

SOL LEWITT: A MERCER UNION LEGACY PROJECT

Anthony Sansotta

interviewed by **Sarah Robayo Sheridan**

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Anthony Sansotta is an expert draftsman who worked with Sol LeWitt for many years and has overseen the installation of hundred of wall drawings internationally. On the 31st anniversary of Mercer's first opening on July 10th, 1981, Sansotta and Sarah Robayo Sheridan, Mercer Union's Director of Exhibitions and Publications, discuss Sol LeWitt's life and works.

This interview has been transcribed from the audio recording by Danica Eving with additional edits by Sarah Robayo Sheridan.

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York Lethbridge: Thank you all for coming today to the official opening of Sol LeWitt: a Mercer Union Legacy Project. I'm York Lethbridge, one of the Directors here at Mercer and I'm very happy to announce that today is our official 31st birthday so thank you all for coming out...

Audience: (applause)

York Lethbridge: I would also like to thank the sponsors for the show: Bruce Bailey, Dr. Paul Marks, Robert Mitchell, Jay Smith and Partners in Art. Without them, we couldn't have made this possible, and I'd also like to direct you to our Director of Exhibitions and Publications Sarah Robayo Sheridan to lead a conversation with Anthony Sansotta, who has been very generous in coming up from New York to speak with us today.

Audience: (applause)

SRS: The first exhibition at Mercer Union opened on July 10th 1979. Anniversary projects are a difficult exercise. When I first took over as Director of Exhibitions, now two years ago, and I was scanning through the archives, I saw that this exhibition had happened, it really popped out for me, and it started me thinking about how so many different contributing artists and people were involved. It was also an occasion to make a new work, because Sol LeWitt offered a ground-breaking model of instruction-based drawing which allows for a permutation of the drawing, over time, to occur. So this show happened in 1981 and Sol LeWitt travelled to Toronto to complete the

work, and Michael Davey, who's in the audience today, was instrumental in bringing Sol LeWitt to Toronto for that process, because he had worked with LeWitt on a wall drawing in Edinburgh. So LeWitt came and worked with the crew of artists who were active at Mercer at that time. I'd like to read all the names of artists who participated in the installation in 1981: Carol Androccio, Peter Blendell, Michael Davey, Robert McNealy, Judith Schwartz, Renée Van Halm, Cheryl West and Robert Wiens, and if you take a look at the back gallery, you'll find that there are individually signed cards from LeWitt to some of the members who helped install the drawing, a gift to those artists in acknowledgement of the work that they'd done for that exhibition. So that's just a bit of context, and now, in 2010 I also need to acknowledge the new crew that was formed to execute the drawing. First and foremost is Jon Sasaki, our in-house installation technician, who can't be here today because he has his own solo show in Galway in Ireland, but we all thank Jon for his dedication to the space, and overseeing a crew then comprised of Danica Eving, Max Gatta, Eric Glavin, Jen Hutton, Chris Kennedy, York Lethbridge, Vanessa Maltese, and Liana Schmidt. I want to thank everyone who gave their time and lent encouragement for the project as it was developing. Thank you all for coming. I'd like you to join me in welcoming Anthony Sansotta, who is a long-time draftsman and artist in his own right.

Audience: (enthusiastic applause)

SRS: So I think I may just begin by talking about your history and meeting LeWitt. I understand that you first came to know Sol when you worked at the John Weber Gallery.

AS: That's correct. 1975. John used to be the director of a gallery called Virginia Dwan. Virginia was the heiress of the 3M company and she was a patroness of the arts. She established a gallery at the time (this was in the sort of late 60's) where there were earth artists, so there was people like Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson and Walter de Maria, and a host of people like that, and then there were sort of the beginnings of the conceptualists and the minimalist artists. So, she also sponsored people like Sol, Carl Andre, and various other people who were working in that manner. The federal government unfortunately closed her gallery, because there's this sort of law in America, where if you have a business and you're not profitable after five years, you can no longer stay in business because you're always getting a loss rather than a

profit. So it's a way to kind of control people who may be so rich, that they just want to have a tax loss rather than a profitable business. So that happened at a moment when John Weber was the director of her gallery, and it also happened at a moment when SoHo was just beginning. There was this building called 420 West Broadway, which was purchased by a group of gallerists: Leo Castelli, Illeana Sonnabend, André Emmerich, and Virginia Dwan. And this building was just about ready to open up, it was about 1971, and John asked Virginia if it would be okay if he kind of re-opened the gallery under his name, and with a group of the artists which Virginia had been patronizing. She said okay, and the gallery opened and got off the ground. I came into John's gallery in 1975, basically as the preparator, and I worked with artists who were within "the stable", as they were called at the time, there was Carl Andre, Robert Smithson, Mangold, Robert Ryman, Sol, and a whole host of other artists as well, so that's where I got to know Sol.

SRS: And then you started working with him around 1975?

AS: Well, I worked at the gallery for five years, and then in about 1980, he said, "Well, would you like to do wall drawings?" And I said "Sure," and so we've had a collaboration since then.

