*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.*

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SKOWHEGAN SCHOOL
OF PAINTING & SCULPTURE
Skowhegan, Maine

Lecture by Vik Muniz
Summer, 2001

Transcriber: Judith Stoodley

Introductory welcome by Linda Earle: (Recording begins with introduction in progress)…suddenly, our last Visiting Artist's lecture… (murmurs from audience) of the summer… yeah? But it's a good one! (laughs) (laughter) I want to thank our friends and neighbors for coming… again, and for coming all summer and being so supportive… and I want to introduce you to Allen Ruppersberg, who's going to introduce you to Vik Muniz. (applause) Introduction: Well, Vik is… (blows in microphone) Hello? Okay. (laughter) Vik has been cracking me up all night, so I'll do my best to… keep a straight face and read what I wrote. And… fill you in a little bit. I've always thought that one of the best things about New York was the people who are in it; and… I met Vik in that place… I guess in the mid to late Eighties, or something like that, when we were running around in the same places, and in the same galleries and… it's one of those times that lasts about five years, and then people go on somewhere else and… you ...follow them, and… keep in touch, and see their work, and… so now he arrives here! And… that's the nature of this big, amorphous art world. And… so first of all I will, you know, give you the stats… of Mr. Muniz's… oeuvre here, that… (laughter) He's from Brazil, and… lives in New York. Recent exhibitions include a… show at the National Center for Photography in Paris; a show at the Whitney, in New York; and… also a show at the ICP in New York—the International Center of Photography… a… show at the Foundation—Huis Marseille

in Amsterdam… the San Paolo Biennale; and… at the same time, or in the same area… of the Met—not too many people do the San Paolo and the Met at the same time; and… gallery shows, of course—You know, it goes on in New York, L.A., Paris, Brazil, etcetera. And… this year he is in the Venice Biennale, with Ernesto Neto… in Brazil… Pavilion. And… that I think goes on, in case you're going there, until… I think, early November. And… so the way I thought to… introduce the work is by saying things that I like. And… so I will read off a list of things that I like that… I get from… the work.

Speaker: And then you will go on to things you *don't* like)

Introduction: (laughs) (laughter) That's *after*! They've already heard the things that I *don't* like, anyway. So… anyway, as far as his work goes… I will say that I like pictures… and… those of you who know me a little bit know that I like pictures of just about anything. And… including pictures of pictures themselves. And… I like the camera; I like photography; I like images; and I like things; and… I like images and things in weird combinations. And… I like reproductions of things. And… I… like history; and I like memory; and… I like truth; and I like secrets; and… I like color and I like language… (laughter) and… I like games and I like humor… and I like equivalence (equivalents?) and I like parallels; and… I like sugar and tomato sauce and chocolate… (laughter) and dust; and cotton; and… illusions (allusions?) and… I like advertising, which we both studied at a certain point—You didn't know that. And… I like snapshots; and I like—as everybody likes Rembrandt—I like Rembrandt! (laughter) And… I like fiction and I like reality; and I like… the opposition between high and low things; and then I like the combination of high and low things where you can't tell the difference of one to the other. And… I like dirt and rubbish; and… I like magic and I like behind-the-scenes. And… I like drawings… (laughter) I like Vik Muniz. (laughter, applause)

Speaker: I don't like him! (laughs) (laughter) Just kidding! This is the *wonderful* introduction, because it didn't reveal my age, my weight, and any credit card number. (laughter) Ummm… Yeah, well after that you told me everything you like is pretty much everything I like, it left me with very little to say… that I started my career as an artist working in a gas station in Newark… (laughs) And then I went to packing groceries in the supermarket in Chicago… and… then I—I

was once a bouncer in a roller skating rink. (laughter) She heard all those stories—Janine (066)—I got ashamed, 'cause I tell them—I guess she can limp-synch—lip synch to lectures like this. (laughter) But… what… you know… there is—whenever somebody… presents that—oh, this is an artist; he's going to talk a little bit about his work…. Talking about somebody's… own work is usually a little bit embarrassing… because… it's always a sensation of after the fact. It's easy for me, you know, being… working on these things for like thirteen…-- fifteen years, now… and it has gone through so many phases; and I had… what is so-called a retrospective—It looks like a medical term—but… it's—when you have a chance to sort of pile all your work together in some… sort of way, you realize that all the crazy things you've done, things that you had no idea they were going anywhere, actually they make sense at the end, and they look very… important, you know, in the ensemble of things that you've done. I never thought I could ever talk about my work, even if there would be a word that would describe even… *my work*; you know this—Who is making fun of quote *my work* was I think (laughing) Monica. So… (laughs) and then I think of… You know, there's no really such thing; and I'm always very evasive of what could be considered my work. But… all this experimental crazy things that I was interested in the beginning, they sort of coagulated into a certain form. And found it now… even more of a challenge to sort of try to run from it, rather than try to figure out a form which I could—my work can be recognized… for. I… started… in advertising. (sound from audience, baby shouting?) Hm! And… this was… not that I really… wanted to. Being born in Brazil from a working class family—violence place… I… you know, didn't have much of a choice. I didn't even know that people could actually make a living… working as an artist, you know. The only artists you know when you're born in Brazil and brought up is Van Gogh; and you know the guy never made a penny and cut his own ear off; and… you know, that's pretty much the—what the story of success, you know, in the art world. And you think, okay, I want to be a *mailman*, or a TV repairman, or something like that. I… didn't know—was not because of… a lack of will, or because I didn't like art… I always drew; and I always liked to play with images, but never—I didn't… think it would be possible for me to—or for anybody to become an artist and actually *live* out of it. I… started thinking about… You know, my first dream was to become a doctor, actually; it was—I wanted—I was very interested in perception. At one point I think I bumped into this book by a… psychologist named… James Gibson. He… is the guy who in the Fifties wrote the book to help… pilots of… the recent—then recently invented jet planes, to cope with

