Artists Documentation Program

Video Interview Transcript

BRICE MARDEN

OCTOBER 1, 1992

Interviewed by:

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro,

Founding Director, Artists Documentation Program,

and Chief Conservator, The Menil Collection

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

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About the Artists Documentation Program

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

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

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

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ADP Archive
Menil Archives, The Menil Collection
1511 Branard Street
Houston, TX 77006
adparchive@menil.org

[Speakers (in order of appearance): Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Founding Director, Artists Documentation Program; Chief Conservator, The Menil Collection; Brice Marden, Artist; Paul Winkler, Director, The Menil Collection; Elizabeth Lunning, Conservator of Works on Paper, The Menil Collection.]

[BEGIN RECORDING]

[00:00:43]

CM-U: Today is October 1, 1992, and this is the fourth in our interviews--the Mellon interviews with artists. Today we are talking with Brice Marden very specifically about a group of work here at the Menil Collection called *The Seasons* [1974-75, The Menil Collection, Houston]. This is special to me, because this is my particular research interest in monochromatic work, and it's very special that Brice Marden is our first painter. So far, we've only dealt with sculptors.

CM-U: The intent of the discussion, really, is to talk about the creation of *Seasons*, and to talk about their physicality in an attempt to understand what might be its subsequent aging. That's important for us because future preservation is dependent on it. It's not so much a question of just what the materials and techniques are, although that's something I am going to be interested in asking you; but it's more how those materials and techniques participated in creating the essence of the work; and that in the end is what we should strive to restore.

[00:01:44]

CM-U: So I'd like to start with just sort of asking you how the works came about. Were you commissioned – these were done for the exhibition at Rice, "Marden, Novros, and Rothko," in '75 ["Marden, Novros, Rothko: Painting in the Age of Actuality," April 18-May 31, 1975, Rice Museum, Rice University]?

Brice Marden: Yes. Yes. Yes.

CM-U: And were you commissioned to do these specifically for that exhibition? Or were you already working on them?

Brice Marden: I don't remember.

CM-U: Okay. (laughter) I couldn't find any answer to that either.

Brice Marden: When we knew the situation. You know, knew that there were the specific spaces being designed for the pieces…

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Brice Marden: …I mean, David Novros, his ideas are much more site specific than mine.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: I just figured, "Well, there's a big space, and I'll do a big painting." And this is something I had in mind to do, and it sort of all fit together to do it for this situation. I ran into my usual time problems because everything always takes much longer than I thought it would. So, do you want me to just run through the general…

CM-U: Yeah. Sure. At this point…

Brice Marden: You know, starting, I had at this point a big interest in Roman wall painting. And I also had ideas about enlivening the space – the spatial situations in my paintings, you know, which up to that point were like these monochromatic panel paintings. And so I was working, thinking mostly in the context of this specific exhibition. These paintings were able to go on a wall, you know, and then with these other two walls coming out.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: You know, it was hanging these paintings on the side walls so that they read in a kind of cyclical situation. But really what I wanted to do was to have this be a painting that stood on its own eventually, you know.

CM-U: Were these [referring to *The Seasons – Small Version*, 1974-75, The Menil Collection, Houston] conceived as studies for this painting? The wax [sounds like]…

Brice Marden: Yeah. And the drawings were done just to familiarize myself with proportions of the shapes.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: But I had these going – what (points at paintings on wall) – How did it go? I forget how this – there was an order.

CM-U: You had two on each…

Brice Marden: Yeah. Two on each side. So it would have gone – winter – wait, no – It would be the two – I mean, it was a continuation, so it went through – this would be autumn, winter, spring, summer – autumn, winter, spring, summer…

CM-U: I see. So they were regarded as a context [sounds like]. I see.

Brice Marden: Yeah. But really, when I worked them, I was really pushing it because there seemed to be a time – there was this time problem. So what I would do was, I would put a coat on the big painting. I'd put a coat on the big painting, and then work through the big painting in – you know, the panels in relation to each other. And then make a correction of the original color on the small painting.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And so I was working these paintings (points at small paintings) side by side. These panels (points at large paintings) side by side. So I'd make the correction here, and then, when I did the next color, I would make the correction of this color on this panel. So I was really – instead of, like – I don't know, I forget how many layers there are on here; but, you know, instead of having eight layers, there's four layers here, there's four layers here.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: So these were sort of surrogates, and they were being, you know, worked in direct relation to the bigger painting. So they weren't studies per se. I didn't do this to figure out what I'm doing there.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: I was figuring them both out as I was working. But this is the one that sort of got left over. You know, this went to a certain point; and then this went to a point beyond it. And then one of the considerations in the exhibition was – I don't know if it was commissioned; it was purchased before – but that after the exhibition I would be able to work on the painting more.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: Because I didn't feel that this was really fully resolved, and I wanted this to be able to stand on its own; and I thought it was working – in the context of the exhibition, it was working with these other paintings.

CM-U: Right. I see.

Brice Marden: But I really wanted to take this further.

[00:07:02]

CM-U: Can I just ask you some questions about that?

Brice Marden: Um-hum.

CM-U: Are these the colors, then, that were on the large panels at the time of the exhibition?

Brice Marden: No. No.

CM-U: No?

Brice Marden: No, these were up to one point, and this was a point beyond…

CM-U: And then you continued a point beyond on those?

Brice Marden: Yeah.

CM-U: When we were comparing the graphite studies to the oil/wax pieces, we noticed the proportions of these (points toward graphite studies), the one and two here, were akin to the finished paintings, and the proportions of those drawings…

Brice Marden: …of those, yeah.

CM-U: Right. So that was part of where you were working out the shape, I guess, or size?

Brice Marden: Yeah. I mean, these (points toward graphite drawings) came before I started painting.

CM-U: Um-hum. Is there – for some reason, when they entered this collection, they entered it as A, B, C, and D. That's not something – was that – is that just a clerical A, B, C, and D? Or did you see them in a certain order?

Brice Marden: I think it probably had more to do with how – the order they were made in. They were probably all made at the same time, but they were really thought of as, "This is the first, second, third…"

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Brice Marden: So it directly relates – oh thank you (accepts cup handed to him by Menil Collection Director Paul Winkler) – the A, B, C, D relates to how I was thinking about them.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: I mean, it's not just clerical.

CM-U: Do you remember – the difference in proportion, which is slight between them but does exist; there's a ratio difference between the studies and the final panels…

Brice Marden: Yeah. Yeah.

CM-U: Were you thinking of trying to work it out in one way? But you said you were painting these all at once, so then that was an intentional difference?

Brice Marden: No, these were – I mean, what these are, these are on *Soji* [sounds like, the artist may be saying *Shoji*] screens, right?

CM-U: On paper. And then matted on paper again.

Brice Marden: Yeah. They are – so it's a standard size sheet of Arches…

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: …*Torchon* [rough], 300 pound paper. Mounted on this screen made to fit that size of paper. That piece of paper.

CM-U: I see.

Brice Marden: So that's just _____ [phrase inaudible] – and they are the same sizes as these pieces of paper. It's the same paper as the drawings are on.

CM-U: I see. Okay. Great. That answers – that helps answer that.

[00:09:22]

Brice Marden: And these were – this was a very specifically worked out shape. I mean, I have a whole book which is now in the – the book was broken up, and there are separate drawings – it's a group of drawings that's in the something or other cabinet in Vienna. What's the…

Woman: The Albertina?

Brice Marden: Yeah, the Albertina. Yeah. And it's called the *Shape Book* [1973-75, Graphische Sammlung, Albertina, Vienna], and they were freehand drawings. What they were were freehand drawings, and then, when I finished the drawing, I would start with a shape and then refine it by straightening the edges and making it taller, wider, this and that. And then I would do that drawing, and then on the next page I measured the final rectangle and put that on the page next to it. And so the drawings are each like little diptychs, you know.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And I forget – there's about – I forget how many of them there were. But this _____ [word inaudible]. I forget what the shape is. It's a pretty standard measurement. But I really worked it out in those drawings. And that was specifically for the big painting.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And this was just done on the pieces of paper. It was like a convenience or something because Ed Finnegan, who was my frame maker at the time, he made these screens for me.

CM-U: Good. I'm glad we clarified that because I was going to _____ [phrase inaudible].

