



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Robert
Richenburg, 1968 August 27

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Robert Richenburg on 27 August 1968. The interview was conducted in Provincetown, MA by Dorothy Seckler for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. This is a rough transcription that may include typographical errors.

Interview

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler interviewing Robert Richenburg in Provincetown [MA] on August 27, 1968. This is actually a continuation of an interview or resuming an interview that we did several years ago in Provincetown. At that time, Bob, you had been concerned mainly with painting and had completed a series of monumental paintings of a series we refer to as "shingle paintings" in that they were composed of hundreds of superimposed swatches, angular, you know, squarish swatches of canvas and with an interpolated section which was created in another way in several of them. Now, in meeting you again after an interlude of a year or so, I was very much surprised to find that you were concentrating largely on sculpture in a completely different material and the work has a very different effect.

I'd like to go back to the period where we left off after the period of the shingle paintings and find out what happened immediately after that to sort of set you on this new-- in this new direction.

ROBERT RICHENBURG: Well, actually it was about four years ago that I stopped doing the shingle paintings. The only reason I stopped was that after experimenting in many different ways as to how to extend the image I found that it was impossible, at least impossible for me. I found again and again I was simply repeating myself. So there was no alternative but to try other things. So for the last four years I have been in a kind of state of nothingness, in a way. I've experimented with anything and everything that has come my way that seemed at all possible of either having meaning in itself as a material or being capable of creating some kind of image.

I went through a period of about two years in which I worked mainly with collage as I moved from the stapled shingle paintings into all types of collage. I brought together many different kinds of materials, many different kinds of images. Still, nothing occurred that had a great deal of meaning for me. For an artist at certain periods it's just a blind searching, a blind attempt to find something that is going to create a kind of emotion and be honest. After working with collages for two years that didn't seem to give me anything that I wanted or could relate to, so then I started moving further and further afield, trying many different materials. I've worked in plastics of all types, of all methods. I've utilized all kinds of [inaudible] material, all kinds of new materials. I've examined machines. I've thought a great deal about the various processes that can be seen in various objects, engineering principles, engineering devices. I've even looked into certain elements of mathematics on a kind of primitive level. I've created a number of works touching on many of these things. Still nothing of substance came from it, although I feel that through all this there was a kind of generalization of direction that took place. Perhaps the main thing I learned was what I wasn't and what materials were not capable of being meaningful for me at the time.

MS. SECKLER: Good. It is true, certainly, that during that time you were also going through certain dislocations and moving from New York [City] to Ithaca [NY] and so on. That must have been, perhaps it made it a little more difficult, too, to follow through. Or do you think that affected your work in any way?

MR. RICHENBURG: Yes, it affected my work very much. Actually, the problem I had in finding my way in my painting occurred before I left New York for Ithaca. And the change from being in the city, and I had been in New York City for nearly 25 years, going to a predominantly rural place like Ithaca was certainly-- it certainly caused a dislocation. It's going from one extreme to another. Ithaca is a very beautiful place. It's dominantly 19th century rural America. Although Cornell University, where I was teaching, is a very fine university, one of the best in the country, nonetheless in terms of art the activity there could not quite, could not possibly compare with what was occurring in New York. So suddenly, I was in a somewhat isolated position in regards to creative ideas.

MS. SECKLER: What classes were you teaching at Cornell?

MR. RICHENBURG: Well, I taught undergraduate classes and graduate classes in painting. Now, this isolation that occurred for me artistically was something I rather wanted, something I rather looked forward to. I felt it was probably very good to be away from the continuous barrage of ideas that one gets in New York, and I felt it

would force me to sort of look into myself more and find things there. I'm not sure exactly what happened, whether or not it worked out that way, but certainly the experience has been a very fine one.

After three years at Cornell University and in Ithaca I then came back to New York and I am now teaching at the faculty at Hunter College. The change, coming back to the city, has been quite exciting. It's wonderful working at Hunter with a large number of highly creative people and living in the city where there are so many artists doing exciting work.

