Artists Documentation Program

Video Interview Transcript

JAMES ROSENQUIST

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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 and Chief Conservator, The Menil Collection; James Rosenquist, Artist; Elizabeth Lunning, Associate Paper Conservator, The Menil Collection.]

[BEGIN RECORDING]

[00:00:43]

CM-U: Today is October 21, 1993, and I am here with Jim [James] Rosenquist, and we are going to discuss works of art by him that are in the [Menil] Collection, as well as talk generally about his paintings and the materials he has used.

CM-U: Welcome.

Rosenquist: Thank you very much. Beautiful day in Chicago – no, it's not Chicago.

(laughter)

CM-U: Right. Wherever we are.

Rosenquist: It's a cool day in Houston. Beautiful.

CM-U: Very cool for us.

[00:01:10]

CM-U: Let's start with your earliest work in the collection, which is *Promenade of Merce Cunningham* [1963, The Menil Collection, Houston, Formerly in the Collection of Christophe de Menil].

Rosenquist: Um-hum.

CM-U: Do you know how it got here, or how it was…

Rosenquist: Sure. Not exactly here, but I painted the painting, and I gave it to – boom! – I think it was still wet, and I gave it to the Merce Cunningham, uh, gave it to Merce Cunningham, and Christophe de Menil bought it – boom! – like that. And it's Winsor & Newton oil paint on canvas, boink [sounds like] on linen canvas. And the only – there's really no medium, there is only using a high quality mineral spirits and the oil paint. That is it. No other waxes or oils or anything added to it. And that's that.

CM-U: Um-hum. And this is one that you worked from collage first, putting together?

Rosenquist: Yes. Make a little collage, and then that expands into a painting. And then I change it. It's like – it's quite different than, say, doing a silkscreen of something because a silkscreen has certain reproductive qualities because of the photo. I mean, as other artists have done. But I always – from being an outdoor commercial artist, billboard painter, I like to change things, and keep bending them a little, and moving them around. And so there is not – even source material from old newspapers and magazines isn't exactly the way it is in the magazine because it's painted.

CM-U: Um-hum. And I've seen examples of your scoring, and then presumably for transfer to a larger…

Rosenquist: You mean squaring off.

CM-U: Squaring off.

Rosenquist: Yeah. That's an old, you know, technique from the Renaissance.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: But I learned that painting outdoor signs. And I really thought that if I could do something, paint from a sketch that I made, or a photograph, or whatever, pretty well, or actually good enough to sell, that I could paint anything. I could paint the Sistine Chapel. I could paint anything. So that was my motivation.

[00:03:30]

Rosenquist: I started – ever since I was a little boy, I could draw, but I didn't know what to do with it. And in 1948 I won a scholarship to study art for four days, four Saturdays, at the Minneapolis School of Art; and they gave me the best pencils and the best erasers and the best paper. And I was really impressed that – this is good – dollar apiece for this paper. And also that some of the finest master drawings are really made out of burnt wood, which was charcoal. I thought, "Burnt wood." Master drawing from that. And an eraser, you know. And chalk. So that was an illumination.

Rosenquist: And then in '54 or '55, I won a scholarship to the Art Students League in New York, and I studied with George Grosz, Edwin Dickinson, Sidney Dickinson,

his cousin, which were two entirely different people. Edwin was a little tiny man with a little smock, little granny glasses, and he says, "The reason why artists have such difficulty drawing and painting in Manhattan is that Manhattan isn't situated directly north and south. And the light that comes in the window throws them off."

(laughter)

Rosenquist: And then his cousin, Sidney Dickinson, was a big guy with a cowboy hat and one of them chain tie – or those string ties – and he said, "Son, you've got to be a mechanic with the brush." It's a completely different sensibility. He says, "May I take your brush, young man?" I said, "Please." So he goes zip, zip, zip. With a few strokes, there'd be a nose. Zip. The cartilage in it. Zip. The eye. Zip. Cartilage in the lips. Bzz, zip, zip. Bing. He said, "See?" "Thank you very much."

(laughter)

Rosenquist: So, you know, Edwin was the soft – George Grosz, too, was very – spoke very – didn't speak English very much, and he said, "Now, here and here, here, here, here." And he'd take your tablet or paper – 'cause we couldn't afford anything – and he'd take a blue and red Conté crayon and make fantastic drawings of four figures with the light shining through four figures like this. And I have the – I think I have that drawing somewhere in a magazine, or stuck – but I don't know. I haven't seen it in years and years. But so there was all different kinds of temperaments, you know, at the Art Students' League.

[00:06:24]

Rosenquist: But in outdoor billboard painting, they used the white lead, pure white lead, for the white. Cheap colors. Red lake, Prussian blue. Probably a cadmium barium yellow. That was a bummer. You'd never see a rose…

CM-U: What medium were these paints in?

Rosenquist: Oil. It was oil paint.

CM-U: It was oil paint?

Rosenquist: Outdoor billboard painting was oil paint. And then a lot of it was in enamel, but I've never really rendered a picture with enamel. It was always the white lead. And we were told, "Don't eat the white lead."

CM-U: Was the billboard prepared in any way? I mean, do you just – is it made out of wood?

Rosenquist: No. It was just a piece of sheet metal painted white with a flat white paint. And the process – I mean, I don't know why we are talking about this, really, but…

CM-U: Oh, I'm just curious.

Rosenquist: …but it's probably going towards fine art, in some way. I would take a picture of – I would be given a picture of anything – I wouldn't even hardly know what it was – and square off the photograph, or picture, or whatever it was. Square off the sign, and then with a big piece of charcoal, draw the image in on this paint, and then mix up the paint and paint it. And it had to – it had to look like Tony Curtis, or Gregory Peck, or whatever. And their heads would be about as high as this ceiling here. It was – this paint was out in the sun and the rain and the wind and the sand. You know.

CM-U: How long was it expected to last?

Rosenquist: Probably a month. Two months.