Brice Marden: There's another painting that's done on the same kind of screens.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: It's a long study for the *Thira* [1979-80, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou] painting that [collector Michael] Ovitz owns in L.A. I forget the title, but it's done on the same kind of screen, except those screens are butted together.

[00:11:18]

CM-U: Um-hum. I do want to ask you about the spatial – the interval – space interval between the panels. But before I do that, I read that this was the largest painting that you'd done up to this point.

Brice Marden: Yeah, I think so.

CM-U: And so – but again, it was something of working out – you had already worked out your dimensions, and then it was just going to a larger format. When the paintings were shown at the Rice Museum, they had an interval – when this painting was shown, it had an interval of three inches between each painting. And that matches up with the differential in your drawings. Was there – I mean, obviously it was intentional. Was there some significance in that number relation, or was it just…

Brice Marden: No.

CM-U: And how about – of these, I don't remember any notation of spatial distance between the oil studies.

Brice Marden: No, it doesn't seem to work out in that either. I mean, those – that, I think, that drawing is worked out the way that – that's the way they were hung originally…

CM-U: At Rice.

Brice Marden: …in the installation, you know.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: But I don't think I had really worked out a specific distance between these.

CM-U: Uh-huh. Was this just dictated more by the space that you were given at Rice, or do you see this three-inch interval between the panels as…

Brice Marden: It really had to do with the overall size of the whole piece.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: I mean, it might have had something to do with the size at Rice; but I think – I mean, I think I worked this in the studio with this interval, rather than getting them down to Rice and deciding on the space at that point.

CM-U: Um-hum. That certainly is what the drawing seems to indicate.

Paul Winkler: _____ [phrase inaudible].

CM-U: Paul, do you want to go to the microphone just so we can hear…

Paul Winkler: Apparently there was a big discussion about the relationship between wall and panel, and the dynamics…

Brice Marden: Yeah.

Paul Winkler: …of your proportioning.

Brice Marden: Well, that was also one of these Roman wall painting things, you know, where they have these borders and…

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: So that was some part of the thought. I mean, these could have been butted together…

CM-U: Well, that was my next…

Brice Marden: …but I wanted them – wanted to keep them separate. Because each one is, you know, in terms of subject matter, specific unto itself; but then they all have to be together, you know.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: Because you hear it referred to one, you know, a panel as a painting; but this is just one painting.

CM-U: One painting. Right. Sheldon Nodelman makes, of course, a very eloquent point about that in his catalogue [*Marden, Novros, Rothko: Painting in the Age of Actuality*] about how they are individual visual unities, and yet they are meant, given their distance, to be seen also as a whole.

Brice Marden: Yeah.

[00:14:02]

CM-U: I would like to talk now a little bit about the paintings themselves. What you remember in terms of just – this is just sort of the rote "materials and techniques" questions. Stretchers. Did you paint them in New York?

Brice Marden: Yes.

CM-U: I'm assuming you painted them in New York. And the stretchers, you had made, or…

Brice Marden: Yeah. I forget who made them, but…

CM-U: All right.

Brice Marden: …they were made by probably some artist stretcher maker.

(laughter)

CM-U: All right. Who needed to make some money, right?

Brice Marden: David Paul was making them for a while. I don't know if he was doing it around that time. Because I'm trying to remember where these were painted. What studio they were painted in. Whether it was – it must have been Grand Street. What year are they?

CM-U: Seventy-four. Seventy-five. The show opened April '75 here.

Brice Marden: I would think they were done in Grand Street. So that probably would have been David Paul who made the stretchers. You know, he was a sculptor who made stretchers.

CM-U: Um-hum. And they are _____ [phrase inaudible] stretchers.

Brice Marden: But the thing about the stretchers with David. My – I was very specific about the depth of the stretcher.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: There was a specific measurement. I forget what it is, but they had to be that. And it was before I – obviously, before I got into the thing about – see, you run into this problem when you are applying the paint, you know, of bumping into the stretcher.

CM-U: Um-hum. Well, it is a problem. I mean, it is a problem because, as you apply the paint, it does press against the stretcher, and you often end up with these creases.

Brice Marden: Yeah.

CM-U: And I know artists have tried different ways of resolving that, but that is just one of the – I assume these are painted in a vertical format.

Brice Marden: Yeah. They are painted leaning against the wall.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: I have them on blocks. On 2x4 wooden blocks.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And…

CM-U: They are painted on cotton duck?

Brice Marden: Yeah.

CM-U: Yeah. That's what it seems – or it looks that way to me.

Brice Marden: Yeah, these are painted on cotton duck. I sized them and primed them.

CM-U: You did that yourself?

Brice Marden: Myself. Yeah.

CM-U: Was there anything in particular about that sizing and priming that you were looking for?

Brice Marden: No. I mean, I was still doing it until then. I think the next – there's a bunch of things after this that I let somebody else do it, and it just really – they put two coats of sizing on there, which started cracking.

CM-U: Yeah. It makes a difference [sounds like] – I mean, it's the most important step.

Brice Marden: Yeah.

CM-U: Yeah.

Brice Marden: And I had studied technical painting with this guy Reed Kay at Boston University, who really knew his stuff.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Brice Marden: And now I didn't feel I knew my stuff that well, but, I mean, I'm no technical freak. You know, I'm not really into it. But I knew how to size it.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And these are tricky because, you know, the cotton is very absorbent…

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: …and you have to be able to get it on right. And then I always considered the priming, you know, the lead white priming, to be the beginning stage of the painting.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And so I felt that it was important that I do it. I mean, it was my hand that was involved. And then bringing it right up from the bottom, you know. It was always my hand.

CM-U: It's also incredibly important visually, in trying to – in preparing, and just doing simulations of this oil/wax mixture – in my simulations I found that the fabric was playing much too big a part in trying to do this. And I realized that your ground must have been such that you were minimizing, trying to minimize that play of the fabric.

Brice Marden: Yeah. I mean – 'cause I would prime, and then it dried, and then I would sand it, and then prime it.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: I don't know. I'd have to look at these more closely. I can't remember how many layers. It was at least two.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: It was double front. I think that's right. I mean, I don't know – you know, maybe these have been gessoed, but I doubt it.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Brice Marden: You know. I mean, with an acrylic gesso. But I don't think I did that.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: If we looked at the back, with it turned over…

CM-U: Right. Take a better look at it.

[00:18:36]

CM-U: Then came the application of the wax/oil mixture.

Brice Marden: Yeah.

CM-U: And you started in layering. Can you talk a little bit about that? I mean, do you wait – were you waiting in between layerings? Was this multi? Explain kind of the process of the layering. Was this wet into wet, or did you let it dry _____ [phrase inaudible]?

Brice Marden: No, no.

CM-U: I mean…

Brice Marden: The mixture of wax – I kept the mixture of wax and turpentine in a double boiler on a hot plate on the palette.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: The mixture was one part wax to – one part wax to, I think, four parts turpentine.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And that would vary from, like, four parts to seven parts. Because what would happen was, sometimes, when you were heating it – you are constantly heating it – there is evaporation. So sometimes you just add more turpentine to it.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: Because then the mixture got much too – kind of gunky, too thick, and…

CM-U: Right. This was just beeswax you were using?

Brice Marden: Yeah. It was just beeswax and turpentine. There is no Damar. There is nothing else added. And then I mixed the oil paint and would just add that mixture as a thinner, or a medium.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: So I always – instead of calling these encaustic, I would just say, "They are oil and wax."

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: Because there is no burning in process. I mean, in encaustic, you go back afterwards, and you reheat it so that it adheres to the layer. And I always figured there was enough oil so they would be adhering by themselves and didn't need that fusion. There has been that problem technically where they – you know, parts would pop up. Layers pop up. They don't adhere.

CM-U: We haven't had that on these at all.

Brice Marden: Yeah. I mean, it has happened with them.

[00:20:40]

Brice Marden: And so then I would just paint a coat on, and I would put it on with the brush, and then rework it with the knife.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And on these, I was very conscious – it's also worked out in the drawings of a vertical, a long vertical stroke going from the top to the bottom. And it had – I was thinking it had something to do with the Roman painting, but it also had to do with, like, trying to open the space up in the paintings.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And it's there, and you can see it. If you sit one on the floor and look up, and in the right kind of light. But it was like – it was a *very* important part of painting the things, you know.

