Artists Documentation Program
Video Interview Transcript

SUZAN FRECON

APRIL 9, 2012

Interviewed by:

Brad Epley, Co-director, Artists Documentation Program, and

Chief Conservator, The Menil Collection

with

Jan Burandt, Conservator of Works of Art on Paper, The Menil Collection

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This interview is part of the Artists Documentation Program, a collaboration of the Menil Collection, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, Harvard Art Museums.

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About the Artists Documentation Program

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, artists have experimented with an unprecedented range of new materials and technologies. The conceptual concerns underlying much of contemporary art render its conservation more complex than simply arresting physical change. As such, the artist's voice is essential to future conservation and presentation of his or her work.

In 1990, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded a grant to the Menil Collection for Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, then Chief Conservator, to establish the Artists Documentation Program (ADP). Since that time, the ADP has recorded artists speaking candidly with conservators in front of their works. These engaging and informative interviews capture artists' attitudes toward the aging of their art and those aspects of its preservation that are of paramount importance to them.

The ADP has recorded interviews with such important artists as Frank Stella, Jasper Johns, and Cy Twombly. Originally designed for use by conservators and scholars at the Menil, the ADP has begun to appeal to a broader audience outside the Menil, and the collection has grown to include interviews from two partner institutions: the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, Harvard Art Museums. In 2009, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded a grant to the Menil Collection to establish the ADP Archive, formalizing the multi-institutional partnership and making ADP interviews more widely available to researchers.

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[Speakers (in order of appearance): Brad Epley, Associate Paintings Conservator; Suzan Frecon, Artist; Jan Burandt, Conservator of Works of Art on Paper]

[BEGIN INTERVIEW]

[00:00:44]

Brad Epley: Today is Monday, April 9th, 2012. My name is Brad Epley. I'm the Chief Conservator at the Menil Collection, and I'm here today with Suzan Frecon, and also with Jan Burandt, Conservator of Works of Art on Paper, here at the Menil. And we are grateful to have the opportunity to talk with Suzan about her painting and about several works on paper. So, thank you very much, and welcome to Houston.

Suzan Frecon: Thank you so much for doing this. This program is wonderful, it's great.

[00:01:12]

Brad Epley: So I was wondering if we could start a little bit by talking [about] how *version 13* [2010, The Menil Collection, Houston], the Menil's painting, kind of came into being, and how typical, or atypical that might be for your working process.

Suzan Frecon: Well, the earth reds are—as I say in the book, it's a core—it's a very important heart of my work, and I love working with all colors, but these—in particular, these earth, close earth reds are major to the unity of my work. And so, many of the watercolors have the earth reds too, it's all ongoing all the time, and I'm still working on these versions of red paintings.

Suzan Frecon: And I'm delighted that the Menil has this one. This painting is one that I'm very close to, and I've invested a lot in this painting. It's actually one of the oldest and the youngest of my paintings, because it spans a long period of time. I worked on it a long time, I sanded off the colors and put them back on, and you know, I really worked it from the ground up, and finally, I was having an exhibition in New York ["Suzan Frecon: Recent Painting," David Zwirner Gallery, September 8-October 30, 2010], and finally, it just got finished just before the exhibition by a miracle. I didn't think it could be in the exhibition, and then I did one more thing to it. I rubbed on oil with my hand to try to get it the right sequence of the reds, so that they'd be playing with each other and going in and out, and it worked! And I was like praying that it would dry all right, and it dried all right.

[00:03:09]

Suzan Frecon: And so now, I see it again. It's a little hard for me to see, because it really has to be in natural light. It's very important to it, because it functions, totally with natural light.

Suzan Frecon: So, but it's really good to see it again. I haven't seen it for a few months, and it's held up well. (laughs) And I'm—since I have sanded it, and worked on it much more than some of my other paintings, I was worried about it. So before I exhibited it, I had a conservator look at it to make sure that it wasn't going to—you know, fall apart, God forbid. And, so it still looks good. (laughs) The way it's supposed to look.

Brad Epley: It looks great.

Suzan Frecon: And it's in good hands here at the Menil, so I know that if there ever is a problem, they'll take good care of it, it's just like the dream. The dream place for my painting to be is, here, especially in this room, and in the company of all these beautiful paintings, and I'm really quite overwhelmed to think of it being here.

Brad Epley: Oh, well we're really fortunate to have it, so...

[00:04:30]

Brad Epley: When you say that you worked over it for several years, how many years do you think that would be? Two or three, or?

Suzan Frecon: Maybe five. I like to say that I don't—you know, when I'm working in my studio, I don't keep track of the years. The time just melts away, and it goes away, you're not aware of time. So when it began, and when it ended, I probably could figure out from my notes, because I do keep very specific notes, and actually that gives me the idea right here and now that I should donate those notes to you, because they have all my mixtures, and the measurements and everything in the notes, so that's part of the painting so…

Brad Epley: That would be great.

Suzan Frecon: …that could be (laughs) a little, a side thing.

Brad Epley: Yeah, that would be wonderful. I had noted in several of the—in a couple of your catalogues, there were these graph paper, kind of annotated images, and I wasn't sure how that played into the development of a painting.

Suzan Frecon: Yeah, there's a very specific graph paper drawing, because I work out the curves in proportion to the other curves, and all the areas in proportion to each other, so that's pretty precise. And then I have another kind of diary of notes, which could or could not be on graph paper, it just depends whatever

sheet of paper is lying around, I start noting the dates, and then how long—then that, I can see, you know, how long I have to wait till I put another coat of paint over the one coat of paint, because it has a lot of oil in it, so it has to dry for a good amount of time. So that way, I can keep track of—and the mixtures, like if I put like, proportion of one to three, oil three, and pigment—I grind the pigments. All the pigments of this painting are ground in oil by me. And so I keep track of the proportions, because if I want to refer—if I want to try to recreate the sheen, and the red of one of these colors, I can refer back to my notes, and sort of have a ballpark figure of what the proportion was. Now of course, the weather makes—affects it. Everything, you know, if I do the same proportion, it may not turn out the same at all, but it gives me a guide to start with, a basis.

Brad Epley: And the graph paper, is that for scaling up, or is it really just a kind of—a structure?

Suzan Frecon: No, it scales up. No, it's to scale. So, you know, it—I could make a big painting, I could make a medium-sized painting. But concept for these red paintings is large. I do small trials, but I don't often do a middle-size—a kind of torso-sized painting with this particular composition. It just seemed, my instinct, or my intuitive concept of this painting was that, you know, you're looking at it as a large painting.

Brad Epley: So those smaller paintings would be considered maquettes or studies?

Suzan Frecon: They're—I call them trials, but they are paintings in themselves, too. They're little paintings, and that's fine. (laughs)

[00:08:07]

Brad Epley: In terms of your studio practice, do you do all of your materials preparation from stretching, to paint application yourself, or do you have assistants that work with you, or...

Suzan Frecon: I don't do it anymore, I work alone. I'm used to working alone, I—the long, quiet hours, where I'm just trying to, you know, get my mental connection, my soul connection to the painting. I need to be there, alone. But, I used to make the stretchers, and stretch them, and put the grounds on, and it was so much work, that—as time went by and I got older, I just didn't have enough time to paint, I was spending so much time sanding the grounds and things like that.

