



**Artists Documentation Program
Video Interview Transcript**

**CY TWOMBLY
SEPTEMBER 17, 2000**

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

**Video: Laurie McDonald | Total Run Time: 00:31:23
Location: Cy Twombly Gallery, The Menil Collection**

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

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About the Artists Documentation Program

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

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

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

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[Speakers (in order of appearance: Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Founding Director, Artists Documentation Program, and Chief Conservator, The Menil Collection; Cy Twombly, Artist; Nicola Del Roscio, Friend of the Artist.)

[00:01:09]

Cy Twombly: Okay. You want to start in here?

CM-U: Let's start in here. Yeah. This [*Untitled*, 1970, Cy Twombly Gallery, The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist] is a picture that Kirk [Varnedoe] once said to me that he thought this was part of the picture [*Untitled*, 1970, Museum of Modern Art, New York] that was at MoMA that he bought.

CT: Yes, it is. I will show you how that went. This painting was ten meters long, and it was cut there, and you can see—I don't know if it's the right-hand side, or the left-hand side. But you can see the image.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

CT: And then it was turned this way, and the slight wash on, and then [word inaudible] on top. So the painting was '70s, and this was done a little later. Because it got too much.

CM-U: Too much to—

CT: Too much to paint.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

[00:02:06]

CM-U: Are these painted in daylight? Do you think these need to be exhibited in daylight, or doesn't — do you feel that's not—

CT: In this room, it's not possible.

CM-U: No.

CT: Yes, I don't necessarily—well, it does have a kind of impact with the light.

CM-U: Yeah.

CT: And this not. But architecturally, I wouldn't see them in the light.

CM-U: This [*Untitled*, 1971, Cy Twombly Gallery, The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist] is a particularly beautiful one, I think.

CT: Yeah.

CM-U: So the washes come—I mean, in interlayering between the—it's *Caran D'Ache* with the *caran*—the crayon of some sort, right?

CT: Of changing, yes.

CM-U: Yeah.

CT: It's very—the oil painted quite thin, and there's not heavy paint on any of these.

CM-U: They are in beautiful condition, Cy.

CT: Yes, this is the *Caran D'Ache*. Everything is.

CM-U: Beautiful condition.

CT: And, you know, some of the paintings are forty—some—years old.

CM-U: Oh, yeah.

CT: That colored painting back there. And the paint is fresh [sounds like]. Of course, they never really moved around much. And now here they are perfectly—

CM-U: But also, it's the way you paint. And your thin layers upon layers. That's the best way in terms of preservation.

CT: Uh-huh.

[Transcriptionist's note: The following segment was removed from this abbreviated version of the video]

[BEGIN REMOVED SEGMENT]

- CT: These paintings [*Volubilis*, 1953], and are over-painted over and over and over. The use of the canvas, you know?
- CM-U: Over many years? Or just as you're working on the piece?
- CT: No. Not over the years, but, you know, just to have something to paint on. You can see that the—like this surface. It wasn't done as one—at one—for the painting.
- CM-U: Right. I've always been inclined to leave this kind of darkening. Is that—
- CT: On both—these two paintings [both *Untitled*, 1954]. The one in the next room, which is a little later—
- CM-U: Right.
- CT: This I don't understand, because it was this color when I saw it years ago. But I don't—
- CM-U: These were the same color. They were both at the Stable Gallery at the same time, right?
- CT: Yeah. It's obviously been remounted and everything.
- CM-U: Yes.
- CT: But it—I mean, it wasn't *painted* over, because the image is still fresh.
- CM-U: Right. How does this one look to you? In terms of color—
- CT: It must have immediately changed in here from the paint. Of course, it must have had oil in the—you know, it's flat paint. Flat paint at that time wasn't artificial. It was really—it wasn't acrylic kind of thing—
- CM-U: Uh-huh.

