Artists Documentation Program (ADP)
Interview Video Index

Artist: Larry Bell
Date: April 18, 2006
Location: Larry Bell Studio, Taos, NM
Interviewer: Laramie Hickey-Friedman
Video/Edit: Laurie McDonald
Total Run Time: 01:35:21

Abstract: In his studio in Taos, artist Larry Bell discusses his work with Menil Sculpture Conservator Laramie Hickey-Friedman. Bell explains the technical processes that he employs to create his works. He describes in great detail the process of vapor plating, or the coating of surfaces with metals in a vacuum chamber using thermal evaporation. He also explains how his glass works function as experiments with the optical properties of light, namely reflection, transmission, and absorption. Bell expresses his wishes for his works' future conservation and exhibition. The discussion focuses primarily on the small-scale, three-dimensional glass cubes owned by the Menil Collection, but additional time is given to the discussion of two paper collage works, also owned by the Menil.

Controlled Access Headings (Library of Congress):

Corporate Name(s)
- Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
- Artists Documentation Program
- Harvard Art Museum
- Menil Collection (Houston, Tex.)
- Whitney Museum of American Art

Genre(s)
- Interviews
- Oral histories

Personal Name(s)
- Bell, Larry, 1939-
- Hickey-Friedman, Laramie
- McDonald, Laurie

Subject(s)
- Art--Conservation and restoration
- Art--Technique

Glass sculpture, American
Optics
Sculpture, Abstract
Sculpture--Conservation and restoration
Taos (N.M.)
Vapor-plating

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**	
00:00:42	**Introduction** Laramie Hickey-Friedman, Larry Bell	
00:01:56	**Process of Creation** Bell describes in technical terms the vapor-coating process (high-vacuum thermal evaporation) that he uses to create his glass works.	coating (material) coating (process) evaporation metal plating (metal coating) processes
00:04:02	**Concept/Nature of Work** Bell describes the relationship between light and surface in his work, as well as how he employs the optical properties of coatings to alter the reflectivity, absorption, and transmission of light on or through surfaces, e.g., paper or glass.	coating (material) glass (material) light (energy) optical properties paper (fiber product) reflectance reflected light surface properties surfaces (object portions) transmitted light
00:04:52	**(Images)** **Larry Bell** ***Glass Cube 20- 1 -92*, 1992** **The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist**	Menil Collection sculpture (visual work)
00:05:35	**Process of Creation** Bell explains how he discovered the vapor-coating process in the early sixties in Los Angeles.	coating (process) evaporation experimentation Los Angeles plating (metal coating) processes
00:06:06	**(Images)** **Larry Bell** ***L. Bell's House III (Death Hollow)*, 1962-63** **The Menil Collection, Houston**	Menil Collection sculpture (visual work)

00:07:05	**Process of Creation and Technical Specifications** Bell describes how he began to employ a simple cube shape in his work. He also explains the process by which he purchased equipment and began to do his own vapor coating after several works for an exhibition were damaged in transit and repaired by an outside firm.	coating (material) coating (process) cubes damage equipment plating (metal coating) repairing restoration (process)
00:07:12	**(Images)** **Larry Bell** ***Untitled*, 1966-67** **The Menil Collection, Houston** **Larry Bell** ***Untitled [Cube]*, ca. 1966** **The Menil Collection, Houston, anonymous gift in honor of Mr. Walter Hopps**	Menil Collection sculpture (visual work)
00:07:54	**(Exhibition Reference)** **"Larry Bell"** **Pace Gallery, New York** **November 6-December 6, 1965**	exhibitions (events) Pace Gallery of New York, Inc.
00:10:16	**Historical Anecdote** Bell gives an account of his setting up a studio in New York in 1965-66, and then moving back to California to be closer to his peers.	Los Angeles New York studios (work spaces)
00:10:54	**Process of Creation and Technical Specifications** Bell describes the process of applying patterned, stencil-like resists to the surface of *Death Hollow* in preparation for the work's treatment by an outside coating firm its assembly.	assembling (additive and joining process) preparing stenciling surfaces (object portions)
00:11:27	**(Image)** **Larry Bell** ***L. Bell's House III (Death Hollow)*, 1962-63** **The Menil Collection, Houston**	Menil Collection sculpture (visual work)
00:12:07	**Technical Specifications** Bell describes the chemical, physical, and optical properties of the metals and alloys with which he most commonly coats glass, e.g., aluminum, Inconel, and silicon monoxide.	alloy aluminum (metal) brightness (optical property) coating (material) dichroism film (material by form) hardness Inconel (TM) light (energy) metal optical properties reflectance Silicon monoxide*

