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Transcript: The Art of Criticism with Jerry Saltz



Guest Jerry Saltz

By  Charlotte Burns

executive editor of In Other Words

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Charlotte Burns: Hello and welcome to *In Other Words*. Joining us today for a special podcast in the heart of downtown Manhattan is Jerry Saltz. We’re here at [New York](#) magazine, and Jerry is of course the [senior art critic](#) and columnist here. Jerry, thanks for joining us.

Jerry Saltz: Pleasure to be here.

Charlotte Burns: You joined *New York* magazine in 2006. In those two decades, both the media and the art worlds have changed dramatically. How have you experienced those changes?

Jerry Saltz: Boy, they have changed dramatically. We’re living in the time where everyone knows the advertising model for magazines don’t really work anymore. It’s really unclear if magazines are going to make it. More and more newspapers are cutting critics. I’m a dying breed. Critics are a dying breed. I also think that we lost two or three, maybe more, generations of art critics to academia.

For the last 20 or 30 years, too many critics have either written in a language that no one understands except them. 55 people are writing for the same 55 other people. They’re writing on a very narrow, pre-defined, government approved kind of taste, usually based in the art they were taught about from the ’60s and the ’70s Post-Minimalism. “The Greatest Generation”.

It was a great generation, but there’s no greatest generation. And it seems to me that too many of these critics are afraid of putting off an opinion. You have to read their work very carefully to have any idea—did they like this work? Or they’ll hide one squirrely adjective in the second to the last paragraph that says: “This work is problematized.” You don’t know if that’s a good thing or a bad thing. They often will take a page to even mention the artist’s name.

I think that that didn’t help art. It didn’t help criticism. It only helped the machine of criticism. That is, everybody got jobs, then they would write on museum shows, then get hired by the museums to write the catalogues, and then often these critics would be the ones in the magazines reviewing one another’s shows. To me, that’s inbred.

I love a lot of younger critics that I’ve been seeing writing on blogs, in magazines, online, in social media. Doesn’t mean criticism’s dead. On the contrary, criticism is waking up again. I see more and more people taking matters into their own hands, doing what you’re doing, doing a podcast, writing idiot things like me online, on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, whatever it takes to get through.

Critics are free because we’re not paid. We are never going to make any real money. We have nothing to lose. If we don’t like a show at this gallery or that museum, it’s very easy to say why. Write about your own generations, critics. Galleries outside are dying for you. Say what’s good. Say what’s bad. Don’t hide behind jargon. Come on out, be radically vulnerable.

Charlotte Burns: Do you think, though, it’s possible to be a critic of your own generation, of your own city when the city is a city like New York in terms of real estate and, like you say, criticism isn’t well paid? Before, people would be paid a pittance, but now a lot of people aren’t paid at all.

Jerry Saltz: I was a long-distance truck driver. I never went to school. I have no degrees. I was terrified to do what I’m doing. I didn’t start writing until I was over 40 years old. I don’t consider myself a critic today. I think of myself as incredibly lucky that a voice like mine is in the art world. It’s insane to me, even what I’m doing.

Charlotte Burns: Why do you think it’s insane?

Jerry Saltz: I think of myself as a folk critic, somebody that is entirely 100% not only self-taught, because all artists are

outsider artists. We learn something, and then we unlearn it, use the tools we have, and then reinvent ourselves from desperation. We're going to be poor our whole lives. My rent was high for me then. I lived in a shithole on the Lower East Side with drug dogs in the hallway. I feel terrible for everyone in every city. We're going to be poor.

My wife, [Roberta Smith](#), has said many times that just because you write in *New York* magazine or the *New York Times*, maybe that's your power, but you have to earn the credibility. When I came to *New York* magazine, no one said congratulations to me. They said: "Why are you doing this? Ew, you want to write for a weekly glossy magazine?" I said: "Yes." We say art criticism should reach a larger audience. Well, I agree with that and here's the larger audience. I want to write in a language that people will understand, and then we can have a conversation.