extreme… cases of like very… challenged perceptions. So that he was even thinking about how to gauge perspective… how, you know, the whole body is actually a perceptive apparatus. And… I've thought it was really cool somebody would spend his life just figuring out how people see things. It didn't work, you know, for me to become a doctor then, or anything else, 'cause it was—during the Seventies it was very hard for somebody to be what the person wanted to be in Brazil. And… I got like a half scholarship in an advertisement—*communications*… school, which I… followed through… I—for like two and a half years until I got a job. And… my major became advertising, because I thought I could use a little bit of that… those—I wouldn't say skills, but my interest in psychology; I could use it for some… end. I couldn't really pay for school at then; I had to find a job. And why not find a job in advertising? They had a… challenge for ideas: Whoever could get a—it was something that was happening at the time, my second year. And… I always had this thing about… walking towards pictures and seeing how pictures would change as you get closer and farther from it. I remember even that happening in museums, that I liked to sort of get close enough to paintings until they sort of dissipate into a blur, and sort of walk back until there's coagulate into something else. And then your… a penitent Virgin, or something like that. I… thought that—in Sao Paolo in the late… mid-Eighties—Mid-Eighties? Let me… Seventies; oh, God, I'm so old. (laughter) You know… people could never read… adver—the billboards, you know. And I could never-- I was into advertising a lot; but I would drive and I would never manage to see what he billboards were saying. I would see an image; by the time I would figure it out, it was past already. And I thought it was a reading problem, was my own… inability to read. But then I started my *mother*, people around me, and they—nobody could read the billboards, because they were totally wrong; they were placed… Like they would advertise for toys on the driver's side… parallel to a high-speed highway; so you have to be a driving baby (laughter) who could read backwards… at an enormous speed and small type, to be able to buy the particular toy. So I thought… maybe I could do something, a study that I would be able to make a chart and help people make better billboards. So for a year I started—driving people with different reading skills at different speeds… at different rate of type; and I created like what could be possible to be read at a certain speed and certain angle of approach as well. And I got me a job…. And also I got me a… ugly Plexiglas trophy. (laughter) (laughs) Then… when I went to receive the trophy… I—something—I'm very lucky, you know…. I went to receive the trophy; and the day… I rented

the smoking (smocking?) for the…. What do you call that?… tuxedo. What's the plural tuxedo? Tuxedi? I never… (laughs) (laughter) And I rent like tuxedo and I went to… receive this thing; and… I—on the way out, I was about to drive away… I see a fight; somebody was hitting somebody with those brass knuckles right in the face. And I stopped to help… the person who was being hit. I broke the fight apart, but everybody was dressed in black tie; so the guy who got hit thought that I was the guy hitting him, so he went to this car, got a gun, and shot me. Luckily the guy was rich, so that's how I got money to buy a ticket to come to America, (laughter) and that's why I'm talking (laughing) to you today. (laughter, applause) You know, that's how I—ways of… you know, getting an art education. (laughter) When I arrived in New York, my idea was to study theater, something that I was messing around with in Brazil, with… a group of amateur theater called (unintelligible, phonetically "Astrubo Trosso Tromboni"); it's untranslatable. I—We… It was really beautiful, 'cause there was something about a theater that was not really well crafted. It was something… that would be very poor, and at the same time tried to use as much of the creative efforts it could possibly get to create representations. So… as for instance, you know, if a scene in a play needed a river, they would just make a row of buckets with few good water; and everybody could see a river in that. I was into that type of theater; it was at least, you know—It was… very positive and… at the same time constructive. You don't have the sort of negativity of avant-garde theater that I found when I moved to… New York. I couldn't—I sort of got a little bit… sad with it; and I didn't follow anything. In New York at that time, you know, the whole thing that I hoped to see, which was off-Broadway or off-off-Broadway, was basically in extinction. They had like… you know, a lot of… very—well, there was a lot of great performance work, a lot of good avant-garde things… which was—for me was hard to relate to, 'cause it was not really what I was into. And then they had "Cats." (laughter) It was nothing… really in the middle. And I didn't know… really what I wanted then; but I started… you know… like (unintelligible), and I stayed working in New York for… about four or five years… until… I started to think of becoming… an artist; and… because—I had kind of an epiphany actually, 'cause I—I went a walk. (laughs) (laughter) See, you start talking, you feel more confident; and… (laughter) And then… even my voice got a little bit more sexy, uh…. (laughter) I won't walk. (laughs) (laughter) I… went—I used to go to the Met to copy masterworks… Every… Sunday I used to go there and sit and try to copy something… and… as a—You know, you don't have to pay to get in; just pay ten cents and they'll let you in. And… I

saw a show in… '86… called… "The Princely Collection of Lichtenstein;" and… there was a variety of things, but went… mainly because I really like intaglio… of stone and wood; 'cause it was something that didn't use paint; and I was very into that kind of thing. But I went on to see the rest of the exhibition. They had a… selection of paintings by Rubens… which is a guy who always impressed me by the technique… but… I always feel like… oh, well; it's kind of—besides the technique there's not much to see in this. You look at one of these paintings; they were *very* large, and they were designed to be in a palace, you know; so many, many people could see it at once. And you could see even like how people approached these paintings, by just by standing next to them in the museum. People would stand here, and move places… so it—they see a little bit there, a little bit there; they sort of move along the surface of the painting, never being able to see the whole painting at once, but kind of fragmentary parts of it. And… the painting was… structured in fragments; there was like… little bits of subjects, like… nudity… religion… you know, classic stories—any—little channels that you could sort of get the painting. But it was very hard to see the whole thing at once. I looked at that, and I thought, "That's why I really don't… really want to do any are, because this is—was something that got—became obsolete by television." It was just like channel… surfing, you know; people will see this part here, see this part there…. I made a turn in the museum; and… on another room I see a different dynamics; I saw a line… being formed to see a painting. Now that was different…. You know, you don't see that very often. You know, you see lines for all kinds of free things; but… for paintings, not really. And, you know, I'm Brazilian—we see lines, we just get into them; we don't ask questions. (laughter) You know. And I stayed in the line; and by the time it was my turn, people would stop at this imaginary lines—There were no red/yellow lines like in the passport… thing in the airport. There was—People would just stop at that particular place… and look at this image, also by Rubens. And… stay there for… an amount of time that (laughs) was very precise, too, until moving along. It was… a portrait of Rubens' daughter… a five-year old girl named Clara Serena. And… it was mesmerizing because she was slightly cross-eyed… and there was one place—only one place in the universe where you could have… the feel of that painting. It was so intense, because… also, when you—you paint somebody you know, or you draw somebody you know very well, you usually bypass… little… non-symmetric traits of that physiognomy; because you think you see that face too much, you usually overlook a lot of things, and you tend to do it more symmetrically. Rubens—he painted his *own* daughter

with—you feel a lot of affection for the subject when he painted; but he took into consideration every single little defect, change, things that wouldn't go this way—so the whole thing was so dynamic, and you would be caught into there looking at it until somebody would just go like this—"Hey, hey—it's my turn." (laughter) You know, I took that… line as a ride like for like six/seven times, like… for the rest of the afternoon. And I went home; I said maybe I could try to do something that you have a feeling that you've seen that; and you have a relationship with what you're looking at. But I couldn't… do… I could *not* make a painting; it's just something that I could never… really—I'm never happy with what I do when I'm painting. I draw… but I could never do that. So I got—I said, well, when you—in advertising… most of what you do, you give identity to things that do not necessarily have any identity. You get—you give… a form… and a shape… and you give a color and a name to liquids and powders, you know. Everybody knows what Coca-Cola *looks* like; but Coca-Cola is just a brown, syrupy… you know, liquid, you know—but you imagine first the form…. Advertising people, they make something that looks like a gun, and it's blue—because it's tough on stains… or they make something that is shaped like a little lady; and because it's good on your hands…. You know, I wanted something that would go a little bit beyond and betray a little bit the idea of identity in….—So I started—My first impulse was to make objects, sort of… maybe to get rid of… the—you know, the image-making that I did when I was working in advertising, selling liquor. (laughs) Oh, I said it! Well… And I… decided to make objects that had identity crisis. I'm going to go on and show some of them….

