Artists Documentation Program

Video Interview Transcript

LEONARDO DREW

JANUARY 10, 2008

Interviewed by:

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Helen Molesworth, Curator, Harvard Art Museums; and

Angela Chang, Associate Conservator of Objects and Sculptures, Harvard Art Museums

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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, Director, Artists Documentation Program and Founding Director, Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, Harvard Art Museums; Leonardo Drew, Artist; Helen Molesworth, Houghton Curator of Contemporary Art, Fogg Museum, Harvard Art Museums; Angela Chang, Associate Conservator of Objects and Sculpture, Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, Harvard Art Museums]

[BEGIN RECORDING]

[00:00:50]

CM-U: Today is January 10, 2008, and we are here with Leonardo Drew, with Angela Chang, Conservator, and Helen Molesworth, of course, Curator of Contemporary Art. And I am Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, for the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art. And we are here talking about *Number 122* [2007, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Purchase through the generosity of Deborah and Martin Hale and Richard Nortion Memorial Fund, 2007.209.A]…

Leonardo Drew: 122.

CM-U: …2007.

Leonardo Drew: Yeah. That's it. Yeah. I have to confess that actually I don't necessarily remember all the numbers.

CM-U: Good. That's why I helped you along there.

Leonardo Drew: But there are certain numbers that I do remember.

[00:01:23]

Leonardo Drew: This actually is a special piece, though. I think I was telling you guys earlier what that – you know, it moved from New York. Started in New York…

CM-U: So where did it start?

Leonardo Drew: _____ [phrase inaudible]

CM-U: You started it in New York?

Leonardo Drew: In a studio in New York.

CM-U: In New York? Okay.

Leonardo Drew: And, I mean, it's small – it started off really as that big (makes square with hands), and it just keeps growing. I mean, it's like, I mean, really like fungus, you know. So, looking at it, for me, like this, not amongst all these, you know, other parts and other works that are surrounding – usually I'm working on seven things at a time.

CM-U: Hmm.

Leonardo Drew: So it's like this is just among maybe, like five or six other things that are going on simultaneously, and being rotated, sort of like, you know. So it's like when I'm not – something not happening with this work, then you go over to this one. And it explains to you what happened, should happen with the next work. So the fact that this thing has been going on for, like, a good – maybe a good two years, this piece, you know, like ongoing. It's probably enhanced by a number of elements. I mean, the drawings that were happening at the time, you know. Like, even, like some of the ones that you can tell are almost add-ons, like that one there, you know. It was a drawing unto itself. It had nothing to do with this piece, you know. That one there, too, you know. But they have to be there. As far as the composition of the piece, they have to become a part of this piece. And the fact that it took two years to do this, it just gave it ample time for that to actually happen, you know. So…

CM-U: So were the drawings already made? Or were you making them during those two years?

Leonardo Drew: It's the drawings – some of them were made before. Some were happening at the time. And mind you, there's all this stuff happening in the studio. I mean, if you were to come in, it looks like, you know, Beirut [sounds like]. You know, I mean, it's like – I mean, it's like an explosion of things [sounds like], and it's like all this rust and it's all this stuff piled up. And this piece just benefits from just the fact that it's amongst all this stuff.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: So…

[00:03:13]

Helen M: And are all of the pieces – the seven pieces, everything you're working on, are you using the same materials or different materials in each piece?

Leonardo Drew: They differ. I mean, like, there's – like in that exhibition, for instance, there's some pieces that were made of cast paper.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: And the odd thing about that body of work, because that – those works have been going on for like three years. And this piece benefits from some of the cast paper stuff. There is some of it there, and here, you know. So, like, you know, the works inevitably, they, they talk to one another, and they share information and material.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: So this piece actually has all the elements from that period, plus. And it has also influenced the new body of work, the things that I'm working on right now. Because a lot of things are ending up on paper now, and then there is these sculpted images on paper. That's a small version of what I'm talking about, but in effect, this is a larger version of that.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: You know what I mean? So they're in the same family. This is just a gigantic version of that, you know.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: And all the kind of drawing that happens in it, they are kind of free-wheeling. I mean, there it's happening so quickly, so spontaneously, you know, that you can't fully realize because you've got these other crying babies in the room, and you are trying to sort of like, you know, to apply yourself to them, too. So only when it leaves that it actually starts to tell you, what, you know, that was all about.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: So this is one of those moments. Not necessarily at the exhibition because still the other works that were created alongside it are existing in that same space, too. Even though it's a cleaner space, this is unto itself. It's, here it is in its space, and now you have to kind of like digest it. I'm looking at it, and it's like, "Why in the hell did you make this thing?" And it's like – now mind you, this was happening when I was creating it. Because _you've gotta know I had to put that up there by myself. So this maneuvering that you're talking about, it's like – I mean, I had to do that with my own body, and there was no one helping me.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: So it was like a – there's all these ingenious methods for, like, how to get something up that high, and that heavy, you know, and put it into place, you know. And it's like after – my goodness, thirty-something years of this making art, you know, you learn all the tricks, you know. I mean, you know, like this grid situation that you're seeing in here is a part of not being able to get pieces out of your apartment. You know what I mean?

[00:05:36]

CM-U: Yeah. Like you said, you started it in New York. Then you moved to San Antonio.

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum.

CM-U: How much of it – how big was it at that point? I mean, you kept adding onto it, right?

Leonardo Drew: Hmm.

CM-U: Or no?

Leonardo Drew: It was – I can tell you, by the time it got to San Antonio, at least it was not this shape. But it was on paper. And if you look, look – you don't have to look that hard – you can see that this section, and that section over there, they are like pillars that were added on.

CM-U: Wait. This…

Leonardo Drew: You see how it branches out? Look.

CM-U: Oh, yeah.

Leonardo Drew: It flutes. It's like, it was straight at one point. You can see it...

CM-U: Um-hum.

Helen M: Uh-huh.

Leonardo Drew: …there. You know.

CM-U: Right.

Helen M: And so is that about where you started working on it in San Antone?

Leonardo Drew: Umm, yeah. And all that business in there. And this here. Well, this is in New York. That's San Antonio.

CM-U: You can almost tell. It's a different…

Leonardo Drew: Yeah. It's a naturalness that happens with the way things are growing, and the light, how the light spreads, and how you see things. In San Antonio, how you breathe. It affects how you are realizing the work. So, I mean, the density, obviously, of this stuff is like New York; and it's like – it's so, you know, almost academic. Right. It's realizations, like, well, yes, this has to be New York. It's how dense it is, you know?

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: But then you get to San Antonio, things get to be kinda like – they spread out like this.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: They spread out like this still, you know?

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: And it's like, and it's, it's, it's all this new stuff, this kind of free, this – like, you know, this…

Helen M: And are the materials at this point from San Antone, or are they…

Leonardo Drew: Yeah.

Helen M: So this is like stuff that's in the New York studio? And by the time you are in San Antone, it's from the San Antone studio?

Leonardo Drew: Yeah. But I can tell you that there's a piece that I created in Hirshhorn [sounds like], for the Hirshhorn Museum. That's part of it.

Helen M: Uh-huh.

Leonardo Drew: This – you can see it. The coloration. There's the toys and things like that.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: I, I had made the decision that's sort of like, "I'll go back to my roots of painting." And that was how I was realizing painting was just actually through color, and in terms of, you know, objects.

Helen M: Um-hum.

[00:07:30]

Leonardo Drew: And so this piece was made up of all this, these things that I found. I don't usually work with found objects. Things are fabricated in the studio. But this piece benefitted from this, that I still had that section from that, from that piece. And I said, "This works in here," you know.

CM-U: This is interesting, this idea of you reusing parts…

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum.

CM-U: …and reworking. I mean, you said that you don't necessarily use found objects.

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum.

CM-U: But you might reuse something from a work, right?

Leonardo Drew: Absolutely. These are cannibalized all the time in the studio. I mean, if it's – I remember – oh, this is on film. Oh God.

CM-U: That's all right.

Leonardo Drew: I won't mention the collectors.

(laughter)

CMU: _____ [phrase inaudible].

Leonardo Drew: But the collectors…

Helen M: And don't admit to any kind of crime…

Leonardo Drew: There's some crime, there's some crime going on in this, I'll tell you right now. So I will admit my, my, my guilt in it, but I won't mention the names.

Helen M: There you go.

