

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

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Interviewee: **Marlene McCarty**

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ACT UP ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview of Marlene McCarty

February 21, 2004

SARAH SCHULMAN: If you could just say your name, where we are, your age, and today's date?

MARLENE McCARTY: Marlene McCarty. We're in my home in New York City. This is February 21st, 2004, and I'm 47.

SS: The only thing I know about you is that you're from Texas.

MM: Actually, I'm from Kentucky. I grew up in Kentucky. There was a kind of southern contingent in Gran Fury, but I was the only one from Kentucky.

SS: So, did you start making art when you were a child?

MM: No. I did all the crafty things. But I grew up in an environment where there were no artists around me at all, and the idea that you could be a grown-up existing in the world as an art maker, was not a concept that was even a potential in my world. I have to say, I never saw any real artwork until I was 18 – real paintings. Everything was just reproductions or in magazines or books. And I was probably mostly influenced by magazines and record covers, because in those days we had those beautiful big record covers and I thought, maybe I could grow up making those things. So, I actually wound up studying design, and I went to the University of Cincinnati for two years, because they had a really, at that point in time, a very significant design program. And then, after two years, I applied to this school in Basel, Switzerland. It actually can trace its history back to the Bauhaus. And I applied and got accepted into the first year, which meant that you could do the first year, and then you had to take a test to get into the design program. So, I did that, did the test, got into the design program and stayed there. It took five years to do that program. But it was kind of an interesting environment to be in because it took design out of – in America design was and is sort of like a corporate handmaiden. Ninety

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percent – there’s always exceptions – of design is about making corporate ventures look fantastic. And that can be music or it can be banking – it can be anything – toothpaste or whatever.

But being in Europe there was a sense – I just remembered there was a guy in Germany named Klaus Staeck, who worked with Joseph Beuys, and he had a print shop that produced these really political, cool posters. And when I was still in school in Basel, I actually wrote to him and was like, “Can I come work with you?” Of course, I never heard anything from him, but that was a very influential moment to me, in terms of giving me these ideas of the crisscross of art and design and the idea that design could be used in a non-passive way – in other words, it could be used in an assertive or even aggressive way to make a statement, as opposed to just making somebody else’s statement look nice. It was while I was in Basel, that I had really started to slip into the like, “Actually, I don’t want to be a graphic designer, I want to be an artist!” But I was always going back and forth over these lines. And then – that was five years. I came back to New York in ’83, and it was in Basel that I first heard about “the gay disease,” and people were all up in arms about, “What is this weird cancer?” And, funnily enough, the guy in my class in Basel, who brought in – was it *Newsweek* that did that big article that sort of broke it wide open?

SS: *The New York Times.*

MM: Well, I was in Europe –

SS: *The Herald Tribune, maybe?*

MM: No, it was one of the glossies, like *Time Magazine* – whatever – it was on the front cover – The Gay Cancer. And this guy in my class brought it into me, and

ironically, he's the only one from that class who eventually wound up dying from AIDS.

SS: I want to go back a little bit, because you just went through the first 25 years of your life really fast.

MM: I did. I did.

SS: In the milieu in which you were raised, did you ever hear social critique?

MM: No.

SS: What did the adults around you do for a living? Or, what were their interests?

MM: My mom was a housewife, and she was very – she came from a tradition of quilters. My grandmother quilted, my grandmother's mother quilted. So, both sides of my family came from real pioneer people, who came across the Appalachians and started farms in Kentucky. So, there was always this real sense of making everything yourself – self-sufficiency, sort of. But also, my mom was a grown-up in the '50s so it was like, "Oh, let's just go buy everything in cans!" But there was that weird thing of, let's make the curtains, let's make the quilts. So, my mom was very handcraft oriented. My dad has an insurance company – a small, general agency. They manage insurance from bigger companies. And that's what he has done, my entire life. And his main interests are, World War II, baseball and insurance.

SS: Was this in a small town?

MM: It was in Lexington, Kentucky. My dad came from Sulfur, Kentucky, and my mother came from Bethlehem, Kentucky, which are teeny towns. Bethlehem is the home of the Living Nativity.

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SS: So, here you are having these kind of profound insights into the line between commerce and art, and trying to negotiate that. How did your family respond to those ideas, or to the decisions that you made?

MM: Well, I have to say, there was always hesitation. I went to a very small private high school. I was salutatorian of my class.

SS: You were a smart girl.

MM: I was the smart girl. So everybody was like, “She should go to Bryn-Mawr, she should become a lawyer.” And around junior year in high school, I had finally figured out this whole graphic design thing. And I was like, “I want to be a graphic designer.” And at that point in time, nobody had any idea what that was. And the headmaster of my school – you could just see, “What a waste!” Everyone was like, “Well, if that’s really what you want to do.” So, the thing with my parents was that – I really wanted to, at that point in time, go to school in New York for college. And my parents were like, “We will not send you to school in New York. You don’t even know if this is what you want to do. How are you going to make a living?” Blah, blah, blah. If you go to school for two years and decide – really decide this is what you want to do, you still feel confident after two years, you want to do this weird thing that we don’t know what it is – then, maybe we can talk about going to school in New York. Which actually, I kind of by-passed by instead going to Europe. Beyond the kind of handcraft of making something, there was no support or dialogue. There was nothing in my family, in that environment that encouraged that.

SS: So, when was the first time you got exposed to any kind of political movement or social movement?

MM: You know, I don't know. I don't know, to tell you the truth. I think in Europe, it became really clear to me because people in Basel – like, feminism – there were lots of women's groups and really engaged. In those days, things were always a couple of years off. Information didn't travel so fast. So even though, maybe, I had not been in an environment here, where the whole feminism thing was a big topic, I got to Basel and there were like, women's groups and women's rallies for political things. I was a little like, wow! So, that was probably the first time I was exposed to it in a kind of everyday, social situation. I mean, I think the first time I realized the sort of power of just political discussion was – I was brought up in a family – I had to go to church every Sunday.

SS: What church did they go to?

MM: The Methodist Church. Every Sunday, we went to church. One Sunday, in Sunday School, I remember there was a discussion about Christianity, and just sort of talking about the good things of Christianity, and I for some reason, had this insight suddenly, that – I think we were studying Karl Marx in school – that actually, the most ideal form of Christianity would be communism in its pure form, where everyone has the same amount of everything. Which I just kind of brought up, as an interesting thing that had happened in my head – of how actually, those two ideas kind of do run parallel. That Sunday school class just went crazy. It was the first time that I had ever have maybe crossed the boundaries of that status quo – just keep doing the same thing – and I was a little shaken up, because I had never been in a situation where you said something that had such an impact and there was such an aggressive response to it. So, that was my first experience of ever engaging in any kind of political dialogue that broke the norm.

