



**Artists Documentation Program
Video Interview Transcript**

**JASON MORAN
DECEMBER 17, 2019**

Interviewed by:

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Whitney Museum of American Art

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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): Jason Moran, Artist; Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Whitney Museum of American Art; Margo Delidow]

[BEGIN INTERVIEW]

[00:00:39]

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Today is December 17, 2019. We are here with Jason Moran and Margo Delidow, and I'm Carol Mancusi-Ungaro. We're at the Whitney Museum on the occasion of Jason's exhibit. Thank you. It's an amazing exhibit.

Jason Moran: Thank you.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: And also thank you for agreeing to talk to us today because we're going to bring you into our world of conservation and preservation. And when I was thinking about this I was thinking we're like two different completely different worlds. I mean, your world is improvisation. Our world is permanence. And I thought, it's like we're just, we're completely different. But then the more I thought about your work and hearing you speak I realized we're in the same business. So what I'd like to talk about this afternoon is how that is that we're in the same business. Your vocabulary are words like time, space, residue, trace -- love that -- layers. Those are all our words too, but we come at them from a different place. So we're going to start by kind of talking about your run drawings, running drawings and then go from there into music and your other --

Jason Moran: Exciting.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Exciting stuff, right. Okay, so Margo, we'll start with some kind of question.

Margo Delidow: Yeah, Jason, can you start with telling us what you do when you make one of these?

Jason Moran: Sure.

Margo Delidow: What do you start with?

Jason Moran: Well, I mean, I start with paper first. And --

Margo Delidow: And do you cut it? Is it come on a roll? Does it come in a sheet?

Jason Moran: It comes in a big -- these came in a sheet. Yeah, all of -- most of these come in a sheet except for that piano roll.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Other than the piano roll.

Jason Moran: Yeah, the piano roll is on a roll, but anyway, and -- but these were kind of like the first ones I was trying. I've just wanted a paper that was tough but that could also receive information and also not like totally tear but also leave an impression. So it's a kind of paper that needs -- has to have some flexibility, but also these are pretty delicate, kind of like snake skins. I mean, you know, like a snake skin when it sheds its skin, not the actual but like the shedding. And so then I put them over my piano. There was a while -- these were a couple of years where I was destroying my piano literally by putting charcoal all over my hands and then putting it and playing on top of this --

Margo Delidow: And is the charcoal powder?

Jason Moran: It's a powder.

Margo Delidow: Does it come in sticks?

Jason Moran: It's a powder.

Margo Delidow: And you're --

Jason Moran: Yeah, it's a grounded powder. And --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Did it take a while to get paper that wouldn't rip, tear when you did this? Or you just --

Jason Moran: You know, there's a paper company in LA, I think it was called Washi, W-a-s-h-I, and they mostly have Japanese paper. And I was there with a printmaker. And he was suggesting papers to me. And he was suggesting these because of their -- they felt -- they're fragile.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: They also give a little bit.

Jason Moran: And they give, you know.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: And so they respond to you --

Jason Moran: And they hold, you know. And it's kind of like tuning. Think about permanence but about tuning a piano too. Like, because of the pressure you place on a note, after you play it for a while the note starts to give way, and then it becomes out of tune, right. And when you -- the paper also is like that. Like, you can press on it enough times, and then if you do it enough times then it might fracture. But that's how these kind of started. This is how it started. And then I got a little bit smarter. (laughs)

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: So when we see it really dense like that, is that you going --

Jason Moran: Yeah, no, and that's just -- that's a longer improvisation than this. Right, so there's just more material, meaning more sonic material that has been played with --

Margo Delidow: Do you reapply in between?

Jason Moran: I do. Yeah, I do. And I will say, like even for some of these first ones --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: We can keep walking if you want.

Jason Moran: I tried not to look down as I played because then it would --

Margo Delidow: Influence you?

Jason Moran: Yes, it would. And but I started buying also these old piano rolls, and this was actually for a toy player piano. And they had all these amazing rolls inside. So you know, there was something about, you know, like, this is paper from the 1930s, so rather than treat it like this treasure, these precious piano rolls, of which I will never get a player piano to play this stuff on, then let's just use it like paper like I would normally buy. And because these are perforated and because that's their information that's layered into the player piano roll, then it's like a double play. But it's the same process.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: So you really wrecked the piano with that one, right? The stuff going through the holes?

Jason Moran: Yeah. I had to stop.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: I guess. Why?

Jason Moran: And also I wasn't -- you know, I bought a lot of this stuff when I was in Rome, so I wasn't really reading the back of what it was. And then I'd buy

more, and then I -- and Alicia, my wife, she said you know, you should look at what that is. And I did. And I was like, oh shit.

[00:06:26]

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Did it matter what the song was? Sorry, I had to ask.

Jason Moran: In these, yes, it does matter. So this is a song called *Darktown Strutter's Ball*, which --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Oh, I know that song.

Jason Moran: Yeah, right.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) the Lindy to that.

Jason Moran: Yeah, and like, these are -- this actually then became a song that I started playing with the band. We did not play it before I was making this.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Oh, that's interesting.

Jason Moran: And you know the -- and I would choose songs that I felt like had, for me, historical value. If I chose a piano roll then I would try to choose specifically something that I could feel comfortable touching, but yeah.

Margo Delidow: And then when did color come into play?

Jason Moran: I think -- well, I just needed to see something else. And this, I guess this is a year or two ago, I guess in preparation for the show. I wanted to -- and Adrienne, the curator, Adrienne Edwards asked like, oh, maybe you should make something new for this show. And that's when -- to kind of move from this is really piano heavy, you know, like black and white, black and white, black and white. But for what blue represents not only in jazz but in kind of music across culture, like how it's used as a color for healing in North Africa, right, like there's all -- and there's all these songs related to blue music, right. And then in America we have the blues, you know. And it becomes the song form of America, basically. And so there was just this notion that this could also now start to leave something very different than what black would leave. And I'm still in the middle of figuring out where else to go.

Margo Delidow: Have you thought about the difference of what blue means in music and what blue means in the visual arts?

Jason Moran: Mm, no. I mean, yes, but no. Someone asked last night, like, oh, well, tell me about the blue. And I was like, well, you tell me about the blue. (laughter) And but I know that -- I just know from music it -- in America we don't often talk about song form, like song structure, and the blues has been probably America's most significant contribution to song structure globally. But it's also comes from the most simple, you know, space, meaning it's not in the concert hall that the blues is born. It's like in a -- it's very humble. Are you going to break down blue for me?

Margo Delidow: No, I'm --

Jason Moran: Oh. (laughter)

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: It's interesting.

Margo Delidow: I was thinking that blue I think of Yves Klein blue.

