

## Harvard / News Release Art Museums

# Menil Launches Online Artists Documentation Program Archive, In Partnership with Whitney Museum of American Art and Harvard Art Museums

*In intimate studio interviews, a growing roster of prominent artists discuss how works of art were made and their intent for future preservation*

*Conversations document artists' materials, techniques, and intent—conservation of contemporary works is goal*

*Website provides enhanced scholarly access to digitized archival materials*

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Founded in 1990 at the Menil Collection, the Artists Documentation Program (ADP) is known within the art world and scholarly circles for gathering vital first-hand interviews with prominent artists—and occasionally their close associates—about the making of art and its conservation. Now, the ADP interview collection is available to researchers on the Menil's website as the ADP Archive. Partnering with the Menil in a new phase of this important oral history project are two fellow institutions: the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Harvard Art Museums' Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art. Links to the ADP Archive may be found on their websites as well.

Outside the museum world, many regard conservation as a science concerned only with the art of centuries past. But modern and contemporary art presents to conservators and scholars a host of new challenges, which the ADP interviews address in the most direct way possible. Over time, as the physical aspects of a modern or contemporary work of art change, so can our perceptions of how it ought to look. Researching an artist's original intent becomes critical, especially for conservators, whose intervention invariably determines a work's long-term health and appearance. With no professional consensus on what constitutes appropriate aging and acceptable damage for modern works, artists themselves are a critical authority in evaluating the current condition of their work and in identifying the tangible qualities that should—and can—be preserved.

Faced with the unusual and sometimes fragile and volatile nature of modern art media and techniques, as well as individual artists' intentions, former Menil chief conservator Carol Mancusi-Ungaro began interviewing artists, in the presence of their works of art, recording their attitudes and feelings toward the works' conservation and exhibition. These interviews led to the establishment, with funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, of the Artists Documentation Program.



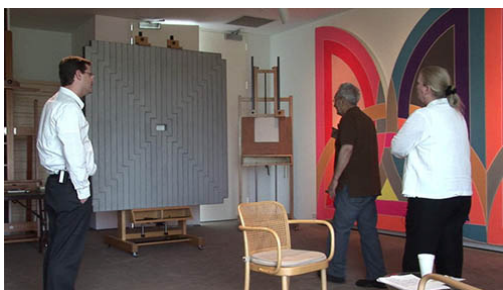
Jasper Johns and Carol Mancusi-Ungaro inspect Untitled (Green Painting), 1954, during the artist's 1996 ADP interview at the Menil Collection. Copyright 2011, Menil Foundation, Inc. All rights reserved.

Since Mancusi-Ungaro incepted the program at the museum over twenty years ago, the ADP has continued to record interviews with the goal of achieving a rare and nuanced understanding of artists' materials and working techniques—and discovering the original intentions that contributed to the creation of particular works of art—most notably those that are ephemeral, conceptual, or time-based in nature. By consulting ADP interviews with such artists as Jasper Johns, Brice Marden, and James Rosenquist, viewers can better understand the overarching preservation issues attendant to each artist's oeuvre and how to approach conservation treatments of the artists' individual works. Because interviews are conducted in the presence of works, they capture the state, at that moment in time, of the works of art under discussion.

For 21 years the growing collection of filmed interviews has continued to be a vital part of the Menil Conservation Department's work. The ADP interviews are casual and candid, filmed in the conservation studio, an exhibition gallery, or an artist's studio, often by award-winning filmmaker and video artist Laurie McDonald, who performed video editing and post-production on the full collection. While the video-recorded conversations reveal the full array of activities that went into the creation of works, they also capture artists' attitudes toward the aging of their works and identify important physical characteristics that would affect the works' preservation. In this way, ADP artists take a dynamic part in determining the what, how, and why of preservation.

The interviews were originally designed for use only by fellow conservators and scholars who visited the Houston museum, whose conservation studio is a central part of the building's design and whose focus on modern and contemporary art is highly regarded within the field. In 2001, Mancusi-Ungaro left the Menil to assume dual positions at the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Harvard Art Museums. For the next several years, she and her colleagues continued to record artist interviews at the Whitney and Harvard, while her successors at the Menil, Elizabeth Lunning and Brad Epley, recorded interviews there. The project evolved into a collaborative entity among all three institutions.

In time, scholarly demand for the interviews grew, and it became evident that they should be made more accessible to conservation scholars, educators, practitioners, and interested public. Additional grant funds from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation have assured the permanence and accessibility of the interviews by establishing a centralized ADP Archive at the Menil.



Brad Epley, Frank Stella, and Elizabeth Lunning discuss Avicenna, 1960, during the artist's 2006 ADP interview at the Menil Collection. Copyright 2011, Menil Foundation, Inc. All rights reserved.

To date, 33 interviews from the Menil, the Whitney, and Harvard—approximately 50 hours of footage—reside in the ADP Archive. All interviews have been fully transcribed and indexed at the timecode level by subject matter. Once accessible only to conservators and art historians, the archive is now available to a broader audience, who may watch, listen, and learn from some of the most notable artists of our time. This rare and remarkable resource is a veritable oral-history library where such notable artists as John Currin, John Chamberlain, Ann Hamilton, Jasper Johns, Max Neuhaus, Frank Stella, and Cy Twombly speak on camera and for the record.

To access this important collection, researchers can visit the ADP website at <http://adp.menil.org>. The bulk of the collection is presented digitally in two formats: standard—streaming video accompanied by downloadable research aids (transcripts and subject indices); and enhanced/rich media—synchronized streaming video and research aids, which allow researchers to navigate to, and share, specific video segments, and to search within or across videos for important names or keywords.