		surface properties transmitted light
00:13:45	**(Images)** **Larry Bell** ***Glass Cube 20- 1 -92*, 1992** **The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist**	Menil Collection sculpture (visual work)
00:14:10	**(Images)** **Larry Bell** ***Glass Cube 20- 1 -92*, 1992** **The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist**	Menil Collection sculpture (visual work)
00:15:31	**Technical Specifications** Bell explains how it is possible to ascertain which materials he used by the date of the work, e.g., chrome, silicon monoxide, and dielectric films (magnesium fluoride and zinc sulfide).	dichroism dielectric film (material by form) Magnesium fluoride* metal Silicon monoxide* zinc sulfide
00:16:00	**(Image)** **Larry Bell** ***Untitled*, 1966-67** **The Menil Collection, Houston**	Menil Collection sculpture (visual work)
00:16:29	**(Image)** **Larry Bell** ***Untitled [Cube]*, ca. 1966** **The Menil Collection, Houston, anonymous gift in honor of Mr. Walter Hopps**	Menil Collection sculpture (visual work)
00:17:32	**Technical Specifications and Exhibition** Bell describes his fabrication process from start to finish, including: creating mitered glass panels, having the panels vacuum coated, assembling them into a cube, and having a silver metal frame fabricated and attached to edges of the work. He also describes how his fabrication process and the experience of viewing his works in an exhibition evolved over time.	adhesive assembling (additive and joining process) basic liquid epoxy coating (process) exhibiting framing (process) machining mitering silicone rubber silver (metal)
00:18:48	**(Images)** **Larry Bell** ***Glass Cube 20- 1 -92*, 1992** **The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist**	Menil Collection sculpture (visual work)
00:20:00	**Exhibition** Bell expresses his preferences regarding the exhibition and lighting of his glass cube works. He explains how the cubes should be exhibited on Plexiglas pedestals with indirect light and no shadows.	exhibiting lighting pedestals Plexiglas (TM)

00:20:12	**(Image)** **Larry Bell** ***Glass Cube 20- 1 -92*, 1992** **The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist**	Menil Collection sculpture (visual work)
00:21:50	**Exhibition** Bell outlines and explains his preferences regarding the exhibition height of his glass cube works, as well as the use of Plexiglas bases. He describes how the combined ambient lighting, height, and clear bases cause works to appear to "float" within a room.	direct lighting exhibiting general lighting height lighting Plexiglas (TM)
00:25:25	**Exhibition** Bell describes the process by which he typically lights an exhibition of cube works, using preexisting conditions.	direct lighting exhibiting general lighting lighting
00:28:17	**Concept/Nature of Work** Bell describes the desirable qualities of glass--low cost and availability of skilled labor. He reiterates the properties of light and surfaces that he manipulates in his work: reflection, transmission, and absorption. Bell stresses that light, not glass, is his medium.	coating (material) glass (material) light (energy) optical properties paper (fiber product) reflectance reflected light surface properties surfaces (object portions) transmitted light
00:31:00	**Process of Creation** Bell describes the highly controlled processes by which he prepares his glass surfaces for vapor coating, e.g., cleaning and inspecting for scratches. He suggests that coatings are more durable when they are applied to a clean surface.	cleaning coating (process) hardness plating (metal coating) processes visual inspection
00:33:44	**Conservation Issues** Bell describes two instances where delamination occurred, as well as how to resolve delamination issues, e.g., replace panels or accept delamination as part of the work. He also articulates his philosophy with regard to conservation of his works in general, particularly given that the cubes contain sealed gases and that substances, e.g., water vapor, can accumulate on the surface.	coating (material) condensation (process) delamination gas (material) gases glass (material) Glimcher, Arnold B.* Pace Gallery of New York, Inc. sealing
00:38:55	**Conservation Issues** Bell explains how to disassemble his works for cleaning. Then, he discusses his working relationship with the Los Angeles conservator Jack Brogan and the adhesives that Brogan uses to assemble Bell's cubes. Bell describes his failed attempts to use pressure-sensitive adhesive tape to assemble the cubes.	adhesive tape Brogan, Jack cleaning cubes dismantling glass (material) glue pressure-sensitive tape surfaces (object portions)
00:43:35	**Technical Specifications**	adhesive

