Artists Documentation Program

Video Interview Transcript

RICHARD TUTTLE

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Interviewed by:

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Associate Director for Conservation and Research,

Whitney Museum of American Art

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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): Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Founding Director, Artists Documentation Program, and Associate Director for Conservation and Research, Whitney Museum of American Art; Richard Tuttle, Artist]

[BEGIN RECORDING]

[00:00:25]

CM-U: Today is January 30, 2006, and I'm here with Mr. Tuttle in the Whitney for the installation of his retrospective, that has been here for a few months.

[00:00:38]

CM-U: So, to just start specifically, why don't we talk about this piece and anything, any salient points of the construction that you think have had an impact on the aging of it or the way it looks.

Richard Tuttle: Well, you know, the plus side of things is that they are much more beautiful today than they were when I made them because the patina, the oxidization creates, I don't know, maybe a deeper wisdom, deeper mystery, or they were, actually, made with no intention that they could be arranged any way. They could be on the floor, or they could be on a wall. They could be on the hand. Somebody could make them part – we haven't actually ever tried that, where they could be like half on the floor and half on the wall. But they were – we put them on the wall in the '75 Whitney show, and with these pins. But someone – they were in Germany, a collector in Germany – and they used a very tough double-faced tape, and that was actually removed by the Modern, I think. And on the back of them, they still have this little square…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …you know, this rectangle from the – yeah.

CM-U: What is your feeling about attaching them with the tape? It seems to me the feeling would be very different.

Richard Tuttle: Yeah. I mean, yes. I mean, I'm not a total fan of these kind of L-hooks.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: Those little pins. But somehow I think it's all right as well that…

[00:02:36]

Richard Tuttle: I think why the piece works is because of some, oh, like, almost magical way that the mind can take in this kind of whatever it is, like a statement. And I know, when we spoke before – and I've actually thought more and more about that – but this whole issue that there's a certain kind of art that tries to, you know, say the highest level is when there is no expression. You go beyond the range of human expression. I mean, Josef Albers most represents that stage.

Richard Tuttle: But there is the other side, which will say that art is simply and purely a question of human expression; and we are actually in a world where those polarities are – plainly exist. And that's why, you know, Albers couldn't stand the American – the New York – the Abstract Expressionism of the – and they didn't really have a high place for him either. And you can go over to the Metropolitan now and see probably one of the greatest paintings painted in the second half of the Twentieth Century, Rauschenberg's big, you know, horizontal panel, which was to escape Josef Albers. And it's a – but salient to our conversation, it's we – I mean, an artist like myself has to deal with the fact – I mean, who wants to make a really important, significant artwork, has to somehow solve those two opposite sides of things. So this piece could exist purely formally, you know. And in terms of conservation, then, one could approach it on formal, just purely formal considerations. Like, for me, the solder, uh, the soldering is a revelation of quote my – or I should say my quote "line" unquote…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …and which you see in – I mean, each body of work is another revelation of that line. And so, you know, there are some pieces where the metal has broken away from the solder, and there are some that it's even dangerously broken away. But to – and this is not soldered the way a professional solderer…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …would solder. It's somebody who really doesn't know how to solder. But it works for me because it's a line. It does – I mean – so, anyway, the point is there is also an expressionistic side of this work which, yeah, you can see it if you look at one piece…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …but basically you can see it as a totality. And when we showed it in '75, we had it sort of in front of a wall where you could see a cloth octagonal.

CM-U: Hmm.

Richard Tuttle: And even in the photographs, these pieces will come together, you know, as an octagonal. I mean, that's a characteristic of real creativity, and that's one of the things I'm trying to do as an artist, is to work in a way that shows not only – you know, I mean, a picture, you know, a form, da-da-da-da – but like what real creativity looks like. You know, what pure creativity looks like. Because it's something we don't often – it doesn't come to a visual, like a pictorial place. And indeed that works with this formal expression side of things because where that – if you can bridge those two, it seems to me you get the chance to make something that can just – people can *see*. It's even like not even an art experience. It's just made visible what pure creativity looks like.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: You know. And in a way, that's why I'm kind of radical, I guess, because as much as I love the art experience, I kinda love the fact that one can see something like pure creativity more than it – what the piece triggering an art experience, you know.

CM-U: Um-hum. Hmm. I see that.

[00:08:32]

CM-U: But with regard to these. I mean, what you say is so much to my mind also fundamental to a good restoration treatment, frankly.

Richard Tuttle: Yeah.

CM-U: It's formal, but beyond that, if you don't understand the immaterial, if you don't recognize it, or give way to it, then you've done something that can actually impair it. You did the weld – just to clarify, you did the welding yourself…

Richard Tuttle: Uh-huh.

CM-U: …on these?

Richard Tuttle: Uh-huh.

CM-U: And so, should it be necessary for single point correction, or…

Richard Tuttle: Correct.

CM-U: …you know, that's one thing.

Richard Tuttle: Yes.

CM-U: But an entire edge would be something really that would be totally interfering with your hand in this, really?

Richard Tuttle: Yeah. If the – you know, the single point restoration would – I would sorta like vote for that. But we did actually have a piece that was a little bit earlier than these, and it was in the collection of SFMOMA…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …and they faced the need to restore – it was actually dropped, and it was dented, you know.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: And that actually shifted some of the solder, you know. And I remember, you know, after a good amount of thought, saying – you know, just going in one day and saying, "We need a metal guy." And, you know, sometimes – it's just like – asking the question…

CM-U: Why didn't you call in one?

Richard Tuttle: Well, I know the – I mean, this is – maybe it makes perfect sense; maybe it makes no sense, but I am really in love with the whole subject of conservation, you know. And maybe because I make work that really needs conservation, you know…

CM-U: (laughs)

Richard Tuttle: …or maybe – I don't know why, but, you know, I can sit for hours and talk about fibers of paper, and how they are laid, and all this stuff, you know. But I – you know, after time, and getting to know people. And so I knew that the restoration was not – didn't fall under the skill, no matter how great the

department is – and it is – that this metal restoration – I mean, my mind actually went in the direction, "Okay, this is a dent. Where have you seen dents?" You know. "And how do people react to dents, and so on?" And I actually went to thinking about, you know, car shops, you know…

CM-U: Um-hum. Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …and all the things they can do. And there are these guys out there who can just, like, you know, take a certain kind of hammer and go "pop!" like that, and it's like it goes right back, and there's no abrasion, and there's none of that.

CM-U: That's right.

Richard Tuttle: And so – and then I went back to the – you know, back to more familiar territory. And when I said, "We need a metal guy." 'Cause I knew the answer to that question was going to be – come from their experience. And sure enough, there was someone who did a project – maybe it was a David Smith or something – and they did such a great job, and their name was in the Rolodex, and they – you know, and then we went to him, and sure enough, he did – he came, and he did this great, great job, you know. But it was, you know, the…

[00:12:35]

CM-U: Well, that's more of a localized kind of treatment, which is less problematic, you know, from an artist's point of view, I would imagine, than…

Richard Tuttle: Yeah. Yeah.

CM-U: So you like the patina on these?

Richard Tuttle: Yeah.

CM-U: But you really record it [sounds like].

Richard Tuttle: Well, yeah. But this is – I mean, oh, gosh, you know, as we are getting into aesthetic [sounds like]…

CM-U: Yeah.

