like a double consciousness.

02-01:13:47

So the film, I have two talking heads—not actress or actors—and they talk. They say certain things about "we want everything you have," and blah, blah, blah. At the end, I went to—there was an organization. It's the International Center [of Inquiry], whatever—it's been so many years—and they had pictures of war atrocities. I then flip on the images, so after you hear the talking heads then you see the result in terms of how it afflicted and affected the population. It's not as long as *Free, White and 21*, but it kind of is a shock when you see the images. I might have been better off using actors. I mean, it just hasn't been shown, it hasn't been shown.

The painting I did that's called *In My Lifetime*, I would be tempted to show that next to the painting, because that deals with Hiroshima, Nagasaki, different war issues such as landmines in Angola. I believe the highest population of people who have lost limbs is in Angola, and landmines during the war that are still around. I guess it continues to wound, injure, and kill people. And then it has an image of a child from Hiroshima who's sort of like an ember, then there's an image of one of the bomb shelters we bombed in Iraq of a child who's been incinerated. Now this particular, I think—what was it called? The International Center for something or other. But anyway, it was free to use. It was free use. So, I just would take a few seconds on one image, and then a few seconds on the other after the talking heads. So, but having it with the painting *In My Lifetime*, there was something between the two that worked well, so I think that video was better with the painting than as a stand-alone video, yeah. But it's never been done. This just the idea I have that I wish I—I don't even know if I still own that painting. Have to check with Garth. I don't think I still own it.

02-01:16:18

Campbell:

Let's keep going with the questions because I think they're really good. Did your activism and politics have an effect on your art?

02-01:16:25

Pindell:

Oh yeah. I mean, it started off as writing where I did that report about diversity in the *New York Art World*. And then *Free, White and 21* was really, what would you call it, the first shot. [laughs] After that, I did a painting called *Suttee*, which was about wife burning in India. Whenever I'd see a funeral in India, I was like, oh my God, is there—it's illegal now, you can't do that. But in some of the remote areas, they do. They'll burn a woman if her

dowry isn't large enough, and they'll burn a woman when the husband dies, and she's put on the funeral pyre alive. Prior—

02-01:17:06

Campbell: Oh!

02-01:17:07

Pindell: Yeah. Prior to that, the Hindu temple asked that she place her hand to be traced on the temple, and they carve away a high relief of her hand. So if you go to a Hindu temple and you see hands, those are women who were burned alive. However, if you go back into the religion, the Hindu religion, the early, early, early aspects of the religion did not include wife burning; the woman walked around the funeral pyre. But then as families became greedy because they wanted the wife's material goods, they wanted the inheritance, then suddenly it was required. It was considered a divine act. And young people, young women, if they were married to old men, were terrified, because they knew this guy's going to die, and they would die, too.

Yeah, so that was what that painting was about. But it was also about the car accident. Because when I was in the back seat of the car, I was trapped. I have no knowledge of it—the head injury just blocked it—but apparently, people were standing around expecting the car to blow up. And a white policeman—which is odd in Long Island because they are so prejudiced out there—but he saved my life and got me out of the car. So in the painting, I lay down and trace my body. The paint is supposed to replicate flames. And then I have hands all over the painting representing the women who had to put their hand on the temple wall before dying. So there's that one.

Then there was another one, *CS560*, which is owned, I think, by Detroit Institute of the Arts, which is about—well, it was more or less about the Intifada, and then it became like civil unrest in general, anywhere. The *CS560* is a tear gas developed by the US in my home state that was used in Vietnam to sort of smoke bomb or whatever—bomb with toxic fumes—any of the Vietcong that had went into tunnels. But then they gave it to the Israelis, and the Israelis used it against the Palestinians. And it causes fetal abortion. So if a woman is pregnant, she loses the child. So that painting, this is when I started using text in the paintings. There's the word "the Green Line." I can't even remember what that really means anymore. I use the word "Intifada." I have an image of someone who's been wounded.

02-01:19:48

Campbell: What year is this?

02-01:19:50

Pindell: Oh Lordy, I suspect it was in the mid-nineties.

02-01:19:59

Campbell: Because Intifada, I always think about—

02-01:20:00

Pindell: Maybe it was the mid-eighties. I don't—

02-01:20:01

Campbell: —being used later, but with—yeah, obviously it has an earlier connotation, so I just wanted to see when you were thinking about this.

02-01:20:08

Pindell: Mm-hm. I can't remember, tell you the truth. Do you have the catalog for the show, Chicago?

02-01:20:15

Campbell: I have it on a PDF.

02-01:20:18

Pindell: It might be there, it might be there. And the medium, actually the back of the catalog shows the medium and the credit line and all that, and whether that painting was in the traveling show or not throughout the whole tour. So you might be able to find that image, and then underneath would be the information: what it's made of, whatever, and the date. Because that is important: the date. I think it was done in the eighties, because I think *Suttee* was done in the eighties. The reason why I say that: *Scapegoat* in 1990 was kind of a turning point, and I start a—I think it's because my mother died in '91, no, '91. That's when I did *Slavery Narratives*, where you have water and text with people's names, and then next to it it's the shelf, and on the shelf are books where you look up that person's name and you find out—you read their slave narrative. That painting, I think it was done around '92, so the other one must have been in the mid-eighties, yeah. I don't remember this stuff. It's been so long.

02-01:21:56

Campbell: When you label your work—this says if you discuss your labels—you're doing more figurative stuff when you were younger, and then later on you moved to abstraction. But then in the last year—

02-01:22:09

Pindell: I mixed—

02-01:22:09

Campbell: —I noticed that you had things that referred to slavery. Actually in the last show, you had that piece with the shackles, because you'd bought the—

02-01:22:16

Pindell: Oh, the baby shackles.

02-01:22:17

Campbell: —the shackle online, yeah, the baby shackles, which were—

02-01:22:19

Pindell: I have some—

02-01:22:20

Campbell: —broken open, but—

02-01:22:22

Pindell: —but that has never been shown. I'm hoping that Garth wants to do a show of the issue-related work.

02-01:22:30

Campbell: Yeah, because I know that you had been doing both, and kind of like—in thinking about someone like Picasso, someone that did both at the same time.

02-01:22:39

Pindell: Right. No, I hadn't. Although, *Guernica* was at the Modern when I was there. But no, Picasso, for me, it's a troubling figure, because he's seen as being like a cult, in the cult world, the anti-cult world, his personality in terms of the demands he would make on his women. Like when he did a painting, then he'd have them take that painting in many different directions and then he'd choose the one he wanted to work on—no. They would copy the painting and then make maybe five copies, and then he would take the painting in different directions. Yeah. And then his wife killed herself after he died.

02-01:23:24

Campbell: Oh no.

02-01:23:25

Pindell: Yeah. He was a problematical figure. He was a great artist, but he was a problematical figure. Can I interrupt a second?

02-01:23:34

Campbell: Uh-huh.

02-01:23:35

Pindell: Rachel, it's about twenty after 3:00. I think you probably only— [break in audio]

02-01:23:41

Tewes: Okay, we're back.

02-01:23:42

Pindell: Okay.

02-01:23:43

Campbell: So, let's see. We talked a bit about racism and then colonialism and oppression. We've discussed that, and we've discussed how history plays into your art. Would you discuss issues like colonialism and violence?

02-01:24:05

Pindell: Like what?

02-01:24:05

Campbell:

Like colonialism. Kobena Mercer recently gave a talk here and he gave a talk that I went to. The culmination of it is a summation of bodies of work that he had written about these very issues, and I wanted to know if you had some sense of the colonial and how that figures into your work. Because he writes so much about African American abstraction and issues of what we—figuration and abstraction in that—

02-01:24:40

Pindell:

Well, the—

02-01:24:40

Campbell:

—book.

02-01:24:40

Pindell:

—pieces I'm doing for The Shed are in some cases about colonialism. The one that I'm working on now has hands. It's nine by nine feet, and it's all black. The hands are both rice paper, as well as wove paper. They're pointing down. Every time I stop—you know, when you go to cross the street, there's that hand. So you reverse it, and there are hundreds of them. At the base of the painting—we already have pulled one silicone mold of a hand. It's kind of wobbly and soft, life size, and we're going to have a bunch of those at the bottom. The text on the painting will be about Columbus, and how when the indigenous people welcomed him and gave him gold—and he got really greedy, and so you had to bring him gold or he would cut off your hands and you'd bleed to death. And, this was a case where very wealthy families—because of the rubber plantations that were being plundered—made a lot of money off what the king, Leopold, did. And so the families, like the Rockefellers, the Guggenheims, and the Whitneys, what they did was they laundered all that money through culture. If we look now at Walmart, who is terrible to their workers, they have the Crystal Bridges Museum. They're one of the first museums to have a show about indigenous American Indian art.

02-01:26:26

Campbell:

What? I mean, there are shows here in New York, but you mean like in that part of the country?

02-01:26:30

Pindell:

I mean in that part of the country, yeah. So, I try in this piece—I have a bucket of blood, but it's stage blood; and then I'm going to have 3-D printouts of the hands; and then the text, of course, I'll talk about Columbus. The Egyptian army, ancient Egyptian army, when they defeated their enemy, they would cut off one hand of that person so they could count how many enemy dead were there [that] they had killed. And what is the other one? There's another. I have to read more about it. But apparently, one of the students actually at school wrote an article for the school newspaper that our own Marines went into Haiti and cut off the hands of anyone who was rebelling, and then they would shoot them and throw them into mass graves. I assume this was probably in the 1930s or so. I'm trying to think. There was another hand story, because we

have Columbus, we have Egypt, we have Haiti, and I can't remember; there was another. I'm glad I do sketches to remind myself, [laughs] because I forget everything.

02-01:27:45

So that piece is heavily about colonialism, heavily, heavily about colonialism. The other piece, though, is not about colonialism, per se, but it's about civil rights and the burning of black churches, the burning of black towns. So I'll have text naming towns and whatever. It'll be another nine-by-nine piece. I'm going to get furniture and children's toys and burn them. We're looking for—Ko, who called—we're looking for a place where we can safely burn things. So, just a lot of people don't know about these things, or not aware that there was a place called "Black Wall Street," a very prosperous town. [It was near Tulsa.] And the whites went in and I think they killed about 300 [Black] people. They just destroyed everything.

02-01:28:33

Campbell:

That was in Oklahoma, wasn't it? Someone told me this. My friend Devang [Arvind Shah] told me about this.

02-01:28:36

Pindell:

Really?

02-01:28:37

Campbell:

Yeah.

02-01:28:37

Pindell:

Yeah, was it Tulsa, though?

02-01:28:39

Campbell:

It was near Tulsa, I'm pretty sure, yeah. It was like a very developed community of African American—we had Wall Street—

02-01:28:46

Tewes:

The Tulsa race riots?

02-01:28:47

Campbell:

Yeah, and the race riots. They burned—yeah.

02-01:28:50

Pindell:

Yeah. So that other piece, I think I'll have burned parts of furniture. Maybe I'll put the toys, the children's toys on the canvas itself. And then I'm going to do three media pieces. One shows an African American man over what looks like almost a wooden cross, and he's burning from within. And the whites are running around, "Ha, ha, ha." I saw it in *Life* magazine. At the time, I was visiting my friend, Denise Thompson. We were kids, and her mother was cooking dinner and she was cooking meat, so I associated the smell with the man burning.

02-01:29:32

So what I'm going to do—I have to find out about fair use; I don't know if I can actually get that photo—but I will try to have that projected on a wall. That will be a black room. And then there would be text that would say things, because they took trophies, like castration. Men, women, and children; there were so many thousands lynched between certain dates. Although what I found interesting is whites lynched whites in the Southwest, and I don't know what those reasons were. I need to look into that. But anyway, I will take a hot plate and cook meat, so when people walk into the room it'll hit them. They'll see it, and it'll hit them through their nose.

Then the next room—a lot of people don't know that the children in Birmingham, I think, when they turned the water hoses on them, it burned off their skin or it blew off their skin, yeah. We never hear about that, we never hear about that. So, I want to get that film and put it on a loop, and then project text.

02-01:30:41

Then the other one, the third one, I want to get a scrim. I don't know whether I need to use silk or silk threads—it shreds too easily. I want to get a scrim that's like this, and maybe two of them, and project a video of sharks swimming back and forth. Then near the ceiling, I have a very beautiful replica of a ship from maybe the seventeenth century. I would put that on a Plexiglas shelf so people could see the boat, and maybe somehow light the boat, and then have the sharks. Apparently what the slave captains would do is, they would hang you out over the edge of the boat so the sharks would eat you from the head up. They would do this to both their crew because they were afraid of mutiny from the crew because they didn't want to have anything to do with slavery, as well as to terrify enslaved Africans into not rebelling. So, that's sort of horrible. And again, I'll have some text on the wall just basically saying, "Slave captains did this in order to terrorize people into obedience. And sometimes they would throw people overboard for insurance."

So, that show would have five pieces: the three media rooms and the two paintings. The space is huge. The Shed is huge, yeah. I'm supposed to share that show with Hans Haacke, so—

02-01:32:18

Campbell:

Oh, nice. I mean, as we saw at the—

02-01:32:19

Pindell:

Back in the—

02-01:32:21

Campbell:

—Whitney with this whole Dana Schutz controversy—

02-01:32:25

Pindell:

Oh, about the Emmett Till [painting, *Open Casket*]?

02-01:32:27

Campbell:

Yeah, about the Emmett Till. I think the reactions seemed to be very—it seemed to be kind of generational in terms of the split. But yeah, I was thinking that, at the time, probably not, but nowadays, it seems like there's the Generation Y, seems to be more—how do I put it? They seem to be more sensitive, thin skinned maybe. I think I'm pretty thin skinned, too. [laughs] But it seems like a lot of these controversies, instead of being talked out, they're boiling over before they get to the point where conversations are happening. I like the idea of you signing this letter. I know that you can think about precedents in the nineteenth century even or early twentieth century, or [Constantin] Brâncuși when he showed *Princess X*. That rocking piece was removed by policemen, and all these artists signed—

02-01:33:31

Pindell:

Tell me about it, tell me about it.

02-01:33:32

Campbell:

[laughs] It looks like a phallus. It's this large penis, basically, but it's bronze with two balls. So it kind of looks like Louise Bourgeois.

02-01:33:43

Pindell:

That's what I was thinking, yeah.

02-01:33:45

Campbell:

Yeah, but it's bronze and it kind of rocks. I took this class with Anna Chave and she showed it to us. Basically the piece was exhibited, and someone came in and said, "Oh my, this looks like a—" they thought it looked very phallic, which it does. And so, it was taken down, and all of these artists who he was friends with, like [Marcel] Duchamp, and all these people, this—

02-01:34:10

Pindell:

Yeah, Duchamp and his urinal, [*Fountain*].

02-01:34:11

Campbell:

—yeah, exactly—

02-01:34:12

Pindell:

Gosh. [laughs]

02-01:34:13

Campbell:

—decided to—well, his brother actually, the other Duchamp. And then Duchamp did the urinal, which was also removed. We only have that picture. The only original is that picture with the Marsden Hartley behind it. What else? We have the idea of artworks coming into the country in '21 and other—and the Brâncuși, the trial on that; *Bird in Space*, which also ended up being a trial about what is the nature of abstraction. I like this theme of kind of thinking through this history of exclusion and what gets excluded and why. I don't know if you have some thoughts about that, but things that are—

02-01:34:57

Pindell: Well, the timing—

02-01:34:57

Campbell: —things that have been shut down and what—

02-01:35:00

Pindell: Well, it's funny, the timing. It brings me back to Artists Space and *Nigger Drawings*, and the fact that they shut themselves down so that they wouldn't endure the slings and arrows, et cetera, and sent to the police. The police didn't arrest us, they left us alone. When she allowed us to go in, to have someone, a surrogate, say to us, "How dare you come down here and tell us what to do; this is a white neighborhood," that kind of attitude, I don't think they would be as out in front in the art world, out in front with that kind of thinking, or as public about that kind of thinking now. I think part of it is, I don't know whether it's Trump being so horrendous that makes people start to think, Am I with this person or I'm against them? I don't know. For some reason, Trump is like a kind of—I don't know if I can say the word right—an antidote to some of the marginal racists because they don't want to be associated with him, with his lying and all the terrible stuff.