[00:08:18]

Rosenquist: And then, also, I painted a lot on the reverse side of Masonite. That has a cloth texture. And that's kind of remarkable stuff because the paint would go in the cracks, and it would last quite a long time out in this wind. In 1963, I was asked by Philip Johnson to paint a painting for – 20 by 20 feet – for the New York State Pavilion. And I thought, "Hey, what a great chance to experiment with different brands of artists' oil paint." So I used Bocour, Lenny Bocour's Bellini picked [sounds like] paint, Winsor & Newton, Grumbacher, various kinds of yellows, real cadmium, cadmium barium, ultramarine blues, and especially violet. Buy a violet paint that was bought – prepared in a tube, and then mixed up violet and rose colors, for instance.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: And so I mixed up the Shiva rose and Winsor & Newton ultramarine blue, and I got quite a nice violet paint that lasted. It was – amazingly, it stayed violet. The other color that was prepared would turn – violets turn gray a lot.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: It's just flat gray. So at the end of two years, when this painting came down, the Bellini yellow turned the color of that cardboard on the floor there.

CM-U: Hmm. Wow!

Rosenquist: The Winsor & Newton cadmiums remained yellow. I even used sign Dayglo fluorescent paint on it, and that remarkably stood up. It got worn off by the sand a bit, but it still was brilliant. I mean, a person was always told that – by art teachers, or professors, or old time, really old guys – that that stuff would all disappear.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: But some paintings that I did with Dayglo paint are still bright.

CM-U: It's interesting how that works.

Rosenquist: It's amazing.

CM-U: I know. It is amazing. And I wonder sometimes if it has more to do with what they've been exposed to, or just the nature of the paint. But it's amazing to me how those materials last, too.

Rosenquist: Some have really lasted amazingly well.

[00:10:59]

CM-U: So you were working with commercial materials, but still oils, doing the billboard paintings? And then you…

Rosenquist: But then in the…

CM-U: …went to fine arts?

Rosenquist: In my studio, I used the best paint I could buy.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: And used Blockx [Belgian paint]. But Blockx, I didn't like because of all the oil. There was so much oil in it. Which probably is a very good thing because oil – it seems – I mean, I've told people that, I mean, I've told students that oil paintings seem to be minerals ground up in oil, applied to a piece of cloth with the hairs from the back of a pig's ear; and master drawings are a piece of wood, a piece of burnt wood on top of a piece of cloth or parchment. You know. And that was all very simple and reliable. It's not cinema, electricity, television, or anything like that. The image that is there will be there. Maybe.

Rosenquist: So I was always – I was concerned, in making my first paintings, in that they would hang around for a while. And I've been pretty lucky. I've noticed, as in this painting here, that I see where the oil has gone out of it. I mean, it is going out of it; and that makes it delicate.

CM-U: You mean in terms of a sunken in effect of the colors? What do you mean?

Rosenquist: No. Is that the oil seems to leave the pigment, and what remains much later is that you'll have sort of a dusty quality instead of a shiny, slippery oil painting.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: And I think then that those minerals that have been held together by oil, you could wipe off with your fingers.

CM-U: Well, that's true. I mean, that does happen with some paintings…

Rosenquist: Yes.

CM-U: …that as they age, the binder has just changed, and you are left with just the powder pigment.

Rosenquist: Exactly.

CM-U: And it's a real problem for restoration, of course, because any kind of adhesive that you put on can saturate the pigment in a way that it changes it from the rest.

Rosenquist: Yeah.

CM-U: So it does provide a problem, but that – but you didn't – did you varnish your pictures? You tended not to, did you?

Rosenquist: No.

[00:13:11]

Rosenquist: No, see, what I was interested in when I first started painting was really – I'll tell ya things I did when I was a billboard painter, I would experiment all the time while I worked on huge things. Once, on a Friday, I was sent out with three gorillas, old guys, to paint on the Bruckner Expressway, to paint a bread sign out all gray.

CM-U: To paint out the sign?

Rosenquist: Paint the sign out to get it ready for next week. We were going to paint bread on it or something. I don't know. So here's these old guys I'm working with, my friends. One of them was a sculptor who showed with Arshile Gorky and Mary Callery…

CM-U: Hmm.

Rosenquist: David Mischnick. He was a realistic socialist sculptor against the evils of capitalism. You know, that – and so the people I worked with were very – some were very interesting, some stupid. But – so we go to paint this thing out gray, and everyone is mixing up their paint like soup. Everyone has five gallons of gray. So we go down to lunch, and while these guys are at lunch, I go out, and I get a little bit of red, and I pour in one. A little bit of yellow, I pour in another one. A little bit of green, and a little bit of blue. So they come back. You can't tell anything. So we start painting. And everybody paints a patch about as big as this wall, you know, on this big, big sign. And we finish, and everything is wonderful. And we're walking home to the subway, and I said, "Hey, you guys, look. What happened?" And you turn around, and here it looks like a Jasper Johns, see. It looked like there was this blue, faint blue gray…

CM-U: Delicate blue.

Rosenquist: …or pink-yellow gray, nuh-nuh-nuh (makes gesture to show layout of colors). They go, "Oh, Jeez, we're gonna get fired! Oh, what are we gonna do?" I says, "It's Friday. Forget about it."

(laughter)

Rosenquist: "We'll do something Monday." But I did things like that. And then, you know, I'd say to these fellows, I said, "Hey, you know, what if I didn't paint this sign? You know, what if I painted something else on here? What if I wrote another message…?" "You better not." (in gruff voice) You know.

CM-U: (laughs) Right, for your job.

Rosenquist: And these guys were no faint – one fellow, he was in the Fighting 69th in World War I, and he was a morphine addict that he had a prescription for. And he hated my guts.

CM-U: Hmm.

Rosenquist: But he was my assistant. I was 23.

CM-U: You were much younger.

Rosenquist: He was – I – he was six – he was in his seventies. He lied his age.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: Nasty. Nasty.

CM-U: Did they put – you don't put any coating on the billboards? Varnishes or anything?

Rosenquist: No. So, getting back to your…

[00:16:11]

Rosenquist: I'm sorry, but getting back to your question. But when I experimented – so I really – so in some paintings I would – in my own paintings, to a little gray, I'd add a little blue.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: The reason why – I mean, how this got into my artwork was that, when I painted film clips, the boss would say, "Put some yellow in it, or put some blue in it. Make it look like film. Put some yellow ochre in it or something." So, in my paintings, I thought, "Hey, I'll put a little tint in this, and a little tint

in that." And I did this painting, *I Love You with My Ford* [1961, Moderna Museet, Stockholm] with a Ford, and two people whispering, and some spaghetti.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: And I varnished the – it was just that kind of gray, but then I varnished it so that would shine. Something would be soft, and that would be soft.

