



**Artists Documentation Program
Video Interview Transcript**

**ARMAN
NOVEMBER 15, 1991**

**Interviewed by:
Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Founding Director,
Artists Documentation Program,
and Chief Conservator, The Menil Collection**

Video: William Howze | Total Run Time: 00:44:11

Location: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, “Arman 1955-1991: A Retrospective”

Copyright © 2011 Menil Foundation, Inc. All rights reserved.

All works of art by Arman used by permission / © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

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.

The Artists Documentation Program has been generously supported by
The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

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.

Acceptable Use

All uses of this transcript are covered by a legal agreement between the Menil Collection and the estate of Arman.

This interview is made available for non-commercial research purposes only and may not be duplicated or distributed without express written permission from:

ADP Archive
Menil Archives, The Menil Collection
1511 Branard Street
Houston, TX 77006
adparchive@menil.org

[Speakers (in order of appearance): Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Founding Director, Artists Documentation Program and Chief Conservator, The Menil Collection; Arman, Artist.]

[BEGIN RECORDING]

[00:00:51]

CM-U: Today is November 15, 1991, and we are at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. I am with Arman at the site of a retrospective that was organized here at the Museum. [William] Bill Howze is making the video, and we are here at the kindness of Alison [de Lima] Greene [Associate Curator of Twentieth Century Art, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston], who is the curator for the exhibition. This is going to be very informal. We are going to talk about particular pieces and materials, and I'm grateful to Arman for agreeing to come with us.

[00:01:17]

CM-U: I thought we'd just start...

Arman: Yes.

CM-U: ...on one of the *Allures*. [*Allures aux Pistons (Traces of Pistons)*, 1958, Allure d'objet, Collection of the artist] I guess my questions have to do here with, again, how it was made, and the paper. The issue of using the paper.

Arman: Yes. Well, those particular pieces, *Allures d'objets* – and this one is a pure one – were following rubber stamp pieces with traces of rubber stamps. And rubber stamps *and* objects mixed together. But that was only objects. The objects were taken in motion. Here you have the white part, which is made with – the paint is a kind of white enamel.

CM-U: It's an enamel paint?

Arman: Enamel paint. It was piston from an engine, from a car motor.

CM-U: A piston.

Arman: The piston was rolled in paint, and I let it unroll, you know, directly on the canvas and it left...

- CM-U: Were you up, or were you down?
- Arman: No, flat. Flat on the floor.
- CM-U: You're flat? Okay.
- Arman: Flat on the floor. Some of the things – the red is also enamel. The black might be Indian ink.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Arman: The blue is enamel, too. And I was mixing, you know, very freely, I was mixing different type of paint. Those things (points toward canvas) I made with a chain...
- CM-U: Uh-huh.
- Arman: ...and some...
- CM-U: Sort of just swinging the chain over?
- Arman: Yes. That, I guess, was a hat. The top of a hat. And different objects that I mixing _____ [word inaudible]. Chains, sometimes. A necklace with beads. I was getting different effects by using different objects. But the prominently major is the piston itself. It's why it's called *Allures aux Pistons*.
- CM-U: Yeah.
- [00:03:07]**
- Arman: The paper. Unfortunately, I had some money problems, and I was getting my material as cheap as possible. And that particular roll of paper, I made several pieces with it, and the paper was not very good. It was already – I don't know, might have been exposed to water, but it had a tendency to tear...
- CM-U: It was very fragile.
- Arman: ...very easily, yes.
- CM-U: Was it mounted, or did you just roll it out on the floor?

Arman: No, no, I was pinning, pinning that with paint, and working. And I keep – for years, I keep those things rolled, too.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Arman: And I was showing them by unrolling them. It's only years later when we thought about showing them, or conservation, the large rubber stamps and the *Allures d'objets*, that we gave them to a framer, who was a specialist, to mount them on canvas. That was done professionally. I didn't do it, thanks, God.

CM-U: (laughs) It's good that there are people who do, right?

Arman: Yes.

CM-U: And that's the same – can we swing around here, Bill, do you think, and talk about this one? [*Sombre Dimanche (Dark Sunday)*, 1958, Cachet, Collection of the artist]

Arman: Yes. That's a little bit earlier because we still – we still have...

[00:04:18]

Arman: ...we still have some rubber stamps mixed with the, in motion, the trace of plates...

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Arman: ...that were put in ink and turned like that. That idea of plates turning like that came from concr....came from *musique concrète*. Concrete music.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Arman: Because they were using – I remember my first wife [Éliane Radigue] was a musician, a composer, and she was working with Schaeffer. With all those people. And they were using the sounds of plate and dish, voom, voom, voom, voom, turning like that on the floor. And name of the recording was *Allures*.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Arman: So I – and I start to use that technique, but putting the object in ink. That’s all Indian ink.