Suzan Frecon: So, I found a stretcher-maker, who makes much better stretchers than I could ever make—I don't have carpentry skills, and I found a Belgian linen, that was very nice. I like it a lot. And so that's what I use, it's grounded with oil ground, and it works well as the support for my paintings. And so I give the

dimensions to the stretcher maker, and he makes them, and he stretches the linen, and then I'm ready to paint.

Brad Epley: Oh, so then they come to your studio, ready to go? Okay. Do you do any additional preparation to the ground once they come to you, besides just starting…

Suzan Frecon: No. No, this linen is top-of-the-line. It just has a beautiful ground on it, and I wouldn't touch it. (laughs) I do for the panel—when I paint on wood, I have smaller paintings on wood, and then I have to do the gesso. I do, you know, about ten coats of gesso and sand it. And very recently, I'm teaching somebody to do the gesso. But even so, I'd rather do it myself, because that is—you know, I like to have it just right, you know, not too, too smooth, and not too rough. But you know, it's okay, I can—you know, the paint covers it anyway, so it doesn't matter if it's a little bit one way or the other.

[00:10:28]

Brad Epley: I know that you taught for a little while at the New York School for the Visual Arts. Were these—was it because of this kind of attention to, you know, the specifics of the material? Or did that—did one come before the other, or did your appreciation of gessos and grounds, and the qualities, and the varieties, come through that teaching experience?

Suzan Frecon: No, it—you know, I wanted to know as much about painting as I could, because that's what was my life's work, and I always felt inadequate as far as technique, because I didn't learn technique. I learned more from, you know, the mental side, the intellect—what you're trying to do as a painter. And I felt, I knew, you know, I knew that side, I knew what I wanted to do. I had lots of ideas, and I was—never felt like I was missing any in that part. In fact, on the contrary, I had so many things going on in my head that I had to find a *way* to turn into art, and that's a process that happens little by little by little, and…

Suzan Frecon: …for me it was a very personal path, because I didn't have enough expertise in the techniques of painting, so I had to really search out—you know, I moved to Europe when I graduated from college, because I wanted to look at real paintings, and I wanted to go back to old masters, and to the original paintings, and I kept going further and further back, and the things that I really liked a lot were pre-Renaissance. To me, that was more abstract, and I liked, you know, many things earlier than that, like, you know, migration art, 8th century art. I liked American Indian art a lot. I liked any art. I mean, I think there are common denominators for all human cultures that you relate to, and the colors are connected, and you can understand art without a language. You can look at 30,000-year-old paintings, and the communication comes through, you don't—there's no language to explain

what the story, but the paint—the art comes through the passion, the power—you feel that these people put everything they possibly had in their bodies and souls into those paintings, on the cave walls. So, that's—but anyway, to get back to your question. (laughs) I got a little, a little…

Brad Epley: That's a nice—no, that's…

Suzan Frecon: …far out there.

[00:13:34]

Suzan Frecon: So, when I got the job—I desperately needed a job in New York, I had just moved to New York. And a conservator was teaching this course on techniques and materials of painting. "Research and Workshop," it was called. And she didn't want to teach it, because she had so much work as a conservator, so she knew I needed a job, even though I was unqualified for this job. So she recommended me for the job at the School of Visual Arts, and I immediately did a lot of research on other mediums, that I wasn't using. I was using oil always. But, I wanted to go through all the history of painting, and the mediums.

Suzan Frecon: And so, you know, I tried to read as much as I could on fresco painting, and let's see—encaustic before that. I think I started with encaustic, because that was the oldest one I knew of, and we'd go to the museum and look at the Egyptian encaustic paintings. And then I integrated fresco, which was very, very hard. And I tried to get (laughs)—I tried to tap into David Novros, but he was like—(laughs)—put up a sort of firewall. (laughs) So I thought, "Okay." So I went to a few other more figurative painters, who were using fresco.

Suzan Frecon: And I read a book by—oh, I can't remember—Merriweather, Miss Merriweather. She wrote this wonderful book on fresco painting, and that really revealed a lot to me. And you know, I just did it in a very basic, beginning way in this course, but the research taught me a lot about—it gave me insights, and you know, I even incorporated acrylic, which I have nothing to do with acrylic, and—to egg tempera. That was hard.

[00:15:47]

Suzan Frecon: And I went—you know, I went to look at a lot of these paintings. So, it was wonderful to look at all the paintings and understand that the egg tempera paintings didn't change; the color didn't change, because the oil changes color more than the egg tempera. So, you know, I just wanted the students to get insight into what goes into painting in any medium.

Brad Epley: Did you work—during those times in encaustic, or in a fresco for your own personal work?

Suzan Frecon: I did, I did. But I didn't, you know—I liked oil better. I mean, oil is the thing that you can—I could do what I wanted to do (laughs) more in oil, than in—egg tempera is more linear, it's more precise. When, one of the things we did in the class, we'd go to the Metropolitan, and you could see the crossover with [Giovanni] Bellini. There's one painting in egg tempera, and one in oil, and you can see the nuance that kind of happens in the oil painting, and I wanted nuance. I wanted to move the paint around.

[00:17:04]

Brad Epley: You talked about grinding these red pigments in oil yourself. Is that with all the colors, or is that particular to your practice with reds?

Suzan Frecon: Well, my first—the germ of everything is the color in my paintings. I kind of conceive of things in color. Not always, I mean sometimes I have the—you know, I conceive the composition first, and then I struggle with the color. But so, I have a lot of earth red pigments, and they're very subtle shades of earth red, and some are hard to grind, and some are easier to grind. But if I find an earth red in, say Rublev [Colours / Natural Pigments LLC], or Old Holland [Classic] Colours, I'll use that if that's the color I want. But for the most part, the earth red ones are ground in pigment.

Suzan Frecon: Now, other colors sometimes are tube colors, and sometimes they're ground, like earth—like ultramarine blue, I like—there's a very dark shade of ultramarine that I like. So, I grind that myself. But Old Holland has an ultramarine blue that I like, so I use that out of the tube. So I don't have strict rules about—and I don't grind cadmiums, I—in fact, I don't use many cadmiums, I use—my reds aren't cadmiums anymore. They used to be, but I like the earth reds. And yellows—sometimes I mix in cadmiums, or I use earth colors, raw umb—I've been using raw umber—a raw umber that I really like. And, I'm—I've started to use lapis, real lapis. Uh, so—but I haven't used it in a large painting. (laughs) It's very expensive. And it—it's a very interesting color.

Brad Epley: Do you get your pigments from one single source like Kremer [Pigmente], or are there other different places that you have found to have the right colors for you?

Suzan Frecon: Well, mostly I get them from Kremer, because they're close to my studio, and they have very good pigments. They have all kinds of pigments. You know, it's like the candy shop. I have to restrain myself, because I can't—you know, I have pigments I haven't even used yet from Kremer. And when I was doing some egg tempera and watercolor, they had pigments like

brazilwood, and orpiment, and—all these obscure, ancient pigments, and I was just fascinated with them. Although I didn't do much with brazilwood—that was really hard to use.

