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Oral history interview with Jack Tworokov,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Jack Tworkov on May 22, 1981. The interview was conducted by Gerald Silk for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Mark Rothko and His Times oral history project, with funding provided by the Mark Rothko Foundation.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

GERALD SILK: I'll ask you some of these Rothko questions and then I want to get involved more with your career. These are very specific things and whatever you can answer is fine. By the way, I saw yesterday in the paper that you were given membership in the Academy.

JACK TWORKOV: Yes.

MR. SILK: That's nice. The first question is when did you first meet Rothko? Do you recall?

MR. TWORKOV: Gee, I can't remember. He was on the project for a while, I think, and I was on the project, and I must have run into him at that time.

MR. SILK: So sometime in the early '30's?

MR. TWORKOV: It could have been in the middle '30's. I didn't get on the project until the middle '30's.

MR. SILK: So you met him through the project then?

MR. TWORKOV: Yes, yes. I became acquainted with him a little bit, but we didn't become friends or close. But I must have met him.

MR. SILK: Until later, this was?

MR. TWORKOV: Yeah.

MR. SILK: All right. So you don't recall who introduced you?

MR. TWORKOV: No.

MR. SILK: You just probably met him there. So then when did the friendship develop a little more strongly and intimately?

MR. TWORKOV: Again, it's sort of difficult for me to know. I would run into Rothko here and there. We'd exchange a little bit of talk, but we weren't on an intimate basis. We weren't inviting each other to the house or going out together or something like that.

MR. SILK: Was he involved with The Club?

MR. TWORKOV: No.

MR. SILK: He was always uptown. Was that-?

MR. TWORKOV: No. He really was-I think he very quickly developed an antagonism against the painters who were gestural abstract painters. And I think he kept-

MR. SILK: Kept apart-?

MR. TWORKOV: Kept apart from them. But I did run into him, say, occasionally in the late '40's. We were bound to meet each other.

MR. SILK: Sure.

MR. TWORKOV: And I think he once visited de Kooning at a time that I had my-

MR. SILK: Studio right near his flat.

MR. TWORKOV: On the same floor.

MR. SILK: That was the late '40's, early '50's?

MR. TWORKOV: So I maybe ran into him then and talked to him a little.

MR. SILK: What kinds of things did you talk about?

MR. TWORKOV: Well, he was telling us a little bit about his travels. He had been-at that time I think he had gone to Europe. It could have been his first trip to Europe. He came back with some kind of attitudes about it, but I don't recall those. I must confess my memory is not very sharp. I mean if my wife had participated, she would be full of details which I don't have. But generally I remember that he was distant from the kind of painting that was done say, or began, in the late '40's and developed in the early '50's. And my own attitude towards his work as I began to look at it-in fact, I didn't see much of his work until about the middle '50's. Surely he showed but I didn't follow it very closely; I didn't see it. I knew there was this group of ten that he belonged to.

MR. SILK: Right.

MR. TWORKOV: And somehow or another, I didn't follow that group and didn't know too much about it.

MR. SILK: Were you more involved with The Club which then by the early '50's had dissolved?

MR. TWORKOV: Yes. So I really didn't know too much about his early work then. And I, myself, at first reacted a little bit against it-what seemed to me like the emptiness of his work at first. And it wasn't until Elaine de Kooning at one time when I mentioned my attitude towards Rothko's work cautioned me that I had better give it a little more attention. Anyway, whatever the case may be, towards the end of the '50's, I myself was having some doubts about some aspects of the way-not so much about the work, the abstract expressionist work, but the way it was developing, the way it became academic all over the country.

MR. SILK: You wrote that article in Art Works in the late '50's about that.

MR. TWORKOV: Yeah.

MR. SILK: Is There an Art Academy About Abstract Expressionism?

MR. TWORKOV: Yeah.

MR. SILK: So you admired Rothko's work more then by the late '50's.