CM-U: It’s beautiful.

Arman: It’s more homogeneous...

CM-U: Yes.

Arman: ...as a, as a.... And, you know, you will notice it owes something to Jackson Pollock.

CM-U: Yeah.

Arman: Because I saw – in ’54, I saw some Jackson Pollock. I was very impressed by the allover, the _____ [word inaudible]. And the paper also...

[00:05:28]

CM-U: Has the paper yellowed? Was it whiter? Do you remember the paper?

Arman: It was like that, yes.

CM-U: It was like this?

Arman: Like that, yes.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Arman: Didn’t change the color.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Arman: But it was a sort of, kind of – not very, very good condition paper. Luckily enough, we put it on the canvas, but it had a tendency to break very easily.

CM-U: Um-hum. And then they put the tape around to tape it to the canvas...

Arman: Yes.

CM-U: ...so you don’t see it?

- Arman: To keep it here. Yeah.
- CM-U: Yeah. And what about print? I thought I saw some sort of print up in here. It looks like you were...
- Arman: I use rubber stamps.
- CM-U: ...using rubber stamps. Using the stamps along with the plates?
- Arman: Yes. That was – yes, rubber stamps stand still [sounds like] for numbers that you use in crates. And the rubber stamps, and the plates turning.
- CM-U: The swirling of the plates. Great. Okay.
- [00:06:15]**
- CM-U: We were just talking about another piece, but I'd like to talk about this one. This is called *A First Robot Portrait of Yves Klein* [1960]. Right?
- Arman: Yes. Because robot portrait was a generic name of what the police was doing in Europe – I don't know here – when they make a composite portrait of a criminal.
- CM-U: Oh, yes, the profile and _____ [word inaudible].
- Arman: Yes. No. No, they tried by asking questions. "Is the nose big? Is it this? Well, I had no hair. Wide eyes. Narrow." No, composition like that. But as the thing – it's just a name. It's more a symbolistic portrait, an analogic portrait than really a portrait. It's done by using personal objects, or objects referring to the activity, the taste, and the character of the person.
- CM-U: Did you select the objects?
- Arman: Oh, yes. At the home of the – of the person.
- CM-U: Of Yves Klein.
- Arman: Of Yves Klein. And I did only portraits of friends and relatives because I cannot do – some people asked me to commission me to make their portrait. I cannot do it if I don't know them. I have to know them very well.
- CM-U: Of course.

- Arman: And I have to – I go on a rampage in their apartment, and I take what I want, from clothes, to personal objects, to medication, and everything to make a kind of a – the portrait is like any kind of portrait. It is dated. So, I made a portrait of my wife in '73. If I do it again now, it will be different.
- CM-U: That's true. That's true.
- Arman: And each portrait is *very* different. They have – the character of the person shows at the end. That was the first one. (points toward work on wall) It was a little bit small for that purpose, and I didn't develop the idea very well. But that was the first one. And you can see – I guess you know Yves Klein?
- CM-U: I do. I do. I've worked with – I know his work very well.
- Arman: You know his works and everything. First, the blue for the blue painting. And he had been very impressed by [Gaston] Bachelard, about earth, fire, water.
- CM-U: Right.
- Arman: And also he was an avid reader of comic strips. The Tintin comic strips. He made his living as – one of his passions was judo...
- CM-U: Right.
- Arman: ...and jujitsu. And that was his black – that was his only object he was a little bit reluctant to let me take the black belt – because this black belt, he got it from his *sinsei*, his master in Japan.
- CM-U: Hmm.
- Arman: But I told him, "After all, you own it. You own the portrait when it is finished. Oh, don't cry too much."
- CM-U: (laughs)
- Arman: Some of his writing. A photo of Rotraut [Klein-Moquay, wife of Yves Klein]. The roses are there because, I guess you knew, he was a Rosicrucian.
- CM-U: Yes.

Arman: And I put the rose for that. He was always, when he was dressed, wearing a bow tie. Never another tie. Only bow ties. Plus a lot of _____ [phrase inaudible]. You have a blue sponge. You have a body paint. [Yves Klein, *Anthropométries*]

CM-U: Yes. The anthropomorphic – right [sounds like].

Arman: Anthropomorphy [sounds like]. It's – a complete one is there.

CM-U: Oh, really?

Arman: Yes.

CM-U: On the Mylar? On the film?

Arman: On the Mylar, yes. On the, I guess, acetate.

CM-U: Acetate?

Arman: Yeah.

CM-U: But I've never seen it with the red. I mean, the red pigment was part of the anthro – sure, they are. That's right.

Arman: No, the, the shoe...

CM-U: On the bottom of the shoes – the pigment, right.

Arman: On the bottom of the shoe. It was the shoe he was working with.

CM-U: Right.