MS. SECKLER: And in the meantime the arts scene had changed very much since you were there.

MR. RICHENBURG: Yes, the arts scene has changed radically. There has been a far greater emphasis on young artists. They're doing some extraordinary work, far better than what most of the young artists were doing 20 years ago and 10 years ago. However, there has been a cult of the young in art as well as in every other phase of American society. Now, this youth cult has certain drawbacks, although it has helped to stimulate the development of American art in a wonderful way. But society has certain sicknesses. Perhaps in art the dominance of publicity in the buying and selling of art has done a great deal of damage in this case. There has been the tendency to buy only the newest and latest thing, which is usually by the young artist, and there has not been a continuation of support for the artists who have been working for a long time.

MS. SECKLER: In discussing the various projects that have occupied you after the shingle paintings you put a rather heavy emphasis on the exploration of various kinds of materials, including a good many that would be new materials. This is particularly interesting or striking to me because usually when I do a tape with a younger artist I get a very heavy emphasis on new materials and a great reliance on experimentation with new materials, and very seldom do mature artists emphasize this. So I'm sort of curious as to why in your case the--I think you did partly explain it, as a matter of fact. You know, you rely on the new materials as a way of, well, to some extent a means of self--revelation. But if there's anything else that you would like to dig into on that I'd be very interested.

MR. RICHENBURG: Well, for me the new materials were essential simply as a means of continuing to be an artist. When you find you cannot create using the materials you have been used to using over many years then you have no alternative but to try new things. It's in a sense like being reborn. I have had to start almost as though I were just beginning painting and sculpture. It was almost as though I knew nothing about it. Because every artist who has achieved any kind of mature state of development can quite readily find himself in the position where the knowledge he has acquired, which is quite extensive, can be actually a detriment to his creating. So one of the main things that has interested me was in breaking the habits of thought, the habits of working that had been established over the years. Now, in an artist's development it's a wonderful thing to find that certain things seem to reoccur. One finds that certain kinds of images and devices continue to come back into their art at very unexpected times. The only trouble with this is that the mistakes in one's thinking or the limitations of one's creative process also reoccur. So I felt it was necessary to try to completely start again, even though I know this is not quite possible. Nonetheless, I feel the attempt is very necessary. I wanted to wipe clear everything. I wanted to start fresh from every point of view, not only my materials, not only my way of working, but the very thought process itself.

MS. SECKLER: This need that you felt to sort of be reborn in terms of your thinking, would you imagine that this urge, this need might be felt more particularly at a time such as we're now living through in which there's a constant shift, a very rapid shift of values, way of life, cultural forms, environmental factors on all fronts so that we feel that unless our ways of responding, however they may have been expressive for us at a previous time, need to be renovated more rapidly than they have at other times?

MR. RICHENBURG: Well, I think there's no question but that we're in an age where renewal in every phase of society's activities has become very much a part of things. It's been pretty well dealt with in various writings. We find we buy automobiles to turn in every few years. We have all kinds of packaging, all kinds of devices, gadgets, machines, which are planned to be obsolete in a relatively short time. I think this is very much a part of our age and a very necessary part and to me one of the most exciting parts of our age. Whenever there is a radical change brought about by technology, as this is, there are unquestionably certain values that we regret losing. One has only to go into a museum and encounter the magnificent images created by artists of the past without feeling a certain nostalgia that certain conditions couldn't exist today. Just as when you go into a rather remote farm area and visit some of the people there there's a way of life there that belongs to the 18th and 19th century that's very beautiful. We lose many things when we come into the modern age. But nonetheless, though we lose many things I think we gain far more. And it really doesn't matter in a way because this is the way it is. We are in this period of great change and we have to use it.

