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SKOWHEGAN SCHOOL
OF PAINTING & SCULPTURE
Skowhegan, Maine

Lecture by Bruce Pearson
Summer, 2001

Transcriber: Judith Stoodley

Introduction (Linda Earle): I want to welcome you to the second of our series of lectures by resident artists at Skowhegan this summer. We're… this evening—and welcome to our neighbors, many of whom we've seen over the years coming back to lectures here…. This evening I want to introduce to you Bruce Pearson, a wonderful painter… who is in residence here… and he makes these… really beautiful paintings, as you'll see, that beckon you and excite, and then reveal a text built into the surface of the paintings in a way that is quite exciting and has to be experienced. You sort of—The work is about seeing and reading in its most expansive sense, I think… and meaning… and his process is about that kind of combination too, as I think you'll see. There are a wealth of cultural and literary references in the work. And it has an incredible energy; there's nothing like being in a gallery full of Bruce's paintings; it's just… startling and… I think somebody called it hallucinatory, (laughs) (laughter) and it sort of is…. When I went to see his show at Ronald Feldman, I was leaving, and thinking about the work, and sort of… tripped over the curb, so…. (laughs) (laughter) I think I—That's a salute to you, Bruce. He's been working professionally since the early Eighties, has show at… Pierogi Gallery, Exit Art, the Brooklyn Museum, and… at the Museum at Brandeis—the Rose Museum, right? — which was the occasion for a wonderful essay about his work by John Kentner, which we have in the library, and I hope you take a look at. So… I'm very pleased to welcome Bruce Pearson. (applause)

Speaker: Thank you, Linda. I think I'm going to start directly with the slides and keep talking about the different processes, and some of the things that I was thinking about when I was making the work.

SLIDE

What I usually start with is a drawing; but what really starts is using different types of found text. The text comes from all different aspects of… media; and lately I've been incorporating certain literary references also. But when I was first starting, it was mainly Pop—Pop culture; and that moved into a lot of media culture. And what I was trying to do with the initial early work was, indeed, to kind of create this hallucinatory… sense of what I was experiencing in the culture. So what I do is I write out the text…. This piece is called "Something that seems to Symbolize in Quotes 'Reality.'" And where I got that quote was an article in the *New York Times* on fashion in the Nineties. And when I was growing up reality was reality; and now it seems that reality can only be a quotable thing; and it can only be a thing that seems to be itself. So I start with a drawing, and then, if I'm happy with the drawing I move to a painting; but maybe in the drawing I can show you some of the letters—where the letters is [sic]… I surround the shape of the letter… (inaudible, speaker leaves microphone 037-039) What I did is I quartered this piece; and then I folded it up four different ways to kind of create this mandala-like… structure. And… the next piece is, from the drawing, that these are much larger; these are generally about six feet by eight feet. And again, it's the same thing, with the same text. And I carve out with a hot wire sheets of Styrofoam, so I get a dimension going; and on that I generally incorporate about six gallons of different types of acrylic paint, modeling paste, etcetera. And then, near the end, I start to lay in the color and try to get the color to a point of where I want it; and then I top-coat everything with an oil paint.

SLIDE

This is a detail of the previous piece, so you can start to get a sense of the dimension in the work. They generally float about a half an inch to a quarter inch off the surface. And along—I've been trying to work with a lot of simultaneous series; and… when I had—I went to a Robert Ryman

retrospective; and… most of Ryman's paintings are white… and it seemed that everybody that would encounter these white paintings kept talking about the spiritual qualities. So I wanted to kind of see what would happen if indeed I did this white painting; and I kind of wanted to explore the idea of spirituality in the Nineties and also in this new century. But instead of… the ways that we've been incorporating spirituality, it seems… now the way that spirituality is being presented is… like the name of this piece, "Sexual Contact With Extra-terrestrials." And what I did is, in the middle I wrote the text. And you can start to see… (unintelligible, goes off mike to image) you start to see the letters… and that I folded that shape up on top of itself, where you can see it in reverse—kind of folded up on top of itself, and then folded down on top of itself; and I let the whole thing dissolve. And it's not really a white painting; it has about seventy/eighty different types of white.