CM-U: Absolutely.

Brice Marden: So I would have to make this long vertical stroke, you know. And then at the top are these spatula marks.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: You know, they start at the top and then go – and they are sort of like this measure, that's the top of the stroke. And then by the time you get to the bottom, it's looser and I was still keeping the bottoms open on these, so you had some reference to the layering.

CM-U: How wide a spatula were you using?

Brice Marden: It was like a cooking spatula, you know, like a – you know, like they…

CM-U: You mean that type? A flip…

Brice Marden: Yeah, a flip thing. It's not one that was bent like that. It was a straight…

CM-U: And so you…

Brice Marden: And I would hold it. And I would hold out my finger (holds out finger) – I always kind of liked the idea 'cause, you know, in the Renaissance paintings, you know, with the angel was always holding his finger…

(laughter)

CM-U: It's great…

Brice Marden: …which is – you know, that's the presence of God, you know.

CM-U: Right. The power, right…

Brice Marden: And so I always thought – and I was like really basically like drawing it like that, with the finger. I mean, 'cause the finger is pressing on the spatula like this. (makes gestures with hands)

CM-U: Oh, I see.

Brice Marden: You are going down like that. You really – it's all coming out through the finger. And you have to keep reworking it and reworking it, going back, across. And then as you work it, and as the wax starts setting up, every time you make a stroke, it gets matte-er.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: The more you work it, the matte-er it gets. And then also there's variations in the oil content of the oil paint…

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: …like, there is much more oil in, say, a yellow than there is in a green, or you know. So there's all those kind of variations, which are just sort of more intuitively dealt with, you know.

CM-U: Um-hum.

[00:23:25]

CM-U: Were you painting these in artificial light or in daylight in your studio?

Brice Marden: Artificial light.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Brice Marden: I was working on them at night.

CM-U: Working on them at night? What was the impetus in adding the wax, to begin with, in the oil paint?

Brice Marden: That originally came about because when I first started doing monochromatic paintings, there was an element of hostility involved. And in a way, you are trying to make a painting that people couldn't see. And I was putting a lot of Damar, a lot of oil, into a highly reflective surface.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: So where you had the most – in one way, a very simple, obvious surface, in another way, it was a very complicated surface…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: …'cause it was a highly worked, and lots of little marks and scratches through, you know – I mean, I would paint a darker color underneath, and the lighter on top, so you have these little dark – this was in the early ones.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And they were still all oil. But I worked those for a while, and then I became much more interested in the possibilities of variations of grays. You know, more color variation. And so I wanted it so you could see it, instead of having this bright, reflective surface.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And I tried putting a lot of turpentine in, but it was difficult to control. You would still get these shiny spots, and you never knew what was going to dry out and what wasn't. What was going to remain. And someone suggested – well, Harvey Quaytman, who I knew knew elaborate technique [sounds like] because he was in Boston, too, and they seem to teach a lot of technique in Boston. He was at the Museum School. And he suggested I use wax. He had been using wax. He said, "Just add beeswax." So I did. I did it on this one painting called *Wax 1*, and it seemed okay to me; so I just kept using it. It evolved, in a sense; but it was just pretty basic.

CM-U: What's interesting to me, the way you used it, by putting it into the paint. Into the oil – it's predominantly oil paint, but the wax gives you a quality, both a physicality and a matte-ness that seem to…

Brice Marden: Yeah.

CM-U: …yeah, a building up with the layers, which is so beautiful.

[00:25:53]

CM-U: One of the – I mean – There are many things that amaze me and move me about the paintings, but just in terms of the surface, is that there are marks that indicate your movement and the complexity of it, but we don't see this incredible overlapping of the spatula as it came down. I mean, it's just an amazingly flat surface that you were able to achieve.

Brice Marden: Well, I mean it's – yeah, they are not like grooves. Or it is not sort of like a plowed surface. I mean, it was a spatula, and you are trying to keep it flat. And then every – so if you ran down – see, if you went down, you know, the outer rounded edge of the spatula was pressed against it…

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: …but then when you did the next stroke, you erased that.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: But, you know, with the next stroke. Because the inside surface is somewhat irregular.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: So, but then the next stroke, you went back down and straightened it. And then you might go all the way over till you get to the edge, and then at the edge, I went in with a smaller knife and just went down and just _____ [phrase inaudible]. 'Cause with the small knife, I could run my…

CM-U: Do you want to…

Brice Marden: …go like this. (stands up and walks over to painting) I could just…

Brice Marden: You could hold it and just run your finger. (demonstrates running his finger down painting's surface) You know, keep your finger on the side…

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: …you know, of the canvas, and just go right down like that so you had a straight line. So you could correct it.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: But then if it was too far off, you know, you'd have to go back and go over the whole thing again. But even when you put the paint on, when you first put it on, you know, with the brush, then you have to work it over with the knife so you work the whole surface. I mean, one of the things about these things is that, you know, all this attention – you know what I mean, there's all this attention to the surface because, I mean, it's worked minutely over the whole thing to get it all – first you've got to get it all – you have to sort of make sure all the – I mean, it takes about how many brush loads of paint to cover the whole thing.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And I always work sort of from top to bottom. And, you know, I always had this thing about bringing it down, and then sort of closing it out, you know. It's like, when you're painting yourself into a corner, when you're painting the floor, you know. You make sure…

CM-U: A little safe way [sounds like]…

Brice Marden: …you get out. And I never painted, finished the bottom and left things open up here. It was like just a superstition or something. It wasn't like a working ritual. Yes, so then when you first put it on, then you had to start smoothing it all out. So you'd want it kind of all over the surface. And then you had to go back in with a smaller knife and pick out all the little pieces of dirt and stuff.

CM-U: Yeah.

Brice Marden: Because there's lots of stuff in the mixture, and in the paint, you know.

CM-U: Right. I've noticed that.

Brice Marden: You have a pile of paint on the palette, and you don't work for a couple of days, and there's a skin on it. And then you take the skin off, and you remix it. So then you have to pick a lot of that out. But you really do – I mean, it does come out sort of smooth.

CM-U: It does.

[00:29:19]

CM-U: The other thing I wanted to ask you about were the edges. I mean, is this just sort of a first layer that you just put on, just sort of color… And I notice you painted the sides, and just – the tops and bottoms are just the raw canvas.

Brice Marden: Well, you would have – there would be excess, you know. And on this, I started painting around the edges 'cause I didn't want to have too much visual action on the sides of the painting. You are getting it more in the little ones, in the studies, you know.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: But I thought it would be too distracting if you are going to have this space (gestures toward interval between panels) to have it like a lot of color. So what I would do is, after I'd get the front done, I would do the sides. And I would kind of scrape it, scrape off any kind of excess, and then spread it out. So it's painted…

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: …but it's painted in a different way. But it's painted with the overall painting in mind, you know.

CM-U: It also does something in setting out the frontal surface. I mean, there is a distinction there.

Brice Marden: Yeah.

CM-U: And I like the way it really sets that.

Brice Marden: And also I didn't want it to, like, build up so the outer edge got kind of bumpy.

CM-U: Yeah, I've seen that, and that's easy to do. The bumps. That's another thing that's so impressive is how straight and tight the edges are.

Brice Marden: And then usually I would have to, you know, after I scraped it, then I'd have to usually go over it with my thumb to – 'cause there's usually a white edge.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And then I'd have to – you still get a lot of this (points to edge of painting). But you can see some places where I've gone…

CM-U: So you're saying those thumbprints are yours?

Brice Marden: Yup.

(laughter)

CM-U: Okay. Actually these are quite good…

Brice Marden: The shiny ones aren't.

CM-U: They are later additions, right? That's actually an issue. And fortunately it's not so much an issue on these. These have been handled well enough with handling frames and so on.

Paul Winkler: Did you work up all four colors at the same time, Brice?

Brice Marden: Well, I would put a color on here, and then go to this color, and then go to this color, and then go to this color. And then go back.

Paul Winkler: Right.

Brice Marden: You know. Yeah.

CM-U: We were just looking, and I was just commenting about the markings, which to me are – have they changed much, do you think?

Brice Marden: No.

CM-U: No?

