

**A C T U P**  
**ORAL HISTORY**  
**P R O J E C T**

A PROGRAM OF  
**MIX – THE NEW YORK LESBIAN &  
GAY EXPERIMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL**

Interviewee: **Eric Rhein**

Interview Number: **164**

Interviewer: **Sarah Schulman**

Date of Interview: **January 25, 2014**

00:06:45

**JAMES WENTZY: Jim, weren't you cold today outside?**

**JIM HUBBARD: Yeah.**

**SARAH SCHULMAN: Yes.**

**JW: If you stood in front of that light – you'd warm up.**

**JH: Well I'm actually going to move over there**

ERIC RHEIN: Do you want me to shut that door for now? Or  
leave it open?

**JW: No I like the door open. It's the light actually, I would  
rather Jim stand in front of the light.**

ER: Do you want to turn it off?

**JH: Okay, well, just a sec. Getting confused here.**

**SS: Is that – ? Eric, careful you're attached. Is that a model, or  
is that a, a person who's actually getting an IV.**

ERIC RHEIN: This is an old boyfriend of mine – Ken. And I  
could tell you about it later, if you want.

**SS: Talk about it later, yeah.**

ER: I did a lot of photographs, also, that time period.

**SS: Okay, great.**

**JH: Okay, where's the bathroom?**

ER: It's down the hall, to the left. Go all the way down to the left.

**SS: Does he need a key or anything?**

ER: No.

**JW: They're not afraid artists will take the bathroom? Is the heat 24 hours a day?**

ER: I don't think it's on on the weekends. Like the elevator.

**JW: I remember with P.S. 1, they used to turn off the heat at 5 o'clock. Six people that were living there illegally kind of got cold.**

ER: When were you at P.S. 1? Did you have a studio there?

**JW: '80 – '82. Just before I moved to the basement of 12 Wooster Street.**

ER: They don't have studios there anymore, do they?

**JW: I guess you have to be a performer. Guess you can't get an Amtrak Rail Pass either unless you're a –**

**SS: Was Alanna [Heiss] running it then?**

**JW: Yeah. Two years after that.**

ER: The interview, it's chronological?

**SS: The interview?**

ER: Yeah. Your questions are –

**SS: Oh. We start at the beginning of your life.**

ER: Okay.

**SS: And we go all the way through.**

ER: Okay.

**SS: But the focus is on ACT UP.**

ER: Right.

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: Okay.

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: Or things that I – would feel are – advocacy –

JW: At one with.

**SS: Well, it's basically ACT UP.**

ER: Okay.

**SS: The focus is ACT UP, yeah.**

00:10:00

ER: Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay.

**SS: What do you do if you need to take a nap?**

ER: Um – the massage table.

**SS: Ah.**

ER: Yeah.

**SS: Okay.**

ER: Yeah.

**JW: Does it vibrate?**

ER: It doesn't vibrate, no. No. If I don't want to, if something makes me uncomfortable to answer –

**SS: Then you say you don't want to answer.**

ER: – and it gets edited out?

**SS: No, there's no editing. It's just a transcript and a tape.**

ER: Okay.

**JW: Or we could give you dark glasses.**

ER: Okay. Okay.

**SS: I gotta tell you, honestly, no one has ever refused to answer a question.**

ER: Okay.

**SS: And you're like number 161.**

ER: Okay, no, no I understand that. Just more – I mean, it would be things I would feel like would put me in jeopardy.

**SS: Well then, don't bring it up.**

ER: Okay.

**JW: Sarah's Masterful at this, making you comfortable.**

**SS: Basically we're doing the history of ACT UP, right?**

ER: Right.

**SS: So we're just trying to understand what people did in ACT UP. What they knew, what they think about what they did.**

ER: Okay, does it go into what things they are continuing to do? Even if it's –

**SS: Whatever you want to do. We'll see where it goes.**

ER: Okay, okay.

**SS: Are we ready?**

**JW: Yup, 20 seconds.**

**SS: Don't worry about it.**

**JH: Do you need me to block this light?**

ER: Do you want me to turn it off or – ?

**JH: I'll turn it off.**

**JW: You can turn it off.**

**JH: Is that better?**

**JW: That's better.**

**SS: You just look at me. So the way each interview starts is the person says their name, their age, today's date, and where we are.**

ER: Okay. Okay.

**SS: Go ahead.**

ER: I'm Eric Rhein. And I'm 52 years old. It's 2014 – January 25<sup>th</sup>. And we're in my studio in the East Village.

**SS: No, actually we're in Long Island City.**

ER: Oh, that's right.

**SS: Ha ha ha! We're in your beautiful studio, filled with your beautiful things.**

ER: Actually, I guess I still feel like I'm in the East Village studio, because that's where my heart is, and it's where my apartment is.

**SS: Right.**

ER: And up until I was in this space – I had a studio where my first apartment, when I got, in 1980, '81, was. And a lot of the space is actually has

the furnishings of that apartment. So I often refer to being an East Village artist, which I am. Yeah.

**SS: Okay. So where were you born?**

ER: I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1961. My family is from Kentucky, though. My mother grew up in small-town Appalachia – Hindman, Kentucky, near Hazard. About 15 minutes from Hazard.

**SS: Oh.**

ER: And my father grew up across the river from Cincinnati, in Dayton, Kentucky. We moved around every two or three years through the beginning of my childhood, up until the fifth grade. Then we settled in New Paltz. But going home to visit relatives in Kentucky every summer was very much the sort of grounding. So I think of myself as being from Kentucky, and have my roots there, and –

**SS: But what is your accent? It's not Kentucky.**

ER: It's an amalgamation of things – insecurity being one of them, probably. I had a Swedish boyfriend for nine years, from about 1982 – well, we technically stopped being boyfriends in about '90, '91, but we continued being very much a part of each other's family. So he's from – probably – his Swedish intonation. And then during that time I also was around Japanese people that had infiltrated and come to the United States in the '80s, these very fashion-forward young people, who didn't speak very much English. And one of them was my

00:15:00

assistant, and became my lover. And I, through that time together, pretty much taught him English, so I think that's spacing out of words.

**SS: So it's like Swedish English for Japanese people, is your – okay! Okay.**

ER: Yeah, yeah.

**SS: So what did your parents do?**

ER: My father taught art education. And up until he got cut from the budget at New Paltz, when I was about, I guess entering junior high school. That's what took us, like every two years, we had to move from university campus to university. My sister and I would go with him and do ceramics and printmaking, and had a very sort of free reign of the art studios at a really young age.

And then my mother, about that time, when my father stopped working as an art teacher, teaching college students how to be art teachers; she went into teaching English in high school; and eventually got her master's as a English teacher, in a valley school system.

**SS: So you were raised to be an artist.**

ER: I was, I was. Yeah. I made art really seriously from as long as my parents can remember. And it came from a very soulful, authentic place. I know that that's what's carried me through, into – and certainly, through my history with HIV and I think is instrumental in my survival.

**SS: We're fixing your microphone.**

**JW: Can you also get the light on the stand outside the door?**

**JH: You want the stand on it?**

**JW: The light on it. They can keep going, but we can set up the light.**

**SS: No, we'll wait because it's distracting. Okay, we're going to add another light.**

**JH: Where do you want it?**

**JW: Right here behind you. It's snowing out.**

**SS: I always thought you were German.**

ER: Oh really?

**SS: Oh god. He came here 20 years ago from Germany.**

ER: I'll weave that into my mythology, somewhere along the line.