This is where social media comes in. I'm not suited for, nor am I interested in a vertical model of art criticism, the one I came into the art world to discover. That is, with the one critic on top of a pyramid writing to the many below, and the many below really can't say much to the critic.

Somehow by complete accident on Facebook I wrote something I didn't like about a [Marlene Dumas](#) show back in around 2008. About 200 people came on my Facebook and tore me a new one. In an instant I knew. In one second at home alone at my computer, I got it. I thought: "Instead of the one speaking to the many, this is the way for the many to speak to one another." That there's a way to reverse this model, go horizontal and speak back with every commenter. Now, it helps that I have elephant skin. I Google my name once a day and see all the terrible things people write about me.

Charlotte Burns: Why do you do that?

Jerry Saltz: Frankly, because I read each one and I think: "That could be true." There's a grain of truth in every piece of criticism. I think: "What did I do?" I never think the commenter is wrong.

Charlotte Burns: Do you ever block people?

Jerry Saltz: Do I ever block people?

Charlotte Burns: Yes.

Jerry Saltz: I do. I have two rules on social media. One, you may call me names or attack me anytime you wish, but you may not call anyone else here a name or attack them. I have found on comment threads that's when things fall apart instantaneously. You have 5,000 different arguments. I don't mind if it's all directed at me because I can take it. Then I can say: "Dear Mr. or Ms. Juju69, I'm sorry you think I'm an asshole because I said this about Marlene Dumas. When I said this about her space, and composition, and color, and subject matter I was trying to relate this..." Nine times out of 10, I found that they would come back and go: "I didn't really see what you were saying that way." For me, it began a conversation that benefited my work so much, it's incredible.

Charlotte Burns: Has it changed your opinions in large-scale ways, or in smaller ways about artists?

Jerry Saltz: Incrementally, every day. I wake up every day thinking I know something. Then I'm reading these things, conversations that I'm having in my idiot Instagram comments that have insights that I missed about work that I wrote about, work that I didn't write about, work that I missed, work that I didn't.

My other rule is—it could be generational—I hate cynicism. I hate cynics. To me, cynicism is certainty. Cynicism thinks it knows things like: "I know why he's showing in that gallery. I know why she's got reviewed. I know this." The truth is: you don't know. There are incredible back-stories to all of this. Art's greatest weapon is paradox, not certainty. We believe that more than one thing is true at a time.

Charlotte Burns: How many shows do you see a week?

Jerry Saltz: I see about 20 to 30 shows a week.

Charlotte Burns: How do you go about that? Do you approach it systematically or spontaneously?

Jerry Saltz: I'm very lucky. My wife, the art critic Roberta Smith, is incredibly organized. I'm not. She maintains lists of every show and every gallery, many galleries that most people listening to this podcast have never gone to, nor necessarily should they go to, but as a critic our job is to see as much as we can to give it an equal opportunity.

I also learned from her that the best way to see a show is to go in cold. I don't read the book before I go in. I don't want to get the spiel from the artist or the gallerist. I tell the gallerists: "Please, stay away from me while I'm looking at the show. Be nice to me because I'm as insecure as anybody else in the whole wide world, so on't act like you hate me because I'll get depressed. However, I want to see the show; I don't want to interview the artist." I want to tell the reader what I'm picking up from what I'm seeing. I do it in a fairly scattershot manner with Roberta as an incredible organizational and motivational

factor. This is criticism never sleeps, ever. We talk criticism 24/7.

Charlotte Burns: Do you agree with each other?

Jerry Saltz: A lot of the time we agree. There's a great quote in the Al Davis—he owned the Oakland Raiders, American football team—in the end of his *New York Times* obit, they asked him about his life. Roberta, again, read this to me. It said something like: "I'm not part of society. I have no life. It's a tunneled life." That's our motto. We don't go out much. You'd think we're very social. We get invited to everything, thank God. I would have a heart attack if nobody wanted us, but I am almost incapable of going to sit-down dinners. I can't sit through them.