MR. TWORKOV: Slowly I began to admire his work quite a great deal. And by that time, towards the end of his life, the last couple years, we really became close. We began to talk quite a bit.

MR. SILK: What did you talk about?

MR. TWORKOV: Mostly there was a need on Rothko's part to explain himself a little bit. He was aware of the criticism that people had made of his work-that he was repeating the same form, that there was what seemed like very little development in his work. And I remember on one occasion when we had lunch together (that was, I think, in Provincetown, actually) that he felt a need to say something about it. And for the first time-you know, his usual habit was to kind of joke about things and to avoid conversation.

MR. SILK: Right.

MR. TWORKOV: If you asked him, "How are things going?" he would say, "Well, I'm just bored." That's almost a standard reply of his and gave you the impression that in the studio that's all that happened to him is that he was just sitting around being bored. Obviously, it wasn't so because he was working, producing so much work. But that was his attitude. He often invited me for a drink and I'm not much of a drinker. But his conversation was kind of on the lighter, on the joking side, a little bit.

MR. SILK: So did you talk about a philosophy, a literature?

MR. TWORKOV: No.

MR. SILK: No, not at all?

MR. TWORKOV: Very rarely. It was only at that time in Provincetown that I felt that he had a need to talk to someone about his-but I don't remember in detail what he said. I do remember that he made a point about how difficult to develop his art had been and how intense the struggle was to find something of his own that he could

hang on to.

MR. SILK: Did you feel that his art was reaching a dead end?

MR. TWORKOV: No, no. No, I didn't think so at all at that time. But he I remember specifically saying-I forget exactly how it was phrased-but it was difficult for him to give up something that he had so struggled to achieve and to attain. And of course, he was strongly aware of the fact that he had attained something, that he had reached something. And he was-he didn't have to say how committed and convinced he was of what he had achieved. At the same time, he was terribly hurt by, say for instance, when Greenberg turned to Newman as a superior artist to Rothko. He was probably deeply and terribly hurt. I once brought up the question of Newman to him but it was sympathetic to my feeling because I certainly didn't feel that Newman was the superior artist. But it may be that he sensed my sympathy for his work and therefore became more friendly and more open.

MR. SILK: But he felt competition with Newman's art?

MR. TWORKOV: Oh, yes, intensely. Not only-well, it wasn't competition. He broke with Newman. I don't think they talked to each other towards the end.

MR. SILK: They were different personalities, though.

MR. TWORKOV: Oh, intensely different. First of all, I think that Rothko's struggle was an intense one. And now that I know his work much better, his earlier work that I've seen a great deal more of, I can now see what he started from, what he worked through in order to get where he did. Whereas Newman began painting I think in 1947 with that stripe and that was it.

MR. SILK: He did a few things before but they-

MR. TWORKOV: No, there was hardly any-

MR. SILK: Yeah, some of these genetic, but there wasn't much before.

MR. TWORKOV: No. When I met Newman, I didn't-well, I knew Newman as a matter of fact better than I knew Rothko.

MR. SILK: I see. This was during the '30's?

MR. TWORKOV: This was in the late '40's. He lived down on the block where my studio was-I think 17th Street or something like that. I forget now. And I used to visit him. And he was also a closer friend of my sister's, a painter. And I used to meet him on the block all the time. And I remember one evening at his house when I asked him, I said-because he was improvising at the piano, and I had the impression that he was trying to tell us that he was really interested in composing music. And I at one point sort of-there were some other people at dinner. At one point I turned to him and just asked him simply, I said, "Forgive me, but really what do you consider your work?" He said, "Well, essentially I'm a writer." That was 1947, you see.

MR. SILK: I see. There's not much evidence of his work in the early '40's even though he claims to have done things. That's true.

