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Oral history interview with Terry Winters,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Terry Winters on November 13, 2018 and November 15, 2018. The interview took place in Lower Manhattan, New York, by Christopher Lyon, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Terry Winters and Christopher Lyon have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. 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

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CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is Christopher Lyon, interviewing Terry Winters, on November 13, 2018, at his loft in Lower Manhattan. Thank you very much for submitting to this.

So, we have to start somewhere, and I ended up starting with thinking about Richard Schiff's essay about you in the 2004 retrospective catalog, where he had this to say: "Winters has avoided developing a personal mythology and has never cultivated an exclusive autographic mark. Something grander than personality is at stake for him. The continuum or 'correlation between life and matter.'" He's quoting Gilles Deleuze in that last phrase.

By "autographic," I think he means a kind of signature, artistic handwriting. And I'm not sure about that, because you have a very distinctive style. But what really resonated for me, after looking at a lot of work and reading about you, was the remark about not cultivating a personal mythology. I've been struck, in reading interviews with you, that—[by] what I took to be an almost anti-autobiographical reticence on your part. You know, so many artists that I've encountered over the years have a pretty well-oiled story about themselves.

TERRY WINTERS: That's true. [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But you seem, in interviews, to be pretty relentlessly focused on your work, and even to the point of being somewhat self-effacing.

So, Schiff's second big point is that he thinks you're addressing, in your work, the—and it could be described in many ways—the continuum, or the correlations, between life and matter, between culture and nature, and that your aim has—and he borrows a term from you—may be to convert un-sensed information into something unhidden. [00:02:01] I was really taken with that term, "unhidden." To use a term like "unhide," as opposed to more simply to say "to reveal," is to somehow be taking a backdoor into things a little bit. You know, a kind of double negative almost.

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, with that little bit of intro—

TERRY WINTERS: Well, I think that's a good place to stop too. [They laugh.] That seems perfect to me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, no.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, I think there's some way that I feel access to whatever these realms are that I want to access is aided through an indirect approach, rather than a direct approach. Maybe that's what—I mean, I'm reacting a little bit to your response to the unhidden remark—that there's something to be revealed and something that I'm interested in emerging, but it's not something that can happen through my direct intention. It's more about defining a parameter within which things can happen and things can emerge.

So I think I've spent a lot of time trying to focus on what those procedures could be in terms of the painting process, that would allow for that to happen. I think that's a little bit why there was an effort on my part not to make it about me so much. Because the interest, for me, in the expressive potential of paintings are not just about self-expression. That's one of the things I'm after, but there's a kind of expression and intelligence in the material and in the process and even in the cultural convention of painting itself that interests me. [00:04:07]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is there a sense, almost, of getting out of the way of those things?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, definitely. And it's kind of—obviously, it's paradoxical. I end up with an object that's like a painting, and it's my painting. And I'm interested in the painting being a register of my gesture and touch. So

in a way that's—I understand what Richard [Shiff] is saying there, where I'm not trying to develop necessarily a signature approach or style, but the kind of inflection that comes from moving material around, and its accumulation on the surface, is something that I think is very particular to painting and is the most exciting potential that it has: to express things.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, so I would like to take aim at two goals in this interview. One is to reveal a little bit more about your personal biography, insofar as it illuminates your art.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah, no. I do exist.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] And secondly, to inch toward a fuller understanding of your creative thought—you know, what you've just been talking about—and how it plays out in your practice particularly. I'm really curious about that. And finally, just to get a grasp of your aims as an artist, what you're attempting to unhide, as it were. And as I say, the basic point here is to incite you to talk, so [laughs] you should feel that you can go anywhere you want with this.

So you were born in Brooklyn, 1949?

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What part of Brooklyn? [00:06:00]

TERRY WINTERS: Brownsville.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Brownsville.

TERRY WINTERS: The un-gentrified Brooklyn, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And your father was in construction?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, I mean, manual labor kind of stuff. And he worked his way into a kind of management position. He oversaw sort of maintenance crews on larger housing developments, things like that, eventually. But he started as doing kind of carpentry, floor installations, things like that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah. And your mother is a housewife?

TERRY WINTERS: She did secretarial work for a long time after she was married—just a homemaker—and then went back eventually, to do office work and things like that. But, you know, I grew up in Brownsville, right at the—I guess in the '50s, right at the end of Brownsville being this enormous Jewish enclave, and saw the very beginnings of the migration of African Americans to that neighborhood, and all of that. And I just totally loved it there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Why? What was it like?

TERRY WINTERS: It was just, I don't know, the street I grew up on, and the sense of community with the kids that were there, and the kind of street life of playing. It was really like New York, stickball.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Like stickball. [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: It was like the whole seasons thing. I lived just down the street from a huge park that we used to hang out with, and it was really kids out till it got dark, running around the streets. But the neighborhood shifted in a way that the city really withdrew so much funding from it, that we felt we had to leave. My mother felt we had to leave.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Where did you end up going?

TERRY WINTERS: To near where my father was working, which was more towards Flatbush and Midwood, near Brooklyn College. [00:08:04]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, yeah, sure. I know that area.

TERRY WINTERS: Somewhat in that area. Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

TERRY WINTERS: I was miserable the first few years, though.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Let's see, you went to high school at Music and Art, right?

TERRY WINTERS: Art and Design.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Art and Design, over on 56th.

TERRY WINTERS: Right, 56th.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Sixth, Seventh, in that block.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Were your parents observant? Were they Jewish particularly?

TERRY WINTERS: Early on. My grandfather was. Both my parents were born here and they weren't particularly observant, but as a kid I grew up around all of that stuff.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. It was interesting, to read that they—you said in some interview that your parents were very supportive of you and your interest in art. What were you doing that they noticed your interest in art? Were you drawing obsessively?

TERRY WINTERS: Kind of.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah, I was drawing obsessively, exactly.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: It was just something I always had an interest in. It's not here; there's a drawing, an early drawing here. But yeah, it was just something always I knew I wanted to do, and they helped me do the things I needed to do to do that, although they weren't necessarily—didn't know anyone who was an artist. I had a cousin who had studied at the Brooklyn Museum School, so she helped make it seem as if it were something that was normal to do in some way.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's interesting. Do you have siblings?

TERRY WINTERS: A brother.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, yeah, I was curious about that, the cousin who studied. [00:10:00] It sounds like you spent a lot of time going to museums when you were still fairly young. You mention, at one point in an interview, standing in line at the Met to see the *Mona Lisa*.

TERRY WINTERS: Right. When was that?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I looked it up. That would be 1963.

TERRY WINTERS: Really?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So you were like 13 or something.

TERRY WINTERS: Oh, yeah, but in '63, I was already at Art and Design.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, you would be, I guess.

TERRY WINTERS: I mean, I was like—in the ninth grade I started going there. And I think that that's—there was something about—I mean, I was taking courses, and I think I took a course at Pratt one summer before all of that, so it was something I was doing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: In Brooklyn?

TERRY WINTERS: In Brooklyn, yeah, like a Saturday course. Things like that. And I took private classes with people or my parents.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow, you were really intensely serious about this.

TERRY WINTERS: I was totally into it, yeah. So by the time I applied to go to Art and Design, I guess it was in the 8th grade. So I got in there in '63, and that's when I discovered Manhattan in a bigger way, in terms of the gallery scene and forging some kind of connection with that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I mean, that's pretty interesting. I mean, you were there right at the moment when Pop art is taking off—

TERRY WINTERS: Totally.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —with Castelli and everything like this.

TERRY WINTERS: Totally. In my high school, I remember we had an assembly every Friday, and there was—Ivan Karp was debating—I think the guy's name—I want to say his name was Bill O'Reilly, but not the Fox guy, [they laugh] but a teacher, a figurative painter from the Art Students League. And it was all about Pop art versus traditional painting. This was in my high school. But it wasn't as if so many of the students were that aware of who Ivan Karp was, or Andy Warhol or any of that stuff, but it was just that my closest friend in high school and I, would go to the galleries every Saturday. So we would just see it. [00:12:05]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And the gallery is like right there on 57th.

TERRY WINTERS: Right on that street. I mean, Sidney Janis was there. Dwan Gallery, Bykert. That was a bit later but we would just do that every Saturday. It took us a while to figure out that the shows didn't change every Saturday. [They laugh.] We were precocious but not that bright.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Do you have memories of things that—did you go to the—you must have gone to the Modern.

TERRY WINTERS: Oh yeah, a lot. Because, I mean, even after school, just heading over to the Modern.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Are there things that you remember seeing that just kind of went, "Whoa, that's pretty interesting"?

TERRY WINTERS: All the shows I saw at that time had a big impact for me. I mean, just walking through those galleries, which were a lot less crowded and dense at that point. But very clear memories of a Giacometti show and a Robert Motherwell retrospective, and a Turner show that just blew me away, of his watercolors and things. That was at the Modern. And this was at the time when the Modern—the temporary galleries were where the restaurant was. They were so beautiful. They were all off the garden. It was so spectacular, all those shows.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The Modern has gone downhill in various ways since then. You said that you had a very classical art education, figure drawing and so on and so forth.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah. I mean, at Art and Design that's what I—I did that, and then I got into a program at Parsons after school, at Art and Design, where I did figure drawing, because Parsons was right down the street really. [00:14:00]

I took summer at the Art Students League, drawing. And then when I first—even the first year at Pratt, they were teaching figure drawing. I think it was really—I started art school right at the moment where all of these traditional notions about a painter's education were still in place. I think it's been so dismantled at this point, to a shocking extent, for people who want to become painters, I think.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Do you think that's a loss?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah. Totally. I mean, I think it was those craft—like, the emphasis on craft might have been exaggerated to one extreme, but now the other extreme is so great that there's no way in for people who really know what they're doing. I think it's good that there's an emphasis on a kind of theoretical approach towards how someone goes about making an artwork, but this sort of interdisciplinary, nebulous thing doesn't make much sense. You still know how to make an object, I'm interested in that. [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And one of the things that you've talked about becoming aware of—and I don't know at what point exactly—is Rauschenberg and Johns and perhaps Twombly. Would that have been in those early visits to the galleries?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, late '60s.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There's the famous anecdote of Rauschenberg going to Yale and saying, "This place reeks of Matisse." Did Rauschenberg [laughs] look like something fresh to you at that point? Or something—

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, I mean, I think what, let's say, Rauschenberg or Johns and Twombly too, really got me, was the way that they felt completely advanced, whatever that means now, or what it meant in my 16, 17-year-old self—meant. [00:16:16] It seemed like they were pushing the limits of painting within painting itself, and that that was—that allowed me to connect to it an almost emotional and visceral way, since that was my connection

as a kid, just moving material around and making drawings. My completely instinctual response to things like Kline and de Kooning—I mean, when I saw that work I had no idea what it was but I just knew I loved it. I think it's that feeling that I'm always trying to connect with, that completely unknown and unnamable connection.