CM-U: I was going to ask you about that painting because I just saw it in the – "Hand-Painted Pop," right? ["Hand-Painted Pop: American Art in Transition, 1955-62," (traveling exhibition), Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, December 6, 1992-March 7, 1993]

Rosenquist: So now they call me from Stockholm last week…

CM-U: Right.

Rosenquist: …and said, "Do you think we could take that varnish off? If, you know…" And I said, "Be my guest." I said, "I don't care."

CM-U: I was going to ask you about that. Because I noticed that it was just – it looked like the top register was varnished.

Rosenquist: Well, some parts of it looked like the varnish disappeared up in the corner.

CM-U: Yeah.

Rosenquist: And it looked yellow.

CM-U: And it is slightly yellowed. I wondered if that was something intentional on your part, or it had just yellowed.

Rosenquist: Yeah.

[00:17:20]

Rosenquist: So generally after the World's Fair painting, I really stuck – and I can tell you what my palette is right now, exactly. I use – it's very simple, and I think I have all the colors in the rainbow except – there's one little area. But I use Winsor red. That's an extremely tough color that doesn't fade. Winsor red.

Winsor blue, it's thalo blue, thalo green. Ultramarine blue. Light ultramarine blue. Dark. But I use a Shiva rose.

CM-U: Hmm.

Rosenquist: That's very permanent, for some reason. And you can get good and bad batches of it. You can get some that looks kind of alizarin-y. And then I use alizarin crimson, burnt umber, burnt sienna. And, rarely, black. I mix complements to start out at the bottom, which almost are blacker than black. And then that complement will go up into an analogous color that naturally works. Black is pfft, unless black is for a specific black thing or something's black.

CM-U: Right. Right.

Rosenquist: But these things have seemed to serve me pretty well. I buy them by the ton, and this same group of colors, which really amount to about eight colors. And the only one is manganese blue. I like that, but that's so transparent and thin. It's really a lovely color, but it's hard to…

CM-U: Have you seen changes in colors in some of your works?

[Break in video]

Rosenquist: At the Art Students' League, you know, because it's such an old institution, there are sort of hand-me-down formulas and things there.

CM-U: Um-hum. Hm, that's interesting.

Rosenquist: And I just got one posthumously from Morris Kantor. Handwritten down…

CM-U: Really? That would be interesting to see.

Rosenquist: …for a beeswax formula.

CM-U: For painting with beeswax?

Rosenquist: For restoration.

CM-U: Oh. For doing [sounds like] beeswax linings or something.

Rosenquist: Yeah. Yep.

[00:19:40]

CM-U: I just wanted to go back to *Promenade of Merce Cunningham*. We were talking about how it is not as vibrant, and it is sort of less oily, I think you said, than it was. Did this have a ground on the canvas to begin with? Or did you just paint…

Rosenquist: This had a – either an oil ground or an acrylic ground. I'm not sure.

CM-U: Um-hum. A very thin ground, anyway, I suspect.

Rosenquist: Yeah.

CM-U: But even though the colors are not, maybe, as fluid and visually as you once thought, varnishing wouldn't be an option, do you feel?

Rosenquist: No.

CM-U: No? Because it's a completely different look, when something gets a coat of varnish.

Rosenquist: I don't like any varnish on anything.

CM-U: No. No.

Rosenquist: No.

CM-U: Well, I think that's so. And that's the most – that's the material that changes the most, too, of course, is the varnish.

Rosenquist: And then, you know, I've seen – I saw the *Guernica* for ten years with nothing in front of it. And I've seen a lot of masterpieces. Now, God, they're covered with bulletproof glass.

CM-U: I know. You can't see it anyway.

Rosenquist: And three layers of everything.

CM-U: Yes.

Rosenquist: It's terrible. It's too bad.

[00:20:50]

CM-U: One of the things that interested me in various comments I've read, that you made, was that you were – you seemed to be very respectful of people doing whatever they needed to do for their – using whatever materials they needed to make their creative statement. I think one of your statements was something like, "I don't care if it is made out of mud or an anthill, if it tingles, it's a work of art. It works."

Rosenquist: I don't think that's me.

CM-U: Oh.

Rosenquist: That's Bob Rauschenberg.

CM-U: Well, I know it's not you working, but that's not you…

Rosenquist: No, that's not me saying that.

CM-U: …that's not your saying that.

Rosenquist: You've got me confused 'cause I know Bob said that.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: I may have – God, I don't think I've ever said...

CM-U: It's something _____ [phrase inaudible]…

Rosenquist: …now I may have.

CM-U: It doesn't matter.

Rosenquist: When I think about it…

CM-U: I guess my…

Rosenquist: …well, you see, you see – I mean, you may not have anything around. If you're inspired – get an inspiration – you may not have anything around to work with, so you can work with an anthill or a mud pie…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: …or whatever you want to do. And then that seems to be, could be, or seems to be not the finished piece but the sketch for something larger. And the Julio Gonzales Museum in Valencia really buys rough maquettes of famous – tries to get them from people. And they seem to be much more interesting a lot of times than the finished big piece. So, I mean, you grab something when you get inspired, you know. I mean, I don't know. But I do, I do think about something lasting a while because it seems to help my sanity.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: That's another thing about conceptual art, is that I think an artist makes something to prove to themself that they actually had an idea, and then they can bounce off that, or relate to that. Because like in Salvador Dali's great title, *The Persistence of Memory*, the image can come or go, or the idea could come or go, but remains a concept. It can be – it goes into the Eastern philosophy, too, and how – it goes into a lot of things. How aware can one maintain oneself all the time for heightened awareness? I named one painting *Pearls Before Swine, Flowers Before Flames*, and where some idea or some thought – I mean, even a banal thing that you make, manufacture, might be better than guns, or war, or flames, or killing, or whatever. Or nothing else. I mean, so, you know, if you can make something you can suggest or see, it's not – it's out of one's memory, out of one's – it's out of a concept into something.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: And it may not mean a – maybe look pretty awful, whatever, but it is something instead of still remaining a dream.