02-01:36:20

Campbell: Do you think so? I have to respectfully disagree. I think it's actually increased, increased the amount—

02-01:36:26

Pindell: Well, it's increased—

02-01:36:27

Campbell: —of racism that's allowable, and we have statistics that say they've gone up 30 to 40 percent more. You see this mostly in schools, kindergartens. Kids are being called names, whether it's—I don't want to say—

02-01:36:30

Pindell: That's interesting.

02-01:36:30

Campbell: —them, the words, but you know, "wetback," "nigger." You can think of a million different names that people—

02-01:36:48

Pindell: Well, I think it's—

02-01:36:49

Campbell: —have to hear.

02-01:36:48

Pindell: —both happened in a parallel way, because there's some people who are just so appalled by him, who would consider themselves Republicans, that they can't associate with him. And yet—

02-01:37:00

Campbell:

A lot of those people bowed, though, if you think about it. Mitt Romney, all of those people, they, as soon as they're offered a job, they said, "Oh, okay, maybe we'll all go back." Yeah, it seemed like there was just this bowing that happened. In fact, they didn't really come around, you know? I don't know.

02-01:37:26

Pindell:

No, that's interesting. I agree with you. And yet on the other hand, I think that this show at Crystal Bridges, in a way, was motivated by the extreme Trump stance, but then they needed to launder their image anyway, because of the way they're so terrible to their workers. I don't know. I mean, I'm a—

02-01:37:53

Campbell:

So, you're saying that in some ways, what's happened—

02-01:37:55

Pindell:

Those marginal people, sort of moving over to being more progressive than they actually are, because they're so embarrassed by him. But then, the shootings and the—you know that guy who looked for a black church and he couldn't get in, so he went into—I don't know if you know about this—Kroger's in Tennessee, I think, and shot two black people, because he couldn't shoot up a black church. Had you heard about that?

02-01:38:25

Campbell:

No.

02-01:38:26

Pindell:

It was at the same time as the synagogue, and so the synagogue news kind of overwhelmed [the news]. This was, I think—

02-01:38:34

Campbell:

The Tree of Life [Synagogue] news, yeah.

02-01:38:35

Pindell:

Yes. But I believe this was in Tennessee. If you look on Democracy Now!'s website—it probably is still there—and on one of the MSNBC programs, one of the African American women commentators did mention it but none of the whites mentioned it. But no, he just walked in and said, yeah, he basically was going to shoot black people because "white people don't shoot white people," and that was what his quote was. So you get these nutcases that are boiling over with their own personal horror, taking it out on us or on the Jews. That's something. Really, it's not new, but it seems like it's more abundant, where people who, I guess, have really serious problems. I keep hearing in my mind when Trump said for someone in his audience to beat up a reporter and that he would pay for their legal bills. He just is encouraging so much.

But all I'm saying is just that there's some people who are conservatives and who are borderline who are very disturbed by what Trump is doing and the results, that they may end up becoming more progressive than they really are

or they're more progressive than they ever have been. I was surprised to find out that Hillary [Clinton] used to be a Republican.

02-01:40:12

Campbell:

Yeah, but Republican used to mean something different back then. Lincoln was Republican, as well, and I think there are a lot of people still left over. It used to be that the Democrats would control the South.

02-01:40:28

Pindell:

Interesting, that's interesting.

02-01:40:31

Campbell:

Yeah, even in the fifties, sixties was a strong Democratic backing in the South. There was a backlash against that under Johnson, and I think Johnson basically was the one that—he was more—I mean, he'd said some very kind of racist things while he was running, but he was someone that wanted to carry out Kennedy's legacy because basically, after Kennedy gets shot, he decides to change everything, becomes a champion.

02-01:40:56

Pindell:

That's interesting.

02-01:40:57

Campbell:

Yeah, so there's that story that has legs.

02-01:41:08

Tewes:

I'm curious. You were talking about politics and how that affects how you see the world. I'm wondering how you think your art plays into this. Do you want people to walk away from seeing a piece of yours with a different perspective, and how does that play out in gallery spaces or in museums?

02-01:41:29

Pindell:

Well, I think in some ways, the museum spaces have a much larger audience, so it has a better chance of being seen by more people. I always think of the art world as a tiny piece of real estate, in terms of the gallery scene. I'm hoping that Garth eventually gives me a show with my political work because I really want to show the shackle piece. I think it's an important piece for people to actually see a physical artifact from that time and that it was for children. Oh, I don't know. I just keep doing my work, and when something strikes me, I feel I have to say something about this. But one thing that I do, when there are things that really upset me and I don't see a fast track through my work—in other words, it has to do with timing—I will send out anonymous letters to the press, giving my point of view.

02-01:42:37

Campbell:

Yeah, so tell us about this letter that you sent. This was in the seventies, you told me, and—

02-01:42:44

Pindell:

Well, I would send—I can't remember exactly what I say or what it was about, to tell you the truth, but—

02-01:42:48

Campbell:

"The Black Hornet."

02-01:42:50

Pindell:

[I signed the letters] "The Black Hornet." But it was when I was at the museum, and I didn't want someone to say, "Oh well, the museum sent us this letter." I can't remember exactly what it was about, because there was so much going on. I was part of the Art Workers' Coalition sort of briefly, but people didn't really trust me because I worked for a museum. Members of the African American community didn't trust me because I was abstract. The African American women who were mostly from New York didn't trust me because I wasn't from New York. I would run into all of these things.

So I kind of felt I had to be kind of an independent person, and if I thought something was wrong or I felt badly about it—like being a member of the panel in the New York State Council's attempt to give fair funding, but then to find out line item places didn't have to worry about it. They didn't have to jump through hoops. They just had to be there and functioning, and they would be guaranteed a certain amount of money. And yet, the black organizations, like The Studio Museum in Harlem—now the Children's Art Carnival was different because it was funded by way of MOMA. It's like they were doing something up in Harlem, and then it's all white downtown.

I don't even remember those letters in terms of the kind of observations, except I knew it was not something I could put my name to, because people would automatically connect it to the museum. Maybe it was self-preservation that I didn't want to do that, but I just felt that people's imagination about who this is from would be far stronger than if they knew it was me. And so, I preferred just being called "The Black Hornet." I would have to go through old papers to find a letter, and I don't even know, because in those days, Xeroxes weren't that prevalent and we didn't have computers and computer printers and so forth. So frankly, it's so long ago I don't remember. But I remember I felt I needed to protect myself, but also I wanted it to have more power when someone didn't know who "The Black Hornet" was, yeah. I have to interrupt a second.

02-01:45:10

Tewes:

Oh sure.

02-01:45:11

Campbell:

Well— [break in audio]

02-01:45:12

Tewes:

Okay, we are back from a short break, but we are going to finish this session for today, which is November 16, 2018. Thank you.

Interview 3: November 17, 2018

03-00:00:02

Tewes: This is a third interview with Howardena Pindell for the Getty Research Institute's African American Art History Initiative, in association with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. The interview is being conducted by Andrianna Campbell and Amanda Tewes at CUNY Graduate Center in New York on November 17, 2018. So thank you, everyone, for joining us for a third day. I'm going to hand the baton to Andrianna.

03-00:00:28

Campbell: Hi.

03-00:00:28

Pindell: Hi.

03-00:00:29

Campbell: Hi. So, we've been talking about mainly your work in the eighties. We saw the convex paintings. I want to talk about any other work shifts that happened, because you talked about now working on a stretch canvas. When did you start making these kind of irregular-shaped paintings, and what were some of the changes that happened in the work in the eighties and nineties?

03-00:00:54

Pindell: Okay. Well in the eighties, I lived in Japan for seven months on a grant, and I think that influenced my work in terms of color and shape.

03-00:01:03

Campbell: And you mentioned this, the lavender and lime green.

03-00:01:06

Pindell: Yes, a beautiful Kabuki costume, and just the way the Japanese—I don't know. The culture was phenomenal. It changed the way I see things, even though it was an unpleasant experience being there. I started in the eighties, there was a painting, *Suttee*—I think we talked about it—about women in India, when the husband dies, she's burned alive in the funeral pyre. So, I would say the beginning of my work shift came with my leaving the [Museum of] Modern [Art], my getting a job at [SUNY] Stony Brook, my living in Japan. I got tenure, thank God, and my mother was ill. She was ill around that time, but she died almost ten years later. So I moved to work where I was cutting postcards and splitting them, and I was driving nails into my work after the accident. *Free, White and 21* occurred in 1980 when I was kind of fed up with the women's movement, that they didn't seem interested in women of color or they just wanted women of color to back up their issues, and I started doing the autobiographical series.

One of the paintings I think I might have talked about the other day was called *CS560*, and it was about a form of nerve gas that was used against the Vietcong, but it was also given to the Israelis and they used it against the

Palestinians, and it caused fetal abortion. But the painting sort of flared up in a way where it encompassed all attempts by people to save their territory from colonial powers, even though these colonial powers are current, put it that way.

03-00:03:08

It's also when I went to South Africa and gave a paper on racial stereotypes being used by African American artists. That blew up into a whole thing, where Kara Walker or something—the whole issue of Kara Walker's work was something I started to write about, and—

03-00:03:30

Campbell:

So, talk to me about this letter that became so infamous, and what was your problem with Kara Walker's work?

03-00:03:39

Pindell:

I didn't like the use of negative stereotypes and also her language—she would mock, verbally, the Civil Rights movement—and the way she presented children. For example, there was one piece of a child, female child having intercourse with a horse. Or multiple black women sucking each other's breasts. Now maybe it's just my age, I find this offensive. But I found her words equally offensive, both in the implication that she was kind of making fun of people who cared, and kind of mocked, again, people who fought in the Civil Rights movement. So, it was twofold.

What came out of it were two publications: one that was called *Kara Walker: Yes/No*; I think you can still get that on Amazon, and the other one you can't get. It's a smaller text, like a booklet that was just my essay, which was too long for the book. There was a lot of back and forth. I got a very threatening letter from a very well-known African American [male] artist, and I wrote back and said, "I have my rights [to] my opinion, and to sharing my opinion. I haven't walked into a show and said, 'Shut it down.'" Anyway so, that started in '97.

And my work, I'm sort of drawing a blank. My work at that point, after my mother died, I started looking at slavery. I believe I mentioned this in a prior interview, where it was, like, slavery memorial narratives. At the top of the painting were different people who became free, and then I had publications that, in those publications, you just looked at a little chart and it said what page in what publication you could read about their story. I started using, in the eighties, texts in my work, and sort of a semi kind of installation approach.

03-00:05:51

I think in 1990, a pivotal painting was called *Scapegoat*. That painting had—it's hard to even explain it. It had all kinds of things in it. It started off as a painting for an exhibition in Florida, and the curator passed away of AIDS. I turned it into a personal piece in terms of things experiences I had had—you know, my boss at the Modern who was kind of mean, and one of the reasons

why I left. There were three images of me from my age at that point, younger, and then I was trying to get an even younger image. There was an old boyfriend, I couldn't get him out of the painting. I kept painting over and over and he stayed there, so I said, "The hell with it. All right, I give up." [laughs] And then there's a picture of a child holding a ball, and that's me as a little kid. Of course, it's interesting because of the circle. And then some other odd things, odd texts and so forth. It was about twelve feet wide.

03-00:07:00

And that kind of was a pivotal point. It's like I'm drawing a blank when it comes to in the 1990s, because so much happened, and it seemed like I was doing more writing than painting. At this point, I have too much to worry about.

I've already said my piece about Kara Walker, and if people want to read about it, just go on Amazon; you'll find at least one of the books. One of the issues is, my publisher is in the process of dying, and I don't know if she's following up on orders. Maybe there are second-hand sellers that will list with Amazon. But I just want to get beyond the whole thing with Kara Walker.

03-00:07:50

Campbell:

I know you want to get beyond it, but I guess for me, one of the questions I have, because I feel like—I don't feel, but I think when you think about someone like Faith Ringgold's work, she did so many of those paintings that mention like "the black dream" or "death of a ni—" you know, like these very strong words where you're just like, wow, this is very intense. But so I wonder about Kara Walker's work, if it's doing the same thing, but it's doing it from a woman's perspective. And I want, I mean, I guess—

03-00:08:23

Pindell:

I don't know.

03-00:08:24

Campbell:

—Faith is a woman, too, but she's doing it from a perspective of kind of showing these kind of dark thoughts, and in that way allowing us to go through a kind of—what's that word—like cathartic, is the word I'm looking for, experience with them. Because think about it: there are not many depictions of slavery by artists. When they choose to depict slavery, it has a lot to do with—it's like her installation *The Sugar Factory*, it has a lot to do with the labor of slavery and laboring bodies, even like the Steve McQueen movie, [*Twelve Years a Slave*], about people getting beaten. When you then start to look at the work, you start to think, Oh, well there's also this exposure to kind of sexual element of slavery, which I think is really kind of the hardest material to explore.

For my family, it was—I don't know want to talk about myself—but it was definitely something where, based on skin color, we knew that one side of the family—and they had more money—had been kind of prior house slaves, and

another side were field laborers because they were darker, sort of more like my mom and my father was.

03-00:09:40

So it was just like, I wonder about if there's a way in which these really stark black and white, high-contrast silhouettes, and even the installation, *The Sugar Factory*, if those find a way to deal with an issue that obviously isn't black and white, isn't like that, but to kind of put it in such clear terms where you're like, yeah, there was a lot of rape—

03-00:10:01

Pindell:

Well—

03-00:10:01

Campbell:

—there was a lot of miscegenation. Is anyone truly black in the African American community, or do you have a community of a lot of mixed people? And that's what Henry Louis Gates has been writing about, for instance, with all this genetic testing and stuff. That's something you've probably had to deal with, because you've mentioned people have said, "Oh, you've got good hair," or, "You're fair skinned. Oh, like maybe you could fit in in India because their people"—

03-00:10:25

Pindell:

Yeah, that's always what happens when I travel.

03-00:10:27

Campbell:

Yeah, so I wonder: for me, her work does that in a way. Like, it's not like you using the child slave shackles, and I don't know if you saw her installation of *Sugar Factory*, but for—

03-00:10:40

Pindell:

No, I saw images.

03-00:10:42

Campbell:

I thought that was so striking because it smelled so sweet. I started thinking about the Havemeyer Collection at the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art], and it really brought up this fact that a lot of the art collections in the city were based on collectors who had money through exploitation—

03-00:10:58

Pindell:

Yeah, colonialism, sure.

03-00:10:58

Campbell:

—and it smells sweet, but it's sickeningly sweet, because, in fact, it's something that was built on the bodies of people. So, I don't know whether you think—

03-00:11:12

Pindell:

Well, no. I think what turns me against her more are her words where she mocks the Civil Rights movement. There is no reason to do that.

- 03-00:11:21
Campbell: Yeah, and I agree. That, I think—
- 03-00:11:22
Pindell: I mean, why say that? And then, the people that would show her work would never show an African American artist, but they would show her.
- 03-00:11:31
Campbell: Sperone Westwater [Gallery]?
- 03-00:11:33
Pindell: She's with—I can't remember the guy's name. Shoot, I can't remember. It's not Sperone Westwater, unless she moved.
- 03-00:11:42
Campbell: Yeah, they're right across from Dia [Art Foundation], right? It's—
- 03-00:11:46
Pindell: I can't really—
- 03-00:11:46
Campbell: Anyway—
- 03-00:11:47
Pindell: —remember the name of her gallery.
- 03-00:11:48
Campbell: Okay, so let's go. So anyway, I don't know if you just think about it in terms of those issues. Because sometimes I think that, I, for me, I think that—I have never met her, but just I think that she's probably not in support of rape and all of these things that she shows in the art.
- 03-00:12:12
Pindell: Well, I think one of the images that I found very upsetting was, it's a silhouette of an African American woman with her legs cut off, and then there's a child. The woman is on her back with her legs up, and the child is just sort of standing nearby. I know in Angola, because of the mines, that—there's a picture in one of my paintings of a child in the same position as the woman, but it's not something that titillates. It's hard for me to explain. I just find that the mixture of her images and words very disturbing. Again, that's just how I am. That's how I react to it.
- 03-00:13:04
Campbell: I understand. I just wonder if that disturbingness brings to the fore issues that we need to be talking about in our culture. Like, where do our—
- 03-00:13:12
Pindell: Well, I wish they would allow it, because—

03-00:13:13

Campbell:

—like where do our collections come from? I think that Nan Goldin's been dealing with that a little bit, too, I think. I can see the Havemeyer project and the Sackler Centre project as being very much in line in terms of dealing with things that are at the forefront of the ways that we're thinking about culture, and things that people don't want to talk about because they're kind of ugly.

