



Artists Documentation Program (ADP) Interview Video Index

Artist: Jasper Johns
Date: February 15, 1996
Location: The Menil Collection
Interviewer: Carol Mancusi-Ungaro
Video/Edit: Laurie McDonald
Total Run Time: 01:12:43

Abstract:

Jasper Johns speaks with Artists Documentation Program Founding Director and Menil Chief Conservator, Carol Mancusi-Ungaro. The conversation focuses on several of the artist's paintings, including *Gray Alphabets*, 1963; *Untitled (Green Painting)*, 1954; *Star*, 1954; and *Voice*, 1964-1967, all owned by the Menil Collection. Johns traces each work's provenance and describes the materials and techniques that he employed to create them. Throughout the interview, Johns discusses his intent for the future conservation and exhibition of his works. The interview includes occasional comments from art historian Roberta Bernstein, Menil Paper Conservator Elizabeth Lunning, and collector David Whitney, during a segment in which questions arise about the provenance and repainting of *Voice*.

Controlled Access Headings (Library of Congress):

Corporate Name(s)

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

Genre(s)

Interviews
Oral histories

Personal Name(s)

Johns, Jasper, 1930-
Mancusi-Ungaro, Carol
McDonald, Laurie

Subject(s)

Art--Conservation and restoration
Art--Technique
Artists--Interviews
Artists' materials
Artists--United States--Biography
Painting, American--20th century

Exhibitions/Works:

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

Controlled Vocabulary:

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

Time	Contents	Subject Keywords
00:00:01	Opening Credits	
00:00:50	Introduction Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Jasper Johns	
00:01:13	(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Gray Alphabets</i>, 1956 The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:01:13	Technical Specifications and Conservation Issues Mancusi-Ungaro describes a treatment that she undertook in 1985 on <i>Gray Alphabets</i> . Over the course of her description, she and Johns discuss the materials and processes that he used to create the painting, as well as the work's provenance.	beeswax dammar encaustic paint Heller, Ben, 1925-* Menil, Dominique de Menil, John de* Menil Collection newsprint oil paint (paint) paper (fiber product) provenance restoration (process)
00:01:49	(Images) Jasper Johns <i>Gray Alphabets</i>, 1956 (details of paper letters and encaustic) The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:02:58	Technical Specifications Johns discusses the canvas onto which he painted <i>Gray Alphabets</i> .	canvas cloth cotton (textile)
00:03:42	(Images) Jasper Johns <i>Gray Alphabets</i>, 1956 (details of problems with canvas) The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:04:09	Conservation Issues Johns assesses the current condition of <i>Gray Alphabets</i> .	beeswax canvas cloth color shift encaustic paint newsprint visual inspection yellowing

00:04:24	(Images) Jasper Johns <i>Gray Alphabets</i>, 1956 (details of darkened newsprint letters) The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:05:02	Conservation Issues Mancusi-Ungaro continues to describe the treatment that she undertook in 1985 on <i>Gray Alphabets</i> .	adhesive tape aluminum (metal) canvas cleavage edges (object portions) frames (furnishings) honeycomb mounts (secondary support) restoration (process) stretchers (framing and mounting equipment) wood (plant material)
00:05:49	(Image) Conservation notes showing areas of treatment in 1985 on <i>Gray Alphabets</i>, 1956	documents Menil Collection paintings (visual works) restoration (process)
00:06:39	(Images) Jasper Johns <i>Gray Alphabets</i>, 1956 (details of original frame) The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:07:34	Conservation Issues Mancusi-Ungaro continues to describe the treatment that she undertook in 1985 on <i>Gray Alphabets</i> . She focuses specifically on the honeycomb aluminum support that she created.	aluminum (metal) edges (object portions) honeycomb mounts (secondary support) museum board putty (sealing compound) stability
00:09:16	Conservation Issues and Exhibition Johns assesses Mancusi-Ungaro's treatment of <i>Gray Alphabets</i> and discusses the possibility of mounting his other encaustic paintings onto solid supports. Mancusi-Ungaro describes her efforts to minimize damage to the painting during its travel and exhibition.	aluminum (metal) cracks encaustic paint honeycomb shipping stability
00:10:44	Conservation Issues and Exhibition Johns and Mancusi-Ungaro discuss various strategies for exhibiting <i>Gray Alphabets</i> , including the Menil Collection's choice not to cover it with glass and how it might be framed.	exhibiting glazing
00:13:04	Historical Anecdote Johns and Mancusi-Ungaro discuss the provenance of <i>Untitled (Green Painting)</i> , 1954. Mancusi-Ungaro outlines the painting's treatment history at the Menil Collection.	Blum, Irving, 1930- Ferus Gallery frames (furnishings) Janss, Edwin Jr. Menil, Dominique de