SRS: So at that juncture, was that sort of a personal decision to commit your own artistic practice towards his ideas?

AS: No, that came a little bit later. That came a little bit later. Sol, as you might know, was very prolific (laughs).

Audience: (laughter)

SRS: Yesterday at one point you noted that one of the things you were interested in was this argument that Mel Bochner makes about the exhibition of Italian frescoes that happened at the Metropolitan Museum and that this would that have been a critical exhibition for LeWitt to have witnessed? Can you explain how a study of these frescoes could have influenced his wall drawings?

Anthony Sansotta: No, I really can't do that (laughs). I mean, I would have to be in his mind...I don't know if there was a sort of direct correlation, but I'm sure that there was something that went on. I mean, Sol was not a kind of non-visual person, I mean he was very well read,

he had studied art history, he was in Italy many times before that exhibition, I mean, so he was aware of things like frescoes and so on and so forth, but what happened in New York was more or less in and around the mid 60's—after the floods in Florence there was this great effort to save the heritage of the Renaissance frescoes that were damaged in Florence, so many of them were removed by restorers and conservators, who know how to do that kind of thing but in removing them, what they did discover underneath them, which is something that was never seen, were these rather large drawings for more or less the composition, or the approximate composition, of the frescoes that were there, so these were something also that came to New York as part of this exhibition called "The Great Age of Fresco". Mel and Sol were friends at that time, so Mel was kind of conjecturing at, you know "Perhaps this was an influence on, you know, on Sol." But Sol's response, when asked if he invented this idea of wall drawing, to an interviewer, he once said, "Well, no, it was the caveman first." (laughs)

Audience: (chuckles)

AS: So. (laughs) We could sort of make a history up, but I don't know whether, unless there's some actual diary of Sol's that says, you know "Saw the great age of Frescoes..." So just remember it was the caveman first (chuckles).

SRS: I remember you mentioning that to me and my first response was, "did Mel actually write that down?" And you said "yeah, I think so. As it happens, Max Gatta emailed me that very article the next day and it's called "Why Would Anyone Want to Draw on the Wall?" [*October* 130, Fall 2009, pp. 135-140]. In it Bochner argues for the Fresco exhibition as a reference point but also for the May 1968 student riots in Paris and the political use of walls as signboards in those events.

AS: That to me is a stretch you know because in World War II there was "Doughboy Was Here," so the idea of, you know, leaving your mark on various walls or surfaces was not unknown.

SRS: Yeah. But do you think the wall as a communication relay system is in play in the work?

AS: One of the first things that Sol said about why he wanted to do wall drawings, and I mean this sort of blends in with an idea of minimalist thinking as well, was

that he wanted something that was as flat as it could be. And on one hand you have Carl Andre, who was a friend of Sol's, who decided that, well, he wanted sculpture to be as flat as it could be, so therefore he made these floor plates that are on the floor that you can walk over, that are just maybe about a centimeter thick, or 8mm thick, and that was an idea of flatness, as well as in regards to three-dimensional work. And I think Sol's use of walls was to achieve a kind of flatness in the same way, you know up until then, paintings were kind of objects, and they hung on the wall, and Sol wanted to just, use the walls.

SRS: Right. I think a current thought on it is centered on an anti-illusionistic tendency that was a breakaway from where painting had been.

AS: Well, I don't know, I mean, you have all of the abstract expressionists, you know, from the 50's onwards, even from the 40's onwards, so even before with Mondrian, there was a sort of trend against figuration. And you know actually also, Sol also looked back to the Russian constructivists as well, and the neoplasticists of, you know, the 30's in Poland, so...

SRS: Right, so there was a whole chain.

AS: Yeah, there was sort of a confluence of things.

SRS: And then, maybe returning to the discussion of the first wall drawing, at Paula Cooper Gallery, it came up in our discussion that it was an anti-war exhibition, part of a benefit for the student mobilization committee to end the war in Vietnam, and the show happened in October of 1968. So, do you see a relationship between this aesthetic program he was exploring and the political context at that time?

AS: Hm...no. (laughs).

SRS: Did you see that show?

AS: No. (more laughter) I mean, I know that Sol was anti-war, of course, I mean you know there are things that you know at some point in his career he was approached by the Nestlé company of Switzerland who wanted to commission him...and he refused. Because he didn't like Nestlé's policies, and this was particularly with regard to the scandal of the infant milk formula in Africa. And this was sort of happening maybe the year before or some-

thing like that. So, I mean, he never politicized his art, and I don't think many artists do. They still make what they make regardless of the politics.

SRS: So this an opportunity to debunk certain myths. I know that when we were talking, you corrected me on the notion that LeWitt was deeply into mathematical thinking. And one of the points that he was maybe more interested in was the logic, which led maybe to the agreement that those were the two branches of mathematics, as more theoretical, less concrete math. Can you talk a little bit about how that worked in his process, how logic seems to follow rigid structures and programs to their nth limit, elaborate all permutations and combinations that are shown in the bookworks?