Jason Moran: Oh right, of course.

Margo Delidow: I think of body prints. I think --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Oh, I was just going to go with --

Margo Delidow: Dave Hammons.

Jason Moran: Of course. Of course.

Margo Delidow: I think of all of these other things.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: And I was even going back further. I was thinking about ultramarine blue, which was the most prized pigment of all. And it's called ultramarine because it's ultramarino, it's beyond the sea. It all came from Afghanistan.

Jason Moran: Oh wow.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: And only the Madonna's robe got ultramarine blue.

Jason Moran: Oh wow.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: All the other blues in the medieval paintings were azurite or another blue. But ultramarine blue is the refined. So I think it has a lot of

meaning, and I associate it with the blues too and the soul, spiritual way that ultramarine blue has.

Jason Moran: Right, right, the royal.

[00:10:10]

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: So but what's the media here? Pigment and --?

Jason Moran: Pigment on paper, and then there's -- the one you can't see is I moved away from using my actual piano, and I went to Steinway and I got a -- it's called a manual. So it's the keyboard manual, but it's not attached to a piano. So then I start --

Margo Delidow: Does it make sound?

Jason Moran: It makes no sound. So now I place a big tube on top of the hammer, and so now you just hear (claps).

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Oh cool.

Jason Moran: You need something to resist. So the sound is here now.

Margo Delidow: And how does that change for you?

Jason Moran: Well, now it becomes like a practice away from needing to always hear the thing. And then in this really -- it's a really rickety setup that I have, the pigment started to have its own life as it started to move. And it wasn't necessarily from my hands anymore. So gravity started to have an effect on it in the setup that I have now. And I liked that because I felt then that actually gets to what music does is it -- you can't control how it hits people, how it bounces off of a wall, no matter where you place your microphone or your speakers, that it kind of -- it moves in a way that my hand can't always control.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: You know, when we're talking about pigments, there was a medieval pigment called ivory black. And when I was trained in conservation I was charged in making all the black pigments the way they did in medieval times.

Jason Moran: Oh wow.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: And we have a treatise that told them how to make it. And so it said to get ivory, but I was a student, and I didn't have a -- I went to a jewelry store, and I bought the cheapest ivory I could find, and then I came home, and you char it, put it over a fire, and you put it in a closed crucible. And you char it, and then it turns into pigment, but it always turned brown. I never got the black. And so I began reading more, and I realized that what I was buying wasn't really ivory. They were selling it as ivory, but it was camel bone. I really needed to have ivory to get the black. So I was up in New Haven, Connecticut, and I read that in a town called Ivoryton, Connecticut is where they were making the last ivory keyboards in the US. Yeah, I should really be telling you. I'm glad I told you this. (laughter) I think this is a whole other thing. Get this. So I called them up and said what do you do with the ends of the tusks that you can't use for the keys? And they go, oh, we have tons of that. I said would you give that to me? You know, I need to make this pigment.

Jason Moran: Wow.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: And they said yeah, sure. So I drove to Ivoryton, Connecticut. They gave me boxes of these ends of the tusks, and I charred it, and I got the most beautiful black you can imagine. So it's interesting to think that you could use ivory black --

Jason Moran: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, this --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: I mean, that's not my job to be telling you ideas like this.

Jason Moran: Yes, it is.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: But I just, in the course of our conversation it just hit me about ivory black, which is the most beautiful black you can imagine.

Jason Moran: And it's only made from ivory tusk? That's so --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: With pieces of ivory. I mean, you could take -- I don't think Ivoryton exists anymore because I don't think they make ivory pianos.

Jason Moran: Right, no, they don't.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Maybe they do somewhere in the world.

Jason Moran: Of course they do, because that's why they keep killing elephants.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: They're not supposed to, but that's why they're killing elephants, right.

Jason Moran: But it -- yeah, and that's the piano, right. Like, that's also the history of the piano in a way. The history of the piano, like, gets into those problem areas, right. So you know, like, oh, we're making these for homes, and we need this material, right. Or then for us nowadays it's like, I'm thinking about the instrument and how difficult it is to move and also then what can I plant inside the instrument that kind of relieves some of the tension that it has lived through? The instrument itself, the instrument I played last night and the audience that comes and interact with it because the piano is -- you know, there was even moments like even when they get to there in the '60s Steinway got to start to use Teflon parts, and they started to deteriorate, and they started to -- you started to hear clicking in the instrument. You know, there's a term I use which you probably know, it's called fugitive material, right. And I remember hearing this at the Walker with a curator walking through the collection, and I always thought, like, that's really where music lives. It's fugitive, right. You can't say oh, here it is and it's, like, perfectly packaged quarter pounder with cheese that we're trying to make it sound the same or taste the same for everyone, that it kind of, like, is reckless. Sound becomes reckless. And it deteriorates in a way or it penetrates and revives or whatever, but it -- you can't ever tell which way it's going to go once it goes out. And that's what I --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: It's moving.

Jason Moran: -- felt like this -- yeah, that these other ones started to kind of get to more of what that is, that fugitive aspect of those works, yeah.

[00:15:33]

Margo Delidow: And by layering two colors I see that, as a viewer, not knowing anything about those, is that two different times? Are you layering space and time?

Jason Moran: Yeah, two different times, yeah. And yeah, it's very simple. I mean, I have so many zillions more to do. (laughter) As I'm looking at them. There's a thing called practice, which, you know.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: There's that thing. (laughter)

Jason Moran: I have so much more practice to do.

Margo Delidow: Do you allow yourself to take as many risks making visual arts as you do with music?

Jason Moran: Definitely not. Definitely not. And I even, even in music now, I wonder, it depends on the situation I'm in the kind of attitude I take as a performer. If I'm with musicians that I know really want to go, let's really go far, then I have to make sure I keep up with them, you know what I mean? If I'm with a group that wants to kind of, like, sit back and be conservative, then I want to -

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Push a little.

Jason Moran: -- I want to pull them, right, you know. And I think when it comes around to this I'm still beholden to the instrument. So that part I'm working my way through trying to imagine other ways for these to fall out, even in the stages on the inside. You know, like there's -- I'm beholden to the stage. It's still, like, the place. It's the studio.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Maybe that's something that comes with time. You know, time is such an important element of all of your work. And you know, maybe the more you do this the more you begin to feel into it. And I suspect that's probably what's already happening.

Jason Moran: Yeah, it is.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: When did you start these, by the way? What dates do we have on these?

Jason Moran: What, like, I don't know, five years ago, four or five years ago maybe?

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Five years ago.

Jason Moran: Yeah. I mean, these look -- these are all, like, brand new. It's like three years ago, I mean, yeah. So they --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: And you're going to keep doing them, you think, or doing something with the arts?

