Artists Documentation Program

Video Interview Transcript

ROBERT GOBER

APRIL 18, 2013

Interviewed by:

Brad Epley, Chief Conservator, The Menil Collection, and

Jan Burandt, Conservator of Works of Art on Paper, The Menil Collection

Video: Laurie McDonald | Total Run Time: 01:15:27

Location: The Menil Collection

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.

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

About the Artists Documentation Program

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

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

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

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[Speakers (in order of appearance): Brad Epley, the Menil Collection; Robert Gober, Artist; Jan Burandt, Conservator of Works of Art on Paper, The Menil Collection]

[BEGIN RECORDING]

[00:00:41]

Brad Epley: Today is Thursday, April 18th. My name is Brad Epley. I'm the chief conservator of the Menil Collection, and we're in the galleries of the Menil Collection with Robert Gober. Bob is here for the opening of *Forrest Bess: Seeing The Invisible,* which has expanded installation of his installation from 2012, *The Man That Got Away*. And Bob's agreed to talk with us today about the pieces of his in our collection as well as one that's on long-term loan from him. So thank you very much and it's a real pleasure to have you here.

Robert Gober: Pleasure to be here.

Brad Epley: Since the sink form is so constant throughout your work—

[00:01:18]

Brad Epley: —I was wondering if maybe we could spend some time talking about how you make these and if it's changed over the course of the years.

Robert Gober: Yeah, it has changed quite a bit. Because when I started making them, I was working by myself in my studio and really did not have money. I remember, like the early sink, one of the early sinks now when I borrow it back and I look at the piece of plywood that's against the wall, it was my kitchen counter. And so I literally had to take my kitchen counter for materials. I remember waiting for plywood to be in somebody's garbage on the street, etc. So—And then later on with a sink like this, now I can't remember without taking it off the wall, I began using a welder to—Because the weak point of the sinks, I learned decades later, tended to be right here. Because what I would do, there was a piece of plywood back, and then I would get angle iron and bolt the angle iron. And then I'd bend probably like 5/8ths threaded rod for here, wire that together, put two or three layers of wire lath, galvanized wire lath, and

then pack it with plaster, which—And I used a product called Structo-Lite which is a perlited plaster, because it's lighter, and then many coats of spackle, and then many coats of paint, which was always Benjamin Moore semi-gloss Dulamel straight from the can. And that product is slowly being removed from availability. Like, you can't—because it's an oil paint and because of new rules. So we get it now actually from Atlanta. And I won't say that I don't remember the supplier, but it is illegal for him to ship it across state lines to us. But they don't care. And we keep replenishing because I don't know what the—in an unopened can, what the shelf life is for paint. But even in an unopened can, it does have a shelf life. So we tend to buy it in quarts now and stockpile it, because I don't know if I can find the perfect—In fact, you should have some here and we can give you the—You might still—Texas, you can probably still buy it. I don't know. So now anyway, we were—It's—When we make one now, it's much more—because—much more, not elaborate, I would say we do a much better job because—Now the first sink was '84, so however—almost 30 years later, we can see what happens just by age. And this tends to be the—in the arms, the elbows here of the piece, there tends to develop hairline cracks. And I think—Well, we'll tell—Someone will know 30 years from now. I probably won't be here. We think we've solved that problem with a good solid welded angle iron. So that's basically the only thing that's changed. And I think instead of using galvanized wire lath, we use stainless wire lath now. But—And I don't build them anymore. My assistants do. That's the other thing that's changed.

Brad Epley: Yeah, I was curious because the media description from the ones in the mid-'80s—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Brad Epley: —had changed a little bit. And so I was wondering if the framework itself that underlies the plaster and the—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Brad Epley: —paint had changed. And that sounds like it's changed a little bit.

Robert Gober: Yeah. And I can't remember where this one falls. It's a much better armature I know than the early ones (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)—

Brad Epley: I think this was '99, 2000, so. But we can—

Robert Gober: It's probably a much better armature. Yup.

Brad Epley: And then I wanted to talk, too, a little bit about the use of wax and these legs. I seem to remember that these are actually from a cast you did from a—for a much earlier piece, or at least—

[00:05:09]

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Brad Epley: —a slightly earlier piece.

Robert Gober: Well the—We first cast Louis who was five at that time. And Louis was the son of Gayle Brown who was a seamstress and would do some sewing when I needed sewing. And so we made a plaster cast of Louis's leg. But it was just a straight leg from, like, here down. And we've subsequently—We made a plaster cast because I had an assistant, Daniel Oates, who was trained in England. And so in art school in England, you—at least at that time—and at this school, you actually learned crafts like stone carving, mold making, woodworking. And so Danny made great plaster casts. We've since remade the mold for a silicone cast because the plaster wears out. But then—So we would cast that original leg. And then in clay, I would mold the other parts that bend. And then we'd make a whole new mold and recast the leg.

Brad Epley: Oh, OK.

Robert Gober: Yeah. So there's a new mold for that and there's a new mold for this piece also.

Brad Epley: And so there's no need—Or is there any kind of infrastructure in the leg?

Robert Gober: Yeah, I think that there's a threaded rod, probably half-inch or five-eighths that goes through the whole thing.

Brad Epley: OK. Obviously you're able to utilize the wax for lots of different things, not only kind of legs, but butter and cheese—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Brad Epley: —all these different things. I was wondering, in terms of its—the qualities that it has, what are the—what have you seen in terms of aging that's maybe disturbed you, in this case specific to legs, but—

Robert Gober: Well, it's been a bit of a journey with the wax. And it continues. We used a wax supplier for—I mean, first I just got wax—I always used a bleached beeswax. And first, I would just get it from a craft store in New York, from Pearl Paint. And then when I was using more of it, we found a supplier on Long Island called Edward Hess who's since gone out of business. And so we used Edward Hess for a long time. And we used to buy the wax in blocks at Pearl Paint which meant it had already—Well, I'm not sure. Well, we used to buy it in blocks. And from Hess, we got it in, like, a pebble formation in a bag by the pound. And then what we found years later—And it had to do with—

[00:07:47]

Robert Gober: We found it because there's a piece at the Schaulager in Basel where wax legs are submerged in water. And we found that over time, the legs were turning bright green. And we couldn't figure out—and—why it was. And they convened because they're—The Schaulager's also has endowed a scholarship in art conservation at the University of Basel and—because they collect cutting edge contemporary work, they very much want conservation to be part of their mandate. It's about preserving things that are difficult in their time and how do you do it? And so they made this colloquium of scientists and conservators to figure out why the legs were turning green. And they came up with the reason, but it turned out to not be the reason. And what they thought—There was seaweed that was in—The man was standing in a tidal pool. And this piece was shown—Actually a fraction of it was shown at CAM maybe, like, ten years ago. They thought that what was happening is that—We had used dye for the seaweed. And they thought that the dye was very slowly leaving the seaweed and attaching itself to the wax, because you could scrape it off. Logical, but it turned out not to be the case. So we remade all the seaweed based on their recommendation. It was—first it was a polyurethane. And we remade it with a silicone platinum because these things, plastics and rubbers change so much every year. And there's no received body of knowledge about how these works either are going to perform over time, do perform over time. It's not like oil paint. And once—the company will tell you things, but they don't know. And once you add another material, like a pigment to a polyurethane, all bets are off. Like, what's going to happen in the future? So anyway, we remade all the seaweed. But we used a pigment instead