**SS: You're from New Paltz, Germany.**

ER: Right.

**SS: *Neue Paltz*.**

ER: *Neue Paltz*?

**SS: Now we're good. That was Jim.**

**JW: There's a power strip down here, does it work?**

**SS: Does the power strip work?**

**JW: Right here –**

ER: It does work. Yeah.

**JW: It's an LED light. It will be just one moment. I'm still rolling, so –**

**SS: Okay, we've been doing this for 13 years.**

ER: Yeah.

**JH: And one of thee days we'll get it right.**

**JW: We should stay in bed when it snows – has to be turned on?**

**JH: On the side. Yeah it's on.**

**JW: Is that special?**

ER: I also kind of think slowly. So that has to do with my condition also.

**SS: Well, it creates more mystery.**

**JW: You can go ahead and –**

**SS: There's a little Three Stooges element to all of this. I have to admit.**

**JH: But that's true of all –**

**JW: I'm still rolling, so pardon the distraction.**

**SS: That's fine.**

**JW: Well you're born again.**

**SS: He was never born again, right?**

ER: Like a born-again Christian?

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: I've been born again many times, but not as a Christian.

**SS: Right. Okay, so you knew from the beginning of your life that you were an artist. And your family recognized that.**

ER: Yeah, they did. I was very lucky with that. It wasn't that they actively encouraged it; but it just was. My parents were very much of the '60s, so I grew up on college campuses during the '60s. And there wasn't any differentiation, really, between, like, the kids and the parents. We were included. Except, obviously, when my parents would – the evening would turn into more, like, real adult things, and they might be smoking pot, which I think there was a bit of that. And the kids would go and have what we called rock parties, our version of rock parties.

**SS: What was a rock party?**

ER: For us, rock parties were hovering near the black-light posters, and incense, and listening to music, and eating candy.

**SS: Sounds great.**

ER: Yeah. Yeah.

**SS: So when did you leave New Paltz?**

ER: I left New Paltz in 1980. I graduated high school half a year early. I realized that I had enough credits to finish early. And there was a toss-up between staying and being in a school play, or taking this man, Kermit Love, up on an offer to come and be his apprentice. He designed Big Bird for Sesame Street, and had a house upstate.

**SS: His name was Kermit?**

ER: Kermit, yeah, Kermit Love.

**SS: Was Kermit the Frog named after him?**

ER: It was, it was.

**SS: Okay.**

ER: Yeah, yeah. And I had started going to his house on the weekends before I moved to New York, because he had a house upstate. And he had heard from a friend of mine who had come – we were in a ballet company together in high school. And Peter had come before me, and told Kermit about these puppets that I had made. So our weekend friendships and his sort of tutelage, and taking me under his wing ended up with this invitation to come to New York and work for him, designing – well, first, it was to help recreate the *Parade* figures for the Picasso retrospective, for the ballet Picasso did for Ballet Russes. And also, I was in charge of developing butterfly puppets for a New York City Ballet production that Balanchine did for PBS, called *L'enfant et les sortilèges*

So that was my introduction, really, to the East Village. Well, that's not actually true. – when I was six. So that was like a second – my move to the East Village.

**SS: So you were in high school, you were an artist, you were in the ballet troupe, and you were making puppets. So you were gay, gay, gay, right?**

ER: I was, I was.

**SS: And was that okay?**

ER: Well, I was, but – I didn't really – well – honestly, I mean, I – I think I'm more bisexual, but I set out living a life as a gay person, which is actually absolutely fine with me. And coming to New York – I mean, I actually happened to be driven here by a man that I had an affair with, who was one of my ballet teachers. And he picked me up at my parents' house in the mountains, in his red pickup truck. It was really very, very dear of him to do that, and sort of shepherd me into Manhattan, and made sure that I was okay with the place I was staying.

**SS: So you have the classic gay mentorship entrée to Manhattan story.**

ER: I do, I do.

**SS: Right to the top.**

ER: I do.

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: I do.

**SS: It's amazing.**

ER: I do. I mean, not all of it was lovely. I mean, some of it, in my green state, was kind of traumatizing. It was a rather sophisticated group that I was shepherd into, and some of the people were not necessarily – you know, had the right place in their hearts for this very beautiful young man who was highly

creative and needed more – sort of a brotherhood. I mean, actually, even Kermit wasn't necessarily the most nurturing person, in all. So I had to find my way through the years.

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**SS: What became of him, by the way?**

ER: Well, he lived to be an older person. He died probably within the last five years.

**SS: Oh, okay.**

ER: Yeah.

**SS: So you're living in the East Village, it's 1980?**

ER: Um hm.

**SS: And you're working in these fabulous places with these incredible people.**

ER: Right, right.

**SS: Right.**

ER: Right. I met Bill Stelling – one of the gallerists on the Fun Gallery, with Patti Astor. And he was actually making boutique fabrics for the butterflies that the dancers would wear. And I'd been in about my 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> apartment in the course of a year. And Bill and I became romantically involved, or sexually involved, and friends. And he invited me to move in with him, into his apartment in the East Village for awhile, to give me some grounding.

I was in my freshman year at School of Visual Arts. Because I had gotten a scholarship, a full scholarship. At that time, the school was offering 12 scholarships to graduating seniors, and I was lucky to get one.

I was actually navigating many different worlds.

**SS: So when did you first become aware of AIDS?**

ER: I was living with, at that time, my partner of nine years, Mats Gustafson, who's an illustrator and painter. I certainly had gay friends, and gay artist friends, but I was a little bit – actually, that wasn't the first time.

The first time, I was living in my first apartment, on 14<sup>th</sup> Street, between Avenue A and B. And actually, I was living with a woman. It was the first relationship I had with a woman, the only one. Her name was Trish. She's since changed it to Alexis. She was 10 years older, and I was supporting us on my student-loan money. Because the, the landlord was a slumlord, the building was falling apart, and we lived on the top floor, so we were basically living in a little corner of the apartment. Because some of the tenants organized a rent strike, we got to know our neighbors. And one evening, a man knocked on the door named Jim Jones. And Jim and John became really close friends of ours. Jim was in a study at that time for, I guess it was ARC, or maybe GRID, at that time.

So that was the first time I heard that there was something going on. But I kind of – took a long time for me to really understand what was happening. I lived a lot in a fog, even through my teen to adult years. So it was

awhile before, like, the pieces started coming together. I didn't really go to bars or gay haunts where a lot was being talked about, and didn't read newspapers or magazines.

And then, also some friends of theirs, of Jim and John's, also who would come up when I was visiting them, and showed lesions that they had, and compare notes on what might be happening. This is before it was identified and called AIDS.

In 1982, I met Mats. And through going with him to clubs and going out within the fashion world more than the art world, there was a bit of a bubble around us, in some ways.

**SS: What clubs did you go to?**

ER: We went to – we went to Area, Danceteria; well, I knew people, actually – it's not really true that there was a bubble. I think it was just more my fog, to be honest. Because I was also leading dual lives, with Mats within the fashion world, and his crowd; and then my artist friends in the East Village art world, like –

**SS: They weren't that separate, at that time.**

ER: Well, they weren't that separate. But they were separate for me, because Mats didn't come along with me in this other –

**SS: Okay.**

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ER: – in these other groups. That's true. I was very close friends with Huck Snyder –

**SS: Okay.**

ER: – and he was my connection to a lot of people in the East Village art world. And through him, there was David Wojnarowicz – he was part of our circle of friends, and he navigated a lot of different worlds, and Judy Glantzman. Huck had this event at his house called the Grand Salon, and invited artist friends to come and hang their work, and people would come and congregate, and hang their work, and celebrate. It was very much of a happening.

