Artists Documentation Program

Video Interview Transcript

JOHN HOGAN

JUNE 20, 2019

Interviewed by:

Christina McLean, Artist Documentation Program Fellow

Video: Christina McLean | Total Run Time: 01:42:23

Location: Yale University

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This interview is part of the Artists Documentation Program, a collaboration of the Menil Collection and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

The Artists Documentation Program has been generously supported by
The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

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): Christina McLean, The Menil Collection and Whitney Museum of American Art; John Hogan, Artist]

[BEGIN INTERVIEW]

[00:00:31]

Christina McLean: Today is Thursday, June 20th, 2019. I'm sitting with John Hogan. He's the installation director and archivist of Sol LeWitt Wall Drawings. I'm Christina McLean, ADP Fellow at The Menil Collection and this interview is a part of the Artist Documentation Program. We're at Yale University -- West Campus?

John Hogan: West Campus.

Christina McLean: (laughs) Thanks for being here. I know you have a long history of working with Sol and working with the wall drawings. So, if you wouldn't mind giving us a bit of a recap of how that came to be and --

John Hogan: There' a long version and a short version. (laughter) I'll keep it pretty simple. I met LeWitt in the -- I was in graduate school in Chicago in the mid '70s and I was quite taken with his book works and the whole concept of Printed Matter, which he had been one of the founders of. And subsequently, there was an exhibition at the museum where one of his wall drawings was done. And after the exhibition was done, the walls that it had been on were painted out and the piece was destroyed. And I was, like, I have to meet this guy. He's definitely of interest. And subsequently, I was -- when I was in my last year of graduate school, I was a curator for the gallery. It was part of the student gallery that's part of the museum. And I decided to do an exhibition of works that were ephemeral by nature, either printed book works -- not precious artist book works but -- so, people like Ed Ruscha and LeWitt and Baldessari and sort of the whole wide range of that. So, I went to New York and basically got to know him a little better, borrowed books from him and from Printed Matter.

And then, I moved to New York in 1980, '79-80, and was basically -- was a neighbor. Sol was living on Hester Street where he had been living forever, I guess since the '50s, and I was liv-- in -- on the edge of Chinatown and I was living a couple blocks away. So, we just sort of got to know each other because he was somebody who I knew sort of as a friend. And because of my interest in Printed Matter, I was very -- I became friends with a lot of people who worked at Printed Matter. And somewhere along the line, Sol just said, "Oh, can you help me on a project?" And at that point, I was basically doing what artists do: you find lots of odd jobs. (laughter) And I was doing construction work and everything else that you could possibly imagine. I was working part time for Dia with some of their artists, Walter De Maria and things like that. And Sol said, "Why don't you help me on this piece?" And I said, "Fine." And I thought, well, this is great, it's an interesting job. I'll do this for a little while but it's not something I'm going to sign on for. (laughter) Well, here we are.

Christina McLean: Here we are.

John Hogan: So, here we are. Basically, it started out as a friendship and then it really became a -- I became, basically, one of his primary assistants. [So?], there were several of us but it was a small group of people. And I, subsequently, after Sol passed away was asked to sort of take over managing the logistics of the installations and then was hired subsequently after that to basically start this archive of the wall drawing materials here.

Christina McLean: And can you talk a little more about what that role is for director of installations and then, also, starting the archive?

John Hogan: Well, the director of installations, I -- it's a com-- I work part time for the LeWitt estate and I work part time here at Yale. So, it's sort of a job that blends itself together a little bit. The projects going -- and the contemporary projects for Sol's work are basically structured where either a museum or a collector or someone who owns the piece wants to have the work installed, they contact the estate or one of the galleries that represents Sol's work or they contact myself directly and say, "This is what we -- the piece we have and we would like to have it installed." And then, I work with those people getting elevations of walls, how the wall's -- getting the information to them about how the walls would be prepared, making an estimate of how long the project's going to take, what the costs are involved, and I basically facilitated -- there's no economic charge for what I do. It's just to sort of maintain the integrity of the work. So, I say, okay, if the project's in Paris, there's somebody who is in, you know, Paris that can do the piece that we have worked with several times, so I know that the individual's who's being the lead draftsperson for the project is somebody who's -- who understands the --

[00:05:37]

Christina McLean: The work.

John Hogan: -- the work intellectually -- and also the skills that are required to do it, to execute it properly. And so, we have a very loose network of about 10 to 12 people scattered around the planet (laughter) and they all basically work freelance but pretty much -- many of them make their living as artists and this combined life like I had before where they do their own studio practices and then also install Sol's work. So, I do that for the estate and then, subsequently, Yale has -- is one of the -- has one of the largest collections of Sol's wall drawings, which had been promised -- a promised gift prior to his passing away. And then, subsequently, in the last two years, the -- his estate has gifted the rest of the work, so is roughly 47 wall drawings. So, we have done exhibitions and then, because, certainly, Sol believed that the work should be out, visible, been -- I've been proactive and tried to have works placed on campus in various places. So, there's been works that were put into the new law school building, works that -- put in the School of Management, works that have been put in the -- one of the science buildings here, one into a residential college. So, the work isn't just functioning in the white box at the museum. Obviously, there's several of Sol's drawings in the museum, installed semi-permanently, but Sol's intention was that the work be seen. And certainly, he embraced them being in public places. And from a practical point of view, it -- there's a lot less risk involved with Sol's work in the sense that if it gets damaged, it's something that can be redone or it can be repaired reasonably easily as opposed to a one-of-a-kind artwork. So, Sol's intellectual practice lended itself to public environments somewhat more than other artists might.

Christina McLean: Yeah. And so, when you are arranging for the lead drafter to install a wall drawing, are they then responsible for coordinating a team of local artists or --

John Hogan: Right.

Christina McLean: -- is that also something --

John Hogan: It depends on the circumstance, it -- there are -- obviously, because it's a long -- it was a long career, in many cities, we've had young artists that we've worked with before. So, sometimes, we simply hire the same young artist to work with us or maybe even not so young artists at this point. (laughter) But it's not the case everywhere. Sometimes, we just simply go -- a project will be in someplace where we don't have any contact with anybody and we just -- we either reach out to the local art school or to a local university or to a gallery that might be in that city and say we're looking for somebody who's interested in working on a project. You know, it might be 10 days, it might be a month, it just depends on the scale of the piece. And we basically hire people with the understanding, well, you know, you're making a commitment to do this project. Ideally, we want to hire people who aren't just looking for an income for a -- or freelance job. We want people, ideally, that are interested in Sol's work. And generally, I think our -- it's been my experience, and I think across the board everyone would agree, pretty much, that when we do bring people in that have not been exposed to Sol's work that they do actually feel like they've gained an understanding of the work better than they had previously. And also, they gained some, like, just manual skills on how you execute an artwork on a large scale and what it means to be on a scaffold and what it means to work as a team to sort of -- how we try to develop what we would refer to as a 'democratic hand' so that the individual artist impulse, which is to say, oh, I worked on this part or that part is -- they come to understand better that it's a group effort and that it's collaborative and that ultimately, they are collaborators with Sol's work. And Sol felt very strongly that they should be recognized, so -- as such. So, aside from the fact that they're doing the job, getting paid for it, gaining a skill, ideally when there's a wall label, then it will list their name as one of the people who actually installed the work. So, there -- it's a quite rewarding experience for a lot of people.

[00:10:34]

Christina McLean: Sure, yeah.

John Hogan: And, you know, yet there are other times where we work with people who -- you know, it's -- for them, it's simply an experience and they're, like, "Well, this was fun but I don't -- (laughter) it's not something for me." But for the most part, I think often when we do a project and it has a duration of a little bit of time where people get to know each other, frequently people basically say, "You ever have another project in town, let me know. I'm for it."

Christina McLean: Yeah.

John Hogan: So, I think it's been a system that Sol felt very strongly about from the very beginning and it works very well. And it is always interesting that people gain some skills, some knowledge, and an insight into Sol's work.

Christina McLean: So, you're not necessarily looking for painters specifically for an ink wash drawing or anything --

John Hogan: No.

Christina McLean: -- like that, or --

John Hogan: I mean, there are some -- some of the drawings, some of the pencil drawings and things like that do require rather extraordinary commitment and skills. So, there might be some variants in what we, depending on what the piece is --

Christina McLean: What you'll look for.

John Hogan: -- what we look for. But basically, we're looking for people who are interested in doing the work, ideally comfortable on ladders and scaffolds, that are capable of showing up every day. But we've had, you know, such divergent backgrounds. I mean, we've had mathematicians, we've had musicians, we've had people who have no art background but are interested, we've had people that are, you know, fresh out of graduate school, so it really runs the full course. Primarily, the main concern, again, is that if -- especially if they are trained as artists that they're able to sublimate their ego and their hand. But for the most part, it's -- it really -- it just requires somebody who's able to make a commitment. Some of the drawings, like the ink drawings, do require moving around very quickly, so you do need somebody who's nimble (laughter) and is comfortable on scaffold, you know? Some of the drawings -- so, the pencil drawings or, like, the scribble drawings or the drawing series pieces, you're stationary all day. So, if you're somebody --

Christina McLean: [Depending on your?] --

John Hogan: -- who doesn't sit still well, (laughter) then it's a problem.

