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**Interviewee: Adickes, David**

**Interview Date: October 19, 2004**

A CONVERSATION WITH DAVID ADICKES

IN CONJUNCTION WITH  
THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

Interviewee: MR. DAVID ADICKES

Date: October 19, 2004

Place: Houston, TX

Interviewer: Leigh Cutler

## INTRODUCTION

Center for Public History  
University of Houston

### DAVID ADICKES

David Adickes is a Houston artist who was born in Huntsville, Texas, on January 19, 1927. In World War II, he was in the Army Air Corps (Air Force), flying back and forth between the U.S. and France. After the war, in 1948, he received a bachelor's degree in math and physics from Sam Houston State Teacher's College (now called Sam Houston State University). From his trips to Paris during the war, he became interested in art as a profession. After college, he returned to that city for two years to study art with Fernand Leger, one of the masters of modern French painting. This experience launched his career as a professional artist. He started out as a painter and eventually added small bronze statuettes to his repertoire. Today he is best known for his large-scale outdoor concrete sculptures.

Adickes settled permanently in Houston in the mid-1960s. It wasn't until the early 1980s, when banker and businessman Joe Russo asked him to create a piece of sculpture for the outdoor plaza of his downtown building, that Adickes turned to larger than life artwork. From his Houston studio, *SculpturWorx*, he has been focused on this medium ever since that commission.

### INTERVIEW

The interview centers on Mr. Adickes' sculpture, *The Virtuoso*, which is located in the outdoor plaza in front of the Lyric Center building, 440 Louisiana, in downtown Houston. It covers all of the various stages of development leading up to the sculpture's installation. Attention also is given to the role *The Virtuoso* has played as part of the downtown landscape for twenty years, including the public's reactions to it.

The interview was conducted in Mr. Adicke's home at 2409 Kingston Street and required approximately one hour. Mr. Adickes was candid and cooperative throughout the interview, providing open, straightforward answers to the questions posed to him. He spent a short amount of time near the end of the conversation discussing his plans for future public art projects. Mr. Adickes read the following transcript and did not have any major editing suggestions.

Side A

Cutler: Side A, Tape 1. This is Leigh Cutler interviewing artist David Adickes for an Oral History of Houston project, to be housed in the Center for Public History at the University of Houston. The interview is taking place at Mr. Adickes' home, 2409 Kingston, in Houston, Texas. The date is Tuesday, October 19, 2004.

This is Leigh Cutler and I'm here at 2409 Kingston, talking with Mr. David Adickes. Mr. Adickes, tell me a little bit about where you were born, about your family, some background information about yourself.

Adickes: I was born in Huntsville, Texas, January 19, 1927, small town, 5,000 people. My father was in the electrical appliances business. He had the store that sold all the electrical stuff. My mother worked also with him. I have three brothers, two older, one younger. We were all sort of engineering-oriented. My father was an A&M graduate of 1910 and the two older brothers were in the war, one a Navy pilot, the other a Marine pilot. I was in the end of World War II, and I joined between V-E Day and V-J Day. I was too young to be in the heart of it. When I was young, when I was seventeen, I joined. I was in the Air Force-it was called the Army Air Corps at the time, which later was called the Air Force. I went through boot camp and all that, and was sort of flying back and forth to Paris.

I always loved art in school. I did the posters, and stuff like that, because I could print neater than other people. I decided to go into art professionally due to these trips to Paris, primarily, but after I'd gotten my degree from Sam Houston State Teacher's College-it was called then; now it's Sam Houston State University-in 1948 in math and physics. So, I have a Bachelor in math and physics, double major. As soon as that was over, it was sort of like, "Ok, so much for that," and I went straight back to Paris to use my GI Bill... Do you know what the GI Bill is?

Cutler: Yes.

Adickes: ...for my continued schooling there, and I studied art with Fernand Leger, one of the big modern French masters, for two straight years. Then I came back to the States and started having shows of paintings right away and was very successful from the beginning. I was selling paintings cheap, of course, and then moved on up and made my living painting pictures for years. I got one job in the beginning, to just sort of make ends meet, working with a company that's a little bit like Schlumberger, that was called Perforating Guns Atlas. I was drafting well logs-they'd send an instrument down in a hole, a magnetic instrument, and I would draft that, get it on film, and deliver it the client.

Cutler: So, this was in Houston?