**SS: Where was his apartment?**

ER: His apartment is over what was the Waverly Theater at that time, which is – what is it now?

**SS: The IFC.**

ER: Yeah.

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: Yeah.

**SS: Oh, so David lived over one theater — he lived over the Yiddish theater — and Huck lived over the Waverly.**

ER: Yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly. Exactly. I hadn't thought of that before, but it's true. Yeah. Yeah. And Huck and I were lovers from that time until he died, off and on, in between and during relationships that he had and relationships that I had.

**SS: So when did you think that you might be infected?**

ER: I tested positive in 1987. But I very well could have tested positive from even my most early experiences. There are times when I remember getting the chills and being quite ill. I mean, it might have been after my relationship with Trish, though, because I don't think she ever became positive. But of course, you don't know by that.

I was with Mats when I tested positive. The reason why I tested positive is because I went to Dr. [Dennis] Passer, who had a clinic in the West Village. And my platelets were really low. And again, I – I was pretty conscious of it by then, because we had a really close friend, Roger Schrader, who died. He was our first friend who died a year before. And Roger and Mats were extremely close, and I was really fond of Roger as well. So there was an inclination that there was more going on I should be aware of at the time.

**SS: So what did you do after you tested positive?**

ER: Like immediately after, what did I do immediately after?

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: I felt – well, before I knew that I was positive, I went and had the test. And my mother was turning 50. And because there was such a long time between when you tested and when you got the results — for us, I think it was several – a month or more? — Mats had arranged for my mother and I to go to Paris for her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, and then go to Sweden to visit his family. And my mother and I are extremely close. So she was filled in on what was potentially going on, what was going on. So the whole time that we were there, it was

colored by the experience that we were having of not knowing what was happening. And I wasn't actually very well then, and I think I was probably going through some reactions to some exposure. And I was really allergic to some cats that we came in contact with and throwing up. But it might have been also nerves.

When we got back, I called Dr. Passer. The test results were positive.

My mother went into action immediately, and started calling resources like GMHC, and went and visited them, and also found an interpreter, Japanese interpreter, for our friend \_\_\_\_\_, who was my Japanese friend at that time.

00:35:00 So I have – also a pretty strong spiritual center and drew upon that, and also that connection to my artwork that is tapped into that source. And – that kind of set me personally on a quest to figure out what I could learn from the experience, and how I could work with my life to improve it and unblock any kinds of emotional traps that were happening. And I had heard from a Swedish friend of ours, Aya, who is a very eccentric Finnish woman who'd come to New York, about things like juicing and fasting and everything from magnet therapy and all kinds of diverse esoteric therapies. Because she was in New York at the time, helping Antonio Lopez and his partner, Juan, because she was very close with them. And though we weren't supposed to know why she was there and

helping them and staying with them, everyone kind of knew what was happening. So she started treating us as well, in all these alternative therapies.

Mats falsely got the news that he was positive as well. But then we went down to the doctor to have a consultation, Dr. Passer, he then apologized and said indeed he wasn't positive. But at first, he set on a path to kind of support me, with these alternative therapies, and got the best Norwalk juicer that he could find, and he paid for consultations to have a telephone conversation with this man who was said to be able to channel electrical magnetic beds underneath the ground to make sure that your bed was in the right section of the room, and various things like that. Various things like that.

**SS: You covered all your aces.**

ER: We covered all our aces, yeah.

**JW: With tin foil?**

ER: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: Yeah. One quest led to another. I'd also developed a friendship with Ross Bleckner shortly before I tested positive. I met him at the, I think it was the Tunnel. And I was wearing this little heraldic brooch that I had made out of brocade fabrics and old buttons. It was very reminiscent of some paintings that he had done that a friend of mine had shown me. So I introduced myself to Ross, and we kind of bonded over similar iconography. It was before I – he knew that I was positive, we developed this friendship. But after, when he

found out, he sent me to a woman who was a healer. I think she was an acupuncturist. And she actually didn't want to work with me, because she, I think, was – kind of burnt and scared from having lost some people that she had worked with. And she sent me to another woman for acupuncture, who told this man Abelardo about me. And I got this call from this man Abelardo, who called this 27-year-old who he didn't know, and told him about the Healing Circle. And I went to the Healing Circle.

**SS: So if you could just explain for people who don't know what the Healing Circle was.**

ER: Yeah. Well, the Healing Circle – a healing circle is a group of people who came together – at that time, it was in a Catholic church — I think it was a Catholic church — in the basement. It was on 17<sup>th</sup> Street. And on Tuesday nights, there was a group of anywhere from a hundred, hundred and fifty or more people who gathered with the idea that they would work on self-healing and group healing, very much inspired from the work of Louise Hay, who wrote this book called *Heal Your Life*, feeling that she could – she claimed to – I hesitate, because I don't want to get anything wrong. People, forgive me if I do. I'm not going to say anything. I might say that Louise Hay claimed to heal herself from cancer through addressing ways of affirming things in her body and loving yourself and loving your life, and addressing things that might block your abilities to – your psychological abilities that might affect parts of your body.

So Louise Hay was one of the influences of Healing Circle as well as spiritual teacher Ram Dass and Stephen Levine; and Marianne Williamson was part of the group that would come in. And they would have group encounters and meditations and people would do Sufi dancing and there'd be trance channelers that would come in and channel entities from other lives and other worlds.

**SS: And there was this Israeli guy, right? Samuel.**

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ER: Samuel Kirschner. Yeah, Samuel Kirschner, at that time, was kind of the –

**SS: You know what? Let me just ask you; is there a problem with the noise from the hallway?**

**JW: No.**

**SS: Okay, great. Just tell us about Samuel –**

ER: Samuel Kirschner was at that time – really the leader of this circle. But I don't know whether they would think in that term. He was the facilitator, the main facilitator. I actually became involved with Samuel, as well. And that kind of put me in the center of this whole group within the Healing Circle. And through the Healing Circle, I met also Cynthia O'Neal, who went on to be the director, Manhattan Center for Living, which was a Marianne Williamson group, in the late '80s. And then Cynthia O'Neal went on to develop Friends in Deed, founded Friends in Deed – this other spiritually based group to help people with life-threatening illnesses and caregivers.

**SS: Do you think that being in that circle helped you live?**

ER: I do. I really do. Not necessarily that circle per se, but my quest for self-healing and learning, and, and care. I think that there is something energetically that really helped me. Also just unblocking things that would go back to childhood for me, leading a more expansive life. If it didn't help me, if it's not why I directly survived, it certainly was a part of me living a more full life within that.

But my artwork – would be equally or more so part of it, but they're also very much connected.

**SS: Because Louise Hay has a complex legacy. I think people feel very conflicted about her.**

ER: I, I, I do, I do as well. I mean, I feel conflicted about all of those experiences. And I think that for myself, it became really apparent that it was up to me how I utilized these conversations and how I utilized these tools. And there are people, there are people, certainly, within the Healing Circle and Manhattan Center for Living and Friends in Deed, as well as other places, that survived, and those who didn't. And for myself, as I started to see friends of mine die who were very seriously on these paths — and also included more radical medical therapy — die, I realized that it wasn't a question of healing with an agenda to survive; but healing on all kinds of different levels. Not having that goal as being the survival of one's life.