Christina McLean: -- yeah.

John Hogan: Or if it's an ink drawing and you're somebody who doesn't move quickly, it's a problem. And then, often what we do is you find people's skill groups and you simply reorient what they're doing on any given project. So, I've had projects where some people were not really good at the big, quick moves but when it came to doing touch-ups with, you know, like a 001 brush, they could stand there all day and, [with a?] steady hand do the work. So, you try to orchestrate the skill groups that show up and the personalities that show up and see if you can get it done. Every once in a while, you do find that there's somebody who just doesn't work (laughter) but it's really rarely the case. Generally, by the time they get to the point where they realize this is a job, it's an artwork, it's in a museum context or a gallery, they're pretty responsible individuals already.

Christina McLean: Yeah. And the 'democratic hand'? Do you want to explain that a little?

John Hogan: So, it -- with all of the ink and the acrylic pieces and the scribble pieces and their -- they -- if a single person works in one area all day long, ultimately some sensibility of -- the lightness or the heaviness of their hand or how they use a brush simply starts to show up. So, we sort of have a system, basically, where you -- we move people around. So, maybe someone will work on this section of a drawing for that pass of the ink but the next time that they -- there's a pass of the ink, someone else will work in that exact same place. And people move -- shift around on the surface of the wall so each hand essentially complements and cancels out any of the nuance of the previous person's hand so it really becomes like this layered system, which is part of why LeWitt also developed the approach that he did with many of the materials, with the ink drawings, that -- there is a -- if the plan indicates there's one coat of red ink, it's done as a combination of three passes. So, rather than just put on the red ink really heavily to get the -- it saturated, there's this very subtle way that it's -- that the surface is brought to completion so that you have a -- more option to really get that 'democratic hand' and not have something, really, that's totally nuanced be revealed.

[00:15:51]

Christina McLean: And the large scale of most of these drawings probably lends itself --

John Hogan: Right.

Christina McLean: -- to people moving around. (laughs)

John Hogan: Right. So, I mean, you know, it's sort -- it's, like, okay, so, so-and-so starts on the upper left corner and works down the top -- from the top of the wall to the bottom of the wall from the -- what they can reach from the scaffold and then someone picks it up from that area and continues on and it's always this movement. And then, the next time you start, that person who was at the top starts at the bottom and the top -- so, it really -- you move it around and it really lends itself to, you know, the -- with the ink pieces, the rags are -- one person makes the rags.

Christina McLean: Okay.

John Hogan: So, if you had everybody make -- soak --

Christina McLean: Dipping and then -- (laughs)

John Hogan: -- dipping the hand -- dipping the rags in the bucket and they squeezed them out last, they squeezed them out more, we -- again, it's something we learned the hard way. It wasn't a system that was, like, clearly defined in the very beginning. It was something that every time we would do a new piece, we would gain experience on how to make it more a 'democratic hand'. So, yes, you have five people who are working on an ink drawing, then one person makes all those rags so that they're reasonably the same saturation, they're reasonably the same density, you know? If you have just one person doing an ink drawing, then it's just -- they're going to be -- just their hand. With the scribble drawings, it's the same. It's, like, some people are really good at really heavily scribbling, some people have a better soft hand. So, it's, like, okay, so you work on the six tonalities and somebody else will work on the ones. You know, and there are things -- with the pencil drawings, it's, like, well, how do you draw a straight line that's 25 feet long (laughter) and have it be consistent in tonality? But obviously, you can't just draw it, you know -- so, there's little tricks, little nuances that everybody sort of learns and teaches the next group of people. It's, like, well, you draw to this point and then you stop before the end of the stick, you know, and then somebody else picks it up. And then, you don't start right at the spot -- so, there's a lot of little things. But again, it's not -- they aren't skill groups that are so sophisticated. They tend to be things that if you think about them in advance just a little bit, they become sort of self-evident or, like, oh, well, that's the simplest way to do that.

Christina McLean: And so, if a wall drawing called for three layers of blue and you had a team of people that all were a little light handed, on that blue would the lead drafter then allow for a fourth --

John Hogan: Sometimes that happens. Generally, the person who is in charge says, "Your --"

Christina McLean: Is not -- (laughs)

John Hogan: "-- hand is too light." We do of-- especially with people who have never worked with us before, generally what we do is a practice board. So, we'll just have somebody take a piece of sheetrock and paint it the same way the walls are done so that you say, okay, this -- so, the lead person will say, "This is what I'm looking for" and then has somebody practice and then they say, "Well, that's" this or this. So, with the ink drawings in particular, it is this random movement of the hand. And, again, human beings, even with random -- do make patterns.

Christina McLean: For sure.

John Hogan: So, you learn very quickly if you do this practice with somebody it's, like, look at their hand and it's, like, oh, they're pressing too hard and they're really making these figure eights, even though they think they're being random. So, you say -- the lead person would say, "Well, you're pressing too hard, so you're putting too much ink on the wall. You're making these figure eights." And then, you sort of go back and you try it again until you get, again, this better sense that -- it's, like, okay, that's within the range of what we're looking for. So, you don't want this hand movement defined. You only want it to be adding a tone and adding a little bit of ink at a time. So, yeah, they're -- a lot of the initial impulse is to press really hard and it's, like -- and then, it's, like, oh, I missed a spot and then you go -- people go back and it's, like, no, no, no, just keep going, don't stop. So, it has to be this really fluid motion. It's, like, "Well, you missed a spot at that section." And it's -- if you go back too soon, it becomes a dark spot, so there's, like -- there's a little bit of this -- again, it's some practical training that once you have sort of the basic understanding of how the process works, it takes care of itself.

[00:20:45]

Christina McLean: Yeah. Is there -- when -- do you introduce new drafters to the previous iterations of a wall drawing before they begin work on a particular drawing?

John Hogan: We -- on occasion we do. Generally -- well, while Sol was alive, you know, the -- all of the plans -- I mean, I think that's -- as an aside, I think one of the gen-- really true genius aspects of Sol's work was all the plans for Sol's work are only in black and white, (laughter) so there was never any color reference. And his nomenclature for the ink drawings are simply combinations of red, yellow, blue, and grey and -- in the order in which they go, the number of passes, et cetera, et cetera. So, all of the plans only exist as line drawings with colors indicated.

Christina McLean: Extraordinary. (laughs)

John Hogan: And I -- to me, as somebody who worked with him for a long time, it was always this, like, how does he know --

Christina McLean: What --

John Hogan: -- what that's going to be? And then, sometimes he would say, "Well, I don't know but I have a pretty good sense." You know, you had -- you -- if it becomes -- it's your vocabulary, you learn it.

Christina McLean: Yeah.

John Hogan: So, on a -- prior to the Catalogue Raisonné being done, we had some reference books but, again, bad photo reproductions perhaps or bad photographs and ultimately, it sort of belies Sol's intention to show somebody what the drawing --

Christina McLean: Of course, yeah.

John Hogan: -- looked like because, ultimately, that was somebody else's version of it. So, yes, it could be a general reference but ultimately it wasn't something that we did very much because it was sort of contrary, essentially, to his intention, which was that this is you reading this plan and this is your understanding and this is your hand. That's not to say that it isn't helpful at times to have a reference because sometimes the language is so dense or the plan is a little -- like, the location drawings are very complicated for a lot of people to draw. And because visually they changed -- they only reference the wall on which they're drawn. So, even if you look at a photograph of a location drawing, the dimensions are going to completely change how the lines or whatever's drawn occurs. But you do get a sense, a relative sense of placement. So, sometimes people do look at those and say, oh, well, that's how that line worked. But with the Catalogue Raisonné now, we do have good quality visual reference. But for the most part, people still are -- when we send somebody to do a piece, we're doing a scaled plan -- again, the same way Sol did. So, we're working from the original diagram and doing a new scaling of it and that's still also done in the exact same way. It's a black and white line drawing with the colors indicated. So, we're not doing maquettes. And, you know, some -- many artists -- like, well, that -- we'll do a maquette where all the colors have to be exact and that sort of thing. That really isn't part of -- wasn't part of Sol's studio practice. Certainly, there were some commissions here and there where people wanted a maquette because they wanted to know what they're going to get, but for the most part it wasn't a traditional aspect of the work. So, we pretty much don't' want to say, well, this is what the drawing is supposed to look like.

Christina McLean: Yeah, so, in a way, it probably doesn't change too much of your practice approaching a *Wall Drawing* that's being installed for the first time posthumously to a wall drawing that has previous iterations --

John Hogan: Right.

