

Sean Scully - Interview with Ned Rifkin, Hirshhorn Museum, Washington DC. 19 June, 1995

*We are all here this evening to hear Ned Rifkin and Sean Scully have a conversation and dialogue, look at a few slides and feel free to ask some questions of them.*

*Ned Rifkin is the curator of the exhibition, and a familiar face to all of us here, the director of the High Museum of Art in Atlanta (a position he has held since 1991). Ned holds a Masters and Doctoral degree from the University of Michigan, taught in the late 1970s at the University of Texas and his first curatorial position was actually at the New Museum in New York, and he worked as core curator before coming to the Hirshhorn as Chief Curator. During his ten years here he organised a number of memorable shows including in particular the Robert Markowitz show in 1989, before leaving to go to the High in 1991.*

*Sean Scully is a native of Dublin, Ireland. He grew up in fact in London however, although I suspect he will have something to say about that. He studied as a young man Graphic Design at the Central School of Art in London, and also at Newcastle University and also taught there following his schooling. He made several important trips to Morocco in the development of his work in 1969. In 1972 he acted on a long-standing fascination with this country and came in 1972 to Harvard University for a period before moving here permanently in 1975.*

*Since coming to this country he taught at Princeton University, received a scholarship from the Guggenheim Foundation and bursary from the National Endowment. He has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Carnegie Museum at Pittsburgh in 1985, the Artist Studio in Chicago in 1987 and Lloyds touring show that was only seen in Europe (London, Madrid and München) in 1989. So this is in fact the first major touring exhibition of Sean's work in this country.*

*Having said all this, I want to also mention the coincidences that place me introducing these two people. I have known both Ned and Sean a good many years - both of them individually and together and we have had a very wonderful three-way relationship. Ned of course is my predecessor here, and we have worked together often on a number of projects and have shared an affinity for a number of artists. In regards to Sean, perhaps an even more interesting relationship, I mentioned a moment ago the exhibition that he had at the Artist Studio in Chicago in 1987, and that was a show that I in fact organised. It was a very small show of only four paintings but it was a very important show for Sean for a number of reasons. We spent a lot of time together in Chicago at that time and I have some very vivid memories of Sean at that time - one of the most vivid was the time we spent looking at a wonderful Matisse painting in the collection called 'Bathers by the River' which I think Sean has some very compelling observations about and I have some very vivid memories of visiting Sean in London where they were living at that time and Sean showing me some of the paintings that are in the show here tonight (especially some of the earlier paintings that I don't think a lot of people had paid an awful lot of attention to - some of the dark -I use the word vitally - minimal paintings that introduce the show here). I also remember the opening of Sean's show in Chicago. In particular, I was one of*

*four people that attended because the opening happened to coincide with an unusually fierce snow storm in Chicago and even Sean couldn't make it out of New York to make it to the opening so I had a lot of food to eat that evening. I remain very proud of the fact that I was able to push through the opposition of Sean's early, and still to this day one of his most important paintings, 'Heart of Darkness' from 1982 which was the painting that really convinced me of the power and the passion of Sean as a human being and a painter. And I feel doubly pleased in a way that we were able to acquire that painting at that time because that remains one of his most powerful and strongest works of art.*

NR: Thank you Neil for everything you have done. Not only for Sean's show, but since I have come back periodically to Washington you have done outstanding work here and it is really great to come back here and see it thriving. Amazing to see the second floor with new flooring and it really does beautifully for the work, and indeed triangulation is a very auspicious formation here.

It's great to be back in Washington and seeing so many familiar faces and having some Atlanta friends in the audience as well. Clearly this exhibition in many ways is the linkage for me personally because in fact Sean and I first worked together as artist and curator at the Corcoran Gallery of Art when I did the fortieth biennial of American painting and his was the last and culmination of several rooms of individual artists' Abstract work. Out of that the Corcoran bought a piece that unfortunately isn't in the show but presumably is over at the Corcoran. When I left the Hirshhorn one of my fears was how this place would work. The Hirshhorn is such an extraordinary museum. I think we have many times over proven, but especially with this show - I really thank Judy and every one else involved with the Hirshhorn for accommodating the show. It's the first time I have ever organised a show and not been involved in it. Its really humbling to realise that they did it much better than I could possibly have done. Sean was involved in that as well. We want to engage you in a process of dialogue with the focal point, trying to extract some ideas and insights perhaps into what makes Sean tick. I have prepared some questions. In talking about this together we will call out for some slides which came out of a conversation Sean and I were having about him having seen the show, what he would wish were in it. So these slides that you are going to see, are not in the exhibition upstairs and it's not, I don't think, to say that all of them should have been in the show - but why don't you comment on that Sean?