Adickes: This was in Houston, in 1951. Then, I was offered a job teaching at the University of Texas, which I accepted, from '55 to '57, so I taught there for two years. The summer of '56, I took off and went to Tahiti for the whole summer- you know, sort of following in the footsteps of Gauguin, one of my great heroes. Then in '57- I did the two years. I was only really interested in teaching two years. I didn't want to make a career of it, so I wasn't looking for tenure or anything.

I took off and went around the world in two years, living one year in Japan, painting the whole time, and then one year for the rest of the world- and ending up in France- which I thought was well proportioned. You give a year to Japan and a year to everybody else! And I loved that Japan experience- painted a lot of pictures, had two shows there, but was sending back paintings every six weeks or so to the gallery here in Houston. They were forwarding me checks to the visitors' mail at the various American Express service centers in the capitols as I was going around the world. Do you want to hear all of this stuff?

Cutler: This is good information...

Adickes: This is leading me up to the sculpture... So, in '59 when I ended up in France, after that trip around the world, I bought a studio in Antibes, right on the coast, and then painted from there and kept sending back and returning each year around the end of November and having a show in December, staying for two months

(January and February), then going back to France and living nine months there and three months here. I was missing hot summers in Houston-it was a great life, a great life!

That would bring us to about the late 60s. In '67 I was here and was very impressed by light projections and the psychedelic period, and opened a great club downtown that was called Love Street Light Circus and Feel Good Machine. It was really hot. It was really great. I was too old to really be a hippie or be interested in rock-and-roll, which I never have been interested in, but I loved the projected light side of it. It was very creative and a lot of fun.

Cutler: Is that in the old Sunset Coffee Building on Buffalo Bayou at Allen's Landing? Is that the building?

Adickes: It is...but I've never heard it called the Sunset Coffee Building.

Cutler: I think that's what it originally was called.

Adickes: Really? It's the building that stands alone on the right of the bridge...

Cutler: Right, it's green...

Adickes: It's dirty green-gray. Yeah! How did you know about that?

Cutler: I used to work on Buffalo Bayou and...

Adickes: Oh, really? It was the top floor of that building.

Cutler: Yeah, and my dad has told me about it, actually-the club, he told me about the club.

Adickes: Really? The stairway outside, which is still there, we built to get on the third floor. There was an interior freight elevator, which we didn't want to use for that crowd... So we built that stairway. It was owned by three guys. One of them was the head of the architecture department at the University of Houston – Burdette Keeland, who just died a few years ago. And they're naming a building on the campus for him now, in the architecture department.

Three guys owned the building, so I rented it from them. It was kind of interesting – they told me about that building, thinking I might want to rent it as an art studio, as a place to work downtown, but it was an old building. I wasn't that interested, but it was worth going down there to take a look at and the minute I walked onto that third floor, it all just came together-a club, because I'd spent the New Year's eve '66-'67 at the Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco, which was the Mecca of projected light clubs, and saw these bands that became very famous, like Jefferson Airplane, and Big Brother and the Holding Company, and

Mothers of Invention. Those were all unknown to me and to most people at the time. That was the first year of that big launch of the whole psychedelic period. I was doing no drugs – I was too old, I was 40 years old. I was just interested in the art side of it and in the kids, and all the excitement of it.

So then, I got married in '69, I guess it was, and we went and lived a year in France and then came back. I was always painting and selling then at DuBose Gallery, which was my old friend that started a gallery called the James Butte Gallery that was owned by the paint company. He moved to Kirby and opened a big gallery, which was DuBose Gallery, where the Penner building is now – M. Penner, that men's clothing store. So, I was showing a lot and doing very well and living in France and here. I always made a very good living painting.

Well, Joe Russo<sup>1</sup> owned a bunch of banks and was going to build the Lyric Centre building. I had shown stuff in his banks, particularly one out on Woodway- about twenty paintings or so, which he'd bought. So, one day I just saw him at a party and he said he was building a building in the Theater District- it hadn't been named at that point- and would I be interested in doing a big piece of sculpture for it. Before that, I only did bronzes up to sixteen inches tall, little ones.

Cutler: So this was the first concrete, large-scale that you were doing?

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<sup>1</sup> Joe Russo was a prominent Houston banker and businessman in the 1980s. He was tried and found guilty of bribery and misapplication of funds in the early '90s.