03-00:13:36

Pindell:

Well the thing is, they didn't want people talking about it. For example, when Kara Walker had a show at the Whitney, they had a blog where people could sign in and give their opinion. There was one guy that signed in who was not pro Kara Walker, and the Whitney censored it, they took it off the blog. So what he did was, he opened his own website and expressed his opinion about her. So there was open attempts by the powers-that-be to make it so there wouldn't be another opinion out there allowed to be heard, that we would only hear her side of the story. That's why I—well actually, I was approached to write about her.

03-00:14:15

Campbell:

By who?

03-00:14:16

Pindell:

Cynthia Navaretta, Midmarch Arts Press.

03-00:14:20

Campbell:

Nava—what?

03-00:14:21

Pindell:

Navaretta, Cynthia. Right now she's dying of cancer. I don't go to see her because I've been fighting this cold, and God forbid, I don't want to make her sick. But she called me and said, "Do you want to put together a book about Kara Walker?" So there are twenty-eight—including myself—essays in the book. Most of them are not pro. One of the strongest essays is by a professor from the University of New Mexico. Her name is Doctor Kirsten Buick, and she's very smart, like you're very smart, but smarter than—

03-00:14:57

Campbell:

Oh, that's sweet.

03-00:14:57

Pindell:

—I am. She is going to be putting forward something in print, I think, eventually. You know—

03-00:15:07

Campbell:

I have this question and this is a little bit off track, but I wanted to ask you about—because I have this journal called *Apricota* that I edited, both I co-edit and found with my friend Joanna Fiduccia, my colleague. We had an essay in the last issue that was about artists, two female artists, and the idea of: do women have to back each other up? If you have Jo Baer and Agnes Martin, are they—even if their work has nothing to do with each other's, which is

something that comes up often—women are asked to talk about other women. Is there a feeling that you have to be in solidarity with women, or was this approach by this person, was it in some ways, I don't know, a way to kind of cleave women apart from each other? You know what I mean? I just wonder about that. I—

03-00:16:03

Pindell: Well, I don't know about that. I don't—

03-00:16:05

Campbell: Because—

03-00:16:05

Pindell: —know about that, because this was a guy who wrote his opinion, and I agreed. I agreed with him. I can't remember whether there was any space for me to respond. I don't know. For me, it's a whole unpleasant period, I feel, and I think Obama also put him on his artists committee [President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities]. I would think Trump, with her work, would definitely put her on his committee.

03-00:16:40

Campbell: I don't think so.

03-00:16:41

Pindell: Really?

03-00:16:41

Campbell: I really don't.

03-00:16:42

Pindell: I think there's—

03-00:16:42

Campbell: I mean, I'm sorry to—I just think the work is far more left or progressive than you would think.

03-00:16:48

Pindell: I don't. I don't think it's progressive. I think it's pandering to the white community, and just the way she puts down Civil Rights activism.

03-00:17:00

Campbell: Her last show, she had a poster about Civil Rights, and she posted something on Instagram about it.

03-00:17:05

Pindell: Maybe, yeah, maybe she's changing, she's growing.

03-00:17:07

Campbell: I wonder about this thing. Do you ever wonder that? I think that, as you so accurately stated, before this current presidency, people could kind of think—we think about the term "post racial"; we can think about the term "post

black." We can think about, there is this feeling that Civil Rights as we knew it was over, and we're entering a new era that was different and more inclusive. I think that what's happened is a lot of people, as you were saying, have been forced to kind of grapple with the fact that, because there's such an extreme about of what feels like racism, you have to choose a side. I think it's pushed a lot of people in another direction. So—

03-00:17:46

Pindell:

Yes, I agree.

03-00:17:47

Campbell:

—I think that's something that might be happening. We can think about that, but it's just something I'm considering because I worked on this show, *POWER*, where Todd Levin curated about an essay. And you were one of the artists listed. One of the things that came up was this issue that he had curated this show of all black women, and that's something we saw a lot in the seventies. People were like, how could you do this trans-historical show, where none of the work necessarily—some of the work, I think, had formal affinities, say, but it didn't necessarily then all have that. It was more grouped around this idea of identity. I like certain people like Renee Cox and other people who said, "Hey, I hadn't seen a Betye Saar—you know, I needed to drive this far to go see this, and I needed this opportunity. It's very hard to see the work of black women together."

So, I guess my larger question is, how do you feel about those identity shows that you probably saw in the seventies when you were in New York, and then the kind of return to issues of identity that we saw in the nineties and then again now? How do you think—

03-00:19:01

Pindell:

I don't know.

03-00:19:01

Campbell:

—about that in terms of your own work?

03-00:19:04

Pindell:

The thing is, in my artwork, I was searching through my own issues and problems and my own identity. One of the things that helped was doing DNA, getting DNA tests done. What I found was my mother's primary DNA started 80,000 years ago in Uganda. That was through the National Geographic website, the Genome Project. Then I did another DNA with an organization that was kind of amazing. They went way back, and they gave you percentages and everything. So, my DNA included Inuit, Eskimo. "Eskimo" is considered a pejorative, within the native community—

03-00:19:52

Campbell:

Yeah, I know—

03-00:19:53

Pindell: —but in a way—

03-00:19:53

Campbell: —a fish eater, yeah.

03-00:19:54

Pindell: Yeah, Inuit. Zulu, Cape Town—they give you places and also names of nations—oh goodness, Basque, Scandinavian, Somalia, Ethiopia, Libya—trying to remember it all—two markers in New Delhi, two Ashkenazi markers, one Sephardic marker, one Palestinian—trying to remember all of them—one Finnish, Portuguese, a lot of Portuguese. It sort of blew my head. I just was like, Oh my God, to think that one has all of this in your bloodstream or in your hair, whatever, that people can track way, way back. But the way they track it is through—if you're a woman, they will only give you your matrilineal line. If you need your father's DNA, you have to either go to your father or your father's relatives, for either a son or an uncle, whatever.

So this is just part of the story, and that is something—actually, once I kind of backed off of the Kara Walker thing, because I felt, I was like, enough, I've said enough—anyone wants to know what I think about [her], just get the books—and I started thinking about my own identity, and that I have all of these different parts of myself but I identify as African American. That is, I'm African American. I don't see myself as Swedish or—

03-00:21:34

Campbell: Well, that's what Barack Obama said. When people were like, "You're half white, you're half black," he often said—and a lot of people deal with this—my friend Ethan Greenbaum has said this to me: that even though his father's the one that's Jewish, his mom is not, and that's a matrilineal culture. It's all about how people kind of see—identity's tricky, because it's about your own culture, but then it's also how people see you. Barack Obama was like, "I look black and people treat me as black, and so this way I'm socialized. I am black. I wouldn't go around saying I'm white." Some of that's coming out of the one-drop rule, of course, which is a slave rule, but—so yeah, I'm curious about—I guess my point is, what do you think about identity as a kind of driving force for putting together an exhibition? Is that something you—

03-00:22:25

Pindell: Well, I did an exhibition and I'm trying to remember even the title of it. I'm getting so old. It included indigenous women. I can't remember. Emma Amos was in it. Oh my God, it's so many years ago. Oh, I can't remember it, but that whole show was about individual identity. I had Ana Mendieta—post her dying, but we were able to get an image. I tried to get all the women together as a group to talk about the exhibition. I didn't expect them to do a special piece for it, but if they could or wanted to they could. Oh, I just can't remember the title of it. Green catalog, can remember that. This is from the, I think, late eighties, early nineties. I wanted people to look at their own

identity, and I was looking at my identity through their identity. The work showed all of these different—I think Lorna Simpson was in the show. It was done at—there was a Latino alternative space that was down in the forties, and they approached me about doing an exhibition.

03-00:23:56

I sort of stumble with the whole issue of identity because I feel kind of overwhelmed, now that I know my identity. I just feel literally overwhelmed. This one particular chart had percentages. The most DNA I have is Portuguese and Zulu.

03-00:24:14

Campbell:

Oh wow.

03-00:24:15

Pindell:

Yeah, that's the most, the highest percentage. I never even think about Portugal, but I love the Portuguese language, I love the sound of it. And Zulu, I was in Johannesburg and I think the Zulu people are in that area. So, I get a little [muted] about identity now because I've reached out to get more information, and I'm kind of stunned about the amount of information and the contradictions in the information. I don't know how to process it. I'm just having a hard time processing it. Also Thracian, I think German, Irish[, Greek Scythian]—just trying to remember it all—again, in different amounts. So, identity is like a tricky thing for me right now. It's hard for me to even answer the question, because I know that information, and I know my identity here and now is as an African American woman. I can't identify as white, I wouldn't identify as white. I might identify as Zulu, but I wouldn't identify as white. The Zulu people would say, "But you're not really Zulu because you have all this other stuff."

03-00:25:45

Campbell:

So I guess that's what I mean. I think about identity in very much the same way, as being something that is so much about so many different types of backgrounds. That's the truth of identity. You're never just one thing. People have written about how the idea of these kind of uniform identities makes things—other problems—more invisible, whereas if there was—yeah.

So I guess going back to your artwork, what else, what other kinds of paintings were you doing in that—

03-00:26:25

Pindell:

Well, I—

03-00:26:27

Campbell:

—in that period?

03-00:26:27

Pindell:

I keep thinking of the narrative painting. I did a sort of a painting that was called *Kandinsky Relationships*. It's owned by the Heckscher Museum. I just

wanted to do a painting that wasn't about identity. And in it, I have text from different languages; I have a ton of dictionaries from different cultures. I have no idea where they are right now, but it had a lot of text in the painting in different languages. It included abstraction, as well as figuration. It was a diamond-shaped painting and it had three-dimensional stuffed pieces attached to it, and then on the floor there was a three-dimensional piece. It was about bad relationships and good relationships. I had driven nails into one thing on the floor that looked like a bug; and then I had a Plexiglas mirror cut that looked like tears, that looked like water, and put that at the base of the painting.

03-00:27:30

So I started to get playful. And then I think, again, I draw a blank because it was at a time when my father was not doing well. My mother had passed away. I started doing works on paper that were three dimensional. I believe I did some prints with the Brandywine Workshop. They were about autobiography. It was, like, a really hard time for me. My father died in 2007—start again—and it was hard because he was practically bankrupt, and it practically bankrupted me taking care of him.

03-00:28:21

Campbell:

Yeah, you mentioned that you were going to Pennsylvania?

03-00:28:23

Pindell:

Yeah, going to Pennsylvania to see him, and hiring people to help him. It was a very hard period. It's hard for me to even talk about it. But he passed away in 2007, and I was almost becoming destitute. It was terrible. Thank God for Garth, who came along and kind of saved me.

03-00:28:44

Campbell:

Would you talk about this idea of hunger? Because that's something that we mentioned before, and you talked about you were working on that painting called *Hunger*, because in this period—

03-00:28:53

Pindell:

Yeah, for years.

03-00:28:54

Campbell:

Yeah, you were very—

03-00:28:55

Pindell:

I mean, I was spending very little money for food, and I also was eating so little I hardly needed to go to the bathroom. As long as I could pay for my rent and all of that, I covered that. And at that time, I was using a cane so I could use regular transportation. The *Hunger* painting, I don't know. It meant lot to me. I've lived in India, and that's one of the reasons why I featured the people on the right that are from India during the time of the British occupation, when they were kind of starved on purpose by the British because the British would take the cottage industries and move them to England. I think it had

something to do with cotton, with textiles. And then, that strong image of the man with his hand out. I don't know, I just identified with the painting because I was kind of living it.

03-00:29:56

I see Garth Greenan as really saving my life, because I really was almost destitute, and now I don't have to worry and I can just do my work, which is nice. I have assistants, since I obviously don't have the kind of strength I had when I was twenty. So, everything changed.

It's just that whole time between, like, '97 and 2007 [when] my father died is muddled. I don't remember how much work I did. I pretty much, I think, worked on paper pieces, and then I started painting again. I can't remember what the first painting was when I started painting. And so I reach a kind of muddled state around that time, and it's sort of like rags to riches.

03-00:30:53

Campbell:

Would you just give us like a summation of the time period? Was it '80—

03-00:30:59

Pindell:

Well, when my mother died it was 1990. My traveling show was going around for four years, a US tour, mainly college galleries. And then let's see, the Kara Walker thing was '97. I went to South Africa then. My father died in 2007, and then I had a hard time years after that, and then Garth came along, I think, around 2012 or '13. It's kind of painful to talk about it, actually, really hard to deal with it, yeah.

03-00:31:37

Tewes:

And how did you meet Garth Greenan?

03-00:31:39

Campbell:

So it was like, the nineties to 2012, is what you're saying?

03-00:31:45

Pindell:

The nineties: the Kara Walker thing in '97, my mother died in 1990. I believe the paper pieces took place around that time.

I met Garth, actually, through the gallery, through Al [Alvin D.] Loving. [Garth] wanted to meet with me, and he loved the work and he's taken it over. He's been incredible. I have one dealer—a brother—who owes me over \$200,000. There was a woman—African American—who had work of mine that she held; it took [us] a year to get it away from her. I was just running into so many bad things with dealers, really bad things. So, Garth just kind of took care of it, and I'm grateful to him for that. [I am also grateful to my attorney Barbara Hoffman.]

03-00:32:37

Campbell:

That's so good.

03-00:32:38

Pindell: Yeah, it's very good. It's hard for me to talk about the nineties and the early 2000s, it's hard for me.

03-00:32:46

Campbell: Yeah. So, what do you think about in terms of the kind of work you were making? Do you think that there were transitions that happened then, because it was a difficult time, or as opposed—

03-00:32:57

Pindell: I think—

03-00:32:58

Campbell: —to some of your—because when I think of the work in the seventies, and the eighties, but then in the MCA [Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago] show, there were works from the nineties, as well.

03-00:33:06

Pindell: Yeah. Well again, I draw a blank. It was a period that was so difficult that I don't want to remember it.

03-00:33:13

Campbell: Okay then, we don't have to—

03-00:33:14

Pindell: Yeah, I don't want to deal with it.

03-00:33:15

Campbell: —go over it.

03-00:33:16

Pindell: I do not want to deal with it.

03-00:33:19

Campbell: Yeah. It's interesting that you were able to work again, which is such a good thing that you were able to come back. Do you have any questions that you have on the list that you want to ask, Amanda?

03-00:33:38

Tewes: I know this is difficult for you to talk about, but I'm interested: when you were using paper, is that because it was cheaper than canvas to work with, and—

03-00:33:47

Pindell: It had to do with space. Well, I had a lot of stuff stored in my place, and Garth got rid of it and put it in a storage unit, which he pays for. So that's why I was working on paper. [Now I was able to again work on large paintings.]

03-00:33:59

Tewes: And were you able to work—

03-00:34:00

Pindell:

Oh well, thing is, there was a lack of room for me to really work on big pieces, but now I have the room. That's where Garth made a huge difference, because he has all of my paintings, and then any things that were in boxes that were in the way, he put in a storage place for me and pays for it. So I know that period is just awful. I just go into a dark [space] there and I don't want to even go there.

03-00:34:31

Tewes:

That's fine. Thank you for sharing with us.

03-00:34:33

Pindell:

Yeah, sure.

03-00:34:45

Campbell:

What—

03-00:34:45

Tewes:

I—go ahead.

03-00:34:47

Campbell:

I was going to ask you about—we talked about your feeling, like Kara Walker as being someone that you're not interested as an artist, but are there any other contemporaries of yours that you are interested in that—or people that, even if you don't know them, that you find their work to be of interest or influential?

03-00:35:08

Pindell:

I'm thinking of his name. I'm trying. He had his MacArthur the same year as Kara Walker. African American, huge paintings, beautiful paintings. Oh God—

03-00:35:21

Campbell:

Not Kerry James Marshall?

