



Artists Documentation Program (ADP) Interview Video Index

Artist: John Chamberlain

Date: March 27, 2000

Location: The Menil Collection

Interviewers: Carol Mancusi-Ungaro and Helen Winkler Fosdick

Video/Edit: Laurie McDonald

Total Run Time: 01:25:51

Abstract:

John Chamberlain discusses his work with Artists Documentation Program Founding Director and Menil Chief Conservator, Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, along with Dia Art Foundation Co-founder, Helen Winkler Fosdick. Chamberlain describes the materials and methods that he used to create his metal and foam sculptures.

Controlled Access Headings (Library of Congress):

Corporate Name(s)

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
Artists Documentation Program
Harvard University. Art Museums
Menil Collection (Houston, Tex.)
Whitney Museum of American Art

Genre(s)

Interviews
Oral histories

Personal Name(s)

Chamberlain, John, 1927-
Mancusi-Ungaro, Carol
Winkler, Helen

Subject(s)

Art--Conservation and restoration
Art--Technique
Sculpture

Exhibitions/Works:

Names of exhibitions and works referenced during this interview appear below in gray cells.

Controlled Vocabulary:

Except where indicated, all keywords employ Getty vocabularies (AAT/ULAN/TGN). Those marked with (*) employ Library of Congress Authorities. Those marked with (**) employ local terms.

Time	Contents	Subject Keywords
00:00:02	Opening Credits	
00:00:58	Introduction Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, John Chamberlain, Helen Winkler Fosdick	
00:01:17	Conservation Issues Chamberlain assesses the condition of <i>Rooster Starfoot</i> and discusses various works that may have come in multiple pieces.	titles (documents) visual inspection
00:01:30	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Rooster Starfoot</i>, 1976 The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of Heiner and Fariha Friedrich	
00:01:58	(Work Reference) John Chamberlain <i>Two Dark Ladies</i>, 1979 Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:02:16	(Work Reference) John Chamberlain <i>Luftschloss</i>, 1979 Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:02:23	(Work Reference) John Chamberlain <i>Tongue Pictures</i>, 1979 Collection of Chinati Foundation, Marfa, TX	
00:02:42	(Work Reference) John Chamberlain <i>Pigmeat's Eb Bluesong</i>, 1979 Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:02:56	(Work Reference) John Chamberlain <i>Hurray for Bernie Galvez</i> <i>(3¢ under the Limit)</i>, 1981 Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	

00:03:05	Technical Specifications and Conservation Issues Chamberlain expresses his preferences with regard to the coating and cleaning of his works.	cleaning coating (material) polyurethane Pre-Kleano®
00:05:13	Conservation Issues Chamberlain and Mancusi-Ungaro discuss an apparent area of loss on <i>Rooster Starfoot</i> , comparing its current appearance to its appearance in a photo from the artist's catalogue raisonné. They inspect the work and make note of specific issues, including loose welds. Chamberlain expresses his opinions regarding the work's restoration.	catalogues raisonnés Chamberlain, John Duncan** visual inspection welding
00:08:56	Conservation Issues Chamberlain assesses the condition of <i>Slow Dancing to the News</i> and <i>Ultrafull Private</i> . He, Mancusi-Ungaro, and Fosdick compare <i>Ultrafull Private</i> to its image in the catalogue raisonné.	catalogues raisonnés hot-dip galvanizing steel (alloy) visual inspection
00:09:29	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Slow Dancing to the News, 1981</i> Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:09:48	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Ultrafull Private, 1967</i> Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:12:14	Conservation Issues Mancusi-Ungaro and Chamberlain discuss his works' tendency to change over time, comparing works in person to their appearance in the catalogue raisonné. Chamberlain expresses his preferences regarding the works' restoration.	catalogues raisonnés restoration welding
00:14:29	(Work Reference) John Chamberlain <i>Luftschloss, 1979</i> Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:15:01	Conservation Issues and Historical Anecdote Chamberlain expresses his preferences regarding the restoration of <i>Rooster Starfoot</i> . He discusses another work, <i>Fantail</i> , from which an element was stolen and how that affected his view of the work.	paint theft visual inspection welding
00:15:52	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Rooster Starfoot, 1976</i> The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of Heiner and Fariha Friedrich	