MR. TWORKOV: He showed me some drawings that he had made, but I took them as I took his piano improvisation. It didn't have any meaning for me. But his first show at the Betty Parsons Gallery was a kind of surprise to everybody. Everybody was astonished. And I remember he was supposed to come up to The Club. There was supposed to be a little bit of a celebration for him. And I think somebody maybe de Kooning or somebody, put up a card table which had a split in the center of the table on the wall. And I think he was rather offended. I don't think he stayed long or came to that Club again. Anyway, his turning to painting could have been a big surprise to Rothko because Newman sort of helped Betty Parsons arrange shows and things. He wrote pieces for the catalogues. And often in shows that Rothko participated in at that time with Gottlieb, and so forth, he often used to write the catalogue. And I think that's the way Rothko looked upon him-as a guy who would write notes for his catalogue. And the fact that he became- [Laughter]

MR. SILK: A painter of note-

MR. TWORKOV: Well, I don't think he would have minded it so much if-I remember soon after I was telling Greenberg, I was telling him of my own change of attitude towards Rothko's work how much I had come to admire it. And Greenberg said to me, "But it's not Rothko. It's Barney Newman." And I was terribly shocked.

MR. SILK: But what it really is is Clem Greenberg I think. Ultimately.

MR. TWORKOV: Yeah. So I never told that to Rothko, you know. But my sympathy went out to Rothko when

Greenberg said that. And I am sure that as Rothko became aware of this-Greenberg at that time was really the most important critic, and he influenced a lot of the younger painters-really turned to Newman and rather ignored Rothko. I mean this might have been true of people like, say, maybe Stella and others.

MR. SILK: Although Stella actually, the early things he did around '58, '59, they are related to Rothko. I think he was actually interested in Rothko early on. Greenberg may have sent him in the other direction because his work was fairly atmospherical.

MR. TWORKOV: But afterwards when they mentioned influences, they mentioned Newman, rarely mentioned Rothko.

MR. SILK: Did you visit Rothko's studio?

MR. TWORKOV: Yes. The one on 69th Street. (?)

MR. SILK: Can you describe it at all?

MR. TWORKOV: Excuse me?

MR. SILK: Can you describe it?

MR. TWORKOV: Well, you know, it was at that time-there had been an earlier studio which I knew about on the Bowery or something like that I did not visit. And also, I must say Rothko's interest in other people's work was slight. He was interested in his own. And he was interested-if he was interested in people, it was because they were interested in his work. And I knew that from the start. I never made any effort to get him to see my work or have any opinion about my work or anything of the sort. I had no desire to show him what I was doing or anything like that because I got the message of what he was about. But I did visit his studio and his home a number of times, his home on 95th Street I think it was, and his studio on 69th Street (?). It was a very magnificent studio. It was this old-

MR. SILK: Carriage house, stable?

MR. TWORKOV: Yes. And it was also near at that time Christoph-what's her name-de Menil in a similar carriage house which she had turned into a house nearby, and I used to visit there occasionally. And I enjoyed seeing him.

MR. SILK: Did he talk about technique at all?

MR. TWORKOV: No.

MR. SILK: Acrylics or-?

MR. TWORKOV: No. I never asked him questions like that.

MR. SILK: I know now that you're associated with the foundation, but did he ever explain to you how he wanted his works exhibited?

MR. TWORKOV: Well, he didn't have to explain. I knew that he refused to show in any group show after a while. He wanted his work seen always by itself. Where I saw-you know, at that time a very close friend of his who also collected some of my work, Donald Blinken, had made a big collection, a fairly good sized collection of Rothko's work. And I notice after a little while as he got to know Rothko, in the living room he took out all the other paintings that were there so that there were nothing but Rothko's. This became typical. I mean he put the paintings in other rooms or he took them to his house on Long Island, but he'd had some other paintings-like Guston's, my own, which he took out and after a while there were nothing but Rothko's in that living room. And I'm sure that's the way that Rothko really wanted it. Or for instance when he had an exhibit at the Phillips Gallery in Washington, they had to make a little room.

MR. SILK: That's right.