03-00:35:22

Pindell:

Yes.

03-00:35:23

Campbell:

Yeah, he was—[laughs] it's just, yeah, right back there.

03-00:35:25

Pindell:

I've—

03-00:35:25

Campbell:

Those paintings are gorgeous.

03-00:35:27

Pindell:

He's so good. He's—

03-00:35:28

Campbell:

Did you see the show at the Met [Breuer]?

- 03-00:35:31
Pindell: When was it?
- 03-00:35:32
Campbell: It was last year. It was like—
- 03-00:35:33
Pindell: Oh, I probably—
- 03-00:35:34
Campbell: —last year and early this year, I believe, but—
- 03-00:35:36
Pindell: I'll try to get the catalog. I didn't see the show.
- 03-00:35:38
Campbell: He did something very interesting.
- 03-00:35:40
Pindell: He's a very good artist, wonderful.
- 03-00:35:41
Campbell: He's a very good artist, yeah. He did something very interesting where he basically installed his work, but then he also installed things from the collection or paintings or objects that had African American subjects that are not typically seen. The idea was to kind of say, "Oh look, at this what we call 'encyclopedic collection,' and what are the ways in which we can bring these things into the kind of public conversation?" It was like both a private show of his, and then there was kind of the section that was a museum for everything you know. We can—
- 03-00:36:29
Pindell: Makes me think though of Fred Wilson, the way he would "mine the museum," so to speak.
- 03-00:36:35
Campbell: Yeah, "mine the museum," yeah.
- 03-00:36:38
Pindell: Well I love his work. I'm sorry I missed that show. I've been so intensely involved working, and then my commute to my job is two hours each way.
- 03-00:36:51
Campbell: Yeah, I was going to mention him because I did a talk with him at Art21 when the show was up.
- 03-00:36:56
Pindell: Oh, how nice. Is it online?

03-00:36:59

Campbell:

Oh no, they didn't record it, so this is unusual; usually, they record them. I didn't even think to ask. But yeah, it was me and Fred Wilson. We were at NYU, and it was a really good—mm-hm.

03-00:37:11

Pindell:

Yeah. So, I do want to mention that thing that happened with *Free, White and 21*.

03-00:37:19

Campbell:

Oh yes, of course.

03-00:37:20

Pindell:

Yes, I showed at a gallery that lasted maybe two or three years: Cyrus Gallery, on Fifty-Seventh between Madison and Fifth. The art critic that introduced me to them—and she's the one that really made that show happen—but when she saw the tape *Free, White and 21*, she demanded it be removed from the show. She was a white woman. I refused to remove it from the show, and so she went to the dealer and said, "You have to remove this from the show," and he wouldn't take it off and wouldn't take it out of the show. Basically she stopped talking to me. I haven't heard from her since. She said things like she knows the Rockefellers, she knows this person. In other words, she could basically get big sales for me if I only complied, and I wouldn't. So that's one experience I had in terms of a negative reaction.

I had another negative reaction. I was at the University of Vermont in Burlington, and it was a large audience of students, and a white woman, after the tape was shown, said, "Well, do you feel better now?" That kind of offhanded kind of thing. So those are two.

Actually, there's a third one that's very curious. Someone said that when it was shown in New Jersey, the black guards were upset by it. They were upset by the wig, because some of them, their wives wore wigs, and so they felt it was a putdown of women who wear wigs. I thought that was kind of interesting. Anyway so, I wanted to just say that. Do you want to ask me more?

03-00:39:08

Campbell:

Well I want to ask you about issues of abstraction, because we've talked a little bit about figuration and meaning that comes out of figuration, and it's very easy to think through what that could be because it's more representational or mimetic. But in terms of your practice, I'm curious about: what do you think about the abstractions, and is there signification that could be generated from some of the things that you're pairing together? We've talked about that in the past, and I don't know if you can think about bodies of work that have certain meanings for you.

03-00:39:42

Pindell:

Well, the abstraction started—I started to let go of traditional painting at Yale, and then as soon as I started working for the Modern—because I was working

from natural light, I didn't have natural light to work from, and so there was this abrupt change to a kind of abstraction. Well, it was really abstraction, with the ovals and the circles and the paper works. And then I started hole punching and numbering and spraying through the templates that I made. And then the work started to be involved with a kind of intense texture, where I would put paper circles into the paint itself, and I might even put powder on top and maybe some glitter, and sewing. I started then to sew everything.

03-00:40:39

Campbell: Yeah, and what year was that?

03-00:40:41

Pindell: Probably '75, '74.

03-00:40:43

Campbell: Yeah, I could have seen that.

03-00:40:44

Pindell: Yeah, something like that.

03-00:40:45

Campbell: And then painting on top of the thread.

03-00:40:46

Pindell: Yes, yes. I think the reason why I started sewing was that my—I may have mentioned it the other day, but the salary at the Modern was very low, and so I would make my own clothes, because you were expected to go to openings where people wore gowns. That day is over, and—

03-00:41:06

Campbell: I remember seeing pictures. It looked so beautiful! I hope it's not over.

03-00:41:12

Pindell: Well, kind of the VIP, formal, black-tie receptions. I don't think they have that anymore.

03-00:41:20

Campbell: Sometimes they do.

03-00:41:21

Pindell: Really?

03-00:41:21

Campbell: Sometimes they do.

03-00:41:22

Pindell: Yeah? Hm.

03-00:41:23

Campbell: I was going to ask you about your working on this work. You were sewing. What was my other question? It was something that you mentioned about—so

you were looking, but there weren't any abstract artists you were looking at? Al Loving makes sense because of the collaging—

03-00:41:44

Pindell: Oh, I love his work.

03-00:41:44

Campbell: —of his work, and he lived Upstate [New York], correct? I know his widow lives Upstate now.

03-00:41:48

Pindell: Well, his widow's Upstate. He lived Upstate for a while, but he was in, oh, Red Hook, I think, for a while, and then he had a loft. His studio was on Forty-Second Street, I think, when he was doing the geometric pieces. He was very kind to me, very kind, because I—this is weird—I fell down the subway steps down to the—couldn't hardly walk, yeah, had a nice big bruise on my leg, and that's when I started using a cane. There was an opening of a show we were both in, and I told him I just couldn't go. So he rented a wheelchair, and he and his wife picked me up and drove me to the show and pushed me to the opening. He was just really lovely. He introduced me to a collector and he brought her to my studio, and sat there with her while I talked about my work and he talked about my work. He was incredible. He was just very kind. So it was his show, the dinner for his show that Garth reached out to me and wanted to see the work, yeah.

03-00:43:03

Campbell: So that's when you started walking with a cane. When was this? What year was that?

03-00:43:10

Pindell: It might be 2012 or 2013. I think my first show was 2014, and then I can't remember when the last one was; maybe two years ago.

03-00:43:25

Campbell: Do you ever use staples in the work?

03-00:43:28

Pindell: No. I mean, if I'm going to stretch something I would use staples, but Garth does the—someone does the stretching at the gallery or somewhere else. I used to do my own stretching and I used to use folding stretchers, because the paintings were too big. But I just stopped. I would say there were two influences that led me to taking the painting off the stretcher: not only space and expense, but seeing a textile exhibition of African textiles. The museum had an exhibition, I think it was in the 1970s, and I was influenced by that. And then Lowery Sims and I traveled to Africa together for about a month-and-a-half, and we went actually to Ghana, to Kumasi, and we saw people weaving *kente*. So I became very interested in loose fabric and started just nailing things to the wall. I pretty much nail things to the wall now, yeah.

03-00:44:33

Campbell: Once you nail something to the wall, how do you keep that structure? Is it important for you that it goes up the same way when it's hung in the gallery, or is the kind of looseness and drapery part of the piece?

03-00:44:46

Pindell: Looseness and drapery is part of the piece.

03-00:44:48

Campbell: Were you aware of Sam Gilliam's work?

03-00:44:51

Pindell: Oh sure, yeah, Sam Gilliam, I, and a few other people went to Russia at the time of this summit. And I got a call from the Hirshhorn [Museum and Sculpture Garden], from Ned Rifkin, saying, "Hey, do you want to go to Russia?"

03-00:45:04

Campbell: What year was this?

03-00:45:06

Pindell: It was the same year as the summit that was in Moscow, oh God, 1989 maybe, '88? I don't remember very clearly. But Sam and I represented painters, and then they had music people. They had the Harlem Ballet, the woman who ran La MaMa Theatre. I don't remember; maybe there were twenty of us, and it was all very—I mean, I wouldn't do it now, I'd be too scared. We were told by the Americans that, "If you have trouble there, don't come to us." And the Russians paid. We went by Pan Am there, Pan Am back. They paid for everything. They fed us. They put us in Hotel Russia, which is kind of a [crummy] good hotel. I mean, that's one of their main hotels. I think the most wonderful experience was going to the Bolshoi Ballet. They gave us box seats, and it was unbelievable. Also, they took us into the subways to show us their ceramic—not ceramics, their mosaics. I don't remember whether the mosaics were ceramic mosaics or glass mosaics, but they were really beautiful.

That got me started in terms of my having two mosaic commissions: one for the airport in Arizona, and another for Lehman College up in the Bronx. One is like ten by fourteen feet, and the other I think is eight-and-a-half by eighteen-and-a-half feet. They were fabricated in Italy with a man named [Costante] Crovatto, Crovatto Mosaics.

So that trip was a kind of inspirational. And then for some reason, they took me privately to see—they were starting to show [Kazimir] Malevich, they were starting to take out some of the icons. So I went to the museums with them. And then I made probably a request they didn't understand. I don't know why I did it, but I wanted to know. I wanted them to take me to a breadline, and I wanted to stand in the breadline to see what it felt like.

- 03-00:47:21
Campbell: So this is under the Soviet Union.
- 03-00:47:23
Pindell: Under the Soviet Union, yeah—
- 03-00:47:25
Campbell: Yeah, so there was toilet paper—
- 03-00:47:25
Pindell: —Gorbachev.
- 03-00:47:26
Campbell: —toilet paper lines, when I remember wheelbarrows, like people were—and breadlines and—
- 03-00:47:32
Pindell: Yeah, it was under Gorbachev. So, I always wondered what happened to the people that were so nice to us.
- 03-00:47:40
Campbell: Well, the relationship with communism, you think about the kind of ideals of the thirties in terms of a communist future, and then with the realization of that in the kind of more totalitarian government that happened in Russia. Now that we have, what, a kind of strange, special relationship with Russia again, but it's not a relationship with, say, a socialist ideal or a communist ideal. It's more a relationship with totalitarianism, which is what the people in Russia have there now. So that's what you found when you were there. You were kind of—
- 03-00:48:17
Pindell: Well, I couldn't speak the language.
- 03-00:48:21
Campbell: Yeah, so you didn't have—yeah.
- 03-00:48:22
Pindell: If I had the language, I probably would have found out more. They treated us very kindly, very nicely, made sure we ate well—probably better than their own people—and they got us there and back in one piece. The trip lasted about a little over a week, and it was a short trip. Moscow is not that far away. I think it might've been five hours by plane. England's farther away. Whatever, it just seemed like a very fast trip there. And it was the hottest time that they had ever had, so all of us were dressed for cruel weather. My suitcase was lost so I had to wear the same thing every day and I was hot, it was too hot. When I got back, they found my suitcase. [laughs]
- 03-00:49:16
Campbell: We've been talking so much about what happens in life, but I've interviewed Sam [Gilliam] and he talked to me about public installations he did in Philadelphia. I don't know if you knew—

03-00:49:26

Pindell: Oh no, no, from Philadelphia.

03-00:49:27

Campbell: Yeah, that. And then he worked in the Venice Biennale.

03-00:49:30

Pindell: Oh, good for him.

03-00:49:30

Campbell: Yeah, but I was wondering, what did you think of his work? Because there was this period—and I think your work fits into this—where you're dealing with painting as it becomes removed from the wall, like we've talked about, and removed—

03-00:49:46

Pindell: Oh sure, the [draped] pieces.

03-00:49:47

Campbell: —from the rectilinear shape, and he's working with that. Jack Whitten told me that he was working with something called the "developer," where he is trying to think outside of the paintbrush and think with new forms of making work. I know that you weren't, as you say, a part of that group or you weren't hanging out with them, but obviously, going on trips with Sam, did you think about your work in that way, as kind of like a move away from the traditions of painting?

03-00:50:14

Pindell: Yes, I think so. I was aware of Al's work both as of the geometric pieces. I just don't do that kind of work. But I love the torn-cloth pieces; I think they're incredible. I always liked Sam's work. I like the way he's working now with kind of a geometry, the different sections of the painting—that might even be just wood—that he paints and puts together. I haven't actually seen his work in a while in the flesh, so I'm not quite sure what the support is, but I like it very much. I also like the fact that he is a mentor. He can be a mentor to African American artists. He kind of looks out for us. I have a good opinion of him.

03-00:51:08

Campbell: Who is this?

03-00:51:09

Pindell: Sam Gilliam.

03-00:51:10

Campbell: Oh yeah, Sam, yeah.

03-00:51:13

Pindell: Yeah, Jack, I didn't get to know that well.

- 03-00:51:20
Campbell: Because Sam's in D.C., and then Jack—
- 03-00:51:24
Pindell: Well—
- 03-00:51:24
Campbell: —was here in the city.
- 03-00:51:25
Pindell: Yeah, he was here in the city. But I, for some reason, I felt closer to Gilliam than I did to Jack.
- 03-00:51:33
Campbell: And what about someone like Alma Thomas, not just for the whole Washington Color School that you—but I just think the circles, for me, it seemed like there's a relationship and—
- 03-00:51:41
Pindell: Well I, of course—
- 03-00:51:41
Campbell: —the color—
- 03-00:51:42
Pindell: —never knew her. I like her work. I like the simplicity of it, and I love the fact she worked on the kitchen table to do the work. I think that's wonderful.
- 03-00:51:52
Campbell: Well yeah, she had salons. And I was starting to think about—
- 03-00:51:54
Pindell: Oh, interesting!
- 03-00:51:55
Campbell: Yeah, in D.C. She lived in Paris for a little while and then she came back—
- 03-00:51:59
Pindell: Oh, how wonderful.
- 03-00:52:00
Campbell: —yeah, and she had these salons where she brought people together, whether they were life drawing, or she was—
- 03-00:52:06
Pindell: Oh, how wonderful!
- 03-00:52:07
Campbell: Yeah. I mean, I think about—
- 03-00:52:09
Pindell: That's good news.

03-00:52:10

Campbell: I know. I think about her because I think that sometimes that people promote the story, and this is part of her story: that she was a teacher and she was—and she taught for a long time and then she started making work later on. But, a high school teacher, right, or like a public school teacher?

03-00:52:25

Pindell: Public school, probably.

03-00:52:27

Campbell: I think that she obviously was involved in the community at the same time, and I always wanted to know if her work had been of any influence and—

03-00:52:39

Pindell: Oh, the fact that she was being shown meant a lot to me, because there were so few of us that were being shown. Faith [Ringgold] kind of got shown a little bit more. I remember Emma Amos was part of *Spiral*, and now you see more of her work. But she now has dementia.

03-00:52:58

Campbell: I heard, yeah—

03-00:52:59

Pindell: Yeah, I've been—

03-00:53:00

Campbell: —because we tried to interview her.

03-00:53:00

Pindell: —to her place.

03-00:53:02

Campbell: Yeah, for that in the *National Review* of African American art, Jacqueline Francis and I co-edited this special edition on Norman Lewis.

03-00:53:07

Pindell: Were you able to talk to her?

03-00:53:09

Campbell: I wasn't. Ruth Fine basically put together—she looked at some—she edited an older interview [with] Courtney Martin, and edited an interview that she did with her. But yeah, I heard she's not doing so well. Were you aware of *Spiral* at the time?

03-00:53:27

Pindell: No. It was only later I heard about them. I think she was the only woman.

