

45  
65

2010.028.0598

Frank Owen

1

M: Okay Frank, just tell me what you want about--

Frank: Okay, well I think that the question that I'm asked the most frequently by people is: what difference has it made in my life, in my work as a result of being up here in contrast to having lived in and being in New York City where I used to live and where I first established myself as a painter. The questions asked of me most frequently by other artists who themselves are toying with the idea of moving out of the city, as indeed anybody is who reaches a certain point in their lives. And so the--I am--I ponder the question a lot. I thought about it a great deal before I determined to settle here. When my wife had already moved up and had established a career as a broker in real estate two years before I moved up. To me the difference is--is--is for me is the character of the mountain, quality of the time that I have to work. In the city I discovered, in the late 70s, most of my time was being chewed up by events or by guilt. Feelings having to do with my inability of reluctance to attend events.

M: Openings and--?

Frank: Openings and, you know, things having to do with my career or other people's work, being part of that community. Which was very vivid and exciting kind of thing, particularly--

M: Didn't that also give you feedback that influences

your own art?

Frank: Well I think that you'll find that-- Looking at the work influences my art, looking at other people's work, on occasion does. But that's fairly rare. Most of what the art world in New York's about is about career and pursuing the right connection, and so on and so forth. But most people talk about real estate, you know. The longest and best conversations I ever had with other artists were with those people that I entertained as house guests when they in to New York City from California or from Arizona or wherever and then they would come into the city with an eagerness to look and to enter into the discourse of ideas.

M: Now you can do that if you're visiting.

Frank: That's precisely what I do. I go down about 3 or 4 times a year and keep everybody up late at night and exhaust all my friends and I see everything the city has to offer and then I get on a northbound train at Grand Central and quite happily ride back up here.

M: What about the financial question? Is New York getting so expensive for artists that only the very successful can afford to have adequate space there?

Frank: Well I wouldn't say that only the very successful. I think that a lot of people have space and are working very hard to maintain their space and--but then it becomes--there has to be a choice. At least at my career

strata--my level of success, if you will, that I've attained. It is a matter of can--what are you working for? You're working to be an artist or you're working to be in New York. And when I determined I wanted to be, was I wanted to be an artist. And New York is an exciting place to do it, but the cost is outrageously high. Here I get to be a full time artist. Everyday, or almost every day.

M: So the quality of your life is, what now since you've come up here? How long have you been up here?

Frank: I've been up here since--living year round, since summer of 81. And this is a charming community. It's a small village with just enough people, many of whom are very interesting, all of them are positive. And all dedicated to an idea of being in a community. That's one thing that is quite nice.

M: Are there other transplants like yourself? Or like minded.

Frank: Yeah, I think there's an increasing number of transplants, too. That's going to be a strong factor in the future of the Adirondacks, I believe. There are more people now who've taken up living here who earned a living outside the region. They function as consultants or they have some sort of professional activity that they can pursue up here without the necessity of being in the marketplace directly. Maybe they do it through a computer modem and connect that

way.

M: But I mean money aside, are you happier producing art here and selling it in New York as opposed to producing it in New York to sell to New York?

Frank: Well I miss the city too. There's no question about that. And the ideal, I suppose, would be able to be there maybe 3 months of the year, mid-winter when everything is very active. But on the other hand--at the same time I'm working well and I'm having more ideas than I can possibly ever manage.

M: Oh I see, so being up here doesn't stifle ideas.

Frank: No, no, no.

M: Being cut off from the mainstream art world or anything.

Frank: No, it--it--you can be connected to that via the magazines, if you choose to read them. And as I say I do go down to the city.

M: Where do you sell in the city?

Frank: I'm--a dealer named Nancy Hoffman is my-- handles my work. Down in Soho neighborhood on West Broadway. So the really distinctive differences is the-- there's a shrinking of external stimuli but a real expansion of my territory. And maybe that's appropriate to my age too, I mean, I'm middle-aged and my pathways have been fairly well charted and I don't anticipate massive

revolution in my consciousness. But I do have, you know, a craving to pursue my ideas which I seem to be getting closer to the nub of what I mean and intend. But it's hard.

M: To get toward that--or the fact that your life is easier up here, does that help, I mean you gonna walk to work and if your phone calls and fewer functions and somehow does that help you get the core of your work quicker, there's less in the way in a way.

Frank: There's less in the way and you have no excuses, you have--

M: You and the studio.