SLIDE

And this is another series that I've been working with. These I'm calling my "Post-Feminist Masculinity Series." And the way that I started this series is I started to think about masculinity, and how it had been totally scrambled since feminism. And it seemed that people were really trying hard to get a sense of identity. And with this series I wrote the initial text; and this text is… "Why can't love come in a six-pack?" (laughter) And… what I then did is I got a lot of fashion advertisement from different fashion magazines, and also sports photographs from the *Times*. And I would project the image on top of the text, and just trace the outlines; so it would start to get this very subliminal… shape. So you can start to feel like body shapes, etcetera, in the work; but it becomes very abstracted, very subliminal…. And when I first started the series, also I was exploring the idea of taste. And there's a lot of received taste; and… for this I got a hold of some Ralph Lauren color chips; and used that particular palette—I would choose some of the chips for this…

SLIDE

This is a drawing for the next piece, which is called "Violence, Profanities, Supernatural Strangeness, and Graphically Rendered Sexual Situations." And where this came from was a

warning for a movie… The *Times* would give these little warnings at the end of the reviews; and I really liked the idea of having, you know, violence, profanities, supernatural strangeness, and graphically rendered sexual situations in an abstract painting. (laughter) So… you know, you read the title and you try to find where that activity is taking place; (laughter) but actually, where it is taking place is in the letters themselves. So I write out the text, and then you can start to pull out some of the letters—like the G seems to be popping out quite strongly; and then next to it is a D… and then you can see the R and then the A. So with these shapes the letters start to emerge and fade and shift; and… also I wanted this kind of somber palette, because I wanted to see… You know, I'm very interested in how… by changing the palette you change the meaning of a painting.

SLIDE

This is a series that I did… Along with this idea of doing color, I decided to do a triptych. And I wanted to see how radically the painting would change if I did three of them with three different palettes. And what I did for this one, which is called "Die of Pleasure," I wrote the text in a circular form in the middle; and I projected it seven times on top of itself. And it was kind of like, when you throw a pebble in a still pond, the ripples ripple out. So it kind of just, you know, kind of ripples out from itself.

SLIDE

This was the white version, which almost seems like a different painting; and it's identical except for the palette.

SLIDE

And this is the black version. And actually none of—the white one is—I would incorporate the colors of the previous painting, and I would approximate it, but I would just really whiten it out. And the same thing with the black one. What I did is I did the same intensity of color; and I just did like Renaissance glazes. So when you go up—Whoops! When you went up to this painting,

which was very, very shiny, the light would constantly be shifting when you would move… And also if you went up very close to it you would see the bright colors underneath, so it almost had like a deep, deep opalescent quality.

SLIDE

This—I did a couple of paintings. I became—I was trying to start a philosophy series; and I was very interested in Western philosophy… and I was reading a book on Derrida; and…what it was saying is… most of Western philosophy is based on negation. So… what I did for this piece is I just wrote "No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no" over and over until—on a grid; and then I totally flipped the language right on top of itself, and it gives this symmetrical kind of structure.

SLIDE

A detail of the piece.

SLIDE

This is again the same piece, but with a different palette.

SLIDE

And this is another series that I'm working on. Most of my paintings, what they say on the painting is what the title is. This series is the one exception. I became very interested in the idea of recovery language; and that's like AA, etcetera; and… also kind of pop psychology, and… what I wanted to do here is to use that language, which is to me really full of pathos and… very disturbing… And I wanted to combine it with—Originally I was going to turn them into Rorschach's; but a friend of mine gave me this medical book of his when he was studying to become a doctor on dissections of the brain. So I would put the projection of the brain over the piece; and the—So this piece is actually called "Step One;" but what it's saying is, "You deserve to be with someone that doesn't hit you." And I saw someone on Oprah Winfrey kind of giving

advice like that, and I just… couldn't believe what I was hearing… that people would even need to be told about this. And the palette on this is… I'm accessing Impressionistic palettes… for two reasons. For a long time I made my living as a painting contractor; and I would work for very wealthy people who could afford a lot of art… but they were afraid of contemporary art. But all of them kept saying, "If I could afford to, I would buy an Impressionistic painting." And then on the other side, every artist, and especially every painter I know, hates impressionism more than any other. So I thought, you know, this palette was really ripe to be explored.