Christina McLean: -- as a -- from the drafter's --

John Hogan: Yeah, from the drafter's point of view, it's just always a new piece. It's always a new pi-- I mean, certainly, there are several of the people, myself and others that had worked for Sol for a long time who might have installed the same piece several times --

Christina McLean: And that was a preference, that [the?] first drafters --

John Hogan: No.

Christina McLean: -- no?

John Hogan: No, it wasn't a preference. Sometimes it just happened.

Christina McLean: Okay. (laughs)

[00:25:21]

John Hogan: And that's sort of informative even on personal level. It's, like, well, when I did it that time, it was -- came out like that. And when I did this, then it came out like this and -- but it was generally not the case. It was often so-and-so did that piece there and then somebody else did it there and it's rarely that people did the same drawing many times. So, it's always sort of, like, first time. (laughter) I mean, you bring the skill groups --

Christina McLean: Of course.

John Hogan: -- and you bring the knowledge of the materials and the methods, that that is a continuum. But, you know, that wall is prepared this way, you know, you're doing something and, [yeah?], on a wall in a museum in Italy, it's not the same as doing something on a wall in a museum in the United States, you know? The walls in Italy are -- you know, the -- sometimes they're 300 years old, so things just work different, you know? There's moisture [inherent?] and there's, you know, Lord knows how many layers of paint under there (laughter) and all those kinds of things. So, there are a lot of variables that you just have to be able to adapt to as somebody who's installing the work and basically be able to resolve the problem yourself. And that was always an aspect of Sol's that was rather extraordinary, was that he trusted these individuals that were working for -- as draftspersons, saying so-and-so understands this -- the materials for this piece. "They have a good hand. I trust them to go do it," and that was -- it was it. Sol wasn't going to show up to say, "Oh, I need to see if it's -- the piece is okay." If it was a work that was brand new that he -- hadn't been executed before, certainly Sol would come and visit and want to see how it was going, sometimes actually did -- you know, not often but would occasionally make some changes in a piece if it was a new work. But if, you know, somebody said, "Oh, you know, we have to install, you know, one of the drawings from the '70s," he'd be, like, "Yeah, yeah, whatever, I know what it looks like." So, he had really no partic-- not that he had no interest in it not being done properly, but he didn't --

Christina McLean: He just --

John Hogan: -- have an interest.

Christina McLean: -- relinquished [that?] --

John Hogan: He just trusted the person was going to do it, follow the plan, and it was going to be within the parameters of his expectations. When it was a new work, then he wanted to see, he wanted to get a sense of it. So, for him it was equally a surprise.

Christina McLean: Yeah.

John Hogan: So, I think that that was also something that was pretty extraordinary about him. It's, like, you know, most artists don't let anything leave their studio until it's exactly what they want. In his case, it went out the door with, (laughter) "I don't know. I'm pretty sure it's going to work." And really, it -- I have to say that there was always this, like -- he would come and -- when a piece was new and he would say, "Oh, that's what it looks like," you know? It was a sense of exploration that was visible.

Christina McLean: That's wonderful.

John Hogan: Yeah.

Christina McLean: (laughs) And so, with that level of involvement, when it was a drawing that had been installed previously, would he just want a picture of it at the end (inaudible)?

John Hogan: Yeah, he would just say, "Send me some snapshots." (laughter) Tried to get the museum, art gallery to send a real photograph, you know? (laughter) It -- I mean, that was one of the things that -- doing -- working on the Catalogue Raisonné, it was a lot of -- again, it was -- he wasn't so interested in the history of -- he was interested in always doing new work. So, he would say, "Oh, okay, yeah, send a picture of it. I'd like to see how it looks." But it -- again, like, I sort of know what it looks like, so I don't really -- so, it wasn't a primary focus. So, there -- you know, there are gaps. There were gaps when the research was done where it's, like, well, this was a *Wall Drawing* and it was poorly photographed or it wasn't photographed or, you know -- so, those are the things that we have tried to find -- do the historical research and find the reference points and find people who might have worked on them or see if somebody had snapshots. You know, you have to imagine that this is a practice that started out when people -- if you imagine starting in the late '60s, doing this kind of work, people took black and white photographs back then. (laughter) You know? So, they weren't even making, really, color photographs back then. They started -- then they started making color photographs, and it -- often the color photographs were bad color photographs.

[00:30:17]

So, it is a very evolutionary process. So, we went from, on a really good day back in the, you know, late '60s, you might have had a museum context that had a real photographer who could take a really good high quality black and white photograph. And now, you know, we have digital cameras that will render, you know, images way better than the best film camera back -- did in, you know, the '80s or the '90s. So, a snapshot camera will give you a -- equivalent image to what a good camera might have given then. So, there's -- it was -- it's interesting because the documentation aspect of it is -- it does reveal when you do get to see -- it is sort of interesting when you get to see a piece that's been installed several different locations and see how the image -- how the piece does change based on the wall dimension, [when?] it was done, who did it. So, you get to see some of the variants. But unfortunately, there's not as many good quality images as one would have liked. But his practice was based on, "I want to do new work. I'm not" --

Christina McLean: Not -- [right?].

John Hogan: -- “dwelling on” -- you know, if he was asked to do an exhibition and somebody would say, “Oh, I want you to do *Wall Drawing Number,* you know, *51*,” he’d say, “I know what that piece looks like. I don’t really want to do *#51*. I want to do a new piece.” So, he was really rather adamant and often, for the most part, the curators and gallerists who showed his work trusted him and let him do it. So, that is all -- was also sort of, like, he developed the -- with the people who were interested in the work, who represented him and collected him, he developed those kinds of working relationships. The same way that he trusted the drafters, the collectors and the curators trusted him.

Christina McLean: And that’s so, so much trust in so many different --

John Hogan: Yeah, yeah.

Christina McLean: -- ways and -- I mean, in a way, that really seems like a -- second to the legacy of the work, it’s also this legacy of a studio practice and [employing artists?].

John Hogan: Right. I mean, we delivered.

Christina McLean: Yeah. (laughs)

John Hogan: Yeah, I mean, we -- I mean, that was -- I mean, I guess the, you know, integral aspect of that trust is that he delivered.

Christina McLean: Yeah.

John Hogan: It got done on time, it got done on budget for the most part. I mean, obviously, there were projects that went -- became difficult because maybe the wall had problems or something else or somebody got sick or, you know, but -- you know, the variables that happen in life. But, for the most part, it was a -- it’s, like, if they say it’s going to take 10 days, it’s going to take 10 days. They’ll get it done in 10 days. And this is what the work will be and, you know, this is the -- Sol’s intention for the piece was going to work. His ability to address the space was going to work. So, he -- it wasn’t, like, oh, well, we trusted him to do it and it was a real disaster. (laughter) It was -- it -- were [made?] for the -- you know, with rare exceptions, really everything came together really quite well.

Christina McLean: And so, the preparation of the walls happens all before the drafters show up.

John Hogan: Right, for -- each of the materials have sort of particular preparations that are required. So, the pencil drawings require one kind of wall prep, the ink drawings another kind, the crayon drawings a little bit different, acrylic pieces a little bit different, scribble drawings a little bit different. And that's something that also -- certainly when Sol started out, he just went to the wall -- if it was painted white -- I mean, Sol did write specifically about doing *Wall Drawings* and he said, "Well, you know, the quality of the wall is going to vary." But one of the things that we came to realize -- that if the wall wasn't properly prepared, ultimately there -- the flaws in the wall would telegraph into the piece and become distractions from the intention of the work. So, it's not so much that we want something so special, it's only that we want a surface that's consistent so that there won't be distractions on how the work gets installed.

Christina McLean: Are [those?] --

John Hogan: And again, it's --

Christina McLean: -- things you can recognize --

John Hogan: Yeah, it's --

Christina McLean: -- when you walk up to the wall?

John Hogan: Right, (laughter) yeah, so, I mean it -- you know, the ink process, the wall texture is done -- painted -- again, it's simply the wall is prepared with traditional house paint. But it's done with a very heavy [Knapp?] roller so that there's a texture very similar to an orange peel and -- but that means that it needs to be uniform over the entire wall. So, at the edge of the wall, you can't just paint -- like, if you were painting [in an?] apartment, you would just use a brush at the edge because it -- all it needed to be was that color. In this case, it -- that surface needs to be stippled in with a brush so that it is uniform and consistent. So, there are some things like that but generally, it's only -- it's -- we have a PDF for instructions for each of the kinds of wall prep and if somebody is actually able to functionally read it and understand it and do it as -- according to the instructions, there's never really particularly an issue. Maybe sometimes they -- you know, the studio person will show up and say, "Oh, it needs another coat of paint, just to bring the surface up a little bit more." But for the most part, the preparation really can be done by somebody who's -- has some experience as a house painter, you know?

[00:36:23]

Sometimes the people who are, like, in the industry as real painters were, like, "Well, we don't normally paint this way." And it's, like, "We're not disrespecting your trade. Just do it this way" and it -- get the result. And then, you have to sort of, like -- sometimes it's a phone conversation to say, "Well, you have to understand that you're not just making it a white wall. It's going to be the ground for this artwork. So, this artwork is going to be -- what you are putting there is integral to what the artwork is." So, once they sort of get that, that it's not, "Well, I just need to paint the wall white," it's, like, "Oh, okay, so we'll do it the way you want," you know, us to do it.