Because I remember this day—my father once took me to the Brooklyn Museum. And really, I think I still have the magazine—and it is from 1963—and it was in an issue of *Art International*, and I got my father to buy it for me, which was like \$1.50 or something. It was, like, a lot of money. And I used to take it to school and look at it inside my desk. The pages that I was transfixed by were installation shots of Franz Kline's Sidney Janis show. And it was just—I just—the paintings were like floor-to-ceiling in there, and they were just—there was something in this thing that just I couldn't get, and then when I went to Art and Design, I actually went to the Sidney Janis Gallery. And the whole thing kind of locked in like a radar locking on, and I just completely connected with these things I felt I was part of in some way. [00:18:08]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's a little hard for me to recapture the sense of what Franz Kline meant to people at that time. I remember talking a lot to Irving Sandler about it. I mean, Franz Kline was such a hero to him, you know, and just like this excitement. And of course de Kooning, but, you know, Kline, something about him seems to have excited people.

TERRY WINTERS: I mean, for me it was just the graphic immediacy of it. Not to—and I—yeah, in a way it was sort of the simplicity of it. It was so limited too.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It was just so powerful. Yeah.

TERRY WINTERS: In a way, I guess over time people have—the limitations of him, plus he died so early and wasn't able to fully develop his thing about color. But there was something he had right away in that work.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. I have to ask you this, given your later interests: Were you interested in sciences at all when you were—

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah. I mean, only in a grade-school kind of way. Like, that was the thing also, I would take the train up to the Museum of Natural History and was interested in all that kind of stuff.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, you went to—I'm sorry—

TERRY WINTERS: Art and Design.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —Pratt, in '67, would it be?

TERRY WINTERS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. And I gather that they, in the classic way, had a foundation year where you had to do your materials and Bauhaus.

TERRY WINTERS: You had to do your homework, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was that important for you?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, because—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I mean, it sounds like you're already pretty deep into—

TERRY WINTERS: I was deep into it, but I guess our foundation year—maybe it was the color class—it was really at that time where I would study with Herb Aach—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I don't know that name.

TERRY WINTERS: —who was, like, an Albers student. [00:20:00]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

TERRY WINTERS: He wrote a book on color. So the foundation year was full of people who had really—grew up with that Bauhaus education. And I had been—as kind of a precocious, really unknowing, undisciplined student of Modernism—kind of knew about the Bauhaus and knew all these people and didn't quite know where they all fit in, so it was great to be around people who were giving me a structure within which to think about those people. I mean, I felt completely inadequate, figuring out the interaction of color [they laugh] and stuff like that. "I don't know, whatever."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: But I'm glad I did it all.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I also have to ask you—I mean, Pratt, at that time had an engineering school, right?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And emphasis on architecture. There is a kind of ongoing element of building, engineering, architecture, in your work.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is there a connection there?

TERRY WINTERS: Oh yeah, total. I mean, in terms of my interest in architecture, I was also very torn between, "Should I study architecture or should I study painting?" Because, you know, having gone to Art and Design, by the time I went to Pratt, I was actually living on Crosby Street, just a few blocks from here, and commuting to Pratt. So I felt like I already had a studio downtown and I was working, so I went through a number of departments at Pratt, one of which was the industrial design department. Because to get into architecture was a whole other thing. But I was interested and I had a really good teacher there who did industrial design. David Brown, I think his name was.

Architecture and design was really a big thing. [00:22:01] Some of my closest friends were studying architecture. I heard Louis Kahn and Buckminster Fuller speak at Pratt during those years.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

TERRY WINTERS: I mean, I sat in on courses with Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, who was teaching architectural history. That was a big thing for me because—I mean, in some sense, I was so self-educated in terms of the art world and the shows I was seeing already at that time. I felt like architecture, I was really hungry for that. I also had a kind of intuitive connection to how architecture felt so real-world to me, but totally abstract. And I knew that that was something I was trying to struggle with in terms of my own work, how it could be both those things.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah.

TERRY WINTERS: Where were you during that time? Not yet in grade school.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: We're almost exactly the same age.

TERRY WINTERS: Really?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. I was at the University of Chicago.

TERRY WINTERS: So are you from Chicago?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No, I grew up in South Jersey and outside Philly. But yeah, I went to U of C in '68.

TERRY WINTERS: Oh, yeah, so it's the same thing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, yeah, it was a different thing. [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: But what's so amazing for me is how much I was totally formed by those years, whether it's McLuhan or—I mean, through my interest in Rauschenberg and Johns, discovering John Cage, and through him the whole—you know, Buckminster Fuller, Marshall McLuhan, Coomaraswamy. That book *Silence* was just so tremendous. And the relevance of all of that thinking now is so incredible now. Have you seen that catalog that the Walker did, a show called *Hippie Modernism*?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yes! I have a copy of that.

TERRY WINTERS: It's amazing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's incredible.

TERRY WINTERS: It's incredible. [00:24:00]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

TERRY WINTERS: So that whole thing, that whole move from—you know, like being interested in Cage and McLuhan, into the *Whole Earth Catalog* and what all of that stuff meant.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, geez, as soon as you say *Whole Earth Catalog*, I'm thinking of this great big globe on the front and I'm thinking [gesturing to globular forms in Winters's paintings]. I don't mean to be simplistic but—

TERRY WINTERS: Well, all that cybernetic thinking is, like, so relevant now, and I think it's part of why McLuhan has gotten such a revitalized look.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah.

TERRY WINTERS: I don't know, it's an amazing—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You know, I wasn't thinking about you at all in that aspect and it's so—it's like, yeah, that makes so much sense. Wow.

How did you—you ended up in a loft on Crosby Street. I mean, that's interesting in itself. You were sort of on the —

TERRY WINTERS: Well, it wasn't a loft. It was a seven-floor walkup tenement that a friend of mine had found, and it was at the top of like two railroad apartment tenements. It was the attic. It was illegal to rent a seven-floor walkup, it was so high up.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: —and it was where two buildings had been connected and there was no wall between. Or there were walls between them but—we just had one kitchen with—you know, what did they call those, where you had the tub next to the kitchen sink? Anyway, the front of the building was literally four and a half feet high, because it had, like, eyebrow windows.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Dear God, I can picture it.

TERRY WINTERS: And then it went all the way up to like nine feet in the back. It was an incredible place. But it was—when I graduated from Pratt, I moved to Greene Street, into a proper loft.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: That was my graduation. That was my grad school.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was Chuck Close living on Greene Street at that time?

TERRY WINTERS: I think he was on—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Or Wooster?

TERRY WINTERS: Wasn't he on Prince? Prince and Greene? [00:26:04]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was he? Yeah, yeah, right. He shared a building with other people. Yeah, you're right.

TERRY WINTERS: No, but I moved to Greene Street when 112 Greene Street started, when FOOD started, the whole thing there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I have to ask you—I mean, what was it like then?

TERRY WINTERS: It was like a broken down industrial neighborhood. Garbage trucks at four in the morning across the street, all of that. And right before—maybe the galleries were just starting to move down there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I think Paula Cooper was in 1968. [Paula Cooper opened at 96 Prince Street in October 1968. -CL]

TERRY WINTERS: Paula Cooper was open. She was open. But I forget the year 420 [W. Broadway] opened. [1971 -CL]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wait, I've got to be wrong about that. No, I think I am right about that.

TERRY WINTERS: No, no, Paula was there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Who were your fellow artist students at Pratt at that time?

TERRY WINTERS: At Pratt?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Anybody that sticks out as someone that—

TERRY WINTERS: When I was at Pratt.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's not important if there wasn't one, but I thought I would ask.

TERRY WINTERS: My two best friends were going to School of Visual Arts. I went to Pratt because they had a degree program. My parents really wanted me to get a degree. Plus the degree program did offer me a student deferment.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: A student deferment. Yeah, this is important.

TERRY WINTERS: But yeah, two of my closest friends went to School of Visual Arts, and everybody was teaching at the School of Visual Arts: Richard Serra, Steve Reich, Mel Bochner, Brice Marden, Robert Mangold. [00:28:08] The guy who started that school, I think his name was Silas Rhodes. He just hired so many interesting artists to teach at this school. And I went to many, many classes there. Sat in on a few of Steve Reich's music classes and stuff like that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow, that's great. And artists you were looking at then. I've read that you were interested in Brice Marden.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, Brice, that whole generation of process people, I think were important to me. Serra, Brice, all of that stuff. I'm thinking about at that point in school, I mean, assuming the whole Johns, Rauschenberg, Twombly trifecta. [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, so you graduated in '71 and now you've moved to a loft on Greene Street. [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And you're doing odd jobs and so on.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, well, I'm working—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How are you supporting yourself?

TERRY WINTERS: —doing mostly construction, like doing drywall construction, since everybody was fixing up places. And my best friend was really a top-notch carpenter, knew everything. He was a sculptor. He was one of the guys who went to SVA—this is like a rambling thing now.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's okay.

TERRY WINTERS: Okay. So he and another friend of mine, we just started this company called Walls. And we built walls for people. They did all this stuff and I did—I learned how to do a drywall taping, because I was really into plasterwork and thinking about application, paint applications and things like that. So they did a lot of the kind of carpentry stuff and I did all of the kind of masonry, finish-work things. [00:30:04]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's interesting. So, I don't think I've seen anything that you were doing at that time. The Whitney retrospective catalog starts with a work from 1979. There's a mention in Klaus Kertess's essay about you of a spare graphic style, you know, featuring simple structures and so on. Is that—

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, that's kind of Minimalist application of paints. I mean, part of this interest in process work was trying to learn about pigments and where they came from, and open up the subject matter to be a kind of metaphoric notion about where they came from. A lot of the paintings had place names or pigment names, to try to get at that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about that.

TERRY WINTERS: And I worked like that for a number of years, from when I got out of—while I was still in Pratt to, say, that '70 drawing, or '69 drawing. What's the earliest drawing, in '79?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [19]79.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, okay. Basically there was all of that time, I was doing things sort of like that, or within that kind of Minimalist style.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I see.

TERRY WINTERS: It just became increasingly frustrating, not drawing the way I really liked to draw, and it was an attempt to try to find my way back into that. And I think it really, in some tautological way, started taking some of the notebook things I was doing about pigment structures and my interest in architecture and just tried to put that in the middle of the work, rather than on the side of the work. And that's what sort of got me to—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It sounds like you were experimenting with unusual kinds of mediums, like egg tempura and casein.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah. I was collecting books about old painting manuals. [00:32:01] You weren't in New York to know those Fourth Avenue bookstores.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I know, and it sounds like a golden age. [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: It was really unbelievable. So I've got, like, a huge library of all these books that no one really cared about. You know, all that stuff was sort of dying. It was my way to try to get at the heart of what I thought was truly profound in a way, about people like Richard Serra's work, and Nauman's work, about how they—they were really accessing an idea about material and structure and the implications of it on some profound level I couldn't articulate to myself maybe, but I knew that there was something in that I wanted to get to. And I wanted to get—but I wanted to—I thought painting still had a capacity to do that. Especially since I really could trace back all of the sort of foundational ideas of these people to somebody like Johns. I think it really comes out of Johns and Pollock—really were like the place that so much of that thinking came out of.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It seems paradoxical somehow, but that painting somehow, at various points, needs to reconnect with its distant past in order to find a way forward. There's something oddly counterintuitive about it, you know, that you have to go back in order to go forward or something. This starts as early, at least, as the 18th century, with the students of David sort of rediscovering Greek drawing. You know, I mean, they were trying to get back to basics somehow.

