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

**Lecture by Philip Pearlstein
Summer, 1986**

Transcriber: Judith Stoodley

INTRO (Emma Amos): Good evening. It's wonderful to have so many visitors here. I'm Emma Amos, resident faculty at Skowhegan; and I'm so pleased to be able to introduce Philip Pearlstein who's been a hero of mine for many years. He's a person who has been able to keep a lot of us going just by his example; and I don't think it's important to go into all the things. You've seen the books over at the Gab Lab; I just want you to hear Philip Pearlstein tonight. Thank you. (Applause)

Philip Pearlstein: Thank you. Could we start with the slides please? Just—

SLIDE

This is one of the more recent paintings.... I recently moved into a new studio, and for the first time I have a kind of view out of a window. (laughter) But... the painting is five feet high and six feet wide; and... it's representative of my major (BREAK) in that... I guess my take-off point a long time ago was the idea of finding abstraction in nature—not bending nature to look abstract, or to force it into kind of Cubist patterns—but to find the kind of things that I had... figured out for myself from looking at the masters of 20th century art. My major influence, I guess, was—were the Abstract Expressionist painters... and the idea that excited me most about

their work at the time... was the kind of structures they were arriving at... large lin—well, with Franz Kline, for instance, large linear movements that—where you sense the brush moving across the canvas... And one day it occurred to me that painting exists in time, rather than instantaneously. When most of us look at a painting we want to see it immediately and then pass on. I forget the... ratio of time that most people spend per painting in museums; but it's not very much. It's a fraction of a minute. But if you stand and look at a painting, you become aware of all sorts of things going on in it.... It's a hallucinatory experience. If you look at an early—let's say a typical 1912 or 1913 painting by Kandinsky, with all those lines flying around... it—you know, if you just glance at it you just see a bunch of lines flying around. But if you give it time, your eyes ride along those lines, travel along them; and you spend time in that painting. And it's that kind of thing that I've been trying to do with Realism... And so I've used the movements of the models' limbs... and torsos and so-forth, and the aspects of architecture, to give me those movements. In the course of that I had to learn about how to develop a surface so that it looks like it has a real particular texture and... that it reflects light in a certain way... and so on... which made it very interesting... which made *Realism* very interesting. How do I turn that up?

Comment: I turn it. Do you want it on?

Speaker: No, I want the light off.

Comment: Okay.

SLIDE

Speaker: That's it. Right. This is just a close-up. But... I spend as much time while the model is sitting there... on painting all of those details... as I do on the model. And after I've painted all the details of all the buildings—at least that my eyes could pick, sort of point by point—I then painted in all the—that chicken wire in the windows. And the model sat there all that time. The painting went over a period of about six months, working on it, usually, one session per week, a session being about five hours of actual working time.

SLIDE

I'm showing this stuff... because in a way, I guess, the title of this talk is "How I Missed the Boat... But Found the Snug Harbor Anyway." (laughter) This is current graffiti on a subway in New York; you see it on all the trains. And, of course, a couple of years ago it became a very big force in the art scene. And... suddenly there it was at the Sidney Janus Gallery, a lot of these young people having by-passed the whole structure of the cultural setup and emerged as superstars. And it was an interesting phenomenon to observe, because it could not have happened earlier. And, like everybody else who's ever, even vaguely, thought of getting to being shown at the Sidney Janus Gallery, you wondered how this happened. And... So I actually wrote an article, where I spent a lot of time at it trying to analyze how it happened. And... of course it's easy. Once you get into it, you realize that a lot of 20th century art, late 19th century art, has been leading up to it. This is—I mean *I* appreciate this because it looks so much like... say a Miro, or... any other number of painters you can name. Paul Klee.... A lot of graffiti looks like Jackson Pollock. A lot of it goes back, I think—I mean our *appreciation of it* goes back to what happened in the 1880's in Paris, when it suddenly became fashionable for artists like Degas to ignore, or to turn their backs on, on the academic training they had, and to get involved in... *essentially* what they were doing in their sketchbooks, a kind of scribbling technique... fast notations. And if you look at the notebooks of Degas, which are now being published for the first time, you find all kinds of weird things going on. A lot of it looks like David Salle... I mean *amazingly* like David Salle. A lot of it's grotesque caricature... but none of it has to do with the kind of drawing we associate with Degas when we think of Degas. And that was true of his prints... A lot of, you know—what do call it? The mono prints... which have become popular, say in the last twenty years, simply weren't known before. All this stuff has emerged recently. But because of that emergence, and the... coincidence with the last years of Picasso, to say nothing of the periodic revival of abstract expressionism, we're all tuned in to the kind of sketchbook scribbling as a dominant stylistic way of working.