Brad Epley: (laughs)

[00:20:05]

Brad Epley: And in terms of medium, it's always oil, you don't use varnishes or add—incorporate varnishes into the medium?

Suzan Frecon: No. No, I like the play of the sheens on the—on the paintings, so as you walk around them, and in natural light, it—it has more life to me that way. To me it makes the—it activates the painting, and it becomes an integral part of it, of the painting.

Brad Epley: Um-hm. I also noticed, on the back of this painting—like, you are, I think with all of your paintings, and all of your artwork, and that's adamant about the lighting conditions that it's exhibited under, and that's exclusively natural light when possible.

Suzan Frecon: Yeah. Yeah, I—I make a point of putting it on the back. I put a lot of things on the back now, (laughs) because—and this is why this program is so useful, because it sets a record of how you want the work seen, because one time, I was doing a big four-panel painting, that was connected, and—and someone—a collector who came into my studio, and she said, "Now how would you frame something like that?" and I—it never occurred to me that anybody would want to frame one of my paintings, so I—put on the back of the smaller ones, I—I figure the bigger ones—I think I put it on the back of the big ones.

Brad Epley: It's on this one too, yeah. (laughs)

Suzan Frecon: "Do not frame." (laughs) Because I—it just, the frame kind of puts the painting into a picture, and I want the painting to come out of the picture, I want it to take place when you're looking at it, and, you know, jar you, and move you. And, yeah, back to the light, okay. So, I write on the back now, to light it with natural light, and this light is ideal. It's diffused, it's—and even if direct light comes on, like, you know, even if rays of light come on, that's all interesting, I like that. It just, it's okay with me. The worst for me is if somebody puts a spotlight on the painting, and then it puts a sheen on the painting, and it bounces back, and you can't—you know, the glare kind of interferes with your experience of the painting.

[00:22:28]

Brad Epley: I'm trying to remember your studio in New York. You have natural light coming in from the side? Or do you have it from above and the side as well?

Suzan Frecon: I have it from the side, and that works just fine with me. I just don't have the luxury of having skylights. They work differently. But, you know, if I had a wall like that (points at wall) in my studio, with this kind of light coming in, it would be really fantastic. (laughs)

Suzan Frecon: I've been through a lot of studios, unfortunately, because I was always busy painting, and never had time to tend to real estate, so I've had to move around, which is very disconcerting, but that's neither here nor there. But in my studio right now, I have northern light for the first time, and I love northern light, it's just wonderful to have it, and it's good northern light, there's—there aren't any obstructions. So, it comes from the side, and I do work on one painting at a time. But, you know, the "yes and no" to that question, I focus on one painting at a time. But the drying time, you know, I—while one is drying, I work on another painting, because sometimes it takes a week or two for one layer to dry, and then I have to wait awhile till it settles in, before I can come back over it. So, the answer to that question is, "yes and no." I like to focus on one painting, but I do have several going on at the same time. And recently, I had about, more than several going on at the same time, because I was preparing for a show, and so I was, you know, had more than I wanted to be working on at the same time, but it's okay, you know, I do what I can.

Brad Epley: Do you work entirely vertically? Or would something like this ever be flat in the course of…

Suzan Frecon: It dries flat, but my—you know, I look at things a lot. I look at the painting a lot, because all my decisions are visual decisions. I mean, like I've had this one, for years I've been looking at this painting and adjusting it, changing the color, you know, going—getting it orchestrated to be what it is, now through the technical work, through the painting work.

[00:25:13]

Brad Epley: You mentioned that this one—you finished, or you finally achieved the right surface by applying just a drying oil, rubbing that into the surface directly?

Suzan Frecon: Well, I—can I stand up when talking about the [word inaudible]?

Brad Epley: Sure, sure.

Suzan Frecon: I—it was coming close to being finished, and I had—you know, over the years, I—the top color is, it's a—I think it's a Venetian pigment. And it's very transparent, and it absorbs a lot of oil, so it was still sinking in too much. It was too ashy in relation to the rest of the painting, even though I want all the sheens to be slightly different in playing with each other. So I—you know, I—I just put some—I shouldn't even tell you this, cause—but, I will. (laughs)

Brad Epley: (laughs)

Suzan Frecon: You're digging out all my secrets. So, I rarely do this, but I—I put sun-thickened oil on my hand, very small quantities, and I just kind of, rubbed it over the whole surface, and I had to keep working it so it would—so it would come out even. I—I took most of it off, but—you know, I just left traces on the color, and it dried okay, and then—you know, I waited a few weeks and it—it looked good to me, and I felt very good about this painting. So, it got signed. (laughs)

Brad Epley: (laughs)

Suzan Frecon: It's signed on the back. (laughs)

[00:26:53]

Brad Epley: Have you—have you noticed changes over time in the surfaces of these paintings? For example, do they tend to matte out a little bit, or do they --

Suzan Frecon: Yes, they—they all—they all seem to—some of them are very shiny, some—some of them might have much more oil, or stand oil, in them. And those surfaces are very shiny. But they always kind of diminish. And I like that. I like it, it makes the color—it doesn't get matte, but it still feels like oil paint, but it just—um, gets—I've been happy with the way my paintings—my oil paintings have aged. I have one in my studio that—that I stopped working on, because I was working on a group for an exhibition in a smaller space at the—for David Zwirner. And, so that one's been there maybe two years, and I noticed—I didn't like it at first, I was going to go back and change everything. And now, I kind of like it, cause the—it's kind of settled in, and the color's very substantial. And, so I might not change it as I thought I was going to change it as much as I thought I was going to change it.

Brad Epley: So those aren't things that need to be addressed with varnish or anything like that later, and they just—you're—you're happy with the way they…

Suzan Frecon: No, I think the painting—you know, I go, I work with the paint. The paint tells me what it wants to, it's like a back and forth, it's a collaboration. (laughs)

[00:28:33]

Brad Epley: Have there been works that you've executed, that you either have not liked the way they've aged, or they've had some kind of accident or, you know, something befall them that really has had you question—question them as artwork anymore?

Suzan Frecon: Yes. And I used to use caput mortuum a lot, because it was—when I put oil with it, I put stand oil with it. And it got this beautiful, deep red, that I really loved, it was like an earthy, orange-y red. It was just luscious. And, but it—if I built up more than two or three layers of that paint, it never dried. There's something about caput mortuum and stand that never dries. And I—and Brad helped—he gave me a great piece of information, because I thought that if they dried long enough, I could wrap them in plastic. And I found out, much to my dismay, that no matter how long they dried, if you wrapped them in plastic, plastic stuck to them, and I had paintings in storage that were wrapped in plastic, because I thought they were dry enough. And the plastic stuck to them, and made a moiré surface on them. And then, finally Brad told me, that the plastic has an emulsifier in it, which interacts with the oil paint, and that's why they were sticking.