TERRY WINTERS: Well, I think that's that thing that—you know, the past isn't really the past. And that's one of the exciting things about painting, is that it's within this very circumscribed and limited format. There's so much that has been done, and still can be done, and it can be seen in some new way. [00:34:02] So in a sense, all painting is contemporary. Some of it is locked into a historical framework that it can explain away why it was done that way, but there are potentials to be taken from anywhere, really.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There's a wonderful phrase in Klaus Kertess's essay, speaking about you: "The physicality of his means metamorphoses into metaphor, and vice versa."

TERRY WINTERS: Alright. [They laugh.] And back again. Well, that's sort of what I was trying to—I wanted to get this little bit about how the blankness of Minimalism could be somehow opened up to a wider metaphorical poetic readings, without retreating to some outmoded representational style, or sentimental style.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

TERRY WINTERS: Not that there aren't people still being able to revitalize many of those ways of working, but for me it really had to do with figuring out a way to use abstraction, and my commitment to that, as an approach to build something that was a picture. I mean, I really wanted to make pictures. And that's where the drawing thing came in, wanting to get drawing into the work and to make something that could be pictorial in some way.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So was there a sense, by the early '70s, of—and I know this is a gross simplification, but of Minimalist work having kind of worked itself into a corner?

TERRY WINTERS: No pun intended.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No pun intended. [They laugh.] Where it needed to somehow be opened out again? I'm thinking about this partly because I've been struggling with trying to write something about Dorothea Rockburne. You know, she just has this show that opened at Dia, that's now closed while they redo some parts of it. [00:36:04] You know, the materials and means get so reduced somehow, and it just seems like there has to be—it has to unfold again or something like that, in order to find a way forward.

TERRY WINTERS: Well, don't you think that's a little bit of what people like Serra or Barry Le Va—all of that was trying to unharness or unleash the energy that was inside of these Minimalist structures. You know, the Richard Serra's *House of Cards* is really different than a Judd box, where there's no fasteners, where it's really the dynamics of the weight of the material itself.

And there was something about that work—the Arte Povera people excited me too, in the way that they were trying to make work about nature, and so about something outside of the restrictive, reduced geometries of

Modernist abstraction. That interested me too. And I think that's where Brice was important, and Twombly, in the way that they took a kind of Minimalist approach. But I would say with Brice there was a kind of heightened sense about the materiality of the paint itself, and a desire to refer to landscape or something outside of the self-referential negative theology of so much Modernist abstraction.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There's an interesting juxtaposition up there right now, where there's the galleries devoted to Dorothea's work and then just outside of this is that huge Walter De Maria *I Ching* piece. And so this was important to you, right? You spent like four months in New Mexico, working on *Lightning Field*?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How did that come about?

TERRY WINTERS: Well, one of my—Robert Fosdick was one of my art school friends. [00:38:00] He was making sculpture, and he was the guy I was in business [laughs] with. He was supporting himself doing different odd jobs and at one point he started to build. He built something for Robert Scull, who then got him to build something for Walter. And then he did more and more work for Walter and he got involved with figuring out the logistics of *Lightning Field*, and I would just hang out with him and Walter. We had dinner, like, you know, a lot. And we would end up talking about the *Lightning Field*, because they were just figuring out how to build it. So I got to know a lot about the *Lightning Field*, in terms of its construction, what they were doing, and all of this.

And they packed up to go out there and I was in New York. Back then I was living on Bleecker Street. And I got a call after they were there for a few weeks, saying could I come out, because they just needed an extra hand and figured since I knew everything about it already. But I had committed to do something, so I couldn't get out there right away, but then I went out there. They said just for a couple of weeks, just to get it going, but it ended up being four months the first time I went there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What time of the year was it?

TERRY WINTERS: I went out in August and didn't come back until December. End of December or middle of December, something like that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So this thing—I mean, it's really intriguing, it seems to have some oblique relationships to what you ended up doing later. I mean, the—I understand the tips of the poles, they're all at the same level, right, is that right?

TERRY WINTERS: They're all at the same level.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So they kind of create this kind of unseen but virtual—

TERRY WINTERS: Plane.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —plane.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How was that done?

TERRY WINTERS: The field is—it was done with a couple of—there were a couple of surveys done. One was a laser survey. And the land, although it appears to be level, is actually quite undulating, so that the shortest pole is something like 13 and a half feet and the tallest pole is almost 30 feet. [00:40:11]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

TERRY WINTERS: So every one is different.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, my God.

TERRY WINTERS: And that was sort of my job there, to cut them all. I ran the shop in Quemado. Have you been out there?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I haven't, no. It's something I've always wanted to do.

TERRY WINTERS: What is now the Visitor Center in Quemado was my workshop, where I had a crew of people. I would drive out every day, from the field into town, and I would cut the poles and then go back out with the cut poles.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It sounds like an incredible experience.

TERRY WINTERS: It was incredible. I had barely been west of the Hudson before that, [they laugh] so it was quite an experience.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So how did this impact your thinking?

TERRY WINTERS: Well, you know, at that time, I was already making—I had just started—I was in a couple of group shows that summer. And the work I showed in both those group shows dealt with pigments I was grinding and making. So it was like—I was very much involved with these earth pigments and the very primitive process of making paint. I was in something called *A Painting Show*, that was in the first show at PS1, it's like a huge painting survey show. And then I was in the first selection show at the Drawing Center that same summer, and I showed this group of drawings that were like four native earths, like from four regions. There was a yellow earth and a red earth and an umber and a red ochre, and they all have the names of the places they came from.

So when I went out to New Mexico, it like—and I had an ongoing interest in Native American work. [00:42:05]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, really?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah. But that was part of the whole '60s thing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, sure.

TERRY WINTERS: The *Whole Earth Catalog*, all of that had lots of Native American dye things. I was interested in things like that. But going out there and seeing that landscape and having proximity to native cultures and the artwork they produced from the place, it was—there was just something about the connection of the people, the art, the place, the whole thing just resonated with me. And having that happen at the same time I was working on this project that seemed like the hippest thing going, in terms of the Walter thing, it was great.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's also interesting in relation to your work, because of the imposition of this highly precise, measured, scientific-looking thing, on natural landscape. I mean, just the layering of those two things, it must have been an interesting thing to experience, especially over an extended period of time.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah. What you're describing is, for me, the two things that I'm interested in resolving: this idea of an interest in a kind of higher technology, and also the connection to the most basic and elemental nature of life itself, which is, like, being out there in this incredibly inhospitable landscape. And just being in New Mexico, we were just a few miles down the road from the Very Large Array, the radio telescope thing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, interesting.

TERRY WINTERS: And all of New Mexico's craziness about that. [00:44:01]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's beautiful there.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, it's incredible. 'Land of Enchantment.'

CHRISTOPHER LYON: For sure, for sure. My wife and I went out there, we spent a night camping in Chaco Canyon.

TERRY WINTERS: Oh, Chaco.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It was just—it was magic, total. The stars were out and they had the astronomers there, you know, sharing their instruments with the few people who were camping, and it was just—it was incredible.

TERRY WINTERS: I know, it's amazing, Chaco. That was the other thing we were able to do there. When we were not working—like, every weekend we kind of had off—we would do Chaco, we took trips to Canyon de Chelly, we did all of that, all of those places.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There's one aspect of the—I don't know why I made this connection exactly, but I gather that the *Lightning Field* is one mile by one kilometer.

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Which is so odd, you know, the juxtaposition of these incompatible measurement systems. And then your *Set Diagram* things are like one yard by one meter, I think?

TERRY WINTERS: Right, exactly.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And I thought, "Oh, that's funny." [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: That is sort of the way it was meant to be, funny like that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] It's just, like, a subtle joke.

TERRY WINTERS: Exactly.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Great, okay.

TERRY WINTERS: But, you know, that whole—like the one mile by one kilometer, it really comes out of—you can just see, like, a Jasper Johns 12-inch ruler. I mean, it all is there for me. Like, I just think so much comes out of that work, or what got precipitated through that work.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah. It's hard to put your finger on exactly what that means, but it's intriguing. You were also reading—I was interested—D'Arcy Thompson, *On Growth and Form*.

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is this during the '70s, that you were looking at this kind of thing?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I mean, the forms—I mean, some of these sort of multi-cell forms and so on like that, can't help but bring to mind some of the things—

TERRY WINTERS: [00:46:06] Yeah, well, I was interested in the kind of natural structures. I was interested in finding, you know, this idea of the ready-made and the found object, but I didn't want to take something that someone else made. And these were just things that no one actually made. Like, nature. [They laugh.] But it was found, like I didn't have to make it up. And it was something I could work out of. It is sort of paradoxical, to go back to kind of nature as a subject for painting, and that my interest in, say, paint and going back to different kinds of older techniques, really had to do with an interest in technology, rather than nostalgia.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, there seems to be a whole theme of imaging technology running through your work. And actually a good deal of postwar work. You know, everybody from Lichtenstein and his Ben Day dots, and Chuck [Close] sort of recreating four-color separations as paint.

TERRY WINTERS: Right, exactly.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And then you're working with computers in the '90s. Computer imaging seems to have been very important to you.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, I mean, computer imaging, if not specifically to generate my own images, as a kind of metaphor for painting itself as a visualization system. And I got very interested in how sort of computational analysis could generate pictures of things that you couldn't see, in a scientific sense. It seemed like abstraction was being harnessed there, to make pictures that were very believable to people. It seemed like part of the trajectory of 20th century Modernism—really right out of Kandinsky or Hilma af Klint, if you will—into this highly pragmatic and fact-based realm of science. [00:48:20]

There seemed to be a merger between these kinds of worlds: highly abstract visual production and computational analysis. And that interested me a lot, just in terms of having a curiosity about it and seeing how it could be, like, put through the painting system, to open up to other kinds of potential meanings or emotional powers or psychic realms.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I can't help thinking that there's a point at which one starts to wonder whether one's in an actual environment or a virtual environment, that it's gotten to be so convincing—I mean, not just rendered images but robots and all kinds of things that are creations of—anyway. [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah, science.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It gets a little frightening.

TERRY WINTERS: It's a science fiction world.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, for sure. I wondered if we could look a little bit at some of the *Spine Series* paintings that you were doing very early on. Oh, there's that 1979 piece.

TERRY WINTERS: So that's an egg tempera. So I got very involved in—like when I got out of Pratt—in making my own paints and figuring out ways to do it, and one of the—I became intrigued by this kind of surface that egg tempera paint could get, and you had to mix it up fresh every day. So I got incredibly good at separating egg yolks. [00:50:00] [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, egg has played this big imaging role, you know, in early photography—

TERRY WINTERS: Oh, albumen.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —dependent on albumen.

TERRY WINTERS: That's fantastic. I hadn't thought of that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Eggs were different then a little bit, apparently.

TERRY WINTERS: In what way?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I remember getting into a whole conversation with [Joel] Snyder, at the University of Chicago. He recreated a lot of [Alexander] Gardner's images, and [Timothy] O'Sullivan, images that were taken in the West. And they [exposed the plates] up on the roof of the Smithsonian building or something, but he couldn't get the albumen mixture correct because it had—eggs have changed.

TERRY WINTERS: Oh, God, I'm sure that's true.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: Right, the proteins have been so defiled and degraded.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Anyway, that's a completely meaningless topic.