SLIDE

The figure's by Richard Hambleton; and I think the other graffiti's by other people who came along later. Hambleton did these all over New York; they're life-size figures sort of lurking exactly where you would expect to see somebody lurking, (laughs) you know; in alleyways they're... rather scary. But again, the aesthetic appreciation, I think, has very little to do with what he did, but a great deal to do with this tradition out of modern art... that discarded careful drawing or careful development of anything, and went into... again the sketchbook sketching kind of drawing, and—where *accidents* become important. I even—When I was doing that article I came across statements by Delacroix talking against photography as... building up a certain kind of expectation for... Realism that the artist would have to turn his back on in order to make a coherent picture. He would have to ignore a lot of what his eye actually saw.... And statements by writers—Well, George Moore is one I quoted who made a fantastic statement about... “Art cannot be taught in schools; it cannot be taught as cooking is taught; and... it doesn't matter how badly you draw or paint as long as you don't draw or paint badly like somebody else.” (laughter)

SLIDE

That was in the 1880's. This is Kenny Scharf; it was one of— It was the installation he did at the Whitney Biennial, I guess now about three years ago. But I've been fascinated by this... kind of use of... I guess kind of cartoon imagery along with everything else, which all comes out of that same pool of 20th century thought, largely because the people who wrote about this stuff when it first appeared at the Janus Gallery, and at the Whitney, and so on, in articles on the graffiti in the subways, made no reference at all that I can remember to what is really one of the main streams of 20th century art. This is inconceivable without certain works of Miro, again... Kandinsky... Chagall... Picasso... and so on. But none of them were mentioned—to say nothing of Peter Saul—when this work was being lavishly praised. But it struck a particular note for me because I felt that it's what—I related to it because I had been playing around with ideas like that when I was... much younger. This is actually the last painting I did when I was in college. I guess I graduated in 1949... But I was working on... as a draughtsman... on catalogs for... industrial plumbing... and window fixtures and so on. The big hulking skeleton shape came—are actually shapes that I drafted for a catalog on extruded aluminum window frames; those are cross

sections. (laughter) And the yellow shape down below was a window lock; and I turned it into a self-portrait, screaming at this—in front of this huge skeleton.

SLIDE

This is one of the pages I did for one of those catalogs; and it was one of those—I took one of these... shower units; these are showers for... institutions...

SLIDE

... and I used it in this painting, where it's attacking a young girl. (laughter) And it has a very aggressive spigot, (laughs) which is like a penis. The girl's figure came from an inkblot on my drafting table; and all those other shapes also I traced from my drafting table. I worked for many years doing this kind of stuff. It's a skill I picked up in the United States Army. I was drafted at the age of eighteen, and... fortunately the year before I had won National Scholastic High School contests; and... had paintings reproduced in *Life* Magazine, which just accidentally happened to write up the show that year. And so that issue of *Life* Magazine functioned as a passport, for me, through the United States Army through the years of World War II. I was tossed into the Infantry, of course; and every time I got in a tight situation I would show this article to the nearest officer; and I'd be assigned to painting signs, or... (laughter) training charts. But I worked—In those situations I worked with men who had been commercial artists; and I picked up a great deal of my knowledge about whatever... you want to call it, of just technical skills from them, about lettering, spacing, drafting, perspective, and so on. In a crazy way my art is a product of the United States Infantry. (laughter)

SLIDE

And so is my schooling. I went to school on the GI Bill; and after I finished undergraduate work as... a painting major, I went up to New York to get involved in commercial, because in those days that's all there was—Or at least from where I was in Pittsburgh it seemed like that's all there was. So I went up to New York to be a commercial artist, and I got a job because of my

experience in working on those catalogs.... I spent the next eight years working on *more* catalogs; and also ended up working at *Life* Magazine doing editorial work. It's all called *mechanicals and paste-ups*. Today it's given a dignified title of graphic design. Well... I... went to work in New York for a man who was one of the great graphic designers of his time, in Europe, during the years before—during—well, after World War I and before World War II; and he had come to America as a... -- to sell off the materials that had been accumulated for building the Czech Pavilion, which he had designed—He had been sent by the Germans when they took over Czechoslovakia in 1939; and had become... head of this large organization called “Sweet’s Catalogs,” that puts out these big industrial catalogs every year for the building trades. He was the most sophisticated man I’ve ever met; and he... said, “All American art students are stupid and are badly educated... and are ignorant... and illiterate.” And he was—as far as—in my case was concerned, he was absolutely right. And he talked me into going to study art history. I applied to the wrong school and got accepted. That was NYU Institute of Fine Arts, which was the toughest art history program in the country... and... where I had to learn to read and write English for the first time in my life; and to take notes; and then to go on into a second language, which I actually managed somehow... And I actually got a degree in art history. And... it was a miserable experience. But I kept working for this fellow whose name was “Latis Lavsutner” all during that time. It took me five years to get the degree; and... the odd thing was... I picked—as the subject for my thesis—the work of Francis Picabia, who was hardly known at the time... and Marcel Duchamp, who *also* was not known at them time. And what interested me was their use of machine shapes—taken from catalogs very often—as acting out roles, you know, human roles... given human personas [sic], in funny little comedies, with very esoteric titles. You had to translate their titles to get at the meaning of the story and to know the background. They really weren’t interested in communicating to the public; they did their work just for their own small circle, which included people like Ezra Pound, who were tuned—and Gertrude Stein—who were tuned in to their little jokes. And I actually made a contribution to the history of 20th century art by deciphering both of their works, Duchamp’s and Picabia’s, as being-- at least for a period of ten years, all of their major works involved around telling of the sexual adventures of a young woman. Duchamp’s woman he simply called “The Bride;” and Picabia’s was called... Well, in English it’s “The Child Born Without a Mother,” which translates as the machine. One of the things that I got out of the study of art history was a fascination with careers, how things

