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I: In terms of your...I mean you were...you went back to teach at Holy Cross, didn't you, for a while?

R: Mm hmm.

I: And I suppose at that time Richard...

R: Just a year, yeah.

I: ...Richard would have been involved in...

R: That's gorgeous.

I: ...as a teacher also?

R: That's gorgeous. Yeah.

I: So, were you in touch or did you just know by...?

R: Yeah, through the paperback, oh yeah. Oh...

I: Because...

R: ...he had a shine on me.

I: ...because I had a...what do you mean?

R: He had a shine on me.

I: Meaning?

R: I mean he invited me to all his parties when I was a student. So, I was going to Fredrick Street to all his parties.

I: What do you remember about those times, because I think I sent you a photograph of...it must have been taken in his flat, I think, and there was...

R: Oh yes, so he did.

I: ...Ann Demarco was there?

R: Yeah, so you did, I'd forgotten about that.

I: Do you have any particular memories about these soirees or were they just sort of blending into one or...?

R: Oh yeah, no. I remember once I took an LP, a Polish LP of...called...gosh, I forget. Stunningly beautiful music. The...an ex-student of the art school had gone to Poland, to a film school.

I: To Lodz.

R: Mmm, and he brought back this LP, Meschia, I think it's Meschia, and somebody's stiletto heel went through it. Oh yes, I didn't own it, I borrowed it from a girl, a woman, and a fellow student. Boy, did she give me hell. So, I then wrote to the ambassador consult and after months and months I managed to, through the consult, consulate, purchase a new LP to give back to her. She never forgave me. I've still got the old one. It is the most wonderful music.

I: What sort of people did...?

R: So, I took it to Ricky's parties. Oh, they were all upper class. At his parties?

I: Aha.

R: Oh yeah, it was the glitterati of Edinburgh culture, you know, life and everything.

I: Does he have some kind of...? What I've noticed is he has, for example, this great desire to associate himself with landed people or people with power or influence or big houses or...

R: John Calder, yeah,

I: ...this kind of thing. Maybe that comes from a sense of being...

R: The alien.

I: ...and from a...you know, the Italian community that were...in a sense they were people who worked, you know, as ice cream shop owners or cafés and they were basically serving, okay?

R: Yeah.

I: They were in that role and they were seen to being that kind of socioeconomic niche but he always thought he...he always felt he had aspirations to...

R: Oh definitely.

I: ...move out of that completely almost.

R: Yeah. See, Louis represents what could have been. I mean Louis just followed the family, you know?

I: Yeah.

R: But Ricky had aspirations, but you know what, I think he...even I think his wedding day...I wasn't invited to the wedding. I was walking along Princes Street, taxi stops, it's Ann and him, he gets out to have a chat with me.

I: Going to his wedding?

R: Yeah. I mean he really had a shine on me.

I: Well this PhD...

R: They're just Janus-faced, you know?

I: Yeah. This PhD is actually...the core of it is Richard as a teacher and it's why I wanted to talk to you because he set up so many things but the argument of the thesis is really that they were all part of the same process, that they were all about a type of education. Wherever he found himself he was going to push the boundaries of that, whether it was done Scotus taking kids out of the school and then inviting them to his art gallery.

R: Well the first time I saw it was he had an exhibition of their work in The Paperback, in the basement.

I: That's right. So, wherever he found himself he was attempting to...you know, so, yeah, you said Janus. It's an odd combination because on the one hand he's really not a...he's not a snob because he's dealt with people on many different levels and, you know, he wants to promote kids' art. You know, he did it, as you just described, but he's also...when he set up the Edinburgh summer schools, the Edinburgh arts project, and he

went on this lecture tour to the United States and he brought all these students over what he did was it wasn't...the idea of a summer school wasn't that unusual, he...as I said to you, he'd got the idea from...

R: Miss Greek, yeah.

I: ...John Zervos and Aegina but what he did start doing, which was more interesting in some ways, was that he started taking groups of people on these journeys. It reminded me about...of your work because your work has been about engaging people with art, I suppose to give them confidence and as a basis for doing many other things, okay?

R: Yeah.

I: It's an idea that creativity can...if you start with that you can work out the with and it seemed to me that he was doing some similar things. He was even taking people to stone circles on these journeys and, you know, clearly you've worked somehow with that idea about bringing the stone circles into modern context into people's lives so it may not necessarily experience them. So, it's a strange...there are some very strange parallels and intersections...

R: Contiguously, yeah.

I: ...in your careers, although you haven't, as far as I know, collaborated on a formal sense.

R: No. Ricky has never helped me at all in the art world in any respect.

I: But he had a shine on you, so...

R: He did but not in the art.

I: Just in a personal level or...?

R: Yeah.

I: And have you actually had any...?

R: I've never exhibited in his space, or anything like that.

