



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Astrid Preston,
2020 July 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 recorded interview with Astrid Preston on July 27, 2020. The interview took place from Preston's studio Santa Monica, California, and was conducted by Matthew Simms for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Pandemic Oral History Project.

This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MATTHEW SIMMS: —can you?

ASTRID PRESTON: Okay, there it goes.

MATTHEW SIMMS: So now we are officially recording.

ASTRID PRESTON: Right.

MATTHEW SIMMS: So I'll do my little—so this is Matthew Simms, uh, speaking with Astrid Preston via Zoom in her studio in Santa Monica, California, um, on July 27th, 2020, as part of the—we're calling it the Pandemic Project. Uh, we toyed with different words and [laughs] that was the one that stuck.

ASTRID PRESTON: [Laughs.]

MATTHEW SIMMS: Uh—For the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art. Um, and, Astrid, we're—first of all, thank you very much for agreeing to be part of this and—

ASTRID PRESTON: It's—it's such a pleasure to speak with somebody, you know, in this isolation [laughs].

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah, well, tell me about how things have been going. How are you?

ASTRID PRESTON: It's a long period of time now, uh. I'm great. This is—was easy for me, is that this is what I do anyway. I work alone in my studio, which is in my house, so I don't really have to go anywhere except my back yard and, you know, the mailbox.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Right, right.

ASTRID PRESTON: So in that way—and my husband still goes to his office so I'm alone all day and I really like that. So it's been very positive for my work—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ASTRID PRESTON: —and of course the stress—how my stress gets balanced is through the work —

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah, well.

ASTRID PRESTON: —So more compulsive work relaxes me and, you know, gives me a little dialog with what's going on inside, which is very strange and—I call it the plague. You call it the— [laughs].

MATTHEW SIMMS: The plague.

[They laugh.]

ASTRID PRESTON: The—yeah—yeah—the year of the plague.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Right. And—

ASTRID PRESTON: It's been used a lot in literature.

MATTHEW SIMMS: That's right, Camus, I guess wrote—

ASTRID PRESTON: Yeah.

MATTHEW SIMMS: —*The Plague* and then other things people—

ASTRID PRESTON: Right.

MATTHEW SIMMS: —and some of those things were popping up, um, on social media and other people—

ASTRID PRESTON: Right.

MATTHEW SIMMS: —trying to find reference points for this. It's—it's interesting.

ASTRID PRESTON: Yeah.

MATTHEW SIMMS: And you were mentioning, you know, feedback, how to get feedback during this period. How—how— [cross talk]

ASTRID PRESTON: Yeah, I didn't have any for months and months, so general—I usually have at least, uh, somebody who comes in, does a studio visit, you know, every other week or so, just so —there are times, you know, if I'm stuck on something they walk in and I can instantly through their eyes see, okay—

MATTHEW SIMMS: [Laughs.]

ASTRID PRESTON: —push myself harder, not just abandon something, you know, just go, “Okay, it's not finished, I'll keep working harder.” And that's nice, just to have—but I haven't had that.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Hmm [affirmative].

ASTRID PRESTON: Last week somebody came in just very briefly, and I thought something was finished and they go, you know, I can see that that's not quite, you know—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay.

ASTRID PRESTON: Yeah. So I've been painting flowers. I got very compulsive about flowers and these floating spheres, and—just a compuls—the spheres especially. I just started doing this. And they sort of in a way they look like Don Suggs's spheres, but very small.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ASTRID PRESTON: And, uh, you know, my husband and I are involved with astronomy at UCLA [cross talk] and they invited me to a virtual colloquium about protoplanets. A woman was speaking about—from Liden [Observatory] and since we sponsor it. They often invite me but this time I guess it was something I could understand—

MATTHEW SIMMS: [Laughs].

