

CONVERSATIONS

**JUDITH
BERNSTEIN**

VENUS

MANHATTAN

CONVERSATIONS



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Conversations is an ongoing production from Venus Over Manhattan, where artists, writers, critics, academics, and familiars come together to talk about art. Each conversation is published as an audio recording made accessible the gallery's website, and accompanied by a PDF that features a transcript of the conversation. Listen along at #ConversationsVOM.

On April 23rd, 2020, Judith Bernstein and Alison Gingeras spoke with Anna Furney about Bernstein's career. They discuss her time at Yale in the 1960s, her first solo-exhibition at A.I.R. Gallery, and what it means to be a Feminist artist.

Judith Bernstein is an artist living and work in New York City. She joins the conversation from her loft on the Lower East Side, where she's lived for more than 50 years.

Alison Gingeras is a curator and writer. She has held positions at numerous institutions including the Guggenheim Museum, the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Pompidou and the Palazzo Grassi. She joins the conversation from her home in Brooklyn.

Anna Christina Furney is partner at Venus Over Manhattan. She moderated this conversation

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ACF: Hi everybody. I wanted to introduced Judith Bernstein and Alison Gingeras, two very dear parts of the VOM family. Judith Bernstein is of course the legendary artist living and working here in New York City, and Alison is a world-famous curator and art-historian of all things, and in particular, has had a longstanding relationship with Judith and her work, and a lot of the subject matters that she deals with. So welcome, both of you.

JB: Thank you. It's great to be on this call.

AG: Thank you so much for having us.

ACF: Yeah. So I guess I wanted to get started. Alison, I was curious to know how you were introduced to Judith's work, and then, if you could give a little background on your work with her, and then I would love to dive in with Judith, her early biography, and how she came to be the superstar that she is today.

JB +

AG: [Laughing]

AG: Well, I have had the pleasure of working with Judith and also doing a couple of art-historical, sort of oral history interviews with her in the course of my research about the beginnings of Feminist Art and Second Wave Feminism. And, of course, I came to this history sort of through the back door. I was actually interested in interrogating this category of Feminism, not through the

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accepted canon of a lot of the women artists that were celebrated, and sort of the mainstream cornerstones of this period of time. I hesitate to call it a movement, because Judith is among the artists who, in my opinion, is part, and was part of this sort of radical fringe that questioned from the very beginning what feminist art should look like, and what it should be about. So I had put together an exhibition called "Black Sheep Feminism: The Art of Sexual Politics," and the followed it up with another project called "Sex Work," and Judith was part of that project, which was at Frieze London some years ago. And I'm also still, and actually now, at the height of this shut down due to the pandemic, I am going back to this manuscript that I've been writing about these fringe histories, and about artists who were not part of the Feminist mainstream, who by many accounts were actively excluded by other Feminists because of the iconography or the subject matter that they were confronting, specifically subject matter that was seen as, like, sexually incorrect. So that brought us to Judith, and I was very interested in her beginnings and her involvement with a group of artists that were brought together by Anita Steckel and the FIGHT CENSORSHIP group. And Judith, maybe you could talk to us about that group and the fact that you were all sort of brought together into this loose collective, because you'd all experienced censorship in one form or another, and because of the [breaks up...]

ACF: Oh, Alison, there's a little break up, but just,

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sounds like you're back, sorry.

AG: Oh, okay. Well I was just saying maybe Judith could talk to us about the FIGHT CENSORSHIP group, and how she wound up getting involved with that group of women artists.

JB: Oh, you know, it's interesting, because Anita Steckel was certainly part of that group, and a very big part of that group. So was Joan Semmel, and there were a few artists that were doing work that was out of the mainstream, so to speak, mainstream Feminism; not considered part of it. And also it was a very interesting time, and Anita Steckel was very bawdy, and she had a quote that she always said, which is actually right on target, but it's a little bit unusual. She said: "If a penis is wholesome enough to go into a woman, it should be wholesome enough to go into a museum."

ACF: [Laughing]

AG: I love that.

ACF: That's fantastic.

JB: It's a great quote, and she used to—every time she would bring that up, and it was very funny. She had also worked as a croupier, by the way, in Las Vegas, so she had a whole range of things. But I know that with my own work, that many times, the Feminists considered—when you were a Feminist, it somehow had to be self-referential.

