

## Sean Scully lecture on Myth and Abstraction, July 2003

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

**(THIS IS THE DIRECT TRANSCRIPTION OF THE LECTURE, NOT THE EDITED VERSION THAT APPEARED IN THE SMITHSONIAN MAGAZINE)**

Not necessarily may I expect to attract gods as in the case of the Dogan mask that lives in my house in New York, but to attract human beings and above all to make the point that this is not mere space or mere geometry. In other words, here Barnett Newman tries here as in many other occasions to create his own mythology. Of course this cannot be proved, this cannot be proved, that this is a special place. Newman rather charmingly liked to compare himself to Michelangelo. The point of myth is one must be living it to keep it alive, and its not really necessary to prove it, but of course in order for a myth to take root, to have power it must have more than one devotee. He says on one hand that he is a great religious artist or quasi religious artist, one like Michelangelo and that ZimZum is not an arrangement of minimal shapes, but the cradle of a special and mystical place. Since it is special and must be mystical since it must be special to feel it to be so. There is of course a relationship here very stretched out relationship extended relationship with Duchamp who says that its an artwork because he says its an artwork. Like, this is an artwork here,. I'm drinking this water. There you see, I just made an artwork and this is very prevalent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century where the subject of personal mythology, a result, obviously, of democracy where everybody becomes or is able to become their own world. So, people are capriciously establishing their own idea of myth and nominating this or that as special because they say so. This, however, is a longer discussion for another day. But, I think it is interesting the relationship between the way

that one person designates a space as special and another person designates in more or less the same epoch, relatively speaking, an object as special chosen, chosen by me. It raises a point that is at us no longer since it is abstract or self-evident or self one might say, because it is abstract. Thus, it asks more of us in the sense that we are asked to suspend our disbelief and cooperate here with Barnett Newman's reference to a special place.

Songay Mask, on the left, is unfortunately not in my collection. It is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum in New York. It's made with wood and straw. The point is, to gain the maximum in expression with almost no consideration for the appearance of things. The way they might look, it goes back and forth with tremendous force between the rhythmic stylized linearity of the drawing which expresses and does not express the appearance of a head; though it does express the life and the continuing rhythm of death. However, it does not attempt to tell stories. It embodies in its constant fluctuation between the fact that it straw as material and the deeply stylized rhythm of the drawing the belief of the people it is made for and by. It is made again to conjure up the gods.

And on the right, we see a very beautiful painting by Picasso, *Study of a Head*, 1906. One extremely powerful aspect of 20<sup>th</sup> century art is the obedience and disobedience it has with the appearance of things. That's the profound similarity between the abstraction of the repeated lines in Picasso's head and the Songay mask. They both attempt to represent or get at something deeper than the appearance, what might be called the inner rhythm of things; the primitive soul of the world, its emotional, spiritual and empirical structure. To step back to something lost. Yes, Picasso, who we consider to be

a revolutionary artist, stepped back here and went back to a former model as did the other, Brancusi, Giacometti, etc. to undo the artificiality of culture, what we might call cultivated ways of thinking, cultivated structures. A sense of rhythm is fascinating; it has a connection with the panic and emotional crescendo of Van Gogh in the face of the mechanization of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I always thought that Van Gogh was in a sense a visionary fellow of sorts, very powerfully the demise of the natural world. His work seems to me to be tragically and almost hysterically attached to things sensual and nature, including the rhythm that runs through his painting, where everything in a Van Gogh painting is a thing. Everything is a positive, including the air in the sky, not just the objects or what we call objects. It's a way of fighting the terrifying face of a mechanized world is to cut out the artifice of by going back into primitivism and very importantly, myth.

As a minor diversion here, I was reminded while I was writing this to talk about Ireland a little bit. During the period of Colonization of Ireland, the Irish used to talk in circles because they had lost the physical war, the military war. So, they invented another kind of war, the war of confusion, or the war of myth. They would invent things like fairy circles so that the English would think that they were a little soft in the head. These are myths that are meant to confuse, charm and confuse. Van Gogh's rhythm seems to me desperately religious in a sense. Once he is in the Picasso head, however, once he's something far more secure, ferocious.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century above all proved that the world is made up of vibrating particles. The interesting thing for me about this notion of primitivism or rhythmic motion or rhythmic viewing, looking at the world is true in both senses it happened to be true in