SS: Did you all see the civil rights movement on television or the peace movement on TV?

MM: You know, it is interesting that – I was actually a child in the South – like, I remember all those assassinations. I remember JFK, I remember Bobby, I remember Martin Luther King. I remember seeing the race riots on TV. I have to admit, quite embarrassingly, that I grew up in a very conservative home that was – actually, it mirrors their same issues with homosexuality, later. But, my parents were – they always had this kind of torn or ambiguous feelings towards the Civil Rights Movement, because on one hand, as Christians, they were like, everybody deserves the same. On the other hand, they were so the product of southern segregation for so many decades, years. They were so weighed down with, “Oh, these people aren’t properly educated. They won’t know how to take care of themselves.” There were these weird horrible things that would just kind of come out, which indicated that they probably would have preferred for all of the segregation laws to have remained intact.

SS: Was Lexington segregated when you were a kid? I think we’re the same age.

MM: Kentucky was always a border state – that’s where a lot of slaves escaped to. So, we didn’t have the hardcore segregation of split water fountains – in some of the little towns you did, but in Lexington, you didn’t. However, it was much less obvious. There was the black part of town. It was obvious that African Americans did not hold jobs that were anything but service jobs. Schools were segregated. Churches were segregated. It was like segregation-lite.

SS: So moving away, in a way, is the beginning of you becoming yourself.

MM: Absolutely. That was when I was finally able to think for myself, and be on my own and form my own ideas without being constantly told they were wrong.

SS: So then you come to New York in 1983, and you come here to start your art career, I assume.

MM: I'm another generation. I'm not from the generation of – some of these younger ones – like that really cute girl who were talking about a few minutes ago. They were really trained. They went to schools, they came out with the idea of, you get out, you've developed your art, you get a gallery, you plow forward. I still have really, what I now call old-fashioned ideas of – I was very much of the mind-set that you went to school, you got your education, you got out of school, and then you had to develop, on your own, whatever it is that was to become your artwork. I had no sense of okay, I'm out of school, now I need a gallery. So, I really moved to New York just because I wanted to be in a vibrant atmosphere where I could develop. I hoped that at some point in the future, I would be able to have an art career and show my work, and do all that, but at that point in time, that was not my reason for coming here. My reason to come here was to develop whatever it was I was hoping to become.

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SS: Where did you live when you first came?

MM: I have never lived anywhere but this neighborhood. I lived on 5th Street, between B and C, which is a dead-end street, which at that point in time, there were three buildings standing. Right now, it's filled with these little project houses, but it was basically three buildings – one garage that was used for like, recycling or something, and then the rest were abandoned, derelict lots. And it was the kind of – no heat, rats in the apartment, the ceiling falling in.

SS: And were you working in your apartment?

MM: Yes.

SS: How did you start to meet people and develop a community?

MM: It was a little hard because I was married at the time.

SS: You moved here with your husband?

MM: Well, we got married to move here, because he was Swiss. And so, we got married – because at that point in time, it was really easy to get married and get visas and all that. So we got married in Switzerland, and then that made it really easy to come here with him. So, we were both living in the same apartment, and both making art in the same apartment. It started really small. We didn't really know anybody. I knew a few people who had been at the University of Cincinnati, who had since come here and really done the corporate graphic design thing. I knew a few of those guys, but I was so, "I am so doing something else," that I didn't really – we saw each other, but I didn't really connect up with them. To tell you the truth, it became a really tight community of the people who lived in that building. There was a woman named Emily Waters, who had actually been in a graduate program in Basel, who moved to New York. I got her an apartment in that building, and she turned out introducing me to John Lindell, which is – he was the first person I met that – he was kind of doing the same thing. He was the young artist. We had very similar attitudes about a lot of stuff. So, I met him. The people who lived upstairs who were James Siena and Iris Rose, and we literally met because we lived in this unbelievably abject house, and our windows faced each other across what used to be an airshaft. And, we could tell by looking up at their apartment – like, it was all white, and you could see bits of paintings or artwork up. And they could

see down into our apartment, and they were like, gray floor, white walls – what’s going on? So, we actually met in the airshaft, looking at each other – hey, who are you? Oddly enough, I still see –

SS: They were performance artists, right? The Clockface.

MM: Exactly. Iris and James and Melanie and Chaz. There were a whole group of them. But, I still see James in the art stuff today. We’re always like, “I’ve known you longer than anybody else!” It just started on a really personal level, and it took a very long time to develop all those relationships, because also at those stages, you wind up meeting a lot of people that you think are going to be your friends, that you think you’re in sync with, and then you’re kind of like – actually, you’re not.

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SS: So you started to see your friends’ performances?

MM: Yeah, I started going to their performances. Actually, I said Emily introduced me to John. It gets a little confusing, because he was also connected to some of the people in Watchface – he was friends with them.

SS: That’s what it was called, Watchface, not Clockface.

MM: Exactly. Anyway, John was a very important character at that point in time, because we suddenly connected, because he came from the architecture thing, I came from the design thing, we were both interested in the art thing, we were both kind of a little politically interested, but not knowing quite what to do.

SS: Had you had close gay friends before?

MM: Yeah.

SS: And when was that? When did you first start socializing with gay people?

MM: Well, college, for sure. In my high school, nobody, nobody was out, and there's only, like – I know of two guys who then later came out, who were friends of mine in high school. But at that point in time, the whole sexuality, identity thing – it wasn't part of a conversation. It wasn't an option that was even in the air, in a weird way. But then, when I went to college – it was a giant state college. So I went from this teeny little traditional school in the middle of Lexington, Kentucky to this gigantic state college that was just like – the '70s were alive and well at the University of Cincinnati. And it was like, sexual experimentation. It was like everybody had to prove that they could sleep with everything – that they were that open. Drugs were flowing freely. It was like a time warp. In Lexington, it was kind of stuck in the '50s in a weird way, so I kind of went from like, 1958 to 1975 – like that. But in college I had tons of gay friends, and then I went to Europe and I also had a lot of gay friends. But also, Europeans were a lot less into defining categories. So, there was a very fluid sexuality that was going on that – actually, I have to say when I came back to the States after being there for five years, I was a little shocked at how rigid the definitions of sexuality were – even among all of these arty, intellectual people. It was still very clearly defined.

SS: Let's talk about that. So, the East Village community – arts community – in the middle '80s you're talking about. What did you see there?