Arman: It's _____ [word inaudible]. There is not too much in this portrait. But it was a portrait of Yves Klein.

CM-U: Oh, very much so...

Arman: More or less working, and...

[00:09:45]

CM-U: Are the objects joined to one another, or are they loose in the box?

- Arman: They are not too – sometimes I try with nails at the time to put them. There was always put on the wooden panel, nails, glue, staples, screws, and everything I could do to maintain the objects. Sometimes they got loose. I repaired the portraits, but they fixed. They glue and fixed.
- CM-U: And the boxes have just been...
- Arman: Yes, just...
- CM-U: You said some blanching, I suppose, _____ [phrase inaudible].
- Arman: Yes, that's not – that can be changed. I mean, nothing is attached to the Plexiglas. Some were made in glass. Some in Plexiglas. Some, the box comes here, and you adjust the top. The technique varies to, to show the...
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Arman: But that was the first one. Iris Clert's [Yves Klein's gallerist] portrait is smaller.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Arman: But it's in glass. And, well, that was the second one _____ [word inaudible] I restored...
- CM-U: Why? Why did you do some in glass and some in Plexi – depending on the person? Or the size?
- Arman: Depending – no, depending on the availability of material.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Arman: Plexiglas was not too common, and a lot of time, I had to rely on glass.
- CM-U: Yes.
- Arman: That's why usually when it is in glass, you have blocks [sounds like] coming here (points to edge of Plexiglas)...
- CM-U: Um-hum. (nods) The tension...
- Arman: ...because the holes on the side to hold the glass.

CM-U: Yeah. If in the future it seemed advisable to replace the Plexiglas front...

Arman: Oh, yes.

CM-U: ...is that something...

Arman: That has nothing essential about that.

CM-U: Okay. All right.

Arman: But nothing, nothing essential about it.

CM-U: I've seen Yves Klein's portrait of you. I think, before I met you, I saw that.

Arman: Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes.

[00:11:23]

CM-U: I'd like to talk about this one. This is called *Suffragette heroique* [*Heroic Suffragette*], 1963 [The Menil Collection, Houston].

Arman: Yes. That, I started to slice objects in '61. In '61, I sliced violins or guitars or things like that. And the slicing of objects came after the breaking of objects. And there is so a fascination for me, as it is related to an experience when I was a child. My father took me to several places, fairs, where you have exhibition of motors, or technical objects, sliced in two to show the inside.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Arman: And when I start to cut, after I broke some musical instruments, I start to cut them, and I discovered some aspects that remind me of the inside of objects. And later, in '62, I acquired a saw, a band saw, that with some blades I could cut metal. Not too hard. As you see, none of those first pieces were in bronze. They were all in white metal, which is quite soft.

CM-U: Hmm.

Arman: And I started to cut, and I discovered with delight some cuts that were so strange and different. Sure, when you cut a statue that represents a person, they have kind of an organic quality, but also an abstract one. And I was very interested. And that's one of them. And I recomposed them after, and I called it *Suffragette* because she has kind of a _____ [word inaudible], proud

attitude like that. And it was certainly a victory, you know, with her hand and arm like that. (raises hand in air)

[00:13:14]

Arman: And a lot of them before this one in '62, the little piece where I was drilling very small holes and putting very small nails to hold it against the wood. As I start to experiment a lot with plastic, this one is glued directly on wood with polyester.

CM-U: This is polyester and not acrylic?

Arman: Polyester. Not acrylic.

CM-U: Okay.

Arman: It's polyester. And, as you see, polyester has a percentage of refr – *retractation*? How do you say? Shrinking.

CM-U: A shrinkage.

Arman: A shrinkage, which is about 4%, which is big. A lot. And with time and change of temperature, you get – sometimes you see you have here... (points at cracks in polyester)

CM-U: Um-hum.

Arman: ...some. It can be repaired. The serious problem, if it gets unglued from the panel. But for the moment, it's all right. But it's a fragile piece. In the trip, with vibration, the – one day we have to be careful. The polyester can get separated...

CM-U: From the box.

Arman: ...from the wood.

CM-U: I think that's what concerns me, I guess, is _____ [word inaudible]. So it was laid – it was poured in a box?

Arman: Ah, yes, always. It is better to carry – to carry it horizontal [sounds like].

CM-U: I think that the cracks – this piece is owned by The Menil Collection, and we have dealt with this. The cracks were not really something of an issue.

Arman: No.

CM-U: What's more is kind of this blanching that's occurred.

Arman: That shows some separation between the wood and the polyester. Yeah.

CM-U: Yeah. Have you restored that on other pieces?

Arman: No. Not that type. We have restored a lot of pieces, but not that type. While I was experimenting with plastic, and I made a lot of mistakes – for instance, I did worse than that. I used polyester to glue objects against Plexiglas!