of a dye, because they said that that would be more—trapped within the material and not leach. Well, it turned out, it was not this. It was the—They have their own—within their HVAC system, they have their own osmosis purification system for the water so that mold doesn't grow in the HVAC system. And it turned out that the copper pipes of the HVAC system were leaching microscopic amounts of copper into the water. And that's what was attaching itself to the legs. And the copper was turning that bright green that it does as it patinates. So anyway, but what we found through—what we found from them analyzing the legs was that the legs were part of the problem, because we were using a bleached wax. And it was determined that the bleach was not fully expunged from the wax. And so the bleach itself that was left in the wax was creating part of the problem. There was a co-factor there. And so Christian Scheidemann, who is an objects restorer, who you probably know in New York—I met him first when he was in Hamburg. And we've worked together for more than 20 years. And he's my go-to person, both—not just when things happen to works—I think he worked on this piece. He doesn't just—for me, he doesn't just work on things after something happens to them, but I work with Christian often when I'm making works to find out what things should go together, how to join things that don't want to be joined. You know, you try to be proactive. And you can't solve all the problems. But better to—I feel like it's better to spend the energy and the time while you have the enthusiasm of making the piece than ten years later when you could care less (inaudible). Oh, so Christian turned us on to a wax supplier, where, in his opinion, the wax, the bleached wax was much purer. And we've just had—I don't know what happened to this guy, but he got—you know, sometimes people are reliable for years, and then they just go screwy, you know? And so we're now looking—And Christian thinks he's found another supplier in Switzerland for the wax. So it continues to be—to find the purest bleached beeswax is an issue.

Brad Epley: Because I think when this came to Schaulager, there were some issues that we worked with your studio. Like, it's a—kind of efflorescence that—

Robert Gober: Yes.

Brad Epley: I guess it starts to look kind of like eczema or something—

Robert Gober: Yes.

Brad Epley: —on the skin, but not—And I think we slightly dabbed at it with petroleum distillate—

Robert Gober: Yes.

Brad Epley: —and it would kind of reform that—the surface layers.

Robert Gober: Yeah. It does. I found the wax very friendly, forgiving in way—I mean, it has its own difficult qualities for sure. But, yeah, a little mineral spirits and—can—yeah—can heal some problems on the surface. Yeah.

Brad Epley: So its appeal to you is both obviously visual but also its handling. It—You can do with it what you want?

Robert Gober: No, it's a difficult medium. I mean, it's stable. Wax is stable, which is nice. It resembles flesh and has a translucence. And that's what I think I like about it. And it's a metaphorical reference to candles. I grew up Catholic, and the flame of the candle and the burning down of the candle being a metaphor for life, and the wax being used in the human form all made sense to me.

Brad Epley: So when you've had issues with it in terms of its preservation, it's been this kind of efflorescence or a discolor—

Robert Gober: Or the fragility, that it breaks. It cracks. And it can be hard. That's where—because it's organic, sometimes you can heal a crack and sometimes you can't. Sometimes you can completely disguise it and sometimes it just won't. It has to be recast, so. And we have the molds for these if they should ever need to be recast.

Brad Epley: Have you worked with collectors in the past where things have happened with components of a piece? Or do you—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Brad Epley: —prefer to just kind of refer them to a conservator? Or—

Robert Gober: It completely varies. I used to do repairs myself. Now I think I refer them more to Christian, although there's a case right now where a piece got damaged in shipping. And it—I knew it was a very fragile piece. But I thought that that was part—It was a stool basically. And we cast it all in plaster. And it

was very—if you know about these things, it's very—there's a wow factor to it, like, "You cast—That's plaster, and it's one casting and there's no joins?" But the downside to that is that, you know, impact can shatter it. And so it shattered. And I felt that there was some inherent vice in the piece because of the fragility. And so rather than having anybody else try to fix it, what we did is we cast the same stool in aluminum and painted it white. And you really can't tell the difference between the painted plaster and the aluminum, so, I gave up the plaster part of it. And so we're remaking it in the studio. So sometimes it makes sense to just give it to Christian, and sometimes we do it ourselves, depending on the nature of the problem, and the collector, you know, and the person, you know, if they don't—You know, if they're unpleasant or unreasonable person I just sort of say, "You deal with it Christian."

Brad Epley: So in some cases then, it's not a—on your part at least an inherent commitment to a given material like the plaster versus the—resolving it in a different way that may be less fragile. It's—Or is there a little bit of disappointment on your part in terms of the—needing to realize it in a different way?

Robert Gober: A little bit. But it's all a process. You know? It's—You know, you try something. And it—It made sense to me at the time. And it still makes sense. And there's still some out there where there hasn't been a problem. And who knows? You know, once something gets in a crate, you know, it's, like—you know, guys drop it and they, "Oh, I don't know how that"—I have never, in all the things that have been damaged of my work, I've never ever had somebody say, "I'm really sorry. I dropped it. I'm really sorry. I tripped over it." I'll never—like, never. It's always a mystery, how things get damaged. Always—

Brad Epley: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

Robert Gober: Nobody knows. It's always a mystery, so. So it could have been the inherent vice in the piece. Or it could have just been being dropped—you know, being dropped. You know? So, who knows?

Brad Epley: And the one last element I wanted to talk about are the sandals a little bit because the soles and the straps are all handmade. But the fasteners and I guess the socks to an extent are kind of standardized or off-the-shelf items.

Robert Gober: The buckles are the pull tabs from Budweiser beer cans. And this was, at the time, important to me. I thought it lent a whole other quality to a children's shoe because there's a kind of innocence about the shoe. And there's—There's nothing wrong with a Budweiser beer tab. But it brings adulthood and—I don't know what the other qualities would be. But it was always important to me that they be from a Budweiser beer can. It's also so—such a common—I guess it was important that it was Budweiser and not a—like a refined Belgian beer or German beer, that there was something, kind of a common—American common denominator in the item that I chose. And there's something funny about it, too.

Brad Epley: Which is—right—important as well.

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Brad Epley: And the socks are custom done?

Robert Gober: The socks are store-bought. And then we dyed them to be the shade of blue that they are. And the sandals—People describe these legs as girl's legs a lot of times. And I think it's because of the sandal, that it's based more on what I would see as like a European boy's sandal, although now, kids' sandals are like SUVs. You know? They're (inaudible)—They're—along with strollers, you know, they've all gotten super-sized. So I think it's that delicate quality of the sandal that Americans think, "Oh, it's a girl's leg," because of that. Whereas to me, by dyeing the sock blue, because pink for girl, blue for boy, it always said boy. Plus I knew the leg came from a boy, too, so. And I never hid that fact. You know? It was pictured in catalogs, the casting of Louis and stuff like that, so.

Brad Epley: I think I remember seeing images of him watching videos while he's—

Robert Gober: Yeah, we had to get cartoons for him, yeah. Yeah.

Brad Epley: OK. And just from a materials standpoint, is it, like, RIT Dye or something like that, that you would have used (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)—

Robert Gober: Yes, I think it was. Yeah.