Brice Marden: I mean, I remember this being up here (points to top of gray panel and kind of – But another thing is, you know, in working them – I forget what I was doing. I had some sort of stepladder or something I would be up on to start at the top, and then I would have to step off of it. And so it became sort of an elaborate kind of dance thing, you know [sounds like]. And then, plus, you're pushing against the stretchers, 'cause you see this buildup here.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: And, I mean, there's a lot of – because as the wax gets harder and starts setting up, you have to press harder. And so that's where you start getting all the – you are pressing into the chassis, you know.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: And so you would have to, like, have your stroke going, and then somehow be pushing out from the back so that the canvas wasn't getting too – so it was a weird – I might have had cloths or something on the stretchers behind this, or sometimes I used foam rubber strips.

CM-U: Uh-huh. I think I read somewhere that you are using foam core. Is this right? That you put foam core – now…

Brice Marden: Yeah, now I put foam core behind it, yeah.

CM-U: Are you putting foam core?

[00:33:07]

CM-U: You know, this might interest you. We deal with this in terms of restoring or preserving these works as well. And we've been developing a system where we use a clear piece of fiberglass, epoxy-impregnated fiberglass, that we stretch over – we infuse it with fiberglass, and we stretch it over the stretcher, and then we lay the canvas on top. So that there is something hard between the stretcher and the surface of the painting, but the stretcher can still be keyed out, because it's attached with the cloth.

Brice Marden: Uh-huh.

CM-U: I can show it to you downstairs in the conservation studio. Which helps this exact problem because in your paintings – and it is something that I want to

address particularly – as the stretcher bars become more apparent through aging, which they'll do, aside from just…

Brice Marden: Um-hum.

CM-U: …and this is the technique. But they'll also become more apparent through aging from air flow and different problems.

Brice Marden: Um-hum.

CM-U: It's desirable to eliminate – to have an interface between the paint layer and the stretcher.

Brice Marden: Um-hum. Um-hum.

CM-U: And so we've been playing with different ways of doing that. And I don't know. I've hesitated on these, this painting, because I don't really want to get into it. You have to undo it and restretch it, and so I didn't really want to get into that.

Brice Marden: And if you put something on, it makes – and there is a very – I mean, this is a very tight relationship…

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: …to the edge of the stretcher.

CM-U: That's why I haven't done it. And also, we've worked – the stretchers were split at one time, in the eighties, just before they went to *Grand Palais*; and they had been corrected with bolts screwed through them.

Brice Marden: Um-hum.

CM-U: And I don't know if this was done here subsequent to your participation or not. Anyway, the bolts, where you can particularly see it on this one, the bolts were knocking circles when they were actually hitting the paint layer.

Brice Marden: Um-hum.

CM-U: And so we took the bolts out and reglued the bricks, and we put metal plates that were screwed into the stretchers from the sides to eliminate anything uneven on the surface.

Brice Marden: Um-hum.

CM-U: And we haven't had a problem. So I think that's more the way to go.

[00:35:14]

CM-U: Um, let's talk a little bit about this, the importance of the straight edge and the depth of the stretcher. I mean, you alluded to the importance of the depth of the stretcher.

Brice Marden: Um-hum.

CM-U: Had you been working on different, narrower stretchers, or how did you do it?

Brice Marden: No, it had evolved. I don't know how it evolved. I might have had some stretchers that – I mean, in the early things, I was just painting on other people's stretchers.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: But a certain thickness. Because a big issue at the time was Frank Stella's – the thickness of his stretchers.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: And you know, does the thing become an object? I mean, if you make a – you know, it starts being a box on a wall with a painting in front of it, or across the front, you know. And, I mean, I didn't want them to be objects; but then also I wanted it to have a kind of heft to it.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: So it was worked out. And it's always still a thing – you have to go up and measure. And whenever I'm ordering stretchers, how thick they should be.

CM-U: It's critical. I mean, it's very…

Brice Marden: Yeah.

CM-U: …the slightest difference can…

Brice Marden: Well, see, any – I mean, because it's all intuitive. I'm an intuitive painter, you know. So, like, any kind of decision about the color, you know, and you can say, "Well, it has to be, you know, more alizarin," so you go back and put more alizarin. And you put it up. And then, you know, if you get the whole thing covered, and it isn't right, you either, you know, you let it dry, or you just take it off. And then, you know, you let it dry, and you go over it. And it's all, you know, just by the look of it. And so – but then if, you know, you are working any number of variables with intuitive decision; and eventually it all – it kind of works out. I mean, that's form, you know, to have it work out so that it has form. So, you know, if it's in any way considered, you know, I mean, it just has to work out that way. And, you know, I've seen it. I've seen paintings relined.

CM-U: Your paintings? Really?

Brice Marden: Yeah. Be relined, and they have a kind of funny feeling around the edge because it – you know, it has that stuff underneath it added.

CM-U: Absolutely.

Brice Marden: Or they build new stretchers and stuff like that.

CM-U: I think it's important to keep the original stretchers. That's why I like this system of putting something _____ [word inaudible] – we take – reusing the original stretcher with this _____ [word inaudible].

Brice Marden: Um-hum.

CM-U: But I don't know if it would work here. Anyway.

[00:37:52]

Brice Marden: Well, yeah, because you have this thing. Because also, like, these marks, you know, really directly relate to what's behind it, you know. And you also, you know, like – I don't know. It's really not important to the viewing of the painting, but in thinking of the painting, you know, and the form of the

painting, it does become somewhat important. I mean, when you think – like, if the stretcher behind here wasn't the same as these marks, then something…

CM-U: I agree.

Brice Marden: …like, I mean you're talking about what happens down the line, you know, that's something people can't figure out.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: Or they say, "Why are these here? What do they…?" And in a way, this measure – I remember Jasper came to my studio. Johns came in the studio. And this is very early on. I was just beginning to paint the monochromatic paintings, you know. And I had some things against the wall. And he was looking at the back of one of the paintings. He said, "Well, very often the back is just as interesting as the front, you know." And it really is true. I mean, if you see, like, when a painting comes out of the studio, and you look at the back, I mean, now when I photograph the paintings, you know, for archival reasons, I always photograph the front and the back.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: Because there's a lot of writing on the back, and…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: But this, the chassis, is a piece of drawing. You know. And it's this kind of grid, which really relates to the painting and the thinking about the painting. So it's part of it all. I mean, it's a very obscure thing, but it's still part of it.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: I mean, I wouldn't say the painting is destroyed if you have to put a different stretcher on it, you know. But it's more…

CM-U: Right. But these marks are part of it…

Brice Marden: Yeah. I mean – 'cause lots of times you look at the backs of paintings, and they are just really dull and uninteresting.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And there isn't much thought in it, you know. And then others are – they are really very complicated. They are worked out in a very specific way. The artist has made all sorts of decisions about how they have to be. It's part of the thinking, you know?

CM-U: Uh-huh. You know, so many of the problems that we have with restoring monochromatic, the flat surface, even-surfaced paintings, is these, quote, "marks of the" – I was going to say "disfigurements" where the quote came from, but that's all wrong. It's the marks of the process that are part of the work. And it seems to me that we just – we need to accept that, even if they become – well, how do you feel about this? – if they become more evident as the picture ages. They could in fact begin to be a more active part of this overall _____ [word inaudible; might be *layer*].

Brice Marden: Yeah. Yeah.

CM-U: And that's where – I guess, that's where the issue becomes. But I wonder – I mean, I make a distinction in my mind between these that are marks of the process, as opposed to other kind of aging, either from vandals or other types of natural aging.

Brice Marden: Yeah. I mean, I like to think of it as patination.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: I mean, I have seen people go in and have their – you know, they wanted to have the painting fixed because there's a mark, you know. And what do you do? Do you reduce the whole surface to get rid of a mark? You know, what's better? And I have come, you know, in the long run, I've opted for, "Leave the marks." I mean, it's a drag. Some of the marks are pretty bad. They were like, you know, big circular crack things and stuff like that…

Brice Marden: I mean, there's one that's being worked on now that has a big thing right in the middle of the painting. Which totally destroys the painting. And the problem with the monochromatic things is, like, if you do have some sort of mark there, it can be against the intent of the painting. And I don't know. I mean, I don't know. Maybe my tendency now is to say, "Leave it. Let it patinate." Because they are pretty funky to begin with. These aren't pristine surfaces. They are never meant to be. They are carefully worked and everything, but they are not pristine. I mean, it has to do with the hand. You know, it's not like spray gunned or something where there is no hand…

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: …and it's a very fine surface. You know, where maybe they would have to. But then also – that can be replicated.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: When they go and – I mean, these have been, like I say, relined. You just lose – every time they get worked, the paintings go further away.