CM-U: Hmm.

Arman: And that's a no-no.

CM-U: Hmm.

Arman: They are bound to...

CM-U: Separate.

Arman: ...separate.

CM-U: Yeah.

Arman: And that, we have to repair several pieces like that.

[00:15:23]

CM-U: But this was also very early. I mean, this polyester and so on.

Arman: Yes. But in '64, when I had a show at Sidney Janis [New York, Solo Exhibition, December 29, 1964-January 27, 1965], a man came. He wanted to see me. Mr. Winfield, I remember. And he was a consultant in plastic. And I hired him for several consultations, and he solved a lot of problems and showed me how to avoid a lot of mistakes.

CM-U: Hmm.

- Arman: I guess it's important – artists should not be bashful about asking advice from technicians...
- CM-U: Absolutely. Absolutely.
- Arman: ...because after I worked with Mr. Winfield, I changed some techniques that were very bad about conservation.
- CM-U: And about your own health, no doubt, too, working with this.
- Arman: Yes, I know. But I didn't follow the advices. No, really. Because to work hours with a mask or gloves, I could not.
- CM-U: I know.
- Arman: The result, I've been sick at the end. I had a cancer years ago, and César, that works with the same material, had the same cancer. I guess we had the – it's a cancer that a lot of people working in plastic or in – on fumes of a nonferrous metal – get. And so I guess it was an occupational hazard.
- CM-U: We have it, too, with the solvents we use. Did you make this in New York, or did you make this...
- Arman: New York.
- CM-U: In New York?
- Arman: Yes, when I lived there [sounds like].
- CM-U: So – and you had made these polyester pieces before New York?
- Arman: New York, yes. I – you know, I start to work in '61 in New York.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Arman: And the first things I did – in '62 I was in California.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Arman: I had a show in the beginning of '62 with Dwan Gallery. [Solo Exhibition, Virginia Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles, May 1962]

- CM-U: Yes.
- Arman: And there I met [artist] DeWain Valentine. He was working also in plastic, and he gave me the address and names of people doing polyester and things like that.
- CM-U: So that really started it, then?
- Arman: Yes. No, I bought some small things in Canal Street to make plastic, but after I got better material.
- CM-U: Yeah. Well, this is a wonderful piece. We really haven't had any problem with it other than I – I think I made one small repair, a small piece, and I just embedded it back in.
- Arman: Ah, good.
- CM-U: But otherwise the screws are holding the box to the – you know. (points toward work)
- Arman: Yes, more or less. And they help to hold the plastic, too.
- CM-U: Yeah.
- Arman: But also, it's not – polyester is not – it's quite different, and especially in the black background like that – shouldn't be too afraid to put back some polyester if it is necessary. To inject.
- CM-U: Yeah.
- Arman: I was doing that to repair, when we had cracks like that, with a syringe and a needle, to inject polyester to glue it back together. It glues back quite easily.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Arman: Especially there is nothing in this polyester, no color, nothing.
- CM-U: Well, color isn't really – discoloration isn't an issue with this, but it's something we may talk about with some of the others.
- Arman: Oh, yes.

CM-U: Okay. Thanks.

[00:18:30]

CM-U: We're going to look at this piece. It's called [*Ainsi, Font, Font: Little Hands*] *Patty cake, patty cake*, 1960, and it's owned by Arman. Do you want to talk about its construction, and then something that's...

Arman: Yeah, its construction. Well, I made a – the first thing. Just at the time I was using – I found in some store that was closing a lot of dolls' parts and dolls. For a while, I used during – I made several pieces, maybe less than ten pieces, based on dolls and dolls' parts. And this one was made in a small box, and I discovered at the time a contact glue that was using rubber cement glue. It was very practical because I was putting a layer on the bottom of the box, a little bit on each piece, waiting, and just putting the... (holds hand out)

CM-U: Right. It's very convenient.

Arman: It's wonderful. Like magic.

CM-U: (laughs)

Arman: Yes, very convenient. But – but – that cement dries...

CM-U: Um-hum.

Arman: ...in a certain way. And finally one day I found a lot of hands – because I owned the piece – down. And I could not even remember where they were. I could not find even a photo of the piece. Well, I tried to repair it with epoxy, and I reglued them more or less. Some didn't fit any longer where they were supposed to be, and so I turned them. And now the pieces will be different. We have the color of the glue, which has been added.

CM-U: You left the color of the glue on?

Arman: Yeah. It's not so bad after all. I like it like that.

CM-U: I think so, too.

Arman: Yeah.

CM-U: So they're really just glued on? There aren't any nails or screws or...