**SS: So when did you come to ACT UP?**

ER: I found out about ACT UP, through, actually, through the Healing Circle, and through my artist friends. And it was always kind of like – peripherally. And I – I’ve not been that much of a group persona. So I was sort of looking from the background, being inspired more from the background.

I became friends with Eric Sawyer, actually through a benefit for Friends in Deed. Because I had donated a work of my art to a benefit for Friends in Deed. This very strikingly handsome and dynamic man and I started talking. And he invited me to – well, first we went on a date, also in a truck. And I think it became – sort of apparent that we weren’t going to – do anything further than dinner and conversation and being comrades. But he took me on to some kind of dance and performance party of ACT UP. I saw other people that I knew from Friends in Deed, actually, there. Maybe at that time it was Manhattan Center for Living in a group, too.

**SS: Who were some of the people who were in both?**

ER: There’s this guy, Tom. And I don’t remember his last name, actually.

00:45:00

**JW: Cunningham?**

ER: Yeah.

**SS: Wait you’re plugged in.**

ER: This man, he had really long hair, really beautiful long hair, and he was a –

**SS: That’s Tom, right?**

ER: – performance artist. Is that Tom? And –

**SS: Tom was not a performance – was Tom Cunningham a performance.**

**JW: I can't say.**

**SS: Okay – she'll come back later. Was Tom Cunningham, he was not a performance artist. He did have long hair, though. Okay. Anyway –**

**JH: Tom, performance artist?**

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: Victor Mendolia. He was initially a friend of mine when he had Limbo Lounge in the East Village, and he was one of the guys from Limbo Lounge. I don't remember why, actually, Victor and I re-met after his departure from Limbo Lounge. But we became involved in '89, about the time I was getting ready to step out of my boyfriend relationship with Mats – and also got involved. And he took me to Fire Island – he had a house in Cherry Grove. And there was another man that I met – Jeffrey, his friend Jeff – who's still alive. And later on, I became friends with David Nelson, through Visual AIDS, helping co-found the Visual AIDS Archive Project.

**SS: It's interesting, because I – you usually think of the Healing Circle as a separate sphere from ACT UP. But there were people who overlapped.**

ER: There were.

**SS: But not many, right?**

ER: There were.

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: There were. There were. I mean, there were conversations – by some of the people at the Healing Circle, I think probably as well as some of the people at ACT UP, that had very strong ideas against the other approaches. I didn't feel that way, except I knew that for myself, I wasn't gravitating towards the anger that I felt at ACT UP. I felt that it was – not that I was afraid of it, but I was so much on this quest of loving myself and loving other people, and healing. And at that time, I didn't necessarily see the possibility within that anger. I've since become much more angry, in touch with my anger, and fear, and grief that that drives. I mean, very, very, very much so.

I remember probably also 1992, or maybe before, I went to a gay pride parade. And it was the same year that people involved with Visual AIDS — Harvey Weiss and Frank Moore and some other people — did the beautiful red ribbon costumes in the parade, which is very sort of whimsical ACT UP – I said “ACT UP” because I feel that they're kind of one and the same, but it's a different kind of approach. This is the same year that that was going on, the sort of like joyful caravan of a display. There was this procession of men and women in black, as I remember, then almost. In my mind, there was this synchronization of footsteps, but probably not, but it was like that. And then hailing ACT UP. And I was extremely, I was extremely moved. And I was going to say proud, but I don't

like that word, to begin with, and it had nothing to do I was going to say also, it had nothing to do with me, but it did, and I felt very connected, and very grateful, and kind of connected. And that – like, I think that that was one of the main moments that I got, that I got it – and felt – purposeful – and –

**SS: Yeah –**

00:50:00 ER: – so there was two – thinking about – what I could contribute; like those two worlds, which I was been a part of, and now feel like I'm holding in my own work, in my own life was a good recognition – because I've been searching for names and dates, and trying to remember, and feeling self-conscious about wanting to get it accurate, and – but in general, you know, it comes down to the essence of what it's about.

**SS: Yeah. I think we all inspired, everybody inspired each other quite a bit at that time.**

ER: Um hm.

**SS: Yeah. – So let's talk about your time in ACT UP. What did you do in ACT UP?**

ER: Well, I actually feel more that I'm carrying on a legacy of ACT UP through my everyday life and my work as an artist, as a co-member of ACT UP, without necessarily naming that. But I feel even more, over the years, that I am a member of ACT UP. I'm not, maybe, known as that, but I feel that.

**SS: Did you go to the Monday-night meetings, or –**

ER: I went to some of the Monday-night meetings.

**SS: Do you have any memories from that?**

ER: The main memory I have are more recent-year memories, of, like, when Larry Kramer, over the last several years, tried to get a re-initiation of ACT UP going, and was calling on the – wanting to raise a military. And there was an action in reference to one of the officers of the military, making some comments about gays, and we congregated in Times Square. And there was an ACT UP – so there's sort of these – starts to want to have like an ACT UP now, continually. Which I've tapped into, but I'm much more like a lone – not a lone wolf, because through my work as an artist, I have my own actions. So I feel like there's a heritage of ACT UP that goes into what I'm doing, just like there's a heritage of the Healing Circle and Visual AIDS, and this intermarriage between inspiration that Visual AIDS has gotten –

**SS: Interesting – we'll talk about your artwork in a second.**

**But I just wanted to just focus on anything having to do with ACT UP –**

ER: Okay.

**SS: – any actions that you went to –**

ER: Uh huh. I went to the – well, the actions from recent months, of David Wojnarowicz being pulled from the show in the Smithsonian.

**SS: Oh, Jonathan Katz's show.**

ER: Yes.

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: Yeah.

**SS: What was that action?**

ER: There were several of them. One of them, they had made masks of, sort of spinoff of masks of David's work, with the lips sewn, and parades of, going from several places, with that. And then there was a van that was outside of the Smithsonian, with, I think it was showing, actually, David's film that was extracted from the Smithsonian show in Washington.

**SS: So you never went to, like, Stop the Church, or –**

ER: I was. I was outside Stop the Church.

**SS: Do you remember how you felt about that?**

ER: At that particular time, at the particular time, I felt mixed about it, actually. I felt that it was – I was more in a frame of reference that it was something – that was invading a sacred space. My mind retrospectively has changed very much, especially when I look at footage from it, at this time. So I've gone through my own evolution. In a sense.

**SS: Did you ever go to ACT UP looking for treatment information?**

ER: I went to friends of mine who went to ACT UP. Tim Pettifer. You knew Tim Pettifer?

**SS: No, I don't know him.**

ER: He's a friend of mine who was in real estate. He was a boyfriend of another friend, Carlos Rodriguez. So I would tap into friends who would get –

**SS: And what kind of advice were they giving?**

00:55:00

ER: They were – well – it was more tempered advice.

**SS: Because there was a lot of question about AZT at the time, right?**

ER: Yeah.

**SS: Whether or not to take it.**

ER: There was. That was a question that I had made a long time ago. Because I innately didn't feel that it was something that was the right thing for myself. It was the one thing that Dr. Passer offered me, and I left, and went another route. I did go on AZT later, in 1994, because I didn't really have a choice, because HIV had gone into my brain, and I had had a severe manic episode. Also, at that time, in 1994, starting to really decline really rapidly, and became quite emaciated. At the same time, a lot of my friends started dying, so there was trauma induced by that.

The artist friend of mine, Russell Sharon, came back from – he had moved from New York to Minnesota, and he came back to get rid of the contents of his and Luis Frangella's loft. And he and I had been close friends before, but we also, through him coming back to take care of Luis's belongings and his, became involved. And for a moment, there is a sense that he was going to stay in New York, but he decided not to. So there was a tremendous amount going on.