Brad Epley: OK. Great. Anything else about this piece that comes to mind?

Robert Gober: You've taken exquisite care of it. And it's not the easiest piece.

Brad Epley: No, it's a tricky piece to store and then to—

Robert Gober: Yes, because that leg, getting—weaving it through the holes and settling it and stuff. But you've taken great care of it. No, that's about it really I think. Those are the problems that we've—I think we've covered the problems that I've had with similar pieces. In the past. Yeah. Great. Good. Yeah.

Brad Epley: Just one last quick—

Robert Gober: Yeah?

Brad Epley: —follow-up question.

Robert Gober: Yes?

Brad Epley: The fastener that's part of the clasp—

Robert Gober: Yes?

Brad Epley: —you had described—

Robert Gober: I think it's a finishing nail that we clipped and stuck in there. Yup. And there's also some graphite that—drawn onto the white leather to simulate a change in buckle size. When you go from hole to hole, it leaves a dirty indentation.

Brad Epley: So that—Yeah. And it's an expansion, right? So he's getting—

Robert Gober: Getting bigger.

Brad Epley: His foot's getting bigger. Yeah.

Robert Gober: Yes.

Brad Epley: Great. So I guess at this point, we'll take a break and move the show to conservation.

Robert Gober: Yup. Great.

Brad Epley: OK.

[00:21:00]

Brad Epley: Again, it's April 18th and now we're in the conservation department of the Menil Collection with Robert Gober. And we'll be talking about this piece, *Untitled, 2003-07*.

Robert Gober: I don't remember.

Brad Epley: I think conveniently, you've signed it in a—

Robert Gober: It says my signature, and 2003, 2007.

Brad Epley: So is this an edition, or is this—

Robert Gober: Were there two?

Brad Epley: Are there more than one of this iteration, or—

Robert Gober: Oh, you know what I think it is—No, wait. Oh, I know. There's this one, which exists by itself. And then there's another one which the Hirshhorn has which went with a giant stick of butter on the floor. And so it came as two—two pieces, one sculpture. Anyway, so.

[00:21:39]

Brad Epley: And so—But this is realized separately from the—that extra component of the installation, the butter? OK.

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Brad Epley: And was there an earlier iteration of this, maybe not the sunset, but of the prison window?

Robert Gober: Yeah. I first did 'em in 1992 for an exhibition that was at the Dia Center in New York. And there were—Within an installation, there were, one, two, three, four, five, six prison windows, same size, same set-up, but bright blue sky, whereas this is kind of a semi-lurid sunset sky. So that's the difference.

[00:22:10]

Brad Epley: And I believe you worked with a lighting designer to—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Brad Epley: —come up with the—

Robert Gober: I know. It's so simple. Should we turn it around for the camera? Yup. I had never worked with lights before. And my assistant at that time, Daphne Fitzpatrick, said, "Call Jennifer Tipton," who's—And Jennifer is, like, one of the premier theatrical lighting designers living today. She works with Robert Wilson. She works with a lot of dance and performance. And Jennifer came over and she said—And I didn't know how I was going to do the diorama. I really didn't know. And so we talked it through. And she came up with this idea of just incandescent and fluorescent, and that I paint the sky on the diorama. So that was—It was a very, very simple solution.

Brad Epley: And so the lighting set-up that's in the earlier version is the same kind of balance between incandescent and fluorescent?

Robert Gober: It is. I think at first we had the incandescent mounted on the sides. And I forget. It must just be more effective to have it mounted above than on the sides.

Brad Epley: And there's a note in the installation instructions that the studio sent with the piece that—Is it possible? Sometimes you have to adjust the intensity of the light for a given space, so maybe take out bulbs, or—

Robert Gober: Yeah, because it's always a balance of the light that's in the space. To make the magic work the best, that you're seeing sky—You never completely believe you're seeing sky. But it does work to a degree. And it's dependent on that balance of the light in the room and the light in the box. And so the more light you have in the room, the more light you need in the box, and vice versa. But in general, just keeping the lights like this and then lowering them in the gallery tends to work. I don't know if you had it—Did you have any issues here with it?

Brad Epley: Well, we did—It was curious because it was on a wall that was adjacent to the corridor.

Robert Gober: I remember.

Brad Epley: So you did get a little bleed-in—

Robert Gober: Yup.

Brad Epley: —of daylight from the corridor. And I was just curious if—what—if you had seen that, what you thought of that, or if we needed to adjust the installation next time.

Robert Gober: I did see it. It wasn't perfect, but it worked perfectly fine. Yeah. And I know it's difficult because it needs back space. And that was a wall where you had back space, as opposed to building a wall in a gallery where you're going to lose five feet. You know?

Brad Epley: And was this the piece, also the specific one that you used in your *Meat Wagon* installation here?

Robert Gober: Oh.

Brad Epley: That may be—

Robert Gober: I think—No. I think I used a straightforward blue sky. Yeah, it was not this same piece.

Brad Epley: So this was subsequently created then.

Robert Gober: Yes, yeah.

Brad Epley: OK.

Robert Gober: Right.

[00:25:18]

Brad Epley: Because that was an installation where it was in a completely interior gallery.

Robert Gober: Right. Yeah. That's right. We blocked the window in that gallery. Yeah.

Brad Epley: Anything—I guess one issue, how you felt about the particular equipment here, just knowing the way technology's going, that incandescence, the writing may be on the wall for how long we can—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Brad Epley: —use those, and maybe even get those.

Robert Gober: Right. I don't know. You know, the first impulse—Well, this one says made in China on it. I think they'll be make—Well, who knows? China might beat us in technology. I don't know. But, you know, my first impulse—

[00:25:56]

Robert Gober: I have a piece that involves a slide projector. And so as soon as we heard that Kodak was discontinuing slide projectors, you know, we bought a dozen slide projectors. So my first impulse was, well, you buy—you know? They're not expensive. You buy a hundred light bulbs and put 'em aside. But I imagine that there would be something—I mean, I had my first sort of experience with LEDs because we're changing the light in the studio. And they're advancing so rapidly, the quality of the light from LEDs, that I'm pretty confident that we'll find some substitution for the incandescent. I don't think it's going to be that big a problem.

Brad Epley: So in a same way with the plaster discussion we had earlier, it's not any particular technology that you're wed to here. It's the—

Robert Gober: No.

Brad Epley: —ultimate effect.

Robert Gober: Exactly.

Brad Epley: So if in 50 years, this needs to be changed out for LED—

Robert Gober: Yup.

Brad Epley: OK, great.

Robert Gober: Yes. Yup.

Brad Epley: All right. Let me—

Robert Gober: Should we turn this back around?

Brad Epley: Turn this—Unplug it, then we'll—Actually I'll push it out and we'll pull the chair in.

Robert Gober: OK, great.

[00:26:53]

Brad Epley: It's an early piece, or—at least from the mid-'80s maybe?

Robert Gober: I think '87.

Brad Epley: I think '86 and '87.