Also, I'm really very boring. It's incredible. I only have this one subject. I don't have another subject. We have hobbies: opera, things like that, but that's it. I don't go out for dinner. I'm not complaining. I love, love, love my life. I spend about 50% of every day, honestly, truly, thinking about how lucky I am, that I really am a late bloomer. I barely made it here.

Charlotte Burns: You were an artist. You wrote a great article recently called "[My Life as a Failed Artist](#)", which I thought was great. It was also very sad because it you wrote very elegantly and eloquently about the pain of loss that you felt in not having the "boundless psychic bliss of making art for tens of hours at a stretch".

You kind of took the reader on this journey through the loss: the way that you hadn't really thought about the loss; the way you treated it a little bit like a joke. And then you went back to your art to look at it and you remembered the routines, the days, the smells and the sounds of the life you were living then.

Then, you started to think about whether the work was good, and what you were trying to do, and you felt surprisingly—and this seemed to be the twist at the end—that it was good. But, then the twist at the end was that Roberta came in and said: "It's awful." I was like: "Oh, gosh. That hurt."

Jerry Saltz: It's all true. Every word. She's got a good eye, you know. I love my work, but I would really trust Roberta's eye. If I really wanted to make art—this is what her criticism told me—if I really wanted to, her criticism wouldn't have mattered. I really must not have wanted to. I need to be more social than an artist is.

Obviously I'm not well adjusted socially, but being a critic means always being outside—well, 20 or 30 shows outside—and then I go right back to my computer like it's a little cocoon, and I never leave. Never. That's my whole life. I don't watch TV, except sports. I've even cut the news once it all went to hell.

Charlotte Burns: Tell me about the work you were making. I thought it was kind of interesting the way you were describing it. It was interesting to me that you set yourself boundaries that you kind of described as coping mechanisms, or your way of finding a way.

Jerry Saltz: I'm a terrible reader. To this day, I'll assign myself one book a year to read. Because I'm very conventional with my reading, I only read gigantic classics. This was true at the time. So, I was going to illustrate all of Dante's *Divine Comedy*: the 100 cantos of *Hell*, *Purgatory* and *Heaven*. It was to take 25 years. It began before all of you listening to this were born, in 1975. It was going to change at the turn of the century, exactly midnight—I would have reached Paradise. But, that didn't work out. I made opening and closing paintings. They're called polyptychs. They were based on Sieneese paintings in my mind, and my favorite painting probably, Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece* (1516).

Charlotte Burns: It's amazing.

Jerry Saltz: At Colmar. I've seen the painting a few times, and once jammed my fourth chakra while I was there. My kundalini stopped, and I became invisible, I think. They let me stay between noon and 2pm when the museum was closed. I was in that church museum entirely alone for two hours. I just was standing there. I was not hiding. But, I think I became invisible, like heroin addicts are sort of invisible on the street.

Charlotte Burns: The *Isenheim Altarpiece* is really interesting because that work was so political. It was after the first world war. There was a huge argument to do with the territory in which it was situated. It was at the border of France and Germany, about who owned it.

Jerry Saltz: The Alsace.

Charlotte Burns: The French saw it as their work, and the Germans saw it as their work. The reason it was so meaningful to both sides at that time was because they identified with the suffering. So, Grünewald was depicting their suffering, and they couldn't share that suffering: the French didn't want the Germans to share in that suffering. It was uniquely French.

Jerry Saltz: I love what you're saying.

Charlotte Burns: It was a French work of art. And the Germans didn't want the French to share in it, because it was a

German suffering. So, that work has a very political history. Centuries after was made, and—

Jerry Saltz: That's brilliant. You should write about that right now. Next Basel.