Leonardo Drew: But there was a piece that was – it was a huge cotton ball [sounds like]…

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: …that these collectors bought, and they had the nerve to leave it in my studio for over a year. That was a huge mistake. Now by the time they got it, it was like, well, you know, who was it – Olga…

Helen M: Yeah.

Leonardo Drew: …Viso [Director, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis] says, "You know, I remember this piece being more horizontal than vertical."

(laughter)

CM-U: That's a lesson we learn!

Leonardo Drew: It's like, you know, I needed [sounds like] that material. You know what I mean? The piece has sold, but it's still in the studio, so it's my stuff, you know?

(laughter)

Leonardo Drew: And it's like, that's material that I mean – you have to have it right then and there. So a lot of works get taken apart, depending on the importance of that moment, you know.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: And so, you know, like the Hirshhorn piece got taken apart. I can tell you, uh, that's a part of Fabric Workshop. Yeah, there are just things in there that are like, you know, just bits and pieces of, you know. And I will say that this one displays that most obviously, you know, most blatantly in terms of this cannibalization.

[00:09:20]

Leonardo Drew: But there are other works that were – like *Number 43* [1995, Marc and Livia Straus Family Collection and the Saint Louis Art Museum] for instance, is made up of these rusted boxes.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: Now it's – you know, like, I had a piece before that one that was like twelve hundred of these boxes that were so big. And it's like I said, I had twelve hundred boxes, you know. And then I just started filling them with all the things that I had in the studio, you know. And in the end you ended up with this piece that was humongous boxes of stuff, you know, stacked one on top of the other. And that occurs mostly because all throughout my creative life, there has been this kind of regeneration, or rebirth, that occurs naturally. I mean, it's not like I have to ask myself that, "Okay, this is what…" or say, "This is what my work is about." It just kind of happens, you know.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: You find yourself doing things. Collecting things. You know, your body has a gravitational pull towards certain objects, certain materials, you know. And like, even that expands. And I have at times challenged that just to sort of see exactly what is at the heart of my work. Like, for instance, when I worked with the Fabric Workshop [Philadelphia, PA], they said, "Okay, Leonardo, okay, we do this stuff with fabrics, whatever. You know, like, whenever you come up with an idea that you think that we could sort of come together on…" I said, "Well, actually, when I was in Japan, I was doing this stuff with paper." And I said, "I never really did anything with it, but I was curious about what I

could – you know, like if I really took some time out, what would I do with that? Just white paper. Not colored paper. Just white paper."

Leonardo Drew: And it's like, okay, a lot of times I'm using aging materials and things like that. And people always talk about the dark that exists in the work. You know, this heavy emotional stuff. I said, "Well, if you just work with just white paper, then where's yourself in that?" You know what I mean?

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: So, in the end, it ended up being the same thing.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: I don't know how it got pushed in there. I can't tell you exactly what happened. But in the end, the mood was the same.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: Even though it was a completely white piece, it was made of a very light paper. I mean, I wanted to capture the lightness of being [sounds like] of that material, but in the end, it was still emotionally heavy. So that dark, or whatever you want to call it, it's always going to be in the work, no matter what color, what complexion, material, it's always going to be there.

Helen M: And do you find this work emotionally heavy?

Leonardo Drew: Well, I mean, it's physically heavy.

(laughter)

Leonardo Drew: I think actually – sometimes something that is physically heavy actually brings on…

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: …especially if it's this – you know, like, it's hanging over you literally.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: I mean, it, it, it has a tendency to seem sort of, uh – it does this (holds arms out by side).

Helen M: Um-hum. Yeah.

Leonardo Drew: You know. So it's like, yeah, I guess that's almost spooky. You know?

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: So it's like, even if it's in a physical sense, sometimes it's just raw emotion; but in the end, it inevitably ends up being that. I don't know exactly why. I haven't laid on any couches to find out exactly, you know, why that is consistent in my work.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: But when people meet me, and they know the work before they know me, a lot of times they have this kind of – you can see this kind of confusion. They say, "He's a really – very up," you know.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: But maybe exorcism happens here. You get that out of your system. And like, you know, there's a bliss that happens with me with the work. There's no – I mean, outside of the pains of the obvious of making this stuff. I mean, it's just like labor intensive. But in the end, it's like, you know, it's something I have to go through. But on the other end of it, it's just like, you know, it's wonderful, you know.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: It's like, uh – they're not all successful either. I mean, this piece is made up of pieces that did not make it out of the studio. So, really in the end, it's like – I mean, when I look at it, and I remember as I was creating it, it's like, you know, "Why do you want to do this again?" You know, like, "I thought we were not going to be doing this kind of work anymore." It's like, "This is too crazy." It's like, I mean, the demands of your body. I mean, in order to lift this stuff. And like – I mean, just look at this. I just get exhausted just looking at it (points toward *Number 122*).

CM-U: Yeah.

Leonardo Drew: You know what I mean? Just…

[00:13:11]

Leonardo Drew: I have to first lay all the stuff in, and then I have to cut it, you know. And then have to release everything in it. And I had to put it back in again.

CM-U: Now wait. I didn't get that. Could you do that…

Helen M: Yeah, let's – can we do that process again?

[several voices speaking at the same time; cannot distinguish the speakers or understand their words.

Helen M: Nice and slow.

Leonardo Drew: Now, mind you, this – even in here, you can look, and you can see that this piece is made up of other works.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: I mean, these colors, they don't come from any – it's just like, they come from some place. There's comic books involved in there. You can see them in there. You can see some of the rusting from some of my old works, you know. But you lay down a board – boom! boom! – on a plate, like so. That board is sliced into what is that? Like a half, or a quarter _____ [phrase inaudible]. Something. It's like a quarter inch or something like that…

Helen M: And you're working horizontally? So you're…

Leonardo Drew: I work on the floor, but…

Helen M: You work on the floor.

Leonardo Drew: …you know, always on the floor pretty much. And usually it's a plate at a time.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: You know. And I have a bench, and I sit on it, and it goes between my legs, and I push it through.

CM-U: So a plate's about how big?

Leonardo Drew: Twenty-four by twenty-four.

Helen M: Okay.

Leonardo Drew: Always pretty much that size.

Helen M: And the plate is made up of what?

Leonardo Drew: Wood.

Helen M: Wood.

Leonardo Drew: Usually a backing of like a quarter inch plywood. Glue on [sounds like]. And it's like, you know – but this one was layered in a way that that had to be sliced up, and then put back together again.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: And then puzzle fit it together. If you know what I mean. You can sort of see it. This is one that remained itself, so to – and I say puzzle fitted. You can see where it was cut, but I put it back together the same way. But not all of them work that way. Some of them were cut up, and then they were put together all ass backwards, or this part was taken and put in with that plate. We can find some of them like that.

Helen M: So I want to be – I want to just ask a really stupid question.

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum.

Helen M: So when you look at the work, it feels like what you've done is found lots of little scraps of wood, and arranged them…

Leonardo Drew: It was never that easy.

Helen M: …into a grid. So what you're saying is, you start with a square…

Leonardo Drew: Yup.

Helen M: …and then you have larger, large pieces of wood…

Leonardo Drew: Indeed. That's right.

Helen M: …that you're slotting vertically to a horizontal plane…

Leonardo Drew: They could be of all different sizes.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: But they are going on a table saw.

Helen M: And then you take them – so you put them down…

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum.

Helen M: …and you look at them. Then you take them off and cut them on a table saw. So these were all cut by you?

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum. Yes. One at a time.

Helen M: One at a time? And then how are they attached to the under plate?

Leonardo Drew: They are glued down with matte medium. I'm like the poster boy for matte medium.

Helen M: Matte medium?

Leonardo Drew: They give me a forty percent discount at Golden's whenever I order the stuff. So they're always waiting for my order. So it's like, yeah, you know. I use that stuff. It's waterproof. It lasts forever. You know, it's gone through beatings. I mean, I used to take an axe to get things off, you know. And you can see where I chopped away at certain places. And it's – and they hold on, you know. It's like, "That's not going anywhere." You know what I mean? That's like, in there, you know. I mean, you have to really try to get it out. You've got to take a chisel, and you've got to chop it from the bottom.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: And then, still, you know, it's – no, it's in there, you know.

Helen M: But the matte medium didn't have any importance to you other than the fact that it held everything in place?