Suzan Frecon: So that was a—that was such a—a good piece of information, and I never let anything touch the surface anymore. But anyway, somebody had wrapped one of—you know, quite an important painting for me, it had been wrapped in plastic, and it was caput mortuum, and it just ruined it. And so I tried to repaint it, I tried to paint over the old paint, and it was a disaster, so I had to destroy that painting, finally. Luckily, no one had bought that painting, and I didn't have to—but that was a rare instance. That's the only time I can think of that a disaster like that happened. But it was with caput mortuum. And I don't use that color anymore. And I don't—and I'm careful about building up my layers too, not to make them too thick.

[00:31:07]

Brad Epley: One last point, while we're here with the painting, and that is the exhibition height of the work? Is that something you like to see them up higher, or I seem to remember when you were here in 2008 that you liked lower a little bit better.

Suzan Frecon: Yeah, yeah. I—I feel that, the way—the most important thing is for, how the viewer experiences the painting, and when they're high, they look like they're floating. And these are—you know, I want these paintings to really interact with the viewer in a very tactile, physical way. And I find that that's how I can enter them. You know, that's how I experience them, so I figure the viewer will experience them in the same way I experience—and I see here that it's great to see all the paintings are kind of—have that same

demand that they're low and—I saw one of Brice Marden's painting exhibited at MoMA recently. It was in the lobby, and it was above the desk, it was like a five-panel painting, and they had it above the desk with—you know, it looked like a decoration—it just upset me, because I couldn't imagine why they had done that, and there was so much other—there was so much else to look at too, the desk, and the people, and the brochures, and everything were under that painting. (laughs) And so this, you can—you can see it, much more the way I'm talking about seeing my painting, and the other beautiful paintings here.

Brad Epley: Well, maybe now is a good time, we could segue to some of the works on paper?

Jan Burandt: Could I ask a question or two…

Brad Epley: Sure.

Jan Burandt: …about the painting?

Suzan Frecon: Yeah, and I wanted something to say something, too…

Brad Epley: Oh, sure, please.

Suzan Frecon: …that continues with this piece.

[00:33:05]

Jan Burandt: I was just curious, because you talked about sanding the surface of…

Suzan Frecon: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: …of the painting at different points in time and…

Suzan Frecon: Oh, good question.

Jan Burandt: …I was curious about, you know, what and how you—do you use various grades of material to do that, and how do you deal with the surface afterwards?

Suzan Frecon: Usually, I don't like to sand these big paintings. I—usually the paint is what it is. But this one, I didn't like the way the paint dried, and I didn't intend to sand it, but I did. 'Cause I couldn't put another layer of paint over all the paint that I had on it, I knew I'd run into trouble. So—so this one, I—I sanded, and then put paint over it again. But none of this paint that you're looking at is sanded. It's the under that's—that I sanded. But some of my paintings, I—there was one that I sanded. I sanded one color—it had dark

blue, shiny areas, and then it had this one area of very—it was like a caput mortuum color that was very purplish, deep, dry, earth red. And I sanded that, and I then I looked at it, and it really looked great with the shiny blue, they just really played with each other. And so I left it that way, and, you know, there you go. (laughs)

Brad Epley: (laughs)

Jan Burandt: So, when you're doing—I'm just trying to imagine working with this big surface and that kind of—so, are you talking about like a sand paper, sort of?

Suzan Frecon: Yes, I use—I put something stiff on the back of the painting.

Jan Burandt: Oh good.

Suzan Frecon: You know, like a thin board.

Jan Burandt: Um-hm.

Suzan Frecon: So that I don't break the ground, hopefully. And this, some of the oil did bleed to the back of this painting. That was part of the problem of repainting the paint on the top, because when, you can see there's—there's oil bleeding, into the back --

Brad Epley: That's interesting, because it's actually this beautiful, almost kind of tortoise-shell pattern of—where the oil has come through a little bit on the back, and that wasn't—it didn't totally correspond with the shape on the front, so that's interesting to know that that's…

Suzan Frecon: Yeah, that's why, the oil went—you know, I sanded the ground—you know, I sanded it, and so some of the oil bled back into the linen. So then, when I came over it with subsequent layers on that color, it became very uneven, because some of the oil would still bleed in, and some would stay on the top, so that was why I went on with the way I did complete it.

[00:36:14]

Brad Epley: You mentioned there was another thought you wanted to add about…

Suzan Frecon: Well, I was going to say something that isn't on the back of the painting. (laughs) And when—and it could be useful for future exhibitions, because I like it that you look at one painting, without—like some, sometimes in an exhibition, someone will put a smaller painting next to a big painting. But I feel that you have to look at the big paintings in a different way than when you look at the small paintings, so—so it's okay if there's a small painting somewhere else. But I wouldn't exhibit a small painting in the vicinity of the

big painting. I kind of try not to do that, just because it doesn't—you perceive the paintings differently, as with yourself, with your whole body, and your—and I can't think of—what are—I'm trying to think what else I write on the back. I think we covered the light…

Brad Epley: There were—I think you actually mentioned the sanding, you mentioned…

Suzan Frecon: …the height…

Brad Epley: Um, I think you mentioned there are a couple of pigment numbers, which probably relate to a Kremer number.

Suzan Frecon: Yeah.

Brad Epley: And then the lighting. And the no frame. I can't remember what else, but…

Suzan Frecon: Yeah. So I added this about—(laughs)

Brad Epley: It's great, that's all…

Suzan Frecon: I don't…

Brad Epley: …all good information.

Suzan Frecon: …I break my own rules all the time, because as I said, I go with what works visually. But I found visually that I want to contemplate these in a way that wouldn't have the—the way that you look at a small painting, because, you know, I notice in—things are exhibited so beautifully here, because you do see one painting at a time, you're lost in the world of this painting, and then you're lost in the world of these other paintings. And those are—you know, they kind of go into each other, the Rothkos—and so that's wonderful to have all this space, and to really be able to experience the painting. It's ideal. But so many museums, you go into, and you're looking at a De Kooning, and there's a Kline there, and then a Hofmann there, and it's just—you can't really get the full experience. And that's what you want. You want the viewer to get the fullest possible experience of art when you look at a painting, or any work of art.

Jan Burandt: I think when your exhibition was here in 2008 ["form, color, illumination: Suzan Frecon painting," The Menil Collection, March 7-May 11, 2008], the lobby where we had the paintings arranged was such a beautiful example of that. I spent a lot of time there when your paintings were.

Suzan Frecon: Oh, thank you.

Jan Burandt: It was uh—and the natural light that's there is so beautiful, too.

Suzan Frecon: The light was beautiful, yes, it was…

Jan Burandt: Extraordinary.

Suzan Frecon: …great. It came from the side and from this (points toward ceiling) wonderful system of Renzo Piano.

[Break in video]

[00:39:26]

Jan Burandt: This is the earliest of the works on paper that we have of yours, and I thought it was an—it was interesting to compare it to these later works, especially with the papers that are used, and I was wondering if you would like to talk a little bit about your relationship to paper and paper selection for your drawings.

Suzan Frecon: Yeah, I'd love to talk about—especially, you know, this kind of—maybe, stands out a little differently, because it is from quite a—ah, I'd say at least ten years maybe, difference, or am I wrong on that? I—I don't remember. But these are all from after 2000, and these are maybe from '90—well.