AS: Yeah, well it would be just a question of simply thinking it out. And I guess a good example of it would be, there's a book in the back of «Incomplete Open Cubes». And what Sol wanted to do in that sense was create a series of structures which were based upon a cube. Now a cube has four, twelve, if it's an open cube, it has sort of like twelve legs. So he started out basically with three. Because the thinking there was that if you have three legs, you could have height, width, and depth. If you have two, you can't have an idea of the cube, because you'd only have height and width, or height and depth, or width and depth, or whatever. So you had to have three. So he started with three. And then he just sort of ran it through, and I think maybe in the Museum of Modern Art retrospective book, there's a drawing of him kind of figuring it out. You know, kind of pretty much like the blueprint that's in the back gallery there. But he ran through that in his mind logically, I mean, he ran through it as far as how many variations you can have using three where you're never repeating the configuration, and then did it with four, and then five, and then six, and then seven, and then eight, so on until eleven, and then there's no more. Because it wouldn't be incomplete. If you hit twelve, it's complete. (laughs). So that's what I was saying, that it's not anything that he worked out like a mathematician, like, solved that kind of problem, I mean, it was much more based upon rational thinking. I'm going on here... but that's the same thing with these kinds of forms, I mean, Sol remained true to the square, and as you see all of these forms are something with fits into the square in some sort of way. And I mean, basic kind of logic or rationale, that is taking the square, and the square pretty much becomes like the wall plane, so that you're going to be using corners, and since you don't really want it to be,

oh, arbitrary, in a way, or you don't want to have it be a subjective decision-making process, he then takes things like the midpoints of sides, and then he takes the point that's in the middle of that as well, so it's a quarter, you know, the quarter point. And then he just, you know sits down, and you can kind of see in those postcards how he just sort of outlines a square and then sort of indicated where these points would be, and then drew the figures. And came up with a bunch of things that would still be somewhat in a classic geometric figure tradition, because obviously they could have also been sort of very weird kind of forms, but he wanted them to be geometric forms. And geometric forms kind of rely upon particular angles. And he pretty much was working with kind of 90 and 45 and combinations thereof. 135 and etc. So, that's what's kind of happening here.

SRS: If I could get you to talk about the transposition from then until now, into different architectural spaces—I know that there's this quote from LeWitt, where he's drawing the parallel between his role and that of the architect and he's quoted as saying: "an architect doesn't go off with a shovel and dig his foundation and lay every brick. He's still an artist." Can you talk about LeWitt's interest in architecture and also how the wall drawings are made to adapt to different architectural environments? Certainly some of the works have been executed in different situations but there are also fixed parameters that make it that some drawings can't work in certain spaces.

AS: Well, I mean, the first thing that I do—I look at what the work consist of. So, in this case it was ten geometric figures, and they were on red, yellow and blue walls. And then I found out that there also was a white wall. But the title, which is also kind of the instructions for the work, just stated "Red, Yellow and Blue Walls". So my original idea was that the white wall was going to also be a yellow wall, not knowing that a white wall had existed in the first installation. So then I found that out and I corrected it and made it a white wall. So then what you've got to do is, since everything is derived from a square, you have to be able to lay out ten squares in some sort of way. We did it with the rectangle, although the rectangle kind of is an excusable form for that wall, because the rectangle is only half of the square, and it's half of the square right in the middle, so it can kind of fit on a wall that doesn't allow a square to be there, although I believe there is a square if you just draw to the corners (laughs). But it was okay to do that, I mean, there was sort of a precedent for that kind of shape existing in that kind of narrow space.

And then these walls worked out rather nicely, that, you know, three squares were able to be put on them, and this one there was only room for two, so it kind of worked out that way, and then you just had to kind of follow the work's logic in a way, so the space is going to be even on the top and the bottom, and the space is going to be even in terms of the vertical intervals as well.

SRS: And I should note that Anthony redrafted the plans for us to apply this in this space. The exhibition brochure includes both the archival position and views of the current exhibition in process, because we weren't finished installing when the brochure went to press. But you can tell that the elevation is much lower at the original Mercer St. address. And so the drawings had to be done to scale to accommodate where we are here. This was to me was an interesting way to mark our own history, and the different spaces that we've inhabited over time, especially because we're very proud of this particular space. But then also, it leads to the question of cataloguing and archiving all the information about LeWitt's work, because certainly Sol LeWitt was a very prolific artist and executed over 600 wall drawings.

AS: Try 1260 (laughs).

SRS: 1260! When I was doing my research, the first things I came across were the black and white negatives Peter McCallum had shot, which didn't tell me about the colour, only about the form. And the AGO archives did, it turned out, have Peter's colour photography, which was useful to have on file. I also made use of Susanna Singer's catalogue raisonné, but you're right, it only made reference to the primary colours and also contained an error, which was that the black that was filled in was crayon. And we knew, from all accounts and from really looking at the documentation, that it was definitely India ink.

AS: Right. And then Carol Androccio is Sol's wife. So she actually knew herself that they were not crayon.