Charlotte Burns: I did write about that for an MA dissertation that I think probably one person in the world read.

Jerry Saltz: Boom.

Charlotte Burns: What was the last piece of great art you saw?

Jerry Saltz: I went up to [Gavin Brown's enterprise](#) on 127th Street in Harlem and saw a magnificent [show](#) of [LaToya Ruby Frazier](#), who won a MacArthur, who is 35 years old, and I think could be the strongest artist to emerge this century in America.

She documented the [Flint water crisis](#), and then her hometown of Braddock, Pennsylvania, which is just outside Pittsburgh, and has been decimated. She basically addresses the Trumpian idea that when we speak of the middle class, he's coded it to sound like the white middle class, when really these are majority black cities, good or bad, and the working class is majority black. Frazier documents this and takes a step further and allows her subjects to take some of the photographs. She records their voices. I think she's brilliant.

Like what [Kara Walker](#) did with the past, ripping a scab off of slavery and representing it to us as a living thing, Frazier is doing with the present. I was just blown away. It kept reminding me of a kind of solemnness and seriousness I get off of classic art, like Cézanne or something, where it's implacable and powerful. Goya, like that.

Charlotte Burns: Do you have that experience often?

Jerry Saltz: I always tell people to be generous. About 85% of what you all see out there in a day in Chelsea or the art world it will be crap. What makes the art world so thrilling to me is that your 85% and this person's 85% and my 85% are entirely different. Yeah, there's some overlap, but that 10%, 15% the art world gets interesting as we get in arguments about our tastes and why you like this, and why I like that, and how this works, and how this fits the time.

If I really—I'll be honest, if I see one good work of art in a day, I am completely jazzed. Honest to God. It's a weird thing. I don't mind seeing a lot of bad art. In fact, you learn as much from bad art as you do from good. In many ways, you learn much more. It's easy to look up at Everest and go: "Picasso good." But, it's very interesting to have to deal with lesser artists and what might make them good, and how that defines your goddamn taste.

I'm also very interested, Charlotte, in the walls of the art world coming down between what they call "outsider art" and what I call "insider art." There's really no difference between how [Brice Marden](#) talks about his squiggly snakes in a box painting—"It's in relationship to the edge, and there's a kind of rhythm," and I love his paintings—and the way an outsider talks about her work having to do with: "Oh yeah, I'm in a relationship with the numbers around the edge of the work." It's the same. There's no difference.

The truth is, we're living in a crisis. I'm going to be frank. I love the past. I go to the Met about 35 or 40 times a year. Roberta and I have date nights there. We are so boring, and we just wander around the museum. I love the past.

Charlotte Burns: Do you go to set places?

Jerry Saltz: Usually no. We'll wander and let something grab us. I'll go by myself, she goes by herself, then we meet in the great cafeteria and then go out and show each other what we've seen. Then of course you stumble on things the way one always does.

I love the past, but we are living in a crisis and I think it's time to look at the art of the present. Look, we were so lucky under Obama to go back and start the job of correcting art history. Right? Of opening up the gates, of letting artists, women in. Yay. Artists from other places, other cultures. That has to be done and it can never be stopped. That is the project.

However, institutions and many—too many—galleries have become stuck in a kind of niche where they're going to find every second rate Post-Minimalist painter from Kosovo and give him or her a show at a museum. And then I see it in art fairs, and they're second rate for a reason not just because they weren't from the right country—that's huge and important—but in this crisis, I want to see what artists say now.

Charlotte Burns: The crisis as you would define it is a crisis of lack of interest in the present?

Jerry Saltz: Yes. In a period of political and environmental crisis, I want to see what bad, very bad and good artists have to say about my time. This time here. I don't want to keep turning back the page to the Minimalism of the '60s and la, la, la. I'm sick of it. You're wasting our time.

The great art is the present. The great is the enemy of the good. We don't know yet. Let's get it out there and see. Curators, take the blinders off. Take a damn ... Look, I love curators. I love dealers more than anyone else in the whole art world. I know they have to survive economically. I could never do it.