Robert Gober: Yeah. Yeah. I think it was shown in '87. And it is—The structure is, if I may, made out of wood, and then like the sinks, wire lath and plaster that's been sealed and painted. And then I designed fabric pattern for it. And the images came from a very basic embroidery book that I bought at Barnes & Noble. And I traced it and came up with my own colors for it, created a repeating pattern for the fabric, and then hand-painted with fabric paint on linen the imagery in the linen. I sort of tinted by boiling it in coffee repeatedly on my stove and then rinsing it out and rinsing it out, and boiling it and rinsing it out just to give it a—kind of a used look. And then I sewed the slipcover. I sewed a muslin version first to—as a pattern, if you will, and then took the muslin one apart and used it as a literal pattern to sew this one, because I didn't want to—because the painting was laborious. So I didn't want to waste material, in a sense, on it.

Brad Epley: Had you done a lot of sewing for your own work—

Robert Gober: No.

Brad Epley: —prior to this?

Robert Gober: No. I basically taught myself to sew.

Brad Epley: Have you done a lot of sewing pieces since, or—

Robert Gober: Not that many.

Brad Epley: Mm-hmm.

Robert Gober: No. A few, but not that many.

Brad Epley: And condition-wise, age-wise, etc.—

Robert Gober: It's in really good shape. It looks really good. What do you think?

Brad Epley: I would agree.

Robert Gober: Yeah. There was a—There was a—Where is it?

Brad Epley: There is one hole—

Robert Gober: A hole in it. Yeah.

Brad Epley: —a small hole. It's right there, yeah.

Robert Gober: Right. Now there was another hole, or there was a spot. But it's gone. I forget how we got rid of it. It was quite a dilemma. We tried—We consulted with Christian. We steamed. We ironed with, you know, absorbent stuff. Do you know Sheila Hicks, a woven fabric artist? Oh, she's fabulous. She put her two cents in. But we got rid of it. I don't see it. Yeah.

Brad Epley: There was one little—And I wasn't sure if this is an erasure on your part or maybe—where it's worn away. But it looks like one of the birds—

Robert Gober: Oh, yeah, I paint—

Brad Epley: —maybe this little guy—

Robert Gober: Yeah, I painted it out. I don't know why. Maybe the—Maybe it didn't look right with the composition. Maybe it grabbed your eye too much.

Brad Epley: And do you remember the kind of paint you used? Or were these kind of hobby store sort of—

Robert Gober: DEKA [D-E-C-A], fabric paint that you buy at a craft store. You paint, and then you iron it to seal, supposedly, seal the fabric paint that it can be washable. I probably tested it, but I don't know. I forget. Yeah.

Brad Epley: Anything else about this particular—This is not an edition—

Robert Gober: No. This was a unique piece.

Brad Epley: And I also—I'm thinking of the chair that has the culvert that goes through it [*Chair With Pipe, 1994-1995* Emanuel Hoffman Foundation, on permanent loan to the Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel]. In terms of construction, they're totally unrelated.

Robert Gober: Completely. Completely different, yeah. Completely. Yeah. No, it's pretty straightforward. It's pretty. I like this piece.

Jan Burandt: Can I interject a question?

Brad Epley: Sure.

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: So I've only ever seen this chair on the floor, directly on the floor. But in terms of presentation, I notice that there's—seems like there's less patterning on the back of the chair and—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: And also, you know, sometimes sculpture is put up on protective pedestals—

Robert Gober: Right.

Jan Burandt: —to remove it from the—access to the public. And I'm wondering how you feel about that kind of presentation of this particular work.

Robert Gober: Right. The back—It was originally shown in a corner, just with—just a little space. Did we show it in a corner here?

Brad Epley: It was in a corner here, too, I think.

Robert Gober: Yeah. So that's kind of my intention, is a corner for it. I think it works the best. The platform thing, it's—it's always negotiable, I mean, with the—with an institution. Obviously I think it's more effective on the floor. But, you know, things—Like, sometimes you just—It depends on the—Like here, this is a very calm institution. But you have places where you just have hordes of people going through and—like the Hirshhorn where it's tourists. And you've got a fine art museum next to the Air & Space Museum where children are used to interactive things, and you're supposed to touch and be engaged. And so it can be a problem. So protections—You know, in some instances, you have to go with a compromise.

[00:32:23]

Brad Epley: The next piece up is this *Untitled* from 2005—

Robert Gober: Yup.

Brad Epley: —complete with official piglet comb and—

Robert Gober: That says 'Do Not Display' because if you put sometimes things with an object, someone will think it's part of the work and display it.

Brad Epley: But that's the comb that you used at the studio to—

Robert Gober: It must be, yeah, or we wouldn't have included it, yeah, with a little piglet on it. Yeah.

Brad Epley: So this was a piece that was in the *Meat Wagon*—

Robert Gober: That's right.

Brad Epley: —installation. And I'm trying to remember the details. But it seems like you had a different one initially in mind, and ultimately ended up making a new one for that exhibition. Because there was a—I just remember in reading the files, there was an issue with the photography. But I think there's a long-haired version of this [*Long Haired Cheese* 1992-1993 Unique + artist's proof]—

Robert Gober: —and there's a short-haired version. [*Short Haired Cheese* 1992-1993 Unique + artist's proof]

Brad Epley: —and there's a short-haired version. And you ultimately ended up, I think making this one for that installation.

Robert Gober: I don't remember, actually. Yeah.

Brad Epley: Are these all from a mold? Or are these—

Robert Gober: These are from a mold, not from a real piece of cheese. We created the cheese out of clay and then made a rubber mold and cast, again, the bleached beeswax.

Brad Epley: And could you talk a little bit about the hair insertion method that you used?

Robert Gober: Sure. The hair itself is store-bought human hair. And we buy different—and that's partly to take away a fetishistic quality, like that it comes from me or people that I know. And we get it—there's a hair district in Manhattan for wigs and wig suppliers, and we buy it there. And depending how we're using it, you know, there's all different thicknesses, straight, curly, blah, blah, of hair. And the method we've developed for the implantation of hair is to heat the wax up gently with a light bulb for maybe an hour, because if it's cold and you pierce the wax with a needle, it can fracture the wax. So you want to be able to go in easily, but you don't want the wax too—too melted or that changes the look of it, if it goes to liquid and then—and then back. So you just get it warm enough to accept the needle. And what we did is we take a regular sewing needle and we cut off the top part of the loop. And then we grind those two remaining prongs to be very sharp. And then your hair is cut into maybe two-inch fragments. And so you loop the hair on that hook and you press it into the wax, pull the tool out, and then you take another tool which is—has a rounded edge similar to this. I think we used, like, the back of a pair of tweezers. And then you press the wax down so that it captures that hair and it heals the wax. So it's a one-by-one process.

Brad Epley: And all the—I guess the styling, so to speak—

Robert Gober: Yes.

Brad Epley: —happens once the hairs are in? Or do you—Is that already in mind? So you would maybe insert shorter ones on the top knowing—

Robert Gober: No—Well—No. Usually you give it a trim afterwards, depending on how long you want the hairs and what looks good. And you can control the direction of the hairs in the implantation and then in the sealing of that hole, whether they—you know? Because it's—It's—This is a different beast. But, like, if I did a hairs on a chest, like, sculpture, they don't all go in one direction. You know? Hairs on a chest take all these different kinds of paths and directions. And to make it look realistic, sometimes you have to, even in a small patch, make them go kind of different directions, so.