So for me – I never really, like, followed particular advice; I zeroed in to my own core and center, until there was a time when I had no choice to do that.

**SS: Okay. All right, well let's look at these photographs here.**

ER: The photographs are of me and my friend Ken. And Ken was going through a treatment for HIV. I think he might have had CMV in his digestive system. This is 1996. And I got thrown, because – so much went between those times, but –

In '94, I had become – like that really the time when I became really, really ill. I went down to 127 pounds, and had four T-cells –

**SS: Ecch.**

ER: – and also had candida systemically into my bone marrow. So it was affecting my red and white blood cells, and I was giving myself Neupogen and epogen every day for about two years, which are injections. Neupogen – one of them raises the white blood cells, and one raises the red blood cells.

In the end of 1995, I was told not to go out of the house by Dr. Bellman, who was my doctor, because I could hemorrhage if I fell.

**SS: Oh, wow.**

ER: And I was treated with amphotericin, which they call a shake and bake, because you shake for the hour that you're being treated. And at that time, it was experimental, to see if it would get rid of the candida that was in my

bones and it worked. And then shortly after, I became part of a study for Crixivan.

**SS: Oh, okay.**

01:00:00 ER: And so the photographs are at a time when my body had rapidly become transformed, and it became really apparent that I was on Crixivan, and it was working. But at the same time, Ken was declining, who was a boyfriend at that time. I had taken Ken under my wing, because he was a lot younger, and really couldn't help himself. He had tested positive when he was like 17 or 18, but his first experience, too, so he hadn't really developed a lot of skills. So he lived with me. And so the photographs are this moment in time when he's being treated in my – well, what became our apartment, while I'm recovering.

**SS: And what became of him?**

ER: Oh, he's alive. Not so long after, our doctor fudged some information about his health so he could qualify for a study. And he got in a study himself.

**SS: Okay.**

ER: Yeah. And then once we both got better – I mean, I knew from the beginning that we, though we cared about each other, it wasn't what we had in common was our possible death. And I helped him get an apartment, through the Actor's Fund. And he went on, and I got on with my artwork.

**SS: So Crixivan saved your life, really.**

ER: It did.

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: It did, it did. It did. And that, I mean that – that’s really my involvement with ACT UP. Ultimately, that’s my –

**SS: Right. Okay.**

ER: And I’m indebted. I feel indebted. It’s not the only thing that saved me, but it’s certainly part of it, I believe. And it gave me the freedom to – not be so regimented about all the other alternatives.

**SS: Well, I mean, this conversation is taking place 20 years after that time in your life –**

ER: It is, it is –

**SS: – yeah.**

ER: – it is. It is. And the anger that I perceive, even though I know that my experience of – when I did experience the rooms at ACT UP; saw the conversations and the joy and the camaraderie, the anger and the trauma and the grief are something that I’m arguably much more in touch with now than I allowed myself then.

**SS: That makes sense. Did you want to show us some of your work that’s related to AIDS?**

ER: Yeah. I’d actually love to.

**JW: Could I add that ACT UP did zap Crixivan — Statlanders Pharmacy — for the cost of Crixivan when it first came out. And it was**

**handled by the pharmacy, and they got the pharmacy to drop the price by like fifteen hundred dollars. ACT UP did that.**

**SS: That's great. So – let's look at your work.**

ER: Okay. It was challenging, because – so much of my work is woven through what we've talked about. So that's like why I hesitate at certain times, or got, like, the loss from HIV being in my brain – in '94 to those photographs, and how to get there.

**SS: Let me ask you something. Do you consider this to be an AIDS-influenced piece?**

ER: Pretty much all of my work is, actually. I mean, I contextualize my work since, really, 1989, around HIV and my experience with AIDS – even though it's part of the human experience as a whole, I've informed it with a dialogue about HIV and AIDS. I mean, that's very much the legacy of ACT UP, also. But also, it goes back to my uncle Lige Clarke, because he was a really early AIDS ac – well actually, it's a slip, but it's actually in keeping with how I feel. I was going to say he was a really early AIDS activist; but in fact, he was murdered when I was about 13. He was a very formative gay-rights activist, along with his lover and partner, Jack Nichols, in the '60s and '70s.

**SS: And he was your uncle?**

ER: He's my uncle.

**SS: Okay.**

01:05:00 ER: Yeah. Do you know he is? He and Jack started the first national newspaper called *Gay*. And they wrote a book called – a couple of books; once called *I Have More Fun With You Than Anybody*, about their relationship, from when they met in Washington and were part of the Mattachine Society, and helped to organize the first picket at the White House. My uncle had several levels of top security when he was in the Army, at the Pentagon. And then in the nighttime, he and Jack would pass out gay-rights literature.

And I came to visit him and Jack – they're part of my family, when I was about six years old. They lived on Seventh Street, in the East Village, about – I live on 14<sup>th</sup> Street, so seven blocks from my house.

Me making that slip, that he was an early AIDS activist is because there's that lineage that I feel like I'm bringing between him and me. And he's – it's like he's sitting over my shoulder, helping me find my work.

What were you saying –

**SS: Well, the reason is – you could look at that, and say, okay, this is a jewel-encrusted man.**

ER: Uh huh. Right.

**SS: But for someone like me, I look at it, and I think about KS**

–

ER: Okay.

**SS: – when I look at a photograph like that.**

ER: Okay.

**SS: So it really depends on who's looking at it.**

ER: Uh huh. Right.

**SS: But I was just wondering what you were thinking.**

ER: It's a self-portrait of me. It's actually overlooking the bay in Fire Island. It was taken in 2007. I did a lot of self-portraits from 1991 until '98, that go through my physical history, because they're nudes. So it goes from this younger healthy boy's body to slightly old – slightly deficient body to transformed body. And then this one picks up – pretty much expresses how I feel now. Though none of my work really comes from, like, an intellectual, conscious place; it comes more through me, and then it resonates with something afterwards. So I actually, I like that association to KS. I certainly feel it's like wounds, or scars, but also, scars are beautiful, and the wounds that we carry are part of us.

**SS: But there's also a camp element.**

ER: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, actually, it's interesting to hear.

**SS: Because it could be costume jewelry, right?**

ER: Right.

**SS: So it's just like, fabulous.**

ER: It's a little feminine. Feminine –

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: – on this masculine back.

**SS: Yeah, it could be.**

ER: Yeah. And Fire Island is a place that I started going to first with Victor Mendolia in the '80s, late '80s; but then I went back after I became well. And it's been very much a part of my healing. And it's a place that – obviously, people go there to party and let go and commune in all kinds of ways. But there's an energy to Fire Island that I found really beautiful and soothing. And it's a place that my uncle also went, when he was – pretty much a part of the gay scene. He was on the cover of a book called *Welcome to Fire Island*. And when I started going there, it felt like he had beckoned me there, because he knew it would be a place for me to heal.

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: You know, there's a lot of ghosts out there. Of which I had experience with some. Some of them not so – some of them is scary; others rather beautiful.

**SS: Do you want to show us the nudes? Should we go into the other room and take a look?**

ER: Yeah. Actually, can I show you these?

**SS: Yeah, please.**

ER: These are –

**SS: Show us whatever you –**

ER: These are hospital drawings.