I: But have you had serious discussions about your wider pedagogical, philosophical vision?

R: No.

I: You haven't?

R: No.

- I: Is that a conversation that you've wanted to have or avoided or...?
- R: No, not really. I mean geographically I was out of Edinburgh a lot, I told you that. So, eight years in Glenrothes. I worked there for ten years but eight of them, or seven, I was there and then we came back. We came back to Edinburgh to Hermiston. Frances couldn't stand it any longer.
- I: In Glenrothes?
- R: Yeah, the new town syndrome, you know, which I understand, and I made a living at our council house and we kept our flat in Edinburgh. So...and then Dartington, eight years, Nigeria, four years, you know? So, I was out of Edinburgh a lot and so we didn't actually get the chance to nurture the kind of thing that you're describing, no.
- I: And he didn't...he never asked you to come and do a lecture, or anything like that?
- R: Never, not that I can recall anyway, and then...so when I came from Devon to Glasgow, or Glasgow, as they say, is Edinburgh's further away from Glasgow than Glasgow is from Edinburgh, you know, so it's another world. So, I'd only...but I invited him to teach a couple of times at the art school.
- I: Was that an invitation that he accepted?
- R: Yes, but the students didn't like him.
- I: Why was that?
- R: Because of his manner.
- I: In what way?
- R: Well that bumptious know-all, you know, manner.
- I: Monopolising conversations or...?
- R: They just didn't like his way of being, his persona, his posh, you know, Edinburgh...oh, he was doing the same talk that he still does, you know, and his blah, blah, blah, and they saw through that, you know? They didn't like him so I didn't have him back, we didn't have him back.
- I: Do you think that they gained anything from the experience?
- R: No.
- I: And the invitation wasn't reciprocated?
- R: No.

- I: So, you wouldn't rate him as a teacher particularly?
- R: No, but I admire him immensely. Those summer schools and those journeys, I mean they were fantastic.
- I: Well that's the core of what I'm trying to write about because I think it's the core of what he is and what he did.
- R: Yeah, definitely, because he's an impresario, you know, he's, you know, a leader, he's the Piped Piper, you know? He's...so...but coming...and the thing is that most...many of them, the majority of them were known artists, not exclusively known artists but there would be people interested in the arts, you know, or from other disciplines but not visual art. There'd be a few. That's my reading of it. I have no evidence for that at all but...so he could perform. He's a performer. He was a performer, that's why, and he had a captive audience, but I think they were magnificent. I never went on any. The only one I went on, which was a wonderful one, and by God, I use it as an example of what Ricky can do, was a bus trip from Edinburgh. There was a conference on. Well I was talking at the conference, so was Ricky, that's right, in Edinburgh College of Art, 1984.
- I: Was that during the Anzac art conf...event?
- R: Yes, correct, the Australian/New Zealand artists, yeah, that's right, and get this, we left in the morning, we went straight, and I'll tell you who was there, a guy that I introduced to Scotland, Bernard Lassus. Have you seen that in my book?
- I: I know who you're talking about but I don't know...
- R: Ah, he was on the bus. So, we went to Finlay's.
- I: To Little Sparta?
- R: Yeah, to Little Sparta and Lassus was able to, you know, talk about it and Finlay gave us the trip, and everything like that. Then we went on to Margot Sandeman's. Oh no, we went on to The Burrell, which had just been opened, and the architect for The Burrell gave us a tour of the building, Ricky Rooms, all that, on to Margot Sandeman's and we had, you know, a studio. Then three o'clock in the afternoon, it was a Saturday, or four o'clock, we came to Glasgow School of Art and Tony Jones, the wonderful director of the School of Art, was there on the steps to meet us, was there on the steps to meet us and gave us a tour of the building. It was then that I understood this, you know? Tony Jones was going to say, just feel underneath that table and you'll feel the bevel going like that, so you get a narrow, you know, edge, but in fact it's quite a thick bit of wood, you know?
- I: Aha.

- R: And oh, it was a wonderful tour. To have the director of the School of Art come out on a Saturday afternoon to do a tour, I mean that's Ricky, you know? Then we were down to the Third Eye to a conference in the Third Eye. Then from there we were going to the Queen's Hall in Edinburgh for poetry readings, Sorley MacLean, and all of that. I didn't do that bit because I was too knackered by then. That was Ricky.
- I: But that's how...I mean...
- R: That's a day in Ricky's life.
- I: So much energy, the obsession, the commitment.
- R: Oh, and to have organised it.
- I: To have the powers of persuasion.
- R: Fantastic, it was a great day, great day.
- I: I spent three days with him in Poland, three or four days, in 1989 when I was working there teaching English. I met up with him and this bus load of people and it changed my life, just this being taken around, being introduced to people, listening, going to places I would never have been able to access...
- R: That's right, yeah.
- I: ...and it just...you know? That's why I decided that this was an important part of art history that needed to be analysed because he's really only been the only person who's actually commented on his own work and there hasn't really been... There are lots of people with stories and opinions but the analysis, the evaluation in a kind of more rigorous framework hasn't been done. So, that's what I'm trying to do. It's a monster, you know, but I'm trying to channel it in a particular way, in a particular timeframe.
- R: Yeah. The only danger is that you can only deal in facts and there's so much fantasy.
- I: Yeah. Well as your students saw there was a lot of...
- R: Yeah. I think it's the self-aggrandisement, you know? The Glaswegians couldn't take it, you know?
- I: No.
- R: On Saturday, you know Douglas...I sent you that thing about the Cameron Gill, you know?