Frank: Yeah, it's you and the studio, exactly. And that can be very exciting. I mean I work well alone, I mean, anybody that wants to be an artist better be able to do that. And--

M: What else do you do in the Adirondacks? Do you-- How do you--do you do anything with the outdoors?

Frank: No, remarkably little. I mean my wife and I took a canoeing trip the other day, that's the first time in years I've been out on one of the lakes. And remark on it. I mean she's out all the time, as a real estate broker, out on the hillsides walking, you know, borders and survey lines.

M: Now is she from a local family.

Frank: Yeah, she's--she--her family has been here in

Keene Valley since either, between 1790 and 1800, they first settled here. So my daughter is like the 8th generation to have some connection with Keene Valley. So yeah, they're an old family, one of the oldest.

M: Fastastic.

Frank: Essentially you get to chop this down and give you quotables if possible.

M: Tell me more about your art in the Adirondacks. Coming out of come center, or whatever, you know, just more about yourself.

Frank: Okay, I mean--I think that I'm asked too, and I think about it, what is the influence. Is there an influence of the environment upon my work; I think that there is, to some degree. I think that the phenomenon of experience that interests me the most, that seems most reflected in my work, is--is, has to do with the kind of density of the wilderness or, or of nature. A closeup kind of vision of things. I mean most people tend to think that art should treat the big missis in the Adirondacks, the sweeping scope. And I'm much more interested in the small disasters of breakages and windfalls and thickets and things that operate on a level that a human being really experiences as you move through the trees with--ducking branches at eye level. And I think the character and the space in a lot of my paints has a lot to do with that. And

some of these geometric forms that are prominent in the paintings are really echoes of what I'll see right out my studio window in the wintertime when the branches are covered with snow and everything is just very stark and spiky. I mean I don't mean it to be exactly like that, on the other hand I can't help but do--I can't help but see the points of comparison or similarity. I'm also--nature's intruded a bit more into the work in the form of--oh absorption I've got with the idea of paths and short distances and sets of choices made along the way and that kind of thing. So some of the paintings, because they are relief pictures, covered with stones now, or about to be anyhow. And I like the idea of small events that happen at the level of looking at a cluster or \_\_\_\_\_ just about the point of view of taking just about to put your foot down on a portion of a path. I like maybe a message to be down there, you know, some way. So this stuff is sort of filtering into the work.

M: Are other artists talking to you about living up here because they kinda want to move to a similar place and, I don't know, get to a simpler life themselves?

Frank: Well I suppose so, yeah. They're looking for much the same kind of place, the same kind of experience. I presume, can't tell them at all. Essentially you want to make your work, if you're doing well at it in the sense that

you're satisfying yourself in terms of being--maintaining your excitement and interest and you're tantalized always by what you haven't done, then you want to buckle down and have a place to do it and get at it. I mean people say well you-- It frees you up and the artist's life is presumed to be one of great freedom, you can go anywhere, do anything. Yeah, you can. But mostly you don't want to because--

M: You really have these very minute choices you can't do everything you have to sort--

Frank: You have to figure out what it is that you want to be about, and then do that. And for me making paintings seems to be the thing that I want to do the most, 'cause I-- there's all these things that I have yet to make that I haven't seen. And I want to see it so that's why I make them.

M: That's interesting the thing about freedom but yet you can't just dash all over the place and do everything and paint everything and have every style, you have to cut it right down to something specific that's then and there.

Frank: Yeah, and what is that going to be? And what is that--yeah. Well that's the dilemma of modernism, I mean, you're-- All these territories have been--of one, you're free to do anything you want, and then question is what's worth doing. And that's a real toughie. That's the killer question. And then how do you--how do you embed



meaning in this personal activity? How do you take something which is seemingly well--at it's genesis very intimate and personal and private and then how do you try to put more expansive meanings into it that somehow might communicate to other people? It's real difficult problem. An interesting one.

M: Did you try and make a piece count in sort of a way as part of a personal decision, I mean, you sort of equate them with going down a path.

Frank: I'm very, very conscious of choices. I mean, as everybody is in life. But I mean get very focused upon decisions about whether to do this thing or that thing, there are multiple options always.

M: In life as well as to the painter.

Frank: Yeah, yeah. Everything in the studio is always bubbling up more possibilities and you're always having to-- and sometimes the decision is based upon a very arbitrary set of factors.

M: I do believe you've given me plenty.