

*This is a transcription of a lecture that was given at the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture, an artist's residency program in Skowhegan, Maine (www.skowheganart.org). It is part of an Archive of lectures recorded from 1952 to the present, which are available in audio form on CD at this institution. It is important to note that most of these lectures incorporated visuals, which are **not** available. However, the Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture does have a limited number of slides from a selection of lectures in the Archive. You may contact Skowhegan to find out if they exist for a specific lecture.*

*These lectures are **not edited**. Please be advised that there will be typos, misspellings and occasional "breaks" in the audio. It would be prudent to listen to the audio to help determine the lecturer's intent. You must obtain permission from the artists or their representative to publish any material contained herein. The contact information is available from this institution.*

**SKOWHEGAN SCHOOL
OF PAINTING & SCULPTURE
Skowhegan, Maine**

**Lecture by Elizabeth Murray
Summer, 1979**

Transcriber: Judith Stoodley

Introduction: Ladies... and gentlemen... probably Trustees... and Governors... Friends! (laughter) Tonight's speaker is Elizabeth Murray. Elizabeth Murray has taught at Yale University, at Princeton, and is currently teaching at the School (unintelligible) in New York. She lives in New York. She's been painting for... a considerable amount of time. (laughter) And she's a graduate of the Art Institute in Chicago. And... I think rather than say anything else about her art you should probably see it, and then you'll have a chance to talk to her. (Applause)

Speaker: Okay. Well. This is a little more formal than I'm used to. Can you hear me? (Negative response) Is this working? (unintelligible responses) Oh. So I just have to talk, not—Okay. (laughter) Well, if you stop hearing me you'll have to say something, 'cause I'm not used to talking so loud. (laughs) What I plan to do this evening is show a group of slides from my student years as well; so... what would help me a lot would be if you would ask questions as I go along, instead of just waiting towards the end... although I'd like to have questions at the end, and if they don't occur to you until the end, fine. But I would welcome your questions as I show the slides. I thought it might be helpful if I showed you, since most of you—I'm speaking primarily for *you*, the students—if I did show you some student work, and where I've been, which has been in diverse places. And some of the slides are even a little embarrassing. The work, some of which no longer exists... (laughs) The best are in the slides, actually. So, could we begin... with the....

SLIDE

This is a drawing. I was born in 1940 in Chicago. I didn't stay there very long. And I later went back and went to school, to art school, there. I went to the Art Institute of

Chicago. And when I went there I had no intentions of being—becoming a *fine artist*. I wanted to be a commercial artist; and I didn't know anything about art, fine art. I knew about Michelangelo; and I had made a trip to Chicago to see a Picasso show; but I really was very uninformed about art. And the wonderful thing about the school is that it's in a very good museum, one of the best museums in the country. And so I kept walking through... this museum, these galleries. And I was curious, but it took about a year before I finally started stopping and looking at the pictures. And I began to feel like, through that kind of contact, that it was something that was reaching out to me. And I didn't understand it. I took art history courses but I hated them. So it was that kind of contact that made begin to change my mind about what I wanted to do. Also—Could you put on the next slide, please?

SLIDE

As you can see from the drawing that I had a real traditional kind of training, lots of drawing and lots of figure painting. I was also terrible in the advertising courses that I was taking. I really couldn't do it; I couldn't make a straight line with a ruler; I couldn't keep it clean; and I couldn't—It was quite different than I thought, this idea of being a commercial artist. And then I thought perhaps I would not be an artist at all, that it was really something that my—that I just had fallen into, and that it wasn't something that I really wanted to do; and then I began to get interested in painting. And I considered this... I guess I would have made this around 1960, maybe—1961—the first really good painting that I ever did. Could you put the... next slide? (laughs) (laughter)

SLIDE

So, I was in Chicago; and I began then to really paint in earnest. And it felt to me at the time like I was discovering the Holy Grail, this really incredible avenue of expression; and ... hope, and independence, and freedom; and that it was a very radical kind of a thing for me to be involved in. And I was completely thrilled at how clever I was (laughing) to have become this painter and to be—I became—Of course, one of the things I was attracted to at the time was the lifestyle. I came from a small Midwestern town; and it was the first time that I saw people acting like they felt like I thought, acting. (laughs) (laughter) And that was very thrilling to me. Like it seemed much different from the kind of middle class background... oppressive, that I came from. And it—Things were—It was twenty years ago, but—more than that—it was really considerably different to be sort of a late beatnik at that time; there were really... It was very exciting; and I was discovering books and things—and music that I had never come in contact with before. And I'm sure that most of you now are having somewhat similar experiences in different ways. I hope so. It was *very* exciting. At any rate, this is one of the paintings that I did then. Would you keep—?

