



**Artists Documentation Program
Video Interview Transcript**

**ANN HAMILTON
JULY 30, 2007**

**Interviewed by:
Carol Mancusi-Ungaro,
Founding Director, Artists Documentation Program,
Associate Director for Conservation and Research,
Whitney Museum of American Art;
with Joan Simon, Curator-at-Large, Whitney Museum of American Art**

**Video: Ronald Bronstein | Total Run Time: 01:01:55
Location: Storage Facility, Whitney Museum of American Art**

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This interview is part of the Artists Documentation Program, a collaboration of the Menil Collection, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, Harvard Art Museums.

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About the Artists Documentation Program

Throughout the twentieth century, artists experimented with an unprecedented range of new materials and technologies. The conceptual concerns underlying much of contemporary art render its conservation more complex than simply arresting physical change. As such, the artist's voice is essential to future conservation and presentation of his or her work.

In 1990, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded a grant to the Menil Collection for Ms. Mancusi-Ungaro, then Chief Conservator, to establish the ADP. Since that time, the ADP has recorded living artists speaking candidly with conservators in front of their works. These engaging and informative interviews capture artists' attitudes toward the aging of their art and those aspects of its preservation that are of paramount importance to them.

The program has recorded 33 video interviews to date, with such important artists as Frank Stella, Jasper Johns, and Cy Twombly. Originally designed for use by conservators and scholars at the Menil, the ADP has begun to appeal to a broader audience outside the Menil, and the collection has grown to include interviews from two partner institutions: the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, Harvard Art Museums.

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ADP Archive
Menil Archives, The Menil Collection
1511 Branard Street
Houston, TX 77006
adparchive@menil.org

Ann Hamilton Interview Transcript, Artists Documentation Program, Whitney Museum of American Art, 07/30/2007

Video: adp2007a_hamilton_edmast_a.mp4 / Interview #: VI2000-020.2007a / TRT: 01:01:55

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[Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, Director, Artists Documentation Program, Founding Director, Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, Harvard Art Museums, Associate Director for Conservation and Research, Whitney Museum of American Art; Ann Hamilton, Artist; Joan Simon, Curator-at-Large, Whitney Museum of American Art]

[BEGIN RECORDING]

[00:00:42x]

CM-U: Today is July 30, 2007, and we are here with Ann Hamilton to discuss her piece, (*accountings*) • *vitrine*, 1992. We're in Bulwark, our storage place at the Whitney, and we're very happy to be together, with Joan Simon as well.

[00:01:00]

CM-U: Seventeen boxes, just wrapped like this, and when we unwrapped them is when we saw some of the damaged parts, but let's start with talking about the piece, and the date, and the title, and so on. My understanding is that it's "accountings dot vitrine, 1992."

Ann Hamilton: Um-hum.

CM-U: Is that right?

Ann Hamilton: Um-hum.

CM-U: Okay. And it was first shown at Henry?

Ann Hamilton: It was at the – this one was – yeah, at the Henry.

CM-U: Henry Art Gallery?

Ann Hamilton: Um-hum.

CM-U: In Seattle?

Ann Hamilton: Um-hum.

CM-U: And you took over the entire couple of rooms?

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Ann Hamilton: It was right before they were getting ready to renovate.

CM-U: Ahh.

Ann Hamilton: So it was great time, because the building wasn't precious . And so they gave me the whole building, which had one, two, three, four, five, six rooms. And we didn't use the front room. The front two. We used the main room, two side rooms, and a back room.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: And then built sort of steel doors that went in with the architecture, and had two hundred – two hundred? – two hundred free-flying canaries all through the space.

CM-U: So are the – the walls that where it had the soot – candle, on them.

Ann Hamilton: Um-hum.

CM-U: And the three vitrines.

Ann Hamilton: Right.

CM-U: And the canaries. And the tags. The metal tags on the floor.

Ann Hamilton: Um-hum.

CM-U: That's all part of the piece?

Ann Hamilton: That's all part of it. And then there was also one of the things we...

Joan Simon: All part of the installation.

CM-U: All part of the installation.

Ann Hamilton: Part of the installation. Not part of this. This comes from this installation.

CM-U: Oh, okay. So we're making a distinction then.

Ann Hamilton: The – so the way things are titled, it says "accountings dot vitrine.". And I can't – is *accountings* in... (holds up fingers in shape of parentheses)

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Joan Simon: I'll go look in the book to see if it's in the book.

Ann Hamilton: Because what I tried to do is distinguish the installation...

Joan Simon: I think it's...

Ann Hamilton: ...which is a piece that in fact doesn't exist. But it's how the relations were originally placed, from those things that step forward in time and have a material object life outside of the...

CM-U: Yeah, I see.

Ann Hamilton: ...the context of the installation. So those things that bore, or bear, were bearing on the decisions of how the installation came to form, which were architectural in time and place. It was from that experience that you sort of decide what can survive in some way. I mean, unless I had a storage facility like this...

CM-U: Right. Right.

Ann Hamilton: ...it – things are not really kept. Especially then. So in the installation at the Henry, what we did was, we – one of the first acts of the piece was actually to uncover all the skylights.

CM-U: I saw a photo of that.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah. And so – 'cause normally I would set those – Beaux-Arts skylights are either really dirty, or covered over, you know, to control the light. And so the first thing was to not only open the light but take down all the artificial light. And that had a whole lot to do with the atmosphere of being in there. So there was no artificial light. I mean, we took down – we didn't just not turn them on. We took it down.

CM-U: Right. Just clean – cleaned it...

Ann Hamilton: And we cleaned the space out. So it was like emptying the space out.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: So that meant that the experience of being in the space with the free-flying canaries was one where you were in the natural light. And it was winter. So that kind of purple, northwestern light...

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: ...came in, and your eyes adjusted.

[00:04:29]

Ann Hamilton: And so then all of the walls could be soot-licked. Again, because they were getting ready to renovate. And so they were going to strip all the surfaces of the walls. So they turned off the fire equipment.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: Sensing equipment. And we spent – I do have process shots that I could...

CM-U: Oh I would _____ [phrase inaudible].

Ann Hamilton: ...I didn't – I came from L.A., so I didn't bring material with me, but you know, of standing all day. And so we had somebody – actually a friend in Ohio – had donated a huge shipment of candles, long tapers. And we burned them so that you held the two candles tip to tip, so it created a larger flame. And as you stood, like we stood really close to the wall like this, and the flame sort of licking up; and, depending on the air currents in your own breath and – your own breathing, really – it's like, it determined the pattern that it licked up. And so we had a whole crew of people, and we were just, like, listening to this wonderful music, and like, soot licking the whole wall. So the, you know, carbon sort of licks up.

CM-U: Yeah.

Ann Hamilton: And the pattern of it shifts all over the building, depending on whose hand it is.

CM-U: Yeah. I understand _____ [phrase inaudible]

Ann Hamilton: Well, and sort of the presence of that. Yeah.