SRS: So this is probably a difficulty in the work—if you're negotiating the fixed parameters, versus some shifts in the execution that happen over time, the question is how to best preserve and exemplify best practices in a wall drawing?

AS: Well, again, you know, first to refer to how the forms were made, so that's always referring to the square. And

then you refer to the material. And, you know, rightly so, these were ink drawings and not crayon drawings. And then as far as the colours of the walls are concerned, we refer to colours that are more or less within the primary range. So it's not sort of a powder blue or it's not kind of a deep cobalt blue, it's a blue that's fairly intense, but not dark. So, there's notes on all of that kind of thing. I mean there's a kind of a general standardization. You know. I will say that what Sofia, Sol's daughter, and I both thought was interesting as far as this re-installation was concerned was that we said, "Okay, go back to ink." Because Sol used an ink that was a light-fast pigmented ink, made by the Pelican company. And they stopped manufacture of that about 15 years ago or so. And we had to come up with another material, that was going to somewhat give the appearance of ink, but was not. Pelican still makes a kind of coloured ink, but it's not light-fast, it's a dye kind of ink. So installations just change colour in a matter of weeks. And the pigmented ink did not do that. So what we use now is a very dilute version, dilute solution of Lascaux acrylic paint, that's mixed in a particular way, with a gloss medium and water to kind of reflect what ink does, and still retain transparency. But when this project came up, Sofia and I said, "Well... they still make black India ink, so let's just go back to its historical form."

SRS: And this time it's Speedball India ink.

AS: Well, Speedball. Whatever. India ink is India ink (laughs).

SRS: Yeah. But just a question of over time, when certain materials or even tones are discontinued or changed, there's kind of an evolution of material of what's available on the market for artist's materials. I think the drafting supplies are much harder to access even though that was a really common part of even my education.

AS: Yes, I went to Woolfit's this morning (laughs). I said "Do you have pencil leads?" "Oh yeah, oh but we only have H and 2H" (laughs). And only two leads per little box (laughs). Okay, thank you. Yes, I think that's a problem in general for contemporary art, and certainly it's a problem for older art as well, you know, when you want to try to duplicate either the colour within a fresco or the colour within a Caravaggio, or within a Picasso, or within, you know, a Monet, or whoever, Delacroix, it's still a problem. You know, I mean, with those materials from the 18th century or even before, are just not manufactured in

quite the way that they were. For instance, fresco painting happens to use a calcium carbonate solution which is a slaked lime and slaked lime basically means that it's a kind of seasoned lime mixture that comes from in and around Naples, because some of best calcium carbonate was produced by Vesuvius. And they're running out of it (laughs). Of course this is, you know, eight centuries later, but (laughs). So it's just a general kind of problem. I suppose that conservators will kind of address that, you know, in the future. I know that when you get to things like some of Picasso's works where he worked with a lot of found objects and things, sculptures and things like that, that there's this sort of thinking that, you know, how do you get that right tin can? Or something like that, I mean. But I think that's a conservator's problem.

SRS: Right, yeah.

AS: What we're doing is trying to create a kind of depository of materials. And in fact before coming up here, I called up this company called Faber-Castell, which is a German pencil manufacturer, and they've been in business since, like, 1761, so hopefully they'll continue (laughs). And I asked to make a special order of 2mm colour pencils leads.

SRS: So you have a warehouse for these?

AS: And then they'll be warehoused, yeah. We'll buy, like, 80,000 of them because it's a minimum order, but it should last for about 25 years.

SRS: That should help them stay in business (both laugh).

AS: So it's sort of things like that, I mean, in terms of at least being able to do Sol's work for the next 50 years.

SRS: Right. I was re-reading Paragraphs on Conceptual Art, and the one thing I was stumbling over was when he makes reference to the execution of the drawings as perfunctory. I understand his whole focus on the idea being the thing of import that you're carrying forward, but then it also seems to me that he IS very invested in material, and the analysis of different working materials. I understand that he had a graphic design background, and a good understanding of certain technologies and processes, like the printing press. With his colour palette—the four colours being derived from the four plate process of offset printing, I'm wondering about the interplay between

his extreme valuation of the idea and instructions, versus the precision of the hand, of the tactile component of the work that you can't ignore.

AS: Right. Well, first and foremost Sol was a visual artist. So therefore, you need a result. So he's not just someone who's going to, you know, write things down. And I think that he basically meant by its being perfunctory was that it wasn't the primal thing—the execution of the work, or the realization of the work. I think it was a way of kind of making the work less of an object and keeping it in the realm of the ephemeral. And I think that, as we have here, a second installation of the same idea. You can see how the first installation was not THE installation or the core installation or the definitive installation, nor will the third one be. So I think that's what he's kind of getting at when he said that the execution was a perfunctory affair. Because as long as one is being true to the idea being constant, that's it. So. Did that help?

SRS: Yes. I think another thing that helps is the utility of the analogy of...

AS: ...music.

SRS: Of music yeah, and composition.