03-00:53:33

Campbell: Yeah, she discussed that, being the only woman. Another thing that comes up a lot is that because it was headed by Romare Bearden and Norman Lewis, the fact that both of them were like, "Oh, when we get together with black artists,

we often talk about money and funding, but we don't talk about the artwork as much," which is something I wanted to really make sure to do, was talk about your work. Because I think these interviews, people will want to come and access them and think, Well, there are all of these social political things, but also, what about the artwork you were making, and what were your influences and what was your practice like? That's something that Lewis says. But the show was the first show that Bearden started working on black and white Photostat.

03-00:54:12

Pindell: Oh, interesting. Oh, really?

03-00:54:13

Campbell: He does this collage. Before that he had been working more in an abstract way.

03-00:54:18

Pindell: Yeah, I heard about that.

03-00:54:19

Campbell: Yeah, and working with more issues of community—

03-00:54:20

Pindell: Think that's all one image.

03-00:54:21

Campbell: —and baptism, and so—

03-00:54:23

Pindell: Baptism?

03-00:54:24

Campbell: Yeah! I don't know. That's one of the themes that comes up in his work. So Spiral seems like it was an important exhibition, in terms of melding politics and art, but it also brought up a lot of issues for these artists about, what does that mean? Does it mean showing things that are more kind of like people with placards protesting, or does it mean showing things that are more abstract and—

03-00:54:55

Pindell: Well, I got into a lot of trouble in the seventies.

03-00:54:58

Campbell: How so?

03-00:54:59

Pindell: Because I was abstract. I remember I went to The Studio Museum—I think Bill Williams had the same experience, too—and the director at the time told us to "go downtown and show with the white boys."

03-00:55:12

Campbell: Who was the director?

03-00:55:14

Pindell: Trying to remember. It's not Skip. Oh God, I can't remember his name [Ed Spriggs]. He, to this day, he hates me, still, in his brain. I sent him a catalog, and maybe he saw some of the other work I've done. I remember there was some kind of meeting, and one I was part of [at] Just Above Midtown, Linda [Goode] Bryant and one of her assistants, A.C. Hudgins, went to a meeting and I remember—

03-00:55:47

Campbell: A.C. Hudgins was her assistant?

03-00:55:49

Pindell: [Yes.]

03-00:55:53

Campbell: Oh wow! Because he's now on a MoMA—

03-00:55:56

Pindell: Yeah, I heard. But he was working with Linda Bryant, and he had gone to some sort of meeting in Brooklyn. He came back and said, "Oh my God, Howardena, they really hate you," [laughs] that people were putting me down for probably being at the Modern and also being abstract.

My work changed really because of the head injury and the accident, and my leaving the Modern; all of that caused the work to change to something else, where I would start to have statements in the work and looked at issues and so forth. So, some of the people who at the time hated me started to like me. I don't know.

It was kind of distressing because on one hand, I had the women from the white women's movement wanting me to not talk about issues of race, then I had women in the black art movement wanting me to talk about race. My work was going where it goes. I wasn't trying to pander to or please anyone, I was just doing my work. It seemed as if the doors were closed, and—

03-00:57:12

Campbell: Well yeah, it does feel that way when you're just trying to do what you want to do. I was wondering about Audre Lorde, because she's mentioned that the way in which, being in the black community, people were like, "You're gay," and in the queer community, people were like, "You're black." I think there was definitely a period of—it was almost like an exclusion, like an art of exclusion or something like that, where I think if you identify multiple to groups of people, somehow you never really fit in—

03-00:57:44

Pindell: Yeah, I just felt—

03-00:57:44

Campbell: —with—

03-00:57:45

Pindell: —I didn't fit in anywhere. I was living in a loft. I was living in really isolation, in a hard, cold, isolation. My next-door neighbor was a former member of the Hitler Youth.

03-00:57:58

Campbell: Ah!

03-00:58:00

Pindell: Yeah, and it's—

03-00:58:01

Campbell: What?

03-00:58:01

Pindell: —interesting. He was probably in his fifties when I moved into that loft, and he had that loft behind mine. It was weird because all of his girlfriends were women of color. I don't know how they could put up with him. He was like, I remember once—

03-00:58:16

Campbell: They didn't know? Because you knew; how did they not? Did they know or—

03-00:58:20

Pindell: I don't know.

03-00:58:21

Campbell: —people didn't tell them?

03-00:58:21

Pindell: I don't know. I remember before I knew, I had him over for lunch with some friends, and someone said something and he said, "Our Führer would never do that." That's the last time I let him into my place.

03-00:58:37

Campbell: [laughs] Wow.

03-00:58:38

Pindell: Yeah, that loft was great, but I wouldn't have been able to stay there; I can't do the steps and stuff easily.

I don't know. One of my best friends who was with him at the time, a woman, Saraswathi Ganapathy [Karnad], she [was a doctor and] was head of neonatology at Bellevue [Hospital]. [She was] from Madras. My first trip to India was with her, and I was traveling around with her family. I don't know how she put up with him, I just don't know how she put up with him.

03-00:59:16

But in that space is where I started numbering, in the Westbeth space is where I started taking canvases off the stretcher, and I made the grid, the soft grid. I would say I produced a fairly large volume of work while I was ten years in the loft, and it was pretty big work. Then I had a brief stint in an apartment on Eighth Street, and then I moved to a loft on Broome and Broadway, which was much smaller than what I was used to. I started doing the autobiographical work there. And then I moved to the apartment I have now.

03-01:00:03

Campbell:

Would you discuss the autobiographical work?

03-01:00:07

Pindell:

Well, *Scapegoat* is one of the main ones. Another one is *Chrysalis*, and it talks about issues of spirituality. Right now I'm like really off of spirituality. I'm not into gurus, I'm careful with meditation. I was going to a twelve-step program once, which I found very helpful in terms of family issues, but I was also aware of cult issues as something to be concerned about. The painting has two sections: one is kind of joyful and light; the other's sort of dark with blues and greens, but very cool, and then it had text in it and it talked about the guru types who lie. I went to India, to an ashram, and it turned out the guru was a pedophile, and that was just really upsetting. The other side, well, what's interesting about that particular piece is: I have Nigerian DNA, and in the piece, there's like, I'm standing and then I'm lying across, and then out of my head there's like a tusk. If you look at this, the altars in Benin, they would have a bronze head with a tusk coming out of the top. I considered that a kind of ancestral memory that I knew nothing about—I saw that later. Also what I thought was interesting: my pieces that were heavily clustered with dots and sequins and stuff, with the texture itself, were very much like the staff handles—I think it's fifteenth-century Nigerian Igbo Ukwu, if I've said it right. It looks very similar, but I never knew anything about it; I noticed it afterwards. Anyway so, I just you wanted to know about *Autobiography*. Trying, already said CS—

03-01:02:14

Campbell:

Well do you—

03-01:02:14

Pindell:

Hm?

03-01:02:15

Campbell:

I don't know if you think about the work of Lorraine O'Grady, but I've spoken to her—

03-01:02:19

Pindell:

I don't know that much about her work.

03-01:02:20

Campbell:

She did performance about being a bourgeois black woman where she'd sewed the gloves—

03-01:02:27

Pindell: Oh, I know that, with the gloves and stuff, yeah.

03-01:02:28

Campbell: —yeah, but then also this question of, like—this has come up with me [on] my travels. So many people assume because I'm black, I'm a prostitute or a maid, like you fall into these two categories, two very negative—not negative, but two derogatory categories, I think. One of the things that she was dealing with in her work is dealing with issues of the black bourgeois, which is very middle class—it's about ebony and life—and I don't know, all these different ways of being middle class, and especially starting in the sixties and seventies. I thought you might know her work, but I was just wondering if you've thought a little bit about that and in terms of your own art practice at all, like—

03-01:03:16

Pindell: I don't know if I've really thought about that in terms of my art prac—can we take a break?

03-01:03:20

Tewes: Sure!

03-01:03:20

Campbell: Oh yeah.

03-01:03:21

Pindell: I just need to stand up.

03-01:03:22

Tewes: No problem.

03-01:03:22

Pindell: I'm getting very s— [break in audio]

03-01:03:24

Tewes: Okay, we are back from a short break. And during the conversation—or during the break, I'm sorry—Andrianna and Howardena were having a great conversation. I was hoping you could pick that up again here.

03-01:03:35

Campbell: Yeah, would you discuss—we were talking about—because I think your travels have had such an effect on the work, and I was curious about Mexico. Because the Charles White exhibition's up right now, and basically there was a strong African American community in Mexico postwar, making work—Elizabeth Catlett being one of them—

03-01:03:53

Pindell: Oh yes, I know—

03-01:03:54

Campbell: —White—

03-01:03:54

Pindell: —about Elizabeth, yeah.

03-01:03:55

Campbell: —and they had a lot of communication with people in Chicago—

03-01:04:00

Pindell: Fascinating.

03-01:04:00

Campbell: —and in New York publishing in the Chicago *Labor Defender*, and here in New York, *New York Amsterdam News*. So, I just was asking you if you had any connections in Mexico. You mentioned this trip that you took.

03-01:04:12

Pindell: Well, I—

03-01:04:13

Campbell: What year was it?

03-01:04:14

Pindell: —think it was when I was in college, so it was probably '63. Because '64, I went to Europe, and I was hired as a companion for the organizer of the trip. He wanted to bring his wife along and she was pregnant, so I was there to just be with her. I think all the students were white, high school students. We flew down. That was an awful flight, I remember that. It was so bumpy. We went to a small town. It was called Saltillo, Coahuila. There was a Spanish school for teaching Spanish as a second language. We were spread around. I was with the wife and some of the young women, and then I guess the husband stayed in another home. It was a private home with like a little courtyard. I remember we had our dinner: it was goat and she brought out the goat's head. It was like, blegh.

But anyway, we took the bus back. When we were going through Texas, I believe, the police stopped the bus and wanted to know if it was a Freedom Ride. I guess the director of the group said, no, we weren't a Freedom Ride; we were just going to Philadelphia. And then we had a rest stop where African Americans and whites could go in and eat and use the bathroom, but they forbid indigenous people, Native Americans, to go in. So I refused to go in. A nun, she went in and bought us food, which was nice, yeah.

My Spanish is terrible, so I don't know how much I learned [laughs] when I attended that school, but I don't know. Travel has been like a big part of me, although I don't do that much traveling anymore with the walker. You have to take people and it's complicated. I've lived in India for four months. I've lived in Japan for seven months. I've been to Cuba, where I was in an exhibition which was curated by Ben Jones; that was a couple of years ago. I've been to Russia. I've been to Brazil. I lived in Scandinavia on an exchange kind of, Experiment International, living, you know? I've been to Denmark, Sweden,

Norway. I've never been to Spain. I was always turned off because they always warn young women, "Don't go to Spain because the men are very aggressive. If you're by yourself, it's a problem."

03-01:06:58

I've traveled through Africa, Kenya, Uganda by default because Idi Amin was in power and he used the airplane or a particular airplane company to pick up diplomats. We were technically flying from London to Nairobi, but we were brought to Entebbe, Uganda, to deliver the diplomats. And of course, everyone was hysterical because, Why are we in Uganda? I was in Nigeria, I think, about two weeks. That was a tough trip. The culture was unbelievable but it was a tough trip.

Let's see. I've been to South Africa, Ghana, Senegal, Ivory Coast, and Mali by default. I've been to trying to think—Egypt, yes, I forgot, Egypt, where I went through the whole thing with the pyramids and all of that. I don't travel like that anymore. With a walker, it limits you. And also, my fear of flying is really ridiculous. I get really scared when I'm in an airplane, partly because—I may have mentioned it the other day—flying over the Amazon Jungle, the engine was loose on the wing all the way back to the States. It was very scary. And being hit by lightning but the plane didn't go down. I had one weird trip: when the oil wells were burning in Kuwait, the air outside was gray. I remember the plane was like this, shaking all the way. That might have been the Gulf Stream, and then when we got out of that it was like totally smooth. It was very strange.

I'm supposed to have a show in London in [June 2019] and I really don't want to go, and Garth is insisting I go. So I don't know what I'm going to do, but anyhow—

03-01:08:55

Campbell:

Have you traveled in the continental United States? Have you been to Nevada or some of the other states that we can—

03-01:09:02

Pindell:

Well, I've mainly been to Colorado—not Colorado. Yes, I've been to Colorado because I did a one of these visiting artist gigs. I've been to Colorado, California. I got tenure at UC San Diego, but I decided to keep my tenure at Stony Brook, partly because I hate flying. My parents were elderly; that would mean I have to keep flying back and forth, and I wouldn't do it. I'm trying to think, what other states? The installation of my mosaic was in Arizona. I used to mainly travel by train, which was great. The trip was beautiful. I've been to Florida. I went to school in Boston. I've been to Maine, of course; Chicago; Detroit; St. Louis.

I had to do a condition check in St. Louis. And St. Louis, then, it was very racist. Every time a museum would call a cab to pick me up, the cab would see me and leave. Finally, one of the staff had to drive me to the hotel.

03-01:10:13

Trying to think what else: Texas for college art. I'm thinking, I'm thinking. Of course, I'm from Pennsylvania. My father's family lives in Maryland. So yeah, I just haven't done, though, that kind of extensive traveling. One of my assistants, [Ko], just did a tour of all of the national parks, as many as he could see in about two weeks. I haven't done anything like that. I've only seen the Grand Canyon from the air. I think I've probably traveled more in Europe than I have in the States. Because I used to go to Paris, but only thing in Paris: I always felt so alone because they're not that friendly.

03-01:11:06

Campbell:

What about Italy as comparison, like Rome?

03-01:11:07

Pindell:

Oh, I've been to Italy. That's right, I forgot there was a trip where I did. I went to Italy, Rome, Capri, Pompeii, Pisa, and then we went around on the water side of it. We went to—not Morocco—was it Monaco? Nice, and then went up through to Paris by bus, which was actually nice. It was beautiful. I've been to Switzerland. I don't know. I have so many fears of flying that it just kind of limits—

03-01:11:47

Campbell:

But it's so interesting to me that, because I've interviewed so many artists—and you say that you have a fear of flying, but I know that based on all our conversations, you've traveled so extensively throughout your career. I just wanted to get that documented because I think that you've been all over, not only the continental United States, but all over the rest of the world, as well. I don't know if you've been to the South Pacific or even Hawaii or—

03-01:12:11

Pindell:

I've been to Hawaii. I did an artist—well, I judged an exhibition and did a little artist residency thing for about a week in Hilo. I can remember seeing the lava at a distance going into the ocean, and then the fire would shoot up. You couldn't really stay there if you had asthma. It's—

03-01:12:34

Campbell:

It's like burning water.

03-01:12:35

Pindell:

Yeah. I didn't have asthma. It just was a weird smell of sulfur. Trying to think, where else have I been? I haven't been to Alaska. I've been to Canada: Montréal, Québec, Toronto. Sometimes I would—

03-01:12:50

Campbell:

And Mexico.

03-01:12:51

Pindell:

Mexico, yeah. Just Rio [de Janeiro] and Cabo Frio [in Brazil], which is like seeing Atlantic City. Trying to think where else. I've never seen the redwood

trees. I would love to do that. I have gone to Yosemite. I found it really creepy. Trying to think, where else have I been?

03-01:13:18

Campbell: Yeah, California is really beautiful.

03-01:13:21

Pindell: Well yeah, San Francisco, I like San Francisco a lot, LA. Right now I'm worried about my friends there.

03-01:13:27

Campbell: Palo Alto, I know, with all the fires. I don't know how people live in all these places.

03-01:13:31

Pindell: Very upsetting.

03-01:13:31

Campbell: Seems like—

03-01:13:34

Pindell: So—

03-01:13:35

Tewes: So I'm curious, being that you're so well-traveled, how you think having those experiences have impacted you.

03-01:13:47

Pindell: Well, I think for one thing, I don't feel I'm missing out if I don't travel. That's one impact. I don't feel, Oh, if only I could—I don't feel that at all. I feel like, Enough already. [laughs] I think it impacted sort of my visual practice, especially living in Japan. I think that was probably, of all the places, the biggest influence. I saw a lot of art history images that you see in books here, in the Louvre. But I've never been to Barcelona, I've never been to Spain. I've never been to Portugal. I've never been to Scotland. I think at one point, I kind of wished I had been an Africanist and studied African art, and then what I found was that women have a real hard time in Africa. You know, right? Have you been to Africa?