Jan Burandt: '93 is the date on that piece.

Suzan Frecon: Okay, so, it is about ten…

Jan Burandt: Yeah, and this is 2006.

Suzan Frecon: …over ten years, maybe 15 years. And I was—this, I didn't have the old Indian paper yet, which I'll get into when I talk about those, but, I think this is a recycled paper. I'm having trouble seeing what. But I think it was just an ordinary paper. And I was doing a lot of red—something that I call, "Red structural studies." And this is one, and actually since you have—since the Menil has this one, I would like to give them a few more—one or two, or three more of these so that it makes more sense what is going on here, and maybe transition into these, I think that would be a good idea. And it just occurred to me, when I—I didn't realize you had this one, and so.

[00:41:19]

Suzan Frecon: But these relate—you know, they related a lot always to the red paintings, that the large, red ones, and I was kind of, you know, trying to find structures, and I—just kept doing these red, linear red structural studies. And they are the earth red colors, mixtures. So they relate a lot, they're for—they're before—way before this painting, but they relate a lot to some other early paintings, and before I was doing these measured paintings, I was doing—

you know, large areas of color, with many subtle strokes in them. They had—the strokes were—the surfaces were similar to this, to this surface.

Suzan Frecon: And then, then I started—when I was always, you know, seeking my path, I was slow to come to it. And I'm one of those painters who had to work very hard to get to where I was going, if I ever got there.

Suzan Frecon: So, I—some of the paintings, I remember one in particular—it had, you know, pretty much disappearing strokes that made the painting, and they were rectangles. And then, I was putting in shiny strokes of the paint, very few strokes, but kind of they were related to these red structural studies. They weren't precisely structures. They were, you know, part of the composition. But they differentiated the shiny from the matte. And, so, when you have a few more of these, maybe it'll transition more into these. And then I—then I started little by little, I wanted—I didn't want to make lines, I wanted painting. I wanted my paintings to be paintings, not drawings, so—so I was trying to make areas of color. And that—that was actually much harder than making lines of color, which were structural, but I wanted to watercolors to be more paintings in themselves, so the challenge was to turn these into areas of color.

[00:43:59]

Jan Burandt: And back to the paper of this particular—the early one—what drew you to that type of paper? Is this a paper that we see in a lot of your work, or is this…

Suzan Frecon: Well, I was experimenting with different kinds of painting. You know, there was a period—I wasn't doing watercolors before, I was only working on paintings like early on in the '60s and '70s and '80s. I was working on oil paintings, and I did very few works on paper, and one year I couldn't work on oil paintings for a personal reason, I had a problem. And so I just, really, I wanted to keep working…

Suzan Frecon: …and I had been to Crete, which was very inspiring to me. I had always wanted to go there, and I was just thrilled to see the—to think about the labyrinthine architecture that had been there that I couldn't see anymore, but I could try to imagine it by looking at the ruins. And so, I came up with all this work on paper, and I was working on Chinese paper pretty much, because it sort of bled into the paper, but it stayed on the top, too, so I could mix the red pigments, and really, you know, some of it was area, and some of it was line. And some of them came from that, and then they evolved into other ones, too.

Suzan Frecon: But these two are late pap—these, so anyway, well these were mostly Asian papers, Indian, and—and I had, as I said, I had this very common Chinese

paper. It was handmade, and I thought it was really beautiful, but it's—it's very bad conservation-wise, it falls apart, it gets brittle, it gets yellow. It is yellow to begin with, which I liked, but. (laughs) But it doesn't hold—this is a rag paper. It's old Indian paper, and I'm trying to figure out how to talk this into—from this paper, and this period, into this, all of a sudden into this, (laughs) which is from 2006, '07, '08. I guess 2005, '06 '07.

Suzan Frecon: So anyway, that was—I did a lot on old Chin—on this common Chinese paper, just because I liked the way it took the paint, and it had this handmade quality. If you held it up to the light, it looked very beautiful, because it was done by hand, and it had the imperfections in it. So I was always looking for paper that just pleased me in a tactile way, and that would take the paint. And so, jump ahead ten years, and I came upon this old Indian paper. It's old Indian ledger paper. And I saw it in New York Central [Art Supply] in the store, and I looked at it, and I thought, "Ah, this could be really good." (laughs) So I bought about ten sheets, and I went home, and I tried it, and I loved it. It was only—the size was very limited. It was small, and so I would cut one of these sheets in half and use half a sheet. But I loved the way it took the paint—it took, you know, it would not sink in too much, so it wouldn't bleed all over the place, but it would—I could really get the color to have these interesting nuances and be connected to the paper. And the paper is really part of the painting.

[00:48:08]

Suzan Frecon: So I go with that, I ride with that, because I let—people ask me all the time, "Well why do the watercolors look so different from the paintings?" And it's because of the support, because it wouldn't make any sense for me to measure—to do a measured drawing. Although this is measured in a—you know, in a loose way, the proportion of blue to the white is kind of, same, similar proportion that I use, relation of the one red to the other red, believe it or not. (laughs) And this has red underneath it, and the blue is floating on top, so it gives you this electric blue jumping out, and it bleeds into the paper, and I like that. But, you know, the format of the paper is what generates the form of the watercolor, the same as the format of the canvas generates what the composition of the painting is.

[Break in video]

Suzan Frecon: So I was going to say that, also the material of the paper generates the watercolor, so as I said, it's very much a part of the painting, the watercolor painting.

[00:49:38]

Brad Epley: Can I ask one quick question about the paper? They're identified in the media descriptions as "burnished paper." Is that—and this is my ignorance of the kind of paper—do they come burnished already, or is that something you do in preparing them?

Suzan Frecon: No, they're agate burnished. You know, they—a smooth agate stone, the people. This—I don't think they make this paper anymore, although I've had different opinions, and they're—you can see there are sometimes stains, and little writings on the paper, and—and that's all—those are nice little caveats, but that's not why I use the paper, I don't—you know, I'm not trying to have little interesting things happen, I'm just using it because I like the way it takes the paint. And it is a good paper, because I think it's—I mean, I don't know, you—you know more than I do, but it's supposedly a rag paper, so it should stand up pretty—better than the newsprint paper.

Jan Burandt: (laughs) And we're doing our best to keep them in good housing, so…

Suzan Frecon: And some of it—this paper's in good shape. I have some paper that, I'm running out of supplies of it, and I don't want to keep—I don't want it to be—to define my watercolors, either I'm using it so much, that I want to get into other papers again, because I don't want to be the woman who uses old Indian paper all the time. (laughs) You know, so I'm trying—I'm constantly trying to find other painters, but—papers.

Suzan Frecon: But my main work is the oil paintings. And I sort of do the watercolors for many reasons. You know, I do them to find colors; I do them because I enjoy doing them. As studies, sometimes, if I'm working somewhere in the country in a small studio where I'm not doing oil paintings, I might try out oil painting ideas in the watercolors. But for the most part, the watercolors come from the paintings. I don't do a watercolor and then do a painting, although sometimes, I do do that. But these come from the oil paintings.