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In my situation, I was observing men, and then I was making work in terms of my observations. So I was actually calling out the male patriarchy. Since that time, I was also thinking, when you talk about the penis, the penis represents power. My own work, by the way, has these very large penises, and they were a combination of penis and screws. And when I started out, I did these "Fuck Vietnam" paintings, when I was a graduate student at Yale. And then I went into doing these very large drawings that were nine by thirty feet, approximately, and they were a combination of a screw and a phallus. And I felt that—the penis represents power, and every woman has a penis. Now, not literally, but figuratively. And men literally have a penis, but they do not have a copyright on it. And women have a metaphorical penis, and it is a source of women's power. So that's what I came to believe, and still do. So that was part of that timeframe. But we got together, we had a lot of fun, but we also were on a lot of radio shows, and it was quite a time frame. And Louise Bourgeois was also part of that group.

AG: Yes, and wasn't Hannah Wilke.

JB: Yes, Hannah Wilke was part of it, too. And there were a few others, a few others in it, too.

AG: And, in terms of this central question, I mean you were all, sort of, I would term you all "Phallic Feminists."

JB: Yes.

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AG: And the phallic=ness in both in the iconography, and what you depict, as well as in this kind of use of power. And I wonder, why do you think—on one hand, it wasn't like sex was completely forbidden in that time, because a lot of Second Wave Feminism dealt with, like, the myth of the vaginal orgasm, and...

JB: Yes, that's correct.

AG: ...there was a lot of vulva imagery in Feminist art. But what was it, in your recollection, that made phallic imagery—that made Feminists so nervous?

JB: Well I think that, as I said, they seem to have a very rigid attitude about what Feminism was about. And it was self-referential. And that took many many many years to change that opinion. So, any time you had a penis, that was obviously using male imagery, and it was not really Feminist. As opposed to—so, as a result, if it was not a cunt, it was not Feminist. So, it was, uh, it shut me out, by the way. Although some Feminists let me in; I had my foot in the door, but not the whole body.

AG: [Laughing] Well, and in many ways, you're lucky, because you were, you know, you had this camaraderie. I mean, some of your peers—like I'm thinking about someone like Betty Tompkins—were just completely not let in...

JB: Yes, yes.

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AG: ...it was misunderstood that a Feminist artist could appropriate something from patriarchy, and change it's meaning.

JB: Yes, that's right.

AG: So, your appropriation of the phallus as screw. And that actually kind of brings me to a really simple question: When did that conflation of the screw and the penis come to you? How does that come to be such a signature?

JB: Well you know, it's funny, because when I—I'm seventy-seven years old. And when I went to—I went to Penn State as an undergraduate. When I was there—you have to realize this was in 1960—there were three men to every woman. And then when I went to Yale, it was an all-male undergraduate program. It was an all male school. In the graduate department they had women. But I saw the hierarchy that was involved, and, of course, after I graduated, I realized that I hit a wall, and that's why, myself, and twenty artists started A.I.R. Gallery. So that's how that worked. But I would say I did these "Fuck Vietnam" drawings, and the "Fuck Vietnam" drawings and paintings were because I had read an article in the New York Times that said "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" was taken from bathroom graffiti. So, with that, a lightbulb went off, so that I was actually influenced by something that was not part of an art movement. So that graffiti, I made these "Fuck Vietnam" paintings. And at

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the time, the Vietnam War was really raging, and of course, it was a war that was a draft war, it was not anything else. And as a result, all the undergraduates and graduates were wanting not to go to war. So there was an enormous amount of protests. So I was doing these "Fuck Vietnam" paintings. And then, when I—after I left Yale, and also I continued—I continued probably until '66, '68, because I made works that were, that were...For example, I made a painting that was an anatomical drawing of a male phallus, and it had a trigger, bullets, and, literally, forty-five bullets attached in the scrotum, and they were shooting out, and that was on a grid, and that was called "The Fun Gun." So there was an undercurrent of fighting and also war, and then I made some drawings, for example—one, the Whitney bought—that is called "Vietnam Garden." And with that "Vietnam Garden" drawing, they were, the phalluses were actually tombstones. And they had either stars, one had a Jewish star, and then many crosses, by the way, in terms of a "Vietnam Garden." And so I had used these very funny graffitis—"This may not be heaven, but Peter hangs out here"—this had to do with a "Supercock," a man flying through the air with a phallus three times the size of him. And then, I did one, "Superzipper," with a zipper on. And I did another one, "Vietcock," with a flag coming out of the urethra, and the cape was a flag, and then he's attached to the White House. So I did three variants of that. And then I also did these "Vietnam Salutes," and I did very crude paintings that said things like "Baby,