develop—you know, like the Renaissance and so on. And I've been sort of concerned about how my own career has developed. And all I can see it—I see it as a series of accidents... of kind of accidental... happy... timing. While I was working on my thesis on Picabia he died; and I was suddenly the world's leading expert on Picabia, which was no great shakes, you know, for most people... But I was asked by both Tom Hess of *Art News* and Hilton Kramer of *Arts* to try to work up articles. At the time I think I picked Thomas Hess of *ArtNews* to show it to first because that seemed to be the more important magazine. And... he said it was far too serious. He said, "Dada's all bubbles and champagne." And I said, "It's not. They were... nihilists; they wanted to destroy Western civilization through art." But he rejected the article. But Hilton Kramer published it. This became important only because I had my first one-man show roughly about the same time that the article was published in *Arts Magazine*, which just at that time introduced a brand new big, glamorous format. They'd been a scrawny little magazine before that of about eight pages every two weeks; now suddenly it was this huge, slick publication, and my article was the longest article they'd ever published, and it had lots of illustrations. And coming out at the same time as I had the one man show was... interesting, to say the least. And... it also meant this Kramer sent down somebody to review the show that he thought would do a good job, and so did Thomas Hess. So my first show received very good attention from both magazines. I got off the track a little there, but I'm showing this because—This is by—the large self-portrait of Van Gogh reinterpreted as a woodblock print is by some contemporary German artist whose name I can't think of; but again, it's startling that a lot of the current subject matter of contemporary art that falls vaguely into the... you know, orbit of graffiti influence... is reference to other works of art. And that's what I did while I was studying art history. While I was at the Institute of Fine Arts I began a series of paintings based on slides that were shown in some of the lectures; and this is a painting by—I mean a—I'm sorry, (laughs) it's a painting of mine, but based on a sculpture by Verrocchio in Venice. All I kept was the outline; and you can see influence at this point of... I guess Philip Guston probably, more than anybody else, if you ignore the lines. The painting's about five feet square. It was done around 19... I guess 1951....

SLIDE

But this was my major work of that period... (laughter) which also has a reference. It's—I found it in the comic book; but it is Superman exactly in the attitude of Michelangelo's "God Separating Day From Night" on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. And here Superman's keeping two missiles from colliding over New York City. So I loved that kind of double meaning; and I was all involved in meanings of works on many layers; and.... At this point I wanted to become a member of a co-op gallery that had started. You have to remember, there were very few galleries that would show contemporary art in New York in the early 1950's. And most of them were not interested in anybody under the age of... at least 35. So a group of young artists—or a couple of groups of young artists started their own galleries; and... I knew somebody... a couple of people in one of those groups called the Tanager Gallery; and I invited them up to see my work. And I remember they came up; they saw the paintings; and I think it included a Statue of Liberty, a couple of other—a Dick Tracy.... There were a couple of others in that series and... there was a stony silence... and I knew I'd never succeed with that group. So this is where I missed the boat; and I started looking for ways to change my style.

SLIDE

Well this was another—a somewhat earlier painting done from a little sketch I had done of a classical torso in the Metropolitan Museum. And I simply redid all of my paintings. Some of the images I kept; others I painted over. This is the same—at least the *idea* of the torso, only now it's done as a shredded living body... being ripped apart. Well the painting became important in my career... again by accident; 'cause I was invited to be in a Christmas show at the Tanager Gallery, which was a very small space. I forget the exact dimensions... something like fifteen feet wide and twenty-five feet long... was this gallery; and there were about a hundred small works of art in it. And just at that time Clement Greenberg was putting on shows every year at the Kootz Gallery, which was the big glamorous gallery at that time, called "Emerging Talent." And other people in the gallery called it "Emergency Talent," (laughter) because he would put the show together whenever one of the regular gallery members cancelled, or didn't have enough work. (laughter) And... this time he had a group of young artists that he had found in Washington, D.C., who were doing things with color, including, you know, Morris Louis, and... Oh... God, I can't remember names any more. The stripes. Vertical stripes.

Comments: (various)

Speaker: Who? Gene Davis, right. And... Well, there were a couple of others. And... he wanted to fill out the show with some New York people. So he did the logical thing; he came down to the Tanager Gallery, and he picked about seven people from that show, including me. And he invited himself to my studio to choose the works that would be in the show. When he came to the studio he asked me to line everything up around the walls... around the four walls of the room. And then he shut his eyes and whirled around. (laughter) (laughs) And when he opened his eyes, the first painting that caught his attention was the one that was for the show. And that was this painting. I said nothing about it being a torso... and... he liked it. And...it was in the show. Then... the next thing that happened was that... There was—Before Hilton Kramer took over *Arts Magazine*, there was an editor whose name was... “Hub Kreyon”.... And *Arts Magazine* at that point, as I say, was this eight page publication that came out twice a month, and had all the reproductions, which were only in black and white, grouped in one center page. And... in the issue that came out just then, this painting was reproduced very large... in that centerfold, with other very well-known artists’ works reproduced very small around it. And a couple of years later, I met—I was introduced to “Kreyon”, and he told me the story of why he did that. It was very important that he did it, again in my career, because the following week I was invited to become a member of an uptown gallery which was called “The Peridot”. (Perry Dove?) So those things carry weight, I discovered. And... “Kreyon” said he had picked that painting—Well, it was his last issue. He’d been fired from his job for a number of reasons, I guess; and he was about to move out to the West coast... and he picked this painting because he thought it was so ugly and awful... and it was his way of thumbing his nose at the New York art world. (laughter) (laughs) But it... did wonders for me. (laughter) But most of my works then went into this... next phase of painting from rocks. I picked up rocks on the—out at Montauk Point; and... would hold them in my hand and paint them as if they were real landscapes—only where some disaster had happened... or something disastrous *was* going to happen and so on. So they fitted into the Expressionist scene of that era... and I carried on like that for a number of years, and had a fairly decent career going.