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		Menil, François de provenance Rosenthal, Rachel
00:13:05	(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Untitled (Green Painting), 1954</i> The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:14:13	(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Untitled (Green Painting), 1954 (painting in white shadowbox)</i> The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:14:28	Technical Specifications Johns describes the materials and techniques that he employed in the creation of <i>Untitled (Green Painting)</i> . Mancusi-Ungaro tells him about an unexplained crystalline substance that appeared on the painting's surface.	crystal (material by form) enamel paint folding (process) glaze glue oil paint (paint) paper (fiber product) viridian (color) wax white pigment
00:14:38	(Images) Jasper Johns <i>Untitled (Green Painting), 1954 (details of folded paper)</i> The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:14:59	(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Untitled (Green Painting), 1954 (detail of painting verso)</i> The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:16:07	(Images) Jasper Johns <i>Untitled (Green Painting), 1954 (details of white crystals on surface of painting)</i> The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:17:29	Exhibition Johns expresses his preferences regarding the exhibition of <i>Untitled (Green Painting)</i> . He comments on the painting's taped edges and its orientation.	adhesive tape edges (object portions) orientation visual inspection
00:18:27	(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Untitled (Green Painting), 1954 (image of painting showing former orientation)</i> The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:20:00	Technical Specifications	age

	Johns and Mancusi-Ungaro discuss the bits of paper that he adhered to the surface of <i>Untitled (Green Painting)</i> . In order to see the printed letters on the paper, they examine the work in transmitted light.	canvas cracks letters (signs) newsprint visual inspection
00:22:11	(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Untitled (Green Painting)</i>, 1954 (detail showing print on paper in transmitted light) The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:22:53	Conservation Issues and Exhibition Johns and Mancusi-Ungaro discuss her proposed treatment for <i>Untitled (Green Painting)</i> , as well as her plans for it to be framed and mounted during travel.	exhibiting frames (furnishings) mounts (secondary support) shipping
00:22:52	(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Untitled (Green Painting)</i>, 1954 (detail of verso showing support treatment) The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:24:06	Technical Specifications Johns and Mancusi-Ungaro discuss the text that they observed during their inspection of <i>Untitled (Green Painting)</i> in transmitted light.	letters (signs)
00:25:23	Technical Specifications Mancusi-Ungaro and Johns discuss the orientation of printed text within the newsprint letters of <i>Gray Alphabets</i> .	letters (signs) newsprint orientation
00:25:59	(Images) Jasper Johns <i>Gray Alphabets</i>, 1956 (details of paper letters and encaustic) The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:26:31	Conservation Issues Mancusi-Ungaro describes and solicits feedback from Johns on a treatment that she undertook to consolidate the encaustic material and secure the paper letters on <i>Gray Alphabets</i> .	beeswax encaustic paint letters (signs) newsprint restoration (process)
00:28:55	Exhibition Johns and Mancusi-Ungaro discuss his preferences regarding stretcher depth.	depth (size/dimension) edges (object portions) frames (furnishings) Lebron, James** restoration (process) stretchers (framing and mounting equipment)
00:31:51	Process of Creation and Conservation Issues Johns traces the provenance of <i>Star</i> , which the artist Rachel Rosenthal commissioned him to paint. He and Mancusi-Ungaro	cleaning glass (material) provenance restoration

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	inspect the painting and discuss its construction. Johns offers his opinions regarding how to clean the work.	Rosenthal, Rachel staples Stars of David visual inspection wood (plant material)
00:31:53	(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Star</i>, 1954 The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:33:59	(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Star</i>, 1954 (detail of glass, nails, and surface) The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:35:46	Conservation Issues Johns expresses his opinions regarding Mancusi-Ungaro's plans to prevent damage to <i>Star</i> during its shipment and exhibition.	damage frames (furnishings) mounts (secondary support) shipping stability
00:38:05	Conservation Issues Johns expresses his opinions regarding the natural aging of works and their cleaning.	age cleaning restoration (process)
00:41:03	Conservation Issues Johns describes occasions when his works suffered damages.	damage restoration (process) Solomon, Alan R.*
00:41:31	(Work Reference) Jasper Johns <i>Painting with Two Balls</i>, 1960 Collection of the artist	paintings (visual works)
00:42:11	(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Voice</i>, 1964-1967 The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:42:11	Historical Anecdote Johns traces the provenance of <i>Voice</i> .	Castelli, Leo Leo Castelli Gallery Menil, Dominique de Menil, John de* provenance
00:42:34	(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Voice</i>, 1964-1967 (First State) The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:43:05	(Exhibition Reference) "Gray is the Color: An Exhibition of Grisaille Painting XIIIth-XXth Centuries" Institute for the Arts, Rice University, Houston	exhibitions (events) Rice University Institute for the Arts, Rice Museum