ASTRID PRESTON: —not a technical [laughs] [cross talk]—so technical—and so, you know, this was just about a month ago and I've been painting these circles since, uh, March. And, so, anyway, they look like protoplanets. The talk was about what exoplanets and being able to see them and protoplanets forming [cross talk], you know, in—out there [cross talk]. So that was ' very exciting, and so I call them protoplanets. I don't want to call them, circles [laughs]? And they're not—you know, so they're repetitive little spheres, so they're like light— you know, be like stars in the sky but they're not stars and they're not floating viruses, either.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay, yeah.

ASTRID PRESTON: So they're protoplanets. I—I know I'm sure I'm influencing somebody—I think the coronavirus is so beautiful [laughs].

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah, the—there was while when there wasn't an image, and suddenly this digital image—

ASTRID PRESTON: Yeah.

MATTHEW SIMMS: —now it's everywhere. We keep seeing it.

ASTRID PRESTON: Yeah, yeah.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Can you show us a little bit of what—what you're talking about? Because it's one thing to hear about it and another thing to see [cross talk]—

ASTRID PRESTON: Yes, so the flower is mixing with the, okay, with the—it's interesting, I—you know, and I don't quite understand why I needed to do that, um. So the first [cross talk], this is the first one.

MATTHEW SIMMS: How interesting.

ASTRID PRESTON: Do you see it?

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

ASTRID PRESTON: It's—so it's 42 by 42 inches. And I was interested in using, you know, it's like a friend was doing portraits of artists with masks on, she asked me, "What's your favorite flower?" and I said, "Well, the tree peony—tree peony."

MATTHEW SIMMS: Hmm [affirmative].

ASTRID PRESTON: You know, from China. It's just amazing. —I grew—for two years I was able to grow one by throwing ice on it in the winter and, so, these are all tree peonies, sort of, you know, not—the shape, not necessarily—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

ASTRID PRESTON: —the—the color. They're huge things, and bees just get in the middle of them and lounge around going crazy.

[00:05:01]

MATTHEW SIMMS: Mmm-hm [affirmative] [laughs].

ASTRID PRESTON: So this was, uh, number two. So, and so I—and I realize now, thinking about them, so still, that first one's finished. This one I've still been opening up the space over here—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Mmm-hm, mmm-hm [affirmative]

ASTRID PRESTON: —like giving it a little more breath. But—They're hard—

MATTHEW SIMMS: [inaudible]

ASTRID PRESTON: What? I'm sorry.

MATTHEW SIMMS: You have a scattering of smaller, whiter flowers that seem to be in a space somewhere behind some of the larger, uh—uh, flowers. Are those—

ASTRID PRESTON: Yeah.

MATTHEW SIMMS: —the same kind—

ASTRID PRESTON: These are—

MATTHEW SIMMS: —Or are they different—

ASTRID PRESTON: —they were more Japanese, um—the spring, um—pup-pup-pup, oh, my God, cherry blossoms—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Cherry blossoms. Okay.

ASTRID PRESTON: —which I've painted before, so, it's like I had the spring of cherry blossoms coming under the, you know, these other flowers, that are sort of random colors and the composition made from flowers.

And this was number three of—so these are—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Mmm [affirmative].

ASTRID PRESTON: —a little darker, you know, a little more of a composition, not just floating. They—so I'm not sure about that, yet, if I'm going to, you know, still have things coming from the bottom and if this is, like, a little too decorative.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Well, you have some structure coming in with some branches and things, as well. That makes it—

ASTRID PRESTON: You see the, uh—so these are my little protoplanets.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Oh, yeah, I love those [cross talk].

ASTRID PRESTON: So it depends if they're up—you know, depending on what color they're on, I realized recently they're almost like, um, studies, of color studies, as I do them [cross talk]. This is my last one, here. It's very simple. Do you see it?

MATTHEW SIMMS: This one, here. Yeah.

ASTRID PRESTON: Yeah. That's my last one [cross talk].

MATTHEW SIMMS: [Cross talk.] Each one is so different, you know, each one has—

ASTRID PRESTON: The grass, yes, and I was comfortable putting the protoplanets everywhere.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah. That's right.

ASTRID PRESTON: And just sticking sort of to two-color flowers, so it's very loose. So when I first started doing these I was—it was uncomfortable for me to look at them, uh, these particular ones, because they weren't grounded in any way. This lack of grounding is—then I realized, well, that's exactly what we're all feeling.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Mmm [affirmative].