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I got a Fulbright, and went to Italy, and painted much larger rocks on the Amalfi coast. This painting is eight feet high, and... six feet wide. But this was 19... 1960, just at the end of the Abstract Expressionist era, which was more or less symbolized by the death of Franz Kline, and the sudden emergence of a whole— You just saw it around in all the galleries; instead of seeing Abstract Expressionism in every gallery you went to, other things started to be shown. A new kind of use of geometry, for instance. People like Red Grooms were suddenly on view. So there was a whole—You could sense a change in time; and a lot of—Suddenly there were things like Op art, Pop art, Color-field... and the beginnings of Realism. I forget some of those other forms of art that suddenly came up that wouldn't have been permissible a few years before. So it was almost like a... ice—whatever you call it, when an ice field breaks up and things begin to flow. It was a very exciting moment. But the show where I had all these very large ambitious paintings was a little too late. I had already—again—missed the boat. Expressionism had—was over for the moment... which was just as well, because I got involved in work—was getting involved in working from the figure. I joined a group... most of whom were teaching at Pratt Institute, and I began teaching there at that time too, in 1959, after I came back from Italy. I was hired at Pratt to teach art history; and I taught survey courses under—for George McNeil, and a course called “History of Art Workshop” in the Foundation Program. And I began teaching at Brooklyn College, where I was hired primarily for my commercial art background as a graphic designer. Nobody ever hired me because I was a painter, (laughs) but that's how I got into teaching. And... But at any rate, a group of people teaching at Pratt got together Sunday nights and began drawing in the... well, mostly in the studio of Mercedes Matter, later Lois Dodd's... studio. And that group kept drawing every Sunday night for about the next twelve years. Sometimes it met on Friday nights, I think. And... there were a number of terrific people who drew there, including George—at the beginning George McNeil, Philip Guston... Paul Georges... Oh, I can't remember other names. Later on a lot of those people dropped out and other people came in... like Alex Katz, Ann Arnold... Who else? Anyway, it just kept evolving and kept going, and... I was producing these... this bundle like everybody else, the bundle of drawings of the figure, which I began painting from as I'd painted from those rocks earlier.

SLIDE

And this was one of the first paintings I did when I was just trying to find my way.

SLIDE

Again... I wrote an article. I—After that article on Picabia I went on to write about ten articles for Tom Hess for *Art News Magazine*, always on different subjects... not really as a critic, just kind of doing stories. And he asked me to do... something on a show that the Museum of Modern Art held called “Figure Painting USA.” Something like that... It was an open competition; and... it was after their... exhibition that had been called “New Images of Man,” which had all—you know, was all about Expressionism, and... every figure in it was all ripped to shreds, and torn and tattered... And I remember people referring to the “New Images of Man” show as the Buchenwald show. And... this open competition show I think was about two years later. And I went to the Museum of Modern Art storerooms, where I saw... all the work that had been rejected and... as well as the work that had been accepted... by the jury. And... it was—Something hit me. All the work that approached being realistic had been rejected. Everything—not everything, but those that approached abstraction were accepted. And so I began wondering as I started the article, trying to figure out why, in 19... I think it was '61 or '62—why at that time it would be so difficult for an artist who knew all about modern art to paint a picture of the human figure in a really defined space... and come up with a picture that would be convincing as a painting, that could hold its own in company with any other painting... and why it would be so difficult at that time for a sophisticated audience to accept such a picture. So the article actually became a series of discussions of art problems. I don't want to go into those now; but during the course of writing it I really defined for myself what my course of action would be. I sort of laid out a program for myself in the article; and I've spent the next—whatever it is—almost thirty years trying to work out that scheme. But by the time I had submitted the article, it was too late to be a review of the show, and it really had nothing to do with the show; so somebody else actually reviewed the show, and Hess ran my article just as a separate article. And it was called “Figure Paintings Today Are Not Made In Heaven.” And about the same time I wrote another article for Hilton Kramer called “Whose Painting Is It Anyway?”-- This was long before the play

of a similar title showed up on Broadway-- in which I tried to come to terms with the idea that... paintings cannot, on their own, really convey meanings as you would want them to be conveyed—as the artist would want them to be conveyed. (Coughs) Pardon me. In other words, Van Gogh spent all that time writing all those letters... to his brother and to others... defining exactly what each color and each brush stroke would mean... but when you look at the paintings, you don't get that. You don't... commit suicide in front of... the painting of the billiard room, as he wanted you to. You know, it looks nice; and people hang it up as a reproduction in their... rooms... to live with... which... is not what he wanted. (laughter) And... I more or less based that idea on the fact that I'd spent so many—really about two and a half years—trying to decipher Picabia's and Duchamp's works. And what did it mean? It meant nothing to me; it didn't make their work any more or less acceptable to anybody else. And why bother? What really counts is how the work is done. The reason Duchamp became—has become—famous and a leading figure in 20th century art, and Picabia *still* is relatively in the background—that Duchamp took all those ideas, and did them with a great deal more pictorial elegance; and resolved them in a really new way. And it was his inventions that counted, his *pictorial* inventions, (unintelligible)—whatever you want to call it—and the elegance with which they were carried out that counted, not the ideas. I mean, who knows the meaning of that big painting “The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even.” You know, the one on glass. But it's really one of the great works of 20th century art. And... I decided—So I could abandon subject matter. And that article really was my own way of talking myself into accepting the fact of—that I was painting nudes who I—I mean models... who took off their clothes when they came to my studio... and they posed for me because that's a conventional thing that goes on in artists' studios, and has always gone on, and that it had no other meaning than that... Whatever my impulses were... I didn't want to know, either. I've never been analyzed. And I don't want to be. (laughs) But it's been hard to put across that idea, that a painting like this means *nothing*, other than two models sitting there. But... it has, for me, all kinds of pictorial meaning. But this was the first large-scale painting that I did directly from life; 'cause, when I finished that article, the first one, “Figure Paintings Are Not Made In Heaven,” I... felt if I were going to really develop as a figure painter, or as a realist, I really had to work directly from life all the way, not just from the drawings I had made from the models. And so my then dealer, Alan Frumkin, very generously offered to lend me money—to advance me money against future sales to hire models