- CM-U: No. I just read the description, but I didn't understand it until I saw you doing it with the (makes hand gesture).
- Ann Hamilton: With the – yeah.
- CM-U: With your breathing.
- Ann Hamilton: Yeah, it really is one of those processes where you become very aware of – like just being very present. It's – you know, you are always looking for this excuse to be slow because your life is totally frenetic.
- CM-U: Yeah.
- Ann Hamilton: And so then you are working really hard. You're saying, "I'm still working, but I'm being very quiet."
- CM-U: _____ [word inaudible] slowing down.
- Ann Hamilton: Yeah.
- CM-U: So that was the installation?
- Ann Hamilton: So that was the installation.
- Joan Simon: And the answer is...
- Ann Hamilton: Yes?
- Joan Simon: ...the title is "parentheses-accountings-bullet-vitrine-parentheses." Ann, you can explain why the parenthetical...
- Ann Hamilton: Yeah, that's a good idea. Ah, partly it's that everything is a vocabulary. And so things can shift around in different ways. And as I started to see, and Joan started to see, really, recognize how that was happening, I needed a way or a system of distinguishing the relationship of something that comes forward and has a life separate from the installation – from the installation. I still wanted it to carry the same title. I didn't want them to be retitled. So it has the original title of the installation, which was "*Accountings*." And then it's in parentheses. And so the parentheses indicates that it – it's – it comes forward out of the larger environment.

CM-U: Yeah.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah. And then the dot-bullet-vitrine is indicating what part of the original installation is coming forward, and just naming it as an object.

CM-U: Okay.

Ann Hamilton: So it might be, in another case, bullet-video, or, bullet-table, or clock, or something.

CM-U: Okay.

Ann Hamilton: Okay?

CM-U: That makes sense.

[00:07:36]

CM-U: So what does that mean, or we will get to talk about that, what does that mean, then, for a reinstallation of this piece, (*accountings*) ● *vitrine* at the Whitney? Does that mean we would – what would the piece consist of? The heads? The vitrines?

Ann Hamilton: Yeah, I think – well, there are two discussions really. I think that this would be installed as the vitrines with the heads stacked in it.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: And it could also be installed with the soot licked-wall...

CM-U: Okay.

Ann Hamilton: ...that the dimensions of which could be variable, depending on the situation that it is going into.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: So...

CM-U: So this...

Ann Hamilton: ...the intention of the relationship is partly that it's – that the one provides almost like a landscape of marks of consumption, if you think of the oxygen being absorbed...

CM-U: Hmm.

Ann Hamilton: ...eaten.

CM-U: Yeah.

Joan Simon: To be clear, the object that's given by Ginny Williams to the [Whitney] museum...

Ann Hamilton: Yeah.

Joan Simon: ...is the vitrine and the heads.

CM-U: Okay. But when we install it, if we were looking for installation instructions...

Joan Simon: You would be...

Ann Hamilton: It exists...

CM-U: Yeah.

Ann Hamilton: ...totally by itself.

Joan Simon: Right. That's what you would be looking at at the outset.

CM-U: Okay. So it doesn't have to have its own room, but...

Joan Simon: (shakes head)

Ann Hamilton: No, no, it should.

CM-U: Oh, it should?

Ann Hamilton: Well, you know, this is something I am still working out.

CM-U: Yes. Right.

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Ann Hamilton: I'm very interested – it's not an installation.

CM-U: Okay.

Ann Hamilton: It's now come forward as an object. It needs to have an object life. It needs to exist in relation to other things. Originally it had the relationships which were determined by the config [sounds like], the installation. Now it comes forward differently. And I just went through a process at SFMOMA with remaking and installing the two really very objects from a project called *Indigo Blue* [1991, Site-specific installation created for Spoleto Festival, Charleston, SC, Recreated for SFMOMA in 2007].

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: And went through this long conversation about this very thing. About, "Does it sit in its own room? And is it an installation? Or does it sit as in the collection in a different way?" And I didn't want it installed in its own room.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: I really felt like – it started to speak to trying to recreate something you can't recreate.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: You can't recreate the atmosphere...

CM-U: Yeah.

Ann Hamilton: ...the light, the temperature, all of those things that were part of what it was, even though they were kind of intangible. And that it is much better, I think, for the work to come forward as an object and sit in relation to other things in the collection. And that's what we did in San Francisco with this really quite enormous piece. And I think that that feels right to me.

CM-U: It's really historical, isn't it? I mean, if I think about it...

Ann Hamilton: Yeah.

CM-U: ...over time, that's what's happened to artworks that come down to us. Many of them were conceived...

Ann Hamilton: They had...

CM-U: ...commissioned, or conceived in a certain space.

Ann Hamilton: Right. Right. And then they leave that space...

CM-U: That space.

Ann Hamilton: ...and I think that's also part of, you know, what's in this book, and in the discussion behind this, which is a long, many-year discussion. It's partly what are those things that come forward and can have their own life? And what are those things that are so much about the contingencies of that time and place that they – they can't really come forward. But the other part of it is, how do I work with you, work with whomever, to also build into it a kind of flexibility or responsiveness...

CM-U: Yeah, yeah. Keep it alive [sounds like].

Ann Hamilton: ...to what this context is, and how can it be here now? Like in the sense of – it shifts. Things – things shift how they can sit." And it's like, "What are the parameters of that, and how do we establish what that is."

CM-U: It's hard, isn't it?

Ann Hamilton: So that – yeah. So given, it's like how these heads get arranged in the vitrine. Like, I would never look at a photograph of how the vitrine was and say, "We're gonna remake that exactly." It's more, "What's the sensibility that gets conveyed, or passed on it so that it sits – it's how it needs to be, but it's not because you are trying to recreate the picture of what it was."

CM-U: Now, you're speaking very centrally to what we do.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah.

CM-U: And so that – I mean, that is the nut. I mean, that really is it. How do you kind of imbue it with an energy and a life. And it's not just a complete duplication of something before.

Ann Hamilton: Right.

CM-U: Right?

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Ann Hamilton: Right.

CM-U: But that's...

Ann Hamilton: Which is also – I mean, there's a labor of recreating something you can't recreate that's really not fluid.

CM-U: Yeah.

Ann Hamilton: You know, it's like – so it's like, how does – I mean now, they seem really precious.

CM-U: Let's do it [sounds like]. I bet they seem precious, because they are in a case.

[00:12:25]

Ann Hamilton: You know, these, I actually, I reinstalled this. I partly had this process, and I can send you the catalogue from the – this was reinstalled for the first time as an object in Lyon.

CM-U: Oh. I don't think I knew that. Good.

Ann Hamilton: Um-hum. So I have photographs. In fact, this photograph is...

Joan Simon: This one is from Lyon.

Ann Hamilton: It's from Lyon. Yeah.

Joan Simon: You know, I wonder. What might be really helpful is for you to talk about the three projects that relate to each other, that began with São Paulo. I think that would be a very helpful background for you.

Ann Hamilton: São Paulo and then Accountings [sounds like]...

Joan Simon: Offerings [sounds like].

Ann Hamilton: ...and, and – yeah. So what year was this?

Joan Simon: This is '92.

Ann Hamilton: So the first project was – really São Paulo was the biennial...

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CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: ...in São Paulo.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Ann Hamilton: And it was a really enormous two-room installation that was built within the huge Niemeyer Hall.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: And it had in the center a large steel object that cradled hundreds and hundreds of long tapered candles that were made in Brazil, and which I first saw in the churches there. So, depending on – you could buy different length ones. You know, some of them are this long. Down to short ones. And they are all in the churches. And, you know, I am like a good – come out of Calvinist culture, so it's like, "Wow!"

(laughter)

Ann Hamilton: I just – you couldn't get me out of the churches.