CM-U: It's true. It's true. I totally agree.

[00:42:45]

Brice Marden: And then you go to a museum, you know, and everything is behind glass anyhow.

CM-U: Not every museum. (laughs)

Brice Marden: No, no. I mean, yeah, I mean, it's interesting. I mean, you come to accept, you know, somewhat crude museum practices. I mean, they've got their reasons.

CM-U: Yeah.

Brice Marden: I'll never forget when – the first time I noticed in the Met – it wasn't too long ago that, you know, every painting, you know, was behind glass. And, I mean, in my time, they weren't. I mean, in the time that I know that they weren't all behind glass.

CM-U: How do you feel about that with your own work? I mean, if in order to exhibit it, if they have to glaze it, how does that sit with you? I mean, are they seeing your work?

Brice Marden: Well, I'm of two minds about it. One is, the important thing to me about the work is getting it made and seeing it, you know. So, in a way, when it goes out of the studio, it's in the world and has to kind of deal with that kind of thing. And I've seen them in plastic boxes, and people say, "Oh, this is absolutely horrible." They hold up, you know.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: I mean, it's terrible. They are better the other way. But if there's – I mean, you're going to get people marching through, and everyone feels they have to touch it.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: You know, why not put it behind a plastic box? But then – I mean, I'm – with [Robert] Ryman. Ryman was talking about someone having one of his paintings in a plastic box, and it was in their apartment. You know, the collector's apartment. He said, "Well, this is fine here. But if it ever goes out and you show it, you're going to have to take this thing off." But then the problem with these things is, this is an incredibly – the reason I stopped using the wax, because it's just too fragile a surface.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And there are these problems. I mean, it's wax. Wax never hardens. And I remember talking with some people, and they said, "Well, Julian Schnabel, he had some chemists that he consulted. And you can put additives in it that hardened it." But that seemed unnatural to me. I mean, that scared me more than having the marks on it.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: I mean, because of Reed Kay – you know, Reed Kay never trusted acrylics. He said, "Well, this is new. I mean, this is plastic. I mean, we want to know if something is going to last three hundred years." That's usually what you keep in mind…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: …is it going to last about three hundred years? I mean, it should be able to last longer, you know. But that seems to be a safe span.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: So then these are three hundred years later, they might get pretty beat up. You still have pretty much the intent.

CM-U: That's the issue, I guess, isn't it?

Brice Marden: Yeah.

CM-U: So how beat up can they get when the intent is really compromising?

Brice Marden: I mean, I think these can get beat up, and the idea of keeping them neat and clean – like, you know, like the Reinhardt problem. You know, you go to the Reinhardt show, and, oh, give me a break. You know, what's Reinhardt?

CM-U: Exactly. That brings up this – the whole next question, which is…

[00:46:16]

CMU: …of the kinds of damages I've seen on your work was things kind of hit, or a flake, something with a dent, or shiny spots where people have gone in obviously with heat to try to correct an area.

Brice Marden: Um-hum.

CM-U: I mean, those are the kinds of things that you are saying are just – where it's unfortunate that they happened. But what's the alternative? Repainting it? I mean, you know, we…

Brice Marden: Well, I used to do that.

CM-U: Yeah. Let's talk about that.

Brice Marden: Because we'd get these damages, and people would say, "Oh, well, it's all messed up." And I'd say, "Well, send it back, and I'll repaint it. But I won't restore it. I'll just repaint it. I'll take it, and I'll just work it from wherever it is. So I'm not saying you are going to get back what you sent. Or even an approximation. So you have to take that risk."

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: But then, you end up, you have these paintings hanging around the studio for years. 'Cause you don't want to work on them, you know.

(laughter)

CM-U: Oh, I understand completely, believe me!

Brice Marden: You know, there's always something else to do.

CM-U: Right. And you're thinking differently…

Brice Marden: And then I just said, "I can't just keep on doing this."

CM-U: No, I think that's too hard to ask that – as far as _____ [phrase inaudible]. You are sort of working on something else. What I thought was interesting about the exhibition with the Rice Museum was that the paintings were shown in one stage, and then after that, you reworked them.

Brice Marden: Yeah. I reworked this one [referring to larger version]. I didn't rework the studies.

CM-U: You reworked it – you reworked these? I've read somewhere, you know, you were talking about showing works. That's okay. You know, showing works that are unfinished, or sort of in state, and it kind of shows – it shows the life of it. It puts it in the context of what you are doing. What was sort of the impetus for why you wanted to take them back and sort of – I mean, did it sort of come through looking at them at the show. Or was it something you sort of had _____ [phrase inaudible]…

Brice Marden: I felt that they weren't really worked enough.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: I mean, you know, you can't let – especially something – especially something this big, you know, and it's something you've been thinking about a long time. You are really working something out. I mean, this is the seasons. This is the old, traditional theme, you know. You know, you are doing it. And as you do it, you are looking at all the other ones – not all the other ones, but a lot of other ones. You are thinking. And you are dealing – it's dealing with a lot of stuff. It's dealing with things you think about. Just like – not just the weather, but the way the earth revolves around the sun. You know, like big stuff. So you just don't want to let something out that you don't really feel you've given your whole, you know, as much attention to as you could. I mean, 'cause you could always just keep on working something forever.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: But, you know, I just didn't feel it was resolved enough.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: It was – and the surface wasn't anywhere near as worked up as it is here.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And that has something to do with the whole feel of the painting, you know. And it had a lot to do with the paintings as I was working on them then, you know. Which is another reason why I stopped using the wax. Because at a certain point, I began feeling I could get a certain feeling with the wax, and it was almost – it was like a cliché. It was like my own personal cliché, and I think it was one of the reasons to stop using the wax. 'Cause I knew if I put four layers on, it had a certain look.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And, you know, I could sort of slough off and not make the color – you know, that was a worry, you know. Like, "Well, you got the surface right. And the surface can hold the color."

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: I mean, you had to get – the challenge is to push it so that you get them all right, you know.

CM-U: Well, it's in your work. I mean, this constant kind of pushing and risk taking, in a way, of just kind of working it and…

Brice Marden: Yeah, well…

CM-U: …you know, I mean, is that…

Brice Marden: I mean, to me, it was more of a risk to leave it.

CM-U: Right. Yeah.

Brice Marden: I don't know what was a risk about it. I mean, I could have just left it.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: But it just wouldn't be very good, you know. And, you know, I mean, I guess there was the – you know, you're younger [sounds like]. You're much _____ [word inaudible].

(laughter)

Brice Marden: You say, "Oh I'll work on it some more. I can always make it better," you know? And then now I don't quite know whether I can do that.

[00:50:26]

CM-U: You did it here in Houston, at Fredericka Hunter's [Texas Gallery]. Is that right?

Brice Marden: Yeah. And I had the worst backache.

CM-U: It's amazing what we remember, isn't it?

Brice Marden: That, and you know. I mean, it was really – 'cause I had been out driving around the south of New Mexico with [David] Novros.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And it affected, you know, some of the colors. Like this yellow was really affected by that color out there, more than by, say, my northeastern American looking at the landscape. I'd been driving in a car for seven days or something, you know, and my back was all out – I had a lot of back problems. And it was really painful. Because somehow, I went someplace, and they did something to it. It wasn't a chiropractor, but then…

CM-U: Here?

Brice Marden: But I could work, you know. Yeah, I went – I thought, "They have all these great hospitals and stuff." And they x-rayed it, and they figured out what it was; but they couldn't really do much about it. So I think I was on a lot of Valium or something.

CM-U: Hmm.

Brice Marden: So I didn't – I hardly didn't do anything except sort of paint and sleep.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And I think I worked it about a month. Came back and – I mean, I took – I think, you know, people sort of think you can come in and just do it. But you sort of had to destroy what was there, and then bring it back up.

