

INTERVIEW WITH: James Rosenquist (JR)

INTERVIEWER: Leah Dickerman (LD)

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[CREW DISCUSSION]

LD: Hi, I'm Leah Dickerman, I'm the curator at the Department of Painting and Sculpture, here at the Museum of Modern Art. It's April 17th, 2012. And today, we're going to have an interview with James Rosenquist. Jim, would you introduce yourself?

JR: No. [Laughing] My name is James Rosenquist, and I'm here, and I'm a painter with, sort of, a long history with this institution.

LD: Yeah, that's actually a great place to begin, Jim. When was the first time that you had contact?

JR: Well, that's back in 1961. Alfred Barr and Lilly Bliss came to my studio. I think, maybe with Phillip Johnson, but I don't remember.

LD: Dorothy Miller?

JR: No.

LD: Lilly Bliss?

JR: And then, they came, and I had a big painting called *Silver Skies*. And Alfred says, "How are we supposed to look at this? Are we supposed to stand up close, or are we supposed to stand back, or...?" And so they looked at it, and they left, and then they said can we -- well, they said, "Can we come back?", and I said, "Sure, I don't care." Because from my experience in commercial art, people were always looking over my shoulder while I was painting, anyways. So I didn't give a damn. They came back Thursday, and they went through the same routine, and then Alfred recognized the bird in the -- my painting, which was a serrated Narragansett Duck, wood duck, or some damn thing. [Laughing] Anyway, they still didn't buy it off of me. And that was it. So then, Sidney Janis bought a painting of mine called [Marilyn Monroe \[MoMA # 646.1967\]](#) from Dick Bellamy. And then he gave that to the Museum of Modern Art, so that was their first acquisition of any of my work. Kaboom. And, then, Dorothy Miller, who is a lovely, lovely lady, selected my work for a *16 American* show [MoMA Exh # 722]. And I was in that.

LD: Who were you showing with?

JR: I think [Marisol](#), [Oldenburg](#), I'm not sure. [Robert Mallery](#).

LD: [Jim Dine](#)

JR: Maybe Dine, I'm not sure. Anyway, that's a long time ago. Anyway, that was that. And, I used to come to the Museum of Modern Art, because there was nobody here, it was usually virtually empty, and there was no attendance. Same with the Metropolitan Museum, it was sort of empty. If you can believe that or not in this day and age, because they're packed. But I used to see Marlon Brando and this comedian having coffee on the second floor, in a little coffee shop they used to have here. And the museum here was -- it felt little, little. But not anymore. So anyway, that...

LD: What did you used to look at?

JR: Everything. Everything that was available. Everything, anything, everything. I mean, going way back, you think of museums, when I lived in Minnesota. I rarely -- I rarely saw a real painting. I saw books on paintings, usually in black and white. Believe it or not, there were very few books on art, years ago. So, I hitchhiked to Chicago to the Art Institute to see real paintings. And I was so surprised that they were so sloppy, vigorous, messy, but beautiful and correct. It was a hard dichotomy, because in books, they looked like photographs. But in reality, they were actually done with a person's hand, with wet paint.

LD: How you can feel the crust, and the dimensionality.

JR: Yeah, yeah, you could see the personality of the person. And so, my favorite painting on was [Manet](#) [Whistles] , what a painter. And I'll tell you too, art history is that, if you're too young for this, but in the early '40s, if you saw a Picasso, you'd go *yuck!* The nose is in the wrong place, and this face is all crooked like it's been in an accident.

LD: Because you were coming out of this Realist tradition.

JR: *Of course!* But, I mean, of course, realism, of course. But, they looked ugly.

LD: You talked about, in your autobiography, about the power of looking at illustration, certain illustrators that you were looking for in the magazines.

JR: Sure.

LD: Can you talk about that?

JR: Sure, there were some incredible watercolor artists who worked on magazine covers. One's name was John Pike. And I mean, he could be equated with any of the -- with Winslow Homer, for instance, or someone. He knew color, I mean, this guy was -- what a painter. But he was a commercial artist, and then you could -- only art books you could buy, usually with books about painters who did *Saturday Evening Post* postcards. [Laughing] Which, you know, very boring, but

that's all you could get. But, I mean, I don't know what we're -- what we're going to talk about here because, usually, I mean -- generally, youngsters come up to me and say, "How do you get started? What happened to you?" What happened -- what did you -- how did this happen, that happen. So, that's -- it's sort of organic, or sort of a thing how one develops.

LD: Well, I thought I -- can I -- I can tell you some of the things that I think would be interesting to hear you speak about, partly because I've read your book, and know that you're...

JR: Oh, you read my book! [Laughing] Listen, I was on a panel with Marshall McLuhan in Canada. Someone says, "Mr. McLuhan, I read your book, and I disagree with you." And he says, "Oh, you read my book? Then you only know half the story." [Laughing]

LD: Well, I think, reading your book, that it was interesting to hear you talk about your experience as a billboard painter. Clearly, that's an important thing. But it's great -- it would be great for people to hear you speak about that, and how you think it played into the work that you did. And also, I would be very interested in hearing you speak about early in your career, and that moment when you're going up to Irvington, and staying with the Sterns, you're interested in being an abstract painter. And I thought it would be interesting to hear you talk about what abstraction meant in those days, and then why you moved away from it. It would be great, also, to hear you talk about Pop art, what the word pop means to you. What kinds of relationships you have with other pop artists, both in the United States, in England, German Pop artists.

JR: [Laughing] That's a lot of questions!

LD: Yeah. I'm just sketching out some of the things I want you to talk about.

JR: Yeah, yeah. We'll start with one and then we'll go on.

LD: OK. I'll give you the big picture first. So you know that -- where we might end up. I'd love to hear you talk about your dealers, your relationships with Dick Bellamy, and then Leo Castelli, and Ileana, and with Gagosian, and Bill Acuavella, and talk about them as personalities.

JR: Yeah.

LD: I'd be interested in hearing you talk about key curators, like Dorothy Miller.

JR: We're going to write another book here!

LD: Sure. And then, I think, this Russian thing is interesting. You've had a long and important role in Russia. You were shown very early in '91, it had a big impact on a lot of Russian artists, I've heard them talk about that show.

JR: And now, I'm on the board of the Hermitage Museum.

LD: So, that's a span of things that we might talk about, then...

JR: That's a lot.

LD: Yeah.

JR: That's a hell of a lot.

LD: So, should we talk about abstract painting first?

JR: No.

LD: Or do you want to talk about billboards first?

JR: No. You could just say, from the very, very, very beginning.

LD: From the very, very, very beginning.

JR: Yeah, the very, very beginning is that my mother and father were aviators. My mother was a flyer, and they met at the Grand Forks Airport in '31, and my mother met Charles Lindbergh there. And she said he always had -- he always wiped his nose on -- he was so macho, he wiped his nose on his flying jacket. [Laughing] Then, so they were adventurous.

LD: Your parents?

JR: [Yes, my parents were adventurous. So, anyway, my father planned to start an international airline with my uncle, Albert, who I was named after. And Albert had been in the Army Air Corps for four years. And you had to be nominated by a senator or congressman to get in, you couldn't just get in. So they were going to sell their Model T coupes, and buy an airplane, and get a mail route between Grand Forks and Winnipeg. That's the international airline. That's how many big plane -- big lines started, they're so simple.

LD: So small.

JR: OK. Then poor Albert crashed in a rainstorm flying a senator somewhere. That was the end of -- in the Great Depression came to the Midwest, and that was the end of that. That was all -- that was it. So then, I spent a lot of time in North Dakota with my aunt Dolores, I just loved her. And she was a tomboy, and she used to make things. We had no radio, and no television -- no, and we had no radio and no telephone. We were nothing up there. It was, when the sun went down, we went to bed. So she -- [Laughing] she used to entertain me. I just loved her, and she was -- she had a lot of talent. She was a perfectionist when she made little things. And my mother, too, was a painter, and played piano, but -- a painter. I think my talent comes from both of those gals. And now, my aunt Dolores is 85, I think like that. And she think she's bed ridden, she shouldn't be, but she's in Texas. Anyway, so this -- so, then...

LD: Were they tolerant?

JR: We moved around a lot because of World War II. My father became an A&E, and aircraft inspector. And we moved to Ohio, to Wright Patterson Field where he serviced bombers, B-24's, and then back to Minneapolis, he worked there at old Chamberlain Airport in Minneapolis, and so on. And then, in 1948, I did a watercolor of a sunset, and I won a prize to study for four Saturdays at the Minneapolis School of Art. So, see, times were different. So, I go to this school, and I get this pencil that cost \$0.25. I went [whistles]! And a piece of paper costs \$0.35. I go, [whistles]! This is serious business. I should really apply myself, because this is *expensive*! You don't know what expense is. All of you youngsters don't know -- during the war, my father would get a chicken dinner, cup of coffee, and a piece of apple pie -- guess how much that cost? Twenty-five cents. Ten cents for the chicken dinner, five cents for the coffee, ten cents for the pie, because it had sugar that went into the war effort. That was...

LD: So the pencil was the same price as that.

JR: Yes. See, that's serious. So [Laughing] I did that, and I, you know, my teachers were World War II vets, who took their G.I. Bill in art. And they said to me, "Do you ever think abstractly?" I said no. "Have you ever" -- I think one of them said, "Have you ever heard of French non-objective painting?" I said *no*. I paint as realistically as I can!

LD: Were they interested in that?

JR: I have no idea. I don't know nothing. Still, I don't know anything. So anyway, then I went to the -- then I had an art teacher -- see, I had an art teacher -- I mean, little things in your life really give you a jolt. And I had an art teacher in junior high school who was kind of an odd fellow. And he invited us to his house to see his pets. He had little rabbits and things, and everything. Then he invited us six months later to see his pets, and he says look, and they are all in the goddamned freezer. He killed them all, and he was going to eat them all.
[Laughing]

LD: And he wanted to show you that?

JR: Yeah, and he showed us that. Then another thing that happened in that class, I'm in there, there's a kid, this big -- the teacher says "We're having a young fellow here from a reform school, *don't talk to him!* He's going to sit over there. And he's going to be in our class." They put him in -- [Laughing] and this guy, he was in art class, and he just sat there like stone.

LD: And no one was supposed to...

JR: We couldn't -- we couldn't talk to him! [Laughing]

LD: Oh, poor guy!

JR: And I thought, you know, this is really weird. That was a weird thing. But anyway, my life -- what I wanted to do in my life was ride a motorcycle and raise cattle. And I wanted to graduate from high school, go out to California -- I went to California in '51 with my dad, and I thought, this place is going to grow, this LA. We went -- San Bernardino was still all orange trees instead of houses then. And you see, go west young man was the thing to do. Because, if you go west, you'd make your fortune. And I'll tell you an example of that. We knew a guy in Minnesota, Junior Jensen, who was in a motorcycle accident; he got every bone in his body broken. He was in a hospital about a year and a half. He left -- he could barely walk -- he went to California. He started repairing car batteries, because after the war, you couldn't buy a car battery. And then later on, he went to work for a door lock company. And then there was a housing boom. And then he became a metallurgist, just designing door locks. And then, a few years later, my dad was at the Minneapolis airport, this private plane comes down, outlimps Junior Jensen, he's the president of the whole damn company. [Laughing] Go west, young man, make your fortune.

LD: So...

JR: And I thought, that's fantastic! That's it, I'm going to California now! [Laughing] I'm going to California. So, again. So, my mother said, "You better go to the --

you should go to the university. You read" -- I said, "No, no, I'm going to California." So we had an argument, she won. I went to the University of Minnesota, and I met this amazing artist named Cameron Boothe there, who was in World War I, who studied with [Hans Hoffman](#) in Munich. He could draw a portrait like [whistles]. So could I, I could draw your portrait. I could -- I knew how to do that. After a while, he said, "There's nothing for you here. You should go to New York and study with [Hans Hoffman](#)." So, Hans Hoffman quit teaching on 8th Street, and moved to Provincetown permanently, allegedly, and so I sent my drawings to the Art Student's League, and I won a one year scholarship to the Art Student's League in Manhattan.

LD: What did you know about the Art Student's League when you applied?

JR: Nothing.

LD: Nothing.

JR: Except that all of the greats were there, had been there. And I was lucky enough to study with [George Grosz](#), Morris Kanter, Vaclav Vytlacil, all of these old-timers.

LD: Can you tell us a little bit about the atmosphere in studying there?