Van Gogh's painting that the world is inhabited by what one might call a turbulent beautiful cosmic rhythm. But it is also true scientifically. It's an extraordinary coincidence that in intuition it takes place in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is proved in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to be scientifically fact. In relation s to the sense of realism and non-realism in Picasso and the Songay mask, one hears this today in jazz for example the way that the original structure of a song played by John Coltrane is constantly lost and found and brought repeatedly to the edge of emotional crisis. This is what's happening here, with the look of thing and with John Coltrane and in Jazz the sound of thing sna dht subject would be the subject that he would be abstracting. Here, the subject is a head. The 20<sup>th</sup> century brought with it all its mechanized advantages and inventions war and panic and to a large extent the beginning of the end of the natural world. Suddenly, it's a fear of sever modification and how else to fight this but with myths and a reconnection with primitivism. So I think that personally that the interest in primitivism at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century relating to a large degree to cubism and primitive action relating to Dadaism, is a reaction to this 20<sup>th</sup> century machine. Picasso, of course, above all, had the pure force of personality, the ability to be more violent and physically powerful than the others. Thus, he represents the inevitable and vital counterpoint to the 20<sup>th</sup> century machine world.

This is another Dogan mask, vertical mask, similar to the one I've got, only much better. It has a repeated vertical rhythm. This mask, as I said before, is made to attract Gods, to get the Gods to somehow inhabit it. A Zulu shield, for example, was meant to be seen in motion. One might say the first kinetic art. The stripes were made to be animal-like, ferocious and to make the shield appear bigger than it is, thus more

powerful, which is an invitation or an imitation of the animal world where the animals puff themselves up to look bigger for example like birds and lizards. The Zulu shield, unfortunately I don't have a picture of one, dazzles with its fierce beauty. Its stripes and formation, and lines are hypnotic and frightening. They are beautiful, but they are frightening. Brancusi, on the other hand, is all meditative hope. The endless column, as it is called, the fact that the column does end, its not an endless column. Thus we are being asked to believe in a sense that it doesn't. That its spirit or idea is bigger than its physical form, like the Zulu shield. However, it is metaphorical it is not visceral. The primitive visceral force of the war shield has been replaced by meditative spirituality, an ascending metaphor. What I am saying here is that this column physically ends, but as an idea and as a feeling, it does not end. We make a difference between the physical fact and the hope and feeling that the artwork provokes. That's why I say the Zulu shield is an artwork, because it in a sense, psychologically provokes something bigger than itself, even though its used in the art of war.

Giacometti, one of the few artists that Picasso was scared of with good reason. Giacometti represents the absolute polar opposite of Picasso's expansiveness, Picasso's, in a sense, primitivism. Although Picasso was a lot more than simply primitive, obviously. Giacometti, it is called Big Figure 49 and it is a figure ravaged. The nobility of the figure I believe comes from its sense of survival. It is a survivor. In a sense, he is the polar opposite of impressionism and post-impressionism. Here the world does not give the components and the rhythm of the world does not come together to produce pleasure or sublime facades as in the case of Monet. The world has become hostile and the sculpture is what's possible in a sense, what has withstood the force of the world and

what is left. The force of the world takes away until it can take away no more and this is what is left. The figure stands mute, dignified and silent. Thus in a sense, his work has become mythic. It has in it a sense of myth, something that one can only feel, but not see.

Morandi, a painter much adored by painters such as myself painted still-lives, or perhaps they are not still-lives, he painted pots and jars. This one was painted in 1962. These jars and jugs reappear in an endless silent conversation. The color in Morandi's work is as low as possible. And the scale in Morandi's work is as modest as possible. And the development in his work is as static as possible. So he did everything backwards in a sense. His is definitely the voice of resistance. However, there is evolution but it is the evolution of the inevitable, not the expressive and the mythic. He is like the Cheyenne Indian who rides his horse backwards in order to be a contrary. A contrary figure is a figure of strange status. These are anti-careerists, yet they persist. They become mythic because they are not explainable, particularly their success as static in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 20<sup>th</sup> century was obviously a century of movement and violent and war and mechanized invention, the invention of art movements. Here we have a painter who stands in opposition to this and yet his paintings have persisted and have resisted. In a sense, like Giacometti's figure they stand silent and reverential. Reverential are vessels and thus one creates, therefore, a metaphor with the term vessel. A painting being a vessel for meaning, a vessel for feeling. Again, in the case of Morandi, one can look at his paintings and at times be almost disappointed, almost bored, almost ready to leave it. He raises the issue of fame perhaps in myth in the sense that for Picasso, it is very difficult to be mythic since everything about Picasso is known. No that's not true,