And I have been very interested in my work in using materials which are not absolutely permanent. I like the idea of replacing the materials when they wear out. For example, I'm doing some things using polyethylene plastic, which would have a life of only, say, 10 to 20 years under good conditions, but they are very readily

replaced. So that in a sense there is a far greater permanence by using materials that can be replaced than one would have by trying to use absolutely permanent materials. And in terms of the changing of one's ideas, it has often been expressed that unless one can change one cannot grow. Living itself has to do with participating in the rhythms of growth and the rhythms of change.

For an artist to persist in maintaining simply one image, one kind of thought, for too great a length of time, it tends to bring him to a point of artistic suicide. Even though there are certain artists who can spend a great many years working on and developing one image, I think, though, this tends to be the exception. I think for the most part those artists who are doing that are doing it because of a hangover of 19th century thinking. Right from the beginning when I started painting I found that I wanted to change. I wanted to try all kinds of ideas. I think at certain periods in my development I had been a little bit affected by the dominant requirement for exhibiting at the time in that one was supposed to exhibit only one type of work. This one type of work was to be one image, and unless one painted one image one wasn't mature. I've always felt this to be false, even though I gave in to it somewhat at various times in my career. I have always wanted to experiment with many different things and I always have. However, when it came to exhibiting I usually would select the one dominant thing that seemed to occur in my work and exhibit works that were only related to that.

One of the finest things I see coming out of the current scene is a breakdown of the idea of the one image. As I say, there are certain kinds of artists who need to work on one image over long periods of time, and I have nothing against this. It is only wrong when there is an insistence that an artist is not mature unless he develops the one image or the one idea. Today we have a number of young artists now who are not only working on many different ideas but they are exhibiting them. I think that Funk art is helping to emphasize this and bring it out.

MS. SECKLER: I guess I begin to see which side of the--among the artists today there seem to be two main groups developing, one which feels that art develops out of itself into, you know, more a refinement of the pure aesthetic and would cut off from life pretty generally, and the other insists on a constant mixture of art and life which is, you know, most obviously represented by people who developed, let's say, from [Robert] Rauschenberg through the happenings sort of thing where there is more entertainment for change, discarding things, making things that are less permanent, an openness to response to what is going on in life itself at a particular moment. I must say, though, that your work, the forms that you've created out of the, did you call it polyethylene? Polyethylene?

MR. RICHENBURG: Yes. Polyethylene.

MS. SECKLER: Plastics, have about them a beautiful purity and almost crystalline order in spite of all of this sense of, you know, being very responsive to all sorts of impurities coming in from life and experience and new materials and responding very much to what's going on now.

MR. RICHENBURG: Well, as you can see in some of the other work that I have done, this kind of purity in the sense in which the plastics happened does not come through. There's a very impure attitude in much of what I do. However, in working with an idea when I find something that has meaning for me I try very much, very hard to get rid of everything extraneous to that idea. I try in a sense to purify the idea, to isolate it and to reduce the image or the idea to the simplest and most direct form. And in my work I've done a number of things, for example, with [inaudible] takes some of these I use simply in a rather abstract manner. Others I use in conjunction with pigments where I have things happening to figures. Some of my other work has been done in rope. I've done some very large rope figures, which create very interesting images. But these are [inaudible] pure in terms of plastic imagery. But then I have done a lot of work recently using toy plastic soldiers. For example, I have one project which I hope I'll be able to complete, and that is to make a large monument to the Unknown Soldier which would be about five feet high and about five feet square, made-- simply made up of a huge pile of these toy soldiers.

MS. SECKLER: I believe the monument you're speaking of is one of a series of drawings that I saw the other evening that seemed to belong to [inaudible] in the case of what was [inaudible] imposed in any kind of plastic sculpture [inaudible] what would make them into a permanent form?

MR. RICHENBURG: Well, I would have to have a fiberglass base to them and that would be [inaudible] would just appear to be a huge mass of soldiers in a pile. Now, I have done some other things with the toy plastic soldiers. I've made a series of plant--like forms which look very much like actual plants. The fact that they are made of the very realistically created plastic from soldiers gives me [inaudible] strong impact and it helps to express certain ideas about the present Vietnam war and war in general.

