

IMPORTANT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

Title Page

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Title: Mr.

Interviewee's forenames: Jack

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Sex: Male

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F7879 Side A

Recording with Jack Smith at his home in Hove on the 24th of November 1999.

[break in recording]

Do you know what today's date is?

I think it's the 25th is it? Is that right?

Of which month and which year?

November, '99.

[break in recording]

If I may, I wondered if I could just start where we usually start, which is asking whether you knew your grandparents.

Yes, briefly I knew them. Well I knew one of them more than the other side of the family, because my mother's father, when his wife died, came to live with us. In fact, also her brothers came to live with us. In those days the eldest daughter, or the daughter, if there was a death of either parent, the other parent came to live with that daughter, and also the brothers or sisters came to live in the same family. So I got to know him better than the other grandparents, because he was with us for quite a long time.

What was his name?

I think it was Alfred. He was known locally as Affy, so I presume it was Alfred.

And his surname?

Booth, Alfred Booth.

And have you any idea when he was born?

No I haven't. No. I know that he...he lost whatever work he was doing during the Depression, which will be the Thirties, and he never worked properly after that time; in fact my father kept him really. I mean he did...he did odd jobs; he had an allotment and he brought...that was his contribution, if you like, bringing vegetables and things like that into the home. But he never worked again.

And do you think he found that a very difficult position, were you aware...?

I should imagine so, yes, I should think so.

And where had he grown up, do you know much about his life?

No, I don't. I presume he was...he'd grown up in Sheffield, I don't...I can't imagine him being anywhere else. (laughs) But the other, the other grandparents were my father's parents, they were very different, they were kind of, the Victorian mother and father. The grandmother sat in her chair, she was very very fat, and all she did all day was read the Bible, that was all. He was more active. I don't know what he had done. I think he'd had something to do with the railways. He spent most of his time gardening, that I do know. And we met them every year at Christmas, all the family, which of course being a Victorian family was quite large, had to go there for Christmas. Personally I hated it, because we had to play, as children we had to play stupid games, and I was the kind of person who preferred to sit in a corner and read a book. (laughs) And we had worst of all to kiss our cousins, which at that age of course one didn't like doing. As one got older of course when one might have liked it, one wasn't allowed to. (laughs) So it was that kind of background

Did the grandmother read the Bible aloud, or to herself?

No. No she just sat there with it in her lap. I don't...I don't know, I don't... I mean, one had really no contact as such, you know?

What...where did they live? When you said you went to them, where were they from?

They lived about, two or three miles away from where we lived. It was within walking distance. I mean at Christmas we always walked back at night late, because there was no transport, so it was within walking distance, you know.

And if they had a large family, was there space for everybody, or not?

They had...there would be two rooms, all the family would be in two rooms. (laughs)

As in, a front room and a parlour?

That's right, yes. Yes.

And what do you remember about the house? Was it dark, or light?

No, it was quite light. I think it was, my guess is that it would be a 1930s house, in a more, a more kind of middle-class neighbourhood than...more middle-class than where we lived for example.

And were you made to feel uncomfortable about that, was there a sense of class difference?

No, not at all. No. No there was none of that. But we, as I say we hardly ever saw them. My other grandfather of course, as lived with us so we saw a lot of him, and, I mean he spent the war with us, and a war made you get to know people better.

And would your other grandfather have come with you for Christmas with your father's parents?

No, no. No he didn't. Funny, funny question you ask. I never even thought about that, but no, he didn't. I'm sure he wouldn't want to.

Mm. So how big was this family that met at Christmas, how many brothers did your father have, or sisters?

Let see, he had...let's see, one...two sisters, no three...four sisters, four sisters, and two brothers. Mm.

And they all had children?

And they all had children. [pause] They all had only one child, not more than one. I mean that was very wise of them, because I don't suppose they could afford having a lot of children.

It was quite unusual then as well though wasn't it?

Only to have one child? Yes, I suppose it was. Yes, the idea of course was to have two children.

And, were your aunts and uncles part of your life, or did you really only see them at Christmas?

No, not really. No.

And, how much do you know about the way your father was brought up? He was presumably brought up in a very Christian framework.

I don't know. He wasn't...he didn't go to church or anything like that, but, he had...he had standards about behaviour, but not rigid. He was a good man I think. I think he was a good man to take in my grandfather and my mother's brothers; I mean that must have been a terrible strain you know.

How old were the brothers at the time, the mother's brothers?

I think they'd be in their thirties, I think.

And obviously they were unmarried?

They were unmarried, yes. As soon as they got married of course they, they left. One of them died. He'd already left, but he died quite young.

Of an illness?

Yes, he had meningitis I think, yes.

And did that have quite an impact on you, were you aware of what had happened?

No. Only my mother coming to tell me he had died one morning, as she woke me up.
No. I didn't know him very well.

And was she very distressed by it?

Very...?

Distressed by it?

Yes she was, yes.

So, was that one of the first times you ever saw a parent being very unhappy?

I think so, yes.

And did that...was that quite a burden for you?

I don't think so, as a child, I don't think... I don't think life is like that for a child, I think they live for the moment and then there is the next moment and then there's a next moment.

Mm.

I don't think they kind of ponder over it. I mean they might ponder over it if their parent dies, I think that may be different, but not so one more removed.

Mm. And what were you told about death, do you remember?

No. Can't remember it ever being discussed at all. I know that, I mean, we were surrounded by people. My mother helped certain people when they were ill, and one knew when they'd died, that's all. Or one knew when there was some kind of unusual tragedy, like a man committing suicide. (laughs) Something like that. Or the way he committed suicide. I remember this man. There was a park near us, and with a tiny stream running through it. He killed himself by immersing his nose and mouth into the stream, which was no more at that time than maybe two inches deep. Now that, that did make an impression. (laughs)

Mm. Did you know him?

No.

Mm. And I mean, were you more intrigued by the possibility of it, or shocked by it, or...?

I don't know, as I said, as a child I don't think you actually think in those terms.

Did you have a religious upbringing? Did you have a framework for it?

No. No. We went to church when we were very young, that was a kind of idea that you should do that. But by the time I was eleven I think, I ceased going. I was going out with my friends. We were walking in the countryside every weekend, and then, we were living near Derbyshire, beautiful country. And many young people used to go out at the weekend walking for the whole day.

So it was really more because you wanted to do something else, rather than rejecting the Church?

Yes, it became a nuisance. (laughs)

Mm. And do you still have any residual belief, do you have some basis, or not?

No, no I haven't. I don't think I have any at all really. [pause] What is it somebody said about being an artist? It's a heavenly curse. Which makes...which presumes that there is something about it which, to deal with the imagination, that one doesn't understand; where that comes from I don't know. Why one has that in the beginning, I don't know. I mean I knew at the age of fourteen that I wanted to be an artist. I think that was for one or two reasons, that, it was the only subject that I was really good at at school, at grammar school, apart from English literature, and, the other reason was, I wanted a different kind of life to what I saw around me. I also came across a book called *Modern French Painters* in the reference library by a man called Wilensky, which was very important to me, it introduced me to modern French painting, Picasso, Braque, Matisse. Made a tremendous impression on me. And I thought, this is what I want to do. So in a funny way I was introduced to modern art before actually coming into contact with Old Masters, which at that time they didn't interest me at all, I thought, I thought it was rather boring to be quite honest. Whenever I saw a reproduction, I never saw an original then, but when I was faced with these paintings, I thought, this is terrific, you know?

And what do you think it was about them that you found intriguing?

I don't know. I suppose the open vistas that one instinctively knew, or wanted to explore. And also I think something about their lives seemed so romantic, a lovely idea. I mean the idea in, in Sheffield at that time was to leave...was to go to grammar school if you were intelligent enough to make that, and then to either go on to university, or if you don't go to university, then you should go for the bank, or into teaching, both of which were considered safe occupations. Of course, after the Thirties of course they looked like safe occupations. So that was the kind of thing everybody was aiming for. I mean I understand it, but, it was deadly. (laughs)

Mm. Did you have any anxiety because you'd been aware of the economic disaster of the Thirties, did you have a worry about survival, or did that just seem irrelevant?

It seemed irrelevant. I knew it was going to be tough. I got a... I went at the age of sixteen to Sheffield Art School, I got a scholarship to go there, so that some of the financial difficulty was taken away from my parents. And then, I went there, yes, from the age of sixteen to eighteen I went to Sheffield College, then I did two years military service in the Air Force, which was a terrible interruption, I hated it. At some point I'll tell you how I got out of the Air force, because I find it an amusing but terrible story. But I went, I went as I say for two years in the Air Force. During that time I knew I wanted to get to London where art took place, and where there were other artists, so when I was on leave in London one weekend I went, I went to an art school called St. Martin's, which was in the Charing Cross Road. I thought, what a marvellous place to be, in the middle of Charing Cross Road, all the bookshops and galleries. I could imagine nothing better. So I went inside and I said, 'I'd like...when I leave the Air Force in such-and-such a date, I'd like to come here, is it all right, is it possible?' So he said, 'Well next time you come on leave, bring your folder of work.' Which I did, I took a few things that I'd done. It was so easy in those days to get into college by comparison with now. He looked at the work and he said, 'OK. Come next term, September the so-and-so.' And so that's how it started. But, when September came, though I'd got my place at St. Martin's, all demobilisation was stopped in the Air Force because of the Berlin airlift. So, naturally the military use any excuse to keep everybody in. And, I was...I was very upset about that. I wrote home and I said that this had happened, and I'd got my place at St. Martin's, but it started and I couldn't take it because of this, this taking place. Unbeknown to me, my father wrote to the M.P., obviously a very strong letter. All I knew about it was, one day I was sitting in the billet with some friends, and an Air Force sergeant came in and said, 'You're wanted at the office immediately.' So I went to the office. They said, 'You're leaving here in twenty-four hours. Pack your bags, get your warrant, and go to Blackpool to be demobbed. But, before you go, the commanding officer wants to see you.' So I thought, well, all right. I went in to see the commanding officer, and he said, 'How the hell did you get a release? Who's your father? Is he somebody powerful and important?' I said, 'No, he's actually a senior clerk in an

engineering works.’ He said, ‘Why are you going out?’ I said, ‘Because I’ve got this place at St. Martin’s School of Art.’ ‘Oh Christ!’ he said, ‘artists! We’ll be bloody glad to get rid of people like you.’ He said, ‘Here am I, I’ve been in two world wars and getting ready for my third.’ I thought, this man is insane, and not only insane, he’s dangerous, because he’s trying to provoke me. I didn’t say anything at all. So he said, ‘Go on, get out.’ I mean if I’d said anything, if I’d really said what was in my mind, he would have kept me in. I’d have been in the clink. (laughs) Anyway, I got out.

Were you quite used to dealing with people like that? I mean it was a good strategy to say nothing; was it instinctual or had you learnt it?

Yes it was, because, being in the Air Force, one had to kind of be someone other than what one was. I mean very often I wanted to talk to an officer and say, ‘You’re being bloody stupid,’ which you would in normal life, but you couldn’t. Not unless you wanted trouble.

And had you had similar circumstances at school or in the family, had you learnt how to work round those people?

No, I don’t think so, but I was a very, I suppose I was a very inward person, protecting myself shall I say. The fact that I used to go in a corner and read a lot of books, is a means of protection, or looking for another life isn’t it?

Mm. But your...

I mean I remember going to the library when I was very young and kind of, just absorbing book after book after book.

Was it a bookish family, were there books at home?

No. The only books at home were brought in by my uncle, who read cowboy stories. (laughs) One of which I read myself, but, that was because I had nothing else.

Did they have illustrations, were they little paperbacks?

No, they didn't have illustrations. They were...they were library books.

And what about your very early books, did you have books as a small child?

I can't remember. I had comics. My kind of literary education started through my brother, who was five years older than me, and he started to collect books, good books, you know, which he'd got the idea from being at grammar school himself. So I came across all kinds of things. I can't remember all of them now, but, D.H. Lawrence, and you know, writers like that, which one knew nothing about, but one started to read them, because they were there. And, that was very very good, you see.

And would you and your brother talk about the books, or not?

No. He was five years older, I mean five years for a child is a lot. When you're eleven, he's sixteen. I mean when one was sixteen oneself, did one have any conversation with a child of eleven? I don't think so. (laughs)

And, was he letting you read the books, did he know, or was it rather...?

Yes. Oh yes.

So he was generous in that way?

Yes.

What was his...

Well my father occasionally read one of them. He sometimes read one of my books that I'd brought in from the library.

What sort of books would you have been reading, before you got to the stage where your brother was bringing those books back, what was...?

Well I remember reading George Bernard Shaw plays, George Bernard Shaw. I loved, I loved big books. (laughs) I had a passion at one time, I don't know what age I was then, but I had a passion for rather large American novels of the period, like Theodore Dreiser. Do you know Dreiser's work?

I don't, no.

Right. The big American novel is about that thick by Dreiser, and each one would be called, *The Mathematician*, *The Genius*, or something like that. Oh *The American Tragedy* was the famous one, which they made a film of. Totally absorbing.

So were they quite racy, what were they like?

They told a good story. They were only, I mean they were only strange in the sense that he, he went into each subject so thoroughly. I mean if he was talking about a scientist or a mathematician, there would be a lot of talk about that, the science or the mathematics and things like that. *The Financier* it was called I think. So you can imagine what that was about.

And did you know much about America? What did America mean?

No, I knew nothing about America, except when the American troops came over here. They weren't stationed near us, but one heard about, you know, rock 'n' roll and swing, all that kind of music, and those kind of films which were...which were very frequent at that time.

When did you first actually hear the music?

[pause] I presume it was on the radio. I mean that was the main sense of entertainment wasn't it at that time. I suppose I was eleven, the war started when I was eleven, so it would be about eleven or twelve when I first came into contact with that.

And did you like it?

Yes, I like jazz. I like films, it was a means of escape again I think. [pause] It was also a way of meeting girls, going to the cinema. (laughs)

Do you remember particular films having an effect?

[pause] No I can't, not at that age, no. There was a lot of Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland around I seem to think, when they were young.

And in terms of music, had you had a musical education at all?

No. I... Oh sorry, I am touching that. No, I hadn't. We both, both my brother and I learnt to play the piano, because that was considered a good thing to do, but, my brother was better than I was at it.

Was there a piano in the house?

Yes there was, yes.

And did anyone else play?

No, nobody else played.

So, did you get sent out for lessons, or did...?

Yes, we were sent out for lessons, yes.

And were you pleased with that, or was it something you resisted?

I eventually resisted it. One reason why I resisted it was because I wasn't... I didn't spend enough time learning or practising; I was interested in other things. [pause] My brother kept it up longer than me, I mean he was able to...he was able to play one or two things, though he no longer does. I mean he eventually gave it up. I also had

to give it up because when I went to grammar school I just didn't have time, you know, there was always homework and things like that.

Were you quite well taught, were you...did you begin to understand the structure of music at all, or not?

No. No I didn't. I seemed to like rather sombre music. I remember my teacher was rather upset that I wanted to learn the beginning of the funeral march by Beethoven. (laughing) Which I didn't play very well either.

How did you know it existed?

What?

The funeral march from Beethoven.

Well because it was in the book that the teacher had on her piano.

So it was its title more than anything else?

Yes.

Right.

Absolutely.

And you presumably could read music, you were taught to read music?

Yes, in a primitive kind of way. I mean music meant more to me when I got to be, at the age of about sixteen, fifteen or sixteen.

Mm. I mean presumably if you were taken to church as a small child there was music there?

I wasn't taken, I went on my own. Well there were hymns, they were ghastly. I think English hymns are absolutely awful. There's too much moaning in them, you know? Which it shouldn't be, I think it should be more of a celebration. I mean when you see very often black communities, when they go to church, that's better I think, they love it, they enjoy themselves.

Mm.

I'm just going to flip the.....

End of F7879 Side A

F7879 Side B

Was there singing anywhere in life, I mean, was there ever singing at home or at these Christmases, or anything like that?

No. No there wasn't.

Would you have ever gone carol singing or anything?

Oh yes, yes, one went carol singing. But as I was tone deaf, it wasn't very good.
(laughs) Both my brother and I were told at school not to take part in singing, because it put the other people off.

Not very good for your confidence.

(laughs) Lovely. It didn't stop me liking music, but it...

*But do you remember your house being mainly silent, or was the radio always on?
Was it...*

The radio was on quite a lot, because, being wartime, that's what I remember most about the radio during the war, that was the main mean of communication, what was going on in the world. It was also the main entertainment that was available.

And would it be the whole family gathered round the radio, or was it more individual than that?

I think when we were all at home, yes, we all listened to the radio, but I mean, I was also going out with friends in the evening.

What are the radio programmes that stick in your memory?

ITMA. Do you know what ITMA was?

It's That Man Again.

It's That Man Again, yes, that was very popular. And it was very funny at the time. I don't think it's funny now. When I hear it sometimes, when somebody replays it on the radio or, you know, when you come across it, I don't think it's funny at all. But then, one thought it was. I suppose one was... One's sense of humour changes, doesn't it, I think, very much so. And maybe there was nothing else to compare it to. I mean when I see films of that period, I think they're abominable, boring. But one had nothing else, so one, one took part in it.

Would your parents have been going to the cinema as well? Were you all...?

Occasionally.

Right.

I don't remember ever going with them actually, I always went with a friend. Or on my own occasionally, though I usually went with friends.

Mm. And what was your parents' social life, did they have a kind of, people in to supper, and did they go out and things, or was it rather internal?

They never had things in for supper. The only thing that, if they were entertaining relations, there would be tea, that is, aunts and uncles, it would be tea. My mother actually went to whist drives, she played a lot of cards, and she was very lucky with it. [pause] Funnily enough, my grandfather, the one who lived with us, all my young life I remember this, this painting hanging on the wall of a sporting scene, a dog, you know, usual kind of Victorian sporting scene, a dog and something it was hunting or picking up, a bird or something it was picking up. That was on our living-room wall. I never really asked about it until, until I think I went to art school. I didn't think it was any good, I thought it was terrible, really; not a great, not a good painting, I mean, I thought it was by a very very competent amateur of the time. And, I found out that my grandfather won that painting by playing a game of snooker with the artist, and the...my grandfather said to the artist, 'I can beat you at snooker. I will use

an umbrella, and you will use the cue, and I will still beat you.’ And they put down an amount of money that was to be paid by the loser. Well as it happened, my grandfather won, and the artist couldn’t pay, he didn’t have enough money, so he gave him this picture instead. (laughs) I felt that was, that was an extr... When I used to look at my grandfather sitting there, I just couldn’t connect him doing that, you know. Anyway this picture, I mean, it didn’t survive my time at art school, because I painted over it. I was given it by, given it to me by my mother, who said, ‘Well, we don’t want it, you use it.’ So I painted over it. If I’d have kept that picture until the 1950s, it would have been worth a lot of money, not because it was a good painting, but because people, country people were buying that kind of picture, you know?

Your grandfather sounds rather splendid.

I think he was, maybe he was more interesting than one ever found out.

Did he show any interest in you?

Oh he was... No, I wouldn’t...well I don’t know whether he did or not. I mean he used to take me to the allotment occasionally to get me out of the way, because my, my mother’s washing day or something I suppose. He was all right, all right.

Did he tell you stories of any kind?

No, no, not at all. No.

And you give the impression somehow that he might have been rather silent by the time he came to live with you; was he?

Yes. Yes he was.

Did you ever know your grandmother at all, had she died before you were born?

No, I was born. I think I remember visiting her once. She lived quite close. But I don’t remember anything about her.

Do you remember their house at all?

No. I know it was a very small house.

Right. And, your mother had grown up presumably entirely in Sheffield?

Yes.

And do you know where she went to school?

No, I don't know.

And did she have brothers and sisters?

Yes, she had three brothers. No sister. She was the only girl. That's why she had to take on this responsibility of looking after the family.

And do you know how she felt about that?

Must have been a terrible life. I mean constant work, constant housework.

Did she have a job at any point?

Yes, before she married.

What did she do?

She was in a, working in a cutlery, Sheffield cutlery works. I don't know what her job was, but, I know that's where she was, because when she got married they gave her a complete set of cutlery, which they gave to everybody who got married.

In one of those boxes?

That's right. Yes.

Do you still have it?

Everything. No, I'll tell you what I have got now, she gave me, when I came down to London to live on my own she gave me some of the knives, and I've still got some of those left, yes. They've lasted a long time, and they're good.

Was the cutlery box, was that something you would have played with as a small child?

Cutlery? No I don't think so. No.

And did you get the impression she quite enjoyed working? She must have had a sort of camaraderie there.

Yes, I should imagine so. They were all girls together.

And did she stay in touch with any of those people?

Not that I know of. I mean she had one or two close friends, but I don't know how she knew them. I mean she married my father, my father was in the '14-18 war, I can't remember exactly...I think...I think he possibly married about 1921 or something like that. I think, I'm guessing that, that time, because... We always had, in the house we always had two paintings done by my father, about this size, which were dated 1921. Now, he never did any more but those two paintings. Those two paintings would have been done because, when you have a house, you put something on the wall, 'so I'll do two paintings, we'll have one for this room and one for that room. We also need a sideboard; I'll make a sideboard.' And that's what happened I think. So, when...when he died actually, I had one of the paintings, which I've got outside, and my brother had the other one, and they are really views of, I think Holland, the canals with boats on and things, and my guess is that they were done from postcards, which he picked up when he was in the Army. I mean, I thought, it's a lovely idea, you've got to have a picture so you do one; you've got to have a sideboard, so you do one; he needed some chairs, so he made some chairs. (laughs)

Fascinating. And are they in oil?

No, they're water-colours. I'll show you one eventually.

Did you remember finding them intriguing when you were a child, or not?

No, not at all. Not at all.

And do you think he could have been a painter?

I don't think so. No, I don't think so.

Because?

[pause] I think, I don't think the environment would have helped him in that direction. I think people were too frightened to do anything other than take a job where they get a steady income. I mean the idea in those days of being an artist was poverty, being a poet[??] was insane.

But, so he might have had talent but not the right circumstances?

I don't know whether he had talent or not. To copy a, to copy a postcard... Well, I mean, say he'd spent twenty years after that producing work, yes, it's different. My brother for example, he went...he came...he was a pilot during the war. He was in the war for six years and survived as a pilot. When he came out, he went into... You know you were given a grant if you wanted one to do something? He went into teaching. He should have gone to university but he didn't. I think he wanted to just have a life of his own, so he went into teaching. No, I remember when he was at grammar school, he did one or two posters which I remember being very good, but then he did nothing else. So one...not all that long ago, maybe in the late Fifties or early Sixties, he said to me one day, 'When I draw on the blackboard for the children to illustrate something for them, I find it very difficult, and is there any way I can...is there anything I can do which would help me in that way?' So I said, 'Yes, there is.'

I said, 'If you actually can learn to draw something every day, it doesn't matter what it is, a box of matches or, anything, a cup, saucer, it doesn't matter what it is, just draw something every day, you'll find that you're able to think in those terms much more easily, it won't be a, a traumatic experience for you.' So he started to do that. Of course once he started to do it, he got interested. And he went on to do some painting. So, a bit later he said to me, 'What I don't understand is, when I look at a painting, say by Cézanne, are all these colours in the face? For example he uses blue and purple and orange. I just do not see that in people's faces.' So I said, 'Well that's...that's something that you can only learn to see, and in any case it's an imaginative interpretation of what the artist is looking at. What I think you might try doing is copying a portrait by a painter, and see how you get on with that.' Well next time I saw him he showed me this...he'd done a copy of a Cézanne portrait. (laughs) I couldn't have done it. I couldn't have done it. But all I am trying to point out, first of all it's easier to copy than to actually, using the imaginative interpretation yourself. I mean if I painted you, I would use all kinds of colours, I mean, because I'm...I'm thinking in those terms. But someone who is learning at the beginning doesn't think in those terms, they're faithful to what they are copying. And I think... That's why some amateurs are very good actually at copying other people's work, they'll do a pastiche of something and it's quite good, because they're not led astray by wanting to invent, which one does oneself. So he did this copy, to my amazement, and from then on he became interested in art, and now he spends his time, not painting but doing etching, and has done for many years. So what I'm trying to say is, that maybe if my father...if that had happened to my father, maybe it would have developed, you know, in a way, in some way.

Mm. How are you able, given that your experience is so totally different from your brother's, how were you able to suggest those very helpful things for him? Because it's a big leap, it's not really connected in a way to the way you've worked. How did you know to say those things to him?

Well I had...I had been teaching by that time. I have given similar instructions maybe to students, I don't know. I certainly maybe would have given the idea about drawing every day, because both my wife and I did that ourselves in order to develop a language. You see that's a difficult thing for any artist to develop a language through

which he can speak. It takes usually a long time. It took me twenty years to develop a language through which I could speak. And now when I say develop a language, I mean a language which can give you a freedom to express imaginative ideas; maybe we even have to invent a new language, not a language that belongs to the past. Many other artists take a language that belongs to the past, use that in order to speak. Nothing wrong in that. But there are...some of the languages of the past are just not adequate for what some of us want to say, therefore you have to invent a new language. I mean, let's take Picasso for example, Picasso and Braque, the invention of Cubism became, had to come about because they had to say things that no other language could say, that kind of fragmentation of the image. There's no previous language which said that, so they had to invent a language. However, going back to the drawing idea, I think if you do, if you do concentrate on, shall we say drawing every day for a year or two years, you will at the end of that time know something about it, you know. I mean we try and paint every day. I mean, one never questions a concert pianist who plays the piano every day, because one knows he has to be proficient; he has to be able to play without thinking, how am I doing it? And it's the same with an artist. I know when I go upstairs to bed, I don't think, 'how am I going to do it?' any longer. I just do it. And of course, take into consideration all those extraordinary things that you do not expect to happen, but which take place as you're doing the work, and which you take advantage of. They're accidents of the imagination in a way. It's also having an open mind, you must have a mind which will allow in ideas which you didn't have before you started the work, because each work has its own life. Each work tells you what it wants to be, really. And the work is finished when it looks back at you and convinces you of its reality. Does that make sense to you?

Yes it does. I'm intrigued though, I mean, that presumably when you were starting to build a language, it began from really very literal things, like drawing a cup, you can trace it back to something as...

No, when I began, when I began, which is possibly at the age of fourteen, or sixteen when I went to art school, I used...I used other languages. I remember being influenced by Picasso's Blue Period for example; being young, a young man, I would be, because that was...it looked a very romantic period. And I remember doing this

painting at art school of two emaciated figures sitting on a bed in a very empty room, all in blues of course. So I mean, you have to use other people's language when you start, because they show you a way forward. But you have to keep on doing it to really conquer the technical possibilities of each thing. I mean getting a thing right technically becomes very very important eventually. I mean things like, there are things you were taught at art school which were of some value. There were lots of things which were of no value at all that you had to get rid of, or discover things for yourself. For example, you might be told... I was told at art school that you must never paint a landscape without painting a sky in the landscape. Now I know why people were telling one that, but I thought, this is ridiculous, and I went home and painted a landscape without a sky. And it worked, which of course it can. But in those days it was considered wrong, because, history teaches you, like all the paintings, that, here's a landscape and here's a sky, because it's a source of light. But all those, they're conventions that can be broken down.

What was your painting without a sky like?

I presume it wouldn't be very good at that time, but at least it freed one from a conception which wasn't a good conception. What...what Picasso taught one eventually was that, you can do anything as long as it works eventually, but you've got an absolute freedom to do practically anything. I mean the other... I was trying to think of another technical... Oh, this was quite a good thing, they always taught that you started, you kept your darks thin, thin paint, and your lights could be thick paint; that's not a bad idea actually, just technically.

Why?

Well the thin dark gives space to the painting, a very thick dark doesn't, it stands on the surface of the picture. If you're interested in space, it's best to think in those terms, of light and dark. Well for...I mean, you can obviously, if you take an example of a Rembrandt portrait, all the dark areas of the face are very thin; you see pastel[??] takes place in the light areas of the face, which you must have noticed anyway. That's not a bad idea, it helps...it's helped many people, and still does help them, you know? Now, many artists have painted very very thick black paintings; that's another

matter altogether. But you don't have space if you do that. (laughs) It acts as a, a texture, if you like.

But at the stage you've reached, of finding your language...

Yes.

...presumably it would be of no use to you at all to do even as an exercise something as literal as drawing a cup any more; that's something that was the foundation a long time ago, or would it still have a value?

[pause] Well, I wouldn't...I wouldn't quite think in those terms about the cup that you've just mentioned. Between 1952 and '56 I painted figurative pictures which were to do with interiors that I was living amongst and familiar with. After '56 the work started to change, because I had to talk...I wanted to talk about other things, other imaginative ideas. Now that led on to a number of paintings which were concerned with light being a constructive and a destructive force at one and the same time. So that the idea was that light would make an object, and would also take it away, dismantle it. Tremendous light, objects disappears. Objects only exist because of light really. I mean when you see an Impressionist painting, an Impressionist painting like Monet's cathedral paintings, the cathedral is so immersed in light, it's hardly there, if you see what I mean. So, having...thinking in those terms, you no longer paint a cup or an object in the same way as you would many years previously; you're already thinking about it in a different way. And you can't really go back. Well you can, but it will not convince you, it will no longer seem real in actual fact. I mean now I couldn't paint a portrait of you for example as I did in the 1950s. I have done abstract portraits, in fact if the gallery gave you the catalogue you will find in, in one of the catalogues a portrait of a composer.

Mm.

Right. That's a portrait, I did three abstract portraits at the same time, two of composers...

I'm just going to.....

End of F7879 Side B

F7880 Side A

Two of them were of composers, and the third one was of a choreographer that I worked with. At that time I did some modern dance pieces for Rambert company, and also a piece for the Royal Ballet, both modern dance pieces, so, I came into contact with these two composers and this choreographer at that time. And I had the idea of painting something to do with their, well, if you like their music is, is who they are, really, and the same with the choreographer. So I had to find forms and language which would tell me something about their, their music or their occupations if you like. I could never have painted a portrait of them. It wouldn't have any meaning to me. I wouldn't believe it, I wouldn't believe that this is that man or that woman, you know? But I can when I look at those paintings, I can believe that that is those people, right?

One of them was Harrison Birtwistle wasn't it?

Yes it was, but I wasn't... How did you know that?

Because of reading the Flowers catalogue.

But surely it's not in the catalogue.

It's not...it doesn't say anything about Harrison Birtwistle is the title of the painting.

No.

But I think the introduction talks about, I think it's Bryan Robertson piece isn't it, talks about you having worked with those particular people.

Yes, I did work with those people. But, you see, with the one in the catalogue, I used the composers' initials, that was done intentionally, a portrait of the composer, so and so and so and so, the two initials. I asked his permission for that. I wanted not his name but his initials in order to make it more anonymous, and more mysterious in a way, who is this man? you know. With Birtwistle I did exactly the same thing. I had

to write to both of them to ask for permission to use their initials. With Birtwistle I didn't get any reply, so I couldn't use his initial, but the painting actually is based on his music, yes.

So it's really a response to the music...

Yes.

...more than a physical person in any sense.

Yes it is. It is, yes.

And, since we've hit on those two, I mean can you...they're very different paintings.

Yes.

And very different musicians presumably.

Yes.

Can you talk about how they evolved, or is that impossible?

What, the painting?

Mm.

[pause] Well, I don't know whether I can, but with the choreographer, he was a choreographer and also a dancer, and I think the image I used there, which isn't in the catalogue unfortunately, was to do with balance, thinking about the dancer, I think. They were forms to do with balance. They were also rather joyful but sombre, which is like him in a way, this full of life, but also there's this, there can be this sombre mood running through him. With the composers, I don't think I can say exactly. It's such a long time ago as well. [pause] One might use forms which are either noisy or

quiet, or move fast or move slow, and that has something to do with their kind of music.

But would you be, when those pictures are evolving, would you be quite, at the time consciously knowing why you were using a particular shape, or would it be much more intuitive?

I think it would be intuitive. And very often shapes or forms spill over from another painting, but you will use them in a different way.

Mm. And would you have been thinking about particular phrases of their music...

No

...or would it...

No, not at all. No. When I was doing those pieces I of course had to listen to their, to their music for the dance piece a lot, so I heard all of them very often as I was making the sets and costumes. And one got in a sense of, the music kind of pervaded, you know, it entered one after listening to it for so long. I think...I think that's...that's true for any, any imagery you're going to use. I mean when I came to live down here, I lived in London most of my adult life, but when we came down here, I didn't use the environment here, the sea and all that kind of thing, and what happens in the summer and all the activity on the beach, I didn't use it. But it kind of came into one in some way, and came out in the paintings. They came out in an imaginative way. The colour changed quite a lot. I wanted to use colour in an un-English way. That was a definite decision to use colour which was rather extreme, you know? which is very un-English. The English tend to use, they tend to paint in tone rather than colour. But I think that was kind of underlined, that intention, by the sense of light that exists down here, and a sense of colour, of course. I mean it's not uncommon down here to see a brilliant blue sky. (laughs) It happens, I mean it happens in London occasionally, but not, not very often. I mean occasionally in Brighton you can feel you're in the south of France, I don't know whether you've ever experienced that, because of the light and everything floats in space, you know?

Mm.

There's all the activity on the beach which I like, I like lots of activity, I think that spills over into my painting. Though I did say earlier on that I wanted a painting to be as complex as a symphony. So there is that interesting complexity. But again, maybe after doing a lot of painting which are complex, I love to do a painting which is totally simple, that only contains maybe two forms.

Do you subtract from your paintings much?

Yes, tremendously, tremendously. I tend to, I might start a painting with a very small drawing, just an idea. Like that.

Can you say what it is for the tape, because the tape won't be able to see.

Well you see that comes from another painting, which is on the wall there. That form running down the centre is nearly the same form as that. There are about six paintings using that form, one painting came from another painting which went to another painting. This painting I'm showing you actually contains form that come from, not only that painting on the wall, but these forms here, kind of lozenge forms, come from a different painting altogether. But because they're done at a very similar time, they tend to come into each other. Now, when I'm making that painting, if I've got the main structure which is that running down the centre at the moment, these forms at the side will be collaged onto the picture; they will not be painted until I've decided where I want them to be. In fact, every form here, apart from that central form, is collaged before I start painting it. That enables me to move them round continually until I get what I actually want. Or should I say, not get what I want, but I get what I could never have thought of before I started doing it.

So it is like choreography.

Yes in a way it is, yes, that's true. I've never thought of it in that way but it's true. But it means, the painting is constantly in a state of flux, until I finalise it. Now

people when they look at my paintings think I must work systematically from the word go, I draw it in and then fill it in and that's the painting. It isn't like that at all. I move a painting around as much as an Abstract Expressionist would move a painting around.

And with the little Biro drawing you were just showing me....

Yes.

...that's on a diary page or something...

Yes.

The number of lozenges or whatever that shape is, would that probably remain constant...

No.

...or might you have more or less or whatever?

No, I'll have more or less.

Am I right in thinking that sometimes they're kept in as collage, they're not always painted?

They're always painted, unless I do a collage. (laughs) I mean some of the things at Flowers East are collage, drawings mainly with paint, they're sometimes... I don't know what...did they show you any collage drawings when you were there, or did they...did they show you the catalogue where there are collage drawings in it?

I've got the catalogues with me.

Yes, well one of them has collage drawings in it, where everything but the coloured pieces are drawn in charcoal. The coloured pieces I think in nearly every case are

collage. They're moved around like a jigsaw. And then if it's not working, I might...I don't know, shovel the whole thing together like a pack of cards.

And have you a body of collage pieces...

Yes.

...or do you make a new collage for every piece?

No I have a body, I've collected, over the years I've got by the side of me where I'm working, I've got a, a kind of table which is full of cut-out coloured shapes, which, I suppose if someone sorted through them all they might find quite a lot of the architecture for the works[?]. (laughs)

And, you...

It's the inventiveness that matters to me you know, inventing is, is the life blood of the picture.

But I found in a lot of paintings there were...they reminded me of theatre, and again it fits with what you're saying, that they're like actors moving.

I see. Funnily enough, the piece that I did for the Royal Ballet, I actually thought of it as a moving painting, so that all the costumes are, they contain little bits of things, so that when they, when they dance and move, you're seeing lots of movement, not only their movement but movement in the costume. And that was true of the, of the back-cloths as well. So it was kind of a, to me a moving painting. I didn't tell the choreographer that, I've never told anybody who was connected with it, but that's what I had in mind. Because, well, they might not think...they may think I'm using the experience in a way that I shouldn't be using it, you know?

So did you feel quite at home in that environment?

No, I wouldn't say at home, but it was a tremendous experience. Because, one...one lives...one works alone in a studio all one's life; one goes upstairs and stands there in front of this work. And suddenly you have to work with other people, and somebody else's got to carry out the final painting in actual fact. I mean it's going to be huge, absolutely huge; your own painting is only this big. But the painting they're going to do from it is colossal. And, you have to work with those people as regards to their costumes, I mean they have to be tried on, you have to look at them trying them on, and see whether they're all right. You may have a crazy idea as they had, that all the dancers should have red hair, bright red hair. So OK, they make a wig with red hair, and I put it on one of the dancers and it was a disaster, I knew immediately it was a disaster.

Why?

[pause] It looked like an eighteenth century costume on her head. (laughs) So, we got rid of it.

So presumably when you were thinking of it, it was a bit like moving red collages around the page, of the theatre.

Yes that's right. Yes, yes. I wouldn't want to do it again. It was an experience, and it was very interesting.

How did it come about?

Through Bryan Robertson, who at that time was adviser to the Royal Opera House. He used a lot of contemporary artists which was very, it brought in people that they'd never used before, or even heard of. And the same with Rambert. And they happened to be people who wanted to use modern works, music and painting, so that's how it came about.

So, in some senses it's true that it's slightly like translating one of your paintings into another medium, but there was also, it wasn't as comfortable as that sounds though.

No, it wasn't. I... Normally I wouldn't let anybody else touch what I'm doing.
(laughs) I would be telling them to take their dirty hands off it. (laughing) I find it very difficult to understand those artists who actually get other people to do the work from a preconceived idea that they've done. I could never work like that.

Mm. And when your design was translated by somebody else into the vast actual theatre piece...

Yes, mm.

...did you feel that they did that well, or was it distressing?

No they did it very well. They're very expert at it. The first time I did it with Rambert, I mean I went along to the man who was going to do it, showed him what I had in mind. Which, the piece was very black with very bright colours, fading out from bright to light, very slowly in colour and tone, and that really worried me, whether he could do it. I thought, he's only a designer, he's going to slap it on and, you know, do it any old how really. And he was quite insulted when I said to him, 'You see this tonal range and moving from red to a lighter red to a lighter red to a white? Can you do that, you know, are you able to do that on a vast scale?' He said, 'Of course I can do that. I can do anything.' He said, 'Haven't you been told the story about when I received a design from an artist, and there was a mark on it, a round mark, which I interpreted, and the artist came along and said, "What's that mark on it?" I said, "Well that's on your design."' It was a tea stain left by somebody's cup. He didn't know that, he just put it in because it was there. Brilliantly done of course. (laughs)

And was it kept?

No, I'm sure it wasn't. But, they're very very good at it, incredibly good.

And did the experience of having done that feed back into your work in any way?

No.

Did it change you at all?

Just the opposite. I fed my work into that. They used ideas I was currently working on. I didn't do separate ideas for it.

Mm. And, do you have much experience of theatre? Because there seems to be a theatricality in your work.

No, I have no experience at all, no.

Did you ever get taken as a child even?

No, no I can't remember that at all.

And in the Fifties in London...

The thing about theatre you see is that, its only...at its best its only similarity to painting perhaps is the unreality of it. I mean I know there's a lot of theatre that tries to be real, but that bores me, I find that boring. I like the fantasy and unreality of theatre.

Did you ever go to Beckett for example?

Yes. I like Beckett. I saw his first things in London, at the Royal Court when he first came over. I saw *Waiting for Godot*, which was terrific, and I saw *Krapp's Last Tape* which was incredible, absolutely incredible at that time. Just this one man speaking into this recorder. And I think I saw the one with the mouth just lit up speaking.

Not I.

Yes, I think I saw that as well. Now that's...that's what I call imaginative theatre. On one level it's totally unreal; it's not trying to be real, you know?

And with the composers, did you spend any time with them talking about the music, or it really being music, was the communicator?

[pause] No, I didn't talk about music with them, and I haven't...I haven't enough knowledge of music technically to talk about it to them. I do have more recently a friend who is a composer, in fact two friends now who are composers that I've met, and I tend to talk about music more with them now, or they tell me more about music.

Who are they?

Andrew Tilby is one young man, he's in his thirties, and, sometimes he's on the Third, you hear him. And... [pause] Oh! I'll have to look his name up. Terrible, this is what happens when you get older. He was here two days ago, I was talking to him.

And have they come into your life through doing those productions, or...?

No, no they've come in through... The young man has come in through knowing my paintings, and being very interested in them, and the older man, apart from being a musician, he was...he used to take photographs of artists and musicians, and he came to take a photograph of me, and that's how I got to know him.

Mm.