SLIDE

This is again back to the idea of the spiritual series; and… I used to have a number of different rotating roommates in my old loft. And one of them got very involved in… extrasensory perception, UFOs, etcetera; and one day, after they had moved out, a catalog arrived… that was kind of a New Age catalog. And one of the things that they were offering was a video saying how to feel read good in zero to sixty seconds. So I thought, you know, a drawing that could do that would also be, you know, an engaging… idea. And again it's based on the mandala principle of where it's quartered, and, if you look in the lower right-hand corner, you can start to pick out some of the letters.

SLIDE

This is another series that—This unfortunately is only one painting of a series that I was planning to do. And this idea was to combine heavy metal music with Minimalism. (laughter) And… so… I thought, you know, there was something about it, like heavy metal and Minimalism, you know—heavy metal like Metallica and Richard Serra's somehow seemed to really make a lot of sense to me. (laughter) So… what I did is-- This text actually comes from "Nine Inch Nails; and it's "God is dead and no one cares." And… one of the reasons why I haven't continued this series is… doing the research, having to listen to all the Heavy Metal, was driving me crazy; so… I decided to not keep going with this series. (laughter)

SLIDE

This is again back to the Mandala idea. This actually was the first of the Mandala pieces. Generally with all of these series I've kind of told myself that I'll allow myself to do up to twelve versions of each piece and then drop it… so that I keep myself fresh and keep the ideas fresh; and I don't have to keep, you know, painting myself into a corner. So I've intentionally tried to—since I've started this whole body of work, I keep trying to move away from the corner and go farther into the room. But this piece was "I Want to Be Happy. Be Happy."

SLIDE

And this is the large version of it, the painted version. The previous one was gouache on paper.

SLIDE

This is back to the "Step" series. And what I did, again—It's the brain dissection; and the text is… "Today I will not give in to suicide." And… what I got—I stumbled across this Al Anon book of 365 daily meditations; and I couldn't believe some of the things that they were meditating on… so I've been kind of accessing some of this, you know, and appropriating some of this text. And for this particular one I looked at Bonnard, and kind of broke down the color on it, and… The funny thing is is… people don't read the text; or… they keep saying how beautiful they are. And then the text usually to me is just totally horrifying; so it's kind of playing against these… different things. And then it adds up; it starts to set up its own… you know, it spins out in different ways of reading it.

SLIDE

This goes back—This is the second one that I did of the "Post-Feminist Masculinity;" it's the same idea of taking different photographs and projecting them onto the text… and… again these are Ralph Lauren colors. In this piece… One day I was reading about the future of American imports—or, I'm sorry, exports. And what it was saying, in the year 2000 America is going to be exporting five different things; and those are money, movies, missiles, malls and madness. So I thought, you know, that seemed appropriate for the Post-Feminist idea….

SLIDE

This was something that I did—I had been intentionally playing with the whole psychedelic era of posters and painting and art… and then that—almost by—Once you start to explore that, the next step is Op. So when I did this piece, I intentionally did this kind of optical grid; and when I did it I was really worried because to me, at the time, Op Art was the most despised movement of the 20th century. But I kind of liked it; I liked how the paper warped, and I liked how the image warped… and it did this strange kind of contortion. And… But I thought, you know, that I was kind of committing career suicide. But actually it worked—it ended up working really well to my advantage. After doing this piece and starting to explore opticality and Op Art concerns, about a year later a couple of curators from the Museum of Modern of Art came over to my studio and asked me to be in a project show that was… re-examining Op Art.