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the fuckin' you get..."—"A Soldier's Christmas in Vietnam"—"Baby, the fuckin' you get ain't worth the fuckin' you take." And one was "US Bombs...", uh... Anyway, there were a lot of the Anti Vietnam, and they were very crude, they were pantyhose that had been stuffed and painted, and they were phalluses that had been severed. So they were very crude. But you know something? It's never as crude as war. Because, I always had this rage at injustice; and, nothing is as horrible as the savagery of war, and war gives men the license to kill, and all that. And I know in '68, there was a horrible thing that happened with L.B.J. It had to do with the My Lai massacre, where hundreds of South Vietnamese women, children, and older men were killed, were massacred, by the Americans. And then, also, in '68, there was the Tet Offensive, and that was an enormous killing of Americans. So all this stuff made this kind of imagery very appropriate. And after I left, and I was in New York, doing these drawings and paintings, I started doing screw drawings, and they were screws, screw, being screwed, and I always used the wording, I always like a lot of humor, and I used graffiti for humor. And humor is actually wonderful because it cuts the seriousness of it, and also, there's always that psychological subtext that I had in all my work. So, then when I was doing these screw drawings, I did a series where a screw became a phallus. So that first it was a flat screw, then it was a metal screw, and then it kept going on until it was a phallus. So then I used these combinations of screws and phalluses in my imagery, and I did

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many of them for a long period of time. And many of them look like warheads. There was a series, "Five Panel Vertical," that I showed in 1973 at A.I.R. Gallery, and that one was sold to the Carnegie Museum—that was only recently, by the way, that was not sold at the time.

AG: How many decades later, right?

JB: Oh my god, oh, listen. You know, I'll tell you something: recently, I'm talking about six months ago, I sold a piece to MoCA, Museum of Contemporary Art in California, of one of those screw drawings, and I sold, recently, a giant screw piece to the Dakis Collection [Dakis Joannou's Collection, the DESTE Collection], in...

AG: Athens?

JB: Athens, Greece. Yes, yes. And so I had a lot of work that was sold, but was sold so far later than the Vietnam War, it was just a different timeframe, yeah.

AG: Well it's taken more than fifty years...

JB: That's right.

AG: ...for not only the mainstream of art history, but also even Feminism to catch up with you.

JB: That's right, that's right.

AG: And I wonder about the way you started those

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drawings, and the connection between their style, and the vigor with which you use charcoal—the expressiveness of them—and the violence that you are addressing.

JB: Right.

AG: I see this kind of connection—maybe you could speak a little bit about that, and that method...

JB: Well you know...

AG: ...especially that scale.

JB: ...I'll tell you something. I had a lot of rage, personally. And I came from a background where my mother had a lot of rage. Now my mother was not someone who wanted access to the system, which is what I wanted, but she was someone who didn't like her life. And when I was part of the Gorilla Girls, there was enormous rage, too, for women who wanted so much more. So I had a lot of rage, and my rage was actually put into my work. It was not something that I had general rage when I talked to people and stuff, but that was something—that rage was part of my aesthetic. So I have these giant pieces that were very ominous and rage-filled, and they were sexual, they were anti-war, and they were Feminist, and mine is bigger than yours. And later on, after I did these screw drawings, I also did signature pieces, literally, and I did some that were gigantic, like, sixteen by forty five feet, of just my signature, and called "Signature Piece."

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And those pieces were about stardom, ego, male posturing, and also my own ego, and my own rage.

ACF: And then from that kind of body of work, you really evolved into, kind of, employing language, and literal words, you know, into bodies of work.

JB: Yes.

ACF: I'd love to hear more about how you chose those words, and how the evolution from image to text happened.