TERRY WINTERS: No, hardly, hardly.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Some of these works—there are these—it's just been fascinating to me to look through this and keep looking through it, to see how you structure so many of these. There's often a centralized spine.

TERRY WINTERS: Well, this was an attempt to get out of the flat field, and how to move into a drawn and illusionistic space. It just seemed to me in some way that—I really—all the things that were taken out of abstraction, whether it was space or narrative, were all the things that interested me, and that it needed—I somehow needed to find a way to include that kind of material within the context of what I consider a kind of abstract work.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There was this particular—what was that, a picture—oh, *Plane of Incidence*, this one. [00:52:04]

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You know, I was trying to imagine this picture with, "This is a horizon line?" You know, kind of oriented.

TERRY WINTERS: It looks that way here. [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It does. But when it's—when this happens to it, it sort of abstracts the space in an odd way.

TERRY WINTERS: When it's what? When it's—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: When it becomes vertical.

TERRY WINTERS: Oh, when it's vertical, yeah. Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And the elements looks perspectival but they're not describing anything anymore. They've just kind of been given an abstract presence.

TERRY WINTERS: That's a state I find very satisfying [they laugh] in some way, because I'm involved in making these new paintings right now, where there's almost a kind of representational volume in it, but what are they representing? That paradox for me, is something I realized that is really—I get a lot of traction out of that right now, so it's interesting to hear you talk about these in that way, because I knew that that's what—these did something to me that I knew, like, moved me into another place.

It's that sense for me, that the devices and strategies of representational painting can be used to other ends now. And that it's back to what you were saying about, there's so much you can take back from older things. There's so much in painting's history, in the way that it conjured up new kinds of images that can still be applied to things that are not so easily named, and that reflect or resonate with the crazy world we're in right now, the crazy abstract world we're in right now, and the crazy interconnected ecological cybernetic world that we're in now. [00:54:02]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is there a relationship, conceptually, between this and early Cubism, in the sense of Cubism sort of like taking apart the tools of representation and then treating them as autonomous elements?

TERRY WINTERS: I think so. I think in the sense that that moment in the beginning of the 20th century, when you had, you know, like, Bergson or Einstein or Picasso all feeling out in their own way, through the specificity of each of their disciplines, and arriving at some kind of parallel place. I think that there's some way that painting can still address the abstract spaces that are created now and give it some kind of image, some kind of likeness. But I don't know how. [They laugh.] That's where that thing about the indirectness comes in, like to set up a place where you really don't know what you're doing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] Well, you don't know what form a flower is going to turn into when you plant it. You know, I mean, it just—you know, it could go this way or that way.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, I guess.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Whatever, that's a pretty inane thing to talk about. You've mentioned several times the choice of organic forms as a kind of metaphor for the development of a creative thought or the development of a created object. Was this something that was pretty conscious on your part, that you were looking for at that time?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, it was a way to—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Kind of a metaphor?

TERRY WINTERS: It was a way to represent something that seemed abstract. I mean, these are really based on different kinds of mineral structures.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. [00:56:00]

TERRY WINTERS: So that gave me a way—like, "Okay, I'm taking something that's in nature."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So like a crystal?

TERRY WINTERS: A crystal, yeah. It's two different methods. There are three different ways of the growth, growing, I don't remember what though. I had the whole thing down. And it was about the architecture of the plant forms, or the architecture of things that existed in a world that you couldn't quite know what they were, but they were some place for me to get traction to unleash a kind of structural development of the painting itself. They were armatures for me to hang, like, whatever invention I wanted to have through the painting process. And I had always been fascinated in Blossfeldt's photographs, and the sort of presentation of data. Some of the books that I was collecting from these Fourth Avenue bookshops were all these 19th century science books with, like, illustrations. That whole struggle of trying to make a picture of something you were discovering.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And make it schematic so it can be understood.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, in a way like—the whole notion of the diagram and how—or the map—could be used as a way for me not to sacrifice a commitment to the real world, and still get lost inside the paintings, and see how that could then open an imaginary space.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The other aspect of this—and this is something that I just picked up obliquely from D'Arcy Thompson—but that he's talking about the organic form, mathematically speaking, as a function of time.

TERRY WINTERS: Far out. [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Far out, man. [00:58:00] And so that he's thinking—I mean, he's such an amazing character.

TERRY WINTERS: No, he's amazing. I mean, if you think of all that work—what's the other guy? Waddington. Like the ideas of Conrad Waddington.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is new to me.

TERRY WINTERS: He's another one of these guys figuring out the epigenetic fields and how things grow. Like, people who are working out of Darwin and figuring out just how this thing developed. I mean, it's pretty astounding. I don't know, when was D'Arcy Thompson, like 1913 or something?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: He died in 1948.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah. I know, that's amazing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: He was like 98 years old or something.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah. That book must have come out in 1910 or something like that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Something like that, yeah. It's relatively late in his career, like when he's 57.

TERRY WINTERS: Oh, really?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. I was just looking it up, I didn't know these things. But yeah, "We might call the form of an organism an event in space time and not merely a configuration in space."

TERRY WINTERS: But that's—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, I'm bringing this up because you so typically began working in series. You know, there's like this sense of things developing across time and I'm just—there's a science-like aspect to this, about watching things develop or working out the iterations of something over time.

TERRY WINTERS: Well, there's a kind of procedural thing that comes out of wanting to have this distanced approach, and also maybe out of a kind of Minimalism, serialization thing. But also within the painting itself. I mean, in studying how to make the paints and my interest in all those procedures, the painting itself is a series of events, superimposed. And the painting is really a superimposition of maps. Like, that's the diagram of the painting. It's like a mapping of information. [01:00:01]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I think it's Kertess again, he says something like, "It's a fossil of its own making," because you can see the levels of it. But there is an aspect of certain kinds of Minimalism—I guess maybe think of Sol LeWitt or Dorothea for that matter—where there are notionally ideal forms that exist outside of time.

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You know. You're very committed to time as a—

TERRY WINTERS: Exactly, yeah, that's true.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And the decisions that create something are part of the thing in some important sense.

TERRY WINTERS: Exactly, in a very important sense. The idea is not the artwork. I mean, the artwork is this thing that unfolds over time and is revealed and emerges from that process. It's a more process-reality thing, [they laugh] as Mr. Whitehead would say. And so much of the thing that was developing through the '80s, through the Santa Fe Institute, complexity theory and fractal mathematics—I mean, all of this stuff is—all these things that are, like, being discovered really—not just invented, being discovered—about the way the world works. You know, just like you were saying that Cubism had some correlation to so many other kinds of things that were going on at that time. One would hope that painting could respond to the kinds of other technologies in a similar way that, let's say, Cubism responded to filmmaking or Impressionism responded to photography. You know, that there's some life—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Crossing [ph].

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, where that—and, you know, the response is one that's kind of very—it's not very systematic, certainly not on my part. I mean, whatever my interests are in science and technology, it's completely intuitive and poetic. [00:02:05] I got zero—

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TERRY WINTERS: —comprehension, basically, of how any of this stuff functions.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I'm wondering if it's—there's a remark in Deleuze's first book about repetition and difference, that philosophy and science and art are very distinct occupations, but that there is a sense in which

it's necessary to have, like, a one foot outside each of those in order to make progress.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, no, I think that sounds real to me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What was I going to ask you about? One of the quotations—I think it's a Lisa Phillips quote—says, "My whole first years of doing these things were really about trying to come to terms with the fact that I was actually making pictures." [Laughs.] I like that quote. [They laugh.] I mean, was there, you know, almost a taboo at a certain point?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, it was, it was. I mean, especially in the mindset that I had for myself, about what was—all the important work that I saw at that point. But that's not totally true. I mean, I think that's—that was the lockstep I was in maybe. You know, when I think of it, I think of it like—you know, Twombly and Johns's paintings I was involved with were involved with a kind of picture-making, but I couldn't quite see that yet.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There does seem to be a sense, in some of these early works, that you were—a high degree of self-awareness, that you were sort of starting—you were finding yourself, finding your way back to ground zero. The painting from 1982 called *Early Animals*, for example.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You know? And then these kind of—I won't call them primitive, because I know there are things much more primitive than that, but from the standpoint of humans—you know, shell creatures or—

TERRY WINTERS: No, totally that, totally that. [00:02:01] There was something about—and that was about, for me, like kind of getting back to the origins of painting, like using these earth colors, as both a kind of resonance for what the subjects were, but also on a technical level that these things dried faster than other pigments—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: —and I just wanted to work faster. So, it was about the beginnings of things for me, the beginning of making marks, the beginning of me drawing again, the beginning of architecture emerging out of the beginnings of life and things like that.

I mean, I just had an interest in that, the dynamics of it. And it seemed somehow related to so much of this work I said, like the Serra or the Arte Povera people, who were making art about natural things in some very oblique, advanced way. And the Frei Otto stuff. There was a big show at MoMA—I saw a show of his at MoMA, it must have been the early '70s. I just love that stuff.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, yeah, he's just amazing.

TERRY WINTERS: Total genius. And that, for me—like a total, a complete merger of high tech and this interest in naturally occurring structures, because of the kind of engineering, precision engineering of natural forms.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There's a spine sense that's incredible.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, it's unbelievable.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah. It is interesting that in this early work, you give the figures in the ground very distinct roles. You know, they're very—they're separate. They're both active, you know, neither of them is—I mean, even to the extent in this *Theophrastus' Garden* thing of, you know, implying almost a landscape. [00:04:00] But more typically, the grounds seem to be really worked, but the figures are—I don't know, it's like they're in some kind of a conversation with each other.

TERRY WINTERS: The ground and the figures.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I mean, this is unusual, right? We're still talking about a time, thinking of—oh, Christ, what's her name? Stuart.

TERRY WINTERS: Martha? [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No, the artist, [Michelle Stuart]. She's also got some pieces up at Dia right now.

Anyway, when you were talking about different kinds of pigments, dirt—you know, the kind of ground, earth

color pigments—there are three or four long pieces that are up right now and each one—they were done in a quarry in New Jersey and each one is a slightly different shade of clay, I guess. They're very beautiful objects and just—you know, big, like 10 feet high. Why did I mention that? [Laughs.] Oh, I know why. Because I was thinking about the sort of—for a certain generation, everything is sort of locked into the surface. You know, the object is the object. There's not a sense that—if it has any depth at all, it's a kind of bas relief, you know, it's like coming off the surface, but there's no [depth]—and suddenly, you're doing works that kind of start to go into serious depth.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, and that totally surprised me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah. And the degree to which there was a kind of choreography between all these things. I was trying to just lay them out and have a look at it and see what it felt like, of having these things in the paintings. Because, you know, before that, this would be the painting, without any of these things on it. [They laugh.] [00:06:07]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I see, okay.

TERRY WINTERS: You know? Trying to work the surface in a way, expose the different complexities of the pigment, the range of color, the physical layering, blah blah blah. And then suddenly, I was populating them with—just for me to have a look at how these things could be painted in it. And what I got taken with was, like, the kind of choreography of them, or how much they look like how they took on these facial and figural aspects, a kind of animation that I never anticipated.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I hope I haven't turned this off. [Laughs.] Yeah, right.