SLIDE

And this was the painting that was based on the drawing. Oh, and the piece is called "Another Nail in the Coffin of Objectivity." And where that text came from was… I was watching PBS news; and there was a bunch of white guys arguing about Ebonics in Oakland; and one of them got so flustered he just went, "Oh, this is just another nail in the coffin of objectivity." (laughter) And, you know, that kind of statement is… I'm very fond of; so… (laughter)

SLIDE

Oops. This one wasn't supposed to be in this sequence; so I have to find out what this one says. (pause) I can't find the text for this. What I did is, after doing the other colorful Op grids, I decided that I wanted to see if I can do a monochrome Op. And this was my exploration into this… idea.

SLIDE

This one is… I've not done a painting of it; this is a drawing… that says "No Freudian symbols." And again, what I did for this particular piece is I write the text one way, and then I do a tracing of what I've written down; and I flip it back on top of itself, and it kind of gives this Rorschachtian… symmetrical… structure. And I like the idea that, you know, when you say, you know, Freudian symbols, the first thing you do is start looking for them.

SLIDE

Again, this is the idea of the flip. This one is of Salenus; and Salenus was the tutor to Dionysus… and I've always been… intrigued with the idea of Dionysus… So the idea of Dionysus' tutor intrigued me even more; but not much is known about him.

SLIDE

So this is drawing, and then… I did a large painting based on that drawing.

SLIDE

For these pieces I started to… I got myself a camera; and I started to play with image. I started to want to put text, image and abstraction; and start to layer them all together. And what I did for this is I was taking a lot of pictures of clouds; and I decided to turn the clouds into Rorschach's. So… And then I was jamming them against very kind of—the idea of words that seem to have no room for subjectivity. So, for instance, this piece is called "Evidence;" and another one that I did is called "The Facts." So what I've… I like this idea of using language that is not supposed to move, and putting it against something that is very, very subjective—like a Rorschach test. So… I'm not sure if you can see the cloud-like structures; but if you divide the page into four and quarter it… the yellow shapes are… cloud-like shapes.

SLIDE

And this is another version of the drawing.

SLIDE

And these are back to the idea of clouds. I did—I was reading another review… Seems like I read a lot of reviews, right? (laughter) But this was about French film; and it was saying that, in all of the French films in this festival, there were certain elements that were in each of the movies; and those were food, love, air, light, trees and architecture. And what I did is then—I had been in the south of France and I had seen this kind of embankment of clouds… kind of clustering over the horizon… and I took a photograph, and then I manipulated it, and did this… And I wasn't happy with this particular palette, so I tried again…

SLIDE

… and I came up with this drawing. And I liked this drawing, so…

SLIDE

… I did a painting. And… (pause)

SLIDE

…these are very early pieces. When I first started this whole series I was watching a lot of daytime TV. (laughter) And… you know, whenever I show this slide I get really worried that people are going to think this autobiographical… and it wasn't. You know, I had all of these elements at the time. (laughter) But… it was actually a young boy talking about his mother's boyfriend; and… he was going, you know, "no car, no job, no life."

SLIDE

And this is something that I've tried—this was kind of… I like these, but I don't like these. I started to try to move into dealing with portraiture; and these are my—I'm going to show you a couple of attempts at portraiture. What I did is… I started to use palindromes, and…

palindromes are words, or word sequences that read the same both directions. So this one says "Nital ar bra Latin"which is actually Swedish for "You speak good Latin." (laughter) But if you read this, it reads the same both ways. And what I did is I took a friend's photograph—and the idea also I wanted to explore… something that also seemed really taboo to me, which was the smile. So I wanted to do a whole series of portraits with people smiling; because in the history of portraiture it's incredibly rare. But ultimately I feel that the series—by using pixels—kind of falls too—you know, get into Polke, and… you know, can start to reference Charclaus, and… you know, some other people. So I've backed away from this idea, and I'm re-examining it now in a different way.

SLIDE

Again this… from a very far distance… This one was "Divisi God," another palindrome. And this was actually a wedding present for a friend of mine who has a gallery in Brooklyn, and his wife who's an editor of a small press for the same gallery, which is Porgy 2000. And from a distance it really looks like the photograph; but it—the drawing—you would have to go back about twenty-five feet for the image to emerge.