- Arman: No. It doesn't. No. No nails. No screws.
- CM-U: And you put the black tape – this is the way you got into the box from the front?
- Arman: Yes, that was something I saw. Discovered. That can be changed. I guess I changed it already once or twice.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Arman: I was using black tape to hold a little piece of glass or Plexiglas. Glass, especially, because I didn't know how to make a hole in the glass. Or, sometimes I didn't like the idea of a little piece of metal coming...
- CM-U: Right.
- Arman: ...distracting, going back from the side.
- CM-U: Right.
- Arman: So a lot of times I used tape.
- CM-U: And that gave you a clean edge...
- Arman: For glass. Especially for glass.
- CM-U: ...on the glass?
- Arman: For glass.
- CM-U: Uh-huh.
- Arman: For Plexiglas, I often used little screws that were holding the piece.
- CM-U: And this piece was made in...
- Arman: 1960.
- CM-U: In Paris?
- Arman: In the south of France.

CM-U: South of France.

Arman: I seldom...

CM-U: Worked in...

Arman: ...been working in Paris.

CM-U: Yeah. Wonderful.

Arman: Thank you.

CM-U: Okay.

[00:21:11]

CM-U: This piece [*Dreaming Crystals*, 1964, Accumulation, The Menil Collection, Houston] was made in New York?

Arman: Yes, that was when in New York. All the pieces here were made in New York, and they are the result of collect of objects, and some technical objects, some very shiny – a brand new object that was new for me, that I found in Canal Street. At the time, in Canal Street, on the old Canal Street, there's a lot of job lots [sounds like]. You could pick up a lot of things there. And my studio was in Walker Street, parallel to Canal. And this particular piece, I made some of the piece with image behind the prisms. But that particular piece is the result of something that I didn't want. What I wanted when I thought about this piece, and it's why you have some little squares or so, or rectangles...

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Arman: ...that they don't show too much now, but they were a mirror. Mylar...

CM-U: Oh, so these opaque pieces were mirrors?

Arman: Mirror. They were supposed to – I tried to fix that. When I did it in my room of the Chelsea Hotel – and I bought a projector that had the loop, I was shutting the light completely in the room, and the prisms were sending fraction of image of the film. And it was very difficult because I put too many prisms. After I learned that if I didn't put that many prisms, I would get that result.

- CM-U: So...
- Arman: But too many prisms, only occasionally I could see half of a face or a hand, or things like that. It was connected with my idea of cutting and slicing images. And I tried to correct, and I got sometimes some results by gluing those mirrors, or Mylar mirrors; and I got some images, but one day – I guess they are not mirrors any longer...
- CM-U: No. The adhesive is probably gone.
- Arman: Yes. And they become apart completely. And now I didn't have any more. I guess the image is projected nowhere. *Alors*, it was called the *Dreaming Crystals* because I read a novel about – a science fiction novel called *The Dreaming Crystal*. But now it is something nice, doing something like that, (uses hands to make flickering gesture over work) but that was not the goal. The goal was to have on the dark wall the projection of cut images.
- CM-U: The original film was a Bozo the Clown film?
- Arman: Yes.
- CM-U: Did that have any significance per se...no?
- Arman: No, I would have put anything, but Bozo, I decided on that because features movies, with people, were too – because so many prisms, too complex. And a cartoon was something much easier. If it gets cut, you'll get something anyway. But that's the story.
- Man: Later, you chose to put the prisms over cutouts from magazines...
- Arman: Yes.
- Man: ...and so you did then obtain that result that was almost cinematic.
- Arman: Yeah. And it's what I wanted to accomplish on the projection.
- CM-U: Did you ever see the Bozo image on this?
- Arman: Oh, yes, yes.
- CM-U: Oh, in the beginning, you did?

Arman: The beginning, yes. You could get – if you were very close, like that (points to wall)...

CM-U: Right against the wall.

Arman: ...like that, you could get a lot of little parts of Bozo. But you had to get close. The myst... [sounds like] ...I was hoping, like when you go in the planetarium...

CM-U: Yes.

Arman: ...I was hoping something like that. I hoped I could achieve something like a planetarium projection. I didn't. But when you were close, you were getting some of those images.

CM-U: I'd just like to comment on the restoration that we did on this, which was to provide some sort of color, continuous color, with an image down there.

Arman: Yeah.

CM-U: But that we couldn't actually project the color...

Arman: Yeah.

CM-U: ...the image itself.

Arman: That image was, for me, important because the goal was to divide image. To cut image.

CM-U: Uh-huh. Okay.

[00:25:20]

CM-U: Could you tell us who made – where the base was made, or what...

Arman: I ordered the base.

CM-U: You ordered the base?

Arman: Yes. I ordered the base, and it was made in New York. I don't remember. A cabinet maker made the base for me on my description and my requirement, and it was well made, properly made.