JB: Well you know, I always used the text and the image, by the way. And, for example, I always nailed it with—[laughing] “nailed it,” so to speak; everything is a double- or triple-entendre with the work I do.

ACF: [Laughing]

JB: But nevertheless, with “The Fun Gun,” the “Vietnam Garden,” and “L.B.J.,” by the way, I did work with L.B.J., and the Whitney bought a piece that had that in it; it said “Hey, hey, L.B.J., how many kids did you kill today.” And that was a ditty that was actually sung at the time at these rallies. Let's see: “Union Jack Off Flags.” “Jack Off On US Policy in Vietnam.” Then I did a painting that I've repurposed again, “Cockman Shall Rise Again.” It was Governor Wallace, a reactionary Governor of Alabama, and his head is a phallus: a limp dick. He's a dick head.

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ACF: [Laughing]

JB: And then I had some “Uncle Sam Balls Vietnam and gets V.D., not V.C.” Then I also did a drawing that was in the show in Washington that Melissa Ho had curated at the Smithsonian, and that was “Fuck by Number in Vietnam.” And it was to connect the dots, and it said “20,000 Americans Killed in Vietnam So Far.” And it was one of those, they used to have these books, you know, these, that you connect the dots, and this one made a phallus. But I used all the time, and still do, use the language, by the way. I love the language. And I find it—I think that humor is something that, it's also a way—it's almost like an ejaculation, because it relieves tension, and it also makes it very memorable, and also, I personally have a good sense of humor, so I use that. And I just love to nail—when I think, for example—I had a show against Donald Trump. And that show was called “Money Shot,” which is a porn term. And I also had a show at the Drawing Center, which you interviewed me for—

AG: Yes.

JB: and at the Drawing Center it was called “Cabinet of Horrors.” So I love the language. Language is as important as the visual imagery.

AG: Well, and I love the fact that when you take on phallic power like the presidency...

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JB: Right

AG: ...gone awry, you deploy that same phallic power against itself. Maybe you could speak a little bit about these incredible caricatures where you turn Trump into these, you know, ridiculous cock-nosed symbols...

JB: Yeah, that's right.

AG: ...and you, it was a, you know, a total violence burlesque...

JB: That's right.

AG: ...of his own, you know, ridiculous assertion of his male dominance, which we all know—thank you, Stormy Daniels—is...

**JB +
ACF:** [Laughing]

AG: ...not that impressive. [Laughing].

JB: You know, it's funny, I use terms like "Trumpenschlong," by the way, and I use, "Count...," oh, what was it? It was a Count Dracula, but it was called something else. I have "Frankenschlong," "Trumpenschlong," um, so I make fun of it. And I have, what's the other one? Uh... "Count Trump." I have "Count Trump," that's with Dracula teeth and stuff. So I make fun of him, and I feminize him, and put him in—always a limp dick, by the way—and I also

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a spread eagle one, which I made, where you have Donald Trump as the head, and the head is a phallus, and you have a Nazi swastika on the cheek, and his hair, and the mustache, and then you have the spread eagle legs, so that Donald Trump is a cunt.

AG: Yes. Well it's funny because I was thinking a lot about that show that you did—which was very early—

JB: Yes.

AG: You know, you made those works right after the election.

JB: That's correct.

AG: And then the show was just a few months into his presidency.

JB: That's right.

AG: And I remember, because, in parallel, I was doing some activist work, as well—and, so many people thought we were being hysterical, we were overreacting, and how it's gotten so much worse than some of your most horrific drawings.

JB: That's correct, that's exactly right. And you know, it's funny, because, Adam Weinberg, the Director of the Whitney came down, and he said right away when I was doing these, he said, "Donald Trump is a conman." And that's exactly what it was, he's

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a conman. And he said that it was very brave of Brett Littman [Director of the Drawing Center], in an institution, to give me a show. And I was very lucky that I was doing work even before Donald Trump was elected, I did some that had Hillary [Clinton], as well as Donald Trump. I did not like Hillary, but I certainly voted for her, without a doubt. But nevertheless, what an incredible time. But I knew right away that this was gonna be a horror. And of course his cabinet appointments were, you know, beyond belief. Beyond belief.