George Newsom[ph], it's come to me now, George Newsom[ph]. He took photographs of artists for the National Portrait Gallery, you know, they have a collection of photographs. And that's how I met him. And he, he was also...he became interested in my work. And we did an exchange. Because he couldn't afford the work he said, would I do an exchange of a painting for a piece of music? And I thought that was a lovely idea. So I did that. And the piece of music...he actually did two pieces of music, one is dedicated to me, and the other one... He also took a piece of work from my wife as well. And he asked each of us to choose a poem. I chose a poem by Ezra Pound, and my wife chose a poem by D.H. Lawrence, which he then set to music. And those two pieces, amongst others, are going to be performed I think

in Canterbury next year. I've never heard them sung, so I shall be interested to hear them, hear them sung. I mean I've heard him sing them on the piano, but not sung properly, you know. I thought that was a nice idea, I liked that idea.

So do you see him quite often, just to talk, or...?

Not often, no, because he lives over at, near Rye; I just find the journey too long now.

Mm. And they'll come...

Maybe see him, see him twice a year perhaps.

Right. And the pieces of music will come to you in some kind of recorded form will they, or is it notionally yours?

Those particular two pieces, they're hanging in the hall, the two scripts for the poems. The poems are written in as well. They'll be the ones that are performed. So he hadn't sent me a separate score. But you'll see them when you go out.

Mm.

There's one of his photographs in the centre of them. I must have a pee.

[break in recording]

We were just talking about the difficulty of putting abstract art into words.

Yes, you see we live in an age of explanation, and everybody thinks everything should be explained and talked about. And I find that a great mistake. I think, with painting or sculpture you need to...you need to look at it, and keep on looking at it. I mean they're kind of objects of contemplation if you like. And you don't have to explain to anybody, you just have to look, and... I mean if I try and explain my pictures, I'm dealing with a world that's...that has nothing to do with the making of the picture really. I mean, as the French painter Braque said, any explanation should

add to the mystery. And I agree with that, that's fine. Any explanation that takes away the mystery, I don't agree with at all.

I was wondering that, it must have been very frustrating when you were doing the series of paintings that are almost like hieroglyphics.

Yes, the written...the written painting I call them, yes.

That people seem to want to be able to make a very literary, literal translation.

Yes.

And which must have been extremely frustrating.

Yes. Well people always want to give...they always want to give a word to describe something that, with which they are unfamiliar. If you think of it, it's like a child, if it doesn't know the word for cup, it doesn't know what it is. But give it a word, and that's a cup, then it's at ease, now I know what it is. And I think that's true with painting. If those...if those particular pictures, my written paintings, could have been read, people would have been much happier about it; they wouldn't have understood it but at least they would have been happy about it. But the fact that I just invented a visual language, that's a bit uneasy for them, they think they're looking at, well maybe it is hieroglyphics or something like that, and what's he doing that for then? (laughs) It all started, those particular paintings started with, I wanted to make what was virtually an itinerary of the things in my studio at that time. That was, I think that was the first painting I did in that way, so it was like making, well it was like making an itinerary, so I looked round the studio and I invented a form for everything I was looking at, and sometimes it might be part of a newspaper, or... But I invented a form that hadn't any relation to what I was looking at. You couldn't look at the form and say, 'Oh that's so-and-so, and that is so-and-so,' no, it wasn't like that at all. I was creating if you like another mystery about the familiar. And I rather like the idea of it being done in lines, because, I wanted to break away from the idea that a painting must have a climax. Most paintings do have a climax, we were taught really to make paintings that had a climax, you move towards this and that's it, that's the climax of

the painting. I didn't want anything to do with that. I wanted to break away from that, what I considered a restriction. There is...yes, you won't find it in the catalogue, but there is...there is an essay written by a Portuguese poet that I knew at that time about those particular pictures. He was fascinated by the idea that it was a language that could not be read. And he wrote an essay on it, which was quite interesting. Very intellectual, but...because he's a very intellectual person. But, it is interesting, the fact of a poet writing it, you know, who you think would be concerned very much with, with understanding what he's reading. (laughs)

But I'm interested that your starting point was the objects in the studio.

Yes.

And that you wanted a, that it had a, an actual starting point, rather than that you began with a canvas and making marks on it that might be a language that didn't relate to anything.

Yes. All those written paintings actually started from something. After that, some of the written paintings started from just picking up a book, maybe a book of poems. One of them started by picking up Louis MacNeice poems, and just using a sentence, and breaking that sentence down into forms, which are not necessarily anything to do with the word, with a word or the letter, I just use it as a means of invention.

End of F7880 Side A

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Isn't it in a sense a rhythm [inaudible] you?

Yes, that's right. So some of those, I might limit myself to the primary colours, red, blue, yellow and red, every line was to consist of those colours. And naturally it would be a rhythm. But that, in a funny way that's no different to any painting. I mean, let me put it this way. My first form which I invented and put in, then from then on every form would be related to it, and so it went on. It's not much different to painting a still life in actual fact, because that's what you do when you paint a still life, you're putting a form and a colour and then you relate the next thing to that, and the next thing to that, and the next thing to that, and then you relate the thing to the whole. But it looks...you don't think of that when you look at those paintings, but it's like making a painting, its rhythm, its form, its colour. And sometimes it can be emotional, very emotional, other times not so.

And would that be to do with how you're feeling, or could it be to do with...

Yes.

...the mood of the line of the poem, or whatever?

Mm, it could be either of those things. And another thing is that, it's such complex...it's such a complex procedure, I could only paint one line a day. Now that in itself is of interest, because it allowed me to be different every day. I don't have to re...I don't have to get back into the mood of the painting that I was doing yesterday, I can incorporate today and tomorrow and next week and so on.

So there's an element of it being almost like a diary.

Yes in a way, it's a visual diary. Yet a diary is more about, I don't know, it's more personal I think isn't it.

And your starting point is always the shapes of the previous day, it's not as if you're starting a new mood and a new piece of...

Yes, yes. Well they come from the last line, yes, I continue it.

So does that mean at the end of the day you would know roughly what your starting point would be, or were there many possible starting points the next day?

Many possible starting points. Many.

And would you ever find that the next day's work in some way rubbed uneasily with the previous day?

[pause] Yes, it did usually. If it didn't I would be painting another painting. I don't...I don't just work on one painting all the time, I work on maybe two or three paintings, which I find very useful to, for my way of working and thinking. Also I'm very visually restless, so if I'm not getting through on one painting I can move to another.

And with the written ones, would they...would you subtract from them or would they tend to be just a fairly steady progression?

No, I would sometimes subtract from them. In those particular cases, subtracting would mean obliterating totally what you had put in. I mean you can obliterate with turpentine or, if the painting's dried, you can use methylated spirits, which tends to soften it get rid of it. I tend now never to paint over anything. When I was younger of course, and, I just didn't care about things like that; I'd paint over a thing and if it's wrong, wipe it out and paint over it again, and it's... Technically it's disastrous.

Because it shows through?

It comes through, yes. I mean the painting in Liverpool of the *Creation and Crucifixion*, all those still life objects, there's the table and then there's other things happening in the background, and then in the foreground I had a cat walking towards

a spectator, which was wrong, and I obliterated it. It's coming through if you look closely. And all the blacks are cracking, because they're painted over, other pieces of painting which are thicker, so if you paint a thin black over thicker things it just cracks.

And can anything be done about it now?

People who are conservationists can do anything, if they want. They'll only want to do it if the picture's important or expensive, but they can do anything. I saw a painting a number of years ago by Constable, a portrait by Constable which is unusual, of a country gentleman, [inaudible], head about this big, and, the picture was owned by somebody who when they were going away lent it to a friend, he didn't want to leave it in the house, so he lent it to a friend. The friend had it hanging on the wall as it might be there, but underneath it was a chair. And it fell of the wall, and the chair was one of those chairs that had wooden pieces sticking up like this each side of it. Those pieces went through the painting. And they caused a tear in the painting from the neck, this is the way it went, up here, over the mouth, up the nose, and out of the head. And the man doing the conservation showed me the photograph of it before he dealt with it. I mean, I just couldn't believe it. Then he showed me the painting. You wouldn't believe it, there wasn't a mark on it.

No.

I mean it's... I don't know whether it's a good thing or a bad thing, but it's amazing. He said to me, 'Oh well you see it was quite a, I was quite...it was a lucky tear, it was lucky.' I said, 'Why? Why was it lucky?' 'Because it didn't go across any form, it moved up it, not across. That would have been really difficult,' he said.

And would you like, what do you feel about your paintings being conserved like that? Would you like something to be done about the Liverpool one? And would you want to do it, presumably?

No, I couldn't do it.

Because it's a totally different skill?

Yes, absolutely. Absolutely.

But are you hoping they will, or do you believe they should...?

I don't know, it's so far in the past, I don't know. If they think it should be kept, they'll keep it. I'm too concerned with the present really to worry about it. And I'm also too concerned with what I consider my mature work, which is I suppose Seventies, Eighties and Nineties work, thirty years' work. I'm more interested in that.

And when you talk about re-working, would you only be re-working the painting you're currently doing in the studio, or do you sometimes go back to ones quite far in the past?

Yes, I might go back. I mean there is, there are one or two works upstairs, particularly those which are partly collaged and partly painted, where I might use pieces of wood and metal in them. I mean there's one that was in the process of being made over about ten years I think. That's because I made a statement about it at one time, and then, it never left the studio, I wasn't quite satisfied, and then suddenly I see it again and think, oh, I'll do this with it, try that, and try that. And then it's left again, and it's never shown, and then suddenly again it reappears and you think, well, it's not right, I'll do this to it. And that can take a long time.

And is that when you just come across it again, or is it really in your head a lot of the time?

No, it's when I come across it.

Right. And with this painting over the fire...

Yes.

...are the little brown dots collage or are they painting?

Yes, they're collage. They're collage.

Right, so they're...it is a combination.

Yes, it's a combination. All the rest is painting, but they're collage.

Mm. And could you just describe that painting?

No.

No? When you were doing it, I don't know how to describe these sort of tubular forms that make up the little frame.

Yes.

Would you have those shapes and be collaging them, or are they drawn right from the beginning?

Those particular shapes going round the edges came from other paintings of the time. I did a lot of paintings using that format, round the edges of the painting. I mean, not...not...I don't mean putting that into the middle of the picture, I mean actually filling the whole picture so it had that border round it, like that other boarder.

Yes.

It would have that kind of border right round it.

They're almost like filled-in test tubes aren't they. I can't think how to describe them really.

Yes. Yes.

But when you were constructing that picture, would you actually have collage shapes like that, or did you draw from the beginning?

No, I'd already...you see I'd already done a number of paintings of that, that format, so I just painted those. Then the centre of course was, that was invented from that, after that.

And you...in there you use the, in the centre, a similar way with the horizontal lines with the circles on; it reminded me in some of the paintings where the proportion's slightly different of an abacus.

Yes that's right. A lot of people thought of the abacus, yes. I didn't think of the abacus until somebody told me. (laughs) I was thinking about movement and interval, you know.

Which again, we're back into music.

Yes, in a way, yes.

And what about the way you use outline?

Well when you say what about it, what do you mean by that?

Well, in the painting sort of to the right...

Yes.

...where the...there isn't, in the vertical parts...

Yes.

...a black line...

Yes.

...it's still I think, maybe I'm wrong, it's the shape that have been drawn in in the first place.

Yes that's right, yes.

So what would determine whether you, in a sense just end it with colour, or whether you put a black border round it? Because you use black border a lot, don't you?

Mm, yes. It's what I'm obsessed with at the time. A border is very often... I used a border actually for years in different ways. The border for me gives it a, a different sense of reality. It's not...it can never be confused with a scene, it hasn't got that kind of space; it's a picture. It makes it into a picture on this surface.

It makes it flat?

It makes it flat. Though that's not entirely true, because it's impossible to paint a flat picture. It's totally impossible to paint a flat picture.

You mean because you're literally putting on layers?

Well every...you put two colours down, and they're in space, immediately. I don't know anybody who's ever painted a flat picture, I don't think it's possible. They might think it's possible. Let's say they try and take away space, yes, I've done that, but you still don't end up with a completely flat picture.

When you say take away space, what do you mean?

Yes. Well take away relationships back in space like this, going back from the picture surface, you know.

And how do you avoid it?

Well you can avoid it by... [pause] Well for example, a Cubist painting I think, you're not sure where you are in relation to what you're looking at. You're looking at certain objects that have been painted, but you don't know where they are in relation to the artist or yourself, they come and go all over the painting. So that's quite a different space to say, Turner or Hobbema painting a landscape where foreground, middle distance, background, that's space, that's in theatre if you like. I used to sometimes ask students when they were doing a drawing of the figure, from the model, what the paper was to them. It's either a surface in which you're putting these marks, or, it's a space in which you're inserting a solid, and that makes a difference to how... They'd never thought of it, in most cases. It's just something to scribble on. But if you think of it in those ways, it makes a difference to the kind of drawing you're going to do.

And did you first begin to think about those things because of your teachers...

No.

...or was it something through working?

I think through working. And through ideas going on in one's head, and, I mean all kinds of things I think make a difference. I mean how was Cubism invented? Nobody really knows. It doesn't look logical, you can't go back to the painting before it and say, oh that was done, and then... It's as though they all woke up one morning and decided to do this. (laughs)

And going back to that book that you first saw in the library that was so important, were those reproductions black and white?

No, they were in colour.

Gosh, that was unusual then wasn't it?

I suppose it was, yes. It was rather a very, I should imagine an expensive book that you would only get in a library, in a reference library. I couldn't take it out, I had to sit there and look at it.

And did you find it almost by accident?

Yes, yes I did. I mean at that time I found most books by accident. But it was a revelation. What's interesting is, Bryan Robertson has just put on an exhibition in Cambridge, and in his introduction about his own life, he mentions this book, which is amazing. I must tell him about it some time, that I had that same experience. That kind of gave him his love of French painting.

Mm. And it sounded as though you read the text as well as looking at the reproductions.

Yes, I did, yes. I thought, what a marvellous life, to live in Paris. (laughing) Always painting, and all these artists with all these models. What more do you want in life?

Do you still feel romantic about it?

No. Oh no no no no.

When did that change?

Well because, people have this romantic idea about being an artist, and it's just not like that at all, it's...it's so difficult getting the whole thing right, and I mean, it's a lifetime's job, it's not...it's not this idea that you get up and be inspired, and do a painting and then off to the pub and all this kind of thing.

When did that really sink home, how long did it...?

Oh very early on, very early on. I mean when I first went to St. Martin's art school. I realised it was hard work. There are people who are talented, they have a natural talent. That's not necessarily a good thing. Very often it just peters out or never

develops, becomes academic usually. And there are those who have to work hard at it, and that's much better I think.

How much is intelligence a factor?

Well it's...it's important to some people more than others. I mean I think painting is an intellectual activity, definitely I think that. And I think to appreciate painting or sculpture you need to be a sensitive person, and open-minded really, not to have a preconceived idea of, I know what art is, because I do not know what art is. I paint in order to find out what it might be, and that's something quite different. That's why it can continue, and that's why one continues oneself[??]. There is no end to it at all. It will never end; there's always somebody who can give something new and different to it, and somebody else will build on that. Nobody in the Renaissance could have conceived that art can be what it is today, impossible.

So are you an optimist?

Yes, I am as regards, as regards the creative act, yes. But not otherwise. But I make my, I make...in a way I make...I positively make my work optimistic, because I think that's important, that it should be uplifting and joyful, and make you feel better when you look at it, and you come out of an exhibition and the world by comparison looks dull. You've been in a magical world, and look, how great that was. And what the hell's going on here? (laughs)

And, when do you think you first ever went into an art gallery?

[pause] Well, again that must have been when I was about...that would have been when I was about twelve, between twelve and fourteen. Because the art gallery was also a part of the library, it was in the same building, so you only had to go upstairs and there was the art gallery. So that's when I first saw pictures.

And how many children would have gone upstairs?

Not many, no. Not many children would go the library, never mind up to the gallery. I mean in those days, there was not, as far as I know there wasn't a children's section, I don't think so.

And what do you think made you go up there?

Up to the art gallery or to the library?

Either.

It was there. (laughs) It was like Everest as they say, it had to be conquered. Because it was there.

And do you remember other books in the reference section that had an impact on you?

No I don't, I don't remember any other book, yet there must have been other books. I don't remember any of them.

And when you discovered this book, did you talk to anybody about it, was there anyone to tell how exciting it was?

Yes, I had a friend who was also a painter, called Derrick Greaves, who is still a well known artist now. He lived in the same street as myself. How I first met him I don't know, but I think we met when we were about... He was at the junior art department while I was at grammar school. I met him just before he left the junior art department, so I must have met him when I was about fourteen or fifteen. And, we had a lot in common. I don't know how we met, I've no idea, I can't remember, but we had a lot in common. And, we used to go out drawing and painting together into the countryside, and talked about it a lot. He also wanted to be an artist. And when he...the year that I went to do military service he was fortunate enough to fail his medical, which I wished I'd done, and he then went to the Royal College. So he went to the Royal College two years before I did. I joined him there when he was in his final year, and I became in my first year.

What was he like?

Oh a very good friend, I mean we talked a lot about being an artist. I mean it was very important in those days to find somebody of similar, similar feelings, similar ambitions.

Did he too at that point think it was a romantic thing to be?

Yes, I think so.

And did you both have a sense of being rebels, or just different?

Yes, different. Different. Very different indeed. Sheffield was somewhere to escape from, and London was the, the promised land.

Did it mean that you felt disloyalty to the people you were leaving behind, or was it easy to go?

No, it was easy to go, but... [pause] I don't think they understood really. I remember, there was a radio interview with me and two other people who had been at Sheffield Art School, must have been in the Sixties, and there on that radio programme I actually said Sheffield was a place to escape from. That really upset them.

Your family?

Yes, aunts and uncles and, everybody. (laughs)

And did that surprise you, did you expect them to understand?

Yes I did, because I mean you're always going where what one wanted to do could be done. It couldn't be done there. But they were so, I suppose they were so patriotic to their, their place of residence.

Did you have any problems, I mean it still exists today, the sort of north-south thing; did you feel that you were neither one nor the other? Did it crop up?

[pause] Well in a way, once you become an artist you aren't either one or the other; you're kind of... [pause] I mean being... Artists are classless, I think, that's what I'd like to say, they're classless, they're without class. I've met artists from all kinds of parts of society, and they're not aware of where they came from, I mean they're just immersed in what they're doing and they expect you to be the same.

Mm.

And you have that in common, there's no question of, I'm a northerner, or I'm a Scotsman or...you know, I'm a southerner.

Mm. And when had you first gone to London, did you actually know what London was [inaudible]?

Yes, I went to London, again with my friend, we came down for a week to see galleries and things.

This is Derrick is it?

Derrick Greaves, yes. And, we went round the galleries, all the private galleries as well as the Tate and the National Gallery, and also, we went to places that people had, like Sickert, we went to Camden Town and Kentish Town, the places where they had painted. And of course at that time there were cafés which were like Sickert paintings, they were all cubicaled off for privacy, you know? Very interesting really.

And where had you seen those paintings, again in reproduction or...?

Yes. Yes.

Where did you stay in London?

We stayed with a cockney family, that a friend of, a friend of ours who was older than us had stayed. He was a kind of, kind of doing commercial travelling, so he moved around the country, and he knew this place in London, and so we stayed with this family. Very nice people.

And what impression did London itself make on you?

The promised land. (laughs) I must just have a word with my wife now.

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....kind of childhood is of interest, and being a young man is also of interest, what he had to... In a way, there was a lot of antagonism, maybe he's told you anyway, there was a lot of antagonism towards him being an artist.

Yes, it was quite a brutal environment in a way.

Yes. He had a lot...he had a lot of arguing with his family.

Do you think it mattered to him a great deal that they did understand, or was it simply that he had to respond to their...?

They understood eventually, they were very proud of him eventually, just as they were of me I'm sure. It all helps when you get your name in the paper you know.

Did he tell you the story about his mother coming to see the portrait of herself in the Sheffield Art Gallery?

No. No, no I don't remember that.

She complained that the skirt was too short.

Ah, yes.

It wasn't as it should be.

Yes.

But was otherwise sort of, unabashed really to find herself the centre of this big retrospective show.

(laughs)

Did you know his parents then?

Oh yes, I knew both the parents.

What were they...

Because I used to go around and, well, call for him on our way out to do something or other.

And what did they seem like to you?

They always seemed very friendly to me. And, I mean they had a hard life, his father had a very hard life, I mean he must have told you that he...I think he was a cabinet-maker, his father, originally, a very good one, but when the war came he had to go into munitions, which were absolutely exhausting you know, they used to work on, in shift work. I mean he would come home and just drop asleep on the, over the table, over his meal. Physically exhausting. Not easy at all.

I think the noise levels where he worked were very painful too weren't they.

Yes. Yes.

Mm. But your father sounds as though he was pretty sympathetic, if he wrote the letter to get you out of the Army, or was he just wanting to get you out of the Army?

He wanted to help me do what I wanted to do. I wasn't very good, at grammar school I wasn't very good academically. My brother was very clever academically. I was...unfortunately we went to the same school which was a mistake, because they were always holding him up as an example, 'Why aren't you like him?' Academically I wasn't good at all, but I had, like most of the people in my form, I had, I was passionate about maybe one or two things, in my case it was art and literature. In those two subjects I was very good, but the rest I was bored with, just didn't spend time.

How old were you when you first went to school, did you go as a sort of four-year-old, or what?

Yes, five years old I think you started.

And where did you...?

At the local school.

And how did you find that?

Can't remember. I knew it...I mean, the playground was a place to survive in if you were lucky. Schools are very violent places I think, they are for boys anyway, I don't know whether they are for girls.

Did you fight?

There were fights all the time, and I was fortunate enough to have a protector. How that comes about I... Oh yes, I do know how that came about. There were two twins who were the sons of a friend of my mother's, and they were older than me, and they were protectors. So I had two protectors when I was at school.

And you needed protecting?

It was useful, let's put it that way.

So were you bullied?

Everybody's bullied at school, or was then. And I would have even been bullied at grammar school except... I mean it's...it's unforgivable to be interested in art and literature. But, I was very good at sport, and it saved my life. I could run faster than anybody else, which was an advantage, and I was also good at cricket and football. So I was accepted.

And did you actually enjoy those things as well?

Yes I did, yes. I suppose because I was good at them I enjoyed them.

And were you the sort of child that when you weren't in organised sports, was always running around and climbing trees, or were you more of an indoor child?

No, I think I was pretty adventurous, running around I think.

And when you went to the first school, it's sometimes quite alarming if you've been mainly in a home environment, to be in a big class or whatever.

Yes.

Did you find it difficult?

No, I don't think so. I think just, it was expected of one. I think going to grammar school is...I think when children first go to a grammar school, or now a comprehensive, I think that's a daunting experience at first. I mean that really is I think. So many...so many people, so many children. And of course, there's so many bullies around, older, much older children, you know? So that takes some time to settle into I think.

Mm. So it sounds as though you're quite confident in a way.

[pause] Yes, I suppose so. I think I learnt how to survive, which is important. I mean I learnt how to survive in the Air Force. I mean that was...that was dangerous, to be an artist, as my CO pointed out. (laughs)

And...

Well everybody wants you to be interested in what they're interested in, don't they? I mean, everybody's interested in football, all men are interested in football, nearly all

men anyway, and if you're not, then you're an outsider in one. You can't...you can't enter certain worlds because your interests are different, can you?

Mm.

I remember some, some men being interviewed, you know they used to have many years ago the workers' educational programmes for ordinary workers, they'd go away for a week to a kind of summer school. And this man had been interviewed, he'd gone away for the week to this summer school, he'd been allowed to write and things like that, and he said when he got back, it had virtually ruined his life on one level, because he couldn't...he was no longer interested in what the others were talking about, and doing. He'd been introduced to another world. And unfortunately I think... Well you learn how to get on with other people, don't you, because you have to, because you're in this world and you're also, you may have a job, so you come into contact with other people. But that's different to being a writer or an artist I think, they live on...they live in two worlds, I think, I think they have to. Do you live in two worlds?

At least.

At least, there you are, you see. [pause] I mean there are people who do live in one world, this world. (laughs) They bore me to death. (laughs) Actually, at the same time I feel...I feel a bit jealous of them, life seems so simple to them in a way. I'm sure it isn't, but it seems it, you know?

Mm.

They're not worried about getting this thing right, and in any case, what...what's the point of this thing anyway, or...?

But you don't think they have got to that state really by avoiding quite a lot of things that are lurking there?

Yes, I do. Yes I do. And the environment they come from and... I mean some of the boys I grew up with, they, twenty years later they're living in their parents' house who are now dead, and they've got married and they're living the same life as their father did, and they look like their father, and they think like their father, or their mates.

Do you ever go back there?

No, I couldn't bear it. I went back, when my mother died I went back, but... Then I went back, my father moved to Derbyshire, outside Sheffield, which was quite a nice place, I went back to see him, but to actually... Well, I didn't enter Sheffield at all, but before he went to Derbyshire, when Sue and I got married, again we did the wrong thing, we got married in secret, at Chelsea Registry Office, and informed our families that we'd got married the following week, that we'd got married on such a such a date. You mustn't do that. The idea is that you involve the whole family. They must meet who you are going to marry, and talk about her or him. (laughs) So actually, after we, I think perhaps a month after we went up to visit my father, he took us round all the relatives to meet them. And that was the last time I did it.

Mm. And had your mother already died by then?

Yes, she died quite young, she was only fifty-one when she died. Yes.

What did she die from?

She had a blood clot which moved to the brain. Gave her a, I presume a severe stroke, I presume. But I mean she didn't come out of it, it left her totally, she was totally unconscious, and then just died.

For...she was unconscious for a long time, or...?

For a number of hours.

Mm. So, it came out of the blue?

Yes, absolutely.

And how old were you then?

Oh, right, I was twenty-one. I'd just gone to the Royal College. I was in my first, first year, and actually I think the first term, yes, the first term at the college. So I had to come home at, it was just before Christmas, I had to come home for that.

And were you shattered by it?

[pause] Well, yes, in a way, but not...not as much as you'd think, and that's not because I wasn't fond of her, but because, I didn't know her. I mean I don't think you get to know your parents until much later. My father died when he was eighty-five, I got to know him very well.

Mm.

Just because of the age you see, and being with him and seeing him every year, going there, I just go to know him so much better.

Mm.

So it was more of a, a blow when he died than when my mother died. I think when she died I was too self-absorbed. I'd just come out of the Air Force, I'd started at... No I hadn't, I'd just got to college, the Royal College, and, I was very self-absorbed in what I was doing, you know.

And have you thought about her much since?

Thought about her? Yes, because, I've often thought about both of them, and about maybe, maybe all of us, we don't...we never seem to get to know their, their dreams or their ambitions in life, we never get as intimate as that with them, I'm sorry one didn't. And I'm sorry I wasn't able to say to my father, 'Well what...you know, were

you happy in your life, and what did you really want to do?' And... And... And he must have had dreams as a young man when he came out of the Army in 1918; 'What were you thinking then?' No, one never touched on these subjects, and I...I think...I'm sorry for that, but we didn't.

Mm.

I mean do you with your parents? Are they still alive?

No, my mother died at fifty actually.

Yes. Well I mean, did you find out what their aspirations in life were, ever?

To an extent, yes.

You did?

But...

Well I think that's good. I think that's good.

What was your mother's name?

Laura.

And what was she like?

A very motherly woman. I mean her life was devoted to the family and looking after it; I mean, in a way it was a life of, well drudgery in a way, cooking and washing and doing the laundry and, and there were no washing machines in those days, it was all done with the tub and all that kind of thing, and cooking every week, and, looking after all these people. I mean it's incredible really.

Did the adult males help at all?

No, not at all. Not that I know of, I never noticed them helping. Perhaps they did, but I didn't notice it.

Did you live in the same house the whole time you were growing up?

Up to the age of, now let's see, up to the age of twelve. Yes, we all lived in the same house.

And what was the kitchen like, what do you remember about the kitchen, what equipment was there?

I don't remember in the house where we all lived, but then we moved, when they moved out, the sons, when they moved out, we moved to a more modern house, and that had more modern conveniences to start with, but the kitchen, it was called a kitchenette, which was about the size of that bit of end of the window there, just enough room to get in and wash pots and a cooker, and... Yes, there wasn't even room for a fridge, that was in another cupboard, the fridge.

And what kind of food did she cook, what was her...?

Well English cooking, Yorkshire, Yorkshire cooking. She was a very good cook, very good. I mean there was a baking day every week, I can't remember what day it was, I think it was probably...possibly it was Tuesday. I mean Monday was washing day. I think Tuesday was cooking day, very likely, so it was got over with. But it's a life of drudgery you know, making beds and all that, and going out doing the shopping. And then, when all the, I mean all these, all these things had finished and the war had finished and my brother had come back safe and I'd gone off, and now was the time she could enjoy herself, that was it, that was the end of it, didn't have time to do that.

Mm. I mean looking back on it, do you think she was quite depressed, or did that not enter into it?

There was a period when she was depressed, yes I think so. Definitely, yes.

And how did that show itself?

Worries about her health, whether she was all right. Which she was, she was all right, I mean she went to the doctor and she was all right. But, anxiety, anxiety of the war, my brother flying, particularly all those years flying. He was fortunate enough in one way to be in bombers not fighters. He was also fortunate to be sent to the Far East rather than Germany. But, all that worry, you know, must have caused terrible strain.

And was it a good marriage, was it something she shared with your father?

Yes, no I think it was a good marriage.

Do you know where they'd met?

No, I've no idea. No idea. Hard to imagine isn't it. Where did people meet in those days? Well, I don't know. Dance halls I should think, usually, wasn't it?

Did they dance, do you remember them?

Yes they did dance, yes. Everybody danced. You had to dance. (laughs)

Did you actually go and get taught how to dance?

Yes.

Ballroom dancing?

Ball, yes, there was no other kind of dancing then, ballroom dancing.

What did you feel about it?

I wasn't good at that. I couldn't do it. Well I can, I can do one thing, I can do the quickstep, that's the only thing I can do. And I can also do the foxtrot which is the quickstep.

And did you want to be able to, was it important to you?

No, it wasn't very. But when I was at, of course when I went to art school I...I did a lot of jiving, that was something different, quite different.

And you just...

I did a lot of that, I mean, both my wife and I did. I mean when we lived in London we had a rather, a pretty hectic social life amongst other artists, and... It was all the jiving and the twist. Have you ever done the twist?

No.

Very energetic.

And did you feel happy doing that, that was something you did naturally?

Yes. Yes. Invigorating.

When did you last...?

The Sixties was a marvellous time let me tell you. It really was. Everything was opening out, you know? You could dress as you want, you could think what you want, you could paint what you want. I had a beard when I first came to London, in the Fifties, which was incredibly dangerous. I was threatened through having a beard. It's hard to understand that hair, long hair and a beard could cause so much controversy. On the tube in London I was threatened by a man with a pickaxe handle; he was going to work and he couldn't...it annoyed him, the whole look of me, and how the hell did I earn a living and all this kind of thing. And if I went into a pub I could stop the conversation dead. And, Derrick may not have told you this, but when

we...when I went up to Sheffield with him, back for one Christmas, I went out with his mother and father to a local pub, and when I went in, the conversation stopped immediately. And we sat down and had a drink, and his mother was most uncomfortable. She said, 'Do you realise they're all looking at us?' I said, 'Yes, I know, I know they are.' I said, 'If you like I'll leave.' And Derrick said, 'Oh no you don't. Stay where you are.' But what I'm trying to point out to you is, how conservative they were in that environment. I mean what's a beard when all said and done for God's sake? I mean if I'd have been a seaman, OK, I'd have got away with it.

What length was the beard?

Well, like it is now.

So short.

Yes. I mean I didn't have a long beard like that, just quite short.

And your hair was long, or what?

My hair was, because I've lost some hair but it was long by, by their standards. I mean you had short back and sides, and that was a proper haircut for a man. I mean Derrick's father used to say to him, 'You look like a bleeding lass.' (laughs)

And do you remember what you would have been wearing when you went up there?

Ah yes, well that time I was wearing ex-R.A.F. clothes which I'd had dyed, because you went out with an overcoat. Well they gave you, they gave you flannel trousers and a jacket, but then you could take your overcoat with you, which was quite useful actually, which I had dyed dark brown, because that's the only colour you could get except black on top of blue. So I used to wear that. But even that was tramp-like. (laughs)

And if you knew everyone was staring at you, were you quite resilient...

Yes.

...or were you quaking inside?

No, I wasn't quaking, I was... I thought, what the hell, you know, I'm going to do what I want to do. I thought, it's one of the things you have to put up with. I mean the people I mix with don't think like that, or act like that, and that's all that matters really.

And when you grew a beard, did you feel you were doing something slightly revolutionary?

Oh yes, absolutely. You see when I looked at this book on French artists, and read about them, I mean the artists I admired all had beards. (laughs) I mean Cézanne had a beard, and Degas had a beard, and...I felt, artists have beards. Monet had a beard and all that, and it was a time when everybody had a beard, and I thought, I'll grow a beard when I get older. But then, when I went into the Air Force, I was sick to death of having to shave every day, having to have a haircut with this man coming around and telling you to get a haircut or a shave, and I thought, right, the day I leave here I'm going to grow a beard. And in actual fact I started to grow it the day before I left the Air Force. And so when I went, when I went home, demobilisation, for a short time, I'd already got a moustache, but the beard hadn't really got going for some time, my mother was horrified. Anyway it doesn't matter, I went to London. And I was continually being stopped by the police. 'Can you give any identification who you are, where you come from?' Because they, they used to think, a man with a stubble or half-grown beard, you know, what's he doing? He's on the streets, or escaped from a prison or something. Extraordinary you know. So I'd get this tap on the shoulder at Earl's Court tube station, a man in plain clothes, showed me his ticket, 'I'm a policeman. What's your name?' I used to take great delight in saying, 'Jack Smith.' And then I said, 'They all tell you that don't they?' (laughs) He says, 'Can you prove it?' I'd say, 'Yes, it happens I can, I've got a letter here. And I've also got my demobilisation papers.' That was all right. Absolutely extraordinary. What's extraordinary about it in retrospect is that, if I was a criminal, I wouldn't want to draw

attention to myself by doing that, I'd be very clean-shaven and wear a top hat. Like most criminals did.

It's very interesting your mother though, because on the one hand she must have been anxious about you both during the war...

Yes.

...which you would think would make her not mind whether you came back purple, never mind whether you had a beard or not.

Yes, but I wasn't in the war. The war was over when I joined up. We'd been through the Blitz, two serious Blitzkriegs on Sheffield, due to careless talk, that's something to remember. We used to go to the shelter, the shelter in the back garden every night before the sirens started, and when the blitz started of course, it started at six o'clock at night, very early. I was out in the fields playing, had to run home. But I think they came... They had two blitzes in the same week, they came one evening and blitzed Sheffield all through the night, it was absolute hell. And the ridiculous thing was, the papers came out two days later and said in large headlines, 'They haven't touched the steel works.' They've missed the steel works. They've only destroyed a shopping area, which was flattened from one end to the other. Can you imagine the stupidity of... I mean you were warned about, about not talking in that way about anything during the war. The result is, two nights later they came back and flattened the steel works.

Mm.

Which could be easily found, because, there was a river running through Sheffield and the steel works at the end of the river, at the side of the river. So it's a moon lit night. I can imagine nothing more stupid than that.

So were you...

The interesting thing is that, the day after that blitz, I went...I walked down to the centre of Sheffield with my friend, and I was fascinated by what I saw visually. Just...funny how you take away the, the horror of it all; I was suddenly interested in trams, which had been completely burnt out and just skeletons of trams on lines. Houses with rubble with children's toys scattered amongst the rubble. It's strange how the visual world kind of takes over in a situation like that, which is appalling.

But do you think it was visual divorced from the humanity of it?

Yes, I do. Yes. Doesn't say much for one at that age does it? But it's true, that's right.

And did you draw it, did you...?

Yes, I did some paintings based on it, yes. I remember, I think it was...it was Monet who did a, a painting or a drawing of his dead wife. I mean at the time I thought that was, I don't know how he could do that. That was much later on, I mean not at this time. I thought, how can he do that, you know, so dispassionately? I suppose he wanted to, I suppose he wanted a memory of her that he'd made, I don't know. Now, we must have lunch now. We're quarter of an hour late.

End of F7881 Side A

F7881 Side B

Before we move back into the art school, can I just go back a bit. I just wanted to find out a little bit more about your mother and father.

Yes.

How would you describe your mother's personality?

Mm. [pause] It's a terribly difficult question, very difficult. Very difficult. I don't know how to start describing her personality.

Was she the sort of mother who gave you cuddles?

Yes, but...but at the same time of course the, the kind of northern culture was rather opposed to showing too much, too much emotion, I think. It doesn't mean they didn't have feelings, but they disguised them. That's what I think.

Was she protective of you?

Yes, yes. Oh they were both good parents, no doubt about that. But I felt I didn't know them until, until I was older and my father was older. I got to know him much better I suppose when I was in my, maybe thirties.

Did he remarry?

Yes he did, he married, I think maybe two years after my mother died, he married a friend of my mother's who lived locally, and looked a bit like my mother actually. Now why did he marry again? Well, loneliness of course, but, men in those days just could not look after themselves. I mean it's ridiculous, I don't think he ever cooked a meal in this life, you know? I mean I remember when my mother died, he used to come home for lunch every day because it was in walking distance of where he worked. Well, when she died he couldn't come home for lunch, so, he started having lunch in the works canteen. But that didn't last long, I remember he started to go for

lunch to his sister's, who was quite close again to the, where he worked. But it's a kind of inability to cope, you know, on his own. My grandfather was still alive, and he arranged for my grandfather to go and live with his son, which my grandfather didn't want to do but my father couldn't cope with it. So I think he married again out of loneliness and to be looked after.

Mm. If you had to, would you be all right domestically by yourself?

Yes, I can manage. I would never marry again. Because, I don't think it was the best...well no, that's wrong to say... I don't think it's the best thing for everybody to do that, and, though my father was well looked after when he married again, I don't think they had much in common really. I mean, first of all, unfortunately she could never stop talking. And this I think was the onset of what became Alzheimer's disease, and she would tell a story again and again and again, immediately after telling it. So it was...it was exhausting, absolutely exhausting to be with her. And I think he found it exhausting. It doesn't surprise me that he went deaf. (laughs)

So did he end up looking after her effectively?

No. No he didn't. He died before her. But... I don't think...I think it's a mistake for anybody to remarry for those reasons, I really do. I think it's better to be alone.

And did you feel concerned about him, or were you really rather oblivious at that stage?

No I was concerned to a certain... I was concerned when my mother died for him. I was glad when he remarried, because I thought he wouldn't be so lonely. But... I don't know whether it was the best thing for him to do or not, I really don't.

And did you mind him remarrying, did you feel...?

No I didn't mind him remarrying, no.

And was he close to your brother? What's your brother's name?

Gordon, my brother. My mother was very close to my brother. I think he was less selfish than I was, would take her out more and that kind of thing. I was very inward and didn't do the right things I don't think. (laughs)

And do you feel guilty about that, or you...?

No I don't, I don't feel guilty about it. I mean, it's inevitable for some people. I've always been very very glad that my brother was clever, academically clever, because it released me, it gave me freedom, you know. Nothing was expected of me, and that was marvellous.

That was lucky, because it could have gone the other way really couldn't it.

Mm. Yes it could.

And did your brother settle nearby, did he stay up in that part of the world?

He came to London when I was in London, because he came to do his teacher training in London. And then he stayed in London. And he, he married a friend of Derrick's wife, they were nurses together in Sheffield, and he married her eventually, and lived in London. And then he went to teach in Cornwall, and has been there ever since.

So he used to positively make the journey up to Sheffield to see your parents?

Yes, he would do that, yes.

And was he supportive of you being an artist, did he believe in you?

Yes, very. Very. Yes. He thought it was very good that at such a young age I knew what I wanted to do, because he didn't.

So he drifted into teaching really?

No, he didn't drift into teaching, he drifted... He left school at sixteen, instead of going to university, which he could have done so easily, I think because his friends had all left and got jobs. So he left school and went into an office, the electricity company offices. And then the war came, and he...he wanted...if he was going to be involved in it, he wanted a non-fighting participant in it, so he volunteered for the Merchant Navy. And, there was quite a long waiting list for the Merchant Navy, you couldn't just go and join like that, you had to put your name down and wait. And he waited a long time. And then for some reason which I don't understand he just went out one day and volunteered to be a pilot. So that, that came before, before he received any notification from the Merchant Navy. Of course it was a godsend really. He would never have survived the Merchant Navy, I mean, the losses were colossal, hardly anybody survived in the Merchant Navy from the beginning of the war to the end, it was horrific what happened. So, maybe it was to the good.

Did he ever talk to you about the risk?