#### Excerpts from ADP interview transcripts

- Cy Twombly discusses his tendency to use paint on bronze (Cy Twombly Gallery, The Menil Collection, September 17, 2000): “You know, bronze, like marble... loves paint. It takes paint beautifully... And I understand the Greek sculptors, when they use those beautiful browns and blues... It goes in like a tattoo. It’s absorbed right in, so they’re beautiful. It’s not a surface thing... It’s just a stain that’s part of the piece.”
- Jasper Johns describes the risk involved in cleaning paintings (The Menil Collection, February 15, 1996): “I’ve cleaned a few paintings myself. A friend of mine had a painting, which was all white, and she smokes a great deal... So I took it over to my place, and I did a section of it, which scared the daylights out of me, because it was so white, and the other thing was so brown... I thought I had ruined it, because I had only done this little section... I did the whole thing, and it looked very nice.”
- Brice Marden expresses his preferences regarding natural aging of his paintings (The Menil Collection, October 1, 1992): “Maybe my tendency now is to say, ‘Leave it. Let it patinate.’ Because they are pretty funky to begin with. These aren’t pristine surfaces. They are never meant to be. They are carefully worked and everything, but they are not pristine. I mean, it has to do with the hand. You know, it’s not like spray gunned or something, where there is no hand...”
- Max Neuhaus discusses his site-specific sound installation at the Menil Collection, Sound Figure (The Menil Collection, May 2, 2008): “Although I work with sound, I don’t make music. I build entities with sound. And this entity is as much an entity as a piece of bronze sculpture, as a piece of steel sculpture, as a painting... In one sense, it’s very fragile. If you unplug it, *whsst!* It’s gone. But in the other sense, it’s more robust, because you have a document that you can always make it again. So it’s this kind of contradiction.”
- Lawrence Weiner discusses a work of his installed at the Jardin des Tuileries, Paris (Whitney Museum of American Art, January 16, 2008): “If they fix the wall, then have them repaint it on it. I don’t mind a little decay. I mean, look, you know... *C’est pas mal, mais c’est pas toi*—When you look in the mirror, it’s not bad, but it ain’t you.”
- Richard Tuttle reflects on the unique conservation challenges presented by contemporary art (Whitney Museum of American Art, January 30, 2006): “This kind of art—say my generation’s kind of art—has been very hard on the conservator, because it pushes the conservator on that one side, you know, where the art becomes visible.”

#### More about the ADP team

Brad Epley joined the Menil Collection in 1999 as assistant paintings conservator. In 2006 he was appointed chief conservator, overseeing the museum’s conservation laboratory as well as administering the Artists Documentation Program. Epley received his Masters and earned the Certificate of Advanced Study in Art Conservation at the State

University of New York College at Buffalo. His graduate internships include programs at the Denver Art Museum, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. His arrival at the Menil followed a post-graduate fellowship in painting and conservation and conservation science at Hamilton Kerr Institute at the University of Cambridge. A member of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC), the International Institute for Conservation (IIC), and the International Council of Museums (ICOM), Epley has published and lectured on a broad range of issues and projects in the field.

Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, founder of the Artist Documentation Program, is associate director for conservation and research at the Whitney Museum of American Art and founding director of the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art at the Harvard Art Museums. In 1970 she earned her Master of Arts degree from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. For 19 years she served as the chief conservator of the Menil Collection, where she founded the Artists Documentation Program in 1990. She has lectured widely on the conservation of modern art and contributed to monographs on Jasper Johns, Brice Marden, Jackson Pollock, and Mark Rothko and to the catalogue raisonné of Barnett Newman. In 2004 she received the College Art Association/Heritage Preservation Award for Distinction in Scholarship and Conservation, and in 2009 was elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the first practicing conservator to be so honored.

Heather Nodler, ADP archivist, holds a Bachelor's Degree in History and Art/Art History from Rice University and a Master's degree in Information Studies from the University of Texas at Austin. A member of the Society of American Archivists (SAA), she has managed digital media and film collections for various libraries, archives, and museums.

#### About the Harvard Art Museums

The Harvard Art Museums, among the world's leading art institutions, comprise three museums (Fogg, Busch-Reisinger, and Arthur M. Sackler) and four research centers (Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the Harvard Art Museums Archives, and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis). The Harvard Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. The collections include approximately 250,000 objects in all media, ranging in date from antiquity to the present and originating in Europe, North America, North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. Integral to Harvard University and the wider community, the art museums and research centers serve as resources for students, scholars, and other visitors. For more than a century they have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and are renowned for their seminal role in developing the discipline of art history in this country. [www.harvardartmuseums.org](http://www.harvardartmuseums.org).

In June 2008 the building at 32 Quincy Street, formerly the home of the Fogg and Busch-Reisinger museums, closed for a major renovation. During this renovation, the Sackler Museum at 485 Broadway remains open and has been reinstalled with some of the finest works representing the collections of all three museums. When complete, the renovated historic building on Quincy Street will unite the three museums in a single state-of-the-art facility designed by architect Renzo Piano.

#### Hours and Admission

Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-5pm. Closed on major holidays. Admission: \$9 adults, \$7 seniors (65 and over), \$6 college students with valid ID. Free for children under 18, members of the Harvard Art Museums, and Cambridge Public Library cardholders. Free plus one guest for Harvard University students and affiliates. For Massachusetts residents

with valid ID, free on Saturday, 10am–noon. Paid admission includes entrance to the museum, guided tours, and gallery talks. More detailed information is available at 617-495-9400 or [www.harvardartmuseums.org/visit](http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/visit).

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