MM: Well, it was more a pervasive attitude that if you were a gay man, or if you were a lesbian, you held on to that identity very tightly, and there was not very much leniency with any kind of slippage. Whereas, I was coming from an environment where it was very much about like, who cares, whatever. It just wasn't that defined, which I know in a more theoretical sense, is looked upon as not a good thing, because it

sometimes takes that kind of rigid identification to be able to sort of own up to what one is, and who one is, and where one is, and claim certain rights.

SS: Did you find that gay and lesbian artists who you met in the middle '80s were out of the closet?

MM: Yeah.

SS: For the most part, or entirely?

MM: I think entirely. I can't quite remember meeting anybody – the only people I ran into who were closeted were – I did have to work, because I don't have a trust fund. So, I used my graphic design skills to pay the rent, and the first couple of years in New York, I spent working in big corporate design studios that did Chubb – that kind of stuff. And, it was in that environment that I ran into – I don't – to my knowledge – didn't ever run into any closeted lesbians, but it's that issue of like, sometimes lesbians "pass" easier than a gay man. But I did run into numerous kinds of closeted gay men in that situation. But, I didn't consider that part of my social – it's kind of weird, I didn't consider it part of my life, in a weird way. But, as far as artists and performance artists and those kind of people you were meeting around here – I would say that everyone was really out. Some of the first people I met were John Lindell, Donald Moffett, Felix Gonzalez-Torres – and they were not closeted.

SS: How did you first get exposed to AIDS in New York?

MM: Friends started getting sick.

SS: Do you remember the first time – or some of the first times that happened?

MM: I have to say, the first few cases tended to be – they actually tended not to

be my direct friends – but, the boyfriend of a really good friend of mine. And, it was also – I’m just thinking back to that time, when it was, suddenly one day you looked up and it just like, oh my God, everybody is sick or dying. Probably the closest immediate case – who actually is still alive today – was the husband of my best friend who lived in the building. I guess they still do now. This couple – they had been together for months and months, probably a couple of years – and they decided to get married. So they went to get their blood tests to get married, and when they got their blood test, the husband – the male – tested HIV-positive. That was a really early situation, and that was also very, very close, and it was very traumatic, because at that point in time everyone was just, like – it’s a death sentence. There’s just no recovery. And, it was also very interesting to watch those two – that couple – go through the whole AIDS environment at the time, because they identified as a straight couple. Paul had been out as a gay man for a number of years before that. And that was not a closeted issue. This was something both of them were very aware of. But it was interesting going into the whole AIDS support system of how difficult it was for them, because it was so built around the gay male model. But, that’s just a sidebar. But anyway, it was amazing – just the quantity of people that were just dropping. And oftentimes, it wasn’t people this close to you, but it was the next circle out. And then, it was just everywhere – in the art world, the theater world, the music world, the fashion world.

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SS: So did you get involved with AIDS before you came to ACT UP, or was that simultaneous?

MM: You know, I have to say – I never really was that involved in ACT UP, per se. I was really more involved in Gran Fury.

SS: Right. But we're considering Gran Fury a sub-structure of ACT UP.

MM: I'm just clarifying, because that's where all my energy went, and a lot of times our topics and thematics kind of crisscrossed with things that ACT UP was doing, and sometimes stuff we did had to be taken to the floor of ACT UP. But, I never was one of the people who went to every ACT UP meeting and was involved in that capacity.

SS: Actually a lot of people that we're interviewing really, only functioned inside their affinity group, whatever it was, and that's one of the interesting things about the structure of ACT UP – there were all these different ways to be in it, or be part of it. So, Gran Fury – and we'll get to that in a minute – that was your first entry into AIDS. You weren't a buddy beforehand or something like that?

MM: No, no, I was just kind of flopping around in the general malaise of the time. And I personally, in my – I was not affected – I was not sick, I didn't test positive with HIV. The man I was living with at the time didn't test positive for HIV, so it wasn't that kind of –

SS: Did you get tested?

MM: Yeah. In fact, I had a doctor at that point in time that was just like, "If you've had more than two sexual partners – if you had more than one sexual partner in the last five years, you should just test." Which was probably pretty smart. To tell you the truth, I actually did go – it was ACT UP, actually – it's fuzzy, it's been a long time. I'm just thinking actually, I did go to a couple of ACT UP actions – not really kind of even knowing what they were, but it was more like, Paul – he's the husband of my friend who tested positive – he was like, "You have to come to this thing. You just have to come and you have to be a body and you have to stand there and you have to yell." And I

was like, okay. We went to something at the UN. I can't even quite remember what

SS: Do you guys remember an action at the UN?

JAMES WENTZY: There've been a few.

MM: It was outside. And then there was one of the Wall Street things. I was just like, there.

SS: Had you ever been at demonstrations before?

MM: In Europe, I had been to a couple of anti-*atomkraft* – atomic reactor things, and I'd been to a couple of marches – women's things – politics specific to Basel. But, that was also on a not very central position. I was just like okay, I'll go. But, it was interesting to me to see people actually standing up and saying what they thought about, as opposed to, where I come from, you just don't say anything. You just kind of get through every day without causing any disturbance.

SS: Okay, so you're going to a few demonstrations, and then what happened?

MM: So many things happened at the same time – it's not like one thing. John Lindell started going to Gran Fury – no, no, no. That's not what happened. What happened was, I was still hanging out with John Lindell, Emily Waters, Paul, Felix – who else was in that thing? Anyway, John knew Donald Moffett, and John and Don had gotten involved in that massive production for the window at the New Museum that basically was an ACT UP project. And, John basically was like, "You should get Marlene involved, because she knows how to do all this stuff." And I was like, working, I had a job. I was working at M & Company, which is this design firm that was kind of like, the hot design firm in the '80s. I was doing my art, and I was just – I don't have

time to do this. But of course, John was like, “Just come, just come one time!” So, I went to the offices of Terry Riley and John Keenan – Keenan & Riley Architects, who were both in ACT UP, and that’s where a certain portion of the production of the window was happening. So, I started working. Of course, we started having a great time. We were all talking, and I met Donald, I met Terry Riley, I met Todd Haynes, I met Tom Kalin – all there, in these few evenings that I went there and worked on that. And it was just kind of like that bonding thing, where you’re just, “Oh, I like them!”

SS: Were you the only woman?

MM: At that point in time, I was not. There were a number of women there. Emily worked there a couple of times. That was really, lots of people in and out. It wasn’t just like – here’s 10 people who are doing this. It was massive shifting faces. It was whoever people could pull in.

SS: And what were you literally making in there – you, personally?