because its not possible to say that everything about anything is known. But in the sense that it is nearly possible. I hope you will forgive me if I say it. Much is known lets say. I've argues myself to a much. Much is known about Picasso. Much is explained. You can go to museums all over the world and you can find people explaining Picassos to groups of people wearing New Balance shoes and you won't find that to be true of Morandi. Morandi is compressed, compressed and humble. This is why I believe his work has the quality of the mythic about it because it is not demonstrative, it is visual but it is also repressed and depends largely on mastery and on the devoted interest of experts. So, his support system is very narrow, but very pure and very true. What reverberates in the work really is his myth, his whispering myth.

In case you are wondering these are paintings. One is called Adam and one is called Eve. And again I go back to Barnett Newman who was extremely interested in attaching himself to great themes. Barnett Newman painted for example a painting called *Onement* as if this would be the one moment, the beginning, the origin. He wanted to get to something that was fundamental and pure in some way, to sweep aside all that messy, confusing, polluting, compromising and dialectical European shadow and make a pure American Art, a new beginning and that's what these paintings are constantly trying to present. Barnett Newman painted the Stations of the Cross, the tragic story of Jesus being tried, taken out to Calvary and executed. He painted this in black and white stripes as if this could in fact express this story. He has attached himself to this story. I'm arguing with myself, I'm not coming to a conclusion. I have no conclusion. I think art is not really a question of conclusions or closed opinion. Its something that keeps us alive and it becomes more vital as the world continues on its merry slide. So here you have a

picture of Adam and Eve and if I ask you in this room without prior knowledge to tell me which one is Adam and which one is Eve, my guess is that you will get it right by about 50% which means that the painting are not in a sense self-evident or self-descriptive as I was saying before. They require an enormous amount of cooperation on our part, huge effort on our part to believe that these paintings in some way represent Adam and Eve. Its also interesting as a note to be aware that Adam was painted after Eve. What that means, I am not sure. He painted Eve first. But we usually say Adam and Eve, we don't say Eve and Adam. So, that seems to me that he painted one and then he thought about painting the other one. So its not like Masaccio painting Adam and Eve. It wasn't a commission, he didn't set out to paint Adam and Eve, but I don't believe he started out painting Eve and later on got the idea of painting the other one, Adam because Eve would need Adam. Here we have a person who compares himself with Michelangelo, rejects the example of Mondrian or lets say ungrateful for the example of Mondrian and wants to tear down all the artifice of smoky, confused European art, babbling European art and start again. In other words, in order to create his own mythology and to do it with stripes. And again like Morandi, this is an art that is for experts or this is for devotees. There is a dictionary of art and artist published by Thames and Hudson in which the author of the book says, of course I don't expect you all to like Barnett Newman but please respect him for his beliefs. Once again we have a schism between what the artist says and what is self-evident, going back obliquely to Duchamp. So we have a crisis of what the artists say and what they can support. I have it myself. I live with it on a daily basis.

Talk about the Matisse first. Matisse is one of my favorite artists and I wrote my thesis when I was a student on Matisse The Dance, a very charming story attached to the

version of the painting. I believe painted in 1936 if my memory serves me correct. He was commissioned to make this painting by Dr. Barnes in Philadelphia in the United States and measured it wrong. It was meant to go between the windows like this and he measured it wrong and thus we are in receipt of two. It's a very nice story. If he had measured it right, there would only be one version. The reason there is a version in Paris is because he measured in wrong and he had to make the second one. It's a beautiful story,

The Dance, 1909. And then I arrive right here from the vertical, figure to the dance and to the rhythm transformed, that I talked about earlier. Although in the Matisse, the drum beat, the constant hammering rhythm of African art, becomes the endless idyllic curve. Here he silently speaks of Arcadia, of a perfect time expressed in an endless and more importantly weightless dance, a dance without gravity. We can only see it, one might say one can only sense it here in this painting. In other words, what I say here is that we can only sense this, we can only have this. This reality is an idea and an image and a skin, most importantly as it is here in this painting because we can't ask these people to dance like this. If you ever go to see dance performances, people can't dance like this because we have weight