Christina McLean: Yeah, and maybe we can talk a little bit about recognizing a damage to the drawing or fading condition issues? How does that result in repainting a wall drawing (inaudible) and --

John Hogan: The -- obviously, especially since often the work is up in -- long-term or in more public environments, things happen. It's just -- it doesn't even matter if it's in a museum or not. I mean, it -- they just happen. I mean, because they are done directly on the wall, people often -- the audience often sort of can't really believe that it's there, so there's a -- this weird desire to touch that's really sort of out of proportion, comparatively speaking, to traditional artworks.

Christina McLean: Well, and I think they just make you want to step back and look at them and then get really close. (laughs)

John Hogan: Right, right, and get really close. And there's, like, is that really drawn on the wall with a pencil? You know, that kind of thing. So, things do get damaged. And it's one of these things where it's a practical assessment. If something --

Christina McLean: Does the institution do that or --

John Hogan: Well, what we often say is if the piece gets damaged, contact the estate, send me photographs so we can sort of take a look. And we can say, oh, well, it's only that section of the drawing that really has -- got messed up and maybe it can just be touched up. Often, we -- if there's somebody who's worked on the piece locally, we'll say, oh, you know, so-and-so worked on the piece, they know how to do the touch-ups with the inks, just reach out to them. But sometimes, it's considerably more damage and then we'll say, well, you know, somebody from the studio needs to come and do, perhaps, just that section over of the piece. And then, sometimes it's, like, well, it's damaged. It's not a repair that's -- like, a scribble drawings, it's -- they're really hard to fix.

Christina McLean: (laughs) Yeah.

John Hogan: So, sometimes it does just simply require that the work, the entire work be redone. So, again, economic decisions. It depends on the extent of the damage, it depends on the type of -- the piece it is. You know, if it's a glancing scratch from, you know, somebody walking by with a cart, you know, perhaps it can easily be touched up. If it's a smudge in one of the pencil drawings, sometimes they can be cleaned up. But if it's a dent in the wall, then it has to be plastered, it becomes different. You know, particularly to your -- the piece that you have in the collection, when it was installed the first time in his -- in Mr. Stern's home, that wall was fairly fresh and a blister --

Christina McLean: Oh, wow.

[00:40:18]

John Hogan: -- occurred, shortly after the piece was finished. I mean, part of it is with the ink drawings, when you're introducing an extraordinary amount of moisture to a wall surface -- it was that environment in Texas, it -- so, there were a lot of variables. It was a new building. And it was a blister but it just showed as a blister. It didn't peel or anything like that. So, we simply -- I was there and, you know, put a pinhole in it, let the air out and injected, you know, matte medium into it so that it would stay adhered to the wall. That doesn't mean -- you know, again, if a big chip of it -- if the blister had broken and it had been a section that had come off, then you got to -- you're back to zero. You have to fill in the plaster, you have to prime it again, you have to do the whole section [to go?] -- sometimes it's, like, well, the border -- you know, especially on pieces -- a lot of institutions have -- really don't have baseboards, so there's -- might be just a very small reveal at the bottom of the wall. So, people who clean the floors --

Christina McLean: [Get a little close?].

John Hogan: -- you know, get a little too close or haven't been trained properly how -- maybe to do it by hand instead of with the machine. So, sometimes, things get damaged at the bottom. It's, like, well, it's a border in black. Okay, we can fix it fairly easily. Or, now they really did it in and then it has to be redone. So, it -- again, it's -- some things can easily be done by somebody who worked on it, some things can be done by somebody who's a local conservator who has got a good skill. Sometimes, it -- and we have had occasions where pieces have been damaged and with good intention, the institution or collector has gone and hired a conservator at rather considerable expense, where if they would have contacted somebody from the studio, we would've had somebody who was a local artist fix it for not a lot, you know? Not a really serious economic issue. And it's not that people have done it with, you know, poor intentions, it's just -- they just assumed, well, we'll have to hire a conservator because that's the tradition that they know. And in some cases, it's fine and in other cases it would've made just more sense for somebody who had worked on it to fix it and -- you know, as opposed to, like, some -- a conservator. Again, it's about doing the proper research. A good conservator would -- if it was an ink drawing, they would understand, well, it's -- the ink is done in these level three applications of these colors as opposed to I'm going to try to mix that purple. It's, like, well, no, it's just red and two coats of blue and it'll be that purple. So, the -- there -- it --

Christina McLean: It's different skills.

John Hogan: There's different skills. But for the most part, people are responsible and do simply contact us and say, "We don't know what to do," and then we deal with it directly.

Christina McLean: And do all the drafters share their experiences amongst one another in terms of, [sort of, repairs?], or --

John Hogan: Yeah, we -- they try. I mean, everybody has their own proclivities but basically we try -- people are good at sharing skill groups. And for the most part, it's a -- they all, at some point or another, have worked together. So, there is a social environment to that aspect of it, especially on bigger exhibitions. You know, you'd -- and for the most part, anybody who's working who's a lead drafter trained by somebody who was a lead drafter -- so, you have that working relationship to begin with. It's not to say that they're all, you know, good friends it's just to say that they know each other and have spent time -- you know, you work for 22 days, six days a week, you have some kind of working relationship with those people. And they, you know, share skill groups and say, "Oh, well, you know, if you do it this way, it'll be easier," or "this way," and then there are -- you know, some people are, like, "Well, this is the way I do it and I really don't" -- you know, but that is -- you know, it's a -- some people, it's, like, "Well, I only use this kind of straight edge and I don't like that kind of straight edge. That one gets too heavy for" -- and, you know, again, doesn't matter as long as the intention is -- of Sol's piece is respected and it gets executed within the parameters that are expected.

Christina McLean: Can you talk a little more about coming together on those larger exhibitions and what it's like to go from working on one drawing installation to doing many and maintaining that consistency across many walls? (laughs)

[00:45:27]

John Hogan: Yeah, I mean, so -- I mean, the -- when we do larger exhibitions, often there are two, three, four people involved from the studio and then lots of local artists. And we try to break it down where this person is responsible for these three drawings and this person's responsible for these drawings. And obviously, you know, there are people who do certain drawings with more ease than others. So, I wouldn't be asking somebody who likes to do ink drawings and run around all the time to do a piece where they have to stand in place all day. So, there's a little bit of orchestration on -- from that point of view on my part and through the estate. And while Sol was alive, as well, Sol often would say, "Oh," so-and-so "should do that piece because they -- that's there -- play to their skills. Don't make somebody do something that's contrary to, you know, their -- what they're good at." It's just -- it serves the work, it serves the purpose, it serves the idea. You enjoyed this kind of work, you have a good hand at it. The more you do it it's going to only get better; it's not going to get worse.

But when we have these projects that come together, it's, like, often, again, people have worked solo. So, they go out in the world, they work -- install a piece in an exhibition or in a collector's home or in a museum and they work with local artists and they're sort of the boss. Not sort of: they are the boss. (laughter) And, you know, they'll come -- get back to me about some things that maybe go wrong where they might need some, you know, advice or, "How do I deal with this?" Or they'll say, "Oh, you know" -- they'll get in touch with somebody else who is, like, "Oh, you know, this wall blistered, I don't -- you know, can you tell me what you did when it happened to you the last time?" That kind of thing. But when we do the projects together it's sort of, like, "Okay, that's how you do that." And there's a little bit of -- it's a learning process. Again, it gives the people the opportunity to say, "Oh, you know, [Nikolai?] does it this way in his -- it works really quickly," or "Andrew does it this way" or "Sarah" does it this way." "Oh, I have -- it never occurred to me to do it that way. That makes it a lot easier," you know? When we started doing pieces, they -- we didn't have laser levels, you know? We had plumb bobs and traditional spirit levels. And then, you know -- so, there are groups of people who have never done it [out of their -- with?] -- been with a plumb bob and a spirit level to, you know, draw straight lines or create a grid and then somebody says, "Oh, well, you know, we have this laser level." And, you know, you just saved an hour's worth of time.

Christina McLean: Wow, yeah.

John Hogan: So --

Christina McLean: There's huge benefits in coming --

John Hogan: There's huge benefits to having new people come in because they often might have insight that doesn't -- you know, again, if it makes it simpler and more efficient and it works, it's all good. Just because we did it that way before doesn't mean we have to do it this way now, you know? So, I mean --

Christina McLean: So, the techniques can evolve.