MS. SECKLER: Among the paintings and drawings that we've been looking at [inaudible] it just amazes [inaudible] and what they would be composed of. I notice that there's more than one in that series using small toy soldiers [inaudible].

MR. RICHENBURG: Well, I have one here that is a landscape which is made up of [inaudible] in a way the [inaudible] it would be a two-dimensional landscape made up of [inaudible] make up the sides. These [inaudible] figures [inaudible] create [inaudible].

MS. SECKLER: Have you [inaudible]?

MR. RICHENBURG: [Inaudible] the experience [inaudible] actually look like [inaudible] several hundred soldiers [inaudible] compared to what's happening in the world. So I [inaudible] reason for doing these [inaudible] definitely start out from the philosophic point of view [inaudible] simply a [inaudible] certain images which affect [inaudible] personal basis [inaudible].

MS. SECKLER: You said when you're working out something you like to [inaudible] that we might find a formal [inaudible] that would [inaudible] out of which many subsequent ideas were developed or it would be likely just to move on to other kinds of things [inaudible] beyond toy soldiers?

MR. RICHENBURG: Well, as I say, I've experimented with a great number of materials and ideas. I find that almost any material has an infinite number of ways in which to [inaudible] however, most materials don't produce images that are strong enough to move me. So as I would experiment with a material or an object or a process just to see what happened. And it's only when I am strongly affected that I will continue working with it. I find that over a period of time certain things that I have left as being not worthy of development have come back into the work and they've come into it in a very different way. For example, I spent quite a bit of time making files of all kinds, files out of wire, files out of [inaudible] aluminum, highly polished steel. And there was one in particular. There was an arrow made of these files, pieces of metal, that had a lot of meaning to me and yet not enough as it existed. Later on I came across some unusual [inaudible] and I created a mask out of fiberglass and at a certain point all of this came together. And I think each one of these things by itself was insufficient but brought together it created a very beautiful and moving image.

[Audio Break]

MS. SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler resuming an interview with Robert Richenburg in Provincetown on August 27, 1968 at the second reel. We had been discussing a number of unusual materials that you were involved with in a series of experimental, well, I don't know whether I should say experimental. You take them as seriously as any other part of your work. These ideas for using unusual materials were elaborated as a series of drawings and I'd like to have you talk about a few others that you've been occupied with recently.

MR. RICHENBURG: Well, one of the things that, one of the materials that I've been using a great deal have been plastic tapes, plastic tapes of various types. I've utilized some chrome tapes which reflect light in a very powerful way. I did one work which is a series of relatively loose tapes which are blown by a fan and strong lights are attached to them. It creates a very powerful and brilliant shimmering of light, yet they work when it is without any artificial light or any strong light. It also has a certain beauty to it. I've utilized tapes in a number of different ways, usually in conjunction with light. I find that the relationship between plastic tapes in motion and water and air is very strong. I find that there's a tremendous power that can come from some of these works.

Another thing that has interested me lately has been the things that happen to people and in certain of my works I have tried to in a sense symbolize certain acts, certain events that occur. For example, I have one work in which a shiny tape is run back and forth over the back of a figure. This one motion continues over and over again. And in looking at the work all kinds of images and ideas run through the mind. It's very difficult to look at the work without feeling at least repelled, in many cases attracted to the image. I like the lack of specific action that comes about through it because it leaves the viewer in a kind of vague, with a kind of vague uneasiness.

I have sketches for many things which involve actions and things happening to people. I'm not sure that these are necessarily in the realm of art or in the realm of sculpture. This is one of the things that I am not too concerned with in them. I'm more interested in creating something that will affect me strongly.

MS. SECKLER: Does it seem to you that they might be like an episode from a happening but instead of staging it, you know, in life or with live people it's in a miniature scale?

