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PURPLE FASHION

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ROBERT M. RUBIN CURATOR on curating as nonfiction

interview by JEFF RIAN
portrait by GIASCO BERTOLI at La Maison de Verre, Paris

JEFF RIAN — How did you become a curator?
ROBERT RUBIN — Well, I'm a longtime collector, and I think curating is a natural extension of that. I'm not talking about collecting contemporary art, which is essentially a money game, like putting together a portfolio of securities. I'm talking about collecting baseball cards, coins, stamps, books — things where the act of putting them all together creates meaning. Curating is a way to create layers of meaning. I've always collected with literal connections that meant something to me.

JEFF RIAN — Like what?
ROBERT RUBIN — It's very personal. I collect objects that relate to movies that made an impact on me when I was younger. I've bought valuable art. But when you drop $100,000 on a painting, you're boxed out until you have another $100,000, and it could be a long time. These days, $100,000 can't even get you in the door. I've sold most of it because I want to collect things that I can engage with every day. For example, I like Japanese clothes because the Japanese are very good at taking American culture and essentially evolving it.

JEFF RIAN — Like Comme des Garçons or Yohji Yamamoto?
ROBERT RUBIN — I'm more into their streetwear, like this jacket with the Indian buttons and the yak wool — it's kind of obsessional, artisanal Japanese stuff. I love Japan. I have a proxy who gets it for me, because it's not always exported. I also look on eBay. Sometimes I get it, sometimes I don't. I'm looking all the time.

JEFF RIAN — What was the first show you curated?
ROBERT RUBIN — An architecture show on Jean Prouvé called "Three Nomadic Structures," first shown at Columbia University, then at MOCA in Los Angeles. It was a mixture of photographs, plans, and fragments of buildings. I was trying to counter the prevailing trend of Prouvé as a furniture maker and present him more as a designer of building systems. He made furniture to make money to create building systems. Unfortunately, the buildings he was involved in were torn down, and pieces got sold by decorators, which decontextualized and abstracted his architecture. After that show, I bought one of the tropical houses from Brazzaville — never imagining it would become such a fetishized object.

JEFF RIAN — Where is it now?
ROBERT RUBIN — At the Pompidou. I'd built it at Yale and then at the Hammer, in Los Angeles, before bringing it back to France. My curating tendencies kind of went dormant, and then I met Richard Prince.

JEFF RIAN — How did you meet Richard?
ROBERT RUBIN — I met Richard in, like, 2004. Through golf, actually. Somebody introduced him to me, we played, and I said, "You really ought to join my club." He said, "Would you take art instead of money?" I said, "Sure."

JEFF RIAN — You curated the exhibition "American Prayer" at the BNF [Bibliothèque Nationale de France] in Paris, which featured Richard Prince's book and paraphernalia collection. How did that come about?
ROBERT RUBIN — We became friends. I was also very friendly with John McWhinnie, who found many of the works in Richard's book collection — I was executor of John's estate when he died. John and Richard were extremely close.

JEFF RIAN — So the three of you had interests that were peripheral but quite related to art.
ROBERT RUBIN — John and I would talk about Richard's book collection, and kind of a show, but the Morgan being the Morgan, time moves differently. I knew the president of the BNF and thought this was an opportunity to have a major Richard Prince show based on his book collection. Richard always envisioned showing his book collection in a library. That's why he was talking to the Morgan. That's when I became what I am now.

JEFF RIAN — Which is what?
ROBERT RUBIN — I might best be described as an entrepreneurial curator, meaning that I'm not associated with any institution, and I do all the heavy lifting: I conceive of the idea, I sell it to the institution, I sell it to the artists. I bring everybody together. I also help raise money. With Richard Prince, it was a magical experience. It was the first show that really sprang full blown from my head. Richard was enthusiastic, as was the BNF. David Adjaye's design of the barn-like building within the space was simply off the charts. It was a happy moment. Richard gave me carte blanche. Eric Brown, Richard's studio manager, came over, and together we put up the show.

JEFF RIAN — Richard's collection is very much of a piece with his art. Are you trying to show how curating can be as personal and creative as collecting?
ROBERT RUBIN — Right. It's storytelling. And when people read the story, maybe they see things in the art that they didn't see before. I'm not proposing any overarching aesthetic theories here. I'm putting together material. There's definitely a curatorial taxonomy.