**SS: Okay.**

ER: And my mother, who – was very – I’ll put this down. This is a piece – this is a piece I call – well, it’s kind of an homage to Walt Whitman and my uncle – my uncle Lige carried Walt Whitman with him all the time. So I’m working on a series called “Song of the Open Road” about my uncle.

My mother came and kind of rescued me through this manic episode. I was staying at our friend Mats’s loft. And – put my glasses on –

**SS: They’re over here.**

01:10:00

ER: And I was in this very – I think of it actually even still as a very graced state, because I was very highly creative, and making what a person on the outside would think is just a mess, but in my mind, it was very, it made a lot of sense, of these creations of things. But then when my mother came — because she heard from one of my friends that I was in trouble, so she knocked on my door, coming from upstate New York, and said we were going to go and have, I think, dinner with Dr. Bellman. And she took me to the hospital.

So for a month, I was in a hospital, sort of being brought down out of this manic state. And I made all these hospital drawings. And I did hundreds and hundreds of hospital drawings. It was 1994, in St. Vincent’s – which now no longer exists. So this is for Van Gogh. This is a series that I call “Tears.” This is my mother, and this is my sister Jamie. This is my father, Jim.

This is for Cy O’Neill. And this one is for Liza Minelli, though it’s “Lizi’s Tears.” I can’t spell. And then I was really thinking how to spell – Vinnie’s tears. “Helen’s Tears.” Sue’s Tears.

I've never shown them. But I would like to do some prints that could help raise funds for various categories. And then showing them in relationship to St. Vincent's closing –

**SS: Right.**

ER: – could be meaningful to me personally, but hopefully to a larger community. “Stormy Weather.” And snow.

“Shit I’m in the hospital.”

“Uncle Lige had a star in the palm of his hand.”

This is “Tit Toilet Paper.” This is Uncle Lige had a star in his hands, because he had a – part of his lines in his hands was a little bit of a star.

“It’s puzzling my brain.”

“Penis Flytrap.”

**SS: That’s funny.**

**JW: At St. Vincents?**

ER: Yeah. This relates a lot to some series of phallic sculptures that I did of these cage-like structures I did in the 1980s.

**SS: It’s also a crucifix.**

ER: Oh, I hadn’t seen that before. I love that.

**SS: Yeah.**

**JW: And an ankh.**

ER: Yeah. An ankh?

**JW: Upside down.**

ER: Yeah. This is for Ted Muehling and Mats and me. They were very much part of my care at that time, and then became partners after that. Through taking care of me, they – became involved, and still are.

“I love Mondrian.”

This is for Nurse Pam, who gave me a bath and saw my tallywacker. “Not Mari/Nana.”

This is my mother’s handwriting, because she was involved with a lot of my storytelling.

**SS: Nice.**

ER: My feeling – like the – because this is the ACT UP Oral History Project, is this is my continuing that spirit. And though they’re – in a way, this series is maybe more slogan-oriented, and specific than that kind of work, but then –

**SS: Oh, you mean like Gran Fury –**

ER: – historical –

**SS: – kind of thing.**

ER: Yeah, yeah.

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: Yeah. Exactly. Without my realizing at the time that I made them. And then what I would like to do with them now – to pick up that – initiative.

**SS: Um hm.**

**JW: Well, there were people that were angry at St. Vincent's.**

**Were you among them?**

ER: I was, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I've had some really – horrible experiences at St. Vincent's since then. So personally, I'm glad that it's not there. More recently, I had some really horrendous experiences there.

**SS: Rosie O'Donnell is living in a penthouse.**

ER: Are you serious?

**SS: Yeah. She paid eight and a half million dollars for it.**

ER: Wow.

01:15:00

**JW: Oh, so – medical care.**

ER: Right, right. Yeah, I'd like to show these. One idea that I have is to show them in, like, in a storefront that isn't leased, or something, around St. Vincent's, in relationship to the memorial. And then have some kind of action or projects around it – community projects.

**SS: Great. Let's look at your self-portraits. You're plugged in, how are we going to do this?**

JH: Where are we going?

**SS: We're going to go in the other room, right, and look at the nudes?**

**JW: Let me change a mic, then.**

**SS: Okay.**

**JW: Can you unhook that? Carefully just pull that apart. Don't twist, there it is. I just have to do one thing here. That, to my amazement, works. Can you speak?**

**SS: Can you actually pick us up?**

**JH: Once you get in here can you plug in? Or do you want to use that –**

**JW: Can you plug in? You're going to be standing?**

**SS: Yeah. Okay, we're rolling. Okay, go ahead.**

ER: I was asking you –

**SS: About Buyer's Club.**

ER: Yeah, the Buyer's Club, because I was thinking of knowing that there are other ways that ACT UP is –

**SS: Were you part of a buyers' club?**

ER: I went there, I went there a lot.

**SS: What did you get from them?**

ER: I honestly don't remember – I got bags of things. Mats was very supportive, and me being able to afford things. Which was really lovely of him. So I don't remember things offhand. But most of them were – something that didn't taste very well, and you had to mix. But I got things from there all the time. Yeah, yeah. Were they – they weren't technically in ACT UP.

**SS: No, they were technically separate, but many people from ACT UP ran buyers' clubs.**

ER: Right.

**SS: Yeah. It was all interwoven.**

01:20:00 ER: I also met Sean Strub really early, too, who then later became a friend. It was when he was running for some office. I don't remember what office he was running for.

**SS: What did he run for? He ran against Tom Duane? Was that – no. City Council? I don't remember.**

ER: Yeah, yeah. And he had called a group of us together at his loft one time to have a meeting about safer-sex issues. So that's when I became more – I knew who Stephen Gendin was, and Hush. But that's when I became more aware of them. My friend also, I think John Dugdale was there. Who I feel is a real ACT UP person, too, but I don't necessarily know that he went to meetings. The same way he's –

**SS: John Dugdale came to – I think he also donated work to the artist auction.**

ER: Yeah. As did I, actually.

**SS: Oh, okay.**

ER: Yeah, as did I.

**SS: Oh, great.**

ER: As did I. Yeah.

**JW: Which year?**

ER: I don't remember which year. One of the things – it might have been for a DIFFA fundraiser at the same time. I did a wire pillow that I wrote “Goodnight” in wire. Yeah.

**SS: So show us this – okay.**

ER: This is from the first sitting, in 1991, in Mats's loft. And it's not so long after I tested positive; it's two years later.

**SS: So you were like 28?**

ER: Twenty-nine.

**SS: Okay.**

ER: This is Self-Portrait with a cabinet, and laying on bench. And this one I call “Rain.” I'd set a tripod up and have natural light and then occasionally a friend would help me frame things. And these are actually freckles and moles, but I actually like that they could be KS lesions. I call it “Constellation,” to bring more of a sense of beauty and wonder within that realm. That's “Band-Aid.”

This is taken in a barn, in 1994, and this is actually Russell Sharon; at the time, I was helping him find homes for Luis's work.

You can see how thin I'm starting to get.

**SS: Oh, yeah.**

ER: I call it “Passage.” This is “Specimen.” This is actually, it belonged to Luis Frangella.

**SS: Where did his work end up?**

ER: It got dispersed in different kinds of ways. His family in Argentina, I think, technically has the estate. Then Hal Bromm, who was his dealer when he was alive, helps find homes for things. I have a bunch of his work — some very small works — one of them, I actually would like to show you. There's about 24 of them – they're lining walls of my kitchen.

And this is in Hal Bromm's house in the country, called the Dellawana.

I call this "Internal Dialogue." This is at Hal's as well.

And then I went to, Edward Albee has an arts residency in Montauk, called The Barn.