MM: I literally was cutting letters out of rubber, to make those tombstones. I don’t know if you remember them. That’s what I was doing, which was total gofer work, in a way. But it was exciting. This was cool. And, I was starting to know about ACT UP because I had been dragged to these actions – not even really totally knowing what they were about, but just knowing like – I need to be there, and I need to be a body, showing my support. So anyway, the bond was made at that window thing, and then Mark Simpson had a potluck dinner, after all that was over, to try to coalesce people into continuing to do those kind of projects. And by this time Donald was after me, John was after me. They were all like, come, come, come. And I was like, I don’t know, I don’t know. And, I just kept putting it off and not doing it and whatever, until finally John or

Don – I can't even remember who – was offered a chance to do something at King Tut's Wah Wah Hut.

SS: On 7th and A.

MM: On 7th and A. And this is actually a little piece of Gran Fury history that kind of never really gets talked about, because it was not the whole group. What happened was John, Don, myself, and I think a little bit of Tom Kalin, decided to do something at the Wah Wah Hut that would be about safe sex, because that was kind of like the hot topic at the moment. And so, we wound up doing these slides of all this pornography and had all these napkins with safe sex things on them.

SS: In the window or inside the club?

MM: It was inside, in the bar. And you know, it just ran at night, while people were there.

SS: And who came to see it?

MM: Just whoever went to the bar. It wasn't about like, advertising to get people to come see this art show. It was really just about doing this kind of interesting thing in the environment that existed, and hopefully disseminating a little bit of information using the structures of the already existing venue, which was a bar. People come there, they think about sex, they talk about sex – whatever. It was a quirky project. It's nothing that I would ever hold up and be like, "Didn't this change art history?" It didn't – but it was so exciting to suddenly realize that all these things I knew how to do, could be put to some kind of use in a way that I felt was really positive, and had a really positive effect upon the social landscape. That was actually when I got kind of hooked. Then, I just started going to Gran Fury meetings. By that time, I was the only girl. There

was another woman who had been there prior to me, who I have never met.

SS: What's her name?

MM: I knew you were going to ask me.

SS: It was Anna Held, or something like that?

MM: Anna Held. She was involved, and there was a Lisa somebody, who I never crisscrossed with, never met.

SS: And you were still married, so you were still straight?

MM: Yeah, I was straight all the way through Gran Fury, actually. It was only after we kind of dissolved Gran Fury that I changed my category of sexual identity.

SS: We'll get to that later. Okay, tell us what a Gran Fury meeting was like. Where were they? Who was there?

MM: Well, we met everywhere. We met, lots of times, at Mark Simpson's house, because he had kind of a biggish loft. We met a little bit at Michael Nesline's house, but he had a teeny apartment, so it was kind of cramped and itchy. We met at Loring McAlpin's house, but not as much. We met for a long time – there was a whole stretch where we met at – John Lindell was working for an architect named Madeline Speer, who said we could meet in their offices. So, we went through a really long stretch of meeting every – whatever it was – Tuesday night, Wednesday night or Thursday night – I can't remember.

SS: Once a week?

MM: Yes, once a week. And, we met every – whatever night of the week it was – at Madeline Speer's office. And it was, really, kind of a good thing, because then we got in. I would say we took care of business, but taking care of business was like a snit

fest. They were hysterical. People would get really riled up at each other, and I know there's lots of – some of the people in Gran Fury still carry resentment to others in Gran Fury for having wielded too much power, whatever. But, they were kind of great. They were great, rambunctious –

SS: Can you remember any particular fight that you can tell us about?

MM: You know, I kind of can't.

SS: Did you guys discuss showing in art spaces? Was that a contentious –

MM: Yes, that was contentious.

SS: Can you lay that out a little bit, what the argument was?

MM: Well, you know, it's kind of a long – it was a longer kind of development, because we never met and started doing work, with the idea of "We're making art." Which, actually – this is a little off the topic, but Gran Fury has this peculiar place in the world, that it has sort of remained alive, at least historically, and that is in the art – really, like – academic art world. Students know that the collaborative of Gran Fury existed as this interventionist art group. And, I've actually taught at schools where people have been like, "So, how did you guys decide to make art like that?" And I'm just like, stop. We never, ever, ever came together and said, "We're going to make art." We had a whole other mission. Our mission was to get out in as raw and rambunctious a way as we could – to get out certain messages that we felt like were not getting out into the mainstream world, which is why we adopted the mainstream look of advertising. So, that said, it was really more about wanting to engage discussion. It was more about wanting to bring issues to a head, or to at least put them out into particular spheres where then people could go at them. But, at least it gave particular issues a certain amount of weight.

SS: I just want to ask you some aesthetic questions right now, because you just raised a hundred million different things. You said you used the look of advertising – that idea, that was already in circulation in the art world.

MM: Absolutely.

SS: So did you say, oh, this is what Barbara Kruger is doing, let's apply it to ACT UP?

MM: We did! We were like, Barbara Kruger's doing this – who else?

SS: Jenny Holzer.

MM: Good Material did it a little bit. We were like, that's a good thing. We were not like, "Let's do something that's never been done." We were just, "Oh, that works, let's do that." So, yeah – we just were, "Yeah, we'll take that idea."

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SS: Did you look at other political movements and their aesthetics? Or, were you only looking at advertising in the art world?

MM: We talked a little bit. I brought up at one point The Situationists, and of course, three-quarters of Gran Fury had never heard of them. And so we talked about them a little bit, but we never were like, oh let's go see what they did.

SS: So, you didn't look at Soviet art, you didn't look at the old left?

MM: No, but we talked about it. It constantly was coming into discussion, but we never brought in books or looked at that kind of stuff. I mean, Gran Fury did towards the end kind of really – some people were much stronger with the text part, some people were much stronger with the visual part.

SS: What was your interest?

MM: Well, I mean – I did the visual part. But, we were all involved in all of it.

Like hammering out this text – even though they sound, so many of them – I look at them now and think, they're so flat-footed. But it was just – we would hammer away for hours on a few words.

SS: Were any of you from the advertising copy side of things? Or, were you all –

MM: No.

SS: So, it was artists writing copy and then deciding how to present it visually?