SLIDE

I'm not going to tell you the title of this one, because I'm not fond of it. But this also was the idea of… I wanted to explore the idea of reflection, the idea of… reflective… structures, reflective surfaces, so that—you know, sometimes you'd think about a painting, and the painting can be a certain type of reflection. So what I did is I crumpled—I got a hold of some Mylar and I crumpled it up, and I took a series of photographs and… was playing with it. But this… I haven't explored any farther, either.

SLIDE

This is something that I'm starting to move into also, which is the… I've become very interested in the idea of landscape, because… it's… I mean, how long have people been doing landscapes,

and how… out… is a landscape—although, interestingly enough it seems that a lot of artists right now are moving back into the idea of exploring this idea. So what I did is I was down… in Mexico, and I was looking—I've always loved watching reflections on water. So I took a series of photographs of those reflections… and again I projected that on top of the text; and the text is… ecstatic explosions of romantic love. And for this particular palette, I had been over in Italy, and I had been moving around—I'd gone also to the Louvre in Paris and just been blown away by some of these Renaissance paintings. So there was something about it that I kind of wanted to look into further… So for this particular painting I did a lot of breakdown of Botticelli "Birth of Venus;" and just pulled out the main components of the colors that he used. And I wanted to see if I could kind of slip in this—again, almost a subliminal—another layer that would start to come through, where you couldn't directly… figure out what was going on, but something was—you know, more layers would keep coming through.

SLIDE

And this piece… is—I was trying to play with the idea of abstract painting; so I did a series of kind of Pollock… Mytho-like gesture… blobs, on paper, that I would then scan and manipulate and turn into photographs. And… then project and push it back into a painting.

SLIDE

And this is the same idea of doing these kind of funny little gesture drawings that I would project on top of the text, and have that intersect.

SLIDE

This piece is… another drawing that I did; and this one is "Threat of Extinction." And even though it's reeds, and it kind of looks like a Jackson Pollock, it was more kind of referencing… The threat of extinction had more to do with the idea of painting than… the environment… for me.

SLIDE

This piece is the last piece that I've done of the "Post-Feminist Series…" And – the "Post-Feminist Masculinity Series." And this piece is… "My Planet Wants Me Dead." And what I did hear is I kind of dropped the Ralph Lauren thing, because it just seemed a little too glib for me… after doing a couple. It was fun to explore when I was exploring it; but I wanted to explore the emotional palette a little bit deeper, so… again I delved into Renaissance painting, kind of broke apart some of the palette in Leonardo's "Virgin on the Rocks."

SLIDE

This one is… I've always loved moire patterns; and in my window I have like a lot of window screens to keep the bugs out… And the ones that we have in Brooklyn kind of intersect, and create these amazing moire patterns, so… I figured out like a little method of letting the light come through… and getting pieces of white paper, so that the reflection would go onto the paper and I could photograph that… and then do these kind of moire shapes over the text. And the text I thought was amazing; it was an article again in the fashion section of *The Sunday Times*, which was… an article about shoes. And there was one irate—a quote that was saying, "Who's to say a shoe is not a piece of sculpture?" (laughs) (laughter)

SLIDE

This goes back to, again, the landscape idea… and… I was canoeing on the Delaware River, and Monica pointed out the light hitting the water on the Delaware… and she said, "Oh, it kind of looks like the way you draw text;" and it kind of does. So… I took that photograph and then, indeed, projected that. But I was really look—I had the image and I was looking for the right text for it. And I was really… kind of struggling to find the text… and when I was at a show I was stuck in a hotel out of town, and I was in a lobby, and I saw *People Magazine* on the afterlife. And usually I can't stand *People Magazine* because they don't have really great text that I've found in there. You would think that I would, but… it's not been the case. But this

one, just on a whim I picked up this magazine; and… within the first paragraph there was indeed the quote that I needed, which is "hope and comfort from the other side."

SLIDE

This goes back—This is "Step Three;" and this one is… "I'm Lonely Without My Pain." And again it… is a Bonnard kind of breakdown of palette.