Richard Tuttle: …that this – like my work, you know, I mean, it's built on like anomalies, you know. It's almost like constructed on one anomaly after the next, you know; and if it looks casual, it's really the opposite. And the way to think about it is like, you know, every molecule counts. You know. So that's the intention. That's the intention behind it, and there's many examples of work that's been done that takes, you know, surely, "this is a part where it's not important, or it's the back, or the" – you know, something like that. And that is not the case at all.

CM-U: Exactly. Exactly.

Richard Tuttle: And so, in these pieces, I did use a flux.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: And the flux actually, you know, gets dirty, and it's a greenish color and so on. And if you look really, really closely, you'll see that this line here is – I mean, it's made with this kind of grease. There's a greasiness, you know, right – 'cause the flux that I used has, you know, grease in it because they want it to spread up over, you know, all, everything. And so the heating, the grease becomes a vehicle for the flux.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: And then that in turn leaves this greasiness, which, in time, has a kind of discoloration. And I'm also making this as hard – I'm using this to somehow take the subject, you know, even beyond where it's ever been taken before, you know.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: It's not just for me, but for everyone. Here you can see that greasiness a lot easier 'cause the flux tended to go to the side of it. See those kind of…

CM-U: Oh, yeah.

Richard Tuttle: …this darkness in that line up there? Well, there's a characteristic of my quote "line" unquote, which means that there are like three symbolic elements that have to come together, and that doesn't always happen, and I don't know why, you know. It's age. It's astrology. It's materials. It's time. It's this, that, and the other thing. But the great thing is, for an artist, you know, is to be at the cutting edge of art history of their time. And that's like – that's some

kind of sense, you know. It's like an animal, in an animal sense. It's not cerebral cortex or anything. And that the – it's the part of my senses that there are these, like, three elements that come together. And as much as I – I mean, it's the greatest times, you know, when that happens and you make something like this. It's like you go through life just, you know, like floating like that. And it ends. It comes to an end. And it's horrible, you know. It's like you've had some kind of nutrition, and it's been taken away.

Richard Tuttle: The first time it happened, I don't want to tell you. But these – so, anyway. This flux – I mean, you've got solder, you've got the edge, and you've got this flux. I mean, you've got, in this kind of ninety-degree angle. And the combination of those – I say three; it's – I mean, in – okay, if we're being precise, I would say it's not really three things fit together. It's more like three and a half, or something like – if there were a number between three and four, it would be that. And I can just feel it even like now. I'm not, like, in that – it's not happening for me at the moment, but I know it, and I'm looking for it. And I'm waiting for it.

[00:17:33]

Richard Tuttle: And so, in terms of like conservation issues – and I am feeling that this can be known. And maybe that's why conservation is so important for me because I think this is a new kind of art, and that the old kind of art, the last place in the museum it would arrive would be the conservation department, you know. With this kind of art, just even to say it's a new kind of art, the first place it arrives is the conservation department. And I, I mean, there's a piece on the wall over there where, frankly…

CM-U: Do you want to go right to it?

Richard Tuttle: Yeah.

CM-U: Because we don't have to follow any particular structure [sounds like].

Richard Tuttle: I actually feel it's, you know, it's the piece, what the piece is saying is like, you know, "I want to collaborate with the conservation department." So all these kind of different elements, of which, you know, there are – I mean, I kind of like left some – I don't know if you – like even this piece [*Ten, A*, 2000, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Accessions Committee Fund Purchase]. That, like that there on…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …there are zillions of little hidden stuff. But that was – I didn't make this – you know, I mean, I'm trying to make clear that the – you know – when you are in the groove, and the work is telling you what it wants. It's about what the work wants. Not what I want, you know. But the work was very happy to go along and not be thinking about, you know, the eternal – you know, like this is in stone or in bronze, or…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: And when it was bought by San Francisco, and, you know, it went to the conservation department. I mean, things like this was…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: This was broken apart when they bought it as an artwork.

CM-U: You mean, as a damage or intentional?

Richard Tuttle: It was not intentional. It was a real, real damage.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: And I didn't like that it was damaged. But what could I do, you know?

CM-U: Right.

Richard Tuttle: Because I'm not – you know, I don't have the skills…

CM-U: Right.

Richard Tuttle: …you know, that a conservator has. I would like to make an art as if I had the skills of a conservator, but seeing as I don't, you know, then my problem is, "Well, how do you get those skills into your work?" Well, you make a work that will go right, the first stop, into the conservation department…

CM-U: (laughing)

Richard Tuttle: …and they call you up, or you can go there.

CM-U: Right.

Richard Tuttle: And they can say, you know, "Well, did you mean this for it to be hanging that way?" "No, I didn't." I know what I meant, you know?

CM-U: Right.

Richard Tuttle: But did I do it? No, I didn't do it, you know. And it's this like – I mean, but that's part of my whole program, that art is much more a social phenomenon. I mean, you know – and I'm like – you know, I could live in a monastery. I am a very isolated, alienated person. But the work is very, very social.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: And things that uh, yeah…

[00:21:22]

CM-U: But, you know, what's interesting. The conservator just really, as you said, looks at the work as its integral parts. The fibers, the medium, the glue. I mean, you know, we break it down so that we can recreate it if it's damaged…

Richard Tuttle: Um-hum.

CM-U: …but you have more – I mean, the artist looks at it in a very – you know, it may inform you, but it's not the way you really look at the material, I would imagine. Is that right?

Richard Tuttle: Well, I think the – okay, if I can just go one step farther…

CM-U: Yeah.

Richard Tuttle: …in terms of this collaboration, as it were, you know, with the conservator. And why not?

CM-U: Right.

Richard Tuttle: Yeah. And, you know, because frankly, by the time I made this, I had already made a lot of other things that had fragility issues, which were enormous.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: And I know that there are people like, you know, hold symposiums about Eva Hesse, and how do you keep these pieces and all that.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: And I can say that – well, you know, like, whether it's true, I'm not a hundred percent sure. But for this generation, we decided to experiment with art being linked to mortality, you know.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: Because it always seems that wherever art is linked to, qualifies the art. And so if it's linked to something more important, it's apt to be a better art, you know. And so you have that going on. Art is invisible, but what it is linked to is visible.

CM-U: Is invisible.

Richard Tuttle: Is visible.

CM-U: Oh, is visible?

Richard Tuttle: Is visible. Like, now, when it was linked to religion, you know, you see the Madonna, you know…

CM-U: Oh, I see.

Richard Tuttle: And there is this and thhh thhh. And then the conservation issues are about the visible side of the link, you know. But as an excellent conservator, you realize that it's not only in the visible. And that that's the – and in some sense, what I'm saying is, say, in any, you know, a piece like this where it's like a proposal of a – like a collaboration with the conservator, it's like, you know, trying to get the conservator out of this dilemma. So if the conservator is – I mean – as it were, this kind of art – say my generation's kind of art – has been very hard on the conservator, because it pushes the conservator on that one side, you know, where the art becomes visible.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: If you look at a Rembrandt or, say, the older kind of art or whatnot, then you are not pushed so much on that one side, you know. And this is – and we feel bad about that. I mean, I felt horrendous. But because of this retrospective, it forces you to understand your work. I mean, you are going to have defend it. Or even to show it. You can't show what you don't understand. You know, you can't show it to someone else.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: And it's not just me. It happens to every artist who has to make a retrospective. So I am saying that it sounds like, you know – say, we're looking for a solution, why the conservators are on that one side. That what the – you know, we want to bring it – we want to make it normal. I mean, that's not – you know, we're trying to make a better art than has ever been made before. And when something pops up like that, you know, that's a nuclear indication you're not – you haven't done it, you know. So in a certain sense, this is like trying to get the situation back to – I mean, it certainly maintains the fragility. It has all the expressive qualities that the work has ever had. And maybe even more so. But by, you know, pushing it a step further, you almost like get a solution. And that's not in the work as well. I'm not trying to say, "Okay, I'm giving up."