JR: Well, it was a gray -- the walls were painted gray, and it was kind of depressing. George Grosz was a very delicate guy. He'd say, "bitte bitte, could I have your conté crayon?" And he'd make a drawing that was so delicate. You know, of light shining between individuals, or people, or things. And I've lost those drawings, I wish -- I don't know where they are anyway. Then, I studied only with the abstract artists. They had commercial artists there teaching commercial work, I didn't bother with that. I was only interested in -- see, here's how it started. I was interested in learning how to paint the Sistine Chapel. It sounds ambitious, but I wanted to go to mural school. So they had -- oh, they had a mural class. But the damn mural was only as big as that wall. It was a little -- that was supposed to be a mural. That's not a mural.

LD: I would like to hear more about your interest in muralism, and why you...

JR: Well, I'll tell you right now. So, this thing wasn't much of a mural, so I thought where is -- so where does that happen? And so that -- back in Minneapolis, I had the same feeling, I wanted to paint the Sistine Chapel, and so where do you learn that? So, maybe that's in billboard painting, or outdoor sign painting. So I went to General Outdoor Advertising, and I said, "I can do that!" It was painting great big macaroni noodles as big as firehouses for Kraft Foods. "Oh, we don't let anybody do that until they've been here 20 years." I said, "Well, I can do that." So, they gave me a job to paint two heads for Coca-Cola. I worked like hell, I worked about nine hours. And Henry Bevins, the boss, says, "I'm sorry, kid, you don't have it. I'm sorry." So I left. I went back to see him nine months later, I don't think he remembered me. I just went in there with -- I says, "I can do that." The same old thing, "We can always use a good man around here." So they had me paint two more heads for Coca-Cola. And Coca-Cola is very fussy, everything has to be perfect. So I did it, and they said, "Not bad, kid. Now, move the whole nose over a quarter inch." It's a big [arabesque?]. I did it, he said, "OK, you got the job." So I went to work there painting big paintings for -- for Northwest Airlines, for whiskey, everything and anything. But, you get the material, and you either do it or you get fired. It's got to be commercially pretty shot, or you get -- accurate, or you get fired. So, OK, so I got laid off, and at that time, the Art Students League said, "James, we inform you that you've won an out of town scholarship" for one year's schooling only, that's it. So I had \$350 saved. I left for New York on the redeye to New York, stayed one night at the YMCA. I got a room on West 57th Street for \$8.50 a week. [Laughing] That's in the olden days.

LD: What was a room like then?

JR: Just a room with a sink and a toilet. Kaboom. I thought, this is too much money. I got another room right in Columbus Circle for \$8.00 a week, and it was a nice landlady who knew I was -- had nothing, so she'd invite me for spaghetti once in a while. [Laughing]

LD: Is that why we see spaghetti in some of your work? [Laughing]

JR: No, that's not the reason. But anyway, people -- there are nice people in the world, you know? And so, then I caught pneumonia, went to the welfare ward of the Roosevelt Hospital, got out of there. And then my friend Ray Donarski in the school said, "Jim, I know of a great job. You stay in a millionaire's house in Irvington, New York. And they have great food." [Laughing] That was the big -- the big attraction was food! [Laughing] So, we went up there, and this girl jumped out of the house wearing Bermuda shorts with her gin and tonic. She says, "Come on, boys, jump in my Wildcat, and I'll show you the castle!" It was Joyce Sterns. They had a big castle on their property from the Sterns family, S-T-E-R-N-S. And these people -- his father, Roland's father, put an A in his name, and started Bear Stearns Stock Brokerage Company. So, she said, "Well, do you want the job?" And I said, "Well, we have to think about it." We thought about it for two minutes, I said, "I'll take it." So I went to work for them. And I liked them, I liked the people that -- they were young and fun. And Roland, when he was 30, I did a- I carved a big bust of him in ice for a punchbowl. And on his thirtieth birthday, back in '56, he got his first \$16 million. That's a lot of money in '56. Anyway, I stayed there one year, and I thought, this isn't my house. This isn't my place. I drove -- I was a chauffeur and a bartender. And one cocktail party, who shows up? John Chamberlain, Romy Bearden, and Superman. And I got to know Romy much later, and then Chamberlain a lot. Superman shot himself, I didn't get to know him later, George Reeves. Anyway, they were nice people, but I thought, this isn't my place, this isn't my house. I'm going to transfer into the sign painter's union in New York City. So, I go there, 23rd Street and Lexington -- 28th Street and Lexington. Kind of these gruff old Italian guys, with old woolen shirts. And I walked in and they said, "What do you come here for? There ain't no work for you here, kid. We got nothing going on, ain't no work for you." So I got up and made a speech. I said, "I respect the rights of all of the older gentlemen in this union, and I'm willing to take my turn. The guy goes, "Ah, ah, ah. OK, kid. Bring your initiation money in Thursday." Which was \$300.

LD: That's a lot of money.

JR: Yeah, I scraped it up. And so, I brought in my fee, and the secretary says, "James, do you want to paint stripes down a highway?" I said no. "Do you want to paint numbers on the Polo Grounds on the seats?" No. I said, "I only paint pictures." So, I got a job -- my first job was painting a Hebrew National salami sign on the Flatbush Extension in Brooklyn, New York. I went to work for A. H. Villipigue Company in Brooklyn. Worked there a month, got laid off because I didn't know how to letter. I could paint pictures galore, but I didn't know how to letter quickly. And I had funky experiences doing -- I worked those -- [Laughing] they sent me to Coney Island one time to work on top of Stauch's Baths, to paint a Seagram's Whiskey sign. I went up there with Red from Red Hook, my helper. And all of a sudden, women started coming up to the top of this building and taking their clothes off. They were naked, big women. And I said, "Red, we better say something, or we're going to get arrested for peeping Toms." He says, "Yeah." So, [Laughing] I'm up above them about 20 feet. I says, "Good morning, girls." And this one gal says, "Don't worry, Sadie?, they don't look anyway." Anyway, then Red threw his damn cigarette down on a tarpaulin, and it started on fire. And there was a fire on the roof, and all of these naked women grabbed their clothes and ran off. [Laughing] Ran off the roof. So, it was -- things like that happened. With paint, I don't know what -- I got a lot of other stories, too.

LD: Did you learn to letter?

JR: What?

LD: You learned to letter, didn't you?

JR: Yeah, then I was laid off there. Then I went back, and practiced lettering on rooftops where Lincoln Center is now. I practiced -- there was a lot of Puerto Rican -- new Puerto Ricans were living there. Anyway, then I got a call to go to work in Brooklyn for General Outdoor Advertising. And I showed up, and they says, "You're late, they already left for the job." So then I went out to the job, and I made good, I know how to paint and everything. Also, I worked alongside mafia guys. This guy named Al, I won't say his last name. [Laughing] He's a tough,

about 40-some years old, he's a mafia guy. So he pulls this picture out of his pocket and he says, "This is my niece. Ain't she beautiful? You should take her out, but you can't leave her." Something like that. And I said, "Oh, Al, she is beautiful, but I'm engaged." "Oh, that's too bad." [Laughing] Why?

LD: Yeah!

JR: The mafia law is, if you leave a mafia daughter, they break your nose. They don't break your arm, they don't break your leg, they break your nose. This happened to two friends of mine, they had their noses broken. Anyway, [Laughing] a lot of experiences like that. And then, I got laid off there. And I was off a few months, and I went back to Minnesota. I thought, am I going to give up on New York, or what? So then I got a call to come back to work, and I went to work for Artkraft Strauss in Times Square. The big, big, biggest signs in the world. And I was good. I made good, like that.

LD: That was one thing that impressed me was, you know, you weren't just a billboard painter, you were the best billboard painter out there.

JR: Well, I had a previous art education. So listen, when I painted, I painted this one movie -- God, what was it? It was -- all of these movie stars were in it. Their faces were, like, 20 feet square. And I painted them, and I knew cartilage in the nose. I knew how people were built, so I put that from the...

LD: On that picture? All that training?

JR: They had a photo, I put that in there, and that looked really good! So, my paintings looked good up there. Contrary to other sign painters who didn't know that, their faces looked like cardboard cutouts instead of real people. So anyway, I stayed there until '59, and then A. B. Markel got -- A. B. Markel fell off Klein's Department Store, and got pushed off to Klein's, and then another guy fell off a Budweiser sign. I thought, this is dangerous.

LD: Did you wear ropes when you were up there?

JR: What?

LD: Did you wear ropes when you were painting?

JR: We wore nothing. It was on the scaffold, it was a rope driven scaffold which had mechanical advantage.

LD: But you didn't wear any harness?

JR: No, nothing. The highest I worked was 25 stories. And, the only fall I took was only three feet. I fell three feet one time on a beam, hit my leg, and I thought, that's -- gee, that hurt. If I fell two stories, it would really hurt. So, anyway...
[Laughing]

LD: You were taking breaks, though, and going up to Irvington on the weekends, though, painting in the space up there?

JR: No.

LD: No?

JR: No.

LD: No?

JR: Not at that point, no.

LD: Hmm.

JR: No, no, no, no I didn't. I never went up there and painted, ever. Anyway, so '59, I quit. So, the union, our union rep was Italian, Dante Mirande, he says, "You're crazy! You're making a living. You could even get married some day, you could even buy a car, or something. You know, what are you doing? You're a union

guy!" I says, "I'm tired of it." He says, "I'll do you a favor, I'll put your name on the bottom of the unemployment list all of the time, so it never comes up." So, I collected 22 extra weeks of unemployment compensation. [Laughing]

LD: He did do you a favor!

JR: He did me a favor. And I got a -- I got along with him, Mirande. He wasn't the mafia, but they dealt with the mafia, they settled things. Anyway, so I got a studio, I was out of work. I got married, I got -- I was out of work, I got married, I thought, what the hell am I doing? And, I got a studio in Coenties Slip, those photographs you got for \$45 a month. And I wondered what I was going to do.

LD: What were you trying to do in that?

JR: Well, I, what I did -- [Laughing] what I did was watch people go to and from Wall Street. I thought, boy, am I lucky. Here I am, living on nothing, not in any money, newly married, no responsibilities, and I'm living in this cosmopolitan city where the museums are free. Stuff like that. So I thought, jeez, I'm lucky, personally. So then I began to paint, and...

LD: What were you trying to paint at first?

JR: I painted some abstract pictures, because I was always informed by my -- Cameron Booth, he was an abstract painter. And the idea is, the idea really is how to make a dynamic composition, not paint a portrait. You could paint anything, but the picture has to be dynamic. Every cinematographer in Hollywood knows that too. Every frame, they want -- even if it's subtle, they want it interesting. So that was my note, that was my interest, always, was to make a dynamic picture. And then, so, but I still didn't know what to do. And then I thought, hey, well, if I could make a painting using real painting, realistic imagery, so large that the one closest to you would be recognized last, because it would be up too close, just like my sign painting experience.

LD: Yes, you talked about that. Can you say that on film? You talked about that experience. You talked about the experience of not -- of playing with some of the other guys who were sign painters, about how you really couldn't see the image cohere until you backed away from it.

JR: Sure, I learned a lot of things.

LD: Yeah.

JR: For instance, I painted "The Roots of Heaven" on the DeMille Theater, which was 17 stories up. And the word roots had some 40-foot O's in them, zero -- O's. And it was black on yellow. And so, trying to paint this perfect O going down, and so I got down the street and looked at it, it looked like bent banana, it looked wrong, and I was like, how the hell am I going to do that? So, what did I do? I took the black and the yellow, and I blended it on the edges, with about a blend, really 'ishy' looking color. But it smacked out perfectly, it came out perfect, only because of distance. So that's my education with hard edge painting. Hard edge painting only depends on distance, no matter what imperception. So that's that. Anyway, a whole number of -- so I -- I painted a lot of paint, and I dropped a lot of paint on ladies during matinee days and everything, you know? And then, so anyway, you know, I said I quit doing that. I got the studio, and I wondered what I was going to do. And I thought, if I could make this painting, where I could set imagery in a picture plane, that would be identified at the rate of speed because of the reality and the size of it, but the hardest thing to decipher would be the one closest to you like this. So, that would be almost -- that was the name of my book, *Painting Below Zero*. And that meant, reintroducing imagery in a non-objective manner. That's the whole attitude, because non-objective painting came along, it was very famous, popular, everything else. And I thought, maybe I could use things recognizable and still be non-objective.

LD: I wondered if the zero meant, referred to [Kazmir] [Malevich](#), did it?

JR: What?

LD: The zero, did it have a reference Malevich in it? The zero?

JR: No.