[00:52:05]

Jan Burandt: And what is your relationship to the watercolor itself? I mean, how do you procure and prepare that material? I know you have a…

Suzan Frecon: I—watercolor is much more immediate, so it gives me—sometimes, when I'm waiting for paintings to dry, it's sort of a—you know, you have to wait, and you know, you go from, when you look at the painting, you go—like any painter could probably tell you this. But if you do something you like, then you're in a good mood. (laughs) And it makes you happy, and then when you're waiting for weeks and weeks for something to dry, and you've having a hard time with it, it's going to go like—(laughs)—duh. (laughs) Might be getting in a bad mood. But, you know, watercolor, doing watercolor is more immediate. Your color dries fast, and you can see what you have, and you

can—you know. Sometimes I work on a watercolor over years, too. I'll put it in a drawer, and then I'll get it out years later, and figure out how to take it somewhere else. So I don't really have any rules, but in general, watercolor is a more immediate satisfaction than—the oil paintings, just are a long, slow process that develops little-by-little. But I think oil painting goes further than watercolors. I just—that's my personal, in—inner working, the way I think.

Brad Epley: And in terms of the material itself, you're satisfied with the range of commercially available watercolors? Or do you make your own in the way that you do sometimes with the red paints?

Suzan Frecon: Yeah. The colors are great. I don't—I use some pigments for the reds, but for the most part, I use good quality commercial paints. I use—again, I use them for the color, like I might have a Chinese orange that's from Sennelier. But I don't use many Sennelier's colors. I use a lot of—Winsor & Newton, their colors are bright and they have a—the right quantity of gum Arabic. And I use Old Holland [Classic Colours] sometimes. They have more pigment, I think, than medium. I use Rublev sometimes. I have a lapis that's from Rublev. I use—what else? I think that—but I look at the color. You know. I use some of Missoni Schmincke colors too. But I—I use them for the color, like—like I do for the oils.

[00:55:07]

Suzan Frecon: This orange one [*orange f*, 2007, The Menil Collection, Houston, Anonymous gift] is the most recent. And that came into the show. I don't even think that's in the book. I think it came into the show after the book was in progress. I can't remember if it…

Brad Epley: I'll have to go back and look.

Suzan Frecon: …made it into the book. But I wanted that to be in the show, because it was the most recent, and I was—you know, it relates to the shapes of the painting, and I have been doing this orange series, it's cadmium yellow-orange. And, I'm using it now. It's come back into some of my oil paintings. It took me a long time to be able to use it into my oil painting. But I did it recently in a painting, and so I felt like I had achieved something by throwing in that bright orange…

Brad Epley: (laughs)

Suzan Frecon: …into my more subtle, nuanced oil paintings. So I'm really happy that this one is in the collection, too.

[00:56:16]

Jan Burandt: These [*yellow Euclid*, 2006, Gift of the artist, and *blue, yellow, orange and indigo composition*, 2006, The Menil Collection, Houston, Gift of Peter Blum] are two where the paper is completely obscured.

Suzan Frecon: Yeah, these—I'll connect from what I said about the orange, because I see, it's interesting for me to see this, because, I just finished a painting with these four colors, and I—an oil painting, and for the first time, I did put in the bright orange over another color, so it's funny how it came back unconsciously from this painting, which is very related to one from 2012 that I just showed. And, just before I get into the, how much dense, how dense the paint is. I—again, the reason that reason that these are on a long format, or on the formats, is because that's the way the paper comes. And I don't—in this case—in this case, in the case of the oil paintings, I determine what the format of the painting is, very much so, you know, it's very much a part of the painting, my determination of the precise size. But in the paper, the paper is what determines the size, so I cop to that. I'm subservient to—to following the dictates of what the format of the paper is, and so the paper takes me—and, where it's going to.

Suzan Frecon: So this paper is so—I like this paper so much that I hardly ever throw any of it away, if I screw up a watercolor, I even wash it off and start over again. But, it ruins the beautiful, burnished surface that the paper has. So then it starts to—I start to have to work heavy with the paint, and that relates to the oil painting too when I start to work heavier. So, here you're not seeing the paper anymore. It's really disappearing below the paint, and there's heavy paint, and there's paint on both sides of it, probably.

[00:58:33]

Jan Burandt: And, with the surfaces completely covered with a heavy layer of paint, it's more frequent that we see small areas where there have been cracks and losses in the surface.

Suzan Frecon: Yeah, the more I work it, it—I guess it makes the paper crack more. Oh well, I guess it's the paint that's cracking, that's what we were talking about the paint.

Jan Burandt: If you see this small area right here is an example.

Suzan Frecon: Yeah. Yeah, that was—when the paint pools, it has a pool. Then it takes away the gum Arabic, so then it can flake off, but I don't mind that. You know, that's part of the painting. I mean the distressed thing, the red underneath shows through the blue, because the blue was very liquid. And I can do that with watercolor; it's part of the nature of the watercolor that I can do that. I wouldn't do that with the oil painting where it pools, and part of it flakes off. (laughs)

Jan Burandt: (laughs)

Suzan Frecon: It's a different material. And I go with the material, I want to make art out the material, the same as I orchestrate pigments. (laughs) Whether they're in watercolor or oil paint.

Jan Burandt: Mm-hmm. Well I think, in this particular one, there is an area that I was looking at earlier, where the break in the top layer is a little bit less of a natural studio feeling, and bit more of an after-the-fact type of…

Suzan Frecon: Oh, this one?

Jan Burandt: Mm-hmm. And I was…

Suzan Frecon: (examines painting with magnifying glass) Yeah, I see what you're saying.

Jan Burandt: …and I think too, that when you look at the nature of paper and the expansion and contraction that you continue to have, whether there's a pigment on the surface or not, that it forces the medium to a different conformity.

Suzan Frecon: But do you think that it's arrested now, since it's on a flat—it's stationary, that it won't—like, more won't come off?

Jan Burandt: In our practices here, what we try to do is to give everything the most stable environment in terms of the temperature and relative humidity. I think the thing that is very problematic for works on paper is the fluctuation of relative humidity, which causes the expansion and contraction of paper, which tends to react more than, say, a canvas might under the same circumstances. And that's one of the reasons that we're so protective of the work, and wanting to work with the natural tendencies of the sheet, and to preserve it in a frame that is going to—you know, it will stay in this frame to buffer it from those kinds of fluctuations that we also try to eliminate from our museum environment, so…

Suzan Frecon: (laughs)

Jan Burandt: It's a—it's in a happier situation.

Suzan Frecon: Yeah, I think they're about as safe as they could possibly be here at the Menil. There's nowhere (laughs) safer, unless a hurricane comes along, a tornado. (laughs)

Jan Burandt: But it's good to hear that you appreciate, and are not bothered by the kind of cracking and flaking that may…

Suzan Frecon: No, I'm not. I mean sometimes, if I look at something, and it really bothers me visually, in a watercolor, I'll just go back in and work on it. But it usually—that something has peeled a little, or cracked a little, for me it works all right with a painting. It could or could not be touched up, but I think it's better not to touch it up, because, it's part of—of the nature of the paint.