[00:26:29]

Richard Tuttle: I mean, things like where these little metal flaps, which are actually – they are little nails that go through those – well, you can't construct this without having a space in like there. And somebody from a more mechanistic mind would – you know, that would be an objection. It's not an objection to me.

CM-U: No. No.

Richard Tuttle: It's just like – I mean, the picture is certainly structured enough, you know…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: What about some fluidity? And so, you know, that can come from there.

CM-U: Now when you talked about mortality – I'm sorry. I interrupted you.

Richard Tuttle: No, I just wanted to – yeah, I was just busy trying to be friendly. To make this, uh, that this is not as many people see it, you know, as a, you know, a terrible, like, affront to the world of conservation. Say a piece like this, which might take the artist a short amount of time, might take the conservation two years or three years or something.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: And is that okay? No, that's not all right, you know. Unless it has the point. Unless the point – that taking that time is part of the point of the piece. And I

think, especially in this case, it is. I mean, this is a very – see, this is another example. See down here where you get – there's this little block that's nailed to the end of that?

CM-U: Right. Uh-huh.

Richard Tuttle: You know, and that means you can't butt these two together.

CM-U: Right.

Richard Tuttle: So the only solution is to have this come forward a little bit, and then you get a further – this wire actually just lays on top of that, and then turns and goes under…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …under each of these. It's not glued. It's just – you know, that's how it is. In a way, if this weren't always intended for this kind of collaboration, I never could have – I never would have had the authority. I mean, that's not the kind of space in my meaning, you know, individual, limited world, you know. And what I am trying to do is get beyond that limitation and still not lose the identity that – the strength. You know, I am trying to get beyond the weakness without losing the strength. Or even enhancing the strength. And all of that is in the piece. I mean, that's the content of the piece. So it's not like there's no separation between the content and the materials. You know, it's completely interwoven like that, yeah.

CM-U: I do understand that.

Richard Tuttle: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:30:02]

CM-U: How can you imagine this over twenty years, or fifty years?

Richard Tuttle: Well, you know, I don't know. But like the tin pieces, that's a good example of them getting better, you know.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: And so, you know, you get patina age. It certainly is – I mean, all the work is built to accept change, or welcome change.

CM-U: Hmm.

Richard Tuttle: And, I mean, in something like this piece [*Replace the Abstract Picture Plane IV*, 1999, Nos. 1-20, collection of the artist, Nos. 21-40, Kusthaus Zug, Switzerland], I was here yesterday, and I was very happy because, you know, I feel I can pick up on the different responses – you know, the response when a viewer responds…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …that they, like, leave a little something behind. And, for me, one of the great parts of this piece is when you get through the colors, and then you start – you can start looking at these lines, these kind of – the wood that's underneath. And it's almost like – and for me, the – whereas initially it looks so colorful, it really wants you – what it wants to give you is this kind of place that's between the film of the color and the film of the wood. It wants you to be in that place.

CM-U: Absolutely.

Richard Tuttle: And that I was so excited because I felt people were getting there. Because when it was first put up, "Yeah, it's a decorative. It's nice. It's got energy. It's got all these qualities." But the real hit is deeper than that.

CM-U: Was this – in terms of technique, was this exaggerated by going back in with color? Or was it sort of something you saw naturally, and it went on, and then you went from there? Or – because I have the feeling that there is more paint under certain areas.

Richard Tuttle: Yeah. No, it's – that's actually, you know, carefully done, if you can use that word…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …to not have any preparation. And I find the…

CM-U: Is it…

Richard Tuttle: …you can – as it's aging, different colors…

CM-U: Um-hum. Right.

Richard Tuttle: …react to the color of the wood in different ways. And in that sense, you know, this is like that dynamic truth thing that you are getting closer to – I mean, what I think, call my project, like a total living art, you know. It's like in the sense that art is a tool for life, you know. But the more art is the totality and living, the better tool it is for life.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: And so there is a war against this static – you know, the mausoleum, the – reducing it to information. And that's, you know – I'm not saying, and I've never even expected, you know, I'm not like – if I could have my way, if I could have like the existence of a total living art with a snap of the fingers, I certainly would. It's something that you have to fight for in every way. And that's basically what our discussion is, too. Because I want to enlist you in my campaign, you know, to…

CM-U: Yeah. No, I see that.

Richard Tuttle: …achieve a total living art, you know.

CM-U: Well, it's nature. I mean, it's living and changing, and I imagine, you know, ten years from now, these will – well, you look at something like that, and you think, "I can't help but feel that there's something under there in the blue that's probably becoming more apparent as it's absorbed. As other materials are absorbed into the wood over time." Yeah?

Richard Tuttle: Yeah.

CM-U: Yeah?

[00:35:11]

Richard Tuttle: But I think this is – you know, I'll just maybe take the time to say. You know, a little – I was able to make a little collection of this great Japanese potter. And I was by myself, and I sort of cooked a Japanese meal. And that involved some boiled root vegetables, you know. And I used this one dish for that. And I put the hot items on this dish. And I walked across the room, and I heard, C-R-R-A-A-C-K, like that, you know. And I just – I said, "You are such a great artist, you know, that this crack is internal. You know, this is the adjustment. You have made a work that is so natural and integral with the natural world that this is going to be subsumed into your work, you know." And I went back, and I very carefully – it was like some kind of exquisite

torture – just took off one piece by one piece. And each time I was expecting to see, you know, this break. And it never was there, you know. Yeah. It was…

CM-U: It was internal.

Richard Tuttle: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

CM-U: It was like responding to you.

Richard Tuttle: But that's – you know, I think that that's like a – I mean, that kind of art. I mean, that's a Japanese art, you know, where the artist is about, like, like the soul of – I mean, the *yamato-damashii* or something that you put in an artwork is something that you put a life spirit, whether it's a sword or _____ [word inaudible]. But I tried to fold that into my work as well, you know, and that it is actually, in a way, indestructible. That's how – but that's another anomaly in my work, where sometimes what's weak is actually the most strong, and what looks strong is actually the weakest. But these are – yeah.

Richard Tuttle: Because the conservation, I mean, I can't help but – the connections with conservativism [sounds like], you know, to conserve the world of, you know. And then ultimately politically, that the – a politics can come out of the direction of conserving. And I think that's something in our world, in our, you know, museum art-world. But my position is actually this – that I am more radical than the most radical, and I'm more conservative than the most conservative. You know, and that that's the – and I believe that an artwork has to have politics in it, you know, or it's not worth looking at. But the politics of that is, it's as radical as you can possibly get, and it's as conservative as you can get.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: It's about, you know, every work of art that man has ever made, you know, is consistent, you know, with that. And yet it's inconsistent with any artwork man has ever made, you know. And that's the joy of creating something. Okay?