SLIDE

Okay. Now that's… okay. This is… (laughter) (clears throat) This is the "Clown School;" it's a remnant of a race of clowns that existed in Scotland about thirty thousand years ago.

SLIDE

The "Rocking Podium"… for—you know—(laughter)

SLIDE

"The Ashanti Joy Stick." Unfortunately… (laughter) it's… definitely a modern—It's a relic, 'cause it only operates with Atari system… (laughter) which no longer exists. (laughter) A Playstation 2 model is in the works.

SLIDE

This is "The Bonsai Table." (laughter)

SLIDE

(laughter) This is the entire encyclopedia Britannica bound in one volume… for travel purposes. (laughter)

SLIDE

"The Pre Columbian Coffee Maker." (laughter, applause) (laughs) Most coffee that you buy in New York City is Pre Columbian. (laughs) (laughter) Well…

SLIDE

"A Bowling Ball with Wheels." (laughter)

SLIDE

And… the half-tombstone for people who are not dead yet. (laughter) I… Something happened on the way—You know when you're making—start making objects, I was not really *happy* with them, because they—I was interested in humor. And I was explain—I was talking to one of the students here today about the importance of humor in art. It's probably one of the *latest* things that arrived into consideration in art making… is humor; and it's something very important, because it's a very dynamic structure of humor that makes… --it's *usable*, in art. I was just

copying the way… a comic, a comedian makes… this structure—a joke—into making an artwork; and I wasn't completely with that at that time. But the way a comedian… makes… a joke is very interesting, because… he builds a structure, a very complex structure, in which you start going up on it—It starts—you start getting involved with it, and you start following it. It usually follows in a sort of a crescendo; and… all of a sudden, when it's really up high… he takes a very fundamental part of that structure, and you fall with it. And for a few moments you don't know what to think… because… it's a linguistic structures… that has collapsed; and you have to think for yourself what has happened. It's a moment at the same time a little panic and freedom, you know; but also it's a moment that you totally… You *lower* your guard. And when you make something funny, you're usually able to put other meanings into it… and stick—probably more deeper, more important messages in what you're doing. So I take humor very seriously; and at the same time… many times people, you know—I've been condemned for structuring my work around gimmicks. I am shameless about gimmicks; because I think Giotto… employed gimmicks, you know; Canaletto, Leonardo—every image that was first interesting—even before you start looking at it—it's a gimmick of some sort… that makes you look at it and allows you to rest your eyes on it for a little bit longer, so you can get a little bit more than just the image itself. Every image, to be interesting, has to be a structure that attracts—traps you in some sort; and the gimmick is always there. When I started… showing those objects in a gallery in… the Eighties in New York, I needed to photograph the objects for… documentation, and for like reviews and things like that. They had a great photographer at the gallery, a guy named Peter "Moscato" —You know that guy, right? And he was very good; but he takes the pictures with this four by five camera, something I had never seen it before; and the pictures are totally sharp and beautiful… but I'm never happy with the pictures. I take the same pictures with a—in a—just a (unintelligible)—a simple camera that I had—the cheapest, like fifty dollar camera; and I liked the pictures, although they really not good at all. I kept thinking about that, how—why do I like my pictures better? Am I that egocentric? You know… not—It wasn't really—I'm egocentric, but it wasn't because of this. (laughter) It was because of something else. When you make an object, any object, first you think of this object. You imagine it in your head; and because of the inability that we have to rotate objects in our head, you imagine it from a very particular angle. When you photograph a—the object that you've made, you have the tendency to photograph them from that particular angle that you first

imagined it. Another photographer will make a much better picture, but from the wrong angle. So I started photographing my own work… and being very happy with it. The only difference that once the photographs were taken, I didn't no longer care… for the objects themselves. You know, I could do anything—we could throw it in the garbage… because I—the picture, as you see—you know, I show you the pictures and they work just as well. What I wanted was just to go—an idea that goes full circle; that goes back to an idea itself I wanted to *make* an idea and be able to photograph it… hold it somehow; but I wanted it to be something very ephemeral. This is a piece that's the first photograph I put it on the wall; it's called… "Two Nails." None of my work works on slides. It's… (laughs) You know, I shouldn't be saying this, right? But… it's… Most of my work evolves the idea of walking towards and from it; and walking around it. And… a lot of it changes as you get closer, you know; sometimes video is a little bit of a better way of showing my work, because you have the zooming effect that you have when you're walking towards a picture. In this case… you see two nails hanging this piece of paper; but the second nail, the one on the bottom, is just a photograph of the nail on top. So when you walk around this picture, you just see… You know, one nail changes position and the other stays the same. And… this picture is very stupid… but it's very effective; and sometimes—I keep thinking, you know, what do I like better… Siegfried & Roy? Or somebody like (unintelligible, sounds like Thamus Blaine)—What's the name of that guy… that does… like street magicians, you know? I don't know…. I like the fact that something is just very simple, rudimentary and it's still able to… fool you, like Ricky Jay with card tricks, you know? I love simple tricks that can just… --because these tricks are not just telling you—the magician is not telling you how much… he can— he is able to fool you. He is actually telling you how much you *want* to be fooled. So in effect I really don't want to make… illusions to… you know, fool anybody. I want to make illusions to make people aware of their own—the measure of their own belief… how much they want to be led by an image. This sort of dichotomy between the object and image sort of prevails in my work up to today's. I think it was one of the few constant things that I can say are always present in what I do.

SLIDE

I did work such as this; it's called "Cogito Ergo Sum"—I think; therefore I exist…. The picture in the middle is a picture of the wire below; so you don't notice this… very silly way of fooling somebody. And then it lights up—the picture itself.

SLIDE

This is called "Cozy Couple." I used to work making paintings for… furniture stores. I made… marine paintings, like battleships shooting each other. (laughter) And I had a name… I forgot—I had to—I had even a bio then. It was always a problem of like making the painting the right color; 'cause it was for those starving artist sales—You know, "It doesn't go with the sofa." So I made the painting and the sofa. The sofa is just a flat picture; I started using framing devices. So it's… It's just flat… (laughter) with little silly legs there. And… you know, you get both—you don't have to—everything… coordinates; it's very nice…. (laughter)