Leonardo Drew: I started out with it because it was waterproof, and I was rusting a lot of things. And I had to put them underwater for like months, you know. And then you take it out, and you don't want the stuff to fall off. You know what I mean? The idea is that it maintains its integrity.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: And that's another thing about this piece is that, when things do fall off, you'll find it will always be very minor things. The major stuff is actually in there, so you are…

Helen M: Is there hardware attaching…

Leonardo Drew: Yeah. Well yeah, exactly.

Helen M: …in addition to…

Leonardo Drew: Oh, yeah, yeah. Like, say, for instance, you can – this block is like on a 45-degree block that is screwed in and glued. And it's like, it's permanently in there. You'd have to really want to take it out in order to do that. And the branches are the same way. I mean, there is a fragility of this, what's going on out here; but where it's grounded, it's like, "Good luck trying to get that out of there."

Helen M: And how are the branches grounded in there?

Leonardo Drew: They are like – there are – it's like a cloth. You can see it, the cloth wrapped around some of them.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: You know, like that's been saturated with matte medium, you know. You can't get that off. Once it dries, it's like – you have to cut it to get it out of there. You can't get it out.

Helen M: So there's glue…

Leonardo Drew: I mean, it's shoved into a hole in the blocks. So the little _____ [phrase inaudible]….

Helen M: So you've drilled the hole. You've made…

Leonardo Drew: You drill the hole…

Helen M: …you've made the hole

Leonardo Drew: …to size, yeah.

Helen M: You've made the hole based on the size of the branch.

Leonardo Drew: Based on the size of the branches. And the shape.

Helen M: And then the, the cloth has the matte medium on both sides; so it's…

Leonardo Drew: Exactly. But that – the cloth only comes on the plate after the very top of it.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: That's the – you know. Because the matte medium is also inside the hole. So when you push it in – I mean, it's just like – it's just done, you know?

Helen M: Got it.

Leonardo Drew: So that it's not coming – that part is not going to move. It can't shift around. It has to maintain – that branch has to stay in that – go in that direction. You know what I mean?

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: There's some that are actually even – that move around. I know. Because that one right there is usually in that notch. I like it where it is, though.

(laughter)

Leonardo Drew: That's why that notch is cut out there. And that cloth is flexible, so that it allows you to take it, go over that, and then the square should be almost touching your head. That one right there.

[00:17:54]

CM-U: Let's talk a little bit about that. That installation process.

Helen M: Yes.

CM-U: Was that the way you went about it?

Angela Chang: Well, I was present during the installation. I didn't hang actually any of the pieces. But, I don't know; I think we all thought it was just this living, breathing…

Leonardo Drew: That's right.

Angela Chang: …object, and we didn't really know where it was supposed to hang. We knew where the pieces of the grid fell, and then we just put it up there and thought, "We hope this is how it's supposed to be."

Leonardo Drew: That's exactly the way you do it.

Angela Chang: Okay.

(laughter)

Leonardo Drew: When something is like – I mean, it's all the works are like pretty much like that. There is a base composition that you're following. Obviously, the grid. You know, these things, one falls into the other. They're numbered. That's easy. But when you get around in here, you know, things can shift. And usually those things are the flexible, like that branches on this, like, loose cloth.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: I mean, if we were to take it, it would still hang, but it would fall into that notch. It's not necessary for it to fall into that, because I've seen it in a number of other directions in different places in the studio…

CM-U: And that's okay with you?

Leonardo Drew: It's perfect. I think it's great that way. You know what I mean? And it's not – it absolutely is not a problem. You got that on record, right?

(laughter)

Leonardo Drew: But I thought I should bring that up.

CM-U: Oh, yeah, definitely.

Leonardo Drew: These things, you know, they have a life. Obviously if something breaks and falls off, you know the major things, you know.

CM-U: Would you want them to be replaced?

Leonardo Drew: Oh, yeah, they should be. Just put back, you know. I mean, you can put them back. But I, I can tell you that this one has been to Ireland, and this part that was at the Hirshhorn, started at the Hirshhorn, ended up in Ireland. That beautiful shaped board there, for instance, was in the boxes being kicked around from this place and that place. It's still there. You know what I mean? That paper just dangling there. Looks like a book, but that's like compressed paper. Can you see it?

CM-U: Yeah, definitely.

Leonardo Drew: Right there. Yeah. It's like – and it's just dangling there, but it's, you know, it's built so that it actually – that dangling is only an illusion. In the end, it's like it has a – and that one, too.

CM-U: Okay. Let's say that – something like that breaks off. _____ [phrase inaudible]

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum. I can tell you that right – that's probably glued down. It only looks that way. If I touch that, it won't move very much. I can't reach it…

CM-U: That's okay. We'll take your word for it.

(laughter)

Leonardo Drew: And there are other marks, too, that are like that. They are called accents. And this gives you motion, you know.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: It allows you to sort of like read the piece, and it breaks the rhythm. So it's just like that juts out, and then it breaks the rhythm. But it's important, so you glue that down so it does not move, you know. But it looks as though it is falling apart.

Angela Chang: Well, when we were installing this – or, we do a thorough condition check when this comes in…

Leonardo Drew: Sure. I've seen those.

Angela Chang: …sort of square inch by square inch. And, you know, we actually did find a lot of – we were calling them loose teeth.

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum.

Angela Chang: I mean, they were wobbly. They were hanging like that. Or they were detached and sitting nearby.

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum.

Angela Chang: Or they were detached and in the box…

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum. That happens…

Angela Chang: …someplace, and we don't know where they go.

Leonardo Drew: Oh, yeah. Um-hum.

Angela Chang: So initially we kind of made an attempt to…

Leonardo Drew: To find where they belong?

Angela Chang: Well, if something was dangling that – you know, put it back up. Or to find where it belonged. But how do you feel about that? I mean, there is damage that happens…

Leonardo Drew: Things are alive.

Angela Chang: …as it's here, and breathing – because the humidity is changing here. But there's also damage that happens, you know, in the box as it's traveling.

Leonardo Drew: I've seen the works move around. I've gotten calls from museums, and the same questions you're asking I've been asked a million times. And it's like, in the end, these things are alive.

Angela Chang: Yeah.

Leonardo Drew: It's like, you know, there are certain things that are gonna, like, fall off – they age, or you know – but you're never gonna lose the integrity of the piece.

That's never gonna go. That's always going to be there. Because there is something that I put in there. You can't get that out of there. You know what I mean? It's like, you know, not with detergent or anything. It's just in there.

Angela Chang: Yeah.

Leonardo Drew: And so I think that, when it comes down to those little bits and pieces, you know, it's a conservator's job to worry about that kind of stuff. But I'm going to tell you you shouldn't worry about it. I've gotten calls from museums, saying, "Oh, there's this rust on the floor, or whatever. What should we do with it?" I said, "Put it in the garbage, you know." They were going to try to, like, blow it back into the piece, or something like that. It's like, you know, don't drive yourselves crazy. It's like, there are certain major things that, if that fell off, you've got to put it back. You know what I mean? That's a part of – the major part of the composition. But these little bits and pieces, they are meant to sort of like, you know…

[00:21:46]

Leonardo Drew: This thing is alive, and it's growing, you know. It's changing with weather. I mean, I've never seen that like that before. I love it. I mean, that's – I'm going to use that.

CM-U: What? What did you not see?

Leonardo Drew: The way that paper is…

Helen M: The paper is _____ [word inaudible]

Leonardo Drew: I remember it somewhat like that, but it has a kind of a – Arches has that anyway. Has a body to it.

CM-U: Yeah. Right.

Leonardo Drew: And it also breathes what the condition of your rooms, or whatever. It is like, if it's humid, or whatever, it does the – it sags, or whatever. But also it breathes, you know?

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: So I think that that's a respect of that material that I like. Now with a bond paper, it's a whole other thing. So I always know, like when I'm working like, like with pieces on bond paper or on Arches, it's like I know what the end result is going to be. What it's going to give me. It's going to fold this way or that way. It's going to wrinkle certain ways – and you put water around it, it's going to do something. You know what I mean? That's a part of the process of life, and I've always been, you know, like involved in how these things shift, and move, and that they have to have a life. They have to breathe. You know? And so I select those materials for those very reasons, you know, because they are going to give me something in the end, you know. It's like fine wine, you know. It is just going to age in a way that is going to be like, "God, that's perfect." You know, certain things you can accelerate, and then other things are just going to happen as you're watching it, you know. But you're never going to lose the integrity of the piece because that's something else that I – like I said, you cannot get that out of there, you know.