LD: No? OK.

JR: Nope, no.

LD: For you, zero meant this idea of non-objective, using realist...

JR: Emptiness, it's like dreams about -- what do you --- have you ever seen emptiness? I thought I saw it once where I went to bed, and I saw the great big wrinkled sheet, and then nothing. [Laughing]

LD: Were you aware of other artists who were starting to move away from abstraction at that time, or was this...

JR: No, I knew, gee whiz, I knew -- I knew [Agnes Martin](#), [Bob Rauschenberg](#), [Jasper Johns](#). Jasper was a big influence, because he did things that people called pictograms. In other words, he would put an association of things together, like a collage, and an idea would pop out of it. And so then I'd begin -- I really worked in collage manner, making collages of things, and thinking about collage forever. I still do it.

LD: You literally make collages too?

JR: I make collages, yeah.

LD: Yeah.

JR: And then I make paintings from these collages. And then I studied this, and studied this, and I think collage goes way back to ancient Japan, where -- I mean, everybody says well, collage came from [Kurt Schwitters](#), and so on, and so on. But then, during World War II, I saw a museum show of assemblages of

three different things together, a flower, a painting, and a shrunken head. and I go, what the hell does that mean? Then going back further, the Japanese tea ceremony was drink ten cups of tea until you got sweaty, and you'd meditate a flower, a painting, and a beautiful tea bowl-- very beautiful looking tea bowl. And that goes way, way, way back. And it's these expendable things you put together that produce --

LD: Something new.

JR: -- An incredible idea. You really don't need the physicality of it anymore, hey, you're left with the idea. And that's what I do.

LD: When did you start working with collage?

JR: In '60.

LD: I'm looking for this image of [Doorstop \[MoMA #3.1996\]](#).

JR: No.

LD: I wondered if you could talk to us about this.

JR: You really want.. [Laughing]

LD: Yes, because it's hanging in our galleries right now.

JR: Isn't that funny?

LD: Yeah, I think it's a hoot. I really -- I love this one.

JR: That is so my wife -- let me tell you, there is a long story about that sucker. When I was painting Phillips 66 signs, with a W. G. Fisher painting company -- well, I'll tell you, early, early on, in the summer, my mother says, "You're always drawing a painting, maybe you can make some money out of that." So I

answered an ad in the paper for a sign painter, an artist sign painter. So I went to see this guy, and he gave me keys to a truck and says, "OK, James, I want you to paint these Phillips 66 symbols in North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, and Wisconsin." All by myself, I went with this truck, all by myself, put up scaffold, painted the damn thing, went to the next town, painted the same thing. Finally, I met -- he says, "I guess we'll meet you in Black River Falls, Wisconsin." So I drove there, and who do I -- who do I find out? Fisher's hired jail birds, guys that have been in the slammer. They were a crew, I'll tell you. See, I was 18, and they were 28, so they didn't beat up on me. They'd take me in a bar, and they'd say, "Give this kid a gin and tonic. No, he's too young, give him a malted milk. No, no, give him a whiskey sour." Drink them all -- and they'd make me drink all of them. You know, like, they were tough guys, but I didn't get beat up. Then, there, criminals are odd people, they're quite -- they have different mentalities than other people. So, this is a long, long story, but, so Wally's friend Red came back from the Korean War, and he wanted Wally to marry his big, fat sister, and Wally didn't want to do that. So what did Wally do? He held up ten gasoline stations until the cops caught him and threw him in the slammer, and he didn't lose face, didn't marry his fat sister, and he went to jail, luckily. [Laughing]

LD: That was better.

JR: That was the thing. OK. So then I went to visit Wally at his house. When he was home again from the tour of painting, and he's like a caged animal. I knock on the door, and a guy peaks though the window shade, and noises. And then I go in, he says, "Come on in." And then he was wandering around the house like a caged -- like he'd been in jail, right?

LD: He'd just pace?

JR: He'd go from room to room and [ram to room and ram ram reem rom ruh?]. So then I thought, that's crazy, I'm going to do something about that. So I tried to do a miniature -- this is no kidding -- I tried to do a miniature pinball machine. I made this miniature pinball machine, where I was looking for randomness. Now, your husband is a scientist, there is no such thing as randomness. It always

comes back eventually. So, then I thought -- then I did this thing of a floor plan with light bulbs, and I still have -- I should finish this, this is unfinished work. You can put in a light bulb socket, a little thing that the lights will turn on and off at randomness.

LD: In a pattern?

JR: No pattern.

LD: Just...

JR: They just go on and on. And I wanted to put that in three, four of those lights so they would -- things could go on and off at randomness around a floor plan, and that was dedicated to Wally. But instead, it got -- for some reason, it got taken away from me and sold.

LD: Quickly, right?

JR: Yeah. And someday, maybe I'll just -- it's very simple, I'll just insert those little -- the gadgets will make the lights go on and off. That's what that's about. It's about the itinerary of someone in a cage, that's all.

LD: Did you do other pieces with light bulbs?

JR: I did a couple of other little ones too, two or three -- a couple of little ones with a red -- back red, and -- yeah.

LD: One of our...

JR: But see, to me, that was a very off -- simply -- not simple, but just one of those ideas, bang, and then people say oh, we like it.

LD: And why did you think about hanging it on the ceiling?

- JR: Because it's just the reflection of the floor.
- LD: The floor plan turned... One of our handlers told me that you asked to have one of the bulbs --
- JR: Yes indeed, right.
- LD: Untwisted?
- JR: Yeah.
- LD: As a kind of homage to Wally.
- JR: Wally, yeah, yeah, yeah. But it should -- the light should blink, blonk, blink, blonk. I'll do it -- maybe I'll do another one, or I'll fix that one. [Laughing]
- LD: And then Ethel Scull, the Sculls bought this work.
- JR: Yeah, they hung it in their hallway. Bob and Ethel were great, great, great, great. Their apartment, I think, on 1010 5th Avenue, somewhere in there, it was like a [selloff?]. If you walked by and rang the bell, come on in and have a drink. So, you'd go in there and you'd see Andy Warhol sitting in a chair, or, you know, another -- George Segal, anybody there. And they were, like, big supporters, and they continued to do that, you know? And until the very end. And poor Bob got phlebitis in his leg, got his leg amputated, and I went to see him in the hospital, and I brought him a print, a nice print to hang in his hospital room. And his wife says, "Where's my print? You didn't get me a print!" She was a piece of work, Ethel. You know, Ethel, they wanted to interview me in part of their divorce case -- no thank you, I don't want to be part of that. But my point, or my position was, she deserves a lot because she raised three boys. But she said, she's the one who developed the art collection, not true, it was always Bob.
- LD: What can you say about what kinds of things he was interested in, what his vision was, and his taste was like?

JR: Who?

LD: Bob.

JR: Well, Bob was in the taxi business out in Queens. He had 120-some taxis. And he was a -- sort of an investor in the Green Gallery, and also with Leo Castelli too. He backed Dick [Bellamy], and he backed Leo. And Dick, he kept saying he was going to close his gallery, and I says, "Dick, if you keep saying that, I'm going to leave the gallery." He says, [makes faux-speech sounds]. He had, not financial problems, he had personal problems, he had personal things bothering him. And I went to his -- he died, I went to his memorial, it lasted four hours long. A lot of people got up and talked.

LD: How did you get hooked up with him in the first place?

JR: I'm in my studio, that little studio, the pictures, and I was painting away, and I looked out the window, and there was three guys on the curb smoking cigars. One was Ivan Karp, one was Henry Geldzahler from the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art], and one was Dick Bellamy. About a half hour later, there was a knock on the door, and these guys come in. They just heard about me through Steve Durkey's wife, I think. Or Helen Stone, or somebody. Anyway, they came in, and Karp says, "Don't sign any papers!" And Henry, he just dances around like Porky Pig. Wooo, looking around. Dick says, "I'd like you to be in my gallery, I'm starting a new gallery, and I have a couple of artists now." He had [Mark di Suvero](#), and -- anyway, Mark and [Dan Flavin](#), just a couple of people. I said, oh yeah? And then he said can I bring somebody down here. I said I don't care. He brought down Bob --he brought Bob Scull down, and Bob says -- walked in, wonderful, fantastic, a great American spirit, and he walked out the door. Dick says, "Could I bring some more people down next weekend?" I said, "I don't care," and he brought down Burton and Emily Tremaine, who had a lighting company. And they came in, and they said, "Dick, how much is that one?" He said \$350. "How much is that one?" "It's \$1,100." So, she said, "We'd like to buy them." And I said, "Dick, these are not for sale!" It sounds crazy, but I

had no money. But, this was -- the thing I was trying to develop, I still had my union card from painting signs, I could make a horrible living doing that. Or, I was developing this new group of works I wanted to present some day. And Dick says, "Well, think it over," because Bob wanted this other painting for \$650, she wants that for -- I forget what it was, \$300, something like that, \$350, that one for \$1,100. "You've got that, or nothing." And I said to myself, I don't have any money! I could pay the rent. I could buy more paint. So I sold them.

LD: Do you remember what they were?

JR: Yeah, sure. One was called *Hey, Let's Go For A Ride*. Another one -- another one, I can picture it [in my] mind, I can't think of the title. Since then, they've gone, resold for big money later. So I kept painting, and painting, and painting. And then, Dick brought down a lot of other people. And in February of '62, I had a one-man show, and everything was sold. He sold everything before the show opened. It was on West 57th Street. I mean, that's -- that was cool. And then, my next work went to Dorothy Miller's Museum of Modern Art.

LD: Yeah, and here's some things that we have from your show here. Some of the correspondence with Dorothy Miller.

JR: Really?

LD: And this is what I like, you might. The guest list of all of the people that were here.

JR: Really?

LD: Yeah, here are the rest too. I'll give you these, and you can see.

JR: I'd like a copy of some of these, because, you know, my house burned down and everything in Florida, I've lost everything. Oh my God. (pause) [Laughing]

LD: Here's the -- you can take these. I'll ask -- and I'll ask for copies of anything else.

JR: Ah! Hmm. [reading list] (pause) Boy, oh boy, oh boy. She invited these people to dinner?

LD: I'd love to hear you talk about Dorothy Miller. You know, working here, and opening files, and seeing what she did, the whole series of American stuff. She picked well again, and again, and again.

JR: Yeah. To look at the list of people...

LD: Here's a Xerox of that, you can have this. This is the guest list.

JR: (pause) Hmm. I wonder what dinner this is.

LD: [MOMA - 59:22]

JR: Same dinner. Hmm.

LD: That's Janis.

JR: Hmm. (pause) Hmm. I knew [Salvador Dali](#) fairly well. [Marcel Duchamp](#) too. (pause) [reading list]

LD: How did you get to know Duchamp?

JR: I was invited for a drink at Devon Thomas' apartment, and there's Salvador Dali. I heard he was going to be there, so I brought him a New York Mona Lisa button, and a sunflower fly swatter. Every time you hit a fly, a flower bloomed.

LD: [Laughing]

JR: See, young artists really put him on a pedestal, and they were always afraid to visit him. But Marcel was a regular guy, from the Lower East Side. People don't know about his personal life. He was a good friend of Israel Levitan's, the

sculptor, whose wife Idee was in a total body brace, crippled. And he married her crippled, and he would spend his life getting her well. And Marcel [Laughing] used to give her painting lessons, and give her painted screens, and all sorts of things. And, oh, Jack Levitan lived on Avenue A and Tenth -- right near the park, Thompson Square Park. But anyway, so I asked Marcel if he ever studied eastern philosophy. He says no, not really, he said he read *Zen in the Art of Archery*, but that was about it. It's amazing the people she invited to this.

LD: Here are some photos of your studio in....

JR: I've seen them.

LD: You've talked about the importance that each studio had a kind of different...

JR: Here you go.

LD: A different flavor for you. It had a big impact on your work.

JR: Yeah, it was always the size.

LD: Yeah.

JR: The minute I moved in, I made the biggest thing I could in it, and for the size. So that little studio had only like eight foot high ceilings, I made them eight feet high, then I moved to another bigger studio, I made them bigger. So, I always made the largest size I could in that expansion.

LD: One thing I wanted to come back to again was the billboard painting. Because it's clear that these oversized images are related to your experience as a billboard painter. But there are other things too, you know, the scale, palate, even the interest in commodity images. How do you -- how do you -- what do you think about how these things are related? Your billboard practice, and the art that you made?

JR: Well, I mean, I really didn't think too much. I'd go to work everyday, there'd be a big desk, and I could pick up anything I wanted to paint indiscriminately.