SLIDE

(laughs)... after I left Chicago I went to California, and I went to graduate school there; and I met in—at a place called Mills College, which is in Oakland, they have a graduate

department that then—I went there because they gave me money; and I went to graduate school because all my friends were doing that; and the idea was that if you went to graduate school and you got this degree, you could come out and be a teacher. (laughs) I got out and I worked in a bookstore and as a waitress (laughs) (laughter) for many years. But... this is one of the paintings from that period—It's a detail of a painting. I met some people there that really influenced me a lot in terms of painting. Would you--?

SLIDE

This is an etching, a small etching that... I did. I met people who got me interested in the art of... primarily Gorky and De Kooning... And I had seen several of Gorky's paintings in Chicago, and many of De Kooning's paintings, but I hadn't really understood them. And I began to get some idea of what they were doing. When I went to school the big art form was Abstract Expressionism; and, as you can probably see from one of the paintings that I showed, that was how I learned to paint... like... I... You just—you got the right wrist action... and the goosh and the moosh; and (laughter) it just started falling into place. It was, again, like very viable and a very important thing—And I don't mean to make fun of it; but it was how I learned to paint. And I became, when I was in California, interested in some other aspects of painting... the weight of the paint... the quality of putting the paint on and a certain kind of energy that—I met a young man out there named Carlos Vija (phonetic) who I've really never heard from since—I've heard of him. And he was... a big help to me and a big influence on my work and how I painted at that point. And he introduced me to a lot of the San Francisco artists... who I didn't really like very much. I found them like too... too lazy. But I learned a lot when I was there; the experience was very exciting, and the *physical* experience of being in California was exciting. The next slide, please.

SLIDE

It's another—This is maybe the most typical of the paintings that I did. I would just buy gooshes of paint from a place called Byzantine Paint Company; you could buy a quart of cadmium red for six dollars. (laughter) It was primarily oil, you know, mostly. And then I would begin the paintings at that point by standing back and heaving the paint onto these big—this was about eight by ten feet, this canvas. And I really just... was... pretty immersed in the work, like I was *very* involved in painting, and it felt like the most important thing to me in the whole world, just being an artist... trying to be an artist. And I never for a moment at that point stopped and said, "Well, what am I doing?" or "What is this about?" It felt like I was just on this path, and the whole thing would carry me somehow. It was very poor; I didn't care. It felt like—the thing about art that was the most critical thing was that if one got involved in it, you—the rest of the world would go by without your having to be concerned with money or... security, period, that that just wasn't an issue. I was beginning to be very political at that point too, because that was the time in California of the free speech movement, and the Vietnam demonstrations were beginning. And all those things. But still, like at that age, it didn't occur to me how serious all those things were; it was just part of the whole exciting world; and art seemed to fit in very well. And again, it just—it seemed like something you could do where you

would never have to worry about money; it's like, as long as you could get money to get paint, get some food... and some drink... and have a place to live, everything was okay. Could we have the next slide?

SLIDE

This is another painting... I began to get interested—The next painting, please.

SLIDE

This was the studio that I had in San Francisco; and I worked—began working with constructed things and plastic materials and wood. And... I became real interested in, at that point, Pop Art; I saw the first show of Pop Art that I'd ever seen in Los Angeles. It was when it was just becoming... known. And I was very impressed with the attitude of... I don't know how to say it—I was very impressed with the license that people like Warhol and Oldenberg, particularly, took with objects... that I was interested in working again with objects; and I didn't know really how to go about it. And I was more interested in it than say the sort of—I liked Rauschenberg and Johns, but that seemed more... interesting to me; it was more ironic. Yes... the next one.

SLIDE

Question: Were those two things hanging off of the painting, were those part of the painting or (unintelligible)

Speaker: No, they were part of the painting.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: Could you flip back, and I'll tell you. I think so. Those are—were supposed to be two legs. The painting was about a man standing—the reflection of a figure. The figure's here... The reflection's there. And the man had a fishing pole that stuck way out from the canvas that you can't see; and those are the legs of the person. And the—I don't know what I intended by those two legs on the edge of the painting. Maybe it was somebody sitting on a—Oh, I do remember now, as a matter of fact, (laughs) what I meant. (laughter) The legs—This was a—these works I'm showing you are the more embarrassing ones. (laughter) I intended that those should be the—just the legs, sort of the disembodied legs of somebody sitting on a shoreline, maybe. The rest of the person is not there. I— A pair of shorts.... Someone actually bought this painting from me (laughter) for fifty dollars... (laughs) for fifty dollars....