John Hogan: The techniques can evolve. You know, there are some pieces that are -- these thing-- the pieces that are referred to as *Loopy Doopy* -- but you know, so these are these very freehand -- that were curvilinear pieces that Sol did, very irregular. There's the [*Splot*?] pieces that are also very irregular. And when we first started doing those, it was, well, you got to plot out all these points, figure out -- you know, and then you got to try to, like, look at the diagram and sort of draw it the same way. And then, somebody said, "Oh, well, you know, we could use an overhead projector and make a transparency and project it onto the wall and, you know, draw it that way." And it was, like -- and then, somebody said, "Yeah, but, you know, it -- the -- we can't turn off the lights in the room and it -- we can't get" -- then, somebody said, "Well, we could use a video projector." I mean, so --

Christina McLean: Yeah.

John Hogan: I mean, it's not that we do that much of those kinds of pieces where we are working from a template to -- that's being projected. But when we did them, from the beginning, it was really: here's a curved line that, you know, runs 37 feet and you're, like, plotting points, you know, every 12 inches. And then, you're, like, trying to draw with tape and somebody said, like, "Oh, well, this will just make it easier." Again, Sol, he didn't care how that occurred as long as it was respectful of the intention. So, as the materials evolved, as the technology evolved, it was fine. You know, I think -- and I -- that sort of is the interesting aspect of the work that they're -- that it's an open practice. Somebody at one point said, "Oh, well, you know, now they have these mechanical -- they have these robots that will draw on the wall," you know, that --you know, I guess you put up wires and it simply uses a computer program to mimic -- and those are the kinds of things Sol wasn't interested in. It's not to say that he didn't understand technology or see it as what it was but he wanted the human aspect. He wanted it to be a human hand, that it was a collaboration between a human being understand-- reading the text or seeing the diagrams and following it with their skills and with their knowledge and with their hand. So, he wasn't interested -- you know, because people say, "Oh, you could just print this on -- you know, we can do -- laser print this on vinyl and, you know, put it on" -- it's, like, not interested.

[00:51:24]

Christina McLean: [Not if?] -- yeah, that's where the --

John Hogan: Has to be -- you know, it had to be the human involvement. It had to be that it was a collaboration between somebody who read it and then followed the instructions. But that's not to say that, you know, we want to do things the hard way if there's an easier way to do it. So, you know, some people would say, "Well, it's always been done this way and it's always going to be done this way." And it's, like, as long as you do it according to his system, you know, that if it's an ink process, it's three passes, if it's a, you know, acrylic piece, it's this, if it's a scribble piece, it's this. But, you know, he created these very specific systems to create the work. Respect the systems, bring any new skills to them, but don't change the system.

Christina McLean: And how does that go with transposing into a new medium? So --

John Hogan: Again, Sol wasn't somebody who worked in his studio figuring out that stuff. He would say, "Well, this is what I want. What do you think? How do we do this?" So, even with the ink drawings, it was a matter of him saying, well, he wanted to do these wall-based pieces that were with -- done with ink. He understood print-making. He unders-- he had worked as a graphic designer, he understood the context of what it means to work with process colors. So, he brought that knowledge to it and said, "Okay, so can I bring that fairly universal approach to technology, bring it to a system to create the artwork on the wall?" So, you know, if you understand process colors, then you -- and it's, like, yeah, you -- again, ideas that are universal, materials that are readily available, skill groups that are basic, all -- not -- you know, it's not about mixing some luscious purple. It's not about mixing a particular orange. It's, like, it's a combination of these three things and that's what you get. And it's a commitment to respect that system. Pencil drawings, you know, when the -- with the drawing series pieces, when they were first done, Sol first did them, it was drawing one line at a time, you know? They're two mil-- two-and-a-half millimeters apart, it takes a long time. Somebody said, "Oh, well, what if we take three of the leads and tape them together so we draw three lines at a time?" No problem. Makes it quicker.

Christina McLean: Yeah.

John Hogan: You know? If somebody in the future comes up with a, you know, a system that will facilitate that even more easily, fine, as long as there's a human involvement, you know? The -- with the drawing series pieces, it literally is three leads with a single lead in between them to -- as a spacer and we just tape them as a flat -- like, a little stick and draw them that way. Here, I got somebody who -- one of the people who works in conservation who under-- knows how to use a 3D printer made, essentially, a -- 3D-printed a little pencil -- a lead holder that eliminates doing it that way, where the leads simply can be slid into [it?] and it works (laughter) much more -- works much more quickly. So, again --

Christina McLean: Why not?

John Hogan: -- we did it that way before. We also did it one line at a time. We find that -- you know, we did it this way, this was -- this worked forever. Now, there's this 3D-printed thing that I -- you know, got 20 of them made and sent them out to everybody and they can use them if they want to. They want to do them the same way they were doing them before with taping, fine. If they want to use the thing and it's with the -- it was 3D-printed, fine. It doesn't make any difference as long as the intention of the work is respected.

[00:55:35]

Christina McLean: And then, with the discontinuation of certain products --

John Hogan: Well --

Christina McLean: -- that happened in Sol's lifetime -- (laughs)

John Hogan: In Sol's lifetime. So, [I mean?], again, you know, Sol, with the ink drawings, Sol started out with Pelican ink, which was available pretty much everywhere on the planet. Architects used it. Artists used it some but mostly architects used it. But architects adapted computers and the inks stopped being -- or they went to AutoCAD or whatever. So, initially, Sol convinced Pelican -- first, we bought up everything Pelican had, (laughter) [we?] -- from [our?] --

everybody -- like, literally every studio assistant everywhere around the planet, you know, went to every art supply store and bought what there was and we went through that. And then --

Christina McLean: That only lasts so long.

John Hogan: That only lasts so long. (laughter) And then, Sol convinced Pelican to make ink in large volumes for us and they did that, I think, two [or?] -- maybe two times or three times. And then, the last time, Sol said, "We want to have more ink" and they said, "We got rid of the machines." So, we were stuck. And Sol said, "Okay, well, my studio practice is based on this system. We need to come up with something that will approximate that system." So, we went through this whole series of experimentation trying other material-- trying one brand of an ink, trying another brand of an ink. Ultimately, we came up -- by working with someone, we came up with a system of using acrylic pigments with distilled water and varnish and it basically approximates -- visually approximates what the ink process was. And Sol said, "It's fine. Doesn't matter that it's not ink anymore. Don't -- I don't care that there's no Pelican ink anymore. This gives the exact same visual result as my intention. Going forward, we'll do it."

And that -- and the same with the two millimeter leads that we use. We used to buy them from a company and they stopped making them because architects (laughter) and artists weren't using them anymore, you know? So, we started by buying up everything that we could find and then we went through that. And then, ultimately, we approached Koh-I-Noor and Koh-I-Noor now manufactures these two millimeter leads for us. And as long as they'll do it -- I mean, we buy them in bulk, obviously, and we're not ordering a box of 10. We're buying them by the hundreds and they make -- they manufacture them for us and we have them stored properly in a warehouse. And we'll use them as long as Koh-I-Noor does that. And if Koh-I-Noor says, "Well, we're not going to do anymore," we'll find the next permutation of what it means to come up with a red, yellow, and blue lead that is consistent color-wise that we can use with the system. So, it does -- we don't feel -- you know, the traditional notion of -- somewhat of conservation is that you use the original material if you can. And in this case, it's, like, system works --

Christina McLean: The work needs to go on.

John Hogan: -- system works, the work needs to go forward. It doesn't matter -- you know, and there may come a point where there'll be, you know -- it's, like, you know, the -- yellow number two pencils used to be ubiquitous on the planet.

And I'd be hard-pressed to think of anybody who has one readily available in the pocket. So, there may come a point at -- where those kinds of leads are culturally not available. That'll present a different problem. But because these things were addressed while Sol was alive, we don't feel trapped by the traditional artist intention, the artist material. It's, like, if it's this piece, it has to be this. And certainly, there are lots of other artist practices that were informed by Sol's work and that evolved on their own where there are similar conservation issues, you know? I have --

Christina McLean: A lot. (laughs)

John Hogan: I have a good friend who is an artist who uses a plastic bag from grocery stores and things like that as part of his work. And, I mean, he is -- he's making a comment about the environment in his work. And at some point, those bags hopefully will be discontinued and it will present a problem for his work, potentially, in the future. So, you know, yes, there -- we -- because Sol was able to address these things while he was alive, we don't feel constrained by the ability to let the materials evolve as long as it respects the system. You know, I can think of other artists that, you know, died, unfortunately, young or something and people say, "Well, you know, we don't know what he would say." You know, we know Dan Flavin wanted those light bulbs this way. Those light bulbs aren't made anymore, you know? Somebody's making them and when they stop making them, it'll be some -- it'll be a discussion. And a lot of artists are starting to realize those things, even -- because contemporary art practices now often use these materials that are a little iffy, archivally speaking, people are starting to address that in their own work and say, oh, well, you know, if it's this I don't care, it could -- or it could be this, or no, it has to be this.