LD: You just chose...

JR: If I felt like a big tomato, I'd paint a gigantic tomato. Or if I painted Marilyn Monroe in a bathing suit, I'd paint Marilyn Monroe in a bathing suit. So, I just felt like a cut -- if I felt like a certain color -- the funny thing, the funny thing was, James, paint this big orange. So, I painted a big orange. James, paint this two-story Early Times whiskey bottle. So, I was going to mix up paint to paint the whiskey, it was the same color as the orange. So then it made me think, how does color relate to any reality? Then, during the Korean War, the North Korean insignia on a plane was the same as our insignia, only it had different colors. What does that mean? So what does color mean to things? You know, basically, you're born on the earth, and you see grass is green, and the sky is blue, and so forth, and so on. But, then, from there on, it's like you do things that are more sophisticated. So I didn't really care about commercialism, like Andy Warhol did, where he painted 100 Coca-Cola Bottles, or something like that. I didn't care about that whatsoever, that kind of thing. But the challenge to be given to paint any damn thing, that's the way I think of my work now. I get only excited if it's really hard to paint. [Laughing]

LD: I imagine at the time that you were first showing these pictures, you know, not only was the -- you know, the imagery and the scale shocking, but that palate was really shocking. Those colors you used, I mean, those were not part of a vocabulary part colors at all. I mean, they must have...

JR: What do you mean?

LD: I bet they -- I mean, they must have surprised an audience at that time. Am I wrong?

JR: I never thought they were very unusual, it was just colors of things.

LD: Yeah?

JR: It wasn't a shocking palate. I don't think about it as anything shocking.

LD: No?

JR: As far as color goes, I mean, the Fauve painters, that was shocking.

LD: Yeah, I mean, that was a bright use of colors, but your colors, you know, you walk into F-111 now, you know, those combinations.

JR: Oh, oh, oh, I see what you're getting at.

LD: Yeah.

JR: No, no, let's listen. When I was painting signs, I used everything you could imagine, from fluorescent color. One time, on the Astor Victoria Theater sign I was painting fluorescent red for miles, and miles. And I'd look down at the Times Square, and it looked all green.

LD: Because you'd been looking at red so long?

JR: Because you're looking at the red, it makes everything look green. So, with the F-111 painting, I made that painting, and then I said, I'm going to put some fluorescent color over the surface as an experiment, but if it ever wears out, there's still a painting underneath anyway. So, amazingly, that paint has held up pretty good for fluorescent paint.

LD: Yeah.

JR: Except one little part on top of the hair dryer thing with the pink, it's kind of a little sketchy there. But the rest of it doesn't look too bad. And I have other paintings too, old paintings now, forty years old, that still hangs in there.

LD: I think so.

JR: And I always -- listen, darling, I always wanted to use paint that would last, so I used the best. I used Windsor Newton oil paint, and that stuff doesn't fade. That's really the best. There are other paints better or equal to, Blocks, for instance, very expensive. But Windsor Newton hung -- see, for the World's Fair in '63, I did this big mural, and I put a lot of different colors on it to see what would fade. And I bought cheap colors. And some of the yellows turned to brown, and everything else. Never going to use those again. So, it's like you get to the bottom of it, of what's good. Also, it has to do with prints too.

LD: Yeah.

JR: A lot of prints -- early on, prints would fade. These still hung in there.

LD: These, I mean, the colors here are sort of what I mean. I mean, that's a wild palate coming out of Ab Ex you know...

JR: That's an old print, 1965.

LD: Yeah, '65.

JR: Yeah, that's old. But then there was other prints that faded too.

LD: Yeah.

JR: So then the, you know, the printer really got angry and went after -- tried to find the best ink, the best inks. This painting here, with the face on it. Old Mr. Marleau saw that. He liked that there. You know, he printed for Picasso, and all of the old timers in Paris. And his son took it over, and he came in one day, met him. Now, his grandson has a studio on 79th Street. This was done with Tatyana Grosman, in Long Island?

LD: What do you think of the relationship between print making, and your practice of painting?

JR: Here's what it is, I'll tell you exactly. When artists were already painters, or already have some reputation, are asked to do prints, usually, they'll do a print of something they know already, an image they know, just to learn how, how to make a print. Then after they learn how, then they go freestyle, and do original prints right off the bat, instead of from a painting.

LD: So, do you use it as a kind of lab for thinking about ideas?

JR: Well, first of all, print making was really like sketching for larger works, until you did prints that were original originals, original ideas, directly. Like, that one, that's an original print. I like that one.

LD: Yeah.

JR: These are all learning things.

LD: Will you speak about Tatyana Grosman?

JR: Sure. [Laughing] She -- I met her, I was out in Long Island in '62, guest of -- with Jasper Johns, we were guests of Bob Sculls out there. Jasper says, "There's an old lady who's making prints in her garage, you should go out and help her." Well, didn't happen until '64. I met her in '64 and she says -- then by that time, I was in the Castelli Gallery, and she says -- so, she was born in Siberia, lived in Paris in the '20s and the '30s, married to Maurice. She escaped when the Nazis rolled into Paris. She escaped with some ladies who stole a truck out of a showroom, and drove a hundred miles south, and then kept going south, and had a lot of escapades with the Nazis. And, once they got on a train, they thought they were heading south, and the Nazis guy came to the train and says -- they said, here's our ticket, they said, "Here's our ticket." And they said, "No one on this train has any tickets!" Because it was a prison train going to a concentration camp. So, they [Laughing] got off on the next station, and hid behind the station

until the other train came along. Then they got to -- they had a lot of escapades. They got to Spain, and then came by boat, I think, to Philadelphia. But, once, she said to me, "Rosenquist, would you like to go to Paris with me? I'm going to [St. Ouen?] to see my brother." I thought, why do I want to go to Paris with an old lady for? Then I thought, I thought maybe that would be a good thing, because she knows her way around. So then she told me a story, she always told stories about La Coupole Restaurant. Have you been there?

LD: Yes

JR: OK. She said the -- there was a guy at La Coupole named Sasha, he's a deaf mute. And he'd come up to you in the -- he'd draw your picture. She said -- she told me about this guy. And she said that the cashier, this girl was in love with Sasha. And when the Nazis came, they hid him upstairs in his stocking feet. [Laughing] And he had great food, but he was hidden with great food above La Coupole.

LD: [Laughing]

JR: So, anyway, (pause) I go to Paris at another point with -- what's his name, Norman Bloom, who's a loudmouth guy, artist, interesting artist. We go to La Coupole. This guy comes up to us, with him, with Sasha, and Norman, the jerk, he says, "Go away, we're artists, we don't need that," [makes faux-speech sounds]. And I said "Shut up!" The next thing was Tanya -- Tatyana told me that she went to -- she went to Paris, and the only place to eat that was open was the [Brasserie Lip?] and La Coupole, so she goes there, La Coupole, with her brother. And she's there, and Sasha comes there. And he comes by, and he looks at her, and he puts a hand on her shoulder, and he starts to cry. [Laughing]

LD: Oh!

JR: She starts to cry. She says "That's why I don't ever want to go there again!" And so -- so anyway, I -- at her place, a lot of people would visit, a lot of people would

visit, I met a lot of interesting people out there. We became friends, like Morley Safer, the newscaster. He's a good friend of mine. And I've got a whole lot of them, a lot of people.

LD: You did a lot of prints with them too.

JR: I don't know if I did or not, I mean, I don't know what a lot is, I don't remember now. But guess what, I'm still working there. [Laughing] I just did a thing there very successfully, sold it out.

LD: What was it?

JR: It was a print -- we always experiment there. I printed on that material on that table, that plastic stuff, we printed directly on there in colored inks with a revolving mirror that would spin -- you see yourself, you spin it, it had numbers, clock numbers on it, and you'd still see yourself, and the numbers would disappear. It was something, like, the clock disappears, but the face remains, something like that, what is it. Anyway, you know, I'm very tight with Billy Goldston, who kept her alive for four extra years. He inherited the place. He had to sell all of the work, and he bought a lot back. Half her fortune went to her brother. The other half of the money,[it] wasn't a lot of money; the other half went to Billy to keep the business going, and he did. So he's a very good guy, straight arrow, straight honest fellow. And I'm taking him out to dinner in Harlem pretty soon, for his birthday. [Laughing] He just had a birthday.

LD: How about Leo? How did you make the move to Leo's gallery?

JR: Well, I was on a plane, I think, from LA to New York, and Leo is sitting right there, and he says, "Jim, if you ever think of leaving Dick, please consider me first." He's a very cool guy. So I joined his gallery in '64. And my first show, I thought, was with his -- I don't know, with his organization, but with Ileana Sonnabend in Paris. It was my first trip to Paris. I had a marvelous time. You had an opening in Paris in the springtime, springtime in Paris.

LD: Sounds good.

JR: Yeah, it does. Stayed there for four months, and even, I brought my folks over, I bought a car over there, drove them to Venice, Italy for the Biennale, when Bob won it. Rauschenberg won it. And we had a high old time there with the -- my folks got a room in Venice, you won't believe this. Beautiful room, big drapery, curtains, and marble floor. Great big bed, it was \$1.80 a night with breakfast.

LD: [Laughing] During the Biennale too! That doesn't happen anymore.

JR: No, now, you know, the Bauer Grunwald, and the other hotels, they're like \$5,000 a night. [Laughing]

LD: So you already knew Bob Rauschenberg, and had...

JR: Oh yeah! Yeah, no, OK, here's one. So I go to the Biennale -- I went to the Biennale there, like, they wouldn't let me in. I see Bob, I says, "Hey, Bobby! I came over here to see you!" And he went -- he made a big ruckus. He says, "If you don't let him in, I'm leaving to the show." He said to me.

LD: [Laughing]

JR: He was always a -- he was always something else. [Laughing] So, they let me in, and he was a friend of mine until he was on his death bed.

LD: I bet.

JR: And he was amazing, oh Bobby is, like, generous, he gave me his lights for my Russian show, because they didn't have any lights in Russia. But he said something on his death bed. He said, "I don't mind death, I just don't like the infinity part of it." [Laughing]

LD: That's pretty funny.

JR: It is funny, he wants more action. But he was -- and you know what, he pulled the plug on himself. He had such a disdain for death. He wouldn't go to John Cage's funeral. He hated the idea of funerals, and death, and everything. So do I, but he went home and pulled the plug with his doctors, and his nurses. He ended it himself. But he was a -- he was a killer diller until he died. I mean, I saw his downfall happen within six years. I had a show with Larry Gagosian, he showed up, he was walking around and everything, drinking a little white wine he shouldn't be. And he went home, he fell down, and he broke his hip.

LD: Yeah.

JR: Then his hip healed up, then he had a hip replacement. Then he still kept -- then he fell again, and had kind of a -- I don't know what it was, a thing where his hand got messed up, kind of a stroke. Then, he still rented Ricky Martin's jet, and he went to Spain, then he went to Portugal, then he went to Spain and back, came back to Washington, choked on some pills, they threw him on the floor, broke his collarbone, then he went downhill. Downhill...

LD: Definitely, when something happens like that, something happens, and it's a trigger, and we see this person in his decline.

JR: See, and I'll tell you something else, the key to longer life, I've seen it. If you've got anything wrong with you, get it fixed! Robert Hughes, my -- the Australian critic, a good friend of mine. He was in a car wreck, smashed his knees. I says, "Robert, get your knees fixed, I've got two new knees. Get knees, get them fixed. He put it off, he put it off. Now he's not well, and he's in a wheelchair.

LD: Just deteriorated.

JR: And I've invited him out two different times, and he's too -- he should've been fixed, he would've been different. It happened to one of my employees, old timers, too. They didn't get fixed, and you get caught, and something else happens, and whoo.

- LD: It throws your balance out of joint, or it throws your musculature out of joint, and then you hurt something else.
- JR: It throws a lot of things out of joint, it depends.
- LD: I'm going to do a Bob Rauschenberg show here this place, for 2016. I'm going to do it in collaboration with the Tate. I think that's going to be a great project.
- JR: Yeah, he's very -- he's a party guy!
- LD: Sure.
- JR: He came to my show in Bilboa, Spain in a wheelchair. I says, "What are you doing here?" And he says, "I came for the party!" This has been going on for as long as I can remember. I would have an obscure show in Memphis, Tennessee. He'd come out of the hotel room, out of the elevator. And I'd have another show somewhere in Sweden, he'd come out of a bedroom. He was always showing up. [Laughing]
- LD: From the stories that I've heard, he sounded like a guy who hated to be alone. I mean, he'd make sure he wasn't alone for...
- JR: But you know what he did once?
- LD: Yeah.
- JR: He says -- which is wrong. He said to all of his people working with him, he says, "Let's all have a New Years Eve working party together!" Everyone goes, oh no, they want to go home to their families. [Laughing] They don't want to have a working party on New Years Eve. [Laughing]
- LD: But it turned out for him, I mean, he has these great collaborations, one after another. I mean, because he always wanted to have people working around him.