AS: So I mean, it's the same thing, I mean, I think a composer probably hears it all inside, and either hears it in a very sort of real and kind of tactile way, inside the brain, or hears it in a kind of intuitive sort of way. And I think that Sol's process then, I think Sol is not alone. I think many artists work in that way as well, they kind of see it somewhere inside, and bring it out. And Sol, he's not one for writing, so he's not jotting down the idea, just in words. As you see from the blueprint, he actually is visually thinking it.

SRS: Right. Actually, this brings me to another question. In the back gallery, there's a foldout for an exhibition, where there's a written proposal for Cologne. It's just sort of his annotation in a verbal form of what the form of drawing would be. Can you describe some of the different ways the drawing are communicated?

AS: Well, some drawings can just have a verbal description. You know, if I said, "within a circle of a three meter diameter, draw 10,000 straight lines." You don't need to know what that would look like, and Sol didn't need to know what it would look like either. So it's kind of some-

thing that gets made as it's being made. But as long as you've satisfied the three millimeter diameter—I mean the three meter diameter—and the ten thousand line factor...

SRS: ...You're good to go!

AS: You're good to go (laughs). But you know I mean in that sense, people often refer to Sol as being democratic, because the artist's ego and the artist's hand is really being taken out of the equation in terms of the art making. And somebody else is being sort of put in that place. So as long as the idea is understood and satisfied, then it's the correct work. It's like music at the end, you know, there will be four or five different pianists that can interpret a Beethoven sonata. It's always the same Sonata, but it's always sounding a bit different.

SRS: And you were saying that Sol truly had a real devotion to classical music. And can you talk about his indexing of his music collection?

AS: The obsessiveness of his indexing? (laughs) Well, Sol used to just record music constantly. What he was listening to, and I think it was in a way a kind of diaristic activity recording what went on during the day, or between certain hours, because many times he would record from the radio and he wouldn't stop when there was a news announcement, or when the radio announcer was giving you the time, or whatever, and he had the record of what the work was, who was playing it, etc., etc. So it's a kind of real time, almost like a reality recording. But at a certain point Sol decided that, well, all of this stuff needed to be cataloged. So not only are the cassettes numbered, chronologically, not by date, just like by one, two, three, and up to something like two thousand and something, so, then they're also written down as to what's on them, both side A and side B, and then what he did was create another index where everything was sort of cross-referenced in terms of the artist. So you'd have one book, which is the composer and the work itself, with also a list as to many different recordings of the same work, and then, which cassette number they're on, but then you also have an artistic reference as well, so if Leontyne Price is singing several different arias, you have where you can find those as well. It's a way of organization (laughs).

SRS: So, certainly the database that records the wall drawings must be far more complex.

AS: Well, the list of provenance, perhaps, you know, because certain drawings were done more than once. Others were only done once and never done again. This one, I mean, after almost thirty years, is finally being re-done.

SRS: Right, it hadn't been exhibited in between.

AS: Uh huh, but if you hadn't had this idea to, you know, do the Mercer Union legacy, who knows when it would have been done.

SRS: I'm interested of your role as oral historian for the work but also as a teacher helping to preserve his legacy. You knew him personally over time, and there is a certain development of a pool of people who hold this very detailed expertise. And one of things you mentioned is the preservation exercise that is consistent with what conservators have to deal with in terms artworks—each has its own idiosyncrasies. I know that there's been discussion of releasing a kind of «cookbook» that would lay out the parameters for the execution of the drawings...

AS: Oh, well we can't really talk about that (laughs). It would be better to have a cookbook here, yeah. I don't know, does anybody know this Kay Spicer? [pulls out a used cookbook] It's "From Mom with Love" and Kay Spicer happens to be a well-known Canadian cookbook author (audience laughter). Does anybody know her? Or know of her? Is it true?

Audience member Andrew J. Paterson: Kay Spider? (?)

AS: Kay Spicer.

Andrew J. Paterson: No, there used to be a Kay Quick-spider (?) who was a well-known art critic in the 70's or something.

AS: Well, this is someone who's been working in food marketing and communications since 1953.

Audience: (laughter)

AS: (laughs)

SRS: Um, so maybe you want to...

AS: That's just a joke (laughs).

SRS: You've been working on these drawings over your lifetime they will continue to occur throughout the history of time. For example, there's the Mass MoCA 25-year retrospective that opened after Sol's death.

AS: But it's something he acted on, a year before, I mean, for a few years before.

SRS: Definitely, yeah. But the question is, the survival of the ideas because, you know, on basically it should be possible to execute these always if the parameters are well enough recorded but, I am interested in the precise knowledge of the people who install the drawings over time obtain materially—for example some of them are more specialized in the pencil drawings, others in the ink applications, so I just want to have you talk about those installers.