SS: Well they could have been in the show - but of course you have to stop somewhere and they are huge paintings. Unfortunately that reduces the number of works that one can put in an exhibition. But anyway I do want to start by thanking Ned for all his unflagging and unwavering support over the years and I think my work is not very fashionable. More at sometimes than at other times but it never seems to be in vogue - and this gives me an opportunity to say thank you to Neil for all his support and indeed that show that we made at the Chicago Art Institute was indeed phenomenally important for my sense of myself. How I stood in the culture and having such a strong relationship with the Museum because of the 2 famous paintings there - the Matisse and the Seurat. Anyway, the exhibition I would say is very democratically chosen between the two of us. It wasn't more you than me.

We should utilise the slides to get a structure. They are in a chronological order – let's darken the room and throw some light onto the wall here. This is 'Backs and Fronts'. This is perhaps your largest picture.

I am sorry this picture is not in the show. The reason this painting is never in these shows is because it is so big. It is 10 feet. And what happened with this painting is I took 10 panels and bolted them together. The painting started out as a 4-panel painting and grew. When I put the 4 panels together at different heights, and they were uneven top and bottom, I thought it had a kind of infinite quality and the relationship between the panels seemed to have an arbitrary energy. Like strangers bumping into one another. So I just exploded that notion, that idea. I remember showing this painting at P.S.1 in New York which is now an exhibition space, and what is sometimes called an alternative exhibition space, and I remember it was a big show curated by six people - they all had a room. The people that liked my painting were all the anarchistic punk people and that made me very happy. The show was called 'Critical Perspective' - where six art critics were invited to make a room each and give their point of view and Joe Maschler was the critic of my room with about seven other people (that included Jeremy Gilbert-Rolf, Sean Gould, Catherine Lee and I can't remember who else was in that room but anyway...)

There was a kind of break out energy where relationships weren't carefully controlled any more. Integrity of the object - the idea of the reduced, refined, irrefutable, absolute, distilled object was completely thrown out of the window in favour of lots of relationships. This has really in a sense -more than 'Heart of Darkness' - has become my manifesto painting. 'Heart of Darkness' has a greater emotional wallop to it, but I think this painting really declares what I was going to do.

Do you see the painting as a fence at all? Just curious looking at it here.

I was actually thinking of figures. When I gave it the title 'Backs and Fronts' I was thinking of the ideas of figures in a line; making relationships. In total, as a formal entity, it makes up something like a ramshackle fence - like a construction site. But that's where I get some of my ideas from - the way people put up plywood on the outside of building sites - there is something very beautiful about that. It is also I suppose some notion of something to do with a connection (in a strange way) with a proletariat idea. I used to do that kind of work myself, and even when I was doing it I was aware that, when I was doing it, that even though one is doing work like construction work, working on a building site or whatever, I think every human being has a strong sense of duty and is moved by things that are beautiful. And when you do that kind of work you are still making decisions or appreciating what you are doing -sometimes you just put things together and they look good, or they give you an idea for something you want to build at home - so it is kind of connected to the beauty that it is in the world in the way that is unconscious and is just left hanging. This has a lot to do with my own path in that I did other work as well as being an artist.

Your background, really in growing up in South London

The crime centre of London, yes!

Well I was being diligent, it always amazes me, well so many wonderful artists are really from working class backgrounds but, I was interested that as a young person what did it mean to you, or when did it start meaning to you to be an artist. Share with us a little bit about the aspirations of becoming an artist. Some ways that you entered. It would be important for us to hear about your evolution and journey.