MM: Yeah, it shows. [LAUGHS] I didn't answer your question about the art galleries –

SS: We're going to get to that. We're on other tangents now. Did anyone ever want to bring in something that was very ornate? Because you went for this very kind of clean –

MM: We tried ornate one time. Towards the end of Gran Fury, it was very difficult because we had sort of – our kind of currency was this very flat-footed approach to really blunt topics. And, we were really great at just the over-generalization. After a number of years, the whole landscape of AIDS changed so much, and a lot of what we were doing – what I feel like was our important moment, was going from the area of zero discussion in the world around us, to really kind of flat-footed – to, okay this topic is now in a realm where it could be talked about. But once those topics kind of got into much more accepted discussion or it was more common to discuss AIDS, to talk about AIDS, we kind of lost our ability to really refine that kind of activist punch, and we started – we spent so many meetings towards the end, trying to decide how we were going to

transform.

SS: Let me ask you something about that, because I think that's a very important issue that you're raising. Is this advertising aesthetic – no matter how effective it is – is it inherently unable to convey really complex truths? Is that why it no longer served?

MM: It might be. Yes, I think that was part of the discussion. Part of the discussion was looking for these formats of being able to talk about more complicated issues, because you can't do that in two lines. And, anyway, one of the things we tried doing towards the end, was actually collaborating with other groups. We tried do a Guerilla Girls collaboration. It never happened. They came to the meetings in those fucking gorilla heads. We were like, "How do we work with people who are in gorilla heads?!" We had a number of meetings, it went nowhere. Then we decided to work with PONY. We worked with PONY and Tabboo!.

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SS: PONY was Prostitutes of New York. Carol – what was her name? It was like, Scarlot Harlot, or Carol Queen –

JIM HUBBARD: Carol Leigh is in San Francisco. Iris de la Cruz.

MM: And Annie Sprinkle and – I can't think of her name – she had short red hair.

SS: Veronica Vera? Diane Torr?

MM: Exactly. And then, there were various other characters who – I can't remember who they were. And we decided this was going to be really elaborate and over the top, and fun and sexy, but fun. And we decided to work with Tabboo!, the drag queen painter – Stephen Tashjian. That installation, which we did in the New Museum

window, was not one of our most successful. It was not.

SS: Why?

MM: There were no clear messages. It was a mess. So many people were involved, and everybody wanted something, but there was nothing that rose to the top to sort of make sense. It was just a lot of minutiae. But, that was the one time when we tried to do something ornate, and it didn't work.

SS: You know what confuses me about this is that – and I'm saying this as a writer, myself. A painting or a work of visual art – a fixed work – is able to convey so much complexity about human emotion. How could you guys, who are visual artists, be unable to convey this complexity when the subject matter expanded?

MM: I think that goes back to your original question of like, the venue. I think as kind of one of our foundation points, we were not about being in the rarified, contemplative environment. Not to say we didn't wind up there, but that was a goal – not to be there, but to be outside, where people might read some of these texts or images who would not necessarily go into an art gallery. So, given that as sort of a fundamental basis of, "we're going to be in the public" – I think that had a large effect on kind of shying away from the contemplative image. Plus, I also think – just having been through the experience – I think, to create an image that has that kind of resonance that you're talking about is very hard to do in a collaborative situation, I really do, because I'm thinking, what images from that time kind of stick in my head that would feed into what you were talking about?

SS: Felix.

MM: Felix's work, and particularly – there's an image from David Wojnarowicz of the buffalo going over the cliff. I get chills, even mentioning that. That is a kind of connection to the work, that – I may be getting in trouble here – I do feel like that's really an individual thing – for 15 people to kind of hammer away and come to that. I only say this from experience, it's really – I won't say it's impossible, because nothing is impossible, but it's very difficult, very difficult. So in a sense, as I'm talking to you I'm thinking, oh my God – Gran Fury, one of our weaknesses was probably the same thing, like the weaknesses of commercials. I was just working on some film titles this week, and I was at a post-production house. The person I was working with was telling me he does most of his work on big commercials and he was like, "You cannot believe, every decision is like, this huge consensus. And everybody in the room knows that they leave with a product that is inferior to what it could have been." That said, we never felt that our product was inferior to what it could have been, but I think there are limits as to what you can do when you're working in groups like that.

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SS: Okay, fair enough. Let's go back to the other question about, what was the ongoing discussion about relationship to the art world?

MM: I've already said the fundamental thing was, we're not going to be in this quiet, contemplative, rarified space. We're going to be out in the world. Then what started to happen was that, actually, money started to come into us. When I say money, it was a little money. And no, we didn't make any money from Gran Fury. There was some issue at some point of some people being like, "They're making money!" We made no money. In fact, we all – it was a negative financial investment. We did start to get some small grants, or offers from people who were in the art world, like the Whitney

Museum. They were like, “Why don’t you do a piece for Image World, and we’ll pay for the production.”

SS: What piece was that?

MM: “Welcome To America, The Only Industrialized Nation Besides South Africa With No National Healthcare.” It had a baby on it. So we did that piece, but at that point in time we were still saying, “Okay, we’ll do a piece in conjunction with your show, but we won’t do a piece to be shown in the Museum.” So what we did was, we did billboards around town. That was always an issue. There was always a lot of argument, as these offers would come in, of should we do them? Should we not? Are we preaching to the converted? Is there the potential that people who could actually benefit from some of this information, or from this discussion – will they actually be able – will someone besides art world people be able to see this work? So, that was always an argument. And, the one that became kind of the most problematic, and some people had real issues with, was the Venice Biennale.

SS: How did that happen? How did you get included in that?

MM: To be quite honest, one of my early jobs when I came to New York was working in the graphic design department of the Museum of Modern Art, and one of the curators I worked with a lot was Linda Shearer, who then went to Williams College to run their art museum. And that year, Linda Shearer happened to be the American curator on the Aperto panel. And she basically just called me up and said, “Would Gran Fury do something?” And she said, “If they do do something, I know these three granting agencies that I can help you get funds from, to fund the project.” So of course, I go back to Gran Fury to present this, knowing like – and it was a lot of back and forth. I mean, a

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couple of people were so mad they wouldn't even go to Venice. We tried doing our whole, "We'll do a project, but we won't do it in the space." And they were like, no. So, we did. We finally decided we would do it because 1) it's a big international situation – people come from all over the world to the Venice Biennial. And secondly, the whole Catholic Church thing was such an obvious target, that we just kind of couldn't let go of it.

SS: So, who worked on the Venice project?

MM: Pretty much everybody worked on it. To be catty, Avram [Finkelstein] was the one who the most anti-the project, and probably did the least amount of work, and refused to go to Venice. But everybody else kind of, eventually, came around.

SS: What was the piece?

MM: We call it the Pope piece. And, we had a big quote from the New York Cardinal – who's name I can't remember now –

SS: O'Connor.

