

You were talking about the black paintings and how there are figures in some of the paintings and the black was the beginning of all of this. It was just shoulder width.

Yes - it was the proportion of the paintings arrived at by walking to the wall and holding my hands straight in front of me, so they were more or less shoulder width, or slightly larger than shoulder width, and then made them 10 feet high, so they had the same presence as a human. I did a series of black ones like that. Some of them were even called 'Standing', which emphasised that.

And the diptych ones, were they the same proportions?

Yes, they were the same proportions.

[phone rings - Sean has background discussion]

I seem to go into the paintings very often with the horizontals because it is a very easy way to go in to a painting.

I was coming back from the Pittsburgh Museum and I was in an aeroplane and was looking out the window at the colours of the clouds and they were kind of fluffy Ochre and pale Sienna, and I was thinking about a diptych that I was going to paint. I just came back to New York and painted this diptych and called it 'The Angel'. Drawing on one side, like a very native, linear thing on one side, and painting on the other side. And that was it.

There is a linear look about this. Sometimes it makes me think about Klee. I don't know if you like him?

Klee is an artist that I have never liked. It's to do with that art and language business. Klee can't convince me - I don't like it - I like Matisse - where you have the line in a painting. Probably it isn't like either of them, but it is interesting that we were talking about knowing the painting. You know the painting. I really knew that painting before I painted it. It was effortless to paint it. When you have to knock them round a bit - like that black and yellow - although I love that painting - that may be my favourite painting in the world. Its called 'Mercy'.

We talked about the changes you were going through in certain articles. I was wondering after I got home, might there be another purge?

Well that depends... it depends on a number of things. Whether I feel that I need to turn everything on its head in order to expand the works. And whether or not work is expressive. It really depends on those two things.

Can you make it even more expressive?

I can deepen it or expand it in some way, and if I can then I will go along with it. But what I am not interested in doing is just making paintings for people to buy that are not that interesting. I see myself in doing something. I am searching for something, or exploring something - out of that, the paintings come and as long as that is the way it is, that is the way it has to be. Otherwise, things have to get turned on their heads and knocked around a bit. You do it to yourself; you are doing it to your work. You have to inquire. To be able to be objective about oneself is a very difficult thing to be able to do. Not to delude oneself and not to be vain. I have a tremendously high opinion of myself but low self-esteem. That comes from things - like the amount that I believe in what I am doing. But now my self-esteem comes from my work. That is very different from being complacent and vain. I talk to people and they are not doing good work but they are too full of themselves to take a good look at what they are doing. Abstract painting, or any kind of painting doesn't have a privileged position. You have to believe that you are starting from the beginning every time, and you have to have a sense of urgency about it and a necessity about it. An absolute necessity. Then you just have to figure out what is necessary and I guess that just requires being hard on yourself. That is what is so incredible about the act of creating Art because you are aware of the respect for the tradition that you are working in. I don't mean that in a narrow sense, I mean that in the tradition of art-making, which goes back to the beginning of time. You have to have a certain humility, and you have to be tremendously assertive, in order to do anything. It's a two-way thing. You have to be able to go right back to nothing, to strip yourself right down, get rid of any vanity, and really have a good look at it, and at the same time, think yourself a fantastic artist.

You were saying the other day - you can't make something unless you feel that way.

You have to believe and think in it. Sam Hunter, sitting down over lunch was talking about the Abstract Expressionists, in fact, talking about Rothko, and I always want to hear about Rothko, and he said they were larger-than-life guys.

You really got the sense that when you were with him, you really were with some one whom was larger-than-life. They really believed that what they were doing could change the world. He started to laugh because he thought it was such a funny idea - but when he said it I thought what is funny about that? Of course you have to believe that.

My paintings are about a kind of collective longing. All the people in the world can have a shared experience so therefore that's a kind of mad conceit - so you think you can kind of change the world by making abstract paintings.

It might seem a ridiculous thing to do - OK so you paint a few stripes, and put your heart and soul into them and then feel like you can change the world. It's childish and naive. There is just something about it that is very moving to me. You have to be able to turn to your own work. It's like you created something, but you actually bring up established values to support it. To make it into a plausible thing that you are doing. I

actually find it inadequate at some point. Art-making itself I sometimes find very violent. It has a certain violence about it. The way the bands career off the end of everything - it seems like they never slow down when they get near the edge of the picture. They are just shooting off into space. They just go crunch.