AS: Well, there are kind of assistants who came into kind of like the studio atmosphere although Sol did not keep a studio for assistants who were involved in the production of his wall drawings, but they did come into kind of the studio system in a way, but they came in at different times. So therefore, some of them came in when Sol was no longer interested in doing the earlier pencil drawings. And they came in at a time from 2005 when he was doing something called Scribble Drawings, where the scribbling was sort of gradation from light to dark. So there's people who came in when his involvement was no longer with ink drawings, but with acrylic. So they developed expertise with that material, but not with others. So gradually, they're getting integrated, although it also was an individual temperament thing as well, not everybody can have the patience or the inclination to do certain kinds of drawings as opposed to other ones, it's sort of like that. I mean, eventually I think it's not particularly secret in its technical aspect, so it's fairly straightforward and elementary. So I think that there will always be some kind of person around that is going to be able to do it. And of course, there's many times now, with work that has been done in the 20th century, there's reconstructions. So they'll do things like Lissitzky's Proun Room because there's documentation about it, it's not Lissitzky doing it himself, but there's documentation for it. Or Mondrian's New York Studio. They'll reconstruct it. Even in Bologna there's a Morandi museum where they've reconstructed his bedroom and studio, which was within one room. So, I mean, I think that there will always be somebody who can kind of do that. And if not... (laughs) I'm not here, you're not here, they're not here... who cares? (laughs) I

mean I don't know whether the Pharaohs object to the way that Pyramids are built today. I'm sure the Roman Emperors don't resent where the Parthenon was today because it's not covered in marble anymore. Or the Colosseum, I mean... You gotta be careful about how we think of ourselves.

SRS: Well, I think I've had a good run of asking you questions for the past two days and I want to give everybody else a chance. And to save my voice now, you can all pose questions directly to Anthony (coughs).

AS: (whispers) Have some water.

SRS: Thank you.

AS: I was trying to get her to gargle with brandy (laughs), but there is not a brandy sponsor for the Mercer Union. Can anybody help them out?

SRS: Any questions for Anthony?

Kate MacKay: I was just wondering about... you mentioned that determining the colour, that you sort of had a basic primary colour, and I was wondering if there was any recording of, like, specific pigments?

AS: Oh, this is just regular house paint. And I believe we used Benjamin Moore...

SRS: that's right, we followed the codes exactly.

AS: ...So Benjamin Moore is basically, as far as North America is concerned, is a pretty standard kind of company. Although now, with new environmental laws, you may not be able to always get the same product in all different parts of North America. I know California, for instance, has some very stringent laws about what can go into a kind of paint. Simply because they don't want anything dispersed in the atmosphere.

Kate MacKay: So would they be the same codes that were used in the original installation?

AS: No, there was no definition at the beginning. I mean Sol, and I don't know if Steve can confirm this or not, but...

Michael Davey [member of Mercer Union who participated in the 1981 install]: Yeah, when we got the Benja-

min Moore paints, he basically gave us a serial number.

AS: He did?

Michael Davey: Yeah, and that's how we got everything. And Benjamin Moore was next to us, and because Mercer Union was such a good customer and good downtown artist-run centre, they basically gave us the paints for free.

AS: Uh huh.

Michael Davey: And it was, like, 350 dollars worth of--

AS: Paint.

Michael Davey: Yeah, standard. Sol us that "I want this number, put that number in and give it to Benjamin Moore", and they gave us the paint that way. It was like a three digit. It was a standard product which is the stuff you work with, it's mixed up to industrial standards, and that was a totally great thing, the project was made possible, really, being all the primary colours on the walls, for that amount. And really, I'm not sure, but I think we got India ink. Maybe Jaan Poldas got it, and I'm not sure, but I think Jaan got it through one of the art stores that was on Spadina Avenue, as well was a donation, so all the products was basically given.

AS: Uh huh. Sponsors.

Michael Davey: But the india ink I don't know what it was.

AS: It could have been Higgins or it could have been anything at the time. A big giant bottle. Like a liter. A liter of ink.

SRS: How closely were you looking at the chemistry of these materials? Because of the coding over time, you could look at the chemical composition, do you keep track of like that?

AS: N... no. You know, and actually I'm surprised that Sol had the colour codes, because in the past, he used to say, "Well, it doesn't have to be any specific red, yellow and blue, but it has to kind of what you think is going to be the primary." So maybe it was because he had done some work already in house paint, that he had the codes. But, I mean if I went to Paris, I'd have to try to figure

out, from what's available in France, what would be their equivalent of what would be a primary red, yellow and blue. Or England, or Italy, or wherever else we happen to be.

Michael Davey: Well I guess you could accumulate various paint chips in various places doing projects in various museums. You probably could take stock.

AS: Find something equivalent. I mean, Sol wasn't so much of a stickler as far as that goes. We sort of standardized things for him, later on. Back in the kind of early 80's, he kind of more or less stopped doing wall drawings personally, simply because he was married, his children were coming, and he liked to be at home, he liked to be with his children, with his wife, so he didn't do so much travelling. So, another assistant of his, Joe Watanabe, and myself, more or less went around and did most of his projects at that point. And it was very easy for Sol to sort of relegate to the both of us, just to go here and there, and it kept him at home.

SRS: Next question?

Andrew J. Paterson: Um, yeah. You mentioned earlier Sol's affinity with classical music. I wonder, did he dislike jazz?

AS: Uh, no he didn't really dislike other forms of music.

Andrew J. Paterson: Okay, just thinking in terms of...