It's time to show the present. We have to see who we are right now. I'm not saying don't rediscover the past. Please don't put me in that box. But you're asking: "What's good now?" Get in the galleries. You'll be shocked how much good work there is among the 85% to 90% crap. Galleries that spring up in a Chinatown mall and show a woman painter from, say, Germany, who I just saw. Made my day and started telling me what painting could be.

That means also go to your damn mega galleries. I mean, for God's sake, [Larry Gagosian](#) gave us late Picasso after decades of the academics telling us: "Yes, after Cubism and *Guernica*, Picasso basically flat lined." Bullshit. That's not true. I'd say Picasso's one of the best painters of the '60s, maybe the '70s.

Charlotte Burns: Yes. There's been a shift in appreciation for those works.

Jerry Saltz: Thank God. And that man from outer space, Larry Gagosian, let people see them. Because museums, A, couldn't afford to, and B, were too scared to.

Charlotte Burns: When you go to galleries, are you often alone in galleries these days? Was that ever thus, or is this a kind of increasing trend?

Jerry Saltz: You're right, it's an increasing trend. More and more dealers tell Roberta and me that they'll see a curator in Basel or in Hong Kong, but not on 57th Street, and this is a nightmare. I think curators are busy. I know they have a job to do, but you have to see your galleries. Think locally, you know? Support your local damn galleries. Galleries are where new art comes from.

The foot traffic is dropping. For me, as an older person—I'm 66—that's sad because I love galleries and I love art shows. I can't go to art fairs, because, again, I'm not socially well adjusted. I go, and I'm having a good time talking to people, and I love talking to people because I never get to, and then when everybody goes to dinner, I am in my hotel room looking out the window basically crying, going: "I wish I could go out. But what would I ... you know, I don't want to go out. I'd rather sit here." And a great curator once told me, from a bigwig museum, said: "Oh, Jerry, dear, don't you know? We all do that. Everybody's in their hotel room crying. I just am there at eight o'clock. You start crying at 1am."

So, yes, the art world now is seeing art in art fairs, and I'm not against art fairs. Any way that artists and galleries can make money, I'm down with that.

Charlotte Burns: You were talking about the art of the present, the political and environmental crisis. You want to see art show us who we are now.

Jerry Saltz: Right. When I talk about seeing the art of now and how it's involved with the present, I definitely do not mean subject matter. I can't tell you ... right now my Instagram, while we've been sitting here, probably 400 people send me works of art that I should look at about Trump, or about the environment, and they're okay agitprop, but it's not good art. This is a misnomer in the art world. It's a complete red herring. If you're making art now, the content of now is in your work.

Charlotte Burns: Right.

Jerry Saltz: Or you've denied that content of now, and that becomes the content of my review.

Charlotte Burns: Right.

Jerry Saltz: Okay? I don't want to see shows that are: "This is a political show, Jerry. You'd be interested in it." All shows are political to me. It's either original work or it's unoriginal, and I'll judge for myself.

Too much art right now relies too much on wall labels. You have to read an enormous backstory. I'm fine with a little backstory. It's very hard to figure out why a [Robert Ryman](#) all-white painting is a painting, and it does take a lifetime to understand that, or you do have to explain to Mom why the Duchamp shovel is art. I get that. I believe in the space between the object and the label as being absolutely filled with plasma and power. However, now you go in museums and idiot biennials where you have labels as thick as magazines.

Somebody showed me a photograph a couple of years ago of white clouds. I said: "Okay, those are white clouds," and the gallerist said: "Those are clouds above Ferguson, Missouri where the riots were." I went: "No, they're not. They're just clouds." That's not in the work. It's only in the label. Sometimes that's okay. I'm not against reading. People are going to listen to this and go: "Oh, Jerry's dumbing us down. He's anti-intellectual." Okay, I'm not. Let's get real. Okay? Let's not just write it all down in the same jargon about the same subjects and make art in the same conventional manner. Why does all the art, then, look alike? This is curator art. They got to wake up, get out there. I'm not for any medium. I'm for originality.

