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Interviewee: **Ann Philbin**

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Interviewer: **Sarah Schulman**

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ACT UP Oral History Project
Interview of Ann Philbin
January 21, 2003

SARAH SCHULMAN: To start, if you could just say your name, today's date, where we are, and how old you are.

ANN PHILBIN: What's today's date again?

SS: What is today's date? The twenty first.

AP: My name is Annie Philbin, and it is the 21st of January, 2003, we're in Los Angeles, and I am 50.

SS: Okay, Ann, so my first question is, do you remember the first time you heard the work AIDS?

AP: Oh. No. I actually don't remember.

SS: Do you remember when you first became aware of it in proximity to your life?

AP: Well, yeah. I mean I, I had friends pretty early on who were sick. So early 80s, probably, I started to hear and I was in the art world, so, in New York City, so that was kind of ground zero. And I don't even honestly remember the first person I knew who had it because I knew a lot of people who were sick. Sort of quickly.

Of course, I remember reading about it early on, and you know, I probably, the first time I heard about it was certainly not from someone I knew who was sick, but I honestly can't identify the moment, really.

SS: Who were some of the early people in your life who had AIDS?

AP: Um – Earl Millard, who was a friend. He lived in St. Louis, probably a lot of people who are watching this probably don't even know who he is. W.C.. All gay men, basically, in the art world.

SS: And did you have a lot of gay men in your life at the time?

AP: I did. A lot. Yes. Yes.

SS: So how did it start to transform your relationships?

AP: Well, I was – grief became a sort of daily kind of – a daily emotion that – I remember calling my parents after a while and telling them about – I would call them weekly on Sundays and I would say blah blah blah, and I remember they became almost the measure of how much grief was in my life. Because I would tell them about the next friend who was sick, or the next friend who was dying, and they were – it was so interesting because unlike my friends, even, they were the ones who would say to me, this isn't supposed to be happening to someone your age. This is supposed to be happening to us.

And it was this – it was a very interesting measure, to have them witness what was happening, in New York, in the early 80s and the mid-80s, in my community. In our community. It was big.

SS: When it first came into your life, who were you, at that moment?

AP: I was a – I was actually a dealer at that time. An art dealer, in New York, and I was – I had just started to work. I was just – there was a moment where I left the gallery world, and I went to a place called Livet Reichard, which brought me into my first – actually, the AIDS epidemic was probably well under way when I started a job that brought me in direct contact with a lot of AIDS related issues and fund-raising because I started to work for AmFAR.

And I was a curator for Livet Reichard, which was an organization that basically raised money for AmFAR. So I was involved on a daily basis with the positioning, the packaging, the branding, of this organization, American Foundation for AIDS Research.

And I was the art world person who organized exhibitions around the country that would raise money. So I was raising money from art communities around the country for AmFAR, but I was also involved in organizing an AIDS awareness campaign on billboards and bus shelters, and things like that. So –

SS: Let me go back a little bit. Had you been previously involved in other social and political activities?

AP: Yes.

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SS: Like what, for example?

AP: Well, it started when I was probably 18, because I was – I went to the University of New Hampshire. And in, I think it was '71, '72, I was part of a small group of people, about six of us, who tried to have a – to see if there were any other gay students on the campus.

And so we tried to organize a dance. Well, we ended up in court. The State of New Hampshire versus the six of us, because the university tried to expel us. And I was not political when this happened to me, but by the end of it, I was completely politicized by it. They flew in lawyers from the ACLU from New York, and they defended us, and we won the case. And it is a precedent setting case in books. So - but I was very engaged in gay activism from the – from an early age because of that. And then very involved in the women's movement, as well.

SS: What did you do in the women's movement?

AP: Well, I was – I marched in the streets a lot. I had women's meetings in my college. I organized women's groups in college, and I was, you know, I was very active politically.

SS: So you had hard-core, grass roots political experience, putting yourself of the line, in a socially dangerous situation?

AP: Yeah, I would say. Yeah, yeah.

SS: And you brought that to your AIDS work?

AP: Yes. I would say the AIDS work was more dangerous than anything else I had ever done in that sense because - and I think that is something that people don't really realize that it was actually dangerous.

SS: In what way?

AP: Some of the actions that happened were – I was actually speaking to someone this morning because I was telling them that I was going to have this interview, and I was trying to remember about certain actions that happened around – for example, the NIH action was – there were policemen on horseback clubbing us.

So I think people don't quite remember actually, how violent a lot of it was, but it really was pretty intense. And that wasn't that long ago. I mean, not that it doesn't happen still now, but in a way I think people don't remember it quite that way.

SS: So when you came into this job at AmFAR – now did you create the job, or did they?

AP: No, the reason they hired me at Livet Reichard is because they had sort of art world expertise and connections, and they had raised money for other things through

the art world. And the art world, because it was the site of so much loss, of course, was incredibly generous. And AmFAR, you know, made use of that.

SS: So AmFAR already had the idea that could get money from the art world?

AP: I don't know if it was AmFAR's idea, or if it was Ann Livet's idea. Steve Reichard, who died of AIDS – he was one of the early people I knew who died of AIDS – Livet Reichard. It maybe – I think probably Steve and Ann came up with the notion of doing it. And a lot of the people who worked there were gay. Patrick Moore worked there. Not just gay, but activists, and really cared about what was happening. And so, it was a really, sort of, passionate group of people working on it. And it still wasn't enough, though. I mean, the AmFAR part of this was more establishment, in a way.

SS: And how was that, politically?