[01:01:38]

Christina McLean: Conversations are happening that --

John Hogan: Right, conversations are happening, I mean -- and, you know, I recently was at a conference about artist estates and different artists had very specific, like, "Well, I wouldn't want that ever to happen to my work." And then, others were, like, (laughter) "It's going to have the life it's going to have." So, you know, it runs the full course. But with Sol's work, there was clarity. He understood the issues that were at hand, he addressed them directly when he was alive, and basically guaranteed that that would be a continuum. And subsequently, this position that I'm in currently is an endowed one here at Yale, so when I leave it, someone else will take it and there will always be, as long as the institution is functioning, there will be this relationship to the conservation department. So, if our materials start to become problematic again, we have the samples of everything so that people here can work directly with conservation. I mean, we've already done that with some of the materials where, as I mentioned when we were talking yesterday, that we have this -- the piece that's done with tissue paper that faded. And I worked with conservation here to try to come up with archival tissue paper that's dyed with pigment so that it has a -- more [life fast?] qualities than simply commercial tissue paper that -- red, yellow, and blue. So, it's a direct relationship to try to solve those kinds of things. So, you know, we have the ink samples, we have the acrylic samples, we have the crayons. So, we have the leads. All of those kinds of things can be, you know, looked at -- you know, the same way conservation is, like, well, we have a collection of pigments, you know, these luxuries, (laughter) wonderful things that -- you know, pigment collections that, you know, are just like this gift to conservation, we have the contemporary version of that. They're not so, you know, beautifully packaged but it's still essentially the same context.

Christina McLean: And can you talk more about some of your collaborations and how embedded in the conservation department here at Yale has informed your practice?

John Hogan: Well, it -- being here -- essentially, when I first came here, people really weren't so clear on what I was or wasn't (laughter) or what I was supposed to do. I mean, they simply -- they knew that the -- we had a large collection of Sol's work. They really weren't clear what I was doing, because part of what I'm doing is I -- the archival aspect of the -- so, it's an archive of the work as it was installed previously but it is an ongoing archive that is a continuum, so every contemporary project is also being archived. (laughter) So, it's not an archive in the sense that it's -- was a traditional archive that's fixed in time, it went from the beginning of his career to the end of his career and it stopped. It went, in this case, from the beginning of his career and continues. So, in the years that have passed, hundreds of the drawings have been executed since he died in 2007 and all that material, the -- that correspondence, the working plans, the budgets, all of those things, all of that are archived here. So, that part is somewhat different than the conservation part but by doing that, it also made me, as a person, like, oh, I have to really think more into the future about this. So, talking to conservators -- and I'm lucky enough in this environment that there are -- even though there are broad range of ages that basically people get it, that it's the kind of work that is repeatable, that it does -- it -- that the materials are evolutionary, that the process is set, the system is set, but the idea is the intention of the work. And it's been good because there's -- there have been various fellows that have come through here that are young, in training, and I would have -- just as a matter of course, you would have conversations about what somebody does or doesn't do and then they'd say, "Oh, well, you do this with what?" And then, you have these conversations and say, "Oh, well, yeah, this is how we do this and this is how we do that. And this is what the materials are and these are the kinds of problems we've experienced."

[01:06:31]

So, they're going out in the world. I mean, as you were wandering yesterday, you ran into two people who you knew that you went to school with. So, this kind of thing happens here, where people come and they get -- I get exposed to them and they get exposed to me and they go out into the world and say, "Oh" -- [if?] something comes up with a LeWitt, they're, like, "Oh, I know" -- (laughter) so-and-so, or "I know who you can get in touch with." And it also made me more cognizant of what conservators have to deal with and what kinds of questions they have to deal with. So, I've had a coup-- I've co-presented at AIC, some years ago, with Carol Snow and she worked on pieces in Sardis and Syria and, you know, sort of was presenting this notion of, ultimately, the idea that something that an idea in culture can be destroyed by physically destroying it. And that's one aspect of how culture carries its history. It's, like, well, we have this monument that's these mosaics or these, you know, these temples or whatever or these Buddhas and if we destroy that thing physically, then the idea is crushed. And Sol's position was you can destroy it and the idea will always be alive. So, that kind of a dialogue I would never have had --

Christina McLean: Without --

John Hogan: -- without being in this environment, without really thinking about that. So, that is something that benefited me intellectually but it also -- it became this collaborative thing where I also made somebody in conservation, by being able to co-present this -- so, certainly, mostly people are being trained in conservation are being trained in these traditional skills. And, yes, certainly young people and older people are saying, oh, there's also this aspect of contemporary art that --

Christina McLean: Doesn't fit.

John Hogan: -- doesn't quite fit. But ultimately, they're, like, "Oh, I -- this is different, I get it." Some years ago, there was a piece that had been installed in Belgium for decades and the museum was going to be completely renovated. And I was contacted by good-meaning conservators in Belgium who didn't really understand Sol's work particularly other than they were asked to move it.

Christina McLean: Yeah.

John Hogan: And they contacted me saying, oh, you know, did we have experience with moving or disassembling the walls. (laughter) And I'm, like, just chop it up --

Christina McLean: Just redo it, yeah.

John Hogan: -- and just redo it. And they were, like -- you know, there was this, like, moment of horror and I was, like, "This is what his practice is about." So, it was an opportunity, again, for me to work directly with conservators who had not been exposed to Sol's intentions and to the ideas, the under-- ideas and the processes involved and say, okay -- and they were, like, "Oh, okay." So, ultimately, they facilitated having the other piece destroyed but also having the new wall built that -- so, the dimensions of the wall were going to be exact to how the piece was installed previously, because that was what they wanted. So, those conservators, like, took all those measurements, got everything, [said?] -- you know, figured out all the -- all that, gave that kind of information to the contractors that were renovating the museum, saying this is what this wall has to be, this is where it has to be, and then ultimately worked on the piece when one of the studio people went so that they as conservators gained that skill, as well. So, again, not the kind of thing that would have happened in a more traditional environment. So, by being here, there was -- it was a way for people to be in touch and also say, oh, well, it's not just this guy being weird (laughter) and saying, "just chop it up." It's, like, he's -- there's this position in this institution that says this is what the work is about, this is how it functions. And, in the future, there will be somebody other than myself who will be able to be in that same circumstance.

[01:11:06]

Christina McLean: And I think we're getting more comfortable with that practice as other artists are also --

John Hogan: Yeah.

Christina McLean: -- just learning those ideas, so --

John Hogan: Yeah.

Christina McLean: -- definitely informed by Sol DeWitt, yeah.

John Hogan: Yeah, I mean, I -- on a regular basis, I'm, like -- you know, every once in a while, somebody -- I have, you know -- I do work occasionally with graduate students here and I'm, like, "Why are you using that material? Don't you know it's completely going to rot?" You know, this kind of thing and they're, like, "Oh, I don't care." And it's, like, "Okay, well, then that's fine, but" --

Christina McLean: As long as you know.

John Hogan: -- "as long as you know," (laughter) you know? It's, [like?], you know, there are Sol -- some of Sol's works use markers. And when we first started doing them, we were just using regular markers and then we realized that they were going to just eat through the wall and you'll never be able to paint them out. Doesn't matter how many coats of paint, they'll just eventually leach forward. So, now we use pigment [based?] markers. Again, not something we would have necessarily discovered on our own without some guidance from somebody who was trained as a conservator. So, there's a -- there is a collaborative aspect to it.

Christina McLean: And maybe we can speak a little about how it functions, training drafters and how that really becomes a lot of the conservation of the ideas of the work, which are --

John Hogan: Right.

Christina McLean: -- the work.

John Hogan: Well, as I said, there's a whole set of systems and basically it's the way it's functioned from the get-go, which was, you know, somebody understood it and they worked with some local artist who understood it and said, "Oh, I'm interested in keeping -- to doing this work" and they had a good hand, and so they suddenly -- they worked on enough projects that we said, oh, well, they know how to do this kind of drawing and this kind of drawing and this kind of drawing. We can trust them. They understand the work. So, it was this sort of apprentice kind of -- traditional apprentice kind of thing and it's worked fine. You know, started in the late '60s and it's 2019. Sol's been dead for -- since 2007, there -- for -- not entirely but almost everyone who now is a draftsperson for the studio never met him.

Christina McLean: (laughs) Wow.

John Hogan: Never met him. Came to work for the estate or for however -- how best you would explain it, came to work with us after he passed away and has simply been trained either by myself or Anthony or Joe or Sachi or, you know, or Tak or any of the other people that have worked long-term. You know, people's lives change, they have kids. It's not a job that's -- it's great but it does involve travel, it's not consistent. If you have a family, if you have a personal relationship, it has to be stable because -- you know, so people's lives evolve. Some people stayed forever, some people work for five years and said, "Okay, I'm done." So, it's always functioned but part of how it's functioned is that it's this, you know, verbal, one-to-one apprenticeship kind of thing. And so, one of the things that I'm trying to do here is create an environment where we have examples of how the work is done and executed so if there comes a break in that system where, perhaps, somewhere in the future the work falls out of popularity for some reason or --

Christina McLean: And it's being installed.