I: Yes.

R: We're having a celebration. Come and Cameron Gill.

I: Okay.

R: Well Douglas, his house, you know, on Saturday.

I: I've never met the great man, so. Is he okay?

R: Aye. Oh, well he's not really but...

I: Is he...I mean what I mean is, is he amenable to a normal sort of friendly conversation or is he more difficult to reach or...?

R: He's difficult to reach, yeah.

I: Is he? Right, because I've never met him and I don't know him at all.

R: Here's a thing, he was having a big exhibition in a new art gallery in Tel Aviv and he got in touch with Sam and I and he said, I'd love you to come.

I: To Tel Aviv?

R: Yeah. He said, but there's one condition, I pay for the lot. So, when we agreed to go, naturally, everything was taken care of. We didn't have to lift a finger.

I: That was a big thank you.

R: And he had organised a Burns supper, it was January, and it was in an alleyway in Jaffa, tables down the alleyway, and...because I started the Burns suppers at the art school and we used to have them in the hall. There'd be 24 people, you know, seated and it'd be Douglas, Ronnie, Martin Boyce, David Shrigley, you know, the whole shebang, Christine Borland, Ross Sinclair, the whole lot, Claire Bartley, you know, and the tradition has been kept going. So, I did a short thing, Douglas did something and his dad was there and he did the pipes just at the canter, you know? So, we did all the Burns thing, we sang the songs, and everything, you know? It was just out of this world.

Two o'clock in the morning get to bed and he had said that a bus was leaving the hotel in Tel Aviv taking everybody to Old Jerusalem for the day. Well the bus was leaving, you had to be up at nine o'clock, you know, and away. I said...and Sam said, Douglas, oh, I can't make that, so sorry, we're not going to go. So, we were in the hotel in the morning having breakfast and this guy came up to us and he said, Douglas said I have to look after you for the day, he says, and we're getting a taxi to Jerusalem. Got a taxi to Jerusalem and the taxi was ordered to wait and

we met up with the bus group and we did this tour of the old town and then came back, got the taxi back to Tel Aviv all paid for.

I: Well I'm sure he's well paid for what he does, I don't know. He's a bit of an international star though, isn't he?

R: Yeah, but it's the generosity. I mean he would phone me up from the Cote d'Azur, you know, I've got an exhibition in Nice, come on down and I'll pay you for your fares, I'll send a car to the airport, you know, big car.

I: Oh, from to?

R: Mmm, or Paris, the World Cup, phone me, I've got tickets, you know, for a match, a Scotland match, you know?

I: Yeah. So, will you see him at the weekend?

R: Yeah, because his film is premiering at the Glasgow Film Festival, the one that he's having at the Documenter.

I: Okay. What's it called?

R: I Had Nowhere to Go. It's on...Jonas Mekas, the avant-garde film maker, an Lithuanian refugee, some guy. Then the others are, you know, in degrees. You know, Douglas is the effigy of our friendship because he's Douglas, you know? He's got what it takes to do that, you know? Then there's, you know, Roddy and Jackie and Ross and Christine and Martin, and all of these, you know, Tony Paris and...not that he was one of my students but he's married to one of mine. I mean I've been to many of their weddings, that's right. So, it's...although time has passed and it's a bit fragmented down we remained a family with that group.

I: I better think about getting my stuff together, David. I feel kind of awful leaving you with the washing up.

R: Oh, no.

I: Can I clear the plates at least?

R: Oh no, don't touch a thing, no.

I: Thank you.

R: No no.

I: I took photographs of the cricket book and the script.

R: Ah, fine.

I: And I've got a wee bit of information from you, which is very useful. I'd like to be in touch about your work at the Documenter. If you could have a word with then that would be great?

R: Yeah, if you want me to do that I'll do that.

I: Yeah, and all I can say is thank you very much for what's been a short but very good visit. I'm glad to see you're...apart from your hip that you're fine. Marcus said that he saw you the other day.

R: Yes.

I: He said you were looking well.

R: Ah, did he mean then?

I: Yeah.

R: That's a good...yeah, Benedict, the youngest, is a television producer, BBC. He freelances...

End of transcript