Charlotte Burns: Tell me about the envy. You mentioned that before we began the podcast, that you for years had this envy.

Jerry Saltz: When I was an artist, I used to walk around feeling sorry for myself, always. Looked at every loft, every apartment. Hated everyone I saw. Everyone. Hated you if you had a better apartment. Hated you if you had more hair. Hated this one for being tall. Hated that one. Everybody had it better than poor me. They had more money. Oh, I was cynical. I knew why she was getting what she got and he got what he got, and I was eaten alive by this envy. Eaten alive, and now I tell young artists and writers: “You must make an enemy of envy today. Today. By tonight, because it will eat you alive.”

Charlotte Burns: How did you change?

Jerry Saltz: It’s a willed thing. You stop your eyes from looking out because that’s a way of not looking in, of saying it’s the world’s fault. “They’re fucking me up. If only I could blankety-blank.” It lets you feel sorry for yourself. Well, you’re going to be poor your whole life. I got to tell this to 99.9% of the people in the art world—you’ve accepted a life of not being very rich. You’ve accepted a life where you’re going to work all the time, and if you don’t, I don’t really want to talk to you. I have no interest in people that don’t work. You’ve accepted a life where you’re going to be alone a lot of the time. You’ve accepted a life that will never be boring ever. Ever. That’s a pretty good trade-off, if you ask me. I’ve been in the real world. It’s hard out there. I never want to go back to the real world. If I have to, I will. You make an enemy of envy tonight. You stay up late every night with your peers. Every night.

I don’t care if you’re poor. I don’t care if you’re having panic attacks at night. When you’re young, you’ve got to go out. You’re vampires together. You’ve got to learn together, to take over the world. You work, work, work, work, work. Yes, you’re going to have a job. Sorry! Or marry well, if you want to. I always tell artists: “You want to find a lawyer? Marry them! Boys or girls. I couldn’t care less.” Envy will eat you alive, and cynicism will eat your work alive, and your work will be a zombie. It will just start to look like other art.

Charlotte Burns: Tell me about your social media presence. You’ve talked about how it’s really helpful to you, and it seems like it’s helpful to you because it’s something you can control more than being in an art fair. You can sort of turn things on and turn things off.

Jerry Saltz: That’s true. Oh, God.

Charlotte Burns: Do you find that you’re yourself? Are you mediated? Do you have a kind of Jerry that lives online? There’s this thing of mixed reality where there’s the online people and then the real-life people. Where are you on that spectrum?

Jerry Saltz: Well, whenever people say: “I want to meet you,” this happens all the time, I go: “This is my second self. My second self already knows you online. My first self never meets anybody. I don’t have a life, my first self.”

Social media has stopped me from being as alone as I was. What I do is I write all day. Takes me a long time to write. There’s no such thing as writing. There is only rewriting. That is all that there is for me, and it takes to the last draft. When I hit send, I’m still suicidal, like: “God! I didn’t get in the main idea. Where is the main idea?” You’ve had that, as a—

Charlotte Burns: Constantly.

Jerry Saltz: —writer. It’s a shocking thing. Oh, it’s: “I’m going to write about my coffee cup,” and at the end of the piece, somehow that one good idea of it you had didn’t get in. While I’m at home panicked; desperate; terrified; searching; writing; procrastinating, I can do this: I can touch my phone or computer and for just a second, I’ll go to—it used to be Facebook more. Now, much, much, much less. Go to Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. Look at something. Get an idea, or have an idea about a coffee cup, and then start hyperlinking on Google Images until I see something that catches my eye. I’ll post it and write usually an odd or provocative comment.

