

[Beginning of Recorded Material: Side B]

Sean: Where the colors occur. So I am not thinking about making these colors. I have set up a situation where things can happen, that I hope to be able to capitalize on, where I hope to be affected. So, when I am working, particularly on a beautiful little painting like this which is only three feet, I'm not thinking strategically at all about the painting. I am only feeling. So I am running the colors through the painting and the paint underneath is affecting the color on top, which happens of course in post-impressionism, which is a painting movement which is very close to me. When you're looking, for example, at one thing but you feel another thing, factually let's say, which is like life itself. You have something in front of you, a situation you are seeing, and you can describe it to yourself, but you can't in a sense, understand it, it's just that description with describing the parts or ingredients of whatever composition it is. It could be any human drama, interaction. You can't understand things informationally. It won't give you an understanding, a human understanding of what's going on. I have a metaphor of this.

What I'm trying to do in my painting is to make colors that have other memories, or other possibilities, other histories. See this yellow here is painted on top of this red. It's not yellow. It's yellow on top of red, so it's really a yellow that was red-that has the history of red, redness that registers in its current life something else, that it carries with it the history of another incarnation. This is running all the way through the painting. So they're very complicated, they're very complex experientially. And there's a rhythm running right through this painting, through these gaps, these reds, and so on. So here, I come to in a way my earlier aspiration of combining Jackson Pollack and Mondrian. Not that I want to combine Jackson Pollack and Mondrian, I want to, god knows what. But, I wanted to combine emotion the abandonment of sense, with classical order, which of course is asking for too much, but so what. I want to have in the painting a timelessness, a permanence, a sense of the classical, and a reference to the higher history of painting, which is of course a reference to our conscience, it's what we've made, it's culture, it's all we have. It's all we've made, and I want at the same time to have this aimless kind of moving rhythm that runs through the picture.

And in a painting like this, that size, it's easier to achieve than it is a risk. This is called "Sea Wall", It's a giant painting, three meters by four meters with a split down the middle. It took a very, very long time to make this painting, and typically of me it's a painting that starts out with hope and life's blood and it ends up being wrapped in a cloud of melancholia. So I was thinking about it in terms of one force pressing against another, two parts of a human being and a lot of red running underneath it. And it's the way that the red seeps out of the gray that gives this sense of duality to the painting, a double possibility. This of course goes back to the Window paintings I am always looking for a layered feeling a layered possibility in a painting and not just simple, not just icons. But I try to make them experiential. I don't have a formula for this, I don't really have an explanation for it of course I just have to do it and live it, and I hope that it radiates from the back of the painting and from the front of the painting.

And this one is called "Desert Day". Again, I painted this painting for Australia and it lives in Australia now, and I painted it before I went to Australia, once again. And you may notice that when I paint paintings for Australia that I always have Australian red, which is that color. Dirt red, and in fact it is just like the red in Australia. And we were driving a lot. Again it's a story of over painting and the brush and the hand are moving in rhythm within this grid. So the grid is really the memory of a city that is a syntax of which I grew up and in which I've lived my entire life. And in fact none of us can take a step without walking into it. It's what we've made, it's where we live what we look at and how we order everything. And what I like to do in a sense is overwhelm it with color, turn it, [and] transform it. So again, it's a strong dialectic within a work.

This one comes from a studio in Germany. It's called "Wall of Light: Summer Night". And it will shortly be appearing in Abbot Hall, by special delivery. As you see there's a tremendous amount of orange coming through. So these paintings almost have within them the times of day, the time of day, the times of day, the passage of day within a single painting. And they are layered constantly layered, but with the allowance to permit the backgrounds or the earlier layers to inform the top ones. But very, very affected in

terms of its color, you can see these strange green colors, but very affected by the color of the countryside, where the studio is located.

And now, for the Piece de Resistance- I said that, to help the audience to appreciate this painting, and since it was the last image, I thought I'd become baroque. This one is called "Wall of Light: Red Summer".. It's an exuberant painting. Most of my paintings are not exuberant as you may have noticed. Most of my paintings are sad, or they have sadness in them and element of sadness in them. This painting has darks in it but the darks are pretty much overwhelmed by the brighter colors, which are painted in the summer. And the summer in Germany where we are is really intense, where we see, in fact, the Alps from the window. And the Alps- those rocks change in a single day from grey to blue to pink to crimson to the darkest blue, midnight blue in one day. So this of course is a painting in a sense of sun, the power of sun. What else can I tell you? Anything else? Let's see time check, sixty minutes exactly. Okay. So would you like to, would you like to, or would you like me to?

Male Voice: I think it was [unintelligible] in terms of the name?

Sean: No, it was the other inset.

Male Voice: Oh.

Sean: God damn it. Where is it?

Male Voice: Anyways, what more can we say? Sean is coming back tomorrow, I know some of you are coming along for a walking tour around the exhibition. We know this time it's sold out. There'd be more of a chance-

Sean: Blue Yellow Figure.

Male Voice: So, there'd be more of a chance to talk to him later. Now, [unintelligible].

Sean: Yeah, let's hear them.

Female Voice: [Unintelligible].