CM-U: Yeah.

Ann Hamilton: And all the different kinds of offerings, and the way – you know, the whole tradition of how the – you – the milagros, which I had only seen small...

CM-U: Right. Metal.

Ann Hamilton: ...the metal ones. And I had never seen these kind of larger pieces. So the heads actually come from being collected in São Paulo, but were not actually used in that installation. So that installation in São Paulo had this large steel base, and it was piled with – in a kind of whale-like form – in these long tapered candles. Those same candles were used to soot lick all the walls. There were metal tags on the floor. And then in the back was a vitrine, and that vitrine actually – it was very controversial – it had two carcasses of turkeys, and they were being eaten by Dermestid beetles.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: So they were being cleaned by this last process of decay. And there was a certain odor. You can imagine. And it was a huge process. But the vocabulary that comes from the language of preservation in the natural history museums. And so, like at the Smithsonian, there's a room where you can go; and they're cleaning the bones.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: And, you know, there's all these different carcasses in different – in the last stages of decay – and they are being carefully cleaned by all the mouths of these bugs. And there's a whole story about that, as you can imagine.

Joan Simon: Um-hum. And then the next one was at Carnegie. *Offerings*?

Ann Hamilton: Was that next?

Ann Hamilton: Ninety-one. Yeah.

CM-U: That was called *parallel lines* in São Paulo?

Ann Hamilton: Yeah. So the thing that's important about the beetles and that thing is that that's the first vitrine.

CM-U: Right. I see.

Ann Hamilton: So that vitrine – this vitrine that comes forward in *accountings* is based on that vitrine that was in São Paulo. And also came forward.

[00:16:11]

Ann Hamilton: So the installation that was at – it wasn't at the Carnegie. It was the Carnegie International, but it was actually installed in a row house adjacent to the Mattress Factory...

CM-U: Right.

Ann Hamilton: ...on the north side of Pittsburgh. And so the top vitrine was – we were making these wax heads, a huge quantity of these, so that the vitrine could be filled on a regular basis. And it had heating rods installed in the bottom of the vitrine, and it would slowly melt the heads, and those would drip down. And we had heating rods in slits between each floor...

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: ...below. So some of the wax filtered down to the first floor, second floor, and the top floor, the attic, is where the vitrine was. So the melting heads, you can see here that they are in a state of moving from form to formlessness.

CM-U: Right.

Ann Hamilton: And this is this table where the – it's accumulated, like in reverse stalagmites is – it has a book underneath it. It collected the first droppings.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: And – is there – oh, there's not a picture of the installation. And so the act of something changing state was part of that.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: So then the last iteration was when it came forward. The curator, and the sponsors, and the institution I collaborated with for São Paulo was the Henry Art Museum.

CM-U: Hmm.

Ann Hamilton: So it was like, "How do we bring this show back?" Okay. And that's when the vocabulary of "vitrines" came forward; so what happened at the Carnegie, at the Mattress Factory, kind of melded with what had been in Brazil...

CM-U: Right.

Ann Hamilton: ...and became this other piece.

CM-U: Okay.

Ann Hamilton: There were canaries in Pittsburgh, so _____ [phrase inaudible]

CM-U: Oh, there were as well?

Ann Hamilton: I think, thirty.

CM-U: Um-hum.

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Ann Hamilton: And we actually installed a heater and everything so they could sort of be warm in the winter. And so the birds came forward. The vitrine came forward. And then, the Henry, in the *accountings* piece, it had lights. It has the lights that go on the back of the vitrine, and those warmed the metal just enough so the canaries tended to congregate along the edge of...

CM-U: Hm.

Ann Hamilton: ...of the piece. And so you had the live yellow birds. And then you had these in different states of kind of deformation, although they weren't actively melting.

[00:18:40]

Ann Hamilton: And when I installed this in Lyon, I know that the way a lot of things arrived – they arrived in big cardboard boxes. I mean, just – they weren't wrapped individually. It was like a hunk of heads.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Ann Hamilton: (laughs) It was...

CM-U: That's an interesting idea.

(laughter)

Ann Hamilton: It would have been your worst nightmare.

CM-U: Yeah.

Ann Hamilton: And we're taking them out and going, "Oh, these have been stored somewhere that's very warm." But in fact – and I don't know that we really have details. You can't – 'cause this detail is actually from Seattle. (looking at book)

Joan Simon: This _____ [phrase inaudible].

Ann Hamilton: And this is actually the installation in...

Joan Simon: Here's Seattle.

Ann Hamilton: This is Lyon. And this detail is Seattle.

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Joan Simon: This one is Lyon, and this is Seattle.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah. And so when I – I was worried because some of them were a little melted in Lyon, that we wouldn't have enough to kind of make a horizon of these in the thing. But we did. We had more than we needed. So all of those should have come forward here. And in fact what I felt at the time is that the kind of half-collapsed shape of some of these made them stack in the vitrine better because...

CM-U: I was wondering – let's undo this so you can really look at it.

Ann Hamilton: Because what can happen is that – these look like these are all the young girl. I think I have four or five molds.

CM-U: Oh, there are. Okay, let's talk about them.

Ann Hamilton: There's – I got the molds out. I think I sent – did I send them to you? The snapshots of the molds?

Joan Simon: Yes.

Ann Hamilton: Or to Heather [Cox, CM-U's assistant] ?

Joan Simon: Yes.

CM-U: Yes, we have it. We have it.

Ann Hamilton: So I don't – I think there's one original mold I don't have.

CM-U: Is this beeswax?

Ann Hamilton: I knew you were going to ask me. It's not.

CM-U: Okay, well we can deal with that later.

[Both speakers speaking at the same time. Conversation inaudible.]

Ann Hamilton: It's microcrystalline wax. But see how it's got this brown in it?

CM-U: Yeah.

- Ann Hamilton: That's the – I'd have to go back through...
- CM-U: Okay. _____ [phrase inaudible]
- Ann Hamilton: ...and talk to the Henry.
- CM-U: We can talk – we can deal with that. That's not an issue.
- Ann Hamilton: So there's a young girl. So I thought – I think, partly being in Brazil, I was very interested in the fact that they – these milagros were very European in their features.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Ann Hamilton: And so there's a young girl. There's a young boy. There is, like an adult female head, and an adult male head. I think maybe there were – there was one other. Let's see. This would be the young girl.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Ann Hamilton: Or I'm calling her the young girl.
- CM-U: Right.
- Ann Hamilton: And then I think this is the boy. I'm just– it's amazing to see these like this. You know, because we were – I mean, we made hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of these. And I shouldn't even tell you that at one point, you know, I gave boxes of them away to be melted down to the sculpture students.
- CM-U: Oh, that's also very historical. _____ [phrase inaudible]
- Ann Hamilton: It's like the horsehair from Dia went into a huge Petah Coyne piece, and other artists use the materials, so...
- CM-U: Yeah. That's okay.
- Ann Hamilton: So this is – and there's a history of the wax in – like the wax floor in *Palimpsest* [1989, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC Gift of Ginny Williams in honor of Olga Viso, 2004]. Having used wax before, that you walked on, and you just clean. You kind of clean these off. And so here's the young man. The young girl. Okay, here's – this is the...

CM-U: It looks like a young man. Oh, wait.

Ann Hamilton: Okay. This is the same mold. Okay, so this is an interesting – here's this for the camera. This is the same person.