AP: I think politically that AmFAR and ACT UP came into a lot of – had a lot of friction. Often. And both had their necessary place in the world, I would say. But there were moments where it was frustrating for me and Patrick to be working for an organization that was so high powered, powerful, political, in the sense of having to play certain games. And so there were moments where it was hard for us because it just wasn't enough. And they absolutely, by their nature and by their definition, couldn't radicalize what they were doing. And, I mean, Matilda Krim is an amazing person and what she did is extraordinary, but the necessity of the ACT UP component during that period of time was obvious.

SS: Do you remember any specific things that happened at AmFAR that you felt that you couldn't identify with?

AP: I do, and enough time has passed now that I am sure that I can talk about it. It wasn't good to talk about it back then, but – do you remember the Grand Fury image, kissing doesn't kill, greed and indifference do?

Kissing doesn't kill, greed – indifference – greed and corporate indifference do – the last part of the phrase. But anyway, it was this remarkable image of two men kissing, two women kissing, and a straight couple, interracial, kissing. And it was on the sides of buses, and Creative Time and my project, Art against AIDS on the Road, commissioned it from Grand Fury, and when we brought it to Los Angeles it was fine. We brought it to Washington DC, it was fine, San Francisco. But when we got to Chicago, it was – it created a huge uproar. To the point where the mayor was on the radio talking about it, and people were ripping it down off of – now this was an AmFAR produced and commissioned image.

I was the curator of the project, and it was interesting because when push came to shove, it was very difficult for AmFAR to be in a position of alienating themselves from the power brokers of that city, because they were there to raise awareness and raise money. Whereas this was an image commissioned by artists who were helping AmFAR.

The art world had given an enormous amount to AmFAR, and it was just very awkward because we were - and I do remember Patrick and I very much were caught between a rock and a hard place, because we believed very much in our AmFAR work, but we also believed this was the moment that AmFAR should step up to the plate and defend the image, defend the artists, and be public about it. And they didn't. So it was very – you know – it was moments like that, that you really felt – that it was frustrating.

SS: When you commissioned it from Grand Fury, how much was the commission?

AP: Money?

SS: Yeah.

AP: Oh, probably – I am not even sure they got paid. When I say commission, you know, it was like –

SS: So you paid the production costs?

AP: Yeah, probably something like that. And I don't actually remember what the exact relationship between Creative Time was and AmFAR, but oh, I am sure they did it for absolutely nothing. Yeah, they didn't get paid for it.

SS: So how did you first come into contact with ACT UP?

AP: I just heard the meetings were happening, and this is when they were on 13th St, in the Center, and I actually don't remember, except to – I started to – I started showing up. I think it was Wednesday nights, and you know, I was like everybody else. My buddies were dying.

SS: What were those meetings like?

AP: Oh! They were amazing. They were amazing. They were amazing because I just couldn't believe how brilliant some of my friends and colleagues and these people were, in their -- absolute -- in their rage, the articulation and the poetry, and the -- it was -- they were just the most impressive people I ever saw. It was really an amazing group of people. And the leaders, the people who would surface, the leaders -- of course, there aren't supposed to be any -- were completely brilliant. I mean, they were just brilliant. It was almost -- you just -- you wanted to sit in that room because first of all,

you had no place else to go with your anger, but also, it was incredibly entertaining. They were gorgeous, you know, they were sexy, they were angry. It was better than any, you know, any TV or movie. It was really – it was high entertainment, but also just – it was the place to go to relieve yourself. Because you actually felt like something was getting accomplished there. It was different in a lot of ways than a lot of my experience in the women's movement, for example.

SS: In what way?

AP: Even though they had learned a lot from the women's movement – a lot – I mean a lot of the processes of the meetings and how things were ultimately supposed to play out, these were all things that I had been through many times, but somehow there is just simply no denying the fact that in New York, at this moment in time, there was a – there was a – and this is, I know, really a dangerous thing to say, but the – the – the beauty of – of these young, angry, brilliant people was so overwhelming in a way that it was glamorous. I mean, in fact, it was – it was – it was kind of – it was interesting because after ACT UP – I'm sorry, I am jumping around a little bit.

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00:15:00

SS: That's fine.

AP: But after ACT UP, an organization started at the place where I worked called WAC. I mean, called The Drawing Center. The organization called WAC, Women's Action Coalition, we actually took the things that we, the women's movement, had taught ACT UP, and then we learned from ACT UP, and took those things on to make WAC actually a glamorous, sexy, activist force.

And that's, I think, a little bit what happened, is that it became – they captured the media, because they knew how to do it. And it wasn't just a sort of – it was – they

understood the media, and that was a big, big difference, I think, between the women's movement and the gay AIDS movement. I think they understood how to manipulate it. And it's because a lot of the leaders in it were actually from the media. They were professionals. And that was a huge difference, I think.

SS: How did they manipulate the media?

AP: Well, first of all, they – the whole, the actions were staged in such a way that – I mean – first of all, there was a media committee. The committee actually knew the people to call, and were friends with the people to call. The media actually, they were part of, in a way, ACT UP's machinery. It was fascinating, how it all kind of worked together. But the actions were media worthy. They were choreographed, they were riveting, they were – it was – they just understood what would play.

SS: So when you say that they learned from the women's movement, how did they literally learn?

AP: Well, I think they – they had to learn about things like diversity, which I think, obviously, there are many movements that the women's movement learned from as well. I mean, we can go through civil rights to the women's movement, but in each – somewhere along the way, everyone, I think, it goes back. It just keeps going back to the civil rights movement, obviously, but I think men were not used to being in groups where they had to kind of listen to each other, pay attention in a certain way. Where leaders wouldn't immediately rise to the surface, take control, and form their own individual identities.