SLIDE

Everybody knows that picture, right? When I moved to America I didn't have—I didn't—couldn't speak English… I had… I moved here with… Brazilian school English, which was not enough to communicate to anybody. I communicated better when I spoke Portuguese to… American people. And… I didn't really—I was by myself in Chicago when I first moved here, and I—in Northbrook, you know; it was very… lonely there. And I didn't fit in the culture, couldn't talk to anybody; and I kind of felt… I needed to belong; I needed to have something that I could share with people. I bought my first book-- and books have been a passion for me all the time (laughs)—in a garage sale in Northbrook, which was a book that many of you may have; it's called **The Best of *Life***. It's a collection of Pulitzer Prize-winning pictures… that everybody knows by heart. Everybody is tired of seeing these pictures; but, you know… how much… you remember. For it was great because it was just like having a family album that I could relate to anybody—just like when you get a family album you know all the people in it; you know all the situations; but it's still opened from time to time, just to say, "Oh, yeah, this is Aunt Sarah at the picnic…." Or something like that. So I could open that book with anybody—to anybody on the streets and say, "Do you remember this?" And they'd say, "Yeah, sure, I was there. I remember

that, yeah….” It was just like having the family album… of the family of man. I lost the book… in Evanston Beach; and… I… started thinking of how much I could remember of those pictures without looking at them. I started making drawings… without looking at the images. The drawings were *really bad*. And… sometimes I would remember something else… at the distance… I would get the head… or something right. In this drawing, for instance, I could remember—the only thing I could remember is the… sleeve of the guy who’s shooting. Facial expressions are almost impossible to remember. And… I… made the drawings which were very horrible; and… I… was invited to show them in a gallery. I liked the drawings; and I didn’t want to lose them. So I decided to photograph the drawings… a little bit out of focus to get rid of… the hand; and then I printed them with a… dot pattern… that was similar to the way I saw them for the first time when I saw the magazine. And I called the show “The Best of Life.” When people came they thought they were looking at really bad reproduction of… famous images, you know. But it… worked, because they could identify with those images as if they were seeing the real thing, when they were just utterly mental. The thing is I had… made half of the effort for them to meet me in the middle; and I think that’s what goes in with images in general. The artist is only make half of it; the viewer is always making the rest of it. It’s impossible to sort of control the viewer into seeing the whole thing without any… consideration for… memories… or personal experience.

SLIDE

Another… thing that, you know, always keep me thinking about is what the charge the viewer brings into… consciousness—what you know… How what the viewer knows will influence what you’re doing, you know. I—I’m not the kind of artist that does work for myself. I make work so I can watch people look at it; and I can learn a little bit—a bit about the way I look at the world in relation to the way other people do it. And it helps me also make… art that challenges… these correspondences. Alfred Steiglitz, in a series of photographs… which is his—this is not mine… called “Equivalents,” talked about this… the idea that an image is more of a feeling, something that it exists and you can see things in it; and a lot of it is what you can put in it yourself at that particular moment you’re looking at it. These equivalences, you know, they exist at this very idealistic, poetic mode… but also they exist in… more linguistic ways.

SLIDES

These are paintings… by John Constable. What is it like to sketch… a piece of the sky? You know, how fast can you do it… without it being, somehow, an abstraction. Clouds are being like…. Looking at clouds and seeing things in clouds is a longtime pastime; but, you know, and many people have done things with it. But I wondered like how much you can look at this correspondence and try to think of them from a linguistic point of view. These things have always puzzled us, you know, images that we find in nature that have… representational value. In the case of this the dog has a chicken in his hindquarters… and I've been looking at those things… and trying to study them for a long time. I went to Ripley's archives… and I found… a cow that had a perfect picture of southern Pennsylvania upside down on its back. I mean, if you're not from southern Pennsylvania, you won't know what the cow is about! (laughter)

SLIDE

I wanted to do… equivalents of my own; and I could—You know I could do those things much better; I could use a computer, and just render these things perfectly in the shape of a…. teapot, for instance—This is called "Teapot Cloud." But computers are kind of… very… complicated things. You know, if you do it on a computer, then you lose all the fun…. Not only that, it's just that, again, I'm not really trying to make great illusion; I'm trying to make a complex illusion that's very simple. I keep seeing like… in films like "Jurassic Park," where you have all those dinosaurs running around eating people in the beginning, you're scared for the first five minutes. But then five minutes into the film you start getting used to them, and they just scare you as much as a lion… or… a tiger would scare you. They just scare you by sudden appearances. You know, I keep wondering if you could do a remake of "Jurassic Park," with like… sock puppets with goggly [sic] eyes… (laughter) you know, and just go "Boo! Boo!" like this. You know, you would scare people just the same way. I wanted to do something like this, you know, just getting people to… some of the images are simple enough that they show the mechanics of the way that you see things. In this case… I want something to look like a lump of cotton, a teapot and a cloud… at the same time… but that could not be perceived… --The three things could not be

perceived at once, because you have a sort of a bottleneck. You can only see the lump of cotton, the cloud, *or* the teapot; you can never see the three at once.

SLIDE

This is a "Snail Cloud" (laughter) Also scale… plays a very important role in what I do; so the scale of this… In this slide everything becomes the same size and they're all wrong. These are not… big images; they're very small… and when you see them you feel compelled to get closer to them.

SLIDE

There's a "Kitty Cloud." (laughter)

SLIDE

That's… (laughter) Yeah, you know you have cows here… that… I wanted to do something for the (unintelligible, sounds like Moster) Project… in—this—They allowed you basically to do anything you want in the city. You can paint the mayor blue if you want. And… I wanted to present a project which would be—have cows… with maps of different European countries… so when people see like a cloud—a cow with… I don't know… Sweden, they wouldn't—they'd say, "Oh, it's a cow." But if they see Italy, they start looking at all the ones trying to figure out what countries those were…. So I was in France, and I asked the farmer… up road when I was staying if I could paint his cows. And he said, "No." And I said, "Can I paint *one* of them?" He said, "Okay, you can take that ugly one there… and… you paint it… and you *wash it*." And… I said—He did this because I promise him I would do a cow with a map of France, make a picture and give it to him. So I went to buy washable paint; and started painting France on the cow… But it's very hard to paint on a cow. The cows—Cows like being painted on; (laughter) and they start moving towards you, kind of like… you know? And… you know, I started this France; then I tried to make it look like Spain… and then I tried to (laughing) make it look like Cypress, or somewhere that—It ended up the only thing I could paint on it was that cow. (laughter) And

then I went to wash it, and… they sold me the wrong kind of paint… (laughter) so.. that cow has been tattooed… with its own image… up to today you can go and visit. (laughter) And of course I could never paint another cow. This is one of those series that end up really short. (laughter) Well… you know, there are… -- Accidental representation is something that has fascinated people from Leonardo… to… (unintelligible, Ky Lo Ab) Many thinkers thought of it as something amazing; and we still—we hear stories of like… humidity stain on the office… building in Connecticut as being attracting thousands of people, you know, or… But—People have started to realize the power of these accidents and start to employ them. First I was thinking of ideas of accidents; and now I'm thinking of how to use actually these things in a more active manner, such as in the way Archie (unintelligible, phonetically Bodo? Boulder?) was using these things. So he combining two times of representation in once makes something that is in a way… a split; but something that is very hard to keep your eyes out of it.