CM-U: Um-hum.

[00:24:14]

CM-U: You seem to have resisted the temptation to – well, I don't know if it's temptation or what people were doing, of just picking up paints in the hardware store, or house paint, or that sort of thing.

Rosenquist: God, I, I don't know. I can't – I've heard Rothko used some strange paint from a store. I never knew that. I never knew it. De Kooning, I always thought, bought the best paints that he could afford, and they always seemed to be…

Rosenquist: The material that artists work on. I don't want to mention names except a positive name, and that is, some artists, the canvas or material they work on maybe was economics at a certain time, but it was really sort of crappy. And then I remember when Franz Kline died. I used to know him, and when – I knew him a bit. And when he died, all his studio material was stashed in a loft at 41 First Avenue, I think it was. Right in there. And the [Leo] Castelli Gallery sent a painting to that warehouse to be restored – that I should work on and fix.

CM-U: One of Kline's?

Rosenquist: No, mine.

CM-U: One of your own? Okay.

Rosenquist: My – mine. And I looked in the corner, and there was this stuff. There was some chairs, and a table, and some rolls of canvas, and some paint. And I, "What the hell is this?" It was what was left of Franz Kline's studio. And I must say that the canvas was extremely high quality.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: It was heavy, heavy French primed Belgian linen.

CM-U: Hmm.

Rosenquist: The best. And I, [whistles] "Is that ever nice stuff."

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: I used linen at that time. I started off with linen. I tried cotton duck, and it kept stretching like a rubber band. You could stretch it for a mile. And so I never used it. I didn't – I maybe did one painting with it or something like that. But I always went to the best – me, you know, I couldn't afford the really – Belgian linen, but I did buy that too, once in a while. But I'd find some good tight weave linen and paint on that because it felt good, and so forth and so on. But then I heard, you know, famous, famous artists didn't use very – didn't work with very good material.

CM-U: Well, I do suspect economy had something to do with that. _____ [phrase inaudible]…

Rosenquist: Yeah, but I know guys who made a lot of money, too. And I won't mention their names, and they still used poor – it looked like poor grade stuff.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: But I, you know, that's another thing. You know, Bob Rauschenberg made a – like one of his cardboard pieces, which was run-over cardboard boxes down in Florida, and he glued them on a big strip, and he sold it to Dr. [Peter] Ludwig for $125,000, you know, years ago. So someone said, "Well, Bob, how much did it cost you to make that piece?" And he says, "About $6.75 worth of glue."

(laughter)

Rosenquist: So, I don't know. But, again, I mean, you've been in museums where there's things on the floor underneath the artwork because they fell off, you know.

CM-U: Um-hum.

[00:27:39]

CM-U: So permanence is always an issue for you. Or just…

Rosenquist: Yeah, the most economical way of having a permanent vision. And very – extremely simple. When I was living on Coenties Slip, there was a fire in the bar down below, and I was sleeping on the second floor. And the fire – I wasn't supposed to live there, and the fire department chopped a hole in the floor and stuck a fire hose right up in my bedroom…

CM-U: (laughs)

Rosenquist: …and shot off one of my paintings. Now that painting is still in pretty damned good shape, and a fire hose hit it. So I said, "Hey, if you don't like it, you could wash my – if you get spaghetti sauce on it, you can wash it off." So, I don't know. I mean, it's very peculiar. I mean, the idea of an artist wanting to make sure that their work is seen correctly, and curated correctly, and, you know, conserved and everything. That's very, very difficult, I think. Now you correct me if I'm wrong, but I think Marcel Duchamp said that he put the best he could into what he did, and it went ahead – either it had a life of its own, or it didn't. And then someone like Karlheinz Stockhausen, the composer, who I met and know, a little bit – he wanted – after he died, he wanted his work to be played mathematically, very correctly, so that it would

always have this sound. And other artists I know, they are very diligent and very careful that their work will be this way and that way. That's hard. That's hard to control. I think at the best, you can just be lucky. You can just be lucky that they are under a roof somewhere.

CM-U: Um-hum. All works of art change as they age. Ever so slightly, but they age, just as we age.

Rosenquist: Look at the Pollock. I saw a Pollock in Japan that was painted on – I think, I don't know what – I think it was cotton duck about the color of that Arches paper…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: …in Japan, that was now the color of that cardboard on the floor.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: Now the colors of the paint were the same, but I really would have liked to have seen it. It was much another kind of painting with a white background.'

CM-U: Right. The space is very different.

Rosenquist: Another kind of space, yeah.

CM-U: Um-hum. But in most of your paintings, the canvas is completely covered, so canvas change, per se, isn't really an aesthetic issue so much. It's more the kind of change of just the aging of the oils themselves. Is that what you've found?

Rosenquist: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:30:20]

CM-U: How about damages? Have works of art been damaged, and then needed to be restored?

Rosenquist: Yeah, the worst thing I have – the worst damaged painting, my God, looks like kids kicked it, punched it, bit it, hit it. It's got ringworm. It's got this – it's got every kind of thing you can think of. I thought, I want to get the poor thing back. I'd like to buy it. I don't know what they did to it.

CM-U: Have you ever restored one of your own paintings?

Rosenquist: To – well, I don't know to what extent you mean.

CM-U: I mean, did you ever have to repaint a section?

Rosenquist: Oh, repaint? Sure.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: Sure.

CM-U: How do you feel about someone else doing that when you're no longer able to? If that's necessary?

Rosenquist: Well, I always feel that they sort of, kind of, kind of camouflage the damage.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: That's all. They sort of soften it. That's all. And they boldly don't paint it back.

CM-U: Right.

Rosenquist: Gee whiz. I've had – I had a painting totally slashed in Paris at the FIAC [International Fair of Contemporary Art (FIAC), Grand Palais, Paris, 1990] about three years ago. So did Roy Lichtenstein. Cut right – big slashes with a knife. And someone thought they could restore it. But I don't – I have to really ask you, what happens if the warp and the weft is just – whsst! – cut with a razorblade? I don't know.

CM-U: It's very hard to get it perfectly aligned. But even if we do it, it often requires a lining, which means putting a second fabric on the back. And that changes…

Rosenquist: But what does that mean? I mean, the cut is just glued to the other lining?