with... and to paint from. And the future sales really didn't take place for a number of years; but he kept up this advance of money; and... I made full use of it. And this painting was done within, I think, the first three months of when I worked directly from the models. What's... interesting to me now—One of the things that's interesting is that... this painting was done from drawings of the same two models; and here I had translated them into white people, without even thinking about it...

SLIDE

... and they are here obviously black—one is black, the other mulatto. I wasn't making a point; it just was done from observation. But just at that time the political climate was changing in America. Everybody was suddenly yelling and screaming; anti-war things were popping up all over the place; and suddenly Black Liberation Movement was taking place... Women's Lib... Gay Rights and all that. Nobody was sitting back any more... and confrontation became the big word. And I remember being on a panel somewhere with Alfred Leslie... It was also with Alex Katz—Alfred Leslie, Alex Katz and myself. And Alfred suddenly defined us; he said, "We're making paintings about confrontation." So suddenly we had *political meaning*... (laughs) which I never cared too much about, but it was an interesting idea.

SLIDE

Anyway, this is a very recent painting. It was in my last show... I'm now at the Hirschl and Adler Modern Gallery. And it still has all the same formal concerns about the movement across the canvas... and the use of detail as... points of visual tension, or whatever you want to call them... whatever Hans Hofmann called "push and pull;" or what I got from—(laughter) What are you doing... staring at Mondrian? No, no. Go back.

SLIDES BACK

No... We want that other one. During the years I was studying art history, I—My original thesis subject was the work of Mondrian, 'cause I'd read through all his essays that had been translated

into English and tried to put it together for myself in another article which never came off. (Coughs) But Mondrian was really not painting lines... or squares; for him those were all highly symbolic items. And he had some great scheme in his mind that had to do with... universalities and all sorts of things like that... Rosicrucianism... and... his paintings he thought were meant to be a demonstration of how you live, of how we have to maintain all the opposing forces that are trying to crush us, how we maintain them in balance. And someone—I explained this to someone who pointed out that those were exactly the same years that the idea of the League of Nations was being formulated on the political scene, you know, during World War II. And that was an interesting idea. But I remember... and the museums were not crowded then; that was an important point. You could go to the Museum of Modern Art, as I did; and I stood in front of Mondrian's "Broadway Boogie Woogie," I think it was.... I had it all to myself; and I remember staying there for about an hour, just staring at it. And it became hallucinatory. All those little squares suddenly, at a certain point, began moving around. They were floating up and down, and diagonally... off. I mean it has to do with the after image and all those color theories we learn about. But it actually happens, if you give it time. And that's what, when I started talking, what was in my mind. And that's how I used detail in these set-ups... all those little points on the rug—the toes, fingers, fingernails, toenails, lips, knuckles—all of those become little points for me that are *moving*. And, as I paint them they almost become hallucinatory. And my experience of the painting is of painting it, not of looking at it after it's finished.

SLIDE

I think that's probably true of all painters and their works—or any artist. Well, I went back to landscape, also as a fully developed new—

(AUDIO BREAK)

...five foot square... and I stood there, counting all of those stripes and all of those adobe bricks, because I knew that someday somebody coming along would count them. And... as I was working there people would keep coming up to me and asking, "What are—" First they'd ask, "What are you doing?" (laughs) (laughter) And then the next question is, "Why not do it from a

photograph?” And they were right. You could do it from photograph, except working from photographs simply would not have that intense experience that I get of fastening on detail by detail, and letting it fill my whole vision as I’m working on it, developing it. Again, that kind of hallucinatory aspect....

SLIDE

This is a detail.

SLIDE

And that’s in the field. I guess I was thinner! (laughs) (laughter) This was a set-up at the American Academy in Rome... in 1982. The Academy has one of those great old... 17th century villas that belonged to the Farnesi family; and it was from this rooftop that... Garibaldi conducted his first attempt to take Rome away from the French. And I went up on the roof and I decided that the best view was from this corner... That... had to be where he stood; and... so I did a watercolor from that view...

SLIDE

... which is this. And I’ve done a number of... such views. But this is a watercolor I did... probably—I guess I was nineteen or twenty at the time; and this was after the war ended in Italy... and those were German prisoners of war... and... at that time I was running a sign shop, (laughs) doing—We produced signs for all the roadways around Florence, the city of Florence. And... some of these men worked under my direction in the sign shop. They were German professional artists, a few of them. But the reason I’m showing it is that it’s not any different than I would paint now; and I find that in a way curiously disappointing, (laughs) after all this time to come back to the same point.