No, never. In fact he never talked to about his experiences in the Air Force until, well reasonably recently. I mean when he came back he didn't talk about it at all. He might have talked about it to my parents, I don't know. But it was only, maybe in the last ten years that I knew, when he went to Burma and India, he just happened to mention one day that he was, a part of his job was dropping agents into the jungle in Burma or somewhere; the idea was that they would infiltrate native tribes living in the jungle, to work on the behalf of the British against the Japanese. And he said those agents... I said, 'Well did you speak to these men?' He said, 'No, we just said hello; they were on the tarmac, I was going towards the aeroplane, we just nodded and said hello. I got into the aircraft,' and he took them to where they wanted to go, and they dropped into that territory, knowing that they would never get back until the end of the war. It was absolutely impossible for them to get back until the war was over. He said they must have been amazing men. I'm not surprised. So that's all he's ever talked... Oh yes, he once...yes he once gave an interesting description of flying without, without instruments. I remember this, because I thought it was very interesting. You know, they're given instruments which actually, when you're very high up you don't actually know whether you're the right way up in the aircraft or not. It's only the instrument that tells you that you're upright – well in those days

that's what it was. And his...that instrument, it stopped working. So he wasn't sure whether he was upside-down or the right way up, even though you'd think with the blood rushing to your head or anything, but evidently not. If you're wearing an oxygen mask, it doesn't necessarily follow. So he was in cloud, and he came out of cloud, and to his horror in front of him there was this black line with black on the side of it, and then some sky. And he thought, God! it's a mountain, right in front of me is a mountain. And he swept away in time out of it, to a different position, and it was only after he got to the new position that he realised he was seeing the horizon upright. I thought, I thought that was fascinating. I mean I find it fascinating, because I've known artists who do that kind of thing in their painting, you know, they turn the horizon wherever they want it, so it can be down here or down there. Peter Lanyon used to do that quite often. And I thought, I thought that was fascinating. I mean this idea about what we think reality is, and this is in that place and that's in that place, and the cloud's here, and the land's here, and you know, mountains are in between. (laughs) I found that very interesting.

Well Peter Lanyon was an airman as well wasn't he.

He was a glider, he went...yes, he... Well with a minute, he wasn't...he wasn't flying until he came out of the Air Force, or the Army, I can't remember which he was in. But, he did a lot of gliding, that's how he was killed, through gliding. But it wasn't actually, when I say it wasn't the accident, it wasn't directly the accident, he...he was badly injured but it was a blood clot which killed him. I mean if he hadn't have had a blood clot he would have survived.

You knew him didn't you?

Yes, I knew him very well. We were good friends when we taught at Corsham together at the same time. I liked him very much, we got on very well.

Did he ever talk about whether the perspective from the sky fed into his work very directly?

No, not...you mean when he was gliding? No he didn't, no. But he was interested always in the kind of aspects of landscape rather than looking at landscape, that his moving through landscape perhaps in a motorcar. So there's a juxtaposition of positions in the painting. I mean he had interesting ideas, we could talk about them, and...

What do you remember him talking about?

Well about painting, we often used to talk about painting.

But you would be talking about his painting, or...?

No, generally about painting. I mean, we used to joke about it. He said, 'You're an abstract painter Jack, I'm a realist painter.' (laughs) Of course on his level of speech, that was true to a certain extent. I mean everybody thinks they're a realist painter. Because they're dealing with their kind of reality, that's why.

And so would you debate quite seriously, or was it more live and let live?

No, we debated quite seriously about it.

Mm.

Yes. He was very good to share classes with. We did some funny things with classes, we shared... We shared life the drawing classes together, we had some fun with that, doing unusual things. We had a model once riding round the studio on a motorbike, a very strange image, you know.

How did that come about?

The students love it. Well it presents them with, it presents them with another problem you know, I mean, instead of just sitting there and drawing what they think they see.

How did it...how did the idea come about, do you remember?

No, I think we wanted to do something to kind of make them sit up and take notice. One day I got the model to sit behind a screen, and the idea was that... I got fed up with them coming in and sitting round this half circle waiting for the model to come out, and me to pose the model. And I said to them one day, 'For some artists it's been very important to, to train themselves to retain an image of what they might have seen, like Goya did with his bullfights.' As far as I know Goya never drew from the bullfight, I think it was all retained imagery, what he remembered. Anyway I said, 'What we'll do today is, I'll put the model behind this screen, and I want you to go up and look at her, and come back and draw what you've remembered, and when you run out of that, go back and look again, and so on and so on and so on.' (laughs) Well, the drawings they did were no bloody different to the drawings they while they had the model standing there. (laughs) A complete fiasco.

And did you admit that to them, or did you...?

Yes, I said, 'They're not different. I think it's terrible, they're no different.'

So what did you conclude from that, that they had terribly good memories, or that they weren't drawing anyway?

I think they'd fallen into a pattern of behaviour, and ways of seeing. I once also did an experiment at Corsham. I think I'd been reading about the painter Hans Arp, or Jean Arp, I don't know which one it was, French artist, he did a teaching experiment one day that, he...he cut up...each student cut up shapes, as though they were going to do a collage, and then they put their board and canvas on the floor, and having cut up all these shapes and painted some of them and not others, each student threw it up into the air and let it land on the board or canvas, and then they either stuck it down or painted round what had happened. Arp said that what was extraordinary is that the best student always got the best result. Well I thought, this is...this is a very interesting idea, I'll try it out, because I'm curious what will happen. And I did the same thing – well a similar thing. I got them to cut out these shapes, which they'd previously painted some colours, and they all did that. The difference was that one of

the worst students had the best work. Well that was, well I mean that's just chance if you like. Well what was of interest about it eventually was that that student from that moment became so much better, and so much more imaginative, and developed in a way that one could never have foreseen before. And all one can think is, well that in a way gave a confidence or released some imaginative idea. But I found both things, both results very interesting, that he got one result and I got the other result, and yet both were equally of value I think.

And did that student go on professionally?

No. No. Very few of them did go on. Well when I say go on, I mean they're not known. I'm saying that they don't work or paint or do whatever they do, but they're not well known. Except Howard Hodgkin, he's become well known, he was a student there at that time.

Were you teaching him?

Yes, indirectly. I mean, not more than anybody else, but he was in the classes, yes.

And do you remember anything about him particularly?

I remember some of his work, I mean quite talented work. I knew he was rich.
(laughs)

In financial terms?

Yes. Yes. I knew he was going to inherit a lot of money. I don't...somebody told me that, who knew them better. Which he did of course.

I didn't know that, is that partly how he kept going then?

Yes, not that he kept going, but he...he met the right people. (laughs) Entertained the right people. Sorry to sound cynical; you'd better not put this on the tape. It sounds so cynical.

Well except that it is very much part of the way the art world works, which I think is also one of the reasons why it's so complicated now.

Yes.

Is that there's that whole world which is actually attached to finance and wealth and [inaudible].

Absolutely. I mean when I first started, I actually naively thought, all you had to do was be good. That's not so any longer. Anybody, as we've seen in the last fifteen years, mediocrity has been projected, and can be projected on a large scale, as long as there's enough money behind it.

It's also amazing how much one person collecting it gives another person confidence.

Absolutely.

And[??] people don't have any independence.

Absolutely. Because they are so unsure. They're unsure about what their friends will say, you know, 'He must be an idiot to buy that. How much did he pay for it? Oh my God! he's...he's senile.'

Mm. But it's also that there doesn't seem to be anywhere in the art market for people to show work at moderate prices that so-called ordinary people can buy for their houses; it seems to either be at amateur level or at huge prices.

Yes. Well there are, I don't know, there are in-between. I mean the Academy shows work that's saleable if you want it, don't they? I mean they're not high prices.

You mean...

Well some of them are high prices, the Academicians and people, but there are lots of work there which, some of it can be good, and it isn't a high price.

You mean the summer exhibition?

Yes. Yes I think so. Well it's not necessarily work I like, but I mean, if somebody wants a painting, and they've got maybe, they can only spend, say £200 on it, or £300, they'll find something I think.

But on the whole presumably a lot of the people putting into that exhibition aren't trying to make their living on it?

Oh no, not at all. Very few artists could earn their living at it, very few indeed.

Mm.

I mean you have to have a very...you have to have a very powerful dealer who can work world-wide, and you have to have a great deal of projection press-wise. For any of my exhibitions to have been successful there's been a great deal of press coverage, always, to give people confidence that they're buying something that may not make them look stupid.

Mm. But does it make you very depressed, or do you...?

Yes, it does make me depressed, because it means that, you begin to doubt that, that very few people are really buying them because they like them, but they're buying them maybe for investment, and if they don't get a return within a very short time, they're going to get rid of them. I prefer somebody who, I really prefer somebody who loves the work, and maybe one's able to say to them, 'Well, give me what you can afford,' rather than, you know, say, 'Well, I'm afraid you can't have it,' you know. That's difficult when you're with a dealer, you can't really do that with a dealer, because they require fifty per cent, so you have to have a reasonable price for the sale, unless you're selling something that's, before you were with the dealer perhaps. But I mean, not many people are prepared... I mean how much should a

painting be? I mean it's both worthless and priceless, isn't it, really. So how much should it be? I mean should it be as much as a motorcar, a house? I just...I don't... Or should we work it out on the fact that, well the artist needs an income; how much should he need a year? Would £20,000 a year be enough for him to paint and live on? Maybe. So, all right, £20,000. How does he get £20,000? How many pictures does he have to sell for £20,000? If he's without a dealer, say, say he sells them at £1,000 each, so he's got to sell twenty pictures. Now, actually I, I paint more than twenty pictures a year, but not everybody does, it just happens that I'm very prolific, but not everybody does, but say, say they do paint twenty pictures a year, or can paint twenty pictures a year for £1,000; that sounds quite fair. Right, if they're with a dealer it's got to be £2,000.

They've also got to sell them all.

And they've got to sell them all, yes. I think it...I think the whole thing is, is very difficult. I mean it was quite an interesting idea in Holland they had after the war where artists were employed by the State and given an income, but it doesn't seem to have worked, because, how do you satisfy whoever is in charge that you are an artist to start with? How do you go about that? Say the Academy for example, which was most likely there was a Dutch equivalent, decided who was an artist. Some people are going to be left out who are very good, and some people are going to get in with a private income who are no good at all.

Mm.

Anyway, it didn't work, and it's a pity in a way, but it didn't.

Do you find it awkward if you don't have a dealer, dealing with money and people coming to the studio?

Yes, I do.

It's an uneasy situation isn't it?

Yes, I do. I really do.

And were you ever given any training when you were at art school for...?

For doing that?

Mm.

No you are nowadays, but not then. But nowadays they're so engrossed in methods of selling that it's pathetic really, it's... I don't know. They're more interested in that than doing their work.

Mm.

I've got a friend in America who's a painter. He knew somebody who spent all his time going round giving lectures on his work, but he's never had time to do any.

But also it must have been quite hard for you, because you were given a show very very early, you hadn't even left college, had you?

Yes, that's true, yes.

So, that must have been quite disorientating in a way.

I never even thought about it at the time, funnily enough. I mean, it's only after I'd done it that I realised it was considered extraordinary. And not only was it considered extraordinary but everybody was stopped from doing it in future; nobody could do it in future unless they got permission from the head of department. I think because, they couldn't stand the fact there was a student who, who had gained more publicity than them. (laughing) I mean that was, that...I mean that just amazed me, that people took that much notice of it.

So were people hostile to you at the time about it?

No, no they weren't. Whatever they said in private, I don't know, but they weren't, no. But, there was an artist at the same time as me, Alan Reynolds, you've heard of him?

No.

Right. In the Forties he was a very popular painter of rather romantic landscapes, quite good of their kind. Now before he went to college he was very very well known and selling work from the Redfern Gallery at very very high prices. And then he wanted to go to college. So he applied for college and he got in. Everybody knew him. So he settled down at college to work, and in the first year you were given a syllabus, you had to do certain things, still life painting, life drawing and life painting, et cetera et cetera. He refused to do any life painting or life drawing at all, he said, 'I'm not interested in that.' There's no reason why he should have been really, but that's, that was the law of the time, that you did this and that and the other. In order to be a proper artist, you had to do this and do that. So, after a few weeks he.....

End of F7881 Side B

F7882 Side A

So after a few weeks they called him into the principals room, and the principal said to him, 'Now look here, now you're at the Royal College of Art you're supposed to do life drawing and life painting, and I understand you've refused to do it. Well, I'll give you two weeks to make up your mind, to either do it or not do it. If you don't do it, you will have to leave.' So he said, 'All right.' So he came out and he, he talked to me, he said he'd been given this ultimatum. And he said, 'Well I'll have to think about it. I don't want to do it.' So, at the end of two weeks he went back to see the principal. 'Ah hello Alan,' first name terms. 'Come in and sit down. Have you made a decision?' He said, 'Yes, I'm not going to do it. I intend to leave.' 'Oh you don't have to leave, you don't have to leave, it's all right. Everything's all right.' I presume by this time the principal had found out that he was a well-known artist who was doing very well. (laughs)

Was this Robin Darwin presumably?

Mm. Yes. Well, Alan Reynolds left anyway, he thought it wasn't worth... He was quite right actually, I mean... His work has changed now totally, he's practically a Constructivist artist, he shows with Annely Juda, he's given up all that work he was doing in the past. But I mean it was that...and in those days it was like that. And to actually, someone come along and have an exhibition while they were still a student was practically unheard of, you know?

Did you stay in touch with Alan Reynolds?

No, no I didn't know him all that well. I suppose we came together because we were both rebels at the time. I only spent a year in college, I worked outside for two years, away from college, because I didn't like the environment, and I didn't like being got at constantly by some of the staff, who wasted half my time arguing with what I was doing.

What were they arguing about?

Well they'd stand behind me and discuss whether I was suffering from some mental disease or other. (laughs)

Seriously?

Yes, seriously.

Who was it?

Ruskin Spear, one of them. They didn't like anything that was not traditional, that they couldn't identify with. Of course, all that changed once I started, once I'd had this exhibition and was painting figurative work their attitude changed totally, but by that time I was not attending college. They had a system that... My tutor in the second and third year was John Minton. Now, he gave me a chit to give into the office, giving me six weeks off to work at home, and at the end of that six weeks he would come and look at my work and give me another one for another six weeks. And that went on for two years. So I was never in the college except to maybe a tutorial, but he used to come round... They all used to come round and look at my work at home, which was much better, much much better. I got on with them much better when they did that.

So what was the work you were doing that upset Ruskin Spear so much?

Well it was rather bizarre, it... I mean it wasn't abstract work, but it was very expressionist, distorted figures. [pause] I had some idea, I mean I wanted, I never wanted to paint a still life, I thought that didn't have any relevance to life whatsoever, what I thought life was, whatever that was. Funnily enough, when I left college I spent about two years painting objects.

So what had changed?

What changed it?

Why did you do that do you think?

Well in my last two years at college, I think I said somewhere, the work that was coming in to England was coming from France, and it was rather, what I considered to be boudoir painting, and French cookery, the thing was cooked together in a kind of aesthetic, the [inaudible] aesthetic way.

Who are you thinking of?

I can't remember. I can't remember their names, but they were full of...London was full of them, coming from France, because France was still the Mecca. And I just, I didn't like it at all, I wanted something different. So I, I just turned to the environment in which I lived at that time, which was a, it was a house which was occupied totally by artists as it happened, artists who had been at college and left, or were still there. And, so I started to paint the interiors of that house, things left on tables, not set-up still lifes, just milk bottles and things that had been left there. And there was my brother and his wife living in the basement at that time, and they had a child, and I watched the child walking and things like that, and the child being bathed in the sink, because that's where...there wasn't a bathroom downstairs. And so that's where I got those ideas from. And, you know, the way children balance as they learn to walk, and walk on a carpet edge and all that kind of thing, I painted those kind of things. And, so my final degree exhibition was, and my first exhibition, was full of things like that. Apart from one or two snowscapes, not landscapes but snowscapes, where the whole picture was a snow storm of a kind in a city, with snow and lights gleaming through it.

And where had that come from?

That was a bit later actually, when I'm thinking about it, that was a bit later at college, and that came through a conversation I had with, with Peter Lanyon once, about the painting of Malevich called *White on White*, maybe you've seen the painting, you know the one I mean. And the idea of painting a white painting came from that conversation, and of course as I wasn't an abstract painter then, I thought of this snowstorm, which I had seen in a city, and it was a, it was an interesting experiment to use white, and just off-whites.

And what did you find out?

I don't know. I just don't know. I mean it surprised me I must say. I've still got one of them, I kept one, I've still got it.

How many were there?

There were three. One of them I still have. One of them was sold, and has since just disappeared. And I think, there was another small one which went to a private buyer, I don't know what happened to that either. That was, the little one that was sold to a private buyer, was very nearly abstract. It was just of the shape of a field tipped up, practically looking at you, with a snowstorm taking place around it. I mean it was non-objective in that way. You wouldn't have known it was a field really, unless I'd told you.

And might that have led you down a very different direction at that point? Did you sort of teeter on the edge of it?

Well when I had the, when I...when I...I won the John Moores prize for the *Creation and Crucifixion* which was 1956. That same month I opened an exhibition in London, which were really abstract paintings of a kind, abstract... Well they were to do with light passing over objects, but people looking at them would have thought they were abstract paintings. And, I remember William Scott saying to me, how amused he was. He said, 'What you've done could only happen in America. You've just done, you've just won a prize for a figurative painting and you're having this exhibition of non-figurative work.' (laughs) Which, I suppose it was rather, rather funny. But whatever, the change had started, you see.

But at that time, from your point of view, did it all seem rather seamless, or did it feel divided?

Oh it seemed absolutely logical. I mean I was, I was dropping one visual language for a more adequate visual language, I thought.

But was that second language coming very much out of the first language, or did it seem a different...?

Yes, indirectly, indirectly. It partly came out also through doing some sculpture, which I did for a time. For a time I painted very very, I mixed my own paint, very very thickly, and I used the paint like I would clay, that kind of consistency. Kind of wet into wet, and then working on it with, dragging things through it. Rather thick painting. In fact, some parts of the painting were very thick, I mean they might stand out as much as that.

That's two inches, three inches?

Yes, because I'd mix my own paints so it could be put on just like clay, you know. I worked in that way for quite a time. But then I thought the technique I was using was becoming too important, it was destroying the actual imagery that I wanted. I mean for some artists who work very thickly, they...the paint is their image, that is their image. And I didn't...I realised I didn't want that. So I gradually moved away from that. And that's when I did these paintings, and sculpture at the time, of light passing over objects.

So can you...I can't really envisage those, and I've read about them but I've seen very few reproductions. I mean..

What, of light passing over objects?

Mm. Can you actually just describe them a bit?

[pause] Well very often it would be hard to distinguish the objects, they were kind of two forces coming together on a canvas or, might be related to bottles or something like that, but, it's very unlikely you would recognise the object. Occasionally you could tell the object, but not always. They have one in the Tate Gallery which, which is more recognisable. The paint on it is very very thick layers across the bottom, and then there are these things standing behind it, painted in browns and white. I mean I

used, I used very little colour at that time, just for economic reasons. You see all the, all the earth colours are cheap; any other colour is, can be very expensive. Now of course, I love all the expensive colours. (laughs) In fact I find that, I mean it's tragic really, because, when I fall in love with a colour I find it costs a fortune.

But the, the two colours that would be in these pictures would be quite contrasted, they wouldn't be...

No, they wouldn't. No they'd be more tonal rather than contrasted. Brown black white.

And what about the sculpture?

Well the sculpture was done as a kind of...well to simplify it, shall we say, instead of making a plaster sculpture of a bottle, I would attempt to make a form around a bottle which just left the bottle as a negative, so when you looked at it you saw a negative, but what you were aware of in plaster was what was around it. So using those ideas, I sometimes worked from the sculpture, painted from the sculpture, which was, well, quite an interesting method at the time; I could never use it now but it, it seemed of interest then.

And did it seem all of a piece to be doing sculpture as well as painting, or did that feel quite a radical shift?

No, it seemed all of a piece, because it was dealing with the same kind of, of subject matter. At my first Whitechapel exhibition with Bryan in 1959, I showed some of the sculptures in plaster, none of them were cast. People kept breaking bits off them.

Intentionally?

Oh yes. You know, there are people who can't...who can't resist damaging something. If they don't like it, they kind of damage it. The one that the Tate bought about that time, a thick painting, I had a letter or a phone call from the Tate one day saying would I come down and look at the painting. It had been hanging up, and, one

of the people looking after that part of the gallery had noticed there was paint dripping on the floor. Well the paintings were so thick in those days that they dried on top but they didn't dry underneath. In fact it might...I was told by a conservation man it might take twenty years for them to dry fully right through. Right, some idiot had come along, thick paint, taken a pencil or a pen and stuck it into it. The result is, the liquid underneath came out onto the floor. So the conservation man asked me, he came and, when I came to see him he showed me what had happened. He said, 'Do you want to repair it?' I said, 'No I don't.' He said, 'Well I'll repair it, and we'll put it under glass to stop it happening.' And it's been under glass ever since.

And that must change it, being under glass.

Yes it does change it, because it's rather a dark picture so it does change it. I haven't seen it for years. I presume it's in their archive, stuck away somewhere. But there are people who always want to tamper with things I think. Evidently it's not uncommon.

It's a big form of trespass though isn't it. Did you not feel very hurt by it?

It made me realise there are people who want to do a lot of damage. I remember again, now this is a long time ago, there was an exhibition here at the university, a mixed exhibition of paintings, I think, I can't remember whether they came from the Arts Council or where they came from; they were attacked by somebody with a razor. Mine was one of the few to escape, because it was under glass, they couldn't get at it. But, a student protesting or something. Made me realise the vulnerability of these things, and not only the vulnerability, but how powerful they must really be, to effect people in that way.

Mm. And do you...what do you feel about having your paintings in public collections? Does it make you feel calm inside, that they are there? I mean you talk about one of the snowscapes having disappeared.

Yes.

*They're two very different circumstances of things that have happened to the work.
Or is it irrelevant once they leave your company, do they just go?*

No, I prefer them to be in a public collection really. Because first of all more people see them, well they do if they're hung up; I mean I've got about six paintings at the Tate which are never seen, because they don't fit in. They've got to fit in to a way of thought, or a school or, you know what I mean. Because they have galleries full of Constructivist or galleries full of this that and the other. So because they don't fit in, they're not shown. That's true of lots of artists in the Tate collection. But I prefer them generally to be in a public collection, because of the number of people that can see them.

But do you get a certain sort of pleasure knowing that they're there, or do you forget about it?

I forget about it.

Mm.

I really do.

And, can we just go backwards to your time at art school in Sheffield?

Yes.

When you went there, you knew a little bit from your reading, and had you had some encouragement from art teachers at school? When did you...

Yes I did.

When do you remember beginning to draw? Did you draw as a very small child?

No, not...not really. No more than any child draws. I remember at grammar school the art...they gave us art homework, the art master gave us art homework to do, and it

was usually to draw an object in the home, a chest of drawers, a chair, something like that. And I had a friend, we were both good at art, and both got very high marks for bringing this work in, all done on about this scale. He didn't have to try, he was automatically talented and could do it without even thinking about it. I had to try very hard. I got the same marks as him, but I had to try. And that was the difference. But I got a lot of encouragement from the art master, because I was so serious about it. And when I left and went to Sheffield Art School I got a lot of encouragement from a teacher called Mason, who died quite young. His brother was also a painter and actually, after I'd left college he taught at the college. But that man Mason gave me a lot of encouragement. I was interested in the kind of images that I was making.

What were you doing at this time?

Well there was this painting like a Picasso Blue Period, which, nobody at art school was doing that kind of thing then, they'd be painting local Sheffield scenes or something. It must have looked rather strange. But, I mean he was a man who knew about Picasso's work, let me say that, you know. So I did receive encouragement from them.

And what were the things that you learnt at the art school? Presumably it was a very structured course, was it?

Yes. Yes it was.

Can you give me an idea?

It was all to do with getting through an exam, to eventually become an art teacher. Which didn't interest me, I wasn't interested in that.

Did you have to pretend that you were?

Well no, I think they thought I was incompetent at doing that. (laughs) In fact, I mean, you had to do a life painting, a composition and...and anatomy, anatomy drawing at that time, of all things. And one of the teachers said, 'Well, your

composition, you'll either get very very high marks or they'll fail you, because it's so unusual.' I was using all kinds of media, pastel, paint, all kinds of things in the one painting. As it happened I did very well, but it was a fluke, it could have gone the other way.

How did you come to be doing that? I mean...

I don't know. I've no idea. A sense of experiment I should think. When I went to St. Martin's it was quite different, it was a battle from beginning to end. I was only there a year, but it was a battle. In fact when I first went there... What time is it now? It's all right, we're OK. When I first went there, I'd just come out of the Air Force, I had no money, I hadn't yet been given a grant, so I arrived at St. Martin's with a few paints, and two brushes. The first class was a life painting class, and I did this painting, a life painting. And the man who was in charge came round and said...it was a time when they showed you how to do it. They would take your brushes and paint and paint part of it for you to show what to do. So he said, 'Give me your brushes.' (laughs) In actual fact I'd painted that one picture with one brush, which hardly had any hairs on it. And I gave it to him, he said, 'You've painted this picture with this brush?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'I can't paint...I can't use this, it's impossible. It's amazing that you've done it.' I said, 'Well it's all I've got.' 'Why have you only got this one brush?' I said, 'Well I've got no grant, it isn't coming through for another few weeks.' 'Oh,' he said, 'all right, that's all right, I'm sorry to hear that. Well, you'll have to do the best you can.' So I did. But the work, it didn't fit in. They were all painting towards an exam again, you do it in a certain way. So after about, I think a month, he came up to me one day and he said, 'Look, I want you to make up your mind. I don't mind what you say but I want you to make up your mind, what do you want to do? Do you want to get through the examination, or, do you want me to look at your work as though you're going to be an artist?' (laughs) Isn't that marvellous? There is a difference. So I said, 'Well I want to be an artist.' He said, 'OK. You'll fail the exam, but OK.' But that same year I got into college, fortunately.

What was his name, who was it?

Stroudley, James Stoudley. He used to show in the Academy every year. He's dead now. He always used to paint one subject. He lived down here, and he used to paint the cliffs at Peacehaven. You could always recognise his painting, it was that white cliffs of Peacehaven with the green on top. Very competent but very boring. But who cares? I mean, he was honest with me anyway, I mean, and we got on fine after that.

So the course you were doing at St. Martin's was to train you to be a teacher somewhere was it?

Yes. Everybody was going to be a teacher, except those who were considered to apply for college, might apply for college. But very few did.

And was it for teaching in art schools, or for teaching in ordinary schools?

No, teaching generally, not in art schools, no.

Because I'm interested in what must have been in his head about the standard of teachers to send away.

Yes. Yes, but he was...they were only teachers who were going to be teachers in ordinary schools. People teaching in art schools then were people who had been at the Slade, the Royal College, somewhere like that, or were Prix de Rome people. They all had that kind of background. Otherwise you wouldn't be in an art school, unless you were very well known.

But when you were at art school in Sheffield, was the life class, was that the first time you'd ever seen a naked woman?

Yes. Yes it was.

And was that quite an impact? Because it must have been rather difficult.

Well not...no, not entirely, because one knew that artists painted from the model, one had seen lots of nudes. In fact I had a Modigliani nude hanging in my bedroom.

What my mother thought of that, God only knows. But, no I didn't seem...it seemed part of the business of being an artist. And, one had to learn to do it. I wasn't very good at it at that time, it took me a long time to be able to, to do it well. We had a teacher who was a performer. When I say he was a performer, he could draw with both hands at the same time, which is quite rare, only a few people can do that. Augustus John could do that. You have a pencil in each hand and you start like this, and draw down a figure. It's a real performance, and it's really amazing to watch. Anyway he was able to do that. It's not a good training. (laughs)

Mm.

You think versatility counts, and it doesn't.

Do you still like Modigliani?

Yes, I think, yes I do. I'm drawn to some of his, some of his things.

Which?

Some of the portraits I like very much, those thin heads. Yes, they're quite interesting. In fact they had an exhibition a long long time ago, I think at the Tate or the Arts Council, of Modigliani with Soutine, and it was a time when I loved Soutine's work, and not Modigliani at all. And so I went to see it, and when I came away I, I preferred, I preferred the Modigliani, I was more interested in that than the Soutine, who I'd gone to see. But I can't...I mean I can't say I'm over the moon about him now, at all. I think very few artists that I liked, I liked when I was a young man, I still like to the same extent. They've come and gone, not many have lasted really. Picasso has lasted, and Gauguin has lasted, have kind of always been there, never get tired of them. Klee hasn't lasted, but has come back more recently; marvellous, absolutely marvellous.

What brought him back?

I don't know. I think the magic of it all, suddenly.

But did you suddenly see them again?

Yes. Saw a very good exhibition.

Where?

At some private gallery in London. Oh no, in actual fact I actually saw some... When I was at the, at Fischer Fine Art, Fischer, the man who ran the gallery, was a friend of Felix, Felix Klee, Klee's son, and, he was able to get some of Klee's work, because, through his son, works that had never been seen before. And they put on an exhibition of some Klee, and some Lissitzky, the Russian. And my dealer at that time put in one of my paintings amongst them. I was frightened to death, until I saw the exhibition. And it fitted in quite well, I thought, it's fine, it's marvellous. I get on better with them than some of my contemporaries. And, that's when I kind of saw him again for the first time clearly. They're magical pictures really, very much so. I don't know whether you've ever read his diaries, have you?

No.

Read them, marvellous experience.

So do you think you stopped enjoying his work because he just sort of went out of your life?

Yes, I think so. I think so. And I think it's something like, when you first start listening to music; may have been different for you but I mean I, when I first started I liked Chopin very very much, and that kind of dropped away until I, I was bored with him really. But I think in the last five or ten years, I've heard him since then, I think they're fascinating.

Mm.

His piano studies are terrific I think.

End of F7882 Side A

F7882 Side B

I have one that I play, used to play in the car but we stopped playing it because it used to be dangerous. (laughs) You know you...

Do you have music on when you're painting?

Pardon?

Do you have music on when you're painting?

Do I have any what?

Have music on when you're painting.

Oh no, I don't. Sue does, she has it on all the time, she listens a lot to the Third Programme. Hears a lot of contemporary music. I only hear it through the wall, but... I prefer complete silence really. I can't stand a fly in the room even, I can't bear it until I get it out.

So do you have to stop the music coming through, or can you grit your teeth?

No, I...it's too far away, I can get beyond it. But I couldn't have it in the room. But if I'm listening to music here, say, sitting down in the evening listening to music, sometimes it sparks off an idea, not to do with the music but it's as though it releases ideas, you know.

And when you say that, will it give you an idea for a whole composition, or it will be a fragment of something?

No, a fragment, which I then build around perhaps.

And will you just keep it in your mind, or will you actually make a visual note of it?

No, I might make a visual note of it. And I might never use it, or I might use it a year later, come across it by accident. I mean I came across a thing, a photograph upstairs in my drawer of a painting I'd done in the 1960s, and I looked at it and I thought, well, it's an interesting idea, I think I can do it better than that now. So using that idea, I did another painting from that idea, and of course it changed. And I've called it *Déjà Vu*, of course, because I'd been there before. But, that occasionally, very occasionally happens.

And if I were to see the two, would I be able to see where they're related?

No, I don't think... Well, well you...yes, you might, you might.

So what is the journey that takes place between the two of them? What's the original one like?

The format, the format is, let's put it... The main format is a strip hanging down and changing direction and hanging it again. And that's repeated in different...not at the same level, repeated in different ways. There's always this kind of little twist as it hangs down. And in between those forms are things that might be considered to be squares and cylinders, sometimes three-dimensional in a way. So you might be able to identify with it. It's now less three-dimensional, the forms in it. But this format, you could...I think you could identify with that.

I'll just check one thing.

[break in recording]

What was it that made you want to have another go at it, what was unsatisfactory about the first one?

I don't know. I really don't know. I think the thing is, one's always inquisitive, whatever you might see is...you know, you think, well, maybe I could do something with that or... I mean, I'm doing a painting upstairs at the moment, it's only a tiny painting, it's nine inches square, which came about through...I was doing, I was doing

some other paintings and I'd collaged different pieces on it, and I threw the collage onto the table at the side. And, three things came together as I threw them on the table at the side. It was just an accident, they came together in a particular way which was an accident. And, I think perhaps the following day I kind of...I saw it and I thought, there's a painting there, it's already there, you know? So I put some Bluetak on each piece and put them together. And I didn't use it for some time, for a few weeks, and I've just started to use it, seeing it again I thought, I must do something... It's a small painting, it can't be a large painting, because the pieces are only about this big. But it sparked off an idea that I could never have thought of in my life, you know?

Mm. But you would never as a practice throw pieces of collage, a bit like throwing a dice?

No. No I wouldn't.

Take it as a beginning.

No, I don't think I would now.

Mm.

No.

And going back again, you had this Modigliani, poster was it, in your bedroom, of a nude? What was it? A reproduction.

Must have been. Or...no I think it was taken out of a magazine. I think it might have been taken out of *Picture Post* in those days, they did a series on artists, so it may have been that.

And would Picture Post have been something that was delivered to the family home, or would you have gone to get it?

No, no I would have bought it myself.

Did your parents take a newspaper?

[pause] No I don't remember them taking one. They must have done, must have taken the local paper. Must have taken the *Sheffield Telegraph* or something like that, or the evening paper. They must have taken some paper.

Mm. But who were the other painters, I rather led you off on a tangent, you were talking about people that you've liked at certain times and then stopped liking.

Oh yes. Yes. Well Soutine was an example, and, well I'm not interested in Soutine at all now. I mean I wouldn't go to see an exhibition of his at all. [pause] Amongst more recent painters, shall we say since the American influx into England, a painter I still like to go and see is Jackson Pollock, I still find him of great interest. I think he really made a contribution of importance, you know.

Do you know what that was?

No, I don't. I just know that he does it better than anybody else, I think. I think every one of his paintings, what interests me is that every one of his paintings seems to be structured; they're not...they're not as people think, you just drip it all around and something happens, I don't believe that for one minute. In fact I remember, I think William Scott told me when he went to see him he was amazed to see he had a, a big canvas on the floor and there was an actual, a drawn image of a woman in it, as...I presume he used it as a kind of basis to start from. But I think all his work is structured, you know, in some way or another, and I think that's what appeals to me. I think that, that's what lasts, after many years. Whereas lots of the Abstract Expressionists I just grew tired of, you know?

Did they have a huge impact on you when they were first shown?

No they didn't, not...not as regards my work, not at all, no. I was so engrossed in what I was doing, I think, for that to happen.

So did you go up to the Pollock exhibition last year?

I did, yes. And I think it was a great pleasure to see a few masterpieces, which is so rare nowadays to see.

So, were there some that you thought much less of than others?

Yes, yes.

Which are the strong points for you?

I didn't respond so much to the later, very late works, I felt they lost their impetus. I think, I love the ones that are practically like...they're like storms of colour and movement, I like those very much. Did you respond to those?

Well it was very interesting for me, because, although I'd seen some Pollock before, I'd never seen as much in one place.

Ah.

And meanwhile, through doing these recordings, I've been talking a lot to other people about the impact they had on them.

Yes.

And so, it was very fresh for me in a curious way with all this having gone on in the background.

Yes. Of course when they were first shown in England, they were shown at the Whitechapel Gallery, so there were a lot of works there. It was a very great impact, you know. The Whitechapel Gallery is, is not an easy gallery, it's huge as you know, and, to actually be able to dominate it, not everybody can do it at all. And he did it very well I think, the work looked, looked very very good there.

Were you affected by the scale of it?

Well, it's funny, funny to think of now, but when...my first exhibition, lots of the work was four feet square, or four by five; that was considered amazing in those days. People never painted that size. I mean it's nothing now, everyone...that's a small painting. Everybody was doing pictures about this big, you know.

So why had you grown so big?

Why did I make them so big, then you mean? Well, they were all painted on hardboard, four by four is a general size for a piece of hardboard. You can cut it down, I know I could have done that. But I liked the, I felt that, maybe on that scale there could be more participation by the viewer in the work, it envelopes it more, than looking at this little object. I don't feel that any longer, now, I don't think that's very important; I think you can be engulfed by a Paul Klee of this size, or something twenty feet square, really. But there is the physical impact, there's no doubt about it. And, I mean Pollock's paintings are made for American spaces, American houses, which have huge spaces, or offices, and I think that's got something to do with the scale of their work. I think it...I think lots of English paintings because of that are too large, they don't...they don't require that scale at all, they can't...they don't seem to handle it in the same way, you know? I can't do very large paintings, I mean the largest paintings I've done are ten feet by eight, and that had to be rolled up to bring it out of the house, which I hate, I can't stand that. I can't stand rolling a picture up, and I can't stand it being re-stretched, because it never re-stretches properly. Anyway that's my limitation, because of the space in which I work. If I worked in a huge factory like many young artists do, that's why they can paint huge pictures. I can't get them in or out of the house.

But, I saw some very large ones at the Angela Flower Gallery, so you have been doing pretty big paintings quite recently.

What, you saw a seven by five perhaps.

It seemed gigantic to me.

It's most likely seven by five, yes. That's about the limit that, the limit that I've shown at Flowers East I think. Nothing bigger than that. I don't think so.

And what will provoke you to go that big?

Well the idea, the idea lends itself sometimes to that kind of scale. It's very interesting. I don't know whether the painting you saw contained very small images, did it?

There were two. One of them is, I think the one in the catalogue, which is blue with the....

[break in recording]

.....on the back of it.

Mm. Yes it might have been from my last exhibition. If it was the one I was thinking of, it would have been six feet square, no bigger than that.

Oh right. Well...

But pictures[??] sometimes contain small images, it's quite interesting to do a large picture that contains hundreds of small images. I mean I've got a painting which I hope some day to show, which I think is called, something like, *One Two Zero*. I use zero because I like the idea of using zero rather than one two o. Anyway, it means there are 120 images in it, that's what it means. And to do that on a, say, seven by five, which that is, the one I'm thinking of, there's something fascinating about that; it's like actually, what imagines it might be if you go into outer space, and you see all the stars, you know, and nothing else, and they're all there.

It reminds me of that picture in Private View of a circular painting.

Ah yes.

With the small elements.

Yes.

Is that similar to what you're talking about?

That painting, yes, in *Private View*, I think that's...I think that's based on an idea of movement; isn't it, is it called *Movement*?

I can't remember.

May well have been called *Movement*. It might even have been called *Sea Movement*, based on the idea of the sea moving at that time. I'm not sure. And it's the idea of the dance as well I think, taking place, a visual dance.

But, sorry this is rather pedestrian, but, presumably it's very different doing something like One Two Zero on a vast canvas. You could in theory do a smaller number on a smaller piece, which had the same ratio.

Yes, I know what you're saying, but it's not the same. It's not the same because the smaller piece, you take in visually at one go, that's the difference. Whereas a larger work, you have to kind of take it in in many, many ways. It's a bit like listening to a symphony, you don't...you don't get the end and the beginning at the same time, you know. I mean there are certain pictures which just have to be small, they deserve to be small. It doesn't mean you can't produce an epic on a small scale. But let's say, Picasso's *Guernica* could not have been smaller than it is. I mean when you see it in reproduction, it's shrunk, it's not like the original.

When did you first see the original?

I saw it in Paris. I can't remember when it was in Paris, quite a long time ago. It's no longer in Paris now, it's in Spain I think, or is it in America? I'm not sure.

I think...

No, it went back to Spain didn't it.

Mm.

Yes, they've got bullet-proof glass in front of it. It's a great painting I think.

Mm. Do you find it a great painting because of its, purely its visual content, or because of what it symbolises?

No, because of its visual content. It's funny, my wife and I were having a talk about this this week. I don't think it...I don't think it works as an anti-war painting, unless you know about Guernica, and make the connection. But the painting itself is so formally beautiful, that it ceases to be a war painting. And I was saying to Sue, just after the war I saw the best war painting, anti-war painting, I've ever seen, and it was of hundreds of bodies, a very big painting of hundreds of bodies piled up in Auschwitz, and, it was a horrible painting, very badly done, but, as an image which you keep in your mind, it's there, you know? And that's, that's funny in a way, that, a really good painting kind of goes beyond that.

Because it's not reportage?

I think so. It's inventive, and it's amazing, really.

Mm. Can you remember when you first found out about the Holocaust?

Must have been after the war when they put the films out. They put the films out of Auschwitz didn't they, when they liberated it.

Mm.

Horrific films. Do you...have you see those? You must have done by now. Yes, they're horrific films. A time of terrible evil.

And would you ever have tried to paint something like that?

No, I don't think so. I don't think you need to paint that subject in order to make a comment about, about humanity. I think you can paint... I think for example, Picasso's paintings he did during the war of still life objects make a comment about that period, as much as anything else really.

Was your home a place where politics was discussed, or not?

I don't remember it ever being discussed.

Mm.

I couldn't tell you whether they were Labour or Conservative or what they were, at all.

Mm. So was it a great shock to you to realise how evil people could be, or...?

I think so, yes. It still is, I mean it still is.

Had your father talked much about the First World War, was that shadow hanging around?

No, he didn't talk about it. He had nightmares about it but he never talked about it. He... I think he was a very nervous person, and most likely it had really upset him. Must have been a terrible experience.