TERRY WINTERS: And recognizing in myself, that that was the thing that actually I was getting kind of energy from, and so it made me curious to paint more and try to see where I could push it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was anybody else doing this at that moment, that you're aware of?

TERRY WINTERS: Not that I was hanging out with that much. I mean, at the point I was making these pictures, I was sort of close with Carroll Dunham, and so Tip and I had a kind of relationship about these questions and issues at that point. But in terms of the—I wasn't that aware of the total—recognizing how many other people were painting at that time. It was just the beginning of, like—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There weren't a lot of people painting then.

TERRY WINTERS: —the Schnabel, Salle thing. [. . . -TW]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, I'm curious because I was thinking it would be interesting to hear your thoughts about sort of the state of painting at the end of the 1970s. Where was painting at that point?

TERRY WINTERS: Well, I think there were—for me, it was in the stuff Brice Marden was doing. It was in Twombly's blackboard paintings. And Johns, I think, was making some of the greatest abstract paintings ever. Like, those crosshatch paintings are just astounding.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, right, yeah.

TERRY WINTERS: I mean, I saw the show at Castelli uptown in '77, when he did that show of Dutch wives and weeping women. And that was just astounding to me, that show.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

TERRY WINTERS: That was like in '76 maybe.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That sounds right.

TERRY WINTERS: I think it was like, the winter of '76 or something. And I had been making my own stuff and all that, and then suddenly it was like—that show just knocked me out. It kind of like—the beginnings of all of this somehow were triggered by trying to figure out how to make marks and get stuff back.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, Johns is a good place to go for that. [Laughs.] So in 1981, you were in a group show with Castelli.

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It was a benefit, I think, for—

TERRY WINTERS: It was a benefit for Trisha Brown.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And Ileana Sonnabend sees you—

TERRY WINTERS: You know more about this than I do. [00:10:00] [Laughs.] You are like a lawyer; you know all the answers.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Again, it's just to feed you.

TERRY WINTERS: I'm joking, joking. Yeah, I was invited to be in a group show for this Trisha Brown benefit. I think Klaus Kertess must have asked me to be in it. At the time, I was—just prior to making these paintings or right before them, I was making lots of small drawings of these structures, these same structures. And I put one of them in. I was drawing on these Chinese notebooks I was buying in Chinatown. They were calligraphy—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, so they're kind of like a grid.

TERRY WINTERS: They're calligraphy notebooks. Some of them have grids.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But they're very a light grid?

TERRY WINTERS: Very lightly gridded. And I was just drawing. Just like that *Early Animals* painting, I had a drawing that was in that show. And Ileana Sonnabend saw it and she called me to say, "Can I come to visit the studio?" So she came over, and she offered me a show.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: It was peculiar and very surprising, because I wasn't really having people over. Klaus was selling paintings, a couple of things for me here and there. I had one—a woman who was collecting and also sort of an art adviser out in Detroit, Florence Barron, who was really wonderful to me, and she had been selling some of my work. And I was getting to the point where I felt like I was making work, but I actually wanted some people to see it maybe. And then Ileana called me out of the blue and I thought, "Okay, yeah." So it was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Now, but your first—the scale kind of went up a little bit.

TERRY WINTERS: Well, the stakes got higher. [They laugh.] What do you mean?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Just the scale of the work.

TERRY WINTERS: Well, I had made that *Plane of Incidence* before that. [00:12:01]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You did?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, okay.

TERRY WINTERS: No, and I had made some larger paintings. Those were before I showed at Ileana's.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. This is pretty substantial, 87 inches.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah. Drawings like, you know, that size, but it focused my attention.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I'll bet.

TERRY WINTERS: Because I hadn't—I guess I had been working—that was—it was almost 10 years of not really showing, deciding just to do my thing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What was the profile of her gallery at that time?

TERRY WINTERS: Well, I loved the profile of her gallery. That was it—she showed a lot of Europeans.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

TERRY WINTERS: It was where I first saw my Blossfeldt show that I loved. I saw my first Mario Merz show with her, at her. I knew her history with Rauschenberg and Johns. She was someone who was connected to painting but didn't show that much of it. That was attractive to me too, because I was very aware of trying to distinguish

myself [laughs] or fool myself into thinking that I was making paintings but actually addressing these other issues I thought were—whatever the delusional context I allowed myself. But I liked the fact that she had a connection to painting but that she liked lots of other kind of work. And she also showed American art and European art, because that always was attractive to me too.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Some of the pieces there were approaching seven by nine feet. How did this kind of jump up in scale affect your thinking about the forms that you're working with or your methods of working?

TERRY WINTERS: Well, it was just another way of—you know, back to the scientific method of testing, testing the material. [00:14:05] It was about putting the imagery through different pressures, so that some of it is through changes in material, some of it is through changes of scale. So size is necessarily a part of that.

There was also—when I had my first show at Ileana's, I was invited to make prints out at ULAE and that was another—all of this stuff started to happen around the same time, of me developing this new imagery, being invited to have a show, being invited out to ULAE, and it just sort of—it was kind of a pressure cooker of trying to figure out my own relationship to this imagery and how I could keep moving through it in some way.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did it help, in a sense, to have this sort of like—where your personality is not so invested in these things, where you can sort of look at them a little bit objectively? Like, "Okay, I'm going to try this now"? Is there any sense of that being a little bit of a strategy, so to say, a creative strategy?

TERRY WINTERS: Well, I was depicting something that was a bit outside myself, so there was that kind of pose, but they're not abstract to me and I am very connected to them.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, good. [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: And a lot of it dealt with a kind of vulnerability of showing and all that. I think for a number of years, I thought it was a healthy decision not to show and just develop my work on my own and not go in the mix. And, plus, the art world wasn't such that that was really a demand for you to do at that point. Like, I was perfectly happy living downtown and sort of being around and doing my work and whatever. But I also could see that there was also a—I don't know, there was some degree of going public that I was very hesitant about and this forced me into it. [00:16:09] I mean, I was like, literally kind of—her invitation, that sort of—"How could I not do this?" seemed like the right thing to do. And it forced me to allow the paintings to have an independent life of their own, and to look at them in a way—outside of the context of my studio—that I knew was healthy for me.

Like, at a certain point, you're protecting yourself with all of your own rationalizations. You could really give yourself the benefit of the doubt, but when it's out there in the cold, cruel world, you've got to really take a look at it. And that was not always comfortable for me. So I think that helped provoke the work further and for me to dig deeper and to move through it with more determination. So in that sense, it was very useful for me to—at that point, it was good for me to show, however tentative some of the paintings look to me right now or whatever.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So where did Bill Goldston [of ULAE] see your work? How did he come upon it?

TERRY WINTERS: He saw a piece in a group show that I had—or a drawing someone had bought and had in a Texas gallery. He saw it there and then he—Bill called me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is there something about that piece that made him think you could really benefit from working in lithography?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, I think so. I think Bill had an idea that I should make lithographs because, in fact, a lot of these drawings—before I ever made a print, these are actually made with charcoal and litho crayon, because I like the oily, heavy nature of it. That was incredibly productive for me, because I had always admired printmaking and printmakers, especially out at ULAE and stuff they did there, but I had never made a print. [00:18:06] I was just too—I could not go into the print studio at Pratt. It was too—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: I was not well adjusted enough to deal with the communal situation.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. [They laugh.] So this was your introduction to lithography.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Let's see, I'm curious—well, tell me—yeah. I'm trying to remember the story now. I've got too much writing here. [Laughs.] You produced a couple prints and then you worked on *Folio* there?

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But that's not until the mid-'80s.

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah.

TERRY WINTERS: I must have made four or five prints before I started *Folio*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, yeah. I'm curious about this kind of sphere motif that emerges at this time, these spherical clusters that might suggest everything from multicellular organisms to cosmic structures. I mean, there is not a scale thing going on there exactly.

TERRY WINTERS: No.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: They could be almost anything.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah. I mean, that was another thing that interested me, the idea that these things are scale-free.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I wondered about that.

TERRY WINTERS: And that they were difficult to pin down, that they looked like pictures of things but you didn't quite know what.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. It's such an interesting motif, because it can kind of—its symmetry allows it to be almost anywhere on a field and it still works. [00:20:01]

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, and it plays off that difference in repetition thing, that there's a kind of modular construction to it, but the depiction of it, of each of these cells, is different because every one is unique, really. It's different pressure, different attention, different angle. And I was as surprised by them as anybody.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: And I don't know, it might have come back to some of the fascination with the Buckminster Fuller stuff, the Frei Otto thing, the *Fish Eye Domes*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's this funny kind of liminal area where organic forms kind of shade over into constructed things but they still retain their organic—you know, they gain their strength through their organic origin, in a way. That's the funny thing about Fuller's domes, you know, that like, "Oh, yeah, I mean, he didn't invent that kind of interdependent pressure that keeps them up." Nature invented that, so to say.

TERRY WINTERS: Exactly. I mean, I got very involved in all those crazy books he wrote.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] He must have been—did you meet him?

TERRY WINTERS: I saw him lecture.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. So I wonder if you could talk a little bit about—now your quiver has printmaking and drawing and painting, and I wonder if you can talk about the alternation between these mediums, and how—the rhythm of your movement among them.

TERRY WINTERS: The printmaking really offered me a way to triangulate the investigation and exploration of whatever the subject was, still me figuring it out. [00:22:09] It afforded me an opportunity to keep myself off balance. If I got stuck one place, I just started picking up on another project. So I tended to always have my hand in each one of them, but with different degrees of intensity.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I know the market considers them hierarchically, but do you?

TERRY WINTERS: No.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Not at all?

TERRY WINTERS: No. They each help inform one another, although lately I have been thinking about painting. They're all—they all do their own thing [they laugh] and as Barnett Newman said, "Each one is an instrument." Like, every medium is a different instrument. So each has the capacity, in some way, to open up an aperture to the space I'm trying to look at. In some way, the limitations or the specifics of each medium helps inform another. A little bit like you were saying about art, science, and philosophy. Each one helps me think about the other way I work. I don't know if I'm explaining that correctly.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, there may be kind of an interesting example here, these two test pieces for a lithograph. Lithography—I'm not very knowledgeable about this, but it seems to me there's a layering process that goes on there that seems like it finds its way back into your painting.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah. Well, that's the thing, and that's the thing with the *Folio*. I mean, when I first started making the lithographs, Bill's intuition was correct. Like, I had a real connection to lithography, although it took me quite a while to figure out that the mark you make on the plate isn't exactly the mark you're going to get on the piece of paper. [00:24:04] But what I was struck by with the lithography was its ability to have an almost trompe l'oeil relationship to drawing. Like, it could really look like a drawing. But there's actually almost no material on it.

So whereas these drawings that Bill saw initially had a buildup between, like, a lighter white charcoal and a heavier dense crayon mark, in lithography, everything is—you've got the same amount of material on the surface basically, because—from the printing press. And I love that notion that it looked like a drawing but it actually could be layered like a painting, and that's why I got involved, after doing these, to do a very more extended investigation or a look into the lithography. Working on more plates, more prints at the same time, more printings.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And then in '87, I think, you had the opportunity to work with Aldo Crommelynck in Paris.

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And so you get involved in intaglio printing.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How did—

TERRY WINTERS: How did that go? [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It sounds like it was like night and day in terms of a working environment.

