

Sean Scully - Oxford University Lecture 1995

The way I talk is, I don't work from notes and so I tend to search for words. It probably isn't a good deal for you but it is more interesting for me. It's like my work - I try to make it somewhat experimental. There is a consistency to it. I do believe the things I believe, and I say generally the same kind of things. But I try and set it up in one way or another that makes it interesting for me – so that during the course of the lecture I might find something that I didn't know when I walked into the room. It's experimental and a little bit rough. I hope you will bear with me.

What I have done today is set up a diptych, which is something that I am always doing in my paintings. I'll talk about that more in depth as I go along. This will be reflective of the way I work; I tend to work in pairs or to make two things and put them together. These two paintings (*Backcloth*, *Red Light*) were made in the early seventies. *Backcloth* was made in Newcastle when I was a student. The idea was to try and reconcile two major examples: one, Jackson Pollock and the other, Mondrian. Pollock represented for me a kind of desire and freedom, sensuality and sexuality. Mondrian represented conscious structure and morality and the way that they can be impacted into a very intensely layered, worked surface, where an extreme kind of modesty is also at work, where the expressionism at work is repressed. And those two aspects, or possibilities of human nature I tend to try to work with -- both of them -- all the time.

These paintings are made by overlaying systems which are measured off differently. They are vertical and horizontal, and layered and layered, until I got to the point where I didn't think I could put anything else on without losing all the moves I had made. There is a reference all the way back to the start of the painting. The painting on the left, *Backcloth*, started as a loose gestural kind of painting. Recently I walked into a gallery in New York and I remember I saw a painting by a young New York painter that I thought was one of my paintings. I think his name is Gary Lang. Of course I liked it, but when I looked at it closely it wasn't the same as mine – his reasons for doing it and mine were different. Even though the experience of the painting is the same, his painting is not as

systematic as mine. In other words, the grids weren't always tremendously even; he would put one or two lines strategically. I would never have done that because behind my work was a kind of driven, manic, moral imperative. But the fact that the paintings looked somewhat similar in a strange way made the difference between them even greater. It also reminded me how inexhaustible the enterprise is. People keep managing to turn the stone in a different way.

I went to New York in 1975, and this was the kind of work that I was doing when I was there. There is a tremendous break between the spatial illusionism and the almost catatonic visual effects that I was working with when I left. The color was reduced right down. What I did when I went there was really to strip myself right down to nothing, basically, as far down as I could go without having anything. I didn't want to take nothing with me. It was really an extreme action -- personally quite dangerous I think -- and it was something I did with my entire being; there was a real sense of existential danger when I moved to New York. What I wanted to do was engage the aspects of art that I considered important. There were two artists: Reinhardt and Ryman. Both purists in their own way. One more quirky than the other, but both very puritanical. The color I was dealing with was the colour of night, and Related to Reinhardt.

This painting is *Red Yellow Blue*, a triptych made up of stripes.-- At this time every surface that I made was divided exactly in two: it was split (i.e., the colour on the top edge would alternate on the bottom edge), and that was in every single painting that I did during that five-year period. Every surface was democratically split between two colors, almost all horizontally. At the top you would have, let's say, brown, grey, black, and at the bottom let's say, blue, black and these would set up a kind of color vibration. This made a nocturnal light, or cushion of light, that existed in front of the painting. It's interesting the way this structural idea relates to the notion of the diptych. Even the surfaces themselves were diptychs. It wasn't just one surface. I hadn't just mixed up the colors and put them down. Everything was split. In a strange way, psychologically I think, I was back to the split between my desire to embrace sexuality and morality all at the same time.

The one on the left is three surfaces making up one work; it stands in relation to what I subsequently did in that the surfaces are separated. By pushing the viewer to the edge of the surface, to the left and to the right in a constant and repetitive way, one is forcing the details of the painting out. The way the painting relates to the environment becomes very strong. I felt at this time that I wanted to make my work as morally severe as I could. I was very interested in Reinhardt's list of things he couldn't do, rather than things he could do. I think it's interesting ethically to talk about things you can't do. Ryman, by leaving out colour completely, achieved a kind of historical status in painting where by not concerning himself with metaphorical content and by isolating the way material was put down, he did two things. One was that he moved the situation forward, and his work was able to have a dialogue with other kinds of art, Minimal and neo-Conceptual art; and at the same time he held the line and his paintings referred back to other paintings. In fact some people talked about them in relation to Piero della Francesca. Though they are more related to 'materialism' of Manzoni.