MR. TWORKOV: Or in the late-I saw his work in the Tate Gallery, the same thing-they had to make a room for him. And he refused to show in the biannual at the Whitney and so forth. He also had a terrific contempt for the people in the art world, museum curators and-

MR. SILK: Art historians.

MR. TWORKOV: Art historians. At the same time, his ambition was very great for his work, and at the same time, he really had contempt for all these people. Sometimes I didn't blame him at all. I remember once he was

supposed to come for dinner here. When he found out that a former museum curator, a friend of mine, had been a friend of mine quite regardless of her position, when he found out that she was coming to dinner, he called and called. Finally he called and he excused himself, didn't come to dinner because he didn't want to be at the dinner with her.

MR. SILK: But there were some, I think he had a respect for Robert Goldwater.

MR. TWORKOV: Yes, possibly. Goldwater was supposed to write a book about him. So I'm sure he cooperated.

MR. SILK: But in general, he had not trust for them.

MR. TWORKOV: I think the interesting thing about Rothko to me is that while he was very career conscious, very protective of his work, that nevertheless his passion and devotion to his work went way beyond career or anything else. And maybe the way he protected his work was as a result of his consciousness, you know, that he'll achieve something special. At any rate, I never thought of him as compromising in any way his work for the sake of career, or making work just to influence career. If there were two sides to him, I would say, if you wanted to make a distinction between self and ego-his self went into his work and his ego went into his career. But he didn't mix it up as far as his work went.

MR. SILK: Did he ever mention his plans for the Foundation to you?

MR. TWORKOV: No.

MR. SILK: So you have no specific information as to what he intended. Do you own any Rothko's or have any?

MR. TWORKOV: No. I at that time never really exchanged work with anybody. I was very close to de Kooning but have nothing of his.

MR. SILK: I see.

MR. TWORKOV: It wasn't until recently that I really had the work of some younger people that I have a good relationship with. Sometimes they'd give me work and sometimes there was a small exchange. But I never went after-in fact, I would have been embarrassed. Looking back now, I'm almost sorry that I, as poor as I was, that I didn't buy certain things.

MR. SILK: Sure, of course.

MR. TWORKOV: It wasn't my indifference but it's just simply I didn't do it.

MR. SILK: You were actually one of the last people to see Rothko. Is that right?

MR. TWORKOV: Well, it's a very strange thing. I went to visit my doctor on 69th Street. I went for a check-up. And I was coming out of his office and met Rothko on 69th and Second Avenue or Third Avenue, I forget-Third Avenue. And I told him I was just coming from my doctor, and he said well he was just coming from his doctor. And he looked terribly down, downcast. And he asked me to stop at his studio and I wasn't able to. Wanted to go on downtown. And we talked for a few minutes and I said goodbye, and I came home and thought that he was terribly downcast. And that was the day that he committed suicide. But when I afterwards talked to that sculptor-what's his name-he was a friend of his, a close friend of his, a sculptor friend?

MR. SILK: Ferber, Herbert Ferber?

MR. TWORKOV: Ferber. Ferber told me on the contrary, he had gotten a good report from the doctor.

MR. SILK: That's right. That's true.

MR. TWORKOV: So his downcast was not related to his health as far as I can make out. But that was the last I saw him, this chance meeting.

MR. SILK: Can I ask you some questions about yourself?

MR. TWORKOV: Yes.

MR. SILK: Okay. I guess the last time you were interviewed by the Archives, it was in the early '60's and it was not too soon after that that your art underwent a significant change. Do you want to discuss that change a little?