AS: No, that he preferred classical. He preferred classical music.

Andrew J. Paterson: Because it was more ordered?

AS: Well, I don't know. I mean, he also like the a-tonal school of Vienna, and I mean... He liked a lot of different... Phil Glass, Steve Reich...

Andrew J. Paterson: That's ordered.

AS: It's ordered music, yes, I mean, so is jazz (laughs). I mean, it's not freeform, it always comes back.

Andrew J. Paterson: Yes and no.

AS: So, therefore...It just was his preference. He liked to read mystery stories.

Andrew J. Paterson: Oh. That's ordered.

AS: And, he liked to read historical books. I don't know whether that had to do with order or not. He liked Mozart, Bach... well, and I think that was also because you know, what Bach did was themes and variations. And Sol was a great person for doing that. You know, you go through his entire career, and you always find lines in four directions, in many manifestations. And I think the affinity he had with Bach was also Bach being able to do the same thing. So, transposing things from vocal, to violin, to harpsichord, to toccata, to, whatever.

SRS: A question over here?

Unidentified woman: Yeah, you talked about logic, and shape and colour... I was just wondering where aesthetics came into or comes into his work. At what point or at what level would you talk about it?

AS: You know, I don't know whether artists really think that? I mean, I think that's something that's intuitive that comes to an artist in that way. I mean, I don't think artists make a sort of set of rules, and follow them, meaning, always this colour.

Unidentified woman: Maybe I'm not phrasing it right.

AS: Yeah... want to try again?

Unidentified woman: Well, it's beautiful, and...

AS: Well, that's because he's an artist, that's what I'm trying to say.

Unidentified woman: Well, but at some point, he's making choices...

AS: I don't know if I can say he's making choices that have rules. I mean, because aesthetics to me implies a sort of system.

Unidentified woman: Ah, I think we have a different definition, okay.

AS: Okay, so I mean, I think yes, he's making choices in the way that if it's a Matisse painting, he's making, he makes a choice if it's that kind of purple against that kind of green, but that's the artist's part.

Unidentified woman: Yeah, I understand. Okay...

SRS: Another question?

James Carl: Yeah, I might pick up from that, I think that there's something self-evident, I guess, is how I would describe it, the sorts of decisions that are being made here, the work kind of reveals itself as a series of decisions that we have access to as viewers. And I don't have an encyclopedic knowledge of the drawings, but I do know that there were a couple sort of major transitions to that more tertiary palette, that I guess happens in the early 80's, then the more free-flowing, the work of the 90's. And it's that middle step, that sort of tertiary, purple palette where self-evidence of the decisions is almost completely lost.

AS: That's because there is none.

James Carl: Yeah. So what happened there? My question is, you were there, I was wondering if you could tell us what was going on there?

AS: Basically, Sol always worked with four colours. Plus white and black. So you always had grey, red, yellow and blue. When he did work that was involving transparent layers of ink, the initial work involving colour inks, everything always remained black, white, grey, red, yellow, and blue, and it was never mixed over. By extension, and we really should have some supporting visual material.

SRS: Yeah, I can grab the schematic.

AS: The retrospective book? Yeah. Or even the modern one is fine. So, for instance, when he first did colour pencil drawings of lines in four directions, black was generally always the vertical, yellow was the horizontal, red was the diagonal from the lower left to the upper right, and blue was the diagonal from the lower right to the upper left at forty five degrees. Then, he decided that, well, these could be sort of combined. Because again he was making his own system. So you had things happening in double combinations. So vertical got added to the others—vertical/horizontal, vertical/diagonal lower left to upper right and vertical/diagonal lower right to upper left, etc. Then there were triple combinations. And that was vertical, horizontal and one diagonal, etc. Then, they got to be thought of also in terms of colour. So you have something like this happening (book rustles) where, not only are the line directions getting combined, but when

the line directions also happen to be in a colour, then the colours are getting combined. So here you have a perfect example of it happening in just black, so you get a kind of tonal development. And then here you have not only a sort of chromatic development, but also you have a kind of tonal development as well, just by adding more colour. Similar to like, this is all single line directions, this is them being superimposed progressively, so you have a one tone, a two tone, a three tone and a four tone. So when he started to work with transparent layers and planes, he's still basically using the same four colours. But chromatically, now this is still with lines, but chromatically they start to change. When he started to use the kind of inking system, and let's see if I can find anything like that...quickly...here...you know, these were the first drawings that were done in colour ink, this is one of the first drawings that was done in tones of grey.

SRS: We have that in our archives, actually.