Adickes: Right. So I started working on it. We had a deadline date, which was October '84 when, I think, it had to be finished. So this was probably in late '83 that he contacted me, or maybe early '84. I started doing lots and lots of sketches of ideas for a big piece of monumental sculpture. We decided thirty-six feet should be the height because that's the height of those columns at the portal- those chrome, stainless steel columns. So the height worked out. I started doing ideas to try to represent all the arts- acting, dancing, music, and...just those three. So, I had sort of a shelf-type deal with three dancers on one, a trio on another, and a conductor on another.

He came over one day here, to look at how the project was going. I'd made a model this high (motions approximately six feet in the air), which is like the one in the front yard, of a cello, just to show him what the cello and the trio would look like. And he said, "That's it. A single statement, I feel, is better than trying to say too much." He was absolutely right, and I didn't realize it at the time, and I said, "Ok, if that's what you want, that's what we'll do." So, from that model, I proceeded to build the 36-foot cello.

Cutler: At this time, the building that he was developing, was it called the Lyric Centre yet?

Adickes: It was still under construction. I believe it had been named the Lyric Centre Project. I'm not sure when he picked the name, but I think it had already been named that.

Cutler: So, the idea was to have a sculpture that would incorporate the area there?

Adickes: Exactly. His original intention was to try to lease spaces to all of the arts- the Opera guilds, the management of the Alley, and everybody else- and just try to make it an art center for renting offices to businesses. Of course, there weren't that many and it ends up now that there's a title company and lawyers there. It's a general office building now, but the original intent...that's the reason it has a piano in the lobby, which no other building had. It was very artful, artistic, art-ish. He had some other murals inside...so that was the concept, to serve that Lyric Centre area.

Cutler: Tell me a little bit about once the sculpture was installed. What was the timing with the completion of the building?

Adickes: It was installed about the same time the building was completed. It was pretty simultaneous. That was October '84- October 12- I think I dated it on the sculpture there. There was a lot of pre-planning, where they had to go into the parking garage down below and do some big columns to support the weight of it,

and also to install the music system, which was my idea- the idea of it playing music constantly. It was from a loop tape at the time. Now it's probably on CD.

Cutler: What is the actual weight of the sculpture?

Adickes: A wild guess, I would say no less than ten tons, or 20,000 pounds.

Cutler: When you were designing *The Virtuoso*, did you have to take into account the architecture of the building?

Adickes: Well, yeah. The only thing that I took into account was how high it was to be and the fact that it was out on a corner- it had to be seen on two streets, and it had to be seen coming out of the building. At first, I was just going to do the cello alone, without the three musicians in the back. Then I realized that, from the back, it would be pretty boring. People would be coming out of the building and see just this "V" shape from the back of the cello. That's when I decided to do the little trio of the three six-foot guys in the back. That was an afterthought, and I liked it because you have the big cello and then you have these three guys. I like those kinds of contrast in size.

Cutler: What kind of challenges did you face in the process of making it and getting it there? From just physical to...

Adickes: Yeah...I guess the first challenge was just to figure out how to do it. I had a different concept of what would hold it up. I had some angle irons coming out of the back, going to the ground, because it had to be cantilevered like that. I found a structural engineer, who said, "You don't have to do that. If you have a big enough spine and it's welded well enough to a big square steel base..." So, there's about a half to one-inch thickness, huge, square, steel base, that I'm gonna guess is eight-foot square, that just weighed a bunch. It's just welded to that.

So, getting the simplicity of the skeleton of it was a leap forward in the designing of it. Then, after that, how to make it, how to fill it out...It's mostly hollow; it's not solid concrete or steel. There's a lot of Styrofoam in there. The skin is probably an inch thick, whereas the whole thing is probably twelve or fourteen inches thick, so there's a lot of Styrofoam in there *between* the steel...I think there's some pictures of it in that book there.<sup>2</sup> So, no, there were no unusual challenges or setbacks. It went along fairly smoothly.

Cutler: Several years after the sculpture and the building were built, this developing bust happened in downtown. Did this cause you to have any concerns for your sculpture?

Adickes: What kind of concerns? You mean, the less people would see it or something?

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<sup>2</sup> Adickes refers here to the book he loaned the interviewer after the interview: Linda Wiley, *Making It Happen: Exploring the Creative Process through the Sculptures of David Adickes* (Huntsville, TX: Linda Wiley/My Own Backyard Press, 1996).

Cutler: Yeah, and just its still being a part of the public downtown.