Sean: Well, the impulse to get rid of the figure, of course, is the impulse to paint everything at the same time. That's the romantic impulse, to paint the sensation of life. And the impulse to bring in the figure is the desire to bring it in place, to place life in your body again. One might in a way as an attempt to lose himself, to abandon oneself and this is the romantic impulse that drives all romantic art and dare I say so, heroin addiction. It's a romantic impulse the sense to lose oneself to abandon oneself to the universe to the universal. And of course I fight for the restoration of the figure. So I am always in this position and I think that my agenda in making abstract paintings, and as I say I really don't make a deal out of it, I don't really care. And, I am an abstract painter because I like the rhythm of it, the universality of it, the nature of it, and you don't have to pay life models. Well, that's something. But you know what I am saying. It is the human desire to lose one's body in all sorts of things like prayer, dance whatever, you can party and you can dance all night and in sense you can lose your body. And what's to restore it because my paintings are so of-of the world. So they're constantly pushing and pulling. That is why I wouldn't like to abandon my relationship with notions of the figure. If I do one of these or two of these I want to make one of those. Because I am putting it back in. I am not giving it away. It's a market. It's a market. Sure.

Male Voice: [Unintelligible].

Sean: Well I think that I'm a very religious person and I am not religious in the sense that I go to church. But I have I have involved myself with Zen for a very long time, twenty-five years. And I have a very religious relationship to the world, I think to people in it, to human beings, how they are, how much they matter. I mean I think the world for me is sacred, it's a sacred place and I have tried to make a body of work that is unfashionably spiritual and as I've got older, you know, I didn't bleach my hair, it is actually this color

now. As I have got older, I have got less worried about saying these things. You kind of get, I-I've got free about it. And this is my agenda. It is absolutely the antidote to what goes on in a sense in the art world. So, I'm surprised by its market success I must say. It does surprise me when I think of this agenda. And my agenda is more obvious I think as time goes by, it's becoming more obvious, my true agenda. And it is, indeed, spiritual. I mean, I want to move people with my paintings. And I want to restore them. Not that I can do this, I don't say that I can do this. I don't give myself so much power. I don't assume that I can do this. I want to provide something that is restorative in a spiritual sense yeah.

Male Voice: [Unintelligible].

Sean: Yeah, because I only had sixty minutes, and I've been painting for thirty years, man. Why? -Can't talk about everything. Which early must you mean, the early ones, when I was a believer? Well, this is what happened in my career. I'll give you a quick synopsis. I came out of art school like an [unintelligible] missile from New Castle. I landed in London, and I showed in the best gallery in London, age 26, and had a sell-out show. Got loads of reviews and you know I was a Y.B.A. back then, but I didn't want to do those paintings. I didn't want to continue to do those paintings. I wanted to do something closer to what I do now, but I didn't know how to do it, so I was making these criss-cross grid paintings. I went to America and I burned down my house, metaphorically, not my house, my career. I burned it down and nobody bought my paintings for a long time. And I painted black paintings horizontally striped black paintings, and they were extremely Zen and self-sacrificing paintings. And, around about 1981 I started to think that somebody had to do something to put back relationship in painting, I did talk about relationship in painting, aggression, humanism, emotion, hand color figure ground whatever, put it all back in. And I started to put it all back in and that led to the eighties paintings up 'til now, where I am now. So that is more or less my little story, short version. And the lady behind you?

Female Voice: [Unintelligible].

Sean: The same thing, Yeah, I mean it's kind of a disaster isn't it?

Female Voice: [Unintelligible].

Sean: Ah, see what you say, of course. Well, I would say that I have plenty of both, but I think also that there is a lot of possibility and it's a fight, and one is privileged to be in a fight. One has the privilege like I do I am in a very privileged position, but I have the privilege to do what I do and say what I say and put it out there and people don't tell me to bugger off. So that's a privilege, and it's a privilege to be able to work, to do work, to believe in something, that's a privilege. So, I think it's both. You know I come from a personally I come from a difficult environment, a very, very difficult environment. I also work I think out of a kind of idealism. I mean I am very emotionally connected to the work. And of course I am not saying I am more than anybody else, but I'm putting that in my paintings. I mean the work, the work of [Damian Hirst it disgusts me on every level. I find it abhorrible. It's opportunist and they don't give a shit about anything, those people, they just want to plunder, and there's so much of that going on, I do these paintings in opposition to that and I say it like it is. And of course at times, it's difficult, but I am not, not depressed. I'm a very, you know, vital person, I'm really out there.

Male Voice: One more question there.

Sean: Okay.

Female Voice: [unintelligible]

Sean: Yeah, well there is, there is a tremendous difference because these paintings these big paintings are, are powerful. As sensitive as they are, they are competitive. I mean I'm using them. I'm painting them and making them against things, other things I oppose. So I make them competitive and big so they can be in the same arena where these things are fought out, where these ideas are in competition with each other. Now watercolors of

course are something else. They're more relaxed and they're more private. So they're made with an extreme lack of physical effort. Consequently they're more accessible in that sense of directly intimately accessible. And the paintings are confrontational in the sense that they are, let's say against the work of Andy Warhol. You know, people have written about my paintings as being against the values of the paintings of Andy Warhol because they are equally forceful. I can't do that with the water colors. You cannot tip them against other art in the world. So the difference really is, the difference between the private and the public. And this goes more private as the scale goes down, I would say. So a painting like this in the other room is quite intimate and it is a painting that in a way doesn't try to take on other art. But these do, of course-cause that's really meant to be in an [unintelligible]. You know I have these paintings up in a tape right now, and there's four, and they are in a big room like this, bigger than this. And of course in a situation like that and the hate, you know when you come up an escalator and you have people with hate on them. Hate, like hate. Hate, you know, bong, or tight, as they say in London. You know there's no room for this. There's no room for that kind of intimacy because everything is a question of competing power, and these paintings are part of that dialogue, yeah absolutely and apologetically.

Male Voice: I think everyone would agree that was a truly inspirational talk and I'd like to thank you very much.

[End of Side B]