Helen M: You know, my biggest fear about losing the integrity of the piece…

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum.

Helen M: …is actually the branches up top.

Leonardo Drew: Yeah. Um-hum.

Helen M: I think – I mean, I think two things could happen. I mean, one, just with time, or through movement, they could break. But I also think that there is the possibility – and we've talked about this with the guards – that the deep adolescent male desire to jump up and hit something just to show that you can, will happen one day with this piece, and that it could break.

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum.

Helen M: And then how…

Leonardo Drew: You're welcome to replace it.

Helen M: …how – but what would be the like, criteria, to think about replacing it if…

Leonardo Drew: Replace it.

Helen M: …you were not around?

Leonardo Drew: You replace it. I think that – like, obviously the branches are important to the composition of the piece…

Helen M: Yeah.

Leonardo Drew: …and they are the most fragile parts. I mean, that was where they got ridiculous, you know. I said, "Okay." Now, mind you, there are other works that get just as ridiculous. I've worked with glass and with paper. I mean, like, heavy glass boxes that I made. Mitered together with ultraviolet glue. Ultraviolet lamp, you know. And just went through the rigors of just like doing this eighth of an inch glass boxes, cases, that are like that big. Now you just do this, this. And it's like, that thing just shatters. You know what I mean? But it's like, okay, you want it – you have to go through this process. You've gotta just sort of realize, what are the parameters of this material? You have to sort of know that. And how far you are going to go, you know? You know, that piece never made it out of the studio; but in the end, it's like, okay, there are certain things that you test. And you said, "Okay, this is where – how far I'll go with this material. This one cannot leave the studio." This can leave the studio 'cause I know that there are trees. Oh, my goodness, we are surrounded by them. You know what I mean? It's like, this can be replaced. And very easily, you know.

Leonardo Drew: So I think that they – once the branch is, like, broken in a place where it's like, you know, well, you know, it's not going to be – it's going to be easy to sort of like easy to bring this thing back to life again in the same way – I mean, you can find a branch that can pretty near mimic what this thing was doing. I mean, my studio is filled with branches, you know.

CM-U: Okay…

Leonardo Drew: It's just a matter of selecting the one that actually accents and gives it, you know, like what it needs. And I think that – like, it could have gone in a number of directions. This is about the same as what I was saying about that one could have been over there, you know. It's like – it's about respecting what's actually happening with the material, and what the directional pull can be, and other possibilities. But the branches can be replaced because that's something that's – that we're surrounded by. And compositionally speaking, they are extremely important to the piece.

Leonardo Drew: So I think that you want to at least know that, that you can just replace it. If you lose a little finger or something like that, I mean, don't go crazy. But use the composition with the whole branch.

[00:25:58]

Angela Chang: And what do we do with the pieces that fall off and we can't replace them? Or the old branch that we are replacing?

Leonardo Drew: _____ [phrase inaudible].

CM-U: You don't know where it is, you mean?

Angela Chang: No. I mean, if we have…

Leonardo Drew: You have photographs, don't you?

Angela Chang: Yeah. But I mean, no, what do we do with the piece that we've replaced? Like, we have the old broken branch…

CM-U: Oh, I see…

(laughter)

Leonardo Drew: I mean, listen, you're a museum, you've gotta _____ [phrase inaudible] or something like that.

Angela Chang: No, _____ [phrase inaudible].

Leonardo Drew: I'd just say throw it in the trash.

[several voices speaking at the same time; cannot distinguish]

Angela Chang: Yeah. I mean, eventually we might have a bag of fragments from all the different pieces, you know…

Leonardo Drew: You know, I was speaking to the Met – to San Diego, uh San Antonio – all these different museums, they always have these very same questions.

Angela Chang: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: And it's like, you know, they always have these remnant bags, you know, of this or that or whatever. And it depends on, like, what that thing is. Like I said, if you lose that, you want to put it back. And if you lose a branch, you want to put it back. You know, there are certain things that are like so important to the actual life of the piece. And you'll know. I mean, you look at your photograph, and you'll say, "Okay, this is important." I mean, one of these is not important. You know what I mean?

Helen M: Can I go back to the branch? Let's say one of the branches breaks in half, and clearly it is a major compositional shift in the piece. Would your preference be at that moment for the conservators to try and…

Leonardo Drew: Try to mend it.

Helen M: …mend the piece first before replacing it?

Leonardo Drew: Mend it yeah, um-hum. I would want you to if it's a major break [sounds like]…

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: …I would right away if it's a major break. Because I know that you – I mean, I've mended things before, you know.

CM-U: Well, that was going to lead to what – my next question was, is, there's a part of me…

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum.

CM-U: …that, if the branch broke off, and I tried to make the mend, but it's still going to be weak because, you know (makes see-saw motion with hands).

Leonardo Drew: That's why I was saying. That's how I would make that decision.

CM-U: …I'd be inclined to wrap it the way you did. Is that…

Leonardo Drew: Yeah.

CM-U: …what's – I mean…

Leonardo Drew: Well, you know, obviously you've got some white wraps, and you've got some of the dark wraps.

CM-U: Right.

Leonardo Drew: I would say that I understand composition, how those two elements work with the light, and why that one is still white, and why that one is still black, you know.

CM-U: Okay. That's what I need to know.

Leonardo Drew: So that's what I would say. It would be better if you can get this thing to hang without having to wrap it.

CM-U: Okay.

Leonardo Drew: And there's a way of doing it. They make all kinds of epoxies, you know, that can do that.

CM-U: Okay.

Leonardo Drew: But I find that, like, or at least get – letting you know that, giving you the license to sort of like say, "Okay, we can replace this thing with a similar branch," and…

Helen M: Would that be better than?

CM-U: I would say preferable.

Leonardo Drew: I think that if you can't get that thing to do what you want it to do, which is, if it's not going to carry its weight, then you get another branch.

CM-U: Right. Okay.

Leonardo Drew: But if you can get it to work without wrapping it. Because that is so – and that bulge is so important. I mean, that flow is important. Where that fabric wraps around that, stabilizing that branch, that piece of wood there – can you see it?

Helen M: Sure.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: It's extremely important.

CM-U: Yeah.

Leonardo Drew: It's like Band-Aids, you know. But it's about this experience now. We're standing here.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: If you were to put a bulge in there all of a sudden, it's like, hmm, you know, you want to think about that. If I was still alive, if I hadn't croaked, and, you know, get me over here, I could help you. But I think in the end it's like, you know, like, just see if you can get it to do it without Band-Aiding it.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: And if that doesn't work, then you replace it. And it's easy enough to replace. Once it's broken, you can drill back into that hole to pull it out, you know. You can just drill it out. And then at that point then you can add and shove the piece back into the, uh – because you see they all have their own boxes, right? All the branches have their own boxes to stabilize and make sure they stay in that position. But once that branch is broken, then you should be able to drill right through, you know. You break it down to the base, and you just drill it out, the same way I drilled it in. Just drill all the wood back out again. Then shove your new branch into place.

CM-U: That makes sense.

Leonardo Drew: Yeah. Yeah.

CM-U: That makes perfect sense.

Leonardo Drew: Total license to do that. It's – you know, that's not even a – should not be a heavy concern, you know, but...

[00:29:51]

Helen M: Can you talk a little bit about how dirty the piece is?

Leonardo Drew: Oh yeah, it's so important that it be dirty [sounds like].

Helen M: Right, yeah. Because I can imagine, two hundred years from now, someone thinking, "This looks great. Let's clean it." And so can you talk a little bit about the dirt and how, you know [sounds like].

Leonardo Drew: Well, dust is an interesting thing. Dirt is one thing. Dust is a whole other thing.

Helen M: Correct. Right. Exactly.

Leonardo Drew: I mean, I just use a…

Helen M: If you could talk along those lines _____ [phrase inaudible].

Leonardo Drew: Like, say, like when was in the studio, before it left, I dusted it with a vacuum. An exhaust. Dust Buster does the same thing, you know. You can do that. You can just work around it, and it just kicks the dust back out. Dust is not something that is – there are times when it enhances the piece, but if you can make that – once it leaves the studio, then it's like, "That's a decision that has been made," you know.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: So we you have to sort of – that's part of the upkeep of the piece, is being able to, like, do that. On the paper, it's like – you can tell that the fingerprints, the footprints, all those things are necessary parts of the composition…

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: …but dust is something that happens over time. And you can just, like, just blow on it a little bit.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: You know, sometimes I use a feather duster, depending on what the material is, you know. But, like, something as stable as this, you know, you can use a feather duster or you could, you know, just blow on it with the exhaust on a vacuum. Not the sucking, but the exhaust.