SLIDE

A man turning on a light bulb; and the—part of it's wood... the hand is sort of a gloved thing filled with plaster... and oil paint... and a real light bulb and so forth.

Question: Why is the (unintelligible)

Speaker: I... I must—We had an apartment, and I was trying to protect the walls from getting paint on them. It was a long time ago. The next slide....

SLIDE

This is a football—No... kind of a combination football/track player, jumping over a pole... (laughter) and in the middle, that little thing sort of below the shorts of the guy... is a bird. (laughter) Not a real one. And... at this point the things were—my idea of how to put these things together were a few bolts and Elmer's Glue. I really had no idea of how to construct them; but they *weighed* tons. (laughter) I... Then, after doing this painting, I got a job in Buffalo, New York, at a place called... Rosary Hill College; it was my first teaching job. And I packed all these things up in a giant crate... that weighed a lot, and... took them (laughing) with me to Buffalo, New York. And I think that's where they ended up, too. (laughter) Next slide, please.

SLIDE

But I'm... you know... I did these; and they were all things that I did. And when I did them I thought they were fantastic; (laughs) I thought they were very good... for me to do. I was really very involved in them. So my—If I'm making fun of them now, that was not how I felt about them at the time. And I don't really feel like making fun of them; I just see them very differently. This is a detail of a painting that I did; and I show it to give an idea of the stuff that I was throwing into the paint, just about anything I could find. I was very excited with combining different materials. The next slide.

SLIDE

"The Parachute." It's a little box... and the plywood thing behind is not part of the painting part; the part is just the box. The next slide....

SLIDE

That's a—In San Francisco, one of the really beautiful things that I saw there was a Hamm's Beer ad. I don't know if it's still there, but it lights up from the bottom—It's on top of a building, a *Sears* building, I think; and it starts lighting at the top and goes up—at the bottom and goes up to the top; and I was very taken with that, and this is a detail of the painting that I did of it.

SLIDE

Some hands... some clay hands. The next one....

SLIDE

I got real involved in doing cartoon things; and I picked two characters, Dick Tracy and Little Orphan Annie; and I did books about them; I wrote stories. I was writing—I began to write; and I did sort of paintings for the stories, and this is one of them.

Question: How big is that?

Speaker: Oh, it's maybe thirteen by eight—you know, like a standard fourteen by eighteen or something like that, maybe twelve by sixteen.... Yeah.

SLIDE

The next.

SLIDE

Yeah, go ahead.

SLIDE

That's another... gigantic... painting. This is a man eating; and... he's looking into a mirror, and through—then there was a kind of door—This—none of this really worked; I mean... it was *barely* held together... Then I put a little motor inside that yellow door thing; and the motor... a mouse—a sort of little clay mouse came out and turned around and... (laughter) there was music. (laughs) They would be fun to see again, really. I'm... sorry that some of them... Like I would just like to sort of get more—see them and see what they sounded like. The next.

SLIDE

Okay.

SLIDE

Okay....

SLIDE

Okay.

SLIDE

Okay, now there's—I just—That gives you a picture,(laughs) I think, of some very early things. The last slide was maybe 1962... and there's a jump here to 19... maybe 1970, I did this painting. And in the meantime I moved to New York. I moved to New York in 1967 from Buffalo... and... I was quite thrilled to be living in New York. It felt like a dream come true. But I did have some very different feelings. For one thing I was

working five days a week. I got pregnant... had a child. That made a very big difference in my whole feeling about who I was; and it was something I really never expected to do. And... And it took a great deal of—Oh, it just changed my life completely. What really began to happen for me was I began to see art in a very, very different way; it became not less important to me; it became even *more* important, especially, say, a year after I had been—I was a mother for a year and I wanted very much to get back involved in it. And it felt like my involvement, my desire to really begin working in earnest again was much more personal, and... I don't know how to say it exactly, but it felt much more personal and much more of a very real inner need that had not too much to do with a career... or getting rewards, external rewards for like something I really needed to do for myself. And I had not been doing oil paintings, just plain paintings, for years. I had been doing a lot of different things... construction things... very image-y kinds of things; and my work before—I had just gotten very... screwed up for—to myself. I felt very unhappy and very dissatisfied with it. And it was very hard for me to tell myself that it wasn't working out, that I didn't like what I was doing, that it was really getting fucked up. And... my remedy was finally to get the energy together. It's hard to get the energy when you're a young mother (laughing) to do anything except take care of this little being; and... I made—I decided to do the simplest, most direct thing that felt the best to me, which was just to plain paint, with oil paint, which was what I knew the best and was the most familiar with, on canvas. And that was what I did; and this is one of the first paintings that I did. And... the minute I began to paint again I really realized this is what... that... it felt very (unintelligible) to me, and it felt very good to be doing it again. The next slide.