MR. RICHENBURG: Well, there certainly is a relationship to the happening but this was not my reason for doing it, although I am sure that to some degree I've been affected by the happenings. In the happening the action in itself is primary. That is, the action for the individual participating in the happening. They are really meant to be participated in rather than looked at. Whereas the things I am doing in this vein are meant to be looked at and one projects that the things happening to these figures perhaps are also happening to you. And if what is happening is unpleasant it creates an extreme sense of unease and distaste.

Another work I have been involved with has utilized light aluminum rods. I have a series, I believe it's 16 of them, which are bent, suspended by relatively invisible nylon cord, which simply turn at different speeds. It

creates a very unusual swaying motion and interlocking rhythms which somehow turns out to be a very human kind of rhythm. In fact, I was first attracted to these forms through experiments I had made with aluminum rods and the rhythms that result become very much related to the rhythms of certain types of dancing.

MS. SECKLER: How large are these metal rods?

MR. RICHENBURG: Well, the rods themselves are relatively small but they are strung together in a work which is about eight feet high and about four feet wide and four feet deep.

MS. SECKLER: I find it a little difficult to visualize the motion of, the dancing motion you described. Could you make it a little clearer?

MR. RICHENBURG: Well, it's really an undulating motion which would relate only to one certain type of dance. Since these rods are held by invisible cord they appear to be existing in emptiness and you get this series of rhythms, one reinforcing or working against the other, of various sizes all at one time. And it's almost an invisible work in itself. It is not a very obvious work. It's one that's rather hard to see, yet I think this is part of its effect.

MS. SECKLER: In formulating an idea for this kind of object it would be hard to describe it whether it's sculpture or construction. What do you call it?

MR. RICHENBURG: Well, I agree, it does not really come under the title of sculpture. Some of it might come under the idea of a construction. But I think it's sort of in between. I really haven't thought too much about exactly how one would pin it down. It is more of, to me it's more a moving image and that's perhaps about all I could say. As you notice, these works are very different in kind and a very wide range of ideas is involved in these. This is simply a result of the tremendous amount of experimentation that is going-- that I've been going through in the past four years. I find that these are connected mainly because I'm the one who did them. Obviously, each one has a deep relationship to me. Otherwise, I would not have continued making them or carried them to completion. So though to the onlooker they may appear extremely separate, to me they are just part of my life. They are things that have happened in my life in the past four years. They are things I have found.

MS. SECKLER: I was glad that you put this, added this there. I was about to ask you since you, of course, use the word "idea" and there's obviously a certain amount of shifting device in each one and, of course, we emerged in the last two years from a period in which the motivation for most art was assumed to be in the unconscious or intuitive level and you've put it back a little bit to that in saying, you know, it emerges from a level of feeling and belongs in your life. Is there anything that you'd like to enlarge on in that area as to how, you know, how the motive comes about or let's, I don't know, I was thinking about it as I was looking at a moment ago the sketches. They reminded me a little bit, to some extent, of things that emerged in the Dada period when again the artist was allowing life to be more important than the formal element and in which you might have the incursion of all sorts of things that were going on. But there, of course, there's a more sardonic attitude, whereas these, although they have I think certainly in reference to the Vietnam war, let's say, that would involve an attitude of kind of rather bitter satire. In some cases the emphasis seems to lean a little bit in another direction, too.

MR. RICHENBURG: Well, in 1951 to 1952 I did a series of paintings in which I used toy dolls and toy paintings, toy automobiles and other objects. I suppose these were sort of philosophic in basis, although I'm not too sure of that at this point. Nonetheless, at a very early period I was involved with ideas related to this, except now there's another attitude attached to it. So in one sense it's a continuation of something that has interested me for 20 years. However, as I say, there are these differences. Now, I think that we're in a period now where ideas assume a greater and greater clarity. I think ideas have always had a tremendous importance in the development of creative art. It's just that in the past there have been other factors which tended to hide this. In our present period where there is so much change and the change is so continuous it is becoming clearer how very important is the idea in art.