Helen M: And can you talk a little bit about how dirty it is now. And not how dusty it is? And the role that it – it's not pristine wood. Do you know what I mean? It's got this other dingy quality to it.

Leonardo Drew: The dust – that happens in the studio. The dust that happens outside the studio is a whole different thing. I mean, it's like a desert in the studio. You know what I mean? And there are things that you have to make decision calls on that. You're gonna say – okay, sometimes I even go in with the liquefied matte medium in a spritzer to make something stay. So I make the dust stay on it.

Helen M: Oh. Right.

CM-U: Not as a coating, but as you're attaching it? Is that what you mean?

Leonardo Drew: Make sure the dust doesn't – mean, if I like that, the patina?

CM-U: Yeah.

Leonardo Drew: Then you want to keep that. You don't want, like, that to be blown off, or whatever, when you start moving it around.

CM-U: Oh, I see.

Leonardo Drew: So you have to go in. You have to spray it.

CM-U: So you actually do spray acrylic on [sounds like].

Leonardo Drew: Yeah. Sure. Absolutely.

CM-U: Specific panels, or specific pieces?

Leonardo Drew: When it's whole, it's more easy to read than when it's – like, in panels, you can't know anything. You can only know it as a full composition when it's completed.

CM-U: Okay. So once you've got it all together, then you might go and spray?

Leonardo Drew: Exactly. Absolutely. And that would mean sometimes spraying the whole thing with an atomizer.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Leonardo Drew: You know, I have like numbers of them. They are like, big. They are three-gallon atomizers. And you just spray the whole thing, you know?

CM-U: Did you spray this one?

Leonardo Drew: Hmm, that wasn't necessary. But there are things that have been sprayed that are in this family of works.

CM-U: I see.

Leonardo Drew: You know, the rustic ones. Or sometimes – okay, for instance, like you take something out of water. It dries out, and it's rusted, whatever, and it has a tendency to flake. You have to make a decision about whether or not is it important to have it be that color, or is it more important to have it stable.

CM-U: Right.

Leonardo Drew: That flaking to be a part of it, but the color is going to change when you hit it with this medium, so you have to make that decision, you know. So those are things that – I mean, this didn't have to go through that process. So, if it did, it was a long ago process. This is old rust, you know. Meaning, that's been around at least seventeen years, maybe, in my studio. Sitting around, you know, just building up from other works. Maybe even went through other pieces before that, you know. But it's like that rusting has been a part of my process for like, about twenty – I would say about twenty-one years now.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: About twenty-one years exactly. Yeah. So there are different levels of degrading that happens in the work that's acceptable; and then some that's like, "Okay, this is going to be a stabilization process." I do make that decision, though. And it's like a lot of people would like to believe that all these things are going to fall apart. And it's like, that's not – no. I make that decision in the studio that this is going to have to stay this way, and this one can – you know, this one can go this way now, you know. So it's just a matter of…

Helen M: So the decision, then, between the patina on the wood here…

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum.

Helen M: …and what I would call like the lack of the patina here…

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum.

Helen M: …is conscious?

Leonardo Drew: Oh, absolutely.

Helen M: And do you think something like this was sprayed? Or do you think it was just already like that, and just stayed like that…

Leonardo Drew: It became like that because it was probably lying on the floor.

Helen M: Uh-huh.

Leonardo Drew: Got stepped on more often.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: The wood that I used on that was different. I mean, like – well, like these are the same family. This is definitely like from the other side of that, you know. If you were to turn it the other way…

Helen M: Right. See, I can imagine someone in the future thinking, "Well, this looks like this. Do I want to make this look like that?"

CM-U: Right.

Leonardo Drew: Oh, listen…

[00:34:30]

Leonardo Drew: That's why it's great to have photographs. You know what I mean? They tell you a lot. And there are a lot of detailed shots on most of my works. Usually book covers end up inevitably being – or a splash is being detailed. So it gives you an idea what the rhythm of the work is. So I think that there – it's like, you know, there are certain truths about this work that you cannot – you can't make those kinds of mistakes. It's like, "Oh, let me shine this up." It's

like going, taking a piece of rust and saying, "I'm going to turn it back into the original metal."

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: It's like, that wouldn't be my work then, you know.

Helen M: Right.

CM-U: I'm imagining that you have all different kinds of wood, some older, some cleaner, some painted, some not…

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum.

CM-U: …and as you are making these slices, you are positioning them.

Leonardo Drew: That's right.

CM-U: They are the materials with which you are working.

Leonardo Drew: That's right. Um-hum.

CM-U: Is that correct?

Leonardo Drew: That's correct. Absolutely. Yeah. It's all part of a composition. That's a must, especially if you have a painting history. I mean, all my painting friends immediately notice the blues.

CM-U: Right.

Leonardo Drew: You know? It's like, "Oh, my goodness." And it's like, I'm not necessarily so conscious of that. It's just naturally happening. But the fact is, those things were existing in my studio, and I chose to use them. It tells you all you need to know about what, you know, natural happenstance is when it comes to like, okay, "How does something actually get made?" or "Who am I in all of this?" It's just those two questions constantly in flux with one another. And then you end up with this. And then outsiders are usually the ones that are more ahead of me because I am already on to the next thing. I'm not really stationary, and I can't really, like, take too much time. But when I've visited people's homes, and museums, and seen the works up, it's a whole other realization.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: It is a whole – they tell you all these things that you couldn't have known because you were too busy with all this other stuff, you know. And, like, you give everything to these pieces; but in the end, it's almost like there is a residual that is relying on something else, that has to sort of like – it's a learning process, and you end up giving the next body of work what you've learned from this one. So all of my painting and drawing, and all that history and photography, it comes into play in all of my works now, you know. All these different things are a part of your language now. So it's always about building this, like, this vocabulary that's just ongoing. I mean, paper is now a part of that. Meaning, literally – you know, drawing used to [be] happening where I was, like, avoiding that. I think I told you guys earlier that, you know, that was the facility that was – negated my growth. You know, drawing and painting. So I had to tie my hands, and then, you know, find another way. I mean, how do you sort of get past the prettified [sounds like] surface? And this is where I am right now in terms of that, you know. Before, it was about how to draw the figure. Or, you know, like how to paint? How to, like, you know, illuminate an object?

Leonardo Drew: But it's like now it's like – you know, this is beyond that surface, the prettified surface that is not allowing you to – negating the, uh, traveling beyond that, you know. So I think that – like, the work now is more, you know, emotionally involved because it's dealing with me up front, you know. It's no longer like, you know, you can't hide anymore. It's like, "Well, I have to do that." Even though it's just ridiculous. It's like, you know, "How you gonna get that up there?" And I brought all these branches into the studio. It was like, you know, it was like, you know, I kind of felt – I mean, the next – this is seriously influencing the next piece, which is like the tree. I mean, it is really like it. But it takes up the space. You know what I mean? Literally it is a three dimensional sculpture.

Helen M: Hmm.

Leonardo Drew: And absolutely influenced by this piece, and this piece has also influenced the drawings now.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: And the smaller ones that are happening, like that big, are like, you know, all about like all of the things that you picked up on. And only now as I'm looking at it, I can say, "Okay, now I know where that…

CM-U: Now you see it.

Leonardo Drew: …new tree piece is coming from." You know what I mean? It's like – but it's something that's so obvious; but, you know, I'm not scared of branches, that's for sure. (laughs)

[00:38:26]

Angela Chang: Can you talk a little bit about the paper on this piece? You were talking about drawings, and we were talking about dirt. And so I just wanted you to talk more about the marks on the paper, the patina, the tears.

Leonardo Drew: I was looking for the fish that – I sometimes had dinner on the piece.

CM-U: Oh yeah?

(laughter)

Leonardo Drew: And there was a mark. Where is it? I can't see it. It's like…

[several voices speaking at the same time]

Leonardo Drew: …fish grease. Yeah. I know that's like tea or something like that. But you can almost see the cup marks in some places, you know, where – I mean, it's purposeful now. I mean, on purpose you do these things, you know, like you – but before, it was because the studio was like that big, you know. And it's like you've got to make these big things, you know.