- CT: —you know, which is brittle. It had oil. It was oil-based. And this must have been—it wasn't mixed too much, and probably the, I don't know, linseed oil and everything, immediately you can see that it's like—
- CM-U: Oh, I see. So that's kind of a splatter—
- CT: —like a linseed, or like—you know, like when you open a can of paint—
- CM-U: Right.
- CT: —and before you stir it, you have a yellow—real paint, not now. I don't think now, it doesn't have. So this is really like that surface thing onto the painting. You know?
- CM-U: Yeah, that makes perfect sense.
- CT: And it changed color. And naturally it's dirty, the paint, because it was stored in the Stable Gallery probably for years. But I would tend not to touch it to put—
- CM-U: Right.
- CT: I sort of like the aging. It doesn't interfere with it at all, to me. Do you?
- CM-U: No, I, I don't. I think that it—
- CT: You see how, in size, these images are. Once you try to do something, where do you start and where do you end?
- CM-U: Right. Right. I mean, it has the sense of age. Or, you were saying yesterday, everything matured, you know. And it doesn't look like it was made just yesterday—because it wasn't. And it has that sense of age, which is beautiful.
- CT: Or these particularly. Or the others, _____ [word inaudible]. I always liked that painting very much. And it comes—you know, when I was in the Army, I took a doodle that the sergeant had done. And had all these shapes in here on the doodle. And it really came from that. When is this painting?
- CM-U: '54.

CT: Uh-huh. Yeah, that's just after the _____ [word inaudible] one. And the one in the hall?

CM-U: '53. *Volubilis*. One year.

CT: That was right after I came back from Africa. It's strange—that shape, it's like the sculpture [*Thermopylae*, 1992, Cy Twombly Gallery, The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist].

CM-U: Now how—but the sculpture was much later, right?

CT: Yes, but the image is like it.

[END REMOVED SEGMENT]

[00:03:32]

CM-U: Look how wonderful that [*Hyperion (to Keats)*, 1962, Cy Twombly Gallery, The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist] looks from here.

CT: Yeah. This is in—these paintings are in very good condition, since they never really left the house. They didn't get banged around.

CM-U: Were they stretched and stored in your house?

CT: Out in the—

CM-U: Or rolled?

NDR: No, they were stretched.

CT: Yes, the frame was made for a traveling show. These were mounted, for when it went to—the canvas is not old, either, feeling.

CM-U: No. No, the canvas is very fresh.

CT: And this painting [*The Age of Alexander*, 1959-60, Cy Twombly Gallery, The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist] is certainly 40 years old. It's done—

CM-U: 1959.

CT: Alexander.

CM-U: Yeah. 1959. Was this linen that you bought in Europe, or Belgium?

CT: Yes, I bought these rolls. And it's what is Belgian linen.

CM-U: Um-hum.

NDR: Utrecht.

CM-U: Utrecht. Uh-huh.

CT: It's prepared, you know.

CM-U: You mean it has a ground on it? Or a priming?

CT: Yes. The priming. Yes. This is like a large drawing almost.

NDR: This _____ [word inaudible] is unusual [sounds like].

CT: And you can't clean—you can't do any—it's not any sense to ever do anything to it, is it?

CM-U: Well, I have cleaned it, Cy.

CT: Oh, really?

CM-U: I—there were fingerprints along the top.

CT: Oh, that, yes. But, I mean, to get into these things—

CM-U: Well, you know what I saw?

CT: Like, these are sort of mine [sounds like].

CM-U: Those are yours, though. I'd leave that.

- CT: Yes. Like, this must be the dropping of a pen or something in here. Of the eraser, you see. And it was—the eraser fell on the wet paint. You know?
- CM-U: Right.
- CT: But around the edges, that was a tendency to get dirty.
- NDR: But when we rolled that piece to ship it, it all started to—you heard the cracking—
- CM-U: Cracking. Yeah.
- CT: Of course at this.
- CM-U: Yeah. Yeah.
- NDR: It's so elastic. It's so perfect.
- CM-U: It's amazing, isn't it?
- CT: Yeah, that should have cracked because that's very heavy.
- NDR: The only way you could [sounds like].
- CT: It was rolled, of course. Ah, there's Alessandro [Twombly]'s name there.
- CM-U: Uh-huh. But when I took the fingerprints out, then I was left with whiter spots.
- CT: Uh-huh.
- CM-U: And I couldn't find color to match.
- CT: You used it with an eraser, no?
- CM-U: And then finally I put—
- CT: You used it with a rubber eraser?
- CM-U: No. I used it with dry cleaning fluid.