Now, it doesn't matter how one arrives at these ideas. There are some people, like Duchamp and some of the Dadaists for whom the idea was verbal before it became visual, although in most cases there was some working out in the visual before the idea could be complete. Art has always had a great deal to do with invention. Ideas have had a great deal to do with invention. I think that we're in a period where the artist can be freed of this heavy load, this heavy necessity to create a single image, and this gives the idea complete range. In my work I have tried to develop my ideas as fully as possible and I've tried to give, to permit any idea, even the wildest idea, to come in and at least try it to find if it has some meaning. If it tends to be a little bit outside of the accepted area of art, well, that may mean that it really isn't art. But I think that the creative artist cannot be too worried about that. He has to first do what he, what seems to have meaning to him. He has to explore ideas in every direction. Out of that is his only hope of finding that which may some day be called art.

MS. SECKLER: I know, Bob, too, that you find this element in the work of the younger artists today very appealing, their acceptance of a variety of ideas and their, well, another idea that you mentioned the other evening which I thought we might explore for a moment, you were saying at that time that you feel that the young people are rejecting the notion of art as necessarily being hard work. This is something that you share with them, this generation.

MR. RICHENBURG: Well, I share it mostly because I've been raised in the hard work ethic, having had my formative years in the Depression, having spent most of my life working very hard and very long both at my painting and at other things. I think I see with some clarity the limitations of work and the worship of work. For the creative artist one of the easiest things or one of the easiest devices one can have for avoiding creating is in the mystique of work. I have seen this happen thousands of times, artists who feel that because they are working hard somehow they are creating. This is not necessarily so. Most of the artists who work very hard at their art are pretty dull painters. Most of the great artists, most of the best artists are artists who have worked hard but there are some who work not nearly as long as others.

I don't think the amount of work per se is so terribly important. What is important is whether or not the work is imaginative, whether or not there is a high level of intelligence being brought into play, whether or not there is some kind of daring, some kind of leap in the work itself. It's much too easy to just sort of wallow in good works or labor itself as a virtue.

MS. SECKLER: I recall, too, from our previous discussion that you have a certain amount of admiration for the Minimal artists, for some of them, at least, and feel there's no objection at all to their practice of sometimes sending a drawing out to a manufacturer who will then construct an object as being part of this general attitude that hard work is not too important.

MR. RICHENBURG: Yes. I think that, you know, this has been pretty well written about by many people. I see nothing wrong with an artist having a foundry make his casting or having an architect have workers making his building. It depends on the quality of the idea that is behind it. We're in an age which has brought to us many different materials that we never had before. There's no reason on Earth why an artist cannot use these materials. Many of them are already made. He doesn't necessarily have to have touched his hand to them at all. But by using them in certain ways he may be able to create very moving works. This doesn't mean that all works made that way are necessarily good. It's just one more area in which an artist can work and I think it's an area that's going to become more and more important as time goes on. You're going to find many artists working with all kinds of technological devices, scientific attitudes, methods and so on, using them in highly creative ways and in ways quite different from what their originators had in mind.

Now, some of the Minimal artists are very much involved with a cool idea, the idea that somehow they do not want to have any kind of emotional attachment to their work. They want to in a sense be removed from it. Now, I see nothing wrong in this. In fact, for these artists it's very important. You'll find that if you examine the history of art that there have been all kinds of ideas that have been expressed as being very essential and at the core of art which later on turn to be only partial. The Abstract Expressionists had a whole set of ideas which they used. These were very important to them. And they would certainly have not been able to have created the works they did if they didn't have some ideas to work from.

Certainly the Minimal artists are using ideas which at least some of them are rather claiming to be what art is about. Now, it's only here that they go wrong, rather than that these ideas might not be useful to them. Certainly they are absolutely essential to their work. They have a great deal to do with the way the work comes out. And if an artist wants to be cool in his attitude, if he wants to rule out emotion and if he wants to rule out designing or flatness or anything else that has had a certain currency in art, I see nothing wrong with this. In many cases it is very helpful to the creative artist himself. However, I think it needs to be kept in mind that this will go the way of all the other sets of ideas like the ideas used by the Futurists, which were so exciting at the time, or the ideas used by the Cubists or the Dadaists or any other group you want to mention.