I admit I do that because my theory online is: open up two fronts at once. One, visual. The other, verbal. Literary. So, you double your chance of people responding, and you don’t limit. “Oh, it’s a picture of a hamburger,” or whatever.

And so then people start commenting, and I don’t see it for an hour. Then I’ll come back in the next panic attack an hour later, look at it and go: “Wow. Look at what people said. This is great.” Write something wise-ass back. It’s all in public for me. I say it should all be in public. Everything. So, it’s helped me that way and keeps me much less lonely. But my second self, I don’t know who he is: he’s fun; he’s wild. I don’t know *what* he’s doing out there!

Charlotte Burns: Is that liberating?

Jerry Saltz: It feels fun when I’m doing it, yes.

Charlotte Burns: Do you ever have the 3ams, that are like: “Oh, God, did I say that?”

Jerry Saltz: Sure. All the time, like: “What an asshole I am.” That is something I still struggle with. There’s an asshole-ness about my second self and probably my first self that I can’t, maybe it’s a maleness, that I just can’t get rid of. I try to curb it, and then it pops right out. It’s a terrible thing.

I do show many of the pictures to my wife, Roberta, because I don’t want to go too far, and most of the pictures I posted, 99%, are not photographs. I’m not into that. I like posting weird art, and a lot of it is going to be either violent or sexual or really bizarre. This is work that was lost for millennia.

Charlotte Burns: I often think there’s something kind of Bosch-ish about your—

Jerry Saltz: Yes.

Charlotte Burns: —taste in art and social media.

Jerry Saltz: My taste doesn’t run Southern classical. It runs Northern, Gothic, archaic, ancient art, like things that are way more Dionysian. I’ll find something that’s never been seen, that just got discovered in the last 15 years in the pages of a notebook or just came to light from Pompeii, and post it with an idiot comment. A lot of times, I would take all that great medieval imagery that was appearing the last 15 years and then make an art comment. Like I’d say: “This is me going to crits at your school tomorrow, and I’m going to do this to you.” Then it has a devil sticking a sword up somebody’s rear end. Great work of art.

People used to write to Facebook to have me thrown off for that, and Facebook would then write to me going: “You have not violated any of our community standards. You’re posting a work of art. Nothing special there.”

They didn’t like me being disrespectful about art and the art world. Sometimes I have gone too far. I feel terrible about it. I have had to delete some images, but I’m learning on the job. I really am.

Charlotte Burns: How do you see the split between critic and columnist?

Jerry Saltz: I’d see no difference between them. I see no difference when I’m writing about a new show as when I’m writing about the Trump border wall; or the Met’s admission policy; or a Michelangelo drawing show.

Charlotte Burns: Do you feel any pressure to be relevant, or is it just that you feel the pressure of a deadline?

Jerry Saltz: As you know, deadlines are sent to us via hell from heaven, that there’d be nothing. If I didn’t have a deadline, I would do nothing. There’s nothing worse in this life than writing, and yet it’s the best thing I do in my life. I hate this about writing. I do think the idea of relevance comes in where I’m not interested in only making sure ... I get upset with critics that just only cover the big shows. I always think: “Come on. You’re doing set pieces. You’re writing kind of the same stuff over and over.”

Charlotte Burns: Right. Makes sense.

Jerry Saltz: For me, that’s the only definition of relevance and what I respond to. I have to trust myself out there.

Charlotte Burns: Jerry, is there anything you feel we didn’t cover or that you’d like to talk about?

Jerry Saltz: I love that I had a chance to talk about my work. Critics don’t get that that much.

Charlotte Burns: Did that make you feel comfortable or uncomfortable?

Jerry Saltz: Both. I loved it and was shocked to hear some of the things coming of my mouth, but I stand by it all, I think.

Charlotte Burns: Well, thank you so much for being a guest. It’s been really enjoyable and interesting to talk to you.

Jerry Saltz: Thank you. Likewise. You’re great.