Jason Moran: I have to do something safer.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: What do you mean?

Jason Moran: Something that doesn't cause cancer, yeah. Like even in my mask and covering my eyes, but when I think about how I was making these before, the stuff was everywhere. And so there's that part. Right, there's that, for you all as is how does that stuff, you know, live in a body?

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Yeah, it's not good.

Jason Moran: No, it isn't. So I've -- now looking at sensible materials. We'll see what they make though.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Yeah, I was talking to someone who was trained with working with lead white. And, you know, we're trained never to go near that stuff. And you have to grind it and so on. And I said how -- wow, they trained you in grinding lead, and you're still alive? You know, I mean, that's -- he said we did it underwater. We never ground it except underwater, which I thought was interesting.

Jason Moran: Wow.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: So I wonder if there's some other media that can mitigate --

Jason Moran: Right, that's exactly --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: -- the dust quality of it. Because it's kind of wonderful that you're using it. You talk about your hand, and you talk about residue and pressure and feeling. It's kind of a wonderful way of you expressing those emotions in a physical thing as well. It's be nice to figure out another way to do it.

Jason Moran: There has be.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Yeah, there has to be.

Jason Moran: There just has to be.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Okay, how about color paper?

Jason Moran: Right. (laughs)

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: What happened here?

Jason Moran: This is -- the paper was on sale. (laughter)

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: All right, I get it. We get that part.

Jason Moran: Nobody was buying this pink paper. I mean, I was buying this at the same time I was buying all the other stuff. And I don't know. You know, like, there's of the -- there's like Josef Albers', like, color, all of the combinations. And as I worked through that book, which is -- have to show up in here, but this became -- because this one just penetrated way more. And I only did this one. I didn't even try another one.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: You didn't?

Jason Moran: But it's, you know, it's, I don't know, there. I don't have much to say about them. They're -- yeah.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Okay.

Jason Moran: Yeah.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Okay. Margo, anything else?

Margo Delidow: No, I think that's --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: I love the idea of the trace and the residue and all of that also goes into your staged works. It's that same thing, that idea of history. When I said we're in the same business, you know, you are, from what I understand, you're letting history and all the aura and era become part of what you're feeling.

Jason Moran: Era or error?

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Era, e-r-a.

Jason Moran: Oh right.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Becoming part of what -

Jason Moran: I like error too.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Yeah, I do because that's always part of it. And you know, that's what we're doing a lot all the time. It seems like we're just kind of preserving the thing, but we're not. We're preserving the experience of the thing. So I

want to talk to you -- we'll talk to you more about that as we go into the other room.

Jason Moran: Yeah, you know, there was -- what's the museum in Denver? Clyfford Still Museum, and I remember watching a -- because they have, like, a public conservator, kind of like, you can look through the glass --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Yeah, they do.

Jason Moran: -- and you can -- and as they were unrolling paintings that have never been seen before, because he kept so many of them --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Yeah, he did. He hardly sold any.

Jason Moran: -- I never -- that also just boggles my mind, but I often, while watching, I wonder, you know, there are things that you see. Right, like if I hear a recording that's old I can tell the era. You can tell by the sound of the piano. You can tell by the hiss in the air, right. So but as you unroll, like, let's say a canvas from 1954, right, like, how are you looking at or what signs do you see, like, right off the bat?

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Okay, yeah, all right, well, the first thing we do is we see the aged fabric, especially in the case of Still. You see cracks. You see things that happen to things as they age. And we really value that. We preserve that. We think that's part of the soul of the work. So we unroll it. We're looking for that. Flaking paint coming off, of course that's the obvious, but, you know, we're looking for the more subtle things as well. And then when we stretch them out on stretchers it's really important that it all be evenly stretched so that the pressure on it is even all the way around as then we then go forward to preserve the life of the work. In the case of those works, so many of them had been stored for so long they actually were in very good condition, pretty good condition.

Jason Moran: Oh wow.

[00:22:31]

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: I mean, I don't know that for a fact. I didn't look at them, but I know of our own works that have spent a life on a roll, they're often in much better condition. For example, Rosenquist, Robert James Rosenquist would put -- he told me in the '70s he started putting his canvases, stretching them around wood veneer. So he'd take a stretcher, and then he'd put these wood

veneers that were very popular then, like, you know, make your basement into a farmhouse or something, he'd put those wood veneers, nail them on, and then stretch the canvas around that. No cracks. Those canvases are in perfect state because it's the air flow behind the canvas that causes all of this. So that whole aspect of aging when you unroll something or when you take something out, that's what we look to preserve.

Jason Moran: That's fascinating.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: And that's -- okay, let's head into the other room. Is there anything else you wanted to talk to us about with regard to these? Ask us, we're here.

Margo Delidow: We can talk --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Ask us, we're here.

Margo Delidow: We can talk about pigments, that kind of thing.

Jason Moran: Oh you know what, well, this is different, but -- this is different --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Go for it.

Jason Moran: But okay, I'm trying to think about where I was in the world, but the thing I've been reminded about, preservation, is that the earth preserves, like, really well. Like, things that are buried. (laughs)

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Oh yeah. Yeah, it's the same idea. There's no air. If there's no airflow behind the canvas --

Margo Delidow: Ships underwater, no air, perfect.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: No oxidation.

Jason Moran: No air.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: They don't age.

Margo Delidow: Mummies, perfect. No humidity.

Jason Moran: No humidity. Yeah, there's -- yeah, and I've been thinking, like, oh, sometimes rather than these storage spaces I just need a --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Big hole.

Jason Moran: -- big hole. (laughter) I just need that.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Just bury it all, right.

Jason Moran: And that just put a sign that says --

Margo Delidow: Or send it into space.

Jason Moran: -- here, you know -- (laughter)

Margo Delidow: That's what I'm going to do.

Jason Moran: Yeah, that part is still messing with me.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: What?

Jason Moran: Well, because when I work in institutions, institutions would -- will not do that. You know, like, there's a -- like, okay, the Kennedy Center. Right, so if we get a score then we're going to put it in a filing cabinet maybe, right, and it's going to sit somewhere until someone decides to look at it again, but that doesn't ensure it for 300 years. And I think now artists or, like, musicians are really accumulating a lot of -- we accumulate a lot of stuff, as anybody does, but you're -- accumulate a lot of media. So it might be a mini disc, it might be a VHS tape, right, and, like, a DVD player, right, so then there's a part of us that has to keep the machine it works with. Right, we have to keep one of those. You have to keep the media itself. You might want to transfer it all, but it doesn't assume that it will still live on a hard drive. There's a thing that we are battling with digital media is we don't know how it will save itself later. Right, and the cloud is --

Margo Delidow: You have to just keep at it. It's no longer put it in a cabinet and put it away.