MR. TWORKOV: Well, it wasn't a sudden change, nor was I completely disenchanting with the work that I was doing. But I was looking for-I had one problem that if I wanted to experiment with something, the method which

I was using at that time didn't lend itself to experiment in this sense: that working more or less spontaneously without drawings, there was a succession of things related to each other. But if something went wrong in a canvas and you didn't want to change it but you wanted to change it in another canvas, there was no way of keeping something. There was no constant that you could hold on to against which the change would make its point, you see. And this idea that, if you want to change something, you need to hold on to some constant against which the change can be judged. And that sort of led me on to start making drawings and I began planning drawings so that I could use exactly the same drawing if I wanted to. But if I was interested in color, then I could keep the same structure but change the color. Then I know what is working in the painting-was it the color or the structure.

MR. SILK: So the structure allowed you to work on some other levels?

MR. TWORKOV: Yes. So this was sort of the beginning of my thinking at that time. Then I began to make the canvases that were more deliberately structured and made from drawings. As a matter of fact, I have some canvases from that period still in the warehouse which I had never shown, never exhibited because they weren't particularly a successful call of my imagination at the time.

MR. SILK: This is from the mid-'60's approximately?

MR. TWORKOV: Yes. As usual, even while I was still working in the older fashion, I was at the same time experimenting with drawings, sketches in different paintings of another kind. So, after the retrospective that the Whitney gave in '64-

MR. SILK: Did you feel that was a kind of summation of one-?

MR. TWORKOV: It was a kind of summation, but even then there were some canvases moving towards an inter-connection. And after that I really can't say whether I made any conscious effort in the direction of the change or whether it was-my habit was to take a pad of paper and make many, many sketches. I would sometimes make literally hundreds of little tiny sketches on a scratch pad. And it was during that period that a question came into my mind, and that was: isn't there something in a rectangle that is a "given." In other words, every painting begins with some kind of gratuitous mark. You know, everything begins with some touch of the canvas that is spontaneous. Even if you work from nature, the same is true. And I asked myself, what is there in a rectangle that is dictated by the rectangle? And the idea came to me then-and I must say it wasn't an original idea as I found out later-and that was the diagonal. Strange, years later a physicist friend of mine, Dick Cox, sent me a whole bunch of magazines called "The Diagonal." [Laughter] I had once told him about this thing. And he had saved those things you know, and he had even made some kind of experiments in that relationship. And I still have them. He sent me a whole batch of those magazines. I must say even then I never read them.

MR. SILK: Well, were you familiar with-there were theories earlier in the century on dynamic symmetry and the pseudo science.

MR. TWORKOV: But through a friend of mine-

MR. SILK: Karl Knaths?

MR. TWORKOV: Karl Knaths, I heard of it through him and I wasn't terribly impressed by it because Dick Cox had told me a kind of graph to make dictated by dynamic symmetry and he had learned it from another artist, who had picked it up in France when he had studied in France. And this was in the '20's or later '20's. And I took this graph, or made a graph on tracing paper and I applied it to any portrait I found in the newspaper, and it seemed to work. [Laughter] So I discarded it, never gave it any thought. But this idea of the diagonal-I began making little sketches, drawing a diagonal and then saying, what other line can you make after that? I knew if you made two diagonals you got a center point, but that didn't interest me. So in other-

MR. SILK: So, in other words, you began to divide the canvas.

MR. TWORKOV: So I began just making a line that went from one corner that would hit the diagonal at 90 degrees. And it struck me that I was introducing a fourth 90 degree angle into the canvas that way-a fifth rather than fourth. But at that point where the diagonal hit, where this line from one corner hit the diagonal at 90 degrees, I began using that point as a division point in which it divided the canvas vertically. Instead of the center, it was off-center, and horizontally and so forth. And I had planned on making a lot of little sketches. And then I got some images from that which I kind of liked because they were simple images. There was something else that preceded that. For a while I wanted to abolish all references to shape.

MR. SILK: To shape?

MR. TWORKOV: Completely.

MR. SILK: Okay.

MR. TWORKOV: I wanted to-I don't know how that happened really.

MR. SILK: You reintroduced that recently.

MR. TWORKOV: I began making just marks.

MR. SILK: Right.