CT: Oh, I would use the—try it with—always with—

CM-U: Because—

CT: —not that really gummy eraser. Just a regular white eraser.

CM-U: Yeah.

NDR: _____ [word inaudible]

CT: Or the soft, the one that crumbles up. You know?

CM-U: Yeah, I know. The kind of—

NDR: That I would try first...

CT: Although that makes it a little lighter.

CM-U: It does. And the oils from the fingers—

CT: Because there must be a certain layer. Although it doesn't look it.

CM-U: But then I put dust and dirt back in. And that's how I got rid of it.

CT: Aha.

[00:06:39]

CT: This painting [*The Age of Alexander*, 1959-60, Cy Twombly Gallery, The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist] was done in the room that was too small for it, and this piece was on another wall.

CM-U: Oh, really?

CT: So it has a certain—

CM-U: But you don't even see that.

CT: —other character.

CM-U: You don't even see that.

CT: No.

CM-U: But this is the break, and where it bent?

CT: I think.

CM-U: Yeah.

CT: These [*Untitled (The Lexington Paintings)*, 1959, Cy Twombly Gallery, The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist] look very well. Have you done anything to these?

CM-U: Yes, we've worked on all of these.

CT: Because these are done—this is the first painting that I did, and not knowing that the oil-based paint had changed, and it's acrylic. And so it's very brittle. And remains usually very white.

CM-U: Um-hum. So these were—

CT: These were done in Lexington.

CM-U: —in Lexington? And so you got the acrylic paint there in Lexington?

CT: Yeah. But it must have been—when, was it '59 or something?

CM-U: Yes. Yes.

CT: It's an odd little thing. It's a pea pod. And it was a silver good luck charm from Morocco, and how it got there, I don't know. But that's what—

(laughter)

[00:07:55]

CM-U: This was the one that was folded in half. There were two that were folded. Do you remember that?

CT: Oh, yes, to take them to Europe.

CM-U: Right.

CT: This here?

CM-U: It's right along here.

CT: What is this, though?

CM-U: That is a scratch on the back.

NDR: From the back.

CT: From the—

CM-U: From the back. Right.

CT: You don't think that would—

CM-U: I should eliminate that. Yeah, I do think that's disturbing.

CT: That, I would think. That disturbs me.

CM-U: I agree. I agree.

CT: This doesn't, now.

CM-U: Right. But this is more prominent.

CT: Yeah. And what—how—do you mix the paint and put a little ocher or something in it to change—

CM-U: Well, we did. The first thing we—

CT: —because it takes more than watercolors to do that.

CM-U: Definitely. Yeah. Well, no, we did it in gouache.

CT: Oh, gouache, of course.

CM-U: But we did a little ocher and white, and we sprayed.

CT: Yes. That I would love to see go away.

CM-U: Okay. It's disturbing, that line, yeah.

NDR: _____ [phrase inaudible]

CT: Yeah. I could be—

CM-U: I can do it from behind.

CT: What do you mean, from behind?

CM-U: You see, I think it's a raised—see, it's a slightly raised—

CT: Yes, but—

CM-U: —scratch, so—

CT: —it needs—but it's changed color.

CM-U: Yeah. But I'll flatten it from behind, and then we'll lighten the color. Because part of the reason why it looks so dark is the deformation of the canvas.

CT: Okay. Okay. Yeah, that's just a little disturbing.

CM-U: Yeah.

CT: Because it sets a direction. That maybe can be filled in at the same time.

CM-U: Yeah. Um-hum.

CT: Do you think they crack just sitting here? Being here?

CM-U: I think pictures age somewhat.

CT: Yeah, but—

CM-U: But I think they are pretty—you know, I think they are fairly well protected.

CT: Stable.

CM-U: Yeah. Very stable, yeah.

[00:09:54]

CM-U: I mean, two of these went on the tour to MoMA [New York], and Los Angeles, and Berlin, and still are—

CT: Uh-huh. Which ones?