It was really about trying to keep it all – and it was hard, because there were many charismatic people in ACT UP as well. Who you – they couldn't help themselves. They

would rise to the surface, and everyone would want them to, but I think the thing that the women's movement had always done that ACT UP really tried to do was to understand that they couldn't have leaders.

It's the thing that hurt the women's movement in a lot of ways, as well, of course, but it's also, I think, one of the - one of those big lessons about giving voice to every person. And that was something that I don't think - I don't think men did as easily or as well as women.

SS: But how did they get this information? In other words, were there women like you who had been in the women's movement who came to ACT UP and said -

AP: There were. There weren't a lot of women there, but some of them were - some of the leaders - some of the truly articulate people in that room were women. And that's the other thing that was so great about it, because until AIDS happened, gay men and gay women - you know, you had - you had friends, but they didn't really hang together. I mean it really did bring those two communities together in a way that didn't really exist before that, I don't think.

SS: So who were some of the leaders who you remember?

AP: Oh, see, you can't ask me the names of them, because I don't remember anybody's names. But I remember them all vividly.

SS: Okay.

AP: Whatshername who was - you know who I am talking about - the blonde, the light-haired woman who was a media person -

SS: Ann Northrop?

Tape I
00:20:00

AP: Ann Northrop. Wildly articulate and impressive, and you could just see, sometimes you'd sit in a room, and she'd listen to the guys talk for an hour, and then she'd go, okay, and she'd stand up and she'd flatten them. And they'd all be – they'd know she was right. And it was beautiful to watch because her experience was so much deeper than theirs. So everyone learned how to be activists with each other, in a way, that I think the women definitely taught the men.

There were lots of people. Anna Bloom was another one. And there were quite a few – there were quite a few very strong, articulate women in that room that I think they learned from. I mean, I hope that's – that you are hearing that they learned from them. I am not sure you are, but it's my impression that they did.

SS: So were there people that you knew from the art world?

AP: Yeah, oh yeah. Absolutely. I used to sit with Bob Gober and Donny Moffett and Marlene McCarty, the Grand Fury people, John Lindell. You know, people like David Wojnarowicz, who was not an ACT UP person, and he didn't come to ACT UP, but he was sort of an inspirational force for behind the scenes, in a lot of ways.

You know, one night we did an event at The Drawing Center. David was dying, and it was probably one of his last times going out into the world, and there was a reading of his book, *Close to the Knives*, at The Drawing Center. And he was not supposed to read, because he said he was too weak, but Kathy Acker and various people stood up and read from his book, and it was, I would say, probably one of the most memorable experiences of that decade for me. It was so moving and so – and that room was filled with people from ACT UP. And he did. He got up and read for the last time. It was

extraordinary. But there was a lot of crossover between the art world and ACT UP actually. And again, I wish – I can't remember all of the names, but it – that was a –

SS: Did it change your relationships with these artists, to be in ACT UP with them?

AP: No, because I was friends with them anyway. I mean, it wasn't – I was the director of an institution but it wasn't like I was not – I mean, I had relationships with, just friendships with these people anyway. But maybe it was a little – maybe I made an institution where people felt like – where people felt they could come and voice a lot of different concerns than the ones the art world generates. And so it – I think – at The Drawing Center we kind of made a – it was the first time that I realized that it was the job of a cultural institution to actually do this, to actually be involved in an activist community. Because if we weren't going to be involved in the most pressing concerns of the community at that time, then you know, what good were we really? I mean we weren't – we had to – so, I gave the space a lot. We raised money for ACT UP a lot. That's a lot of what I did, because I had done it at AmFAR, so I knew how to help raise money. And that was because I had to do it for my own institution, but that was one of the things we did. We raised a million dollars one night.¹ At the – I don't know if you remember that. It was an incredible event. A bunch of us got together and made a committee, and we raised – it was on the old Guggenheim building in Soho, on the second floor. And whoever owned it said they'd give it to us, which they did. We came

¹ After further discussion, Patrick Moore and Ann Philbin both now believe that the one million dollar figure was an exaggeration. In his book, *Beyond Shame: Reclaiming the Abandoned History of Radical Gay Sexuality*, Patrick Moore cites the figure \$600,000.

together and raised something like a million dollars in a silent auction and a regular auction, as well. It was fantastic.

SS: What did you do? Did you go to the coordinating committee and say, we want to do an auction for ACT UP, or?

AP: I don't remember, actually. I am so sorry. I don't remember details like this. I just remember there were a bunch of us that knew how to do this.

SS: Who were the people on the committee?

AP: I don't remember.

SS: Anyone?

AP: I am sure it was Patrick Moore, and I am sure it was – well, I am sure it was Donny – it was Donny, and Marlene, and Bob, and yeah, I'm – this is embarrassing to me because I am sure there are going to be people reading this going rah rah rah. But it was a lot of the Grand Fury crew, and extended out. And curators and dealers, I remember, and people – oh yeah, Paul Morris was really involved. Quite a few dealers, actually.

Tape I
00:25:00 **SS: So you just started calling people, saying we are doing this auction?**

AP: Yeah, yeah.

SS: And did – was there any resistance?

AP: No, it was fantastic. And the thing that was great about it is we went outside of the community to raise money, and at this point we got fantastic things from very well known artists.

SS: Like who?

AP: If I recall, we – people like – and I mean when I think I am saying that I'm saying straight people – it was like Eric Fischl, and that was back in the 80s.

Eric Fischl gave something big, I remember. April [Gornik] and Eric, both of them, and Brice Marden and obviously Rauschenberg, and people that you would assume. But a lot of people that were very surprising that helped us. It was kind of amazing. [Julian] Schnabel I remember gave a big piece. And we made a lot of money.