When I was a kid, about five or six or something like that, I was very artistic and I went to a convent school and remember that the church was just a little tin shed up in Islington - for those of you that don't know, a part of London where all the Irish people live. It still is very Irish, well there are lots of other immigrants there now, Greeks, but in any case, it's a very accessible part of London and quite cheap. It has a lot of patina about it - it's a wonderful place. Anyway - there are lots of street markets - there's lots of life there - the church that I went to there was very small and as I said had a tin roof, and had little paving stone round it, and of course as a Catholic church there was smoke flying around - it was all very theatrical. There was a big fight between my parents and the Church because my parents worked all the time, and I got dragged out of that school and put into the state school but even so, I had an interest in art up until the age of ten I suppose, and I was what one might call the school 'artist'. I used to make the puppets and the scenery for the school puppet show

Did your parents support you or encourage you with this?

My parents didn't do all that much with me. They used to talk with each other at the end of the day and ignore me. We had our own private world. When I became a teenager, indeed where I lived was very rough. We moved from Islington which is poor but has a great beauty - I don't think being poor and being impoverished is the same thing - at least that is not how I felt - we moved to another part of London which is much more spiritually desolate and I became a member of the criminal society. An expert at breaking and entering and other intrusive sports. That was the end of my art days. I can recount a rather amusing story - a friend of mine told me that he knew where there was a safe, just an easy lock safe; we can break in on Thursday and we can get in to the room and get in the safe. So we took all these chisels and block hammers and were banging our way through this wall and we got through the wall which was really thick and just as we broke through the wall the birds started to sing, so we didn't have that much time. We broke into the room that was next to the room and there was no door - there was no connecting door. It was one of those industrial buildings where they obviously just add on. So we got into a room which had a chair and a desk in it. And we spent five hours breaking in. Anyway, I think it had something to do with adventure - being interested in being a criminal - you know I am not condoning it - I am not saying it was a good thing to do - I once saw two old people who lived next door to me who had been burgled and had a lot of things taken away from them that were of sentimental value and they were absolutely destroyed. I never did anything like that, but breaking into a safe is a different story. Impersonal. You're not wrecking somebody's life. What are we talking about anyway!

Becoming an artist.

Then what happened was I got very interested in R 'n B music - Rhythm and Blues - I used to love Slim Harper and Tim Lawrence and I had a R 'n B club and people came and paid and danced and the police closed that down because it was too rough. Round about that time I remember thinking that I wanted to go to art school and be an artist. I think that what happened was that I was artistically inclined and there were periods that were very bleak and violently bleak and then I worked my way back to it.

What opened the door to art for you at that time?

When I was at school there was a reproduction of a Picasso - you know the blue period one, little boy holding a vase above his head. I used to see that when I was nine and I used to love looking at it. They used to make those reproductions when they used to print the weave of the canvas. Flat but they would print it so it would look like a painting and I would love this picture. It was hanging in the school hall - just a rough hall right next to the gasworks at the bottom of the hill. There was just one rectangle in it in the drab depressing environment that was about tenderness; that was beautiful. I started making paintings with black lines around them - obviously very intimate. I was quite good at doing figures in profile. I used to outline everything in black. Then when I was working in the Victoria Palace Hotel, which is Victoria Station - I was a plasterer's labourer. That is the person that gets thirty percent of the plaster right on the top of their head after they have made it while the plasterer walks through underneath - Leonardo Da Vinci puts the plaster up. In my lunch break I started to go to the Tate and in the Tate gallery, which is free, was a picture by Vincent Van Gogh and again he also outlines things. It seemed so honest and accessible that I was able to enter the world of Art. It wasn't sophisticated to the point of being exclusionary in some way. It allowed me to directly communicate with this painting.

You have talked several times tonight about beauty and poetics. I want you to say something about this painting in particular which I think is incidentally a very sensual, do you know which painting I am talking about?

The Gourd - I can see it reflected in your pupil - that's part of my crime training - that's how I used to know if I was being tailed - I used to look into people's pupils so I could see if any cops were behind me.

I knew you had an edge on me but I didn't know what it was! Talk about your sense of beauty before Backs and Fronts and the Gourd. Tell us about the beauty and tell us how the beauty has permeated the work, if you think that it has.

What I wanted to do was, with these paintings, were to make my audience as small as possible, which is exclusionary. I wanted to make them very demanding and uncompromising. I was much more of the aspirant then than I am now. That had a lot to do with me stabilising myself in New York. When I first arrived in New York within in three weeks I had a haemorrhoid. It projects so much psychological pressure on you. It reminds me of one of those sound machines that projects sound into an object and

destroys the object. I don't know whether these things exist, or at least they exist in movies - it's a science fiction idea. It's like being destroyed inside first.