CM-U: —perfectly flat. That—those two.

CT: Uh-huh.

CM-U: Or maybe that one and one of the—

CT: The big one.

CM-U: Right. No, we didn't send—

CT: I wouldn't lend most of the things anymore.

CM-U: No.

NDR: 1957. Not '59.

CM-U: Oh, they are? '57?

CT: Which? No—

CM-U: We've always thought they were '59, Nicola.

CT: No, they're '59. In '59, I know, it's when I came back to—I was married and I came a short period to Richmond [sounds like].

NDR: _____ [phrase inaudible]

CM-U: Yes.

CT: No, they were done in Virginia and sent to Leo [Castelli].

CM-U: But he never showed them, did he?

CT: He never would show them. And they stayed there in warehouse until, oh, I think there was a flood. It was flooded. And they went to one of those restorers—I don't know, Goldreyer or what. And I just took them away.

CM-U: Good.

CT: And so I had the whole set.

CM-U: So it flooded in New York before you took them to Italy?

CT: Yep.

CM-U: Because I saw water stains on the bottom.

CT: Yes. That—I just came in—I didn't—I just took them away. They weren't restored or anything. I mean, these are in perfect condition.

CM-U: Yeah. They are. But we worked on each one of them.

CT: Yeah, but you don't see the—

CM-U: Oh, good. Yeah.

CT: —the ridges and stuff.

CM-U: No.

CT: Like that is something in the paint.

CM-U: Right.

CT: But that's the problem with these more than any other paintings here, is the material.

CM-U: So then they were rolled, and you took them to Italy? Yeah.

CT: Quite the interesting, austere paintings for 1959, weren't they?

CM-U: I think so. But I must—

CT: I never thought of it until a friend from Virginia, where I was at the opening, and he came to me and said, "You were really courageous in 1959." (laughter) And I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "To do those paintings in 1959." (laughs) And so I came and looked at them, but I never thought—

[00:12:17]

CT: This painting [*Untitled*, 1961, Cy Twombly Gallery, The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist] got better. I wasn't too sure of this. But this was always rolled, so it's in great shape. Yes, what do you think of these things? The _____ [phrase inaudible]. This is not oil paint. It's thick house paint, you see; so it's not flexible in places. It must not now. You've never seen—had anything fall, have you?

CM-U: No.

CT: But, you see, it's just some very thick paint. They used to have what they called *cementita*.

CM-U: Yes. Is that what it is?

CT: This is the oil paint from a tube, you see.

CM-U: Right.

CT: See the difference—see the cracked places?

CM-U: So the one that's cracked is *cementita*? Or like *cementita*?

CT: Yeah. It is *cementita*.

CM-U: It is *cementita*.

CT: So that's why it's very dry. It doesn't exist anymore. You try to get it, but they've also gone into chemical, oh you know, art paints, or whatever they're made out of now. That's paint.

CM-U: Uh-huh. And I see kind of brush and also hand application.

CT: There's a lot of painting with hand. Or like a smear.

CM-U: Um-hum.

CT: This is also house paint. It has kept quite well.

CM-U: Um-hum. The color is beautiful.

CT: This probably was rolled, too.

[00:13:59]

CT: That's the lake near Naples. They're in both paintings. They're in all the paintings. It's like the *Bay of Naples* [1961, Cy Twombly Gallery, The Menil Collection, Houston]—you see you have the lake.

CM-U: So beautiful. The color. Yes.

CT: It's the lake where Virgil lived, near Naples in the _____ [word inaudible] there. I mean, sort of symbols for the region. In fact, I like this painting much more than I used to.

CM-U: I remember when it first came here, you asked me about this painting. You were still thinking about it. I think it looks quite well.

CT: Yeah.

CM-U: Was this a form of erasure, or a reworking?

CT: Yes. I painted that out later, and so it changed the color. But I don't mind that _____ [phrase inaudible]

CM-U: Not at all.

CT: It had been probably done sometime later, too.

[00:14:59]

CT: This [*Triumph of Galatea*, 1961, Cy Twombly Gallery, The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist] is pretty baroque. It's amazing.