On the other side is Andre Derain, Le Danse, 1906 painted at the beginning of the century when Picasso painted his primitively violent head in brown and black. This painting is occupied by a constant rhythm where every element is distinct, in some way narrative and descriptive. It is not like this where everywhere is unified. And in movement, but not the ideal piece in movement for Matisse less idyllic and more sexual far more erotic and malevolent and of course it includes a snake, the most unfortunately

aligned animal ever to slide across the surface of the earth, representing evil, treachery and dark sexuality. The three female figures dance through a magic Eden and the painter here is undoubtedly, I mean absolutely, exotic and almost drunk and dazzled in a garden of myth and magic where the color is sensual and from another world, a world that is dense and impenetrable, but not the simple, innocent world of Matisse. This is more complex, Matisse in the history of painting is estimated I suppose higher, however, I think this is a wonderful painting. Complex, dense and with a kind of impenetrable mythic quality. The Matisse is innocent by comparison.

Now, I am going to turn to the land and the myth of the land. And there are many of course in the world including the myths of the American Indians which are very beautiful and which I had wanted to talk about, but there isn't time today to do everything. I talk about the land, the mythic power of the German landscape where I personally live and paint, in fact where I was yesterday. It is not an accident that I am there anymore than it is not a coincidence that I also live and work in Barcelona. The land in Germany obviously gave rise, gave birth to the movement that we call romanticism that flowered in England and that has a similarly opulent green landscape. And the attachment that the English and the Germans have to their land is profound. It is interesting to me on a personal note, that in nearly all countries the land, nature is referred to as mother. That in itself is mythic of course, the mythic mother, the one we walk over and through and build on unfortunately. But in Germany, it is the fatherland, whether there are other exceptions I don't know because I am not a scholar, but it strikes me as rather distinct.

From a figure dancing, we go to a figure coming with the life force of nature, Kirschner, *The End of the Swim*, 1910. Again at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where once again there was an incredible need to reconnect with the healing power the solace of nature to reconnect with nature and it is not to be forgotten that the first world war was just around the corner on its way, riding towards us like a dark horse and artists were reacting to this and to this horrific level of mechanization, the building of tanks for example

Here in the Kirschner you see that the figures are painted very flat and there is a beautiful, humble sense of material in the German expressionist paintings, they used very simple canvas and dry paint because they did not want their paintings to seem important. This is a very crucial point. They wanted in a sense to be with nature, not to make something that was separate. I have noticed that in these paintings, oh by the way I live there myself, I work in the country side, I paint in the countryside at the moment and I had an exhibition in a house there, kunst, and a very nice lady in the group asked why I never used green. It occurred to me that when I first started painting in jolly old England, where I was an art student, I did use green and I was very good with it. So when I went to my farm studio, the first painting I made was green. And it is indeed a very healing regenerative color.

What I wanted to say was that the groups in these paintings, there are countless paintings of people in the lake and the lakes in Bavaria have a magical, mystical, mythic importance for the people, and the connection between the people and their landscape is very profound and their identification with it is very profound and the way that have protected it is of consequence. Even now you can find people doing exactly the same

things that the people are doing in that painting and they are usually go in the paintings in small groups where the identification with nature and with friends was achieved, but individuality and the importance of the person was not sacrificed. So basically, most of these paintings that you see there are not huge groups of people but they are also not isolated, so they are communing with friends, losing their sense of isolation with other human beings and with nature. And the colors dynamic, of course you see how beautiful it is, how vital that blue is. This is a blue that you would only see in your dreams. There are many paintings from this period with four figures. As if four was symbolic a perfect number, some special number. It is horizontal, the painting that is, it is ambitious, open and hopeful. Above all, the water flows through the composition giving it energy and mystical power, mystical energy of nature and it provides movement. Thus the painting is only a section of the bigger idyllic world. It is an extremely optimistic, emotionally expansive painting where we as human being immerse ourselves in the forgiving water of nature.