This was a very interesting period for me. I felt that I was looking at two kinds of formalism when I was in America. The kind of work that I am interested in is mainly manifested in painting. I don't think it is possible to overestimate the importance of Clement Greenberg. There was one word that Greenberg used in all of this that bothered me a lot. That was 'taste'. It seems to me that 'taste' somehow symbolizes the difference between the post-Minimalists and Minimalists and the Color Field painters. I felt the drive toward a kind of purism was manifested much more clearly by the Minimalists than the other people. It has something to do with this word 'taste.' When I was teaching at Princeton, Clement Greenberg came out to talk. There was a man there called Sam Hunter, an art historian, and he took me under his wing. On the evening that Greenberg came to talk he had a party in his house afterwards (and I remember it was a small little house) and after the talk I refused to speak to him. It wasn't a question of me being aggressive; I was afraid of him. It was a sign of my respect for his intellect. It hinges on this word 'taste,' so it seemed to me that perhaps he was

this purist who secretly, liked Boucher. And he had the Boucher in his toilet -- that only he was allowed to use.

There was another secret agenda going on. I thought the post-Minimalists, Ryman in particular, manifested close to point zero much more clearly, much more honestly. This party in Sam Hunter's house was a disaster, as you can imagine. I sat in one room, and lots of people sat in the other, and in our room was the bar and every time he came in to get a drink I had to look the other way. I was really quite afraid of him! I thought he was quite a despot. He would kind of give you an invitation to join his club, but I felt that the price was your independence. With this word 'taste,' it meant that something else would come into the work that seemed arbitrary to me. My works were very relentless -- very driven -- but they had that kind of fury that was systematic. There was a profundity that I was after that I think this issue of 'taste' somehow subverted.

The question for me was: What was I going to do now? Was I going to move away from painting to extend my ideas or make more paintings? When you start breaking things apart, the implications are quite sculptural. You are dealing with environmental issues. I had a lot of ideas to do with environmental issues. I was building lofts (construction work) and I really liked it. I liked putting things up and leaving strange architectural additions. I had a lot of ideas at that time about that. In the end, my extremely passionate love of painting won; and I decided that the model that had been used up to that point would lead to the death of painting. And that's where it was headed. I decided to put back into painting all the things that have been left out. So again, there is another rupture in my work. In the first place I took everything out, and then I went to New York and after about five years put everything back in again. But of course I couldn't put it back in the same way again because I had learned something.

The painting on the left is called *Backs and Fronts*. At that point, the title itself said something about my intention: I was thinking about people standing in a long line. Making a reference to Bobbies, they are all about the size of human beings apart from

that one in the middle -- that is really a big fat person. There were eleven panels here. I painted them all -- all separately, all over the place -- and when I had finished painting them I just stuck them together. There was a show out of P.S.1 called *Critical Perspectives*. Six art critics had a room and I was in Joe Maschler's room. At that time, 1980, there was a lot of punk energy in New York, and the punk people liked mine the best. I felt that there was a lot of anarchistic, unreasonable energy in the relationships that I was making in this painting, *Backs and Fronts*. And I had decided that what had been stripped out of painting -- i.e., the ability to make relationships, to be metaphorical and referential, spiritual, poetic, all those things and aspects of human nature -- had to be put back in if painting was to go forward.

The one on the right is called *Heart of Darkness*. I was reading *Heart of Darkness* at the time. Recently I decided that triptychs should have titles with three words. They are, in a sense, narrative. I was reading that novella at the time I was painting and it influenced my personality. I tend to read quite often and books are like my soul partner. I find the right novel, and it is my friend whilst I am working and thinking. I think they seep into my work. The panel on the left - it is interesting the way I resolved it. It says something about the way I work, which is rather urban. I couldn't get the painting to work out at all. (By the way, the middle panel on here was taken from another painting.) Things get moved around like sculpture. Real time was involved in my work. I would deliberately paint something in one room and leave it there and not look at it and paint something in another room from a memory that I would have about the first painting. My memory of the sensation.