Joan Simon: _____ [word inaudible], if you want.

Ann Hamilton: Oh, yeah, here's some molds. So you can that in fact, if you load those next to each other...

CM-U: Yeah. We'll _____ [phrase inaudible] show you this document.

Ann Hamilton: Umm...

CM-U: Do you have some of these molds still, or not?

Ann Hamilton: Yeah, this is – I just took these recently...

CM-U: You just took these shots? Okay. So we can put those _____ [phrase inaudible].

Ann Hamilton: So those can come forward. You know, this can be – come forward to be here in the event...

CM-U: Right, that you needed more, or whatever? A source. Or we needed more.

Ann Hamilton: If something needed to be remade, or...

[00:23:04]

CM-U: Let's go back to that. Because that's – I mean, aside from the materials, which we can talk about or document in some other way, I think _____ [word inaudible] on top of your head. You said that the heads should be in the vitrines so that – uh-huh.

Ann Hamilton: (demonstrates appropriate configuration of heads)

CM-U: Okay. So there's a deformation that allows that. That's okay with you?

Ann Hamilton: Oh, it's great.

CM-U: Okay.

Ann Hamilton: It's much better.

CM-U: So do you think – but originally they were well formed and fully formed? So this happened over time in the case where a little bit of the heat from the light...

Ann Hamilton: I had glasses somewhere, didn't I?

CM-U: They're right here.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah. Thank you. You know, I would – I think that partly when we made them, we were making them in the museum. In one room. We had a room set up to be doing hundreds of these.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: And they weren't all perfect.

CM-U: Right.

Ann Hamilton: And their imperfection was fine.

CM-U: Okay.

Ann Hamilton: It was part of it. It's like almost taking something that's about replication, and it's all – they are all individuated in some ways. They are all irregular.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: And so some of these probably were from the original castings. That they were – you know, maybe the wax was still a little soft when we took the mold off.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: This collapsed form probably came over time, but I don't think that they continued to mount or deform, really. Like, I don't think, like, you had a sense when you saw this installed in the beginning, that a few months it was up and then later came back. I don't think – they weren't more deformed.

CM-U: That's interesting. So...

Ann Hamilton: So the – I don't see them as continuing to change states like they did at the Carnegie [sounds like]...

Joan Simon: Right, the heating element, though. Without [sounds like] the heating element in the vitrine now, it should be stable.

Ann Hamilton: Right. They're stable.

Joan Simon: You're not heating canaries.

Ann Hamilton: Right.

CM-U: But there is a heating element that's in the vitrine that we have, right?

Ann Hamilton: There's just a light.

CM-U: Oh, they were lights?

Ann Hamilton: _____ [word inaudible] lights.

CM-U: And it's a neon light, did you say?

Ann Hamilton: Is it? It's...

CM-U: So it doesn't really give much heat. _____ [phrase inaudible] another question...

Ann Hamilton: Is it neon? I thought they were, uh – shall we walk over there?

CM-U: Yeah, sure.

Ann Hamilton: _____ [phrase inaudible]

[00:25:21]

CM-U: Sure. So actually when we got the heads, and we thought they were deformed, that didn't happen in transit or shipping?

Ann Hamilton: No, no, no.

Ann Hamilton Interview Transcript, Artists Documentation Program, Whitney Museum of American Art, 07/30/2007

Video: adp2007a_hamilton_edmast_a.mp4 / Interview #: VI2000-020.2007a / TRT: 01:01:55

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CM-U: Or even in storage?

Ann Hamilton: No.

CM-U: That's the way...

Ann Hamilton: I think there was one or two boxes that was, at some point maybe stored too warm.

CM-U: Okay.

Ann Hamilton: But it was fine. You know, we got to Lyon, and were like, "Oh, this is..." At first we were like, "Oh, something happened."

CM-U: Right.

Ann Hamilton: And then when we installed it, it was actually kind of one of those good things.

CM-U: Yeah.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah.

CM-U: And that's when Ginny Williams already owned it at that point?

Ann Hamilton: Um-hum. Um-hum.

CM-U: Uh-huh. Okay. That's really important to know.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah.

CM-U: Because naturally our fear was...

Ann Hamilton: "Oh, something's wrong with these." Yes.

CM-U: Yeah. That something had happened in shipping.

Ann Hamilton: No. 'Cause it actually – you know, part of it is that – and I don't know if we want to do this today, but maybe if we unwrapped a box, and I could kind of arrange them how I might arrange them in here...

CM-U: Yeah.

Ann Hamilton: Like what's the attitude of handling these, of – you know, how might they sit? So that they're not all in rows, and they need to feel a little bit like they've taken the weight of each other.

CM-U: Right.

Ann Hamilton: You know, and settled down into the case.

CM-U: Right. I noted what you said about them being a horizon, and this idea of kind of fluid something. Or at least not flat and even.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah.

CM-U: So I was trying to get a sense – that would be ideal.

Ann Hamilton: Well, and it's also that the...

[00:26:45]

Ann Hamilton: ...in the original installation, the image of them in this sealed case, in glass, cut off from air...

CM-U: Right.

Ann Hamilton: ...you know, was in relationship to the consumption of oxygen that creates a landscape of marks on the wall. And obviously the free flying birds. And it was a – in some ways it would be very, very influenced from my traveling in Brazil, and going into the rainforest, and all the controversies around whether or not a road would be completed into a village.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: And, you know, what happens once the road is finished. Then you can't control what goes in and what comes out. And thinking about the history of logging in that country, and also in the Northwest. And that's where the tags came from. But more this atmosphere in this case of something, obviously like a museum vitrine, sealed off in time, and having no air. And I think one of the impetuses or impulses that I had at the time as an artist was like, "Okay,

so everything about this architecture, this exhibition space, is about preservation, and removing something from a living context...”

CM-U: That’s great.

Ann Hamilton: “...and preserving that.” And so, you know, my experiences, for instance, looking in at all the preserved and stuffed birds’ pelts. And animal pelts at the Carnegie had a relationship to my thinking about this space. And so how do you animate it? How do you – how does something that is changing – how does another kind of air animate something that’s about preservation? And this tension, which is your life.

CM-U: Yes. Absolutely. It’s what I deal with every day, that’s the challenge.

Ann Hamilton: And so the piece, in many ways, was thinking about those same things. But I mean I – obviously the birds are not coming forward. Then your life would be really complicated.

(laughter)

CM-U: Yes, it would. No, that’s so central to what we think about. I mean, how do you preserve something but keep it alive...

Ann Hamilton: But keep it alive? Yeah. And so, you know, I am very much in thinking about that myself.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: Knowing that that was part of the original impulse for partly making the installation that this comes from.

[00:29:16]

Ann Hamilton: So maybe we should look at the lights.

CM-U: Okay, let’s do that. And I think. You know – they may – I know in the Carnegie – I don’t know. I can’t remember. Let’s look.

CM-U: Do you want to put them on the table over there, GR? Would it be easier?

Ann Hamilton: How many of these boxes are there, for the heads?

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CM-U: I think you said – seventeen?

Ann Hamilton: Seventeen, yeah. And then I have some boxes – I think I also – in the photographs sent you maybe a snapshot. Joan, maybe it's not...

[Conversation inaudible]

Joan Simon: This is good [referring to photograph], so that you can see _____
[phrase inaudible].