Brad Epley: And you're able to get a variety of fineness of hair? Because it seems like—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Brad Epley: —the hair quality on the legs of the piece we spoke about earlier is very different from something like this.

Robert Gober: Now that I think—Those hairs I think are the one-time—So you really can't believe what I say. I think it's the one-time that they're not store bought hairs. I think they were from my assistant, Suzanne Wright, at the time who had very, very fine naturally blonde hair, blonde, brown, a straw kind of brown color. Dirty blonde I guess you'd call it. And I'm pretty sure that we used—when she would get a haircut, we would save her hair and use it, because they don't sell—even though some children probably use wigs because the prevalence of, you know, chemo in kids. We couldn't find it being sold, like, that fineness of a child's hair. It's—especially for their—I guess there would be different—Well, it's different. A child's hair on their head is a lot different than the very, very fineness of it, of the hair on a child's leg. So that was an exception of where we used hair from somebody we knew.

[00:37:33]

Brad Epley: And in terms of installation, I think we have here—It was installed in the *Meat Wagon* on a relatively low—

Robert Gober: Yeah. Yeah, similar to this maybe, a little higher maybe. Yeah.

Brad Epley: And have you had difficulties with long-haired pieces like this over time or not necessarily? OK.

Robert Gober: No. We've had no problems with the cheeses. No.

Brad Epley: And this one looks good to you now?

Robert Gober: Looks great.

Brad Epley: OK, good. All right.

Robert Gober: Yup.

Brad Epley: Anything else about cheeses?

Robert Gober: The cheese is a crowd pleaser. People tend to like the cheese, remember it, bring it up. Yup.

[00:38:12]

Brad Epley: And then I guess we can go to the *Lightbulb*, which is slightly earlier work?

Robert Gober: Yes.

Brad Epley: '90s, I think.

Robert Gober: Yeah, the—Yeah. Because I remember—It would have been—I don't remember the date. But it would have been made before, say, '91. I don't think it's signed.

Brad Epley: It says 1990, yeah.

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Brad Epley: Right.

Robert Gober: So 1990, yeah. And it was a collaboration of myself and Sherrie Levine. She had the idea. I made it or my assistant, Daniel Oates, made it. Again, plaster cast. Danny was the guy we talked about who worked for me. Was made out of clay. I still have the clay original. And then he made a plaster mold. We cast it. I painted it. The wax is embedded within the casting.

Brad Epley: And it's described as a sketch?

Robert Gober: I don't—I don't—Yeah, I don't—I don't know what that was. I think it got a little screwed up, like, in terms of, like, the clarity of the—of the edition, like—What was it—? It was like an edition of—Was it two, with two APs and two sketches, something like that?

Brad Epley: It says edition of two, plus two artists' proofs and two sketches. Exact—

Robert Gober: Yeah. It's unnecessarily complicated. I think I maybe made two to live with, one for Sherrie, one for me. And then we just had those. And then we went to, like, OK, we're going to make an edition of two. And then we'll each keep one. But then we had these others ones that we kind of had forgotten about. And so we thought, well, let's call those sketches. I was, like—It's unnecessarily complicated. So I think that's the story of how this came to be.

Brad Epley: And the original clay, you said you still have that as a—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Brad Epley: —as a standalone piece? Or just as a kind of—

Robert Gober: Yeah. Yeah. It's actually—I think it's on the back of the Walker catalog. We show it sometimes. Yeah. It's all cracked and held together by string. Looks kind of great, yeah.

[00:40:16]

Brad Epley: And then next up is the—

Robert Gober: —gin bottle.

Brad Epley: —gin bottle, yeah—

Robert Gober: Yup.

Brad Epley: —which, 2000-2001, again an editioned piece.

Robert Gober: Yup.

Brad Epley: And this is artist's proof, 1 of 2.

Robert Gober: Yup.

Brad Epley: I—Again, just reading about this, the initial experimentation was maybe with glass blowing. And that was not quite right. And so I think—

Robert Gober: Yeah. Yeah. It was based on a—It was a gin bottle that I found. I came out of my psychiatrist's office. And then he was on West 9th Street on kind of, like, a fancy Greenwich Village block. And right in front of his door there was a tree well that had lush ivy in it. And there was an empty gin bottle laying in the ivy that somebody had discarded. And it just—It was, like, you know when you open a floral box and there's some kind of background leafy stuff, and then the flowers? It was like a—It was—It was meant to be taken. And so I took it home and I didn't do anything with it for years. And then it became part of my show at the Venice Biennale [49th Venice Biennale, The United States Pavilion, June 10-November 4, 2001] in 2001. But making it into a sculpture, we—I work with two different—have worked with two different glass artists. One is a glass blower, Deborah Czeresko, and then Linda Ross who is a—who pours glass, two very different skills, I found out. And people tend to divide. They do one or the other within glass, is what I found. And so I had the idea of blown glass at first. And—I forget why. It had something to do with Venice and Murano. Or maybe it was just a—I thought it should be hollow. That was it, because it was a bottle, an empty bottle of gin, although the cap's on. So Deborah thought the only way to do it was to blow the molten glass into a mold. And so the mold, we gave her the original bottle, and she sent it to the mold maker who makes the molds for Steuben glass. And it's solid graph—It's carved out of solid graphite, because that's able to withstand the heat of the molten glass. And there's no sticking quality. It's a beautiful object. It's like a little safe with—comes with hinges. Deborah had a hard time blowing—it's hard enough blowing glass, but getting enough molten glass quickly enough into that very small aperture, and then blowing it out so that it filled the small detail—And we could see some that were partially working, but it wasn't quite working. And so then I thought, well, let's just try pouring it. And pouring it was the solution because it was no longer about an empty gin bottle. It looked like it was full and it had a kind of luminosity and a visual interest that the blown one didn't. Sometime I'll show you a blown one. It's—Visually, it's just not very rich. But then when I saw it, I decided that it needed to be—it needed some kind of visual enhancement. And so this kind of wormy detail which is on the original bottle, I exaggerated, at least by half. And so I went into the graphite mold with a dremel and with tools. And I just exaggerated the patterns that were there. And then we poured it. And then I

hand painted the labels, which are an exact copy of the Seagram's label, got that. And the top, I guess we fashioned that out of clay, made a mold, and cast it into gold tinted plastic and glued it to there. And then security was an issue. And so we drilled a hole in the back of the glass afterwards and inserted a stainless steel pin into the back, so you can drill a hole and it's invisible. And it places it into the wall. And it's security. When things are that small, I think you have to think about them being taken, but also about it being knocked over or bumped into, or, you know, an unsuspecting guard could remove it thinking, 'Who left a bottle in the'—you know?—'…in the show?' And you're supposed—It's supposed to—It begs for that kind of mistaken identity kind of quality if it's successful. You know, hopefully somebody's going to say, what's that doing there? You know?

Brad Epley: Are these intended exclusively for floor installation or—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Brad Epley: OK.

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Brad Epley: And in terms of just the materials, are—is it oil paint? Or is it a water-based paint that you used? Or—

Robert Gober: I think it's—I think it's acrylic. Yeah. I think it's artists—I think I remember. I think it's artists' acrylic from the tube. And what we did was, we took a label off. And then we gave it to a silk screener. And he silk screened the label. And then I painted over the silk screen, rather than, like, gridding it and redrawing it. So the whole surface has been repainted, including the background color.