In the seventies my involvement with Minimalism and post-Minimalism was obviously informed by a puritanical zeal. Here, I am putting back all the shit that I took out. I was walking up to the art store and I passed the back of the post office, on Lispenard Street and there were painted some beautiful yellow and black stripes on to two columns, painted so the trucks wouldn't hit the wall. They were painted by someone who had never painted stripes before, and in a way I wish I could paint like that every time. You can only paint like that once, in reality. How do you keep the emotion and vitality in the

work going? The way I do it is very often metaphorically. I saw the stripes, and I was going up there to get another color, and as soon as I saw the yellow and black I bought yellow and black, painted the painting, and finished. On one hand I was using a story about the jungle and about the darkness in the human soul, but the thing that actually resolved the painting was an urban coincidence that was a romance with the back of the post office on Lispenard Street.

This one is called *Come In*, that one is called *Earthage*. A person came to my studio in New York around this time -- she was a Museum Director -- and asked me what the title of the painting was. And I said, "Come In." And she began to interpret the painting architecturally. It's true that the painting does make a reference to architecture, as all my work does. It has something to do with construction work, the way I was building lines at the time, the way you contain and open up space at the same time. So it's an argument that goes across. It's as if the paint is trying to unify something that is physically disrupted: the idea that paint and color, something so fragile, can pull things together that are not actually together. So she said, "It's called *Come In* - it could be a doorway, it could be a portal," which is true. I told her the story about why the painting is called *Come In*. The story showed me something that I didn't realize until later, and that is that I can't ever be a real American painter in the way that somebody who grew up in America can be. Because that is not my story. My story is in fact that I am a diptych, which is not all that comfortable sometimes.

The story was that Beckett was taking dictation from James Joyce. James Joyce was sitting back reciting *The Dubliners*. Beckett was writing it down, somebody knocked on the door, Joyce said "come in," and Beckett wrote it down. Why not? He said it! That was his job. His job wasn't to decide what to write down; he wasn't the author. There is something absolutely beautiful about that - it is so ruthless. I just loved it and it made

me so happy. I think of Beckett as a really bad boy, and that is also interesting to me. The other thing that was interesting was that he was a bastard. So anyway, James Joyce said afterwards, "Why does it have 'come in' in the middle of the narrative?" Beckett said, "You said 'come in.' I wrote it down so it has to stay in." To me it is very interesting this argument that they had. It defines the reality of how much of a readable narrative Joyce wanted to make. It is a point of crisis, in a sense. Joyce was convinced by Beckett's argument and left it in.

I told this long story to this person looking at the work in terms of materialistic formalism and its relationship to architecture. She seemed slightly bemused by it all, and I was a bit disturbed because I wondered why I told her that. And I thought it was a bit crazy. But that was why I made the title of the painting. But it also had something to do with the idea of allowing something to come into your life that you didn't predict, and that has a lot to do with the intention of my work. I make things in the studio in different places. In a way I am working much more like a sculptor or environmental artist, as opposed to other types of painters who work with the square or the rectangle. I set up bits and pieces which are not entirely within my control. I let something literally come in. I figured that out afterwards.

The one on the left is called *This That*. The one on the right is called *This This*. Really, my concerns are quite consistent and relentless. *This That* has a huge oppressing bulk on the thing below. The area above is painted in a way that makes it lighter and more light-responsive. There are a lot of opposing forces -- there is a kind of competition for survival -- and I am sure psychologically that reflects something about me, about the life I have led, which I really believe these paintings come from.

I was asked to talk about myself in relation to other artists in New York. I don't like to talk about other artists because I don't feel that I have the right to criticize or judge others. I know what I like and am interested in, and it is difficult to contextualize

yourself without being somewhat critical. I used to have a friend who was a painter. He used to go 'round and look at shows, and his habit was to give them a number out of ten. He'd say it was a seven. This outraged me so much that in the end I just stopped seeing him. Something that might be a three six months later might be a nine, so it's just better not to give it a number and let it do whatever it needs to do within you and within the culture. In other words you can change your mind about things.