CM-U: Did you have to treat the surface that you were then going back into, six months later, differently? Or were you painting right on it…

Brice Marden: No. I mean, lots of times when I would go back, I mean, I would sand it.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: But I don't think I sanded these. It doesn't look like it. And I don't know how many additional layers they got.

[00:52:25]

CM-U: Obviously, the blending is very successful technically, or physically, because there isn't any delamination in any part.

Brice Marden: Yeah. Um-hum.

CM-U: I've never seen or sensed that at all.

EL: Carol, may I ask a question?

CM-U: Yeah. Step up so we can hear you.

EL: How long was it before you had a sense of them as fragile? Years after – did you ever have a sense while you were making them that they were fragile objects? Or did that not come…

Brice Marden: No, that wasn't – 'cause at first I thought, "Well, these are these fine portraits, and they've lasted…

EL: Right.

Brice Marden: …all this time." You know. And then I said, "Well, you know, they've been locked away in tombs for…"

EL: Right.

Brice Marden: "…you know, so nobody is messing around with them."

EL: _____ [phrase inaudible].

Brice Marden: And they were also under, you know, dry and warm and anything – they were under ideal conditions. So I set the wax – and because the wax, it was like natural beeswax, it was a good natural material; and I thought it would be okay. But it was the rubbing, you know. And then the fact – finally, when it sunk in, that it just never dries. That it always stays soft. That's what really…

EL: So that – you know, I think I always saw them as fragile because I think of them as subtle. And then, in addition, if I know it's wax, that's something that I bring to…

Brice Marden: Um-hum.

EL: …I'm confusing a little bit delicacy and fragility. And I realized when you were describing making them, that you were describing a very physical…

Brice Marden: Oh, yeah, these aren't created – I mean…

EL: …tough process that had nothing to do with fragile.

Brice Marden: Yeah. No, they weren't being…

EL: They weren't delicate things at all, right?

Brice Marden: I hadn't thought of it as – I thought it was like, you know, this big, funky material. You know, all this wax hanging over. It was just a great, you know…

EL: Right.

Brice Marden: And you get these buildups on the palette, you know, where the brush went from the can to the pile [sounds like]. There would be this trail thing, with wax, you know.

Brice Marden: No, but I never thought of them as being fragile. And anyway it was also this thing. I mean, you know, you are responding to this need to make a painting; and you figure out some way of getting it made. And then, you know, you're not really thinking about, well – you're not thinking on down the line.

CM-U: Which is right. I mean, that's what we do.

Brice Marden: I mean, it's _____ [phrase inaudible]. But also that's where Reed Kay comes in, you know.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: Like it was good that I studied with him because he gave you some sense, you know, that there is a better way to do it, or that you can figure out other ways of doing what you do.

CM-U: Right. And sometimes…

Brice Marden: And he was, like, really big into casein and stuff like this.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: The casein, and mixing it with glue. And he would make us go look at these Lautrecs and all these different things because it was in Boston, with all these great examples of stuff around you.

[00:55:25]

Paul Winkler: Brice, how strong is the association between color and season? I mean, because it's light, it's color, it's – I mean, is that very much a part…

Brice Marden: Oh, yeah. Yeah, so each – you know, I mean, the spring, you know, which is this blossoming. Then, you know, the green is like a real, you know, like – I mean, that was much more to do with vegetation. Just sort of how it can be overwhelmingly green. There's a lot of red in this color. I mean, I _____ [phrase inaudible] really with the alizarin, but I had – And this had really changed, this – I mean, just looking at the bottom, you know, you can see that some of them really changed a lot. And this got black in the winter.

Brice Marden: So it was like – I had done these paintings that were about the phases of the moon, and, you know, white, red, and black, and then – so this was sort of in relation to this, or a further study of it. And when I did a moon on the rise, moon on the wane, and then the three phases. And just using color symbolism that was right out of Graves.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: Robert Graves. You know, white, red... And this, I was just really sort of evolving my own, you know, for this passage. But then, again, there were other considerations, like using them – I mean, winter is death, black, you know. But then you can see down here that it's come up from being a much darker, you know, blue-black to being this lighter blue-black.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: I mean, so the color is really the subject, and it is trying to summarize a feeling about each season. I mean, if you took them out of context, I don't think you'd get it. But in the context it works a little better. I'm not saying it's that successful as an expository situation, but it's kinda hard to miss it. But then also you are getting into a color like, you know, this color being much harder [referring to the green painting in the small version of *The Seasons*], and this being much softer [referring to the green painting in the large version of *The Seasons*], and kind of greener, and mellower. I wanted the same kind of feel about it. And then, also, you are beginning to relate the whole thing.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And then this is like a live color part. This becomes like a dead part, you know, and so like this is like – becomes value, and this becomes color, and how do you bring up the color? So, like, this is – I think in another context, this would appear much, much bluer. It looks really much blacker than it is; but, you know, in the context, you know, it is really working the color context. I mean, there is the thematic thing, and then there's the more formal aspect.

[00:58:50]

Paul Winkler: You didn't often make a series of study panels though, did you?

Brice Marden: No. No. No. And as I said, you know, these [referring to the small version of *The Seasons*] were being worked in relation to these [referring to the large version of *The Seasons*]. So although all the colors on these paintings would be completely different from the colors on these paintings, they are really closely related.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: You know. I mean, it's…

Paul Winkler: So, how do you consider these now? Do you consider those just…

Brice Marden: I consider this finished [referring to the small version of *The Seasons*].

Paul Winkler: _____ [word inaudible].

Brice Marden: A finished painting. Now I don't remember whether I thought of them as finished separately, and I don't – Is there anything on the back that says "Summer" or "Spring" or "1, 2, 3, 4," or…

CM-U: Well, I think they are numbered on the back.

[inaudible background voices]

CM-U: But I know they are not "Spring," "Summer," "Fall…"

Brice Marden: Uh-huh.

CM-U: No. They came into the [Menil] collection two years later. These [referring to the large version of *The Seasons*] were purchased, and then two years later, as you may remember, both the graphite drawings and those [referring to the small version of *The Seasons*] entered the Collection.

Brice Marden: Oh, I'd forgotten. I don't really remember.

CM-U: Yeah. I was reviewing that to try to get a sense of the relationship to them also.

Paul Winkler: Do you have backing boards on them? Can we look at the back?

CM-U: We do have backing boards on them, but maybe we can.

[inaudible background voices]

CM-U: (Lifts a panel of *The Seasons – Small Version* from the wall and turns it around so that verso is visible.) These have the tape around the side. Let's see. Was it exposed? Oh, yeah.

Brice Marden: Ah, yes (reading label on painting's verso), this says "*Seasons Small Version*, four panels." Yeah.

CM-U: The *Seasons - Small Version*. That's what we've – that's what they have been called.

Brice Marden: So this hasn't been relined, as the paper was mounted on the canvas.

CM-U: Well, the paper was mounted on the canvas. And this is what you're saying…

Brice Marden: I thought it was on a paper screen. You know, like the *Shoji* screens were, like, layered rice paper. But this isn't…

CM-U: Well, you know, in the bill of sale, I was noticing, it said, "Paper on paper." And then…

LL: That would be more like a Shoji screen.

CM-U: …that would be like the screen. And then they just didn't mention the canvas, stretched canvas, because this – not that we did it, but that was probably just considered the support. Sort of like you don't mention the stretcher. You say "Oil on canvas." You don't mention the stretcher, so…

Brice Marden: Um-hum. Yeah.

CM-U: …so "paper on paper" is the way you described – or someone described the medium.

Brice Marden: I think this doesn't look like…

CM-U: This doesn't look right?

Brice Marden: …like me.

CM-U: No?

Brice Marden: This looks like Goldreyer.

LL: Wow.

CM-U: Really? Maybe it was.

Brice Marden: And the only place I've ever seen anything with these – the pegs wired together – is Goldreyer. And this looks like it might be a Goldreyer relining.

LL: Hmm.

CM-U: But he would have done it while you still owned them?

Brice Marden: Yeah. Um-hum.

CM-U: 'Cause these were purchased from you, and these came down to – this way. They haven't been touched since they've been here.

Brice Marden: That's odd.

Paul Winkler: _____ [phrase inaudible]

LL: And on the tape, then what about…

CM-U: Yeah, what about the tape and the paint on the tape? Would that have been Goldreyer, or would that have been you?