AS: But if you look at this... and then look at this... this is superimposed progressively... and this is colour ink superimposed progressively. So the background is grey, this front plane is grey and yellow, this top plane is grey, yellow, red, and this side plane is grey, yellow, red, blue. Okay? So this is again a sort of rational, logical way of combining these colours. Pretty much the way that this is as well. Okay. So then, because he can do what he wants, as anybody can do what they want, he sort of decides that, you know, he can make combinations as he wants. And he doesn't necessarily have to know what that colour's going to be, but he knows that it's not going to be red, or it's not going to be blue, or it's not going to be yellow, or orange, or green, or whatever, but he doesn't exactly know what is the exact colour, you know. And, most of the times, what we had was something like this... and this might be a little bit difficult to see, but you have kind of colour indications, so you have something like this, this is YBG, and that meant that within the sort of technical process, there was three layers of each colour. So there were three layers to make one Y, three layers to make one B and three layers to make one G, or grey. Sometimes they were doubled up. So here you had three layers of grey, with two Rs, which meant that you had six layers of red. And of course the grey and the red and the yellow and the blue were done according to a particular formula, so that it wouldn't be a sort of bright red like this, or a bright blue, or whatever, there was a regular formula for that, which he decided upon. But the result is something like this...so when you see this grey red red,

that's actually...uh...which one was it?...(sighs). I can't find it.

SRS: Was it this one?

AS: Uh, no it's not that one.

Kate MacKay: So how are each of those layers applied?

AS: With cloths. With rags.

Kate MacKay: And then you wait for each layer to dry?

AS: You wait for each layer to dry, yeah.

Kate MacKay: And how long does that take?

AS: Depends on the atmosphere. Sometimes ten minutes, sometimes twenty? Doesn't take long.

SRS: Sometimes he had the same colour happening twice? Like the blue colour?

AS: Yeah, that doesn't matter. You know, he wasn't one to make each one different, right? You know? So that doesn't matter. You know, it's kind of like going back to a sort of musical analogy, you only work with a certain number of notes. And it's just as dependent on how you combine them that you make the melody. And I think that's sort of similar thinking.

SRS: Are there any more questions for Anthony before we wrap up?

Michael Davey: Did you see any of the other works that he was not able to realize... is there anything that you're really looking forward to being able to execute as drawings? Is there anything?

AS: There's really none of that, unfortunately... because he's no longer here.

Michael Davey: Okay, I just thought the...

AS: Uh, there was a series of scribble drawings that, kind of in the last year of Sol's life he was very sort of preoccupied with. In part, it was about all that he was able to do, because he was really debilitated by his illness. So he couldn't sort of work the way you know him to have worked—because you had the experience of working

with him—he was really unstoppable (laughs). He just went on and on and on and on. So there were a number of maquettes which were made of these scribble drawings, which received his approval. Generally, he did work that way. When Sol was presented with a space, or the opportunity for an exhibition, he always just came up with something new. He never thought about doing something before it was going to be done by a long-term project or something like that. He never made sketches until the project was kind of presented to him. So he wasn't one artist who kind of worked in that way from a sort of imaginary world of possibilities. So, he knew that this work of scribbling was important to him, so he kind of resigned himself to the fact that he wasn't going to live long enough to be able to see all of them done, as he had wanted to. So he did make them as maquettes. So those are the only works that are being done posthumously.

Michael Davey: Were there works that he did in Spoleto and he had...that were wall drawings that he did on his own? Someone talked about—I remember reading somewhere that he had worked on the walls and that he was... this was the last work he was actually able to do, he was actually working on the wall drawings. You probably know.

AS: Well, I think probably when you're referring to Spoleto it probably was the last kind of active wall drawing participation that he did. I mean, after about 1982, he really didn't do what he had been doing before. You know, as I said, after he got married, his eldest daughter, Sofia, was born in 1983, so at that point he stopped sort of travelling the way that he normally, you know, travelled in order to do his wall drawings. But that was myself and Joe, among others at the time, giving him the sort of freedom to do that. He no longer had to go himself, because he had a group of assistants and collaborators that he could trust to carry out his work.

Michael Davey: Yeah, I guess it stopped being desirable.

AS: But in Spoleto, there were no wall drawings in his home. But in this place called the Torre Vecchio, which was a place which was owned by Marilena Bonomo that she kind of had as an exhibition space. And I'm trying to see if there's... pictures of those. Here. There was a small room—you can look at this later, because they're really too small, but they're location drawings that he did in and around this kind of fireplace that was in this, um...

Michael Davey: Was that Spoleto?

AS: That was in Spoleto. But it was in a kind of building which was used as a gallery that was owned by Marilena Bonomo. And then these here...because Marilena also had a family property there, so these were arc, circle and grid drawings that were done at this other home that she has there. And then I'll see if I can find...there was one more, because he spent a lot of time in Spoleto, so... and Marilena was always very generous and wanting him to do exhibitions. And she did have a wall space, so he gladly did it. No...I guess they're not in this book, sorry.

SRS: Well, maybe we should just wrap up the session so you can have a chance to engage Anthony one-on-one.

AS: All that this is the kind of scheme for incomplete open cubes...

SRS: You have a chance to look at that book in the back gallery.

AS: So I mean, here you can see that in his mind there were only three variations that would not duplicate themselves when you just had three legs. And then there was of course only one with eleven (laughs). So...

SRS: Well, thank so much, Anthony...

AS: You're welcome, thank you guys!

Audience: (loud applause, crowd noises)

AS: Good old Kay Spicer!

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