I would have to say that I am not a fully paid-up, card-carrying member of the Lower Manhattan Abstract Painting Club, whilst there have been certain moments in time when I would have liked to have been. Like all human beings you like to be included. However, my problem with a lot of the people in my generation with whom I have shown from time to time is that they tend to be specialists, following an American example of extreme efficiency and specialization in art. I would say Andy Warhol is an example -- and Lichtenstein is another -- where American artists have been able to become free by travelling light. That causes a certain kind of visual efficiency, to some degree a kind of radicalism, and it definitely has had its upside in the past. It seems to me that when you reach the point where that model has led to a key figure, like Robert Rauschenberg, it has reached its ultimate point. If the medium is going to go forward I don't think it can go forward in the hands of specialists. If you put all those people together you might make something. So what I tried to do is to not specialize and not be simply an expressionistic, structuralist neo-Conceptual abstractionist. A lot of different aspects to my painting I try to include. So I would say my position is one of inclusiveness rather than specialization. That makes me quite different.

To return to these paintings: it's about putting together the two things that I am interested in. One is a light-filled grid and the other is another type of grid, which is layers of stripes painted in very passionate colors. The emotion in the painting is not represented solely by either. It is manufactured or implied by the combination of the two. It is very much an art of relationship. It's an art that is about 'doing' something rather than 'being' something. Paintings are not, any more, about that idea of the painting representing yourself through constituent parts and not about representing

anything outside yourself. These paintings clearly try to engage the world in a more direct way.

This one's called *Molly* and that one's called *The Bather*, and they both relate to the figure. The skinny panels make a very obvious reference to the human body, to a figure in space. In relation to the ethical, minimal stance of my predecessors that were working in the seventies, these paintings transgress incredibly. They are very impure. I had an article sent to me recently written by a friend of mine who is a Spanish poet. He says that I have said my work goes beyond the illustration of the theoretical questions and that I have spoken about emotional specificity. I think that the way to make abstract painting specifically emotional is to not make an allusion to a particular situation, as figurative artists do. But it is to do something more akin to what Mark Rothko does, which is to make the relationship between form and art so deep that the articulation of those forms in relation to the colors on the surface becomes one of great joy and great pain. That can be true to the point where those sensations can be seen as feelings. They cross the barrier between being something 'felt' and something 'seen.'

I am not an inventor in the way that others, like Stella, were. A lady recently came to my studio and is going to write a piece on my work. Her name is Deborah Solomon. She asked me if I had been psychoanalyzed. It seems to me that one can do the extreme at either end. As much as I love Bruce Nauman's work, I would have to say that my temperament and nature is the opposite. I am someone that works with something for so long that the level of identification becomes enormous. You work at something over and over again. That is at the same time kept open by strategies that I adopt in the studio, by the way that I put things together; and that creates the air in the work, the window in the work.

The art form that I love most, I think, besides painting is filmmaking. I think that in order to be a filmmaker you have to be more equipped to deal with the world than I am. It seems to me that if you work in a medium like painting, which is so stubborn, so inert, so difficult to make happen when you are actually speaking, you need a certain

kind of personality. I think of myself as somebody who is too open to be working in the world. I think I would be destroyed if I were working in a medium that had a more direct relationship with the world. I think as a person I am like a tunnel. I think things just drive right through me and go straight through the other side. It also seems to me that if one has that sort of nature a medium like painting becomes perfect. There is enough distance from the world to make it possible for me to work without being destroyed, and yet the need to be expressive is so strong that somehow there is a pressure there to make -- to speak to whatever degree I have been able to make it speak. When I was listening to Yve-Alain Bois talking about Francois Morelli, he said that when Francois made a painting -- for those that don't know, Francois Morelli is a French neo-Constructivist painter -- it only took eleven decisions. When I make a painting it takes hundreds of decisions. In a sense they fail a certain test on the economy of means. It is not a test they try to pass any longer.

This painting on the left is called *Four Days*. It came out of the conversation that I had with a friend of mine who used to be a film critic. He was talking about a film that he called "Four Days of a Dreamer." I found out afterwards that it was called "Four Nights of a Dreamer" but it doesn't matter, because what matters to me is that the painting came out of the conversation. So thinking about this painting in terms of the cinema, the way that you can go from sitting in the back of a New York taxi to being in Africa in a split second. That has something to do with the way I make the relationship, the way I put things together. It causes a kind of energy, or a kind of relationship, that I believe to be true to the time in which I am living and true to the energy that I live in, which gets consistently harder. So if I want a break from New York I go to Barcelona, which is described as the city most like New York in Europe, only with a different climate.

These panels were painted in different places in my studio. I am not painting them in a way to harmonize them, so 'taste' is completely avoided; going from one area to another, from Day One to Day Two, I don't have to mediate the difference. It's like saying you are on one side of the street and describing how you cross to the other side, and that's not what I am doing. I am on one side, then I am on the other side. There is

no sense of mediation. The relationship is absolutely blunt. In that sense it is related a lot to sculpture.