On the other side we have Otto Mueller?. You know, a lot of people think these paintings are all the same because they are all called German expressionist paintings, but they are not they are all different and the personalities that all painted them were all different. Kirschner on the other hand was wanting to commune with nature and be a good boy was a drug addict. Otto Mouro, his is also a bad ender. The end of the day where peace where you recount the day you are renewed yet you are still in the water before you leave to go to the house. His compositions tended to be vertical, less open, less panoramic than Kirschner, more contained, the figures in his pale color works lose their identity, their separateness, the figures dissolve into nature once again like

Kirschner. But, the nature is not vital like Kirschner, it is the color of memory. Color is extremely delicate and melancholic. One might compare it with Morandi or Agnes Martin later on. The composition is more contained and not bursting with optimism, the painter understands it is only a hope, it is only a faint dream virtually impossible to realize outside of art. It is painted like Morandi before in the color of whispers an aspect in painting that becomes extremely important in the development in painting abstractly when painting becomes abstract and mystical later on in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. So in the end his world is contained. It falls in on its melancholia and the painter has in his hands and makes with his hands a surface of pathos. And once again the painting of the painting is extremely modest. This is very important in German expressionism since the point of this identification with mythic nature is to abandon the ego to a large degree.

This is a Karl Schmidt Rotloff on this side, its called *Pathway*, 1911, around the same time. It's a wonderful painting. He was a fabulous colorist and he painted extremely uncompromising paintings of all of them he was perhaps the purest the most direct colorist and his colors consist of almost habitual use of primary color the force of nature, the force of nature is released through direct color. This painting as you can see for yourself is symmetrical. This is a central characteristic of mystical, tantric art. It's a pathway that carries us into nature and into the sky. He would become one with nature and since the forest dissolves into the sky, one with the universe. The end of the path is crucially located in the center of the composition, again related to tantric art. Here you see, we are invited to enter the painting, we walk up this beautiful golden pathway, we enter the forest and when we pass through the forest, we enter the cosmos. It's a picture

like a lot of others of the bliss of the abandonment of the controlling, contriving ambitious human ego in favor of a return to nature and an immersion of the self in her.

On the other side is Emil Nolde, *Palm Trees on the Beach*, 1915, and Nolde was very attracted to notions of purity. He rather unfortunately passively sought the approval of the Nazis or couldn't understand why they didn't like his work. That's a good one. This is of course is a testament to our power of self delusion that he would think that the Nazis would like this, its great. So, he went to the South Seas. He identified very strongly with the people there. He did incredible numbers of portraits, of drawings of people there and again he wanted to escape, to undo, unravel escape from this edifice that we have built this cultured trap that we have made for ourselves and get to something where we are once gain in union with the mythic power of nature and the regenerative power of nature. So, this is really a picture of the wind and the rhythm of the elements in it, the sea, the trees, the sand that make the original dance, the dance that has been making for millions of years. So in that sense, it predates its reference in the idea the Arcadia of Matisse. Here, Nolde goes all the way back to the original dance, the dance that gave birth to us.

So these guys decided that they would make a clean sweep of things and somehow get rid of art history metaphorically by bombing the art history department so they lit their fuse one night and they threw the bomb threw through one of the windows of what they thought was the directors office, but it happened to be the office of his assistant, the office of a rather shy woman called Prudence Bliss who was a renaissance specialist and who I like very much. And she unfortunately suffered the complete loss of 10 years work since the bomb exploded, but in the wrong office and did not in fact get rid

of the history of art. The history of art is still alive, but it did get rid of Prudence Bliss' work. And she of course, was destroyed. The interesting thing about this story is a couple of themes in it. One is of this destruction of history, the impulse to destroy history and the other is the impulse to put it right. And I am more in the impulse to put it right camp. I'm more like the doctor. And I bought Prudence Bliss a book, and the book I chose to make things better was a book of watercolors of Emil Nolde that had nothing to do with her subject. But I do believe that there is something in these paintings that is rejuvenative and one gets in the sea to makes one feel better, we go back into the sea to remake ourselves, to reconnect ourselves that we don't hear from a sound box, that we don't hear in the street and that we don't make ourselves. This is a rhythm made by the movement of the planets and this is what these paintings refer to. So for a very short time, a renaissance expert in the north of England was in the possession of only one book, and that was a book on a German expressionist painter. So, I like this mismatch.

A couple of private thoughts here. Paul Klee, I love very much. I love his smallness his physical smallness, I am not saying that his work has become mythic because in a sense, he has become too famous for this. However, his paintings are in some sense magical and since magic and myth are probably first cousins, I have included him in this. This is a photograph, by the way this is called, the vonbild, 1924, wall painting and of course it relates to some of the paintings of mine that I am going to show you later, but I will only show you a few, so don't worry. Don't panic, there will be time for lunch.