MM: Cardinal O'Connor talking about how safe sex was a lie, and that that would not protect you from AIDS. So we just basically reprinted this quotation from him under an image of – actually, it was his quote, and it was under an image of the Pope, which was a little bit of an issue, but the Pope sanctions it all. So whatever. So that was one image, and then we had a parallel image, which was, "AIDS Rears its Ugly Head. Men Use Condoms or Beat It. AIDS Kills Women, Too" – which was a whole thing about, because in the Catholic Church, they're so down on homosexuality that they were like, if you're not homosexual, then you won't get AIDS.

SS: How would you guys decide okay, now we're going to do a poster that

has to do with heterosexual women? How would that be introduced?

MM: You know, everything – we had just finished working on a piece which was about the CDC definition of AIDS, and how their definition of AIDS was so male-centric. Basically, women were showing up in emergency rooms and being diagnosed with pelvic inflammatory disease, and being sent away with antibiotics. Long story short – they were dying of AIDS because it was being misdiagnosed, because what they were showing up with wasn't matching the CDC's definition of AIDS. So we had just done a piece about that, so it was in our heads, and it just kind of synced up with the whole Catholic Church marriage situation.

SS: Could you just talk for a minute – it's like, "Marlene McCarty, the only woman in Gran Fury." You've lived with that now for 15 years. How do you understand, or what was it like – all these guys – mostly gay men, I think they were all gay men – having so much consciousness about women, or thinking about women's issues? What was it in ACT UP that created that? Where did the information come from? Who was pushing those issues?

MM: You know, I don't know, I don't know. I have to say, we did a number of pieces that were about women or involved women. And if you looked at faces in the room, you would be like – with the exception of myself – why would they care? I don't know where that was coming from. Actually I do. I have an opinion that it was a kind of forced – this sounds bad, and I think, actually, good things came from it – but I do truthfully believe the impetus was a bit of forced political correctness of just like, we know we need to deal with these issues. So, they may not have been coming from a truly heart felt place, as much as, well, we should definitely do this. So, you know –

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SS: Were any of the women with AIDS in ACT UP involved in any of this?

MM: Not directly, but – for example, on that CDC piece, that information was coming from the Treatment and Data. It was coming from that group. There were a lot of women in that. Or at least, at a certain point in time, there were. So, that's the specifics of where the information was coming from. But it was kind of like, also – the way the dynamic worked was oftentimes, things would be in discussion in ACT UP, and then that would kind of trickle down and be brought up in discussion in Gran Fury.

SS: So, some people from Gran Fury were going to ACT UP meetings.

MM: Oh yeah, some people were like, really, really, every meeting kind of there. I just wasn't. So, there was a big link there. And then, what would often happen is, we would come back and like, hack around ideas, and then get to a certain point – like, on the CDC thing – and then, we'd go back to some specific group, to kind of clarify information.

SS: What was the CDC piece, I don't even remember?

MM: It was – I can't even remember the tagline, but it was a big, purple, backlit poster that was at bus stops, and it had an image of women in beauty contest bathing suits, and I can't remember what the tagline was.

SS: And who paid to get it on bus stops?

MM: That piece was funded by – I can e-mail you that information, but I can't tell you off the top of my head.

SS: What were the relationships within Gran Fury between people who were artists who had their own bodies of work, and people who were not?

MM: Well, you know, everybody was doing something. Tom was making movies, John was making art, I was making art, Donald was making art – plus, Don and I also formed Bureau, which really grew out of us meeting and working together in Gran Fury. Avram was doing his hair thing.

SS: Right, he was cutting his hair at Vidal Sassoon.

MM: Right. Richard Elovich was doing the performance thing. Loring was doing art then. I've left out a huge – Robert Vasquez was also making art, at that point in time.

SS: So, there wasn't like, a professionals versus the civilians kind of –

MM: No. I didn't feel that. Other people might answer that question differently, but I didn't feel that.

SS: Can you tell us what Bureau is?

MM: Bureau was a trans-disciplinary design studio that myself and Donald Moffett formed in 1989. After having worked together for awhile in Gran Fury, we were like, why are we working for other people, doing these jobs that we don't even really want to do, when we could form our own studio? And in that studio we could continue to produce some of the Gran Fury work, try to produce our own design work, which is politically motivated, or has something to say in the world. And also, because of the kind of art work we were both making at that point in time, we were like, we can also use the studio as a place to produce some of our own artwork. So, that's how Bureau started.

SS: Does it still exist?

MM: No, we closed it in 1999. We had it for 10 years. We closed it not because we were going out of business, by any means. In fact, it was the opposite – it

was chugging away. But Donald and I were both at a point where – we were doing less politically motivated work, and neither of us wanted to do it anymore. We just didn't want to do it, so we stopped.

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SS: So, you remembered the tagline, or James Wentzy remembered it.

MM: “Women Don't Get AIDS, They Just Die From It,” which was the whole issue.

SS: And, you wanted to go back to talk about –

MM: I wanted to go back to the Venice piece, just because after so much argument about oh, it's going to be in this rarified art thing and nobody's going to see it but art people, blah, blah, blah – it wound up being this huge scandal because – I don't know how they got this idea, but people who ran the Biennale were like, “We can't show this work, it's blasphemous. We can't put it up, the Church will shut us down.” They kept our work in Customs and wouldn't release it to us for the opening, so we staged like, this '60s-style sit-in, in the Director's Office. So, there was all this hoo-ha going on. And they finally told us they would release our work to us. Magistrates from the Church were coming to judge whether it was blasphemous. If it was blasphemous – because Italy doesn't have the same freedom of speech laws that we have – if it was blasphemous, all of us faced going to jail. So we're like, okay. So, we all had to gather at the Arsenale early one morning, before they opened the thing to the public. And they brought in our tubes, unrolled our tubes, and there were these guys there from the Church, walking around looking at the work. It was like, oh God – I'm going to be in jail by myself! The others all get to go together, I'm going to be stuck in an Italian jail! So the magistrates look at the work and finally they say to the Biennale people, “Well, we don't know if this

art. We don't know if this very good art, but it's not blasphemous, so they can hang it on the wall." So, we hung it on the wall, and the best thing – this is what I wanted to go back to – our goal was always to try and generate discussion, and generate discussion in the real world. The thing that happened was we started out that week of arguments with the Biennale people being like, "Why should we put this up? We don't have AIDS in Italy. This is a New York issue. This is not our issue. We don't have any of these problems. People won't understand it." You can't believe, after the little stink that was made around that work, every newspaper in that part of Italy and in the *Express*, had huge articles on AIDS and how it was like, this un-talked about problem in Italy, and how people have to become aware of this. And we were like, yes, yes – because it leapt out of that, here's a thing to look at in the art world.