CM-U: Yeah. Well, the cuts are joined with different kinds of material. Some people use epoxy. Some people use soluble nylon. There are different materials you use to kind of join the fibers.

Rosenquist: Oh, really? See I didn't know that.

CM-U: But then – but then, it invariably, if it's a large picture, it needs some – another support behind it to give it some – so that's where they'll put a second lining.

Rosenquist: Yeah.

CM-U: And as soon as you put a lining, you run the risk of changing a certain kind of surface quality to the work. Not always. I mean, it can be done very well.

Rosenquist: Yeah.

CM-U: What did they do in that instance…

Rosenquist: Someone just attacked another painting I had at the Four Seasons. I did this mural, and someone hit it.

CM-U: Yeah.

Rosenquist: Scratched it with a fork. And I said (whistles) I said, "Whoa, how did that happen?" They said, "It's one of our employees, and we have the detectives trying to find out which employee. They've been hurting the restaurant, actually. It's like some nut."

CM-U: Hmm.

Rosenquist: But I said, "Is the warp – is the canvas cut?" "No, it's just scratched." So I said, "Well, I might be able to glue it and paint it. Or just paint it."

CM-U: Um-hum. Um-hum. But when you go back in and just paint it, don't you find that it's difficult to kind of match around? Or do you just repaint a section?"

Rosenquist: No, not necessarily. And that's why I use my technique, you see. I use straight color, and I don't – I don't use a medium. So I can, with the Winsor & Newton, I can do pretty well. I can fake it. Ha! Yeah. No, really, I'd – see, the barrier, you know, the barrier between one thing and then a covering or whatever.

[00:33:36]

Rosenquist: I protested the restoration of the Sistine Chapel.

CM-U: Did you? Yeah.

Rosenquist: Yeah. And…

CM-U: What was your thought?

Rosenquist: I went up to see it.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: I climbed up the scaffold. And I went to the Vatican. And it's difficult to get into the Vatican. And – because you are really shunted from one officer to another. So I saw Dr. Walter Persegati, and he is an old Italian with a crew cut. He goes, "Before we let you see the ceiling, why do you protest?" I said, "Well, I'm a young artist. I've been painting for 30 years. And I was really curious why Michelangelo would give up any advantage that he had in producing this master work like chiaroscuro." "Very well. Take him up. Take him way away." [sounds like]

(laughter)

Rosenquist: So Mimi and I climbed the scaffold and the Italian says, "Go ahead. Touch. It's a good fresco." I said, "No, I don't touch it. I won't touch it."

(laughter)

Rosenquist: There was three Japanese guys there. No, three Italians and a Japanese man. And the restorers were there, working. And at this point it was restored half way. About half way. And right down the middle, on one side, there was this head, and it looked like a Bernini sculpture.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: It had the cartilage in the nose that I studied with Robert Beverly Hale. I mean, you know, when I was a student, I studied anatomy. And it was the cartilage in the eyes. It was classical lips. And you could see muscles in the head. But it was dirty and dark. But you could see the restored head on the right was about this big. It looked like a *popetti*. It looked like a meatball. It looked like a cauliflower ear. It looked like someone was punched too much, you know. It was pink. It was pink, and bright, and everything, but it was – it looked like the drawing was destroyed in parts of the muscles.

CM-U: So you felt the modeling had been…

Rosenquist: Taken away.

CM-U: …taken away.

Rosenquist: So apparently, from my – I'm pretty ignorant on the subject, however, from what I gathered, at one point there was a glue chiaroscuro shading [sounds like] put on this thing, and they really don't know if it was Michelangelo or someone else. And that seemed to be the whole contention, to keep taking this away. And my argument is that, in those days, without any illumination, an artist could show off by showing how sensitive he or she was by the delicacy of the light that falls from the highest lights on a figure down into the drapery to the deepest chiaroscuro. And now that seems to be totally missing.

CM-U: Is that something you would have seen from the floor?

Rosenquist: Mmm, maybe a little hard, but, for instance, in a figure, you know, as the light comes in this room, there's a light on your nose and your eyebrow, and it goes on down. There, there seemed to be a headlight coming off somebody's knee, and there's one of a shoulder. And these highlights were – Nyah! It was like they turned it into a crude drawing. A crude thing. So that's it. People just – everybody disagrees with that, but…

CM-U: Yeah. It would be interesting, you know. You bring up an interesting point, though. It would be interesting to see the clean ceiling in candlelight. I've never seen it. I mean, I have been up, but I have, of course, just seen it in the light that's in the Sistine Chapel today.

Rosenquist: Yeah.

CM-U: But it would be interesting to see the clean ceiling in candlelight, to see what happens.

[00:37:23]

CM-U: One of the things as a conservator that I was interested in – I think I wrote to you about this – is your use of boards behind some of the canvases.

Rosenquist: Yes.

CM-U: And the ones I know of, the paintings I know of, are both '80s paintings.

Rosenquist: Yeah.

CM-U: One of them is in Toledo, *Secret Incarnation*… [1984, The Toledo Museum of Art, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey]

Rosenquist: Yeah.

CM-U: …and *Dew Blossoms* [1985] here has it.

Rosenquist: Yeah. Um-hum.

CM-U: When did you start doing that, and sort of what was your impulse?

Rosenquist: Well, I've been very lucky where I haven't had many paintings damaged physically in all these years. I've been maybe three, or now maybe five. I mean, but accidentally, I mean, not somebody who has attacked them. But, I mean, they had three punctures, something like that. So I saw these door skins. They're a little laminated plywood. I thought, "Gee whiz, if I…" I think I started doing it in '77. Now I thought about it. '77. I did a show, and I covered everything with these door skins, stretched the canvas over them. And, you know, you can go like this [pounding sounds] right on the canvas surface, bonk, bonk, like that, which means that if somebody hit it, something hit it hard, it might not rupture the warp and the weft. So I thought that'd be terrific.

CM-U: So you did it with preservation in mind?