The painting on the right is called *Any Questions*. I called it *Any Questions* because I went to see a concert with Talking Heads, a beautiful concert. At the end he said, "Any Questions?" As if you were going to have any questions about punk rock and roll! What I did with this painting was two different things. I put them together in a way that one couldn't really answer questions about. I thought of the right side as the same stuff as the left side, broken up and put back together again. So when I think about these paintings I don't think about them in terms of patterns. I know that they are patterns because they are repeated structures, but really I am thinking about different kinds of thought-structures. In a way that has something to do with computers. It's not the computer that I am interested in; it's the person that invented the thing that's in the computer. It's the way we think. These are the structures that we surround ourselves with. These are our urban structures, and they are repetitive. One kind of repetition juxtaposed with another kind of repetition -- that is how you spend your day in the city -- the endless repetition of life, or expression, or beauty, or mystery without avoiding what it fundamentally is. In other words, without making structures that I don't believe are reflective of the age in which I live. I try to make the structures as direct and honest as I can in that way.

The other thing that I might bring up while I am telling you everything is - so that I don't forget to tell you - that when I was growing up I was in South London, which is a desperate proposition. A working class kid, standing on the street corner waiting for something to happen, feeling empty, I discovered an incredible, ravishing beauty in American R & B. I had a club, which we didn't have for very long because it was closed down by the police. But in any case I think my great love of music was reflected in my paintings, in the constant and relentless beat of these paintings. It had more to do with that kind of thing than with the juxtaposition of patterns. I don't really think of my work in that formalist sense. It's something that I am doing, everything I am doing, to get away from...

These paintings were made during a period of great sorrow in my life when my son died. The one on the left is called *Empty Heart*. I think it is a very barren painting; there is a kind of ferocity about it that one might see on an African mask. African masks always have a kind of savage beauty. It has a lot to do with this distressed white - there is a pink-white and a yellow-white. A brown-black and a blue-black. Of course the black and my constant use of black since have a lot to do with those paintings in the seventies that I made that were all about black, where I was dialoguing with the Minimal-Conceptual paintings. The painting on the right is a painting with the center scraped out. It's called *Green Gray*, 1988.

I think authenticity has something to do with why things are made. If your reason is strong enough, then that is going to result in something that is authentic. So I don't think that authenticity is something that can be corrected afterwards. It is something that has to come from the base, from the concept and from the need. The reason that I raise that is because I was thinking about Gerhard Richter. His scraping away had everything to do with the war and the need to take away and get rid of the past. I think it is compulsively neurotic, which is why it is very interesting to me. A lot of people that work like that in New York have seen it as a kind of interest thing, have seen it as a kind of pictorial strategy. The reason for doing it is not interesting if you think about it like that. That to me lacks authenticity. That is what I mean by authenticity.

The fender of these paintings somehow is a structure that turns in on itself - it has no point. One is ravaged coloristically. The other is just, in a certain sense, cancelled out. There is no center. I think, psychologically, the metaphor is quite obvious, as is the title. So my titles are very specific. A lot of people at a certain point in the development of abstraction started to use titles willy-nilly, to make them up as they like, as they are attached to the painting. What I would like to do with my titles is to make them very specific. That doesn't mean that I want the paintings to be absolutely descriptive, but the titles are not loose in relation to the painting. This painting on the right is called *Angel*, and it's a painting that I decided to make when I was on an

aeroplane flying between Pittsburgh and New York. I was looking at the clouds and the color of the clouds and all that beautiful pollution. The reason that I was calling it *Angel* was because of the idea of body and no body. Body and line, painting and drawing. And there is a split right down the middle.

The painting on the right is *Pale Fire*. A friend of mine who is an architect looked at the painting and interpreted it for me. I will try, if I can, to tell you what he said. He said it was a very sad painting because he thought it was about the American flag with a darkness (in the window) in it -- like an American flag with a cancerous rectangle set into it, which is more or less what I was trying to do. What I wanted to do was make the field, which wasn't the American flag but the color field, the optimistic field of stripes that fought security, surety, direction -- and it knows where it's going -- into a symbol of power. For a long time the painting had a hole in it, and if I had left it it would have said a lot about the thing I had wanted to say. It was a field, but the field had a hole in it. There was a problem with it. But what I did was put in another canvas; and I did something on the other canvas that I hardly ever do, which was to not complete the pattern with relentless regularity. I was putting something in there that was darker and less secure. It had a lot to do with the way my friend described the painting, and of course the title says it as well. The fire's not out but it is pale. That doesn't mean that a lot of things aren't possible, and if that can be reflected then that's what I believe an artist should do. I think if you do that then you have made Art.