JEFF RIAN — That was the first show of Richard's incredible collection, a lot of it from the Beat generation — the intellectual property behind his life as an artist.
ROBERT RUBIN — People don't necessarily think of Richard as erudite or literary, which he is. It made Richard's art accessible and also showed how his art and collecting are related. His art is full of connections to cowboys and

All artworks from the
"Walkers: Hollywood Afterlives in Art and Artifact" exhibition,
Museum of the Moving Image, New York

Gregor Hildebrandt,
L.B. Blume (Japanese Version E.N.), 2008

JEFF RIAN — But "American Prayer" was different from an art or library exhibition.
ROBERT RUBIN — Curating is a way of codifying objects and of having one discovery lead to another. Collecting is, too. I'm trying to break out of the Amazon and Spotify and consultant molds, where other people tell you what to buy, listen to, or look at. I want to stumble upon them. So, it's a codification of spontaneous research, whereas most searches today are measured.

JEFF RIAN — Did the BNF show lead you, or you and Richard, to any discoveries?
ROBERT RUBIN — When Richard and I were doing "American Prayer," one of my finders had come across Pierre Boulle's script for *Planet of the Apes*. Boulle was the original author of the story. And, of course, the BNF has the Pierre Boulle archive! Boulle's novel was in French, but he'd written a script in English, which is not his native language, after he'd read Rod Serling's treatment of his book. Boulle thought it was a desecration of his novel and pleaded, very poignantly, not to alter his novel. He said that the Statue of Liberty scene would never work, which was Serling's invention and turned out to be a key moment in the film. But nobody knew about Boulle's script. Even if the studios have a copy, they're not going to trot out this information. And this is a movie that went through a bunch of uncredited script doctors. So, I said to Richard: let's buy Boulle's script and put it in the show and give it to the BNF when the show's over. This is where it belongs. Richard said, "Great." So we did it. We bought it for $5,500, from the estate of a journeyman Hollywood script doctor who'd worked on the film. Maybe there's one other copy. I mean, you're talking about history.

JEFF RIAN — Forgotten history.
ROBERT RUBIN — Yeah! Under everybody's nose. The best time to find this stuff is right after it becomes obsolete. Because you're in a moment where the people who created it are dying, and their heirs are cleaning out their closets and selling it.

JEFF RIAN — At a reasonable price?
ROBERT RUBIN — Yeah. In another 20 years, the only places where there will be paper scripts will be the vaults of studios. It's like old race cars: finely crafted objects that become obsolete until someone starts to take an art-historical approach, chassis by chassis, and then they become negotiable securities like everything else. The other day, I bought a script for *Vanishing Point,* one of Richard's favorite movies. I discovered that it was written by a guy whose pseudonym was Guillermo Cain, who was in fact Guillermo Cabrera Infante, a very highly respected magic-realist novelist, who wrote film criticism under the pseudonym of Guillermo Cain.

JEFF RIAN — What's the pseudonym?
ROBERT RUBIN — An homage to James M. Cain. The script is dedicated to Neal Cassady, which didn't come out in the movie. It also had instructions for using pop radio as background and other very revolutionary ideas that sort of fell off the wagon. I actually was able to buy two of these and gave one to Richard. Richard also didn't know that Charlotte Rampling played the hitchhiker in a cut scene.

JEFF RIAN — I would guess this is for your next show, "Walkers," which opens at the Museum of the Moving Image in New York. How did that one come about?
ROBERT RUBIN — I had the idea of doing a show about the movies. I take many pages out of the "American Prayer" playbook for "Walkers" because I'm mixing artworks and artifacts, but not necessarily positioning artifacts as art.

JEFF RIAN — Did you do all the research?
ROBERT RUBIN — I did. I bought every book and catalog about contemporary art and cinema from the last 20 years. I started looking at people who appropriated material or images. It goes from Joseph Cornell to the present. One of the key pieces for me was an Israeli poster of *Dr. Strangelove,* with the title in Hebrew. I chose a handful of artists who are central to the show: Richard Prince, John Divola's grids of continuity photographs, John Stezaker's collages, old film stills, Fiona Banner, Pierre Bismuth, Leanne Shapton, Gregory Crewdson's photographs that he shot at the Cinecittà film studios in Italy.