03-01:14:57

Campbell: I haven't. I want to go.

03-01:14:59

Pindell: Don't go alone.

03-01:15:01

Campbell: I have these paintings from Africa that I bought from these local artisans. Some of them, they have names like Raphael. I don't know. They're made very much by hand. Yeah, some of them are quite, I want to say naïve. I'm kind of curious about what your thoughts are, because there's been so much discussion of late about, should we include things like quilts in the museum,

things that are made by people who aren't trained? You're obviously a trained artist. You went to college, you went to university after that, and you've been involved in the art community as a professional. I'm curious about this relationship between people in especially—and at this point, it comes to African American art. This is something that's a huge question right now. People who didn't have that kind of training, like we can think about someone like Horace Pippin or something like that, what do we do with those people? Is that work as legitimate, like as we saw in the outlier show as people who are trained, and why is this more of a question for people in African American community or the Latinx community than it is in, say, what had—

03-01:16:11

Pindell: But is it—

03-01:16:12

Campbell: —been a canonical art history?

03-01:16:14

Pindell: But are there white artists that fit that model?

03-01:16:18

Campbell: Well, like Judith Scott, she's someone that does those wrappings. I think she has—but I think in general, those artists are shown in other spaces.

03-01:16:27

Pindell: Or Joyce Scott, with the beads.

03-01:16:30

Campbell: Yeah. Do you know her?

03-01:16:31

Pindell: I love her work.

03-01:16:32

Campbell: Yeah, so I wonder. I think that there is definitely a place for them in the gallery world. I think White Columns sometimes shows these kinds of exhibitions.

03-01:16:41

Pindell: Oh, that's good to know, right.

03-01:16:42

Campbell: I do wonder, too, if like—well, I don't know, if there was an artist of European descent, say, making quilts or making figures, would they be accepted into the institutions in the same way?

03-01:17:00

Pindell: I don't—

03-01:17:00

Campbell: And is—

- 03-01:17:00
Pindell: That I don't know.
- 03-01:17:01
Campbell: Yeah. I don't know what you think about that question of professionalism, I guess, and—
- 03-01:17:05
Pindell: Well, I—
- 03-01:17:05
Campbell: —a professional training.
- 03-01:17:06
Pindell: Thing is, I think of people like [Vincent] Van Gogh. Did he have professional training?
- 03-01:17:14
Campbell: Well, he kind of did because he was in London with his brother. I mean, he was working as an art dealer, and you're right, he trained—I think he trained as a preacher, and then he goes to London with Theo, and then they go to Paris, and then he moves to Arles, where he's just kind of making his own work. I think if you think of someone like [Paul] Gauguin, did not have professional—
- 03-01:17:34
Pindell: Oh, interesting.
- 03-01:17:34
Campbell: —as far as I know didn't have professional training. He was a banker with a family, and then he goes to—
- 03-01:17:40
Pindell: Oh, Tahiti.
- 03-01:17:41
Campbell: Well, he eventually goes to Tahiti, but he also is in the north with some of the other artists in the cloisonné [technique], and then with Van Gogh.
- 03-01:17:48
Pindell: And [Edvard] Munch, did Munch have formal training?
- 03-01:17:50
Campbell: Munch, I think, had formal training.
- 03-01:17:52
Pindell: Paris, maybe.
- 03-01:17:53
Campbell: He was in Paris, and then he goes back to Norway to Oslo. He was a smoker. There's this really great article about him and being unhealthy, and there were doctors who were writing about the degeneracy of his art based on his

smoking. Yeah, I think that a lot of those artists, too, back then, what it meant to be a professional artist and training was different. You could go to the Académie des Beaux-Arts, you could go to the Académie Julian and take classes; and then basically, based on your exhibition history or if you won a prize, you go to Italy to reproduce artworks there; and then from there, you'd show in the kind of salon system, either what they had in Paris or in London or even in the Academia de San Carlos in Mexico City. Whereas now, it means like what you went through. Because I think you were kind of at the forefront of this: is like you go to college, and then you even go and get your master's at the university, which is not something that we really see before, I think, the sixties and seventies with artists moving into this kind of professionalization, say, and the advanced degree. I don't know if you've thought about that at all, if that was something that—

03-01:19:10

Pindell:

Well, I feel that was lucky that I had parents who were very education minded and they didn't want me to leave with any debt. That really was a big thing, because I would never have been able to pay it all—\$5,000 a year at the Modern, that would have been impossible. But I think that I had a lot of loneliness because I was always either the only one who met the quota of one at Boston University in the Fine Arts Department, or at Yale—they didn't have women there except in the graduate program. So when I would take some art history courses, I might be the only woman. So I always just felt lonely. And I think I had mentioned Gary Watson. He was a boyfriend I had. We weren't really lovers or anything, but we were like companions. He was probably feeling lonely, too, because he was part Aborigine. He was a good guy, and he would take me to different, very calm parties where the women sat on one side and the men sat on the other. Think I mentioned that the other day, I don't know. Bill Williams was a student my second year at Yale. He came in with a very good sculpture, and we don't hear about him. Peter Bradley, he was an excellent sculptor. But still there was this sense of isolation, which I didn't like. And even, I find that isolation [phone rings] also at the Modern, because I'm there when he, in the beginning—someone's calling me. Anyway, in the beginning—I lost my train of thought. Can we stop for a second?

03-01:21:01

Tewes:

Sure! Let's pause. [break in audio] Okay, we are back from a break. And, Howardena, why don't you continue with some of the thoughts? You were talking about professionalization?

03-01:21:09

Pindell:

Yeah. People of color were not welcome in the art schools. The reason why, I'll say back in the seventies—maybe the eighties, but the seventies—I remember giving a presentation in Texas and I was having lunch with Sam Gilliam's ex-wife. She was working for the *Washington Post*, I think. I gave a presentation about diversity issues in the university, whatever, and a white woman came up to the table and she said, "Well, we're not friendly with black

students. We don't want them. They're going to take our jobs, so we just make sure that they aren't comfortable in our department." And then I remember at my own job, it was a casual meeting with one of the heads of affirmative action, and she said that the most resistant departments to diversity in all the schools where she's worked for affirmative action have been the art departments; they are the least interested in diversifying. I found that interesting, because we're not necessarily welcomed. Also finding out from Richard Yarde years later before he died that Boston U had a quota in the Fine Arts Department of one a year. And that's true: one a year, I remember.

03-01:22:38

Campbell:

Do you want to talk about this issue of quotas? It's coming up right now with what's going on at Harvard. I know that with a lot of the—

03-01:22:43

Pindell:

What's going on at Harvard?

03-01:22:45

Campbell:

Well, a lot of the Asian students have sued the university because of the quota system that you're talking about, where they put a cap of the number of Asians that are admitted, because Asian American students have been kind of outperforming other students in terms of—

03-01:22:59

Pindell:

Oh yeah, they're really same at Stony Brook, yeah. [It is improving.]

03-01:23:02

Campbell:

And so there's been this question—and I think that for many of us, it's been an adjustment when we're teaching. I know for me, I'm always excited to have these other voices in the classroom so that when I'm talking about [laughs] Asian American or Asian art, I have someone who can actually pronounce what I'm looking at and actually sometimes give me—you know I do reading, but also give me a context of how these things—maybe these plum jars or something would have been used in their homes, or whether their families have these in their collections. So it's something that I find to be kind of a good thing. I just wanted to know a little bit more about what you thought, oh yeah, so what you think about this quota. The issues of quota is because they felt that they're being unfairly or unjustly kind of—

03-01:23:45

Pindell:

Well, I don't think Stony Brook has any—

03-01:23:47

Campbell:

—excluded.

03-01:23:47

Pindell:

—quotas. Half of my classes—well no, my beginning class, I think more than half are Asian, and it's split between the Korean students and the Chinese students. They're mostly women. They're excellent. They're very studious; not so much the men, the men are a little bit goofy.

03-01:24:11

Campbell: As with most [laughs]—

03-01:24:12

Pindell: As most—

03-01:24:12

Campbell: —men, I think.

03-01:24:13

Pindell: —men are, yeah. It's true. The white men are also a little bit loopy. And school's never said anything about it. In fact, they had a campus-wide—what would you call it? It was more than a conversation. We had to go, and it was a diversity seminar, and diversity and sexual harassment, and the staff had to go. It was held in a huge arena. It was very well organized. The person who ran it was African American. There were 3,000 staff members that went in the morning—there was enough room, as it was a huge stadium—and 900 faculty. You had no choice, you had to go. They made very clear what their stance was, that "we will not tolerate prejudice." Because Long Island's terrible. They found Klan robes in one of the local churches, I think I mentioned the last time.

03-01:25:14

Campbell: You did mention that, sadly. You didn't get specifics.

03-01:25:17

Pindell: I worry about Brian, my driver. I'm going to write the president about it—not Trump, but Stanley, the president of Stony Brook. There's this one handicap van, and it just blocks any access to the only way to get out of my building, which is not handicapped accessible—all those entrances have been closed off for security—and this guy will just sit right in the middle so you can't get by him to the left or the right. If a white truck comes along, he backs up and lets them in. But when Brian goes to go in, he will just stay there. He won't—

03-01:25:56

Campbell: Yeah, you mentioned that before.

03-01:25:58

Pindell: Yeah, just—

03-01:26:00

Campbell: Oh, and I also just want to—I don't know if you can edit this in, but correct Kara Walker's gallery to be Sikkema Jenkins.

03-01:26:05

Pindell: Sikkema Jenkins, yeah.

03-01:26:07

Campbell: So I don't know. You have me on tape—

- 03-01:26:08
Pindell: Yeah, Brent Sikkema.
- 03-01:26:09
Campbell: —saying that you can—yeah, Brent Sikkema, of course.
- 03-01:26:11
Pindell: Brent Sikkema, whatever, yeah.
- 03-01:26:14
Campbell: So what's next for you? Because I just find it heartening: you're in your seventies, but you're saying that you're still working, you're very active. I saw that you were in the *Painting: Now and Forever* show, which I don't know if painting—
- 03-01:26:28
Pindell: Where was that show?
- 03-01:26:30
Campbell: You were in a Matthew Marks, a Matthew Marks show—
- 03-01:26:32
Pindell: Oh right—
- 03-01:26:32
Campbell: —and—
- 03-01:26:32
Pindell: I remember now. Right, I was on the—
- 03-01:26:32
Campbell: —Greene Naftali—
- 03-01:26:34
Pindell: —panel, right. I remember.
- 03-01:26:35
Campbell: Yeah, and then you were close to that Jasper Johns painting, and—
- 03-01:26:38
Pindell: This is all Garth.
- 03-01:26:39
Campbell: —Luchita Hurtado. Huh?
- 03-01:26:41
Pindell: I think this is mostly Garth.
- 03-01:26:43
Campbell: Yes, well that's—
- 03-01:26:44
Pindell: All of it's Garth.

- 03-01:26:46
Campbell: That's really exciting. I also like the fact that: here's a contemporary show about painting and you're very much involved in that exhibition, or your work is being shown in that exhibition. It's not just about what we've seen in the past, but you're also active now. Would you talk about that, where you see—
- 03-01:27:03
Pindell: Well—
- 03-01:27:04
Campbell: —your work going, and what it's like to have this appreciation?
- 03-01:27:07
Pindell: Oh, it's very inspiring. And also to have people working with you, who enjoy helping you. The main series I'm working on now—I think I might have already mentioned it—at The Shed. Did I mention it before? Do you remember?
- 03-01:27:24
Campbell: You did mention The Shed before, yesterday.
- 03-01:27:27
Pindell: Well, that's not going to happen until [2020 or] 2021. I think I mentioned there are two nine-foot-square paintings: one about colonialism and cutting off people's hands, and the other one about black churches and black towns that were burned down—I remember, yeah, because we mentioned Black Wall Street. And then three or four media pieces that have to do—one with lynching, another with being hung over the edge of a boat and having sharks eat you from the head up.
- 03-01:27:59
Campbell: Whoa.
- 03-01:28:00
Pindell: Yeah, I know. And then—
- 03-01:28:02
Campbell: CPLY, [William N. Copley].
- 03-01:28:04
Pindell: —the children [in Birmingham, Alabama] whose skin was blown off by the force of the hose, the water hose, the water pressure. [The Children's Crusade] I can't remember, what was the other one? We have the lynching—my memory is so rotten now as I get older.
- 03-01:28:17
Campbell: Anything to do with the atomic, with atomic—
- 03-01:28:20
Pindell: That's in the piece—

03-01:28:20
Campbell:

—or a dirty bomb, sort of anything like that?

03-01:28:22
Pindell:

Yeah, that was in my piece called *In My Lifetime*—I don't think that's in the show, I think that's in private hands—where I have the child from Hiroshima and the amputee child from Angola who looks very much—although a Kara Walker piece has a woman on her back with no legs, here you have a child on his back with no legs in a hospital bed. Well, no legs from here down. That piece is taking a long time because I need to check on text in terms of what text I want to get the gallery. Because the gallery can get the vinyl type for me; I just need to give them the text for it. I want to burn furniture and children's toys for the other one. Ko is very—the one who just called me—he's very helpful. He's trying to find a place where we can burn things without it being a problem. And the other media pieces where I just have to seek out the images I need; I know the gallery is going to help me with that. One of the means of projecting a white text in a black room. It's out of my life, like with the video *Free, White and 21*. People helped me, and so that's the case with *The Shed*. And then alongside of that, I'm doing pieces that are abstract, and because I just need my head to be in a better place.

03-01:29:59

There's one piece I'm doing now that's a large glacier blue oval. No, it's a circle with ovals in it. I'm building up different textures, but it's going to be low relief and I'm going to mix in smaller—in fact, that's what I've been doing at home, and I start punching holes. I mix the foam, which has maybe a thickness of about that high, and I cover it. I seal it with Jade glue, and then I place it all over the painting. Right now I think I'm going to have some stripes in it, as well, which will be foam. I want it to be very textural, but not three dimensional, if you know what I mean, or it to be like high relief, maybe. That is just a pleasant thing to work on.

Right now I've taken foam, and one of my assistants cuts out the ovals in the inside so when you put it down it's over another oval, which has like either acrylic or watercolor on it, and then you put that over it. It has the hole so you get the color of the paper behind it. Then you paint the outside of that piece, of that little section, with the glacier blue, and you take tape and you cover the circle so you can't change that color. You can do all sorts of things on top, and then when you're finished you pull off the tape. I was going to use masquette, but I don't know. Technically, I don't know if masquette will fuse in some way with Jade glue, so I'd rather use like masking tape. And then you just cut with a zip blade and then lift it, yeah.

03-01:31:49

So, that's what I'm doing right now, just that. And also, one of my upstairs neighbors, her sister's an artist, and her sister sent her for Christmas—or her birthday, I can't remember which—some vegetable papyrus. It's papyrus made in Germany. It's gorgeous. I don't even know what to call it: translucent,

transparent. She sent her strawberries, which were sliced really thin and embedded in papyrus. So I have, I think, about twenty different vegetables and fruits. I gave Garth one for his birthday a while ago. You have to seal it. He doesn't want me to seal his, but I think he might finally give in because you have to be careful; it can get brittle. I'm sealing it with matte medium, and it makes it a little bit more ripply than I want, but at least it's not getting air. They've treated it for rot, and the color might change. I don't know. I think the color, in time, will probably change, but I want to seal it so it doesn't break, it doesn't become sort of little pieces.

03-01:33:04

Campbell:

Do you ever feel that your projects are kind of like an endless kind of ongoing construction where you're just kind of—because you're working from bag to bag, it's almost like there's just like a cycle of finishing one piece but then taking older work and putting it into new work, and—

03-01:33:20

Pindell:

Yeah, it seems—

03-01:33:20

Campbell:

—just like this kind of—

03-01:33:21

Pindell:

—like that. The motion is like this. [laughs] It's almost like: accelerate it, brake, accelerate it, brake. I keep kind of moving things around that were maybe old ways of seeing things, and then I have new—because materials change, and there's a material that actually one of the students started using that I've become interested in because it's flexible paper. It's called YUPO, and it's like the younger generation know about it; I had never heard of it. I find if I need to put any circles on top, the YUPO is the best because when it bends it doesn't crease. So I kind of explore new materials. I don't do the spray—

03-01:34:04

Campbell:

It's like a polyester or something, or—

03-01:34:07

Pindell:

I don't know what it is. It feels kind of like—Kemar, do you know?