ASTRID PRESTON: We're losing our structures, I haven't created new structures beyond my studio practice.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

ASTRID PRESTON: You know, I'm not going to the gym [laughs]. You know my normal exercise routine was gone and I haven't created a new one.

MATTHEW SIMMS: That's interesting.

ASTRID PRESTON: So you know this unsettling thing is what I think they're reflecting. But grounding it in beauty. And—but the earliest flowers were much more traditional in terms of just composition. I'll just show you—can you see that one?

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah. So this—so how long—

ASTRID PRESTON: These are poppies just, you know, coming up from the ground.

MATTHEW SIMMS: How recent is that painting, then, compared to the others?

ASTRID PRESTON: Oh, this one I started in March.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay [cross talk].

ASTRID PRESTON: And this one was also the first big one, I don't know if you see it's in plastic. You see it?

MATTHEW SIMMS: Ah. Yes.

ASTRID PRESTON: So it's again more coming up from the ground. They're grounded, but there's stuff happening behind them with the protoplanets.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah, yeah—with the horizon line.

ASTRID PRESTON: And then, all these little studies, here we go.

MATTHEW SIMMS: I'm struck that that horizon line makes a big difference when you have a sense of a—of a—of a space that you might kind of walk into or—or sort of orient in, versus the other spaces which do feel very floating, you know [cross talk]—

ASTRID PRESTON: Yeah, and—and they're getting comforting or uneasy, right?

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah. Yeah, and there's so much [cross talk]—

ASTRID PRESTON: And I need to be grounded, so it's odd. So here's, uh, two that I really like a lot.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Those ones. Oh, those are—

ASTRID PRESTON: Because they're grounded in water, which is, yeah, so these two are finished.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah, yeah. And—

ASTRID PRESTON: It's a very different feeling.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Show us the—

ASTRID PRESTON: A nice big square, also.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Could you show us some of the smaller ones that are below in that little [cross talk]—

ASTRID PRESTON: Sure, yeah, now these are, yeah, these first two—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Those ones are amazing—

ASTRID PRESTON: —are like—

MATTHEW SIMMS: —those are little studies of—

ASTRID PRESTON: —it's like a night sky [cross talk], I'm not sure of how I'm—I think I'll leave them just because—that was my initial thought, but then—can you see? Am I getting these at all?

MATTHEW SIMMS: I can see them very well. And I see now there's a conversation between those protoplanets and other imagery.

ASTRID PRESTON: Yeah, exactly, and then even using it with my bird paintings and—

MATTHEW SIMMS: And then these lines coming across, which is something you've—you've explored a lot in—

ASTRID PRESTON: Right. I've had a lot of lines in my last show.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

ASTRID PRESTON: So then here they came in more of a net or web, being caught in the web, and here it's more to quiet all the crazy [laughs] COVIDs floating around in that one.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

ASTRID PRESTON: You know, it's quite a different feeling, right, sort of like healing, like I'm in the hospital in that one? I don't know. The bird is—

MATTHEW SIMMS: That's an interesting, that's—that's an interesting association. For that one that we're looking at now, with the bird, I wonder about the steps in your process? It seems as though, if I'm not mistaken, did—there was this kind of a reddish ground and then the paint—the—you must have worked on those planets, and then—

ASTRID PRESTON: Yeah.

MATTHEW SIMMS: —moved towards the bird? How—how did that—

ASTRID PRESTON: Um, I put—no, I painted the bird first.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Oh, you did?

ASTRID PRESTON: Yeah, and then I started painting a background for the bird. And then I put the rectangle around the bird to isolate him from the background.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

[00:10:00]

ASTRID PRESTON: He wasn't sort of happy floating in space [laughs].

MATTHEW SIMMS: Right. Right.