The cool idea is an idea that is simply for a group of artists creating at a certain time. Along with the cool idea you have the hot idea. You have a group of [inaudible] which stems greatly from Abstract Expressionism as it moved through Pop art and you now find examples of that in so-called Funk art. Now, much of the Funk art is certainly pretty shoddy, but I think that there are some artists working in that so-called area who are very vital. These artists are working with strange and unusual materials creating strange and at times somewhat surrealist images. Perhaps the part of Funk art that interests me the most is the idea which I find inherent in it of a kind of silent pointing by anonymous objects. This tends to give a great deal of power to the objects used. It is at its basis a very subtle kind of art even though much of what is called Funk art is very obvious.

MS. SECKLER: In addition to those of your recent works that may tend toward Funk art I'm also very much interested in another direction that you're exploring simultaneously and that is in the sculptural constructions which involve plastic. Would you--I wondered how you had begun to work in that direction and what ideas took

you to this much more constructivist--looking as compared, that is, for instance, with the objects we've just been describing. The sculptures, these plastic sculptures have a quality of sort of constructivist purity but I gather that you're feeling they are not as different as they may seem to be to an onlooker.

MR. RICHENBURG: No, I don't think they are as different, although perhaps a few of them might be. For example, I've created one work out of plastic which is about eight feet by eight feet by eight feet made of simply sheets of polyethylene plastic which are suspended. It creates a kind of image that is in a sense an anonymous image. It doesn't seem to specifically relate to any direct visual experience. Yet these works, this work does not impose itself the way a monolithic type of sculpture would. It's just sort of there, the forms piled one on top of the other.

MS. SECKLER: But in a very orderly sequence?

MR. RICHENBURG: Yes, there's--

MS. SECKLER: Regular sequence?

MR. RICHENBURG: There's an orderly sequence but there are such a large number of sheets of plastic involved that there's a tremendous disorder. It becomes more like an environment than the usual piece of sculpture. I'm very, as I mentioned earlier I'm very interested in impermanent materials and I've chosen in these works to work with the type of plastic which is not terribly permanent. Polyethylene plastic is made for packaging and various other things. It is not meant to last many hundreds of years. However, it's extremely cheap. It can be bought in a lumberyard by the rolls at a very modest price. My works, these works are created with the idea that they would have to be renewed every 10 to 20 years and the renewal job is very simple. All one needs is some kind of workman who knows how to, who could cut sheets of plastic with a scissors of a certain size. In fact, anybody could do it.

MS. SECKLER: Once they had the idea. And another one of these plastic sculptures, the form, the one which is like an inverted pyramid composed of sheets of suspended plastic, has a great aesthetic beauty and particularly--I suppose they all do--in terms of the light, the way it reflects light around it, the light in the environment. So is that something that just happened as a byproduct or were you interested in that?

MR. RICHENBURG: It happened as a byproduct, but once it happened I was interested in that and I intend to make other works relating to this idea. However, in itself the beauty of the materials does not interest me nearly as much as the intensity of the idea. From the way it looks now I think that there will be a number of other works that might be quite different from this which will be created with this essential idea.

MS. SECKLER: Is it possible that you might move away from the, well, these seem to take place in a kind of ordered sequence that has, you know, an almost mathematical regularity. Would you entertain the possibility of using them in a much less ordered or in an irregular order or in a more romantic formulation of some kind?

MR. RICHENBURG: Yes, I would. In fact, I have done a few out of tapes which bear a strong relationship to that, but at the same time they are very different in that they are much less formal and more dispersed.

[END OF RECORDING.]

Last updated...June 11, 2009