Brice Marden: Maybe these went to – no, that's what I did. That's what I did. Finnegan didn't have anything to do with it. I got this all from Goldreyer. 'Cause I had had a bunch of oil paintings that I'd sent to him, and he mounted them on canvas and then stretched them.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And I liked that. So I just had him make these up. So I got these from Goldreyer with just the blank paper, you know, mounted on the canvas, on the stretcher.

CM-U: So that's the way you painted them. They were already on this mounting.

Brice Marden: Yeah. So he provided me with the whole thing. And then this tape was around it, and I just started painting over the tape.

LL: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: Because the tape is really covering up the canvas.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: But still _____ [phrase inaudible]. 'Cause I remember painting out to the edge of the paper. And you see the end of the paper right here.

CM-U: Yeah.

LL: You can just barely see the paper at the end of those.

Brice Marden: Yeah.

Paul Winkler: Do you want a hand?

CM-U: Thank you. They've just got these little wires. You can't really…

(CM-U and Winkler return painting to its original location on the wall.)

[inaudible background voices and sounds as the painting is being replaced]

[01:03:47]

CM-U: One of the real big issues of my field right now is the question of repainting of monochromatic works. [Barnett] Newman. [Mark] Rothko. Ad Reinhardt, certainly. When a picture has been damaged to the point that the compromise seriously damages or interferes with it, repainting is the alternative that some people go to. Others feel that the surface, once you do that, you might as well make a facsimile. I mean, you've interfered with the original surface, and so you are no longer working with the artist's hand, a work of art. In the case of others of your works that have been damaged in different ways, can you sort of talk a little bit about that? What your thoughts are on that? What have been sort of the more serious damages, and how were they treated, and what was your thought about that?

Brice Marden: Let me think. There are some that have really bothered me. There are some. Well, as I said, there was this one. I mean, it's being worked on now – I haven't seen it – that had this circular crack right in the middle. And they kept coming to me, saying, "What can you do about it?" And I said, "Nothing." So they sent it to Dan [Daniel Goldreyer, conservator]. So I don't know what it will look like, you know.

Brice Marden: And then there was – there was another one, somewhat similar, that that happened to; and we sent it to [conservator] Orrin Riley. And eventually it ended up – he mounted it on a kind of Mylar or some kind of thing – and just sent it back. And it came back and sort of looked like a road (laughs). Like a piece of macadam. And that was the intention for me to repaint it; but I was repainting really over the kind of repaired surface.

CM-U: So you mean he had had it relined, and it had a smooth surface from the Mylar?

Brice Marden: Yeah. Relined it. And smoothed it. And then I repainted it. That's a painting called *Passing* [1970].

CM-U: Um-hum. But now in this…

Brice Marden: There have been…

CM-U: I'm sorry. Go ahead.

Brice Marden: There was one – the one that's in the Walker [Art Center, Minneapolis]. It was hanging in the Modern in the first – it was in the show in the Modern, and the first day, somebody just poked a hole right in the middle of it, you know. It must have been like an umbrella or something. And so we took it out of the show, and they repaired it. They just patched it, and then I repainted the panel.

CM-U: The entire…

Brice Marden: Just – the conservator came down and helped me mix the color because I don't really – 'cause the colors would go through so many variations as you are working on a painting, I didn't know how to go right to the color. And she did, and we made – put one on, and we made some alterations and stuff like that. And it's – you don't see it, you know.

CM-U: How does it look in terms of age of the surface, compared with the other? Were there two others in that?

Brice Marden: Yeah.

CM-U: Panels?

Brice Marden: It looks okay because it was – it hadn't been around that long before it was damaged and restored.

[01:07:16]

CM-U: Now how would you feel about someone else doing that?

Brice Marden: Well, someone else, you know, I wouldn't feel very good about it at all, because there's a lot about the stroke and – I mean, I repainted the panel.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: It wasn't just a matter of going in and touching up. Because you really couldn't do it. It was right in the center of the painting.

CM-U: Um-hum. You can't. You can't.

Brice Marden: If it was off on the side or something like that, you could do it, and it wouldn't be that awful. But this was really distracting. I mean, I've seen some paintings that, I mean, I just – Christie's has a painting, and it's in terrible, terrible shape; and it was a painting that I had repainted for someone. And I don't know what happened to it, but it's so beat up that I can't even recommend anything except my repainting it. And the thing is, I would hate to repaint it because in its own way it is very beautiful. I mean, because it was a really good painting. It was one of the *Back Series* [1967-68], and it was like one of the best ones. But when it was repainted, it became – really, it was – and so there's sentiment involved. My sentiment, you know…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: …I'm thinking, "Well, this was one of the best ones," you know?

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: But all I can think of is to somehow get it back, but then, you know, they're not going to give it to me. I've got to trade for it, and it becomes all this economic problem. So I don't know what to do about that one. It's really beat up. It's sad.

CM-U: Cracks?

Brice Marden: Yeah, it's cracks. And nobody did it. It's physical, I think.

CM-U: Oh, it's just aging.

Brice Marden: I think it must have been sent, you know, sent under bad conditions.

CM-U: Right. Climactic swings [sounds like].

Brice Marden: Yeah. Because that's one of the reasons I stopped using the cotton. The cotton worried me because it moves so much.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And I thought, "Well, it's going to cause cracking." So I moved to the linen. But the linen was hard because if you use linen and you press against it, it doesn't come back.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: It doesn't have the resiliency that the cotton has. So…

Brice Marden: I mean, I would rather just let them decay into – I remember coming here – like when I would come to see the [Rothko] Chapel.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Brice Marden: And looking at these things, and the paintings. And, you know, just thinking, "Well, this is Rothko's hand," you know.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Brice Marden: And then reading Dan – it was Dan Rice's [artist's assistant to Mark Rothko] – the interview. He was saying, "Oh, no, we just put these things on, and these strokes." And I am sitting in awe and reverence, looking at these things,

saying, "This is Rothko who did these strokes," you know. And it's just like somebody, an assistant, you know. So I don't…

CM-U: Except my feeling on that has always been that he was still orchestrating them. It wasn't like he gave them the canvas and said, "Okay, I'll be back in an hour. This is the color I want." You know, he was very much orchestrating – they were working side to side.

Brice Marden: Because there is that – because that was an influence on these things.

CM-U: Yeah.

Brice Marden: I mean, that vertical stroke, and how you can read it. And just some of the triptychs. And then, well, that's interesting – that you point that out, that he's orchestrating it.

CM-U: With the Chapel paintings, this just might interest you because it's something that I've spent many years studying. The black forms were painted with an egg/oil emulsion, and I'm convinced that Rothko added the egg to kind of get this matting, again, quality. In simulations I've made where I just did an oil paint, of course the feeling is completely – the surface and feeling is completely different. As that mixture aged, because he mixed up different batches of it every day, or had his assistants do that, there was a differential whitening appearing, and we actually began to see smaller rectangles that were then enlarged. We actually began to see the *pentimenti*, if you will, of the creation of these forms. And in determining what to do with it – and we let it get to a point of real distraction, where, even though there is always a risk going into a surface like that, it was preferable to where they were at.

CM-U: I knew that – I was very concerned about my own strokes, my own way of cleaning it in any way, leaving a pattern that would be opposite from what were, in fact, these parts, working parts of the painting. Anyhow, in the cleaning that occurred, which took seven years just to get to what the problem was, which was the egg that was changing, I was aware that I ended up with something that could be easily repeated because I knew I wasn't going to be the last restorer to ever do this.

Brice Marden: Um-hum.

CM-U: I was figuring ten, twenty, thirty, fifty years from now. But I also realized that there would always be something of those marks there, and that that was the way it should be. I mean that…

Brice Marden: Um-hum.

CM-U: …there was no reason to feel that the surface had to be absolutely perfect, because this was part of the aging of it. And I think about that in regard to your work, too. You have to, with those kinds of films, that part of it is just the aging of it; and we need to have a certain awareness of that and an acceptance of it.

Brice Marden: Yeah. I mean, I think they should just be allowed to age. I mean, the people that don't want it to age, it always seems that there's a market consideration.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: They are coming up for auction, so they send them to the, you know, Dan.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: And those aren't my considerations.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: I'd rather just let it, you know – I mean, you don't want to lose them, but still at the same point, it has much more to do with you if this thing had a bad mark on it than it does if the bad mark is taken off. But then practically everything else is taken off.