[Conversation inaudible]

Ann Hamilton: Like throwing them in the pile. It's like a Felix [Gonzalez-Torres] candy
_____ [word inaudible].

CM-U: It does look like candy. But it has that wonderful feel, of them just kind of falling in place, you know, naturally. Yeah.

Joan Simon: But they're also not precious in that sense, I mean, I think...

Ann Hamilton: No.

Joan Simon: ...the whole idea of change, having been incorporated in them from the start.

Ann Hamilton: Um-hum.

Joan Simon: And that the whole process of making something that was fluid into a solid cast [sounds like], that can go back to being more malleable.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah, it's this, like, form and formlessness, something like, leaking, leeching, losing its set borders. That is part of the vocabulary.

Joan Simon: But is the point of them nestling.

Ann Hamilton: And nestling is really, um, let's see. (picks up stack of photographs) Here, this one.

CM-U: So is this _____ [word inaudible]?

Ann Hamilton: These are the ones, yeah – I have these in my studio now.

Ann Hamilton: So these are boxes. I can't remember in the email. Heather, you might remember.

Heather Cox: Twenty.

Ann Hamilton: About twenty boxes like this. So um, I mean, my son melted these down, and...

(laughter)

CM-U: I know how that goes. Oh!

Joan Simon: There you go. There is the light.

Ann Hamilton: Oh, they are neon. What do you know? So there wasn't a lot of warmth, but it did warm – the metal did warm a little bit. Okay, so originally, I think the lights in – must have been in Brazil. There was a fixture that had two long, thin, clear bulbs that you saw the filament in. And I think that this – when – Peter Reiquam is a sculptor in Seattle, and he fabricated these.

CM-U: I'm sorry. What was his name?

Ann Hamilton: His name is Peter Reiquam.

CM-U: Okay.

Ann Hamilton: And he is somebody I went to graduate school with.

CM-U: Oh.

Ann Hamilton: And he has a fabrication – does a lot of fabrication in public art.

CM-U: Oh.

Ann Hamilton: And so we could, if we had any questions...

CM-U: Yeah.

Ann Hamilton: ...you know, we could be in touch with him.

CM-U: How do you spell his last name?

Ann Hamilton Interview Transcript, Artists Documentation Program, Whitney Museum of American Art, 07/30/2007

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Ann Hamilton: R-E-I-Q-U-A-M.

CM-U: Interesting name. Okay.

Ann Hamilton: Sculptor out there. I know he's also done – I think early on he did some work from Gary Hill. I don't know who else he has been working with. I haven't been in touch with him for a long time.

CM-U: Okay.

Ann Hamilton: But...

CM-U: So these lights obviously are part of the vitrine, and would go back into our vitrine as well when we showed this again? Even though...

Ann Hamilton: Yes.

CM-U: ...the purpose of them was to attract the canaries. But the canaries...

Ann Hamilton: Oh, it was to light the piece.

CM-U: ...and to light the piece?

Ann Hamilton: It does light the piece.

CM-U: Okay.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah. And it's, I think, along the back edge, so like as you approach it, it's – if there was an orientation

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Ann Hamilton: It would be, you know – I think it's only on one side, though.

CM-U: Okay. Well, we'll _____ [phrase inaudible]...

Ann Hamilton: You know, my memory is worse [sounds like]. I don't know if you can tell in those Seattle photographs.

Joan Simon: So is that it?

Ann Hamilton: Well, see now here in this photograph, they don't appear to be on. Did the transformer – did it come with it?

Man: Um, very likely. There are a number of crates...

Ann Hamilton: Crates.

Man: ...downstairs.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah.

Joan Simon: But here you've got the natural light.

Ann Hamilton: Um-hum.

CM-U: So the natural light – light is important to it?

Ann Hamilton: Um, well, no, I'd say some light. I mean it was in the original installation, but that's not, I mean, that's one of the things that makes a lot of museum spaces really hard for me, because in fact, natural light has been so much a part of all of the installation work.

CM-U: I know.

Joan Simon: Here's another one from Seattle (holds out photograph).

Ann Hamilton: I think these tubes might run along both edges. I can't remember, actually.

CM-U: Is there another box of bulbs, or is this it?

Man: There is another box.

CM-U: Okay. So there's one, two, three, four, five, six, seven in this box. So there are 14, probably.

Man: Um-hum.

CM-U: Right. So...

Ann Hamilton: This, I don't think, had any bulbs in it.

CM-U: It doesn't – it can't be fourteen – there are three vitrines. Well, we'll work that out.

Ann Hamilton: So good that you did this work! [referring probably to the collection of photographs on the table] (laughs)

[00:34:30]

CM-U: Um, I would like to see how you...

Ann Hamilton: Should we unwrap some of these?

CM-U: I would like to unwrap them.

Ann Hamilton: Okay, sure.

CM-U: GR, let's move this out. [referring to box of light fixtures on table]

Ann Hamilton: Over here?

CM-U: Want to put it here? Well, okay. _____ [phrase inaudible] another box of heads.

Ann Hamilton: I can't believe these are individually wrapped. (laughs)

CM-U: _____ [phrase inaudible] the red one?

Ann Hamilton: It's like...

[Audio goes out briefly. Hamilton unwraps wax heads.]

CM-U: Yeah. Unwrap.

Joan Simon: Okay.

Ann Hamilton: This is a really good one. See, while you probably would open like this (holds up flattened head) and say (makes gasping sound)...

[Audio goes out briefly. Hamilton, Mancusi-Ungaro, and Simon unwrap wax heads.]

Ann Hamilton: Oh, yeah, look at it. It's great.

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CM-U: And the varying color, which I'm guessing has to do with just the mixture of the wax...

Ann Hamilton: Yeah.

CM-U: ...right?

Ann Hamilton: Yes.

CM-U: And I'm also noticing how very clean they are.

Ann Hamilton: They are pretty clean.

CM-U: They are not dirty [sounds like]. They are not dusty. And that's important, I would imagine.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah. Okay, so the – Carnegie, which has the two vitrines – the table and vitrines from...

[Audio goes out briefly. Hamilton, Mancusi-Ungaro, and Simon unwrap and stack wax heads.]

CM-U: That would be great. I'll come see you at that point.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah. That would be great.

CM-U: And this, I think, is just filler.

Ann Hamilton: And then the other thing that we could do at the studio, if you came, is we could get the candles out, and I could – we could do a little video of the...

CM-U: I would love that. I really would.

Ann Hamilton: I could teach you how to do it.

CM-U: Yeah, teach me how to do it. I would love that.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah.

CM-U: No, I just think it would be really important in the future for people to understand that.

Ann Hamilton: See this one – I think with some of these, even this – oh, I guess this is just actually – yeah, it's just different pots [sounds like] were going with different – this has more microcrystalline wax.

CM-U: That's what it looks like to me.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah.

CM-U: When I've mixed it and made different batches, you come up with different colors, depending upon how you...

Joan Simon: Do you want another box, Ann?

Ann Hamilton: I think this is okay.

Joan Simon: You're okay? This is it?

Ann Hamilton: I think this is fine.

CM-U: Are you ready to record? Okay, good.

[00:37:57]

CM-U: Let's go back over the question of...

Ann Hamilton: You asked me if they were clean?

CM-U: Yes.

Ann Hamilton: You said they seemed very clean.