AG: Yeah, well, and I mean, I think with this banning of—this temporary ban, this executive order now—you know, people, again, did not—thought that anyone who made the comparison between Trump and the Third Reich were overdoing it. But what we're seeing right now is...

JB: That's right, that's right.

AG: ...I mean, positive eugenics.

JB: That's right, that's exactly right.

AG: Even with the way the pandemic is being handled, where the "weak," you know, the so-called "weak," or the elderly population, should be sacrificed for capitalism.

JB: That's right, that's right.

ACF: Or even beyond that, the fact that the statistics show that it's predominantly, you know, it's

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either people of color, or people that are demographically underserved, who are the ones who are the most effected...

JB: That's right.

ACF: ...and that's...

JB: No question.

ACF: Yeah.

JB: Go ahead, sorry.

ACF: No, I'm just in total agreement. It's just becoming more and more obvious.

JB: Yeah. I'm hoping, by the way—you know, you never know how things will go, in terms of what happens before an election. And Donald Trump, you know, when I was thinking of the presidency, I was thinking of course of L.B.J., and he became president, of course, when Kennedy was killed. And also when Franklin Delano Roosevelt was killed, Truman became president, and Truman always had a sign, "The Buck Stops Here." With Donald Trump, the buck never stops here. The only thing that he takes credit for are only things that are fabulous that he virtually has nothing to do with. So it's really all about—oh, I don't know—

ACF: It's propagandist. I mean, so much of what he does...

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JB: It's completely propagandist. It's completely propaganda, by the way, it's completely propaganda. And my work, by the way, is fact-based, and it's not based on misleading or faulty prejudice. It is fact-based. And when you think of propaganda, you think of the Nazis—

ACF: Absolutely.

JB: And that's of course the worst, where it goes to the nth degree.

ACF: So I'd like to ask—

AG: And also—

ACF: Oh, yeah—

AG: Oh, go on.

ACF: No, I was going to change the subject. [Laughter]. I was going to say, you know, I'm curious to know, Judith, you've had this history of art-making, with imagery that is so objectively politically, or Feminist, or, you know, whatever you want to label it. I'm curious to know how you're finding the world's reception of the work now, and why you think people are more, as you said, eager and open, and fifty years later, major museums are adding pieces to their collections. I'm curious to know what your opinion is on the evolution.

JB: Well, I think times have changed considerably.

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And when you say "fuck" it's not like horror, the way it was fifty years ago. It's just in the general vocabulary. It's not even—And all humor is much more out there and raw. And it's a different time frame. So therefore it's much more acceptable to—how in the world have we gotten a president who is so crude, and also, who every time he gives a speech, it's like he's gone to a cock fight, and he's a bully. And I think that the time is so different now that, it's much more acceptable to have this kind of humor, and also, it's raw, and it also nails what the issues are. So it's been—I've been fortunate that the aesthetic has gone in my favor. Sometimes you don't know, it could go in a much more conservative way, but it did not, which works for me.

ACF: You know, and the idea of the woman in power being a more acceptable figure is such a reflection of what your work is about, because the phallus is, you know, it's a powerful image about ownership, and reclaiming the power of the feminine.

JB: That's right, you know, I'll tell you something: originally, when I was doing all these phallic pieces, the "Fuck Vietnam," I thought that if a woman were in power we would not have these wars. I don't believe that; now, I don't believe that. I think women can be as rage-full and war-like as the men. I don't think that there is really that distinction, that I thought at one time was. But we hadn't had enough women in power to know that, but of course we had Indira Gandhi,

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we had Golda Meir, we had some very strong women who were in power, but none of course in the United States. And of course, we had, obviously—England has had women in power. Thatcher, you know, and all that.

ACF: Well I'm curious also to talk about a body of work that we haven't touched on, which is the "Anthurium" series, from the eighties, from the early eighties.

JB: Oh, right.

ACF: Because I wanted to talk—because, you know, that was part of the show at A.I.R., right?

JB: Right. That's correct.

ACF: Yeah, and what those mean to you, the process of how they came to be, and if you could just describe them a bit to us.

JB: Well, you know, I –

AG: Maybe, too, we could talk about A.I.R.

ACF: Oh, yeah.

AG: Because some people might not know what it is.

ACF: Smart.