I think one of the main reasons that I make my work out of separate pieces is because of the way that I can paint them without thinking about what they are with. I can paint them in a way so that I am un-self-conscious. I am just painting bits. A relationship is made up.

I have shown you this picture of the Duomo in Siena. It is one of my favorite buildings for obvious reasons. It may have been in fact the first time I got the idea to make checkerboard paintings. But I remember rather strongly a recent experience: I was walking around in Madrid and there was a huge steel double gate guarding a car park. It

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was painted with a red and white checkerboard. This gate, situated in a narrow street up against an old wall, full of rust, was so romantically beautiful and savage at the same time; it was very inspiring. This painting is called *Yellow Ascending*. Sometimes I think of these panels as vehicles for ascension. I can also see them as figures, but they generally tend to be painted differently. I think they are not meant to be seen as ladders in the literal sense, just a metaphor for ascension. What is interesting is that the tongs are going up and they are pushing the ceiling up, but because of the stripes going horizontally there is a sense of the weight coming down; they look stacked. I thought at different points about making sculptures that were very related, but I never got around to it. This is an unrelenting, rather dreary black and grey that has been modified by that strip of orange.

This one is called *Red Ascending*. Again, these two paintings go back to the idea of the diptych. There is the grey and black field. To press it, coming out of the plus-and-minus idea: energy that is going nowhere has a kind of pointlessness about it. It is pulled apart for something else to enter the painting. It seems to me that when my paintings travel they travel with the relationships taken apart, the pieces separated. When they reach their destination the relationship is re-made. I want to have a sense of that in the painting.

I am doing a series of paintings and giving them the title of women. They have a verticality and a sense of the figure. The one on the left is *Magdalena* and the one on the right is *Lucia*. Magdalena is dirty and ravaged. Lucia is lit-up with a pale delicate light based on subtly different whites.

A printer friend of mine came to my studio and saw these paintings and he said, "You know they remind me of places that I don't even know exist." I do believe that

empathetic communications between humans perhaps will develop in the future. These two paintings were made at a time when I was reading *Sectionez (?)*, which is a story about a place which doesn't really exist - it can't be proven. One of these paintings is called *Akbar* and the other is called *Ukbar*. In the story people would name the place slightly differently every time, so I added more paintings around this idea. I thought it was quite wonderful that this person walked into my studio and said exactly what the paintings were about, and I hadn't even talked to him about them. So there must be something very strong. Maybe it doesn't work every time, but there has to be something in it. These things (the insets) are dropped in and they are painted separately, of course, as usual. The field is painted with something missing, and the other thing is painted somewhere else with something missing, like an uninvited guest.

These paintings are all called *Union*. I had a long discourse with myself about using checkerboards -- not because I didn't think I could make good paintings with them, but because I think that the continual use of something which is obsessive, compulsive behavior is very interesting. What I wanted to do with the stripes was to re-use them in a way that they hadn't been used before, not to continue with the formalist game. I was quite happy not to be inventive in a certain way; I was quite happy to use something that everybody else had thrown away. It was equivalent to making sculpture out of garbage. I was making paintings out of something that had been discarded: stripes. I wondered whether it was more interesting to use the same motif, whether that would be a more important point to prove. It would expose something more and would become deeper by using something over and over again. It would have that sense of repetition about it, like people asking me if I had been psychoanalyzed. It had that aspect to it that was very attractive. Anyway, after a long struggle with myself I decided to make these paintings. These are all called *Union*. They are about a softer kind of relationship, and they also imply a sense of wholeness because of the title and because of the impact between the two sides. The communication between the two sides is more reasonable in a certain kind of way. It is quite a different sort of situation from misfits, where the two things are bluntly slapped together and have to live together and make the most of it and survive. These were painted many, many times, by the way.