CM-U: Yes. And also – yes. Let's start there.

Ann Hamilton: And these are very clean because they're inside the vitrine.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Ann Hamilton: Because they're preserved. At the Carnegie, when they took the vitrine out of the attic, you know, the birds and the dust and everything, it was dirty. When they first installed it, it had all the dirt on the glass.

CM-U: Hmm.

Ann Hamilton: You know, and I was like, “We don’t need to preserve the dirt on the glass. That’s not really...”

CM-U: Okay.

Ann Hamilton: It’s more these in a changing state, but they should be – you know, the glass should be clean. And we don’t need – the dust is not actually part of it. (laughs)

CM-U: Yeah, this is important. This is really important for you to state because, given the change of the form of them, one could have – one could interpret this...

Ann Hamilton: Like, how far do we go?

CM-U: ...that you – exactly. That you are willing to accept whatever aging is. And what you are saying is, “No, I don’t – I want them to look kempt, clean.”

Ann Hamilton: Yes. I want them to look still kind of elegant.

CM-U: Yeah.

Ann Hamilton: You know. Or proper.

CM-U: Right. And that’s what drew my question about the color. Because if that were covered with dirt, the color would be so...

Ann Hamilton: It would be...

CM-U: ...less.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah. And...

CM-U: Well, let’s go back to the original one. I’m sorry.

Ann Hamilton: There was a question you brought up, about...

Joan Simon: Oh, there are two things. One is the difference between treatment of the case...

Ann Hamilton Interview Transcript, Artists Documentation Program, Whitney Museum of American Art, 07/30/2007

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CM-U: Yes.

Joan Simon: ...as an enclosure. That's a clean display item. And the heads within it, which are a different element. So...

Ann Hamilton: Yes.

Joan Simon: ...very pristine clean glass.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah, the clean vitrine. And then – there was something else, though, that we started to talk about.

CM-U: I wanted to ask you about the original heads. We were going to talk about that. Was that what you were thinking, maybe?

Ann Hamilton: Maybe. Oh, no, I don't know.

CM-U: I was asking about the original tallow candles that you used in São Paulo, that you used for a profile, which is to make the _____ [word inaudible] and the soot...

Ann Hamilton: On the walls.

CM-U: ...walls, yeah. But that, in fact, these, you had a – you said you got a mold from Brazil.

Ann Hamilton: I brought – I think I had so many bags when I left Brazil.

CM-U: “Who is this woman?” I've gone through Customs. I can imagine...

Ann Hamilton: The big enamel bowl that was in the *Malediction* piece. I just – I materially was really happy. And in the markets, you know, just buying the most ordinary stuff. I had boxes of the soap back to – the soap bars and stuff.

Joan Simon: Oh, that was the question. The economy of – the consistency of...

Ann Hamilton: You asked if the originals were solid.

CM-U: Yeah.

- Ann Hamilton: And I said, “No,” because of course if they were solid it would have – you couldn’t have purchased them to make an offering with – you know, they would have been too expensive.
- CM-U: Um-hum.
- Ann Hamilton: I think that originally in the north, in Bahia, that the – I mean, I don’t have my history down very well, but they were wood.
- Joan Simon: Um-hum.
- Ann Hamilton: So you would – if you were really – sometimes people would commission very specific pieces to be made by an artisan, that you would then take to the church or cathedral, and you would make an offering. So this is the – you know, this is coming forward in time to the economy of a present where that’s too expensive to commission an original or to take time to commission an original. So this replication from the mold was already influencing then the way these circulated through the culture. And so I just brought home, you know, I think, one of each of the types that I found; and we made a mold of them, and then really just probably imitated their own process of casting these.
- CM-U: Were these supposed to be identified? I mean, individuals? Or do you think they were just like a small child, if you have...
- Ann Hamilton: Yeah. It’s a type.
- CM-U: They were types?
- Ann Hamilton: Yeah.
- CM-U: Okay.
- Ann Hamilton: Yeah. And, you know, I think that – I can’t remember now; I’d have to go back through my notes. But, you know, probably like if you were either – it was, you were making an offering for the healing of this person, a young child, or an older person, or maybe a malady of the head – I don’t remember.
- CM-U: Yeah. Right.
- Ann Hamilton: I don’t know the history well enough. So if we were gonna stack these...

CM-U: Good. Yes.

Ann Hamilton: ...and the vitrines are actually pretty wide. So a lot of what – so if you had all the heads out, what I would do is probably take what I would call the ugly ones...

CM-U: Okay.

Ann Hamilton: ...you know, like how are we going...(laughs)

CM-U: Yeah, which ones are those?

Ann Hamilton: Those, I'd put them in the middle. Because these are all going to get buried. And – or what I would do is maybe work – let's see, how did we do this? Work along the perimeter so that you are looking at how the heads are sitting in relationship to the edge of the glass.

CM-U: I think your table is about – your vitrine is just a little narrower. Not much narrower than this. What do you think, Joan?

Joan Simon: Why don't you map out _____ [phrase inaudible]

[All voices speaking at the same time; cannot distinguish between them or understand their words.]

CM-U: Yes.

Ann Hamilton: When it was mounted – I think it's like when you have an edge to work against...

CM-U: Let's work against this edge as if this were the front.

Ann Hamilton: That's not _____ [phrase inaudible]. See, if you had glass...

CM-U: Oh, I see what you mean.

Ann Hamilton: You know, like...

CM-U: Yeah.

Joan Simon: Yeah, that makes sense.

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Ann Hamilton: You know, and it's like – I think we were, like, turning them so that they are not all doing the same thing. There.

CM-U: Yeah.

Ann Hamilton: We didn't use – we never – I don't think we ever stood them up.

CM-U: Okay.

Ann Hamilton: Okay. So they are always reclining, and – you see, there is a kind of nestling. And what you want to do – and this is why you can see now these are really fabulous...

CM-U: I see.

Ann Hamilton: ...because they allow them to sit...

CM-U: To lock in, like.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah, to lock in, and to... (takes head from CM-U)

CM-U: Sorry, it's the conservator in here...

(laughter)

Ann Hamilton: Yeah, if we told you what we did with these, you'd be horrified.

(laughter)

Joan Simon: But those aren't here.

Ann Hamilton: Okay.

Joan Simon: The ones that you did that to?

Ann Hamilton: If these couldn't nestle, it would be stiff. So they need to have this like slight thing. So what we are really doing is looking how they are all taking gravity in some way. So they are facing different directions.

CM-U: Um-hum.

- Ann Hamilton: And I think if we studied the details. Like, if we made sure you had all the details...
- CM-U: Yeah.
- Ann Hamilton: ...you would – we wouldn't do that. It would be more like, oh, might this one prop up in some way? Some of them would turn.
- CM-U: Why wouldn't you stand one up?
- Ann Hamilton: Because these are all – I suppose, for me – I don't know. It's like the vitrine is like a grave.
- CM-U: Here. I'll get it. The vitrine is like a grave?
- Ann Hamilton: It's like a grave. (reaches over to retrieve wax head that has fallen onto the floor)
- CM-U: Here, I'll get it. The vitrine is like a grave?
- Ann Hamilton: It's like a grave.
- CM-U: Yeah.
- Joan Simon: Plus, it's probably too literal if it was standing up. They are more abstract _____ [word inaudible] side by side.
- Ann Hamilton: I think that we – towards the – we didn't – and I don't remember that we ever did it like this.
- CM-U: Right.
- Ann Hamilton: So that you weren't really looking into the fact that it was an empty mold.
- CM-U: Right.
- Ann Hamilton: You're aware that they're empty.
- CM-U: Sorry, I have to do this. (pushes wax heads further back on table) No, but I think we got a sense of...