CM-U: Yeah. Let's go back into the other room. Yeah. No, I have to think about that. I think you really… I'm going to really think about this _____ [phrase inaudible].

Richard Tuttle: (laughs) You know, it's a…

CM-U: Really. No. I do. I do need to think about that [sounds like].

Richard Tuttle: We – you know, people in the art world, you know, we tend to be a little more comfortable with, you know, left…

CM-U: Yeah.

Richard Tuttle: …but I find I really – nice that the – you know, I can politically, or artistically, or philosophically – almost any way, I can be with a conservative person, and there's a part of me that's simply more conservative than they ever want to go, you know. And then I can go with the other crowd, too. Yeah. So, hmm.

[00:40:37]

CM-U: What I wanted to ask you about this [*Yellow Dancer*, 1965, The Ginny Williams Family Foundation, the Collection of Ginny Williams] has to do with, you look at the piece, you know, there's an overall unity to it, and then there are areas where it looks like it's been treated…

Richard Tuttle: Um-hum.

CM-U: …locally. And I am assuming that – I don't know if that was done by you, or that was some form of restoration. Or maybe that isn't at all. Maybe that's part of the work.

Richard Tuttle: Yeah. Oh, shoot, I don't know what to – if I should say this. I am probably – well, this is – you know, I don't – the things I remember about my work, like, you know, like it was yesterday. But then there are things I don't remember.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: But I think this was – I think there was some issue down here…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …and somebody else did that. And then it was taken back to me, and I kind of, you know, sanded it. It might have come out a bit over the years…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …more than it was. But, yeah…

CM-U: I know that one of the other concerns with some of these works is the way they are on the wall…

Richard Tuttle: Um-hum.

CM-U: …and the warpage that occurs over time.

Richard Tuttle: Hmm.

CM-U: Is that something that concerns you? Sort of, what is your thought about how we should approach that?

Richard Tuttle: Yeah. It's – this intention, this intention idea that – oh, boy, I was just going to promise myself – the thing – I think one of the difficulties we can have in a discussion is that there – and it has a lot to do with the structure of our particular brains. And, you know, where we've come from. Where we are going. What art is supposed to be doing for us? You know, where art is in relation to our development? Maybe what we call art is simply something that forwards, developmentally speaking, from where we are now to something, place we want to go, maybe. 'Cause we have this, you know, cerebral cortex aspect in our development that seems to be tied with language and a lot of issues of, you know, discriminatory issues. And in art, you can get involved with those kinds of discriminations…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …you know, the intensity of the color, the curvature of the relation between that form and other forms in this show, or that form and other forms in art history, and so on. It's just this complete – and there are tons of pleasures and interests in this cerebral cortex. But for me, the big thing is to get off the cerebral cortex and to go into the mid-brain, you know. And it seems like backwards, going back to almost like an animal side of our natures, you know. But I think probably it's forward, you know.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: It's like we're the next step in evolution. We are going to have to, like, combine the mid-brain and the frontal brain, you know…

CM-U: Um-hum.

[00:44:31]

Richard Tuttle: …and that creative work, or what we call creative work, I think is very, very important in that process, you know. And that's why people will live and die for it, you know, because we have no idea if we will survive, but the part of us that makes this next step will survive. You know?

CM-U: Yeah. I understand that.

Richard Tuttle: And, you know, as a conservator, you are absolutely in the same direction, you know. I mean, as a kind of quality conservator. For example, to get lost in the cerebral cortex stuff, you know.

CM-U: Right. Right. So often…

Richard Tuttle: And that's, I think, what I hear you are saying.

CM-U: Yeah, those are my kind of questions, right. That's right.

Richard Tuttle: Yeah. And so I'm saying – and the big hit, what I call the big hit, is something that you might, you know – I mean, if you can handle one of those a day, you know, that's – and you don't need more than that, you know. It so renewing, so refreshing.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: You know, you are so satisfied, you know. And I'm saying, "Well, why do we make a show like this?" Because every single piece in this show could deliver the big hit. You know, if there was somebody who needed it from that…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …that particular piece. Maybe that's why we make shows like this. Because that, at any given moment there – say there's three hundred pieces, and there's three hundred people in here – and conceivably one person could walk up to that little piece and say, "This is it for me," and just, like, be totally renewed and refreshed.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: And that's the, as it were, service, you know, one human being is trying to offer another human being. So, for me, the real question is – you know, from the conservative, real conservative issue, is, you know, how do you preserve the big hit?

CM-U: Right. But don't small factors sometimes contribute to being able to preserve the physicality that might engender the big hit?

Richard Tuttle: Yes. And that, I think, is very necessary to take in because, you know, at the same time, they are – you know, to me, the experience is totally different. And it could even be that, you know, when you pour out, you work your cerebral cortex to the max, and then you realize you are not getting what you want, you know, as an animal. Then you say, "ARRARGH," you know, like, "Get me. Get me there." And you drop the cerebral cortex. So you could say that we have to – you know, that the reason to preserve the cerebral cortex stuff is so to frustrate people, you know.

[00:47:31]

Richard Tuttle: And I'm like that, too, in this show here. I mean, I am a maniac, you know, in going through, that every – I mean, you know, I don't want a label an eighth of an inch higher or lower than that because that's going to, uh – what – it's part of the – you know, the perfection of a show, in a curious way, is the opposite of a perfection of art. And so if you make the show perfect, perfect, perfect, you know, that's like the cerebral – there is no – I mean, only art has the perfection of the big hit of the mid-brain.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: And so – and oddly enough, people can walk in here; and I think it's very important, you walk off the elevator, and you can see, you know, somebody has really – it's in the details, you know, and they really care. And then you trust, you know, and you give your – you can suspend your disbelief, why? You know. Not for that's sake, that stuff, you know, but for going that – taking that leap into the unknown and getting the big, the renewing, restorative art, the full art load. And so that, I find, is – I mean, it's like totally, you know, okay.

Richard Tuttle: I mean, you could go to a conference of conservators, and they could be itsy-picky, like so, you know, for the wrong reasons. And you could be itsy-picky for absolutely the right reason, and you are saying exactly the same language – you're going to say, "Yes, yes, you're absolutely right."

CM-U: _____ [phrase inaudible].

Richard Tuttle: Yeah. Yeah. But you would know that this is directed to the big hit, and they wouldn't know that.

CM-U: That's right.

[Break in video]

[00:49:44]

CM-U: Now, this particular piece you made for this show.

Richard Tuttle: Yes. Yes.

CM-U: But you first made it in the seventies, or early seventies?

Richard Tuttle: Right.

CM-U: Does – so my question – or something like – does the original paper still exist? Does that matter? Is there a quality to this paper, that guides its choice when you make it?

Richard Tuttle: It's actually – it's located in a very, very careful position, and this is a kind of craftsmanship that – where, you know, I say, I like the craftsmanship of disembodied hands. You know, I detest the craftsmanship of embodied hands. This kind of thing.

CM-U: Yeah.