Brad Epley: I think you get a little bit of a sense in that really fine Surgeon General's warning text in the back where you can just very faintly see.

Robert Gober: It's just kind of nonsense—

Brad Epley: Yeah.

Robert Gober: —yeah, just, like, yeah, painting over it, because it was too small actually to paint. And the older I get, the harder it is for me to do these really tiny little—little things. But luckily when I did it—I forget why. My mom was in the

hospital. So I had to go home and stay in her house. And so I was—I had nothing literally to do. And so I—I was—It was a perfect job. 'Cause ordinarily I don't really have the patience to do something that detailed and that slow. So I was a captive. And it worked very well.

Brad Epley: Speaking of those kind of built-in security devices, the—the cheese is nice in that way because it has a string that comes through the bottom that you can then tie off on the underside of the pedestal deck.

Robert Gober: Oh, I forgot all—I forgot all about it. Yeah. Yeah, that was one solution we came up with, was a security device, so. Because these—Has to have a bonnet on it for security. And so with some pieces, we would imbed a string. And then you tie it within the—inside the pedestal so somebody can't grab it. And it doesn't fall off or—yeah.

Brad Epley: In terms of presentation, are you—you feel similarly about something like this in terms of it—A bonnet is acceptable? Or is it really—

Robert Gober: I think bonnets are much less obtrusive than a plinth or a rope. I think—I think—I accept them with much more ease than I do a plinth or a guard before something. So I think really either—either way. Yeah.

Brad Epley: And then one question I forgot to ask before we move on.

Robert Gober: Yeah?

Brad Epley: The height is variable of the *Lightbulb*?

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Brad Epley: OK.

Robert Gober: I think so. Yeah.

Brad Epley: Because obviously there's a lot provided there, so.

Robert Gober: Right. Well, look how high (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)—

Brad Epley: Which we need, right, exactly. OK. Let's make sure we segue to the prints and drawings.

[00:48:03]

Jan Burandt: I'm Jan Burandt. I'm the paper conservator at the Menil Collection. And I'm here with Robert Gober. I wonder if you would like to talk a little bit about your relationship with the printmaking process.

Robert Gober: Mm-hmm. I in general don't like prints. I don't understand the sense of print except to make money. So I tend to be uninterested in traditional fine art printing, etching, aquatint. I did a few. I think I did three prints where I worked on stone, stone lithography.

[00:48:51] [The artist produced several lithographs with Gemini G.E.L. in 2000-2001]

Robert Gober: I tend to be interested more in prints as—using printmaking to make an object rather than to make a traditional print. And that's—examples here, objects. Looks like a receipt clipped from a newspaper or a stack of newspapers, using photolithography, woodcut, and I think, again, photolithography.

Jan Burandt: And when these artworks come to our collection, the descriptions that they're given are very specific in terms of the paper—

Robert Gober: Yes.

Jan Burandt: —used.

Robert Gober: Yup.

Jan Burandt: And in the context of our collection, generally the tendency is to pare down media descriptions, and only when the artist specifies a particular way of describing the artwork.

Robert Gober: Right. Yeah.

Jan Burandt: So without didactic panels in the galleries, if all there is, is a label text and a medium description, having the very descriptive terms of the type of printmaking process and the paper that you've used really gives some insight to the viewer that they wouldn't otherwise have.

Robert Gober: Yes, exactly. That's the—that's the intention. Yeah. And I've never understood, say, the point in sculpture where you say mixed media. Like,

what—What does that tell you? And sometimes I think that the materials can be metaphors, that they can help you understand the piece when you know what it's made of.

Jan Burandt: I imagine that seeing these in stacks, ordinarily there would be—this piece is meant to be stacked on top of this other one. Or—

Robert Gober: Yeah. I think so.

Jan Burandt: —I imagine displayed—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: —singly. But if someone casually views this in a gallery setting, like you say, they—

Robert Gober: Right.

Jan Burandt: Everyone is familiar with the deterioration of newsprint.

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: I mean, this would look to someone like a stack of papers that was put together within the month probably—

Robert Gober: Right.

Jan Burandt: —and have that kind of freshness because of the types of lasting papers that you've used for this.

Robert Gober: Right.

Jan Burandt: So even despite there's a date of—

Robert Gober: —'92 —probably—yeah.

Jan Burandt: —'92, if you were a casual viewer and just coming to this with preconceived notions of what is it, you would have a very different perspective on the piece.

Robert Gober: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Jan Burandt: How would—how do you feel about the display of these newspaper pieces in particular? And I know that there have been—they—there—they've been assembled in a lot of different—

Robert Gober: —yeah, variations.

Jan Burandt: —different variations. And at this moment, we have just these two pieces—

[00:51:46] [*Newspaper*, 1992 Photolithography on archival (Mohawk Superfine) paper, twine AP ½; Edition 10 + 2 artist's proofs The Menil Collection, Houston, gift of the artist]

Jan Burandt: —which I'm not sure if they're to be considered really as one, or if there are two pieces with the option of having them displayed in different manners.

Robert Gober: No. Because this you'll see has a stamp that says, 'This is not an individual work of art and it's not to be sold separately'. It should be sold or displayed separately, so.

Jan Burandt: Right.

Robert Gober: If I may—And just for the record, you're never supposed to touch things without protective gloves. And so it would be displayed like that, like two stacked together, to go, yes.

Jan Burandt: Right. Yes. And so this one…you would never do individually. It always belongs with the second, raised higher.

Robert Gober: This could be individual.

Jan Burandt: OK.

Robert Gober: But this cannot.

Jan Burandt: OK, right. Yes. Understood. So in a sense, we have two variations on the same—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: —piece that's left to the discretion of the curators installing the exhibition.

Robert Gober: Yup.

Jan Burandt: Yeah.

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: OK. With pieces like this, we're careful as they come in to document the condition and noting folds and tears and creases.

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: And obviously with a piece like this, you would imagine that frayed edges of the newsprint are meant to exist as frayed edges of—

Robert Gober: That's right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Jan Burandt: —a piece, and—

Robert Gober: But sometimes people do—We've had incidences of things being ripped because—I don't know what they're thinking obviously, but—whether they want to pull it out or something like that. So sometimes they have been damaged.

Jan Burandt: Right. And at that point, we know the initial condition, so we know—

Robert Gober: Right.

Jan Burandt: —where to step in and to what degree—

Robert Gober: Right.

Jan Burandt: —to make the repair. We're not flattening—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: —the corner. We're just—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: —mending a tear in a (inaudible).

Robert Gober: Right. Yeah. But they're meant to come to you looking used—

Jan Burandt: Yes.

Robert Gober: —and read and kicked around.

Brad Epley: One more question, Bob. This distinction between a top piece and a filler piece, that has to do with the content of the top most piece of paper? Or is it more to do with some other aspect of it?

Robert Gober: No. I think it's strictly content, Brad. Yeah. And for instance, if this top sheet got damaged, you could probably, by undoing this bundle or this bundle, you could probably find a fresh top sheet within all the—all the other papers, because there were a finite number of sheets that we printed. And those go repeatedly to make up the bulk of the stack of paper.