This is a photograph taken by me, it is of the Duomo, Sienna. Here it's the stone on the floor. This contributes to making a concert in a Roman Catholic church, it is

meant to go with the service, that includes prayer, the ritual of movement, singing, sermonizing, smoke and the hypnotic effect of black and white. In other words, everything particularly in this church with the help of this floor is designed to overcome reason or to suspend disbelief in favor of legend.

This one, fits right in with the theme of the talk, it is called *Mountain of the Believers*, 1924. I cannot make a mistake at this very moment because Thomas Yuren is an expert on Paul Klee, so I must be picture perfect. And this one on the other side, 1926 is *A castle in the forest to be built*, to be built, a castle in the forest. He is painting things that don't exist. He is painting dreams or he is painting the mountain of the believers, but there aren't people or a congregation of people, so in the sense he is being as free with the visual appearance of things as Barnett Newman earlier. But again it is this attempt by artists who resort to abstraction to create something mystical, to create another deeper level of emotional, mystical, spiritual reality.

On the left is the arm of my student, Hedwig. She is a very, very good painter. She is my student who came to study with me in Munich because she could not get in anywhere else. And she was in a rock band and when she arrived she was covered in tattoos. So of course I thought seriously of not accepting her, but it has turned out great. On her arm, which is not photographed here, is a picture of a bird and the bird represents her flight from Berlin to Munich. It is not decoration, however, it is not decipherable but anybody and everybody the way the instructions in the telephone box are or the way that Masi tattoos are to others who understand the language. It's again another example of our attempt, our need to create personal mythology. As I said before, it goes along with the freedoms of democracy where everybody becomes either king or queen of their own

castle. So, if you were to see her walking along the street and you were to look at her arms and her legs and some of these symbols, you wouldn't understand what they were but if a Masi was walking through a village marked up, the other Masi would understand what those marks meant. And that is a big difference, so now we don't agree on anything anymore. Everything is in crisis in a sense, everything is up for debate and as we were saying last night over dinner, us art experts, these are more permanent than any human relationship she will every have, certainly with a man. So really, here she gets married, here she really gets married. This, I believe is a very powerful strike against the way things are going, this interest on the part of young people to mark themselves up, put things on themselves and make a commitments, the kind of commitment that you can't make on the internet, you press a button and its gone. Me, I write things like this. Of course I don't know how to open the computer.

A person wrote a text once on my work on a computer and he finished it on a Friday afternoon, this is X my friend from D. He wrote a text that has become mythic within a very small circle of people because nobody knows about it. So, it has become mythic in that sense. It has a myth, it is surrounded by myth, the myth of the lost, the lost text. It was five o'clock when he finished and he pressed the wrong button and it said, this text, this information will be lost if you don't preserve it. It was five o'clock on a Friday afternoon like in a James Bond film where he is messing around with the numbers, trying to stop the bomb from going off; he was messing around with the computer, calling all these numbers, but everybody had gone home. And it counted down, counted down, counted down, it disappeared. And he had his plane ticket to leave the county and this is not mythic, but it is an indication of character. So, what did he do, he canceled the

trip and wrote it again. It's incredible. Anyway, he says, not as well the second time. So the first version has become mythic thanks to the power of the computer.

This kind of gesture is a way of doing something to yourself that you cannot undo. It is body art and there are a couple of artists around who exhibit their bodies, and hers are not decoration, they tell stories. They understand them if she explains them to them. So, that means that these tattoos communicate to about 10 people.

This one on the other side is the very famous artist, Yves Klein, who was an expert in judo. He was extremely connected to Eastern philosophy to the idea of the abandonment of the self through the abandonment of the body. As you may or may not know, I myself was involved with this for twenty years, so I understand it very well. This idea of self abandonment, the getting rid of the ego however, this is not primitive because this is not a real photograph, this is a fake, he didn't jump out of the window. Here we have made by a person who understand very well the physical aspect of Zen. The self-sacrificing aspect of Zen Buddhism and practice which is martial art and yet he is ironic. Here is an ironic photograph of a would be, possible, primitive act.