SLIDE

This is a very poor—Some of the slides that are coming up are not good slides. This was another painting that I did along with that one at the time...

Question: How large is this?

Speaker: I guess—It's probably about three and a half by six and a half...

Question: How long did you stop painting?

Speaker: I hadn't stopped working—I'd virtually stopped working really for a year... but I hadn't painted with oil paint on canvas for at least six years.... And I had thought when I began to go away from it that I would never return; it just seemed like a really passé thing. I was one of the people who was saying, "There's no point in making paintings any more." Or...it—So. The next slide, please.

SLIDE

There's another one of the paintings from that period.

Question: Were you talking to other artists? Were you still in touch with... what was going on around you--?

Speaker: Yeah. Well, I was in touch... because... Yeah, this is a good question. I had a few friends that I talked to. And... that's always been very important for me. And through a few people I began to meet other people who seemed very sympathetic. And... I felt... being in New York at that point was very strange; and I loved the city, and I loved being there, and I loved the energy; but there were some difficulties. When I came to New York the artists that were very much in the forefront were, for instance, Jules Olitski (phonetic) and Noland, and... then there were a few artists who were my age who were like being *very* successful; and... like... I mean... my normal reaction to that is to be jealous and envious... and I was; but... there were big gaps between... younger people and older artists. And to me, in my opinion, there were big gaps—Stella.... It felt like a very unattainable thing; and the galleries seemed like—Well, the Costella Gallery just seemed like something that was absolutely... you know, like... really unattainable, way beyond me. I would go there and look at the work; but it would never occur to me to even dream that I could be like in that gallery, or—And the... style was something called “camp,” and mini-skirts, you know. Like all those things like just are—seem unbelievable. Even now it seems like a long time ago, and it wasn't that long ago. But the mood was of great frivolity, really; and it was sort of the end of the times of Pop Art, which was doing very well; like all those people were becoming very rich. And it felt like being an artist was beginning to be more like being some kind of a superstar than being a person who... --that the artists themselves were becoming—(unintelligible, sounds like Sculls) were buying a lot of work, and I would read about them... and it all felt kind of scary—like being in high school again and not belonging to (laughing) a sorority... and there was no chance you were going to get asked. You know. (laughter) (laughs) It was a little weird... and uncomfortable. This is another painting from that period. But I began to meet some really nice people; and I was always—I've always been very curious about what people are doing; and... I... go to the galleries a lot. And I go to see all kinds of things. And I tried to do the same thing then; it was a little more difficult. The next slide....

SLIDE

Another painting.... Really these paintings were to me, and looking at them now, really going back into something that I knew about, and kind of reaffirming... that—how much I liked to paint... how much I liked to move the material, and work on a flat surface, and develop my feelings and ideas... like in that very simple place.

Question: How much time did you have... with a kid, to be able to do this?

Speaker: Not a lot. It was very hard to find the time. Once I began to do it, I began to do it with a lot of—It takes an effort... It takes a lot of effort. But it was important to me; and it always has been important to me. But that's very personal. I mean, I don't think it's something that everyone (laughing) has to do... at... or... that you need to do both—or anything. I just... found it—I needed to have that time, and once I began to paint it

just seemed like it was something I was just going to do. And I made the time, really. Yeah. By this time... I guess—I made this painting around 1972—I began to feel much more confident about my work. And I began to show it as well. And that felt not scary so much as exciting, to begin to show it. And I felt—I had real lucky experiences with that.... One of the things—One of the anxieties that began to happen was that for the first time—I think sometimes naiveté is a very good thing to maintain, (laughs) for as long—When I was in—For instance, as a student I didn't even know about galleries. Now I know it's not possible now for most art students to have that kind of naiveté. But as our galleries were something, in Chicago, that only—I don't know how I thought—what they did. But there weren't too many good galleries in Chicago; and it never occurred to me that it would be something that I would be interested in, or something that you actually went out and tried to get in. So when I—After a few years of doing these—About the time of doing this work I began to feel that I would like to do that, that I would like to find a gallery and find a place to show my work. And it—I found that incredibly anxiety-ridden, and very, very difficult to do. The next slide.