CM-U: So some of these are from much older times?

Leonardo Drew: Mmm, they learned from a lot of older pieces. I mean, like those patinas or whatever, that happened. You learned to, sort of like, keep this thing around.

CM-U: I see.

Leonardo Drew: Like, laying around.

CM-U: Right.

Helen M: So what once happened out of necessity, or maybe even by accident, is something that you now incorporate with intention?

Leonardo Drew: Exactly. Bingo, yeah. And it has to happen in an – organically. That's the word, right? It has to happen organically. And even with – when you put something like this, or like this, in, I mean, that's white and that's not. So it's like, how do you get that from being stuck on to actually happening organically? So those are the kind of things that you learn. As a mature artist, you learn how to do that, you know.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: I mean, otherwise you read this as like, "Oh, this is an anomaly." It's like, "Where'd that come from? And what is that about? It doesn't seem part of the piece," or whatever.

[00:39:57]

Leonardo Drew: And, mind you, this was still being created in the – during the exhibition. You know, like, we shipped it. And I wasn't exact – still, even then, I wasn't sure if it was going to be in the show. And it was up, they informed me [sounds like]…

CM-U: This entire piece?

Leonardo Drew: Exactly. And so I started reworking. This used to be a black – looked almost like an African mask. And I just keep hitting it. Just kept hitting it, kept hitting it, kept erasing. And I remember Michael saying to me, he said, "Do you think it was better before?"

(laughter)

Leonardo Drew: And it was like, you know it's like, so now you are working absolutely naked in front of these people because…

CM-U: Right.

Leonardo Drew: …it was like, I knew it had – you know, I said, "Okay, it was like, okay, I'm not sure if it's going to make the trip. There are other things in the show that

should endure" [sounds like]. We had maybe like seven other works that we could have rotated into place for – in place of this one. And they just loved it, and they said, "Oh, Leonardo, you know…" They didn't want me to touch it. But because I still hadn't fully realized it, you know, I said I kept playing with it. So I kept hitting that. This. I think – I don't think anything happened over there, but definitely on this side.

Helen M: I want to ask you a somewhat dangerous question.

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum.

Helen M: Do you think it's done now?

Leonardo Drew: Oh, it's absolutely done now.

Helen M: Okay.

Leonardo Drew: Yeah. And that, that occurred probably a week after the show opened.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: I made the decision that, you know, I could do more with this piece. Usually that tells you right then and there that, like, that it's in command of itself, you know.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: You know, you could give it nothing else. It's like – I mean, there is – you put yourself – I mean, this is putting yourself out there.

CM-U: Right.

Leonardo Drew: This stuff, compositionally, how it works with this, is a whole other realization though. And, like, I mean, you can almost tear that out, and you say, "Well, okay, now we've got a wall sculpture. We don't have the paper involved." But it's like, how do you incorporate your past, as far as drawing and painting, into this?

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: And especially paper. Since I worked with all that cast paper for three years. I took three years off just to work with cast paper…

CM-U: Right.

Leonardo Drew: …and the odd thing about it is, I've never really shown that all as a body of work. I just kept it. The Carnegie ended up getting one from the exhibition. They've been trickling out here and there, but most of them, I kept. But that was probably one of the first ones that got out.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: And, like, a lot of times people were more like, "Well, do you have a signature Leonardo, for these [sounds like]?" When they see the paper works. Because it's like all this white, you know. They're not traveling with me. But I'm traveling, though. So the paper has to happen, you know. And that's where this comes from.

Helen M: Do you consider this as a sculpture or a drawing?

Leonardo Drew: Oh, those are like meaningless terms.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: It's like it's – you know, it's what it is. It's like – you know, I started off, from what I remember, as a painter. I mean, I was telling you guys that DC Comics, Marvel Comics, and Heavy Metal Magazine was like – okay, when I was a kid, it was like, "Oh, you know, come in, you – don't go to college, and you come in, work in our bullpen, and we do this, this, this." I remember that Superman movie was out then when I went to DC Comics. And everybody was like, "Oh, yeah, you gotta come with us." It's like, "_____ [phrase inaudible], we got this Superman movie coming out, man; and we're the ones you should be working with, you know." It was like, okay, it was either this or school, you know. And if I had gone with them, I wouldn't be talking to you guys right now. I'd be working on the next Superman movie.

Leonardo Drew: But, I'll tell you, man, it's like, you just never know. But this business of asking questions is what this is about. And those questions don't necessarily have full answers. So when you ask me, like, "Is it a sculpture or a painting?" it's like, "Man, I've gotta avoid that one." Because if I end up pigeonholing myself, I would have been an illustrator, you know. And that's like – that was

something that it seemed that, because of my facility, I'd have to go in that direction. But if I had adhered to those rules or what – you know, where things should go, and how you place them, it's like, I would never have made this piece, you know. And I never would have gotten this far, that's for sure, you know.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: So it's just what it is, you know.

[00:43:50]

CM-U: Do you work during the day or at night?

Leonardo Drew: (laughs) Ha! It's like 'round the clock. Four hours of sleep. You know, it's still the case, you know.

CM-U: You work in daylight.

Leonardo Drew: It's like four hours. It's like – the four hours of sleep occur, like, right around, like six o'clock to ten o'clock, you know.

CM-U: So you work through…

Leonardo Drew: That's four hours, right? It's like, right around there at ten-thirty, I'm up again.

CM-U: So you work through the night?

Leonardo Drew: Yeah. It's like, you know, like during the day and the night. It's like – you know, like if something is happening, like right now. _____ [phrase inaudible] I bought this building, so now I'm not making any art at all. I took – right after this exhibition, took four months off. Never took even like a week off, and work would always travel with me. And I knew I was going to take four months off. I just said, "Okay, this is it." You know, after making this thing, and all those others, it's like this is an exhausting process. I said, "You've got to at least try to give yourself, your body, something back."

Leonardo Drew: So in doing that, that was the first time I never missed working. You know, before it was like either it was guilt or whatever, but you always find that you are working all the time. I mean, friends always said to me, "Leonardo, why

do you feel like this? That you have to work all the time?" But this was one time when I was able to do it, and it was just like a wonderful thing.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: Went right back to work right afterwards. I mean, immediately right into the next body of work. There was never this kind of, you know, that period where you have to adjust to, like, uh – that never occurred. So I knew right then and there that is okay. That I actually do exactly what I'm doing now, which is paying more attention to, like, building this place and not making any art. And it's like, when it comes back in again, it's, like, gonna be perfect, you know. It's like something that, I mean, I've been doing all my life. I don't know anything else, you know. So it's not the kind of thing that I have to, like – it's not drudgery, you know. It's like what centers me, you know. And it's like what I am. So however – when I look – when I think of doing something like this, I can't imagine, like, how much work it is gonna take. Because if I did that, then I wouldn't do it.

CM-U: Right.

Leonardo Drew: But I know, in the end, that the process is going to be an exhausting one. And it's just because of the labor intensity of it. It's like you can't really avoid that aspect of it, but you just go right into it. You know, you start with these little bits and pieces. They become like this. They just grow just like that, you know.

[00:45:59]

Helen M: Can you talk a little bit about how you move from the horizontal surface that you work on to the vertical surface that then we experience it on? And, like, do you move the panels back and forth a lot? Do you – I mean, just compositionally, how do you get to this final moment when you're working so close up and on the horizontal plane?