ASTRID PRESTON: He needed to be grounded, you know. So, like this one, also, was just in this field.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay. So back up and [cross talk]—

ASTRID PRESTON: Can you see that one? A more abstract feel, then I gave him a rectangle also because I wasn't comfortable being in that space. And this one I'm still working on. He keeps—this one keeps getting changed.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Gosh, I really—I really love this idea of a virtual studio visit. It makes me want to be there in person.

[They laugh.]

ASTRID PRESTON: It's, uh—Yeah. Oh, here are some small ones that are totally finished, or—can you see this grouping?

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah [cross talk].

ASTRID PRESTON: And these are the earlier ones, just a little—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Is there something that we—

ASTRID PRESTON: —handcraft.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah. Is there something to the, um, the way that these are, um, studies of birds that demands that smaller format, more concentrated, uh—uh—uh, focal point, uh? Or—or, what's—what's the logic in your moving between these smaller formats and the larger ones?

ASTRID PRESTON: Um, well I started small ones, sort of studies and little ideas, and then, just to isolate one object? I haven't—mmm, I haven't actually thought about that recently, you know, so I'm doing it, I like them [cross talk]. But, it's a concentration of information. Because if you're doing something closer to life size, I've done paintings of birds everywhere and I have one here, back here, that's—that, um—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

ASTRID PRESTON: —yeah they're not quite studies because they're finished paintings, but I've been doing small work forever. I like every scale.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah, and you—

ASTRID PRESTON: They all say different things.

MATTHEW SIMMS: You started out in, um—[inaudible] early in your, uh—uh, life as an artist, um, well, not the very beginning, but you kind of had a phase in the late '60s, early '70s, where it was about working on paper, very subtle, very, uh, you know, uh, attentive drawing practice.

ASTRID PRESTON: Yes.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Um—But before that, actually, you were a—you were painting, I believe. I'm trying to remember—

ASTRID PRESTON: Before the drawing, uh? Yeah, well, yeah, I was—I was painting early on, yes and no, back in the '60s—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

ASTRID PRESTON: —and then in the '70s you know I went to drawing.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

ASTRID PRESTON: And—

MATTHEW SIMMS: [inaudible]

ASTRID PRESTON: Yeah, just for 10 years I just drew and drew, yeah, and then back to painting.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Back to painting. And you can see the inheritance of some of these paintings coming back up through in the linear quality like that.

ASTRID PRESTON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, the line—painted lines. I always loved painted lines so, yeah, it keeps coming and evolving. But these are like sisal, dense, what I'm doing, and I think it's just having all this free time [laughs]. You know, it gets more compulsive.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah, now, I know that you've had a few exhibitions recently and I don't know how much, if whether any of this work here has been, uh—uh, shown or—or not. I know—

ASTRID PRESTON: No, this is all new work.

MATTHEW SIMMS: All new work.

ASTRID PRESTON: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MATTHEW SIMMS: So, how about, you want to tell us about those recent exhibitions a little bit?

ASTRID PRESTON: Ah, yeah, well I had a show at Craig Krull Gallery which was December and January, basically, almost, like a month and a half, because of the holidays, we extended it—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yes.

ASTRID PRESTON: —'til, uh, January 18th or something. And, so, that was very, very, successful. Usually December is a horrible month and I told them, "That's fine, I can, we'll see what happens." And we were just lucky that people came and, you know, before they went on holiday and, uh, so that was a surprise. And I think some were going fine for a while, and then, um, I was organizing a group show with four friends and we were making a brochure, you know, all this stuff for it, and that was to open March, uh, 17th, so Tom Wudl had us opening March 11th—

MATTHEW SIMMS: That's right.

ASTRID PRESTON: —and, you know, we were just like—and, you know, every—every day, you know, it's like, one of the four people, you know, she said, "Well, let's get valet parking." I go, "Let's don't rush that" [laughs]. It's like, every day it was like, okay, not this, not that, not that. And so then we go, um—it ended up quite—it—the show was up for a couple of months, but I think only a few people saw it in person.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Who—who was in the show, and where was it?

ASTRID PRESTON: It was Laurie Yehia, it was, um, in—I guess Culver City area [cross talk]. Umm — I have to go get the little brochure, it's quite beautiful, um. And—but the show was called *Antidote to Noise*.