I say that painting unifies the parts of me in an earlier interview. Painting is a unification of the parts of me - which it is in a sense, because what I am trying to do is to get everything I know into these paintings. Of course this has a slightly absurd ring about it, because it's just like bands of colour - so everything I know boils down to bands of colour, but it depends whether you believe in the metaphorical.

It is interesting doing this interview in the morning because I find myself questioning my statements and that's how I start the day off. See, I think if you are an artist, you use yourself as a resource. Everything you say is open to question, and that is what is so amazingly difficult about being an artist. Unless you are a complacent artist of course. You make a plank and have to make your self walk out along it. And you can get pretty tired of doing that. So it is in the afternoon which is usually when I start painting - I can't paint in the morning, it is as I haven't put myself through enough.

What do you do in the morning?

I am ruminating. I think about what I am going to do, and if it's any good and how good is it if it's any good, and why isn't as good, and why am I settling for something that good... everything is up for question. So everything I believe gets the once over in the morning. Not really, I don't want to imply that I beat myself up every day, but I have to know and I don't - so that's why in the morning it is a different kind of work. I am getting ready to come into the studio. I am in the studio by about 11.30.

Do you feel that you have left minimalism behind?

Well post-minimalism was a movement of the 1970s I guess - I would say that I worked my way through it and I got out of it when I needed it. I am more interested in what I am trying to do than what it is going to be called - don't think it has a name yet. I am sure it will get one though. As long as it doesn't have a 'neo' in it I will be quite happy to call it whatever you like.

Do you like Ryman's painting's?

Yes, I like him but I think he is a necessary artist and he is in lots of ways very heroic but in lots of ways art has to be more giving than that. I don't like being told off all the time. Which is basically what he is doing. You know he is a very moral man. He was against a lot of the excesses of the art world, which I can understand why - we just had a period of which Ryman was warning against. There was a load of second rate muck. There was a load of horrendous expressionism. I think this is over now - maybe not over for the art market but as far as the artists are concerned, surely it must be over. I guess the idea is over.

What governs your design process?

It has a lot to do with my own working rhythm. Mostly, it is a question of what I need in order to make the work strong, so if I need to make a big painting, something that's ambitious and grand with all those implications, then that's what I'll do. But if I need and want to make a small or medium painting, where I want to make things happen - actually medium-size paintings are the ones I make where I want to make things happen - they are the ones that are very difficult to make. They deprive yourself of the possibilities of a dramatic sense of scale - in other words the very large command of yourself attention and respect, and the very small which is endearing which brings out the protective instinct. You make things very tough on yourself. Mondrian did that all of his life - he just made medium-sized paintings. There are a lot of things he wouldn't do in his work. That is something that is tremendously powerful in his work and not something that I would address in his work. The notion of the narrowness in his work - not something that I addressed in the last interview. The notion of abstraction really coming out of that sense of morality. I think that we have to try and broaden it a bit if we can. I think I have to try to make a medium-size painting for that reason. To make a painting very un-dramatic in proportion and see what kind of expression comes without resorting to scale. I think people have done a lot of things, like a lot of artists, big and small, without doing anything else. Like the wretched Serra - big black square on the wall. If you made that square four feet square and just put it on the wall, people would just laugh at you. It's the scale. It's because they're big. That's the only thing that's in those works. It's the fact that they have so much machismo about them. And then of course you have Richard Tuttle on the other end of the scale. Putting it on the fishing wire. All very delicate. If you made that medium scale, you wouldn't have anything about it. It's a good way to re-establish what you are doing.

Is your recent work larger than your London work?

What do you mean by 'London work'?

London in the Seventies

Yes, my work is slightly bigger now, now I'm doing 7,8 foot paintings. I use scale now much more dynamically than I used to. It is very deliberate about what size the painting is going to be. It is a really big issue - scale. I want to be able to work on every scale and that doesn't mean that I have a casual relationship with scale. It is quite the reverse. I would like to do some large commissions one day. That is a very historic attitude to painting. Wanting to do a chapel or something. An old attitude towards making art. But I would certainly like to make a series of paintings that inhabit a space. That would be a very interesting thing to do.