00:17:31	(Work Reference) John Chamberlain <i>Fantail, 1961</i> Collection of National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institutions, Washington, D.C.; on loan from Jasper Johns at time of catalogue raisonné, 1986.	
00:18:56	Exhibition and Conservation Issues Chamberlain discusses his work's tendency to come in multiple pieces and offers suggestions for future treatment. He discusses the risk involved in coating works with protective sealants.	coating (material) DeFeo, Jay sealing welding
00:20:08	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Rooster Starfoot, 1976</i> The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of Heiner and Fariha Friedrich	
00:21:39	(Work Reference) Jay DeFeo <i>The Rose, 1958-66</i> Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of the Estate of Jay DeFeo and purchased with funds from the Contemporary Painting and Sculpture Committee and The Judith Rothschild Foundation	
00:21:58	Conservation Issues Chamberlain discusses conservation problems in two works, <i>Fantail</i> and <i>Bijou</i> . He assesses the condition of the paint color in <i>Rooster Starfoot</i> .	cleaning color (perceived attribute) fading theft visual inspection
00:21:58	(Work Reference) John Chamberlain <i>Fantail, 1961</i> Collection of National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institutions, Washington, D.C.; on loan from Jasper Johns at time of catalogue raisonné, 1986.	
00:22:21	(Work Reference) John Chamberlain <i>Bijou, 1961</i> Private collection, New York	
00:23:29	Conservation Issues Mancusi-Ungaro and Chamberlain discuss the artist's unique welding style.	authenticity welding

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00:25:10	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Nanowweep, 1969</i> The Menil Collection, Houston	
00:26:37	Technical Specifications and Conservation Issues Chamberlain explains an unusually shiny coating on <i>Cone Yak</i> .	coating (material) sealing sealing compound
00:27:26	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Cone Yak, 1990</i> The Menil Collection, Houston	
00:28:35	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Cone Yak, 1990</i> The Menil Collection, Houston	
00:28:59	Conservation Issues Chamberlain assesses the condition of <i>Prez's Blurb</i> and <i>Daddy-O-Springs</i> and expresses his preferences regarding securing loose elements.	restoration screws stabilizing visual inspection welding
00:29:04	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Prez's Blurb, 1979</i> Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:29:25	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Daddy-O-Springs, 1975</i> Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:31:40	Concept/Nature of Work and Process of Creation Chamberlain inspects <i>Rainier Falls</i> and discusses his practice of creating titles for his works.	titles (documents)
00:31:45	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Rainier Falls, 1977</i> Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:32:24	(Work Reference) John Chamberlain <i>Toasted Hitlers (from E.J.), 1977</i> Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:33:21	Technical Specifications and Process of Creation	paint palette (color range)

	Chamberlain explains the presence of paint on <i>Rainier Falls</i> and discusses his later practices of acquiring discarded van tops. He describes the process by which he paints his works.	sandblasting vans (cargo vehicles)
00:37:26	Historical Anecdote and Process of Creation Chamberlain tells stories related to his work in Houston in the 1970s. He then describes how he assembles his works from van tops.	assembling (additive and joining process)
00:37:57	(Exhibition Reference) “John Chamberlain: Recent Sculptures” Curated by James Harithas Contemporary Arts Museum Houston February 14-March 17, 1975	
00:40:12	Conservation Issues Chamberlain and Mancusi-Ungaro discuss plans for him to weld his works in an effort to restore them. They briefly discuss the Menil Collection’s Dan Flavin installation at Richmond Hall.	Flavin, Dan restoration (process) storage welding
00:40:23	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Elixir</i>, 1983 The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of Heiner and Fariha Friedrich	
00:41:09	(Work Reference) Dan Flavin Installation at Richmond Hall, 1998 The Menil Collection	
00:41:47	Technical Specifications Chamberlain describes the materials and techniques that he used to create <i>Gondola Herman Melville</i> .	chassis (vehicle component) painting (coating) primer (material)
00:41:58	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Gondola Herman Melville</i>, 1981 Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:42:28	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Gondola Herman Melville</i>, 1981 (detail of primed red area) Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:43:03	Technical Specifications Chamberlain describes how he paints the individual elements in his works separately before assembling them. He also details the process by which he shapes metal and collects materials for his works.	artists’ materials bending components (objects) forming painting (coating)