SLIDE

This was a drawing I did in Rome then... American soldiers eating ice cream, with the Italians on the outside of the fence looking in. But years later I discovered they always do that; it was not peculiar to the wartime situation.

SLIDE

This is a recent watercolor. It's five feet high... and these are slides of the work in progress.

SLIDE

I guess each of these slides would represent about... a four hours work session....

SLIDE

I've eliminated some in the series just to save time.

SLIDE

SLIDE

But... as I look at it now, the startling thing to me is that it's developed the way... I think a layout artist would develop a picture... worrying about the whole scheme first... of the layout; and I always think in terms of measurements. Those years of drafting have forever embedded a ruler in my mind; and I look at the world through units of measurement, either picas or inches. I've never figured out millimeters. And... I simply subdivide everything and measure distances. That's the way I draw... and that's the way I fill in the color areas... and then measure the colors against one another the same way.

SLIDE

But I re-did this—The models are in exactly the same position... but I liked the set-up as seen from this side, which I became aware of while I was working on the watercolor. So this was done as an oil painting. It's six foot square....

SLIDE

I've also—A lot of the way I work comes out not only from my background doing color separations and so forth; but... print making, which clarified a lot of things for me when I first got involved with it; and where I really relied on my background in commercial art for doing color separations, and thinking in terms of color separations as I developed the image. This was done at the University of Omaha; and the drawing is done directly on the stone, a large litho stone which is being held on a dolly, which I used as an easel, 'cause nobody could move the thing. So this was the initial drawing which will be the key plate. Eventually it—I forget which—I think it became the... more or less orange color; I'm not sure.

SLIDE

But... this is always a heart-stepping moment—(laughs) heart-*stopping* moment. The printers take your drawing; and they smear some stuff over it, which fixes it in some way that I've never understood; and then they wash your drawing off. At that moment you can lose it, (laughs) if they happened to have picked up the wrong bottle to wet their cloth with, which happens frequently. Never trust them.

SLIDE

And then after it's washed off they... smear some other stuff on, which fixes the image in some way.

SLIDE

And then, since lithography—This is gum arabic, I guess, which is being washed over it again; and it's rubbed down with that in preparation for printing. Lithography being based on the fact that oil and water don't mix. So... the part that the artist drew on with the grease pencil will hold the ink; the parts you didn't touch will hold water.

SLIDE

So...the printer gets enough ink on the roller, and he rolls it over your stone, over your drawing; and you begin to see your drawing again... which is a great relief. (laughter)

SLIDE

And then his assistant wipes it down with water in between rollings with the ink.

SLIDE

Then they dry it with a very primitive fan; I've never understood why they couldn't buy an electric hair blower.... (laughter) They put the paper on it...

SLIDE

... roll it through the press...

SLIDE

... and there's your impression. Now, to get the other colors onto the other stones, some printers do something very clever—at least when they work with me.

SLIDE

They—over the new impression, while the ink is still very wet, they dust... rust—They call it iron oxide... and... it adheres to the wet ink; and he shakes it off, and you have a rust-colored... print, the rust being held to the surface by the wet ink. That impression is then put face down on the next stone, and run through the press...

SLIDE

... so that the image is on the stone in that rust color... which you see here... that looks like the flesh color; but it allows you to add your next color in exactly the right place, so it can be carefully registered again in printing. And you do that for each of your successive colors.

SLIDE

So it's a very controlled situation. And this is two—Those two particular... colors being printed on the—in succession...

SLIDE

And that's the final image. I've done a number of such projects; and I would say roughly a quarter of them meet with disasters, technical disasters, in the print shop. So it's a very chancy...thing. You're lucky when one comes off.

SLIDE

Now I've also done a lot of aquatint etchings. I started doing them first to reproduce these watercolor landscapes—to re-create, not to reproduce—because I started getting involved with watercolor again as a way of predicting what will happen in print-making, in doing—working with aquatints, full color aquatints. So I've done a series of watercolors on site. This is in Monument Valley.

SLIDE

And that's the watercolor.

SLIDE

And that's another one. And I decided to take this cornier one as a subject for a print. I was feeling kind of Pop art... like.

SLIDE

And I make a tracing-- or I have somebody I hire make a tracing—of every mark, every change of tone... and to color key it, working with colored pencils. And then each of those color key areas is traced onto a copper plate.

SLIDE

Then I set up the original watercolor so I can see it in a mirror; and then I go about re-creating each color, layer by layer-- With aquatint you can work in about four or five bites and get distinct tonal differences. (Clears throat) I'm sorry. For each tonal change you have to paint out what you don't want to be bitten by the acid.

SLIDE

And so you get a series of strange-looking pictures, most of which look like modern art. (laughs)
(laughter)

SLIDE

These were all different stages; I just picked them at random... but you can see the white chalk marks.

SLIDE

But I love doing it; and I like these—looking at these stages that it goes through.

SLIDE

But the are all negative versions of areas of the watercolor. But I also can work with sugar-lift, in which you paint in the area that you *want* to print. And I use those for the finer details. And with sugar lift you—It's actually a kind of syrup; you paint it on the plate in the positive way; and then the whole plate is coated with lacquer... and then put in water... to soak. And somehow the water manages to seep through the lacquer, down to the layer of syrup, sugar syrup, and makes the sugar swell; and that cracks the lacquer off... and so the plate can then be put into the acid bath and it will—the acid will eat where the sugar was.