SLIDE

This is Mole and Thomas; you know, it's an image of the likeness of Uncle Sam… by I think seventeen thousand… people… These guys started taking pictures of… you know, music chorus… of like twenty kids; and once they were invited to take these pictures for the army…. They had to be done in… armored forces—very hard to do.

SLIDES

See, I didn't have seventeen thousand friends to take a picture like that; so I decided to do something a little simpler. And what I do—did this like making drawings in… I started doing drawings in the sand-- This is called "Touching Jellyfish" --and… photographing it; but it still wasn't enough, because it looked too much like a drawing. This is the most—the worstest [sic] slide I have, and I'm proud to present it to you. (laughter) So I… I started making… things—They're small like this; and when you look at them… you think of it as being… a pencil drawing. And as you get close, you realize it's a photograph of a sculpture. And it changes completely the way you see it; and you feel somewhat betrayed by it. And… it's very interesting how you put two types of representation at once, you also make the reading of the image a little

bit more dynamic. I went to… Florence and I saw the doors of the "Gates of Paradise" by Ghiberti; and I've had this idea actually from looking at that, 'cause he combined a very old way of making pictures, which was relief with… three point perspective. And it's totally overkill. So you try to focus from the back to the front of the image, back and forth, back and forth; and you have a very dynamic, really, scanning of what you're looking at. I wanted to do the same thing but using a totally flat surface. This is—I'm using the relief of the photograph… itself. It doesn't work on slides; but, you know, hopefully you'll see one of these pictures (laughing) somewhere.

SLIDE

Some of them are three-dimensional. When I do a series of work I try to explore different possibilities until I sort of exhaust them.

SLIDE

It's called "Relaxation."

SLIDE

Once I could not—I could do still lifes with wire, but I could not do landscapes, something I always very interested in doing. So I started using… threads, sewing thread; and I titled the pieces after the *amount* of sewing thread that I used to do the pictures. Basically I just lay sewing thread on a flat surface and then photographed it from above using a large camera. "This is "Six Thousand Yards," after Cojo." (Coho? Part of title?)

SLIDE

This is I think "Three Thousands After Gerhard Richt—Richter."

SLIDE

These… I was doing a lot of lines… things with lines; and I thought, maybe I can step a little bit farther in the history of representation, in doing a picture using dots or points, which are more similar to photographs themselves. I went to… Saint Kitt's, this island in the Caribbean… and I met a group of children there. And… for two weeks I played with those kids and… you know, like you meet people on vacation; you know a little bit about every one of them. And I made portraits of the children and brought it to New York. In the sugar—the Sugar Isle like Saint Kit's is—Work is very hard, and I—It was very interesting to see how happy… and open… and how the children were very open to everybody; and how the grownups were very tired and very kind of worn out by working, you know; and they were like in the harvest of the sugar cane at that time. I kept thinking, what was taken from those children so they would be like… to be so skeptic, and very harsh life of those grownups. And I realized it was basically sugar, you know… and how you take a product out of somebody, you know; you translate sweetness—like actually *human* sweetness into a product and you just—for our consumption. And I decided to use sugar… over—and just sprinkle sugar over a black sheet of paper and make those portraits. And I called them "The Sugar Children."

SLIDE

This is… "Valentina Loves Orange Juice." It's the name of the… "Valentina the Fastest… " So all you see is just the sugar over black paper; everything is loose. At the end of each portrait I took the sugar back into a little jar; and I used the image that I used as a source for the portrait as a label.

SLIDE

When I was working with sugar, I thought, you know, this is interesting, 'cause you have the choice—You go like this to clean it; you don't have to erase it. Actually it's not so hard to work with sugar 'cause you don't have to erase it; you just lick it. (laughter) And… I started showing those portraits of the Sugar Children to people and say they were the Cocaine Children… they were the Grated Cheese Children… They were the Salt Children. Every time I'd mention a

different element, a different taste, the reading of the picture would change as well. And… it was another way to add still another layer on the reading of those pictures to… -- the idea of a known taste of the thing. So I said, maybe I can play a little bit of the—making the sugar pieces and the work—the thread pieces—They take a long time to make; so I wanted something that would be a little faster, and I… started thinking of something that would be—have a little bit of the feeling of painting, but it wouldn't be kind of light enough, so it wouldn't be… have to compete with painters. (laughs) I'm very insecure about painting. And… I decided *chocolate* would be an interesting substance; because the chocolate is very complex psychologically, you know. You don't really *need* chocolate; you just buy it because it tastes good… but then you feel bad you ate it—or you feel good you ate it… If somebody doesn't give you… on your birthday you feel made at the person… The person gives it to you…. It's very—You know there's all kinds of fights and… relationships breakups because of this thing nobody really needs it. Freud probably would explain why people would go to such extremes because of chocolate; and maybe that's why I chose him to be the first subject. These… on the opposite of the *other* pictures, (laughter) on… --in relation to the other photographs, these are very large, and… the viewer is – the viewer usually feels compelled to walk *away* from the image. I also… I have it in my mind that color pictures… usually feels like the subject… --whatever is in the picture is on top of the picture—rather… black and white looks more porous, looks like you can kind of deep—dive into the picture. So I like, in col—When I do color work I like very hermetic, very—feels like nothing can go through the plastic surface of Cibachrom; and it feels like very repulsive in a way, so people usually walk away from the picture to be able to see what's there. And… you know… Allan Kaprow once mentioned that the really great link between… --It was a great thing that what… Hans Namuth really did a great job linking performance and painting in the work of Pollock; and the understanding of the work of Pollock wouldn't be the same if it wasn't for these pictures. And I really agree. But still, in the photograph the two are split; and I thought maybe I can (laughs) go a little farther and make them of the same subject. Somebody—I think Pepper Carmel, when they were doing the retrospective of Pollock… he mentions to me that this part here—this here is okay… this is not Pollock. (laughter) And… I don't know—You just—whenever you start—Some series you start with the subject, some you start with material. And you look for materials to have some feeling. I usually—Pictures of crowds look interesting… or organizations of individuals, because… you… like in the case of this

photograph, I wanted the picture of a crowd because I'm very interested—In America, if you say to somebody you're—"I'm a painter," you know, the person—the second question is not "What's you name?" It's "Representative or abstract?"… you know. It's… very important to define what kind of work do you do, what kind—If it's something that's abstract or representational. And I thought… It's interesting to see what becomes abstract and what becomes representational… because the nature of the photograph of the material is always an abstraction… and what the material is doing is a representation, there's always a very interesting tension there. I like to look—I go to sports events sometimes; and I like to sort of try to figure out when… the faces—you know, the recog—I can recognize little faces in the crowd… and… at what point that becomes a texture… and at what point that's—that become an abstraction. In this case I picked a photograph to copy from, which was in a sporting event; but unlike most pictures in a sporting event, the people in the picture are… rooting pro and against something that just happened. So they're not—some people are happy and some people are sad. It looks really realistic; but in fact, when I was doing this, you know, it's—some people who were very happy, they became sad people; and some people who were sad became happy. You have to do this in one hour; otherwise the chocolate starts drying… and it doesn't—it loses that kind of shine. I—There's a woman over there, way in the that corner, which is just four… dabs… of chocolate. These are very sharp; you know, I shoot this all with an eight by ten camera. I showed that to my students, isolated from the context; and they said—I said, "What is this?" And they said, "Well, it's… just four drops of chocolate." And I said, "Do you see a face in it?" Nobody could see a face in it. It's funny that when you look at that, you even know that she's kind of smiling, because, if when you smile at the certain time of the day… you have shadows under your… cheeks right here. And you know—you can tell it's kind of a woman, although the person next to her looks like a lion. (laughter) Some of them end of up looking like cartoon characters, but nobody seems to mind. (laughs) I have one of these that everybody ended up looking like "Robert Mattel". (laughter)