JB: Well, you know, A.I.R. was the first women's gallery. It was a coop, and it was the first women's

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gallery. At that period of time, a coop could exist. That doesn't work today. But it worked at that period of time. And we tried to figure out a name for the gallery, because all names had to do with who was the director, and who was the owner, and stuff like that. So I suggested "T.W.A.T.": Twenty Women Artists Together.

ACF: [Laughing]

JB: And which of course got a great laugh. But even at the time, I wasn't serious about that. You know, I didn't really take myself seriously, even for that name. Of course, it wouldn't have gone over anyway. But Howardena Pindell, who was in the gallery, she had suggested "Jane Eyre," and then we used "A.I.R." – Artists In Residence — which was a coin for that, uh, that was an anachronism. And what happened is that in the streets of Manhattan, there were a lot of places that were lost, that were not legal. So if you had an AIR no. 5, you knew that if there was a fire, the fire department would go to 5, and make sure the artist would have left, you know, was safe, from the fire. But, um, A.I.R. was actually very good because the aesthetic of the gallery was, I would say, more—it was not realistic—it was more conceptual, so as a result, it was a good name for the gallery, "Air," "A.I.R." You know, and, we got a lot of coverage and a lot of support. That started in '72, 1972. And you think that it was a hundred years about, but it was very revolutionary at that time. There were no other galleries that had all women artists. So

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that was a great time. Also: at that time, we were all young. Most of the people in the gallery—a few were older, by the way, like Nancy Spero, et cetera—but nevertheless, most of us were in our late twenties. So it was—all things were possible. So it was a very exciting time.

ACF: What were some of the other names involved in the gallery that we might be familiar with, or people you recall?

JB: Well, Mary Grigoriadis, Dotty Attie, uh – oh, go ahead.

AG: Mary Beth Edelson.

JB: Well, Mary Beth Edelson was not part of the first wave; she came later. But nevertheless she joined the gallery later, so did Ana Mendieta, and she joined the gallery also at a little later date. Yeah, yeah. They were not part of the first wave. Mary Beth also wasn't in New York at that period of time. Yeah, when it started in '72. Yeah.

ACF: Mhmm. So tell us about the show at A.I.R. and the works that were included. So your show happened in, what, 1981?

JB: No, my, well—the first show I had with the “screw” drawings was in 1973.

ACF: Yeah.

JB: And that was the first one-person show. They had

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two-person shows before that. And then I was the last person to have a two-person show. So I got to have the first one-person show at the gallery. And that created a lot of buzz, and then after that, I had one other show, in 1984, which was this “Anthurium A to V” series. It was “Anthurium Through Venus,” and I did these pieces that were, um, stylized drawings of Anthuriums, that—it's a kind of flower that's a tropical, and semi-tropical flower, that's like a heart-shape, and it has a stamen coming out. So it was a stylized version of that along, like a runner, on top. And I also had—I used a lot of biological material. I made charcoal drawings of all different kinds of flowers, and many of them were venuses, and penises, and backs of people, backs of women that looked like a penis, and a venus. And so I had these parts, that were drawings, and then I made those very large, on canvas. I made those charcoal drawings on canvas.

ACF: Mhmm.

JB: And the whole show, which was, in essence, had an enormous amount of phalluses in them, but were actually biological. They were anthropomorphic, yeah, pieces.

ACF: I can plug the—

JB: And that was in 1984. That's correct, yeah.

ACF: I was gonna say there are great images of the show, and the work, in the book “Dicks of Death,”

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that you published a few years back.

JB: Right

ACF: A fabulous book—so that's a plug to go buy the book.

JB: That was published by a man in Zürich, called Patrick Frey. And he did a great job. And the book is very interesting because it has all the names of the pieces, so that it's almost like concrete poetry. And it also has, by each year, and it also has installations, as well as small pieces. So it's really like an anthology, from that time. Really, from '66 to, I would say, 2016.

ACF: Mhmm.

AG: That series also seems to be very unique in the way you use color.

JB: Yes.

AG: Which is interesting. Maybe you could speak a little bit about how color has evolved in your work. Because, obviously, black and charcoal dominate, but—

JB: Right.

AG: —I'm interested to hear more about how you make those chromatic decisions.