JEFF RIAN — How did you decide what not to include?
ROBERT RUBIN — I basically turfed out anybody who'd been seen too often, and I looked for people nobody's thought about, like the Avedon portraits of John Ford and Groucho Marx, which are all about the ravages of time. I have a real luxury that other curators don't: first, I don't make a living at it. Second, I take my time. One of the things I learned from doing the book, *Richard Prince: American Prayer,* was CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

Top: Pierre Bismuth, *Following the Right Hand of Gene Tierney in* Dragonwyck, 2011
Bottom: John Divola, *Continuity: Artificial Nature/Artificial Nature #26:* Tarzan Finds a Son, *MGM 1939,* 2002

Opposite page, top: Adam McEwen, *Untitled (Nicole)*, 2004, copyright ADAGP, Paris, 2015
Bottom: Richard Prince, *Untitled (listings)*, 1993

that if you do the catalog first, the show will hang itself, which is what happened when we hung "American Prayer" at the BNF. Most institutions can't function that way. Big museums get them in time for the show, but a lot of art galleries don't.

JEFF RIAN — The "Walkers" catalog is itself a beautiful object.
ROBERT RUBIN — Yes. The same designers who did *American Prayer* — and they're terrific. Their idea that the typeface doesn't have to be the same size for each text allowed us tremendous layout flexibility. I thought of *American Prayer* as a kind of Gideon Bible for the counterculture. Here, I'm saying that I've read all these books and have taken pieces of them, but seen through a very specific lens. Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* has a recurrent image of a torn movie poster as a cinematic sign. Frederick Exley's *A Fan's Notes*, one of my favorite books, has Steve McQueen at the bar. David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* is about the ultimate stunt: a quest for a movie.

JEFF RIAN — Including the romantic illusions people have in relation to cinema?
ROBERT RUBIN — Right. The need to be in a movie theater, to be part of cinema — for two years, I imagined an exhibition through this lens.

JEFF RIAN — Did "American Prayer" relate to this way of making an exhibition?
ROBERT RUBIN — For "American Prayer," the guideline was the literary text's relationship to what one artist does with it, which is to recycle familiar images in different ways. Richard's case is an act of appropriation. To do that show, I originally looked through *On the Road, Howl, Naked Lunch, Trout Fishing in America.* I wanted to figure out how those works spoke to Richard. That was really hard and proved to be impossible. So, I shifted gears and looked for documents that related to aspects of the books and their critical reception, or that connected to Richard's collection, and the kind of free associations that Richard does as an artist.

JEFF RIAN — Provoking issues?
ROBERT RUBIN — Right. And so the contents refracted back to Richard the artist. That also started with me trying to absorb a lot of related material. Of course, I also liked the idea of layering literary and musical references, but these categories are somewhat artificial. The "American Prayer" exhibition in Paris was a lot more linear before Richard got involved with the editing. He included images that were much more tangentially connected, one to the other, but that had Richard Prince connections. It improved the book immensely.

JEFF RIAN — Is that what you did with "Walkers"?
ROBERT RUBIN — You know, a lot of contemporary art is about the in-between. There's a lot of that in cinema, too. For example, I'm obsessed with the idea that photographs taken on movie sets have much more stuff in them than a screen-grab from the film because the resolution of the camera is higher quality. So, having seen films like *Saboteur* or *39 Steps,* you go back and look at a hundred or so continuity stills, and you get the feeling that things are interstitial or somehow connected in between the two.

JEFF RIAN — Are the continuity shots or film stills more detailed?
ROBERT RUBIN — Much more detailed, and full of stuff that's not in the movie. The sets are very detailed, but the movie houses don't want you to focus on the sets; they want to distract you with the action. But another big part of my interest involved the fact that paper is dead, and celluloid is dead. But the signs are not.

JEFF RIAN — In your introductory essay, you say they were killed by digital technology.
ROBERT RUBIN — Yeah. But I think it's interesting to show that the sign is stronger than the delivery mechanism.