SLIDE

In a similar way, you know, I—You go, you do something, then usually—The way to keep on working is actually just not stop working ever. I… was doing… thinking about… almost going

back to "The Best of Life." I was thinking of how images in the media get to us… and… When you come to think about it, they get to us just by an organization—a pattern… of ink dots… in a piece of paper. Somebody in the morning reads the newspaper and thinks he's in contact of everything that's happening around the globe; and everything that he is doing is looking at ink. What I wanted to do is to emphasize the *presence* of the medium, make it more visible, so you realize what is this image made of. This is something that I'm always doing; I'm always trying to emphasize the actor. My… You know I had a really big interest in theater when I started working… is because, in theater, it's not like in the movies, you see Arnold Schwarzenegger killing like thirty thousand people in the film… He's not doing that; he's actually right—At that particular moment he's sitting in a poolside in another place at that time… or you—God knows where he is; he disappeared. All you have is the character. In theater you always have the character and the actor; they're all performing at the same time. And it's magical to see that transformation, because it takes a lot of trust to believe that somebody's becoming somebody else in front of you. I have this… (laughs) anecdote that I tell again and again; and I think it's always the best way to explain what I do; and it's—Once I paid… sixty dollars to see Anthony Hopkins play King Lear… and I was *robbed*, because… you know, once he started playing the king, he stopped being Anthony Hopkins—(laughter) You know, I could (laughing) just paid anybody to be the king. On the opposite, you know, I—Once I went—took two buses to Queens, in New—into a—It was a firehouse. And they had an amateur group, and… there was a guy named Joey Grimaldi and he was playing… Othello. He was a plumber. And he was… a part time actor, you know… very… bad actor. And… you know, he started playing the jealous general in search of bad of advice—He was very good; he looked like a general… You know, he had the posture; he had the poise; he was Othello…. Five minutes into the performance he went a little bit into the plumber again… (laughs) (laughter) you know—and Joey… you know, he let escape a little bit of the accent and all of that and… then got a little bit—went back into being Othello… plumber… Othello… plumber… Othello… (laughter) For three dollars I got two tragedies for the price of one. (laughter) You know. You got the tragedy that everybody knows… of the Shakespearean tragedy. And you had the tragedy of this guy not being able to become somebody else full time throughout the performance… but… I'm grateful to Joey Grimaldi. I went to talk to him. Anthony Hopkins gave me a character; Joey Grimaldi gave me theater, you know; and gave me this beautiful thing which is like with something right on the

verge of transformation, when something that maybe it's be something very similar… something very simple… and earnest… as a plumber become… a general, a Moorish general. It's something of the feeling of right—a second before the first kiss… or… when… the basketballer already throw the ball, it hasn't reached the rim yet. It's an idea of sublime; it's a little bit awkward, but it's something I'm always trying to achieve in what I do. And… there's always a performance being played… very short performance that's played only for the camera for a fraction of a second, but it's been rehearsed before. In the case of this, it's just like ink and glycerine trying to perform the role of Nadia Comaneci in this… Olympics, in '76, I think. I always cast bad actors… because… if I make a portrait of one of you in… pencil, nobody would care, because pencil is the perfect medium to do that thing, and you see… the likeness of the person and it—But if I make a portrait of any of you with molasses—and have ants… walking on top of it—all of a sudden it will look miraculous. And God knows why, because probably it's easier to draw with molasses than it is to draw with a pencil. These are very large pictures, by the way, similar to the size of the slides… the projection.

SLIDE

This is that terrorist in the Olympics in Munich. Somebody became world-famous and nobody ever saw his face. It's very hard to see this, 'cause it's a smaller picture; you have to stand about ten feet—ten meters to be able to see what it is.

SLIDE

The… "Crash of the Hindenberg."

SLIDE

And "The First Step on the Moon."

SLIDE

The same way I drew with sugar, I thought maybe I could draw—do the opposite thing in drawing negative. In this case I tried to draw… I think it was Hegel who said that everything that's visible is luminous or… illuminated. I realized that I spent my entire life drawing on illuminated surfaces. And what would do if I was driving…-- drawing on a *luminous* surface and I had to conceal parts of the painting instead of—You can draw in negative, but the fact element of light coming into your eyes will probably affect me somehow. So I got a light box; and just by—I got some soil from my parking lot. In fact all the soil pieces are the same bucket of soil; they're all recycled. And… by just putting soil on a light box I created this images and then photographed it. I used like a soil—For every series I used a sort of… an assortment of handy/made/invented tools. For this I used those vacuum cleaners that you use to clean keyboards of computers.

SLIDE

That's a nude after (unintelligible, phonetically Frentis or Prentis San Critico)…

SLIDE

… and a self-portrait, which is totally symmetrical. I'm not Rubens; and I look like Spock on that. (laughter)

SLIDE

A bowl.

SLIDE

That's not mine. (laughter) But I've—For years I've been doing jokes like this, and sending to people I'd make my own. One of the reasons people know—not now, but for a long time people believed things just because they're printed on offset newsprint. If you print anything on newsprint, send it to somebody, people will believe it's true. So I started making…-- Also

there's something funny; you know, like a… When a newspaper—Newspaper articles, they're always like this. They always have—Something happen, they have a picture, and they ask somebody to write about it. Or… they have something that happens, it's a story and they ask somebody to go there and take a picture. So I said, "What happen if I do this—the two at the same time; I start making a drawing and start writing a story simultaneously… as I go along, and develop them together? When they are ready, I print them on newsprint, and I'll just send to friends to see what happens. So this is a story of… contemporary art center bombed by a water colorist… in Evanston… and during an exhibition of Neon Art. (laughter) (laughs) I did—I did one like this which was a… say—it was called "Small is Not Beautiful," which said that the people in…. In California they were prohibiting people to come to Yosemite with small format photo equipment… because it was a danger to the environment and they couldn't sell the walk—the… Ansel Adams pictures if people took pictures there. I did that, and I sent it to a friend of mine, Olivier, who sent to a guy at the Met, Malcolm, who sent to a friend of his—put one of these broadcasting faxes… and that was it. So two years later I was giving a talk… in San Francisco MOMA; and the woman came to me and said. "Well… that thing you told about… you know the Yosemite, you're lying." And I said, "Oh, yeah, of course I'm lying." And she said, "No, you're lying because that really happened. I was driving in the valley, and I heard that on the radio." Some local news probably picked up the story from the stupid fax I sent to a friend, and they thought it was true. Maybe people did *not* take their cameras to Yosemite because of that joke. (laughter) But—You know, you never know what these things are going to end up. (laughs)

SLIDE

And this is "Henry Moore Took Drugs." (laughter) No, the drugs were *inside* the Henry Moore sculpture. (laughter) I like the way people… you know… (laughs) (laughter continues) in the tour in Southeast Asia… (laughter) And there's always like at the end I say… they're never—The articles always finish like that: "It remains at Heathrow for *further* investigation." Or somebody was not reached for details….