JB: Well, you know, it's funny, I actually go by, you

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know, I go by instinct to be honest. And also, I made a lot of decisions when I was younger, that were not also completely thought out. And later on, I sort of backed up, and after I did them, I realized a lot of subtext, and a lot of psychology, that I didn't realize at the time. So the same with the color: I used very bright colors, and I used the similar stylized imagery, that was very phallic. And they were actually quite beautiful. And they were a nice counterpoint to the black and white charcoal paintings that were six-foot square, that created an environment. It was a very nice show. Yeah. I never re-showed any of those pieces, you know, yet—I just showed them that one time in '84, and that was it.

ACF: Well we're excited to have them in this online exhibition. So, it's a thrill.

JB: Great.

ACF: I want to ask a question that kind of backtracks some things, a bit.

JB: Sure, go ahead.

ACF: Well so you speak briefly about having gone to Yale and undergraduate, and how that was influential in many ways—But while you were at Yale, you speak about the influences of this very male dominated student body. But I'm curious to know, you know, did you find your academic years at school in that capacity to be as influential and important as your working years in New

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York? Because it almost feels like, to me, that you're education, in many ways, as the artist you that you are today, evolved or really blossomed in New York, amongst your peers.

JB: Yeah. I would say—I will tell you, frankly, the “Fuck Vietnam” series, which was very, was extremely liberating and a lot of fun, by the way—I had known some people in the grad—I roomed with a woman who was part of the graduate drama school. Her name is Carrie Robbins, and that's how I actually went to Yale. What happened was we were doing undergraduate work together, and she wanted to be a costume and scene designer, and she said “Oh, I'm going to Yale, why don't you apply and see what happens.” And my choices—both of us were undergraduates in art education, god forbid—and we thought, “oh my god, my choices will be teaching in a high school in Asbury Park, New Jersey,” which sounded horrific to me. So I applied to Yale and got a full scholarship, and at that time, Yale was so cheap—if I tell you how much it cost, you would think I went in the Civil War.

ACF: [Laughing]

JB: But that was not the case. But nevertheless, I knew these people, John Guare, who had written *The House of Blue Leaves*, and had written the movie *Atlantic City*, and Ken Brown, also a playwright, and Ron Liebman, who's an actor, died recently. Anyway, these guys would tell me all these words: cock, prick, dick, and,

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uh, cunt, et cetera. So it was—I was one of the guys, and I found it extremely liberating and fun. And then I would make up things that were appropriate, and I would go into the bathrooms at Yale, and I would have a good time, in terms of, getting the idea of what scatological graffiti was about. But almost all the graffiti I made up. Some of them I did not. All the ditties and the limericks I didn't make up: “There once was a man from Nantucket, who had a dick so long...,” et cetera.

ACF: [Laughing]

JB: Even I'm embarrassed to say that today! But nevertheless, I would also say that when I came to New York, I also did these giant “screw” drawings, which were a combination of screws and phalluses that were very powerful. And that was also very liberating. You know, at the time—the one piece that was very well known, that's most well known, is this horizontal piece that was censored in Philadelphia. And I had, there was a show of women artists in 1974, and it was an international show. And as a result, the show had I would say about, less than a hundred women, about a hundred women. And it was a show at the Philadelphia Civic Center. And that show actually didn't come about—it did come about—but I was not in that show because they thought, somehow, my drawing would damage children and women forever. They're always trying to protect the women, you know, [laughing], with these phallic pieces. But nevertheless, there was

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a lot of brouhaha, and they printed out buttons that said “Where’s Bernstein?” But I didn’t go to the opening because a good friend of mine, Walter De Maria, had said to me, “Well if you go to the opening, they’re gonna say, ‘Where’s Bernstein?’”—that’s what their buttons said—“and they’re gonna say ‘Oh, she’s over there in the corner.’”

ACF: [Laughing].