Rosenquist: Indeed. Indeed. Also, you know, the people that you work with in the studio. I had a crew of about ten people, and two old-timers who, they didn't realize that this was art or painting or anything. But they're care – I said, "No, don't touch it. You gotta be careful." You know, one was 80 years old. One's in the sixties, late sixties. And once I wood-grained something with wood grain tools on a commission, and the guy said, "That's nice wood. Make me a cord [sounds like] of it." Or they'd say, "I'd do…" They would make a stretcher bar perfect with this covering on it, bring it over. I'd start painting on it, make a painting. They didn't give a damn about the painting. They'd say, "Now where do you want us to put it?"

(laughter)

Rosenquist: You know, like, "Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, what the hell is it? Oh, yeah." So that was their attitude. So I thought, "Gee, I'd better be careful." Because they – you know, people can bump them. The main thing is, everyone is careful with the surface, what they see; but from behind they don't realize it.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: Because there may be something there, and you don't know what it is, even. I mean, like, "Is that a painting?" And it's smashed from the back. So I did that, and I – you know, once or twice I had paintings fall over and nothing happened to them. You know, it went boomp! and it may have hurt the canvas a little, but it didn't cut it. So I've been doing it ever since that. I guess it's '77.

CM-U: Um-hum. Do you nail the paneling right on the stretcher? And then put the canvas around it before you paint it?

Rosenquist: Yeah. That's correct. Yes. Yep.

CM-U: You know, I had…

Rosenquist: Now, I'd see – these canvases, you see, when you make – you manufacture something out of wood, you know, the wood that's available in some community, you try to get the best wood you can. But sometimes you don't know what it is. And this LuAnn plywood is about eighth-inch thick. It's pretty tough stuff, but, you know, but I figured, "I'll paint this painting on this, with good canvas, and if someone wants to change the bar, they're welcome."

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: If they want. But I'm going to provide them with a pretty good stretcher bar. Pretty good. It may not look the greatest from the back, but it's pretty well put together.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: And the only problem is the warping.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: You know. And then if it is something really warped, I'd throw it away, put it on another one.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: But I figure it was up to the person who bought the painting to provide some other kind of thing to hang it on.

[00:41:38]

Rosenquist: And also, as you well know, whatever a person paints or draws or prints on, it's the material's ability to hold the – hang the image on it. I mean, the material's ability to hold the image so it doesn't fall off. So, for instance, a gigantic piece of paper, a very thin piece of paper is difficult because it's so flimsy. So it's the same with canvas, or a stretcher bar. What is this image hanging on? And in this graphic retrospective show, I have big prints that only weigh a couple of pounds, but stretch – the frames are like 500 pounds.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: It seems very silly. It seems silly. I don't know.

CM-U: Well, there is a – I guess, at some point, at which it becomes a negative factor. But…

Rosenquist: Yeah.

CM-U: …it would have to become really…

Rosenquist: But anyway…

CM-U: Are you doing that in your new work as well? Are you still putting boards behind?

Rosenquist: Oh, absolutely.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Rosenquist: Um-hum.

CM-U: I had the occasion one time to restore a group of paintings by an artist who wasn't very well known because he left most of his art to one institution and didn't show it. And I worked on a painting that he never actually stretched. It was a large painting. He just wrapped it around a board.

Rosenquist: Hmm.

CM-U: Perfect state. The painting was in perfect state. Not only just from what you're describing as mechanical blows, but also the expansion and contraction, I'm guessing, was minimized – of the canvas – was minimized by the solid support behind it. And so it had very few cracks. It was really in a pretty good state.

Rosenquist: Ah, ha! I often wonder if they go together, you know. If they…

CM-U: Have you noticed? I mean, in your paintings, have you noticed that – a difference in terms of aging cracks, as these?

Rosenquist: No, in the '77 models, they are really in great shape.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: So ever since then, '87…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: But some things. There's a painting from '64, really great shape, that John Powers – it's 15 feet long, and it's – a lot of delicate painting in it, and it's really in pretty good shape. [James Rosenquist, *Lanai*, 1964, The John and Kimiko Powers Collection]

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: And…

[00:43:57]

CM-U: You seem to accept a certain amount of aging though. I mean, I noticed – I think I was looking at – is it *Astor Victoria* that you still own?

Rosenquist: Oh, that?

CM-U: And it has – it has some…

Rosenquist: No. No, no. See, I did a series of paintings like that, and recently I had them all beeswaxed and restored and covered.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: I mean, from the surface. The surfaces, they were all relined. No, no, the – they had – no, they were all relined on linen canvas. And they look pretty good.

CM-U: They do?

Rosenquist: But that one isn't restored. And I'm gonna have that one restored.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: And then I'll maybe show those. There's about seven, eight of them, with that kind of look. And that's in terrible shape.

CM-U: Well, to my eye, I mean, there was a kind of freshness – well, you see, to my eye, accepting a certain amount of aging, there was a certain freshness to it. There were local problems, but…

Rosenquist: See, my – I started off – I'll tell you.

[00:44:56]

Rosenquist: Part of my whole aesthetic was that I always wondered how I could do a new painting, a new idea, after French Nonobjective painting, where – how could I get below zero, or what could I do? And so when I – I didn't have any money, and I – when I painted signs, I'd paint a glass of beer. They said the wrong color. They said there wasn't enough hops in the beer. I'd have to paint all the foam and the bubbles a little lighter. Or darker. And then mix up one little slight yellow, that's a little bit changed. Or, a huge Arrow shirt as big as the ceiling. They said, "Ah, it looks like it has a dirty collar. Or…" So I would save this paint and bring it home. And I'd say, "I know what this is. This is dirty Hamm's beer yellow. This is Arrow shirt collar, dirty collar white. This is this. This is that." Then I'd make these abstract paintings, and only I knew that this was all the wrong color paintings. It was all the wrong colors. I used to *use* these colors.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: So then, later, I thought, "Well, I could make a painting…" Nothing to do with Pop Art. There was no Pop Art invented. I could make a painting whereby, using an enlarged fragment of something, and setting it in space, I

could – the viewer would identify the closest thing last because it was too close. It would be like if a person was freezing in the winter, and someone offered – in an alley, offered you a fur coat, but you couldn't see who was holding it up, you'd say, "Well, I don't know if I'm gonna get into this image or not."