Richard Tuttle: And so we are in a world where, you know, we have Yves Klein, you know…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …who says, "Well, you know, I'm an artist. I think of a work of art, and I don't really need to make it, but I need to sell it because I am hungry, you know." And so, "Well, why can't I just call up a collector and say, "Oh, I thought of a work of art today. Would you like to buy it?"" And of course, he says, "Yeah, yeah." And I'm like, "How much?" And so on and so on, and send a check, and then, you know. So he like bypass the whole – and this is a moment that's very important when, you know, art was actually separated from the object. Ad Reinhardt was a very, very significant artist in that. I

mean, certainly Agnes Martin used – I mean, she went beyond that, that she had to have something to go beyond and – okay, so…

Richard Tuttle: And then there was like this thing, conceptual art, you know, where you get a Sol Lewitt, and he says, "Draw sixteen lines on a wall, and that's my art." You know, and so on and so on. Okay. Well, those are like extreme polarities.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: This is a case where it's a – you could say it's locating itself between where none of the material things that you see have any precious, aesthetic, really you could even say significance, but they – and it's like, in terms of significance, it's time to absent itself from the significance which is, say, instructions. And so it's like – in that sense, it's like nothing; and it is a little bit of a joke, too, because it is saying – which is true of a lot of my work – but the, say, "Okay, Mr. Reinhardt, you're going to separate the art from the object?" Well, I'm going to say that's nothing. You know?

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: But at the same time, because this is a separation – you know, it's kind of a bifurcation, from the real significance, I'm saying that what it's separated from, the real significance over here is the significance of separating it, the object from the painting. Namely, that you can't say "the significance." And it's a joke. It's a pun back and forth because I – you know, Ad would say, you know – my main thing – oh, what did he call it? The infinite painting, or the last painting, or the final painting. [Reinhardt coined the term "Ultimate Painting."] He had some way of saying that. And that's because he thought, obviously, that this, in the separation, was something. And it's just, you know, taking that a few more steps. So…

[00:54:42]

Richard Tuttle: It doesn't matter. I mean, what matters is that the paper be insignificant, just like…

CM-U: Okay.

Richard Tuttle: …some typewriter paper.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Richard Tuttle: And that the pencil line, it doesn't matter if it's 3H or 2B or duh…

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Richard Tuttle: It does matter that it's a three-inch circle. There's an inch doughnut taken out…

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Richard Tuttle: …and it's displayed on a line like this.

CM-U: Does it matter that you do it?

Richard Tuttle: No. In this case, it doesn't matter; and we are pushing that edge. Because I mean, like, as a, you know, as a friend/conservator, you know, I am also trying to enlist you on my side, which is the side that – what artists do is make speculations, you know.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: The world takes these things, you know, and, because of the market, because of the ego of this institution, or that collector, you know…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …they try to make them into, like, absolute truths. They're not.

CM-U: Yeah.

Richard Tuttle: You know, they were never intended to be, and they never will be. But when they get turned into absolute truths, then of course people see that's not the truth. And then they say, "Oh, so-and-so artist is a crappy artist." You know, something like that. And I don't like that process, you know.

CM-U: I can understand that.

Richard Tuttle: It's important, I mean, that – how much more pleasure can you get from that if you realize that's a speculation?

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: You know, I like it to be at the Whitney Museum, and a certain qualities are better, but it breaks my heart if somebody looks at that, and that's saying to them, you know, "This is the way art is supposed to look, and anything doesn't look like this isn't art," and all that thing. You know, come on, you know. This is just a – you know, it's my best shot, you know. It's not my – hopefully, it's not my only shot. You know, and like it's – can get better tomorrow, or, you know, it's da-da-da-da. But the excitement is – what do I say this? – it's the possibility of creating meaning. And at the same time, you don't make that meaning. It's made by the viewer, you know.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: And when you get into that kind of world of give and take and exchange and everything, wonderful things happen, you know. But if you think you're making the meaning, you know, and everybody is supposed to, like, do what you – I mean, this is, like, you know, it's the opposite, you know.

CM-U: Right.

Richard Tuttle: _____ [phrase inaudible]. And on the, you know, the conservation, real conservation is a living – is alive.

CM-U: Yeah. Well, that's where my mind is going right now. So it – so it's the preservation of the speculation? Or the…

Richard Tuttle: That's much more comfortable. I mean, as you try…

CM-U: Right.

Richard Tuttle: …as you try to preserve the God's absolute, maximum truth of whatever it is, you know, you are going to blow it, you know.

CM-U: Right.

Richard Tuttle: Because that's not what it is.

[Break in video]

[00:58:27]

Richard Tuttle: And this [*Ten Kinds of Memory and Memory Itself*, 1973] is really David [Kiehl]'s idea, but he was keen to have it like a recording of the making of

these pieces. Well, he's been behind getting them in the show even before that. But on Wednesday night, the *Art21* people are coming by, and we are going to redo them in that space…

CM-U: Hmm. Well, that'll be – I'd like to see them there.

Richard Tuttle: Yeah. But they – in making a form like that, you have to – you are required to do certain things. I mean, certain forms you make when you are standing up, and other forms, you have to get on your knees. And somehow there is this connection with, you know, what happens at the end, and where it all began; so that the idea of drawing has a – it's not the same as choreography, but there's a continuum with the body. But that the body, once it's down, then the body – the continuum is broken, and then there's this.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: And it's almost like a kind of life after death. Like a proof that there is a life after death, you know. And it's – I mean, you know, I spent a long time looking at Egyptian art, which I think is among some of the best, you know. But it seems like that that sends a message out that part of every art is the proof of an afterlife. You know, it's directed to that.

[01:00:41]

CM-U: What about the cloth pieces, and the way they differ in terms of their topography? Some are kind of wrinkled, some flat. Some tighter [sounds like].

Richard Tuttle: Well, this piece actually was, you know, lovingly restored by – and I met the conservator who did it, and he went over every – with German meticulousness. And I'm astonished how the work – I can see the work he did in that. I mean, is it a little bit too hard? Yes, yeah. But it was another case where, you know, these pieces were so not appreciated, you know, in their days, you know, that they would even be used as wrapping for other sculptures and stuff coming back. I mean, it was like everything and anything that could happen to a piece of cloth, bad, you know, happened to these guys, you know.

(laughter)

Richard Tuttle: And so the – but there's this funny rule. I shouldn't call it rule, but the shaped ones, I like to be stored crumpled, you know, like in a bag, you know, or

something like that. And then the octagonal ones, the flat ones, I like stored in a roll.

CM-U: Hmm. So you're making distinctions between the ones that have cutouts as being the shaped ones…

Richard Tuttle: Yes.

CM-U: …and the octagonals are the solids?

Richard Tuttle: Right. Right.

CM-U: And you prefer them to be on a roll?

Richard Tuttle: Um-hum. Um-hum.

CM-U: Okay. So then that automatically means they are less wrinkled.

Richard Tuttle: Yes, it does. But they, oddly enough, because they are sewn – in a way, their wrinkles are captured…

CM-U: Hmm.

Richard Tuttle: …because they are really locked in. Locked into this fold.

CM-U: Did you do the sewing yourself?

Richard Tuttle: I did. Yeah.

CM-U: And so you purchased the fabric already dyed?

Richard Tuttle: No.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Richard Tuttle: No. Yeah, they were from a roll of canvas, artist canvas. And then I would cut them, and put the flanges on, and wash them to try to get the dye…

CM-U: Sizing?