What was the inspiration for the *naming* (?) gallery?

That was the big brown one - I only did two of those - one in Germany, which is still there. It's in somebody's apartment that is a gallery. That one also sits in a corner. I called that one spider because spiders sit in the corner - it's like the painting that's on the wall - it only goes round the corner three inches and then stops. So it's really like a

painting that has been shoved and it's suspended. It's the most eerie sensation looking at it because it grips the wall. It kind of slopes and it is made out of oil paint and it has that real sense of love of material and history attached to it and it's this peculiar thing. Maybe it's a sculpture; maybe it's a thing. It's in two different browns - it's very warm. The other one I did was brown also.

Tell me about the forthcoming show with Matisse - when is it?

February. There's a show at Carnegie too. I might put that painting 'Angel' in it too. That was made on that trip so I think it might be nice to put that in. Then it's going to the Boston Museum. There are going to be seven paintings in it- all these ones you can see here.

You know, one point that I do want to make, and I was thinking about, is that we chose the hearts and minds of young painters. I think it's really, really important to make paintings for yourself. That may sound like a stupid statement, but you know Stella doesn't make the paintings for himself. Then of course Robert Longo and people like that. I think you have to make them yourself, and build them yourself. I have been building them for years but this is really a rare thing. I like Van Gogh - he was walking along with Gauguin and Van Gogh was walking along the grass, not along the road where it was all smooth, and Gauguin said 'Why the hell are you walking there?' and Van Gogh replied, 'Because it's more difficult'. That's why I do it. Because it's more difficult. It's more real. It makes your relationship with your work more thorough in a physical sense. The idea of having assistance comes down to us through history, from the Renaissance mainly, when one was giving life to a beautiful epic story in the Bible. This is irrelevant now. Unless you want to make corporate art. I think this is a hangover from Michelangelo and Rubens and people like that. This is what you do when you have money, but with Modern Art there is none of that. Money has no function beyond a certain point. I can't make my art any better with any more money. I don't need the money that I have because I don't use it in my work. I think this is a profoundly important point in painting, that it's about self-expression, that of course the degree to which the value of that self-expression has to do with everything is another key issue in Abstract Painting. Whether your work is able to express something and in order to do that you have a tremendous amount of everything. The age in which you live, and those around you. But it all comes down to doing it yourself. Not getting too big for your boots. I think that you have to realise that what you are doing is not important in the way that what Raphael did was important. Where it had the Government and the Church behind it.

I think that what Van Gogh did was important in a different way. Just as important and just as good as Raphael but it was more reflective of the position of the artist in our culture. That was a question of empathy, as opposed to corporate endorsement, being elevated by the corporate world. I think the Church has been replaced by the corporate world.

A lot of artist's studios are like factories. Andy Warhol called his studio a factory. I hate his work. That work has a lack of empathy. At most it has a lack of understanding and knowledge. No connection and no beginning. It is purely cynical. Exploitation - that's what I think I mean by a lack of empathy.

We don't live in an age where we have to do great big commissions to illustrate a story, so that idea of having all those other guys helping you is completely inappropriate. We are living in an age where the artist is searching for, and trying to give, concrete vision to the collective soul. You don't need assistance to do that. It doesn't help. It gets back to the other issue of making each painting an event - each one a necessity. I would rather have someone clean up the house - which is where I could really use some help - than have any one messing around in here.

What are the base coats on your paintings?

Usually the whole painting has a base colour but sometimes I do that to introduce a different kind of light quality to the painting via the base colour. It glows in a certain way. Sometimes it's a bit too cosy if you do that. Things get a bit too chummy chummy if you do that.

Are there any quotes you don't want me to read?

Well I don't want to say terrible things about other artists. You know I do that in my painting. You know Donald Carrie, he is the Welterweight champion boxer, and somebody asked him what he had to say about one of his opponents and he said he likes to give them a fighting in the ring. I thought it was a great thing to say.

What about your poetry?

I haven't written any for a bit. It's very like the painting. It's very romantic. I wrote a lot at home before I left.