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: So that was the kind of mystery. I wanted to make mysterious pictures. So I used generic hot dogs, generic things, generic – not like, say, Andy Warhol who used Campbell's – I painted Franco American spaghetti all galore. He used – he made Campbell's Soup.

(laughter)

Rosenquist: You know, he used his dot [sounds like]. And so I could never figure out if his images were hot or cold. Because it was the thing. Coca-Cola. I never did that. I may have used part of a bottle cap which said "Pepsi" on it once…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: …but that's…

[00:47:23]

CM-U: When you – you know, you were in New York – this is, you were in New York working at a time in the late '50s and early '60s when a lot of new materials were coming in. I mean, acrylic paints, Magna colors.

Rosenquist: Okay. New material. One of my first thoughts or introductions to new material, way back, was from my teacher Cameron Booth out in the Midwest, who, I think, with Rothk – maybe with Mark Rothko and Clyfford Still and some others – some of those guys discovered you could buy Dutch Boy acrylic paint and paint it right on canvas, and it would be a good ground. And it would – they had some sense that this was a good material. That this acrylic white was cheap. It was only a couple bucks a gallon. It wasn't an artist's material at all. A lot of those paintings, I think, are painted on that.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: So, I mean, why could – why don't students use that now instead of expensive gesso, acrylic gesso, or whatever? I've seen – as far as paint goes, I've

traveled and seen colleges, universities, and people ask me to comment on their class, or whatever. And usually you see a lot of young kids who are really frustrated, with a big piece of glass with a lot of paint on it, and they've put a cigarette out in it, and it's a big mess, and they're tired of painting. And they come back to this big mess again. So I said, "Look," I said, "no art student has any money, usually. I can give you a set of tips on how to have your own little studio for nothing. Have your own little professional studio. Go buy a putty knife for a buck. Get some empty benzene cans. Cut 'em up." I showed them how to make a brush tray. It's all like a trade school kind of stuff.

Rosenquist: "Set this up. You can get a Chinese, uh, French fry basket, and mount it in a five gallon or a 30 gallon can, fill it full of mineral spirits, and you'll have the watercolor technique of oil painting, where your brush is always clean when you pick it up, instead of this mess that you put your cigarette out in." So I showed that to one class. My goodness. And I said, "Here, here's how you can make you paint go longer." Showed them how to get the paint out of the tube and mix it up with a malted milk mixer, and things like that. And I went back one more time, and when I got back, all of these kids had great big color paintings that they did. And I said, "Fantastic!"

CM-U: Fantastic. Yeah.

Rosenquist: "You really – the boys and girls are really doing it." I said, "Now all you need is content. But you, you really got it out there."

CM-U: Right.

Rosenquist: And it was refreshing because the – what they did before was some – it looks like some little scratch, with some little yellow here and another little thing there. And they are frustrated or angry. And they, you know…

CM-U: Well, they're not taught technique. Maybe they're just not given that. [sounds like]

Rosenquist: No, rarely. Never.

CM-U: Um-hum.

[00:50:42]

Rosenquist: I spilled a can of – speaking of conservation, I spilled a can of purple off the DeMille Theater, seven stories, right on the sidewalk at noon. (makes sound of paint hitting and spreading).

CM-U: (laughs)

Rosenquist: And once, for "The Wonderful Country" on the Astor-Victoria Theater, I mixed up about 30 gallons of orange, put it on a truck with all these old guys, and the truck lurched on 11th Avenue, and the paint spilled all over 11th Avenue in a huge orange pancake. So they said, "What are we gonna do? We're gonna lose our jobs, agh!" (laughs) I said, "Toss some – throw some dirt on it, and shovel it out, and let's get the hell out of here."

CM-U: (laughs)

Rosenquist: I didn't know what to do. So the truck driver backed right up into the paint with four wheels and left four orange stripes right down to 45th and Broadway. We – and, I mean, that was like, you know, like tracks. We never got a ticket. It was just luck. (laughs)

CM-U: Luck.

Rosenquist: Yeah.

[00:51:46]

CM-U: Well, thank you. Are there any other just kind of conservation issues you want to talk about, or have we sort of covered what you think…

Rosenquist: Well, no, the – and just again, I mean, with my _____ [word inaudible]. I don't know what other people do. I mean, I've heard that Bill de Kooning put Mazola oil – oh! When, when someone asked me recently, they said, "What new technical things do you like to use in your work?" And I said, "Well, I'm really looking for something to make the paint dry slower, so I can get deeper into that."

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: And, uh, and another thing. I mean, as far as aesthetics go, it seems to me that the idea of collage is a contemporary idea because things happen so quickly compared to, you know, a century ago, or the nineteenth century even, where paintings were painted over a period of a year or two.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: And now, with the paints I use, also the blacks – the black, and Prussian blue, and some colors dry overnight. Why, I don't know, and I've never called their factory or anything. They dry – they'll dry and almost crack, they dry so quick. White paint never seems to dry. Yellow seems to dry. Red never seems to dry. And so forth. But I like that point where you can go back into them and put some finishing touches into something that's still wet.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: Which is quite opposite (clears throat) acrylic paint. And I don't know. Everyone has done – I mean, a lot of people have done a lot of acrylic paintings, but they've trusted acrylic paint.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: But no one seems to really know if that's good stuff or not.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: You know, you don't know. White lead is good stuff. It's poison. It lasts until longer than death. Turns a little yellow. Put it in the sun, it'll get light again.

CM-U: Hmm.

Rosenquist: And that's tried and true. White lead.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: And black. You'll always have a painting. But – so, anyway, I, I personally try to simplify something. And I don't really – I like to see the painting blossom. I like to see the thing happen. I really hate to get into a mess, a technical mess…

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: …you know, something half dry, half wet, half sticky, half this. And it doesn't work, and the painting doesn't work. The best thing, let it dry up and start over again on it.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: But I don't know. Then – and also, source materials, or one's own private – my own photographs I've taken over the years, they fade. And when we had a flood, I lost thousands of photographs…

CM-U: Hmm.

Rosenquist: …when I had this flood last spring. So what we did, we immediately put them in fresh water and stuck them in a deep freeze. And a lot of things in a deep freeze. And a lot of papers and everything rotted immediately. We did manage to save a great number of photographs. The film. It was amazing. A great number. Not – they are still there. They're not great quality, but we did save them.