Richard Tuttle: …uh, the sizing out. But actually I – you know, using extremely primitive tools for this – like, I guess, an old bucket and so on and so – the dye didn't

take in certain, you know, areas with the resist going on there. But that really works for the piece because – well, this is another confession, I guess, but when I was doing this, I was completely focused on shape. And now when I look at them, what I really enjoy is the surface, you know.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: Like that.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: This is the most unbelievable…

CM-U: It's beautiful…

Richard Tuttle: …surface…

CM-U: …in the way it catches the light in the folds.

Richard Tuttle: Yeah. Yeah.

CM-U: It's so random and so beautiful.

Richard Tuttle: It's like – I mean, that's kind of a – I think that's a truth in this field, that the artist can be, you know, as it were, completely turned a hundred and eighty degrees opposite pointing opposite than what the work is pointing to.

[01:04:20]

CM-U: Have they seemed to change in color over the years?

Richard Tuttle: Yes. And I used to say that, you know, you have to be true to yourself, you know. I mean, and a lot of times the hardest is when you recognize you are really weird, you know, in terms of other people. Like, I know that, for me, you know, form is actually – is an open thing. And whereas the informal is a closed thing.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: I mean, that's what I – I've always thought that, you know. But Americans in general think that form is a closed thing, you know, and the informal is an open thing. And in some bizarre way, I've been trying to convince my fellow

Americans that they are off the track on that. And that I'm right, and they're wrong, you know. You three hundred million people are wrong, you know.

CM-U: (laughing)

Richard Tuttle: And I'm right. But the other thing is the – I have this idea, you know, like one moment, the tiniest moment you can grasp, is the same thing as all of eternity. And so if traditional or old-fashioned conservation is involved with making something last for all of eternity, I'm involved in something that exists for like this tiny, tiny second, you know. And there's no difference, you know. I mean, in my head, you know – and people can say I'm crazy or whatever; and I don't care if they do – but the artist, to put something in the world, you know, that had never been there before, is by – you know, that's only going to happen when the artist and a creative person says, "Well, I don't care what anybody thinks. I'm going to do what I have to do, what my work is saying." And so, you know, it also has to be like a matter of life and death. You know, lots of people can make things and all that, but when a poet writes a poem, and they would die if they hadn't written that poem, you know, it just has to, like, come at you, you know, and mean something to you, and levels, and intensity, how it wouldn't mean anything [sounds like] if they kind of did 'cause they were bored, you know, or they had a Sunday afternoon to kill, or something. So I can assure you, these are of the life and death category.

(laughter)

[01:07:53]

CM-U: And in terms of installation, and future installation, is the orientation of each piece dependent upon who is installing it? Or do you feel that there is a preferred orientation?

Richard Tuttle: What's happened here, actually, would show me that there are – instead of getting fixed, it's more about getting unfixed because I – like I never would have put this one up in a corner like that, but we did. And I'm not saying that's my favorite orientation, and I certainly don't expect it to stay like so. And I think that what we should do – and, again, you know, I don't have that, like, "This is mine," thing, that I think is – certainly after a show exposure like this, it's more owned by the society. And so I'd like to say to the society, "Well, let's try. Let's see if we can't find more ways, or different ways we haven't thought of." And when we started out, and I said about the tin pieces being maybe half on the floor and half on the wall, well, frankly, I'd never

thought of that before we mentioned it, you know. And now I'm thinking, "Well, maybe we could do that in Des Moines," you know, or the next place.

Richard Tuttle: These pieces, though, the paper pieces in Des Moines are going to, like, actually go in a kind of line, two on a wall, and then four on the ceiling, and then two on the wall across.

CM-U: Oh.

Richard Tuttle: Yeah.

CM-U: Now these actual ones will not – I mean, these are destroyed with this wall, is that right?

Richard Tuttle: Yes. Yeah. They're templates. They…

CM-U: You have maquettes for them?

Richard Tuttle: Yeah.

CM-U: Yeah.

Richard Tuttle: I like them. I mean, the pattern is the piece, and the piece is the pattern. An equation that…

CM-U: And the manipulation of the paper, and the creasing, and adhering. And that's just part of the moment of the application?

Richard Tuttle: Yes. Yes. I mean, no walls are flat. They look flat. The paper is flat.

[01:10:30]

CM-U: And do others install these as well as you? Or are you _____ [phrase inaudible]?

Richard Tuttle: Yeah, they have. And they've even – I mean, I always like them better than if I do it. But other people prefer mine to them. So, I mean, this is a kind of quandary, and that's why this – like this video of doing the string pieces, that – because we've tried to make these by my teaching somebody else. But that's when we were just thinking of them as shapes on the ground.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: If someone else saw a whole video of what I do with my body to make one, then maybe almost like a – that would be like a choreographic sense that they could then make them. And I really want to try that with the wire pieces, too _____ [phrase inaudible]

CM-U: Let's head in there, too.

Richard Tuttle: _____ [phrase inaudible].

CM-U: Well, Richard, what happens when you can no longer do this?

Richard Tuttle: Well, you know, I don't – that's part of why – you know, it's taken forty years to realize this – what we've done – and, again, this is a generational thing…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …that this combination of art and mortality. I mean, you know, how do you say, you know, "You are looking at art that is about mortality. What is more important to you, you know, than mortality? And what do you know about mortality?" We don't even know why we have to die. I mean, do you know why we have to die? No one knows. So that's a pretty big deal. And so the fact that as an artist – and there's a sacrifice – I mean, being an artist is not like, you know, "Oh, I'm going to be a star." That, you know, I can say – I can make a work and say, you know, "This is something I can make as long as I'm on this earth. And when I'm gone, it's over." And that, like – I mean, especially these pieces [*21st Wire Piece*, 1972, Collection of Judith Neisser, Chicago], which, they are working with the relationship between the made object work and the viewer. And in one of these walk throughs, we hit this really great idea, I think, where – I mean, I've always known these are about – these are made where I empty myself, you know. I mean, the first question was, what would my work look like if I could get out of it? If I could be, like, completely – and bearing in mind, most people think that artwork is about the artists putting themselves into their work.

CM-U: Right.

Richard Tuttle: Okay. How much awful art have we seen, you know, from that point of view?

CM-U: With the artist doing that.

Richard Tuttle: Yeah. So what about trying the opposite, you know? Getting out. And there are examples of artists who work like that, you know. And let's say they can

look successful anyway. The point was that, with these, that seems like in that relation between, you know, the artist-made object and the viewer, that the viewer can stand in front of these and, as it were, become filled, you know, with a sense of themselves. They can as even, like, discover themselves. They come to be themselves in looking at this picture. And so this kind of unbelievable interrelationship where the artist empties so that the viewer can fill…

CM-U: Hmm.

Richard Tuttle: …you know. And it's consistent with what we were saying earlier, that the thrill for the artist is to make meaning, and that the – but the meaning is made by the viewer, you know. So this is a case where, also extraordinary, that the way for the artist to make meaning is to become, as it were, you know, void. And so that the – I mean, that's almost like a, I don't know, some kind of transcendental level of things that the exchange of – like the relation between people is, you know, this empty and full, and empty and full. And even if you're going to lunch with your best friend, they'll empty, and you'll get full, and you'll empty, and they'll get full. And this interrelationship…

[01:16:01]

CM-U: Would that go so far as, if I made one of these, it would be my art?