Jason Moran: No.

Margo Delidow: You have to actively preserve it.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: I mean, we don't know, but we also have to consider our current options. I mean, that's what we're doing at this point. Emulation is something we're all thinking about and doing in terms of the future when the machinery is no longer available or operable. What do we do then? So we

spend a lot of time with time-based media, which is basically what you're doing too, to preserve it, to digitize it and get it on the hard drive and then just -- then we go from there, you know.

Jason Moran: Right, step by step.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Yeah, that's really --

Jason Moran: Come back and check on it, yeah.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: But you're right. I mean, every time you do it you do kind of lose something.

Margo Delidow: You might lose something.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: You do.

Margo Delidow: You don't know what you're losing.

Jason Moran: I know. I saw half an image the day on a old iPod, and I was like, darn, half that image is gone. It was just a random picture, but you know, like, that digital deterioration is very different from, like -- or maybe it isn't. Maybe it's the exact same.

[00:26:51]

Margo Delidow: Do you see that in -- I'm sorry.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Go ahead.

Margo Delidow: Do you see that in instruments --

Jason Moran: Oh, definitely.

Margo Delidow: -- where you were talking about different polymers used in pianos, ivory keys no longer being --

Jason Moran: Definitely. Even just with the temperament of how an instrument deals with humidity and air, and so in the winter the piano needs more water, you know, because the apartment dries out. So I think even this piano, maybe it doesn't have one, but our piano at home has a humidifier in it. It's called Damp-Chaser, and so you kind of water the piano to keep it stable enough so that it

doesn't, like, go out of tune too fast. And then saxophonists have to deal with this. They have to deal with temperature, mostly, you know. You think about all these musicians you see at Macy's Day Parade who are coming down playing their drums, you know, that totally effects the skin of the drum, the temperature was 30 degrees outside. Or you see these brass players playing trumpets on -- it's very cold. So they are constantly thinking about, like, where am I? What kind of room am I in? You know, how will that affect my reed, you know, this piece of wood that they place on their instrument? And then the pitch itself also changes too. So there's just kind of a lot of effects that are invisible that really take a toll on instruments. Shipping this bass around, like, it destroyed itself by the time I got to Cleveland, I mean to the Wexner Center. Like, it was --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Let's go in there because we want to -- these are issues that we want to talk about with regard to that. Of course in Houston it's just the opposite, right?

Margo Delidow: Everything swells up.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: We have plenty of humidity.

Jason Moran: That one's okay. That's the decent one. That one still lives okay.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Okay, we'll start here.

Jason Moran: Oh yeah, so I mean, like, even this bass was -- we bought it in Italy because these two were shown in Venice first, this one and this one.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: These two stages?

Jason Moran: These two stages, yeah. And I still didn't have a bass when I got to Venice. But so I bought one there, and this one, it seems to be holding up. But after we have to kind of be careful with it once we ship it. The drums are kind of a different thing. They can be a little bit rougher, but the bass, because of all these things, there's seams that run along. You know, if any one of them starts to mess up then it'll just totally crack. Or this seam up here will come off that's on the neck of the bass. And those, you know --

Margo Delidow: For you, is the function of the instrument making sound more important than how it looks?

Jason Moran: I think when it's in its rest state it's about just the shape of the instrument. You know, like, then it's sculpture, but until a bassist picks it up. Then it becomes a -- it's active again. So you know, right now it's just in its --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Do instruments die? I mean, do works of art come to a point where you just can't restore it anymore?

Jason Moran: No, you can always restore it. It might not be what it was originally intended to be, but you can always get something back.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: You can you always get something out of it, okay.

Jason Moran: Yeah, yeah, like this set was -- see, this is based on an old club from the '40s. So that's a drum set from the '40s. And you know, they used to use calf-skin on the head of the drum, and they used to really be fugitive. So they used to even have a lamp inside the drum to help warm up the skin. Like, it was like all kinds of crazy stuff that used to happen with these instruments that --

Margo Delidow: So warm-up has a bigger meaning than just physically warming up?

Jason Moran: Yes, it does. That's right. That's right. Like, yeah, the instrument has to get some heat on it. But yeah, I mean, this set is a very difficult set to -- drum set to set up because of the hardware that they used to use back then. Like all that, it looks like a spaceship as far as I'm concerned.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: So is this something you collect then? You have your eye out to get this stuff or --?

[00:31:38]

Jason Moran: I had to stop. I had to stop collecting because I would always have my eye looking for something like this, but I stopped. But the stages kind of help me like, oh, I'm going to get it for the work. (laughs) Yeah.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Yeah, well, a lot of the questions that we're going to ask you about stages have to do with aging. I mean, it's -- this is from the '40s you said, and from the '40s for us is relatively new.

Jason Moran: New, right, right.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: But there is an element of aging that will come into play here. And is that something you accept, or should we make --

Jason Moran: I do accept it in this. Because this -- you know, also this is a active space. So musicians come in here and play. So there's -- my aim, okay yeah, make some music, but actually leave a smudge, right. Like leave a -- like you can tell what's happened on the back wall. Like, you can tell that there's been -- people have been up on this stage, you know, in the past two years. And so it has -- you know, you can start to see it. And that feels better to me.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: That's part of your layers of history and feeling?

Jason Moran: It has to have people step into it. Though it's still a work that sits kind of mostly vacant, but it -- when people step in here I really -- looking to have people really, like, leave parts of themselves. You know, like part of the thing about removing this, it's called the key slip that generally goes across the bottom like this. I always take it off because that tells me the shape of the instrument. Like you unrolling, right, like if things you see, and it tells you how it's been maintained.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Like what do you mean?

Jason Moran: So if -- now it looks normal, right? It looks very clean. But if I'd gone to another piano and taken it off then you might see hair. You might see, you know, parts of --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Debris, stuff that got caught in it.

Jason Moran: And over time it accumulates. And depending on whether or not it's been taken care of or not, then you'll see more. And I always think like, oh, well, you know, actually this is more forensic than it is. And it's also aesthetically beautiful, but it's also like, well, let me see who's been in here.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Because there must be a point in which it impacts what you hear, or not?

Jason Moran: It -- what you feel.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: What you feel.

Jason Moran: It impacts what you feel. And so I'm always interested when I take it off, like, well, what will we find underneath here, under the keys?

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: That's really interesting that you mention that because Margo was just talking about her interaction with this piano.