JEFF RIAN — McLuhan said when one system takes over another, like horses being replaced by cars, the former becomes an art form.
ROBERT RUBIN — Exactly. That's also a transposition of the themes of "American Prayer," refracted by one artist through 40-odd different artists. To me, there is a hierarchy of artists really connected to film in a permanent and ongoing way, which I show in "Walkers," albeit in different ways — artists like Richard, Fiona Banner, Pierre Bismuth, Divola, Stezaker, Gregory Crewdson... What's fascinating about Crewdson is that he always constructed stills that he'd photograph. Then, all of a sudden, he shoots straightforward pictures at Italy's Cinecittà, which is like a very cool pivot in his work.

JEFF RIAN — You also chose quite a number of texts by writers, including Joan Didion, Don DeLillo, and David Foster Wallace.
ROBERT RUBIN — *When I started to put together "American Prayer,"* I thought maybe I'd get, say, Lou Reed

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Nicole Kidman

Elegant and versatile film star who won an Oscar for her portrayal of Virginia Woolf in The Hours

Kidman (2001): enigmatic charisma and increasingly powerful mainstream appeal

NICOLE KIDMAN, who has died aged 37, was one of the most celebrated screen actresses of her generation.

In an era which hankered after the glamour of old Hollywood, Kidman provided something of the mystery and elegance of a true movie star; 5 feet 11 inches tall, with porcelain skin and tousled red curls, she exuded an enigmatic charisma that gave her the ability to be convincing in a wide variety of roles.

Having been a teen star in her native Australia, she came to the attention of a wider public in the early 1990s as the young wife of Tom Cruise, then the most bankable film actor in the world and the epitome of 1980s cinematic brash. Despite the fact that the couple became the obsessive focus of an increasingly celebrity hungry tabloid audience, Kidman managed to retain an aura of dignity and distance.

But her career languished with such flops as *Billy Bathgate* (1991) and the overblown immigrant epic *Far and Away* (1992), with Cruise, in which the main talking point seemed to be the lack of on-screen chemistry between husband and wife.

It was not until her outstanding performance in Gus Van Sant's black comedy *To Die For* (1995), in which she completely inhabited the part of Suzanne Stone Maretto, a ruthlessly ambitious (and murderous) local television weathergirl, that Kidman came into her own. The film also showed her developing a shrewd eye for the right role.

That talent was illustrated from the late 1990s onwards by a seamless run of films which represented both commercial and artistic gold, helping to establish her as a major mainstream star who was also able to take risks.

With Cruise she excelled in Stanley Kubrick's cleverly mannered *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999); she sang and danced her way through Baz Luhrmann's hit musical *Moulin Rouge!* (2001), with Ewan McGregor; and she was a nervous and affecting mother in the hugely popular ghost story *The Others* (2001).

It was a credit to her skill as an actress that she overcame the prosthetic nose she famously donned to play Virginia Woolf in Stephen Daldry's *The Hours* (2002), for which she won the Academy Award for Best Actress the following year.

Her versatility and boldness were seen most recently in her performances in Lars von Trier's *Dogville* (2003) and in the controversial *Birth* (2004).

When her 10-year marriage to Cruise broke up in 2001, Kidman spoke frankly of the devastation it brought her, drawing sympathy from a public who had up till then considered her somewhat aloof.

While she would not expand on Cruise's enigmatic comment on their separation – that "Nicole knows why" – she dismissed rumours that it was related to his involvement in the Church of Scientology, insisting that his leaving had been entirely unexpected.

Even at her most relaxed and ebullient in interview, Kidman retained a veiled sense of guardedness that gave little away about the woman behind the public persona. This seemed to satisfy her many fans; the less they knew about her, it appeared, the more audiences were willing to believe in the characters she portrayed on screen.

Nicole Kidman was born on June 20 1967 at Honolulu, Hawaii, where her father, an Australian biochemist and psychologist, was then working. After living briefly in Washington, DC, the family settled in a suburb of Sydney when Nicole was four.

Although a rebellious and extroverted child, she was always an avid reader; her acting ambitions stemmed, she said, from her desire to lose herself in the lives of the heroines of such books as *Middlemarch* and *War and Peace*.