- CM-U: And it was your choice? This height was your choice?
- Arman: Oh, yes, the height was the choice for to be _____ [word inaudible]...
- CM-U: And do you always see *Dreaming Crystals* being exhibited on a base like this? This height?
- Arman: Always. This one always. The first day – from the first day of exhibition at Sidney Janis, to later.
- CM-U: Um-hum. Great. Okay.

[00:25:59]

- CM-U: Let's talk about this one [*Untitled*, 1968, Accumulation, Allan Stone Gallery, New York] in terms of a change of technique, or what you may have done that was different...
- Arman: Yes. This one. First, what I wanted to accomplish with that, it's to change the designation of color. Color becomes an object. Part of the tube itself. Not something you paint with.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Arman: And I wanted to achieve that kind of a very deep accumulation suspended like that. I could have done it by several pieces of Plexiglas like that, but the embedment is subtle [sounds like]. In order to do that, I made the piece horizontal like that. In the mold, made of wood and Formica...
- CM-U: Hmm.
- Arman: ...because Formica doesn't – and if you prepare it, you polish it, it doesn't attach – polyester didn't attach on the Formica. And the mold was dismountable, with screws and braces. First I put one layer, about half an inch.
- CM-U: Um-hum.

Arman: When it is dry, I put the tubes. Watercolor, not anything else. And when the watercolors start to dry, another layer. When the layer is dry, another. And this took several weeks.

CM-U: I should imagine. Yeah. Amazing.

Arman: Several weeks. By little layers, and layers, and layers, and layers. And it's a very homogenous [sounds like] piece.

[00:27:25]

Arman: It's nothing to fear about conservation. Maybe the color a little bit...

CM-U: Let's talk about it. Was it clearer as you remember it?

Arman: Always like that.

CM-U: It was?

Arman: It was always like that. It's clear, but with a little yellowish...

CM-U: Yeah.

Arman: Depends, you know. As I was mixing everything myself, accelerator and catalyst, sometimes it was different. I put a little bit more _____ [word inaudible]...

CM-U: Right.

Arman: ...than I should have put. But it was like – have never changed this one. It was made in, I guess, '67?

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Arman: Something like that. (looks at wall label) Uh, '68, this one. But 23 years, and it's exactly as it was when I showed it the first time.

CM-U: With the polyester resin that enabled you to have this appearance of things floating, or suspended in space...

Arman: Yes.

- CM-U: ...the clarity of the resin must have been very important to you.
- Arman: Oh, yes. I tried to...
- CM-U: And I wonder, as they age...
- Arman: It's why later I switched for some pieces to acrylic.
- CM-U: Okay. That came after. I wanted to ask you when the acrylic...
- Arman: Yes. First, polyester, and after, acrylic.
- CM-U: Uh-huh.
- Arman: But for embedment, I was still using – after I used acrylic – using polyester.
- CM-U: In order to embed them?
- Arman: Some specific embedment that I wanted to accomplish.
- CM-U: So your thought was that the acrylic would remain more transparent, hopefully, over time?
- Arman: That's right. And harder, too.
- CM-U: And harder, too? Well, it's immensely successful. I like the catch of the [sounds like] bubbles in it. I mean, you really have a sense of the making of the piece itself.
- Arman: Yes.
- [00:28:59]**
- CM-U: We'd like to talk about this piece. It's called *Frozen Civilization* [#1, Poubelle, Collection of the artist]. It's dated 1971.
- Arman: Yeah.
- CM-U: But it's often cited as a particular use of resin for organic materials.
- Arman: Yes, but that's a different resin than usual.

- CM-U: Okay.
- Arman: It's a polyester, too.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Arman: DeWain Valentine gave me the name of that resin that allows you to cast – not in layers like that I was doing because I was afraid of cracking – a large quantity of plastic without any cracking. It's called MasCasts.
- CM-U: MasCasts.
- Arman: A MasCasts polyester. And...
- CM-U: It's produced in...
- Arman: ...for me, it was a very interesting thing because I was left with a frustration of the garbage pieces that I made in '59, '60, and '61. A lot disappeared because they were – as you see, they were free in glass containers. And some fungus, or when some material that was organic made a changing, were destroyed by the decomposition.
- CM-U: Natural decomposition. [sounds like]
- Arman: And that allowed me to make pieces where I could include any kind of material. The real garbage. And before, I had to be – the ones I kept was selected garbage. I had a box of cheese, but the cheese is not there any longer. Otherwise the piece is doomed to be all black one day – and by the fungus, will. And in this one, even milk, everything that I could – what the process, I had a kind of a container like that (holds arms out) – a basin...
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Arman: ...and would put – that was terrible. We put the garbage, real garbage, in the container. Plus we were pouring gallons of MasCasts. And with gloves, by hand, mixing... (rotates arms in air)
- CM-U: (laughs)
- Arman: ...this – the Plexiglas container was in the very strong kind of mold, also, with clamps, with screws and everything, in wood, but solidly made in order not to...