So coming to America was not a smooth transition?

It was unbelievably stressful. We had such a tremendous amount of trouble finding somewhere to live. This was in 1975 and I remember we went for our first interview to look for a loft and arrived 12 minutes late. I said to Kathy, you know it's different over here. The guy waiting for us was absolutely irate. Profound rage because we were 12 minutes late and to me that was symbolic of the environment in which we had chosen to drop ourselves. The pressure was enormous. Out of that making something - I was still making something. There was a lot of nightlife in those paintings. They were nocturnal. I found that the night in New York was very soothing and more manageable.

That's very interesting because I know you are very frightened of the dark.

Yes, but that is a different kind of dark. That is a dark like indoors dark. When I made this painting, 'Ball', I was thinking about making it rapturously engaged in colour. Saturated with colour, which is one of the reasons that I think it would have been interesting to have had this painting in the show because as you can see it is extreme with colour. The horizontal dark colour at the top isn't black. It's dark blue, and it has a strange salmon pink colour in it and it is really quite stunning in that sense. It has a kind of sawing motion. The red and the yellow are in a way contradicting that - they represent a kind of hopeful push up.

This is interesting because as you talk, and certainly we have talked many times about your work, and what it means, but one of the things that is very interesting about having the Mondrian show and your show here in Washington simultaneously, I think Abstraction is a uniquely twentieth century phenomena. That is non-objective painting like abstraction, and I wonder how you would place yourself in the continuum of these hundred years. In terms of beauty on the one hand and meaning on the other. If you could analyse this picture in terms of hope and value.

I was thinking about why it came to be in the first place with Malevich. Malevich is such an engaged person - not a remote person, but very connected to the political life of his country. I read his book, 'Non-Objective World' and it's beautifully written - it's very clear. It's not pretentious writing. The ideas are incredibly ambitious, but the way he writes is very clear, and it's very poetic. It's not made to intimidate. It's really made to give access. At the most alert and wonderful moment at the beginning of the twentieth century, when abstraction came to be, and I think abstraction is about a yearning for universality. I'm using what I consider to be very unpretentious language and in a sense I am using discarded language. I am using the language that has been discarded by formalist painters who work in stripes. For example, Noland, Mondrian.

Tell us about 'Hell Fire' in relation to what you have just said.

Well what I try and do with my paintings is I try and avoid the trap of pure sensation. I just want to talk about another piece of writing and this is a piece by Michael Fried. When I was a student I won a prize, I can't remember what it was for, but anyway, it was a book, and I chose a book on Morris Louis, and it was written by Michael Fried. The writing was like armour. It was as if you were suppose to be in awe of the writing. Everything was a totality - all the senses were welcome but they had absolutely no generosity or spirit in them at all. I was very excited when I saw the book and I read a couple of pages and I thought this is no good so I just stopped reading it.

But you must have thought Morris Louis' work had that generosity, I assume that is what drew you to the book?

Yes, well I do think Morris Louis' work is quite beautiful. I don't put it on the level of Rothko, but it is beautiful work. Very good. What I have tried to do is avoid that kind of remoteness and that kind of abstraction and using that example of Malevich as something to measure yourself against so that my paintings are always engaged in the world so that they have meaning and significance. They are not simply about sensation.

Is that in terms of the larger paintings or does it have to do with the specificity of the work. The way they are engaged rather than image...

No it has to do with all aspects of the work, but let me just preamble for one more minute. In the early Eighties, I met Phil Maddock and we sat in a Greek restaurant and were talking about Art and he said to me the trouble with Abstraction is that it is not specific. That was a very important thing to say. That is the trouble with it and that is the trouble that I am addressing or hoping to fix.

To move to this painting as an example of that, I was thinking about the red and the white as a beautiful, optimistic American field. An American field of thoughts. I put into that field a window, but not a window that leads to light, it's a window that leads to uncertainty. It's more profoundly true of the way things are.

I suppose I would see Morris Louis' painting, to use that example again, as relief from life. I don't think they have much to do with life - they have got something to do with flowers, but not much to do with life. I think that we have a lot of complexity in us and we are not just beautiful so I find Art that takes that on more interesting than Art that doesn't take that on. I just don't think his Art takes that on.