TERRY WINTERS: Totally different, totally different. I mean, the thing for me—working with ULAE was an attempt on my part to bypass all of the labor-intensive and indirect notions about printmaking. Like, making a tracing to get the registration right, do all that. I just couldn't stand doing that. And to bypass the reversals. When you print something, you're working on a direct press, and everything was backwards for me, because so much of that, the way I mark, is like, "I want to see that inflection." So a lot of the work at ULAE was me figuring out ways around that, and so I started to make drawings on paper and transferring them from the paper to the press. [00:26:08] They were into the idea that—"How could I work faster? And how could I use the press?" I wanted to make the prints right on the press. Pulling proofs all the time.

And Aldo is like a 17th century French craftsman. It's like, everything had to—he had to drill every plate if we're going to register it, everything had to dry for 24 hours. It was all so intimidating and slowed down the process for me. And, you know, he was so well-behaved and always like—I so much wanted him to tell me what to do, but he was always like, "What should I do now?" It was more like he was there to help me do—do you know what I mean?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: But anyway, we worked out a great relationship and became very close friends. And I learned so much from that guy. He was a really unbelievable craftsman.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So he had worked with Picasso, right?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah. He printed all of those late etchings.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Geez. So, one of the things—I don't know if it's a turning point of any sort, but in the later '70s or the mid-'80s, you created this series *Schema*.

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The 75. And they're in various mediums: watercolor, graphite, gouache, acrylic. Looking at them, having spent all that time working on the Louise Bourgeois book, there were some interesting echoes there. [00:28:05]

TERRY WINTERS: Well, you know, I never really knew about her work. And then Cheim & Read did that drawing show, I just could not believe it. It was, like, so great. And I think that there's—yeah, there are echoes. Like that whole thing with her and Robert Goldwater. Like, that's that connection, you know, the Museum of Primitive Art. I think that's where some of this thing of trying to access those powers through this culture and this time now—that are still here, just as they were for those tribal people—without appropriating their shtick [laughs] and without leaning on their achievement, but to try to, like, manifest it yourself. And like, seeing how she just did it was great. But I had been totally unaware of her. I guess the show at the Modern was earlier than that. I couldn't make—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It was '82.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah. I was confused by that show. Like, I didn't—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, it was all sculpture mostly, so it wasn't really your cup of tea in a way.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah. But I mean, I could see stuff in it, but I wasn't that into it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I mean, it's a shame—you know, the very early prints, you know, the ones that are these mysterious structures—like the little skyscrapers and stuff that were done in like '47, '48, '49—actually have quite a bit to do [laughs] with your—

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah, no, and I had never seen that stuff and it's just—but I think—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: She was—what does Rob [Storr] call her?—a sleeper who never slept. I mean, she was not known at the time of the '82 thing, in a lot of ways.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, she was totally new to me. That was the first time I heard about her. Although I had that Modernism and primitive art book that Robert Goldwater wrote. [00:30:08]

[. . . -CL]

TERRY WINTERS: But you know what—I mean, I don't know how this sounds these days, but at the time of that show, that first show that Debbie did in '82, not having—it was pitched so much, like, as a feminist issue, her work. It was difficult to see it through the haze of, like, that political wedge. I don't know, I just couldn't—it didn't strike me then. I only look back at it after seeing that show of drawings, which came out of, like, nowhere for me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I mean, yeah, there's all these echoes, these mysterious forms that have this whole sexual kind of quality to them.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah. And I had like zero interest in her dad and the whole, like—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, yeah, that.

TERRY WINTERS: [Laughs.] So—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, that reflects back to this whole concern with the personal mythology—

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah, exactly! Exactly. Okay, exactly.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —that can really get in the way of seeing what's there.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, for me that was like something I couldn't get into. I tried. I actually got that little book of interviews and I went "Oh."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: "I can't do this, I can't do this." [00:32:00]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is really an interesting conversation.

TERRY WINTERS: But what an amazing power of formal invention that dame had. I mean, like a piece of paper that she could make—like register a quiver with, like, psychic powers. I don't know, it's amazing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's interesting that you kind of came up through the period when the women's movement is kind of transforming contemporary art history, in the '70s, really, and into the early '80s. Things kind of stalled at a certain point, I think, for women, but—you know, I'm wondering if you were—when one reads about you, the comparisons with other artists are almost entirely male. You know, at least in the things that I've read. But there is a dimension of this. There's a little bit of an echo of what Louise was interested in, and some of your pieces in my mind bring to mind Kiki [Smith], the things that have an anatomical dimension to them and so on.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And I'm just curious about—you know, you were a witness to this, you were a witness to this period. I don't know if that means anything, or if it's just not something you were interested in.

TERRY WINTERS: I'm interested in women's voices and the kind of aesthetic sensibility that they bring to the conversation. And I think that that's always been a part of my interest in, say, textile design. [00:34:03] I think in some sense, textiles have contributed more to the pictorial history of the planet than almost anything else. And they were largely made by anonymous women. And that that's a huge resource, an encyclopedic resource of information and invention, that it's fantastic that now women channel that into the art world, because they were shut out from it for so long.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You've mentioned anonymous women making textiles—and that goes back so many thousands of years—and Robert Goldwater and your encounter with Native Americans in the Southwest and so on. I think you were also interested in tantric art.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There's a mention somewhere of you buying this book, I think?

TERRY WINTERS: Oh, really? Yeah, that *Tantra Asana* book. That cost so much money. I really had to save up for that book.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I think I have a copy of that. I think it's—

TERRY WINTERS: It is amazing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What's [the imprint]? New York Graphic [Society]—you know, from like 1973.

TERRY WINTERS: Exactly. The printing, the gold printing on that book, it's astounding.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's beautiful. And there it is, this big circular form.

TERRY WINTERS: "To her." That's the first page, "to her." And there was an incredible show of that material, I think up at the Jewish Museum.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, really?

TERRY WINTERS: I think so.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

TERRY WINTERS: I might be mistaken. I might be confusing it with—at the time that that book was published, there was also an incredible book published on Navajo rugs. And there was definitely a show. I saw that show at the Jewish Museum, of Navajo blankets, that Tony Berlant put together. In their own ways, both of those books reflected an idea about women and the women's production. [00:36:04]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

TERRY WINTERS: I mean, Navajo rugs are like—the physicality and invention, the way that they were able to take in new dyes and make new kinds of blankets.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I don't want to totally exhaust you. We have another encounter scheduled. I don't have anywhere to be, but I'm just—

TERRY WINTERS: No, I'm fine too.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. Maybe we'll continue for another 15 minutes and then call it an afternoon. So, in 1991 and [9]2, the Whitney organizes this midcareer retrospective, I guess one would call it. But it's like, a dozen years of work [laughs] or something like that.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, really less than—I mean, in some sense it was like—I mean, I had my first show in November '82, and then this thing was like—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, right, of course, yeah.

TERRY WINTERS: This thing was, like, much sooner than that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How did that come about, Lisa Phillips?

TERRY WINTERS: Lisa Phillips. Who knew? Yeah, she just wanted to do it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So she had been following your work?

TERRY WINTERS: I guess she must have. [They laugh.] I really have no memory of how it was first proposed to me, that she do this.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So that was first seen in LA and then it came here?

TERRY WINTERS: Yes, because of scheduling, it was first seen in LA, which actually ended up being very good for me. Because I had a chance to install it out there and really have a look at all this stuff. In a certain way, I had been feeling my way through this whole thing, like not really getting a bigger look at it. And in terms of just seeing the work, that first installation in LA really helped me take a look at what I liked, what I didn't like, what I felt—it gave me a sense of direction that I wanted to push things. [00:38:18]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You were married to Hendel Teicher?

TERRY WINTERS: Hendel Teicher, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: When did you get married?

TERRY WINTERS: I got married a long time ago, [they laugh] '87 or '86. No, '87.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And she's a curator and art historian.

TERRY WINTERS: She's a curator, right. Swiss. She moved here some time maybe in '90 or something. For a while, we commuted a little bit. She's from Geneva.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How did you meet?

TERRY WINTERS: A studio visit. Way back. Way back when.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Way back when. Just curious.

TERRY WINTERS: It was a great studio visit. [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: "Would you like to see my etchings?" [Laughs.] So, you know, I want to double back and talk about the work, but I thought I would get some biographical stuff out of the way here too, a little bit. The Met had a retrospective of your prints in 2001. Nan Rosenthal did that?

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: In the early 2000s, you bought this place in Columbia County, and then after some years built a studio there, is that right?

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is that where you mainly work now?

TERRY WINTERS: It's where I paint.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's where you paint. This is 2006, I think, that it was completed.

TERRY WINTERS: Or 2008 maybe. [00:40:00]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, yeah. It sounds—oh, 2007, it says here, I don't know.

TERRY WINTERS: That might be right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: 2007 or '08, '07 or '08.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. I'm not the authority. It sounds like a spectacular space.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, it's fantastic. The whole situation is great. And Hendel is also involved in architecture, so we—that was part of the impetus to do that. I had always worked in these New York loft buildings, these sort of 24 by 90 things. I wanted to be able to put work out in a way that I could have it out in the same way I would have lots of drawings out and work on them. So I felt, at that time—like, it's about 15 years ago—I wanted to change studios. I had been painting on another floor in this building. And at that point it was either move to Brooklyn or do something else. And I had already fixed up so many lofts in New York, I just could not see doing it again.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: There's a whole other story in this. I found this building with friends of mine, and we fixed it up—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This one.

TERRY WINTERS: —and did this whole thing. And I just didn't want to do it again in another neighborhood. So we started looking upstate, because we had friends who were sort of near there, and I love the Hudson Valley. Hendel hadn't really spent that much time outside of the city. So we ended up getting this piece of land, and we knew we didn't want to get just a house to get away; we wanted to get a place to work. So we got a place up there, I built a studio eventually, we built a house. And right now, we're building a kind of storage building, to put stuff up there. And that's just very productive for me, being up there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [00:42:02] [. . . -CL] Do you work with—

TERRY WINTERS: I have somebody one or two days a week.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah. I mean, so much of the work is about the marks I make and what I'm doing, or what I'm not doing, or undoing. And I don't like having people around when I work. That was one of the biggest challenges making prints, was having other people around.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Let me sort of preview a little bit. I didn't want to get partway into this and then have to stop. What I did was go through the Addison catalog and just, you know, use its structure as a thing to walk through and look at images with you and ask you questions about.

TERRY WINTERS: That would be great.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But I would like to do that all as one thing.

TERRY WINTERS: Okay.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So maybe we'll stop here.

TERRY WINTERS: Sure.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I think we've been at it for a little more than an hour and a half.

[END OF TRACK winter18_1of1_sd_track03.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is Christopher Lyon, interviewing Terry Winters, on November 15, 2018, at his loft in Lower Manhattan. This is our second session, and it's somewhat Swiss-looking weather outside, snowing. Do you still spend time in Switzerland?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah. At least once, but maybe twice a year, we go over. We have family there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And do you show there?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, I'm actually doing a show in June, in Zurich there. Not a regular thing, but I've done shows. The Kunsthalle in Basel, I had a show, and the Kunstmuseum in Lucerne, and I did a show in Geneva. I've had some shows.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Do we still have the catalog for the Addison show here?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I think I see it. Is that it?