Jan Burandt: Of the process. Okay.

Suzan Frecon: Yeah. And I'm not so picky about it. (laughs)

[01:02:49]

Brad Epley: Can I ask—interrupt for a quick question?

Jan Burandt: Mm-hm.

Brad Epley: With this blue and—actually, it's a nonmaterial question. It's about the source of the image, or of that kind of sliced-off circle that's slid over.

Suzan Frecon: Oh, good. I'm glad you—I wanted to talk about that too, because at this time, I was—I was doing this composition that was—it was atypical for me, it was—you know, usually, I—my—I invent my compositions, they come from—you know, one leads to another, and I find them from the ground up. But this, this composition came from a very small drawing I had seen many years ago in the New York Public Library, and I found out—later I researched it, and it came from Euclid [*Elementa Geometria*, published by Erhard Ratdolt, 1482]. And I just—I like that—I just like that form. It stuck with me. And I finally—years later, found a way to put it back into my painting. So I did a series of paintings, oil paintings, small oil paintings. I never did a large painting, and it came into my watercolors, and it worked with this. You know, I was trying it vertically, and it touched the sides for the most part. And then I did it horizontally in some watercolors, and I did it on this double golden format that I use on some wood paintings on wood panel. And it was just, you know, like the year that I was doing that composition that these came into the Menil Collection, too. (laughs) So it's a little heavy on the Euclid ones, but I think you have three with this form in it, right?

Brad Epley: I think that's right.

Suzan Frecon: I think you have three. So, at some point I'll try to debalance it with some other ones, too, coming in (laughs) to the collection. But, you know, it was a vehicle to make a painting, this composition.

[01:05:05]

Jan Burandt: So, Suzan, if you'll humor me just to revisit the idea of cracking and flaking again, just to think about, in looking at surfaces like this, I mean normally, we're looking at them maybe with a magnifying glass, but I'll take them in the studio and put them under a microscope and see, you know, very complete detail of any maybe insecure portions of paint that might exist. And if you were accepting of a certain amount of loss, how would you feel about—we're looking into the future with this conversation as well, and you know, when you're not next to me to say, "Well I accept this small loss," if it's possible to project a larger problem with an area of cracking and flaking, do you have an objection to a conservator intervening in a proactive way to introduce a consolidant that wouldn't visually change the appearance of the artwork, but that would secure the remaining paint to the surface of the paper sheet.

Suzan Frecon: So you mean like, kind of repainting it, or…

Jan Burandt: No.

Suzan Frecon: …just making it not so—if you find that there's like this big missing area that, you know, some water fell on it, and—or it flaked off, and it was disturbing to you visually, then I would say, you know, go with your instincts of—if it's really jarring you visually, to maybe make it less visible without repainting it. I mean that would be my take. I kind of don't foresee that happening with the watercolors, even though I trust—I know you know a lot more about what could or could not happen. I'm not worried about that happening with the watercolors, because it's like glue, you know, the gum arabic is kind of like glue, and it could flake off a little bit. But I don't see a great big area of this flaking off. Do you?

Jan Burandt: Well, I've seen more of your work as well that wasn't—that we don't necessarily have in the collection—and the surfaces vary a bit. And I think that in general, the heavier the surface is, the more likely you are to see that type of cracking, and if you see the cracking, then the flaking may be not so far behind, and so knowing when to intervene in terms of, you know, we're quite protective and conservative in terms of what we would do, and the most important thing is to protect the appearance of the artwork, and to preserve your intent with it. But if there was an area with—if this area were a larger flaking area where you could see cracks that would anticipate these might join that loss in the future, then it would be possible to introduce a type of consolidant that wouldn't be visible to us now. You wouldn't know that it had been treated. I think that there—you see instances in, maybe earlier treatments, where there is a mismatch of gloss, and that is an unfortunate situation, but it's not necessarily the way that things would happen now or in the future. So I guess it's more about the, um…

Suzan Frecon: You know, I have—I guess I have confidence that you'll know what to do—(laughs)—if that happens. I'd say err on the side of letting it happen, than to overdo making it. Because my watercolors are rough. And so, you know, I'm trying to think of—you know like, maybe an Indian basket if the feathers come apart a little bit, or if they fade, that's part of the aging process, and I don't mind that, cause I—that's—I can't see it the way it was when it was made. And so you can't see—it's fine with me if you—you know, I can't imagine, like 200 years down the road—(laughs)—that we are, that the human race is even going to still be here. But, I—I'm not worried about the watercolors, you know, because they'll age the way they age. I guess I am more worried about the oil paintings, 'cause I've invested, you know, so much of my life into them, that I hope they'll age well. But I don't—I don't think it'll be a problem, how these watercolors age.

Suzan Frecon: Well, but you know, your concerns are—you know, you're trying to—they're very valid, and I'm sorry I can't answer them. I think—you know, I'm just not worried about it—I just…

Jan Burandt: No, I think you are answering them…

Suzan Frecon: I think paper conservators are so—have so much expertise, that they do wonders that I have no idea is even possible. You know, I have a friend who's a paper conservator, and she can invisibly, you know, make a paper alive again, or repaired without even having anything visible.

Jan Burandt: This is what we strive for. So we'll switch—this drawing.

Suzan Frecon: No, I know they're in very good hands here. (laughs) And I couldn't be happier.

[01:11:23]

Suzan Frecon: I guess when I do them, I'm kind of haphazard—you know, I'm not so precise the way you would be with a Leonardo [da Vinci], or something, so, you know, it's—it doesn't concern me too much.

Jan Burandt: Well once they enter the collection, we're interested in getting to the soul of them and helping present the soul of them.

Suzan Frecon: (laughs)

Jan Burandt: And, when we…

Suzan Frecon: And I thank you for that.

Jan Burandt: …started our conversation about the exhibition in 2008, I remember there being a remark about how you would really prefer not to have the works framed if possible. Do you recall that?

Suzan Frecon: Oh. It's not that I would prefer not to have them framed, 'cause I think these frames look—look great, and you're using a kind of glass that really allows the paintings to be seen, which is wonderful. And, you know, I have done—I did do an exhibition where—where they were just mounted on the wall. They were mounted on museum board and then put on the wall. And, you know, that was one way to do it, and this is another way to do it. And, I'm not hung up on it anymore. When I look at them, they're in drawers, you know, and I put them out on the table. But I don't think it diminish—in fact, in fact when they're under, and framed so well like this, they kind of hold their space on the wall—the oil paintings, to get back to light again, which is something we could get into. I can show the watercolors with artificial light, much easier than I can show a big painting with artificial light, so the frame gives it a strength, and—that allows it to be just put on a wall, and it holds its own ground there, because it's a smaller thing to look at, so you enter into it in a totally different way. And so, I think the frame helps with that.

Suzan Frecon: You know, I think of all possibilities, like sometimes in my studio, I'll have a big painting hanging on the wall, that I'm working on, and then I'll just hang up a watercolor that I'm working on, and just tape it to the wall, and I think—"Oh, this could be interesting, to have a big painting, and then tape a watercolor to the wall beside the big painting," because they kind of play with each other sometimes. And it could be visually interesting, but it would have to be done carefully so that one doesn't take away from the other, 'cause you have to look at them in different ways. So, it's interesting to see them—(laughs)—it's a good thing.