MR. TWORKOV: I also eliminated color. Instead of using a large brush, a large brush stroke, I made a small brush stroke. And I came off with several canvases that seemed to me related in some way-it's almost amusing because I had nothing but this rhythmic stroke and its repetition. And I could make some slight changes in the canvas simply by slight densities in the surface. And I made a series of paintings at that time about this was around 1969, called Ideling. It was a matter of fact this goes to that period because I didn't want to continue making these absolutely empty canvases.

MR. SILK: Does the gray have anything to do with-you mentioned once being intrigued with those children's gray slates.

MR. TWORKOV: Actually the gray was an influence that came to me in a very indirect way. I was very much taken with the charcoal drawings of Seurat. And his dark drawings really fascinated me, and they influenced me in making those first canvases called Ideling. (sic) I made several canvases of that, maybe three. And then I said, well, I can't do that. I've got to find some kind of shape or form to work with.

MR. SILK: Right.

MR. TWORKOV: So it was then I began making something like this, you know, very simple things in which I used the square on the right hand side and what was left over. So I made several canvases like that. And then I began using that division and began to make a series of canvases. It's sort of a canvas like that. And there was also something else. If I continued this line over here, I noticed that I would get a rectangle here very similar to the vertical one but horizontal. Anyway, I began using this point. And then I would take this and make the same position there, and I got canvases liked that. And then I would just use this shape.

MR. SILK: It was in the shape you would put a visible hand, a brush stroke.

MR. TWORKOV: Yes, something like that. So this was the beginnings of the thing. And I made quite a number of canvases, variations of this, because this lent itself. For instance, I would double the canvas and would repeat this, this and superimpose it on each other. I began to use structures that superimposed on each other and therefore had a certain amount of illusion because they existed in a space where one superimposed the other. I made quite a number of these and then-

MR. SILK: Some of these have initials for titles. Do those initials mean-? SSP and-?

MR. TWORKOV: Well, they were mostly to indicate where, at what time I worked and where. Sometimes they were summertime in Provincetown, Mass. Sometimes the initials indicated that I worked in New York. And I often used-

MR. SILK: Q and a PS, right.

MR. TWORKOV: The Q. always stood for quarter, the first quarter, the second quarter.

MR. SILK: Okay. I was wondering whether they had anything to do with geometry or-no, okay.

MR. TWORKOV: No. They were just to indicate when I worked and where because it was important to me to remember where the canvas was done.

MR. SILK: Did being at Yale have anything to do with moving towards preordained structure?

MR. TWORKOV: No. Simply that in 1963 when I was at Yale I had some money outside of painting to support myself with. And that kind of liberated me from the gallery scene. I left the Castelli Gallery in 1965 because the gallery had moved so much towards pop art, and I thought that Leo had really lost interest in the kind of work I was doing. And so I left the gallery and I took advantage of that Yale job to just experiment with my work very freely and without showing, without any effort or attempt to show. And this worked until about the time I left New Haven. It was '69.

MR. SILK: Is that when you-Nancy Hoffman, is that when you-?

MR. TWORKOV: No. By that time I already had some paintings I was eager to show.

MR. SILK: Right.

MR. TWORKOV: New paintings that had taken a new form, partly the kind I had just described. And I asked the Whitney to give me a small show, which they did.

MR. SILK: Right. That was '71 was it?

MR. TWORKOV: I think it was '70.

MR. SILK: Yeah, yeah.

MR. TWORKOV: Or maybe '71. I don't recall. And then when they said they would show my work, I knew they were going to show it in that small gallery on the ground floor and I had by that time quite a lot of paintings. So I looked for a gallery to show some paintings of that period related to the work that was at the Whitney, because I had accumulated other work. So I approached-I don't know if I approached them or they approached me. I don't remember how-the French and Company. So I showed there simultaneously with the Whitney Show. And Nancy Hoffman was running that operation for French and Company

MR. SILK: Right.