You just mentioned complexity, and clearly from 'Hell Fire' to 'White Window', which is in the Tate, this is a more complex period where you create much more energy, much more chaos from the field.

Around this time I decided that I wanted to flatten the paintings out because they had been very aggressively three-dimensional. They had had a tremendous physical bump in the Eighties where I was making paintings that were quite aggressively competitive. They were quite external in a certain way. My paintings are still quite external - I don't want to make frenetic paintings - I don't think that is any use to other people. I wanted to make the paintings more interesting in terms of their drawing and it wasn't possible

to do that and to keep the bulk of the paintings going, without causing a tremendous kind of elaboration. At least that is what I decided. That is what I thought. I decided to break up the field. To fracture the lines, the form that I was using, and have been using stripes for so long that the stripes really became the subject matter, as if the nude might be the subject matter or you might want to paint trees or whatever. The stripe was the subject because of the way it was painted. Power gave significance, meaning and content to the painting, whether they were big or small or move around or horizontal or diagonal. On this painting I wanted to make something that was very oppressive and maze-like with very little relief in terms of colour or surface, and I needed to relieve that with that with a window. The opposite of 'Hell Fire'. It works in the opposite way - the window in this painting says the traditional function of the window, and the window of course re-invented to observe beauty, fire arrows out of and so on.

There are a lot of windows and portals in your work, and they are mediation points between interior and exterior. This always struck me as being analogous to the act of painting in so many ways.

Yes, that's very interesting. You say some lovely things.

Well thank you. I think what we are going to do in the interest of time, is to go through the slides to show the audience and then reflect on them a little bit. Not individually so much. Here's one that got away! This is a 'Bedroom in Venice' which is in the collection in New York in the MOMA.

This is extremely lurid!

It isn't it? We have talked about this before, but would you say that 'Magdalena' in our show is close to this?

Yes, very close

But it is much later; several years later. Let's go through the slides - this is a very hard slide to read -

This is called Dakar - but I was also thinking about a record by John Coltrane that I liked. I don't actually like Jazz very much. I like the directness and the rhythmic regularity of R 'n B. But John Coltrane I was able to like very much. I thought this painting was quite savage. It has a real aggressive spin on the top, sort of hanging out. It might be interesting to note I have a collection of African masks. A lot of these ones like Dakar here, I was thinking in relation to the African mask, because an African mask, the brow and forehead is always a slab and then the face comes back in, and then goes down. And in fact your painting, the painting Ned has in his museum is called 'Dark Face', so I was thinking about 'Dark Face' as a face; a huge face. A face you wouldn't want to meet in a dark alley. Especially if it was attached to a body.



This is 'Durango' - and you know 'Durango' is a state in Mexico that has a kind of harsh quality about it. This painting is a very fierce painting. It is very big and aggressive. It has an all-over quality and is probably as close as I get to being all-over because I have actually rejected the possibility of making all-over, holistic paintings. I make relational paintings and if this is on the threshold of my interest in the unequivocal quality of all-overness or holistic and the fracturing of that. The fracturing occurs in the depth of the canvas, in the way that the canvas - the way that the painting is clearly bolted together.

By fracturing, you are really talking about kind of creating a field and somehow interrupting it or disrupting it. I just wanted to clarify that.

This is called 'Red Durango', and 'Red Durango' is a response to the halfness of 'Durango'. This painting is qualified by the piece that drops down from the top edge. The relentlessness of the overall fractured drawing is modified by the yellow and red verticals, which are thinner and more delicately painted and hang down from the top edge. It's as if something's come into it to modify the awesomeness of having a point of view that you are prepared to carry out that doesn't allow for provisionality or qualification and this painting does. The one before comes very close to not allowing it.

Oh great, the slides are looking better

But were not! And that's the most important thing. How often do I get to go on TV? I was looking forward to this.

This is called 'Lucia', and is part of a group of paintings I made over a long period really, well two years anyway, and I gave them all the names of women. They have a kind of figure-like quality. They tend to be quite tender because of the idea of the subject matter and the name that I use tends to be fairly archetypal.

I called one 'Helena' after my grandmother, whose name was Helen, but then I called it Helena because I use names like Lucia, Petra.