SLIDE

What I tried to do—This is another painting from that series—I was involved in just... doing a kind of linear progressive thing, with the images changing—sort of like a film frame—was look around for places where I thought I would like the person. If I asked that person to come to my studio (laughs) it wouldn't be a horrible experience. And I—again I found that the best way in New York is to—not to approach directly-- that seemed impossible-- but to find friends who would help you talk to those particular people, and... go about it in that kind of a way. The next slide, please.

SLIDE

These paintings are about ten by twelve, ten inches by twelve. I was working very small. And I had no success at all... at drawing... from that time. Yeah.

Question: What are you using for these?

Speaker: A colored pencil. The black line is ink. Yeah... it's—I'm sorry about the slide. It's really yellow. I began to clean out the paintings a lot. I wanted to work with fewer and fewer image things, and get the paintings more involved with just the paint and a few linear elements, as simple as I possibly could make them... and as... --I use the word abstract; but I don't think it even is a really applicable word to painting. I just wanted as quiet and simple and succinct an image in the space as I could arrive at. Yeah. The next slide

SLIDE

Of the next group of paintings, I think this is the one that I always liked the best. I began to work... --A lot of things were going on in my mind. One of the things that I wanted to do was clear the paintings out; and I had some kind of feeling that I wanted to put my

paintings into some kind of a mainstream... less eccentricity and more (laughs) simple belonging to the world of art, you know, like—And I—The motion I made was towards what I guess would—It certainly wasn't geometric or analytical at all... the way I approached them; but I approached it really by trying to firm up my lines, and by keeping again a very... a stricter kind of image, and an all-over patterning of the spaces and intervals of the image. And this is one of the first things that I came up with. These paintings were a lot of fun for me to do, because they seemed so simple and clear; and I also—I knew what I was doing all the time in them. They came very easily. The next....

SLIDE

I did a series of fan paintings. Actually I never thought of them as fans, and then someone called them—I was thinking more of them as sort of pulse beats, or something; and then when I connected those top line images they—Yeah. The next.

SLIDE

Next one.

SLIDE

Next.

SLIDE

Next one.

SLIDE

Questions: What are the dimensions of that one?

Speaker: That one's about... eight inches by... No, it's more than inches; it's maybe ten inches by about six and a half feet... It's taller than I.... I really liked doing this group of paintings a lot. Like it was just one of those times when I got in and out of them like very easily... and not much anxiety involved in them. Yeah. The next.

SLIDE

It was at this point, when I did this painting, I also began to show in a gallery, like I had my first gallery show; and that was quite exciting. And... I felt like I was ready to do that, and it all—everything seemed to be working out quite well, and I was glad with the work I was doing. The next, please.

SLIDE

Question: Do you feel that (unintelligible)

Speaker: I think it could have had something to do with that. I won't—I wasn't thinking that at the time, and I would have been horrified... if I had really like... if I had thought that; but I really wanted to... I won't say it—I wanted to be a part of a kind of movement or motion in art that I thought was important, that felt important to me. I don't know how else to say it...-- could interpret it in many different ways. I was tired of doing the lines; and so I began to work with flat planes, and I was very interested again in again working with color, and working with color in a clearer way than I had ever worked with it before. When you're working—One of the problems that—with... learning to paint with Abstract Expressionism as the style model is that you learn to paint very mushy; and... I began to get annoyed at that; it didn't seem clear enough. The drips became—seemed very arbitrary. So I wanted to use color in a more clear way, and this is one of the first color things I did. Yeah.

Question: When did you do these?

Speaker: ... 1975. No, I take it back. I guess it would be 1974 that these paintings....

Question: And how big—how big are the--?

Speaker: That's... about eight by—No. Maybe seven by seven. Seven—It's off, too; it's not quite an exact square; so it would be like seven by seven, two inches. Yeah. All right. Those—Both those paintings were done at exactly the same time.

Question: What is the paint (unintelligible)

Speaker: Fairly thick, and worked into and worked over... but, with these paintings, these last paintings, although the paint—There are many layers of paint on them... They felt more sorted out than other paintings, not quite so...agonized over. Yeah. I went back—I went out to California to teach at Cal Arts for a year; and that was a really good experience for me. I got—I missed New York and I missed my friends a great deal; but I really liked being out of the city and away from the—I had just begun to show my work, really, and it was good to go away and work by myself and experience that.... And I began to work on these shaped... things... there.