Richard Tuttle: Um, well, that's where we started here because I would like, actually, to make a video. I mean, if we're successful to any degree in this…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …I really want to go – that's the next higher step. Because, you know, these are about the drawing onto a wall. And they are like – you could say, you know, like pressure points. Or you could even say *chakras*. You could say acupuncture points. Something like this. I think these points that I am using to draw these are actually shared. I mean, everybody has these points. And so why couldn't they do this just as well as I'm doing this?

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: But that's an example, you know, also from the conservation point of view that, you know, the imperative is to move forward. You know, to go with a dynamic truth, and then let history catch up with you so that the – I mean, certain works will – I mean, technology will come along, or the world view

will change, or like the museumology will change because that's – I mean, I say that I am – I am like zero personally ambitious, you know. But I am really ambitious, you know, for my work.

CM-U: Well, I see what you're saying.

Richard Tuttle: And I am thinking in terms of what we're doing in this show that is – this is the second spot of – six? – that we are actually – we're creating a new museumology. And that the – and I'm delighted we're having this conversation because as far as – and I thank you for making it happen because the conservation is an important part of museums, you know. There's a lot going on in the museum field at the moment. The patronage is shifting, and, you know, who, and the standards, and restructures, and education, and so on. But, you know, like, we have stuff in our lives because our parents and grandparents conserved them for us, you know. And what are we supposed to say to our grandchildren, you know, "Well, we dropped the…" You know, if you want to go that way can get pretty – makes you pretty nervous [sounds like]. Look at China, you know. One generation. Phhhhhw!

CM-U: Right.

Richard Tuttle: Gone. Thousands of years of high – some of the world's highest cultural achievement. And so it's a – I mean – and I actually believe that these, a lot of the theme, the message behind this work, is, even though or because of that they are conservationally – traditional conservationally minded, fragile, or *non-conservable* – they are actually trying to stress the importance of conservation, even to the point of self-sacrifice. Like, you know, Adam [Weinberg, Director, Whitney Museum of American Art] was here when we were installing, and he said – you know, we were there for, you know, an inch up, an inch that way, back and forth. And he said, "You know, what's going to happen when you're gone?" And I said, "You know, Adam, every single artwork needs to have this love, care, and attention when it's hung in a museum. And if my life is just here to show that, you know, and to demonstrate that for all of the dead artists, you know, who can't say this, I am delighted. I've had a great life, you know." And so it's not a passive subject.

CM-U: Right.

Richard Tuttle: Yeah.

CM-U: Right. Well, I see what you're saying.

Richard Tuttle: Yeah. Yeah.

[01:20:52]

CM-U: So these works – you know, I do want to ask you about these works, though, because we are – again, I'm trying to get out of my concrete thinking…

Richard Tuttle: Um-hum.

CM-U: …but I understand that some of these works, in their original manifestation, exist by these owners…

Richard Tuttle: Right.

CM-U: …and that they were put on boards and framed over, whatever?

Richard Tuttle: Yeah.

CM-U: But for the exhibition, you come and recreate them?

Richard Tuttle: Right. Right. Yeah. This was…

CM-U: Do you want to come in RJ, and get a good look at the piece?

Richard Tuttle: This was an enormous turning of the page for me, and it's because initially I thought of these as that they are made – they have like two halves, you know. There's the half that is actually material…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …and it's made of watercolor paper, and this gouache and so on. And that that's the kind of thing, like an insight, you know, that you can have once, and if you don't capture then, it's over. And it doesn't exist in memory. You know, it's the kind of stuff that happens – it's outside of any kind of any other grasp than the fact that – you know, like an artist could draw it, and then it could be, like, stopped, held, stationary. And that's like one half of them. And then this half is, in fact, the kind of thing that doesn't have those qualities that it can be retained in memory, for example. And um, the – and you could even go as far as to say that it's the part of the work which – maybe like a formal/informal dichotomy…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …this would be the informal – I mean, no no no no, wow…

CM-U: It would be just the opposite, right?

Richard Tuttle: Just the opposite. Exactly. Exactly. And so that this would be another way. And there's a subversive, constant subversive thing going on very subtly, very quietly, but hopefully powerfully, where – that I am not, you know, totally – even though I can do this 'cause it exists in memory, it doesn't mean that I do it as well as it can be done. And that I am throwing in my chips on – that art is the side of human life where something is actually growing. It's almost like a spiritual side, you know. And that's another Tuttle – what – difference, because the most – I'm placing the spiritual on the formal side of things. And I have my friends, you know, but…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: So, like this time, I made it – this was the first time that these kinds of drips – I think I actually used the brush more in a kind of a dabbing way …

CM-U: Is that gouache too?

Richard Tuttle: Yes.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: Well, actually it's not. It's a water…

CM-U: It looks very _____ [phrase inaudible], yeah. It looks different.

Richard Tuttle: It's a watercolor.

[01:24:37]

Richard Tuttle: And so what we did, we felt that we had to borrow the originals from the collectors, and that was according to the plan. But these pieces are now thirty – almost thirty-five years old, and I think it was David Kiehl [curator of the Whitney installation of "The Art of Richard Tuttle"] who just one day said, "You know, it hurts me to see a piece of paper, you know, that's thirty-five years old, be stuck on a wall in an exhibition. It just…" You know, I know that he loves paper, and so I really listened, you know, and went back to San Francisco and I said, "Well, okay, let's try to trace these." You know, and I went through the tracing paper stage, and cutting it out, and then going back to

the watercolor and careful cutting with scalpels. And, you know, did the whole thing. And so in each case this is new made, or, you know, in some definition you say, "an exhibition copy." But I feel it's like, in a way, this kind of wonderful thing happened because the original, which is now framed, can go back to the collector; and that can exist in terms of satisfying original needs, requirements. And then this can be out again, can be on the wall in its, you know, unframed condition…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …and so we have this thing, this artwork which, as if it were, overcame itself, you know, or did this kind of leap from one kind of smaller world into this really open world. And I feel…

CM-U: Well, that's absolutely true. I mean, I can hardly imagine that in frames on a wall.

Richard Tuttle: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. But this would be another illustration of, you know, just going forward. And that time will come up with the solution.

CM-U: Were these installed in San Francisco? No?

Richard Tuttle: Yes.

CM-U: Oh, they were. So you did – you did this in San Francisco as well?

Richard Tuttle: Yeah, these very pieces are in the show. There are actually – what? – four more, or three more, or something…

CM-U: These actual pieces?

Richard Tuttle: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yeah.

CM-U: Oh, how exciting [sounds like]. So these come off the wall carefully and then travel?

Richard Tuttle: Yes.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: But if they were damaged, you know, they can – we can make another tracing of them. In that sense they – I mean, it's – I don't know. Not that I could

argue in terms of the physical world or anything, but I feel that what happened with these is like this proof of the life, there is life after death. You know, or that there is – that this ability for them to do what they did. In San Francisco, you walked in this long room, and you just saw this, you know, eight, nine pieces like that. And it was, for a lot of people, it was the most, the biggest thrill of the show moment.

CM-U: Um-hum. I can imagine.

[01:28:33]

CM-U: This is a hard question, but I have to ask it. Can you imagine them having a life beyond your death?