Adickes: No... Maybe I don't understand the question... You said there was a downturn in popularity of that area for a while? I don't really remember that and was not aware of it and it didn't effect anything...was there ever one? It seemed to me that it just kept growing and growing and growing. Wortham was built across the street shortly thereafter and then it was just up, up, up, wasn't it? Was there a downturn?

Cutler: Just in the late 80s...but maybe that didn't really have any effect on your sculpture.

Adickes: Well, I know Market Square had already failed. That failed in the late 60s, I believe.

Cutler: Tell me a little bit about what you think is the significance of *The Virtuoso* as part of the downtown landscape over the past twenty years. What, to you, has been its role as downtown has changed?

Adickes: I think it's been the one that has a certain amount of humor and satire, slightly. It's been a favorite of everybody's. One thing that I might want to mention that maybe you're not aware of is that when it was unveiled, there was pretty strong criticism from CITE Magazine from Rice University because it was so different

than what everything else was. The big mode du jour was big steel things, like the Miro<sup>3</sup> or the others around town... The Dubuffet<sup>4</sup> was different- that's fiberglass – and the Louise Nevelson<sup>5</sup> is steel. It was seen, I believe, as too whimsical and not a serious enough piece to be in front of a major building.

Joe Russo was kind of taken aback by this early criticism, so he decided to do a public opinion poll and hired a polling company- a little bit like those that do political polls and all that- and polled 500 people, over the noon hour a couple of days -downtown people who were familiar with all four sculptures (I have that, by the way; I can give you a copy of that), namely the Mir<sup>6</sup>, the Dubuffet, the Nevelson, and mine. The questions were: Which is your favorite? Which is your least favorite? And why? Both questions. And mine won, hands down. We got sixty-seven percent of it being the most favorable and I think only eight percent of it as the least favorable... whereas, the Mir<sup>6</sup>, which cost a million bucks, was sort of the least favorable. So, I guess those guys, if they read this consensus thing, had sort of a little twist. ..of...something. Anyhow, so that gave Joe Russo confidence that he hadn't bought a pig in a poke, in effect.

Since then, people all the time tell me it's their favorite- and maybe they're being nice and they can't tell Mir<sup>6</sup> that because he's dead, and Dubuffet is also, and

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<sup>3</sup> This sculpture is Joan Miro's *Personage and Birds*, which stands in front of the Texas Commerce (Chase) Tower, 600 Travis Street, downtown Houston.

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Adickes is referring to the sculpture in the outdoor plaza of the 1100 Louisiana Building in downtown Houston, *Monument to the Phantom*, by French sculptor Jean Dubuffet.

<sup>5</sup> This refers to the public art outside of the first Enron building in downtown Houston. The artist is American sculptor Louise Nevelson, who is known for her large, often wood or metal, monochromatic, abstract sculptures.

Nevelson. I guess they're all dead now... But anyhow, tons of compliments all the time and everybody says, people from out of town, they'll take them down there. They take their photographs in front of it and all that. By the way, it's been on the cover of three rock-and-roll albums, for one thing. It was photographed for three. I only saw it on the cover of one, but I was down there a couple of times when the guys were out there, all posed, looking like, you know, black lipstick and all this. One guy says, "It's a hell of a way to make a living, isn't it!" (Laughs) So, it's been very popular.

What its role is? It's just another one of the downtown pieces. The only one that I really liked since then are those columns on the bayou side of- and I guess you're covering those- the Wortham Center. You know, those stainless steel columns. I really like those a lot. Those are really nice. But mine is just another one – the most whimsical one, I guess.

Cutler: You were talking earlier about the change in what the Lyric Centre became, in terms of who it officed, and now I think it's referred to as the Lyric Business Centre. What effect does that have on your sculpture? Do you think it still fits into that plaza?

Adickes: Sure. No change. The building could change its name six times and that wouldn't affect anything.

Cutler: So you don't think there's any real strong relationship between the sculpture and the actual building? Is it more just a part of downtown and the Theater District?

Adickes: The latter.

Cutler: Okay. There's a building downtown, the First City Tower, which had, I believe, a Barbara Hepworth sculpture in front of it, but when that company went under, the fate of that sculpture was that it was removed and sold off. So, if you could comment on that based on the situation of your sculpture...

Adickes: I've never really thought about it. The current owner, as I understand, or the last current, is an Israeli businessman whose wife chose that building because she liked the sculpture. I was told that, that one reason he bought that building is because his wife loved *The Virtuoso*. Now that story is two or three years old. I don't know who owns the building now, but probably the same people.