03-01:34:11

Hutchinson:

[Kemar Hutchinson]: It's kind of a plastic-based paper, but it does have some sort of like polymer in it.

03-01:34:17

Pindell:

Oh, it has some polymer in it? Yeah. I've been using that, punching that out. Sometimes I just punch things out and then I'll decide what to do with them later, where I don't have a particular goal at that moment. I don't know. I just like experimenting with things. Oh, and with the papyrus, I draw on it, like with the *Video Drawings*: arrows, vectors, numbers, whatever. It's the paper itself without anything on it; it is gorgeous—or the papyrus, rather—and then

just adding the little numbers and dots and whatever. It's something I can do when I really want to do something that's very leisurely, and I have like ten of them I'm working on at the same time. You have to be careful too, because you can puncture the papyrus, so I know I have to be very patient and careful. They're only like this big.

03-01:35:17

Campbell:

Oh wow.

03-01:35:19

Pindell:

I was thinking of them as pieces that might be for people who can't afford a painting. They're beautiful just on their own. So that's something I'm working on now, yeah. I haven't lost my strength in my hands. The only thing I'm doing now is I have something—if someone has like a wrist issue, I wrap [a support band] around [my wrists] so you don't sort of get a bruise from the hole puncher [or carpal tunnel].

03-01:35:54

Tewes:

I'm glad you brought that up, because I'm wondering how you think your work has changed by necessity or desire due to aging over the years.

03-01:36:05

Pindell:

Well thing is, I was made aware of archival issues when I worked at the Modern, so I think that some of the graph paper—because I went to Charrette, which was an architectural supply house—I don't think they're around anymore—and I thought the graph paper was archival, but what I've noticed is some of them are starting to get slightly brown on the edge. I try to buy either Fabriano, Arches, BFK Rives. I try to buy archival paper when I'm going to punch things out or make the drawings, little circles, and they might even be this flat and this big.

I'm also aware of sunlight, that you can't put artwork in the window, so to speak. I keep my stuff covered. In the workroom—I'm on the first floor, so I have to draw the shades anyway—this strong light, it comes from the studio track lighting—but I'm aware of things disintegrating if it's not a right content. I was made well aware of that when I started working at the Modern because I did condition reports as part of my job, and so I could see when there was damage: foxing, molds, you name it. Yeah. So that, I try to give that as a gift to the students to make them mindful that they should look for a sketchbook that's acid free or totally archival. I think totally archival is better than acid free, because acid frees still can change.

03-01:37:55

Campbell:

Well it's good to know a little bit about that, because I know that—I was just talking to Cynthia Schwartz at Yale, and she was looking at artwork—and you know, she's a conservator, and I went down to the conservation lab. For so many artists, we don't know how they made the work. And because they haven't had that background training, they use lots of materials that, over time,

maybe even fight against each other or disintegrate. She's been holding a series of talks about material: what's this material? Where is it? What can you build with it? How can things last? How can you build things that will—that while you still have the freedom as an artist to do what you want, but usually you're considering how materials can be harmful.

03-01:38:40

Pindell:

Yes, the longevity of the work I think is important, and your own legacy. Also I tell my students, "Don't throw anything out. You do something you don't like, you keep it, because you never know." Because my earliest collages that were in my design class at Boston U, I thought they were horrible. I looked at one recently or within the past couple of years, and it's like, oh my God, this is really good! Your eyes change and your knowledge changes. I don't believe in tossing things. I know a lot of sculptors do destroy their work because they can't afford to store it, and I think that's really sad. Like people like Mel Edwards was lucky in that he did get a very good job teaching, which meant he had a decent salary, benefits and all. I'm sure he's preserved his work. Plus his work is practically hard to destroy anyway, because of his material. But painters and people who, where drawing is primary, whatever, they should just try to find a way—get acid-free glassine, an acid-free container, like a portfolio, and to keep the work away from the sun. Also you have to be careful with high humidity, as well, because it'll start rippling. Yeah. Those are things, mercifully, again, I was made aware of by working in a department that dealt mainly with paper.

03-01:40:11

Tewes:

Howardena, you've mentioned a few times that you're working with assistants these days. When did you bring them on board?

03-01:40:17

Pindell:

I brought them on board when I joined the gallery because Garth wanted a certain amount of work, and I couldn't on my own produce that much—as much, I should say. There are different processes that don't necessarily need my hand. Let's say, if I want a circle placed on a canvas, I put a mark and we punch the holes, whatever, and they know where to put this particular thing. It just speeds up the process. And also, like teaching, although I only teach two days a week, the next day I'm pretty tired. They'll come in and I leave them directions and put up whatever marks I need to. Jasmin does things: like, she'll change my linen, she'll grocery shop. Ko [Smith] will grocery shop, whatever. They just make it so my life is much easier. What I'm doing now is kind of—what you have to do, you have to punch holes. There are other things that they can do for me, and I can get these holes punched because I need a lot of them. They just, in general, have become good—I consider them good friends.

One young woman has worked for me for [twenty] years, yeah, and it was Jasmin Sian, Sian, S-i-a-n. "Shawn" is how you say it, "Shawn." She's a wonderful artist herself, yeah. Ko [Smith] is also a wonderful artist. And they're both very concerned about me, which I can feel. Like, Ko was just

calling to check in to see how I am. I just have two really helpful people [to] make it easier if we get into, like, a cluttered kind of thing, then Jasmin comes in and opens—you know, sometimes I can't find things anymore, but she'll move things around. The nine-foot-by-nine painting, what we found was where we put the hands—I can't get up on the ladder, and it's tricky turning the painting because it's so big. Ko goes up the ladder and he puts the hands on, and I've put hands on the level where I can sit and put hands. Jasmin's put hands on. So it's like a family [laughs]—what would you call it—project, yeah.

03-01:42:49

Tewes:

That's great. I'm wondering what it's like for you to trust someone else to implement your artistic vision.

03-01:42:58

Pindell:

Sometimes I feel guilty that I'm not doing it all, but it's wonderful because I can see the work come to fruition quicker. The fact that I'm not as mobile as I was is not a factor in the work, because they do exactly what I tell them to do. I'm not a hardnosed narcissist like that, but I just, I show them gently what I would like to have done. I mix the colors. Sometimes if I mix the color because they ran out, they might mix it to match what I have. Ko gets art supplies for me sometimes. Like, we buy paper; not so much, a little bit at a time, but kind of a little bit at a time. I think I need more bond paper, and all I have to do is tell him and he'll, on his way to my place, he'll buy it. He's very mobile, very mobile. I think more than I was before I used a walker. Yeah.

03-01:44:12

Tewes:

Sounds like a great arrangement for all of you.

03-01:44:14

Pindell:

It is. It is, because I appreciate the kind of work they do for me, and I appreciate their own art production. Just, they're two, young, gifted artists. I try not to take advantage of them, and they're paid very well, yeah, paid very well.

03-01:44:35

Tewes:

I'm wondering if this sort of group working arrangement is something that you feel more at ease with because you've been teaching for so many years.

03-01:44:43

Pindell:

That's probably a part of it, yeah. Oh, one thing I wanted to explain about the teaching, I don't think I mentioned it. How does one deal with smartphones in the classroom? Well usually with smartphones, the kids are like this, you know, whatever. What I found—and I learned this from an undergraduate student—I had big classes in the beginning, beginning painting. When you set up a still life, there are other people that use the room. I can't set up still lives all over, and so they're all working from one still life but they can't quite see it as well. If they were late coming in, they're behind people. So what I have them do is photograph the area they want with the smartphone, and then work

from what they see in front of them. And then when there are areas they can't figure out, go and photograph that area, and blow it up on your smartphone. The results are fabulous, because they're seeing more than the human eye can see. If they're blocked for any reason by there being so many students, they know they can go up and take a picture. They can also look at it with their own eyes. When you get difficult things—like the student who I learned this from—there was a copper embossed urn, I guess. Well no, it wasn't. Well, it was weird. It was like a vase but it wasn't. It was copper and silver, and it had a lot of markings on it. She was trying to paint it but she couldn't see it, so she just walked up to it, took a picture, and then she just worked section by section. Oh my God, the results were beautiful. So I tell my students now that, "Use this as a tool. If you can't see it, photograph it, and work from that image." The results are quite wonderful. Otherwise, it's like they're texting or they're listening to music, which I don't mind particularly. But now they're like, this is their work; they see it as a third eye. And so I'm pleased to—this one student, I think her name was Alexandra Palma, yeah. I'm grateful to her that I learned from her.

03-01:47:09

Tewes:

You mentioned in a previous session your particular approach to teaching, from experiences you had as a student over the years. But I'm wondering if you could talk about any differences in the way studio art is taught these days, in 2018, than it was when you were originally going to school.

03-01:47:32

Pindell:

Well, the thing is, I don't know if I can talk much about it, because Boston U had a particular highly traditional approach.

03-01:47:41

Campbell:

Yeah, you mentioned that.

03-01:47:41

Pindell:

Academy. I mean, RISD [Rhode Island School of Design] has a big reputation, and I'm sure they weren't traditional.

03-01:47:51

Campbell:

They were. I went.

03-01:47:53

Pindell:

They were also heavily traditional, formal—

03-01:47:55

Campbell:

Well—

03-01:47:56

Pindell:

—academy?

03-01:47:57

Campbell:

Well you know, that's what it started off as. You had a very kind of technical training in the first year—

03-01:48:03

Pindell: Because it's a wonderful school.

03-01:48:04

Campbell: —it is a wonderful school. And then you kind of got more freedom as you went along. There was an emphasis on these kind of 9:00 to 5:00 drawing, or 7:00 to 3:00 drawing classes, where you'd be standing, drawing from the model. In the Fashion Department, people sewed by hand. In the Draft and Design Department, they drew letters by hand. In Architecture, they drew by hand. I think this has all changed, but at the time there was a real idea that you have to know how to make things. After that, once you knew how to make things, you could then become free to deal with theory and conceptual art and—

03-01:48:39

Pindell: Well, that's interesting. I think at BU, I mean, that we got a very—in other words, we learned how to grind paint, make our own paint. We learned how to do encaustic painting, which I knew nothing about. We made gilded panels after Fra Angelico. I still have it; it's in my—not lobby, but my foyer. It was all learning techniques. But oddly, there was no—like the encaustic I did was a self portrait, but it wasn't. How can I explain it? It was not about creating an image or making a piece, but about knowing the process. So the outcome was not a piece, the outcome was that you had mastered the process.

03-01:49:32

Campbell: And what was Yale like, as opposed to that?

03-01:49:34

Pindell: Yale was entirely different. You were following your own project your own way, and you had various people who were your mentor, your advisor. I had Chaet. Well, oh, I can't remember his first name—Bernard Chaet. This is before Robert or Bob Reed—it's either Robert Reed or Bob Reed, I can't remember—he recently passed away—before he was on the faculty. There was—oh gosh, I can't remember his name—[Lester Johnson]. He was very sweet. [He had a terrible house fire that must have destroyed some of his work.] The person who was hard to deal with was Al Held, and I stayed out of his way.

03-01:50:18

Campbell: That's who I was asking about when I said—I meant to say Al Held, yeah.

03-01:50:22

Pindell: Yeah, I stayed out of his way. He would've just crushed me because I was traditional. He was hard edge and that was that. So I was able to avoid him. I was able to avoid a critique with him, except when we had midterm and final critiques with the whole faculty. I don't remember his saying much about my work, but all I knew was he was mean and I just didn't want to deal with it. [laughs] No.

03-01:50:45

But no, you just were following your own muse, so to speak, and they tried to guide you. They didn't try to make me change away from figurative into abstract, they didn't try to do that.

The course that was the most meaningful was the [Josef] Albers' color course, which was taught by his protégé, Si [Sewell] Sillman, yeah. That was the course I really—[I am writing a course description now for a color course at Stony Brook, where I teach.]

And also photography. I learned darkroom photography. We took that course also with the architects. [Walker Evans] what is the name? A very famous photographer was teaching there, but we had his TA in darkroom practices. We developed our own film and so forth. So I'm glad I had that. I think that's why the *Video Drawings* were not as intimidating a process for me, because I was used to handling a camera. Certainly my *Video Drawings*, I couldn't develop the color film, but I was aware of the process, yeah.

03-01:51:53

Tewes:

So you've been teaching for forty years now?

03-01:51:55

Pindell:

Forty years, yeah.

03-01:51:56

Tewes:

Just about. What has it meant to you to have been able to work with forty years of students coming into the art world?

03-01:52:03

Pindell:

Well, it's different. Every semester is different, every class is different. I don't know how to answer that. Some of them have survived, in terms of being able to find an entry point, but not very many. Our MFA students are very, very good but it's a huge—I remember when I, oh God, when I was doing the statistical report. There was some enormous amount of artists in the New York art world, I would say, New York probably even state. It was something outrageous, like 90,000. It was an enormous amount.

03-01:52:47

Campbell:

Wow!

03-01:52:48

Pindell:

Yeah, it was a giant number. I can't remember. It's in the writings somewhere, the amount of people. The competition was extremely stiff. Some of them went into graphic design afterwards—that is MFA students—even though we didn't teach graphic design. Some of them went to public school teaching. Some of them started teaching in colleges. I don't know.

Some of them—like, we have this guy who, his main focus was on the potato, [laughs] "potato man," we used to call him. And he's showing his work, he's

showing his work. And then there was another student we had who did very well. She got the award from the New York Foundation for the Arts. I think that's what it's called. No, I'm not sure about the name. But anyway, she did these gigantic drawings of corporate figures without heads, and they were charcoal. I always worried about her breathing, because she was not wearing masks. They were the height of the ceiling in her studio, which was maybe eleven feet, twelve feet. They're very powerful, very powerful. You heard about her and then she just kind of disappeared.

03-01:54:08

The group that we have now, I just got an invitation from one of our students who's having a show in someone's private gallery in their apartment in Manhattan. So they're trying all kinds of things to get their work out there.

We are a science university and we don't offer a BFA, so my beginning students often are in other majors. They might be a science major or they might be a computer major, whatever. We do have art majors, but they only get a BA. They don't get a BFA.

03-01:54:46

Campbell:

Yeah, I know the Art History Department's very strong, because Ann Gibson and Katy Siegel and all these people, I think, have taught there over the years.

03-01:54:52

Pindell:

[Katy Siegel is still there.]

03-01:54:52

Campbell:

I think Ann taught there.

03-01:54:54

Pindell:

Yeah, Ann Gibson left many years ago. [Donald] Kuspit left maybe five, six years ago, although I heard he hasn't been well. I haven't heard much about him. I'm trying to think.

03-01:55:05

Campbell:

But now Katy Siegel's there. She came from Hunter [College].

03-01:55:08

Pindell:

Yeah, she's there. I don't know. The department keeps changing, depending on the department head. Our department head is really from Theater, because they closed down Theater, which was ridiculous. They closed Women's Studies, Theater, Comparative Lit—I think it was Comparative Lit or something. There was a language department they closed down. It was kind of an irony because at the same time, it was when [Governor Andrew] Cuomo was saying that middle class—I always resented the fact he said "middle class"—students could go to CUNY [City University of New York] or SUNY [State University of New York] for free, and the deal would be they have to stay in New York state for two years. I was kind of appalled that he didn't say,

"Poor students, as well as middle class students." I don't know why he put that cap on it.

03-01:56:01

But anyway, I don't see as many white students as I did when I first started teaching. I remember that the black male students I had were afraid of the white male students. The white males then—1979—had a lot of swagger.

I don't like Long Island at all. I would never live there. I can't drive, so that eliminates that anyway.

The fact that this president wanted this diversity seminar, and I was hoping he invited the police to do that—

03-01:56:40

Campbell:

Yeah, I wanted to ask you about that. Why?

03-01:56:43

Pindell:

Why? Because it's Long Island, and to make it really clear that the president does not tolerate any kind of racism. I think it was very important that he made a stance, because especially under Trump, some people are coming out of the woodwork. And being on Long Island, where the Klan is active—hang on, I just have to stretch—I think it gave fair warning that they would not tolerate this attitude on campus.