MATTHEW SIMMS: That's right, I remember.

ASTRID PRESTON: It was quiet. About quiet. It was Castelli Gallery. So they wanted to do it, so they just left it up and, uh, the four of us, we did decide to go ahead with the show—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ASTRID PRESTON: —even though the insulation was now, you know, everything was happening as we were installing.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Right.

ASTRID PRESTON: The shutdown. So suddenly, we thought we—you know, then we didn't even have it open, I think for a while, it was still closed even for visitors by appointment, and then it was by appointment you can have a person—one or two people in. We were all very cautious, but we ended up having a Zoom, you know, thing. We have—so, it's online—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ASTRID PRESTON: —there's a lot of, uh, the big Zoom meeting of it, and the discussion, and, uh, so it's well-documented now. So it ended up being good that way.

[00:15:20]

MATTHEW SIMMS: And I saw that—and I know who is in the show but I—I don't know other people will know. But do you want to tell us who was in it, aside from yourself?

ASTRID PRESTON: Oh, it was myself, Laurie Yehia, um, I'm just sort of blank today on names, you know that happens.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay.

ASTRID PRESTON: [Laughs.] I'm sorry, I should just grab it, I just—

ASTRID PRESTON: This is what happens with isolation [cross talk], I can't remember anything. So here's our beautiful little, uh—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Oh, nice.

ASTRID PRESTON: So, Lisa Segal and Margaret-Anne Smith.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Of course. Great.

ASTRID PRESTON: So we just did this beautiful little brochure and, you know, there you have the —

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

ASTRID PRESTON: —all the work—it's—it's beautifully designed. So, anyway, so, you know, we have the brochures but [laughs] no opening, no show, really, just, you know, by appointment.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

ASTRID PRESTON: Very interesting experience.

MATTHEW SIMMS: I talked to Tom Wudl about his, as part of this project, about his experience, too, and he was quite philosophical about it. He said the same thing you did, which is that, in the end, the gallery worked very hard to get, to get, um, uh, social media, other kinds of um, uh, means to—to—to put images out, videos out, of the show. So I think that it was, everybody was, was really bending over backwards to try to, you know, make sure that the, you know, the pandemic didn't just completely, uh, destroy these projects, which were already kind of, uh, rolling out when it hit.

ASTRID PRESTON: Yes. Yeah, yeah [laughs]. It was interesting and I remember with Tom's opening we know it was a dangerous time because I didn't use the valet parking. We parked somewhere on the street and walked over. Went an hour early so only interacted with Elizabeth, that was it, you know, then left before the crowd came because it was already—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yes.

ASTRID PRESTON: —like, be-careful time [laughs].

MATTHEW SIMMS: I remember Friday the 13th was—was when I had to pick my kids up from school, and that was the end of school, you know [cross talk].

ASTRID PRESTON: Right, yeah.

MATTHEW SIMMS: So it was a, kind of um, you know, I suppose, symbolic or telling or something.

ASTRID PRESTON: Quite the—

MATTHEW SIMMS: What other kinds of things are going on for you? So you're obviously generating an amazing amount of new and really compelling work there. Um—

ASTRID PRESTON: Yeah. I had three paintings. One—I did one large one, uh, and two of these small, these new ones I'm doing. I have—I'm just—I'm getting going. I ordered these eight by eight inch canvases—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ASTRID PRESTON: —and, uh, I had done two already, but they went—they really loved them, they went down to La Jolla to the Ron Stevenson Gallery.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay.

ASTRID PRESTON: So he had them up for like a couple of weeks—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay.

ASTRID PRESTON: A large one and these two. And th—so that was nice, to have something happening now, you know, at the by-appointment-only.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Mm [affirmative]. Yeah.

ASTRID PRESTON: Craig here just sort of shut down completely for a while.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Okay. Yeah.

ASTRID PRESTON: I think he had dignitaries show up and, uh—

MATTHEW SIMMS: That's right [cross talk]. I was happy to get to see your show there. And you did a—a question and answer conversation with Craig—

ASTRID PRESTON: Yes.