SS: Did anyone say no?

AP: Probably. I don't, luckily remember, for them, what their names were. But yeah, sure, there were –

SS: Did the Haring estate?

AP: Did he say no? Oh, so you remember these things more than I do. They, now I recall, they were a little difficult. Yeah, that's embarrassing for them. I don't remember the reason. Patrick Moore probably does. I don't remember the reason.

SS: So here you are, you know, the art world – first of all, why do you think the art world showed up for this?

AP: Because we were losing people in droves. And it was so clearly epidemic proportions for the art world. It was just – it was such a time of huge grief, whether you were a dealer or a curator, no matter who you were, it was very clear that this was – that the world was changing right in front of us because of this. The whole art world, the trajectory of the art world, the marketplace – everything. It was really – it was frightening.

SS: How did it change the trajectory of the art world?

AP: Well, in a lot of ways, I think – it's not – I guess not just the art world, but the creative world. I think people are very, and it's been said a million times, clear on the fact that we don't know how the world changed by the losses, but we know that it did. Because the losses, the people that died, were such huge forces, creative forces, and talents that by extension, the world changed by virtue of their loss. I mean, it's just true. We don't know what David Wojnarowicz would have gone on to write, but we know the last thing he left us with was a kind of an amazing thing. Maybe not as a piece of literature, but as a statement of rage it was a remarkable thing. And we don't know what, and you can name the names, I mean, so it just happened last week with Herb Ritts. That's – in his world, that is a major – a major force. And what he did, for his world, was very, very significant, and so I think endlessly, on and on, everyone knew that that was happening. The art world specifically? It was catastrophic, really.

SS: Do you think that AIDS and all these losses changed content?

Changed what was produced by the living?

AP: I think it had to, yeah. I mean, how – how – that's a really good question. That's a really good question, and I wouldn't want to say something simple here, because I think it's really complex, how to answer that. And in some ways, it's one of those questions, you know, maybe 20 years from now, 50 years from now, people will be able to answer it better than we can. But I do think nothing simple like art became more political, because that didn't happen. But certainly there is no denying that the issues of body reappeared in art, in a – visual art – in a very forceful way. And that has everything to do with AIDS, I think.

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00:30:00

And in a way that women were always concerned with body, and their art always reflected that as well, it became something that men embraced, too. And so it – that was another way in a very kind of – I think I can say this – that the art world came together because the imagery started to make sense to everyone in a way that maybe it had been the territory of women.

SS: Would you say that more people came out of the closet in the art world?

AP: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

SS: And did that impact on - ?

AP: Had to. Again, how concretely? Of course it did. It – in a lot of ways, I mean, it paved the way for different kinds of artists to have voices, I would say, yes, definitely.

SS: Can you think of anything – anyone specifically?

AP: Oh, again, if I had been prepared with – in advance for this question, I might – I might better answer it, and it's something I'll fill in later, but specific examples, um –

SS: I am thinking like artists like Nicole Eisenman or Cathy Opie or whatever. Do you think that they would have been able to enter at the level that they did?

AP: Probably not, yeah. Probably not. Yeah, they make perfect sense in that. And just to – also the level of not just queerness in their work, but the level of anger, the level of nastiness, the level of raw, kind of – that all is part of it as well. That's kind of – that's kind of part of the legacy of it, as well, I think. Kathy and Nicole are good

examples, but you know, you can even think about people that are not directly, necessarily, related but people like Kiki Smith. She's – you know, she's part of that - basically claiming that territory. I think –

SS: Her sister died of AIDS.

AP: Her sister died of AIDS. I think people like Bob Gober. I think his work – he wouldn't probably say this, but an understanding of his work definitely comes from that period of understanding the overlap of issues of queerness and the body and grief and loss and childhood and how all of them sort of overlap.

SS: Do you think the deaths of so many men made room for women to emerge professionally?

AP: They say that's the case, and that's probably true. I think it's more about the fact that women, not because of the deaths made room, but more that women and men came together in that period, so it allowed the opening of doors for them because there was a camaraderie, maybe, that didn't necessarily exist before.

You know, I am talking about the art world in New York, so in the larger world, I don't know. I don't know if I could answer that question, but I could say certainly in the New York art world, there was a changing of the tides, for sure, in relationships between people, and men and women specifically, and gays and straights, and yeah, it all – it shifted the power structure a bit. And yeah, it did allow – I do think it probably opened doors for women. But especially women artists. Again because a lot of issues that women had dealt with for so many years, the men were all of a sudden getting for the first time.

SS: What about in terms of the market?

AP: You mean did – were women - ?

SS: How did AIDS impact the art market?

AP: I mean, there are probably some really cynical readings of how, and kind of frightening ideas, of how that might have played out. And I do – again, don't remember specifically cases, but I do remember people being aware of people dying and I remember with David Wojnarowicz, you know, that basically there was this notion that – and it was true with Mapplethorpe, absolutely – there was this notion that the work was going to increase in value, so people were kind of – there were people watching that, I suppose. And it absolutely affected the market if someone was making their last works of their life, and more often than not, if they were gay men, those last works had a relationship to the subject of their deaths. So it – yeah, it was – there was a real intensity around Mapplethorpe because of that specifically. How did it change the market as a whole? I don't –

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SS: Some artists who died of AIDS, let's say Felix Gonzalez-Torres , created a tension around their prices. Other people, I am thinking like Hugh Steers, or whoever, their careers did not – the work did not survive at the same level, postmortem. So was that always clear when the artist died, how the work was going to?