SLIDE

SLIDE

And this is the final... use of sugar-lift for this-- very small lines for the smallest, sharpest accents on the black plate... the key plate. And then lacquer was painted over this, only this time something went wrong, and the water seeped under all of the lacquer, not just where the sugar-lift was, and produced those large streaks that you see at the bottom—most clearly at the bottom of the painting, which looked like rain. There is no way of correcting it; so I went through the whole series of steps again. That's not infrequent.

SLIDE

And this is the final print.

SLIDE

But this was one of the first lithographs I did... I guess it was in 1959... so I think I've... Well, you—again, it's very Expressionistic looking; and... I just recently completed a print, an aquatint print *of* that view of Rome that I showed earlier. This was the first large-scale aquatint print I tried doing from the figure; and I worked directly from the model, on the copper plates. Even when I'm burnishing, refining those tonal areas... to soften edges and to develop other tones, intermediate tones... the model is sitting there, or lying there. This was printed in... only three colors, and they're just used almost decoratively here, the green floor and the red in the cloth.

SLIDE

But again, I—My pattern seems to be to get more complex as I go along; so this was the next one, and it's far more ambitious in terms of trying to get the color that was actually there in the scene in front of me... this time. It's on four plates.

SLIDE

And I did another—a series of landscapes... from—but picking sort of historic ruins, historic monuments, you know, like Stonehenge, or the Sphinx. Now the watercolor's being done on the actual site...

SLIDE

... and... again this was done from the model, whose arm became very sore... (unintelligible)
(laughter)

SLIDE

And this... again this is a print... The key plate, which had the hammock on it, which had taken so long to develop.... These plates have to be steel faced, so that you can actually print an edition... or the aquatint wears off very fast. You know, it's just a fine grain on the surface. The

plate fell off the holder, and... got over-plated... and got bent... and I think it was chrome plated rather than steel faced this time because... they didn't have a tub large enough to do the... steel facing in, the difference being that... steel facing you can reverse the electric plating process and remove... the steel facing, whereas the chrome plating cannot be removed. So they chrome plated it... and bent it... and it printed like wet white-bread; so it had to be totally redone... again.

SLIDE

This one is another large one; but I developed this image first as a computer graphic; it was a computer-generated image...which is nothing mysterious, I discovered. You can use the computer system just like a drawing tablet; and if—and with all my experience of doing these aquatints, it was simply a matter of getting used to seeing what I did on the screen, rather than on the paper, in front of me. It was part of a number of things I did to produce a video... tape... project—whatever you want to call it—that somebody did on me, which I have a copy of, that will be shown here Tuesday—I'm sorry—*Sunday night*, I think. It—

SLIDE

This is the most recent large... figure aquatint. It's about twice the size of the other...

SLIDE

... which means it's almost five feet wide... and this is... lithographs again; and then a tamarin.

SLIDE

SLIDE

(Transcriber's note: It's not clear whether the speaker shows additional slides in the section on Kissinger's portrait which follows. From the comments and flow of the laughter, it sounds as though there might have been, but I was unable to hear the sound of slide changes)

And I occasionally do portraits. I do portraits all the time, very seldom on commission, though; but this was done for *Time* Magazine; and it was done shortly after I'd been to Egypt and had painted the Sphinx. (laughter) And... it was really a closely related venture, 'cause Kissinger... expected me to come and take a photograph and then leave... but he had agreed to sit for it while I painted from life, which was the condition I had set up for doing the painting. So I spent two days with him; and he insisted on at least being allowed to read while I worked. And he also had a very large dog, that was bigger than I am... (laughter) in the room, a Doberman; and he... said, "If you drop anything, just leave it. (speaker laughs) Don't reach down." (laughter) But he read from these large ledger books about the Russians. (laughter) This was—At the time he was writing his memoirs; and the occasion for the portrait on the cover of *Time* had to do with the publication of the first volume of his memoirs... and he was now beginning to work on his second, so he was getting his background. He kept reading about the Russians, and kept saying, "The bastards! The liars!" (laughs) (laughter) But they were large books and he read very fast, and so his head kept moving...

SLIDE

(laughs) You can see... (laughter) if you get that... (laughs) (laughter) And then he—And then the phone would ring and he would disappear for a couple of hours; and I'd sit there with the dog... (laughter) and it (laughs) was like that (laughter). I have another tray of slides which I'll run through very fast. They're mostly of works in... progress slides. (pause while tray is changed)

SLIDE

This was the only one of my paintings that could be shown publicly in Japan... because they have something against body hair. The consider body hair obscene, and will not show a painting

with body hair publicly. They will also not reproduce—you know, print a book with such paintings that show body hair in them. And the magazines and art books are always running into problems with the censors there. The painting is five feet high, six feet wide.

SLIDE

This one's... six feet high, eight feet wide.

SLIDE

And this is a view of Manhattan... which I also did as a print.

SLIDE

And... the view of Machu Pichu... in Peru.

SLIDE

And the Canyon de Chelley... in Arizona. Chelley is spelled C-h-e-l-l-e-y, you know, like Shelley; I don't know why they say "shay." It's a site called "The Mummy Cave Ruins," presumably because they found some mummies, or... figures that had... been naturally embalmed in the ruins. The ruins all date from... I think ten... hundreds through the twelve hundreds, when the site was abandoned. But to me it all—It looks like a huge mask; and with kind of Boris Karloff as Frankenstein's monster kind of hair... coming down—those black stains.