MATTHEW SIMMS: —that was really illuminating, as well. That was very nice.

ASTRID PRESTON: Oh, that's when I had laryngitis?

MATTHEW SIMMS: After I got laryngitis [laughs].

ASTRID PRESTON: Oh, my God [laughs].

MATTHEW SIMMS: [inaudible] questions and people were very engaged, very full, um, great turnout. So—

ASTRID PRESTON: It really was great.

MATTHEW SIMMS: It was good that you got all that under you belt before this.

ASTRID PRESTON: Right.

MATTHEW SIMMS: So—so where do you see things going for yourself in terms of these paintings? Have you reached a—a—a kind of a place where you're, you feel like you've, um, you've,—you've, I don't know what one would say, obviously not figured anything out, but—but—but, um, achieved what it is that you're trying to do with this new—

ASTRID PRESTON: Yeah, I don't quite understand. I mean, I knew the flowers really dealt with, you know, in memory of all the lives lost, so there was that touch with all the flower imagery.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yes.

ASTRID PRESTON: And then, the protoplanets, you know that's again part of that, we're all part of the cosmos, so it'll, when you talk to Lee then, you know, she 'll—I'm sure, you know, will', you know, have all those—I don't usually talk about those things, but they do come into this since we're thinking about this, and, you know, this kind of a—between death and isolation and illness and horrible things happening. Um, you know, flowers are life, growth, birth, death, you know, all

those things. So there's that symbolism in the work. So it'll shift when things shift, but I still have a need to do this right now, and, you know, I'll understand it better, you know, a year from now.

[00:20:00]

MATTHEW SIMMS: Wow, it's so interesting to hear you say that because when I see your paintings I—I immediately understand what you mean by those associations that come—that you can see in that imagery. Alth—and—although at the same time, it's very naturalistic, what you're doing, and so you could also, in fact, not see it, just—just really see this as about, um, an exploration of—of, uh, shape, pattern, color, you know, uh,—uh—uh, imagery, and so forth. But when you start to talk about it that way, it—it—it brings it into very contemporary, very, you know, far more, um, I guess grounded in—in current events kind of thing.

ASTRID PRESTON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MATTHEW SIMMS: Is that something that you generally hope for, or—or do you like it to be open, so that really people can come to it and—and, you know, I—I think of those protoplanets—and I—I—I'm a sort of amateur, I have my telescope—

ASTRID PRESTON: [Laughs.] Right.

MATTHEW SIMMS: —and we were looking at Saturn and Jupiter yesterday, because they're [cross talk]—

ASTRID PRESTON: Right.

MATTHEW SIMMS: —very visible. So—so, you know, this is maybe an unfair question, but to what degree do you—do you hope for people to get whatever they—whatever they can out of it, or do you hope that there will be some sense of, um, seeing into the—the kind of things that you—you feel resonate in terms of the present day, and the present-day issues?

ASTRID PRESTON: Um, I think it's all in there so people bring what they have from their own life experience, you know. I can say one thing and people—that might add to their experience and it might not at all be meaningful to them.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

ASTRID PRESTON: Right? I know a lot of people, it's such a scary time for them, they don't leave the house, you know, they haven't been out at all, they have food delivered, and, uh—And when I do go to the market like three times a week, it's, you know, it's—I realize I'm a little uneasy.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah. Yeah, you wear your mask—

ASTRID PRESTON: The stress there, I have my mask, I, you know, I've got my sanitizer in the car, [laughs]you know [cross talk]. Or in my back pocket. You know, it's—it's an interesting time and there's stress. And so when I look at the work, some are getting—they're getting calmer and calmer as I look at them, but there was stress in them when I first began. So all these things are there and I don't know, people seem to see them, depending on their experience of art. But I mean, you know, my work I've always mentioned, is always accessible through the imagery.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yes.