AP: Well, you could have guessed that – well, it's interesting because someone like David Wojnarowicz, it didn't happen with him in the market. And maybe it's because the nature of his work. You would have thought it would have, actually, but it didn't.

With Felix, I don't think you could have known that would have happened – that what happened to Felix would happen. First of all, because the work was so ephemeral. You just couldn't imagine, but you know, his dealers have done a very good job.

SS: Well, that is a market issue, so that when someone dies, if their estate is handled appropriately by very brilliant dealers, they can control the prices. And on the other hand, if it's left to a friend who then dies of AIDS himself –

AP: Well, yeah. I mean, I think Mapplethorpe is really, even more than Felix, is the real illustration of how the relationship of his death, the controversy obviously around the NEA, too, but – and his market was hugely increased because of the whole relationship of AIDS and how he died, and that's going to happen now.

Tape II
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AP: ... on this market subject than I am, because it's his business to have, sort of, given some thought and analysis to this. I don't know about that.

SS: Let's go back to the drawing center, which you know more about than anyone.

AP: Okay.

SS: So when you decided that you were going to make The Drawing Center be part of ACT UP, which is really what happened, -

AP: Well, yeah, by extension a little bit, because it was a – it was a space really. I mean that's what it comes down to. It was a space, where people could do things. So there was one committee that came to me and said, we want to do – we want to do a fundraiser, for HIV-positive women, in prison, and have their families come and hang out with them for the evening in The Drawing Center. Now, that's not usually the purview of a non-profit museum. But, we did it. And it was amazing, actually, because

in the end what happened is the institution became a community center, as opposed to a museum or an art space. It became more than that. So giving space was really all we did. There was just a – there was a friendly staff and director that welcomed people. But they used it a lot.

SS: Well did you sort of announce it to the people at The Drawing Center?

AP: No.

SS: It just happened?

AP: Yeah, and at one point, a few of my board members came to me, and I had one particular enlightened board member named Winn Kromarsky, whose daughter was gay and very – actually, she was one of the founders of – what was that – one of the offshoots of ACT UP was a lesbian group that had some fabulous name – Lesbian something – of course, a lesbian group – it was – they were young, and they were of –

SS: Lesbian Avengers?

AP: Was it the Lesbian Avengers?

SS: Or was it DAM, Dyke Action Machine? Queer Nation?

AP: No, it had a really great name. Anyway, so there were a few moments where a few of my board, some Upper East-siders, would go, is this really what we are supposed to be doing? And then the others would go, yes, and they'd go, okay. So I had a great situation, I had a great situation. And the truth is that ACT UP didn't use it as much as future activist groups like WAC, who really took – had a presence there, but – but it started with ACT UP and just – and I did a lot of fund-raisers for needle exchange, because that was something that –

SS: How did you get involved with needle exchange?

AP: Well, I was – my boyfriend at the time, because I was with a man in – when I first started getting involved with ACT UP, I was actually, even though I had been a lesbian most of my life, I actually fell in love with this man, and he was an AIDS activist as well, and he started the first needle exchange in the Bronx, called Bronx-Harlem Needle Exchange.

SS: And his name was?

AP: Brian Weil. And together we sort of did a lot of specifically needle exchange fund-raisers and kind of awareness groups at The Drawing Center. And it was amazing, because when you think about the notion of people coming from Bronx-Harlem to SoHo to these events, it would seem ridiculous and impossible, but it actually functioned as a community center for these groups as well. It was really interesting.

SS: Why did Brian get involved with needle exchange?

AP: He was – he just figured out, actually, very early on – he was looking for a way to be effective, as a lot of people were, and he figured out very early on that that was something that – actually, it was very early on, ACT UP wasn't even really engaged in it that much. They were starting one in the East Village, I think, and he partnered with a group from Boston, actually, not ACT UP, initially, to bring it to Bronx-Harlem. And it was illegal, and they were constantly in fear of being arrested, and it was something that was clearly, obviously, incredibly important and a lot of people didn't understand that for a long time, which is – we've seen that play out.

SS: What was the goal?

Tape II
00:05:00

AP: The goal was to give clean needles to as many people as possible, and to raise awareness about the fact that it was going to be the next spike of the epidemic. And I think that's very clear to everyone now, but then it was completely – the notion of giving clean needles to intravenous drug users was just – that was even more radical and more unsavory than homosexuality to most of the, most of the world.

SS: And so how did your friends react to this, early on?

AP: You mean to the fact that I was with a man? That was really bad. No, I'm kidding. I think – there was a lot of – I don't remember why, but there was a lot of tension between ACT UP and the – and a lot of territorial kinds of things going on with ACT UP and the needle exchange people, and I am not sure why. I think it was – it had a lot to do with the fact that the needle exchange people were basically not coming from the queer community. They were coming from the straight community, I.V. drug users, and a lot of them were obnoxious straight guys. And they were really good at what they were doing. Like these Boston guys were very effective needle exchange promoters and actually making it happen in these communities, but they were of a totally different cut than the guys from ACT UP, and there was very little sort of overlap, and they couldn't work together and they were claiming different neighborhoods, and it was kind of a mess. And Brian sort of, because he was involved with ACT UP and really engaged with needle exchange, he sort of filled in – I mean, he sort of put – had a foot in both camps, and he was a straight man.

SS: An artist?

AP: And an artist, and a photographer. So he – he sort of – he carved out with the Boston guys this Bronx-Harlem territory. And it was like that, it was like different neighborhoods had different groups.

SS: And what was his initial interest in AIDS?