	October 19, 1963-January 19, 1974	
00:43:21	Technical Specifications Johns describes the processes and materials that he employed in the creation of <i>Voice</i> . He and Mancusi-Ungaro inspect the painting to reveal that it is backed with an additional canvas.	canvas charcoal (plant material) oil paint (paint) stretchers (framing and mounting equipment)
00:43:35	(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Voice</i>, 1964-1967 (detail) The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:46:19	Historical Anecdote and Conservation Issues Johns and Mancusi-Ungaro discuss possible explanations for an additional backing canvas that was applied to <i>Voice</i> . Johns describes an occasion when the painting was damaged, and he subsequently restored it.	canvas damage Edisto Beach framing (processes) Lebron, James** Leo Castelli Gallery restoration (process) stretchers (framing and mounting equipment)
00:51:13	Historical Anecdote Johns and Mancusi-Ungaro discuss the provenance of <i>Voice</i> and try to clarify some confusion regarding the painting's history of being reworked, as indicated by photographs and correspondence.	Burckhardt, Rudy documents Lebron, James** Leo Castelli Gallery Menil, Dominique de Menil, John de* Pollitzer, Eric* provenance Sidney Janis Gallery
00:51:40	(Image) Letter from Sidney Janis Gallery to Dominique de Menil, regarding <i>Voice</i> .	correspondence
00:52:18	(Images) Jasper Johns <i>Voice</i>, 1964-1967 ("First State" and "Second State") The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:54:11	Historical Anecdote Johns and Mancusi-Ungaro enlist the aid of Roberta Bernstein, Elizabeth Lunning, and David Whitney to clarify the history of <i>Voice</i> 's transformation.	Bernstein, Roberta provenance
00:56:24	Conservation Issues Mancusi-Ungaro offers possible explanations for the additional canvas on <i>Voice</i> . She and Johns discuss various conservation treatments that both Johns and the Menil Collection undertook on <i>Voice</i> . These include creating replicas of the fork and spoon, which were stolen from the work and later replaced, and securing the wire on the painting.	canvas damage forks (flatware) framing (processes) Katz, Bill restoration (process) spoons

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		stretchers (framing and mounting equipment) vandalism wire
00:57:47	(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Voice</i>, 1964-1967 (detail of fork and spoon) The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:59:36	(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Voice</i>, 1964-1967 (detail of security wire) The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
00:59:57	(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Voice</i>, 1964-1967 (detail of screw eye) The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
01:00:17	Historical Anecdote Johns and Mancusi-Ungaro enlist the help of David Whitney to clarify the mystery surrounding <i>Voice's</i> second canvas and its provenance.	Edisto Beach Kulicke, Robert M. Lebron, James** New York stretchers (framing and mounting equipment)
01:02:29	(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Voice</i>, 1964-1967 (verso stretcher) The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
01:04:54	Historical Anecdote The group attempts to reconstruct <i>Voice's</i> provenance using the gallery labels on the painting's verso. They also discuss early confusion, on the part of the Menil Collection, regarding different versions of the painting.	Menil, Dominique de Winkler, Paul**
01:05:06	(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Voice</i>, 1964-1967 (verso detail of Sidney Janis Gallery label) The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
01:05:45	Conservation Issues Johns gives his opinions regarding the possibility of replacing the fork and spoon on <i>Voice</i> , in the event of theft.	forks (flatware) replicas restoration (process) spoons vandalism
01:06:34	(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Voice</i>, 1964-1967 (detail of fork and spoon) The Menil Collection, Houston	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)

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01:06:44	<p>Historical Anecdote Johns, Mancusi-Ungaro, David Whitney, and Roberta Bernstein continue to discuss the mystery surrounding <i>Voice</i>. Using information from labels on the painting's verso, they reconstruct the painting's provenance. Included in this segment is detailed provenance information from the painting's Leo Castelli Gallery card.</p>	Leo Castelli Gallery provenance
01:06:53	<p>(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Voice</i>, 1964-1967 (verso detail of Whitney Museum of American Art label) The Menil Collection, Houston</p>	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
01:07:38	<p>(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Voice</i>, 1964-1967 (detail of Leo Castelli Gallery label on verso) The Menil Collection, Houston</p>	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
01:08:57	<p>(Image) Jasper Johns <i>Voice</i>, 1964-1967 (detail of Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles label on verso) The Menil Collection, Houston</p>	Menil Collection paintings (visual works)
01:11:53	<p>Closing Credits</p>	