If it sold...Now, I had another public sculpture that suffered the fate of the building being sold and it having to be moved, and that was this French telephone, that's also in the book, which was in front of the hotel on the corner of Westheimer and the Loop, just inside the Loop, which is now called the Derek Hotel, I believe. But at the time, it was the Grand Hotel, and that was owned by a man named J.R. McConnell, who built these buildings next to me and half of

Galveston and a lot of other stuff, who died in jail-committed suicide. When he lost the hotel, I knew that the fate of the telephone was in jeopardy.

The new owners of the hotel called me one day to ask me how that telephone is taken apart, "Are their screws in the top?" I said, "Well, why are you asking me?" And he said, "Because we've given it to somebody who wanted it and he just wants to know how to move it." And I said, "What do you mean, you've given it? It doesn't belong to you. It belongs to me." Because in the contract I'd made with J.R. McConnell, it was on lease. J.R. was going broke at the time, so we had this lease that said: "I'm leasing this to you for a penny a day." So he said to his secretary, "Write him a check for thirty-six dollars and fifty cents." I said, "No, three dollars and sixty-five cents." He said, "I'm paying you ten years in advance! I'm a big spender!" So, that was a contract which clearly stated that if he lost the building, which clearly he was going to, that the ownership of the sculpture always remain with me.

So, the man who called me, I said to him, "Just a minute. I've got the document that says the sculpture does not go with the building." And he said, "Great. You come and get it." I mean, he was glad. He didn't care who removed it, so then I went and got it. For a while it was stored on a piece of property I owned on 45 North next to where that banana is. Do you know that banana?

Cutler: I've read about it, but I don't think I've ever seen it.

Adickes: You've never seen it? It's small, but if you know where to look, you see it every day. Then, finally, when I sold that property, I moved it to my current property where all the big heads are. So that same French telephone, which is in the book there, has suffered moving around several times. The trumpet, that's in Galveston on the Strand – are you familiar with that?

Cutler: I am, yes.

Adickes: That was built really for the jazz stage at the New Orleans World's Fair of '85. It was there as a backdrop for the big jazz stage. And when the Fair was over-it was Thanksgiving Day in fact, when everything had to be removed-I was over there with a big truck backed in there, ready to pull the thing out. There had been a court order that nothing could be removed from the Fair at all because the Fair lost so much money and had so many liens against it and everything. But mine had been a loaned piece and I could prove it. The guy at the gate, he said, "We'll call the mayor." This was Thanksgiving Day, at noon, and he's out having turkey some place! They'd open up this gate and let some trucks in and out every now and then, but it was not a regular thing. So one time when they opened the gate, I had my truck, and I just Whisshh! (Laughs) We just went right through that gate and drove it back to Houston and parked it on a parking lot I owned downtown for a while. I sold that, so we had to move it again.

Finally, this same J.R. McConnell guy, who had the telephone and the hotel, bought it and put it in Galveston, where it is today. Then when he lost everything, Mitchell bought all of his estate, so Mitchell owns it now where it is. But that one moved around, too... but *The Virtuoso*... I can't say it will never move, but the chances of it ever going someplace I think are pretty slim. But I don't think about it one way or another.

Cutler: It's not leased, though? It's actually part of that space, right?

Adickes: Yeah. It's owned by the building.

Cutler: Do you consider this particular work public art? Or, because it's part of a building, is it more corporate art? In other words, if it's commissioned by a developer for a building instead of by the city, does it still belong to the public?

Adickes: I guess I don't make a big distinction between corporate and other art. Like a painting, if it's bought by a bank and it's in a lobby, you could call it corporate art, but if it's bought by somebody else... I don't make that big distinction. Now, a lot of pieces that are designed for a given building usually, in collaboration with the architect, you could clearly call that corporate art, I suppose. I don't know, the Henry Moore...it's on public property. I wouldn't call it corporate art, that could be anywhere. I don't think about the term very much.

Cutler: Why do you think that *The Virtuoso* is important to Houston, especially to downtown Houston and to the people there?