And when did you learn about that?

Again, must have been through newsreel films that came out.

Would you have been taught about the First World War as part of history at school, or not?

[pause] I think one would, maybe towards the end of one's time, when one reached the age of fifteen or something, it would maybe come into history at that time. Very likely. I mean we were taught by a man...the man who taught history was very left-wing in his views, and I think he would have dealt with the war, even if it wasn't on the syllabus, I think so.

Mm. And would you as students have debated things like the way artists were being used in Russia as part of the communist...

Yes, yes. Of course it was a great interest in the Fifties about, about art for the people. I disliked it intensely, even though people thought I was making social comment at the time. I mean I just happened...that was my environment as it happened, I mean... The Tate picture of the Mother and Child, they have a quote from me underneath it which says, if I remember rightly, 'If I'd lived in a palace, I would have painted the chandeliers,' and that sums it up really, you know. It was there, had nothing to do with me, painting social pictures as such. Of course it was a great interest at that time. I mean all those paintings from the Italians, Guttuso. Derrick, has Derrick talked to you about Guttuso?

No.

He knew him very well. You must ask him about him. He liked him very much. But those kind of paintings, they...they just didn't influence me, or touch me.

I don't know the work, what is his work like?

Well it's Social Realist painting. He was a communist, a very avid communist, and, his paintings were about, about the people. Derrick can tell you more about it than me, you see.

Was Derrick toying with communism, were you all talking about it?

I think he was very politically aware. So was George...George Fullard was very politically aware, he was a Communist. George's family was communist. His brother

was a candidate in Sheffield for the Communist Party. So he was very committed. And they had Communist Party meetings in the house where I lived with George and Derrick, which I never attended, it just...I don't know, it just didn't interest me.

And, did they mind that you weren't interested, was there any pressure?

[pause] No I don't think...no I can't say there was pressure. No, I think they thought one was a bit of an odd character maybe, but no, I don't think there was pressure.

Did you vote?

Did I vote? No, I never voted. Funny you ask me that, because, a man... Do you know, did you know a Member of Parliament called Strauss? He was the Leader of the House of Commons at one time, left-wing, his wife as well, very very rich. They lived in millionaire's row in Kensington. And they bought a picture of mine, one of the pictures you've just mentioned, the, like the sea movement, they bought one of those. And they asked me to, asked me and Sue to a party. It was full of politicians, all the Labour Party were there. And, there was one man, he was...oh I can't remember his position in the Labour Party. Anyway I think, I was in conversation with him, and he said...he said just what you said, 'Do you vote?' I said, 'No, no I don't think I'm competent enough to vote. I don't think I know enough about it.' (laughs) He said, 'That's terrible, absolutely terrible.' I said, 'Well maybe you're right, but quite honestly, I don't think half the people who vote know enough about it.' Well naturally he was horrified; it was his life when all said and done. But I, I honestly felt I didn't know, I wasn't involved to that extent. I vote now, and that's another matter altogether.

When did you start to vote?

Oh I started to vote when I lived in London, at, when I lived in Leytonstone, and I voted then to keep the fascists out. Leytonstone was a very...the East End was a very fascist area. I don't understand that, I mean that's where...that's where fascism started before the last war, Mosley and all these people, they're all East End. I don't

understand it at all, why they were taken in by it. But the same thing was happening again.

When? When are you talking about?

That must have been, in the Seventies. They had the National Front Party putting up candidates. So I voted against them.

So you voted Labour?

Yes. And Labour got in; the Front didn't get in, but they got in...they got votes, that's the terrible thing about it. I mean we partly left Leytonstone because it became dangerous to walk about. I mean, if you were coloured you were asking for trouble, you know.

And do you still vote Labour, have you carried on?

Yes. Yes. Not that I'm very politically minded. I'm critical of them all really. Aren't you?

It's impossible not to be.

Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean... (laughs) Some of them I wouldn't...I wouldn't trust an inch. (laughs)

But did you feel that George Fullard was really rather tunnel-visioned, if his family were communists, but he was just...

He was for a time, but, I mean I...I had a lot of... Because we lived above, I lived above him with Sue and she had kind of a studio accommodation, I had a lot of conversations about painting and sculpture with him, and one day he said to me, he says, 'You know Jack, I've realised, I don't give a bugger about anybody else really.' (laughing) Well what I'm trying to say is that, suddenly he was kind of released from it all, and that's when the work you now see was done, most of it. I mean you can see

that it no longer belongs to that way of thinking, can't you? I think he did some very good work.

Did you meet him as a teacher?

No, I met him through living in the same house.

Right.

And he came down, I lived in the basement at that time, he came down to discuss something about the rent, and he saw a painting I was doing on the easel and was very interested, and brought his wife down to have a look at it. I knew him from that moment.

Was that his first wife?

[pause] He only had one wife.

Irena.

Yes. They separated, but he only had one wife. Why do you think he had two?

End of F7882 Side B

Tape F7883 Sides A & B blank

F9409 Side A

[CC's microphone low volume]

.....microphones are working. I'm having a great deal of trouble with the microphones.

[break in recording]

.....that's any different? No it isn't.

Since we were last recording, we've changed century, and I wondered if that mattered to you at all.

Oh we've changed century, yes. I didn't... Yes, I never even thought of that.

(laughs) Does it matter to me? Not at all, no.

Did you celebrate it at all?

No. I went to bed at the usual time. (laughs) No, what is all the fuss about, really? I mean first of all my brother told me that it's not the year 2000 anyway, the centenary's next year, or something like that. But... I mean did it affect you, do you feel that you're entering a new phase of your life?

No, not at all. Only, I think subconsciously maybe one felt this might be a good year, and it's turned out to be rather a lousy year.

(laughs) I see. I see.

For the sake of the tape, could you just say your name and what today's date is?

My name is Jack Smith. Today's date is the 25th of July, 2000.

And, we've just, before we started, there were a couple of things you asked to have taken out from the recording last time.

Yes.

Was there anything that you thought of in connection with last time's recording that you wanted to add, is there anything that's cropped up in the other direction?

No, because I can't remember last time's recording. (laughs)

Just the things you wish you hadn't said.

I just can't remember it at all.

I wondered, could I just slightly go back in time in the recording. We talked about school and family up in Sheffield, but we hadn't really talked about the landscape, and I think that landscape, both the urban landscape and the surrounding countryside, was important, so I wondered if you could talk about the time you spent in that.

Well it wasn't the, the landscape was not very important to me. Funnily enough I'll just...my gallery's bringing out a book on my work, and they've got Norbert Lynton to write the foreword to it, and, I've been talking to him recently, it's now finished, but I've been talking to him, and he asked me about Sheffield, and, of course Derrick and I used to go out walking at the weekends into Derbyshire, which is marvellous, absolutely marvellous countryside. But as regards the kind of, the town, I didn't find that of any interest at all, except, as I told Norbert, the day after it had been bombed, and I remember walking down... They blitzed Sheffield twice. They came once, I think it was...well let's say it was a Thursday. I'm not absolutely certain of the day, but say, they blitzed it once, and they missed...I mean they were after the steelworks, but they missed the steelworks totally, and they destroyed the whole shopping centre from one end to the other, and also going out to the suburbs. And the morning after that raid I remember walking into Sheffield from where I lived, absolutely fascinated by what I saw. Skeletons of trams burnt out, just standing there like a skeleton. Visually, totally absorbing, you know. One didn't kind of feel, what a terrible thing has happened, which of course it was, people, many people had been killed; but

already one was thinking, you know, what a fantastic object this is, and... Then I remember seeing a paint factory going up in flames, extraordinary sight of that, late at night, during an air raid. And those kind of things impressed me very much indeed.

And do you think they carried on working away inside you, or do you think it was like a still from a film?

I think it was like a still from a film, and I think, it may have entered some of the paintings I did at that time, I'm not sure. I mean I did some things about, about the Blitz, things in ruins, houses in ruins. I suppose I was...I suppose I was about fourteen, or thirteen, I'm not sure. But because...the stupid thing is this, that the papers the following day were full of, saying that they'd missed the steelworks, and you know, it had all been ridiculous, and they came back on Sunday and did the steelworks. I mean talk about, you know, telling people what we shouldn't be telling them. I mean it's no good in a Sheffield newspaper not expecting the Germans to know what has happened. So they came back and did it again, very disastrously as well. I remember the, the air raid sirens went at six o'clock that night, I was out playing. Six o'clock. It's an incredible time, you know? I think they finished about three o'clock in the morning. A very strange time, I must say.

Did you know people working there?

Working in Sheffield?

In the steelworks.

Well, no I didn't at that time. You see Derrick's father eventually went to work in the steelworks, but I don't think he was just then, I don't think so, I might be wrong. He will tell you, he can tell you that. Derrick's father was I think something to do with the cabinet trade, I think. Did he say that himself? Yes, I'm right then. And he was moved out of that for the war effort into the steelworks. But whether he was there then, I just don't know. But... They were extraordinary places. I remember again, before they were blitzed, actually going around the area of Sheffield where the steelworks were, and going inside to look at them once. So primitive, dangerously

primitive. I mean they had channels in the floor, not very deep, a channel like that, running the whole length of the floor. Molten steel running down it. I mean, there's no precaution, if anybody steps into it. Quite primitive.

And people did step into it?

I don't know. I do remember a cat slipping into it, or hearing about a cat slipping into it.

And do you think, if you did paint anything following seeing the bombing, was it the form of the things that would have interested you at that point? I mean how much would the human story behind it have fed into the image?

No, it's hard to say that isn't it. It depends what kind of artist you are. I mean it seems to me, when I told you about the experience of looking at the skeleton trams, it's a kind of, it's a rather remote experience you know; you're not thinking of, somebody might have been inside it, or anything like that; you're just looking at the visual experience of it. And I think that, that carries through in my work. For other people of course it would be exactly the opposite, they would be more humanly involved in that. I'm not saying that's a good thing; it might get in the way of them structuring the work, I feel. I mean when, when *The Raft of the Medusa* was painted, do you know the painting? It's in the Louvre. It's by Géricault. Now *The Raft of the Medusa* was, it was a tragic event at the time, there was a shipwreck and all these people were on the raft, and, I don't...I think they did survive, but I mean, he paints this epic scene. Well obviously he felt for these people, because it's a tragic event, and you can tell that by looking at it, but, there's also a remoteness about it, you know, standing back from it. Ah yes, well this is a scene; must get it right. Asking his friend Delacroix, 'Would you mind posing for this leg?' It's a kind of, there's two things isn't there, there's a remoteness at one level, and there's the concern at the other level, I think.

And do you feel that painting works?

When I first saw it, I haven't seen it for a long time, when I first saw it I thought it was fantastic, an amazing painting. Whether I would think that now, I don't know. I'm told it's in terrible condition. He used to use, I think he used to use bitumen with his paint, which gives a brownness to it, and it's a disastrous thing to use. It cracks up the surface, as well as discolouring it. I suppose they'll send someone along eventually, someone along eventually to re-paint it. (laughs) That's what usually happens isn't it.

And when you say when you first saw it, did you first see it in reproduction, or in the Louvre?

I think I'd seen it first in reproduction, and then later in the Louvre.

And when did you first go to Paris?

I think I was... I mean recently I told somebody I went there when I was about sixteen, but that's not true. Because I must have gone there just after the war. I must have been eighteen, I think. And I went with two friends. And... Did I not mention this in the tape before, that when I went to Paris I didn't know what the 14th of July meant to them, so we arrived in Paris on the 14th of July, and I thought, my God! what a place to live, this; they're dancing in the streets, and sitting outside in the cafés, and everybody having a marvellous time. And I danced myself with some, some woman, and she remarked about my beard, *le barbe*, which was unusual then of course. And, I thought that was the way they lived all the time. I thought this was a marvellous place to live. I must come and live here. (laughs)

Did you stay overnight and find it untrue, or not?

We stayed for a week.

Right.

Yes. Yes. But, a lovely experience.

How did you get there, and how did you plan to go?

I don't know now. We went by train and boat. I went with two...no, I went with three people. Two of them I knew quite well, they lived close to me, and he was a...I think he was at university, I'm not sure, and a girlfriend he had.

What were their names?

Their names. [pause] It's gone, I don't know. He was tragically killed in a...he was a climber, he used to go to Derbyshire climbing, he was tragically killed in a climbing accident when he was quite young. Only, only a few years after we'd been to Paris. And, he was with his girlfriend, and she brought along her girlfriend for me, I presume, which didn't work. Very rarely does on occasions like that if I remember rightly. But it was the first time any of us had been to Paris, or France, or abroad for that matter. So it was rather a lovely experience.

I mean, for this generation that's growing up now, it's very hard to think that there was not always a tunnel that took you direct into Paris.

Or an aeroplane.

I mean it was much more of an expedition, wasn't it.

Yes, it was, yes. Also the war had only just finished, so, it was even more so.

And do you know how the idea came about, and what the objective was, was it simply to be abroad?

Mm, I think so.

Or was it to do with being in Paris?

I think so.

And do you remember what you did in Paris?

No. Oh yes, I remember that we drank a lot of, what's the...what was the green liqueur? There's a green liqueur.

Crème de menthe?

Crème de menthe. Drank a lot of crème de menthe, because of the colour of it. I love to see it in a glass. We drank a lot of that. (laughs) And even other drinks. I mean I think we tried one or two French drinks.

So was it mainly an eating and drinking experience?

No, I don't think so, no, we must have gone to the museums, different places.

What about the architecture, did that make an impression?

Well I don't...I can't remember now. I mean Paris is a beautiful city, or it was a beautiful city. I think it perhaps still is. Have you been to Paris at all? Yes. Don't you think it is a lovely place?

Wonderful.

Yes.

Do you think, just because it's come up in this conversation, I've had times where I've been very fascinated by things like Campari and crème de menthe in decanters [inaudible]...

Yes.

...and even something like whisky...

Yes.

...can have a wonderful colour with light on it. Do you think that's fed into you in any way?

I think one...I think because of what one already was, and one's interests, that one was visual, and responded to those visual things. Like all the flags in Paris across the street, all those kind of things. I think one was already very very visual, you know. As regards...I think...I think nearly everything comes in, eventually comes into one's work, whether you realise it or not, in some way. You may not understand it, but, I think it does feed in to one's work. I mean there was... I think... Yes, when I came down here to live, I wanted to produce...I wanted to stretch colour to an extreme position, which I hadn't done previously, which I thought was a very un-English thing to do, which it is in actual fact. Most English artists use colour as tone, if they use colour at all. I mean they'd never paint a clear sky blue. (laughs) They never make that kind of poetic imaginative leap. Maybe it's something to do with our climate, I don't know. But... Now that decision must have... Well decisions like that, visual decisions like that come from either disgust with what you see around you, that is other people's work maybe, or you look at your own work maybe of a five-year period and you think it...it requires another element in it, so you introduce that element into it. And I think that in that sense, I don't think I am really an English artist. I think... I'm a Mediterranean man. (laughs)

Why do you laugh?

You see one was brought up on, as I told you before, my first interests in art were, was Post-Impressionism, Gauguin, Modigliani, people who knew how to use colour.

And do you remain interested in them?

I remain interested in Gauguin, I've never lost my interest in him. I said to Norbert Lynton when he was writing, when he came here to discuss this, this foreword, I talked about, he asked me about Gauguin, because I mentioned him like I have to you, and, he mentions in the foreword that, I quoted a little thing about what Gauguin said to a young artist called Sérusier. Sérusier must have written to Gauguin for advice,

and Gauguin in his letter said to him, 'When you see a red leaf, use vermilion.' Now that is a terrific statement to make, because, immediately it removes the painting, it puts the painting onto another level of existence. You're no longer thinking just about a leaf, or a brown leaf, you know, it's bright red, which moves it into a poetic area I think. And I found that very impressive. And I still do.

Do you remember when you came across that?

No. No I don't. It wasn't when I was young, it was later.

So in a way...

I think...I think actually Gauguin's very... I mean you may find this strange, but I think he's very underrated, actually.

He might be not very often looked at in actual fact.

Yes. People think they've got him wrapped up and know all about him, but, I don't think that's true.

Do you go back to the paintings a lot?

His paintings? No, never.

When did you see them really?

[pause] Well I must have seen them in France, not when I first went there, much later. I've seen the one in England. Oh I think there are two or three in England.

But they're in your head?

I think they're remarkable paintings, yes, I do.

But it sounds as though in some way they're current for you; even if you're not actually revisiting the paintings themselves, there's something that's stayed alive in a way that other paintings might not have?

Well I don't know whether I would say that. I mean lots of Picasso's paintings I remember vividly. You see what I'd like to do is to paint a number of what I consider memorable images, a very difficult thing to do in actual fact, even more difficult as an abstract artist. When I mention Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*, that's a memorable image, but it's easier, because it's a figurative image it's easier for it to be a memorable image, if you see what I mean. Picasso's *Guernica* remains firmly in my mind as a great painting, and a memorable image. I don't think one can ever forget it. And it's got nothing to do with Guernica; I don't mean because one knows what happened at Guernica, that it was destroyed by fascist planes, but that the painting, in fact it's such a beautiful painting, it nearly ceases to be an anti-war painting, you know? Shortly after the war I saw a painting, I think, must have been in London, done by someone who had been in one of the concentration camps, and what it was, it was a huge painting, and it was piles of bodies just piled one on top of another. Now that was a memorable painting, but it was a very bad painting. It was forgettable, except reminding one of the Holocaust, you know? So there is a difference between that image and Picasso's image. What I like, and again Norbert mentions this, I like paintings to take up an extreme position, whatever that might be for each artist, and that's why I admire Gauguin for doing so, use vermilion, and Picasso for doing so, which is always an extreme, nearly always an extreme position for him.

When you came across the quote about the red leaf and vermilion...

Yes.

...presumably you had already made that discovery yourself.

Yes. Yes.

So it was finding it confirmed really.

Yes. It was nice to hear it said so long ago. And, I mean now, I mean, we know so many artists who use nature as a jumping-off point into the unknown, or into the poetic field, whereas then, it wasn't so; they were very rare. People like Gauguin and Van Gogh were very rare people, when you think about what was happening at the time.

If you feel you are more Mediterranean than English, did it not occur to you to go to live abroad?

It's my one regret. (laughs) I said to my wife, 'We should have left England when we were thirty years of age.'

And why do you think you didn't?

Oh, too many commitments, and already involved in the, in exhibiting here, and producing work here. I mean one of the disadvantages of being an artist is the amount of work you accumulate, unless you're very successful. So you tend to stay where you are, because the idea of moving the whole lot somewhere else is horrific. I mean the...if we had to move out of this house, there are over 600 paintings in this house. It's not a question of moving the furniture, that's no problem at all. The problem is, the pictures. And, as I'm very prolific, my wife also paints, we have a lot of work. Now that wasn't, it wasn't quite like that when one was thirty, but, one was involved in a, one was involved in work, in series of works, which one didn't want to interrupt, you know? I mean when I was at college, I was asked whether I would like to, when I was leaving, whether I would like to take the travelling scholarship, and I said, 'No, I don't want to do that; I want...at the moment I want to remain here, because what I'm doing I'm interested in, and I want to continue it.' I don't want it broken suddenly, you know, by a new thing. And that was a wise decision, I think. But I think, you see, I think it's quite good to be a foreigner in a country. I mean you are a foreigner in your own country to a certain extent because of what you're doing. I mean, being an artist is hardly like being a footballer, is it? You are...in a way you're standing outside looking, looking in, I think. I'm not, I don't...I don't mean that in a romantic way, because... It has to be so, let me say that, it has to be so. So someone who's an émigré, I think they're at a great advantage from the beginning. (laughs)

And if you had gone abroad to live, where might you have gone?

Mm, that's a difficulty isn't it, yes, very difficult. Again there's a problem of language. I mean it's no good just being able to say hello to the postman every morning, is it? You do want to have some conversation. So you will have had to have gone somewhere and really lived there, possibly in Paris, for a time, you know. You need to learn the language well. It's no good going if you're just...I couldn't stand going and living in an English community abroad, I couldn't bear it at all. Which is what happens to many, to many people who go there isn't it, they tend to see the English community.

So how much contact do you like to have with people?

Not a lot. [pause] That doesn't mean I'm not gregarious, because I can be. I can...I mean, in my twenties and thirties I loved parties, we both did. Love dancing, meeting lots of people. But I think eventually your work does cut you off from a lot of that, it isolates you more. And you resent the time, that's another thing you resent. Shall we go out tonight? Oh no, I don't think so. Shall we go out today? No, I don't think so. (laughs)

End of F9409 Side A

F9409 Side B

And was the move down here partly to get away from a social life?

No. No it wasn't. We've always...we've always really moved in relation to accommodating work. We first lived in Chelsea, in a studio, which was very small, it was virtually a bedsit, which we lived in, painted in, slept in. And then we thought of looking for somewhere... Oh, incidentally, at that time, talking about getting away from people, at that time living in Chelsea of course was so central that people would drop in while I was in the middle of work or something like that. 'Oh you're working are you?' 'Yes, I'm working.' 'Oh, do you mind if we stay?' What can you say to that? So that often happened, and we got fed up with it. So, we moved to Putney. It's hard to imagine this now, but Putney was considered miles out. I mean you were in the sticks, going to live in Putney. So we had a, we could afford a tiny terraced cottage; it was less than £1,000. We could never have got a mortgage, because of our occupations, but we could afford to pay that outright, because I'd sold some work, so we bought that, and moved in there. We knocked the top two rooms through to make one studio for both of us to work in, and we lived downstairs, and there was a tiny basement kitchen. Again, very very small, but adequate in comparison with the Chelsea residence.

Where was it in Chelsea?

It was in Park Walk, Stanley Studios. But... Quite a lot of studios were there. Do you know Park Walk?

A little.

Yes. I mean it connects the King's Road and the Fulham Road. A nice situation.

I mean it became an extremely fashionable place to be; was it at the time you were there?

No, it was a slum. King's Road was a slum. It changed in the Sixties when they opened it up to boutiques, wine bars, cafés.

What do you remember it being like, what was in King's Road before that?

Workmen's cafés. Just ordinary shops, newsagents. Funnily enough there was a restaurant called of all things Picasso's, and that had on the wall a pastiche of a Picasso, a supposedly pastiche of a Picasso painting. Absolutely hideous, no idea at all. Done by some, somebody without any talent whatsoever, let's put it like that. But we used to go there and have coffee. Now, funnily enough, when we go up to London on a Sunday, we stop off at Picasso's to have coffee in the morning. It's now an Italian restaurant but it kept the name, and they've now got, fortunately they've covered over this horrible mural, and they've now got Picasso etchings, prints, all round the walls. But it amuses me that it's kept the same name. And I love to tell people sometimes that, 'Well we stopped off at Picasso's for coffee on the way here.' (laughs) It's the kind of in joke for us. But it changed in the Sixties, Mary Quant moved in, miniskirts moved in; it became the place to walk down, the King's Road. I mean it was rather nice, to walk down the King's Road and see all these people.

Did you feel part of it?

No. [pause] No, but you couldn't help but be...it was a marvellous time, the Sixties, actually, because it was a time of things opening out. I mean you felt that anything, anything was possible; you could paint exactly what you wanted, and live the life you wanted.

And what was it that you wanted?

To be an artist, and live as an artist. I mean, unfortunately one had to teach to a certain extent, but that was a, it was just a necessity, right, I'm afraid. But I mean through doing that one met people who felt the same way. I mean at that time Chelsea was actually a place where artists did live, there were vast areas of studios. Chelsea School of Art used to be a huge, before they were pulled down, a huge number of studios there.

You were teaching there by the Fifties, weren't you?

I taught there first in, it must have been, yes, '56 I think, yes.

And how did you come to start teaching there?

Because I was at Corsham, and I had a friend, Bernard Meadows, who was teaching sculpture there, who was also teaching at Chelsea, and he said to me one day, 'Would you like to come and teach at Chelsea instead of here?' and I said, 'Yes.' We'd just got married, living in Chelsea, no longer having to get a train or anything, I thought, marvellous, just walk down the King's Road and I'm there. So that's what I did. And I did two days at Chelsea.

I mean wasn't Corsham rather a marvellous place to be?

Yes. Yes it was.

So, was it that you...it was simply the journey that made you re-think...?

No, not just the journey, but... Clifford Ellis was a difficult man, I never knew whether I was likely to be coming back the next term or not.

And was that because of some chemistry between you and him, or was it he like that...?

No, no he was generally like...he was generally like that. Though people used to say to me, like, Bryan Wynter, who had been there a long time, I said, 'He never says whether I'm to come back. I mean he knows I'm leaving on Saturday morning. He never says to me, "Well, you'll be starting next term at such-and-such a date".' And Bryan said, 'Don't pay any attention, just come next term. That's what I do, I just arrive.' (laughs) I never did that. On Saturday morning I would go and see him and said, you know, 'Do you want me to come back?' 'Oh yes, of course we do, of course

we do.' It was all right, but... There were... I wanted to be in London again I think, that's what it was.

What was Bryan Wynter like?

A lovely man. I liked him very much, everybody liked him. I don't suppose you knew him, did you?

No.

It's not your generation. But, he was a lovely person. Incredibly good-looking. I mean he remained good-looking till I think, well I don't know about till the day he died, but I mean I...I used to see him, I did occasionally meet him in London in the Sixties and Seventies, and he was still fantastic. No wonder all the girls loved him. How could they not do otherwise? There was something about him, he was...he was so...first of all he had a slight, a slight private income, I think, which made him relaxed. I mean that's why he could say to me, 'Just come back next term.' I mean he, he got away with it. But that didn't...I mean that slight income just enabled him to have a motorcar and things. He wasn't rich, don't think that for one minute, but... He was so, so friendly to everybody, and so relaxed about things. He had a big, he had a big black dog. He lived on the moors in Zennor, actually in the middle of the moor. You know...do you know Zennor at all?

Only in the most cursory way.

You've passed through it have you? Well, there's the house on the main road called Eagle's Nest where, what's his name lived there, Patrick Heron lived at Eagle's Nest, which was a huge house. Patrick also had a private income, let me tell you. But, opposite that were the moors, but if you walked about a mile into the moor, there was Bryan's farmhouse. And he had this black dog, and a pet raven lived in the house. He let it out on the moor occasionally and it always came back; I mean it was a total pet. I don't know how it had happened, but there you are. Funnily enough it used to be the house that Aleistair Crowley lived in, have you heard of him? Yes. He lived there at one time. So it had these kind of mysterious connotations to it. I once asked

Bryan about that, and he said one night, he suddenly became conscious that, at night there was this funny kind of grating noise, which he couldn't...you know, he couldn't understand what it was. I mean he doesn't believe in ghosts or that, it wasn't that, but he just felt a bit uneasy with it. And he decided to track it down. Eventually he did track it down, by staying up one night, and there needed to be a slight wind, and he found out what it was. It was actually just outside the door, there were just two sticks rubbing together, which caused this very very eerie, strange noise that went on and on and on.

And did he like the fact that Aleistair Crowley had been there?

Oh he was just curious I think. I mean it was... He was...of course he was inundated in the summer with, like we were in Chelsea, visitors coming, knocking on the door. 'Oh we're in Cornwall, we're in Zennor, let's go and see Bryan, he'll be glad to see us.' And eventually Bryan got a pair of binoculars and he used to watch the road, and when he saw somebody coming that he didn't want to meet he used to take off onto the moors, through the back door, so he was no longer there. (laughs)

Did he live alone?

No, he had a girlfriend. I think her name was Ruth. He married her. She's still alive; she still lives down there, but not, not in that house. I think Bryan, when he was ill, he had heart trouble eventually, and I think they moved to Penzance, I think, that's where she is now, I think.

And what about Bryan's work, were you sympathetic to that?

Some of it. I remember his work actually when I was, either first in London, or even in Sheffield. There was a magazine, a little magazine called, I think it was *New Writing* it was called, which was mainly about English writers, new English writers, a tiny magazine, and I think they had an art section in it. I remember seeing one of his paintings of a seagull, because he used to paint Cornish scenes, this seagull with its mouth open, screeching. I liked it then very much. But of course by the time I knew

him his work was totally different, he was an abstract painter by that time. Yes he did some interesting things.

And because of visiting your brother, I think you got to know that area quite well didn't you?

Well I got to know the Zennor, St. Ives area quite well through occasionally going down there. And through Peter Lanyon we first had a cottage there, just for a week or ten days, where D.H. Lawrence had lived with Frieda during the war. There are about, below Eagle's Nest there were about, I think four cottages, which are still there, and in one of them Lawrence and Frieda lived, and they used to go to the, the farmhouse, which is about 200 yards away towards the cliffs, to get their milk and eggs. And the farmer there remembered them during the war. And he said that it was very...very hard for her, because she was German. They were suspicious of Lawrence anyway, I mean, who was this funny man walking around with a beard with a German wife? And, the farmer himself was friendly towards her, it wasn't that, but you can imagine the anti-German feeling in a place like Cornwall. I mean she used to, I think they both used to work in the fields occasionally with the farmer, and on one occasion a German U-boat surfaced, which it could quite easily in Cornwall, I suppose, nobody thought it might be there. And he said, you know, it gave them a strange feeling, this one contact she had with Germany. And he remembers, this is a strange story, he remembers, Lawrence used to get very irate at times, and he came down to get the milk or vegetables, or something or other from the farmer one day, and the farmer said, 'What's the matter?' He said, 'I'm bloody furious. We're going into St. Ives, and Frieda won't wear her purple stockings.' (laughs) You wonder with stories like that whether, how much they're embroidered upon through time, you know.

You want to know whether she did at the end wear them or not.

I'm sure she would. Just to keep him quiet.

But did you go down there at this point to the cottage for a holiday...

Yes.

...or really to paint?

For a holiday, mm. And Peter took us around to various places. I met quite a lot of artists. Next door to us was living an artist, a German artist called Karl Weschke. I don't know whether you've heard of him. He shows at the Redfern actually. He was a German prisoner of war who decided to stay in England. Because during his, when he was in internment camp he was introduced to painting, I don't know how it came about, but he was introduced to it. He was...his parents were communists, fanatical communists, and when Hitler came to power they took him away from them and brought him up as Hitler Youth, brought him up as a very very ardent fascist. He believed everything that Hitler and the Nazis said. And when war broke out he went into the, I think he was in the air force. Anyway, he was captured and spent a long time in England, still believing fervently in the German cause. And then, the camp, in the camp he noticed one day... They were losing the war, the Germans were losing the war, and one day in the camp he noticed that, there were a group of German officers round, and they had a, they had a photograph of Hitler, and a photograph of Churchill, and they were discussing the similarities between the two of them. What similarities there were, God only knows; when you look at their photographs, what is the similarity? But they were trying...they were trying to see similarities, because, they felt they were going to lose the war, and that was a kind of, such a terrible experience for them, that they thought, this man must be better or as good as Hitler or something. Anyway, Karl said, he said, 'I thought they were insane.' He said, 'Suddenly it came me that the whole situation was ridiculous.' And he lost all interest in what he'd been told before, and decided to stay in England. And so that was his life. He went to live in Cornwall, he lived in this cottage for quite a long time. I met him, we both met him, and his wife. And he's still living down there, not in the same cottage, he's somewhere else, but he's still down there. Still painting. But a very strange story in a way.

And what...when you met each other, what sort of exchange would there have been between you? Did you have quite deep conversations or...?

As artists you mean?

Well as people and artists, the way you met.

No I don't think so, no. I mean, most of the artists we met were, were non-figurative artists. They were interested in their world and I was interested in my world, and though we had a lot in common... We may not have had a lot in common as regards the images being produced, but we had a lot in common as being artists, but that doesn't mean we had very deep conversations about art.

So did you talk about life or...?

Yes, and about other people, and the parties, and... I mean the funny thing is, because my wife and I were from the outside... You see, Cornwall then was divided into two camps. There was the Ben Nicholson camp, and there was the Barbara Hepworth camp, they were separated by that time, so they each had their followers and friends. They each gave their own parties. (laughs) Patrick Heron was...they were the king and queen; Patrick Heron was the prime minister, until he became the king of course. Being outsiders, we were invited to all the parties, with Lanyon who knew all of them anyway. So we had quite a hectic week. I mean we needed a week to recover really. So we went to lots of parties.

And how bohemian were those parties?

Well what do you mean by bohemian? I think I know what you mean, but I mean it's such a funny word. You think, were they different to ordinary parties, where maybe...

Are we in the 1950s?

We're in the late, later 1950s I think. About '58 I should think.

How for example was a party at Ben Nicholson's different or the same from one at...?

No, I never went to Ben Nicholson's party. I went to Patrick's party.

Well how formal was it?

No, it wasn't formal. I went to Paul Feiler's party. A lovely, I mean he had this lovely converted, still has it, hasn't he? a converted chapel, mm. Went there. I was suffering from third degree burns to my foot through being on the beach all day and not being protected. Very severe burns actually. One of those crazy things you do. I mean it's not...I wasn't stripped, it just happened that, I had my leg up like this, and my sock was down here, and this area was exposed to the sun. I ended up with third degree burns on that leg. Very painful. I'm telling you that because at Feiler's they were all dancing, and I had difficulty dancing, and not only that, somebody kicked me, which made it worse.

What were you dancing to, do you remember?

It was all, it was all...it was all jive and rock 'n' roll, and, that period. I can't remember whether there was one particular dance. I don't think there was. I love jive and that, I love the whole movement of it. Kind of being taken over by the music. I mean as they are now, but it's rather different. I mean now they don't seem to...they hardly touch each other, do they. I mean jive, you do have contact; even though you come apart, you still come together. It is different. But, there was lots of drink.

Can you remember what sort of drink?

No, I don't. No.

Was there lots of drunkenness?

I don't remember it, but there must have been, there must have been. I mean there were people like, what was his name, the artist, alcoholic? [pause] It's gone. Everybody knew him at that time.

In England?

Yes, he used to show at, at Waddington's. He's dead now. I mean he was a friend of all those people down there, he was at all the parties. Just forgotten. It'll come to me when I'm not thinking about him. But all those people were at the same, at the same parties. I mean there was Lanyon, there was Bryan, Paul Feiler, Terry Frost, Karl Weschke. Quite a big community. And unknown artists as well. Because Cornwall became a Mecca for them, because it was so cheap to live there, accommodation was, I mean you could get a cottage for hardly anything, you know? Not buying it, I mean renting it. Because the farmers just let them. I mean the one we stayed in, they had, I think there were five cottages, they all belonged to the farm. Well then there was the woman artist living down there, she's now a Royal Academician, her name's gone. I've got to the age where names disappear. You may have seen her at the Academy, she shows quite large pictures.

Do you mean Gillian Ayers?

No, not Gillian Ayers, she wasn't there then. This woman's older than Gillian Ayers.

Sandra Blow?

Sandra Blow, that's right, she was living down there then.

What was she like?

A very nice, friendly person. I mean she was very young then. She, she was living down there. I can't remember, I don't think she had a partner then, I don't think so.

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....harder for a woman artist at that time, was someone like Sandra Blow taken seriously?

Oh yes I think so, yes. I think so. She was living that life. I mean there were women artists in Paris living that life who were taken seriously I think.

How self-conscious was it all, in Cornwall?

[pause] Self-conscious. I don't think that. They were involved in what they were doing, they liked it, they liked the area, they liked the people. They liked the, I think they, for many of them they liked the community, the artists' community. I don't suppose, you see I don't suppose they had a lot in common with the locals at that time. I'm not sure whether they would even have had much contact with them. Lanyon would have had contact with them because he was Cornish, he lived a kind of, a respectable life in a proper house in St. Ives you know, and had wife and children, and, I think he had quite a lot to do with Cornwall as well. So he might have had, I'm sure he had contact with other people in the community. But I don't think the other artists necessarily. I don't think Karl Weschke had any contact.

Where did Lanyon take you? When you said he took you around, did he take you around the landscape?

Yes, took us to one or two places. I can't remember exactly where. We saw the usual places that people even go to now. I mean the open, the open theatre, I can't remember where that was. You know they have...it's overlooking the sea, they just have... It's all stone, you sit on stone seats, and it's circular, or semi-circular. Everybody goes there because it's a famous place to go. Cornwall was totally unspoilt then, I mean there weren't many visitors, like it is now.

And did that landscape have a particular impact on you, or not?

No, I don't think so. I remember drawing a dead seagull.

Why?

A very interesting structure. It was half disintegrating, so you got the, as it was, and as it is, you know? And how it's, how it's formed round the, round the bones.

When I was talking to Paul Feiler about his training at the Slade...

Yes.

...they actually were given dead bodies to draw from. Were you?

No. That must have been very unusual. I'm amazed that...that wouldn't even be allowed now, never mind anything else. (laughs) I'm surprised. Are you sure...they were drawing from it; they weren't doing anatomy, lessons in anatomy?

Well if they were, they weren't just using a skeleton, it was a body.

Of course the Slade was part of the hospital, wasn't it? Still is to a certain extent I think. So that might have been the reason, that they could use it. They certainly used to dissect in the hospital; they used to dissect the bodies of criminals who had been executed. I remember reading that quite recently, I don't know where but I read it quite recently.

But you didn't actually come across corpses?

No, not at all.

But presumably you did your anatomy and skeletons et cetera et cetera?

No... Well yes, when one was Sheffield, it was part of the curriculum at an art school that you did anatomy. I mean the curriculum was absolutely ludicrous. It was all based on ideas about the training, how training of artists might have been in the past, and also how, what you needed to know if you were going to be an art teacher. So,

the curriculum was drawing and painting from the model. Anatomy, where you learnt not just to draw the skeleton, but to draw the skeleton in motion. I'll give you an example. You draw a skeleton digging in the garden, what that would look like; then the second part of the question would be to draw the muscles on that skeleton digging in the garden.

As an abstract, or on the figure?

Oh no, no. You had to draw, you would draw the skeleton first, in that position, because you had learnt... By that time you were supposed to have learnt all the bones, what they were called, and how they would function in a moving figure. So you did a...you have to draw that. Then onto that you would have to put all the muscles, which you had learnt also. So the idea was, you would end up with something that, I suppose they hoped looked like a Michelangelo figure. (laughs) Full of muscles, bulging in all the wrong places of course, like it does with Michelangelo. And, therefore you would have this knowledge of anatomy, muscles and bones and all that, which were supposed to help you draw the human figure. It's absolute nonsense, absolute nonsense. You don't need to know any of that to draw the human figure; in fact, it gets in the way. Everybody is different to start with, there are slight differences between everybody. I mean it's amazing how different they are. You draw ten people nude and every...there's... Of course there are various, vague similarities, but all of them have, like our faces, they're different aren't they. Different personalities. So you had that, you had drawing, drawing from the nude, anatomy, architecture, so you went out and studied buildings and drew them, and read an architectural book; somebody taught architecture to you. Then you had composition, that was ludicrous as well.

Why?

Well because, it was all geared to examinations. I can't remember the examination that that was for, but even in London, when I came to London, they had an examination in composition, which if I remember rightly had to include six figures, not four figures or five figures or ten figures, six figures had to be in it. So you had to learn how to put together, shall we say a market scene, with six figures in it, some

behind a stall, some buying, or in a shop, or... Well I mean it's ludicrous, it's got nothing to do with, with art at all. (laughs)

And did you realise that at the time?

Yes, absolutely. I hated it. I thought it was ludicrous. I hated it.

So did you protest?

Well I mean I failed the exam. (laughs) It was inevitable.

Intentionally?

No. It was inevitable. I mean I told you, the tutor asked me shortly after I got there whether I wanted to be, my work to be looked at as an artist, or whether I wanted it to be looked at as somebody who was going to pass the examination. And he gave me a week to make up my mind. And he was right. All right, I chose to be looked at as an artist, and that's the way he dealt with me, and that was right. And I failed. Of course I did, because I didn't do, I didn't do it as you were told to do it. They were told to paint the figure in a certain way, and he showed them how to do it, and they all did it, and they got through the examination. Because that's the way to do it.

And what did you do?

Well at that time, I always used to use a dark red ground before painting the figure. I can't remember why I did that; I think it was maybe a misunderstanding somewhere of how the Old Masters worked, as regards using a coloured ground. Some used a green ground. In fact I think that maybe Van Gogh used a green ground, and then painted colour onto the top of that. I'm not sure about that, but I've got a feeling that is so. So of course mine didn't...mine didn't follow exactly the, what were considered the tones and colours of flesh, you see, in a kind of photographic, academic, academic way. So, I mean, those kind of things, they...it's nothing to do with, with painting at all. I mean composition has something to do with painting, but you, you don't kind of learn a formula for that; you instinctively through doing it learn that a picture should

balance in some way, and it's no good if it's dropping out of the right-hand corner, or something like that. However, you learn that you can have the picture dropping out of the right-hand corner as long as you do something else somewhere else.

I was going ask you, Paul Feiler thinks that people read paintings left to right.

Yes.

Do you?

I think so, without even realising it. I think so. I think most people do actually. When I'm, when I'm...when I'm constructing a picture, I tend to think from left to right, I do, yes.

But, for example the painting behind your head.

Yes.

Would you think that that was read left to right?

That's not my painting, that's my wife's painting.

But would you think looking at it that...?