SLIDE

This piece is called "Guilty Pleasures." And what I've been doing lately is I've been taking… photographs from the landscape. This was… certain branches in the winter… that I flipped in a Mandala-like structure; and then I did the same with the text, so the text is kind of… doing the same quadrant and kind of… spilling out from the middle… And… these pieces I'm still… involved with.

SLIDE

This is one of them also… that I had in my last show. This piece is "Broken Silence." And what I did is I did a topographical photograph of like, you know, broken leaves and twigs and stuff. And… when you put them all together this happens. But on this the text is asymmetrical; I just wrote the text very large, so it gives and asymmetric against the symmetrical structure.

SLIDE

And this is what happens when you add color. This piece is… "Counter-Songs;" and "Counter-Songs" came from a story told about—There was one particular Greek poet that—like dissed Hera; and he wrote like scathing comments about her. And… in return she took away his eyesight. So he got a little nervous, and he didn't know what to do; so he wrote a reversed poem, which he called the "Counter-Song," and… he got his sight back. And the image that this is on is… This is a photograph of… grass very, very close up; and I was fascinated by the kind of…

almost natural architecture that takes place when you put these things together…. And this is just the last—basically the last four years of my work; so I didn't want to, you know, go too far back, so this is kind of it.

Linda Earle: Could we have the lights, please? Thank you, Bruce.

Speaker: Thank you, Linda. (Applause)

Linda Earle: Do you have questions… for Bruce?

Question: (unintelligible) Do you—are the carved out or Dremeled out, or—?
Speaker: I use a… an architectural device for model making, which is a little thin wire called a nichrome wire; and a friend of mine rigged it up for me years ago. And… what you do is—I just hit a pedal and the wire heats up immediately. So I can get as detailed… or… well, I can get—Whatever I draw I can cut. And then what I do is I just kind of build these jigsaw puzzles and then put them back together.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: I've been using Styrofoam for about fifteen years; and… the reason was, as I was doing these kind of collage-like paintings, I wanted a relief quality in the painting, and… --because I liked things kind of emerging from the surface—and prior to that I had been, you know, Minimalist; I'd been under the spell of Minimalism. And… I felt like I was… You know, near the end of my Minimalist period I was just doing, you know, three inch strips to define a twelve foot square, and… then I started putting things back in so that I'd have something to keep working on. So I had been doing these relief-like things, and just cutting out with cardboard. And then someone came to visit me; and she was from—She was originally from Tokyo, but had been living in Paris for ten years… and so she had like this really… curious accent. And she said, "Why not use what they stick refrigerators in?" And we kept trying to figure out what that was for about forty-five minutes; and we finally figured out that it was Styrofoam… And then I mentioned it to a friend of mine who had been involved in theater design; and he said, "Oh, yeah,

I was just on Canal Street and just saw some nichrome wire. We used to use that to make different sets." So… he said, "All we need is like a piece of metal, a car battery, a sewing machine pedal, and some of this wire, and we could get one of these cutting devices." So we went down to Canal Street when Canal Street was full of (unintelligible, sounds like Love 434) hardware stores, and we rigged this thing up, and I've been using it ever since.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: No, I mean it's—the wire heats so incredibly quick… that you just keep moving… It's almost like doing a very fast light drawing. If you stop then it does start to kind of go in. Yeah.

Question: Can you talk about (unintelligible)

Speaker: Well, the scale—Yeah, usually the drawings are—Basically I do three sizes of works. The drawings I generally do twenty-two by thirty inch drawings; and the way that it—You know, I kind of want to block out the idea in terms of the drawing to see if I want to spend the energy making a painting… and I want to see if it's going to work. So… I generally do a very finished drawing and then have it up and kind of look at it to see if it's compelling to me for a long enough period, and then…. And also to see if it *is* working, or I need to adjust the idea to make it work. And then… Then the paintings generally have two scales. One is… eight feet by six feet; and the other is four feet by five feet. And… interestingly enough, the larger ones can hold much more detail than the smaller ones. So usually the drawings for the smaller ones are actually smaller drawings. Does that—?