Adickes: Well, personally, because I think it's the best thing down there, and it's certainly the funniest thing down there, and I think the most appreciated by the general public. And it gives a sense of relief to the seriousness of other public sculptures. Like, the Miró, for example, I really don't see the point of it. The little model this big (shows size with hand gesture) is at the museum and to blow it up big and put it there is... I know what the point of it is. The point of it was that in those few years, it was very chic for big new architecture to put a piece of public art out. New York is full of it. Well, there are Dubuffets, several of them in New York, Calder and what not... and that was the deal. Strange enough, to prove that point, three, or all four, of those pieces on that survey were done at the same time, within a year of each other. There's nothing for years that followed. I think the next piece of public art was the James Surls<sup>6</sup> down in Market Square, which was years later, and now that fountain thing on Louisiana, I guess it is.

End of Side A

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<sup>6</sup> This work is called *Points of View*; it was dedicated in 1992 by the City of Houston Municipal Art Commission and is located in Market Square Park downtown.

Side B

Adickes: ...big years when it was sort of (something in French) to put public art in front of buildings. I wish it were that today; we'd have a lot more public art because there are new buildings being built all the time and practically no public art in front of them, that I know of- a couple of pieces in the lobbies I've seen. And then, of course, there's some freestanding stuff, like that sculpture, standing bronze, of Brown, on the east side of Main, near the [George R.] Brown [Convention] Center. Sure, it's George Brown, I think. And do I have any more public sculpture...?

Cutler: Those sculptures that you say were happening all at the same time, in '83, '84, it seems that what they have in common is their large scale. Can you talk about that? Does that have to do with what was happening at the time to the face of Houston?

Adickes: Yeah. Well, that wasn't unique to that period. A lot of public works in New York, for example, are large scale. I guess that was the first time it was necessary that they be large scale. The exception, though, is the Barbara Hepworth, which was small - eight feet tall, six feet tall. And the Henry Moore is not that big either. It's twelve feet tall. So the big ones- that was just the fad at the time.

Cutler: Was there a relationship between the building boom and that fad?

Adickes: Yeah. Yeah, for sure. Unfortunately that's gone. The building boom is continuing, but that particular fad is not.

Cutler: And why do you think that is?

Adickes: I don't know. Architects kind of influence each other so strongly that a big New York architect who *did* start doing this – I've forgotten who it was that did the first Dubuffets and Calders... I have some books on public art of that period and you can just spot them. Philadelphia is real big- the Oldenburg, the big clothespin. There's a bunch of Oldenburgs around, the museum in Minneapolis, the one in Kansas City. The Mickey Mouse<sup>7</sup> at the library downtown preceded any of these others. That was up, I'm going to guess, in 1980- you'd know more about that than I would. I wouldn't say that that set this fad in motion, I don't know. Architects really know more about this than I do! I'm just the guy commissioned to do it and I don't really think about it that much.

Cutler: Do you have anything else that you want to talk about that we haven't covered?

Adickes: Yeah, I want to tell you about some projects that are coming up very soon that are going to be public art that are going to be kind of (laughs) causing a lot of hue and cry. I bought three properties on the feeder road along I-10 between Shepherd

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<sup>7</sup> This reference is to artist Claes Oldenburg's *Geometric Mouse X*, installed in the downtown Houston Public Library outdoor plaza (500 McKinney) in 1975.

and downtown, and two of them are close together at Patterson Street. That's just east of Shepherd on I-10. Ring a bell? On one of those I'm going to put a thirty-six foot statue of the Beatles, in a Cubist manner- a little bit like *The Virtuoso*, but not quite that abstract, but more Picasso Cubist. I've done some small ones that are in a restaurant in Austin, Carmelo Restaurant, this size, about six or seven feet, which gave me the idea of them (the Beatles statues). I have those models downtown. So, I'm starting with that. They will be the Beatles and a Beatle fan will recognize them, but other people will see them as four Cubist figures with guitars.

Next to that will be a Charlie Chaplin, about thirty feet tall, Cubist, and standing at the base, a realist Charlie Chaplin in bronze looking up at himself, with his cane and his little hat, because I've just done a bronze Charlie Chaplin, five and a half feet tall, for a client. I like Charlie Chaplin.

But the big one will be, I-10- at the downtown exit, about where 45 and I-10 come together, there's a church just hanging out on the road practically- it's a white structure about to fall down; it's got a big Bill White<sup>8</sup> sign on the side of it- that I bought that was called, "The Greater Come As You Are Missionary Baptist Church." That's really the name of it- the sign's still on it! That'll come down very soon now and in its place will go a big base, about twelve feet. It's in the flood plain, by the way. This church was flooded- water filled half of it- and

that killed it as a church. It's never been used since—that was Allison<sup>9</sup> that really flooded it. My base will be about four feet above that high point and above that will be four heads, giant heads—Lincoln, Washington, Sam Houston, and Stephen F. Austin – a little bit realistic, like Mount Rushmore, but it will be called *Mount Rush Hour*, because of the traffic. That'll be sort of an introduction to downtown from I-10, and from 45, of two Texas heroes and two national heroes together. So, our own Mount Rushmore is what it is.