No, because it's central isn't it.

Exactly.

It's... Oh can I move? It's centralised.

I mean you can't read that left to right.

No, but she wouldn't want you to; she would want you to read it centrally. Because it's, it's like...I mean I'm speaking for her, which I shouldn't do, but it's like a contemplation object.

But in other words, because... Sorry, can I just....

[break in recording]

We're going to talk about Blue Song 1, 1991, oil on canvas, which is on page 7 of the Angela Flowers Jack Smith catalogue from 1992.

[break in recording]

....paintings, people tend to read from left to right, obviously, but they still have to be read all over, even so. They have to work, they have to function, as one unit, no matter how you read them, you know. Go on, ask me that question.

Well I...because I was thinking about this particularly because of this discussion with Paul...

Yes.

...I was looking at your painting Blue Song number 1.

Ah yes.

And, I mean that seems to me something, would you expect people to look left to right, or...?

No.

So therefore are you setting out to counteract what you see as everybody's normal instinct?

No. No. I'm not setting out to do that. I'm just looking at the title of this. Well it's called *Blue Song* isn't it.

Yes.

Yes. It's one of a series of paintings actually. And what interested me in these paintings, those particular paintings, was the idea of a cascade, a drop from top to bottom. But it is, I mean it's basically... I mean you read it from top to bottom. I don't think you can read it any other way. It's so centralised. I think that, that would be impossible to read from left to right, but, here, I think you would tend to read from left to right.

Which is the painting on, facing page, on page 6. Ah, well, would you?

Well, you don't think you would? I mean you circle it as well, but... It's hard for me to say, because I tend to, I tend to look all over, all over a painting. You see a painting either works visually for me or it doesn't, therefore I'm looking at it as a visual phenomena and does it work? [pause] You see many of these are centralised.

But when you say, does it work, it's to do with it having some sort of balance isn't it?

Yes, that's right, yes. And some rhythm. And spatially comes and goes.

But, when I was reading about the move in your paintings from figurative away from that...

Yes.

If you're looking at a figurative painting, there's a tendency to assume there's a sky area and a ground area.

Yes.

A top and a bottom.

Yes.

And that's presumably something also you're moving away from.

Absolutely. Yes. I want to get away from the idea of, of gravity. I don't want there to be gravity. In fact I did some paintings recently called *Floating World*, which, I like the idea of paintings like that. You were just going to say something.

Well I was interested in you saying that you wanted to get away from gravity, and yet one has a sort of sense of downwardness...

Yes.

...as you were saying, in Blue Song.

Yes, but, I don't...I don't really read that as a weight. I mean this is precarious balance there.

But in other words, the canvases have an equilibrium over the whole surface.

Yes. Yes. [pause] Some of these paintings can't be read from left to right, it's obvious, because they are...they're not that kind of image.

But are you...do you feel with Paul that a human eye instinctively goes left to right, and therefore will try that first?

I think so, because they're so used to reading left to right. It's possible that, I don't know whether this is true or not, it may be that the Chinese wouldn't read it from left to right, I don't know. When you look at Chinese painting, well, not recent but old Chinese painting, it seems to me an overall experience of nature. I don't think they're interested in left to right at all in that, in that particular case. [pause] Once we come to images, well like Paul shall we say, moving from one thing to another like that, I mean it comes a bit like Egyptian hieroglyphics, which you read from left to right,

even though they're also up and down, don't you? But that's, I mean, they're annotating something, they're making a list. (laughs) So it has to be like that.

But I suppose, looking at the image that's opposite Blue Song in there that we were just now...

Yes.

Although you might say that the canvas has got equal weight all over it, you have not got anything that's at all random, have you; you've somehow got a movement in there without one thing enormously outweighing another thing.

Yes.

Which must be fantastically difficult.

Everything is, everything is of equal importance in the work. Some things are obviously more important than others, or seem to be because they are stronger in colour, or blacker, but each thing I put down is of equal importance. In other words, nothing can be taken out without it dropping to bits, or put in, without it ruining it. And that's true of all my work, I hope, because that's the way it's done.

And for instance, can I presume that you would have taken nothing out of this? Would there have been elements that you might have had in there on the way, or are you so in tune with your procedure now that you wouldn't put in anything that would later have to come out?

No, everything is changed. All this is stated in collage before it's painted. So all these forms will have been moved around many times. They only end up where they do end up when I'm sure that that's right for that particular position, and add relationship to other forms.

And so would there be a collage that exactly mirrors this?

Yes. Well...well collage pieces, not a collage itself, collage pieces. All these pieces will, will have existed in collage somewhere.

And is there not a difference through the texture and the materials of collage from paint?

Yes.

Does it not change as it [inaudible]?

Yes it does. Yes, but that's marvellous. Once you put it into paint, it's different again, which I like.

But would that change the composition overall?

No. No, because... It doesn't change. I mean, one's enough experience to know how to make it work, let's put it like that. So that this, this...this red to this colour behind it, it's a kind of, greeny colour isn't it, yes, greeny-blue, turquoise I think, yes. Once I started painting, I would know how they were going to react and work together, even though the collage is a different red and the collage is a different green.

And would the shapes modify as you paint, or not?

They can do. Not always, but they can do.

And the shapes we're talking about, which are slightly like commas...

Yes.

Would you have cut them out as that shape, out of a big piece of red?

Yes. Yes, that's right.

So the form wouldn't have come from anything given in any way, it's an invented shape?

It's an invented shape, but it could also have come from a previous painting. It wasn't cut out for this painting; it belongs to maybe another painting, and I used it because I like it so much and thought it was possible in this painting. Because I mean, this painting is *Ta Ra Ra* isn't it, *Ta Ra Ra*, yes, *Ta-Ra-Ra-Boom-Dee-Aye*. Do you know the...do you know the song?

It crops up in Chekhov, doesn't it.

Oh does it? I didn't know that. Ah. How does he use it?

Well, I can't now remember whether it's in the text or whether it was in the production that I saw, but it's in The Three Sisters I think.

Ah.

And it's at a moment when they all get sort of excited and lifted out of themselves and then they crash down again.

Yes, great. Yes.

Why did you use the phrase?

[pause] Well, it's a kind of... I don't know, there's something, a kind of celebration about it, ta-ra-ra-boom-de-aye. (singing) ta-ra-ra-boom-dee-aye. I mean it's a kind of, things are happening all the time in the musical score I'm sure, and I thought that was appropriate for what I'd done here. I didn't start...I don't start with the title, it comes as I'm doing the work.

And do you remember what the starting point for this image was?

No. No I don't. I know some of these forms I'd used before, I'd used this before.

The cone.

The cone. That had come about through using a collage object, not paper, it was an object that happened to be that shape. So I used that. And, this form had been used in another painting, this greeny form, I'd already used that somewhere else.

And would it have become included again, this sort of snaky greeny-white form, would it have been included again part-way through, or would you have known that that was something you wanted to work with again?

I would know. I mean that particular form, I'd already used that on its own in a painting. I don't think there was anything else in the painting but that. And then I'd picked it up when I was starting this picture.

Did you actually have a sort of pool of shapes?

Yes, yes I do, yes.

And is that nearly always a starting point?

No, not always. But it's a very useful pool to have. It can set off ideas, visual ideas which you could never have thought of when you started the work.

And when did you first start using collage like that, how did it come in?

Quite a long time ago. I don't know, but it was a marvellous thing to suddenly come across. It's been terrific for me. You see these forms are here.

And they're Light Sensation on page ten.

And they're here again.

Light and Sound, 13 and 12 [pause] Aha, that's the comma image again on Celebration, 1990.

Yes. This reminded me of a kind of circus, the colour and this kind of act of balancing.

But they're also quite classic colours of a particular vocabulary aren't they.

Those are, yes. Yes, they are. But I liked the idea of kind of changing the balance of the positive and negative here. Quite an interesting visual problem to solve, these two very large blocks of bright colour.

I mean, going back to our original discussion, do you think that's a painting that could be read left to right, Celebration?

No, I don't, no. I mean the more I think about it, the more my paintings can't be read like that. (laughs) They're very much an overall experience.

Yes. I mean would a painting like Summer Sensation on page eighteen, would that have come out of collage as well? Presumably it's a paint base and then collage.

Yes, that's right. Yes.

So do you know how you, do you remember painting that one? How...what...did you paint a base first and then play about, or...?

I painted... I think, I was interested in painting using a grid, so I would have painted a grid first. All the rest of it came out of collage. One of the most important things to take place there was this, to cut that corner with this form. Without it, the painting could be quite ordinary, but with this and this, it's a bit like entering a slightly different world here to this. Maybe you don't see it like that, but that's how I saw it.

Presumably the danger is creating worlds that don't join up, and then [inaudible].

Ah, that's not a danger, that's not a danger. That can be exhilarating. To put a paint, to put something like a foreign body into a painting can be its making, visually, because it...the spectator is suddenly interrupted in his way of looking at the work. He thinks he understands it, and suddenly there's something that steps outside the nature of the work.

But presumably it still has to be deeply connected, otherwise...

Absolutely.

Yes.

It has to be, in some way or another.

Let's just turn the tape over.

End of F9410 Side A

F9410 Side B

Could we just look at that one again, the...

Which one, this one or...?

The one with the triangle cut off at the...

Oh yes.

The grid one.

No, not that. Here, yes.

Summer Sensation, *on page 18. What would have stopped you at this point of making the whole painting a grid?*

Yes, that's...that's a question I can't answer. I don't know. [pause] I think it would have been a more ordinary thing to do.

And would you for a while have had a grid that had no shapes on it, and the grid itself was what you were playing with?

Yes. It would be a grid first.

But would you have known that it wasn't going to stay as a, as a grid?

Oh yes, yes definitely. No that would have... I mean I've painted grids before in the past, just a grid, and I've been there before; I don't want to go there again, I want to do something different with it. It's still, 1991 it's still...it's now very, rather unusual to paint a grid, it's a bit out of fashion. (laughs)

And it's presumably extremely different if you have these shapes extending out into the grey than if they're all contained in the middle[??].

Yes, that's right, that's right, yes. So you extend the space and you produce a different kind of space.

But it's interesting how sort of autocratic it could be if you, if you weren't allowing yourself to let them spread out of a grid, and in a way quite a lot of people would bow to that.

Yes, I have done myself, I've done that before now. What it...what it means really, what you end up by doing, is compartmentalising everything within these, within these squares.

So you're in a way rebelling out of your own structures.

Yes, that's very important to do. As Picasso once said, if you're not careful you produce your own academic, and that's something to be very wary of doing.

And would you ever have simply cut this triangle out so that you had a, you lost the square of the canvas?

You mean a shaped canvas?

Mm.

No I wouldn't have done, but there are artists who would do that. It wouldn't be the same to do that, when you think about it, when you think about it not being there.

You see it's a quiet, it's a quiet area.

But again, it's totally different because of that yellowish line.

Yes. I know, that cuts it off. That's something you shouldn't do. (laughs) Well if you've been taught correctly at art school, in my younger days, you must never do that.

Because?

Well it interrupts the, the unity of the picture.

And do you think it does?

I believe all these rules can be broken; it depends how you do it.

But I would have thought one thing that was true of your paintings was, they do have a tremendous unity.

Well they have to have a unity, yes, because I'm interested in harmony.

If you were going to break the harmony of that painting, what would you do?

Of this painting?

Mm.

[pause] Well that's difficult, because it's already established. I've already broken the harmony to a certain extent, and then imposed a harmony on top of it. I mean now, to ask me how would I...how would I put back chaos, (laughs) I don't know. I just don't know. Now, I can't imagine that work being any different to what it is.

Mm. And where does this shape on the right side come from?

I don't know.

It's a very strange thing.

I don't know. I've used it a lot. I think again, it's the kind of, it implies something that's three-dimensional but it isn't.

And in your...presumably this is in collage form as well, is it?

Yes.

Would it have this changing...?

No.

No. It would all be single?

No. That's something I use because I want to use a kind of change of light in the work. I use that a lot, that change actually, as I have done in there.

Sorry, we went on a funny route to get to this, which was to do with you talking about drawing a seagull...

Oh yes.

...and anatomy.

Oh yes.

I mean, the things that you were taught at Sheffield, many of which seemed preposterous, do you think they have nevertheless fed into your work, was that training important in any way?

No I don't think so. They taught you everything that you need to forget. So, well all right, you can say, all right, you left knowing what you shouldn't do. (laughs) I mean whether that's a positive result, I don't know.

And if you knew at that time that this wasn't what, how you wanted to be painting, presumably you were still very unsure as to how to find a path that was better for you.

Yes.

So was it a very unhappy time?

[pause] Well yes, because one wasn't...at that point one wasn't amongst people who also wanted to be artists. I mean that didn't happen until I came to the, to the Royal College, where I met other people who wanted to be artists. And that, that was different. That was, that was the start of a different kind of life really.

So the people in Sheffield and at St. Martin's were really wanting to teach, were they?

Well, yes, Sheffield, the course in Sheffield was... The art school was divided into those who were going to teach and those who were going to go into the commercial world of design, and they were the two possibilities. There weren't any other possibilities. Now in London, it was a bit different. The war having just finished, there was a lot of people who had been in the war coming back, and either taking up where they'd left off, which is what I did, or, because they had a government grant to do something, many of them went into teaching, and having some talent they went into a course that made them into art teachers. So the majority of them were going to do that, yes.

And what about your own experiences in the R.A.F.?

Yes.

You were in Scotland.

Mm.

Again in a landscape and a seascape, weren't you?

Yes.

What was the impact of that? Had you up until this point had much to do with the sea?

No. No, I mean the Scottish experience was immediate sea, you're on the seashore all day, taking flying boats to bits. And, the only pleasant thing was taking out the chocolate ration, which were survival rations for the crew. And it was chocolate which was about that thick. And that was the only bonus. It was absolutely, weather-wise it was hell on earth. I mean you worked outside all day, in driving rain very often. You came back literally soaked to the skin, and changed and put on a new suit of clothes, and got the rest to dry out for the following day, you know? It was pretty rough, weather-wise. The sea, well, the flying boats were a strange experience, there must have been over a hundred of them, just beached, ready to be taken to bits, all round the coast. Strange sight that, that is a strange sight.

I've never seen a flying boat, what does it look like?

Well the ones they used in the war were called Sunderland flying boats, and, then there was a smaller one used for tracking submarines I think called the Catalina, that was a smaller craft. The Sunderlands were very big, with... You sometimes used to see them in 1930s films, they have great big floats underneath to land on water. They're very fragile. When you go inside them, in order to make them light, there's a structure inside, and around that is put this canvas cover. Walking down the seaplane, are struts which you have to walk on. If you walked off them you'd go through to the outside. They're that precarious you know. And, bullets would certainly go through them, out at one side – in at one side and out the other, hitting anybody in between. But there was hardly any kind of protection. The rear gunner, there was a rear gunner and a front gunner I think, and side gunners, but, the rear gunner, you had to get...to get into his seat, which incidentally, once you're in was totally outside the aircraft, covered in, not glass, the other stuff that they use, you had to crawl in on your hands and knees to get into that interior, and sit down. I'm telling you this because any rear gunner, if he didn't feel like it, and was a bit frightened, couldn't get out; he had to stay there and fight, neither him or the other person. You couldn't suddenly think, oh my God! I've had enough of this, I'll go. (laughs) Oh this looks dangerous, let's get out of here. No, they're very strange, strange craft.

Did you know the people who were flying them, [inaudible]?

No, no. I mean I met the people who had flown them, but they weren't being flown then.

And did you find them beautiful as objects?

They were very strange, they were very strange. I mean, they're like huge white birds of a funny kind. I mean again, it was reacting to it visually, you know, this is a strange experience visually. Something you're never going to see again, certainly.

With something like that, I mean you were obviously having to be involved in them in the way, but have you got the sort of mind that would be able to work out how they were constructed?

No. Not at all.

No?

No. We were given instructions, this is what you've got to take out, radio equipment usually, and how to do it, that's all.

And were you quite good at that?

Oh anybody was good at that, I mean it was just...you could be as dim as a post and do that. (laughs) It was a filling-in time, because, I was going to be a teleprinter operator, and I had to wait a year before going on a course, so that, we were sent up there, all of us who were waiting for a course, to do that kind of, kind of work, somebody had to do it. So I was there for a year and then I was transferred to a course.

And who were you there with for the year, anybody who mattered to you then?

Yes, I was with...two of the people I was with carried on, came on the same course with me, and I knew them all the two years I was in the forces, from beginning to end.

And who were they and what were their backgrounds?

One of them was, came from Birmingham, and the other one came from Newark, and the one from Newark was working in a bank, and intended to go back to the bank; the one from Birmingham, I can't remember what he was doing, or wanted to do. I think he had ideas about staying in the Air Force, I'm not sure. He quite liked it. I think they...I mean we all got on well together, but I think they most likely thought I was rather a queer, strange character.

Because you wanted to be a painter?

Yes. Yes, I mean they said, 'Oh you'll end up in the gutter,' and all that. I said, 'When I leave the Air Force, the first thing I'm going to do is grow a beard.' 'Ah, now...' So when I left, actually I wrote to them and asked them to come and meet me in London, which they did, just for one occasion, we went to, to the theatre or cinema, and I told them, 'You'll be glad to see that I've now got a beard.' (laughing)

Have you had a beard ever since?

More or less. I, I once shaved it off, and I can't remember why, when I lived in, in Kensington, when I was a student. I was still a student, yes, that's right. And I went down to the communal kitchen one morning and said, 'Look.' They said, 'What do you mean, "Look"?' I said, 'Don't you notice any difference?' 'No. What's the difference?' I said, 'I've had a shave.' 'Oh.' (laughs) That's how visual they were.

But, was this Derrick Greaves and George Fullard?

No it wasn't, no. No it wasn't them. No. (laughs)

And do you have a beard because you like being bearded, or because you hate shaving?

[pause] Three reasons for having a beard. One, I decided when I saw all these artists from the past had beards, I thought, I must have a beard. All the people that I admired

had beards. I thought it was the thing to do. I also thought it was subversive, that's another thing, that was important.

And do you still?

[pause] I think it's become subversive again. I think from the Sixties and the Seventies it wasn't, but I think it has become subversive. Just as long hair became subversive. I mean long hair really became kind of OK with the arrival of pop music and, and the Beat generation and all that, I mean it became acceptable. People no longer felt threatened by it. But, I think it's become subversive again.

And the third reason?

[pause] Well the second reason was, I decided to do it when I came out of the forces, because I was, again I was fed up with being told to shave in the forces, and get a haircut, usual thing. I managed to do quite well as regards haircuts, because I managed to stuff all my hair under my cap, so they couldn't tell that it was long.
(laughs)

And when you mention beat, you were talking about pop music really, but were you interested in the Beat poets in America, did that generation mean anything to you?

No, no it didn't. That came a bit later, didn't it? And funnily enough, I'm just reading Kerouac's *On the Road*, because, I'd heard a lot about Kerouac, naturally, at the time, and I'd never read anything by him, but I keep coming across references to him, and I picked up a book in the library by him which I didn't like at all, I was bored stiff with it, and I saw this last week and I thought, well I'll try again, you know, I'll see, why is he so, why do they think he's so impressive, at the time, and still, I mean he still has a, I mean in American literature he's still thought quite highly of, isn't he? So I tried again, and I must admit I am more into this book than into the first one. But it does...I don't know, it... There are things like, there are things in Hemingway I don't like; there are things in Henry Miller I don't like.

What sort of things?

I don't know what it is; it's something... In... Pushing their masculinity. An American, at the time a kind of American thing, but... Oh I don't know, I...I'm suspicious of it. And there's a bit of that in that as well I think. Have you read Kerouac? There's a bit of that in it I think. Because, I'll tell you what's strange, at the same time as I'm reading that, I'm reading a Nabokov book, an early Nabokov, which I've read before, a long time ago, and it's so restrained by comparison.

Which one is it?

It's one of the first ones. It's about a married man who has an affair with a young woman, and, it's going to be disastrous, I mean it's ridiculous really, but... I can't remember the name of it. Have you read much Nabokov? Can you remember his first book? Well the...no, not his first book, maybe about his third book.

Why are you re-reading it?

Well I'm going in...I'm in the process of re-reading a lot of books that I've read in the past, quite a long time ago. I suppose to, in a funny way to reassess the books, to find out, well do I still think they're marvellous? And some I think are, and others I'm deeply disappointed in. I mean Nabokov is still, it's something to do with style, a way of writing which I think appeals to me now. I've also, a short time ago, re-read Gide, Gide's journals. Have you read those by any chance? They're worth reading actually. It's very interesting, the period in which they're written. I don't know how important you think style is in writing; I don't know...I don't even really know what I mean by style, because I don't know enough about it, but there's something, after the first page you're into it and...you're not going to leave it, you know that.

Do you read every day?

I do, yes I do I think. I read a bit... I read every night certainly, I read in bed every night, but I read during the day occasionally. I read a different book in bed to what I'm reading here.

So do you read at a particular point in the day?

Well when I'm in bed to start with, I do that, but... I may read if I'm waiting for somebody, like you coming, I might read then in the morning. I may read after the evening meal. I'm a very, I'm an avid reader actually, and always have been.

Do you write at all?

No I don't. It's one thing I was quite good at at school, but I never took it any further. I couldn't...I couldn't imagine writing anything at all. I sometimes write a little piece for my catalogue, if I...the recent catalogue, the last catalogue I've done, I wrote...it's quoted, there are two pieces, one recent for this year, and one in the 1970s, and, it's no more than at the most ten lines, because, once I start writing, unfortunately I start thinking of literature, and making a good piece of writing out of it, which is not...it's not really my concern, that, and yet, because I've read so much, it infiltrates if you see what I mean. So very often I start, even when I'm writing the process of, let's say for the catalogue, the process of making a picture or something like that, I still want it to be, well, to have some style if you like to it.

Do you mind writing about your work?

Yes, I find it very difficult indeed, very difficult. It gets shorter and shorter. I think I shall...I shall end up like Beckett I think, with a one-line play. (laughs)

But you don't, nevertheless you don't refuse to?

Oh I do sometimes. I mean in this particular case, with the last exhibition, I did it because I didn't want anybody else to do it. I thought, sometimes critics are useless about it, they irritate me what they're saying, not always but very often they do.

I was going to ask you about some of the people who have written about you. I mean, you've got people like Paul Overy and Bryan Robertson for a start...

Yes.

...[inaudible] the catalogues. Presumably if you've used them in a catalogue it means you like what they're saying.

Yes. I think both of them have got a lot of experience, visual experience. They can actually imaginatively react to my work. They're not dyed-in-the-wool figurative people, or dyed-in-the-wool abstract people; they're people with some knowledge of the visual world, that's why I think they're quite good.

Mm. And you seem slightly ambivalent about the art of the past in relation to your own.

Mm.

On the one hand you can talk about it to do with how you first discovered, say Cubism or whatever, through books, and Gauguin or whatever, but I think I've also read in your pieces that you want them looked at as brand new images, without a history.

Yes, yes that's right. Yes I do.

I mean do you feel that ambivalent?

[pause] Well I think that art, in order to live, has to continually cover new ground in some way or another. Now that doesn't mean... It's not difficult to produce one original, in brackets, work. I mean if I produced a painting made out of rice pudding, it would be original, but it's of no consequence whatsoever. It's new, nobody's ever seen it before, but that's beside the point. It has to be more than that. But it does have to cover I think territory that one has not been there oneself before or you have been there before, if possible. Now I don't think one sets out to do that logically, or you say, 'Right, I know, there's never been a picture like so-and-so and so-and-so and so-and-so, I'm going to do that.' I don't think it's made in that way. It's made by in a funny way being...the ability to follow one's imaginative ideas to a conclusion, without looking backwards.

But nevertheless, your work has an identity, it isn't as if you start without your own past.

Yes. That's inevitable, because of the...of what one has kind of, inherited from the past, and, well if you like it's entered one's soul, what other artists have done. You can't be, you can't be a primitive, unless you're a primitive, it's absolutely impossible. It'll look phoney actually, if that happens.

End of F9410 Side B

F9411 Side A

OK, we're back on again. Do you want to pick up from where you were, or...?

No, it's all right. No.

OK.

No.

But, you also, as well as what you've imbibed from the past of other people, what I was meaning was, although each painting might be new territory for you, you've developed a huge vocabulary of your own...

Yes.

...in the past. I mean, you're not starting from a blank ever now, are you?

No. No.

And that surely is a strength.

Yes, I think it, well it takes some artists a long time to find a language, a visual language through which they can speak. I think it took me twenty years to find the language through which I can speak. And now... When I say a language through which I can speak, I mean, when you get to the point that you can...you don't have to think how you are doing it. I mean it's a bit like a concert pianist, if he had to think how he's doing it, he's finished. It has to come, it has to be released in some way. For some artists it takes quite a long time to get to that point, and it has been for me quite a long time, I suppose because, well because it's been a quest to find, to find that point where one can speak, not only to oneself but to others, in a language which is appropriate to what you want to say.

And did you know when you had found it?

I couldn't tell you the exact time or date, but I know...I know that I'm there. (laughs)
I can't say it was on Thursday morning 1975 or something.

No, but you knew through your fingertips that you...

I knew those things were coming, that, if I wanted to make a particular statement, I could, I knew how to do it.

Mm. And was the transition period between knowing you hadn't found your language and finding it, was that a sort of slow and gentle process, or was it a moment with sort of Roads to Damascus type revelations?

It was a process of, that came about through doing a lot of painting, from one to another every day. I mean it's like...you produce...you produce a stream of work, which I think, you then must pay attention to that work, where it is telling you to go. It's no good, I found it's no good having a preconceived idea of where you may want to go, but to look at what you're doing, and that will tell you where to go. I don't know whether that makes sense to you. I mean, I abandoned... There was virtually only four years after leaving college of figurative painting, only four years; that had to be abandoned, because I was interested in things that could not be stated in a figurative way. It was absolutely impossible. And I suppose later, other forms had to be abandoned, or added to in some way. And I think that's really inevitable.

What were the others that had to be abandoned?

Well when I say abandoned, I mean they had...they had to be added to in some way. I mean I think in the, as I think I mentioned before, I think in the, in the...in the Eighties, beginning of the Eighties, I did...I wanted to push colour to a more extreme position, so, my work through, through that, my work was less remote than it had been previously. It doesn't cancel out what I was doing, say in the Seventies, but it is...it is different. It's less inward. I think it's more, more of a visual celebration than it was before. The other was a very very, well it's still visual but it was still an intellectual, very intellectual activity. I still think it is an intellectual activity, I think

all painting is an intellectual activity. It is so, and it has to be so. I mean people talk about, it's only for an élite; well I mean, yes, all right, all right, it's for those who care to take the time and trouble to keep looking constantly, and questioning, and what is a painting and what is it for, and, what do I want it to be? There are those who just... I mean this business about it being élite is unbelievable to me. They're cutting out a whole area of experience. Well I think so.

But when you say that you wanted to push colour to a more extreme position...

Yes.

...and when you talked about it earlier, you implied that it was through adding some element or...

Yes.

What exactly were you trying to do?

Well I suppose we go back to what one quoted about Gauguin earlier, and that is, use vermilion. (laughs)

But that, that statement related to starting from something in the natural world.

Yes. That's the difference.

But you surely hadn't done that for a long time.

No. No.

What was your starting point then?

I can't remember what it was, but I just felt the need that it must be done.

But are we...we're not surely just saying that you had started to use colours that you hadn't previously experimented with.

No, no.

It's something more complicated than that isn't it.

Yes. Yes. Yes, it was more complicated. [pause] Oh I'd used colours that previously I hadn't used, that I might have been nervous of using. Using a brilliant pink for example, which I wouldn't have done maybe two or three years before that.

Why?

I hadn't discovered brilliant pink. (laughs) I suddenly discovered a lot of very expensive colours. (laughing)

Aha. So you hadn't been hiding from them?

No, no not at all. No.

Where did you discover them?

Where?

Mm.

Oh just at the, where one buys one's paints, the art shop. Suddenly see this colour and think, mm, I've never tried that, I'll try that.

But it had always been there, or it was a new make of paint?

Oh yes it had always been there. But... One, one tends to...well all artists tend to have I think favourite colours that they go for. I mean Mondrian's colours were, I

mean as you know, were the primaries, red, yellow, blue. I mean it's... I think everyone has colours that they love.

So was the problem with pink that it wasn't considered a serious painter's colour?

No, I don't think... I don't think that necessarily, but, I can't remember seeing perhaps a painting where three-quarters of it was bright pink. I mean the Pop artists used lots of unusual colours, I mean that was part of their scene in a way. I mean for example, I'd painted, in the...I think it was the late Sixties... I've always been interested in fairgrounds and circuses and that kind of environment, and I'd painted some, a group of paintings called *Inside.Outside.Roundabout*, which was a play with words, about the fairground, but also a play with, instead of a grid I used different squares, and things were behind each other, going back in space. Some were floating, some were connected to the squares. So that was the inside outside connection. And the roundabout was that they were based on, on the fairground. Now those paintings were mainly in colours, there was a bit of pink in those actually but not much; a lot of blue in them, a lot of red, yellow. But still pretty muted in colour. There weren't, they weren't clarion calls, shall we say. Now as you know, some of the Pop artists were interested in fairgrounds, but they used much more, much brighter colours than what I'd been using earlier. So the colours, it's not as though people hadn't, weren't at some point using those colours, but they weren't using them in large areas, you know. Large areas of bright colour upset English people, they don't think it's serious.

Why do you think that is?

Because they're puritanical.

And are you puritanical?

Ah. I don't think so. No I don't think so.

Are you very disciplined?

I am with my work, yes, I have to be. As you know, Dylan Thomas was an alcoholic, and somebody once asked him about making poetry when you're drunk, and though he was an alcoholic he said, 'You can never make poetry when you are drunk.' So that was his discipline, when he made poetry he was cold sober. And that's true of painting as well.

When you write, you quite often find you've done it in the back of your head when you're not thinking about it, and that suddenly it's there and in place, particularly if you were stuck, it doesn't help to sit and find that you can only do it by stopping. Do your paintings sometimes resolve like that?

Yes. Yes, they do. You sometimes have to come at them at a, in a different way. I mean sometimes it's good to leave them alone for quite some time.

So one might be metaphorically if not literally to be drunk for a bit.

Well let's put it this way, that when something is going well, very well, you may feel elated for a minute. It won't last for long, because there are so many other problems to solve. And even when you finish the work, you may think it's, well it's been successful, you've solved the problem. A year later you may not think so, you know. You're being...you've fallen in love with it too soon, perhaps.

Mm. And, just as we're coming to the end of this session, just to pick up on... Can you tell me, going back to painting this seagull in Cornwall, why do you think you were doing that? If you had found doing related work to that at art school rather pointless, what were you trying to discover at this later stage?

Mm, it was a drawing, not a painting. It just interested me visually. I was walking on the moors one day and there it was, an object that you didn't expect to find. I think one was, one was then still interested in the unexpected, in nature as well as in, in art. I'd never seen an image like it, and I still haven't seen an image like it actually. Yet there must have been hundreds of artists in Cornwall who did it, yet I've never seen one. It's funny really in a way. I mean the place is full of seagulls, and there must be

hundreds of them that are dead, and been eaten, half eaten by foxes or something, and yet I've never seen one.

Have you still got it?

No, I haven't. I gave it... I had a friend at that time who was very interested in birds, and, he was a collector as well, and he got married and I gave it to him.

Who was that?

He was a man called John Bellack[ph]. He's still alive, he lives up north. He was a businessman.

And are you in touch with him?

Christmas.

And, again, picking up on what we were talking about before, with the aircraft in Scotland...

Yes.

...you did work related to that didn't you?

[pause] No, I don't think, I don't think so. I can't think of any image that I, that I used at that time.

Were you drawing while you were up there?

No, I didn't. I...I disguised the fact that I was an artist when I was in the Air Force, in order to survive. But... My two friends knew, because I told them, and, they used to quip one about it, you know, 'You'll end up in the gutter.' And I said, 'Well it's better than ending up in the bloody bank, where you're going to end up.' (laughs)

And did you stay in touch with them, or not?

No, only when I left, as I say I met them in London, but I haven't stayed in touch with them.

And how did you come to choose St. Martin's?

Oh I was in London on leave, for one day; I was stationed near Bedford, at the European Signals Centre, and I used to come for the day to London occasionally. And I was walking down Charing Cross Road looking at the bookshops and I saw this art school, and I thought what a marvellous place to, to attend art school. Middle of Charing Cross Road, short distance from the National Gallery. All these bookshops. What else do you want?

But you weren't happy there?

Well it was difficult. I had very little money. You know they gave grants? Well, no, the Government made it possible for local authorities to give grants to ex-service people to do something, to either continue where they'd broken off, or to do something that they wanted to do, to give them three years to study or do anything they wanted. So my grant was given by Sheffield, which to put it bluntly were in my opinion bloody mean. I mean the fact that one was going to art school was bad enough; they didn't think that was a good idea I'm sure. So, I had to sign a form saying that if I accepted this money, it was on the understanding that I would become a teacher. But for that they gave me £3 a week, that's all. I know it's impossible now to think in those terms, but it was still... My rent in the artists' house was twenty-five shillings; then I had the rest to live on and buy paints. It was difficult. It was rough, let me tell you, very rough. Well I was glad to be at art school, but it was still...it was still a bit like the continuation of Sheffield, at the school, except of course when I got outside, that was totally different, marvellous.

Was it there that Vivian Pitchforth was teaching?

Yes. Yes.

What was he like?

Oh a lovely man, I liked him very much. Did you know...you read about him then did you, in one of my catalogues? Yes. He was stone deaf, a terrible thing, I mean really deaf. You had to write. He could lip read to a certain extent, but he would ask you to write down if he couldn't. So you had to write things down for him. He was a very good teacher, very good. And, well Sue and myself liked him very much.

Why was he a good teacher?

He was very serious, and... At Sheffield the teaching of drawing had been clever. The man who taught it could draw with both hands at the same time, it was like a performance, very impressive, but something to be steered clear of. (laughs) And... I mean he was, he was good in an academic way. But Pitchforth was a bit, I don't know, a bit more intense and honest about making a form, making a form of the wrist or the arm, the difference between soft and hard where it enters, where bone is touching the flesh. Those kind of things. Made you aware, the pencil suddenly gets a bit harder when it comes into contact with bone, and softer as it goes to muscle, you know, that kind of thing. He made you...he didn't show you how to do it, but he made you aware of it.

And, can we say at this point who Sue is. You met at St. Martin's?

At St. Martin's. She was a student there, yes.

And what was her background, very different to yours, or similar?

Well, her father had been in the regular Army for quite, for a quite a long time. But by that time he had retired, and they lived in, funnily enough they lived in Bedford, very often I must have walked past their house many times when I was stationed near there. And she, during the war she and her sister had been in the Wrens, and Sue had been sent to South Africa to be on a, a Royal Naval Air Force station doing Morse code to people flying, sending them messages. And, I mean, South Africa was a

marvellous place to be during the war, I mean there was no rationing or anything like that. I mean you had military service to do, naturally, but, it was an idyllic place to be. And she had always wanted to be, she had thought about different things when she was young, about music and dancing, she'd liked to have been a dancer, but wasn't encouraged to do these things. But when she came out of the Royal Navy Reserve, she...she had a friend who was going to the Slade, and said to Sue, 'Why don't you go to art school, you're interested in it.' So Sue first of all went to, there was an art school in London called Heatherley's, where people sometimes went while they were waiting to go to another art school, just to get training, which is what she did. And then she went to St. Martin's after that. I think she was a year at Heatherley's, I'm not sure. But then she went to St. Martin's. So when I arrived at St. Martin's she had already been there, I think she'd been there a year, or two years, I'm not sure. But she was in the same, same class as myself, because I'd...because I'd been at Sheffield for two years, I went into that class if you see what I mean.

And what's her full name?

Susan.

And surname?

Halcott[ph].

And did you fall for each other immediately, was this one of those...?

Well I mean... Fall for each other immediately? Well I mean we got used to seeing each other at work, and, painting, and... Outside the main studio was what was called the landing, which one or two people occupied, one or two awkward people occupied, like myself. (laughs) And I remember two others that occupied it.

Who were the others?

They were ex-servicemen, one of them was rather eccentric. I liked him very much. Anyway, and then there were two other people, and Sue was one of them. And they

were there, not because they wanted to get out of the mainstream room, but because the other, the other space was rather crowded. So we had these, there were three of us who were troublesome, and two that wanted to have more space. So that's where I came into contact with her much more.

And what was her work like?

Very good, very good. Very sensitive. Very serious. She...she used to feed me occasionally, as I was in rather a bad way. I just wasn't eating the right food at all.

Because you didn't know how to, as well as...?

No well possibly... Well I didn't have the money, and I didn't know how to...use food properly. I mean I'd have a tin of spaghetti or a tin of baked beans or something. The result is, I ended up with a lot of boils and things like that, and if I cut myself it was difficult to heal, it would go bad, and all that kind of thing. So Sue used to cook me kind of, some, lots of vegetables and things. Marvellous really.

Where did she live?

She lived, at that time I think she was living somewhere in Baker Street, a tiny room. And then she moved to a place behind Olympia, in Kensington, where I got to know her better. I was living in Kensington as well at that time.

Where were you?

I was in Kensington.

Yes, but where?

Well in this artists' house, where we all shared.

And who were you sharing with at that point?

Well there was, let's see, there was George Fullard and his friend – and his wife, and his friend Leslie Duxsbury[ph], and his wife. They'd all been art students at the Royal College when it was sent to Ambleside during the war, they'd all just come back from Ambleside, because it came back to London, and they came back with it. So they, they were the two people who took on the occupancy of the house. And then they let it to a sculptor called Andy Tittensaw[ph], who was also a musician. And, then there was Derrick and myself. And two men in the basement who were nothing to do with art. Oh, except I think one of them had been a male model, I think, but the other one was a fitness fanatic. Their real desire in life was to go to America and set up some kind of keep fit health studio on, now where's that famous place in California where they all...where they all go and do all this? There's a famous place.

Is it a beach?

Yes, you must have heard of it.

I think I know what you mean. I can't remember what it's called. And did you steer well clear of that?

No, no we got on fine actually, they were very nice people.

But did you do lots of keep fit?

Oh no, good God no. I mean, the one who was a keep fit fanatic, he used to say to me, 'You're much too thin Jack. I mean, judging by your height, you're much too thin. You should be much fatter.' Well my God! I was living on £3 a week. I was thinner than I am now, believe me. But...

Did you feel hungry all the time?

No. No, I didn't, no. One didn't even care about things like that really. Except, one summer... The difficulty was that the grant only came during term time, so the holiday times were really difficult. And one summer, I remember lying on my, on my bed, it had come to the holidays, and I thought, well, I've got half a crown left; what

am I going to do? I didn't want to write home, to say, could you send me some money, I wanted to be independent.

End of F9411 Side A

F9411 Side B

So, at that time I knew of an organisation, a gallery called the Artists International Association, they had a gallery in Lisle Street in London, which I'd been to once or twice; I'd actually shown work there occasionally. And I knew the woman. She was married to a German refugee writer, whose name I can't remember. But I thought, well, I'll go and see if they can help me. And, with half a crown I could get into the West End on the Tube and still have a bit of money over. So I did that. And I said to her, you know, 'I've got to have work, can you give me any work?' She said, 'Yes, I can. You can look after the gallery.' I think it was something like three or four days a week, and she looked after it. She was having time off with her husband or something. Just happened to be fortunate. So I started... She said, 'When do you want to start?' I said, 'Tomorrow.' So that's what I did, for that summer.

And was that interesting in itself?

Yes. Lisle Street at that time was where all the prostitutes walked up and down and had their premises, and hung out, and they would very often come into the gallery just to have a chat. Not to look for business, I mean they knew very well that I hadn't enough money, or didn't look the right type. And so they would come in and have a chat. And I would see them outside and give them a wave and that. And then I would meet artists as well, unknown artists most of them. Except, Gillian Ayers and her husband, God! I've forgotten his name. He was a well-known...he's still alive, he's still well known.

Was it Henry Mundy?

Henry Mundy, that's right, yes. They used to come in. They were still like I was, a student, both of them incredibly...he was incredibly handsome. She was good-looking but he was very handsome, and he still is; have you seen him of recent years? Well he still is. And, they used to come in, because they showed work there. But they were the only known artists, that had become known I mean now.

What were they like?

Very friendly. Students, you know.

And what was on the walls during this time?

All kinds of things. A lot of political art. I mean it was called the Artists International Association, and it had political, slightly political left-wing overtones to it, so there was a lot of, what can be called left-wing painting. Not all of it, but you know, some of it was.

This had been quite supportive of the refugee artists in the war, hadn't it?

Mm, that's right. A lot of them were refugees. I mean, the woman who was running it... Oh I...Mrs Ulman she was called. Her husband was a refugee, a Jewish refugee writer. He wrote, funnily enough I've read one book by him, I think it's the only one he ever wrote in England, but, it was about his experience of being a young man in Nazi Germany, and it was quite interesting. All those kind of, all those kind of writings are interesting, aren't they, because of the period. How the hell did one live through it, you know? So there were, yes there were a lot of, there were a lot of writers, a lot of artists of that kind showing there. Some were all right, some were awful, and some were, you know, some were quite good. But it was a good place, a good refuge for people.