JB: So I decided not to go to the opening. But I would say that each time that I do something, I want to do something that has a great deal of impact, that is something that you will notice. And I think that all my life I wanted to be noticed, and that was an important aspect. So I did something visually that was arresting, and I also said something that was very impactful. So the combination was very important. But I would say that both series, as well as current shows—because I did a giant drawing of my own signature—that had to do with stardom, and so on, which I mentioned before. And also, a lot about the Donald Trump series—so I had a fair amount of—each series, I thought was—Oh, I did a “Birth of the Universe” series, which—in addition to the Donald Trump series—both the Birth of the Universe series and the Donald Trump series, anti-Trump series, were done with fluorescent paint that also had fluorescent lighting in the space, and it had enormous impact, by the way. Enormous impact. And both of those, those were giant cunt pieces. And they were—I had a [show of them at] Gavin

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Brown, and I had an installation at ICA London, as well as Studio Voltaire in London. They had a lot of impact. They were pieces that worked without black light, and with black light. And of course they were fluorescent paint, which is why that allowed that to come out. But I would say that each time I have a show, I want to do something different—still within my same oeuvre—but something that is impactful. But the work does work with regular light, as well as fluorescent. Gives it an extra kick.

ACF: Well I like the thought that the work was banned in the Seventies, you know, and then I think about the mural that we did for the “CUNT” show in Los Angeles, which was—

JB: Oh that was great! That was fabulous!

ACF: It was a seventy-five foot mural on the side of the building.

JB: It was a giant cock, by the way, seventy-five foot, on the outside of the building, Venus Over LA. It was dynamite. It was just a killer. That was a great, great piece. And it was fun, and it was perfect for the “CUNT” show. It was just a killer. And there were a lot of selfies, I’m sure, taken with that, too. So that’s all I have to say.

ACF: It was a triumph. That’s all you need to know. Google it, right?

JB: Right. Exactly, exactly.

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ACF: Well, Judith, are there any questions that you feel we haven't covered? One of the things we had talked about before we did the interview—I'm always curious to know from people about questions they wish they had been asked, or have never been asked. You've had an art career that spans fifty years now, more than that, so I'm sure you've been asked everything. But is there anything that you would love to talk about?

JB: You know, I'll tell you something. I don't really know. I think that I've pretty much spoken about a lot of things that I've done, and how my work evolved. My work, by the way, is actually quite autobiographical. It's autobiographical in the sense that these are the ideas that I'm thinking about, and these are what—Right now, I'm doing the Coronavirus, by the way. And I'm doing some other series that I'm thinking about now, which I'm holed up here and doing. So it's been quite a haul. I'm trying to think of some questions that might have—

ACF: No, if nothing comes to you, I'm just grateful we could talk about this work. And you were so generous with your time.

JB: Oh, don't be silly.

ACF: Your amazing articulation of your own history. And Alison's immense knowledge of your practice, and your peers' work.

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JB: I want both you guys, when this subsides, to come to my studio, and you'll get a black light extravaganza. And also, Artforum did two interviews with me under black light with my stuff. We had a lot of fun—they should be coming online, we did them quite a while ago. You also wanted me to give you a couple of sound bytes on specific works. You know, some of the works that are included in this show, in this online exhibition.

ACF: Yeah, but Judith you've been so—you've woven all of the questions that I had about different bodies of work into the ongoing conversation so I really feel like you were so comprehensive in the way you spoke about your work, and how one body of work merged into the next. I don't feel like we didn't cover it.

JB: You know, I'll tell you something, which also is interesting—when you're doing this work, it's like telephone. One thing leads to something else, leads to something else. And that's actually how my life evolved, too. One thing—when I was younger, I liked to draw, et cetera, et cetera—I went into one field, and it evolved into going to Yale, and I took the opportunity—I was not afraid to take the opportunity, I was not afraid to go all the way with the kind of work that I had in mind—and I had a good time with it. And that was really very important. And I didn't copy. I know that when I was a student at Yale, Jack Tworokov, who at that time was the head of the Painting Department, said "I don't really understand

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that everyone else, they start out with work that is similar to some other well known artist, and then they go from there. But you, you just start out where you're about." But he said in a very negative way, as opposed to a very positive way. But that's how I evolved my career and this is the best time for me: because my work is valued, and I'm valued. And that's been a great gift.

ACF: Well I don't think we need to say anything more than that. [Laughing].

JB: [Laughing]. Okay!

AG: Thank you both so much.

JB: We nailed it! Okay. [Laughing].

AG: I hope to see you soon in person; I'll definitely take you up on your invitation.

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