- Ann Hamilton: You can see. And that would actually be a good way. You could also just kind of put them in, willy-nilly, and then start to...
- CM-U: Yeah.
- Ann Hamilton: ...do that. Because it's this funny thing, that if you start to get too self-conscious about arranging them...
- CM-U: Yeah.
- Ann Hamilton: ...that doesn't work. So it has to be – and they're not precious. We can make more of them. They don't get damaged. They are pretty resilient.
- CM-U: So you don't have a problem with someone else doing this?
- Ann Hamilton: No. No, no. I think what we need to do is make sure you have really good details, and we – it's this thing about conveying the sensibility.
- CM-U: Right.
- Ann Hamilton: But it doesn't have to be my hand at all.
- CM-U: Okay. I think that may be difficult for us to discuss, but I think that's important to narrow down what that sensibility is. But I think we're getting it, certainly, as we're talking about this.
- Ann Hamilton: I mean the other thing is that – is how high did they come in the vitrine?
- CM-U: Yes.
- Ann Hamilton: You know, I can't really remember. It's – again, I think we'd want to go back and look at the photographs, both from Seattle and from Lyon. Like I did remember – I think, in Lyon, I was very worried that we weren't going to have enough.
- CM-U: Um-hum. Meaning you didn't want empty space?
- Ann Hamilton: Yeah. And we didn't want it to be really low.
- CM-U: Right.

Ann Hamilton: And I think it kind of worked out. See, you have all of those heads. But I remember at the time thinking, “Oh, it could be a little bit fuller.”

CM-U: A little more. A few more.

Ann Hamilton: So I think in that sense, the fact that I had these others is a really good thing for it.

CM-U: Okay. Good. And we’d be a repository for them. I mean, they’d be here.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah.

CM-U: So that’s not a problem.

Ann Hamilton: And, you know, I think that if it ended up being installed at some point, you know, I would be happy to come in and, you know, as long as I’m still walking.

CM-U: It’d be great _____ [phrase inaudible].

Ann Hamilton: I hope I’ll be walking for a long time still. But, you know. You never know.

(laughter)

Ann Hamilton: But I’d be happy to come, you know, work with it.

CM-U: Right.

Ann Hamilton: It wouldn’t be a problem.

CM-U: All right. That would be great for us to have _____ [phrase inaudible]. Yeah.

[00:47:39]

CM-U: So when it was installed in Lyon, they didn’t have the soot-licked walls? And the floor was not the tags?

Ann Hamilton: No. Those actually don’t exist, unfortunately. They were just recycled.

CM-U: Okay.

Ann Hamilton Interview Transcript, Artists Documentation Program, Whitney Museum of American Art, 07/30/2007

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Ann Hamilton: But let's see, in Lyon – I could show you – it's not here, but we soot-licked a very, very long wall...

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: ...as a separate object.

CM-U: Ah-ha.

Ann Hamilton: And it was in another part of the exhibition. That exhibition had two new installations, and then it was one – it wasn't the first chance, but it really came out of having for the first time assembled things for the Wexner Center...

CM-U: Hmm.

Ann Hamilton: ...for an object show ["the body and the object, Ann Hamilton 1984-1996," Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio, Traveling exhibition/digital project], which really allowed – began my thinking about how these things come forward. So it didn't actually sit in relationship to this, like a backdrop. It's like – it's relational in that they are in company...

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: ...but it isn't like, "This becomes the landscape or mural for which we see this."

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: Like, I think that would be really probably the wrong relation.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: It's how does – I think the work is really seeking landscape. And so it needed to be more horizontal than tall. Even though I love these tall spaces. And that how is – how – or might there ever be an opportunity to soot lick enough wall so that it can do that and not feel like it's becoming like a contained picture or – yeah, a contained picture. And so in Lyon, when we did this, we took the entire length of one wall, which was, I think – gosh, it was almost the length of one of the installations. Maybe 70 feet.

CM-U: Hmm.

Ann Hamilton: And it didn't go – it was a temporary wall we built for the exhibition, so it didn't go up to the ceiling. But it certainly felt like it was of the architecture.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: And so – and it's partly that the work has – the installation work, the attitude of it is, it has always found its form at the perimeter of the architecture. Like, I don't kind of make the form. I respond to the form of the space in different ways. And so it's been important to me that those things are of the building, like the walls of the building. It's not like a thing. That it has a – so the skin of it is structural.

CM-U: So it's actually right up against the wall.

Ann Hamilton: Well, it is the wall.

CM-U: It's not free standing?

Ann Hamilton: It is the wall.

CM-U: It is the actual wall? You just do it to a certain height?

Ann Hamilton: But it's like a wall that doesn't feel like it's a temporary wall.

CM-U: Okay.

Ann Hamilton: Like a wall that feels like it's the real wall.

CM-U: Um-hum. Yeah.

Ann Hamilton: So, you know, a discussion about how these might sit together would be that this might even be something you see through a doorway...

CM-U: Hmm.

Ann Hamilton: ...from the vitrine, to it.

CM-U: Right.

Ann Hamilton: Or, it's going over here, and it's making a context for this. But I don't necessarily see that it's like, "Oh, here's the vitrine, and here's the wall behind it." That feels very static to me.

CM-U: Right. I see that. I do see that.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah. Isn't the wall in here, Joan? (flips through book)

Joan Simon: It is, yeah.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah. So...

Joan Simon: _____ [phrase inaudible]

CM-U: So the wall is its own – I mean, that, again, is your *accountings* • *soot wall*, as opposed to *vitrine*. So it's its own piece, but in conversation with the other...

Ann Hamilton: The other, yeah.

CM-U: ...it really brings it alive in a wonderful way.

Ann Hamilton: Yeah.

[00:51:35]

Ann Hamilton: And I think what we should do is make a video of the process that comes forward as a kind of construction, the same way...

CM-U: Yeah.

Ann Hamilton: ...or instruction, the same way as stacking these...

CM-U: Yeah.

Joan Simon: Well, as you video the first time it's installed in the cases, so there's a...

CM-U: Yeah. I mean, that would be really...

Joan Simon: Not a map, but a gesture, to see what your gesture is.

CM-U: Right.

Ann Hamilton Interview Transcript, Artists Documentation Program, Whitney Museum of American Art, 07/30/2007

Video: adp2007a_hamilton_edmast_a.mp4 / Interview #: VI2000-020.2007a / TRT: 01:01:55

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Ann Hamilton: This one, it's the same thing about – I mean, the process of the work, and the spirit of it, has always been, these processes are bigger than any singular hand or effort. And the differences – it's like everyone's hand has its own signature.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: And so the presence of that comes forward through the labor of the work. And so every time these would be stacked, I would imagine that they would be a little different because there's a different sensibility working. That's fine with me. The soot wall is made animate, and hopefully more interesting, because there are many hands in it. Like, if I had soot licked this whole thing – well, I'd still be there, but it would be very static...