CM-U: It was braced...

Arman: ...ruin the catalyst.

CM-U: Yeah.

Arman: Because it become very hot. The only thing, it changes the color of some food because it becomes almost boiling hot. And I was getting garbage everywhere. One day, I guess, it was something like 11:00 p.m., and I went to pick up the garbage from Bob [Robert] Rauschenberg in the car, with my assistant. And a police car stopped by and said, "What are you doing?" I say, "I'm stealing garbage."

(laughter)

Arman: They could not believe it, you know. They follow us to the studio, and they saw what we were doing. And they could not believe it.

[00:31:48]

Arman: And also some – and a strange phenomenon about that piece, those type of pieces. I made them and – I started to make in '69–'70, and I shipped to France for the summertime a large quantity of that MasCasts to do the same thing. And so then, looking at a piece from a distance, you cannot say if they were made in France or in United States. Which is very strange because if you look at the first garbage piece[s], they were very different. Just a little bit of dust, a lot of paper...

CM-U: Um-hum.

Arman: ...a little treat [sounds like] for package, container for _____ [phrase inaudible] in ceramic. A box for a kind of cheese in wood...

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Arman: ...and it was very, almost primitive, comparatively, to the supermarket American garbage. But what that's mean, that in France ten years later, the Americanization of the consumer society has been accomplished.

CM-U: So the garbage...

Arman: In '59, '60, it was still the old Europe system of consumption [sounds like, probably the artist means consumption]. You go in small boutique; you buy this; you buy that. You make your market. And so then in 1970, in France, or Italy, or Germany, it's exactly the same garbage, the same look, the same package, the same name, the same colors. Just it's written in English; it's written in German; it's written in French. But there was an internationalization of the American consumer society. And that was very – for me, it was – suddenly I realized that it was very _____ [word inaudible].

CM-U: And the new material allowed you to be able to preserve that all the more.

Arman: Yeah. Yeah. To catch that.

CM-U: Do you remember the company that made this resin that you're talking about? MasCasts?

Arman: I guess it was Cadillac Plastic.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Arman: Or the Pittsburgh Plate [Glass] Company. Something like that.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Arman: I don't remember. Cadillac was the distributor of that.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Arman: But I was looking for it years ago, and I could not find it.

CM-U: Yeah.

Arman: They were discontinued.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

[00:34:02]

CM-U: Not so much with regard to this piece, but in other pieces that you've done, have you ever had the situation of having to remake a piece entirely because of damage?

- Arman: Some pieces that were made with objects glued by polyester against Plexiglas.
- CM-U: Like _____ [word inaudible] – not like...
- Arman: No. We had to take extensive [sounds like] very precise _____ [word inaudible] where the little part and everything was; and to remove the polyester, and put a layer of Metacrylic glue...
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Arman: ...in order to put the thing together.
- CM-U: Because the polyester had...
- Arman: The polyester had condensed to [sounds like]...
- CM-U: Just completely separated?
- Arman: Completely separated from the Plexiglas.
- CM-U: In the future, should that occurrence – should that happen, do you see future restorers doing that? Or do you feel that's very much part of the creative act of the artist, and shouldn't...
- Arman: Some of the changes, I accept them. Some, I'm disturbed. And also, what I did, I did some preventive actions.
- CM-U: Uh-huh.
- Arman: Some pieces that were okay, but Plexiglas, polyester, what I did, I put another layer of Plexiglas on the other side. Liquid.
- CM-U: So, encased it? Yeah.
- Arman: And that was a sandwich that could hold better.
- CM-U: Right. Right. Can you think of one restoration that you were really disturbed with? That you felt missed a sense of – do you tend to restore your own pieces?
- Arman: Oh, yes.

CM-U: Or do restorers...

Arman: And I have some assistants. And now one became a friend. He doesn't – but, yeah, sometimes he accepts to do some restoration. We do it at my studio, and some people can do it.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Arman: And if it's well done. I have to see the result, but – and also there was a big mistake that I didn't know. Even my consultant didn't tell me anything about it. By using acrylic glue to – not really completely embed; to fix objects against Plexiglas. Before doing that, I should have put the glue, especially when I was using a certain quantity, through a vacuum in order to cure the air from the glue. Because now I have sometimes some white kind – looks like some small mushroom; it has nothing to do – it's the air, therefore – water is the same thing; air, water – that was already in the glue, that expressed itself after years, years, years; and you have some cloudy white little things happening in the piece.

CM-U: Hmm.

Arman: I didn't know at the time [that] I had to use a vacuum.

CM-U: So that's what you do now?

Arman: Now if I do a piece like that, I use vacuum. I vacuum the liquid before putting it in the piece.