Kidman's first acting role was as a sheep in a school Christmas pageant. She started drama classes at the age of 12, and as a tall, skinny teenager found in acting a release from her self-consciousness about her height, since she towered over the other boys and girls in her class.

She appeared in her first film, *Bush Christmas* (1983), when she was 14. Roles in children's adventure films, such as *BMX Bandits* (1983), soon followed. At 17, intent on pursuing an acting career, she ran off to Amsterdam with a boyfriend; she was soon back home, but her determination to act was undimmed.

Her first big break came when she was chosen for a central role in a television mini-series, *Vietnam* (1985), playing a young girl who comes of age during the Australian peace movement of the 1960s. She was an immediate hit with audiences, winning an award and the attention of producers.

The result was a lead role in director Philip Noyce's thriller *Dead Calm* (1989), filmed mostly at sea off Australia's north-east coast. Still a teenager, Kidman was believable as the younger half of a couple who pick up a dangerous man lost at sea.

Her spirited performance caught the eye of film-goers - and of Hollywood, in the form of the producers of the upcoming Tom Cruise vehicle *Days of Thunder*, who immediately flew her to Los Angeles for a screen test.

Despite what she feared was an inauspicious beginning ("Tom stood up and we shook hands," she recalled, "and I found I was looking down at him. It was terrifically embarrassing"), she won the role of the neurologist who gets Cruise's car-racing character back on his feet after a crash.

The film ("*Top Gun* on wheels", scoffed an unappreciative press) died at the box office. But Kidman and Cruise were instantly attracted, and nine months later, on Christmas Eve 1990, they were married in Telluride, Colorado, shortly after Cruise's divorce from the actress Mimi Rogers.

After returning to Australia to play alongside Thandie Newton in John Duigan's successful teen drama *Flirting* (1991), Kidman moved to California to join her husband.

While his career soared to ever greater heights, Kidman's first five years in Hollywood were a disappointment. The made do with one-dimensional roles in films that included *Batman Forever* (1995), with Val Kilmer. But *To Die For* changed all that, and her intelligent, sexy and convincingly self-obsessed performance immediately won her a far wider following.

The next year she was critically acclaimed as Isabel Archer in Jane Campion's screen version of *The Portrait of a Lady*. As with her role in *The Hours*, Kidman felt able, she said, to relate personally to her character's travails.

Still apparently unsure of where her strengths as an actress lay, in 1997 she took the part of a world-renowned nuclear scientist in *The Peacemaker*, opposite George Clooney, which was, predictably, a mess.

The British playwright David Hare was so impressed with on meeting Kidman, however, that he wrote a play for her, *The Blue Room* (1998). The production, 10 seconds of which she spent naked on stage, was a runaway success in London (where one theatre reviewer described her performance as "theatrical Viagra") and on Broadway.

During this time Kidman and Cruise had moved to England to film *Eyes Wide Shut*, made under Kubrick's customary conditions of absolute secrecy. The experience of filming the erotically and psychologically charged tale, based loosely on Arthur Schnitzler's novella *Traumnovel*, was an intense one for both actors. They grew close to Kubrick, whom Kidman described as "a professor of life, and a deep, deep thinker."

In 2000 the couple moved to Sydney for the filming of *Moulin Rouge!*, and the next year Kidman learned Russian for her role in the black comedy *Birthday Girl*.

In 2003 she starred opposite Jude Law and Renee Zellweger in the Civil War drama *Cold Mountain*, before taking the lead in the ill-advised remake of *The Stepford Wives* (2004).

After her separation from Cruise, Kidman was linked romantically to various actors and entertainers, including Toby Maguire, Russell Crowe and the pop singer Lenny Kravitz.

Known for a strong sense of loyalty and a madcap sense of humour, she was particularly close to her sister Antonia and to the Australian actress Naomi Watts. She was a keen sky-diving enthusiast.

Nicole Kidman's marriage to Tom Cruise was dissolved in 2001; they adopted a son and a daughter.

6:00

"The Absent Minded Professor" (1961) Fred MacMurray.