Jan Burandt: Interesting. So these two prints, are as they came to us. The one was just matted. The other was in this—the frame.

Robert Gober: Mm-hmm. Right.

Jan Burandt: I've wondered with the framed piece if you—how involved you are with choosing the frames. And do you look at this as more of an assemblage? Or is that frame an interchangeable—

Robert Gober: I personally would keep it—

[00:54:48]

Robert Gober: —in that I designed the original frame. And then when we first showed it, and then my dealer gave that artist frame to Bark Frameworks in New York, and they imitated the frame and did the whole edition—My dealer, Matthew Marks, doesn't believe in selling a work on paper unless it's framed, because he thinks it should be done right—Because he said, "You'll see it five years later in some inappropriate frame." And so he likes to frame things the right way the first time and sell them framed. And so I—That's—So it's based on an artist frame. I didn't actually make the frame for this one. And the proportion and the box-like nature of it seemed appropriate to me to the qualities of the print. This, I just carried in my bag and gave it to Josef one day when I was here, so—and then told Matthew about it later. So he didn't

get a chance to frame it. So that's up to you. I mean, we framed some in the studio. It was part of a portfolio of prints that were to benefit the Skowhegan School. And then I guess these are the artists' proofs or the TPs. I'm not even sure.

[00:56:03]

Robert Gober: And I think we put a simple black—We put them in the portfolio matted and framed this size with—And the portfolio was in a box. So nothing was framed. But I think it came with a framing suggestion. I wonder if you have that.

Jan Burandt: I don't believe we do, but I'll look into that (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)—

Robert Gober: Yeah. Ask Claudia. Yeah. It was just a black frame of such and such dimensions for it. Yup.

Jan Burandt: Mm-hmm. And again that—that's a very interesting piece because it's—it looks as if it's a clipping from a newspaper. And yet it is—you've—I don't know if you toned that sheet or if that's the natural tone for that sheet of paper. But it's forever at that moment in time which looks like a month-old newspaper, or—

Robert Gober: Yeah. Yeah. It was something that I had cut out and tacked on a bulletin board over my various desks. And then it—you know, you agree to do benefit prints because you believe in places like the Skowhegan School. And then you're, like, well, you know, time's up. What am I going to do? And it's sitting there in front of me. And so it's reproduced pretty much exactly as it was then. Of course the trick is finding archival paper that looks like old newspaper. That's probably the hardest part. And then the printing is fairly simple, straightforward.

Jan Burandt: I actually visited Leslie Miller and talked with her about Monument Valley. And I was interested to hear about the process of—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: —that print being made.

Robert Gober: That was a more—That was a whole—That was a whole other deal than this one, in that it's a wood block print. And that's what was important to me, because it has that—I think it has a little bit of that 'huh?' factor to it, like, a wood block? Like, what?

Jan Burandt: Uh-huh.

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: And when you got the prints from the press—

Robert Gober: Yeah?

Jan Burandt: What state were they in? And how did you handle them in the studio?

Robert Gober: Well first, there was a lot of back and forth with Leslie to get the right—to how we were going to do this, how we were going to make a wood block print. Because the—When you look at the text, it's actually slightly pixilated in a way. But Leslie is very clever. She figured it out. Wasn't it computer etched into, almost like a butcher block of hardwood. And then it was getting the right color to look like a fading receipt roll. And then I think that for the tears, we made—Because the tear at the bottom has a little teeth on it. But then it goes irregular, the way you would rip a receipt off of a unfurling machine. And so to keep them similar, because it is a print, we made templates for these, for the top and the bottom. And then we'd very carefully rip it along the template. So part of it is hand-ripped and part of it has the notching. And then I kind of hand crinkle 'em which is no big deal, and thus the box framing to keep the hand crinkled quality of them, because it was a receipt. I went cross country one summer and the Monument Valley receipt—Monument Valley made a deep impression on me. And so I saved the receipt. And, you know, you put it in your wallet and then you put it somewhere else and you put it somewhere else. And it just—you know? So that's—

Jan Burandt: So there was no jig involved. It was just a hand creasing of the pieces to make them kind of similarly crumpled?

Robert Gober: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, we had a template for the tearing, but then I just crinkle it up. Yeah.

Jan Burandt: Mm-hmm. It's wonderful.

[00:59:55]

Jan Burandt: Here with the drawings, I'm interested in your approach to paper with drawings as opposed to prints. We have a very different array. Each of these papers is unique in the group. And I'm curious—

Robert Gober: Yeah, you're right.

Jan Burandt: —about your selection process and your thinking about drawing papers.

Robert Gober: Yes, we have common copy paper, Xerox paper.

Robert Gober: This is a pad of paper that was in a guest apartment in Basel, Switzerland, when I was working at the Schaulager from a pad.

Robert Gober: This is—has—It's, like, school paper. You know, it has the faint blue lines that would be horizontal and the slight red line on the other side.

Robert Gober: Artist paper from a pad.

Robert Gober: And I assume that's artist paper. Yeah. And I usually work with a found size of paper, you know? I don't change it really. Because I don't—I don't—I don't—It's not that—I don't know how to say it. It's not that I don't take drawing seriously. But it is capricious and sporadic when I draw. So if I have the urge, I just take what's in front of me. I don't worry about the—that it be a durable material. You know? Like an acid-free paper, I don't worry about that.

Jan Burandt: And you talked about tacking things to the wall of your studio.

Robert Gober: Yeah. Right. You can see it here where it was tacked and—a couple times, and then tore it off. That might be the only one in this group. It looks like I had taped this one up to the wall, because I think we've got the glue from the—the aged glue from the tape there. Yeah.

Jan Burandt: So when we look at sketches and drawings and look at the conditions that we find the idea of a drawing having studio wear, that gives a life to it that we want to—we don't want to change—

Robert Gober: Right.

Jan Burandt: —in terms of treatment, whereas sometimes you would look at a drawing and it's creased and you think, 'Well, I can humidify and flatten this.' But of course in the case of a drawing like this that wouldn't be something that you would—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: —see even considering, given—

Robert Gober: Right.

Jan Burandt: —what these drawings are—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: —to your practice.

Robert Gober: Right.

Jan Burandt: Now I've got a little prop back here. One consideration in understanding works then is how they're lit. You notice that if you put normal lighting on a drawing like this, it flattens out the planarity of it. Whereas if there's a raking light, you see—

Robert Gober: Right.

Jan Burandt: —the extent—I mean, this looks like it was folded into almost a paper airplane type shape. And, you know, that tells us—that says something. And in terms of presenting these works, even in a publication, I mean, we look at how—to what degree do you try to represent the physicality of this. I always say, paper is a three-dimensional object.

Robert Gober: Yes.

Jan Burandt: And I think when you look at something like this—That's a question, though, that I'm curious how you feel about that kind of—

Robert Gober: I agree with you about the three-dimensionality. Sometimes there's a practicalness that can come in. Because recently there was a very big drawing,

that was a working drawing for—Oh. It's actually for what became the sculpture. [*Untitled*, 2012]

[01:03:58]

Robert Gober: We took this drawing and we projected it the size that we were going to make the sculpture. So for instance that width is probably that width. And so on a big piece of paper on the wall, we projected it and we drew it out and we made some changes. And then we started building the armature right on that. And then much later, I thought that the drawing looked interesting to show. And there were some—Because we built a foam core maquette of the sculpture on top of the drawing. There were some knife cuts in this big drawing. And they were actually distracting. And so we didn't heal them. The framer just hinged them back. So the slit remained, but it didn't distract from the drawing. So sometimes you artfully hold back some of that information, but retain it.