I remember several years ago, and I don't know, I never knew if the person was white or black—I assumed he was black because this young woman said, "Oh, there was this guy with a gun." He was hungry; he took a sandwich. Meanwhile, the whole campus was on lockdown. They never found him, they never found him, whatever.

So no, I think that President Stanley did this was very important, because it also—if there are any faculty that are kind of iffy—because when I joined them, there were some faculty that weren't—I mean, I was in that car accident, and not one of them showed up at the hospital. I was in a local hospital. The only one who showed up was the woman who drove the car. Her husband was head of the Fine Arts Center [at Stony Brook]. Actually, he died recently.

I think it was a very bold and brave statement to have that seminar, because Long Island is terrible. I can't remember whether they've turned blue in the last election. I think they went Democratic in the last election, and Staten Island stayed red, I think. Or it's reversed; I can't remember which. But no, I'm going to write him a note and thank him so much, and I'm going to explain what happens to Brian when he tries to pick me up in the back of the school, in terms of the handicap van. I think I mentioned Carl Pope, one of the black faculty [members] who quit because he couldn't find housing, unless he sent someone white. He couldn't go to his gym without being heckled and

harassed. So he left, went to Chicago. He gave up a tenure-track job, which I think was sad, yeah.

03-01:59:12

Tewes:

Is there anything else you'd like to add about teaching in particular?

03-01:59:19

Pindell:

Well, maybe when you teach, think of the best teachers you had in the past in your own life and what was it about them you liked, and it might be something that you can emulate. You can give the students the kind of comfort that Walter Murch gave me. He just sat down with all of us individually and just listened, and lovingly appreciated us being there. I have never had a teacher like that ever, except this one time. And [Harry] Kramer, who taught painting, he didn't try to force you to do a certain style, and he was very peaceful and quiet. Reed Kay taught the painting encaustic and gilding. He was ferocious but he was not singling anyone out. He was doing that to everybody, yeah. So, just try to think of the good experiences that you've had in teaching or as a student in being taught, and try to work with that experience. And for heaven's sakes, don't go on an ego trip with the students, that "you have to obey me."

We have one faculty—he's not with us anymore—where a student was painting and he was talking to them, and he just said, "You stop painting when I'm talking to you." To me, that is so ridiculous. Also, the same person said to a student who said or called him [by his last name]. He said, "No, it's Professor so and so." It's interesting because he is the least productive in the whole faculty. He retired eventually. But just to use the students to boost your ego, I think, is really wrong. I think a lot of that happens with the male teachers, yeah.

We had another teacher who couldn't tolerate disability. He couldn't tolerate women who had children, where they had to maybe leave early because they have to pick up their child. I'm just not like that.

I have a student now who's very disabled and her son is very disabled, and she doesn't drive. I don't know how she drags everything on the bus all the time. And finally some of the teachers were starting to be really mean to her, so I sent her over to Disability Services because what they'll do is provide a letter which protects her. She's a woman of color, also. I was appalled by the way she was being treated. So in a sense, the fact that I use Disability Services when I need to—thank God I knew they were there because these professors were giving her just a ridiculously hard time, yeah. And she was clearly disabled. She brought her son in once to take him to Disability Services. He is very extremely autistic, with very, very obvious behavioral problems. She's a single mother.

03-02:02:46

Anyway, have sympathy to the poor students—they look up to you—and give them a positive experience. There's no need to use your ego to kind of crush this person into obeying, in terms of every brush stroke must look like your work or they have to do it your way all the time.

03-02:03:07

Tewes:

All right. Well you know, when we were speaking earlier you mentioned that you don't *have* to publish. Being a well-established artist and being a teacher, there is no reason for you to need to continue to publish and give talks. But I'm wondering—

03-02:03:25

Pindell:

Oh, giving talks is—

03-02:03:26

Campbell:

I think it's important to publish and give talks.

03-02:03:28

Tewes:

Well, I'm wondering how you think those connect, and why it's important to you.

03-02:03:31

Pindell:

Well, it's just the way I function is: if I have strong feelings about something, I'll publish something. My main publisher, Midmarch, she's not going to survive. I don't know. If someone wants to write, they should. I haven't said to myself, "I'm not going to write again." I haven't said that, but it's taking a different form now. Because I want to or I have concerns about our present government, I want to be able to send that out without giving them something to get back at me. With him, you have to be careful, you just have to be careful. I mean, the strongest thing in terms of publishing that I have felt has been about looking at diversity in the art world. That's why I did those statistics. And the whole Kara Walker thing, I felt very strongly about that. I haven't felt very strongly about anything since then, in terms of it ratcheting up my—I'm very involved now with getting my own work done, which maybe it's a good thing. And I keep day journals. I have day pages, yeah.

03-02:04:52

Campbell:

With the daybooks, yeah.

03-02:04:53

Pindell:

Yeah, I keep day pages. With The Shed project, I am doing Maquette or drawings, because it's evolving. That one with the sharks, I decided last week to put a boat at the top, on the wall but with a Plexiglas shelf. It's a beautiful model that I have from maybe fifteenth, sixteenth century, a boat. Yeah, it's a beautiful model. People will get the point fast. I don't know. I just find doing day pages helps, especially as you get older and your memory gets weird. Although I'm finding more young people are saying—I'm saying, "Ugh, my memory." They say, "Well, me, too. I can't remember anything." [laughs] So, anyway, is there anything else?

03-02:05:47

Tewes: Yeah, just a few more questions here. I'm wondering how you would like your work to be remembered.

03-02:05:56

Pindell: I think I want people to remember the work as my sharing knowledge and beauty. That sounds weird. But sharing knowledge, when I learned about something that really riled me up and I wanted to either write it out or paint it out, I wanted it to be a learning experience, that particular kind of work. And in terms of beauty, I want people to be moved. Like one of my students, when I last saw her last class—she's an Asian student and she has a model's body, she looks like a fashion model. She's always into like the color lenses and all this whole bit. She has a beautiful operatic voice and so she's taking opera, and she wanted to rehearse between classes in my room. I was in tears. Her voice was exquisite. I want my paintings that have beauty to have that kind of voice where it moves people, where you're uplifted from the daily drudgery of life. But her voice, oh my God, I couldn't believe it, so beautiful. It was a French song. When she performed it for her teacher, her teacher cried, yeah, incredible. And she's very talented as an artist.

03-02:07:22

Campbell: What's her name?

03-02:07:23

Pindell: She calls herself Amy. [She is an Honors student.] I'd have to let you know what her name is, because she doesn't like use her Asian name. She always signs "Amy," and then she might sometimes stick at either end of it her Chinese name. She is from China. Literally, she looks like a fashion model. She's very thin and very beautiful hair. She, of course, wears wigs when she wants to sing. She's very theatrical. She always has on these blue-gray lenses, but then she found—because she was having eyelashes—and then she got allergic to the adhesive and whatever. She's at the age where you want to look gorgeous, yeah. But her voice was just exquisite.

03-02:08:10

Campbell: That's really great.

03-02:08:11

Pindell: Yeah, it was. I told her, "Anytime you want to practice, you can come into my classroom and practice."

03-02:08:19

Tewes: A nice soundtrack for all the working students.

03-02:08:21

Pindell: I know, I know.

03-02:08:24

Tewes: Finally, how would you like to be remembered?

03-02:08:28

Pindell:

That I survived. [laughs] That after all I've been through—I can't go into all that stuff, it's too terrible—but that I survived and that someone came along to help me and that was Garth and the gallery. The whole gallery is totally supportive, and I'm just thrilled that that's happened, that I've lived long enough to see that and experience it. It's like it's—what's the word? It's inspired me to do another body of work.

03-02:09:03

Tewes:

That's great, a rebirth.

03-02:09:04

Pindell:

A rebirth, yes, that's a good way of putting it. It's a rebirth, yeah.

03-02:09:08

Tewes:

Well, is there anything else, Andrianna or Howardena, you would like to add at this point?

03-02:09:14

Campbell:

No, I just would like to say, I'd like to thank you for these last three days. They've been very enlightening and elucidating, and just hearing about your practice and some of the thoughts you've been having about different things you've doing, and then the fruition of many, many years of work, but your continued—I don't know—working in the studio is really an inspiration. So, I'd like to thank you for taking the time to come and talk to us.

03-02:09:41

Pindell:

Thank you.

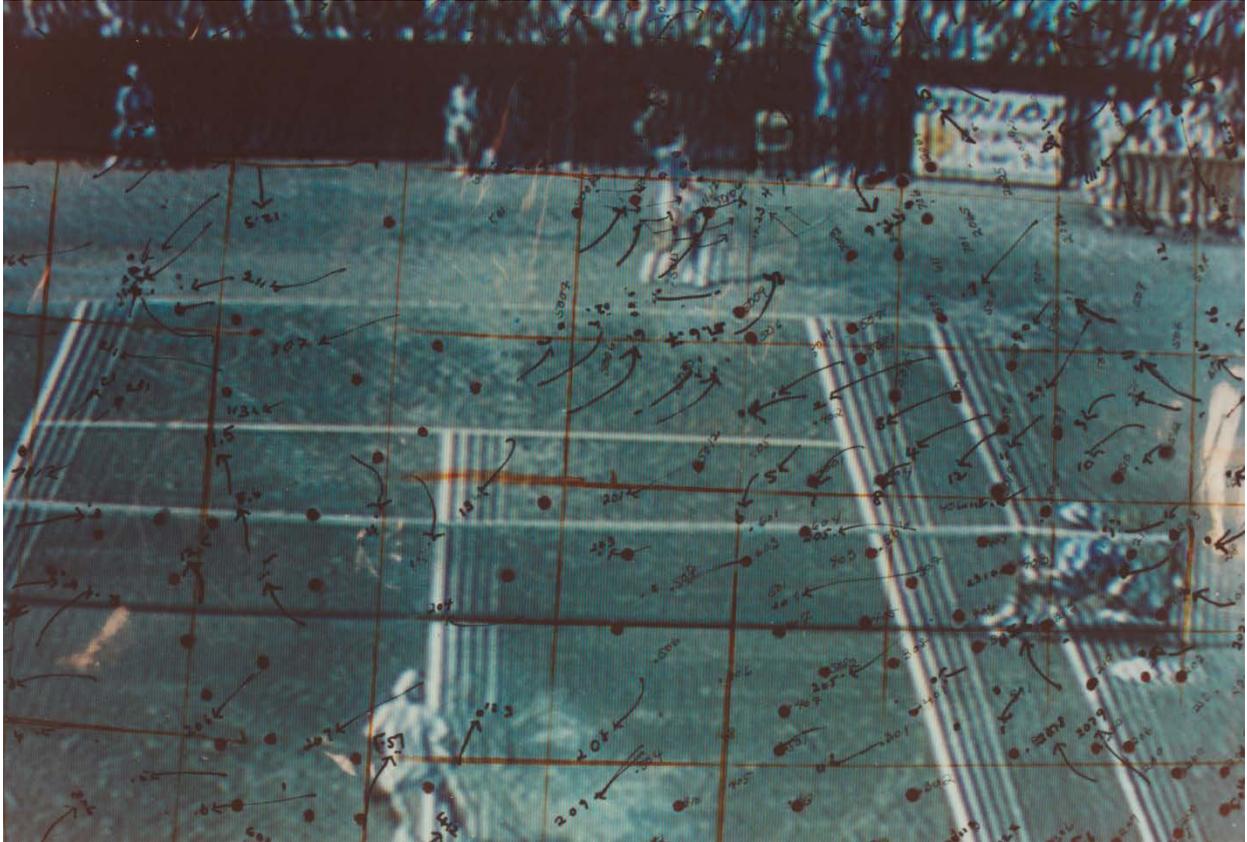
03-02:09:42

Tewes:

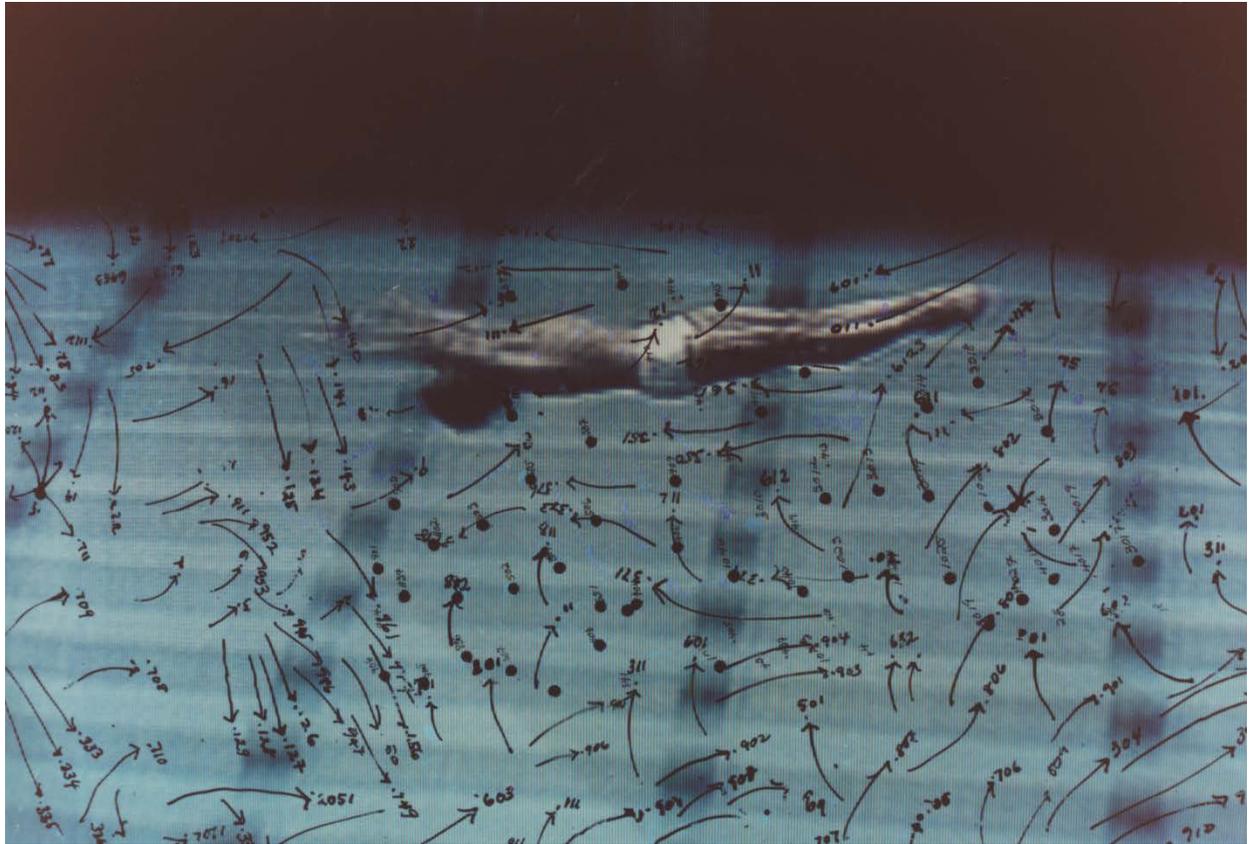
Thank you both so much.

[End of Interview]

Appendix A: Images



Howardena Pindell, *Video Drawings: Tennis*, 1975



Howardena Pindell, *Video Drawings: Swimming*, 1975



Howardena Pindell, *Video Drawings: Baseball*, 1975



Howardena Pindell, *Free, White and 21*, 1980



Howardena Pindell, *Night Flight*, 2015-2016

ⁱ The catalog won the George Wittenborn Award for the best art book of 2018.

ⁱⁱ One of Karen Blixen's pennames was Isak Dinesen.

ⁱⁱⁱ A friend of Pindell's, the sculptor Helen Ramsaran, was supposed to share a train compartment in Italy. When a Japanese woman saw Helen in the same train compartment, she started screaming and screaming. The conductor was kind enough to give Helen another train compartment. Helen said the woman continued to scream even after Helen left the compartment. This was in 2018.

^{iv} Jesuit priests were with Columbus and kept records of what they saw.