SS: So, did Avram concede?

MM: He did, he did, absolutely. But, anyway.

SS: Can you talk about some of your favorite pieces besides that, that came out of Gran Fury?

MM: Well you know, I was very partial to "Women Don't Get AIDS, They Just Die From It."

SS: What did you like about it?

MM: Truthfully speaking, I didn't love the image. I don't think it was one of our best images, but I loved that text so much, and it was just so strong to see that in the street and it was so appropriate, and there was a little like, sub-text that kind of explained it that was somewhat succinct. "Kissing Doesn't Kill" was just hard to beat – it was also just so much fun, because – were you involved in the film?

SS: No.

MM: Because we did little videos of just dragging in everybody we could find to kiss, and it was just so – there was something so vivacious about that piece. It's always remained one of my favorite pieces. And then of course, the Venice piece – I was always like, that was a good thing. There was always – the money that we threw out on the Wall Street floor – I loved that.

SS: What did it look like?

MM: It just looked like Monopoly money. It was so lo-tech. It was Xeroxed literally onto green Xerox paper, and then just like, thrown over the floors.

SS: So, did ACT UP call you and say? We need green money for the Wall Street action!

MM: Everyone knew the Wall Street action was happening. Gran Fury was already kind of coalesced at this point and was going, what can we do? And then, someone would be, “Oh, it's got to be something about money.” And then someone else is like, “Money! We should throw money everywhere!” And then someone else is like, “We'll print words on money!” And then someone else is like, “We don't have any money.” And somebody else is like, “We'll Xerox money!” You know, it was just kind of – we knew the big actions coming up, and at least at that point in time, we were trying to do things that could piggyback with that.

SS: So, you just knew – you knew that there was action, and you knew that you were going to make a visual for it. You were going to make –

MM: In a simplified sort of way – in a very simple, reduced way. It was never quite that clear. It was all sort of murky.

SS: Did you guys ever make something that ACT UP didn't like?

MM: I'm sure we did, but I can't think at the moment what it was. I have memories of people like, "Well, we presented that on the floor." But, we basically by – after that kind of early period, where it was really more synced-up to actions, we started kind of veering off more on our own.

SS: And what did that mean, exactly? What did you do differently?

MM: We were doing things that were not necessarily in sync with ACT UP actions. For example, the piece we did with the Whitney – that was completely not in line with any ACT UP event.

SS: But it still represented the politics and point of view of ACT UP.

MM: Absolutely, I would say it was in sync with it. But, at that point, we sort of stopped caring if ACT UP cared about it nor not – approved it, shall we say.

SS: Did they disapprove it?

MM: It just wasn't an issue. But, the stuff that we did that was more action based – like the Wall Street money situation, that was much more about – can it say that? Can it not say that? That kind of conversation went on, on the floor of ACT UP a little bit.

SS: How do you think ACT UP affected your personal career?

MM: Well, if I hadn't gotten involved in all that stuff, I probably would have never had Bureau, and Bureau was – for 10 years, 1) it provided me a decent income, and 2) I feel like we did some really good work. It kind of put Donald and myself on the map in certain design worlds – which, I don't know if that's good or bad, but that wouldn't have existed. My own art career? That's a little more detached, in a way. Probably in

the early '90s, when I started showing the text pieces. I mean, I probably have to be honest and say that my affiliation with Gran Fury probably helped some of the galleries take notice of my work or me or whatever they take notice of, but the work wasn't the same kind of work. But, I'm sure it did help me get my foot in the door with some of those art people.

SS: What was the relationship in the day between the artists who were really engaged socially and the artists who refused that and were only in the rarified art scene? Were you ever at a dinner party where you would get in a real discussion with someone who had made the opposite choice?

MM: It didn't happen that often, because we tended to circulate in our similar crowds. I do remember winding up at a collector's house for dinner once, and actually getting into a very heated discussion with Barbara Bloom – who is now a very good friend of mine – over issues of politics in and out of the art gallery.

SS: What was the nature of the debate?

MM: I can't reconstruct that. I just remember, it was a very heated conversation and the collector who was hosting it was very uncomfortable with the whole thing. But, I can't even reconstruct what the nitty-gritty of it was.

SS: Because in the day, there was Ross Bleckner – there were all these different kinds of places that artists put themselves, even though people all gave work to the ACT UP auction, but in terms of actually making things –

MM: I wasn't a gay boy, so Ross had no interest in me, and I had no contact with him. So, that was a –

SS: Did you guys ever talk to Barbara Kruger about what was going on?

MM: Actually, Tom knew Barbara Kruger at that point, and he I think was very blunt with her of like, “We’re just ripping you off.” And she was like, “Fine!” I actually met Barbara, probably a couple of years after Gran Fury decided we got to stop. I actually met Barbara, and I was like, “You know, we owed you a lot.” And she was like, “I know, but I’m glad you did it.” She was great, she was really great.

SS: Were you all ever criticized artistically, negatively, in print or in person?

MM: In print? You know, a lot of art critic kind of people – it was kind of a mixed bag, because a lot of the art world saw us as their guilty conscience, in a way. We actually say that the reason we got money to do a number of those projects was because people in the art world had guilty consciences about the whole AIDS situation, and about the fact that that world was being devastated. And they were just like, okay, we’ll paint some pretty pictures. So, money was shuffled our way to sort of like, relieve their conscience, and let us do the dirty work, in a way. I think in a weird way, people – the critics kind of shied away from trashing us head on, because they knew – they knew, in a sense that what we were trying to do – we were never articulating that stuff as artwork. It was other people who were doing that. And, we were only concerned about making a dent in the AIDS crisis. And, I think some of the people who might have been more critical of us as art makers, were maybe just more dismissive of just like, “Oh, that’s propaganda.” Which was fine. We claimed that. We were making propaganda.

Tape III
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SS: I guess what I’m getting at – and it’s a really difficult question and it’s something that I struggle with myself, because as we go around interviewing – ACT UP people are very special people. And what is it, inside a person, that looks at a

situation like the AIDS crisis and decides to go paint a pretty picture versus the person who then gives 10 years of their life to Gran Fury? What is it?

MM: I don't know. I don't know.

SS: But surely, you've thought about your own life?

MM: You know, at that point in time – you can't ignore the crisis situation of like, people were dying all around you. And there was a certain anxiety level that was ever-present. I mean, I have that question now more today, because I've been more involved in the last few years. I don't do any "activist" work, at the moment. That question is always in my head of like, why? Why don't I? Why am I doing more rarified work? It's certainly not like there's a lack of things to change in the world. And, I can't find the answers for it, but I have a feeling that – I don't know.