Brad Epley: Side-by-side, yeah.

[01:14:25]

Jan Burandt: Well, we frequently look at framing, and try to figure out, is this—was this the framing that was condoned by the artist? Is this the framing that the artist preferred? And, you know, of course over the course of a career…

Suzan Frecon: That's good.

Jan Burandt: …that changes, I'm sure, but…

Suzan Frecon: Yes. (laughs)

Jan Burandt: …this, I mean this is an example of one that came to us framed, by a gallery, and this is an example of one that we framed collaborating with you for the museum exhibition. And I just wonder in…

Suzan Frecon: Yes. Well, the—sometimes, it's tricky to use the rubbed—you know, the wood rubbed with white, because the watercolors are so colorful, that sometimes this doesn't work. But here it—I think it works fine. And I know the person who had this framed [Lawrence Markey], and I can count on him to do a good frame. (laughs) And I like it that he—that he tries some different things with them, 'cause he—you know, I trust his aesthetic so much that he—he tries things that even I wouldn't try, putting a color with a watercolor, and he does it very well, so I—I'm very fortunate.

Suzan Frecon: And I wanted to say, too, I see this hole in the paper. And so that would be my decision when I'm painting the painting. Sometimes those white holes get in the way, and I don't like them, and so I tape a piece of paper, of the same paper behind, and I paint it. But here, I like it that the hole is kind of right there. It's—to me it adds interest to what you're looking at in the paintings.

Jan Burandt: Mm-hm. And that character of the paper is something that we've tried to respect in the—even the hinging of the drawings within the mats, to not—try to make it comfort to any kind of flat surface, but to look at the undulation of the paper, and then place hinges strategically where they seem to hold without constraining.

Suzan Frecon: Yeah. And here, you know, this paper is cut in this quirky way, or ripped, or whatever. And it's, you know, here. And it, actually in the frame, the way it's framed on the floating, you can see that, and that look good, I'm very happy with the way you can see these missing areas, and the paper curves up. If I would put this painting out on a table without a frame, it would curl up so much that you wouldn't be able to see it. And sometimes I paint the back so that I can get it to curl down again, because I can't even see it myself.

Suzan Frecon: But in the frame, once—I know once it's in the frame that it can only curl a certain amount, and then the frame stops it so the—that's really nice, 'cause you can see what the paper does, but you can also see the watercolor without it interfering, so. So, you know, they look great in these frames, I'm very happy with them.

Jan Burandt: Well we're very happy to have them here.

Suzan Frecon: But—but I appreciate that too—one thing I wanted to say that I don't like are, when people put—when they mat them, and put a mat around them. I'm not too crazy about that, because that kind of gives you another element to look at, and it confines them in another frame, so you have almost two

frames. So I really like the floating thing much better, because it frees up the watercolor to see what exactly the watercolor is.

Jan Burandt: Well we—when these frames were, worked out, we had the color—the neutral color of the back mat, and the very—the most colorless glazing that we could access, and then the paint was produced to try to match what the mat board would look like, through the glazing to have as uniform an appearance to just focus attention on that drawing, and I think it works really well.

Suzan Frecon: And I think your frames were a little heavier, because as I understand it, they were double-glazed, because they had to be sent to Europe, and then back again, so you were careful…

Jan Burandt: It's a very heavy…

Suzan Frecon: …so that they wouldn't break on that. So normally if, I think the—gallery frames them with a single glaze, and maybe a little, not quite as heavy, frame, maybe. Yeah, I think this frame is a little thinner than. But, they're well protected. (laughs)

Jan Burandt: And well appreciated.

Jan Burandt: So, thank you for coming to talking about them.

Suzan Frecon: Could I just show the red one? (laughs)

Jan Burandt: Would you like—yes.

Suzan Frecon: (laughs)

Brad Epley: Absolutely, yeah.

Jan Burandt: Yes, we can bring these, switch these.

Suzan Frecon: That was my input, to put the red one. I just wanted to end on the reds. (laughs)

[01:19:46]

Suzan Frecon: So I just wanted to end on the red and red [referring to *version 13*, 2010, and *long reds*, 2005], because, when we were working out which groups—which watercolors would go to the Menil, I wanted to put this one in, because I wanted the red information, this has the gradations of red from the oranger red, to the more violet red—and it has the bleeds in the papers. And, everything. I don't have a lot to say about it, you can…

Brad Epley: (laughs)

Suzan Frecon: …look. Come to any conclusions for yourself.

Brad Epley: And that one has some of those incidental marks or writing that come in sometimes on them?

Suzan Frecon: Yeah. Yeah, and it's a very skinny paper, that format, the other papers come in a wider format. So that was—it's challenging to try to make a composition with that long, skinny format. So did we—I think we covered a lot, I don't…

Brad Epley: We did.

Suzan Frecon: I can't think of anything we forgot, but I'm sure I will. (laughs)

Brad Epley: (laughs)

Suzan Frecon: Do you have any more questions?

Brad Epley: I don't—I don't think so about the paintings, do you?

Jan Burandt: I—you know, I guess, I'm really interested in the relationship between the process of working the paintings and the drawings and, you know, this is not so much about the conservation but about, you know, your relationship to those works. And you touched a little bit on that, but I just wondered if there's anything more that you would want to say about how maybe working on one is informing the other as you go along.

Suzan Frecon: I think I—I think a lot more about the oil paintings, especially these days, you know. As time goes on, my time is really—I think my time over the past few years has been spent, maybe like 90% on oil, and maybe 95% on oil, and I have not—but I'm, you know in the back of my mind, I am thinking about the watercolors. Well, I'm thinking now, you know, coming back into the watercolors, even though my major concepts are for going on with large oil paintings, and I'm thinking along the lines of getting some of the measuring into my—of the proportions into the watercolors, and finding some other papers too. So, but that's still in my mind, it's—little by little, it's happening where I'm using some measurements into—in my watercolors, too.

Jan Burandt: Look forward to seeing those.

Suzan Frecon: Does that answer your question?

Jan Burandt: Yeah. Thank you.

Suzan Frecon: Thank you. Thank you.

Brad Epley: Well this has been a great opportunity…

Suzan Frecon: Thank you so much.

Brad Epley: …one I think we've all been looking forward to since 2008. That was when I first became familiar with your work, so this is kind of a culmination of what, I think, I had wanted to do then, and we were so fortunate that this came into the collection, along with all the drawings, so we had the opportunity of something to talk about, so.

Suzan Frecon: Oh, I can't tell you how happy I am to have—to have a painting in the Menil Collection, but to have this one is just—I'm just terribly happy, and I thank you, I—so much, for your conservation of these. (laughs)

Suzan Frecon: Of my work in your care.

Jan Burandt: It's our pleasure.

Brad Epley: It's our pleasure, yeah.

Suzan Frecon: It's such a great place.

Brad Epley: Thank you again, Suzan.

Suzan Frecon: Thank you.

[END RECORDING]