CM-U: Beautiful condition.

CT: The color is exactly the way it looked the day it was done.

CM-U: Where did you get your oil paints? Did you have them shipped?

CT: They're just—no, they're Italian. And some of the reds, as Tatia [Tatiana Franchetti-Twombly] had very good reds. And I used them. This is all—this might be house paint—*cementita* house paint. This is *cementita*. This is all oil paint. But it never changed. Even the yellows.

CT: This is just one of the first colored pictures. The canvas is—you know, because they usually darken when you have—it's for oil-based. No, it's not acrylic based.

CM-U: No.

CT: It's not tempera or whatever you make the—

CM-U: Right.

CT: It's really for oil-based. So it never darkens.

CM-U: And you'd always buy it prepared, so you would just roll it out.

CT: Yeah.

CM-U: Stretch it. And then paint.

CT: Yeah. Different weights.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

[00:16:51]

CM-U: Now what about the paint on this [*Untitled*, 1985, Cy Twombly Gallery, The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist]? This is the house paint again, or—

CT: Yeah. All the sculptures are with house paint. And it actually, unless it looks really corrupted, you know, I don't mind all these things.

CM-U: Right.

CT: I notice a couple over there that have cracks that I would—

CM-U: Oh, you should tell me about, when we go over there. Show them to me.

CT: Okay. We'll go over there.

NDR: _____ [phrase inaudible]

CM-U: Oh, okay. He should show them to me. I'll take care of them. Now what about these [*Untitled (Analysis of the Rose as Sentimental Despair)*, 1985, Cy Twombly Gallery, The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist]? When these came, they were very wrinkled. Yeah.

CT: Oh, yes. You've got it flattened, didn't you?

CM-U: Yeah.

CT: Because it was mounted on plywood.

CM-U: That's right.

CT: And you just did it splendidly.

NDR: Is it on plywood?

CM-U: It's canvas, then stapled onto the plywood.

CT: Yes, but—

CM-U: They were rippled.

CT: —how did you get it so flat?

CM-U: We did moisture treatments with vapor coming through the back of them, and then weights on top—

CT: Oh, that was a long process.

CM-U: —on the floor. Yes, it was a long process. But, fortunately none of the ripples have come back.

CT: No. And how long? It has been some time.

CM-U: You have to break the memory. Yeah. We did it five years ago.

CT: Oh, wow. Yeah, I remember, it was very distracting.

NDR: _____ [phrase inaudible]

CT: This must be _____ [phrase inaudible]

CM-U: You stapled them on the board. Yeah. Yeah.

CT: Yeah. I designed the frame. I liked—I still like that.

NDR: This is coming out.

CM-U: Yeah. Slightly coming out. The nails. Occasionally we tap them back in. You know, they just move.

CT: This is where the lady danced.

CM-U: This is what?

CT: The lady danced.

CM-U: Is that what inspired it?

CT: No, the lady that came in here.

CM-U: Oh, this—no, it was in front of the big painting.

CT: Oh, I thought—

CM-U: No, it was in front of the big paintings that she took her clothes off.

(laughter)

NDR: Was she handsome?

CM-U: I didn't see her. You'll have to ask Guillermo, who's at the front desk.
(laughs)

[00:19:02]

CT: There are two drawings to this. This must be a house paint, too. They are very cold white, but it's part of it, I guess.

CM-U: This might be some kind of—like the *cementita*, but it's too thin.

CT: Yeah, it is.

CM-U: It is? It is a *cementita*. Yeah. Which is both water-based and petro—

CT: Water-based.

CM-U: It's water—

CT: No. Oh that. This. I don't know about this. It almost looks like acrylic. And being so white.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

CT: It's not changing. And this could be acrylic, you know, those big jars that you use to prepare a canvas? This is—there's house paint. That's enamel paint there.

CM-U: Right.

CT: But these are—

CM-U: So like the acrylic, Liquitex Gesso and that kind of thing.

CT: Yes.

CM-U: Yeah. They are perfect. Absolutely.

NDR: This is probably _____ [phrase inaudible].