JR: Yeah, listen, here's another thing, a top about his work. One time, with Ileana Sonnabend, she rented three places downtown in Lower Manhattan. And around Christmas time, he had three shows opening at once. So I go there with -- got it on my mind, with (pause) you know, the famous Japanese sculptor from Long Island.

LD: Naguchi

JR: [Isamu Noguchi](#) I go with -- Isamu was a bar guy too, he's like a regular New Yorker. You wouldn't think of him as Japanese. [Laughing] We go in this one show, there's a bent oil barrel sitting there with a bent car bumper sitting next to it. I looked at it, and I go, "What the hell is that?" And Isamu says, "He could really do it, can't he." [Laughing] And I go, "Do what?" [Laughing] He saw something, I didn't! [Laughing]

LD: [Laughing]

JR: It was pretty good, really.

LD: I'd like to hear more about Leo and Ileana, because -- did you read -- did you read that biography that Annie Cohen-Solal wrote about Leo?

JR: I didn't like it, I just glimpsed through it. But, you know, I went with her to promote her damn book too, with some book signings. But I didn't really care for it.

LD: What it didn't do for me was talk about his intelligence, you know, in picking out artists. I mean, what Leo's genius was, was about having an eye for things early, and being able to pick early. It wasn't all about his personal life, it was really about this particular kind of intelligence had, about being able to see things and their significance early.

JR: Oh, but wait, wait, wait. Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. But it was Ileana that picked them a lot of the times.

LD: She was smart too.

JR: Leo, luckily, inherited a lot of people from the Green Gallery, from other places. To me, she's the one who is a smarty. She's the one who put Leo together.

LD: And they kept talking. They had lunch...

JR: Yeah, yeah. [Laughing] They were a funny crew. Which I, you know, I got a big kick out of-- I stayed with her in Venice, but we had an altercation, and then -- I still talk to her, you know, in her old age. But Leo, he was always a gent.

LD: It sounds like Leo picked you though. Your [web] site, when I asked the question, you said he was the one that came to you and said..

JR: Well, he came early, early on, then I went in the Green Gallery. But he brought down Count Ponza, and bought a bunch of paintings at once. And I don't really know. I liked him because he wasn't always on the side of the collectors, like some dealer. He was, like, fifty-fifty. He helped artists, he helped artists, gave them stipends. I won't mention names, but he gave stipends to a couple of artists for a couple hundred thousand a pop, and they never paid him. They didn't pay him back. I didn't do that with him.

LD: Well, it was a smart stable of artists that he put together. Because it seems to me, in retrospect, and looking at it from a different point in time, like he put together a group of artists that made sense together.

JR: I don't know. I don't know what makes sense as well [Laughing]

LD: [Laughing] Well, maybe -- we're getting to be about 1:00.

JR: Really?

LD: So, maybe we should take a break.

JR: Well, time goes fast with you, dear.

LD: You too, you're a great storyteller.

JR: [Laughing]

LD: And, Jim, I think people are going to love to hear these stories. You know, of course, it'll get edited down, but having -- even if it's something that's said somewhere else, having you say it, I think people are going to love it.

JR: Well, again, I mean, I was there. And they're not secondhand stories at all.

LD: No.

JR: Good or bad.

LD: In the autobiography, I liked the intensity of the scenes of the Depression that you wrote about in the first chapters. Just that idea of really scraping by with nothing, but really making something out of it. You can almost live in these communities without much real money.

JR: Well, listen, listen, listen. I don't know if I said it there, but I remember with my folks, we went over to someone's house, and I said, "Momma, Momma, they're eating eggs for supper." And my mother said, "They don't have any money." And I went huh, what? Because, in a farm community, everyone always ate, everybody always had food. And another thing they did [Laughing] -- they did during the Depression, that the Chambers of Commerce would write a food company, and say, "Let's have a pancake day celebration." Or let's have another kind of a day celebration. So, these companies would provide free food for a celebration. [Laughing] And I used to pull a little wagon with a clown suit, and a sign that says "My daddy sells Mobile gas."

LD: That's your first brush with advertising. [Laughing]

JR: Yeah. And then, the pancake day, they had a contest, who could eat the most pancakes, and some guy ate about 25 or 30 pancakes, and he won first prize -- his first prize was a bigger pancake, and he socked the guy in the jaw. [Laughing]

LD: I don't blame him. [Laughing]

JR: And then another one too, as I remember -- I have a foggy memory, but they had an elephant one time, for the parade in this little town. And the damn elephant just sat on somebody's car and smashed it. He rest it and [makes faux-speech sounds] sat on somebody's car. [Laughter] Oh!

LD: Well, let's take a break now.

JR: Let's do that.

LD: And we can have some lunch, and we can come back. I know we're going to go to F-111, and we're going to talk about Marilyn and the conservation studio, and Jim [Coddington].

JR: Marilyn! I saw Marilyn twice. Didn't meet her, but I saw her twice.

LD: Was she impressive -- as impressive as person when you saw her?

JR: Sure.

[CREW DISCUSSION]

END AUDIO FILE Rosenquist _0006 AT 1:32:08

BEGIN AUDIO FILE Rosenquist _0007

Location: The Museum of Modern Art Conservation Studio

Additional Interviewer: Anny Aviram Conservator (AA)

[CREW DISCUSSION]

LD: Jim, this is a fabulous painting, it looks great. Can you tell us a little bit about what you were thinking when you painted it?

JR: Well, I saw Marilyn Monroe two times, but I didn't get to meet her. I saw her in Westchester County jumping out of a limo to get a *New York Times*, and she knocked over all of the *New York Times*, jumped back in the limo. She looked great. Then I saw her with Arthur Miller in Times Square. Her hair was blowing up in the air. She looked beautiful. And I was painting my mother-in-law's kitchen, and I thought I got -- I'd better paint a picture of Marilyn Monroe. Why? Because I did it the day she died.

LD: This is the day she died?

JR: Yeah, it's like existentialist feelings. She died, bang, so I'd better do -- her life was quick and short, so I'm going to do it quick, do it right afterwards. So I did. And I thought, well, she was such an ethereal beauty, she was so delicate, like, floating thing, that she really -- she was advertised to death or something. She was so fantastic, and she just -- it was like these things, like a pole, but it's like, there's part of her teeth upside down, part of her eye upside down, part of her lip all jumbled up, and it says "ARILY" for Marilyn, [very airily?]. That's what it said. So it was a light, delicate, pastel-y picture. And that's it.

LD: Can you tell us about the turning the images?

JR: No, I can't.

LD: [Laughing]

JR: No, no, it's just, you know, what I was doing, because, listen, I had done -- I had painted her many times commercially for R. Kraft Strauss Company.

LD: Oh yeah.

JR: In a bathing suit, and every other damn thing. But I didn't want to do her...

LD: That way.

JR: That way. You know, like that kind of thing. Like, Andy [Warhol] took out a picture of her face, and they redid it 100 times, and so what? I'd never thought of her as -- excuse me, partially as advertising herself to death, but not really. She died in a very unfortunate way. And they really don't know how she died, ever, I think. How that happened, nobody knows. Anyway, my memory of her is a very lofty ethereal, light, fragile person. That was it, that's the painting, kaboom.

LD: This picture was chosen by Dorothy Miller for the American show, right?

JR: I'm not sure. See, the Museum of Modern Art, Alfred Barr, never bought a painting of mine. Sidney Janis bought this painting. Three people wanted to buy it, Alfred, Sidney, and Bob Scull. But, for some reason, he sold it to Sidney, boom. And Sidney gave it to the Museum, and that's how I became part of the museum's collection.

LD: Now, this is the first picture that we had in here.

JR: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, you never -- I mean, Marcel Duchamp said I -- he says, I put the best in my painting, and they either have a life of their own, or they don't.

LD: Yeah.

JR: That's really what happens.

LD: No, this one's got a -- this one's had a good life.

JR: Because I got paintings all over the world, and some have lives, and some don't, and some are yet to be discovered.

LD: How did you do it? Did you make a collage first?

JR: I'm not sure. In this case, I'm not sure. That's an easy answer, I don't know, I'm not sure.

LD: Perfectly fair.

JR: [Laughing]

LD: So...

JR: Anyway, I still like it, and it even looks good...

AA: Can you tell us a little bit about the writing and the [spray can?] that is [scope?].

JR: Yeah, yeah, yeah, that's really like skywriting in the air. It's like writing in the air, I forget what it says.

AA: Coke.

JR: Coca-Cola or something like that.

AA: Does that have to do with being also an iconic thing at the time, like Coke? Or...

JR: Yeah, cocaine you mean?

AA: No, Coca-Cola.

JR: No, no, no, I just...

AA: Coca-Cola.

JR: I don't know why I did it, it was just I saw some skywriting advertisement.
Kaboom. Yep.

LD: And the metallic paint, were you already using that before, or was this one of the first times?

JR: Oh yeah. Because, you know, metallic paint has two colors.

LD: Yeah.

JR: It's bright and shiny, or it's dead. That's it.

AA: And now, can you tell us...

JR: You're talking too much about it.

AA: [Laughing]

JR: What?

AA: Can you tell us a little bit about how you painted the left side of the painting versus the right side?

JR: Because what I did, I stood behind me and I painted like this on the left side, then I went like this, and I painted the right side.

AA: [Laughing] No.

JR: What are you talking about?

AA: The reason I'm asking you is because it seems to us that the paint on the right side is thicker, and then we have all of this cracking only on this side.

JR: There's cracking?

AA: The cracking on here, on the right side.

JR: Oh, right, there's cracks, son of a gun.

AA: A lot of cracks, on this side --

JR: That's...

AA: -- And none on the left side. And, we also noticed that there is...

JR: I thought I never had any cracks in my work.

AA: No?

JR: Except if kids punched it.

AA: Well, there is a little damage like that here.

JR: Because, listen, I did this painting called *Silver Skies*, it's in the Chrysler Museum. Holy cow! Kids have obviously used it as a punching bag. I tried to buy it back, I says, "Please, let me buy it back, because I'm going to fix it!" They wouldn't sell it to me. I wanted to buy it cheap. [Laughing] See, that's -- you know, it could be..

AA: This is very interesting.

JR: Why is that?

AA: Here, on the top, and the silver paint. And if you look at the other side, there's barely any...

LD: Yeah, perfect, perfect.

JR: Yeah.

AA: There are minor cracks, but nothing like this side. So, this has to do with the ground that you applied, that you...

JR: No, no, no, darling, that's always one ground on the whole thing.

AA: But this side looks like there's a...

JR: Look at it, it's all beat to hell.

AA: Different thickness of paint.

JR: Probably is, I probably painted it twice to make it more better.

AA: And do you see that maybe that the layer underneath was drying faster than the one on top, or is there anything that you can recall you might have added that might have caused...

JR: That cracking up there?

AA: Yeah, uh-huh. This.

JR: Right.

AA: This, on the silver paint.

JR: I can't answer that.

AA: They are stable. And then, what we try to do now is see if we can visually make improvement.

LD: It looks great on the whole, it really does.

AA: So, we just wonder if there's anything.

JR: I don't think I have any cracks in the F-111 picture.

LD: No, it looks incredibly...

AA: Actually, the F-111 have similar cracks in these.

JR: Uh-oh!

AA: Similar, but they are more discrete than this. So that's why I wonder if there's something that you could recall that you could have used that --

JR: No.

AA: -- Was something different.

JR: No, no, no, no.

LD: I love the passages between color, black, and white. It's great.

JR: Well, thank you. No.

LD: Is this how you would do an eye for a billboard, and then you'd back away, and it would come?

JR: I just paint, that's all I do is paint. All I do is that. Listen, darling, in this day and age, wait a minute...

AA: Yes?

JR: [12:19] In this day and age, I stretch canvas over a stretcher bar, see? Like this. you know what I do now?

AA: What do you do?

JR: I put thin veneer plywood on the surface, and stretch the canvas on that.
Therefore...

AA: When you're painting.

JR: When anybody hits it, anyone...

LD: It's got a tautness, yeah.