Question: Is that (unintelligible)

Speaker: Yeah. It's a stretcher, with a canvas. This is the first one of.... And the minute I began to work on the shapes I began to have a lot of trouble with my work again; so it was really very positive to do. Another of that... group from—that I did in California. And this is like the Spring of 1976. Yeah. The next.

SLIDE

One of the things—this will be the following year—that I began to not like about those paintings were the kind of deadpan stuff with the shapes. They felt too involved with

constructivism; and I wanted to be involved with more organic kind of shape-making again, and more connected to images.... I... So I began to work in that direction.

Question: Elizabeth, could you explain (unintelligible)

Speaker: Pardon?

Question: Would you explain the frame around this one and the previous one?

Speaker: The frame....

Question: Is that a shadow?

Speaker: It's a shadow; it's not a frame. The next slide.

SLIDE

This is really a large painting.

Question: What's the date on this?

Speaker: ... the Fall of '76... 1976. I was very excited about doing this painting. It was like one of the paintings that happened that again they were like clear from the beginning to the very end, and happened very quickly. And one of—And I liked the shape, and I felt really good about this particular painting. Yes.

SLIDE

This is a painting from the same time period.

SLIDE

Okay.

SLIDE

Okay.

SLIDE

Question: You seem to have gone from going very flat to just going into outer space... all of a sudden. Did that just happen...?

Speaker: Well, I guess so, because this is pretty... There's nothing missing. There *is* a group of work missing that I don't have slides of, but... --from the time of California... from the paintings in California, there's only one group that's missing. Once I began to work with these shapes, I began to feel all kinds of possibilities that seemed very exciting

to re-involve myself with. They didn't seem very new or very earth-shattering, really, but just other things that I hadn't been thinking about in terms of images or painting or—that again like just—the excitement was very strong for me. The next slide, please.

SLIDE

I began to... last year just work with more and more eccentric kinds of shapes and... more color, more different kinds of shapes inside the shape. This is one of those paintings.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: Well I have the stretchers; I draw a template of what I want, work out the perimeters, and I have them built. They're stretchers... wooden stretchers... And... put canvas on them, stretch canvas over them. And then I'm stuck with it. (laughs) So... one of the things that I like about it is the kind of conflict of making... I didn't expect to make some pictures inside of them. I find them very uncool... like I don't find them like... to logical necessarily, although I think they have their own logic, and I certainly think about them. But I didn't expect them to be quite so zany looking; and... I really—they—I don't know how I do them... really. I think about the edges, obviously, because sometimes I think one of things that I make paintings for is to go to the edge and come back to the center, that that's the excitement that I find in doing that activity. But this is such a conflict, to have those many edges. And another thing I know is that my excitement about them is that there are so many different edges in these paintings. I mean, instead of four edges I get eight... (laughs)

Question: To me they go back to the California—the early things that you did which I really liked (unintelligible)

Speaker: Oh, I never saw that.... The next slide, please.

SLIDE

It's a large painting. Okay. It's a little out of focus... clearer... And the next, please.

SLIDE

Question: Are these oil?

Speaker: Yeah. All oil. It's funny to see that painting. It's like—That's an enormous painting. It looks really tiny and very far away. Yeah.

Question: Did you know you wanted it to hang at that angle? Did you switch them around?

Speaker: Not too much. It depended. This one I think stayed the same way the whole time. Sometimes I took advantage of... that when you do turn them around it's like Larry Poons (phonetic) cropping his paintings; you know, like you can up with some real beauty when you've been working on it one way; but basically I pretty much stick to the same thing—certainly by finishing them, by the time I'm almost finished the way they are is definitely set; so don't really monkey around with them too much. This is—By the way, all three of these—There were five of these paintings; they were all exactly the same shape. I just turned them to do each one. They're turned at a different sort of angle; but they're all the same shape. The... next, I think.

SLIDE

This is just about over. I think that's it; I'm not sure. Yeah. (Applause) So are there questions? Yeah.

Question: In this article they have over in the library they keep talking about you as a (unintelligible) painter.... Do you know what that is?

Speaker: No—I hate that article, too. I have to say—I'm sorry to say... (laughs) that article to me is humiliating; so if you do read it, please keep that in mind. Like I only read it once, and I felt so bad that... I couldn't even read it again. (laughs) I threw it away. So I don't know what he meant by that. He seemed to mean something. (laughter) He wanted to mean something. I can't stand art criticism as a... or the nature of it now.... I must say most of it irritates me a lot.