TERRY WINTERS: Okay, I can get it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Thank you. Oh, great, thank you. So in 2004 and ['0]5, you had a second retrospective, this one covering a decade, 1994 to 2004. And Adam Weinberg seems to have been the driving figure for that.

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is that right?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, he was.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How did that come about? Had he been—

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, I had met Adam at one point when he was at the Whitney, I guess, when he came onboard as—I think he was the curator of collections. I might have met him before that in Paris, when he was at some point trying to set up an American center in Paris. I might have met him there when I was working with Crommelynck. [00:02:00]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And that show went to San Diego and Houston, I think.

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. It's interesting to see how that show was organized, as opposed to the Whitney catalog, which recognizes relationships between pieces. But this show was really very explicitly organized by series, it seems. And he borrowed titles of your series as organizing titles, and yet the works incorporated under them were not necessarily all from the series with that title.

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So he was sort of trying to get at more kind of global—

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, or take a title that was suggestive of an approach or a theme within a certain period of time, I guess.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How involved were you in sort of the back-and-forth about how the —I think there's seven or so.

TERRY WINTERS: I mean, I have to refresh my memory. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Sure, sure, yeah.

TERRY WINTERS: You know, I poke my head in everything.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Those are the structures.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, I mean, I had something to do with it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: It was Adam's show. The show covered a period of time when I was very taken with the idea of trying to develop a sort of abstract language around the work, and I was doing a lot of—I hesitate to call it writing, but sort of writing about painting, or trying to think about ways to approach writing about painting. So, some of these titles reflect that involvement of mine at that time. So we kind of used them as global markers for certain periods and bodies of work. [00:04:10]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Were you concerned to sort of participate in the critical response to your work in a certain way? And to have an input into how the work got talked about?

TERRY WINTERS: Not exactly, but there's a way that I was dissatisfied with kind of reductive readings that were happening with the work, in terms of the kind of natural world representations—that being grafted on it. And so that discomfort drove me to get more to the center of what interested me. It wasn't so much about me, I think, trying to direct a response. It was more about me directing myself towards things that I felt more deeply about.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is it that some writers on the work sort of collapsed the metaphor and the apparent

content?

TERRY WINTERS: I think it was just an easier way to access the things, and maybe part of it is just also feeling my way through this material and figuring out what my real interests were. So, I mean, that's a little bit of what we were talking about last time, about putting the work out and feeling that discomfort and getting a kind of radar reading, bouncing back the signals and helping to locate oneself. So I think that that—all of the period before this time—I guess the Whitney was, what—when was the show?—in '94. So a little more than 10 years since all of that, and there was a real shift and redirection for myself in terms of how the imagery was developing. [00:06:09]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Can you talk about that a little bit more?

TERRY WINTERS: Just this desire to have the work be more immediate and kind of abstract in terms of the imagery that was being developed, more synthesized. More synthesized, even though a lot of the concerns were exactly the same. It was just more how they manifest themselves in terms of the imagery in the paintings.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There's an interesting—I was struck by the way—in a certain way you've—and I mean this entirely positive, but you kind of constructed your—you sort of conducted your education as an artist in a very public way.

TERRY WINTERS: I know. It's been horrifying. [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I mean, for someone who, as I said when we started last time, strikes me as being rather reticent about themselves—you know, your biography, your mythology, if you will—you've nevertheless been very public about the presentation of your art and getting it out into the world in a very effective way, it seems. You know, in a kind of very public way: several major surveys, not to mention the print surveys. I just find that really interesting.

TERRY WINTERS: What do you mean? That I don't know what I'm doing in public, [laughs] that kind of thing?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No, that you do know what you're—you're finding out what you're doing in public.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, no, that's true.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And for someone who started out being so—like, you know, you were just in your studio, you're not feeling a pressure to show your work, and then you kind of—

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, well, I think part of the not showing the work was a—starting to show the work was a recognition that I was never going to be ready, that the process I was involved with always necessitated a level of discomfort and a level of exploration that I was never going to be comfortable with. [00:08:13] So that just seemed like the condition of making new paintings. And once I got in the kind of habit or the—I got used to the idea of showing in public. That just seemed like part of the program. Like, putting out work—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You get it out.

TERRY WINTERS: I'm always committed to the things I finish and then you put them out in the world. And they take on another life and then they—in some way, they help direct one forward too, by having the work out.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So it's like a feedback.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: In his essay, Weinberg emphasizes a couple of things, two things: "the coupling," as he puts it, "of intellectual and speculative thought with the physical activity of mark-making." You know, engagement with physical processes. And then second, "the interaction of the mediums and interconnections of works within the series," across your work as a whole. And it strikes me that—and this is undoubtedly very simplistic, but that there is a kind of a transition from the '80s, early '90s work—in sequences of things—to much more of an engagement with series. I mean, you do series as long as like 100 works or something here.

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Like, in these very sustained explorations. So I'm wondering—so it's as if there's a concern with a larger field in which these works will start to talk to one another. [00:10:04] I'm wondering if that's the way you think of it, if that has any effect on how you've thought about presenting the work, like in the Rem Koolhaas installation.

TERRY WINTERS: Right. It is about that. It's about a kind of proliferation of imagery as a way to expand the field

and deepen the field, and also to allow an area within which these unpredictable things can happen. And I find that working laterally helps me do that. For a long time, especially when I wasn't showing, I would make lots of paintings on top of paintings, and just keep working. And I realized that that wasn't very productive. [They laugh.] So I just sort of found a way to try to spread the experience and allow for different kinds of mutations to happen. And again, it's that kind of difference in repetition thing, of trying to explore the wider field.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Does that term, rhizome, rhizomatic—does that come out of Deleuze? Is that where—

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, it does, it does. I mean, it's going to be just a useful—it was a useful metaphor to think about spreading connections.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And does it mean sort of a non-hierarchical spreading out of things that have multiple connections, one with another?

TERRY WINTERS: Exactly.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is that what that sort of means?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, exactly. That's how I began to think about the different media, and their interconnectedness, and also the kinds of imagery that I was developing within each painting too, and the associations and connections that they made for me. You know, what I was saying before about the reductive reading about, say, the '80s work, for simplified terms, about being about nature—I mean, the same thing sort of happened to some of this work, of it being read about computer spaces. [00:12:05]

You know, so I just—some of that business is just unavoidable. And I think that, you know, the real heart, or the center, of what I'm trying to get at is tangential to all of that stuff, but it's some other thing inside the painting process. And that's sort of what I'm trying to get at, these other kinds of psychic spaces and meanings and emotional contents that painting has always held, for me in any case.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Because of being involved with the Smith catalog raisonné, I can't help thinking of the fields of Smith that Michael Brenson has written about particularly. You know, this idea that toward the end of his life, [Smith] was creating these—you know, at Bolton, these just, like, ongoing fields of related works that relate each other, and I guess he was constantly moving them around and changing them.

TERRY WINTERS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And I think painting deals with a kind of virtual field, where each painting is located within the context of all the paintings that aren't with it that I've made. It's somehow affected by that, as well as what's happening on the surface.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I'm wondering if we could walk through the Addison catalog a little bit. Right here, yes. So these *Tenon's Capsule* pieces that—Adam included works from the series, and from the series *Foundations and Systems*. And then he placed these, but he started off that section with these *Tenon's Capsule* pieces. I understand that the term refers to the membrane that holds the eye in place, or something? [00:14:13]

TERRY WINTERS: Something like that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I had never—

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, who knew? [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But, looking at them with that idea in mind, they do come to seem like almost negative eyes, you know? They're very deep. I mean, the eye is sort of pulled deeply into these. Was that part of the thinking?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, I mean, a lot of—what year are these? A lot of the imagery suggested a kind of ocular reading, so that was something that came out of it. And part of this writing I was talking about, I did this little book called *Ocular Proofs*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, right, yeah.

TERRY WINTERS: Which was really my thinking about painting expressed through the language of sort of visualization systems and seeing all of that. And thinking a lot about how retinal painting, and the whole put-down of retinal painting, and how in fact the visual component of painting is ultimately its real meaning. And just sensing my own commitment to that, and a belief that that commitment to seeing was not a sacrifice to the kind of conceptual framework that I saw painting existing inside of.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Kind of amazing things. How big are they?

TERRY WINTERS: They're big, I think. Yeah, 40 inches. I mean, it's drawings. [00:16:02]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah. You've mentioned the second section that he uses is *Computation of Chains*. What—you know—[They laugh.]

TERRY WINTERS: Yes? The question is?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You know, I made a mistake in looking at this. I think I was trying to do this in the early morning, and what I had written down initially was "computation of chaos," which is not what they are. But there is something about some of your titles where there's this, like, inherent self-contradiction or something like that, like they can both imply precision, computation, and also something loose. There's another title that's—well, *Graphic Primitives* is a little bit that way. But there was another title that really struck me that way. It doesn't matter.

Anyway, the notion between, you know, implying a certain grid-like precision—but then, you know, there's so much going on behind it, seemingly behind it, perceptually behind it. How is something like this constructed?

TERRY WINTERS: [Laughs.] Good question. You know, I'm working from drawings. This one is called *Computational Architecture* because—again, back to this notion of the picture is a kind of architectural, structural object. The drawing that I used to construct that painting actually came from this group of drawings called *Computation of Chains*. [00:18:00] This, again, was during this time period when I was thinking about computer visualization systems, the idea of computation, which was giving us the capacity of computation to give us back imagery. Like, the link between mathematics and imagery was something that was really exciting at that point, like late '80s, early '90s. It just seemed like we were getting back pictures of things that were really abstractions, but the consequence of very precise computation. And that kind of excited me for, I don't know, some inexplicable reason.

I guess I saw painting as being that. A sort of—I was interested in making a painting that was kind of a computational image, but a computational—but part of the matrix of the computing system was my kind of irrational, emotional, intuitive, unpredictable being. And that the kind of wet computation that comes out of, like, biological thinking is also part of the mix of things. And that that could somehow produce, over time—over the time of working on the painting—an image that was a register of what I did, I guess. [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You know, I don't want to get too heady, because it can—but it's—even from some of your very earliest paintings, there is such an interesting interaction of these horizontal elements, which are often fairly regular, and the verticals, which somehow are more irregular, playful, you know. There was a particularly good example of that. [00:20:00] [. . . -CL]

What I did want to ask you about—I was struck by, and I just wanted to ask you about, artists whose drawing you feel a response to. And what made me think of that was this sort of Guston-ish quality of this. As you were finding your own voice, I'm wondering who you were—you've talked about Johns—who you were particularly attracted to, whether this is part of your DNA as an artist.

TERRY WINTERS: There's a whole group of people. But obviously that generation, the kind of Guston, de Kooning, Pollock, Rothko generation. But also back to—I mean, somebody like Degas is somebody who—Degas seems like the sublime sense of kind of accuracy in drawing, and how that thread of his connection to the Old Masters and back up through Picasso and Matisse—I mean, those are the people who really struck me as pushing drawing to some heightened place of achievement.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Going back to your comment about computing and the painting process, there's an interesting text here: page 64. Yeah. [00:22:05]

TERRY WINTERS: Oh, yeah, that's what I was saying, the *Ocular Proof* thing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, that's the one.