Jan Burandt: Right. You could have obviously hired a conservator to repair it without—

Robert Gober: Yeah. Yeah.

Jan Burandt: —looking—Yeah. Another interesting thing about this work is that, in describing these works on paper, too, we usually pare down our descriptions to the—a simple—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: —wall text. And graphite on paper would be probably the minimal description—

Robert Gober: Right.

Jan Burandt: —that you could give to something like this. But in this case, there's a lot of erasure that's gone on.

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: And I wonder how you look at that in terms of interpreting this work now. And is that a feature that you feel is an important part of this work to be described for the audience?

Robert Gober: Oh, do you do that? Do you—

Jan Burandt: It—It—It—

Robert Gober: Erasures, do you put that?

Jan Burandt: It can—It can be done in some practices. We tend not to talk about that so much, but it's one of the reasons I'm curious because of your working habits. And is this—Is the fact that this is a key that was there—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: —and then erased, but it's not erased to the point—I mean, it's still clearly visible.

Robert Gober: Right. I probably could have erased it more. And I could have come over it. Sometimes I do with a flat white paint or white pastel. So I could have—I could have whitened it out. Chose not to. But I don't know—I don't think—I've never put—You know, in the—I've never put erased. Because it's not conceptual. It's not like an erased de Kooning drawing where that information should be—should be out there really.

Jan Burandt: Right. It talks about process.

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: So that's normally not something that we would do in a media description—

Robert Gober: Right. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jan Burandt: —in this collection.

Robert Gober: Yes. But may I interject? My sister has four kids. And one time—I don't know. They were—They were small. And I was in a drawing show at MoMA that Bernice Rose put together who used to work here. I think it was called *Drawing Now.*

[01:07:08]

Robert Gober: My sister brought my two nephews and the kids. And they had decided they were going to have this game to, like—The starting point was in front of the show, and then they were going to rush to find Uncle Bob's drawings. Who would find them first? And so my nephew Cushing came running back. And he said, "Mom, he erased." Like, he caught me cheating. You know? "He erased." I thought that was interesting.

Jan Burandt: That's very funny. Well here again, I think this is one drawing that came to our collection framed as-is. And these other drawings were framed—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: —once they came here. And so the difference I note here is that this piece is floated. It's in a dark frame. I don't know how involved—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: —you were with the aesthetic of that choice.

Robert Gober: I forget. And I tend to leave—My dealer, Matthew Marks, is very good at framing. And I've a limited patience with it. So I just kind of—Sometimes—Sometimes I don't, like with that print. You know? I really controlled it. But with the drawings, I think he makes as good a decision as I could. So he tends to do that.

Jan Burandt: And so you don't have a strong preference for floating versus window floating, or—

Robert Gober: I think that looks better than these do. I mean, these have a kind of—I don't—I don't have very much fondness for this kind of institutional, 'let's just frame it as blandly as possible' kind of—I mean, it's respectful, but it's just an institutional way to frame things blandly. And I don't necessarily think that serves drawings the best. So I think they should maybe be treated more individually.

Jan Burandt: Mm-hmm. It's such a subjective decision—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: —And we really value having any information about artists' preferences when it comes to framing, because then we are able to—

Robert Gober: Yeah, and you have a great frame shop. I loved when I did the *Meat Wagon*, we had to frame up a lot of things that were just in flat files. And I worked with Debby Breckeen who was great. And we—But it was actually—It was Matthew Drutt who was chief curator, Debby, who was conservation, but did the framing, and Liz Lunning. And we had a really good time. We were disappointed when we were done with, like—done with the framing.

Jan Burandt: And so of these works, I think pretty clearly we understand how you're working and the fact that you don't—you don't mind that there are creases and folds, that that's something—I mean, this looks like it was folded and put in a pocket.

Robert Gober: Well sometimes I might take it home, you know? So I just fold—Well, those are band-aids. You know, I just fold it—

Jan Burandt: You might have a drawing in there.

Robert Gober: Yes. Yeah.

Jan Burandt: And we—You know, that's—That's a part of it—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: —that we are open to. Now I think with this one, it's a little bit different. The—When I look at it and I see, OK, it looks like you've taped this—

Robert Gober: Yeah.

Jan Burandt: —to the wall of your studio—

Robert Gober: Yup. I would guess that's accurate.

Jan Burandt: And so my question then would be, well, OK, I know that I can reduce or remove this adhesive. But is that appropriate in this case? Does this speak to the way that you're working in the studio? And is it just aesthetically the look that—

Robert Gober: I would—I would leave it. There's kind of a fingerprint of the artist on it that I think is kind of cool, because it shows that it had some—I had to remind myself of it, you know, if I put it up on my wall to—to be there.

Jan Burandt: Good. I'm glad to hear you say that, because that was my take on it as well.

Robert Gober: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Jan Burandt: And I'm very happy to—to have it there, so. Is there anything else that you—like to share about—your thoughts about your drawing in relationship to the other work?

Robert Gober: With the exception of this one, the other four drawings were all preliminary studies for sculptures that I then made. Because, like, this one, I know even though the pad of paper I took from the apartment in Basel, it was done up in Nova Scotia, because we have a small, off the grid cottage up there. And I don't make sculptures up there, but I do draw. And so I remember I did the drawings up there and subsequently made the sculpture. That was a study. I did a number of variations, study. But that was the first one. This one, I never made the sculpture. This one I did and this one I did also.

[01:12:14]

Jan Burandt: It's good to know. Well thank you very much—

Robert Gober: Sure.

Jan Burandt: —about—talking about all of these and visiting with us here. It's really been fun.

Brad Epley: Bob, I have one other question I intended to ask. You know you have this slide projection—

Robert Gober: Are we still—Yes? OK.

Brad Epley: The slide projection piece, where you showed the progression of that painting. And I've noticed in catalogs, they're frequently reproduced, these images of you and works in progress, it states. Is that something you do regularly? Or is it just kind of a happenstance that a photo may be taken of something in

progress? Or do you regularly kind of chart the progress of a work through stages?

Robert Gober: We do now. Yeah. It's—Sometimes it's very useful to know how things are made. Like, I wish that I had—Like we were talking about how were the early sinks made? Like, we really—For Christian Schiedemann, once we had to go back and try to find photographs. Like, he would X-ray it. But we tried to find photographs of—of it in process. So the process photos can be valuable when you look back at stuff. And sometimes you just get an interesting photograph. Yeah. I think it started maybe for a catalog where we were going to do process. And so we brought the camera in. And then once things went digital, you know, it's just so easy to take—to record and take pictures of things. Yeah. So.

Brad Epley: Thanks. Sorry about that.

Robert Gober: Yeah. Not at all.

Brad Epley: (inaudible)

Robert Gober: Yeah. OK.

[END RECORDING]