And after that summer, did you stay in touch with the gallery?

Yes, I did. I showed once or twice there, odd pictures.

Can you remember what you showed?

Views of... I can remember one picture, Chelsea Embankment, with the barges, a night, a night painting.

And do you remember doing that painting?

Yes, I do. Yes.

And did you do a series from there, or...?

No, just the one-off.

So why, how did it happen?

I used to walk by the Chelsea Embankment I presume, and saw all the barges where people were living. Quite an interesting little area. It's still there, but very different, it's all smartened up now. All the barges then were sinking. (laughs) I mean if you went into one, there was water on the floor. I did something dishonest. We must finish now. I did something dishonest, because, because I had no money I took some money out of the till at the Artists International Association, knowing I could replace it by the end of the week, because of the amount I was going to be paid. So I took some out, kind of on loan, which I shouldn't have done really, but I mean, all right, we do all kinds of things when we're in that situation, I'm sure.

And did you pay it back?

Oh yes, absolutely.

Did anyone know about it?

No, nobody knew about it.

But, on some level it still worries you?

No, it's...it had to be done, you know?

But if the woman had been around, presumably you could have asked her.

I would have asked her.

And she would have said yes?

Yes, she would have said yes. No doubt about it. No.

[break in recording]

Just ask you, as I usually do, if you could tell me your name and today's date.

Well people say that I am Jack Smith, but I'm never sure myself.

Are there days sometimes when you're less sure than others?

(laughs)

Do you know what today's date is?

No I don't. I think it may be the 8th, I'm not certain at all.

Of what?

8th of March.

In the year?

2001.

[break in recording]

It seems to be working. Now we must only do two hours, because of my voice disappearing.

Right. That leads me to something that we've just been talking about. For various reasons we were talking about jewellery, and I asked you if you ever wore any jewellery, and, what was your answer?

No I don't wear jewellery, but I'm not against people...men... You asked me whether men, I was against men wearing jewellery, which I'm not at all.

And you then produced something that you wear round your neck.

Ah, that was a, what's it called? I've forgotten the name of it.

You told me it was a crystal.

A crystal, yes. Which Sue suggested I wore.

For what reason?

Well, you find as you get older that your body is gradually dropping to bits. (laughs)

You sound very cheerful about it.

Not at all, no. There's nothing to recommend, I don't recommend old age at all, for anybody. I think it's a total disaster.

Have you been having problems with...?

Everybody has problems with old age. I mean you get... I've had three virus infections since Christmas, which turn to bronchitis, so you get antibiotics to get rid of them. And, antibiotics affect you a different way. I mean antibiotics are supposed to affect the immune system aren't they, I think.

Sue was saying apropos the crystal that your chest is your vulnerable spot really.

Yes. Mm.

Does that relate at all to what we talked about on previous tapes, which is, when you were first in London, you really couldn't afford to eat well, do you think it had any lasting effect?

No, I don't think so. No, I think it goes back to childhood. I had trouble, bronchial trouble, even then. And then of course after that I smoked a lot, which didn't help. But once I stopped smoking, it did...I stopped getting bronchitis every year, so there is that about it.

When did you stop smoking?

I think I must have been, maybe the age of thirty. So it's quite a long time. So, of course, the doctor when you go always asks, 'Do you smoke?' and I say, 'No, but I have smoked.' 'Oh, how long have you stopped smoking?' 'Since the age of thirty.' 'Oh that's all right then.' (laughs)

And why did you give up?

Because I got bronchitis every year, and one year I very nearly got pneumonia. That's why.

And do you ever...

Anybody can stop smoking as long as they've got a good reason.

So did you just give up like that?

Yes. No I didn't, no, I first went on to herbal tobacco. The more you smoke, the healthier you get. (laughs) No, herbal tobacco is, is quite all right, except it's totally antisocial. People think you're smoking pot, because it smells like pot. So Sue and I used to go to parties and things and somebody would say, 'Somebody's smoking pot in this room.'

And they'd say it crossly, or they would say, 'Who is it, can I have some?'

No, they didn't say that. Not in those days. They were just curious.

And then, that was a grade of giving up then was it?

Yes. Mm.

Did drugs come into your life at all?

No, not at all then, no. Knew nothing about them. Oh wait a minute. In the, in the late Fifties, when I was teaching at Corsham, mescaline came into my life, not because I was using it, but, Bryan Wynter, who was teaching there, experimented with it. I think he'd read Aldous Huxley's book on mescaline. I don't know whether you've read that. I've forgotten what it's called. But it talks about heightening the way we see things. I mean Huxley describes seeing the crease in a man's trousers as though he'd never seen them in his life before, you know, they were very intense suddenly. And of course Bryan being an artist thought he would experiment with it and see what happened. And he said...I said, 'Well did it make a difference?' He said, 'Well I painted a picture under the influence of mescaline, and it made no difference whatsoever.' (laughs) 'And I gave some to the dog, and that didn't make any difference.'

And you presumably weren't tempted?

No, never. No. In fact I'm, I'm very opposed to it, because, I like to be aware, not partially drugged or unconscious. I mean I don't like having anaesthetics at all. I mean I never have an anaesthetic at the dentist. I prefer to have a bit of pain rather than be put out.

And is that to do with control, or what is it to do with?

I like being aware, you know. I mean if it's hurting me, I like to be aware of it. In actual fact it works very well, because they take more trouble. (laughs)

It's a good point. I've always felt very frightened of drugs because I felt that if one took them, you might never get back to being the way you were before.

Mm.

Do you feel that you see in the same way now as you saw, say when you were at Corsham?

You mean, when you say see, you mean see the visual world?

Yes.

Yes, I think...you see I think, being an artist you actually are initially taught to see. I mean what Huxley describes is what we see anyway, to a certain extent; everything is, becomes of greater importance, I think. I think that's just part of being trained as an artist.

And is part of that training defining what you're seeing, as you see?

Trying to, mm.

And are you defining it in your head in words, or what is that process?

Oh I think you, you try and find an equivalent to what you are seeing. I mean you can't, you can't imitate what you are seeing; you have to find an equivalent. I mean art isn't like, art isn't like life, it's not that kind of reality, it's its own reality. You don't see people walking about in the streets looking like a Rembrandt portrait, you just don't, they don't...people don't...you don't look like a Rembrandt portrait. (laughs) Fortunately, let me say. At the same time of course, the vision of an artist can make you more aware of visual things. I mean when my brother tried to copy, as I told you earlier, tried to copy a Cézanne portrait, for the first time in his life he started to see blue shadows in a person's face, and that's what it does, I think, it makes you more aware of things you may never have been aware of before. Whether that's a good thing for everybody I don't know. I mean maybe you see all the

blotches on people's faces instead of... She's no longer a beautiful woman, you know? Her eyes are in the wrong place, or she's got two noses or something.

I was interested, looking at some of the reproductions in the recent Angela Flowers book that, the first two images, which are work of the Fifties, seem to me incredibly like some of the recent work.

In what way?

Well partly because, relating to what we're talking about really, that the shapes on the canvas are very distinct from one another. I think it's partly the way you're not particularly using shadow.

Mm.

And that if you...there's one or two images particularly that come years and years later that seem to me almost the same thing.

Mm.

And that led me to thinking about how in the early work you're not approaching it as many other artists might have done, which is merging things together. If there's a child on a carpet, the child on the carpet is completely separate, they're two shapes.

Yes.

And I was interested therefore in what you were feeling about shadows and the way you use shadows, or don't use shadows.

Well I used to use shadows, in fact, I mean when I went to Spain I was aware of shadows even more than objects, because of the brilliant light, and the shadow was, a shadow became an object. Now those early paintings, I'm trying to remember, shadow. I've certainly used a shadow sometimes in later work, because sometimes I like to confuse the spectator with different realities, so there's flatness, lots of flatness

and suddenly there's something which maybe thought of as three-dimensional, so I may use shadow in that case, you know. But that's again in order to create a visual, a visual diversion if you like, or what might be considered a sudden foreign body in the work.

But, I might be wrong in this, but, wouldn't you be more likely if you do use anything that might be considered shadow that that would, the shadow would throw itself onto the ground of the painting rather than onto another shape?

It could do either. It could do either. I had a colleague when I was teaching, he was a very academic, he was a member of the Academy, a very academic painter, and he, he'd been to my exhibition and he said, 'I wish I could do what you do, and that is, cast the light from any direction you want.' Well I mean, it amazed me that anybody should even... Why not? You know. If you're trained in a particular way, it has got to come from a certain source. That's something you're trained to do. But it's something that you must question. It's ridiculous really. I mean there's no reason why it shouldn't come from any source at all. It comes from where you want it to come from. If you want a shadow on the left, you let it come on the left, and then another one on the right, and so on. All rules are to be broken at some point, as long as eventually the picture works, and has its own reality and convinces you of its reality. Never mind the outside world.

And, there was another area I was interested to talk about. When you say never mind the outside world, you're in a way in this context talking about naturalistic painting rather than the outside world as much as the way light works in the world, aren't you? That whole tradition of painting.

Well not, not entirely, because certain, certain realist paintings can be, can be unreal. I think... Well, for example, I use this as an example because it's an obvious one. Monet's painting of the cathedral is totally unreal. I mean what it is is a building being diffused by light. It's no longer a solid object, it's no longer brick and mortar; it's a thing being diffused by light. And yet it is, it does belong, because of the kind of artist he was, it belongs to the visual world, as we think we know it, does it not? Do you know what I mean when I say that? So it's not that I'm against what you call

that kind of reality. I could say that I'm in favour of reality as long as I can't recognise it. (laughs)

But do you mind... Well, let me start again. How do you feel about somebody looking at your painting, a painting of yours, who knows none of the rest of your work, and also doesn't know anything about the art world, the way they see your, that painting is very different from an art critic who's solemnly researched...

Yes.

...and is also probably locked into certain theorising.

Mm.

I mean which would you rather have, somewhere in between?

I want somebody with an open mind, who is prepared if possible to be amazed; to not know before they see the work what art is, but are willing to enter a different world if you like, in order to have a new visual experience. I mean that's what I've got to do, so I would advise them if possible that they do the same. I have to have not been there before, for me to be convinced by what I've done. Otherwise I'd be bored stiff. Just imagine every painting you do, that you've already been there. Which many artists do, I'm not saying they don't, they do, and many artists do that. But that's partly because of a lack of imagination. And we live in a time where unfortunately the less imagination an artist has, the better he will do, I mean as regards acceptance, and maybe financially. And that's why so much abstract art is considered elitist, which of course it isn't. Well yes it is, in the sense that, it's for a minority, but it's only for a minority because people are not willing to just look and perhaps be amazed by something. Which they're willing to do with music, that's the funny thing about it. When you say to somebody, 'What kind of music do you like?' whatever they say, whether it's Mozart or jazz or anything, they don't, they don't start to analyse it; they react to it in a particular way, for some reason, one doesn't know the reason, but they react to it. They don't start saying, well, why isn't this piece of music describing, you know, so-and-so, so-and-so? They don't need to feel that with music, they react, they

either react or they don't react. And that's all I'm asking them to do. Now the other part of the question is, knowledge. There's no doubt about it, knowledge can help, but it can also hinder, because of, knowledge in a way getting in the way and making you think you know what art should be. In which case you're in real trouble, and you always have been historically. Anything new has been in real trouble by people who think they know. The worst exhibition I've ever been to, of my own I mean, was at Hull University, where the private view was full of professors. And they knew what art ought to be.

And they let you know.

Absolutely.

What was the work there at the time?

My work?

Yes.

Must have been, it would have been Sixties work, yes. And they always try and look for a reference, I mean even with this recent work, at the private view. Well they had a luncheon to launch the book actually, I was sitting with a woman who, she was trying to find a reference to what she was looking at, and she said, 'Well, I suppose you'd be interested in the Russians.' I said, 'Well, yes, I'm interested in many things. Yes, I do like the Russian, Russian art, Malevich, but it has nothing to do with what I do.' Because I find the Constructivist ideas much too limiting, so I couldn't use them. I couldn't...I couldn't belong to that kind of group or way of thinking. I mean I just go wherever my imagination or the previous painting tells me to go. And I find that absorbing, and a great visual interest. But you yourself know, all right, you're not an artist, but you know by now that we live in a, in the last twenty or thirty years, we live in a time where many artists have only turned out one picture all their lives. There's not necessarily anything wrong with that as long as you're able to invent within that one picture, but there is something wrong with it when it sets a kind of way of thought

for everybody else. And that's something I wouldn't want to happen, at all, not to my work anyway.

The exhibition in Hull you mentioned...

Yes.

...did you feel that the professors you were talking about actually spent any time in the exhibition and were changed by it in any way?

No, not at all. They were antagonistic as soon as they walked in the room. The only positive reaction was from two students, who were at Hull University, not art students, I don't know what they were doing. But you see they, they had a more open mind about it. You could say, well they were young enough not to know what art was, but the others were old enough also to know not really what art was, they just thought they did. And that's the difference.

Do you remember what sort of things they said?

No, too far away.

And how did you...

Just glad to talk to them for a few minutes.

How did you deal with it?

How did I...?

Deal with it. It must have been very depressing.

No, you get...no, it isn't you know, you get...you get used to these people who say... I mean even if you're not at an exhibition, 'Oh what do you paint? Landscape, portrait, still life?' 'No no, I'm an abstract painter.' 'Oh you do designs.' 'No I don't do

designs.' It's a way of thought you see. They don't know what abstract painting means.

So would it be better if, say at the lunch you're talking about to launch Norbert Lynton's book...

Yes.

...that people had said nothing?

Yes. Absolutely.

I mean presumably it's come about initially because of people being excited about what they saw, and so therefore wanting to write an article about it or speak to the artist, or tell somebody else to go and see the work.

Yes.

So the beginning of it must have been good, but it somehow turned into something quite other, hasn't it?

When you say the beginning, are you talking about, beginning of what?

Well I suppose, I'm thinking of articles in newspapers...

Yes.

...rather than books by art historians.

Yes.

Because I often think that the art press probably does more harm in terms of getting people who don't already go and look at paintings to go, because it somehow

excludes people. And yet, if you think, well maybe the answer is for everyone to stop writing about art, I'm not sure whether that would help or not help.

No, well I'm not sure. I mean, very often people who write the essays use a language which, which not many people could understand, unless they are artists or are used to that language.

End of F9411 Side B

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.....is, went to one of my exhibitions once in the Seventies, when I was using pins and cotton wool and things with, within the painting. And she wrote it up, a short paragraph, one of the Sunday papers, saying, 'Jack Smith's recent paintings are a drawing pin stuck in thick paint.' Nothing to do with the work at all, there was no thick paint and, there were some drawing pins in some of them, but they weren't stuck into paint at all, they were stuck into thin tissue paper, or cotton wool. Now that's a prime example of somebody not looking at the work at all really, but rushing in, quick glance round, drawing pins, paint; going home, got to say something about it, and writing something totally stupid. I mean, I think it's a good thing to describe work, I think critics ought to describe works much more than they do; describe the work, but, make sure you're describing what you're looking at, if we're talking about technical matters like that. I mean it's like looking at, looking at a Vermeer and going away and writing about the use of paint like Van Gogh, you know? It's just not looking, it's something else. And I don't think they can be forgiven for that.

And would you have just let it go by, or did you challenge it in any...?

No, I let it go by.

And, I mean, with...we're looking at the sort of very negative aspects of putting forward one's work to be responded to in some way, publicly or verbally or whatever. I mean, have you had either with other artists or with critics or with anybody, conversations which really did give you some feedback and did make you think someone had actually seen in a way that you had hoped they had, or even pointed something out to you?

Oh there are people who write to me after, say, an exhibition, one or two people who do really receive something very, very important to them from it, yes, there are people. I mean there are a few people. They don't belong to these, this category we're talking about, they're unusual people, usually. Sometimes they are artists themselves, but not always. I think it would be quite nice sometimes if, not necessarily other artists wrote about someone's work, but say, a poet or a musician or

a writer might have something of interest to say about it. I mean it was an interesting essay by Sartre on Giacometti's work. No art critic could have written it like that, it was quite interesting; made you think of the work and look at it in quite, quite a new way. And I think that can... And all... My written paintings, which I did in the Seventies, they were written about in a smaller catalogue than that by a poet, a Portuguese poet wrote about it; that was of interest. Difficult to understand for many people, but so much better than a critic writing about it, you know? Because what interested him was that the paintings, though they looked as though they were a language, were not a language at all, except a visual language. They didn't say anything. And as he was a poet, he was interested in that.

How did you and he come to be introduced to each other?

We met through Jenny Stein[ph], have you heard of her?

I've heard of her, but I don't...

She was...she ran a gallery from her house at Primrose Hill in the Sixties. In fact my wife showed two or three times, had shows there two or three times. And then, the house was sold and she moved. Then just for a short time she helped at the Whitechapel Gallery while they were kind of an in-between period, looking for a new director, and she helped there. And it was through her that I met this Portuguese poet and his wife. I think he was a political refugee from Portugal at a time when, I mean Portugal now is a democracy but it wasn't, far from it. And so I think he had to get out. Rather funny in a way, he comes to England and, I don't know how much later this was, but he applies for a job at London University, and at the interview a man said, 'Your poetry is on our course.' (laughs) That must have been amazing, you know, I mean because he's not a well-known...he's well known in Portugal, but nowhere else, I mean because, he writes in Portuguese and he doesn't like his work translated into English, though his wife sometimes does translate it, but he prefers it to be in Portuguese.

Have you ever heard him read it?

I've never heard him read it, no. And I've never seen her translations. I mean I'm sure her translations are good, because she's a linguist, so I think they would be pretty good.

So in other words, if you see one of his poems, you're seeing it as visual language rather than...?

I suppose so. Well it's like when you hear opera in a foreign language isn't it, you don't understand it, you just hear the sounds. Personally I rather like that. Sometimes I don't want to know, because what they're saying is so bloody banal. (laughs) You know what I mean by that? You know when you...

Can we for the tape say what the Portuguese poet's name is?

Helda Macedo. That's M-A-C-E-D-O. Helda is spelt H-E-L-D-A.

Thank you.

Helda Macedo.

And having met him, I mean, how did you come to build up a relationship, did he come and see your paintings, what happened?

Yes, we met...well he came to see the paintings because he was writing this article, but...

No, sorry, then, how did he come to be doing the article, what came first? Did you choose him?

Ah. Yes. Because, I was having a small retrospective at Sunderland Arts Centre, arranged by somebody who was very interested in my work, and he was...he made this little book, paperback book about my work, and he wanted somebody to write about the written painting, so I suggested it would be interesting... He liked the idea

of getting a poet, so as I knew Helda, I suggested him. And he was interested in doing it.

But it wasn't that he'd been particularly perceptive about the work then, it was a shot in the...?

He was fascinated by it. I don't think he's got a great knowledge of art, but a very sensitive, civilised person.

But in terms of writing, it was a bit of a shot in the dark?

I didn't know what it would be like, certainly. But it was good. For many people it was a bit too, a bit too intellectual.

But had you and he by this time had quite a lot of discussions?

No.

Or was it not like that?

No. We'd always got on well together.

And are you still in touch with him?

No, no, because, since leaving London we don't, we don't see him. Except I think, two years ago we met him at Jenny Stein's[ph] in London, he and his wife, and it's as though we'd never been apart in a way, the conversation started straight away, because, I wanted to have some... I don't know anything about poetry, and I wanted to know what the difference really was between poetry and prose. I said to him, 'This might sound a stupid question, because, if you like I'm an innocent about it.' He said, 'No, that question is often asked by my students.' Because as you know, if you read some contemporary poetry, why is it poetry and not prose? That's the way I feel anyway. I used to come across a lot of poetry when I was teaching written by students in their sketchbooks, and I used to think, well why is this poetry, you know?

I know there are certain rules at some points from the past, I can't remember what they're called now but there are some, because another writer explained it to me and then now I've forgotten it. But if you're writing, what is it, blank verse, you pay no attention to that, but, why is a poem a poem? Do you know?

Well I would say it's because of what isn't around it.

What isn't around it. Yes.

What did he say?

I can't remember exactly. I...I said, I think I quoted...I said, for example, T.S. Eliot, I remembered this: 'Let us go then, you and I, now the evening is spread out against the sky, like a patient etherised upon the table, through certain half-deserted streets, the muttering retreats, the restless nights in one-night cheap hotels.' I love it, I love Eliot, and, well as you can tell, I mean I've remembered that from a long time ago. Now, is that to do with the rhythm of the words? I think it is myself, I think it must be the rhythm of the words and the, the precision of description. 'Let us go through certain half-deserted streets.' I mean, would you write that in prose or not? With the other things, you wouldn't, would you? Or would you? You think you would? I mean you might write, 'Let us go then, you and I, now the evening is spread out against the sky.' All right, you've got rhyming, sky and I, but that happens quite rarely with Eliot. I don't know, I still, I still don't... I mean, it must be quite nice for people who can write poetry, even if they don't do other things. I mean I've got a friend who ran a poetry mag, he lives down here, he ran a poetry magazine for a short time, but he couldn't make it pay, and they were all, nearly all the people were unknown poets, not from round here, from all over England, and the Continent. And some of them I just couldn't...some of them I just thought were awful, because they were just describing a situation, and if it hadn't been put into that kind of format, but written like this, I don't think it would have made any difference. I mean could you write a poem? Or perhaps you do write poetry.

I do try every now and then.

Right. Do you know what you're writing? Do you... Have you ever been told at any time that there is a way of writing a poem, like, what were they called, the Georgian poets or whatever they're called use?

Well I suppose with certain structures, like a sonnet.

Yes, that's what I mean, yes. There's a certain structure that you follow, and you know what that structure is, do you?

If I wanted to write a sonnet, I would make sure I did.

Yes.

But I think you would only use a sonnet to express something that fell into the shape of a sonnet, and said it, whatever it was it was saying.

So what is the shape of a sonnet?

Well it's to do with the beat in a line and the number of lines.

Yes.

But I mean the Eliot that you're quoting is speech apart from anything else isn't it?

It's speech.

And in a way, it slightly relates to what we were saying about the work in the Fifties, and how much it's to do with naturalism or not. Although you might use some of the phrases in speech that the Eliot poem uses, you would never, in contemporary speech, address somebody in that way.

No. No.

And yet the individual elements are fairly ordinary.

But when you write it, are you concerned very much with the visual experience, or is it an emotional experience that isn't visual? Do you know? Perhaps you don't even know that. Perhaps you intuitively use either one or the other.

Well I, I find, because actually I have been trying to write something recently, and at certain points I find I'm drawing, and I'm hopeless at drawing.

Mm.

So...

Yes.

I think they do run into each other. But...

You see what I do appreciate very much is Japanese haiku poetry, because I love its being so condensed into maybe four lines or more than that, and it's so vivid in its description of certain things, it's totally vivid and, and visual. And I think, I really think that's terrific, to actually put that into so few lines, it's beautiful. Do you respond to that, haiku, or not?

Absolutely, but again, it's because of not only what is there, but of what's not there isn't it.

Yes. Yes. So what do you feel about the poetry of, Apollinaire?

Apollinaire for me is the key to everything.

Really? I mean that is visual, is it not?

Oh the Calligrammes?

Yes. Yes. I find those fascinating.

When did you come across them?

Oh a long time ago, I think. A long time ago. A time when I most likely did read a lot of poetry, even though I didn't know much about it. Ezra Pound I read, *Cantos*, *Cantos*, and Eliot and, and Apollinaire and, occasionally I'd come across a Surrealist poem, which was tied up with the Surrealist paintings at the time. I can't remember their names now. Do you know any Surrealist poets, their names?

Well I suppose Breton is the obvious one.

There's Breton, yes. There's somebody else who...

Éluard.

Yes.

Max Jacob.

Yes, that's right. Yes, I came across all those people. And I came across the American, the woman, very sparse.

Emily Dickinson?

No, not her, later, more recent than her. Oh dear, she's gone. My memory. I mean she died, she lived till quite an old age, she died, I would have thought within the last fifteen, twenty years. She always wrote in small letters, and signed herself in small letters. No capitals. Does that ring a bell for you?

It sounds like e e cummings.

e e cummings, that's right. That is a woman isn't it?

I don't think so.

It's a man? Are you sure?

No, now you say it, but I've always assumed it's a man.

No, I think it's a woman, I think it's a woman. For some reason I think it is. And I think she was interviewed a number of years ago. Or somebody else was talking about her that... He was living in the same building, and he used to shout to her to make sure she was still alive. (laughs)

But do you like...

You must...you must look it up, see whether she's male or female. I thought she was a woman, it's funny that.

But you like the poems?

Yes. Yes.

So have you stopped reading poetry?

Well no, I don't... Well yes, I...yes, I must...yes, I suppose I would, unless I'm presented with it. This friend who ran the poetry magazine sent me a copy of his magazine, and I read all the poems in that. I don't go to the library now and choose a book of poems. There are poems that come into my head that I've remembered from the past. And I think I'm having now a different... When Dylan Thomas kind of came on the scene, that was in the Fifties wasn't it, when he became the flavour of the month for everybody, and he spoke on the wireless, his poetry. I thought that was marvellous actually. I really like his poetry. And then later, within ten years I felt, as I sometimes feel about people's paintings, it's the work of a young man, and not a mature person, and I feel what a pity he died so young. And I feel that about some artists sometimes. And yet now, I don't think like that about his work; sometimes what he said comes into my mind. For example, the poem about his father, 'Do not go gently into that good...' 'Do not go gentle into that good night.' I think about that

poem, and... I think he's much better than I thought he was, at that time. Do you respond to him at all?

Some of them.

Well do you think of him as a young poet, and that he most likely would have developed differently?

I suppose I think of him as a florid-faced middle-aged drunk.

Ah, yes, yes you're thinking about his life. (laughs) You're thinking about all the things that were said about him, his womanising and all that, and drinking and...

But are you thinking of the 'Do not go gently' poem because you're really thinking about death, or because you're thinking about his poem?

No, I think I used it...when somebody was complaining about not feeling very well. (laughing) I said, 'Do not go gentle into that good night.' (laughs) It seemed so very apt. But it can amuse people, that.

Why do you remember the Eliot? Did you consciously learn it?

I think I must have done, yes, I think I must have done. I mean I remember a lot of poems from my being at school, because, the poems we did for the School Certificate, I remember whole chunks, though I'm forgetting it now but I do, I do remember quite a lot of Keats for example who was a person who we were studying, and quite a lot of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, which does still come into my mind. And it comes in much more richly than it used to, because it's...one looks at it as rather beautiful language I think. Are you aware of style when you write?

Of my own?

Yes.

Only of the bits, the aspects I don't like probably.

Mm. You see I was asking a writer who, someone I've known for years, whether... I'd been reading, I'd been reading some work by, by Gide, particularly his journals, which I think are fascinating, and, I thought he was very very aware of style in his writing. I mean I think with lots of those French writers, they were, unless they're bored with it. But by comparison with a lot of English writers, I feel there is no style. They can tell a good story, but for some reason it's...there's something missing. It's to do with the art content or something or other. [pause] English writers like...have you read Sillitoe?

A long time ago.

Yes, mine's a long time ago. But I said to this writer that I find when I read Sillitoe that there is, by contrast with Gide, there is no style. He tells a good story, but that seems to be as far as it goes. And I mean, the writer said to me, 'Well it's just, it's a different style.' (laughs) I mean, maybe it is.

It's a very difficult word to use, style.

Yes it is, isn't it. But do you know what I mean by it?

I think so.

It's something to do with the aesthetics really I think, which you're either deeply embedded in for some reason or you aren't. I mean not...I know Gide is possibly an exception, but... And Colette's got it I think as well. Maybe you don't agree with that.

What about American writers?

Yes, now they're a problem. I've read quite a lot of, when I was younger I read a lot of American writers. Hemingway drives me mad. (laughs) I can't stand the, the macho thing with him, you know?

What about more contemporary American writers, do you read them at all?

Well who? Tell me. Who are you thinking of?

[break in recording]

Carson McCullers you mentioned. Sorry, I turned the tape off briefly because I'd gone blank. Carson McCullers is someone you've read?

I have, I read a lot of Carson McCullers at one time. In fact I read all of her works at one time. *Member of the Wedding* and other things like that. Is that someone you had in mind, or not?

I was thinking of even younger people really.

Yes, more contemporary.

Mm. But you liked her writing obviously, otherwise you wouldn't have gone on reading her.

I don't think I would read one now, you know, I don't think I would go back and re-read it. At the moment I, in the past two, two years, I've gone back and read a lot of, re-read a lot of works I knew in the past, and react to them quite differently. I mean at the moment I'm reading Proust again, and I'm reading it much more intently than I did originally. Of course he's someone absolutely full of style. (laughs) But... And I read Joyce, re-read Joyce, *Ulysses*, and, I re-read Flaubert. I'm thinking re-reading Zola, who I don't really like, or I didn't then, but I think perhaps I'd better have another re-read. I mean I think he's too...he's too macho in a way. Too theatrical. And Montpassant I like, but there again we're getting into the past. Oh contemporary, some contemporary French writers I liked, like Nathalie Sarraute, and the, the one who made the film...Alain Robbe-Grillet, I liked some of his things very much. And there's somebody else whose name I forget, who is very well...you know what...I mean, they were pushed forward in the Seventies was it, and then they suddenly

disappear, you never hear of them now. You can't get any books by them out of the library at all; at one time you could. I mean I, I actually ordered Nathalie Sarraute's books from Hove library, and I got them; you try and get one now. It's all, it's all what's been on television recently. (laughs)

I don't know her work, what is it like?

Nathalie Sarraute? I quote her in my book. 'Everyone wants originality as long as they are familiar with it.' Beautiful I think.

And is that typical?

She's a very strange writer. I mean, they are...some of them are hard-going. Sometimes they're...you get the sensation of being, well for example at a private view, I seem to remember one essay written about a private view, and you get the sensation of being at a private view without anything being positively stated, you know? It's a very strange, very strange, to do that. I don't know how it's done, but all I can tell you is that I felt as though I'd been there. I'm still trying to think of the American writers you mentioned.

Before we go back to that, I mean, are you reading Proust with pleasure?

Very much so. And I'm reading it with... Because I've read it twice before, I'm reading it more intently I think. I think he's amazingly, the descriptions of nature in it are fantastic, I think, which I don't think I reacted to when I read it in the past at all. I mean we all know his descriptions of people, and... I think his descriptions of characters like Albertine are very good, and Monsieur de Charlus. He must have been a menace to be with. (laughs) Do you react, have you read that, his books?

I've read the first two.

The big book.

I read the first two. I'm afraid I use my copy to prop open a cupboard.

Ah. You must try and stick with it if you can. I know it's a huge epic to read, but it gets better and better I think. You didn't react to it?

I did for the first one, which I read in French as part of my A'level.

In French? Fantastic.

And then the second one I remember reading in English and then... It's partly to do with time.

Yes.

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.....onto a better level than the main solid one that was the most well known one. It'll come back to me.

Mm, the well known one is by Scott Moncrieff I think his name is.

Yes.

Something like that.

A subsequent one. And what about the Proust – not the Proust, the James Joyce; when did you first read Joyce?

I suppose I was about, seventeen I think. I read *Dubliners* first, and then *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and then *Ulysses*. This time, re-reading *Ulysses*, I found it fascinating but rather hard going. Whereas re-reading *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* I thought was, was delightful. I mean *Ulysses* is a masterpiece, there's no doubt about that, but he does go on a bit at times, like a lot of Irish. (laughs)

Would that have been a book that you and Derrick Greaves would have talked about?

Yes. Yes. Has he mentioned *Ulysses* to you?

I can't remember now. Because I haven't done a recording with him for quite a long time. But I mean, if you were that sort of age, he would have been the person closest to you in a way.

Yes, yes. Yes.

Would you have tended to be in agreement, or...or would you just be getting both of you excited about it and feeding each other?

Oh I think one got excited, and was looking for the new at that time, and that age. And, I hope one continues through life doing that, but I mean I think, a lot of young people at that age are looking for the new, new experience, new writers, new painters et cetera. And, I mean when I first started getting interested in, in writing, mainly through my brother's collection of things, I used to go down to the library, I didn't even know of many writers, and, for example I picked up Dreiser, the American writer, just picked it up. I didn't know anything about him. I loved the fact that it was a huge book, that it would absorb me for weeks reading it. And having read one, the *American Tragedy* I think it was, I got interested and started to read others, still not knowing he was a well known American writer. And then I, I picked up Bernard Shaw. I'd heard of Shaw, now that's different, but I picked up him from the library and kind of, went through that lot of work. Got obsessed, you know, with one, one writer then another writer. And I found through, well good luck really, that I picked up books by quite, quite good writers that I'd never heard of before. And I think that... Well of course I'd never read *Don Quixote*, I read that when I was about that age. I think Derrick did as well. I think you're discovering aren't you, at that age, you're discovering a different world to that in which you live, what writers did and what musicians did. There used to be a music group of, where Derrick worked at first was an engineering company, where my father worked actually, and Derrick worked there for a short time. Now, the office he was in... Perhaps he's already told you this, has he?

Tell me anyway.

Right, well the office he was in, fortunately for him was full of people who were interested in the arts, two of them I think had been artists or were doing a bit of it, but the person I think running the office was a musician and a conductor, who in his spare time did that, conducting and writing and playing music. And he ran a music group in his house, and the people who worked in that office used to go to that group, and Derrick went to it, and asked me to come along. So we occasionally went to that group. And of course that introduced us to a new world of music that we weren't familiar with at all. I mean quite young to be introduced to that. And the others would talk about it in a serious way and... So I think...I think when that happens to you when you're young, it's very good.

What do you remember hearing?

Oh we only heard... I mean we wouldn't have heard, I don't know who would be considered modern then, we wouldn't have heard that; it was Mozart and Beethoven and Dvorak and Chopin and, all the masters of that time. I can't remember hearing anything that might be considered contemporary of that time. I don't even know what was contemporary of that time. I suppose there was Britten around, would he be, in the Forties? I don't know. Vaughan Williams perhaps. I'm not sure.

Would you have had any music at all at home? Was there...?

No. We, of course my brother and I were, had piano lessons, but, he carried on longer than I did. No, there was no...no music of that kind at all.

And would there have been a radio on, I mean, for other than word programmes, spoken programmes?

I don't know. I think there might have been music for...well, popular music, maybe Gilbert and Sullivan, or things like popular songs of the time. I mean maybe musical songs or romantic songs.

And would your parents have had that on sometimes, or not?

I think maybe they did, or it came on when the radio was on for something else.

Derrick seems to have a huge repertoire of songs; do you?

No. No I don't. He likes, he liked pub life and singing in the pubs, because... We were both friendly with George Fullard, who belonged to that kind of tradition, he used to go in for it a lot. I must say I didn't...no I didn't really respond to it I must say.

What was George like? I never knew him.

Very alive, lively person. Engrossed totally in what he was doing. He came from a political background in Sheffield, his brother was a Communist candidate in Sheffield at that time, so he was, I think I'm right in saying that George was a Communist for quite a long time. Personally I don't think it helped his work at that time. His work started to blossom and mature when he kind of, well like all of us have to do, cast himself adrift, which he did very very well I think. Very alive person. Very passionate.

And did you and he talk much...

Yes, we did.

...or was he...?

Because I had a studio above him, and he didn't...he was restless, didn't like being alone. His wife was working, she's an actress, she was...she wasn't acting all the time, she was doing some, some job, so she was out a lot, and he, he did get lonely, and he would come up and talk, sometimes when I didn't want him to, I was working. Yes, we talked quite a lot.

What kind of conversations?

Oh just about art, and exhibitions that were on.

Would you tend to agree?

Yes, I think so. [pause] I don't think, I don't think we would have agreed later. His work was still firmly rooted in, in figuration of a kind. I mean it wasn't academic in any way; his work very often was made up of collage from found, found objects, found pieces of wood, dustbin lids, all kinds of things which were cast and then used. But, they weren't totally abstract. I think some of them were very very good, very poetic. I don't think he would have responded to my work of the later Sixties, I don't

think so. I might be doing him an injustice, I don't know, but I don't think so somehow.

Why do you think he wouldn't?

I don't think he responded to abstract ideas, or abstract work. He was a great admirer of Picasso, a great admirer of his invention, I think he drew a lot of inspiration from that. And Picasso's invention of making sculpture with objects, you know, that kind of double think on an object. A bicycle handlebars that become an animal, and that kind of thing.

And what was his wife like?

Attractive woman. I never saw her act but my brother did and said she was very good. I think he saw her acting in an Ibsen play. I mean... (coughing) My voice is going you see. She was trained as an artist, that's where they met, at the Royal College of Art, but not a painter or sculptor, I think she was trained as, in the design area, I think. So like many actors and actresses, I mean when they weren't in the theatre they had to find a job, and one of the places where they found, where lots of them found jobs, was the telephone exchange, where they worked I think on shift work, so it gave them time to do other things. She was a great supporter of George.

And, can I just take you back to Sheffield for a minute?

If you must.

Actually, did you know George in Sheffield, or...?

No.

One thing I wanted to talk to you about briefly is, when we talked about your schooling, I know you were very disenchanted with it, and you liked the literature and everything, but did you actually do science? What sciences did you do?

Physics and chemistry. Then, eventually only physics. I was the only person ever let me tell you, until that moment, not to take mathematics in School Certificate.

Everybody had to take mathematics, whatever else you might take. I was so bad at it, so bad, that there was a special dispensation, and I was allowed not to take mathematics as long as I took physics or chemistry instead. So, I took physics. Now the advantage of physics is the ability to draw diagrams, which I had. (laughs) And of course, in a funny way of course, the diagrams made more sense to me than abstract mathematical logic. I just had a blockage about it; it doesn't mean, as my wife says, I'm much better at maths than she is now, as regards numbers and adding up quickly and all that kind of thing, it's just that, I had a total blockage about it, I couldn't stand it, and couldn't do it. I mean once the exams were on, I mean, the paper would be given to me and I'd look at it, put it down and walk out. What could I do? I didn't understand any of it.

But you did spend a certain amount of time in the chemistry lab, did you?

Yes, you had to, the first three years. I don't know whether your schooling was the same, but you spent, you were there for four years, you spent three years practically doing everything, and then the final year for the School Certificate you chose more or less from the curriculum what was available, not necessarily what you wanted but what was available. For example, there was only the choice of languages as regards, well it was only French, it wasn't even German at that school I was at, there was just French. There was no Latin. A boy I knew wanted to learn Latin and he had to have special tuition from one of the teachers out of school hours to learn Latin. So it was a limited choice. You could either choose art or religion. Now what about that? That's interesting isn't it? I wonder who arrives at that idea. (laughs) You can't do both, that's the strange thing about it.

What do you remember of the chemistry lab?

Danger. (laughs) Absolute danger. Interesting, when he did an experiment it was of interest. I saw a boy very...he was very fortunate, he spilt a whole bath of acid right down his front. The teacher fortunately was able to...he actually filled a bucket of water and just threw it at him. So he wasn't burnt, but, my God! it made you think;

made the teacher think as well. I mean it was, it was an accident that shouldn't have happened, of that I'm certain, if it had been done properly. To spill a vat of acid down yourself takes some doing, I'd have thought.

Was it mainly that you watched the teacher doing experiments rather than doing experiments...?

You did it yourself as well, though not difficult ones. Anything, anything requiring explosions, you weren't allowed to do. (laughs)

But I'm interested in a way, because, you talk about light in relation to your work.

Yes.

But as far as I know, and other people writing about it, they don't use the word 'energy', and it seems to me, energy is a very important element. I know light and energy are inseparable in a sense.

Yes they are, mm.

But I wondered whether energy is something you talk about or...

No I don't talk about it, but it's incredibly important. But energy changes throughout your life. Nearly every young artist has energy, that's because he's young, that's the outlet for it. If he doesn't get an outlet for it, he becomes a criminal, or of some kind. So energy is there when you're young. I think, unless that energy is transformed, and becomes intellectual energy, it will, it will peter out, it will become stale. You can't have the same kind of energy at the age of, well let's say forty, thirty-five to forty, as you had when you were twenty-five, you just cannot have it, it's very very different, I think. There has to be some intellectual content within the work of some kind, and it's an intellectual energy which eventually takes over I think. And as you say, light and energy do go together, and a painting must, I think, emanate light, and by emanating light, it will also emanate energy. But it's of a different kind to what a young man does, I think. Now, there are exceptions of course, there are always

exceptions; depends what you call a young man. Van Gogh is full of energy and light. However, he died I think, was it thirty-seven? Thirty-seven I think. He's still a young man in a way; he's not Titian at ninety. Whether...it's immaterial, because one doesn't know, whether you can contain and continue energy of that kind into your forties, fifties, sixties and seventies, I don't think you can. I can't think of any artist who's done it. Picasso's the obvious example of somebody who's contained energy of different kinds throughout his life, but it wasn't the same. [pause]

And again, picking up on something we talked about last time, we talked about you being up in Scotland doing the work on the...