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: ...because I would have my one way that I came to do it. And so I think what's been _____ [word inaudible] about the process is it means that, you know, sometimes you look and say, "Oh, they're not doing it really very well. Maybe we should look at that." But in fact it's like – it's the way all those marks work together that actually make it work. So if this was done in the museum, it would need many different hands doing it.

CM-U: Um-hum. Do you ever step back at the end and look at it and think, "Hmm, we need..." Do you ever?

Ann Hamilton: Yeah.

CM-U: Yeah. There are adjustments that you feel...

Ann Hamilton: I always feel this is a little bit light here, too light here.

CM-U: Right.

Ann Hamilton: And this feels a little bit – you can't really undo it.

CM-U: Right.

Ann Hamilton: So it's more like, "Oh, do we want it? Or is this like dark spot feel like too much like a spot, and do we need to feather it out so that it's..." It's – they're like water or, you know, blades of grass, or whatever.

- CM-U: But in that way, of course, it becomes yours because you are the final person who's determining. There are many hands, but in the end...
- Ann Hamilton: Yes and no. Because I think that the way – like a project like this, you can imagine how many people we were – I don't know how many people, but a lot of people. And so people step forward. It's like – and they take charge. And usually by the end they are ordering me around a little bit. "I think you need more of this over there." So there's someone that has to feel like they can take charge.
- CM-U: Right.
- Ann Hamilton: And say, "This will look better." It was like just being at Gemini with the printers, and I am – they are so respectful. And I kept saying, you know, "No, it's like you're on the press. You see this stuff happening. If – let's try this."
- CM-U: Right.
- Ann Hamilton: So, you know, there is – yes, I have been in control. And there are certain things where it's like, "No, it shouldn't be like that." But there is a broad range within the work, which is very flexible. And I think the allowing of hands with different kinds of training.
- CM-U: Um-hum. I see. Now, sorry if I'm belaboring this, but these are two separate works...
- Ann Hamilton: Yes.
- CM-U: ...but you like them being installed in a certain conversation with one another, if possible.
- Ann Hamilton: They can be – one can exist without the other.
- CM-U: Yeah, without the other.
- Ann Hamilton: They do not need to come forward together. I see them as being able to be very separate, yes.

[00:55:20]

- CM-U: How long does it take to do a soot lick on a wall 70 feet by, I guess, human height? Little higher, maybe?
- Ann Hamilton: You have to have scaffolding so that you can reach all the different – you know, with a platform that you can move across. You know, it depends on how many people are doing it. I know within a week we did it at Lyon. Not working constantly on it.
- CM-U: Yeah.
- Ann Hamilton: Yeah. It's pretty fast. I mean, you are – it depends on how big a flame you get going, you know. But you're not moving like this, but – you know, so if you think about it like covering how many square feet – you could almost do a little section, and then you could extrapolate out to a measurement.
- CM-U: Yeah. Just curious.
- Ann Hamilton: Hmm.
- Joan Simon: One question, Ann. What is your ideal in terms of the depth that the vitrine is filled? Should it feel like it's up to the top glass surface? Should there be breathing – a lot of breathing room? A head's worth? I mean, can you describe that a little bit?
- Ann Hamilton: Yeah. I remember really thinking about this in Lyon. I think that we had it so that some of the heads almost touched the top of the glass.
- Joan Simon: Um-hum.
- Ann Hamilton: But that you weren't having – when you put the top of the vitrine on, you weren't having to press into anything.
- Joan Simon: Um-hum.
- Ann Hamilton: Yeah. So it wasn't like...
- CM-U: That's a good description.
- Ann Hamilton: ...it wasn't compressed in there.
- Joan Simon: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton Interview Transcript, Artists Documentation Program, Whitney Museum of American Art, 07/30/2007

Video: adp2007a_hamilton_edmast_a.mp4 / Interview #: VI2000-020.2007a / TRT: 01:01:55

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CM-U: Right.

Ann Hamilton: So some can almost touch. And it needs to feel full, but not like evenly full.

CM-U: Um-hum.

Ann Hamilton: And so it needs to kind of have sections that don't feel like they are so high. I remember when we reinstalled this, being surprised by how big it was. You know, it's larger than I remember; and its original scale really had to do with the scale of the Henry Art Gallery's back room where it was installed. That's probably about – is it almost as wide as this table?

CM-U: It is. It's not as long, but it is on – and they are linear, the three are lined up [sounds like].

Ann Hamilton: I have three of them, yeah.

CM-U: And you have them line up in a line.

Ann Hamilton: And I actually think that the legs join.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Ann Hamilton: I think the legs screw together, or there's a...

Joan Simon: And a related question. How do you perceive them being lit, as an object? There is this long object. Should the light bathe it? Should it be focused on it? How do you conceive of it being presented?

Ann Hamilton: I think that when we lit this – again, it's really helpful to have had the experience in Lyon – I think we couldn't – I think we had the transformer, maybe, in France, to put this on.

CM-U: Uh-huh. It's different, right?

Ann Hamilton: So I think, there it didn't get the light, so I didn't have the experience of seeing it with the lights on. I think it would be better with the lights on, and less light, less museum light. Because...

Joan Simon: Lights on in the vitrine?

Ann Hamilton: In the vitrine. Because you can see here in this photograph, there's a really heavy, dark shadow on the floor from the overhead light.

CM-U: Yeah. That's a good point.

Ann Hamilton: And I think that that's minimized – I think we did a series of floods over it. That the spots felt – like spots felt too precious, like they were jewels.

CM-U: Right.

Ann Hamilton: And it needed more of a wash.

CM-U: More diffused light.

Ann Hamilton: Um-hum.

CM-U: This is nice to give you a little – little...

[Two voices speaking at once, words inaudible]

Joan Simon: The space below. It's very high.

CM-U: Uh-huh.

Ann Hamilton: I'm just looking at this thing from the Carnegie, which is probably over-lit.

CM-U: It's my understanding, Ann, from what you said, that when we place the heads, you want the heads all the way facing out so there isn't a front and back to the piece?

Ann Hamilton: Right.

CM-U: Correct?

Ann Hamilton: Correct.

CM-U: Okay. And then you were just saying, this looks in pretty good condition, but you're thinking there might have been a coating put on there?

Ann Hamilton: I think this was – had gun bluing put on the seal, and then I think it's wax, and I think then it's heated, and that kind of seals the surface. So that if it started

to rust, you know, you would probably gun blue it and wax it. You know, wire brush it; or take some steel wool to it.

CM-U: Again, trying to keep it as pristine as possible?

Ann Hamilton: Okay. So see here, this is just – this is how it always looked. And I just think it's important to see that.

CM-U: Nice. Yeah.

Ann Hamilton: That it's raw material, and this is not something that's a mistake. Okay? It just needs to be cleaned. And a little bit of wax. Not polish, but just a little wax would do that.

CM-U: Right. Just to make the color, uh, saturated...

Ann Hamilton: Prettier [sounds like]. Yeah.

CM-U: ...but natural in appearance.

Ann Hamilton: So, it feels kempt. Yeah.

CM-U: Okay. I get that. That makes sense. This is probably...

Ann Hamilton: Okay, you can see here that there are threaded holes, and so the legs do bolt together. And I think that's it.

CM-U: Yeah. Good.

Ann Hamilton: And it's...

CM-U: Well, thank you. This has been enormously helpful.

Ann Hamilton: ...really straightforward. Good.

[END RECORDING]