Richard Tuttle: You know, I'm certainly ready for that. Because your – I mean, this strength, you know, is not coming from one individual. There's a generation. I mean, for sure, this is – I wasn't at the Eva Hesse symposium, and I wasn't there and there, and I wasn't _____ [phrase inaudible]. But if I had been there, and had I known what I know now, I would have brought up this point about the relation between the art and mortality, and that these are, you know – as an artist, you know, if people are there freaking out and saying, you know, "How can you preserve this? How can you…" It is keeping a life – you know, the art, not only alive, but it's keeping the message going about the mortality.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: And so as we – I mean, I, you know, have to be – realize that you know, anything can come out of this. It's a case where – well, I hate to use the word "pioneering," but you are going out into uncharted territory, and it's not, you know, easy. It's not comfortable. And I have been comfortable in saying that, "Well, you know, I'm not trying to get immortality through my work, but if I can just inspire another artist to do something that they wouldn't have done otherwise, that's all the immortality I need, you know."

[01:31:01]

Richard Tuttle: And that's the kind of museumology I would be interested in making…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: …where it's much more people-oriented than object-oriented. And I think that finally it's your care about people that can make you, bring you to the

level of certain conservation issue that are really important. I mean, nobody can love a object as much as they can another person, you know. I mean, it really…

Richard Tuttle: I've also had this thing where, you know, you see kids go to museums, and they are always squished, and say, "Oh, you're not supposed to talk, or you have to stay in line." But, you know, museums are where you can experience life, where you can be happiest. I mean, I am always happiest to be alive. And in this show, too, we – the very last thing, I just went through, and I went to every single place; and I said, "Is this alive or dead?" Because people – that's another where human beings are, you know, most important, is to be able to distinguish between life and death.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: You know, we don't. And that art, you know, art is alive. It's something that is alive. And I'm fighting for, you know, the – when art gets institutionalized, so often it's made into a dead thing.

CM-U: Dead. Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: It should just be like a repository for life, you know, and you should walk in the door and just like, "Ahh." So that, I think, is why I love conservation issues because it's not about, you know, forcing something into like a coffin or something. It's about, you know, "Well, how do you keep this alive? How do you…" I mean, and if we could meet tomorrow and have this same discussion, and you could say with me, "Well, Richard, you know, how do you think we could keep this alive?" I mean, like that piece across – with the glint on that wire…

CM-U: I see it.

Richard Tuttle: It's so beautiful now, you know. And that's like, yeah, it happens because, you know, it's put up, and that the tension of the – I mean, the Museum of Modern Art has a piece like this, and they show it – you know, they pull the wires so boldly [sounds like] tight…

CM-U: So tight.

Richard Tuttle: …you know. Like that's a piano scale [sounds like]. Yeah. And this – I mean, this [*1st Wire Bridge*, 1971, The Rachofsky Collection, Dallas] was really the kind of leaping off point for those pieces because, you know, this is

made with a pattern that shows where these nails go. And with those, I just dispensed with the pattern and just drew right onto the walls. But with this kind of infinite structure of the – well, that's, you know, what I was saying about the…

CM-U: It's so amazing.

Richard Tuttle: …like this, that my line is like this between three and four thing. I mean, I'm fascinated by that, too, that it comes and goes. And somehow I like that about art because it's not a machine, you know.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: It's not something you can sell on the marketplace. And so, you know, I mean, those string pieces on the floor, that's a commercial disaster, you know. You can't sell those. It would be like, "Take them to auction. Yeah."

(laughter)

Richard Tuttle: But they are really – you know, that fascinates me, too, that after thirty years or so, I still – they are mine in the sense that, like, I know them, and that they – even though the line that they're made out of is only something that happened when they were originally conceived, and so you get this, I think, very truthful relationship of the outer world and the inner world, and this connection.

Richard Tuttle: These have been – occasionally somebody will wander in there and kick, you know, kick one or so. That calls for a restoration. Yeah.

(laughter)

[01:37:29]

CM-U: Well, this has been wonderful.

Richard Tuttle: Well, great. Good good good good.

CM-U: Really wonderful. I'm assuming we're close to the end of our tape…

(laughter)

CM-U: …but really, really. Is there anything – the one last question is asked, can you remember of an instance where, beyond your control, something was restored? And it so – I mean, what that looked like?

Richard Tuttle: Ruined.

CM-U: Or something that was just totally misunderstood? Have you had that kind of experience?

Richard Tuttle: Yeah, I think I had it. Yeah, there was something recently when – but it's not the kind of thing – I mean, it was awful, where they – you know, like they could take the life out of a thing.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: But, yeah. It's – I don't know. But it's – where was this? Yeah. Gosh, I think – I guess I – I mean, I'm so – I'm in like this phase now where I'm like this – you know, this friend of mine, Agnes Martin, said, "I live above the line."

CM-U: Right.

Richard Tuttle: And, you know, stuff happens below the line, you know, and all that…

CM-U: Right. I understand that.

Richard Tuttle: Just don't feel that I want to go there.

CM-U: No, let's stay above the line…

Richard Tuttle: Stay above the line (laughs).

CM-U: …and just end our discussion for today.

Richard Tuttle: Yes.

CM-U: Thank you, Richard.

Richard Tuttle: You are very welcome.

CM-U: This was really, really a lot to think about. Thank you.

Richard Tuttle: Good. Good.

CM-U: Really helpful.

Richard Tuttle: Good. Yeah, it's – I actually tried to gear it to the general rather than the specific, but…

CM-U: No, I'm glad you did.

Richard Tuttle: …it's – I think the – yeah, in the whole, the museum as it exists in the Newtonian world…

CM-U: I'm really interested in that, yeah.

Richard Tuttle: …to know that the position of the conservator is not in the right place, you know.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Richard Tuttle: And I think that's one of the frustrations that the – I think the conservationists take much more of a leadership role, you know, and especially now as the patronage is changing from, say, these individuals, these enlightened individuals, to the corporations, you know. And the corporations really want the job, you know, which is amazing. 'Cause somebody really needs to do the job, and they want to; but they come in with the values and the structures of their world, which is only natural. But they have, in a certain sense, in the new museum, you know, they have more to learn about, what they really want to learn about. I'm not even saying it's not about, you know, teaching them, sitting down and saying, "You're dumb, you know, and I'm going to tell you what you need to know." I mean, they really want to know what you know.

Richard Tuttle: And so there has to be some, you know, forum where they get to ask the questions, you know. And I think one of the problems is, we – the old people in the art world are – we think that they are like, you know, new people on the block, or they don't – and then we send out a message that we don't respect them or whatever. But I respect them because, you know, the private fortunes are over.

CM-U: Right.

Richard Tuttle: And who is going to take care of this work?

CM-U: Right.

Richard Tuttle: And it's good for – you know, and they have some sense that the vitality of the corporate structures are – need this kind of energy that this – I mean, there are no corporations without people. And the message is right now that the corporations are just killing the people, you know. But what art is, for people, and why we conserve art, or what the point in it – you know, that the life – you know, it's the life that we are conserving – is, can only help the corporations. And they go for their profits, you know, that are, like, made in six and a half minutes, and they can tell their board members whatever. But there is also a long-range profit, you know. So I don't know, it's like – I think there is a new museumology, and that the – yeah, corporations are conservative, but they are dead conservative, you know. And they have an instinct that tells them that they need to be life conservative, not dead conservative. And where are they going to learn that? Except from us.

CM-U: People, yeah.

(laughter)

CM-U: All right.

Richard Tuttle: And, you know, they'll get rich, and we'll get poor.

(laughter)

[END RECORDING]