AP: I think – it's very hard to talk about this without – it's a big subject in a sense, because he was a photographer, documentary kind of photographer, but documentary is a little bit tricky, because he had – his subjects had been very – communities that he had been very involved with, or people that he was very involved with, so for a long time he photographed sort of sex workers, not sex workers actually. He was – it's too difficult to describe. Then he was – another thing he did was he spent a lot of time with the homicide squad in Miami photographing homicide victims. And he would spend two years on the homicide squad in Miami, so he has – he had various bodies of work that reflected very marginalized, edgy, dangerous worlds. And in the process of being involved with me, I think basically he just started coming to meetings with me at ACT UP and realized that there was, especially for him, needle exchange, a world that he kind of already inhabited in a certain kind of way, that he could help. That he – it just – actually, before he even did that, he – I am being so unclear about this history. He started a group that went to hospitals to help children with AIDS. For about two years he did that.

SS: What group was that?

AP: I forget what he called it, because he didn't really call it anything. But he had a group of like six guys and they were – a lot of them were – he met them at ACT UP, but they weren't really – they didn't really go to ACT UP meetings, they just wanted

to do something. And so they found that what they wanted to do was go and hold babies in hospitals, and that's what he did. And he would sort of – kind of – organize these guys and they would go and he became very, very close to a particular family. A woman whose husband was ill, and died. And then she infected her two infants. Her first one died, and her second one is still alive, lives in Puerto Rico. But Brian became very close to this family, and he has a – they are documented in that book, but –

It just became a subject of real passion for him, and he ended up going around and speaking across the country a lot.

SS: So that's how you got involved in needle exchange?

AP: That's how I got involved in needle exchange, exactly.

SS: And that was a step into a new milieu for you.

AP: Yeah, it was.

SS: And how was that?

Tape II
00:10:00

AP: It was amazing, because it was, as I said, it was something that even the people in ACT UP felt – it felt even further out, in a way, because it dealt with an entirely different community. And it was extraordinary, because again, it was like taking the skills that you had learned, and the things that you learn in one place and then you bring them to people who really have no skills, or – and basically no one to organize for them, so the needle exchange thing was something that – and it suited Brian's personality, because you know, he had a huge ego in a way. So he was – could be enormously helpful to people and actually pave the way through the medical system. Which he did. He spent a lot of time helping people like fill out their forms, and get the right doctors and do that. And it was just this kind of community that sort of developed in Brooklyn

and Bronx and Harlem, and he would go and literally hang out in SROs and help people that he had met on the needle exchange.

SS: So what was it like in ACT UP when there was this mixture of all different sub-cultures? I mean, how did the needle exchange people deal with the other people in ACT UP, and what was it like to be a straight man in ACT UP or to be, I guess at that time you were in a heterosexual relationship, to be a straight person?

AP: I think there were enough straight people that really affiliated themselves with ACT UP, so it wasn't a big issue. And also, that had been my community anyway, but for him, it might have been – you know, people might have – I mean he had very good friends in ACT UP, too, so – but – but he definitely felt, I think, at some point that going into the Bronx and organizing people, you know, I.V. drug users in the Bronx, was a place that he actually could feel more empowered. He was not a – he was not the kind of person who would stand up in front of an ACT UP meeting and lead that way, it was more - he was much more interested in this, sort of, the grass roots aspect of – and basically racial issues were really front and center for him. He was a white man, but he – it was very much – I think that was a big problem for a lot of people in ACT UP, too, how the community started, the AIDS community started to change, but ACT UP didn't. But that happens with – that happened with WAC, it happened – it always happens. It's part of the nature of activist organizations. They mutate, or they don't when they are supposed to and –

SS: But, I want to get into that in a second, I just want to say that we just made record about Brian because he has passed away, and that this is a way of recording the work that he did.

AP: Yeah. It's really hard for me to talk about him, actually.

SS: We did that, so –

AP: No, no, I mean – that's great. That's really nice.

SS: And now we can move on to the racial issue and ACT UP. So how would you characterize that, that tension?

AP: Well, it was a constant tension because – and it's so great that it was a constant tension, you know. I mean, that was what was so great about ACT UP, is that people kept it front and center. And it was hard for people, but – and again, my sense is anyway, that the women led the way with that. You know, really making sure that the people of color in the room got their voice and – meaning that the women of color more often than not were the ones – it just – I had a sense that that was the place that past lessons were learned at ACT UP.

Past lessons can be learned, but also, no one has ever figured out how to keep an activist organization from tearing itself apart, because of exactly those issues. I mean, the women's movement is a real – you know, one casualty after another of women's organizations because of those issues.

SS: Well just one more question on this subject, then we can move on.

AP: Okay.

SS: You said that WAC learned how to take – you said ACT UP learned a lot about organizing from the women’s movement, but then WAC learned how to use those things in a more glamorous way from ACT UP.

AP: Right.

SS: But did it work for WAC the way it worked for ACT UP?

Tape II
00:15:00

AP: Yes, because we understood that if we had high profile, hopefully famous – if you could get famous people that was even better. But if you had high-profile women in the art world calling up the New York Times, our friends at the New York *Times*, Laurie Anderson, for example, was one of the found – you know, there was a group of us that founded – and they were the ones that said, you know, be in front of the court house at nine o’clock on Tuesday morning. We will all be there. They’d show up. And plus, if you had great branding, which we did, too, which ACT UP was so good at. I mean, that pink triangle and that – they just knew exactly how to do it. And WAC learned that lesson very, very well. We came up with – it was Marlene McCarty and um, God, I forget her name. She’s great – another designer – who designed the eye, the blue eye, for WAC, and that was exactly a lesson that we took from ACT UP, that kind of branding issue. How you package an activist organization and make sure that when the TV cameras show up, no one even has to talk to them. They know who is there, just by virtue of the pink triangle, the blue eye, whatever. That was a really – that was a very effective lesson, actually.