CT: _____ [phrase inaudible]. Just – after the '59 paintings, the only ones that seem to have—you know, because of damage or were hit.

[00:20:11]

CT: These are—nothing will have to be done to these. It's—they are really something.

CM-U: Someone came to—

CT: The precision of them. I did these in one day.

CM-U: You did?

CT: A day and a half. I just did only that one.

CM-U: That one was the first.

CT: They are monochromes in the sense it is only Hooker's Green.

CM-U: Hooker's Green? Right.

CT: And maybe some white wash in here. And they're all done by hand.

CM-U: Mmm-hmm. Wow.

CT: Hand painted.

NDR: Hand cleaned.

CM-U: Hand painted.

- CT: Hand played.
- CM-U: Hand played. Yeah. Well, there's some wash coming down here.
- CT: Yeah, that's—I see there's a wash.
- CM-U: Were there others to this set? Or this is it?
- CT: No, that was it.
- CM-U: And then the white frames with—
- CT: I have some tiny little ones. And those were done too—it's done like a *voir serie*. They were done for one of those summer shows that the Biennale in the Italian Pavilion.
- CM-U: Right. Right.
- CT: And—
- NDR: It's what you call _____ [phrase inaudible]
- CT: It's one of those rare things. It's just like that, they were done. If I tried – I've tried sometimes with a couple of others, and it just—you just can't. This looks like— beautiful drips.
- NDR: In cutting up clippings saved from the newspaper about the Biennale and these paintings, they said they looked like cooked spinach.
- (laughter)
- CT: Ha ha. That's true.
- [00:22:12]**
- CT: This thing [*Untitled*, 1992, Cy Twombly Gallery, The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist]. And I think it's very funny in this room. That—
- CM-U: Well, yeah.

CT: —that thing that that’s—

CM-U: What about the color of this? Is this color—

CT: It stayed so white.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

CT: I like the way that—probably from the box stain when it was wet, you see—

CM-U: And so that’s very—

CT: —it absorbed a little of the, the stain—

CM-U: From the wood.

CT: —from the wet wood.

CM-U: And you like that color? Color very—

CT: Yeah. Oh in the other one, it gets too flat and opaque if you—is that—

CM-U: That’s okay. Well, I do want to really ask you about that very clearly. That, you know, this kind of bright white isn’t your intent, but this coloration that comes in naturally is what you like?

CT: No, everything is—yeah, it’s like the casting of the bronze. What comes out of the cast, it’s left the way it is.

CM-U: Um-hum.

CT: I don’t want to do fake patinas or anything. I’d like—I would like some kind of paint. You know, bronze, like marble, take—loves paint. It takes paint beautifully. Bronze does, too. It just really takes it in. And I understand the Greek sculptors, when they use those beautiful browns and blues, and it goes in like a tattoo.

CM-U: Huh.

CT: It's absorbed right in, so they're beautiful. It's not a surface thing. It's like—it's just a stain that's part of the piece.

[00:23:43]

NDR: The thing didn't warp. The plywood.

CM-U: The plywood. Yeah.

CT: The plywood is very good.

CM-U: Yeah. Yeah. And I think from time—I think this may have begun to lift, but then the staples were just put—

CT: Yeah. It's all right. It's good enough.

CM-U: It looks very good. Yeah.

CT: Oh, that even gets a little crinkly. A little rippled edge.

CM-U: But that's just the natural aging crack.

CT: Yeah, yeah. That's it. It's less than most. You know, primer is so—it's a simple way to paint it in good paint. And yet it got so full of crackling. It's just those paintings that are that one thing.

CM-U: Yeah. Okay. We can deal with that.

[00:24:25]

CT: This [*Untitled Painting [Say Goodbye Catullus, to the Shores of Asia Minor] [A Painting in Three Parts]*, 1994, Cy Twombly Gallery, The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist] one came down many times to be stretched and unstretched.

NDR: How many times did you deal with it? In New York.

CM-U: I remember. (laughs) I've done it three times. No, I've done it three times.

CT: Yeah, that's right. Two here.

CM-U: And New York.

CT: Yeah, but unstretch and stretch. From there to here, and then from New York.