Leonardo Drew: Well, I can usually tell – I can – actually, usually what happens is, okay, in the beginning, there's the impetus of the idea. You know, you say, like, "Well, I want to work with paper. Or work with wood." Or, "I'm curious where this material is going to take me." And so in the end, there is this realization of self that doesn't necessarily have – you don't have to remind yourself of this thing. That comes with you. So the materials that you touch, they inevitably become you.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: And I'm not concerned about whether I'm going to be able to manipulate this material so that it makes this statement. The statements, or all that stuff, is not important. Absolutely not important. It's the feel of that actual material, how it goes through me, is the most important thing. It's not the questions that are – the obvious question, which is, "Okay, I want to make this piece about slavery, or whatever." That never – that actually doesn't occur in my work. It just doesn't. I mean, I'm just being honest. It's – there is a history. There is a common history, or it will all come together; and there is a personal history. I know all those things exist, and I honestly believe that when I touch this certain material, whatever, all those things are going to come into play, and it is not just going to be about me, but it's going to be about everyone else that's a part of its life also. So I don't necessarily have to be bagged [sounds like; might have meant *bogged*] or, what do you say, weighed down by the idea that I have to be specific, you know. So those specifics are not necessary. So you get rid of that one, and you just go for the truth, which is, "Okay, I think if I do this, you know, I'm going to end up with a composition that – at what point do I interrupt this composition with this?" You allow this, the sheer physical [sounds like; might be *physicality*] of making or transforming material to become the thing. The other stuff is going to come naturally.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: Because I have even heard people talk about, like, all kinds of stuff. I mean, people that, they didn't know who I was. They thought I was some European making this work, you know. It's like, "Oh, he has a European sensibility." Some of the people thought that, "Oh, he's – is it a woman? Is it a woman making this work?" When they didn't know the name Leonardo; they just saw the work. But, you know, because you allow all those things to be a part of the realization of the piece. I've even heard other artists – Agnes Martin, Eva Hesse, Louise Nevelson, Richard Serra, Anselm Kiefer – so it's like, nonstop, all these names come up. It's like, I don't think anyone ever has been missed or – you know, when describing my work. You know what I mean? So I think that there is a reason for that, you know. It's like you just kind of like – all these people, and all these events, all these things are going through your body, and they are coming out like this. So those things are not insults. Actually they are great compliments. That means that you are in touch.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: You know. So I think that, like as far as how material happens, and how it is built compositionally, it is, for me, it's like – a lot of times it starts on the floor. I get up on a ladder at times, depending on how big the piece becomes. It becomes ridiculous, and then it's like, "Okay, it's time to put this up on a wall." Like, looking at this from – I mean, you have to be almost like twenty feet up in the air, you know, in order to see.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: So at some point – I think it might have started like around in here, where I had to start going up onto the wall because at this point, you've committed this much to this piece. You know what I mean? That's enough to sort of say, "I'm committed." So you start adding these other parts…

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: …and you start building up. And then at that point, you can step back, and you say, "Compositionally now, you know what this needs? Branches."

[00:50:14]

Leonardo Drew: So that's what happened. And I remember when that thing came into play. That thing is heavy, isn't it? (laughs) Yeah, it definitely put meat on my bones. I'm like, you know – that was another ridiculous part. But it came before the branches. And it did happen pretty much the way you're seeing it, though, like I was saying before about the – this part here, where it starts to flute out, that came before the branches, but it came right around the time when that happened.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: You know, it was the energy that, you know, that had to – it seemed like it wanted to branch out.

CM-U: In some of the instructions that I think we received – I think we received for you – it said to paint the wall behind, where the panels came together…

Leonardo Drew: Yeah. That's right.

CM-U: …with the idea…

Leonardo Drew: Black.

CM-U: …black. So that you wouldn't see the wall behind.

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum.

CM-U: But I can't help but notice that, in some of your drawings, you have this black that seems almost an element, a form, in the drawing…

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum.

CM-U: …that's not just a practical solution to not seeing the box behind.

Leonardo Drew: Well, I mean, that's a painter's realization of color, and what mood is, and like compositionally things sort of like should come together. I mean, I think that there is a – there are certain truths, and there are illusions also. I mean, I want to maintain the idea of depth. And your idea of sculpture has a lot to do with perception of depth. So when looking at this, if you saw white wall, then boom! right away you're back to a flat plane.

CM-U: Right.

Leonardo Drew: And also, it's like it becomes a loose thread. I mean, you start pulling at it, and it becomes unraveled.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: So to be able to suspend believability as you are realizing these works is so important. I mean, some people call them wall sculptures or whatever. But in the end, you want to at least maintain the integrity of – if it's going to be something that is coming out at you, you don't necessarily want the viewer to sort of all of a sudden say, "Oh, that's a white wall there," you know?

Helen M: Right.

CM-U: Hmm.

Leonardo Drew: It's like – it's not a nice thing.

CM-U: So it serves the same element in your drawings?

Leonardo Drew: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah. And there are more drawings that happened in that family. And usually started off with black.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: And like paint chips and things like that, depending on what tone, range there is, it tells you what the backing should be. If it is going to be black, or it is going to be pink, you know. And believe me, believe it or not, a lot of colors have started happening in the smaller works. And I think that, the small works being – you might have seen them in the exhibition; they are all like twenty-four by twenty-four…

Helen M: Yeah.

Leonardo Drew: …and, like, those very colors actually started in here, too, you know. So all of a sudden I started, like, using paint chips that I create in the studio just by throwing paint and letting it dry and just like peeling them up, putting them in the freezer, and breaking them up, stacking them up just like this. But they are paint chips, though. And they are only this big now, but I know how…

CM-U: You know for where they are destined.

Leonardo Drew: Exactly.

[00:53:19]

CM-U: What is this material here? Do you remember what that is?

Leonardo Drew: It's Elmer's Glue.

CM-U: Elmer's Glue.

Leonardo Drew: Yeah. That's been put in the refrigerator.

CM-U: The refrigerator brought it to mind.

Leonardo Drew: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. It's like you just – and believe it or not, it was actually – they were fuller before, and I broke them up. I came over with a hammer and started breaking, chipping them, at them. You make those kind – it's like sculpture. It's really like…

CM-U: Those parts could very likely turn very brown.

Leonardo Drew: Oh, yeah.

CM-U: So it would have a different impact on the paper.

Leonardo Drew: That's happened already in other works, depending on like what your backing is. Is it acid-free paper? Or is it not, or whatever? What happens in the air. But those are a part of the process of aging. I mean, your ink. Do you notice the pen lines in there at the top? The red ink lines?

CM-U: Oh, yeah.

Leonardo Drew: Yeah. They all go in that direction, too. Further enhanced by – but I think that that's neither here nor there. The whole piece is about that, you know. Some of it accelerated; other parts on their way. But, like I said, you are never really gonna lose the integrity of the piece. It will outlive us and then some, you know. So I think that in the end it's just really a matter of focusing on those elements that are like – could be seriously problematic, and obviously the branches, as I shifted them from one place to another. Those are always, like I say, "Okay, this is a major part of the composition. And a concern." And I say, "How do you realize this?" And that happens, as I said, in the studio. Absolutely in the studio as I'm working on it. I make a decision about, "How far do you want to go with this?" And like, "What do you do when this happens?" 'Cause I have to know that one, too.

Leonardo Drew: 'Cause those things can happen in transit from one museum to another just during an exhibition. So it's like, okay, and so you have a backup for this. How do you realize this? And it's okay for this to happen. You know, I've been doing this a long time. So it's a question that I definitely absolutely have to know.

Helen M: Do you think, Carol and Angela, that the paper will change at a different rate than the center of the piece? I mean, do you think that there's a different temporality with which the piece might change over time that needs to be talked about in some way?

Leonardo Drew: I wouldn't want to know that one.

(laughter)

Angela Chang: Probably. It probably changes on a day-to-day basis depending on the conditions in here. You know, the paper might curl more, and your tears might be more emphasized.

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum.

Angela Chang: But they change in such different ways. It's hard to measure…

Helen M: Timewise?

Angela Chang: Timewise, yeah.

Helen M: So these might – but the paper might really change color, is what I'm sensing from Carol's question. The glue will change color. The ink will change color. Whereas this probably won't change color as much. Is that correct?

CM-U: Well, I mean, even if that's so, my understanding is, from you, that these are all living, and moving, and interrelating in different ways…

Leonardo Drew: That's all right. Absolutely.

CM-U: …so I think that, yes – I think the answer is yes to that question. But I think that's just that we accept that as part of the nature of this work. Is that correct?