	Bell describes a new process for permanently adhering the edges of the glass cubes together--using material that is catalyzed by ultraviolet light.	atmospheric pressure glass (material) ultraviolet radiation
00:46:18	**(Images)** **Larry Bell** ***Glass Cube 20- 1 -92*, 1992** **The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist**	Menil Collection sculpture (visual work)
00:47:20	**Conservation Issues** Bell offers suggestions for how to identify and treat issues at the seams of his frameless glass cubes.	edges (object portions) restoration (process)
00:50:50	**Technical Specifications** Bell expresses his preferences with regard to allowing a patina to develop on his cubes' metal frames. He describes the color properties of silver.	coating (material) frames (ornament areas) oxidation patina (condition) silver (metal)
00:50:53	**(Images)** **Larry Bell** ***Untitled [Cube]*, ca. 1966** **The Menil Collection, Houston, anonymous gift in honor of Mr. Walter Hopps** **Larry Bell** ***Untitled*, 1966-67** **The Menil Collection, Houston** **Larry Bell** ***L. Bell's House III (Death Hollow)*, 1962-63** **The Menil Collection, Houston**	Menil Collection sculpture (visual work)
00:52:38	**Conservation Issues** Bell reflects on the life of his work over time.	damage frames (ornament areas) preservation (function) reflectance sculpture (visual work)
00:55:47	**Concept/Nature of Work** Bell describes the role that metal frames in his cube works play, as well as the effect of using coatings/mitered edges to suggest a frame on the unframed works.	decorative elements frames (ornament areas)
00:56:34	**(Image)** **Larry Bell** ***Glass Cube 20- 1 -92*, 1992 (detail of edge)** **The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist**	Menil Collection sculpture (visual work)
00:57:06	**(Image)** **Larry Bell**	Menil Collection sculpture (visual work)

	***Glass Cube 20- 1 -92*, 1992** **The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist**	
00:57:25	**Exhibition and Conservation Issues** Bell explains that the orientation of a work (top vs. bottom) is arbitrary. For purposes of cleaning surfaces, Bell describes how to determine whether the glass is coated on the inside, outside, or both sides. Framed works are all coated on the inside. Silicon monoxide coatings typically are on the inside, while metal films (e.g., Inconel) typically are on the outside. He also describes the hardness/durability of films that undergo cleaning.	C. R. Laurence Co.** cleaning coating (material) glass (material) orientation Silicon monoxide* Windex (®)**
00:59:31	**(Image)** **Larry Bell** ***Glass Cube 20- 1 -92*, 1992** **The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist**	Menil Collection sculpture (visual work)
00:59:43	**(Images)** **Larry Bell** ***Untitled*, 1966-67** **The Menil Collection, Houston**	Menil Collection sculpture (visual work)
01:00:21	**(Image)** **Larry Bell** ***Glass Cube 20- 1 -92*, 1992** **The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist**	Menil Collection sculpture (visual work)
01:01:53	**Technical Specifications** Bell explains his preference for Inconel as an exterior coating. He also explains the limits of using aluminum.	aluminum (metal) evaporation hardness Inconel (TM)
01:03:00	**Process of Creation** Bell describes how he and his staff aim to keep journals to record fabrication processes and decisions.	fabrication journals (accounts) recording
01:04:26	**Conservation Issues** Bell and Hickey-Friedman discuss how conservators should treat works of his that have been damaged. Hickey-Friedman describes a process by which chipped glass can be repaired. Bell makes a distinction between those damages that are distracting and those that are a natural result of the life of the work.	Brogan, Jack damage fragments repairing replicas
01:12:45	**Concept/Nature of Work** Bell suggests that the fragility of his work may be part of its appeal, but that people who collect the work may want perfection.	collecting collectors fragility
01:14:30	**Concept/Nature of Work** Bell describes the appeal of working and experimenting with glass, due to its ubiquity, invisibility, and improbability as a substrate.	glass (material) physical properties

01:17:01	**Process of Creation** Bell describes how he made vapor drawings/collages on paper in his Taos studio.	collage (technique) drawings (visual works)
01:19:14	**Process of Creation** Bell contrasts paper and glass as substrates for his coatings. He also describes the materials that he used to coat paper, usually aluminum or aluminum/silicon monoxide.	film (material by form) aluminum (metal) glass (material) metallic (color attribute) Mylar (TM) paper (fiber product) plating (metal coating) Silicon monoxide*
01:20:14	**(Images)** **Larry Bell** ***Untitled [MVD 273]*, 1991** **The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist** **Larry Bell** ***Untitled [MVD 274]*, 1991** **The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist**	Menil Collection works on paper
01:24:00	**Process of Creation** Bell describes the three-dimensional effects of wadding papers before coating them in a vapor chamber.	paper (fiber product)
01:25:49	**Process of Creation and Conservation Issues** Bell describes his use of a Magnapex poster lamination machine and acrylic film to flatten his mirage vapor drawings. He also describes a large series of work that he created called "Fractions." The series consists of older, large collages that he cut up and made into newer, smaller compositions.	acrylic film laminating Magnapex (™)** Seal Corporation** thermoset
01:28:42	**Technical Specifications** Bell describes how the crystalline structures of deposited materials affect the optical properties of his compositions, particularly when the materials are deposited onto transparent acrylic film.	acrylic film crystallinity
01:30:37	**Technical Specifications** Bell describes how the properties of the laminate films allowed him to manipulate the appearance of, and add depth to, works on paper or Mylar.	absorption (physicochemical processes) acrylic film diffusion reflectance surface properties transmitted light visual effects
01:34:37	**Closing Credits**	