SLIDE

That was working on the site. I was on the opposite canyon wall, with a... I guess an eight hundred foot drop directly below me, and I was on a small ledge... and so... I tied everything down, because periodically a strong wind would come through; and I lashed a rope around myself. I got involved in this—I got out there because I'd been invited to be artist in residence at

the Navajo Community College for two weeks. When I got there, all the art students left. They were having a crafts fair somewhere; and jewelry was one of their big courses. So there were only one or two painting majors who had stayed behind... and they helped me set this up... find the place and get the stuff down... the top part of the cliff onto this little ledge... every day for about eight days—‘cause there was nothing else to do. I figured they might as well do a landscape too... these two students.

SLIDE

But the Navajo Community College is quite an institution. It's very beautiful, and in a spectacular site... and they have a community—I'm sorry, a cultural center that's a traditional hogan, a seven stories high kind of—you know, a kind of—I think it's seven sided or eight-sided... But it's all mirrored glass, so it looks like a science fiction set-up in this primeval landscape. But in it they had given me a retrospective show of about sixty works which they had gathered from all over the country. So I was quite amazed when I got there, ‘cause I really hadn't expected it. And I thought the throw away chic event of... whatever it was—1979.

SLIDE

Nobody saw it... except some kids who went through and giggled every morning... while I talked to them. (laughs) This was... I also worked on a lithograph on the site. There I am working on the plate... though my hand's wrapped with a paper towel to keep from getting my own grease all over the plate.

SLIDE

At Abu Simbel in Egypt....

SLIDE

This is on the site.

SLIDE

And sometimes I just work with pieces of furniture as the dominant idea.

SLIDE

This is using that same piece of furniture with two models.

SLIDE

And it's a watercolor that I... have as...

SLIDE

... is working sequence.

SLIDE

SLIDE

And then I did an eight foot square painting of it.

SLIDE

This is another portrait... that went through changes. It's Sidney and Francis Lewis, who are among the more important collectors of contemporary American art; and they've commissioned a number of artists to do their portraits, simply because there are such artists around now... who do portraits... as serious works of art. So I started this... to—It was to go into a hospital... in... I guess that they had given the money for... And the dimensions were given to me by the architect; it's five feet high and seven feet wide... and Sidney is sitting in the foreground and Francis is sitting behind. But Sidney's a very large man, and Francis is a very small woman...

and when I got this far and saw that big foot, I realized how small she was going to look... and that everybody would then read this painting as a sexist painting. (laughter) So without consulting them I washed this out and started over... putting Francis in the front. (laughs)

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

And unlike Kissinger, they were perfectly willing to *sit*. But I put up a little TV set right in front of my palette, so they were always looking towards me. (laughter) (laughs) And you can see it reflected in their eyeglasses. (laughter) I mean, this is the final painting. (laughter)

SLIDE

SLIDE

And think this slide sort of reveals everything—a lot of things about my work—or at least it did to me. There's a certain point beyond which I'm not willing to go, in terms of representing things. I'm not interested in fooling anybody's eye, for instance, into thinking they're looking at something that's real. I'm just interested in smearing paint around until it looks like the object I'm looking at and I'm trying to redo... in paint. And I use bristle brushes rather than sable brushes, which has—offers built-in resistance... only because I've always used bristle brushes.... I've never used sable brushes with paint—except for tiny details, like the reflections in the eyeglasses.

SLIDE

The Temple at “Payston”... which is—for me has another interest, because it's where the Fifth Army landed all of their tanks and trucks when they invaded southern Italy. And if you've ever been to “Payston”, it's an impossible thing to imagine... but that's what went on....

SLIDE

Here's working at the site. It rained a lot.

SLIDE

And... those kids were around me.

SLIDE

And I followed this painting... developing.

SLIDE

I just build up the underpainting as fast as I can...

SLIDE

... just filling in each area....

SLIDE

But that takes a long time. And then when it's all, in a sense, laid out, I go back into the individual areas...

SLIDE

SLIDE

I'm smearing a wet paint over the underpainting, but my drawing shows through, so I don't have to worry about that anymore. I just concentrate on building up the forms in terms of light.

SLIDE

...concentrating on the man's knees....

SLIDE

... and the hair on his legs. (laughs) And then the woman's hand.

SLIDE

Then her left leg.

SLIDE

And then the arm of the chair... because that's part of the same visual experience. But that sequence represents... about three working sessions.

SLIDE

Then I went back to the upper part of his leg—or the lower part—whichever you want to call it.

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

And then the shadows... which are part of his form.

SLIDE

SLIDE

That's... the underpainting.

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

(laughs) One toe's disappeared.

SLIDE

There it is. (laughs) (laughter)

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

This series of slides is incorporated into that video... tape, where it flashes by very fast.

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

This went on over a period of six months.

SLIDE

And fortunately the model showed up each time... on time.

SLIDE

SLIDE

And that's all I care about models... (laughs) (laughter) I don't care what type of figure they have... or what their personalities are like, as long as they're quiet, and show up on time. I mean quiet while we paint—while I paint.

SLIDE

SLIDE

SLIDE

That's the last slide.

SLIDE

Is it? Yeah. (Applause) Thank you. I hate to ask for questions, but I'll take them. (laughs) (pause) Okay, you can all leave. (laughter) (applause) (laughs) Thank you. (laughs) All right.

END OF RECORDING