SS: Let’s get into the question of graphics. What was the impact of ACT UP graphics broadly?

AP: Oh, it was so important. Actually, we did a show here at the museum when I first got here about four years ago that was co-organized by – well, it was organized by Julie Ault, and what it was Donnie Moffett's AIDS graphics that he did in the Village Voice. I don't know if you remember these, but they – it was a really important body of work, separate from his artwork, actually.

And the other sort of big figure in the show was Sister Corita. It was Donnie Moffett and Sister Corita, who was a war activist here in Los Angeles, and a nun during the Vietnam War. So it was a historical figure and Donnie. But in the middle of that installation was ACT UP videotapes, and it was an amazing combination of things to see, but that – that's where you saw the brilliance of these people, you know? The talent of the people that made up that group. It was spectacular.

SS: Can you explain, since you know – this is your area, can you explain why that pink triangle was so effective?

AP: You know, well, it was just – it's just pure. And its historical references to the Holocaust and the meaning, the deep meaning of it. But also just the pure graphics of it was such a brilliant, brilliant idea. And the Silence Equals Death motto or logo underneath it. I think the first time it appeared was at the New Museum, over the door. And it was – I think everyone just recognized right away, oh, this is it. This is – this is our thing. This is our sign. It was just – it was just, just brilliant from –

SS: What were some of the other graphics that really stand out for you?

AP: God. That is such a good question. Oh man, I have to prepare myself for that question.

SS: Okay, we can come back to it. What would you say was the cultural, visual impact of those graphics? In other words, what did they inspire? What was influenced by them later? How was it – how did it ripple effect?

AP: Well, I mean, just in terms of – I can say, in terms of activism in general, I think – tell me if I am wrong about this, but I don't remember another movement that was so graphically packaged and identified so brilliantly. I can't remember another one. If there was one, it's – it just seems like a very key lesson from that period. And I remember – what was the – what was the – was it the pink triangle that ran across the – was it Tom Brokaw's news program that night?

Tape II
00:20:00

SS: What was it? Stop AIDS, not Arabs. It was on the air...John Weir.

AP: It was Dan Rather. So there wasn't an image in that one, it was just that text?

SS: They had a pink triangle, but they ... into the corner.

AP: Oh, is that right? Yeah. And what was the huge, the Grand Central Station action? What was that image? That was something amazing. That was Silence Equals Death.

SS: Time is running out?

AP: Time is running – No. Time is something. That was a good one, but I don't remember what it was.

SS: What were some of the other posters? Do you remember?

AP: Oh, man, there were just so many, and they were so smart.

SS: Now you can get on a New York City Subway, and you can look at an ad and say, oh that's influenced by Barbara Kruger. You can see these ideas have become American pop culture.

AP: Part of the mainstream.

SS: And would you say that those graphics – where did they – where have their influences shown up?

AP: Well, yeah, I mean that's – that's true, and I am trying to think where they've shown - I am not going answer this question well. This is so frustrating because that's a really good question, and I know they've shown up. Now how – where, exactly. Man, see you have to ask Donnie Moffett this question. You have to ask Marlene McCarty this question. Because they are the ones that have that kind of awareness of that.

SS: Let's go back to some of the specific experiences inside ACT UP.

AP: Yeah.

SS: So, of course this auction. You are tremendous. You raise a million dollars for ACT UP. What do think the impact of that million dollars was on the organization?

AP: I don't know where it went. I have no idea where it went. Don't forget about the guy who stole from ACT UP. Remember that big thing?

SS: What was his name?

AP: Oh, I forget, but he - that was a huge thing. And he was black, so it was awful, because the whole – the black caucus was defending him, and he was – but actually he had completely stolen an enormous amount of money from –

SS: How much?

AP: Oh, it was a lot, I think. It was a lot. I don't remember. It was like 20 thousand dollars or something. The dramas. It was – oh it was very –

SS: Ann, did you work on any other committees?

AP: No, mostly I worked on various sort of fund-raising committees and anything having to do with raising money in the art world.

SS: Did you ever get arrested?

AP: I never got arrested, no. I marched a lot, but I never actually ended up being arrested, no.

SS: What were some of your favorite actions?

AP: You know who you need to talk to?

SS: Who?

AP: Roma Baron.

SS: Oh, sure.

AP: You need to talk to Roma. She's a good buddy of mine. The NIH action was extraordinarily moving and powerful and –

SS: Can you tell a little bit about that?

AP: Yeah, it was a lot of people. I forget what year it was. It must have been – it was late, so it was like maybe even '89 or '90, the NIH action, if I recall. I don't know how many thousands of people showed up, but a lot and I remember very vividly the Chicago chapter of ACT UP taping themselves in a giant group so that they couldn't be arrested. They couldn't be put in the trucks. It was a pretty intense action because there were police on horseback, and it got violent at one point. And especially violent for

this group, this Chicago group. They were really incredibly brave. I remember one point they were being beat up pretty badly, and Whatshisname – see, I am going to remember – Faust? Fausi?

SS: Fauci.

AP: Fauci!

SS: Tony Fauci.

AP: Tony Fauci came out onto a balcony. It was very – people were climbing up the sides of the building. Big news coverage. Very effective, that way. That was a great action. And the Grand Central action was an amazing action.

SS: Can you explain what that was?