**SS: Oh yeah.**

ER: And one great day, all the artists went to the beach, and I stayed and took self-portraits of me. And every now and then, I sensed a sense of a presence. And it might have been Edward, because he never really came to visit, but he would like look in on artists. And I was there for a month, and by the end of the stay, I couldn't walk very well. And I had all this art materials with me, and I think I also probably had started the beginning of my manic phase, because I didn't have a realistic idea of what I could accomplish. So I had all this stretched canvas and art materials that I could never have gotten home on my own, and my mother and Mats and our friend Sandy came with their cars, and loaded me up while I was laying down outside of the barn.

01:25:00 And this one's called "Threshold at Edward Albee's," with the little horseshoe. And then this one is "Portal," which was two years later, after the protease inhibitors, including Crixivan, had brought me back, and transformed me. And at this time, my body and physicality announced that I was going through something before I would ever actually shared it, even though at that time, I was open about my status. And by the time I was at the colony, the MacDowell Colony, I was still very open about what I had been through, but if I hadn't shared it, no one would have known.

**SS: Right. I wrote their HIV policy.**

ER: Did you really?

**SS: For MacDowell.**

ER: Whoa.

**SS: Because Bob Smith — you remember Bob Smith?**

ER: Yeah.

**SS: — he got very sick there when I was there, and a bunch of the other colonists acted very badly towards him.**

ER: Really.

**SS: And then I wrote that policy for them. Yeah.**

ER: Well, thank you.

**SS: Sure!**

**JW: What year was that?**

**SS: I don't remember.**

ER: When I went there, I told them about –

**SS: Eighty-eight, I think.**

ER: – yeah, I told them what I was dealing with, and that I was giving myself injections, still. And the colony was beautiful, the staff there. And this one is –

**SS: Oh, you're still doing leaves.**

ER: I am, yeah. This is actually when it began, at the MacDowell Colony. Because it was in response to the leaves transforming over me, while my body was. And I felt I was really just in this glow, and the colonists felt that I was in love, because I was always smiling. But there was this sense of surrealness around me, and the colors were brighter, and I felt that the people that I knew who had died were around me, as if they were helping to support me, to go out into the world again.

And this is “Communion with Oak.” So this is in reference to the leaves piece, the memorial, the AIDS memorial piece. And this is a man that I was – then these photographs go into men that I was involved with during the time. This is William Weichert, who –

**SS: Oh, uh huh.**

ER: – William Weichert died – do you know him?

**SS: The name sounds very familiar, yeah.**

ER: I found out that he died the same day I found out that my viral load had become undetectable.

**SS: Oh.**

ER: His sister came and knocked on my door and shared that with me. So this is on Martha's Vineyard. He was really very sweet. And he wanted to be a pop star, so he wrote pop songs, and performed. This is William, also.

And this man, I don't know what happened to him. His name is John. I call it "English John."

And then this is my friend Dodge. And Dodge – at this time, he hadn't tested positive, but then several years later, he did. And he was one of the men that became part of that study that Rockefeller University was doing on early intervention, to see if the virus, if it was treated early, if you could eradicate it. He's very public about it, and was on a number of interviews.

**JW: What drug was he on?**

ER: I don't remember what he was on. David Ho was doing the study. It was one of the early studies when they were really hoping, or at least the hypothesis was that –

**JW: Eradicate.**

ER: Yeah. This – me and Jeffrey.

Did you know Joe Piazza?

**SS: No.**

ER: I think he was part of ACT UP as well. He was a close friend of mine. He's no longer alive.

**SS: Don't know him.**

ER: This piece I call “Uncle Lige’s Sword,” because the sword in the spine of the piece belonged to my uncle Lige, and it was with him when he was killed.

**SS: Oh, wow.**

ER: I did a whole series of pieces that I called “Bloodworks” that use texts from bloodworks. And I later feel like they kind of relate to the Middle Ages, and the illuminated manuscripts. The little skull kind of vibrates.

**SS: Oh, right.**

ER: As well as the chain to the sword.

**SS: Great. Is there anything else you want to tell us, or –**

ER: Well, mainly, also just my involvement with the Leaves piece is continuing. And it’s – it’s a piece that I continue to show since I started it in 1996. That, for me, is my main activist –

01:30:00

**JW: Watch the mic too. I’ll watch –**

**SS: Don’t touch your mic.**

ER: That’s been a primary activist piece for myself, and it also has a number of people that were involved with ACT UP in it. The most recent – one of the most recent people – for Spencer, Spencer Cox. I call this one “Life-altering Spencer.” I got a very nice letter from his mother, because she found out about the piece, and a friend of his sent a card about it. So she gave me a really nice little note. Which I really appreciated. And I continue to work on the Leaves

pieces – people that I know die, including David Nelson, who died last year, 2013.

**SS: I don't know him.**

ER: David Nelson was a really close friend of Joy Episalla.

**SS: Oh, okay.**

ER: And he's also one of the founding members of the archive at Visual AIDS. I know he's been involved with ACT UP as well. Probably that's where he met Joy originally.

**SS: So each leaf is a person.**

ER: Each leaf represents someone that I knew personally; both people that I was intimately involved with, or people that I knew through my doctor's office, or Friends In Deed, or Manhattan Center for Living, or my neighbors. When I started at MacDowell, there were 86. And then as I've been reminded of other people that I knew, and they come to mind, or people who died – now it's over 200 people, including seven people that have died within the last three years.

**SS: Really.**

ER: Yeah. Yeah. Richard Anderson, who showed the Leaves piece in 1998, died last year. I continually show it as both an aesthetic work, but also wanted to have the story of each person behind it.

**SS: Right, it's an archive.**

ER: It's an archive. Nancy Brooks Brody, who – actually, Nancy and I – sometimes I forget, because I've known Nancy – when we were college students, our first year at SVA –

**SS: Oh.**

ER: – we were in Hannah Wolfe's class.

**SS: Oh, wow.**

ER: Yeah. And then, and then I lost touch with her, but then we know each other from Visual AIDS. So I don't know her as an ACT UP person, but I know she was very much there. She's formulated, for me, what I feel about is that we're story keepers, and my obsession and devotion to the Leaves piece is a way for me to handle the stories that I hold, and the people that I carry with me from that time period into today. I've been in this process of writing little biographies about each person in the –

**SS: Oh, great. That's wonderful.**

ER: Yeah. Yeah. It's – it's something I'm calling on help from, from other people, because as time goes by, I've forgotten a lot of details, as our memories do.

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: So I've been sending out calls to people, like for memory jogs, or for them to fill in information that I might not have even known – most recently, for Jeffrey Geiger and Tim Goetz, who were close friends of mine. Jeffrey was the manager of the Wonder Bar.

**SS: Oh, okay.**

ER: Yeah. So actually, this one is for Tim and Jeff. Jeff is the oval one and Tim is the oak leaf. What's been happening, there's been meaningful exchanges between me and this community of friends, either through Facebook or through my e-mail address. And if someone doesn't remember or doesn't know something, they'll send off a message to another person, who does.

It has a bittersweet, touching quality to it; something that feels really important.

**SS: Yeah, definitely.**

ER: Yeah.

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: Yeah. And I feel – I wish I had started that from the beginning of the piece, because time has gone –

**SS: Right.**

ER: – by. I first was titling them by their first name and some poetic attribute; and in part because I wanted to be really, like, an egalitarian piece, and not single really known people out from people that were less known.