Margo Delidow: Oh, so in the venue of your show here it's my job to dust your pianos and keep the fingerprints off of them. And looking at this, first of all, I'll come up here, and it's playing by itself, which is absolutely mesmerizing, and you can - - is beautiful to look at. But I look at the paint finish on this. And it's very nice paint finish. It gets fingerprints on it. And I relate more to these sculpturally, and question, you know, my questions I would have for you is how important are some of these objects that they were from the '30s or the '40s where other things I could see in the top, the ceiling tiles, the panels, that they were designed, and how much does architecture and its authenticity or what it represents in place of time versus what we have here?

Jason Moran: Yeah, you know there's, like, a part of it that's supposed to feel off. Right, like that doesn't go. Right, like, you know, because I can't make a -- this isn't a theatrical set, right, where we're really trying to get an era. But it's like a feeling, right.

Margo Delidow: But it's more than a place that --

Jason Moran: It's more than a place though.

Margo Delidow: Right, it's more than a -- like if we were at a theater. It's more than that but not as much as a movie set.

Jason Moran: Not as much as a movie set. And I mean, you know, I think when I looked at these early photographs of this club in particular, there was something about, like, I wanted to feel like I was encased because that's how that club in the photographs looks like it feels.

Margo Delidow: The basement.

Jason Moran: And when we walk into these basements in midtown or wherever in the city then do we feel like we're in like a tomb or a cocoon? And that's like a space for the music. Because they don't -- there are only a handful of clubs still in New York City. There's one, Smalls, I think. It's called Smalls. It's in the Village. It still is pretty -- it's kind of like this still. You know, Village Vanguard is also very different, but it's also still keeps the scale together. I probably would say that was the more important one for this is the scale because I could actually get close to what it was. And I actually think it was a little bit smaller?

Margo Delidow: Did you work with a designer --

[00:36:57]

Jason Moran: Yeah, a fabricator in Brooklyn --

Margo Delidow: -- to do this?

Jason Moran: -- called Allsorts, and they really helped.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: So as this is acquired by an institution, let's say, do you want it to just to naturally age? Because it all will. All these materials are going to age.

Jason Moran: Yeah, you know, I was looking at how many times it's been put together, and I can see --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: You can already see.

Jason Moran: I can see how that is having its moment. I mean, yeah. I mean, I always feel like when I look at -- you know, if I go see these Manet paintings or whatever, you know, like, you're like, oh wow, the oil still is, like, glistening or, you know, but also you know that this is, like, ancient, ancient, you know. Or when we were in Rome, like, you see it all the time. And that helped kind of frame a lot of this stuff too and that that felt like there you are right there right behind you. Like, that's -- that, I saw that all the time, and that felt like, oh, that the stages should feel like they're holding on.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: But that gets right to the heart of something that's been on my mind, which is, and you used the term yourself, the big fear is that it looks like Disneyland. And you want it to connote, to feel, to experience something different from Disneyland. And I thought okay, well, what is it about Disneyland that's different from this, and can that help me understand what I'm looking at?

Jason Moran: You know, I think, I don't know. I love Disneyland. But I think also what the difference is, in Disneyland you can touch everything. Like, and the hard thing about it, placing a piano in the room, is it is the invitation. Because people are ready to come without even thinking about it. I have been thinking that as these have been touring together, these three spaces, which would never -- could never possibly come into context with each other --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: That was another question. They've never been in the same environment.

Jason Moran: No.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: So you have three completely different --

Jason Moran: And they're different eras of the music, different eras of New York City history, you know. So they'd never meet, actually. That in that way actually I'm looking for more of a bizarre Disneyland vibe. (laughter) Except that all the conceptual metrics are different, you know.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: They are.

Jason Moran: And but, you know, Disneyland loves to have a ton of different sounds going on top of each other. Like, they always have some weird ragtime piano happening and then some (makes sound effect), you know, like some animal talking like that and just and then the sound of the ride, right. And, you know, when this exhibition is on there's a lot that -- (laughs)

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Yeah, you get that. Yeah, you get that.

Jason Moran: There's a lot happening in here.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: That's interesting. You're making me think about Disneyland in a different way. (laughter) You really are. This was supposed to be my question to you, but you're turning it back on me because you're seeing a multi-dimension of Disneyland when I, with my visual art eyes, I'm only seeing the bright colors and the, you know, fake kind of stuff.

Jason Moran: Right, overwhelming.

Margo Delidow: Simulation, but it is still real. There is something real there.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Replicas, and I'm like ugh, yikes, it's in my face. But you're putting it in a different place actually for me.

Jason Moran: And there's also those, you know, those -- you know they have those, what are those? I don't know, fun rooms, are they called fun rooms? What are they called? Like a room where the floor is slanted, right, and then the scale changes, and it looks like you're in a big place, but you're in a small place. You know, there's that kind of play with space that, you know, is nice to be in because it warps you in a way. And I'd probably say, like, you know, when you're in here and so say these pieces are up, you're looking here, and then all of a sudden you turn in the exhibition, there's another -- Kara Walker's on the

screen coming with this other whole other thing, and you're not really thinking about that history related to this history. And I'm like, no. You got to think about those together.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: So in that regard, this whole thing is one work of art.

Jason Moran: It has become that. It was definitely not the intention. But maybe the -- Adrienne Edwards, the curator, found a way to make that kind of live together. Because that makes it -- I mean, it makes it more interesting to me when I walk in here rather than just looking at the rooms.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Let's go look at Savoy.

Jason Moran: Yeah.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: So obviously you were never at the Savoy Ballroom.

Jason Moran: Right, I wish I was.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: And you didn't -- couldn't find anyone who had been or you did?

Jason Moran: No, I didn't. There was a guy who -- his name was Frankie Manning, who was a dancer. He was kind of like one of the famous dancers. And he taught swing dancing for a very long time, and he died maybe less than 10 years ago. But anyway, but no I didn't know anybody who went to the Savoy.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: I'm sorry, he what?

Jason Moran: I didn't know anyone who went to the Savoy.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Oh, okay.

Margo Delidow: And for select --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: So how did you pick this pattern?

Jason Moran: Well, the Savoy, the original Savoy pattern is like a floral, maybe there's a image of it somewhere over there.

Margo Delidow: There's a fleur-de-lis almost, yeah?

Jason Moran: Yeah, it's like very -- and I -- I'm not going to put that on the wall.

Margo Delidow: Why not?

[00:42:46]

Jason Moran: Because that's going for something like too on the nose.

Margo Delidow: So that felt too literal where the padded walls didn't feel literal?

Jason Moran: And the padded walls is about like -- is the restraint of the drums. Like, that's what the pad walls --

Margo Delidow: Because there's a function.