(MAX) ★ FILM: "Faces" (1968). John Marley, Gena Rowlands, Seymour Cassel. Original, engrossing drama about infidelities, via Cassavetes. (R) (2 hrs. 20 mins.) (4:10) 69541148

4:30

to write about Jimi Hendrix. Then I realized what a nightmare it would be to find people, convince them, pay them, and edit their pieces. Who knows what they'll give you? So, taking another page out of the Richard Prince appropriation playbook, I read the stuff and cut and pasted what I wanted.

JEFF RIAN — I noticed song lyrics, too, such as those by Calexico and Blue Öyster Cult.
ROBERT RUBIN — There's a soundtrack.

JEFF RIAN — Who made it?
ROBERT RUBIN — I did. The music is curated; it's not just background. There's "High Plains Drifter" by the Beastie Boys, a couple of rap songs that take samples from *Taxi Driver* and *Scarface,* 2 Live Crew's "Me So Horny," which is sampled from *Full Metal Jacket.* Doing the "American Prayer" soundtrack, the BNF came up with the idea of speakers in different vitrines. As you're going through the show, you might hear something far in the background while the next song would be playing. That worked pretty well. This show is more complicated because we have moving-image works that have sound.

JEFF RIAN — So there must be films.
ROBERT RUBIN — There's a dedicated room for films and a second one for Hitchcock-related films. There's a bunch of stuff on screens with headphones, like the excised footage of Charlotte Rampling at the end of *Vanishing Point.* Some are on open speakers. I've identified spaces where music can be played without interfering with other moving-image pieces and have come up with songs for each of them.

JEFF RIAN — Do these spaces relate to the chapters in the "Walkers" catalog?
ROBERT RUBIN — The catalog's chapters were a way of connecting objects to larger constellations of meaning, so that you can see how *Apocalypse Now* gives you *Full Metal Jacket* and all these other war and Vietnam movies. There was a lot of Jerry Lewis material, which I connected to David Foster Wallace. My favorite chapter, "Dial M for Meta," shows the extent to which artists have used Hitchcock's movies, which are so familiar, and how marked we all were by him. His movies keep coming back in art, which is fascinating.

JEFF RIAN — The catalog looks back in time. Do you want to remind people that there are other agendas at stake because of this loss?
ROBERT RUBIN — It's a lot more than nostalgia. I use a quote from Gerald Fowler, an obscure British writer, complaining about how the bankers ruined silent movies. It sounds just like somebody talking today.

JEFF RIAN — Are you planning a next show?
ROBERT RUBIN — The next show is going to be about Avedon's symbiotic relationship with France, the Proustian images he made during the postwar revival of France, and the shots he made at film studios. Most Avedon exhibitions show pictures from *Harper's Bazaar.* I'm going to try to extrapolate, in the first phase of the show, how the photographs he took on the set of the film *Funny Face* established his career. The second phase will be how Avedon essentially gave the world the image of Lartigue that has endured. Lartigue is a complicated guy, but Avedon positions him in the same way that John Szarkowski — MoMA's famous curator of photography — positioned Atget. The third section is about the portraits Avedon shot for *Egoïste* magazine and his pictures of photography of the Volpi Ball, in Venice, which is really about the end of a phase in history. He kind of reinvents the Belle Époque, and then he closes it. It's a very French narrative.

JEFF RIAN — Will you make a book?
ROBERT RUBIN — Yeah, a book with texts. The show will have pictures and lots of material. For example, I've located a complicated but amazing Mutoscope photo booth from the '50s. Before you got a strip of four pictures, you got one picture in a metal frame. Avedon photographed a number of famous people in the Mutoscope for this *Esquire* article.

JEFF RIAN — Was collecting the motor for your curating?
ROBERT RUBIN — Yes. I'm not a critic. I don't like writing reviews of things. I think of myself as a cultural historian, and I'm trying to go down alleyways that haven't been taken. Which minimizes the rarefication of the object and brings the focus back toward life.

END

Opposite page,
Jean-Jacques Lebel, *La Baignore de Langlois (Henri Langlois's Batht*
2013, collage of original digital photographs on board, including one
Denise Bellon of Henri Langlois's actual bathtub at cent
courtesy of the artist, copyright ADAGP, Paris, 20

Bottom: Fiona Banner and Empire Desig
The Greatest Film Never Made, 20