JR: It doesn't rupture the warp and the weft

AA: Right.

JR: OK? Here...

AA: Just the canvas?

JR: Listen to me, this is like a drum from all of the old ancient paintings you have in here, it's like a skin over a drum, be very dangerous, where a hole can be put in it, and rupture the warp and the weft, and do all of that stuff. But in my new work, which now, twelve or twenty years long, I've had them hit, punched, no cracks, no nothing. Didn't damage it. And it's been a big lifesaver. But this...

AA: But, you know, we always have a protective backing on this.

JR: I know you do that, but the artists didn't.

AA: No, that's true.

- JR: No, no, wait, wait, wait, I know how -- no, it's just like dangerous. This thin skin stretched over like a drum that can be -- if someone fell into this now, you could just rupture it.
- AA: Absolutely.
- JR: And that's terrible. That's terrible to have the -- why? Look at Steve Wynn, his Picasso.
- LD: [Laughing] Just when he was about to close the deal.
- JR: He's a friend of mine.
- LD: Yeah.
- JR: What is it, \$134 million, something like that? Steve can't see from here to here, when you see him, you go, hi, Steve. From there to here, ten feet away, he sees something. He put his elbow in it, then, they had the warp and the weft remove, and incredibly delicate, repainted, it was perfect. But, now, the price of that picture is \$134 million, has dropped down. So guess what, guess what happened after that? He got the painting back and \$77 million in insurance. End of story. All I'm saying is about this drum phenomenon, about all of their ancient paintings. They're like skin on a drum. Dangerous. So my new -- if you ever see any of my new work, you couldn't actually hit it, it won't crack, or do a thing. Basically, it won't rupture it, that's the worst.
- AA: Right.
- JR: To cut through the canvas is the worst.
- AA: Right.
- JR: So anyway, such is life.

[CREW DISCUSSION]

JR: So I used Windsor Newton paint, the best I could buy.

AA: Do you remember the kind of silver paint you used?

JR: Who?

AA: Silver paint you used?

JR: No, it was just out of the hardware store.

AA: You used tape on these mask it off?

JR: Yeah, I think I did, for the little lines. Yeah, I did.

AA: Was there anything else you think that you can tell us that you [used] spray paint? And our records say that you...

JR: No, listen, darling, I paint with a paintbrush.

AA: And then, this print.

JR: I'm not an airbrush artist at all.

AA: Oh, this is airbrush, it appears to me, doesn't it?

JR: No, this thing is.

AA: Yes, yes.

JR: It's probably from a -- I don't know what it's from, here it is again.

AA: Right, right.

JR: Yeah.

LD: Would you tape -- would you tape these different segments, and use tape for each section, is that how it works?

JR: I probably, maybe.

AA: That's kind of...

JR: I mean, a lot of experience of using no tape when I was a sign painter, I didn't need any tape.

LD: No tape, no ropes.

JR: No paint, no nothing. I mean, I was painting something in Times Square of some fruit. So I said to the boss, "You know, that's rose red now. That's -- I can't paint this with this red lake you give me, and this Prussian blue." "Oh, we never use anything differently. This is the way we always did it." What did I do? I went to the goddamn art store and bought some rose red, and painted it. "You did a good job." They were old fashioned, from the 1900s.

LD: Nothing changed?

JR: Here's one. They even painted a stuffed whale on Central Park South, on a flatbed trailer. I think in the '40s, they had a stuffed whale. And the old timer says, "We could do it. We'll give her a coat of baby blue like she's fresh out of the water." And they had this rotten whale outside, can you imagine? A rotten whale in Central Park, on 59th Street?

LD: [Laughing]

JR: Anyway, yeah, so, I'm just trying to think of something else. I painted the naked Maya for the Astor Victoria Theater. It was this nude, and her bush in the

painting was this big. So the boss says, you got -- old Jag Star. "You've got to make that a little bit smaller, that's too big, that bush!" I says, "This is the sketch." "Oh!" OK. I painted -- then the City of New York came, and had to put a canvas over the painting, because that was obscene, it was the naked Maya. OK? [Laughing] Oh, yeah.

LD: Let's go to F-111, because we're going to have a long time there.

[CREW DISCUSSION]

END OF AUDIO FILE Rosenquist _0007

BEGIN AUDIO FILE Rosenquist _0008

[CREW DISCUSSION]

AA: My name is Anny Aviram and I'm a paintings conservator here at MoMA, and we're talking now about the Rosenquist Marilyn Monroe behind me. Thank you.

LD: One more time.

AA: My name is Anny Aviram, I'm a conservator here in painting conservation at MoMA. And we're talking here about Rosenquist's [Marilyn Monroe](#) behind me.

LD: OK, thank you. So I just want to...

[CREW DISCUSSION]

AA: OK.

JR: If it's still greasy, that means it's still young, why? Because there's still oil in the paint.

AA: Right.

JR: Even if it's a new painting. If it's really dried out. So it's still a little greasy up there, means it's still young-ish.

LD: It looks great. We hang this all of the time.

JR: Good.

AA: So, it was difficult to get it up here besides -- because of what Leah says, it's always on view. And I always wanted to make sure how stable the cracks are.

JR: Kids don't punch it.

[CREW DISCUSSION]

END OF AUDIO FILE Rosenquist _008 AT 3:14

BEGIN AUDIO FILE Rosenquist _009

Location: Fourth Floor Painting and Sculpture Balcony

[CREW DISCUSSION]

LD: OK. Hi, I'm Leah Dickerman, we're sitting here in the midst of the 2012 installation of James Rosenquist's *F-111*.

[CREW DISCUSSION]

LD: Hi, I'm Leah Dickerman, we're sitting here in the 2012 installation of James Rosenquist's [F-111](#), here at Museum of Modern Art, and I'm here with the artist, Jim Rosenquist, himself. I'm here with the artist, Jim Rosenquist, himself. Jim, how did you start thinking about the idea of a wraparound painting?

JR: OK. At the time, I really could see people doing -- starting to do videos, happenings, and all sorts of things. And so I thought -- I started thinking about my paintings as tombs, *le tombe*, tombs. Therefore, if you stumbled upon one of my tombs, it would still work. That's why this was the start of "Reflecting Corners", which then continued in *Horse Blinders* and numbers of other paintings. So, that if you moved, the painting would move a little bit. So, all you would need to see my work would be the sunlight, and some intuition, that's all. That's one thing, that's the idea about *Reflecting Corners*. And then, the idea for doing this painting, this among many, many, many, many reasons. One was a long conversation with [Barnett Newman](#) about peripheral vision. In other words, judging self-consciousness from whatever you looked at by whatever comes through the side of your eyes, which occurs to all of us. So what did I do? I thought I wanted to do a wraparound painting so I could control whatever came into the side of your lives. So whatever you looked at was that because of all of the other color in the room. This came from an outdoors painting in Times Square, where I'd paint something, a whole big sign, day glow red, and everything else would look green outside that. So, that began to occur to me about peripheral vision that was one thing. The second thing was I'd known Paul Berg from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, who had went on seven combat missions and a police action in Vietnam.

LD: Yeah.

JR: It wasn't a war yet, it was a police action. So, he told me all about that. The second thing was...

LD: The war was on our mind, or that kind of war.

JR: Well, partly. Well, partly -- the next thing was, I thought, I learned that the Chinese invented income taxes at the age of human -- during the age of humanism, which was not a demand, it was merely a contribution to a community, a society, to make a culture. Then, I visited an amusement park called Six Flags Over Texas, and I saw this corroding B-36 Bomber, and that was during the Cold War, and I thought of all of the money that's being spent for what,

for what reason? Will the Russians ever attack us? I don't think so. Let me think.

LD: How about the F-111 image.

JR: Wait, wait, wait.

LD: OK.

JR: And I visited Russia in 1965, Leningrad, to an old pen pal, Eugene Rukhin. And I thought, these people are never going to start a war with us, they're never going to do that. So then I felt -- so anyway, so then I saw the picture of this brand new bomber called F-111 that hadn't been flown yet. I thought, what a waste of time or money. So I decided to use this as a backdrop for this idea of this painting about the terrible temper of the times. And the aspects of our economy, whereas building war weapons, you know, are they feeding our people, so we can have two and a half children, and three and a half cars, or whatever. And it's part of our economy, or what is it, what's the big question here. Therefore, that was the impetus, or idea, for doing this wraparound painting, and to a peripheral vision, the economy, and a whole bunch of other stuff.

LD: One thing that struck me in your book was you talked about the F-111 as being already obsolete, that it seemed to you crazy that all of this money would be spent on a bomber that was already obsolete.

JR: Yeah, because, listen, I'd saw the B-36, that was an obsolete bomber, and they're building a new one, and at that point, it had never been used. And I thought this is already a token of our economy that's already obsolete.

LD: Yeah, I thought that idea of obsolescence was interesting. That there was this pathway in which things were produced, you know, already obsolete, and they're very...

JR: And the question continues. Like, about war, is a war building up -- is a war going to build up our economy again? I'll tell you something, I have a lady -- lady, Iranian doctor, who's my doctor. So, she tells me about Iran, tells me I'm healthy, or this and that. But then I said, "Well, tell me more about Iran." She said, listen to this, she says, the -- there's a faction there that wants to end it all, have a war, and go up rapture into heaven, including Khomeini, and a few other people, and the government kind of goes along with this, so she said, "You can be sure we're going to have a war with Iran." She said, "It won't last long, but they want this a war, OK?" Next, you've got the Israelis who want to bomb Iran now. It's like sex, they want to -- the Israelis to bomb Iran, and the Iranians want the war. So she says, "You're going to be sure we have a -- so mark -- I hate just saying this, but mark my words, if we don't have a war with Iran." I hope not, but that's what she told me!

LD: You said something pretty powerful also about the idea that all of these middle class families participate in building the bomber. It's jobs --

JR: Sure.

LD: -- It fuels the economy.

JR: Yeah.

LD: It's good for them, so that there's a kind of pathway that's in the United States that has nothing to do with whether something is good or not, collectively, but everyone sort of buys into it, because it's good for them.

JR: Well, no, again, there's a war -- does a war contribute to an economy?

LD: Yes. What about the relationship between warfare and consumer commodity culture that's so clear in this work of art, how did you -- you just talked about it as the F-1 bomber moving through the flack of consumer society, how do you think about that relationship?

JR: Exactly what I said before. Does a political war support the homegrown economy? So that's curious. I mean, we seem to be -- the cycle, there seems to be a cycle of conflicts. And personally, I went to jail during the Vietnam -- protesting the war in Vietnam. And so on, big deal. And then, these things seem to continue, and continue, and continue. So, it's -- I think it's horrible, why can't we get out of a situation that's more progressive, and spend money on other things, and war weapons, and war, for both sides. I mean, it's like, you know, for the -- Listen, here's one for you: I had dinner with Henry Kissinger a while ago. I said, "Mr. Kissinger," I said, "I've always thought that there'd be a think tank in Washington to study the Koran." And he went, "Well, if they all -- if everyone read it, they'd all come out with a different answer anyway, so it really wouldn't do much good." He's smart, he's probably right. He's probably -- I bought a copy of the Koran, and I mean, I haven't read it yet. But the point is, you know, he's probably -- he was probably right. So, the thinking that goes into -- well, it's like global politics and oil, for instance. My relatives live in North Dakota. And they say there's more oil in North Dakota, for the next 30 years, we don't have to deal with the Middle East at all. So that's a big curiosity. He said, including Mexico, North Dakota, and Canada, that strip of area has all of this oil. So, what happens to world politics, when there's no -- not too much need for oil.

LD: Right.

JR: That's a whole other -- that's a new one, a new thing.

LD: Subject of your next painting.

JR: I don't know, not the subject of my next painting, I've already did my next paintings.

LD: This was down...

JR: You've got to come and see them.

LD: I'd love to. This was done for your first show at the Castelli Gallery?

JR: That's correct.

LD: And how did that invitation come about, and what did Leo Castelli tell you? That you could do whatever you want? What were the rules when he...

JR: There's no rules whatsoever.

LD: No rules whatsoever?

JR: No, he asked me to join the gallery in '64. So, my first show with -- because I thought that that organization was with Ileana Sonnabend in Paris. I had a wonderful time because all of the old boys were still alive. [Miro](#) came to my show, [Giacometti](#) came to my show, [Léon] Polikav came to my show. I had a wonderful time. Then, that was '64.

LD: This is '65.

JR: Then in '65, I had my first show with Leo.