John Hogan: -- it isn't being installed and there becomes a -- you know, a linear break in time where there's nobody who's left who knows how to do the work, there is a resource here that says, well, these are what the formulas are, here's a video of how the work was done, here's a sample board of how the lines are drawn, here's a sample of what the texture -- or what the wall is supposed to look like. So, there is a resource here. But also, we never approached it that way before. It was really only since this position came into existence where we started to think, well, let's -- and that was part of the intention of why this position was created, was that Sol approached Yale and said, "I'll gift you all these works but I want to have some notion of this archive and this resources place that will guarantee that there's a way to be able to execute, there's an ability to understand how to execute, that the materials and methods are maintained as a resource so that over time, it'll continue." So, that's one of the things that, you know, up until Sol became ill and ultimately passed away, it wasn't something we ever really addressed because it worked.

[01:16:25]

Christina McLean: Yeah.

John Hogan: There was no reason to think about it. It worked. When there was a problem -- we had asked him how he wanted to deal with it and it was fine. But, you know, he was ill for several years but had -- you know, was completely -- had his wits about him and said, "Oh, well, it's worked really well but now, how's it going to work after I'm gone?" And it wasn't that people -- and there were also curators and other artist friends and -- said, "Sol, what's going to happen to your work after you go?" So, it wasn't like he was -- you know, it was something that got addressed head on. Certainly not something that I would consider was an easy thing for him to think about but, you know, he wanted to make sure that the work would have a continuum. And certainly, from the get-go, he had a system in place that sort of lent itself to it continuing, but he still wanted some other, further reassurances that long-term, you know, it doesn't simply become a lot of stuff in a barn somewhere that (laughter) got forgot. So, yes, this digital archive is here, the relationship to conservation is here, MASS MoCA was created -- that basically is a retrospective of all the linear and material, time-wise -- and the materials that Sol ultimately worked with, representational pieces, basically, from all of the range of the work. And the collection here is all -- as well, at Yale, is fairly historical in its scope. So, pretty much everything is representational of the work. There are some works that represent those periods of time -- so that there is this thing, there's this place, this structure, this resource that lends itself to the work going forward. You know, Yale might stop happening. It's entirely possible. It is several hundred years old, (laughter) but it -- you know, it -- there's no guarantees in anything. But the best intentions and best efforts have been made to create a continuum in time.

Christina McLean: And what are some of your objectives of what you would like to complete during your tenure in this position?

John Hogan: Well, I'd like --

Christina McLean: Certainly been a lot already. (laughs)

John Hogan: Yeah, and I would like to basically have good photo documentation and good samples and perhaps a video of each of the processes so that it -- the representative -- a stable, representative resource. And we've only started some of that. So, basically, I've been working more on the archiving aspect of it and we have done not as much with that. So, that's my goal. And, I mean, it would be the goal of anyone that was going to be in this position. It's not so ego-centric. It's really, like -- it's just a practical thing. That's something that needs to be accomplished. We have some of it but not all of it. And some of it is -- again, it is nuanced and it is interpretive. So, the -- you know, it's -- there's the -- this -- it's, like, what's enough information and what's too much?

Christina McLean: Yeah.

John Hogan: You know, you asked earlier about, you know, do we show people photographs of what the piece looked like before. So, if I explain the process -- how do I explain the process and make a sample of it so that people get the idea that that's the range but that's not -- doesn't have to be exactly that? So, that I haven't quite fine-tuned as much as I would like as an idea. But that is something that I --

[01:20:42]

Christina McLean: So (inaudible) (laughs)

John Hogan: -- I hope to address, that I hope to address or whoever would replace me would address properly so that that was intact and here. And the ongoing archiving is simply -- that's just another aspect of the job. But the -- to get documentation that represents and will be a resource but not a control, I think that that's the -- that really fine line between -- it's, like, again, I don't want the piece to look just like that photograph. That was so-and-so's version but it should be similar to that. So, that's more or less where my benchmark is in my head.

Christina McLean: I want to toss you a couple questions about installing the *Wall Drawings* because you've had so much experience with it. Can you tell me about when you only install a part of a *Wall Drawing* and how the decisions happen to add something to fit the proportion of the wall or subtract something to fit those proportions?

John Hogan: Well, many of the wall drawings have components. So, because of the work is -- was serial in nature. So, if it was a geometric figure, Sol sort of had this repertoire of traditional geometric figures. And if he had the space, he would install -- we would install all those figures. But he would say, "Oh, well, these are all these geometric figures done on a black wall with a white crayon but we only have enough room for four of the figures. But the next time we are in -- next time we show this, there's room for the others." So, they are standalone figures but they are part of one drawing, so -- and then, there are other drawings where it's -- it has to be all of those figures. So, again, artist intention: he said it this way, that's [all?] we got to work with.

Christina McLean: Yeah.

John Hogan: So, he said, "Yes, this can be done -- just this part. Or this could be done just this part. This can be done, has to have all these parts." So, it really is centric to each of the individual works with -- obviously, there are proportional relationships with some of the works. A lot of them are text-based or have no -- it doesn't matter what the wall is. Or there is a fixed dimension of where -- you know, the drawing series is traditionally done on these four foot square -- so, there are some things that are, like, set in stone. That has to be a 96-inch square that that's based on. But then, there are other things like the ink drawings where they're isometric figures, where Sol said the figure has to be two-thirds the height of the wall. So, that's a -- and then it's indicated in the diagram, so you have that. So, if the wall doesn't -- it proportionally doesn't allow for that, that it's two-thirds, then you can't do it on that wall.

Christina McLean: Okay.

John Hogan: And then, there are drawings that are expandable and contractible. Obviously, there are some drawings that are pretty centric to the original locations and really, when we worked on the Catalogue Raisonné, there's a couple of drawings where we just said this really just can't be done any other way. So, there are -- so, for example, the piece that's at the U.S. Mission to the U.N., it's based on a cylinder. It has to be a cylinder. Can't be a flat wall. There's a -- the Bonnefantenmuseum has a version similar that's in black and white. Again, it's a dome. Has to be on a dome. But for the most part, the work is expandable and contractible. You know, that was one of -- as long as the proportional aspects of it are possible, it's fine. You know, a lot of the work is, you know, again, a wall divided into four equal parts. (laughter) It's, like, doesn't matter how big it is, you know? But, yes, there are drawings that have proportional relationships, have multiple figures that, you know, have to go side by side. They can't go one here, go one there. But for the most part, the work is variable and Sol, you know, intended it from that perspective from the get-go.

[01:25:44]

Christina McLean: And then, I'm wondering a bit about certain qualities of lines, specifically when the concept says a curvy line, a wavy line. (laughs)

John Hogan: That gets a little bit more complicated. So, yes, there's a repertoire of straight lines, not straight lines.

Christina McLean: Irregular lines? (laughs)

John Hogan: Irregular lines, broken lines. So, it's sort of his -- like, the notes of his compositions. And again, this is something that sort of gets passed on verbally. So, when Sol was alive, you know, a straight line is a straight line. You draw it with a ruler. I mean, just -- that's just it.

Christina McLean: That [one?]? (laughs)

John Hogan: That's just simple. A not straight line, there's certainly -- the language is a little bit vague but the intention was that it's simply a line that's drawn freehand. A wavy line is a wavy line. A broken line is one that's dotted. And then, sort of, again, the dotted line does go back to traditional architectural reference. So, when you render what's called an invisible line in an architectural plan, it's a dotted line, so it has to be consistent, so -- and certainly, within the research of the Catalogue Raisonné, we had some issues of -- well, is that a wavy line or is that a, you know --

Christina McLean: When that comes down to --

John Hogan: -- is --

Christina McLean: -- categorizing -- (laughs)

John Hogan: -- right, right. So, there's a little bit of that. But for the most part, there -- we just had a -- there's a piece that just was installed as an early drawing. It just got installed in L.A. at MOCA and it's not straight lines. And I reminded the person who's doing the drawing to make sure he told people who were doing it that it's not curlicues.

Christina McLean: Yeah.

John Hogan: You know, it's simply this free -- casual freehand line that's not drawn with a ruler. So --

Christina McLean: Those are different.

John Hogan: -- those are things that are not necessarily readily known or available to the general public by looking at the Catalogue Raisonné but they are our reference within -- internal reference. So, the same way --

Christina McLean: They're established internally.