Jason Moran: There's a function. It's the restraint of the drums. And then, you know, and then in the longer history in America's long history it's the restraint of Africans having a drum period to communicate with. So they stripped generations of enslaved Africans of their drums. So here's this image of Max Roach sitting in a corner, padded walls, suppressing his drums, doesn't matter if it's an acoustic reasoning or not. That's like -- that is like mm. That's the enclosure of -- it's not of his drums. It's like of a whole people. And so like, that needs the pad and the grommets, right. It needs it. This needs like a kind of a -- so this is a fabric from a place called Holland Textiles and they have a very layered history, you know, very, very layered. And that's, I think -- I mean, the Savoy's also a club that, you know, is -- has a lot of positives and a lot of negatives happening in it at the same time too in its history. And that fabric is part of that same colonial territory that was done with the music in Harlem. It's very perplexed, very --

Margo Delidow: Okay, so not design way --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: So the pattern -- every aspect of this connotes that?

Jason Moran: Yeah, yeah. And so that pattern is -- that original pattern is very much that. And this pattern, of all the patterns we looked at, Alicia and I looked at, this one was getting to something that could generate. But it generated from another rhythm source, you know.

Margo Delidow: Another rhythm source but not the design source.

Jason Moran: Not the design source.

Margo Delidow: Because it threw me for a loop when I saw it because it -- in my head it wasn't right. It didn't have -- it wasn't the right era of --

Jason Moran: No, it's not.

Margo Delidow: -- a very specific design that it should have had.

Jason Moran: Yeah, yeah, and --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: And it's capturing something else.

Jason Moran: Yeah, and that's, you know, that's the place, right. Like, it's that -- there has to be a turn on it, you know, much like any other artist. I feel like I've witnessed their work there's -- at some point somebody turns it a little bit off its axis for it to now, like, oh okay, now you have a footing. Might not be the footing you intended in the first place, but now you have a place to jump from. And this is -- I mean, it's not only that this pattern is whatever, this actual stage is actually twice as long. You know, like, it's way longer, and it's way higher, and it's way deeper. Right, like, it's actually a -- so this is the miniature of the stage. And it's, you know, like, it's like this high off the ground, you know, the actual stage. So it's like a -- this is the petite one. I call it *STAGED: I* because I always thought I was going to make another one.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: But it's also bringing us closer to it.

Jason Moran: Yeah, and --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: We're in it. We can't avoid it here. It's a very different interaction than it would have been.

Jason Moran: Yeah, and I always talk about, I think, was when, like, you were asking about architecture, this one felt more, when I learned about the club and I listened to the music in the club, that is more about what happens between the audience, the dancers, and the musicians. You know, so this -- you don't see a arch like this on any kind of performance stage really anymore. There're lots of right angles. But this has this thing that sends music out and sends the dancers' feet back up to the bandstand and back out again.

[00:46:49]

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: So let's get into aging with this again. It's spectacular right now. It grabs us visually, and when I -- I've heard performers here, it worked. We

let this fade. We let this age. Or do you -- this is stage one, in five years someone acquires this, do you make another one, stage two?

Jason Moran: That's a better idea. I like that. Let somebody buy this one first.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: We actually have a replication committee here, and were it to --

Jason Moran: You know, I thought, like, I bought a bunch of this fabric, and because I like this fabric. And the panels in it are very easy to kind of -- to get. I mean, I think the parts that that I'm not quite happy with what I've done is mostly on the floor. And I don't know how that ages over time, and -- or how these age over time. But I don't know. I mean, this one is rarely touched. It's only been mostly in the current exhibition here that musicians have gotten on it. I really was a little strict, like don't touch the Savoy. But here we loosened it. But I really don't have people get on it. So it kind of stays --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: I kind of get that actually. I do get that. Because I have seen a performer here, but I do understand why.

Jason Moran: Yeah, I like it on its --

Margo Delidow: In --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Well, without a person -- I mean, this is just off personal -- but without a person it has a much grander feel than when someone's standing there. So when you were describing the original Savoy, that's not the feeling I have when there's someone standing there.

Jason Moran: Yeah, yeah, no, not at all.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: It's different.

Jason Moran: It is.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Sorry.

Margo Delidow: I was going to ask you about replacement of materials. In a museum world, if the lights burn out we will replace them. If the carpet wears out we could replace it. If there's a scratch on the aluminum brushed ribs we could replace it. Is there a part of these where if we could replace too much it's not authentic to you anymore?

Jason Moran: No, definitely not.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Oh, interesting.

Jason Moran: Not for the kind of musician I am.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Great. Talk a little bit about that.

Jason Moran: Because I mean, I also think that works are made to be touched. So you know, like, that's just from where I am. It was hard working with this stage in particular because it was -- it's someone else's. And so we had to be a little bit more careful.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Someone else's in the sense that --

Jason Moran: Meaning it's the Walker's, like, that they own that.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Right, that they own it.

Jason Moran: And they're like, no, we don't really want --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Yeah, I know.

Jason Moran: They disabled the --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Oh, the jukebox?

Jason Moran: -- jukebox, right. I have records that go inside. They're like, no. We don't want, you know, people touching it. So they -- so it changed. That piece actually changed.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Yeah, welcome to the art -- to the museum world.

Jason Moran: (laughs) They're like don't mess it up.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Oh.

Jason Moran: But I think as the kind of musician I am and I think the kind of liberties I've made at the piano by touching songs that are sometimes forbidden, they don't have a hidden rule, music you can touch all music, but some songs are like, man, don't really mess with that one. But I'm went nah, but you can touch it like this, and it can still work.

Margo Delidow: What would be a song that --

Jason Moran: There's a song called *Crepuscule with Nellie*. It's a Thelonious Monk song. He wrote it for his wife. And generally when he plays the song he just plays the melody. There's no solos on it. But when I played the song I played only parts of it, and then I open every bit of it for lots of solos. (laughs) And I think it still sounds good. And so I think there's -- I mean, this -- I mean, you just do something really drastic for it not to be the Savoy anymore. There's still sound that comes from these speakers. It's low or you can turn it up. So there's -- you know, there's still just the shape of it alone will -- I've -- yeah --

Margo Delidow: So it's --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: So you would replace parts if it needed, they got older and they needed replacement just replace it?

Jason Moran: Yeah.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: You want it to look newish?

Jason Moran: Yeah.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Okay. So the age, the era, the history is in the design, but the materiality is something you would want to keep fresh?

[00:51:32]

Jason Moran: I think on this one because it's so far away from me, you know, it feels -- right, like I know some people, I've met people who have played in there. They were really old, but they were -- I met them. And I know a lot of people who played in this club, right.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Let's go over there. I want to stay on this because you talk about jazz that way. You say you didn't know jazz as a popular museum -- music form, so there's a certain antiquity associated with it. On the other hand it's central to what you do.