01:35:00 Because there's a consciousness that if someone wasn't really famous when they died, their memory can be obliterated very easily, and –

**SS: Oh, sure. Most people have disappeared.**

ER: Yeah.

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: And probably what I do for myself and for others is to try to capture as much of that as I can.

**SS: Yeah, it's hard. Because there's people who nobody remembers.**

ER: Right.

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: Right. Right.

**SS: Maybe we should end on that. Oh, go ahead, go ahead.**

**JH: So you don't put the names on –**

ER: I don't have the names on the pieces, but I have the names on the backs of here. And then I have cross-references. And I have a sheet of paper with the names of people. These lists actually correspond to – like these names correspond to this piece. And then when I show the work, I'll have a list of the names, and then I feel that the poetic names are part of the work as well. Like Angel Boy and Flamboyant Parent was a friend of my mother's and my uncle Lige's. And Jeff's Brother With the Bright-Red Hair; Fair Pam, who's this little, little oval piece.

**SS: Oh, so it's coded. So no one else will know who these people are.**

ER: Well, what I want to, what I initially wanted to do is to have people be able to enter the work, and the names – the poetic names are displayed in reference, so that people can enter the piece. But then, again, as time has gone

by, I realize the importance of having biographical information. So I'm in a process of seeing how to handle that, and have back stories, so that they can be referenced.

**SS: Right.**

**JH: How do you pick which leaf to go with which person?**

ER: It's by something – eccentricity of the leaf, or shape or form, or – it's not necessarily the species of the leaf.

**JW: I'm sorry, can you say that last sentence again?**

ER: It's like some feeling behind it, or intonation or shape. When there's two, they were a couple.

**SS: And some of them are similar, also.**

ER: And some of them are similar. Actually, this is for Ira and Marvin, who were two friends of mine when I was a teenager. They were close friends of an older-woman friend of mine. And I mean, just as an example of the process I'm going through now is my friend Quito came over, because she's going to –

**SS: Quito Ziegler?**

ER: Yes, yeah, exactly.

**SS: I know her. Yeah.**

ER: Yeah. I thought that you did. She's offered some help in me – doing some work on the piece, and archiving it, and writing back stories. But

one of the things that happened is she looked at my list of names, and she zeroed in on Ira and Marvin. And it turns out that Ira and Marvin are her second cousins.

**SS: Oh, wow.**

ER: Yeah, yeah.

**SS: Amazing.**

ER: Yeah, it is. And we had just had a discussion that she brought up about the relevance of the work being that she's a younger person, so we have a little bit of – even though she understands, a little bit of hesitation on her part as developments of memorial in my story, even though I'll say, well, you know, I lost seven friends in the last three years; several just in the last year. And also feel that it's not a dead piece, it's a living piece. The sort of grappling of the relevancy of her generation.

**SS: They don't understand that.**

ER: Yeah.

**SS: They don't understand the mass-death experience.**

ER: Right.

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: Well, and some of the people in this piece were her age. Some of them were younger. I met a young man at – actually, there's a Faerie gathering circle last week, with the topic — Radical Faerie gathering — with the topic being HIV, intergenerational HIV issues, and people were going around in a heart circle and sharing. And there was a young man there named Summer who was

born in '87, the year I tested positive. And he had just shared before I did how he was living in the East Village, and he recognized and came that evening because he knew there were stories of the East Village that he hadn't heard, and he wanted to know about them. And I'm looking at this young man across from me, and –  
01:40:00 seeing myself when I was his age, and hoping that he can maintain some of that youth and innocence that I lost kind of instantaneously.

But then when Quito saw the list, Ira and Marvin on my list, and it resonated with her personally, I think it sort of transformed her consciousness about –

**SS: Right. Because all these other dead people are abstractions.**

ER: Yeah.

**SS: Yeah.**

ER: Yeah. Yeah.

**SS: That makes sense.**

ER: But I wanted Ira and Marvin because many people would know an Ira and Marvin, even if they weren't her Ira and Marvin.

That's the photograph of William, with the shadow. This is William's leaf. So – this one right here, with the tail – that's William –

When I look at them, I can see – I see my friends, and notice them. I just got these back from the gay and lesbian center, where they'd been for seven years on loan, so they've been not as close to me. So I –

**SS: Why did they give them back to you?**

ER: They –

**SS: Are they changing their –**

ER: – well, they did this renovation. But then – they did this renovation, so it became what to do with them after the renovation, and they don't have that room anymore. But then also, for me, it seemed like it was time to take them back, because they were getting damaged, and I have other things to do with them. And I feel a responsibility for the work, that I'm its caretaker, and shepherd in the story – not just because they're work of art; not that, as much as the stories behind them. So I want to be able to shepherd them on to another stage, where they'll be taken care of, more, when I'm no longer here.

**SS: Sure, that makes total sense.**

ER: And I would love for the gay and lesbian center, or a place like it, to be a place for that. But also I have to recognize that that's not necessarily the case, because they're not equipped as much as they would appreciate them.

**SS: I just pulled my plug.**

**JW: And you have your little prophylactic wandering beside your foot. Poor thing.**

**JH: Okay.**

ER: That's a good place to end there, yes.

**JH: Yes.**

**SS: Thank you!**

ER: Well, thank you so much.

**SS: Thank you! That was wonderful –**

**JH: They don't look –**

ER: The frames were –

**JH: The frames were –**

**JW: Let's free Eric, with his mic.**

ER: The heat and stuff is starting to separate them, and –

**JW: Can I ask you a question? You were you in your fog, and they started showing you KS lesions, what, by '83 or something. And then a couple friends –**

ER: I guess that wasn't really clear, was it?

**JW: Well, neither is fog – but you certainly knew what was happening. Did you just turn a blind eye, or –**

ER: Well – I didn't really know the degree that it was happening, and I guess I was – I was in this relationship – although I was having affairs it didn't really sink in.

**JW: You were at that screening – I don't remember his name, that filmmaker's name — who did "Untitled." The Waverly Theater the old Waverly. The new one I guess. There's something about that film that you didn't like, but I forgot what. It was on World AIDS Day, it had lots of miscellaneous footage.**

ER: "Untitled." Yeah, yeah.

**JW: If he had put a title on it, it would have been more succinct to more people. But in a panel, you said something somewhat critical of something. It seemed like political funerals, or something? I don't remember, sorry.**

ER: Oh, I said something –

01:45:00

**JW: Yeah. There's three people – Amy [Sadao], who was sitting down – the director, and – international – refugee? – I can't – anyway, sorry. So from '82 – when were the healing circles? You were saying, like, '84, '85?**

ER: Eighty-four, '85.

**JW: Did you – in 1990 was the first – did you ever go to the Zen monastery –**

ER: I never went, no.

**JW: Were you a member of HEAL?**

ER: I was, yeah. I didn't –

**JW: Back then –**

ER: I should have included that actually.

**JW: For how long?**

ER: A long time, a long time. That's where I met Dr. Bellman, actually –

**JW: Yeah, sure, but – a long time, that was – before it became Michael Elsner, Hypnotist.**

ER: Well, no, I was in it before it became wacko.

**JW: Right.**

ER: Yeah.

**JW: With Jon Greenberg.**

ER: Yeah. Yeah. I was in it before it became conspiracy oriented.

**JW: Denialist, yeah.**

ER: That's my self-portrait over there.

**JW: We better pack up or we'll never get out, never, never get out; never, ever. You're freezing now? Oh, looking forward to going outside, right?**

SS: Yeah, exactly.

**JW: Maybe you could ask him some more questions.**