SLIDE

This is an (laughs) (laughter)—I never—You know, I'm not a *straight* photographer. But… you know, I thought it would be nice to make… a review of a straight photography exhibition that never happened. But I—It was a good review. (laughter)

SLIDE

…How many of you know—Everybody knows this thing, right? How many of you have been there? (laughter) So—I—My grandfather… He thinks men have never been to the moon. He thinks was a studio… kind of thing. And… you know he's not totally wrong; it could have been…. (laughter) People think my grandfather was—He died now—they think he was crazy. But he had two televisions, one… for watching the soap operas and one for watching the news. The soap opera one was color; he only watched the news on a black and white TV. He got—He was on to something—I don't know what (laughs) it was. (laughter) But—you know… and… I kept thinking about that. You know… I love art from the Seventies. I'm very—totally influenced by Seventies art, especially art that was… emerging in California at the time, because… they had the humor. Some East Coast artists, conceptual artists, they were very serious, you know. They make—They *frown* too much; and… I think, you know… I've always liked art that had sort of an edge, that could—the artist—I like art where you see that the artist is having fun, or at least is *happy* doing it, you know. Smithson was one of these guys; although he always making a face or so, he looked like he was really enjoying what he did, and you could tell that in his writings…--It was something very involving for him, and he's somebody who I really like. I can copy people, but I never… I only copy people I respect and I like the work; I never copy the picture I didn't like. And… I never—I don't do it—Somebody invited me to go appear in a show of appropriation art. I don't—I'm *not* an appropriation artist; I'm a copyist. I copy things because I think if I copy something I add something of myself to it in a very sincere manner. I try to copy as much as I—as well as I can; but of course, you know, I do it in an awkward way so I can add a little bit of what—the way I see things… but I don't try to distort the meaning of it; and I don't try to make fun of it. But in this case, you know, everybody knows "Spiral Jetty" or "Lightning Field"… or any of these… environmental sculptures by photographs. In fact most of the art you see or you know you get through the… you know…

through the intervent of… media. So I thought…I think Smithson, in this case, he didn't do a piece in the middle of the desert; he did a piece in your minds. Everybody has "Spiral Jetty" in your heads… and you just never saw it. But it feels like everybody saw it, because he works by complicity, like those images in "The Best of Life." In effect, you know, everybody knows that picture; and you see a picture of a girl that's being sprayed with napalm… how you see is a girl sprayed with napalm. You never question the fact that the photographer was using very fast film, walking backwards. You know, if there was a threat of napalm, it's very hard to backwards to our subjects; you never question the speed of aperture used, never question anything; you just see the girl. It's funny thing to… also… add that…not one picture in the… inventory of *millions* of pictures that exist in the world today were experienced by the human eye. Every time a picture is taken… the shutter closes… or you're seeing it from a different—slightly different angle, so… combined—approximated parallels. It's impossible to see what's being photographed; so the history of photography is the history of blindness; it's the history of *relinquished* experience… just for the sake of the document. The document is something very interesting, because it *confuses* us. As…we—unfortunately we are totally dependent; and we rely a lot on representation to learn things. And often we have the feeling that we are in contact with the world; but we just contact with images of the world. I started making these things in my Brooklyn studio… and… I—you know—intentionally left traces for people to know that they were not the *real* things. This one I think I did it very well… but the other one's a little bit… more difficult. But the fact that they're called "Brooklyn, New York," just to give it a sense that you don't have to go to Salt Lake City to see "Spiral Jetty;" You open any book, you'll see it. When I started making…-- When I started looking at art… I thought—When the first time I saw a picture of "Spiral Jetty," I thought, "Oh. This guy is a crazy photographer. You know… I can't believe he had to go to so much trouble to end up with a picture. And I didn't understand the whole thing. You know. But I thought… it was earthworks, but something done with photography. Perhaps—that probably, you know, Nancy Holt took the picture; not even he did. But it—what stays is that image that, you know, we cannot forget…. And that image is like a household poor (means word?), you know… those little silly trees that I got—I had a good truck that I bought that was just like the one in the picture. But it was too right; so I bought that matchbox truck to make it look silly and… so you know—for a moment you know it's not a true

picture. And the same thing with that… (unintelligible, sounds like ammered) (laughs) (unintelligible, sounds like renth)

SLIDE

That's the last picture. And I think it's because of—it is the first picture. It's a picture of the rooftops in San Luis de Vahana, in France. It's—what's claimed to be the first photograph ever to still exist….by Niepes…. And I—In my… opinion it's the only true photograph that ever existed… because the moment he took a second picture, he had one photograph to compare that second picture with… so he could say that the second picture was *worse* or it was better. It was more beautiful… He had more depth…. Once he started applying the idea of aesthetics or… of quality into any image, he already…. You know… you already helping it to lie… somehow. I was saying that in a lecture about two months ago; and the curator of photographs was in the room. He said that… I forgot that the person who owned this picture… in Texas, he… retouched it… to be able to appear better into a… So not only one the first—Not even the only—the first photograph that was taken in the world actually is able to claim—hold any claim to reality. I think I've been talking too long; I think I drank to many beers, and I… Like maybe if you have any questions I would like to answer. (applause)

Linda Earle: We'll take… questions now. We have some water here…

Speaker: Oh!

Linda Earle: …for you. And… I just want to—Oh, and a sponge, in case you… (laughter) yeah. I just want to invite everyone here to stay for a reception… after the questions; and then later on… the beautiful nuptials of Dan Shank and Amy Finkbinder…. (laughter) (laughs) over which we're all kvelling (laughter) Here. Yeah. At eleven. But there's a reception immediately following this talk. Are there questions for Vik? (long pause) (laughter)…no questions…

Speaker: Thank you! (laughter) Yes.

Question: I was interested that you used the word "sublime" instead of the—a moment when something's on the verge of transformation as a… sublime moment; and I wonder if you could talk more about that.

Speaker: That's… my own definition; in fact, you know, what is being…described as sublime. At the—

Linda Earle:… record it.