Question: I would the scale (unintelligible)

Speaker: Somehow it… somehow scales up really quite well. I mean, the drawing and the painting are pretty similar in a lot of ways, except for the dimensionality and the materiality. But in terms of the image they basically keep going up. Because I'm dealing a lot with transfers, I'll make patterns of—You know, since I'm starting with the text, I can just kind of scale up the text;

and then when I'm using image I can just kind of project it larger so it… it stays within it's dimension. Yes.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: There are a bunch of drawings out there that… are not paintings. Alan.

Question: The drawings are traditional, like watercolor or pencils, or—

Speaker: Yeah, they're gouache on paper… and they're very, very flat, and just… you know, they really just kind of like sit there. Yeah.

Question: Isn't there a point where your process (unintelligible)

Speaker: I'm not sure what—

Question: Well, I mean, do you feel some kind of connection, like a *personal* kind of connection between—I mean, obviously (unintelligible)

Speaker: The process and…

Question: And the content.

Speaker: … and the content. Yeah, I think what happens is… with the way that I work it's—I'm very interested in creating many layers… and different ways of reading the work. I mean, I give it a rough structure and hopefully what happens is when I make the piece it starts to create its own… you know, other layers that I don't know about. By having the dimensionality… that constantly changes depending upon the lighting; and if it's near a window it's constantly changing. So… it becomes very active with the play of light and shadow and… Is that answering? (inaudible response, possibly non-verbal?) Yeah.

Question: (inaudible)

Speaker: Generally I work on maybe three or four at the same time… because—Pardon?

Question: And drawings before that, or—

Speakers: Drawings… sometimes during the same period… because there's a time of where the pieces… need to dry, and there's also… just the physicality of doing it. And then also sometimes, like any artwork, you need to contemplate what you're doing. Sometimes you just need time to contemplate where you want the piece to go.

Question: (unintelligible)… a decision about the degree of legibility depending on the text, because some of it is quite legible—

Speaker: Yes. Generally it's not about the text itself; it's about what I'm trying to do for the particular series. So… And I—You know, I set up certain ideas around each of the series, but I often break my own rules… if it needs be… So I'm not so… You know, generally I—I mean some—I like to incorporate… the ideas of other work into the whole thing, so it becomes more fluid… so it's not so rigid.

Question: It almost seems like the more… you seem attracted to very reductive statements—that certainly reductive statement—

Speaker: Yeah.

Question:-- and some of the more—the most-- reductive ones are the most legible: "No job, no car, no (unintelligible)."

Speaker: Right. Right, right. But then some are just totally illegible—

Question: Yes.

Speaker: like the Op grid, like "Another Nail in the Coffin of Objectivity" is…

Question: Right.

Speaker: …the painting I can't even find out where the text is. I've—you know, I've lost it.

Question: And who knows what that means? (laughs)

Speaker: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Question: Is there any kind of a painting where you don't use (unintelligible)

Speaker: … What I've found—The reason, you know, I'm interested—I've been starting to *try* some pieces without text. I just did a drawing without text to see if it would work, because I'm trying to work out a new idea. And I didn't add the text. But right now the text adds almost… You know, it's a found—Because it's a found text, it's almost like using a found object… in a certain way. And the found text almost adds an element of chance, so that it dictates… It dictates the initial structure that I have almost no control over except for my choosing to use it. So the rhythm of the way that the letters set up a… kind of a ground for other things to… work with; or—you know, things that you can do with it.

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: Like which concrete poetry?

Question: (unintelligible) Do you ever play around with that, or (unintelligible 580) structure…?

Speaker: Generally I stay with what I see. Every time I try to—You know, I see something sometimes that I really like; but it's not quite right… and then I play with the idea of manipulating it… And I find that there's something inherently right—When you find the right

text it's just so right… that for me to… move it, or for me to change it changes the integrity of the whole idea of using a found text… instead of making up the text. (long pause) Yeah.