Question: It's so cerebral... and (unintelligible)

Speaker: It's not just cerebral. If it were really cerebral I don't think I would find it so irritating. (laughs) (laughter)

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: They're pretty close, really. I'm working on more shapes.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: ... No, not really. That changes a great deal.

Question: The shapes are so flat. Are you interested in the surface texture at all, and (unintelligible)

Speaker: Why they had to be paint? Huh? (laughs) (laughter) Yeah, there is, but I don't.... Well, the slides are a little deceptive. Like... I mean I couldn't do them in any other thing but paint; but then... I'm a (laughing) painter. I mean—Do you know—I don't know how to answer your question really. It's a good question; but I wouldn't do

them in wood, or constructions, or something like that. That they are paintings and they're painted is very important.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: Well, sometimes I would like to paint them flatter than they are; but I make... mistakes. Sometimes I build up layers of paint because I do want—I know what I'm doing and I want another color under another color. But other times there is a build-up of paint because I don't like it. I work very slowly, and after... Things will sit for a while, and then I'll see what I want, and change it a lot. And sometimes I do take off the canvas and throw it away—and start again. But I find that for some reason, although that is a *safer* way to do it, I find that very unsatisfying; it's like... I don't know. I like to develop them very slowly on the same surface. So they actually get sometimes very gunky, but—Does that answer your question? Yeah.

Question: You mentioned that at a certain point in New York you wanted to move your painting into the kind of mainstream. I wonder if you could say a little bit about what the issues are that you think constitute such a mainstream today.

Speaker: Well... I don't think that the same kind of issue—First of all, I think one of the positive things about art right now is that there are fewer and fewer issues, really. I mean, not if you read art criticism; but if you talk to artists who are working and who are involved in just doing their work. The issues in *my opinion*—I could find people who I would disagree—really there *aren't* any issues anyway, you know; it's like just working... But *then*... one of the things that seemed to be quite an issue was whether one should paint or not. I mean that was the time of Minimalism... Minimalist sculpture; and performance and conceptual art was like gaining a very strong hold, you know, like again; and... I felt sort of pleased to be out of it in some kind of rebellious way, in terms of being a *painter*; like that didn't—in fact I thought that was exciting. But certainly one of the issues that were around then was whether you painted, for instance, abstract paintings or representational paintings; or what side of the fence you were on in terms of a very traditional kind of form or a very *untraditional* kind of form. And I suppose that still goes on. But it doesn't seem as important. I mean... I don't hear so much about whether one is doing performances or whether you're... you know doing something that you hang on a wall. And most of the young people that I know who are in New York don't seem to be as involved in those kinds of categories of what you do and how it looks. 'Cause it's—I guess I know it's always gone on; but as I get older I find it very (laughs) uninteresting... and unhelpful too.

Question: It seems when you (unintelligible)

Speaker: I can't hear you. I'm sorry...

Question: There's a lot of figurative elements in your recent work, it seems to me; and I wanted to ask you if you feel that you might be getting more specific with the figurative elements that are in it.

Speaker: ... I think I am; but I'm not sure that I like that. But I'll do it, until it finishes. (laughs) But... yeah. Like I see like real clear shaped things that feel about figure things; and... I'll just paint through that until—I would rather not go to... get very close to the figure. Like that's just saying like what I would like, like how one would—the kind of thing I would like to paint is not about so much figuration, but it—I see what you're seeing, too.

Question: What—Why would (unintelligible)

Speaker: I don't know... exactly. I really can't answer your question. I'm just not that interested in doing that. There's some other kind of thing that's more exciting for me to explore... that is personal, to me— Like I'm not putting down that way of painting at all... or that possibility. If... It's never been like as miraculous to me to do—not to look at. I like looking at it; but doing it has never felt like as exciting or miraculous as trying to do something different with shapes and forms and colors. Any more questions?

Question: Yeah. (unintelligible) more or less conscious decision to (unintelligible)

Speaker: (laughs) And I'm regretting that phrase. (laughter)

Question: It seems like your art does a real shift from... as you put it, an eccentric concern to (unintelligible) and the paintings now seem less personal (unintelligible) whether you think a certain degree of impersonality (unintelligible)

Speaker: Well... It's how you're looking at it, so it doesn't—So the validity is your validity. I mean like that's—it's hard for me to really say—like give you an answer, because I don't feel the way that you feel.