CM-U: Right. It has more to do with the restorer [sounds like]…

Brice Marden: All you have is like some monochromatic panel.

CM-U: Right.

[01:13:19]

CM-U: Well, I guess – I mean, when you were talking earlier about how, when a picture gets to a certain point, it's your intent to try in this one case to get it back so that you can rework it or do whatever…

Brice Marden: Yeah.

CM-U: …or leave it, however you decide. I mean, that's an option now. But when you are no longer able to do that, or have a comment on it, that's a real issue. Because that will be the issue, in fact, of these works. And can another hand do that, and…

Brice Marden: Well, I think that's been the problem with these, in that the surface is so – I mean, it's hard to do anything invisibly on the surface.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: Because as soon as you go back at it, it marks up. And I knew they are _____ [word inaudible] these things. They try to reheat them and get – I wish I could give you an answer. I don't know, and I worry about it.

CM-U: Right. It's a difficult...

Brice Marden: I've got a painting in – there's a painting in the Ludwig Collection, and somebody came up and rubbed their fingers on it. So now there's all these streaks on it. And this is what happens with wax. That's why they use it, you know, as a polisher. They've polished the painting! I mean, what am I going to do? I made the painting how many years ago? I suppose I could go back and pretend I'm…

CM-U: No. No, you can't.

Brice Marden: Yeah.

CM-U: I think that's wrong. I don't think the painter can do that. What will happen with this painting that's in restoration now? The one that's at Dan's. It will probably be – possibly be resurfaced. I mean, when you see that, I mean, that's another painting now, in your view?

Brice Marden: Well, it's not another painting, but it's like really – it's not what I really made. The hope for the collector would be that I would repaint it, you know, but – I mean, I don't know how it's going to turn out. Sometimes they turn out okay. Sometimes…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: …you know, he's done some that, I'd see them, and I'd say, "Oh, God, you know, it's just like a shadow of itself." And then they patinate again later. They come back after a couple of years. I don't know what it is. They get dirty or something, and things begin to accumulate, and they bruise [sounds like] or whatever; and they take on a kind of life. I know Paul Walters [sounds like] has a painting like that.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: It sort of came back. They're so funny, because they are living things, in a way.

CM-U: Absolutely.

[01:16:08]

Brice Marden: And also there's things – I mean, I have things that I own at the conservator's now, you know. And I use Dana Cranmer, who is very conservative. She doesn't, you know – and I call her up, and I say, "Well, what's happening with the piece?" She says, "Well, I haven't done anything to it. I can't figure out what to do."

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And I don't – I don't know whether the cat scratched it or something, and all I want is to get it so it's stable. I don't care if the mark is still there, but if it's stabilized, and more paint isn't going to chip off or something like that, I'll feel okay about it, you know. But I don't think it has to go back to some pristine situation. I mean, it doesn't bother me for my own purposes.

CM-U: Well, I think you make a good point. In the natural aging process, a certain surface patina, if you will…

Brice Marden: Um-hum.

CM-U: …does occur on the surface of a painting, and it does mitigate an effect, maybe.

Brice Marden: Well, it's also worrisome [sounds like] about the wax paint. I mean, how are you going to clean a wax painting?

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And since a lot of the stuff is in New York, you know, which is just – I mean, you just hang a picture up on the wall, you take it down six months later and there's this big mark. So you know there's a lot of dirt accumulating on the things. And what are they going to look like?

CM-U: Well, I noticed, in working on this panel, where there was a small area of cleavage that had lifted, and I had set down from the back with a fair amount of success in '84, was lifted again just when we put them on exhibition six months ago. And I knew what I did then. I was trying something that I thought might even be preferable, and in the end, it was, to a degree. But what happened was, water doesn't affect them at all – gently – moisture. But what I did was, I removed an area of dirt. You know, there's an evenness on the surface now. Just what you are talking about. And I had removed that, so I ended up – I mean, it's not jumping out at you – I tried to resolve it, but nonetheless I ended up cleaning locally one spot. And I realized that that means then that we are really limited in what we can do unless we do in fact clean. You know, just remove the surface dirt on all of them.

Brice Marden: Um-hum.

CM-U: Which, you know, is…

Brice Marden: Then how do you do that? Because you can't rub it, because it shines if you rub it.

CM-U: I actually – I was actually doing this, believe it or not, through a tissue paper. I wasn't even allowing my swab to touch the surface.

Brice Marden: Um-hum.

CM-U: And even so – I mean, as I say, it's not jumping out; but even so there was, I felt, a difference.

[01:18:40]

Brice Marden: Because the Albright [-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY] has something. They have one that apparently – that's the one that is now exhibited under Plexi…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: …and that had just been brutalized in the galleries by the public. And they – but it was, you know, dirty. And they sent it to some guy, and he cleaned it with distilled water and stuff like that. I don't know how he did it. But it looked pretty good to me when I saw it.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Brice Marden: And then, again, it was in this Plexiglas box, so…

(laughter)

Paul Winkler: Maybe we should never lend this painting.

CM-U: Yes. I'm glad our director is listening to this conversation.

Brice Marden: Well, that happens. I mean, any kind of show, it's like really hard to get people to lend. They just don't want to lend. And, you know, I can never really get – you know, I can't get irritated with them if they don't want to lend. It makes sense to me. But then I then end up lending my stuff…

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: …you know, and my stuff gets all beat up again. (laughs)

CM-U: Are there any other particular comments you'd like to make about *Seasons*? Or questions?

Brice Marden: Well, I mean I – frankly, I'm surprised it looks as good as it does. I mean, it hasn't become more beaten up in some way.

CM-U: Um-hum. And it has been…

Brice Marden: I'm not terribly surprised – I'm just used to thinking that the worst is going to happen. And the worst has happened maybe three times. I mean, they are fragile; and also these things have moved around a lot. I mean, these have been – they were here, and then they were repainted. They went back to New York. Then they were shown in New York. And they came back down here.

CM-U: They were at Los Angeles.

Brice Marden: They were in Paris.

CM-U: Paris.

Brice Marden: So they can move around. But…

Paul Winkler: I think it's more how you show them. We've always shown them with the floor barriers. That doesn't disturb the visual plane that much, but – I mean, really at all…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Paul Winkler: …but it's amazing that you have to keep people away slightly.

Brice Marden: Yeah.

Paul Winkler: I mean, if you want to show them [sounds like].

Brice Marden: Well, it's also a thing about monochromatic paintings. I mean, it's why they have the [Ad] Reinhardt and the [Kazimir] Maleviches hung so high at the Modern. People always want to touch them.

CM-U: Right.

Brice Marden: And, I mean, [Ellsworth] Kelly has the problem. You know, I mean, like, the people that go around and will walk into a museum and damage every painting they can get their hands on. They always go for the monochromatic ones.

Paul Winkler: Yeah. You're absolutely right.

Brice Marden: You know, there's something really bugs people about it. Or, you know, they feel they have to touch everything.

CM-U: With barriers…

Brice Marden: I never object to barriers. When I showed them at Pace [Gallery, New York], we always had barriers.

CM-U: Um-hum. We've also had a policy of when they travel that of course they are put in handling frames, but then we always send one of our people with them to install them.

Brice Marden: Um-hum.

CM-U: That is something we have done all along, and I just think it – I don't know, it's not that our people are so special, it's just that they are used to handling them.

Brice Marden: Um-hum.

CM-U: And we feel that they just have a sense of them. And it makes everyone else a little more careful about that.

Brice Marden: Yeah. And you never really quite know what there's going to be where they go.

CM-U: You certainly don't. No, you don't. Well, I think they look wonderful, too, and…

Paul Winkler: _____ [phrase inaudible]

Brice Marden: Well, okay.

CM-U: Okay. Well, in closing, I'd like to thank you. This was great. I'm glad you came. Regrettably, Harris Rosenstein can't be here today, but he said to me, you know, you are an artist of power and an artist of courage. And I think these paintings certainly took all of that. And I'm delighted and honored to have the opportunity to look after them. Thank you.

Brice Marden: Well, thank you.

[END RECORDING]