Flying boats.

Yes.

Yes.

And working on the shore.

Yes.

And the fact that you didn't draw at all during that time, and you tried to not talk about being an artist.

Yes.

But the sea later came into your work didn't it.

Yes it did, very much so.

Why did that happen, and was it related to being in Scotland?

No. No it wasn't. I think it had to do again with light, the painting of light, and also, like the slightly later paintings, of figures in rooms with light, light really making and

destroying an object at one and the same time. So the sea does that continually. It's full of light, and it is light which is constantly changing. And if you like, it was like an object dropping to bits, you know, as it breaks and scatters, it comes at you as something quite, quite heavy, when you see it coming towards you, and then suddenly it's dissolved. And I think maybe that interested me.

But had you suddenly spent time with the sea again, or was it the memory of the sea?

You mean recently?

No, when you did the paintings in...

When I did the paintings in the Sixties?

...the Sixties wasn't it.

No, I didn't spend time with the sea then. I was living in London. No. I think it was just a way of thinking that carried over into whatever I painted at that time. So I painted... Funny, you mention the train with the water running down. I mean I painted a window with water running down it, because that seemed to be something... I mean it's very nearly abstract, really, isn't it, that image is abstract really. I think it was the beginning of breaking down the idea of an object or an image. I might even have been thinking without thinking of Monet's cathedral. It's possible.

When you say you did a painting of a window with rain running down it...

Yes.

Was the window itself in the painting?

Only as a, a division. In other words, there was...I think there was one division, not four divisions but one division, and I think it was...I think it was...yes I think it was vertical, the division. I don't think it would have been horizontal, because, that would

stop, it would help to stop the, the flow from top to bottom, so the chances are that it was vertical.

And would the window frame have been in?

No, not the...not then, no, I wouldn't have thought of doing that. I would have thought of doing that later but not then.

So in other words, the glass would have gone to the border of the painting?

Yes.

There is no other border?

No, no other border.

And what kind of light was behind it, what was the colouring?

White. It was a white painting, basically.

And naturalistic, or not?

Well, I mean if I said to you, if I said to you, this is a painting of rain running down a window, yes, in a way, but I would never say that. I would leave that. I don't know what I called it at the time. [pause] That's being too explicit you see, by saying that to somebody; I try to give titles that aren't explicit in that way. Just as I gave titles later, which I added up the forms in the picture and just called it, 72, what was it? I've even forgotten the name of it. Maybe *72 Movements* or, *54 Major and 25 Minor Movements*.

I was interested in some of the major and minor titles.

Mm.

And particular ones where the major seems to refer to quite solid blocks of colour and the minor are more delicate forms. Was that what made the difference between major and minor?

It might have done, I can't tell you now, it's so long ago, but it very likely was so. Just as when I called some of them *Sounds and Silences*. I mean that, that's...that's partly due to my interest in music at that time, musicians like Webern and Berg, particularly Webern of course where silence is just as important as noise, and so you get a whole piece where suddenly there's no music at all, and then it comes on again. So, maybe, maybe that interested me, I don't know, but I called them *Sounds and Silences*. Now, I think some critic said, 'We presume that the areas not containing forms are silences.' Well he could presume that I suppose. (laughs) And yet I said myself when I was, somewhere I was writing about it, that sometimes the silences become sounds and the sounds become silences. So it's not always as obvious as what he was saying. I can...I can see what he's saying, and maybe at times I did use it in that way, but not always. I mean you can have a great deal of movement within a work which is quiet and silent. And you can use a colour which is very noisy; it may not contain anything but it's noisy in relation to other colours. So the title can either set the imagination working in a particular way, which I hope it does, I mean, when I call a painting *Summer Sensation*, I really mean that; I don't mean that there's the sun and there's the grass, and I'm lying on the beach or something like that, but, it can be a sensation. Everybody knows what that means, I think everybody does anyway.

On the whole, the atmosphere of your work is pleasure, so, when you say Summer Sensation, by looking at the painting I would assume that's nearly always a good sensation.

Yes.

You're not...you're not painting shudders.

No, that's right. I try not to do that. I try to be optimistic, the painting, I'd like it to be optimistic. It's not always so, sometimes there's a note of despair in part of it maybe, which I let happen if it's got to happen, because, I don't think it matters, it

only in a way highlights the other part. But I think optimism is very important. First of all it's...it's of course partly a balance to my own, at times despair. I think we do use a balance in some...we have to use a balance in some way. Otherwise you become a mental depressive, or, or the opposite of that, constantly laughing at everything, unable to take anything seriously. I mean everybody needs a balance, don't they, I mean, you must do; what do you need as a balance? You must need something. Perhaps your work is your balance, what you're doing now. Is it? Or not? Or is your balance writing? Or going to the theatre, or...

I guess it changes in different periods of one's life.

Yes, of course it does. Yes.

Have you tended to be fairly even?

No. No I haven't, no.

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Thinking about optimism...

Yes.

You're making it sound as though one has a choice.

Yes. You do to a certain extent. For example you have a choice of colour that you use. That makes a difference to the...to the way a person looks at the work, or how I react to the work. I mean colour can do marvellous things to you spiritually I think. I actually think it's possible for it to have a, to have a healing process of some kind, that you can go into a gallery and if you see a good picture, I think the colour can actually change your mood, or on some rare occasions change your life, like hearing a piece of music at a certain time in your life. So you...I think you do have a choice, and I think you have a choice of the forms that you'd use in a painting. Now my own choice of colour, I mean when I was a young man, I think I've said this before, that, I only used those particular colours because they were least expensive; it wasn't a kind of, oh well I'm going to do a, a dark painting, you know. It's just that, I can't use cadmium yellow because it's too expensive. I can't use cadmium red or vermilion, that's too expensive. Or if I do it only occupies that area of a picture. (laughs)

Could you now, if you're feeling low...

Yes.

...can you change your mood by using a colour that doesn't correspond to how you're feeling, but can take you with it?

Yes, I can, yes. I very often would use a colour as contrast, as I said earlier, that, it might enhance something else happening in the picture, like the movement or the, or the fact that part of a picture is a bit crazy, you know?

If part of a picture has become a bit crazy, does that mean that's how you will be feeling?

Yes, it might be. A feeling of *joie de vivre*. I think the painting, I did two paintings called *Faisons-nous Folies*; you being French will know what that means. Do you know what that means, *Faisons-nous Folies*? Perhaps you don't. I'll tell you in a minute anyway, but, why I'm saying this is because, I took, we both of us took some kind of French lessons locally, because we were interested in the language and thought we'd try and brush up on it, and I opened one of the books one day and one of the stories in the book, a man said to his wife, '*Faisons-nous folies*' one day, when they were going out. And I thought, knowing what that meant, because I looked it up, what it meant, I thought, I think that's marvellous. It's like *joie de vivre*. And I did two paintings which are in that book, and I used the letters, *faison-nous folies* in the painting. And it set the mood for the painting. Which is a bit crazy, part of it, but it's got that feeling of *faison-nous folies*. Now, when I first used it, I thought it meant, let's go mad. It was translated for the man saying it to his wife as, 'let's go mad', do something strange, unusual, let's... He was referring to spending a lot of money on going to a café, I mean, so 'let's go mad'. Now, I mentioned it quite a long time later to someone who most likely knows French as well as you, or if not better, he said, 'It doesn't just mean that; it does mean 'let's go mad', but it also means 'let's celebrate'. Well I thought that was even better, I was even more pleased, that it should mean that. What did you think it meant? You thought it meant 'let's celebrate'?

I thought it meant sort of, 'let's push the boat out', which is supposed to be near[??].

Yes, well that's the same thing isn't it really, 'let's push the boat out', yes, exactly. But I'd never do a painting writing, 'Let's push the boat out'. (laughs) Even if I'd lived up there in the north. (laughs)

Actually going back to boats, we've slightly gone back to the sea. Just to follow my question. Now you're living with the sea so close...

Yes.

...does the sea feed into you, not necessarily by going to look at it, by being there?

Yes. Not just the sea, but the whole...the whole ambience of the seaside and the front. Go down there in the summer and, the activity is unbelievable. Unbelievable. There's yachts, there's people water-skiing, there's people swimming, there's people with hardly any clothes on lolling about. It's so un-English, it's unbelievable. And it's so active. And somebody who actually came down here, I think it was Prunella Clough, said, 'I've just been along the front coming here,' she said, 'it's full of your paintings.' I mean I, I hadn't thought that, but, I know what she meant by that, and I think, you can't help but be influenced by the visual world in some way, or, not only the visual world, but everything. As Picasso said when he picks up a newspaper, it can influence you. And I think that happens whether you are aware of it or not. I don't think I could have painted those pictures in London. I painted similar pictures but not like that, you know?

What do you think the difference is?

Optimism. And colour, particular colour. I decided, I made a definite decision to push colour to a more extreme position than I've ever used before, and I hope I still carry that out, if I can.

How often do you actually see the sea?

I used to see it every day, because I used to walk down there after, I used to paint in the morning and walk down there after lunch, but I don't do that now so much. Though I see quite a lot of it, I do go down there quite a lot, particularly in the summer. I like to sit in the cafés, the outside cafés, make believe I'm in Nice or Biarritz or somewhere. (laughs) I like watching the beautiful people go by.

Do you go out every day?

I don't now, no. We try to go out a lot if we can, try to walk a lot. It's very important to keep moving, remember that.

And, just before we go away from things we're talking about now, who was the person in Sunderland who was your great supporter who you, which led to the catalogue with the poet?

Chris Carroll[ph] his name was. He ran the Sunderland Arts Centre. Made a very good job of it. He not only was responsible for exhibitions of painting and sculpture, but he did film, poetry, poetry readings, music, you know, a whole, a whole area of the arts. He did it very well.

And how did he come into your life?

He wrote to me one day and said, would I be interested in showing there? He'd been interested in my work for quite a long time he said. So he came to see me. I don't know what's happened to him now. He's no longer up there. I think... He did come down here, I saw his name once on the, at Southampton, their festival, Southampton Festival, he had something to do with that, but I've never seen him, or heard from him since. But then he came to see my work in London, when I lived in London, and responded to it. I had a disastrous private view up there, but not for the reasons I gave in Hull. I arrived there the day before, and, he was putting me up in his place, and he was delivering an etching somewhere, he asked me to come with him in the car, and we arrived at this place, I don't know whether it was a gallery or where it was; maybe it was the gallery. And he handed the etching, which was framed, to me, and said, would I hold this and bring it out while he got out of the car and locked it. And as I came out of the car, I caught my leg in the, a strap, and I started to fall with the etching in my hand, like that. And I actually fell like that onto the pavement, holding the etching up. But I damaged my, my thigh very painfully, pulled it or something. So believe it or not, I had to spend the private view, because I couldn't stand for a long time, sitting in the small, in the small room, the office, off the private view. (laughs) So anybody who wanted to speak to me, had to come in there and talk to me. Absolute disaster, on that level.

Sounds like being a priest.

Terrible. Yes, absolutely.

And, were there people there who responded?

Oh yes, it was very good. Yes, I mean, there were people who went to the arts centre. Yes, it was good.

So, how do you feel about exhibiting? I mean it's obviously a very vulnerable moment, especially being there on a private view.

Mm.

Is it...how do you approach it?

I don't want to exhibit outside London. I think it's a waste of time and energy to exhibit abstract work outside. I mean all right, abstract work is for an élite of a kind, well it's for a very small audience at the moment. It has been for a long time in England. So, the energy you put into preparing an exhibition, framing it, all the meeting of people and that, it's exhausting to be quite honest. To do that book was exhausting. So it has to be really worthwhile, which fortunately the book was, because it's so visual, it's marvellous in that way. It has to be worthwhile. And it's only worthwhile, in my experience so far, in London, nowhere else. They, a long time ago, Sixties, early Sixties, they gave me an exhibition in Sheffield, and they arranged for somebody who was working at the gallery to give a talk to the local arts group in Sheffield on my work. And the work was sent up there. It arrived the day before. And, when we arrived, funnily enough I arrived, there was my wife, and also this Portuguese poet and his wife, we went up together. We arrived at the gallery for the talk and exhibition, and, I was met at the door by the attendant, the museum attendant, he said, 'You're Mr Smith?' I said, 'Yes.' He says, 'You can't go in.' (laughs) I said, 'Why not?' He said, 'Oh Miss...' I've forgotten her name, 'is giving the talk, and when the work arrived yesterday she knew nothing about your work. It wasn't what she was expecting, and she didn't know what to say. And she doesn't want you to hear what she's saying to these people.' (laughing) I thought that was marvellous. Oh God! marvellous. And, all right, the talk ended and then we went in for the private view. And she apologised, apologised profusely, but she just said, 'I

just couldn't stand it, I thought you might be totally horrified about what I might say, because I'm not familiar with the work at all.' So is it worth it? Is it really worth it, you know?

When you say she couldn't stand it, you mean she couldn't stand not knowing what to say...

Mm.

...or she couldn't stand the work?

Oh I don't know about that. I don't know whether it was because she couldn't stand the work. I don't think she could understand the work at all.

Did anyone ever tell you what she had said?

No. No, they didn't. Nor did I ask.

But did you get no better feedback than that from the whole exhibition?

None at all. One man came up to me and said, 'This painting, this written painting, I don't understand it. I see no reason why you shouldn't have just painted a question mark.' Well, what can you say to that? You know, what can you say to it?

But you must have felt dreadful.

No, I just, I just...I mean, the audacity of people like that amazes me, absolutely amazes me. Just because they belong to Sheffield art group, does it mean they know anything about it? They certainly don't know more than me about it. So they won't be going along to the man building their house and telling him he's not doing it right, and why didn't they do a question mark instead of build a house?

You sound as though you're very resilient.

You have to be, that's what you learn when you go to art college, particularly the Royal College, you learnt how to survive, and that's very important. It's very important for any student to learn how to survive.

Did you ever have moments when you didn't think you would survive?

(laughs) No, I was too interested in the subject. I mean that's the marvellous thing about it, for both my wife and myself. No matter how despondent we get, we can go into the studio and do something about it.

And how did you find the most recent exhibition at Angela Flowers?

How did I find what?

The most recent exhibition at Angela Flowers.

That was, I mean that was, the private view was very enjoyable. I mean there were people... The good thing about a private view is that you see people and friends that you haven't seen maybe for years. It's quite nice to see them again. So there's that point about it. There's also that, people who know your work, they have a positive response, and people you don't know. For example I met William Scott's son. Now when I knew Scott, his son was about this big, so to meet him as a married man, now in his thirties, or even forties perhaps, was of interest, and, his reaction to the painting was very...very positive, and, he remarked on how young it was. I mean he wasn't being disparaging, he could have been disparaging but he wasn't. He meant that as a compliment, you know. And, OK, some of the reactions were very very good. Now, the lunch that was given for the book, that was a different matter altogether. I enjoyed the lunch. The private view was in two, two places. As you know, there was Chambers showing across the road, and myself on the other side. Now the private view, the lunch place for the book started at Chambers' side, which was his private view, and then came across to my side to have the food in the big hall as well as the work. That was depressing. I saw two people – no three people, actually go round and look at the work. They'd come for the lunch. (laughs) Not for the work. That, I found that... It doesn't depress me because it's my work, that they're not looking at it;

it depresses me because, their lack of curiosity, that's what's amazing. I mean when I go to an exhibition I look at it. I may not like it, but I'm curious, what's this man doing, how is it painted?

It's also always interesting to know whether the people who don't look realise they haven't, whether it ever occurs to them.

No, I don't think it does. I don't think so. I think they glance as they're eating.

Who were the three who looked round?

I don't know. I mean they also sat down and had their meal eventually, but I mean, I don't know who they were. I didn't know them. I just had a.....

[break in recording]

Now you're switched on.

What's...just going back to this lack of curiosity, that really does, it really amazes me with people. I mean maybe they're not curious about anything. But, it's as though they, they know what they want to see before they see it. I mean some people come here in this house and they never look at the pictures at all. Now, I know that's, that's an English trait, because they think it's impolite to look at people's possessions. I'm afraid I don't suffer from that. When I enter a house, I start looking at the things they've got, on the wall or the...all kind of things. Because I'm curious. Why aren't people curious? What is it? Is it an English trait particularly? Something to do with bad manners? Or is it that they don't really, you know, unless they, unless they recognise something, they don't want to know? And does it run through all their lives, with everything, not just art and music? Is it that they are just not curious about anything, that they like blinkered lives? What do you think?

Well, funnily enough I've been recording a very distinguished Rumanian, and he's got lovely things in his house which I'd very obviously looked at whenever I was in a room, and, I was asking him about what he'd seen in somebody's house when

he'd been there to dinner, and he'd said, 'Well I never like to look at what's on people's walls.' (laughs)

Well there you are.

And so I felt very embarrassed. But, so certainly they're in Rumania as well.

Yes.

But, I mean one of the reasons I was asking about the most recent show was actually not so much the reactions of people, but what it felt like seeing the work in that space and seeing the work altogether.

Yes, seeing it in that space. I'd never shown that side of the gallery before, and I liked it very much, to see it in that space, to be able to run from one picture to another, some of them hung together, as they're about a similar thing. And I think it was good to put some of the early works in the little room, thought that was a good idea. That was quite good. I mean what, I think what the gallery would like to see would be a retrospective of my work, but in that space, it's impossible to do that, so, to do it the way they did with a few things from the Sixties and Seventies was ideal I think. They will never...they can't do a retrospective. I mean you need a vast area, you need... I mean to do a retrospective of my work, you need about, well, maybe 200 works to do it properly, and to hang it well. I thought this was hung very well incidentally, I thought they made a good job of it. Did you feel that when you saw it?

Yes, I wondered if you'd been involved.

No, not at all, no, so that when I went there I was pleasantly amazed, you know, that was nice. I thought they did it very well indeed. I mean there's a lot of work that they didn't show, that's not the whole of it; there's at least, there must have been twenty other works that they could have put in, that aren't on show.

And you weren't part of the selection either?

No. Ah well, I mean when they came here, I mean he would ask me whether, what I thought about that, or whether, have that or that or that or that. But, usually we agree on that. When we don't agree, he lets me have my way on it.

Who's 'he' in this instance?

Matthew, Matthew Flowers. Who's come to really respond to my work over the years. I mean he really does respond to it genuinely, not because he's a dealer or anything, I mean he has them hanging in his own house, which says a lot for him, you know.

How did you come to be with the gallery?

Through Bryan Robertson. I didn't have a gallery for about, I think seven years. I was at Fischer Fine Art before that, and it closed down. Fischer gave up being a gallery owner. He was a writer in actual fact, young Fischer's a writer, quite a good writer as well. I mean he gave me one of his books at the opening, and I was quite impressed with it. I mean you know how you can feel, oh my God! what's this going to be like? And I've got to say something about it in a week's time. I was quite impressed. So I couldn't...I couldn't find another gallery. It's not easy to find a gallery as you get older unless you're commercially viable. The first thing they ask you when they come down to look at the work is, 'Do you pay VAT?' Like a fool I didn't realise what they were asking. I said, 'No, I used to, but my God! I'm glad I don't now, it's such a bloody bore to start with, as well as having to pay an accountant to do it for you.' God! how innocent can you get. They ask that question because it means one thing – actually it doesn't, but to them it does: it means you earn a certain amount of money every year. Which I did for about two years, I earned that amount of money. It's now gone up, it's astronomical now, so I don't even get anywhere near it. But, that's why they ask. Anyway, so Bryan Robertson, he approached one or two places, and, then he eventually approached Matthew Flowers, mainly because, they needed, they needed a mature artist at that time. By mature I mean, someone who's been around a long time in the art world, in the art scene in London; they hadn't got anybody like me. I don't mean because I was an abstract painter, just that kind of age group. You know, they had lots of young artists, and he thought they ought to

balance it out more. And they, they actually saw the sense of that. And since that time of course they have balanced it out much more. I mean they've got much older people now and a lot of young people as well, and it's much better for that. And they've also got...I was the only abstract artist when they took me on; now it's changed. So they came down to see me here, and what's amazing is that, I mean I'd known of Angela's gallery for years and years, and I'd been there, but I'd never met her, never met her at all. So meeting her this time was the first time I'd met her. And, they were interested in the work, and they said they would show it. And so it went on from there. Since then they've added, well as you perhaps know, they've added all kinds of different artists to the gallery, which has expanded it in a way. They sell mainly figurative work, but that's true of most London, or English galleries, and always has been. The English really think that abstract art is a con, you know. They think you can't do it properly. (laughs)

So is it a good gallery for you?

[pause] Well, they are the only dealers who've, who've been exceedingly good to me, supporting my work, and helping me financially. They've helped me in every way more than any other gallery that I've ever been at, and I've been at a lot of galleries, unfortunately. It's best to be with one gallery all the time if you can, but that wasn't to be my, my lot. Now, space-wise it's perfect, absolutely perfect, it couldn't be better. I've been at galleries, many galleries before, and they're always, they always looked too crowded, for the kind of work that I produce. I mean really I'd like even more space. It's...I mean, financially it's not possible for them to do it, but really I'd like maybe over six feet between each painting, so it can be seen alone, and then alone again, like that. It's asking too much. Except from a museum, you can only ask that at a museum. But they've been exceedingly kind and considerate, and given me tremendous support, you know. So what more can you ask than that?

Did you get any surprises seeing the work hung together?

No, I'll tell you what I do...I'll tell you what sometimes does surprise me, if they've got a lot of work that hasn't been shown, that isn't in my show, which happens this time as well as the last time, and suddenly they bring one out in a mixed exhibition of

gallery artists, and I may not have seen it for three or four years, that gives me a shock. Usually a pleasant shock. I yet haven't had a bad shock. (laughs)
Fortunately.

And if you're saying that you're now paying VAT again and it's all astronomic, it suggests that Flowers is rather good at selling.

I'm not paying VAT.

Oh right.

No no no, I don't pay VAT. I only paid it for two years. A long time ago, when the woman who used to be in charge of the Contemporary Art Society, buying...she was buying for, for banks and firms who were investing in art, and they were asking her advice about what to buy, and she was a great supporter of mine, and she sold them a lot of work of mine at that time. And of course, because it was done through the Contemporary Art Society, I hadn't to pay any commission, so if I sold a picture, I got, well, virtually all of it. So for those two years I had to pay VAT. No, I don't pay it now. Lots of their artists do pay VAT, they're all figurative artists. But now, now to pay VAT, I think it's...you have to earn over £52,000 a year I think it is. Now for an artist, that means he's got to be selling over, at over £100,000 a year. You have to be pretty successful to do that, as you can imagine.

Have you had any collectors who've been with you during your whole career, or is it nearly always different?

Always different. I don't, can't think of anybody.

End of F9413 Side A

F9413 Side B

I can't think of anybody who's kept collecting. They fall in love with a period, for some reason or another, and then they can't move along from it. And that period might be the past or it might be now. And they can't understand where one's come from, the early work, to where one is now. But that's because they don't know a lot about art history. I mean if you think of any, as far as I can think of, any abstract artist has always had a figurative beginning, always. Mondrian, figurative artist; Malevich, figurative artist, though he actually went back to figuration towards the end of his life, but that's, that's another matter. If you live in Russia and want to survive, you've got to rethink everything. (laughs) Kandinsky, figurative artist. I mean it's a way of, it's a way of development, that's all, it's not, it's not unusual.

What about the scale on which you work on now, it's got bigger and bigger, and yet there's also some very very tiny works.

Mm. I like working within the two scales, small and large. I'd like to work much larger. There is a painting...you didn't...oh you didn't go to the...there was a mixed exhibition where I had a very very large painting, I don't think you went to that, before this exhibition, about two months before it, and it was a painting, I think I told you, I'd had it rolled up for twenty years upstairs in the attic. I haven't seen it since the Seventies. Did you see that exhibition, or not?

No, I couldn't go to that one.

No.

And we talked about it coming up when I was here last time over lunch, but not on tape. So could you say it for the tape?

It's, it was painted in the Seventies, so I, I had to roll it up to get it out of the studio, it was too big to get out of the studio. I rolled it up and put it in the attic. And, then, Matthew thought he'd like to see it, so I sent it down to the gallery and they, their man who, their young man who looks after that side of the organisation, unrolled it and put

it on the stretcher that I sent them, and he actually, in the stretching of it, he actually tore part of the corner. Fortunately it didn't damage the painting. It wasn't entirely his fault, because he told me that, because it was so old, and had been rolled up, the linen had shrunk, so it was slightly, not quite as big as the stretcher, and what it really needs is a new stretcher. However, he managed to, I presume he put... I mean if it had happened to me, I would have put a backing on the torn part and then repaired it from the front; whether he did that I don't know. But it was all right. So, they re-stretched it. It was...it was twelve feet by, it was twelve feet by eight feet, and it...well it's in the book actually, the painting. And, for me of course, after twenty years, it was amazing to see this picture, I mean to find that I was still interested in it. And I thought it was...yes, I think possibly the best picture of the Seventies I'd done. And, that was a surprise to see that. But usually, I'm so familiar with the paintings, it doesn't give me a shock, you know.

What's the name of this painting?

It's in there. Pass me the book and I'll tell you. A very pale colour with reds.

So, we're looking at Bridge number 3, 1980, on page 52 of Norbert Lynton's book.

Yes. There are two more pictures before that, which are smaller; the same format, they're not in the book, those.

Actually I was looking at that one for a while, working, trying to work out these pieces.

Which pieces are those?

The grey oblongs.

Yes.

Because I read them at first as rolls, but they're not, are they?

No, they're not. No, they're just fading out colours from white to grey to black to white to grey.

How do you achieve that?

Just slowly.

Are you using a brush?

Yes. Yes. Yes I always use a brush. I don't use a spray. You can't...in actual fact you couldn't get that particular quality with a spray.

Gosh, I'm amazed.

Pardon?

I'm amazed.

You're amazed, good.

When you say slowly...

Yes.

...how slowly are we talking about?

You mean to paint an area like that?

Well...

You mean one area, or the whole picture?

I suppose I mean one. I mean there was one I was particularly going to use to ask you about it. On page 95, Vertical Inventions, 1997.

Yes.

On the borders where you have this white grey to black...

Yes.

I was particularly interested in that. Again, this is not done with anything but a brush?

It's done with a brush, yes.

And how, I mean it is a sort of daft question but I mean, is this weeks' and weeks' work?

No, no no. No, I mean an area like that, the actual border of that painting would be done in a day. In actual fact, in a way it can't... I mean it might, it might take a week if I change it, but if I don't change it, it has to be done...it has really to be done in a day, because of, you want to see the whole of it in relation to what's inside. Because that coloured border is the final statement after what you've produced inside. Well more or less, that's not entirely true, because I do make adjustments within that painting. Some of the small forms are added later, and some taken out. But that, that part of the border is incredibly important, to set the mood of what it's coming into contact with and set the mood of the whole painting. The same with, there is a picture with tiny forms, it's a summer, a long painting that's in there, I think you've passed it actually, I think that's the *Summer Sensation*. Actually that was in the small room, do you remember? A big painting in a small room. Little forms. The border round that is absolutely essential to it, it sets... Without the borders it would be a totally different mood to the painting. It would be rather, by comparison rather sweet; the border gives it a sharpness.

So you're almost in what Brecht was doing as an alienation technique.

Alienation. Yes, that's true. Yes I know what you mean by that, yes.

And can you just literally tell me, still looking at Vertical Inventions, how you achieve this surface? I mean is the whole of the area painted white first and then you add, or how do you do it?

No, the whole of the area is white because of the canvas, the primed canvas is white. So you start from white. I very likely in that, if you take that particular area, I very likely just started on the left-hand side, and decided after grading it to white, I must change the tempo, so it gets darker, it's a darker grey, darker black, darker grey, back to white again; change the tempo again, light grey, slightly darker but not as dark as the previous grey, light grey, to white again, to light grey and finish with a black. Now the black belongs to the other one, the other border coming down, but because it's black it also belongs to that. [pause] No it doesn't. Yes it does. I thought for a minute it didn't belong to that, but it does.

And for each of the black and the greys, are you mixing colours?

Yes. Yes all the time, yes. You have to to kind of, gradually slightly change them.

So the colours aren't layered, they're different mixes?

The colours aren't...?

Layered.

Layered?

You're not building from a white.

No. Well yes, yes in a way. I mean when I get...starting with the grey, now, starting with the grey on a white, on a white piece of canvas, so it goes to white, I paint it white, I don't leave it white canvas, I paint it white, then I grade it again to grey. It's a kind of, you invent as you go along with the piece. But you also invent in relation

to what's around it and what's above it, and the kind of mood that you want to set in that area.

But to go from pale grey to dark grey...

Yes.

...is your dark grey achieved because you've mixed it...

Yes.

...or you've got pale grey beneath it and you just add...?

No. No, it's mixed. Now we must finish, if you don't mind.

End of F9413 Side B

F9459 Side A

Recording with Jack Smith on May the 30th, May the 29th, 2001.

[break in recording]

If I may as usual, could I just test the recording levels. Have you any idea what today's date is?

Any idea what?

What today's date is.

I believe it's the 29th of May.

And the year?

2001.

[break in recording]

You were just mentioning Derrick Greaves, because he's had an exhibition, and you said you had written to him. Are you in quite a lot of correspondence with each other, or not?

No, not at all. No. We drifted apart when he moved from London, I think he went to live in Woburn first, and therefore we saw much less of each other. It's only recently that I've actually had contact with him. He, I sent him a private view card for my exhibition, and he phoned me on the evening of that, of that private view, just to wish me luck, and I said, 'Perhaps we could all meet in London for lunch one day.'

Because he never comes down here, and I never go up there. So when he sent me the private view card, I wrote and wished him luck, and I mentioned again, the possibility of meeting in London. And so far I haven't... I told him just to think about it. I mean

I don't know how often he comes to London. I know his son lives in Islington, so whether he comes to see him very often, I don't know.

I think it might be more the other way round, that the son goes up there.

Oh does he?

It's a shame, because you're in parts of the country that don't link up very easily by train or anything.

Mm. Absolutely.

You, I would have thought you would both get quite a lot from seeing each other's work and being able to talk.

I don't know. I just don't know about that. I like...he had the exhibition at Islington, at a gallery, what was that, two years ago, or three years ago? Time passes so quickly. We went to see that, and I liked it very much, some very good pictures there.

What was the work that he showed, can you remember?

Well it was all abstract work. None of the figuration that he used to deal with. I thought it was, some very good things, some very small pieces which were excellent, you know. I don't think, he didn't do very well financially, I know that, because he told me it hadn't, and, in fact he's left the gallery now, so I don't...I don't believe he has a gallery any longer. Do you know that, or not?

I think he hasn't. I'm just trying to remember. And he had a piece in the Redfern.

Yes, you told me that.

Yes. But I...I don't think there's anybody steady. You've shown in the Redfern, haven't you?

I have shown for... The reason for that was, I went to Matthiesen Gallery about 1960, and the person running it, not the owner but the person running it, was someone called John Singh[ph], and, we got on very well together, I liked him very very much; I mean he was kind of, the last of the gentleman dealers. And, I think I had two, two exhibitions there, and then, Matthiesen himself died, so the gallery closed. Now John, John Sing[ph] went from there to the Marlborough Gallery, and, I went with him. When I say I went with him, that doesn't mean that he just took me there, I mean, he suggested to Fischer that he gives me a show, and that's what happened. I had one show there, which was not successful at all. And the Marlborough will do anything for an artist as long as he's successful; if not, you're put on the list of artists, but not necessarily ever shown. And this was back in the Sixties; I don't know what they do now. I must say I don't like the artists they show now at all. But they're totally different people anyway. So, I went there because of John Sing[ph], was there for one exhibition, and then they wouldn't show me again. They also got rid of John Sing[ph] because, they thought he had connections which would be useful to them. I mean, he was a man-about-town, you know, I mean he would...if Princess Margaret wanted an escort, he would escort her, that kind of situation. And he went to the Redfern Gallery, which he had always liked. So as I was no longer showing at the Marlborough... They gave me a three-year contract at Marlborough; at the end of the three years, I asked them whether they were going to renew it, and they, would...they messed around with it, and I said, 'I don't want to be in one of your artists on your list, who are never shown,' so we came to an agreement to, to move away. And I went.

*Had they done anything actively to sell your work even when it wasn't on exhibit?
Did they, did they make any effort?*

Oh yes. In fact from the Marlborough, it went to Sweden, went to Gothenburg, with a sculptor who showed at Marlborough called... It's gone. Just gone. A young sculptor anyway, a good sculptor. So we had a double show in Gothenburg Museum. And that was through the Marlborough, somebody had come over from Gothenburg, seen the work and decided to show it over there. Gothenburg Museum bought two of my works. I received more encouragement from Gothenburg as an unknown artists than as a known artist in England. That doesn't surprise me, I mean I think I've told you

before that the English are totally un-visual. At least in places like Sweden and Germany, and Italy, I think...I think they actually are more visual, they respond to, to visual image much more than the English do, unless the English has connotations of literary overtones, you know what I mean, to the picture. So that's what happened. And then I, I came...that finished in Gothenburg, and, because of John, I went to the Redfern. That was absolutely hopeless. First of all it's too small for my work. My work wasn't...I'm not saying my work was big, but anything over a foot or two foot is too big for that gallery, I think. You can't get away from it, as you know. Or it's all right for prints. The corridor is absolutely useless. Absolutely, I mean it's impossible. Anyway, I think I showed twice there. And then, I was, one day I was looking at an exhibition in... Now Fischer, who ran the Marlborough, you know he had this row about Rothko? Maybe you've heard about it. Fischer didn't have anything to do with the row, it was his, his partner, Lloyd I think his name was. There was some bust-up with...there was some bust-up with Rothko, and I don't understand exactly what it was, but it was very serious anyway. And, Fischer moved out of Marlborough because of it, and opened a gallery called Fischer Fine Art, somewhere behind, I think somewhere behind Green Park.

That was a lovely space wasn't it.

Marvellous. Marvellous. And I was in there one day and Jeffrey Solomon[ph], who I'd met, who used to work at the New Arts Centre in Sloane Street, was now at Fischer Fine Art. And as I was leaving the building he said, 'Where are you now?' I said, 'I'm at the Redfern, but I'm not going to show there again, it's no good.' He said, 'I'd like to show you.' So I said, 'Right, that's fine, come and see my work,' and that's what happened. He came. Do you know him, have you ever met him?

No; I think I might have corresponded with him, but not in any significant way.

Yes. A very nice man, I liked him very much.

What's he like?

Very kind. Sensitive. I think his real love is the theatre. He's gay, I think he lives with a younger man who is in the theatre, opera, or something like that, so he goes a lot to the theatre. But he showed me about two or three times, beautifully hung, as you know, a beautiful space. And, well they sold one or two things. But it wasn't...it wasn't the policy of that gallery to show abstraction, they tended to show very figurative work, and I'm sure I wouldn't have been there except for Jeffrey[ph]. Well then Fischer, Fischer's son, who was running the gallery, is a writer; I didn't know this at the time. I only knew it at my first exhibition, I was talking to him at the private view and he mentioned he was a writer, and I said, 'Can I, can I come across your books anywhere, have they been published in England?' And he said, 'I'll send you a copy,' of one of his books. Whether it was his first book I don't know. Anyway, it was very good, to my surprise, and delight, I was able to say I enjoyed it very much. And if anything, I don't know whether you remember that period in French writing which was called, it was called French New Writing, people like Nathalie Sarraute and, the name's gone, the man who made a film as well.

Robbe-Grillet.

Robbe-Grillet, that's right.

We talked about...

Robbe-Grillet. Well his style of writing was a bit like that, and, it was as good as that actually, I think. Anyway I wrote and told him what I thought of it, and thanked him. But he got bored with the gallery, I mean he wanted obviously to write more or, I don't know, or just retire. I think eventually his wife had more to do with running the gallery than he had. Anyway, he decided to close it, finish with it altogether. And that's what happened. And, funnily enough, by that time Derrick had been taken on by Jeffrey[ph], and he did have one show there of collage drawings, a very good show as well. But when Fischer packed up the gallery, he decided to operate privately from his house. Well he didn't, certainly didn't want to work with my work. And what was amazing is, he didn't want to work with Derrick's work, which was figurative, you know. But he said to Derrick something which I think is disgraceful, he said, 'We want to concentrate on younger people.' (laughs) Well, I think that's ridiculous

really. Anyway that didn't last, I mean we never heard of him since, and the people he actually took on to exhibit work at his home all left, they're no longer with him. I don't even know whether he's still in England.

When you had the show at Marlborough and then the Redfern where things didn't go very well, either because of the way life was, or because the gallery was small or whatever, did you go into it with high expectation and find it very difficult to cope with the response, or, or were you sort of ready for it?

Well, I mean I went into it...it was useful having somebody I knew there, John Sing[ph], that was useful, I thought, because I knew he supported my work. But, I think I did have higher expectations of Marlborough than, than previous galleries. Though before, before that, I've just remembered, I went to the Grosvenor Gallery, which was run by a man called Estorick, who now has left the gallery in London, he's no longer alive, but he'd left his collection of Italian work, Futurist work mainly, to this place in London, which is called the Estorick Gallery. Anyway, I was with him for a short time, and I was on contract with him, because I was ill at that time and couldn't teach. So, I think I mentioned this to you before, he gave me so much money a year. Haven't I?

No, we haven't talked at all. What was the matter with you?

Nervous breakdown.

Seriously?

Yes, I had trouble, kind of, going out. And particularly a fear of speed, like the Underground, that was absolute murder. Funnily enough, in a car, as long as I was driving it was all right, but if somebody else was driving, it wasn't. (laughs)

Had you been aware of that building up?

[pause] No, no what...how it started, it was when we lived in Chelsea, I started, what can only be considered running a slight temperature, and feeling uncomfortably hot.

And I went to the doctor about it, and, because he had romantic ideas about artists, he thought I'd got TB. (laughs) I think that's marvellous. He might...I mean he might have been right, but he wasn't, you know. Anyway, he sent me into hospital to have it checked out, into the TB ward let me tell you. (laughs) And, they checked it out and it was negative. So after a week... Oh, yes, then the...one of the doctors came round and said, 'Everything's negative; we don't understand this, running of a temperature.' He said, 'Where do you live, where did you live before you came to London?' He said, 'Did you live in Derbyshire?' I said, 'No, I lived in Yorkshire, but it's on the Derbyshire border.' I said, 'Why do you ask that question?' He said, 'Oh well there is something that comes from Derbyshire which is a virus that you can pick up from milk.' I mean, I...I just didn't take him seriously. I asked to be discharged, because I felt that, I felt it was a nervous condition of some kind. And so the following day... Oh, I asked this doctor, who was one of the main doctors, would he ask the, the consultant whether I could leave. And he said yes. So the following day, they all came round, a whole group of them, with the consultant, and I said to this doctor, 'Did you ask him about my leaving?' And he hadn't asked him. I mean, that kind of fear, you know. You don't ask the boss anything, you're told what to do. So I asked him as he was there, I said, 'Can I go out? It's...no point in my staying here.' I mean the blood count was normal, nothing wrong. So he said, 'I see no reason why you shouldn't.' So I went out. But, I mean then that started this business of going out, and speed. I mean it took, it...I mean it went eventually. I learnt tricks, I learnt a trick, what to do. I mean the doctor gave me some, I presume they were tranquillisers of the time, I don't know, and they worked to a certain extent, but not entirely. One day I learnt a trick, quite by accident. I got on the Underground train, and I bought a paper, was going into the centre of London, and I started to read the paper, and as soon as I started to read the paper, there was no fear, as though my mind was concentrating on that. And that was the end of it. And I realised by the time I got off the train that as long as I did that, I'd nothing to worry about. And that's what I did in future.

When you say there was no fear, were you feeling fear about something very concrete that might happen, or was it more generalised?

[pause] Yes, I think there was a fear that, that it got to such a pitch that I felt I might collapse, for some reason, that it might affect me physically in some way, which it never did, let me tell you, not at all. But, I mean that's the mind playing terrible tricks. So I couldn't teach. I mean I was teaching at that time and had to give it up. And so I... Ah, now, that, sorry, again, John Sing[ph] was at the Grosvenor Gallery before that, so that's where I first met him. And he actually arranged for Estorick to give me this retainer, for which Estorick would take pictures in exchange for it. And which sounds a reasonable idea, and necessary for me at that time, but I would never, I would never enter such an agreement again, because they take the work and then the exhibition comes and you can't actually put in... They only show what they have, because they want to sell their commitment. So, I mean I might have done better paintings, and I wasn't able to show them. Well as it happened, they did sell enough work to clear the debt, which was a great relief. There was another incident at that time. Before I was showing at Grosvenor, I had an American gallery in New York called Catherine Viviano. Her contact came about through Peter Lanyon, who was already there, and he brought her over to see me when she came to England to see his work, he came up to London with her and she came over to see my work, and she showed me in New York, twice. Now, when the Grosvenor Gallery gave me the contract with the money, they wanted no contact with another dealer, except through them. Well, I had no option, because, I was receiving the money and needed it. So I wrote to Catherine and said, would she mind this, would she agree to this idea? And she wrote back and said no. (laughs) Now, all right. What I find it hard to forgive her for is what happened later. She sent back all the work she had, naturally, she's not going to deal with it, so she sent it all back. But, she did not pay for it. It arrived at London docks, and the first I knew about it was, a letter from London docks saying, 'There are twenty or whatever it was, paintings, here, in crates, waiting to be delivered to you, when you pay the fee.' I knew nothing about that at all, until I got that letter. So again, as I was getting money from the Grosvenor, I had to go and see them and explain it all to them. And they agreed to, they lent me the money to pay to get the pictures back, many of which when I got them back I destroyed actually, which is rather a ludicrous situation. But that's what happened before my eventual break with Grosvenor. And that came about again as I say through John Sing[ph]. So I've had a lot of galleries, unfortunately. I don't think it's good. I mean it's not...I

think it's only been on one occasion my fault, or my decision I should say, and that was to leave, to leave Redfern for, for Fischer Fine Art.