Cutler: It seems like your current work and your work from *The Virtuoso* forward has been large-scale. That's kind of what you're known for at this point. Do you feel that you owe that to *The Virtuoso*? Do you feel like that inspired this?

Adickes: Yeah, to the extent that that got me interested in doing big things and learning how to do it, dealing with those kinds of problems. The main thing is I believe the feedback from *Virtuoso* was so pleasing to me. I've painted a lot of pictures in my life, and they're in everybody's house, but only the people that live there and see them, *see* them. So, you get a lot of feedback, but it's not from the general public, and *The Virtuoso* was the first one to give me that. That's a very pleasant feeling, which I call the Johnny Appleseed complex, or the David Sculpture-seed complex (Laughs) or syndrome, I guess is the right word. It gave me a lot of positive feedback, which led to other things.

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<sup>9</sup> "Allison" was the tropical storm that resulted in a flooding disaster in Houston in June, 2001.

But the next big one, of course, was the Sam Houston<sup>10</sup> in Huntsville, which was finished in '94. It was supposed to have been finished in '93, but it was a three-year project. The feedback from that has been phenomenal. Everybody has seen that. People who have never heard of me or Sam Houston have seen that. Like 55,000 people a day drive past it. So, that's all very rewarding to me personally. My ego is fed!

Cutler: Using *The Virtuoso* as an example, what do you hope that the public gets out of it? People obviously see it, so...

Adickes: Just a giggle. They're driving and say, "Hey! That's really cool!" and, "Wow!"

Cutler: Just kind of change their day a little bit?

Adickes: Yeah, yeah. I like it every time I see it. I just think it's funny. You know, it's satirical-it's not a satire on anything, really it's not a satire on a cellist. As a matter of fact, a couple of the Houston Symphony cello people hate it, because it's not really a cello. A cello is on a stem off the ground, this thing's on the ground-we call it a cello; it's just closer to a cello than a contrabass or a violin or anything else. I don't know, I think it's just whimsical funny. I like stuff like that.

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<sup>10</sup> This 76-foot statue of the first president of the Republic of Texas, Sam Houston, is located on Interstate 45 in Huntsville, Texas.

Cutler: Okay, anything else that we haven't discussed?

Adickes: The last three things I mentioned, that aren't done yet, are being financed by me. There will be no money derived, no admission, like the Presidents Park.<sup>11</sup> I'm doing them just because I want to do them. Like it or not, I mean, there they are. Somebody...it was Ann Holmes,<sup>12</sup> was quoted in a recent article that said, "Why does he want to put these big things in our face?" so to speak. You know, she's very conservative and what not. No other city would allow this really, but Houston is a city without zoning, so one has the right to do whatever one wants. If they really were bad or hurtful in any way, I would take them down. But I own them; I'll put them up and leave them, or take them down. Someday, of course, when I go, my daughter will own them and what she will do with them, I don't know.

It should upgrade the value of the land around them because right now you've just got some little dinky, falling down houses that are all – a couple of them are abandoned even. So that'll lift up the neighborhood. I think it's an asset to the city to have them. Plus, things like when you're driving from Florida to Los Angeles, you go through I-10 the whole way, through a bunch of cities, and in Houston you see a bunch of billboards. And in the center of Houston, you're going to see these whimsical pieces, and I think that's going to give you a little bit

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<sup>11</sup> Presidents Park is an outdoor museum in Williamsburg, Virginia committed to advancing interest in the presidency, the democratic process, and civic participation among both youth and adults. The Park features 16-18 foot busts of all 43 Presidents of the United States, constructed by Adickes, and placed in a garden setting.

<sup>12</sup> Former fine arts editor of the *Houston Chronicle*.

of a different memory of downtown Houston- because you'll confuse it with downtown Phoenix, downtown New Orleans, downtown any other city. You know how you travel across the country... So that gives me some pleasure to think that. It's part of the Johnny Appleseed complex, really.

Cutler: Well, thank you so much.

Adickes: You're certainly welcome. That's more than you can ever write down!

(Laughs) End of Interview



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