MR. TWORKOV: So I showed there I think two years in succession or something like that. But my relationship-not to Nancy but to the owners of the gallery was not so good. I didn't like their attitude very much. First of all, after my show they wanted a painting of mine because they were showing my work, and I thought that was ridiculous. I didn't want to give them a painting for showing my work.

MR. SILK: An unusual arrangement.

MR. TWORKOV: And then they wanted more of a percentage than I wanted to give. So I wasn't getting along too well with-I forget the name of the man who owned the gallery at that time. When Nancy left the gallery, I was at first a little bit doubtful about joining the gallery when it first opened. But she had offered to act as my agent for a while, so I thought that was a very good arrangement. And from then I drifted into the gallery. I did join the gallery a couple of years later. I don't recall when. And she's been very good to me.

MR. SILK: It's a nice space to show in too. You-

Voice: Do you want something to drink?

MR. TWORKOV: No.

MR. SILK: Whenever you want to stop. You tell me when you're getting tired.

MR. TWORKOV: Okay.

MR. SILK: In some of the things I've read, you were talking about some of your early work in relation to jazz, and you mentioned Miles Davis. And in the later work you were talking about people like Phil Glass and Steve Reich.

MR. TWORKOV: Well, it struck me when I was doing these Idling canvases, I had heard Steve Reich at one time. And when I was at Yale I had invited that group to give a performance at Yale and I was quite taken with them. No I won't say I was directly influenced by them because that's silly, any more than I was influenced by-

MR. SILK: Miles Davis, sure.

MR. TWORKOV: Incidentally, it wasn't Miles Davis.

MR. SILK: Okay, who was it?

MR. TWORKOV: It was-

MR. SILK: Parker? Charlie Parker?

MR. TWORKOV: No. There were people who used to play the Five Spot.

MR. SILK: Coltrane?

MR. TWORKOV: The Five Spot was right opposite my studio.

MR. SILK: Ornette Coleman?

MR. TWORKOV: Ornette Colman. He really did it. I really loved his work at the time. And I saw a real connection between his work and abstract expressionism. And as a matter of fact, he saw that connection because he started going to the galleries looking at paintings. I used to run into him at galleries looking at paintings. And I think he was influenced by painting. Maybe it was just the other way around, for all I know.

MR. SILK: Sure.

MR. TWORKOV: Steve Reich, they performed at Yale; I forget what year. But by 1970 I was making these paintings and it occurred to me that there was some similarity in both in the use of the repetition of the stroke and so forth.

MR. SILK: Is there anyone, any music now that intrigues you?

MR. TWORKOV: No. I mean I don't listen very much. I mean the work as it developed later, I really don't know how it developed and so forth. But I was very much intrigued by a lot of things that came up that I never anticipated.

MR. SILK: Well, your more recent work is much more colorful.

MR. TWORKOV: Well, I kept on switching with color. For instance, the two paintings I did right after this past winter-I have switched from a more or less flat surface to an articulated surface often depending on what I'm drawing. I mean I couldn't talk about it. I would have to draw. Some of the things that have been taking place that have really been fascinating come out of a certain kind of geometry applied to a rectangle that is very mysterious to me. I don't know-I mean I know a mathematician could probably explain why these things happen. I simply know they happen and I don't try to make the explanations. And I've been using a kind of structure that derives out of these things and using the shapes that they suggest which I would never have invented except for- So that they fascinate me. And last summer and the summer before I began the summer season always by trying to get away from that structure, from the geometry. And so far I haven't come up with anything that I feel-

MR. SILK: Can replace it?

MR. TWORKOV: Can replace it significantly. I have nostalgia for that, for the time of the purely spontaneous. But actually things come up in the geometric work that are almost like accidents because I could never have invented them. So they come right out of that system. And of course, well, you could make a drawing or painting always subject to variations and subject to spontaneous execution. For instance, two years ago I made nearly 12 canvases based on exactly the same structure, same size, same structure, but changed the painting style, color and stroke in each canvas. It was really an experiment on my part. I'm wondering whether I'll arrive at any kind of conclusion. Well, I didn't arrive at any conclusion except that each canvas looked entirely different from the others. [Laughter] In spite of the structure, a simple change in color or a simple change in the way you brushed made a completely new canvas, a completely different canvas. So that was the only lesson that I learned.