Mm. How did you get the New York gallery for this...?

Through Peter Lanyon, knowing the...knowing Catherine Viviano, that's where he showed. I mean she had heard of my work, she knew of my work.

Did you ever go to her gallery?

No; we were going to New York for the opening of the first exhibition but Sue was taken ill, in fact she was taken ill the day before we were due to leave. I had to cancel the train tickets, plane tickets, everything. But as it turned out, I think it might have been better that we didn't go, except I would have liked to have seen New York, but, I don't know.

You've never been to America?

No, never. No.

And during the time when you had the breakdown, were you able to paint?

Oh yes. No difference at all. Tell you a strange thing. There's an artist called Norman Adams, a Royal Academician, do you know of him, his work?

I know of him, yes.

He's got Parkinson's disease. I'm told, I don't...I don't know him very well, I'm told by a friend of his, that Parkinson's disease does not affect him when he's painting. You know he's got the shakes all the time; it does not affect him when he's painting. How do you explain that? I mean it's marvellous that it doesn't, from his point of view, but it is very strange isn't it.

Extraordinary. But it must have been quite a burden, painting in debt so to speak the whole time, when you couldn't teach. I mean although teaching is a burden...

I wasn't...I wasn't in debt, because they were...the money was being paid in a different way. I mean you might as well, you really might as well call it barter. The only, the only unpleasant thing about it was that occasionally the monthly cheque did not arrive, and then I had to ring him up, and he would say, 'Well come down and we'll discuss it.' I know what that meant, that he wasn't selling the work and he was worried about it, and what was I doing now? Was it likely to be saleable, et cetera et cetera. (laughs)

And did that mean he wanted you to modify the way you were working?

I don't know.

What was the work like at this period?

Oh it was abstract work, yes. [pause] I mean, when I had the exhibition he did sell some. So no, in actual fact I mean maybe I'm doing them an injustice, but I think his wife was, had a lot to do with that attitude. She was connected with Marks & Spencer's, I don't know how but she was; whether she was the daughter of the family. Something or other, anyway. She was tougher than him. I mean he always gave me the money, he would then sit down and write the cheque, but I mean I...it wasn't good having to go there.

Mm.

You know, ring up and it wasn't ready. Why haven't I got it? One needs it every month. That's why I'd never enter it again at all. I mean funnily enough, I mean lots of artists are on that contract, but it only works if they're successful, so the dealer's not losing anything.

How long did this period go on for?

Well it can't have been long, because I only had one show with Grosvenor; it can't have been longer than, than three years.

Mm.

May have only been two years, I don't know.

And in terms of the sudden worry about going out or about speed or whatever, had you had anything like that ever happen to you before?

No.

And did it ever happen again?

No. No it hasn't, fortunately. I think it might have been due to being under a lot of strain at the time. I mean I was, during the Fifties and early Sixties, I was, I was very well known, a lot of...people coming to see me, and interview, and, newspapers and... Things one can do without.

It's easy to say that in retrospect; at the time, did it feel as though you could do without it?

[pause] (laughs) Mm. The thing about work which is not immediately accessible, how I hate that word, but, you know what I mean, work that is not accessible, is that you need, in order to survive, either a very good gallery who projects the work, spends a lot of time doing so, or you also need a champion, someone who is also perhaps constantly writing, and writing about your work whenever you exhibit. And that, that is necessary for, for difficult artists, and I think always has been, and very likely always will be. So to a certain extent you need it, but it's a nuisance, you know?

When you were first realising that you were going to be an artist, when you were still up in Sheffield, presumably you would have had no idea of that aspect. I mean what did you think life would be like?

That aspect didn't exist then. That aspect's only taken... Art has become an industry since the 1960s.

End of F9459 Side A

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What do you think changed it?

Well if you go back to, I suppose the late Forties, so the war, the war has finished in Europe, there were a few galleries around but they were showing people...they would never show a young artist; it would be very unusual if they showed an artist under the age of forty. So in a funny way the galleries, you knew that you wouldn't get shown until you were perhaps that age, if you got a gallery at all. And then... I mean when I showed in the Fifties it was very unusual for someone my age to be showing at all, very unusual. What age was I? I think I was about twenty-five, something like that. And, then of course more younger people started to show, through the Beaux Arts Gallery, and it received a lot of publicity. But I had no idea of that, going back to your first, your question. In the Forties, when I was in Sheffield, one didn't think, one didn't think in those terms at all. I mean it was just going to be a life that one wanted to lead, and, not necessarily in England, because all the art that one was interested in was being done in France at that time. So it was like a...one was following a kind of flame if you like towards something that one knew one had to do in order to have a life, what's called a life, at all. There's a famous saying by, I think it's Pirandello, is that right? Pirandello? Playwright?

Mhm.

'Some people have led a life; I have written plays.' And I often use that, 'Some people have led a life, and I have painted pictures.' (laughs) Because it takes over the whole of one's life, there's no doubt about it at all, fortunately. I mean it opens up whole areas of interest. I think for anybody to go to art school changes their life in a way, even if they don't become artists, I mean they're introduced to things which maybe they will always remember or be interested in, even if they don't do it themselves.

How did the contact with Helen Lassore come about? Because you were still a student at that...

Yes I was still a student.

How did it happen?

I was in my final year at college, and, I knew I was about to leave college. I didn't want... There were certain things you could get at college if they thought you were any good, and that was an extra year, a fourth year there; a travelling scholarship; or one or two prizes. They were the kind of things that happened to students. And I didn't want any of those things, because, first of all I didn't want to go abroad for a year, I was so involved in what I was doing here, I didn't want it broken; I just wanted to leave college and carry on, which I decided to do. And I told, I told Johnny Minton that, that's what I wanted to do. He asked me whether I would like the traveller; that's why I told him that I wouldn't want it, that I wanted to stay here where I was. And, so I knew, well, I'm leaving; I don't want to teach really, I wonder if I could perhaps exhibit some pictures and maybe not teach. I mean that was, that was so innocent, it was unbelievable. So one day I went... By that time, because I was in my final year, I had quite a lot of work available, photographs of work, and I decided to go to one or two galleries that I knew in London. And the first gallery I went to was a gallery which there were people who were considered modern at that time, like Craxton, Minton, Colquhoun, Sutherland, and that was the Lefevre Gallery who showed those artists. Which was unusual at the time, showing that kind of work. So I think I went there first, and I showed the photographs, and he said, 'No, we're not interested in these.' He said, 'I suggest you go to a place called the Archer Gallery,' which tended to show, a small gallery, tended to show French, French Realist art of that particular time. So I went there, after the Lefevre, the same day I went there. And he looked at the photographs, and he said, 'Yes, of course you're not a Realist artist.' (laughs) I thought that was marvellous.

What did he mean?

Well I was painting figures in rooms, and still life objects, but to them, I think to them they must have seemed strange, there was a strangeness about them which wasn't just to do with seeing and interpreting. That's what I can only think about now. And they do look different to Realism of the time, no doubt about that, they look different. It's

not that kind of Realism. If you like, I take a subject and transform it, and there's all kinds of imaginative, imaginative things come into it. Anyway they suggested that I tried the Beaux Arts Gallery, because they said that, she was trying to attract new people. So I went along there, and she said she would come and look at my work, which she did. It was a vast amount of work. I mean the room was covered in work. You could only get through, there were only two channels in the room, one to the table and one to the bed. (laughs) Anyway she came to look at the work, and responded to it, and said she would show it. She said she was trying to introduce new artists and younger artists. So, I told her I was in my final year, but she said, 'Well that's no problem, don't worry about that,' which I didn't, I went ahead and, and had it with her. I can't remember what month it was. I mean the degree show takes place in June, so it had to be, maybe it was May, or...or Easter perhaps, that period. And it received a lot of attention actually, to my amazement. And I think it... The head of painting at college was Rodrigo Moynihan, at that time, and I think he was irritated that a student should have an exhibition without asking permission. I mean I didn't even know you would have to ask permission; in fact you didn't have to ask permission, it didn't exist at that time. But he had met people in London who said, 'A student of yours is showing work at the Beaux Arts.' I mean he did go along and see it, but, it obviously caused trouble, because they had, they must have had a staff meeting, and from that moment on, no student was allowed to show work unless they received permission. Now, you wonder why that is. Well I'll hazard a guess, that it might make a difference to the kind of degree that student gets. Say if the work is received very well, it might make a difference to the grading. If it's received very badly, it might make a difference to the grading. Anyway that's my own thoughts, that it might have been for that reason that they stopped it. Now, my, my exhibition of younger artists was not the first; I think the first was the sculptress Frink, I believe she was the first person to show there, and I followed, I had it the following month. Then she started to take on, after they'd left college she started to take on different people. She took on Auerbach and Kossoff, and Bratby later, and some people from the Slade, Michael Andrews I think. Some of the people I can't remember. She also took on Michael Fossil[ph], a friend of mine, also from college. He was a very good friend of ours, he and his wife; his wife is also a painter. And, she received a lot of publicity because of it, it was something fresh in the London scene, there's no doubt about that. Well, she thought she was running a crusade, this was the trouble, and

didn't want any deviation. The result is that as my work developed and changed, and my interests changed, she couldn't take it. You see I believe you have to, any artist has to abandon a language if it no longer is able to deal with his imaginative ideas, it's essential to abandon that language, otherwise you're tied down to something which is just a heavy weight on you. And that's what I did, I mean I moved into a different, to her a different area. I mean to her it looked abstract, but in actual fact it was not all that abstract. All right, it was her gallery, she could do what she wanted, but it's the way she did it which I did not forgive her for. She put on a show of this recent work, and two days after the opening she sent me a letter saying she no longer wanted to continue showing my work, that it wasn't the kind of work she wanted to show, and it could be shown, that kind of work could be shown at any other gallery in London. So, that was the end of that. But it, it didn't stop there. Oh incidentally, I'd mentioned Derrick to her. Derrick was then in Rome, on the Rome scholarship, and I'd mentioned his name to her, and when he came back she took him on as well. Now, when Michael Fossil[ph] heard what had happened, he wrote complaining to Helen Lassore that he thought she had behaved disgracefully. Her reply to that was to get rid of him, he was thrown out, all his work returned. Then a little later, I don't know how long later, Derrick will have to confirm this, because I don't know how much later, she got rid of Derrick. I think...he'll have to confirm this, but I think I'm right in saying that he suggested to her that she painted the walls white. (laughs) Because it was a better colour to show work against. I mean she had this kind of, terrible... You know the Royal, the National Gallery, or the Royal Academy, this dark red stuff they have? It belongs to a certain period, every gallery had dark red. Right, that's what she had. And then later she had just hessian coloured. But it needed lightening up. I mean, I might be wrong in telling you that about Derrick, but just find out from him. But it was the correct thing to tell her to do, paint it white, and let some light in to the place, and the work would take off, I think. So that, that, that actually didn't finish me with...it did finish me with showing there, but, I think three years, yes three years after that I was approached by Bryan Robertson to show my work at Whitechapel, which he did. She told a friend of mine that she was surprised...she was glad that I had a show, but she was surprised that I hadn't been able to find a gallery. She thought any gallery would take my work. (laughs) And, so I had a show at Whitechapel, which was quite successful. But when I went to Marlborough, the Marlborough, because they thought she had done such a good job

with showing younger artists, gave her a kind of memorial exhibition at the Marlborough, showing the artists over the, over the years that she had shown. So right, my name crops up. And I told the Marlborough that I don't want anything to do with her, after what she did. But then, I said, 'Well all right, because I am with you, I will show a picture in the exhibition, but I must choose it.' What's it to be? They tell her this, she writes to me and says, 'No. I've already chosen the picture that I want them to show.' So I said, 'Well that's no good at all. I refuse to have anything to do with it.' And I told the Marlborough and they said, 'OK, that's all right.' So the exhibition went ahead without any work of mine in it. It didn't worry me in the slightest, but I'm just not going to be pushed around like that, for her to use me in order to push what she thought was important, but not to give an airing to anything that I thought was important.

How had she come over to you at first? Presumably she...she would have been a very different character at the beginning.

Mm. Very supportive. [pause] You have to be, well, you had to have your wits about you, in the sense that, you know, she'd come along and look at your recent work and she'd say, 'Yes, that's very very good, very very good, mm. There's something wrong with that picture, I think it's, the left-hand side, there's something wrong with the painting of that, that chair with the drapery on it. But that still life, there's something wrong with the colour of the biscuits and this, the placing of that.' And I'd just nod and say, 'Yes, I'll have a look at it,' having no intention of changing it. I mean I know what I'm doing, I don't need her to tell me what should be done. However, on her next visit, I mean I...I knew how to play it by that time. I mean I said, 'Well this picture, you were very worried about this and that, and I've worked on the area that you mentioned.' 'Oh yes, it's much better. So much better, yes. Quite all right now, yes.'

And it would be identical?

Oh yes, I hadn't touched it, no intention of touching it. I mean I used, I had enough experience even then to know when a thing was right, from my own point of view.

Now, in retrospect, I might think some things are wrong in an early picture, but that's got nothing to do with her comments, it's something else.

Did you ever see her socially, or was it entirely the professional relationship?

Yes, she sometimes held a luncheon party in the gallery, yes, with different people. I don't think I ever went to her, her flat. Oh she lived...no she lived above the gallery, that's right, she lived above the gallery. She had two sons, one tragically was stricken with polio, and, he's still got it, he became a painter. He does show, I've forgotten where he shows. The other one, I don't know what he did. I did meet him once. He was also critical of what, what his mother had done actually. Oh, and there was a young man there used to help in the gallery. He resigned. (laughing) Which I thought was very brave of him. I mean I said, 'I wish you hadn't,' but, he said, 'Oh no, no it was necessary.'

What happened to him, do you remember his name?

No, I don't, and, I don't know what happened to him, until, I met him in London with Sue in Bond Street, I suppose, it could be ten years ago. He suddenly stopped me, he was with his wife in Bond Street, and said, 'Do you remember me?' And I said, 'Your face is familiar, but,' you know, 'tell me who you are.' And he told me, I said, 'Yes, of course I remember you.' He said, 'Do you remember I left the Beaux Arts because of your treatment?' I said, 'Yes, I do remember that.' (laughs) So we had about five minutes conversation. I don't know what he was doing, no idea, I don't know what he did after that.

And how did you react, when you had the first few years of shows at the Beaux Arts and things were going incredibly well, how did you respond to all of that?

When you say incredibly well, yes, work was being sold, but it wasn't...it was mainly being sold to museums; it wasn't being bought privately.

But it must be a pretty amazing feeling for a young artist to find the work in a museum.

Yes it is, yes, it's quite true. Yes it is, no doubt about that. But there's... You see, my work has always been museum work, I...I realised that more and more. The majority of people who, the majority of private people who buy work, I mean some do buy it, I'm not saying they don't, but some do buy it, but the majority want pictures which disappear into the wall. They don't want it to be assertive in any way. Even if it's figurative, they don't want it to be assertive; it's better if it's figurative, because then they can have some contact, they think they can have some contact with it. If it's non-figurative they have trouble. Those who do buy it are very, I've found, are very very unusual people, except the ones who buy it who think they're going to make some money out of it, and that's a different matter altogether. But that situation can only come about through lots of publicity, and someone, as I said, the champion constantly pushing the work.

I mean you had Berger and Sylvester writing didn't you?

Yes, I did.

What was, what did that feel like?

Well, the thing...let me put it this way. I don't think Berger was a good critic, except that he was so enthusiastic about what he was talking about, that people wanted to go and see it. And this is very...you don't, well I don't often find that in a critic writing now, which I think... Most of them are abysmal, just journalists really who happen to turn to writing about art. They never want, they're not enthusiastic enough to make me want to go tomorrow to see the show. And he was able to do that. Never mind about his political convictions, that's something else, that's something he was concerned with but not necessarily his artists. Now, Sylvester was different to that. He was someone who wanted to produce an article that he was enthusiastic about, but he wanted it to be so well written that practically it became a work of, of writing, an art in its own right. And he was very good at it, I think. One must remember, talking about having a champion, Sylvester launched Giacometti in England, he was the man who made Giacometti famous in England. And also he was the man who made Bacon famous in England.

Did you know him?

Yes, because he wrote about my work for the Matthiesen Gallery, and he wrote about it for the, for the Whitechapel Gallery.

What was he like?

I liked him very much. I mean he really did care about what he was writing. When he was writing for the Matthiesen Gallery, I was living in Putney and so was he at that time. He arrived one morning about eight o'clock, knocking on the door, I opened the door and there was this, this haggard-looking, I mean haggard, he was pretty, a pretty heavy man, tough looking, but, he was kind of green. (laughs) A pale green. With huge bags under his eyes, worse than mine. And, he said, 'I've done the article, I want you to look at it.' He said, 'I've been up all night writing it.' I said, 'It looks like it.' And it was very very good. I mean what I'm trying to say, he took infinite care over it, it mattered to him. It wasn't just a piece of journalism, which it is for most people now. I liked him very much. I mean he had, he had enthusiasm. I mean he was an enthusiast for things. I mean at one point he actually managed to borrow a Soutine landscape. He loved Soutine's work, much more than I did at the time, but he loved it, and he borrowed it and said, 'You must come round and look at it.' And so I went round, and he got it, he said, 'If you like, you can pick it up.' (laughs) Which I did, and looked at it. It was a very nice one actually. He'd already told off his son for picking it up. (laughs) I haven't seen him for years and years and years. When my work changed, he didn't follow it at all. And I haven't, strangely enough I haven't, I haven't met him on any occasion. Not...I mean mainly because I don't go to private views, very rarely, or go to any parties at the Tate where he might be. And he, he kind of projects work which I have no sympathy for now.

Was it a shock that he didn't follow through being interested in your work?

No, a lot of people didn't follow it through.

But it must have been inexplicable to you. For you it obviously grew out of the work you'd done before.

Yes, absolutely.

And it seems incredibly harsh that people couldn't make that journey with you.

Well I don't know. I don't know. I mean we were living in a time where, first of all people like to see the same picture stood in a slightly different way; they like to buy examples, that's why prints are so popular. Go round an exhibition and you see that somebody's sold ten prints, somebody else comes along and will buy another ten. They feel safe, you now? An artist like Rothko for example, I mean, I like his work very much, but he's ideal in the sense that he creates a style that's immediately understandable, after it's already been explained. They don't like, they no longer like artists like Paul Klee or Picasso, who moved through vast areas of visual interest; they feel uneasy, you know. You think you know what... 'Oh yes, I understand this artist, yes, but what the hell is he doing now?' You know, 'This man Paul Klee is doing extraordinary bloody things. Why is he doing those?' Or what's... 'What's Picasso... what's this called? Cubism? What's he doing all that about? I mean he was all right when he was doing Blue paintings and Pink paintings.' You know, that kind of attitude. They don't want to be, let's say, imaginatively upset, in having to rethink certain aspects of, of art, that they may already have made decisions about.

But it would seem to me that there is a path through your work that you would expect people to be able to follow. Did you feel that?

No, I don't think it's as simple as that, but I think that, there's enough artists in the past who have... who have been interested in the visual world, and its exploration, not for it to be so amazing. Nearly every, nearly every abstract artist I can think of, or semi-abstract artist, maybe like Klee, have always been figurative artists, as young people. I can't think of anyone who hasn't.

Do you think you were in a way the victim of the period where the idea of abstract art was relatively new, and that if you were following that same path now, I know you

wouldn't in a way, but if you had been, it might be much more easy for people to accept?

I think it's easier for people to accept a language which has already been written about and discovered by somebody else. I mean it's easy, it's easy now and it was easy in the late Sixties, for people to accept Abstract Expressionism because it was already established in America and had been given.....

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It had already been established as a modern way of thought, and therefore whoever worked using that language would not be considered an outcast.

But do you think...

I mean even now it's possible in England for example to, if an Abstract Expressionist has kind of undertones of the landscape in the work, it's perfectly acceptable to the majority of people.

But it's less the case now that people are expected to be in one camp or another, that you're either figurative or abstract, isn't it?

Yes.

And maybe that was one of the problems of the period.

It's still a problem. The main interest in, the main interest in art even now is figurative, has been for the last ten years, really. Abstract art has become a kind of, underground activity; it's like belonging to the French Resistance.

And what was the transition like for you, I mean I said something that was incredibly simplistic, but how did it feel at the time? I mean again, looking at it in retrospect, where you now know where you were being taken...

Yes.

...is different from how it must have been at the time.

Well if you, if you kind of, if you know that the language you're using is no longer adequate, then you allow, if you like, you believe or let happen imaginative ideas which previously you would not have contemplated at all. I mean there are... I mean I suppose... I mean I still use some of the titles that I used then, like, I might use

Summer Sensation, the idea of a sensation, of some particular thing. It's just a different way of thinking about what the picture can do or say. I mean though I'm...lots of people kind of jump onto this idea that I'm...that I'm...that they're all to do with music. No, it's not that. They are visual music, but that's something else, that's not necessarily mean that I, I listen to some Mozart and think, right, go upstairs and I'll do a Mozart. It's nothing to do with that at all. But for example, when I heard the works of Webern, the idea of all those silences being as important as the sounds, I found that very impressive, and I think it made a difference to the idea of letting whole areas of the picture be empty, in order to highlight just those certain little visual notes if you like. I mean, people say, well you must be steeped in music; that's not true. I am interested, I mean I do, I have listened to a lot, and I'm very...I'm very interested in quite a lot of contemporary music, because, I think I've said somewhere at one time that, my work sometimes seems closer to them, those particular composers, than to a lot of artists.

Mm. But when you say it becomes necessary to effectively jettison the language...

Yes.

...that you might have started with...

Mm.

...if it can no longer express your ideas, again in retrospect, you know that you were able to move on and gradually craft the vocabulary you needed.

Yes. Yes.

But was there a moment when you thought, this vocabulary isn't expressing what I need, but I don't know if I can find another?

Well you've got to, in a funny way you've got to believe in...you've got to believe in your imagination, that it will take you through, as long as you don't get in its way. As long as you don't put up a blockage to it by, what I've sometimes said, it's essential

not to have a belief. Now that sounds like a contradiction, but it's not. A belief can get in the way of an imaginative idea, because you may stop it, you might think, oh well, nobody will understand it, or, maybe I don't totally understand it; am I going to go that way and see what happens? No, I'm not going to see what happens, I'm too frightened to see what happens. You have to do it. Very often with a student, you see, when they keep books of scribbles, and you pick it up, and you look at it, it can at times bear no resemblance to what they're doing, in what they consider serious art or serious painting, or serious sculpture. And you might look at it and you say, 'Well what are you doing here with this, what are you going to do with it?' 'Oh I don't know, it's something I just, you know, followed through some funny idea.' And I say, 'You must pay attention to that, that's very important, those kind of scribbles. You must pay attention to those and see where they are leading you, and if you don't pay attention to them, you'll be in real trouble, real imaginative trouble with your work.' And that's what you feel you must do, and it's what I had to do. Everything is possible, as long as you let it happen. If you start saying, like Berger, I am a socialist painter, you're in deep trouble immediately. As they said to Picasso after the war, 'You're a communist. What are you doing all these paintings for? People don't understand these. I know more about painting than the communists know. Quite correct. Why were all the students after the war in the streets of Paris shouting to Picasso, 'Return to your Blue period'? Have you ever heard such nonsense? How can he return to his Blue period? They don't understand the process, really. And it's not always logical, because, is there any, is there any logical link between Picasso's Blue period and Pink period and Cubism? Now you tell me, is there a logical link, that you can see? I think there is, but you can't see it. It looks as though he woke up one morning and thought, 'Oh my God! Can't bear all that stuff.' (laughs)

And, I can...I've only had the opportunity to look at the path you took through for example images in Norbert Lynton's recent book or whatever.

Yes.

Were there paths you took at this point that took you in the wrong direction, and that there's no record of, or was it pretty much a path that one sees from a book like that?

Oh no, there were disasters. There's always disasters. I mean, that's not necessarily to do with direction, it's just that, you don't...you don't get through. The criteria I still use now is that, the work has to look back at you and convince you of its reality; not another kind of reality, its reality. Therefore, there are occasions where there are pictures which are just disasters, because you look at them and you...you're not convinced by what they're telling you. And that's...why that is, I don't entirely know. A moment of weakness. (laughs)

And do you destroy those?

Yes. Yes. Great pleasure in destroying.

And, I mean, is there a sort of path between, is the painting called Crucifixion and Chairs and the shirt paintings that takes you to Snow...

The *Creation and Crucifixion*, and *Shirt in Sunlight* you mean, things like that?

And then there's the fire painting.

Chairs on Fire, mm. That was set off by something that I actually saw, I mean, I set fire to the chairs. I was clearing out, I was moving from one house, from one room, bedsit, to another, and I had to get rid of a lot of paintings and furniture, so I set fire to it all in the garden. Quite spectacular. It's interesting to see paintings actually being destroyed by fire. I know it sounds terrible, but it's interesting to see it visually, how the flames creep up the picture, and blister it first.

If you hadn't needed to get rid of them because of space and because of moving, would you have destroyed them anyway, or not?

Oh I think so. I think I would, yes. There's always...there's always poor pictures. It takes time actually to, to realise it. It's best to live with a picture before you let it go out, definitely.

But presumably it's been necessary to paint those pictures; they're not negligible in terms of where they, where you might...

They had to be done, let's say that, yes. They had to be done, and there is, in my own work, a sense of urgency, always has been, even when I was a student. I mean I felt one had to cover a lot of ground very quickly.

But, sorry, I slightly deflected you. Can we talk a little bit about the Creation and Crucifixion and the shirts?

Oh yes. Mm. What do you want to know?

Well, I suppose because of Norbert's book, one begins to see a path through those pictures that leads to the snow.

Snowscape.

But is that, is that me imposing it because that's the path that's in front of me to see?

[pause] I'm just trying to relate them in time. [pause]

Do you want me to actually give you the dates?

Yes, perhaps you ought to look it up.

Just for the tape, I'm looking at the Norbert Lynton book, on page 12. Creation and Crucifixion is 1956.

Yes.

And, where are the chairs? On page 17, Shirt in Sunlight is '56. Two Chairs on Fire, '52 to '56. And Snowstorm in a City, oh is earlier. OK, that's put me in my place. 1952-3.

Mm, I thought it might have been. I mean the idea of the snowstorm was painting a picture in white. I did one or two pictures using whites and just off-white, mainly sparked off by coming across the, I think it's the Malevich painting of *White on White*, a white square on a white square. I thought it was a very interesting intellectual idea, you know? But it is earlier, yes, I remember now, it's an earlier painting. But you see things...that's quite a good illustration of an idea coming from somewhere and using it, and it's not necessarily logical within the way the work might have been going at that time, but it may lead you somewhere. It may be two years later, you may suddenly think, oh yes, you know, I've... I started this, but I never finished it, I never completed the circuit. So it can do that, I think.

In style, it seems closer to the ones such as Figures and Object in a Room 2 of 1960.

Yes.

It seems an easier transition from that painting.

Yes. It's because of a disintegration of the, a disintegration of the subject, I think. *Figures in the Room* will disintegrate, and objects are disintegrating through light. The *Snowstorm in a City* is a painting about light coming down upon us. I did another painting of a white, I think I mentioned this to you before, of a white painting of rain hitting a window and coming down the window, that was mainly in whites.

And can you remember, when you were doing a painting like the one on page 19, Figures and Objects in a Room, did that seem at the time the place where your language might lie?

Yes. Because I was interested in light, still am, but in a different way, interested in light being both a constructive and a destructive force within nature. So everything has a, a transitory nature to it. I'm still interested in light, but not in...not in the transitory at all.

Why?

Because I want something to be there forever.

Why?

[pause] Well I can give you a reason, but it's not entirely true. One wants to create a memorable image. Now, work that is of a transitory nature doesn't do that in quite the same way. I'll give you an example. A Vermeer interior is not transitory. A painting of St-Lazare railway station by Monet is transitory. Do you see the difference? Technically as well as any other way. Now, you may not, because one can say, well it's still a memorable image. (laughs) But it isn't...it isn't quite the same to me. I don't know how to explain that, because it is full of contradictions. Because I think Monet's paintings of the cathedral is a memorable image, and I've never forgotten it.

You make quite a lot of references to Vermeer. When did you really discover his work?

When I went to Amsterdam, Holland, I can't remember what year that was, but, I went to the... It was the Rijksmuseum I think that had...I'm not sure...I think it's the Rijksmuseum. I spent more time looking at his work there than anybody else. I glanced at the Rembrandts, but not with the same intensity. All the Rembrandt rooms were full of tourists, Japanese having their photographs taken in front of *The Night Watch*. All the Vermeer rooms were empty; that tells you quite a lot.

Sorry, when do you think you went there?

I don't know.

Roughly.

[pause] I can't say. I just don't know. I'll have to ask Sue.

Have you any idea of your age when you went?

[pause] I'd have thought it would be during the Sixties, must be, couldn't have been before. The war finished in '46 didn't it, or it finished in Europe in '46, so, it's after that time obviously.

Would it be after Spain?

Yes, definitely after Spain, yes.

I wanted to ask you how you came to go to Spain.

Two reasons mainly. To see the Goyas, and to see the bullfights. And to see Toledo, Greco's birthplace[sic]. And to see Greco's painting of Toledo. Fantastic picture. The great picture of Greco is the burial, what's it called, the burial scene, do you remember it? Burial of count somebody-or-other. Fabulous painting, incredible. And, the bullfights you see, though one might later disagree with the cruelty of it, there's no doubt it was cruel then. It's memorable, it's an amazing sight. Have you ever been to one? I mean maybe you agree with me that it's not the place to go, now, but it is an incredible spectacle. I mean the light, or the sunlight, brilliant light, huge dark shadows by the bull and the man, and the whole kind of, in a way the whole art of this placing of the darts in the bull. I know, it's absolutely horrific really when you think about it coldly, but as a spectacle it's incredible. And amazingly dangerous. I think the man who places the darts actually is, is more courageous than the man who kills the bull. I mean he has nothing but darts in his hands, he doesn't have any protection whatsoever. He just has to become some kind of slim figure who then puts darts in. Incredibly cruel. The Spaniards love it.

And what about Spain itself?

Beautiful. Beautiful. If you have the chance, I mean nobody ever does it nowadays, but, really to cross Spain, you really need to get a train from southern France to Madrid, and cross that plateau. It's an amazing sight, and, it's really like entering what was then a truly foreign country.

How long did you go for?

Oh not long, maybe a week, ten days. Then we returned to Paris.

Have you gone back to Paris all through your life? Because we talked about you going there just after the war.

I've been back one or two times, not a lot of times. I like it.

But it...was it really the Spanish trip that had the greatest impact at that time?

I should imagine so, yes, I should think so. Well, yes, but I mean as regards this great show after the war of Picasso and Matisse, just after the war was incredible, a memorable experience, one had never seen anything like it. Well I'd never seen what could be done. Made English art look so tame, it was unbelievable. But that must have been in the, that must have been in the late Forties. I was still at Sheffield Art School then. There was a special trip, I think to Leeds, to see it. Picasso wasn't liked, naturally. (laughs)

And, you eventually, you went to Venice didn't you?

Yes.

Why did you go to Venice?

[pause] It must have been to see, see the museums there, but... I mean, visually Venice was a revelation. I mean when you walk out of that railway station, and met by all that water and light, it's incredible isn't it. Have you done that? You know what it's like; it's incredible isn't it. This assault on the eyes and senses. Absolutely great. I mean, you don't want to see many museums after that, and certainly not many churches, which one tends to do of course, to see things. And to see all the people trying to take you round the churches when you don't want to be taken round. It's a magical city; whether it still is, I presume it's been wrecked by tourism now. When we went, there were no English tourists at all; the tourists were German, because of the Italian connection during the war to start with, and I think, a few

Swedes. Very unusual for English tourists to be there. We were considered very strange, particularly as we were travelling with packs on our backs, and, I had a beard, Sue was very brown. They thought Sue was, strangely enough because of her red hair they thought she was Venetian, or certainly Italian, or Florentine I think. Very strange really.

Did you go to the rest of Italy, or just to Venice?

No, we went to Padua to see the Giotto's, that's fantastic. And, Verona, and the islands around Venice. But Sue's seen a lot of Venice, she went as a student, hitchhiking around, she's seen a lot of Italy. I like the Italians very much. My favourite restaurant is still an Italian restaurant, a very good one down here.

And while you were having the time at the Beaux Arts, what was happening to Sue's work, was any gallery showing her?

No, no, she was still working, but, she was doing a lot of drawing at that time. No, no gallery was showing her. She started to show some work, I think she showed some work in the Sixties, I'm not sure. You'll have to ask her about that.

But did it feel uncomfortable that one of you was being taken up in public and not the other?

Oh no, not at all, no. No it's a... I mean it's...it's better if both of you are showing work, but... I think it's very difficult for one artist to live with someone who isn't an artist, I think so. It's not an easy life, unless you're very successful from the beginning. I mean most artists have quite a hard time to start with, and you need someone understanding that, you know, who doesn't want to go out and buy the latest fridge, or that kind of thing, or why aren't we going to, kind of, India this week, or something or other, you know, and there's no money around.

Can I just go back, because I led you off for various reasons. Can you tell me a little bit about Creation and Crucifixion.

Mm, I'll give you ten more minutes.

I know. I'm very aware of that.

I need a pee anyway.

You can have that any time.

All right, ask.

Well, I find it a very intriguing picture, and I wondered how it had come about, and it feels like a picture that's part of this bridge between the earlier work and then what you went on to do.

It was the last...it was the last statement of that period. It was bringing together a lot of paintings of, separate paintings of those particular objects. And it was a way of, in a way completing the cycle and being able from that moment to move forward. It was the finish of a certain way of thought.

And do you think you had an intimation of that before you started to paint it, or...?

Yes. I must have had, yes.

So it was almost an intellectual idea being put into paint?

Mm, I think so. Yes.

And what do you feel about it as a painting?

There are weaknesses in it. I think it was a brave painting to do at the time. It was even brave as regards the scale of it; it was very unusual to paint a picture that size in those days. Most paintings were what I used to call boudoir paintings, in scale as well as in subject matter. That's a museum painting, no doubt about that. But it's in very very bad condition, in fact it's in terrible condition.

Because?

Because in those days I wasn't interested in whether the thing was going to last or not. I mean it's...it's got nails running through it, sticking I think four pieces of hardboard together, with huge pieces of wood behind it. I mean with nails just put in, and painted over. It's got cracks where I've painted things out, without taking necessary precautions. I mean you can paint over things, but you have to do something about it, otherwise they come through, as things are coming through there. And it's cracking badly. When you paint a black, or a dark over a, a rather heavier paint surface, it cracks, it cracks within a few years. What happens is, the...the thicker surface absorbs the oil from the thinner surface, and leaves it vulnerable to cracking.

So could it be conserved, or is it impossible?

They can conserve anything if they want to. They repaint most things. (laughs)

And what response did you get to this painting at the time?

Which painting?

The Creation and Crucifixion.

Great interest. Yes, a lot of interest.

Was it this painting that won the John Moores, or was that another one?

Yes, it won the John Moors. That was the first John Moores. The first time I've had a fan letter.

End of F9460 Side A

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Some lady in Liverpool who said she had seen it and it had meant a great deal to her. She'd never written to anybody in her life before.

The first all round.

(laughs)

And what did winning the prize mean? I mean was it a moment of tremendous excitement, or did you just think, oh, that's what I would expect?

No, I didn't expect it at all, far from it. Solved a lot of, one or two financial problems. Meant I could go to the bank, and they looked at me rather differently in future. My dealer took a third of it, which was disgraceful. It's a prize, you don't take money from prizes.

Mm. And again, I deflected you. You were saying that the burning chairs, did you actually set fire to them, or is this imaginative, having watched the paintings...

Oh no, I set fire, no I set fire to it all. Yes.

But, but sorry, was this having watched the paintings burn that you needed to get rid of, and you then burnt the chairs for a painting, or it was the memory of it?

No, it just happens that, got rid of some chairs as well as paintings.

Right.

Now, I must have a pee.

[break in recording]

OK, you've kindly allotted me six more minutes.

(laughs) That'll make you think.

One area where I did want to go to, which we haven't really talked about at all, is, the constructions that you do, which I love very much from the illustrations.

Yes.

I wonder if you could tell me, well, does it relate at all to what I read that you had done some sculpture while you were working at Corsham, is there a line between doing sculpture and the constructions, or is that...?

No.

No.

No there isn't at all. There's a line...there might be some kind of... No there isn't a line, because, I mean those constructions, they're... I think, it's very important in making a work, no matter what it is, that there should be sense of play of some kind in it. And I find doing the paper constructions, or the wooden constructions, a kind of, an amazing kind of play can take place. I'm always amazed at the result. I've got no idea what it's going to look like. I make it up as I go along. I do with paintings to a certain extent, but even more so with the cut-outs and things. I'll cut something with scissors and bend it and see what happens, tear it up, put it back again. It's a process which is actually fascinating, and it does lead back into the paintings.

Does it relate to the way you use collage as a preliminary part of the painting?

I think it does, yes, I do, yes.

Do you have any idea when it began to come into your work, the constructions?

[pause] No, I can't, I can't think when that can be. In the Seventies I would have thought. Not before, I don't think before the Seventies.

And has it been fairly continuous? How does it work with the rhythm of the paintings?

[pause] I sometimes might start it as a means of a relaxation, if I'm doing a very complex painting shall we say, or a very large painting, I might... Or even if I'm waiting sometimes for the paint to dry for some reason, I might turn to one of these pieces, really as a plaything. (laughs) And then of course it becomes a serious plaything. [pause] It's always, it's always necessary to, to produce something that, to go somewhere where you've never been before, I think that's very important.

And... Sorry, because I've only got a little time, I'm jumping a bit. But you've said when we've talked before that there was a big drive for you to push colour to extremity, to a place where you hadn't used it before.

Yes.

Do you feel you're still moved by that, or do you feel you've achieved that, or...?

No, I haven't achieved it. No, it just continues. Life is much too short, for most of us, not just artists, for anybody, but if you want to do something... No, you're never totally satisfied; there's always further that you want to go.

But if...you have used colour, for example yellow, in a way I've never seen used before really.

Mm.

Do you have a sense of having done that?

I use a lot of yellow, because, I keep finding that it, it produces more light than maybe no other colour. It's also a very optimistic colour, I like it for that reason. I think it's a more optimistic colour than red. [pause] I mean red is quite a dark colour really. If you photograph red, it's usually black, in black and white I mean, it comes out black.

And you have occasionally used black as a background.

Yes, I use that, I've used that quite a lot, mm.

What function does that have?

Because it's like painting with light on top of it. It really is. It's...it's like using electric light. In fact some of them are called electric, something something electric. *Cascade (Electric)*, in brackets.

And what are you painting at the moment, what's happening in the studio at the moment?

Well in the, in the...the final painting in the book is called, the Spanish dancing, what's it called? Just remind me what it's called.

Dialogue.Fandango.

Fandango, right. It's a Spanish dance for two people. I've taken the idea of that, of dialogue and dance, and I've been using that recently, in a similar way to that, that last painting that's in the book. Which is, they're quite...they're quite active paintings, those, naturally. But I've also started a painting which is very very quiet, using these forms but not like that.

And the tape can't see. Which forms are they?

Well I don't know how to describe them. I mean they're a squashed circle. (laughs)

And relative to the size of the canvas, they're sort of, smallish.

Yes. They are. They're about, I think they're about two inches across, those particular forms. One or two are smaller than that; most of them are two inches, mm.

And is the work flowing well at the moment?

Yes, there's lots of possibilities I think. [pause] When the weather's good I tend to make use of it more than I would normally. I like to get down to the sea. I like to sit in one of the cafés on the front, watch the beautiful people go by. (laughs) And all the eccentric people go by. The sun brings out all the English eccentricities which I love.

So are you saying you're painting less at the moment?

I'm doing enough, it's just that I might do one or two other things. Anyway, that's it.

Just one last thing.

One last thing.

You said at one point that a colour can change a life.

Colour can change a life.

Was there any particular experience you had in mind when you said that?

No, but I think, I think with other people they do. I mean, because I paint, I use lots of colours, but I think other people can get a sensation from a colour which does change their life, yes. I mean maybe you react to yellow.

End of F7822 Side B

End of Interview