They don't really represent anyone really, is that right?

Well, the kind of the influence for Lucia came from a trip we made to Sicily and we wanted to go and see this painting. The painting was by Caravaggio, about the death of Lucia and we never got to see the painting because the Museum was always closed. It was Sicily, I don't know what they do over there - they just make it up as they go along. So I just made the painting for myself.

Well it is a beautiful picture. To make sure everyone understands that what you are looking at is a studio shot that is cropped in close, and the white bands are actually just the space and not part of the painting. That may be obvious to many people.

All these paintings have two insets by the way.

One thing I should mention is that I have lots of different themes going in my work, all at the same time. Like the paintings that I have given titles of women, and then I have the Catherine paintings going on.

Here is a painting that I know you want to talk about.

This painting is one I am very fond of so I want to try and keep this one so I can access it whenever I need it and it is called 'Vita Duplex'. It is really about one field, one life, one structure that has been completely undermined or cut in half by something else. So in other words, I think this is very symptomatic, emblematic of what I do, in the way that it is completely against absolutism or fanatical thinking.

The way I paint them is very direct and relentless obviously, and primitive. I put the paint down in a very rough and honest way. The way that I make the relationships undercuts the certainty of the structures so there are two things going on in the work in terms of structure. Then of course there is a lot of stuff going on in terms of colour. The way things are painted - for instance. That has a lot of scraping for instance. All over this painting, I painted it black and then I painted it green and then I scraped all the green off. But it has a beautiful green light that subverts the lack of colour in the grey black area. There is a lot of stuff like that in my painting.

It is a very exceptional painting - the way you have described in terms of the residue in terms of what you have left on.

In fact, the centre, well the off-centre panel that runs through it like a road was all scraped out at one point. I was thinking about having the larger area heavily painted and then I would have scraped out that area so it was about not only something else, but it was about something else that was really the ghost of a sort. After leaving it like that for a very long time I eventually put the yellow in because it could do something similar because it was about colour as opposed to non-colour.

In the interview that we published in the catalogue you talked about skeletal forms and flesh. I am just curious if you would like to elaborate on that, vis-à-vis what you have just said.

Let me just pick up that idea of 'Red Durango' for a moment. 'Red Durango' had something coming in from the top edge. It was something like a visitation. You know - like UPS delivery - a messenger or something dropping in. Some people say thanks for dropping in. In fact that is not literally what you do - you don't physically drop through somebody's roof. If you did, they wouldn't thank you for dropping in probably! I actually do that in my paintings - they actually drop in. The form on the outside is in fact one of the most skeletal forms. It's just about lines really but it's just the line that's left between the tracks of paint and that becomes the negative and that's quite skeletal. The other kind of skeletal line that I do is I simply do draw on the canvas. In fact someone who wrote an essay on my work - Dimitriou Paparoni - the one that got me to go down to Syracuse against my better judgement - and he said to me that when I am writing about 'Angelo', which is the big grey painting in the show, is there anything that I should write? And I said that you should write that it is about the idea of giving up bodily mass. Giving up mass for something that is purely for the idea of the skeletal form. For pure spirit. And he wrote that, verbatim in his essay.

Do we have any slides left - yes - 'Union Black'

Oh, 'Union Black' - this is a very recent one. I just put it in because I thought you would like to see it. It is about a much more subtle kind of relationship. It's about the possibility of union and I'm making also a series of paintings that are called 'Union'. I am making about five series of paintings - that's how I work - I just go from one to the other.

There are paintings that relate to this particular painting at the very end of this show. I would like to talk about your working method because one thing you haven't talked about is the relationship of how Sean Scully conceived and gestated his form from what the process is, from the drawing to the watercolour, and then we should open it up and give these people a chance to ask some questions.

I think about what things are a lot. I don't just think about my work formally - although I think that is pretty obvious by now. I am not really interested in making formal inventions so I think about the idea perhaps of having the window, or making things that are more portrait-like. Making paintings that had women's names and so they have a vertical axis, being in the tradition of portraiture, and they refer to that in history, even though they are not paintings of a recognisable figure. They will have a figural quality though. That might lead me to drawing things that are vertical for a while. Then the ones where I am making these fields of vertical black lines that the visitors' dropping in are about that. And I think about those ideas. Sometimes I am reading things and I get ideas. I was reading a lot about Nietzsche lately and I thought that I was thinking of myself as very dialectical. Then I read the Nietzsche idea of the dialectic was that the dialectic was ultimately a slave. He wasn't really (apparently - I haven't read it all yet!) he talks about Nietzsche as a pluralist rather than a dialectic. I find that very interesting. Out of that I made some paintings from that idea. I was thinking about the idea of frames. Frames being isolated - estranged.