MR. SILK: I think it was Braque who said he liked the rule that corrected the emotion, is the situation of the emotion elaborating the rule on occasion?

MR. TWORKOV: I came across the phrase in Yeats about chance and choice, and I was really struck by it. It was exactly what is involved in my work. By using this geometry, I have choices, a lot of choices in front of me. But the final painting depends a great deal on chance. And the combination of choice and chance is what I really appreciate in the work. It's very meaningful to me.

MR. SILK: Is there anyone now whose work interests you?

MR. TWORKOV: Well, I mean there are a lot of people working whose work interests me but not in the sense that I can identify with, you know. First of all, there are five painters in my family. My sister is a painter and exhibits. Her husband is a painter. And in fact his exhibition was over just yesterday. He was showing at the Sacks Gallery. My daughter is a painter and she's married to a painter whose work has been making a terrific reputation in the last couple of years.

MR. SILK: Who is this now?

MR. TWORKOV: Robert Moskowitz.

MR. SILK: Oh, sure. You were both in the biennial, weren't you?

MR. TWORKOV: Yes. He was in the biennial. And there are people whose work I've liked enormously, like-

MR. SILK: Jennifer Bartlett?

MR. TWORKOV: Jennifer Bartlett and quite a number of others. I like the work of students often very much and young painters very much, especially before they enter the art world stream.

MR. SILK: So you're optimistic about it. Because there was a point at which you said you had some distrust for 20th century art.

MR. TWORKOV: Well, I do and it applies to my own work as well. I'm not just talking about other people's work. I think it's been in many ways a terrible century. And I feel that a lot of it-I look back upon times when there was a more coherent culture, more clear, and art was more bound in some ways. I find so much of what happened in our time as more due to a kind of disillusion. There's so much in modern art that was negative in spirit, negative in attitude towards things.

MR. SILK: You said there were two poles in art-pure form and new outrage. Is that-?

MR. TWORKOV: Did I say that? [Laughter]

MR. SILK: Yes. I think you saw more formal concerns as the pure form and I guess Dada in theater and performance.

MR. TWORKOV: No. I don't consider the more formal art as the purer form. I think theater is another way of working. I think there is to me a difference between the artists who have really worked out of the deepest necessity of their selves and those who have simply worked out of the ego, to conquer the world and to exploit the world. I think there's a great deal-an art oriented towards the market, as everything is oriented toward the market now. It can be novel, it can be innovative. But it lacks for me a great deal of the spirit that I really would look for in art. I can't say that I haven't-at least I think of myself as at least not having the most negative-

MR. SILK: You always talked about much of the art as being an internal search as well.

MR. TWORKOV: Only to say that I'm happy. I think that the art I have admired most in my life was Cézanne. And I've always had rather big doubts about Picasso. And that distinction sort of continued throughout my life. I mean like I feel pretty good about Mondrian, not that it's the kind of work that fascinates me most but because I do believe it's an integrity.

MR. SILK: That's what you respect in Rothko also, a sense of integrity.

MR. TWORKOV: Yes, in Rothko the same thing. But I feel an awful lot of art is very exploitive and it exploits aspects for me that detract from the art. But then I hate to feel so pious about it too. As I say, I don't necessarily-I mean I feel that my art is as much part of the time, whatever it is, as any other art. And since I don't feel too happy about the times, I don't think I'm completely happy about even my own painting except that I think it has helped to form me for what I am. And that's what I am.

MR. SILK: I sense integrity throughout in Nada.

MR. TWORKOV: Well, that would please me.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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