Jason Moran: I'm --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: It's --

Jason Moran: You know, like say for instance right now I've been touching a lot of music from 1917, '18, 1919, and it isn't often played at all, right, speaking of which. And I can't play it to the scale that this guy -- he had a band of 60 musicians. I don't have 60 musicians. I have 10. So I'll never get that grand scale, that overpowering brass sound that he has, but when I play the songs people feel it like oh, that's that sound. And it's kind of like that, like it'll be a smaller version, even if something shifts in it it'll be that thing. I think in a place like this it -- like the people who I haven't even asked, the musicians who have come here to play in the exhibition who actually played Slug's, like so what did you think? (laughs) Like, did it even look like that? Which, I know it didn't, you know. But I'm more thrilled that they are like nah, I walked back into that place again. And they'll walk back in it here and then go onto the stage and make some music. But this one is a --

Margo Delidow: What happens when in a hundred years when there's nobody left? Can these still exist?

Jason Moran: What do you mean like, can they?

Margo Delidow: There's no one left that was alive during that period,

Jason Moran: Oh right, yeah, yeah.

Margo Delidow: What happens to these as objects, these sets?

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: I mean, they just, they become art objects, is that what you're saying?

Margo Delidow: I don't know. I -- that's why I'm asking. What is this then? Can other musicians perform --

Jason Moran: Oh yeah, yeah.

Margo Delidow: -- when --

Jason Moran: You know, actually they asked, like, part of their, the Walker's preservation was you need to write down who can play on this.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Who can play on it?

Jason Moran: Yeah, you know, like, put criteria in place that says okay, this kind of musician can walk on the stage. Right, because I was very particular about

every exhibition like, well, let me see who you're thinking about, or I have ideas like these musicians should come touch it. I think in a hundred years, like, it won't be just anybody --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: So did you do that?

Jason Moran: What?

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Write down your list of --

Jason Moran: I started, and it was weird, and it was totally -- it totally wouldn't work. It was like, they have --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: I think it'd be so hard.

Jason Moran: -- to know who Sun Ra is, right. (laughter) And for me that's a big step, right. So Sun Ra, that would be 200 years old, so like, okay, Beethoven is turning 250 years old. We still know that work. People play it all the time. They're -- somebody's playing it right now in the world. So it does mean that people will still understand what the value of this music and then these spaces are. It's more about like, where will, let's say, quote unquote, jazz be in another hundred years. That's kind of the question. And if that question is being asked by a musician --

Margo Delidow: Then they can play?

Jason Moran: -- they can come on here. Right, because they're thinking about, like, the relationship --

Margo Delidow: And it has to be a jazz musician?

Jason Moran: I think with these spaces yeah. You know, I've been -- because I think it's a history that for America it has to continue to continue with. And because so much has happened from, has birthed from that music, you know, it has kind of just continued to spawn other music forms through its history. So anyone who is taking up the mantle of trying to play the music has chosen a form of music that mostly people have forgotten about, even to this day. In New York City it's different because it's a real jazz town. And there's still a very heavy tradition on performance, and I mean like Broadway performance. Like, they are still, those theaters are conserved there where specifically that function for Broadway shows and plays.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: That's absolutely right.

Jason Moran: Right, like, that's --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: And they give you feeling when you're in them.

Jason Moran: Yeah, you know people come from around the world, and I -- that's still -- I mean, I think I'd still care about that if I wasn't here, or say my grandkids were (inaudible) well, I know something Jason might say would be blah, blah, blah, but -- and I'll let them make the decision. But yeah.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Does this work? I mean, so the Walker owns this. Do they just put this in an exhibition without a musician, without allowing it to be used?

Jason Moran: They can.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: So they can?

Jason Moran: Yeah.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: They can just --

Jason Moran: Yeah, if they like.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: So music is a part of it but doesn't have to be the heart of it?

Jason Moran: No, does not. And that's the, you know, part of the hard part about a -- for a performer is having to always be playing, right. Like, there's never a rest state. Like, oh, you're here. Oh, just go play something. It's kind of the disrespectful thing that always happens to a performer. So to make a stage that would just be there to sit, I also care about that too. The paintings that could be sitting in someone's living room --

Margo Delidow: No, well, they ask us that too.

Jason Moran: Oh right. (laughter)

Margo Delidow: You get asked over for dinner, and you're like, well, there's a spot on this.

Jason Moran: Right, can you come look at this?

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Oh god, I get asked for that all the time. Get me before I have my first cocktail if you want a real answer. When I saw this the first thing I said to Adrienne, and she said oh, you need to ask Jason, is those two things are similar but one's clean and one isn't.

Jason Moran: Yeah.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Was that your intention?

[00:57:58]

Jason Moran: Well, I mean, there -- when I bought them there's a third, but the third one didn't look as good as those two.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Where did you buy these, do you remember?

Jason Moran: Demolition Depot.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Here?

Jason Moran: Uptown (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: I've seen these around. That's why I asked.

Jason Moran: And yes, one should be a different shade. I mean, that's -- I don't know, I think they --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: One should be a different shade, color, like they are?

Jason Moran: Yeah, like they are.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Why? I mean, is -- that is your aesthetic choice?

Jason Moran: Yeah.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Okay.

Jason Moran: Yeah, it doesn't go beyond that. I mean, and the other part was what they're supposed to represent is Sun Ra, right. So it's supposed to represent his relationship with Egypt, his relationship to the, you know, the cosmos, right. Like, it was a place -- he played this club frequently. So it's really also his -- in the original club there's literally like a raccoon skin on the wall, right, like

all kinds of crazy stuff. And in the other places in the club there was a Bob Thompson painting, right. So there was kind of a lot of things on that back wall of which mostly I took away. And the only thing that is a reference that this is a part of a series is that above the piano is the fabric that -- from the Savoy. So that's its reference to those histories. But yeah.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: This is great.

Jason Moran: Yeah, and see, I actually -- that's not supposed to be there.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: What?

Jason Moran: I mean, I left that there at a performance at the Walker, and then they was like, okay, so it's ours now.

Margo Delidow: Now it becomes -- (laughter)

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Now it's part of it. And they won't let you go back in there and change --

Jason Moran: There's a shaker in there. It's (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: I'm sure they won't go back there and let you change anything either. I've heard -- I know that story. Museums don't allow it. Once they own it.

Jason Moran: And you know like, I guess it -- and this one, like, this is also -- I mean, I guess I cared for -- the cymbals are not from the era, but the drums are, and that seat back there has gone through all manner of, you know, deterioration.

Margo Delidow: That foam is going to continue to get harder and crunchier.