SS: You have a show on right now.

MM: Today is the last day.

SS: So when you look at that work, how are you a different person? What is your impulse that's different? Because there was a crisis then, but not everybody responded to it.

MM: Right. I guess part of the thing is – when I look at the work I do now, I see it as a lot of those same issues and – not specifically the AIDS thing – but more around feminist issues or situations. I see a lot of those issues still present in the work, but instead of turning out, they've turned in and they've become more cryptic and maybe richer in certain ways. But, I know from myself that at this point in time, I don't – even though I can identify lots of things around me that should or could change, I don't feel the level of panic that I felt in the mid-'80s, and I don't know if that's because it was so

visceral, and people were dropping dead around you. I don't know if that made it so much more intense, but I don't feel that kind of crisis thing at the moment – which I'm sure people can argue and say, well you should.

SS: But your life is so different. You live in this beautiful apartment. You live with Christine, you have a child, you're not living in the rats on 5th Street. You're also 15 years older. Your whole life is different.

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MM: I'm tired! Yeah, but on the other hand, there's a kind of day-to-day activism of sort of like – being a lesbian couple with a daughter, you do have to interface with the status quo, everyday world in a real traditional way. You have a daughter, she needs to go to school, she has to get into schools, you have to go to schools, you have to do interviews. And every one of those things is like, being really solid with – we're going in there, we're going to be a lesbian couple, we're looking for situations – I'm talking about schools right now – where our child can feel like a part of a community and not be singled out as like, oh, the freaky child with two moms. So, it becomes kind of a more, everyday –

SS: It's obvious. You're the only person I can think of who went through all of ACT UP straight and is now gay.

MM: [LAUGHS] I know! I know!

SS: There are quite a few people who went the other way. So, how has coming out changed your work?

MM: My work has changed – if you took a piece in 1993, and the piece I did this year, and put them side by side you'd be like, "Wow, that's pretty different." One was text and one is image. And one is very narrative based, and one is very ironic. The

old work was very ironic. This work is not ironic. I don't know how much of the change in artwork was a part of coming out, or would the artwork have developed in a very similar way, even if I hadn't come out. I don't know, I don't know that, and I can't say that coming out made the artwork change, because the artwork – it is kind of a weird development within itself – not to say – it's obviously affected by myself, but I can't draw those distinctions about how much of coming out affected what changes in the artwork. I don't know.

SS: Okay, fair enough. What brought Gran Fury to an end?

MM: It was a very conscious decision. We – you know, you asked me earlier about, did we talk about other collaborative groups? And we actually did, towards the end we talked about how they never lasted. And the truth of the matter is – like I had referred to earlier, there were a few months there, where we were all really reluctant to let go of it. And I have to be honest and say, some people had become very tied up with Gran Fury at that point in time – their complete identity, of being in the world was somehow interlaced with this entity of Gran Fury. So, some people were very, very reluctant to let go of it. However, we did all come to this sort of crucial awareness that the way we were working or had been working was no longer effective, and we had no desire to kind of like, peter out as becoming a more and more ineffectual – the PONY situation, we were all a little, my God, what have we done? And we kind of had no desire to die that death – of just becoming more and more incoherent and ineffectual. So actually, the thing that kind of brought it to a head – I might get this a little bit wrong, because I wasn't involved in the last letter-writing situation – but I think it was, again, the New Museum. I might be mistaken. It might have been the Drawing Center – it was

some art institution around town invited us, yet again, to participate in a show. And we were just like, we can't, we can't. Then, what we decided to do was to write a statement. I think it was a pink slip. John Lindell was, and I think Tom –

SS: What year is this?

MM: 1993 or 1994. It was John Lindell. I think Tom was involved. Robert might have been involved. There were about four people involved, who wrote a very succinct little statement about like, we did our thing, it's time to go, we don't exist anymore. And I think at the end, there was a very sweet goodbye. From that point on the majority of us were like, Gran Fury does not exist anymore. We did it, it's over, it's done. There were a couple of people who then did try and do a couple of other projects – like, sort of revive it – but I think there were a couple of attempts, and then it just died out. But, for the most part, we all just decided it was time. It was done, we did our thing, and now we had to go figure out what else to do with our lives.

SS: So, here's my last question. So, just looking back on your time there, what do you consider to be Gran Fury's greatest achievement? And, what do you consider to be its most unrealized potential or disappointment?

MM: Our greatest achievement? I'm sure that question answered by myself, as opposed to somebody on the outside, would be two different things. But to me, it's more a personal thing – the greatest achievement. It was amazing – to be able to come together with these 11 people, and just like, everybody was in there, throwing out their two bits. Some of the comments were completely out in left field, but everything was processed and processed and processed. And you saw how 11 people were better than one. And I don't know – it was just a really amazing experience to see how the collaborative model

could work. And I think there were moments that it was great. It was so fantastic. And that to me is its greatest achievement. The biggest disappointment? Once again, to me and to a lot of us, its biggest disappointment was that we were not able to sustain. I think that was it.

SS: But you certainly made your mark.

MM: But, you know, I have to say – this is also something that I look at as an artist, because we did make a mark, but never once, was the goal to make a mark – which is kind of a great thing, too, because we just did what we needed to do, what we felt we had to do, and we didn't care. We weren't like about, "Let's do something." We weren't about finding the form that's never been done. It was, let's take what works, and make it happen and rip off everybody, and not make any bones about it. As an artist, it's really beneficial to me to remember how we worked, and to try and keep in touch with that thing of working – this sounds so queer – but we really worked from our heart. It was not about – well, we worked from our minds, too – but it was very, very passionate and it was not at all – it was goal-oriented, in that we had something we wanted to reach, but it was not goal-oriented in the sense of like, we want to make a masterpiece. That was never there. And, that was a great experience to have had.

SS: Do you feel like you want to make a masterpiece? You personally?

MM: It's a funny question, because I don't know if I can. Second of all, once you're working alone – of course, I'm speaking for myself – in that studio – I spend so much time alone, in the kind of like, claustrophobic environment of my studio, and the pressure to produce the masterpiece is kind of like from the outside. It's kind of from like, if you're going to play in the art world, this is what you gotta aim for. And I kind of

hate that, I have to say. So, that's where that idea of masterpiece is coming from.

SS: Thank you, Marlene.

MM: Thank you, Sarah.

SS: You told us so much great stuff. It was really wonderful. A lot of stuff we didn't know.

[END OF INTERVIEW]