CM-U: In the Museum of Fine Arts [Houston]. Remember?

CT: Yes, that's what I – yeah _____ [phrase inaudible].

CM-U: And then here. So, yeah.

NDR: This. You see this?

CM-U: Yes. Talk—yeah, what about—

CT: You know about that?

CM-U: No, tell me about that.

CT: This painting was hanging in Rome in one of the rooms where it started being painted. And the side panels were on other walls. But the wall wasn't long enough to take all ten meters, and this was rolled up.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

CT: Rolled up like here. This painting stayed up for at least fifteen—

NDR: Ten or fifteen—

CT: —ten or fifteen years. So the—

CM-U: Oh, I see.

CT: —the dirt from the street.

CM-U: Oh. So that was exposed, and this wasn't?

CT: Yeah.

NDR: This was rolled.

- CT: It's funny that these, though, didn't take it on. Well, maybe it was the placement.
- CM-U: Oh, I see what you're saying. So this was already applied when you bought the canvas. Then this part was exposed for ten or fifteen years, while this was still rolled.
- NDR: Yes.
- CT: This was rolled. And this was done in Lexington.
- CM-U: Right.
- CT: That was done outside of Lexington.
- CM-U: They both were started, because there were images on them. But then you reworked it.
- CT: I rolled it up about ten inches. I couldn't stand to look at it anymore. And this image was originally here.
- CM-U: Right.
- CT: It's in very good condition.
- CM-U: It's in excellent condition, considering that it's been rolled, and shipped, and crossed the Atlantic.
- CT: I don't know about the one at the Modern. They have that big gray painting in the *Caran d'Ache*, and when Kirk Varnedoe took it, I said, "You know, this is not an easel painting. It's not something you put up and take down like a—" And every time that's taken down, rolled up, and then taken up, it's bound to be a loss of the Caran d'Ache. Caran d'Ache is quite waxy. But, you know, it's a stress doing that to a painting that big.
- CM-U: Yeah, I see.
- CT: And that's exactly what's happened to it, you know. It is up and down. And that must be good paint, too. This— isn't this incredible? This is four meters

high, this canvas. And it has a kind of lily white—gray surface rather than the warm, yellowish surface.

CM-U: Yes.

[00:27:38]

CT: I did this, as you know, in Lexington. All of them. Most of them. Then they went through three changes of title.

CM-U: But it was started in Italy, right? And then finished in Lexington?

CT: Yeah, I was starting. It took about fifteen to twenty years, but not steadily working.

NDR: _____ [phrase inaudible]

CT: Yes, that's—

NDR: _____ [phrase inaudible].

CT: “This mortal heart presses out in exhaustible wine.” Look at that lemon yellow.

CM-U: Is that amazing?

CT: That's acrylic. I wonder how that—I would say that's quite permanent. This is an earlier image. These palettes. The text. It would be lovely to have something with the text because I like—they're kind of edited.

NDR: Is it Catullus? Is this Catullus?

CT: No, it's off of a Greek modern poet.

NDR: _____ [word inaudible]?

CT: Yes. And I edit out certain words, I think, to make it go. I think the—

CM-U: I think Robert Pincus-Witten did that, Cy.

- CT: Oh, yes, that's true.
- CM-U: Isn't that right?
- CT: Okay.
- CM-U: I think he did.
- CT: Okay. More or less, yes.
- CM-U: So you painted this just tacked up to the wall? And then you'd have to get on a ladder or something? Or did you paint...
- CT: Yes. But mainly it was all along the bottom, so I didn't have to get on a high ladder. In Virginia, I got up there. And I got a little worried because you—it doesn't look that high, but when you're up there—
- CM-U: Yes.
- CT: —and if I fell, and no one—you know, you might not find me for two or three days. I got a little giddy. But I would have loved to have really an avalanche of that coming in from the top. And had that go really—I wanted it to really go out. That Tiepolesque kind of clouds there. I would have loved to have taken that straight out through the top.
- CT: Yeah, I—oh, look at how much time we've killed!
- CM-U: In the preservation of art, we killed time. I like that. (laughs)
- NDR: I'm so surprised that things like—