Speaker: I'm…-- Oh, I'm sorry, 'cause I hate my own voice—People like to see their own pictures, but people hate to hear their voices; 'cause it's a *different* voice; it's somebody else talking, right? I… I think—I don't know if my idea of sublime conforms with the general idea of sublime. The… If I… I think if I would *go* for the general idea I wouldn't be copying anything, you know because it look like something already reached its peak when it was made for the first time. I… think sublime resides in a sort of ambiguity in a way… that… an image it's there to be sort of questioned; and you have a relationship with it at certain level. You're not—You look at it and you go—What is this? You know? I always think of an image successful when you get that second look at it and you go, "What the hell is that?" You know, if it *works*, it means that between the first reading and the second reading you had a little bit of a short circuit. And… today, you know, you don't question images any more. We think of our… --Changing here? —We think of ourselves very sophisticated and… you know, because we can… consume images in a vertiginous speed that just… turn pages of magazines very fast. A magazine in an airplane, a thick one, lasts me about… thirty seconds, you know. I just stop at the…advertisements… generally. But… that… speed in… consuming images… doesn't mean that we fully process them. We don't… really…. There's no…-- You know, we don't try to understand the syntax of the image of every image we see; we just sort of scan through them very quickly and not really pay attention to what we're seeing. That's what people who makes these images want us to do; they want us to consume them readily and without any judgment, 'cause that's when they—an image in the media works best, you know. I made them. I know… that. (laughs) I was talking today; I said that I watch television, but I like watching… the advertisements, because… these people are not kidding; they are really well paid to make images

that are very perfect. You know I think in a way every image is in a sort a machine, a mechanism of some sort. These people are making (unintelligible, phonetically chararas 356); they know how to craft them; they know how to make them fast and swift and… very smooth. We're just…going through these things and we're not even… stopped it to know… what we're looking at. It's… part of my homework that I think… I could be—continue work in advertising; but I think maybe I'm not a bad a guy after all—not to say that people who work in advertising are bad people… but I think I had a sort of an ethical kind of thing with me that I thought that I should go the opposite way and make images that sort of slow down… it's reading. And… we—if you—I don't know—If you get a… an image that—will work sort of as a vaccine, you know. You will have all the elements, all the structure, of an image that's presented to you on a daily basis; but has a little bit of something… twisted, so when you consume the image, it starts building antibodies on you; it starts involving—building skepticism. So you relationship to all images of the same families of images will be a little bit more skeptical, a little bit more… you know… precise in a certain way. I… think, you know, as an artist, I have… my compromise towards the expertise… in art is to understand how images are made… the structure…the—you know, look under the hood of images… to see how they operate. There're all types of… visual contraptions that go into… images; and they're beautiful. Sometimes they're—like even… I'm talking sometimes… a mathematician sometimes will go use a term: "This equation is beautiful." And nobody will have a clue what he's talking about. How can an equation be beautiful? Images, even commercial images can be beautiful, just by the way they're structured. And as an artist I always try to look at the structure of images, rather than what's in front of it; I have this sort of a Platonic idea about how images are (laughs) do. Any more questions, yeah?

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: Sometimes they choose me… 'cause I—you know you just bump into an image and…like in the—there—and there's nothing you can do. I don't go after subjects unless I have a way to portray them in a certain way. So I go… I—Sometimes I go—For instance… in—I let ideas… rot… a little bit… get… you know, kind of age a little bit before I actually make them. I'm working serious and right now I have six or seven projects that I'm working on. Some of them are very preliminary, very early stages…. Sometimes I just have ideas—I run into

somebody who has an idea for a show, or tells me that they want to do a show with me. Usually it takes two years before I come back to this person with an idea. And example of this… which I don't have images here, is the Whitney show. The curator… while she was still working in Chicago, she told me that she wanted me to do a show in the Whitney. I… had no idea what to do; so I said, okay, fine, we'll talk. And for years I kept thinking of what to do… for years—months and months; 'cause I *wanted* to have a show there…. And I kept thinking about… looking at—I don't know; I think I went to a show… of secondary market Minimalist work… in SoHo around that time. And I saw a Donald Judd that had a scratch in it. And then I thought, this is kind of cool, this scratch on (laughing) on the Donald Judd. And it's *ruins* the thing, right? And then I kept thinking about (unintelligible), that I was in… Paris; and I went to the George Pompidou Museum during a strike that they had in the maintenance department. So they had all the Minimalist sculptures and all the Modernist furniture was covered with a layer of dust this thick. And I remember looking at them, being fascinated, 'cause they had this Barcelona chair that looked like it was made out of marble; it was… beautiful, you know. I think maybe I could make one out of marble, or something like that. And these things sort of start brewing, you know; they have no shape, just as observations that you collect. Usually it's never it's good even to write them; because it's good to forget if they're not very good. And… end up that one day I just called the woman; I said, "I have an idea. I'll photograph—I'll make drawings of the works in the museum… out of the dust *from* the museum; and photograph them, and make a totally…. " So that's what I did; I collected Minimalist works; I researched them in the library of the museum… photographs of installations in the museum of works *of* the museum by the museum photographer…. You know they wanted very special of—for the museum; so I exaggerated—I went all the way. And… I asked them to collect the dust in vacuum cleaners… and they were very (laughs)—They gave me like "dust from room… such and such." (laughter) "Dust from room such and such." And it was great, 'cause there was dark dust, light dust, and I could draw the pieces, you know. And they blew them up very large; they were Barry Le Va's, Richard Serra, Donald Judd piece. And… that has to do a little bit with the idea of—you know, when you look at a photograph—I collect pictures of Minimalist sculpture, because I think they're more interesting than…the sculptures themselves. I'm not saying those artists are not good, or anything. For me, when you see a picture, it looks like the conceptual structure of the Minimalist work, which is to represent only itself… is accomplished. You know… you don't

see the scratches; you don't see the dust. But once a sculpture like that—it's so—It's—Minimalism is something that influences me a lot, because… it combines something very physical with something very conceptual. It has—the poetics of it are interesting; but—the Utopian… ideas—You know, they're a little bit too much. At first, if it has a scratch, it represents something else. So I thought, maybe I can work with these photographs that I like a lot; and I worked with them at the end. But sometimes, you know, like in the case of the Sugar Children, you just… meet a little kid, and you want to take a picture of it; and you end up with that… image; it's really… not—it's not something that you choose. But you—I have different series that start differently. Another thing, you know, I… usually work with things that try to justify the fact that they are being photographed; so I work with… materials that are… ephemeral… They are… They destroy; they change…. And a lot of people think I work with food a lot, but it's just a coincidence that a lot of things that get… get *damaged*, you know; usually… something is good it has to do with oral consumption, so…. But I just photograph because I know it changes, you know. I… I went… Once I went to the Asia Society… for… They had—They were doing a big mandala. And I'm Brazilian, I'm always late for everything. So I got there, the mandala…. What they do they—For weeks and weeks they build this sand mandala, with colored sand—beautiful thing. The monks do it. And at the end they just sweep it and throw it—

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