Leonardo Drew: Bingo. That's exactly true. And the other thing is, I mean, if you wanted to be specific about certain things, it's like, "Okay, I guess that's acid-free Arches." I can tell you this, this and that, what – you know, I can tell you pretty much like, with different things, what the materials are; and then you can take a guess at what their longevity will be. But actually they are kind of a fruitless – based on how I work, it's like those aren't the kind of – the concerns are, up to a point. It's like, if you're working with rust, it's like, that oxidation that's constant, you know. You take it out of the weather and it just goes slower; but in the end, it's like, okay, we agree that that's actually an important artist's staple. At least mine, anyway. And Richard Serra's. So it's like, then you accept those things, you know. It's like, okay. And you've got Kiefer's work in the same way. It's like, okay, we've got straw and stuff like that. You gotta sweep that up in the same way they have to sweep my rust up. You know. But it's like, then you've got to make a decision about like, "Okay, we understand that this is a part of the piece; but we know also that we are not gonna lose the work." It's like that's – you've got me on film saying

that. And I think you'd probably hear Richard Serra say the same exact thing, you know. Especially with those kind of surfaces. So it's like – you know, you have to travel a little bit in order to sort of like and make – uh, what is it? – make sacrifices, you know, in order to sort of like, "Get this!" You know what I mean? I'm saying, from my perspective – not from yours, but from mine – so it's like, for me to arrive at this, and to be able to say, "Here," I have to accept that rust is good. (laughs)

[00:58:04]

Leonardo Drew: Aging is good. You know what I mean? It's a positive. It's a plus. It's not a minus. It's an asset, not a liability. So I think that, once you get into that head, every material now is open. So your whole perspective shifts. And I think that, like, once we start realizing that, even as we look at works of art that we think, "Oh, this has been with us for a long time." But they are all aging. I mean, nothing is not aging. You know? It's such a big part of it.

CM-U: Including us.

Leonardo Drew: Yeah. (laughs)

Angela Chang: So once you're done, and you let go, these unknowns, these changes that will happen, that's just part of…

Leonardo Drew: Oh, yeah.

Angela Chang: …what its life is, then?

Leonardo Drew: Bingo. That's right. And life is the most important thing that we're talking about here. 'Cause there's a cycle, you know.

Angela Chang: So whether it's these organic materials that change daily, or whether it's these synthetic things like the glue and plastic…

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum.

Angela Chang: …those are just unknowns, and those will just change…

Leonardo Drew: They'll change and…

Angela Chang: …as they will.

Leonardo Drew: …they will enhance, actually, the piece. They won't take away.

Angela Chang: Okay. Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: Because since aging is a part of the work's base, then how could that be, you know, like a liability? It's a great thing, you know.

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: It's like – I mean, I push that process in the studio.

Helen M: Right.

CM-U: What damages have occurred to your works that you thought were particularly serious?

Leonardo Drew: Gosh. You know I had something _____ [phrase inaudible]. Let's see. Serious ones. Oh, okay. All right. All right. This is only with materials that I had not necessarily gotten to yet but was headed there. Now, in the beginning, I was working with a lot of dead animal parts.

CM-U: Dead animal parts?

Leonardo Drew: Yes. (laughs) Now that's really where all this starts, this aging stuff starts. Like, *Number 8* [1988, Collection of the artist], actually is a piece that I kept. It's mine. There are two works that I own. There are three that I think are probably the most important works. One got away from me. I own two. *Number 8* is one, and it's made of dead animal parts. And the other one is a rusted wall, *Number 14* [1991, Collection of the artist]. It's a wafer-thin piece that introduces the rust. Obviously both are decaying processes that is part of my base now. But *Number 8* being a piece that started with literally watching things decay. I would bring these things in from the studio with my – I learned also how to, uh, to strip away, you know, like the organs and things like that out of critters. You know, drag deers. You know, full skeletons out of quicksand into the place, and just like, you know, skin them. You know, like, dried them out.

Leonardo Drew: But it's all a part of a process that you sort of like say, "Okay, this is what this does under this." This you can dry – uh, put this in the freezer and cure it by drying it, salting it, or whatever. But there are certain things that it's like, "Okay, I want to know where this is going to go." And then the natural stuff

starts happening, you know. Like, well, the flies came, and then all that. So it's like, okay, this is a material that's definitely going to, like, not be a part of the language. It cannot be a part of the language. You have to do this, this, and this in order to get it, to bend it to your will. You know.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: So decaying animal parts and things like that were important in the beginning, but mostly important to sort of realize, you know, like that, that we all are in transition. All are part of a cycle. And, like, once you start realizing that, you start getting past your fears of death. Or apprehensions, anyway. You know, like that becomes a part of a process, or a cycle. You start understanding things of energy. And so, like, when I started working with these dead animal parts, that was absolutely, absolutely, absolutely the most important base for all the works that you see now. And that's why I kept *Number 8*, because it's like – you know, I have to take it out and look at it on occasion. It's like, "Wow!" you know. I mean, the last time I saw it was in Sienna, Italy. There it was. It's not as big as I thought it was because I had – when I created it, it was in an apartment that had a nine-foot ceilings. Now of course the ceilings are twenty-six feet up. You know what I mean? So it was like – so I'm looking at this thing, and it's only like nine feet up – it's the height of the place – and only no more than ten feet long on this beam. All these strung up, you know, like ropes and things like that, and tangled animal parts. And it's like I look at it, and I say, like, "Wow! The commitment to realizing this material." This is how far you'll go, you know. You put your hands into this thing. Literally. And you pull things out. So, okay, what do you come away with?

Woman: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: So I think that process, like you were asking about, just – you know, that was one of another level of sacrifice and leap of faith, you know, and materials. And you start to adjust your frequencies so that you start understanding that there is something else going on here. But how do I make this something else become not only a part of my work, but part of me? And then how do I give it back, so that you see it holistically as something that's viable, that's important, you know?

Woman: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: And necessary. So definitely in looking back, I would say, yeah, I have not seen the material after that point that's been, like, uh, you can't touch that one, you know. It's almost like, as soon as it presents itself, you've got to challenge it and say, "How do I bend this material to my will?" Like, "How do I get it to sort of become a part of me, and then give it back to you?" Like the glass was a part of that, too. I mean, all these things add their levels of difficulty, but you've got to have trust, you know. Absolutely.

[01:04:04]

Helen M: Do you number them sequentially?

Leonardo Drew: Um-hum. Yeah.

Helen M: So this is *Number 122*. This is the hundred and twenty-second work that you made?

Leonardo Drew: Exactly. There are others that are branch-offs that you'll know right away because there are letters behind them.

Helen M: I see.

Leonardo Drew: They are – like the drawings, for instance. I think they start off as – like the two drawings that the Met owns, they are like – they are A's. There's *1A* and *2A*.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: But they are #24. You know what I mean? So that tells you everything you need to know as far as how it's – okay, so the drawings are A's. Then they start to become D's. You know.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: And so like – and then there was a T. But the major works get numbers. They get numbers, yeah. So this is major *Number 122*.

Angela Chang: And why did you decide to organize them numerically instead of verbally? You're incredibly expressive verbally.

Leonardo Drew: Well, I mean, that's the very reason why – you know, like, you make the decision to sort of, like, pull far enough away so that your ego is not so much a part of the work. You know? Like you stamp them with this sort of like, "Oh this is me, or whatever." No, actually there is something else going on here. It's a lot, "How far can I pull myself away from it, so that I can allow the viewer to find themselves in the work?" It's a mirror. The works are mirrors. So it's like you should have your own experience with the work. It should not be me telling you what you should see in this work. You will never find me being specific. In any lecture, I've never…

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: …you never find me being specific. And people always say, "Wow! You never answer things directly. You're like a little bit this way." So there's a reason for that, you know, because you should have your – these are private things. You should have your own experience. I have my experience through them. But your experience could be totally different. And I also found that I learn a lot more from people when they tell me what they are seeing in it. It's like, "Wow! I didn't think of that." Or, "How did I miss that?" Or, you know…

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: I mean, I remember visiting a collector, Barbara Schwartz. She was just going on and on about this piece, and I was like, "Man." She had had the opportunity to live with this thing for seven years, and I was like, "Boy. I didn't have that much – I didn't have seven months with it." You know what I mean? It was like, "Wow! And she's realizing all this? She's so lucky." And then you start to understand why collectors are so fortunate. They get to go from one room to the other, and they have these shifts. I don't have that luxury. I wish I could have that kind of luxury, not only with my works but with other artists.

Helen M: Right.

Leonardo Drew: Because there are all these different experiences. But for me to sort of tell you what it's about it, man, that kind of negates the – it's a breach of trust, you know. It's like, if you want to talk about how alive these things are, then why don't you just give it a life, and just, like, you know, just step away, you know?

Helen M: Um-hum.

Leonardo Drew: So I think numbering is my way of doing that, you know. And it also allows you to read yourself into it.

CM-U: Um-hum.

[END RECORDING]