LD: What was this, the gap in the doorway, where was that?

JR: That was the entrance of the gallery.

LD: So where was the reception offices? They were behind this way?

JR: They were that way. Yeah, yeah. This little room, he did huge shows, big Chamberlain sculptures, all sorts of stuff.

LD: Yeah.

JR: In this size room, that was it.

LD: I know, it was amazing.

JR: Yeah.

LD: And I know when we talked to you about this work before we installed it, you said it was really important that it was on the footprint of the Castelli gallery, and that the corners fell where they should be.

JR: Yeah.

LD: Can you talk about the corners, because I think that's something...

JR: Well, that, that's a hurdle painted in the corner of reflection, throwing one's self into a corner as a hurdle.

LD: Yeah, it really works amazingly well. I mean, it's completely different if you see it in a straight line.

JR: Yes, oh yeah, yeah.

LD: What about behind you? What's the short panel, why is that one underneath the USAF [United States Air Force]?

JR: That one, just to get back to the -- to the heating radiator. [Laughing] That entrance to the front of the room.

LD: That's where the heating radiator is?

JR: That was -- he had to go back there!

LD: That's great!

JR: Practical!

LD: So, how much of the work is actually aluminum?

JR: Only this and this.

LD: Only these two M's?

JR: Yep, yep, yep. Yep.

LD: And then the rest is a kind of a trompe l'oeil

JR: Oil on canvas, yeah.

LD: How about the roller -- wallpaper roller, did you use a real roller for that?

JR: It's an Italian wallpaper roller because I went to Richard Brownbaker's apartment, and he had that in -- [Laughing] it was real corny in his lobby of his apartment building. And I kept thinking -- see, at that time, the air in New York was terrible, and it was heavy bad air, and I thought of it as radioactivity coming down in a flower form on top of all of us. You know, that was '64 or '65. Here in Manhattan, it's gotten a lot better. They've cleaned it up galore. It was really -- you couldn't even open -- I don't know if you remember, but if you open your windows in your apartment, it would be foul.

LD: The grit coming in.

JR: That's right.

LD: When I walked in for this installation, I was blown away. I thought this was an incredibly prescient work. You could see Paul McCarthy over here, you could see Chris Wool there, you could see all of these artists who have picked up things in this work, and gone on and done other things with them.

JR: I wouldn't know.

LD: There's a -- the wallpaper reminded me of Chris Wool.

JR: I don't know, I wouldn't know.

LD: I'm wondering if it would be OK if we started -- we could do this sitting down, and then we'll walk around afterwards. But if we just moved through the different images in the panel...

JR: Why not?

LD: And you just tell me what you were thinking, what you want to say about them.

JR: I probably was absent. Absent without a mind.

LD: Would you rather do it sitting down, or would you rather do it...

JR: No, I'll stand up for a minute, sure.

LD: OK.

[CREW DISCUSSION]

LD: Tell me when you're ready.

JR: I'll be ready!

[CREW DISCUSSION]

LD: OK. Jim, so we're starting here. You said that only these two sections are really aluminum, and the rest is kind of a trompe l'oeil effect. How about spaghetti? It shows up in your work a lot.

JR: Spaghetti.

LD: Spaghetti.

JR: Spaghetti is merely -- I painted it because it's merely -- oh, those are in crimson and yellow. Two simple colors make that ugly thing, that's from eating a lot of spaghetti.

LD: A lot of canned spaghetti?

JR: Some. A lot of regular -- well, it's a long story, I don't want to get into it.

LD: OK.

JR: Because we used to be starving artists. So, a group of us, if everyone paid \$0.50, someone would make a ton of spaghetti, and we'd all eat. [Laughing] That's partly it.

LD: Yeah. It's amazing, I mean, the color is amazing, it's amazing too because it's so...

JR: [20:09] It's only two colors, it's yellow and alizarin crimson

LD: And then you flipped the colors here?

JR: Yeah.

LD: How about this one, what's this image?

JR: What is it, that's a gulp of air from an underwater swimmer, a gulp of air.

LD: What did it...

JR: And here's an atomic explosion related to just a gulp of air. And then the glitter up there is from jukebox paint, so you get all sorts of paint, including fluorescent paint, jukebox paint, and more jukebox, you can't see much.

- LD: Where is the other jukebox? Down in the silver and gray.
- JR: Sort of that gray is really red, yellow, and blue, that makes gray. And that's -- the umbrella is like going to an amusement park and seeing an atomic explosion, which people did at that time.
- LD: We used to go to viewing sessions.
- JR: Yes, they did.
- LD: What's the stretched out image underneath?
- JR: It's just a blanket, I forget. It's a blanket, I forget why.
- LD: How about over here? You get to this corner, and you have the little girl under a hair dryer.
- JR: Yeah, she was just really like the metaphor of the child that moves, or lives the economy, under a hair dryer, which is a metaphor for a pilot's helmet.
- LD: Yeah, sure.
- JR: She's in a hair dryer. And that little girl now is a mother with beautiful daughters. She sent me -- she was a good looking gal, and she had some beautiful daughters too. She sent me another envelope, another photo.
- LD: Perfect.
- JR: Yeah.
- LD: Anny [Aviram] told me to ask you what kind of paint you used here in the day glow section. Do you remember what kind of paint it was?
- JR: Yeah. One Shot -- One Shot Day Glow.

LD: One Shot Day Glow?

JR: Yeah, and see that's kind of scratchy faded.

LD: Yeah, but that...

JR: But this, look at this, this is all --

LD: That's amazing.

JR: This is all pretty good shape.

LD: What about the light bulbs?

JR: This is a light bulb, and it's like a red, yellow, and blue light bulb. And it's just -- I forget why I did it, but there's some reason for that, actually. See, it's 47 years ago! [Laughing]

LD: What I love about it is, you get to this corner, and it's almost like an abstract painting. It's like whatever your dynamic composition...

JR: Yeah, it's part of the aircraft, then I painted day glow over the surface of it. I thought, well, if that ever fades out, you'll still have a painting underneath. So I was thinking of longevity, I don't know why.

LD: Well, good thing.

JR: Not really, the insignia was very much like the North Korean insignia. See, it was like a take off from the American insignia, but they just painted it a different color for North Korea.

LD: So you flipped the colors here.

JR: Yeah.

LD: How about the tire?

JR: Yeah, the tire -- it's like a king's crown. Something regal, as a king's crown. And the angel foods cake was a metaphor for a missile silo.

LD: The hole?

JR: Where a missile came out of the center of a cake.

LD: How about the little flags.

JR: I forget why. Some far out metaphor. But the...

LD: [Laughing] I...

JR: I mean, I went to -- I went to missile silos in North Dakota, where I grew up. And people asked me about them, and I said, hey, why don't you make art galleries out of them, or something now. And people are doing something with them. But unbelievably, North Dakota became a big missile area, exactly where I grew up. A surprise.

LD: They always reminded me of the flags that you planted when you, you know, got to the South Pole, or the top of a mountain, where you were staking some territory.

JR: Yeah, yeah. I don't -- no, I don't remember.

LD: How about this pattern here, is this also a wallpaper pattern?

JR: Yes!

LD: That's a [star?]?

JR: Yes, it is.

LD: Like a fireworks.

JR: Yeah, it's supposed to be radioactivity again. Yeah.

LD: And you got the hurdle, jumping over hurdle in the wallpaper.

JR: Into nothing.

LD: Into nothing. And the wallpaper panel- can you tell me about the reception on it? I mean, what happened when you first put it up, with Castelli?

JR: Well. [Laughing] Before I ever put it up, holy cow, Leo brought down everybody and his brother to my studio. I mean, Feigen brought Tony Curtis down there. Then the government -- the guy who owns the -- Geico. Government Employee, Insurance [Company], he came down there. Then, [Raf's?] people, and Ileana, here's a funny one. I had Ileana Sonnabend down there, who knocks on the door, [[Gordon](#)] [Matta](#) [[Clark](#)]. She says, "Don't let him in!" She didn't have a thing going on.

LD: Matta?

JR: She wouldn't let him in my studio. You know, like, what? Then I knew his two kids, Roberto and the other crazy one, both died.

LD: Gordon Matta-Clark

JR: Gordon, and then the other crazy one. They had one who was really wild. Crazy, he was really a big drug taker. And tons and tons of people. People, before the opening, and then the opening happened, and it was a big jam up. Big opening, with tons of people coming there, at the time. But, see, the prelude to that was many, many, many visitors to my studio on Broom Street.

LD: Before it was even open?

JR: Sure. Then it hit -- it was on the front page of *The New York Times*, said, this painting needs a hall, not a wall, something like that. And so it was my first show with Leo, which I wanted to make a big blast, and I did.

LD: Can you tell me how it got sold?

JR: Yeah, Bob Scull... [Laughing] We planned to sell it piece by piece to a lot of different people, and have a reunion, and put it together. Then Leo came in one day and he says, "Jim, Bob Scull came in and he wants to buy the whole thing." I says, "Well, great, sell it to him." But I'll tell you another one, there's a different story, I did a painting called "Horse Blinders."

LD: Yeah, another wraparound.

JR: Yeah. So we hung one wall, and Dr. Ludwig came in from Cologne, and he says, "[Leo?] I must have this painting, how much is this?" I says, "Leo, tell him to come back tomorrow, we'll put all of it all up." He was back at 9 AM. "What is the cost here for this?" So, Leo and I talked it over, and thought, well, this was \$50,000, how about \$70,000.

LD: That was a big number.

JR: It was a big number! So, I came in, and Leo says, that is -- asks us the question. Leo says \$70,000. He goes, "Ah, fooley." Just then, the phone rang in the back room. Leo goes in the back room, it was Phillip Johnson, he was interested in buying it.

LD: Good timing!

JR: [Laughing] Accidental! So, Ludwig heard all of this. Leo came back, so I didn't know what to say to Ludwig. I says -- I didn't know him. So I said, "You know,

doctor, in California, they sold all of the oil rights for drilling off California for \$70 million. And they had a lot of -- killed a lot of ducks." And I says, "You can't make a duck with \$70 million." Leo's sharp, he came back in and says, "Yes, doctor, we are the ducks." [Laughing] And then he goes -- and Phillip is on the phone, he goes, there's a little auction signal, "It's mine!" So he bought it. [Laughing]

LD: That's amazing.

JR: So, I mean, it's hard to deal with people who want your work.

LD: So Bob Scull bought this right away?

JR: Yeah.

LD: And then he let it -- then it was -- when it was -- then he let it travel?

JR: Oh yeah, it went all over the damn world. She was in Rome, to Paris, it went every damn place, around the whole world. Yeah.

LD: One thing I was interested in was, in your book, was, you talked about your trips to Russia. You had a -- for an American artist, you had a long relationship with Russians, Russian artists, some people, the Soviet Union

JR: Well, I don't know if I'm so long -- I guess I mainly wasn't the only ones, maybe.

LD: Yeah?

JR: Because, I had a pen pal. Eugene Rukhin.

LD: How did that correspondence work?

JR: He sought literature from the Museum of Modern Art. And he started writing -- he wrote me, and then we exchanged -- I sent him staple gun, masking tape, he

sent me books and records. I played those for Tatyana Grosman. [Laughing] We're dancing around to Russian music. And then, in '65, I went to see him in Leningrad. And...

LD: What was Leningrad like in '65?

JR: It was very peculiar because Russia has gone through so many changes. There was food, really no meat, really. You could never -- you'd get a meatball this big and you'd get potatoes, and everything else. Made great bread, Russians knew how to make bread. And Evgeny was able to stay home and do things, to be assistant with his mother, who was an archaeologist, so he had time off. But, so, we stayed in contact, and the in 19-- what the hell was it?

LD: Ninety, ninety-one?

JR: No. I think it was 1976. I was about to send him six pairs of jeans. And then I got word that he got -- the KGB killed him. Then, long story, I get this magazine, a little piece of paper in it that says, I am Evgeny's widow, will you store his work? I am able to leave Soviet Union as refugee. I put a little piece of paper in a magazine.

LD: Sent it back?

JR: Sent it back and said -- I just wrote "Da." D-A, da, which means yes. On my sidewalk, these two smoking crates -- smoky crates -- of his paintings which had been burned up. And I stored them for nine years. His wife came with two kids and a dog, a little girl, a little boy, and moved directly to Texas. She was afraid of the KGB in Manhattan. She was a talented jewelry designer, who instantly made, like, \$50,000 a year then.

LD: Oh, great.

JR: She was very talented.

LD: So she was OK?

JR: She was OK.