Question: Do you think that in your color choice (unintelligible)

Speaker: Well, I think there's a few—I mean, because of their—Because I'm dealing with a few different types of palettes, they're generally based on the series that I'm working with; and I stay within… the zone of what that particular series is. So… And sometimes the palette will grow, but all of us—

[AUDIO BREAK]

… for many years, and I still am. But I was very involved with… I had a huge love affair with experimental music for many years… and a lot of my friends were composers. And at one point I tried to play music and do some kind of experimental stuff myself, but it was just… really just basically for fun. It was… you know, something—Because I'd been schooled in art, after art school art wasn't any fun for a while… because I'd lost the playfulness; it was like it had to be serious. And I would do music and just kind of… you know, do whatever I wanted. But then later I became friends with a New York composer who I performed with who did this piece called "Speaker Swinging," of where he would spin speakers in a twenty-foot circumference over… you know, like around, like a lasso… and… the sound would—He would be channeling a couple of sine (sign?) waves through each of the speakers; and there would usually be three performers… And they would create like all this (unintelligible, sounds like "hetra dining") and wave patterns and clicking and… you know, it was just this amazing… amazing piece, and… Then what happened for me, hanging out with the composers is I got to know a lot of people in experimental music; but I knew absolutely no one in the art world; and that was what I kind of wanted to do. So… I started to, you know, get to know more artists; and… as everyone here probably knows, the more deeply you get in the art world, the harder it is to keep other activities, other interests… going, because it becomes so focused… much to my… You know, I mean, I really wish that I had more time; but time is now getting tighter for… You know, it takes a long time to do work.

Question: (unintelligible)… did you find yourself like trying to channel that into your work… (unintelligible)

Speaker: Well prior to the text pieces I worked for many years as an abstract painter. And… what I've noticed, dealing with a lot of—you know, since I've used text, and I go visit abstract artists' studios… abstract artists will talk about absolutely everything that they're thinking… and it may have nothing to do with the painting that you're looking at. I mean, I remember looking at some stripe paintings, and… the artist explaining how it had to do with the Gulf War. And I kept looking at it going… So… maybe when I was listening to the music I was thinking the same thing? But it probably had nothing to do with the work. Yeah.

Question: Do you remember what (unintelligible)

Speaker: The which one?

Question: (unintelligible)

Speaker: The first three of the slides?

Question: No, in general. Like when you started showing some abstract (unintelligible), do you remember what the impulse was that (unintelligible)

Speaker: Yeah. The way that I got into text is… I was doing—I had been doing these abstract paintings for many years… and these paintings were so incredibly involved, that they would take maybe three months to do one painting. And they were… You know, they were three feet thick; and they had maybe seven layers of… information going through them. So… you know, I would come up with other ideas as I was working on it; and I kept going, "You know, I'd really love to be able to do some other ideas," but I would have no time. And then I was working—I became friends with another artist, who also had been very involved in doing *their* work; and we decided to do a collaboration based on the initial daytime TV shows. So we would watch these daytime TV shows and grab… the text. You know, it was, you know, when… prior to Bill Bennett, when

they were getting really outrageous, like… "My boyfriend… stole my mother from me." You know. So we would try to do… different pieces based on the particular topic of the day. And it was kind of fast… fast ideas… And we were also kind of riffing on… contemporary art, and drawing upon other artists and kind of being playful with that… and… one day I—for one of these I decided to do—I had written down a lot of the text of what I had heard that day, and just been kind of horrified by; and… I just decided that I would do some psychedelic posters…. And when I was a teenager I used to love doing that stuff…. And it was so much fun that, you know, I was going, "Oh, my God! What am I doing?" But it was still like a lot of fun… that… I started doing some more. And then I decided to try painting; and the first painting that I did was called "Oblivion," because a friend of mine wanted to put together a show called "Oblivion." And… it just—It kind of opened things up for me… like using this language opened up possibilities that I found that my abstract work had kind of… You know, it kept getting more and more narrow, more and more focused, more and more concentrated; and this was… This really opened things up; and the more of them that I did, the more I realized that I could do whatever I wanted, that no one was telling me that I had to do this one body of work…. So… the language kind of freed me to start to think about some other ideas… and to use language with image and… you know, it's—It just keeps going… hopefully.

Linda Earle: Are there other questions? Then thank you again, Bruce.

Speaker: Thank you, Linda. (Applause)

END OF RECORDING