Question: Well, but you did mention more or less that you were (unintelligible) some eccentricity—

Speaker: Okay. Like I felt that the kind of stuff I was working with was almost too esoteric. And I also felt that it was about a kind of like—my own psychology that was resolved... in my own self. And I felt like a lot of the work I'd been doing was almost therapeutical. And I think that's fun; I don't have anything against that. But there's a way where I really felt the desire to try to speak out in a more clear way, to—not just form myself and in my own tiny way, but in a kind of bigger way. I don't think I can give you a better definition in terms of that; but that was what I meant when I was talking about mainstream... like just having a more open kind of vision... that I thought was in me and I thought I was able to do. Where I began to run into trouble with that... happened when I was in California, like I began to feel that I was working—I was really repeating myself; and that it was getting too... I would say impersonal, in a sense... The only reason I wouldn't say impersonal is that I'd just never done anything, ever, for myself; so it hasn't been—it hasn't felt like it's come from... me-- (laughs) and that it's had much more to with... my own inner feelings than the outside. That's an illusion, of course, because everything we all do has so much to do with just walking outside for two

minutes, you know, like every day; but... I do have that illusion. In the last work that I've been doing, it just doesn't feel that way to me; it feels like it's... still open. But I don't know. Like... it doesn't feel impersonal to me... is all I can say.

Question: A lot of your work reminds me of some of Georgia O'Keeffe's early works... (unintelligible) shapes; especially the ones you did in New York remind me of (unintelligible) My question is, was there any conscious influence on your work from Georgia O'Keeffe.

Speaker: Not really. I've always liked her work, but—

Question: You have the same sort of fascination with shapes... that I see in her work....

Speaker: Right... Yeah.

Question: How do you get your initial shapes.

Speaker: ... I don't—I don't do that much drawing; I work them out on the canvas.

Question: (unintelligible) mean the visual structure—the *initial* structure of your paintings.

Speaker: Oh, the perimeters, the stretchers. Well... I just draw them... on a big piece of white paper; and when I work them out I... make a template; and I give it to the person who makes my stretchers for me.

Question: So it's more or less... intuitive... (unintelligible)

Speaker: Yeah... They're very hard to build, because I don't work out the angles and... stuff. (laughs)

Question: When you're building your sheet of canvas how come you always work (unintelligible) but how come they're always angular like (unintelligible)

Speaker: I just haven't wanted to make a circular shape... or a curved shape.

Question: Yeah. Well I noticed that a lot of the shapes inside are sort of curved, more curved—

Speaker: Right... It just hasn't come up to make a curved... outer shape.... I don't have any desire to.

Question: You mentioned that you felt kind of embarrassed about your earlier works. Could you just expound on that a little bit? Why are you... (unintelligible)

Speaker: Well... You really want me to answer that question? (laughs) (laughter) They're just things—This may be just me—that I've done that I've burned... because when I've looked at them later I've not been able to relate to them at all, almost as though they came out of a different person, although I know that *I* did it. (laughter) And... some things... perhaps it would be nice to see your body of work that you've developed so far... at any point in your life as one steady stream of masterpieces, or whatever. And as I look back at my work I don't see that at all; and my embarrassment isn't so severe that I wouldn't show them to you, but... That's all... really. It doesn't seem like a really serious thing to me; I think it's a reality that I've done lots of things that I don't think are very good. And I think one of the funny parts for me is that when I was doing them I thought they were really fantastic...to me, to do them; and I'm very glad right now that I did them. But I think it's a good exercise, because it makes me realize that what I'm doing now I may look back on five or six years from now, and say, "Yikes, I thought that was really good, and it doesn't look so fabulous." I think that's a continual process, too, in working.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: It's not technical, no. It's more a psychological state maybe. Like I don't feel that connected to doing them; and I think that there may be very—looking at them—gee, it's so unresolved... and I left it in that state, and... I would say that there's a kind of spirit in anyone's work, if you look at it—you're sincere, that's... meaningful, (laughs) always. Yes.

Question: (unintelligible) which do you find more important: technique or conceptions?

Speaker: Well, I would—I think intuition is the word I would use—and conception... that technique doesn't mean very much to me—and I'm not very good at it, either. (laughs) I'm not too much of a technician. And... as it happens, like oil paint is a very good medium for someone like myself to use, because I don't like—It's very direct; and it's very simple. And you can't—some people here might disagree with me, but although—once you begin to understand its complexities—it has vast complexities—but it isn't something that I find absolutely impossible to grasp. But as a technician... I am not a great technician, and I don't think about it at all, really. Okay? (Applause)

END OF RECORDING