Jason Moran: Yeah. And this is the bass that kind of -- it's repaired now, but it fell apart, but now it's -- so now it's really -- and it's just a prop set, prop position. Yeah, this one is hard to maintain. The foam that's underneath here, to keep the shape of this rising sawdust is also pretty fugitive. I'm not sure how they'll maintain that over time. But --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Again, do you have the same idea of if it's required to make -- get another one, a similar chair? You're okay with replacement?

Jason Moran: Yeah.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Yeah, the idea is to kind of keep it this physical appearance?

Jason Moran: Yes, yeah.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Talk about the mirrors with this one.

Jason Moran: Right, that's the addition. Okay, this -- for this era, this club's around the late '60s, '70. Consumer photography, people have cameras, yet no one took pictures of this club. There's a handful of images. I mean, I handful of images of this club. So the same handful that were of a club fifty years ago, right, somehow there are a lot -- a fair number of images because William Gottlieb took a lot of images of the Three Deuces. But so how is it that we have photography and people have cameras but they won't document this space? So the mirror just becomes like the -- you have to see yourself in here. And it also -- they swivel because they can lock into place when -- we never really do it, but they can -- I won't touch them.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: It's okay. We'll clean it.

Jason Moran: They lock into place, and then it becomes this -- you know, that. That happens with the ensemble. And also in jazz clubs mirrors have been used in, you know, kind of strange ways. The Blue Note Club in Greenwich Village, they have these slices of mirrors that do a very weird thing when you're in sitting in a odd position and you want to see something, and so you kind of look away from the stage to find what you want to see. It's kind of -- so they function that way.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Is there anything you were expecting us to ask that we didn't ask?

Jason Moran: I had no idea what you all were going to talk about. This is way beyond anything -- no one has ever heard me talk about this shit like this. (laughter)

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Well, we're interested because the bottom line here is you're making art. You're making physical art. You're making music that's activating the soul of this art, but you're also making physical art.

Jason Moran: I think what I -- had I prepared I think when I started this process I did not -- have not been thinking about the long vision of the works.

Margo Delidow: Nor do a lot of artists.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Nor do artists -- nor should you. That's not your role. That's our problem.

Jason Moran: And so even I think with some of these drawings I'll call people like oh, you know, now what? They're like oh, just get it behind some glass, or, you know, just, like, don't -- take the air away. You know, I had to -- and I still haven't started thinking about it, but I guess that's what a team is for.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Yeah, no, you don't need to do that. I mean, we're here if you have any questions.

Jason Moran: It helps when someone -- it helps when someone --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Yeah, if you want to call and ask, you know, look, I'd like to do this, do you have any suggestions of how I could keep from breathing it in or do this, that, and the other thing, we're here for that for sure. But your job is to make it, and our job is to take care of it.

Jason Moran: Yeah, it's -- I mean, that means you all have seen everything.

Margo Delidow: Yeah.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: We've seen a lot. (laughter)

Jason Moran: Because you know, like, the -- a viewer sees, like, what the museum intends for them to see, right. And then in the off hours you like okay, so let me get back in here on whatever the case, you know, the issue might be. And that -- it's like the private lives of the works. I'm sure there's a reality show centered on conservators.

Margo Delidow: It'd have to be sped up because we're really, really slow.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Right. (laughter)

Jason Moran: But there's a show in -- I think it's in Germany. I don't know what it's called, but they just show people working. Like, in the bakery in the morning, real time, right, and then about 15 minutes of that, and then they'll go to, like, someone who's working at an airport, like, flights, you know, coming in and out, so it's like -- and it's just one camera, and just -- I'm just giving you the format. (laughs)

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: It is.

Margo Delidow: It's interesting because you being a performer, I think what I do, I'm -- I do perform. There's a physical aspect of me smoothing something out and stapling something and sanding, but it's behind closed doors. I don't let people watch, and I do a lot of prep work before, but it's not seen. I am not a performer.

[01:06:07]

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: In fact, since you brought it up, when we started our discussion, we'd be happy to take you behind the scenes when you're finished, but when we were designing this building and I was asked about where the conservation department should be, I said well, I thought it needed to be adjacent to the Works of Art on Paper Study Center, which we never had before. And it needed to be right off the galleries so that conservators had to walk by art every time they went to the bathroom and went in and out, okay, as opposed to in the basement or in the attic or the, you know, a skylight, which is usually what conservators get. But I also thought it was important that people didn't see us work. I totally don't agree with that attitude, that I know public think it's interesting, and oh, it's cool. Did you see what they were doing? You know, we're not mice in a cage, and I just -- what we do is pretty intense, if we're doing it well, and it's slow. And it's our business.

Jason Moran: Yeah, I love that.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: So we have a stunning conservation studio, which we will show you, but it's all behind the scenes.

Jason Moran: That's so good.

Margo Delidow: In your practice do you feel like a private versus public side of your work?

Jason Moran: In our house there is no private. So I kind of got -- have none of that anymore, have no privacy. And also, you know, like, the time has changed around privacy, so --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: That's absolutely right.

Jason Moran: I kind of lost it. And the times when I try to gain it again, it works a little bit, but my own, you know, hunger for whatever invades someone else's privacy - - (laughs) you know, so then you go on Instagram. You look at somebody else's fucking life, you know what I mean. So that's how it kind of generates. And also for us the stage ends at up, you know, you have to get over any of

that stuff because we've chosen to actually put it in front of you. And we have to do it all the time. We have to be comfortable with it enough to make you feel like you're not watching something that should be done in private, even if it's something extremely intimate, you know. I mean, and a song can give you a sense of intimacy. Like, oh, should I hear that? Right, you know. So we kind of have to get away. I think for dancers, let's say, dancers have a moment because they mostly when they're working they work with the mirror. And then there's a point when that mirror is taken away and they step in front of an audience. And those audience -- so they have no more reflection --

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: It's very different. It's very different, very

Jason Moran: Yeah, right, so they deal with, like, they watch themselves disappear into the void. Like, you can't see where the audience is. You can't see, but you feel everybody, you know, and the choreography. It's a -- I mean, I always think that that's mesmerizing.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: No, it's interesting to think about intimacy and privacy as actually being two different things. Because you can be very intimate in a public space like that.

Jason Moran: Yeah, yeah.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Yeah, well, (inaudible).

Jason Moran: Yeah.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Anyway, thank you --

Jason Moran: Thank you, Carol, for the pleasure.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: -- very much for doing this.

Margo Delidow: Thank you.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Really, thank you for accepting the invitation and coming to do it.

Jason Moran: No, it's my pleasure.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: We really appreciate it.

Jason Moran: Totally a new, new experience.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro: Good.

[01:09:42] [performance beings]

[01:19:35] [performance ends]

[END]