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00:43:12	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Gondola Herman Melville, 1981 (detail of painted piece)</i> Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:45:13	Conservation Issues Chamberlain assesses the condition of <i>Softer Sticks</i> and expresses his preferences regarding the work's future conservation.	paint visual inspection welding
00:46:13	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Softer Sticks, 1979</i> Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:48:07	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Hurray for Bernie Galvez (3¢ under the Limit), 1981</i> Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:48:50	Concept/Nature of Work and Conservation Issues Chamberlain explains how his foam works were created and expresses his opinions regarding their degree of cleanliness and discoloration.	age discoloration foam rubber wear yellowing
00:48:54	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Mesa (piece of the Rock series), 1981</i> Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:49:20	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Untitled, 1981</i> Collection of Helen Winkler Fosdick	
00:50:51	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Stuffed Dog 3, 1970</i> Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:52:25	Conservation Issues Chamberlain expresses his opinions regarding his foam works' aging and yellowing and offers suggestions for restoring them.	adhesive age crumbling deterioration foam rubber restoration (process) wear yellowing
00:52:45	(Work Reference)	

	John Chamberlain <i>Lop Nor</i>, 1967 Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:53:28	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Stuffed Dog 1</i>, 1967 Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:55:28	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Stuffed Dog 3</i>, 1970 Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:55:47	Conservation Issues Chamberlain describes his attitudes toward foam sculptures that have experienced significant discoloration and deterioration. Specifically, he assesses the condition of <i>Lop Nor</i> and offers his opinions regarding its future restoration. He briefly mentions a group of drawings in the exhibition and explains their relationship to the sculptural works.	artist's intent authenticity deterioration discoloration drawings (visual works) dry cleaning fluid foam rubber French curves restoration storage
00:57:37	(Image) John Chamberlain Unidentified foam work (detail of holes in foam)	
00:58:49	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Lop Nor</i>, 1967 Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:59:00	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Lop Nor</i>, 1967 (detail of holes on bottom) Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
00:59:30	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Lop Nor</i>, 1967 (detail of holes on bottom) Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
01:00:01	Conservation Issues Chamberlain and Mancusi-Ungaro discuss possible conservation interventions that might slow the discoloration of his foam works.	deterioration foam rubber light (energy) oxygen
01:01:53	Technical Specifications and Concept/Nature of Work	artists' materials foam rubber

	Chamberlain describes where he would obtain materials for his foam works and describes a series of “couches,” that he made from foam, including <i>Guggenheim Barge</i> and an installation that he created for Dia:Chelsea.	Dia Art Foundation manufacturers Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum
01:02:51	(Work Reference) John Chamberlain <i>Guggenheim Barge, 1971</i> Private Collection	
01:05:52	Concept/Nature of Work Chamberlain discusses some of the economic difficulties of working in inexpensive and ephemeral materials like foam.	art market deterioration foam rubber
01:07:35	Concept/Nature of Work and Historical Anecdote Chamberlain discusses his use of scale and perspective, offering an anecdote about moving his studio from New York to Florida.	scale (relative size) studios (work spaces) viewers (observers)
01:07:58	(Work Reference) John Chamberlain <i>Dooms Day Flotilla, 1982</i> Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
01:08:07	(Exhibition Reference) “John Chamberlain: Gondolas (1981-1985) and Dooms Day Flotilla (1982)” Dia:Chelsea, New York April 5, 1990-March 3, 1991	
01:09:30	Process of Creation Chamberlain reflects on his creative process.	creativity media (artists’ materials)
01:13:06	Conservation Issues Chamberlain expresses his preferences with regard to the conservation of works that have become worn or dirty, particularly <i>Lop Nor</i> .	age cleaning deterioration foam rubber
01:14:45	(Image) John Chamberlain <i>Lop Nor, 1967 (detail of holes on bottom)</i> Collection of Dia Art Foundation, New York	
01:15:24	Conservation Issues and Historical Anecdote Chamberlain assesses the condition of a work owned by Fosdick and offers suggestions for its conservation. Chamberlain tells a humorous story about one of his works receiving praise from outside the art world.	cleaning foam rubber paper (fiber product) shampoo visual inspection
01:16:01	(Image) John Chamberlain	

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	Untitled, 1981 Collection of Helen Winkler Fosdick	
01:19:26	Historical Anecdote Chamberlain tells stories about his career as an artist to illustrate the types of stories that appear in a book published by his gallery. He, Mancusi-Ungaro, and Fosdick discuss those of his works that are owned by the Menil Collection.	art galleries (institutions) artists' books
01:25:07	Closing Credits	