[Break in video]

Arman: Oh, I don't know. You know, you cannot – you cannot say. Sometimes you have pieces that didn't change at all, and you don't know why.

CM-U: Don't know why.

Arman: Maybe the condition. The temperature when you were making it.

CM-U: Yeah. Yeah.

Arman: You cannot...

CM-U: I mean, the variables are so great when you're working with that.

Arman: And those – don't forget, when they were burning, I stopped the burning with water.

CM-U: That's what I say. Maybe it's moisture in the charred wood...

Arman: Moisture, or so. But it happens in piece that I didn't have water. With metal only. It's very difficult to accept [sounds like].

CM-U: Yeah.

[00:37:22]

Arman: And now we go to see the bronze...

CM-U: Yeah. Let's talk about the bronzes.

Arman: That's part [*Philemon and Baucis*, 1990, Atlantis Series, Collection of the artist] of a body of pieces that I call "Archeology of the Future," or "The New Atlantis." And I'm not going to make many – I made about 23 pieces, and it's an open and closed case. I am not going to make more because I, I did – it's one of the things, when I made an exhibition, like the day after, or have a body of work, it's more staging something...

CM-U: Um-hum.

Arman: ...that I wanted to express. And that I wanted to express several things. First, I wanted to give the impression that we are looking at objects, manmade objects, of today, or close to today, that aged tremendously like – and in a fashion of traces of vanished civilizations, or like Greek or Roman or Egyptian. And when we found some of those things in bronze, especially, they are so excited, so eaten up by elements of water or sand or earth, that they acquire a kind of surface that I was very touched by.

CM-U: Absolutely.

Arman: And we acquire a taste for that surface, called the patina of time. And that's an acquired taste that certainly took place around the Renaissance, when the Humanities were interested in the civilization of the past for the first time. And looking at those Greek or Egyptian or Roman artifacts, or Etruscan, as they were with their surface; and that surface was certainly not the surface

those artifacts or those objects – like furniture, all that – had when they were created.

Arman: Everything – and we know by texts, or by description of the time when they were made – were very shiny. Brand new, like a brand new Cadillac. And there was certainly the world, the antique world was certainly looking more like those Italian movies called Peplum [films]...

CM-U: Yes.

Arman: ...with all the color and the shiny thing that – they were certainly more like that than when we think. But we love the traces of the time. It's like to, when you look at photos of your family, you like to have a past. And we love that, and we include in your set of aesthetical values the patina, the wearing over time, on stone, on marble when it's golden, a little bit used, on metal, on bronze. And I play on that. I play on that acquired taste.

CM-U: I see.

[00:40:38]

Arman: And also on the transformation underwater of metal. An actual bike would not look like that after two thousand years. It is not in bronze. But it's a twist on vision. To accomplish that, I asked my, foundry, Mr. Bocquel [Atelier R. Bocquel S.A., France] – he is a genius when it comes to solve problems in bronze – to study the question; and we arrive at that result. Not after casting part of bikes," but before. Say I take a wheel...

CM-U: A front wheel _____ [phrase inaudible].

Arman: Yes. A tire of a bike.

CM-U: A tire. Um-hum.

Arman: We couldn't make a mold, cast it, and work on the surface. We did the opposite. We worked on the surface before making the mold.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Arman: Because here we have something which is not eaten up – It's added.

CM-U: Right.

- Arman: It's like, under the sea, the concretions and things that are added. And it was very difficult. With epoxy, with a little gravel, with putting them, removing them, with putty, with everything, we create the surface of every part.
- CM-U: Mainly using epoxy and added materials to build up this incredible encrustation.
- Arman: And materials. Or different type of glue. And removing material. You have – sometime you have the effect of like something removed.
- CM-U: Uh-huh.
- Arman: Sometimes you have to vibrate the piece to let some part go, to add some, to create that kind of surface. And then, with a rubber mold – we took a mold, we cast the piece. And after, by patina, we put the color. But that surface was accomplished by doing it before making the mold.
- CM-U: So you, you aged the piece before it was born?
- Arman: That's right. That's right.
- CM-U: Well, I think that's a very good note to end discussions of conservation on. And technique.
- Arman: And that's very solid.
- CM-U: Oh, I should think that it...
- Arman: It can go...
- CM-U: Now what about...
- Arman: It can be outside. It can go through another two thousand years. It will not change too much. So that is a very permanent piece.
- CM-U: And what about coatings on this? You know, so many times we put coatings on our bronzes over time.
- Arman: Oh, no, I don't want.
- CM-U: Never?

Arman: I don't want any coating. If they are to change, to weather, to age, or to be more excited, I don't care at all.

CM-U: That's in keeping with the nature of the...

Arman: It's perfect. It's keeping the vision and the direction.

CM-U: That's wonderful.

Arman: Thank you.

CM-U: Thank you.

[END RECORDING]