The one in a strange way goes back to some of the things I was doing in the seventies. It is more open and has that kind of nocturnal life. All the edges on the painting are soft. It is a lot subtler than my paintings usually are. In fact, I would be happy for this to be in an exhibition with people who weren't necessarily painters, maybe sculptors or installation artists, in a show entitled "Metaphor" or a show that dealt with the possibilities of making relationships. I am more interested in the concept and title of the show than I am in the medium. It is not necessary to share this with people who make paintings. In relation to the ethical, minimal stance of my predecessors who were working in the seventies my work transgresses greatly.

These two paintings are part of a series of paintings that I have been working on called *Union*. The one on the left is *Union Black*, the one on the right is *Union Green*. *Union Black*: the panel is the same and it goes back to what I was doing in the seventies with the nocturnal light. And on the right side of the painting, which is an equally divided -- democratically divided -- diptych of six squarish rectangles, the two sides are painted separately in the blacks and greys and then they are put together. This is done over and over many times. Painting this probably took me six months. All the edges on this are soft, the only hard edge being that one running vertically down the center. So the paintings have a more gentle quality, with the abutments not as violent as they were in the striped paintings, where the color and the size and the nature of the stripes varied tremendously where they abutted each other, causing a kind of rupture. In these paintings, in fact, you get a kind of union: a union that still is making and un-making itself as you look at the painting.

The next two paintings that I want to show you are the *Catherine* paintings. I have chosen these because they show something very important about my work: that it doesn't really progress in a very formal, linear fashion, i.e., according to the rules or game of formalism. The painting on the left is *Catherine (1995)*, which is a painting that

relates in form to other paintings such as *Durango*, which were painted around 1991; however, the colors are very different. The colors are delicate, fragile and very washed out. And it is monumental; it has about it a risky quality. It is a monumental painting pushed to an extreme point where something quite fragile is exposed, and I think that it is only possible to do that with a form that you know well. The one on the right is *Catherine* (1994) from the year before, of course, and that is a checkerboard painting. It is not that the checkerboard paintings have replaced the stripe paintings, not at all. There is always an up-and-down, and sideways, in order to be expressive. In other words, I am not moving forward; I am moving around in a way that is more cyclical and more unpredictable.

The painting on the left is mine and the video piece on the right is by Viola. And Viola's piece is called *Not Triptych*. It is a beautiful piece and I want to talk a little bit about triptychs in my work and in his piece. I thought it would be interesting to talk about his piece in relation to what it is to make a modern triptych. I don't think a modern triptych is based at all on a medium - I don't think it matters whether it is a video piece or a painting. I think it has to do with the psychological structures in the piece. My painting on the left is called *Angelo*, which is not strictly a triptych; it is a triptych with the right hand corner separated off. Bill Viola's is a triptych about birth and death and life and death. On the left panel is a woman giving birth. On the middle panel is a figure that is underwater, somehow existing in an in-between state between life and death. And on the right is a video of his mother dying. My piece, *Angelo*, is really about the idea of giving up bodily mass -- going into something that is more spiritual in a sense, less physical. If you compare what I would call a contemporary triptych with a pre-Renaissance triptych you will see that the middle panel is the dominant panel. It has the central figure in it: the Virgin Mary. They weren't living in a democracy like we are. As the world has become more democratic this has become reflected in the way the middle panel of the triptych is working - certainly in mine, and it is in Bill Viola's. The middle panel of one of my paintings is used to facilitate communication between the left

and the right side so there is no more hierarchy. It is, I might humorously call, a “lower-archy.”

I wanted to talk about a painting that I saw once in Toledo called *The Entombment of the Count of Orgaz* by El Greco. It is typical in the fact that it is realistic. Usually his paintings are over-expressionistic. It is not in fact strictly a triptych. In this painting a very important civic figure is being buried. The facilitating figure in the painting is the priest, and the priest exists between the world of this and the world of that. His robes are painted with the most exquisite transparency, and that symbolizes the movement between what you can see and what you can't see and what you can only feel. And in the painting I think that is crucial; well, certainly it is to my work. What you can see and what you can feel or the way that what you can see conjures up what you can feel: it has everything to do with my big painting *Angelo*, where it communicates with other paintings I have made and in a way makes a kind of series over time. It starts with *Angel*, *Angelica*, *Angelo*. They are all about surfaces that share a drawing idea with a painting idea -- a diagrammatic idea, or linear idea, with the idea of flesh and body.