LD: What kind of art did he make? What was his work like?

JR: [33:11] Well, he was just too -- it's terrible that he died so young, because he was very promising. It was protest kind of work.

LD: Dissident work

JR: Like being in a dungeon in Russia. Anyway, so then, my good old boy, two old boys worked for me, '68 and '80. They took all of his work, put it in a trailer, and drove it to Texas, because I didn't want to be responsible for a widow's work. Then, someone tried to steal all of their work away from there. Then I got a San Francisco lawyer to protect her. She got the work back, then, many years later, there was a knock on my door, Chamber Street, and there's her daughter Masha. Now a big, beautiful girl in a lace dress. So I took her out to lunch and I said, "Do you have a boyfriend?" And where the hell -- somewhere in Texas, she said, "Yes, he's what you call a redneck?" I thought, perfect, she's a Russian with a redneck boyfriend. [Laughing] Then she committed suicide, because the wealthy boy jilted her.

LD: That's terrible.

JR: Terrible ending to it. Now, her son, his son, is a chauffeur in Miami, I heard. I mean, life is bizarre, there's threads of life that just go on, or they don't.

LD: I have a brilliant curatorial assistant who works with me named Masha Chlenova and she remembers seeing your show in '90, '91.

JR: Ninety-one.

LD: She said it had a huge impact on her.

JR: Really?

LD: Yeah.

JR: See, I -- what I did, I showed just the oil paint on canvas, no electronic stuff, no funny business, only painting. Something that the Russians could do.

LD: That was an amazing moment, I mean, '91 is the end of the Soviet Union, and that year, you had a show.

JR: Yeah, I was [Laughing] -- I was there during the revolution. And I didn't know I was in any damn revolution, either. I didn't know. I saw Mike Wallace coming down the hotel steps, and I said, "What the hell is going on?" He says, "Oh, they're closing the banks, and they're doing this thing, and they're making people turn in their old Rubles for new Rubles, and they're waiting for a big revolution." Didn't quite materialize.

LD: No. Kind of disappointing in some ways.

JR: Well, I mean, bloody, it wasn't bloody.

LD: Why don't we take a walk into the pop gallery, just to get some footage with door stop.

JR: That's funny.

[CREW DISCUSSION]

END OF AUDIO FILE Rosenquist _0009 AT 37:04

BEGIN AUDIO FILE Rosenquist _0010

Location: Fourth Floor Painting and Sculpture gallery 19

- JR: That girl on the wall is an old schoolmate of mine at the Art Student's League.
- LD: I think that this is an amazing piece. And she was a Castelli artist too, one of the only ones.
- JR: Yes, yes, early on, yeah. And Daniel [Sperry?], I had dinner with him, Daniel Sperry, at the Chelsea. And this guy was -- I knew him too.
- LD: Tang Lee, that's the Amish New York Tang Lee, that was one of the ones that...
- JR: He was terrific.
- LD: Yeah.
- JR: He was a terrific guy. The last time I saw him was 1967 at the World's Fair in Montreal. He did a piece.
- LD: He seems like he's so key in that late '50s moment about thinking about machines, the end of the machines.
- JR: Oh, he's a genius, he's a genius, what the hell?
- LD: Yeah.
- JR: He's a genius. (pause)
- LD: This was in our Japanese show. And then this is an [Arman](#) that we got from Dick Sisler, but I think it's about as, you know, beautiful an [Arman](#) as there is.
- JR: Yeah, no, I used to know him too. I knew him the south of France. And I just saw his wife.
- LD: Yeah?

JR: She was downstairs this morning.

LD: Sorry. So, here's our --

JR: Clarice.

LD: -- Pop gallery.

JR: Yeah? Yeah.

LD: And there you can see [Doorstop](#) [[MoMA # 3.1996](#)]. So I thought it would be great...

JR: I've got to get those little things to make it blink.

LD: OK, I'm game for trying that.

JR: They cost a couple of cents.

LD: All right.

JR: They would just go blink, blink, blink. It would make sense. I know that guy.

LD: [Histeletto?].

JR: Marisol, I knew very well, you don't think she's...

LD: Yeah, let's walk around the room.

JR: I don't think she's so well.

LD: Do we have sound here? OK. So, what do you think about the word pop, does it mean something to talk about being a pop artist?

JR: Not really, no. I'll tell you why, because everybody comes from somewhere. And it seems as though public or art dealers made the term, or no, Lawrence Alloway coined the term Pop art. It was Lawrence Alloway. And it was a very -- where did Pop art come from? I think it was the kitchen sink school in England, really.

LD: [Richard Hamilton](#). There's a Hamilton...

JR: No, no, not Hamilton, no, not him.

LD: No?

JR: Well, a little bit. A little bit, yeah. But it was the -- yeah, you're right, no, Richard Hamilton, yes. And just a very few other people. But it was all very quiet. So, what happens, in America, everything is bombastic, so then it became poppity pop pop.

LD: The scale is very different from British Pop in America.

JR: Yeah, very quiet, yeah.

LD: OK, now, you told me this story about [Doorstop \[MoMA # 3.1996\]](#).

JR: Yeah.

LD: Is there any significance to the floor plan you used? Where'd you find the floor plan?

JR: I don't know. All I know is he was a criminal, you know, who was stir crazy. That's what it was about.

LD: And Harvey told me that he's the one who chose the bedroom light.

JR: Fine, but I've got to get the little blinkers.

LD: Yeah, OK.

JR: It'd be fun.

LD: I think it's a great idea.

JR: It'd be a lot of fun.

LD: Do you want to talk about some other pictures in the room?

[CREW DISCUSSION]

LD: So, this looks like it's about -- this looks like it's a three-bedroom house.

JR: That doesn't matter.

LD: This -- OK.

[CREW DISCUSSION]

LD: OK. Two-car garage, three-bedroom house.

JR: Means nothing. Means middle class baloney.

LD: I love the idea of the floor plan with the ceiling. [Laughing] And didn't Ethel Scull call it a chandelier?

JR: Maybe. Maybe, I don't know. I don't know what she did. I have no idea. You know, I mean, darling, I really don't know the impetus of motivation for doing anything in here. I mean, I can't tell you.

LD: You don't need to tell me the motivation, I just wondered how you responded to some of these works when you were seeing them for the first time, or even now.

I mean, what happened when you saw War-- what did you think when you saw the Warhol car crash pictures?

JR: Well, I thought that he -- his motivation, or his thing was *speeding* and doing things as fast as you can, getting it over with. And if you knew him, you could find out. Because he would do things like, just do it. Do it quickly, get it over with, do it. He did whole portfolios of things like that.

LD: He moved fast, yeah.

JR: The rationale was the acceleration of time, or something. And I really, I wasn't too crazy about him, either.

LD: How about somebody like George Segal?

JR: George, a wonderful guy, a very nice man. He's a nice fellow. He was from New Jersey, he lived on a chicken farm, and he did things, to me, there were -- I don't know how to say it, very echoing ghosts, some kind of echo of this truck driver, or bus driver, bus driver, and all of the people that he did, and you know, I liked him a lot. I mean, I liked him as a guy. Too bad he -- what the hell, I just saw his widow a while ago. There was a movie about George by Gordon Hyatt. And instead, at the same time, it was my exhibition in 1964. So they put me a lot in his movie, so I was curious.

LD: Well, you got paired with these guys a lot in different shows.

JR: Well, my point was, in this movie he was in, I was in, the fun part is, to see the people in the background, with Andy sneaking around like this. And a whole bunch of other people saying, holy cow, look at who is in that movie from the past. It's like archival again.

LD: Archival.

JR: Yeah.

- LD: You said something in the book that I loved about the Sturm and Drang of the AbEx moment, and then the '60s cool. You know how there was a change in tone between the '50s and the '60s? You called it a Sturm and Drang for abstract expressionist. And then you talked about the mid-'60s cool for your generation?
- JR: Yeah, and I'll tell you why, because the abstract artists at the Friday night club, they'd get them up and say I am an artist, I demand, I am an artist assist -- the Pop artists came on and said they didn't do that to cool man -- they didn't call themselves artists like the other guys did. They let the public call them artists. So that -- but I mean, many times, the Milton Resnick get up and yell and holler about being how important his work was, and everyone's work was there. You know, Pop artists never did that. They're ice-cold, I think. Somewhere icy cold.
- LD: That's interesting. How about this [Lichtenstein](#)?
- JR: How about it?
- LD: What'd you think about [Lichtenstein's](#) work when you..
- JR: [Lichtenstein](#) was a very, very talented guy. I even said to him, right before he died, I says, "Roy, I didn't know you were such a colorist." Because in his late funky room paintings, he put together the most peculiar color situations, you know? His wife is a good friend of mine. I spoke about him in New Jersey at a museum in Montclair. He was a hell of a nice guy. He died accidentally. He died from MRSA [*Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus*] which he didn't have to die from, it's ridiculous.
- LD: And [Ruscha](#), you were close to.
- JR: Who?
- LD: Ruscha, Ed Ruscha, right?

JR: Where is he? Yeah, I see him now and then, but I never...

LD: He was at your opening for the *F-111*.

JR: I know, I know, I know. But I never -- I like pictures, I don't like words.

LD: [Laughing]

JR: [Laughing] That's my problem. That's my problem.

LD: Well, good.

[CREW DISCUSSION]

LD: How do you like our new Dwyane Valentine?

JR: Where is that?

LD: This one. It's not a new work, it's just new for us.

JR: Oh really?

LD: Yeah.

JR: I knew him, I didn't know this work.

LD: It's pretty great, isn't it?

JR: It's wild.

[CREW DISCUSSION]

[Long pause]

JR: I met this guy...

LD: Richard Hamilton?

JR: Oh no. The guys is being arrested?

LD: Oh, really? I'm forgetting who that was.

JR: That was...

LD: It was a dealer, correct?

JR: It was count something.

LD: Yeah. Collector dealer guy¹? No?

JR: Yeah. OK, are we done?

[CREW DISCUSSION]

JR: I shot her work!

LD: Did you? You shot

JR: Fifty-seventh Street, I shot it.

LD: This was some kind of French performance, but there were photos of Leo in...

JR: Fifty cents at the oldest gallery. They had rifles there, and people were shooting her work.

¹ Release [[MoMA # 260.2006](#)], Mick Jagger and Robert Fraser (Richard Hamilton's Dealer)

LD: Yeah, this is a shot painting, and Leo was one of the people in the audience.

JR: Yes. Barnett, I used to have a lot of talks with him, always arguing about the usage of and or but.

LD: This is great². [It almost does have corners in it, this work too.

JR: What?

LD: It does, you know, it extends so broadly that you do have this peripheral vision thing going.

JR: Yeah, when you're up close, yeah.

LD: Yeah. (pause) That's pretty great, isn't it?

JR: Yeah, it is.

LD: It looks so different than the one we saw in conservation. You know, here, it's stained, and layered.

JR: Yeah. You can see the exuberant.

LD: Amazing.

JR: Exuberant.

LD: We have a friend [MOMA - 17:03].

JR: Yeah, she was -- yeah.

(pause)

² referring to Jackson Pollock ; *One, November 31, 1950* [[MoMA #7.1968](#)]

LD: [Laughing]

JR: It's amazing, they're in pretty good shape, I guess, because they're all overpainting.

LD: Especially given that that's a raw canvas.

JR: Yeah.

LD: You know, that's great.

JR: Because a lot of the canvas would turn to be brown, but it's not bad.

LD: No, it looks great, it looks great. OK, that looks... Thanks, Jim

JR: This also is about peripheral vision, why?

LD: The scale.

JR: Because he stood on it.

LD: Right, I know.

JR: And his whole eye was covered with all of what he did.

LD: Right, he couldn't -- there was nothing beyond -- I mean, that -- it extended the whole sphere.

JR: Yeah. So if he's standing in the middle of this, he saw all of the edges. He didn't see everything, which gave him a view.

LD: Right, I think that's right. That, and the change from being on the floor to being on the wall as a...

JR: No, just from being on the floor, the way he worked was like [makes faux-speech sounds]. Yeah. God, he really got into it.

LD: It was spectacular one.

JR: It's a beauty, it's a beauty, beauty, beauty. And this guy here, you could buy his work from Richard Feigen for \$1,500. Seriously.

LD: And did you do it?

JR: No, I mean, what did -- you know, he first showed Francis Bacon in \$1,500-1,700. It'd have been for this one.

LD: Thank you so much. This will be terrific, I really appreciate it. I had a great pleasure for me...

END OF INTERVIEW