It was the paintings that had the same inset with the metal panel on the left.

So there is a painted panel that is inside a painted panel. The same image is then painted and then put inside a metal panel and I called it 'As Was' - it seemed a bit Beckett-like I suppose. It's certainly existential. It's about the expression of identity - as it was, over there. You can't really look at one inset without thinking about how it was. That led on to a lot of paintings that were about the isolation of panels. These are my thinking processes - I'm just drawing little line drawings and maybe watercolours or prints and made an etching that resulted in a big painting.

I feel selfish to keep asking you questions so let see if any one sitting here through all of this has got any ideas or questions or comments.

*Question from audience: How much weight does colour have?*

I suppose it tends to get left out of conversation because I'm generally talking about ideas. I would say that with colour it comes very naturally to me and I am very open to mood, so for instance, I would be making a colour - there is a big painting in the show

called 'This That' and this is a painting that fell on top of me when I was painting it. It was red. So I scraped it all off and painted it yellow. It's not a problem so I think I am a colourist, well that is for sure, and I do a lot with the colour. The regularity of the drawing and so on. What I think about relationship - making my art about relationship - so I certainly would agree that colour is part of the subject, but I don't think it is 'the' subject. It's not like it is in Rothko, or Albers because the drawing in my work is too active - it's too dynamic. If the drawing in a work is rather more passive, the colour becomes much more necessary to activate an iconic, formal arrangement. In my work, I could make a painting in black and white because of the relationships I am drawing, the changes of scale, the abutment, the off-centreness - the way the different parts of the painting are changing is enough for me to be able to make a painting. I suppose then that one thinks that I can forget to talk about colour because it is so natural for me to use it. It really doesn't cover any aspect for me at all.

One thing I do with colour is that I use the layering of it so that if one is looking at a red painting that's been a yellow painting for a long time, one is seeing a red painting and feeling something else. That I'm very interested in because I am interested in making my work as three-dimensional as possible. So it doesn't get worn out.

*Question from audience: Do you think it is possible to address the values of the culture in your painting?*

I wouldn't say that my work is overtly political. It's a philosophical and mental structure. When I am talking about 'Hell Fire', I am really talking about a metaphor for the culture. I am also dealing with the relationships that are not clear. They do not achieve a kind of static finality in my paintings. I think there is a lot of openness in the relationship. There is a lot of abutting or what my friend Joe Maschler used to call 'car crashes' in my paintings. It's as if things in the paintings were put in relation to each other in a situation where they had to survive. Of course, that has a lot to do with the way it is, certainly in a kind of pluralistic society such as this. I am not interested in trying to take that on as a person - because many things are true at once. In my paintings I try to reflect that. They have order and they have direction but the certainty that could be a result of that has been subverted. Put all these things together, and that is one aspect of this. The other aspect is that I am against the kind of loss of humanism in Art, and of course the loss of humanism in the culture. I think there is an attempt to make something so that anybody can enter my paintings and I use influences from all over, and I travel a lot, so in a certain sense, what I am trying to do or be is a human being. I don't think you can be that and have certainty.

We were talking about the Mondrian show today, and I think that is about another time and another utilitarianism that I find not usefully certain. My work is about the culture. That's why I talk about these relationships because I wanted to make it about a kind of relationship again and I don't know whether Art can effect culture in a direct way. I think politics directs us - very overtly - Art offers a kind of love and a way of connecting with another human beings and that's a very delicate process. I certainly say that Vincent Van Gogh put an immense amount of love into the world. Whether he has made it a better place is debatable.

*Question from audience: Have you ever painted a circle, or do you paint with a pen?*

No, and no.

I find New York an interesting place still and I think what I do is too much of what it is for New York. It's not sophisticated enough for New York. It says something about me and it says something about New York. But that is probably the subject of another discussion.

Thank you.