The two triptychs here, which are recent, are called *Demo Logic Red* and *To Be With*. I mostly give my triptychs, if I can, three word titles, i.e., one word for every panel. That is because of the democratic nature of the paintings. *Demologic Red*, 1994 makes an obvious reference; it has this logic of democracy in it. The paintings have drama at each end, with strong color denoting some kind of emotional signal or response from the viewer. The middle panel of *To Be With*, in black and white, is in a sense more diagrammatic. The two panels on the end are more fleshed out and they have another dimension. The little panel on the end is fleshed out - they add another dimension to them. In this painting the middle panel is really facilitating the movement from one end to the other, from yellow and grey vertical stripes to the red and blue giant checkerboard on the right end of the painting. Both these paintings are absolutely the same size, so that enforces the idea of no panel having hierarchy over the other.

In the mid-eighties I painted a triptych called *One One One* where the panels were the same size. It exercises the relationship between the panels and the idea of democracy so that together, and equally, they make another reality. Here I am showing you the painting *For One Place*, which is from 1979, and *Spider* from 1980. The painting *For One Place* was an environmental piece painted directly on the wall. I had a corner that went in and a corner that went out and then went back in again to the wall. It simply follows a wall, but I am choosing where to begin and end the painting. I cut it off in the beginning of one plane and then stop it where the wall returned after making a short outward corner.

I made another painting in a little apartment in the Turkish quarter of Berlin. What I did with both of these paintings was to take a certain area, paint it on the wall, and leave it. The painting can only exist in that situation, which is very different from the other idea that the painting can travel by separating the parts of the paintings. Those paintings were built for travelling. These paintings are only built to last as long as the place - in fact *Painting For One Place* no longer exists. What was interesting to me about those paintings in relation to the future was that they led to projections and to paint around the corner. *Spider* in particular was like a painting that had slid into the corner; it hugged the corner, which is why I called it *Spider*. They were very fertile for me in relation to subsequent work, making paintings that perhaps weren't environmental but had implications of the environment in them because of the way they used the space. In the late eighties I started to make my paintings flat to get rid of the excessive practicality. The idea of painting 'round the corner is still very interesting to me.

Recently I started to make small painted boxes that I started to show. As you can see looking at these small aluminium boxes, they come out directly from the wall and also have implications of something invading the wall, the inward motion of the wall. For example, when I put the insets into the painting there is a wonderful kind of penetration of the surface by the inset as it comes back to the painting, and I think that this issue of having a space behind the painting has always been important to me, as long as I have

been making the painting physically expressive. Even so, by going right back to the seventies, when I was making overlays, the idea of something behind the painting - a layer of air somehow informing the painting - is very important to me and has metaphysical implications. I was thinking about this idea being taken further, exploded out from the wall, and I was thinking about having a space possessed by the box. The way that the boxes are striped is very open. I have only just started to do this, and I think the way they hang from the wall is very exciting and the way they project into the space interesting; and in my mind seeing them painted expressively is a little like saying it is expressionism cubed. They have the physicality of a box but the metaphysicality of something that is quite poetic. These box paintings have a long way to go.

This transparency is of a painted box that is light grey and four little paintings that are painted on composition board, tiny little things. The person who shows my work in Germany, Bernd Klüser, and I were in my studio one evening moving the paintings around and we arranged them in relation to the four seasons. We decided that should be the title of the work. After thinking about it for a few days we thought it was too modest, and too intimate. So I decided to call them *Four Days*. I thought it was more appropriate to their scale and their intimacy. My current concern was that they were all diptychs but they were not made on two surfaces. They were made on one surface, and the paint surface is very physical - quite active. I think they have a relationship with *Murango*, with the physicality of *Murango*, but they are much more formal and geometric. These are going to be shown in one work, and the space between the panels will be the same width as the panel themselves.

Lastly, I would just like to give you one more quote. This is by Alan Viper. He wrote a beautiful essay on my work. He finds my pictures always "balanced on a knife edge to reconcile the tension between part and whole, conflict and harmony, opaqueness and

transparency, coldness and warmth. Plane of space, expanse and restriction. There is a constant interplay of unity and diversity. An endless oscillation between ceiling and actual repetition." I think in those two sentences we very densely establish, very precisely sum up, what I am involved in. That is the constant search for unity and personality, for expressiveness. How to somehow catch the above in a single work.