John Hogan: Right. So, essentially, that's relative to this notion of what it would be here with this concept of materials -- would also be -- these are how these processes work or this is what this means when it's -- says that it's a not straight line, it means that it's done this way. If it's a broken line, it means that it's done this way. So, essentially, it would become sort of a materials and methods reference. Again, there's only, you know, four or five different processes, so it's not particularly complicated. But it does -- it is information that is essential. You know, I have -- there are drawings that -- Sol was asked to simply be in an exhibition and perhaps they didn't have a budget. And so, you know, he said, "Well, here's a -- here's the text for the piece. Just tell the local artist to do it." And sometimes, they got it, sometimes they didn't. So, there are things -- there was, like, a -- you know, draw a not straight line across the top of the wall and then try to copy it. It's, like, you know, sometimes that became sort of insane and then sometimes it -- you know, it's fine. But so when we do -- occasionally do those kinds of pieces, again, where there -- nobody from the studio is going, we do have a conversation with the people who are going to install it, you know, via the phone or an email or, you know, whatever and say what this means is this is how the line is drawn. So, there is a little bit of that. But, again, it's more of an internal resource than a -- one that if you simply read the Catalogue Raisonné, it's not necessarily readily understandable. But that was, you know, that was how he said it, so that's what we say. And I think everybody who's worked for him is very adamant that we don't try to put words into Sol's mouth. I think that sometimes with artists that are -- have passed away, the people who are speaking about their work or have knowledge of it sort of bring their own perspective and I think, for the most part, all the draftspersons that work for Sol, because of the respect that he had for us and subsequently, equally, he -- us for himself, that we don't try to put our spin, particularly, on it but to say, well, this is what he said. He didn't say anything more than that. I don't have any answer to it.

[01:31:06]

Christina McLean: And where do you see some of the challenges? Are there particular *Wall Drawing*s that the -- putting them in a different site becomes problematic? Is that something that's, I don't know, categorizable by its series or -- yeah.

John Hogan: Not so much. I mean, there are -- you know, there are always challenges. And then, certainly, you know, we always are trying to have the work look its best. You know, Sol at one point said, "Well, you know, we want it to look good, too." It wasn't that he negated that it was an aesthetic experience. It was an idea, but ultimately you wanted an aesthetic response from the viewer. So, there are, occasionally, situations where people are, like, "Well, you know, this is the wall." And we're, like, "Really? You know, can't you move -- there's a fire extinguisher in the middle of the wall. (laughter) Can you,

you know, could you move that to another location?" So, there are occasionally those kinds of things. And then, there are drawings that, you know, because they were done at such extraordinary scale, you know, it's, like, yeah, you really -- it's a problem to do it smaller. You -- this is a personal opinion.

Christina McLean: Yes.

John Hogan: This has got nothing to do with --

Christina McLean: Okay.

John Hogan: -- me speaking for the estate. I think MASS MoCA's extraordinary. I think that if Sol had been alive and he had come there, he would have said, "Oh, I really want to do something of a grand scale." There are -- all those walls are relatively similar in height, similar in -- and it's not that he didn't know that. I mean, there was a maquette that he worked on and made decisions about what drawings -- [when?] -- where they were placed. But I think ultimately, if he had lived and come to see it in completion, he would have said, "Oh, I really wanted -- that big staircase, could we do something in there as a big piece?" Because I think that's one of the things that's -- is rather extraordinary is that -- his ability to work at extreme scale with complete comfort and then at a miniscule size, equally. (laughter) I think that that is a shortcoming, not by intention and -- but it's simply the building didn't lend itself to that kind of a circumstance. And the only space that might have, you know, been okay for that was something that he -- didn't exist when he saw the building.

Christina McLean: Ah, okay.

John Hogan: So --

Christina McLean: How do you do that? (laughs)

John Hogan: [That -- you don't do?] --

Christina McLean: Yeah.

John Hogan: -- and, you know, so, I mean, yes, if the institution would say, "Oh, we want to sheetrock this entire wall [of?] the staircase, we could do a piece, huge piece." But that's -- again, that's a curatorial decision. It's got nothing to do with me. So, that's my thing, on a personal level. But I think that that's -- there are pieces that just function so much better visually at extraordinary scale that sometimes it's, like, oh, it's too bad it's that small. But, again, this is where Sol would say that's personal taste. Got nothing to do with the work.

Christina McLean: Yeah.

John Hogan: So, again, that -- I mean, that's why I really wanted to, you know, make it clear that it's my opinion, not his because he would say, "Well, that's what it looks like there."

Christina McLean: Yeah.

John Hogan: "If you like it better at that scale, that's your taste, (laughter) not my problem." And he was also very clear about that. I mean, and it's not to say that there weren't drawings that perhaps he liked better than others. But --

Christina McLean: Yeah. And what's kind of -- like, you had said you thought you'd -- this is cool for a while and you do it for a bit. What's continued you on this journey?

John Hogan: Well, it was a good living. (laughter) I got to travel, go to pretty much everywhere you -- most -- you know, pretty much every continent and every museum that you could possibly imagine and meet other artists and work in places I would never financially be able to go. I mean, certainly, yes, I could get to Paris and London and those places on my own. But, you know, suddenly to work in Paris for a month is really a different experience. So, certainly that was, you know, a carrot. (laughter) And also, it allowed me to work for, you know, concentrated periods of times and then have time for myself and my own studio practice. And it was very satisfying. It wasn't -- I had -- have occasionally worked for other artists at various points in my career where you were simply a hired hand and there was no personal -- you were, like -- you were supposed to be invisible. In Sol's case, you were not supposed to be invisible. You were part of this collaboration. So, certainly that is -- as an artist, that's pretty extraordinary. I mean, I know tons of people, like, "Well, I worked for" so-and-so for -- you know, "I got paid low and they -- I did half that painting," you know? And in Sol's case, that really wasn't the case. We were financially reasonably well paid for what we did. The work is demanding but we were paid well and it continued to be satisfying.

[01:36:59]

And it was also the actual -- you know, when you work on your own work, you have this ebb and flow of ideas and, you know, starts and stops and it's, like, oh, I've -- I'm sick of this painting. I don't know, you know? I'm -- don't know -- I don't know where it's going. I can't do anything in my studio until I finish this one. It's making me nuts. Working for Sol, it was, like, here's a new piece, here's a new place to do it, we're going to do it. So, there -- that satisfaction of hand-brain-eye was a continuum where the frustration that sometimes would -- again, I'm -- it's this personal -- it's not -- that frustration that might come from me being in my studio and, you know, being at an impasse simply does -- did not occur by working for him. It's, like, here's the piece, here's the work, here's the materials. Go do it. It gets done, it's there, wow. So, that part was great, you know? That part was great. Again, --

Christina McLean: Balance.

John Hogan: -- balance. There are, you know, people who worked doing Sol's work who did give up their own studio practices because they just did. For whatever personal reasons they did, they did. But there are also many of us that worked on Sol's work and continued our own studio practices but had that reliability of satisfaction that came -- even if we might be frustrated in our own studios, we were doing this other thing that was rewarding.

Christina McLean: Is there -- this has been great. (laughs) Is there anything else you'd like to add about --

John Hogan: No, not so much. I mean, I think it sort of covers it. I think everybody who worked for Sol has their own --

Christina McLean: Yeah, for sure.

John Hogan: -- thing. (laughter) But ultimately, I think pretty much everyone who worked for Sol who stayed working -- really was because of a personal respect and his generosity, his kindness towards us, his trust in us. You know, it wasn't just a job. It was a working relationship but he, you know, he respected us as artists. He -- you know, Sol's -- Sol traded artworks with us, you know? It was, like, oh, you know, [oh, I like?] -- you know, you -- and somebody would be in a show somewhere and he'd be, like, "I want that painting," you know, "what -- I'll trade you." And it was never about, "Well, Sol, that sells for -- your work sells for this and my work" -- (laughter) it was never that. He was, like, "I'll trade you."

Christina McLean: Yeah.

John Hogan: So, that's just, like, whoa, you know? That's pretty special. And that, you know, that ongoing idea that he -- and it didn't have to be work that was like his. It was, like, "I like that landscape painting a lot," you know? "I like that photograph a lot." It was -- you know, his collection, it -- you know, is of a scope that was extraordinary, you know? He -- and then, subsequently, he and his wife together collected -- made -- amassed this -- an extraordinary collection that were trades and purchases and things like that where -- Sol believed in art. You know, a lot of artists -- you know, if you go to their homes, all that's up are their own works. Sol had everybody's work up. There might have been, like, one piece of his up and there'll be -- (laughter) everywhere else, you know, every other inch of wall space was this friend's art, is that piece that he traded, that person's work. And they -- you know, there was a focus to the collection based on what he liked but it does -- it is not representational of conceptual work, it's not representational of [minimal?] work. It covers the full range of what was being produced while he was alive and also things that were, you know, historical by nature. So, I think that that, to me, is -- that's something special that maybe people don't -- will never know unless they -- you know, there have been some exhibitions --

[01:41:18]

Christina McLean: [They're a part of it?].

John Hogan: -- of his collection but it -- that's not an aspect of him that's necessarily known and I think that that's sort of an interesting thing, that he believed in artists and had a working relationship where he would trade with people. It was, like, yeah, my painting is $1,000 and yours is $10,000 and we're going to just trade." You know, that kind of thing. It was great.

Christina McLean: Awesome. That's --

John Hogan: Yeah.

Christina McLean: -- so special. (laughs)

John Hogan: Yeah.

Christina McLean: Yeah.

John Hogan: But no, I think that that pretty much covers it.

Christina McLean: Great. Well, thank you so much.

John Hogan: Thank you.

[01:42:23]

[END]