This is not ironic. Bartley Gorman was a great gypsy bare knuckle fighter. This is mythic because this is not fame. He is not famous. He is mythic. And what's also very important about his practice is that it is not civilized. He does not fight for fame, he fights in order to immerse himself in battle. What is extremely important about this fighter who was considered to be invincible is that he does not wear gloves. The contact between the two fighters is absolutely direct there is no civilizing rules, there is no sitting down between rounds, there is no commentators there is no TV cameras, there is no big purse afterwards. He fights to fight. He fights to be in a battle, to regain that primate

contact with the original battle. It is skin against skin, extremely personal with noting in between the two fighters. He is fortunately wearing trousers, but that's about the only caviling aspect I see in the whole thing. Now he has become mythic because he is not a star, something is lost and that is the whole point of it. It's in a sense a reaction against the way the world is.

I am going to show you only four paintings by me. And I show you this one because it is called *Hammering*, and I used the work hammering earlier on. Hammering is constant. It's in a sense a primitive form of rhythm. And the colors that I use are black and white and the painting is extremely aggressively painted. So I in these paintings in the 80's was trying to re-find, retake, reconnect myself with something very particular to painting, the ability to do something that is in fact fundamental and impossible to improve on, technologically speaking. In other words, it is me, with a brush and a bucket of paint in front of a canvas and it always will be until I fall over. The light in the painting obviously is a battle between light and dark, a battle is being hammered out on a huge format, but the white in the painting is not as white as the black in the painting is black. And that represents I imagine a flawed or damaged sense or limited sense of hope. So in other words it is not a battle between light and dark, but a battle between nearly light and very dark.

We continue anyway. This painting I include because you can see it in the Reina Sophia and it is called Africa and I made it in a sense as a homage to my experiences in Morocco. I made it out of the colors of the ground, umber and ochre you see them everywhere you walk on them in the countryside. You see rocks. These are cheap colors, these are not expensive at all. This painting was made in a very very small room,

extremely claustrophobic, a room that was only 3.5 meters wide and it is a big painting. When I exited the room, I always had to put my hand behind the painting to find a light switch because the painting was so big that it occupied the entire wall. Here I make a window and the window has a different rhythm to the rest of the painting, it is obviously not massive, it is more delicate the light that one sees at the very, very early part of the day on the desert floor, this yellow and cream color but again everything is dirty and everything is dry. So I attach myself to in a sense the mythic of my own personal myth to my own time in Africa and the idea of Africa, to something dark brown and fundamental and you can see in Africa mud huts that are made in these colors and decorated.

The last two paintings that I will show you are *In Memoria*. Here I show you, in a sense, not the strength of my work, but the pain of my work. This painting on the left is called *Neils*. Neils is a cousin of mine who died young. And when I painted this painting for him, he had not died. So, I painted the painting with a lot of yellow. I always see yellow as a color that is very sexual and that in a sense fights death. This is one of the reasons that I am so attracted to close the circle to the work of Vincent Van Gogh who is probably one of my absolute favorite artists. The painting has red colors coming through from the back and is painted very urgently, obviously there is a sense of structure but the structure has again a sense of falling apart or coming apart. The painting is quite vital, the white, very white, but different you cant quite see it here you get an idea. It is very yellow here, very blue at that top. And there is again this constant rhythm, horizontal/vertical rhythm that runs through the painting. It is just me, just me and the painting and I am trying to make a painting for somebody who is no longer with me, and this is what I can do. In a sense my work is a question of trying to retrieve the

irretrievable. My work is not simply a question of pleasure. It has a lot of yearning in it. There is a structure and the structure is being undone or subverted by a sense of emotion and of loss. I stand in the wrong place in the wrong time in the relation to the history of art and I like that just fine. s

This is for my mother. She died recently. It's a small painting and it occurred to me after I finished it that like Brancusi's kiss that those can be considered like two arms. The painting is delicate, tender, modest, this size is what I can do. In that sense, it is quite primitive and I believe that the problems that artists had at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that caused such a reaction, that caused such an upsurge in the pursuit of the primitive and the mythic again happened after the end of the terrors of the Second World War were because of the crisis and the crisis that they faced, that they saw come to pass. The world became mechanized and this irresistible juggernaut rolled over everything and has given us the world that we live in now. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was the turn of nature and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it will be our turn to be mechanized.

Thank you very much.