ASTRID PRESTON: But then it's the color and composition that might, you know, have more of the emotional content.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

ASTRID PRESTON: I don't—it's—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Or—or emotional, uh—um, associations in the sense that one might begin to, um, see that happening in it. Um, what I mean by that is that, um—um, you know, it's so hard to build emotion into it as content because in a way it's—it's about creating a resonance, I feel, at least in your work, that sense of something that you've felt that you've, um, spent a great deal of time refining and working through, and then someone comes along to your studio and sees it, and in that conversation and in the looking there's that almost sympathetic resonance or something that—that can emerge, um.

ASTRID PRESTON: Right. So without studio visits, I don't have [laughs] any feedback [laughs]. So it's interesting, right? Because to see it in person or see it reproduced is such a different experience.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah. Yeah.

ASTRID PRESTON: Work just breathes so differently when you have a physical interaction with it. So, um, so one problem with [laughs], you know, all our seeing everything through a machine or reproduction.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah. Yeah, um.

ASTRID PRESTON: Things are embedded in the real thing, but, uh [laughs]—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Any last thoughts you might have? Because we're going to sort of wind things up, uh, a little bit here. Do you have any last sort of reflections or—

ASTRID PRESTON: It's, uh, it's interesting. I've been, you know, working in this [laughs] bubble, the poor bubble, the emotional [laughs], turbulent but, sort of calm bubble, too. I mean, I feel really fortunate that I've been able to, that I work through things, and other people don't, and I feel sorry for them. Because it's a nice way to process whatever I'm feeling and going through. And it's in the work that, you know, it's not what—I don't think anyone necessarily sees. They might feel it in person, but it's, uh—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah. That's what I was trying to say, is that it's not [cross talk]—

ASTRID PRESTON: —a lot of formal stuff.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Right, it's—it—it—it's—it's—it—it—it gently invites you into this kind of, this world, this—and I like the way that you use the floating. Obviously, it has, uh—res—um, associations with both Japanese kinds of, uh, gardens, but also I think of Monet and others who've—who've been—who've explored the idea of flowers, um, uh in—in—in that kind of floating, both physical and—and mental space.

[00:25:04]

ASTRID PRESTON: Yeah. You know who I thought of the most, closest in one way was Ray Dong?

MATTHEW SIMMS: Oh, yes, that's right. The way he [cross talk]—

ASTRID PRESTON: 'Cause he does, you know, I looked back at some, I thought he'd done more, but I only have like two images in books of his work, and they're like a few flowers, and then they're like in a floating field. And I thought, well, that's a very close—closest association I—

MATTHEW SIMMS: I love that [cross talk].

ASTRID PRESTON: The Met has a, uh, a Ray Dong.

MATTHEW SIMMS: [inaudible] Because in—in those Ray Dong pastel, um, uh, bouquets you—you don't get a sense of them being just purely, sort of, naturalistic representations that—

ASTRID PRESTON: Right.

MATTHEW SIMMS: —there's a—there's a psychological or subjective energy to them—

ASTRID PRESTON: Mm-hmm [inaudible].

MATTHEW SIMMS: — but it's also—it's not—it's not, you know, obvious either. So it—it creates a mystery to it and [cross talk].

ASTRID PRESTON: Yes. So that's the closest, I'd say—

MATTHEW SIMMS: Yeah.

ASTRID PRESTON: —work that this relates to for me.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Well, that's good company to be keeping, you know, and your, uh, pandemic.

ASTRID PRESTON: [Laughs.] Just my association [cross talk]. I'm sure there's others, but that's what I came to.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Well, uh, it has been a delight talking to you, and I love this virtual studio visit and, obviously, want to come have a real one soon.

ASTRID PRESTON: Yes [laughs]. With masks on, maybe, briefly indoors [laughs].

MATTHEW SIMMS: I'm amazed, all of this work that you've been doing, um, really just blown away. So, more reason to come. So I'll say thank you, and—and go ahead and stop the recording now, okay [laughs]?

ASTRID PRESTON: Okay, thank you.

MATTHEW SIMMS: Uh—Let's see, there we go.

[END OF presto20_1of1_digvid_.mp4]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]