CM-U: Right.

Rosenquist: You know. So, anyway…

CM-U: Well, what interests me is that – it's your knowledge from experience of working materials that you draw on. And it's serving you very well.

Rosenquist: Well, I hope so. You know.

CM-U: It seems so, certainly. And I've just seen the transparencies of your new work. And I mean, they are big, and they are wonderful, and incredibly interesting.

Rosenquist: Oh.

CM-U: So it sounds like you are really still exploring.

Rosenquist: I've painted four 17 by 46-foot paintings. But, oh, when people ask about technology in painting, I said, "There's more digits in a Chinese bristle brush than there is in a computer." They go, "What?" In the hands of an artist.

CM-U: Hmm. That's great.

Rosenquist: So it's fascinating how you twist that brush.

CM-U: It's the best.

Rosenquist: And you can see it in this museum here.

[Break in video]

[00:56:42]

(On screen: "Continuing conversation about Rosenquist's birthday gift to Bob Rauschenberg…")

Rosenquist: And I didn't know what I was doing, you know. I just said, "Here, Bob, happy birthday." Like that. And he goes, "Oh, yeah. I need it." You know. All of a sudden, he makes these Hoarfrost things on this printed – on this material.

CM-U: Oh, you gave him the materials for the gift?

Rosenquist: I gave him a bolt of material. Then he started buying it like crazy. Then I – for another birthday. I mean, I've had birthday presents. Someone gave me 11 yards of dirt. This 80-year old man said, "I've got some dirt coming, and I'm gonna give it to you."

(laughter)

Rosenquist: I says, "That's one of the nicest presents I ever had in my life." So I took it. So I was going down to see Bob another time on his birthday, and I bought him a stack of door skins. And I said, "Here, Bob, happy birthday." I had not a clue if he would use that or whatever. He took them. These – this was plywood veneer. Was the right size for his press. Put it on the press. Put things on it, and ran it through the press. And adhered it to the press. And then made tons of sculpture, paintings, and pieces out of that. So then he kept buying them by the ton.

CM-U: Inspiration by material.

Rosenquist: Yes.

CM-U: Yeah.

Rosenquist: Yeah.

CM-U: That's the best.

Rosenquist: And it seems to be pretty good stuff.

CM-U: Great.

Rosenquist: So…Oh, I thought there was another one, too. I don't know. Doesn't have to…

EL: What's the story that is reported _____ [phrase inaudible]?

Rosenquist: Well, down at his birthday, or sometime, he – it was about four in the morning, and everybody was pretty drunk, and he says, "Jim-bo, come on in! I want to show you my latest work." So I go in, and he's got all kinds of things he's working on, constructions, and pieces, everything. And on the wall was about six bamboo poles leaning against the wall with strings down, and little tin cans hanging off the top. So I looked around and said, "Gee, Bob, you know, this – these are really inventive. This is amazing form. I've seen funny things you did here. But, you know, I've been looking at that for two hours, and," I said, "I still don't get the – what the hell is it?" He looks at me, and he's got his drink. He goes, "Well, I know you put things on the wall before you know what they are, either."

(laughter)

Rosenquist: I go, "Yeah, you're right."

(laughter)

Rosenquist: So it's the same with material, too, you know.

CM-U: That's great.

Rosenquist: You know, you grab something in the middle of the night and write on it.

CM-U: Well, good. I'm glad we did that 'cause I did read another version of that. So that's good to get it straight.

Rosenquist: Yeah _____ [phrase inaudible].

CM-U: Yeah.

[Break in video]

[00:59:28]

Rosenquist: I think that, you know, people – a person like myself, whatever. I didn't know – you don't realize you're living in that certain time, and what you're actually getting. But there are _____ [word inaudible] where my apartment, five room apartment on the Upper East Side, only cost $31 dollars a month. My studio was $45 dollars a month. Breakfast was a quarter. That kind of thing where, in the United States, in the '50s, one could start off from nowhere cheaper in New York than Minneapolis or Chicago.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: And that had to do with Army vets and all sorts of stuff. Now, where is the advantage for a young student? Where is the place that they can be? It could be some part of America that has industry around – not a tourist place, but an industry area where they can get materials, and get something, and have a very cheap studio somewhere out in the back somewhere. No one, I mean guys I knew, Bob Indiana, Bob Jack, and Ellsworth Kelly, and Bob and Jasper and everybody, you never expected anything to happen.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: So I saw Bob Indiana one day, and he said, "Jim, you'll never guess what I saw. I saw this dirty collage in front of a big glass table on 5th Avenue." I says, "What?" He says, "Yes, these people bought it from Rauschenberg, you know." So I said, "Hey, let's go out and have a beer."

(laughter)

Rosenquist: "Let's celebrate his…" Another guy that I knew was a painter, admired Franz Kline. Young guy. Basil King. He sold two paintings for $600 bucks each. I was, "Wow! He's off." He never sold anything ever again, that guy.

CM-U: Yeah.

Rosenquist: So one would never think that you could ever make a living from art. When I came to New York, I had letters of introduction to about 20 older people, from my old teacher. And they were – one was the brother of the president of the Art Students' League. Most of them were commercial artists.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: They lived nicely. They lived on 57th Street or – in fancy apartments. A few hundred bucks for these beautiful places. But they were fashion illustrators

for *New York Times*. They did TV things. They did all this kind of commercial art to make a living for their private interests, their Thursday night painting, that was abstract, which was a private thing.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: Which they – their works were priceless because they weren't worth anything.

CM-U: Um-hum. Hmm.

Rosenquist: So that's the thing now that you hear, maybe a father telling a daughter to take up art because she could make money after she gets out of school or something. (laughs)

CM-U: I know. It's something, isn't it?

Rosenquist: Or something.

CM-U: Hmm.

Rosenquist: So that's where the difference – there are certain specific things, there are facts that are different. They are not the same. But where do you look for them now? Where is an _____ [word inaudible]? Where is a growing place for artists now? It isn't where you think it is.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Rosenquist: You know, it's like looking for your wallet under the streetlight because there's light there. And there's no wallet.

(laughter)

CM-U: Right.

EL: That's one of my favorite expressions.

[END RECORDING]