AP: Well, they went up onto the big balcony over the – that looks down on the Grand Central Station and unfurled this gigantic banner, and they were so stealth. They got in and out in just the amount of time that it took for all the TV cameras and The New York Times and everyone to get all the images they wanted. And, of course, again the media committee was brilliant, and it was all choreographed perfectly. And the big first AIDS march. There was a real – I mean, actually – that was New York, right?

SS: What do you mean, AIDS march?

AP: There was an ACT UP march, in New York, and I am trying to remember. It seemed – it was very early on, it seemed.

SS: Across the bridge?

AP: Was it across the bridge? That's right, across the bridge. That was an amazing action.

SS: You spoke very articulately before about how the AIDS crisis transformed your sense of what a museum director could do. You know, really changing the idea of what it was to have a relationship with a community. Can you say, do you think that ACT UP changed anything about your sense of yourself as a gay person?

AP: Oh, it just – it was – and I do think this is a reason that a lot of people's – when you were asking earlier did a lot of people come out? Yes, they did, because – yes, they did, because it made you so proud to be gay. And, it was very, probably, definitely the moment for me when I realized that I could not afford to separate my life. I couldn't be a museum director, and care about art and artists, and then have my activist self be separated – in a separate – Wednesday evenings, Tuesday evenings. And so, that was – I was lucky though. There were a lot of people that – Philip Yenawine is a good example. He's the Director of Education at the Museum of Modern Art, and he lost – in a way, Philip – I think of Philip as having lost more loved ones. I mean, we all lost a lot of friends, by Philip lost – and it's because he was so loved by so many people, maybe – but, his life for 15 years was one close person after another dying. And so, he couldn't separate his life, and brought to the Museum of Modern Art a sense of obligation, a sense of activism. It didn't play out very well there. They actually had to kind of deal with the Day Without Art, for example, which was December 1st. Every December 1st was identified as a day where institutions had to do something. And, it was, for years, it started out to be – and there was a poster made every year, and everyone decided on either a one day show or a one day action, or they closed their doors, or they put up black banners. Or, they did something to say, we acknowledge this, and how it's affected our

community. And, you know, it was very hard for Philip to get the powers that be at MOMA, at that time, to do such a thing, because they did not consider it to be their job. He was very effective, but at a cost for him – at a great cost for him – a lot of tension and friction and issues. Probably the most effective moment that he had at MOMA, making that institution, that behemoth institution pay some acknowledgment was the night he had Leonard Bernstein come. And Leonard Bernstein came and made a speech in the lobby of MOMA about the AIDS epidemic, and it was – and all the big wigs had to be there – you know, the Board of Directors had to be there. And, you know, people like Aggie Gunds were enormously supportive of Philip's activities, but there were a lot of people that weren't, and so it was – you could see the cultural institution struggling with it, but it was something that you had to struggle with, and you had to fall on this line, on one side or the other, because it was too big and too noticeable to pretend like it wasn't happening.

So, I was lucky, because I had a small institution. I had something that – and a very supportive board of directors. So, I had something that I could adjust accordingly, you know. I could turn it over to people for the evening, to do what they needed to do. But, I was just really lucky. Most places can't do that – especially if they're federally funded. So, if you get – technically speaking, if you have NEA funds, you're not allowed to do anything like this, really. So, it was brave of my board of directors to allow us to behave this way, but –

SS: I just have one last question.

AP: Okay.

SS: What would you say is the lasting legacy of ACT UP?

Tape II
00:30:00

AP: I think the way – a couple of things, but for me, really, the way it brought the community together. And it really did. You know, my – you know, when we – just to go back, if I could, for a second to WAC – you know, when we did a WAC benefit, we went out and asked all of our boyfriends, all of our guys that we had supported for years, to give. And again – people like Bob Gober – people who had become quite important art stars, in a way. And we went to them and said, okay, WAC needs your help, we're going to do an art auction. And we did an art auction exactly – well, actually, after the ACT UP auction, we did a NARAL auction – National Abortion Rights Action League. It was a year later – and I remember this – a lot of women were a little frustrated by the fact that a lot of things were going around about women's issues, at the same time. But, ACT UP was – and AIDS, rightly so – was getting a lot more attention, in terms of – and a lot better results from the sort of philanthropic impulses of people in the art world. And, so, it was about a year later, in exactly the same space, that we raised – I went down to Washington and I asked NARAL if they would like to have the art world do a benefit for them. And, they said, sure. And, I said, you know, we just raised a million dollars for ACT UP. And so, this was done – not through an organization, by the way – it wasn't Livet Reichard, or was it? Yes it was, forgive me. It was. But, the point of the matter is, we went to the same people, the same, and said, okay, now you guys need to ante up for the girls. And, at that time it was like that, you know? It really was like that. And they were there in full force. And, it was fantastic, because you really felt for the first time that the women's issues were getting that kind of play for the men, as well, in understanding that they were all of our issues. So, that, to me, is one of the biggest

legacies, for – as sad as that is, it really was a huge thread that sort of bound us all together in a way.

And then, the other thing is, activism works. That's the other big legacy – it definitely works. And, you know, say what you will about radical organizations – and we weren't even close to being as radical as we could have been – but, they are an essential part of the ecosystem of changing society, you know?

You have to have the AmFARs; you have to have the basic – the NARALs, the basic established organizations, and then you have to have the fringe groups. You have to have the radical ones, making trouble in the streets. It's such an important part of it. If you don't have both sides of that, nothing ever really, ultimately changes.

So, that's, I think – we keep learning that lesson over and over again. We learned it in civil rights, we learned it through AIDS, and we learned it with women's movement, and hopefully, we'll be learning it again with the anti-war – ugh, it's exhausting.

SS: Thank you.