TERRY WINTERS: That's the book. I mean, there's a whole book of those.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I realize this was a detail from it. This painting is so reminiscent of that early one we were looking at, with the intersection.

TERRY WINTERS: Oh yeah, yeah. That's true.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. So is this your text?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, it is.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, yeah. "The painting process demands display," there you are. [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: You can't argue with that. [They laugh.] That was my rationale for showing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, right, "The paintings demand it."

TERRY WINTERS: "Demand it. I have nothing to do with it."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yes, okay. We did talk the last time about—this can't help but bring to mind the generations of artists who have engaged with reproductive technology in one way or another. I mean, this seems to be—I mean, starting with photography obviously, and way back to all kinds of woodcut and the invention of lithography in the early 19th century.

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So this seems like there's a stream of that running through the Western tradition at least, and one imagines the same in Japan and other places. Thinking about that, you did this series, *Graphic Primitives*, and using woodcut, right?

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Page] 72, that's what we were just briefly looking at. This is such an intriguing evocation of computer imaging, when it kind of reduces an image just to a line drawing. [00:24:01]

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There were moments in early computer imaging that were so evocative in a way, and now it's become so slick and three-dimensional, and just, you know, just full of stuff.

TERRY WINTERS: Right, I mean, as it got more sophisticated, it got further away from some of the basic languages that that kind of digital imagery had. So these prints come out of that *Computation of Chains* drawings. They were all originally small ink drawings, and I wanted to see—because of the print studio I was working with, Two Palms Press, they were interested in—they had access at this point, which is 1998—they knew someone in Detroit who used a laser cutter. Like, that's how it was so primitive at that point. And using automobile parts.

So I wanted to see how I could use a laser-cut woodcut to make a print. So I scanned my drawings, and I guess I chose nine drawings from that big group of 100-something drawings, that seemed related in some way and played off of this idea of symmetry. And I scanned them in a program—I forget, Illustrator or something—to see how the imagery looked without the benefit of my gesture and the kind of inflection of the changes, where we put everything back to the same width of line and just read—I wanted to see how the reading of the information in my drawing, when it was reduced, what it looked like. So I was intrigued with that look, but it seemed very disembodied, so the idea was to re-embodiment it—is that a word?—to embody it in some new way, through the printmaking process. [00:26:06]

So I ended up having the blocks cut from these computer images, and then I used a technique called *rincé* that Picasso invented. I had seen a picture years before of Picasso standing in his bathtub in his underwear, like, spraying down a piece of paper. And I was reading it was—you make a print with white ink, then you cover it all with a black ink, a water-based ink, and then you wash it all off, so the ink only sticks to the paper. So this is actually printed in heavy white oil ink, oil-based ink, and then we painted it with sumi ink and then washed off the print.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Ooouu [ph], it must be really lush.

TERRY WINTERS: So it was like—so it became—it totally took the computer image and made it into some other kind of glowy, physical thing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, that's cool. That's really marvelous.

TERRY WINTERS: But of course now, David has his own, like, laser machine in the studio. Just how we had to send them to Detroit—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: —and get them back, it's just shocking, how long ago it seems.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's exciting though.

TERRY WINTERS: And then all these paintings come out of those woodcuts too.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Ah! Okay, so this is that part of that dialogue between mediums.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, exactly. So this painting, which is like nine-foot by 12-foot, *Color and Information*, is based on this woodcut that in itself is based on a small ink drawing. So it was back about putting these things through different kinds of transformations.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's kind of wonderful, there's this very definite circular form there, but at no point is it connected, right? [00:28:04] It's just different kinds of density and direction of the line that's sending the eye there.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, and the connection somehow happens in looking at it, and imagining it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, the eye has to kind of complete it.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, you have to—yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It may be—I wondered if you would ever come across this. Apparently, there's this brilliant MIT fellow named David Marr, M-A-R-R, who in the '70s—he died young—but Gombrich, of all people, was very interested in him, because he was writing about this kind of, you know, liminal state where images are partly coming together but they're not quite there yet. You know, and how we see and how we put together things. And it just sounded like what you—a little bit like your in-between or no man's land kind of area, where you're trying to—

TERRY WINTERS: David Marr.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, M-A-R-R. I think that the late Gombrich, you know, he got pegged as a certain kind of art historian, but he was actually just totally fascinated by these questions of perception and how we construct images in our heads and so on.

TERRY WINTERS: Did he do *Art and Illusion*?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yes, exactly. Yeah, yeah. And a marvelous book about style, decorative style, [*The Sense of Order*,] that he considered to be the counterpart of *Art and Illusion*, yeah.

TERRY WINTERS: I will check that out.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wonderful, wonderful imagery. [Laughs.] It would be really up your alley. [00:30:04]

Page 76. Oh, yeah, this one is one I wanted to talk about. So, you know, an image like this, which is kind of—not monochromatic, but tending toward there—you know, feels like something that the old-fashioned kind of computer screens, the cathode ray tubes sort of thing—you know, it has this feel. It has a very—almost like an historic feel to it now. I'm wondering to what extent actual working with a computer inspired this.

TERRY WINTERS: I don't know. This is also one of the paintings that was based on one of those prints.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, so very indirectly.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, and it's—it reads very differently looking at it in the book. This is a big painting. This is like eight-foot-high. This is eight-foot by 10-foot.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

TERRY WINTERS: So reading the imagery is completely different. I mean, the thing about painting is that they're all actual size, one to one, so they're read—they're very corporal in the way that they're read.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I wanted to ask you about it, because we were talking about some of the—I don't want to call them motifs, because they're not quite that—but certain things, like these spherical things, have a scale-less-ness about them, and yet here you're seeming to say that the scale of the painting really is very important.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, because they're all—I mean, everything in the paintings are actual size, but the scale-free quality they have is all imaginary. [00:32:06] And I think that's part of what excites me about, for me, the painting process, is building these actual objects that have an almost instrumental quality, but that they trigger these sort of multidimensional places. I mean, it's true what you're saying. I mean, I think it does give off a kind of weird, cathode ray, screen-like image thing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Of the works that were reproduced here, the late '90s works related to the computer were the ones that gave me the strongest feeling of the period in which they were made. You know, that had a certain kind of temporal specificity to them, or something like that.

There's a picture—this is [page] 78. One of the things, we've talked about this before, but, you know, the notion of a spine or some kind of an orienting. This almost looks like a compass, has a compass-like quality to it. This drawing almost seemed to me like a schematic rendering of some of your key ways of thinking about organizing a picture. You know, both the spine and this kind of halo-like emanation coming out of it. [00:34:05] Is this the opening?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, it's the key. It's the first drawing from that group of 50 drawings, so in some sense that is what it is. It's the kind of frontispiece that talks about what the group of drawings is.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, so the location plan—oh, this is what I was thinking of, you know, with a very regular, horizontal grid and then this kind of very playful relation. Almost as if this were a staff paper, for music.

TERRY WINTERS: Right, right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And so how did the collaboration with Trisha Brown come about? You had known her for a long time.

TERRY WINTERS: I had known her for a while, and Hendel had worked with her. And she was my neighbor, actually, for years, just a couple of doors down from me. She invited me to do a set, because she was commissioned to do a piece. I have to remember this. She was commissioned to do a piece for the proscenium stage, which she had never done before. And she felt like she needed a backdrop, some kind of big backdrop. I'm conflating a couple of things here, but—so that was my job, in a way, to create something that she could use on a big stage.

I sort of approached it as an extension of my printmaking efforts, so I was able to find a company in Germany that printed enormous opera backdrops. So I was sort of working with that idea, that I would do that. And then something came up about her wanting to do something with someone who was doing jazz. [00:36:05] I don't know if it had to do with the nature of the commission or what. She had just done a piece using Webern's music. And she asked me, because she knew I was kind of interested in downtown music stuff, and I suggested Dave Douglas to her, because Dave—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I don't know him.

TERRY WINTERS: He's a trumpet player. He played a lot with John Zorn and was part of that whole scene of people. But Dave had also transcribed—I had a CD with his transcriptions of these different Webern pieces, so I thought, "Check out this guy." And she did and she actually ended up using Dave as the music person for this thing.

That first piece, this was—these were drawings related to the first set I did. And then that piece became one third of a much longer evening she ended up doing, and I ended up doing a number of sets for her.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And did you do costumes as well?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, I did the costumes and all the visual stuff on it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Were you involved in the lighting at all?

TERRY WINTERS: I sat in on it, but it was Jennifer Tipton.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

TERRY WINTERS: And that was, like, illuminating, no pun intended, to watch how that transformed the whole reading of the piece. And the whole thing was just great. Because I was really there a lot during rehearsals and what they were doing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, right. What was it like to see dancers in front of your work?

TERRY WINTERS: Well, that was the thing, it was fantastic. And that's, I think, what a little bit with these staff things were—like, tracking where they were through the—moving through the stage. [00:38:01] And that heightened sense of the body in front of this abstract imagery, and the specificity of that. And just how atemporal in a way—however much I build paintings over time, the paint—the visual arts are compared to music and dance. Because, basically, Trisha and Dave were always, like, synching when they had to—when something came in, when they didn't, and my thing just sort of—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's just kind of there. [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, except for the way that it was transformed by Jennifer Tipton.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh.

TERRY WINTERS: She and I—I mean, she would ask me about it, but it was basically her. She knew what she could and couldn't do in terms of how the light changed and how—that key to musical or dance changes, and how it affected just the space of the stage and the drop itself. It was sort of great to see all of that animated.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah. Was that the first time your work had been used in performance?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And as I said, I was very much around, [laughs] even if I wasn't doing anything. And then after I did this, I was invited by Merce Cunningham to do a piece, and that basically meant having dinner one night with Merce and him saying, "I just need a big drop and I'm going to use all the dancers in the company; it's going to be very complicated."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: And then the next time I saw it was at the opening night, with music by Christian Wolff.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: And that was fantastic, and I thought, "Wow, this is, like, labor-saving." It was incredible. The different approaches were incredible.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's interesting to think about the importance of dancers, especially in the '60s I guess, to what was emerging in visual arts at that time. [00:40:08]

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There seems to be more attention being paid to it now. I mean, this show at MoMA—

TERRY WINTERS: I know, I know. Well, I think it was the place that women's contributions were so evident. Their role, both in terms of as performers and choreographers and thinkers around the work, is now really being appreciated.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You were fairly young when some of this was going on, but were you attending things in the '60s and early '70s?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, I saw the Judson people dance when I was at Pratt. And Yvonne Rainer came to Pratt when I was there and I saw her perform in the gym. I mean, that was really the stuff that interested me. And that's when I said—you know, when I graduated Pratt, I moved to Greene Street and that was all part of that whole scene, of being close to all of those people.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did you ever perform in something?

TERRY WINTERS: No.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I mean, many artists did. That's the reason I'm asking.

TERRY WINTERS: I never did. No.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Maybe more the women than the men.

TERRY WINTERS: No, there were a lot of men involved too.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah. Funny to think of the impact of things conceived for the stage, like maybe Rauschenberg's very first *Combine*, which was seen in that show at MoMA. It was only later dubbed a *Combine*, but it was really a set piece for a Merce dance in '54, I think. And of course Bob Morris's structures that were originally—you know, they were things to walk on and interact with, in performances like Simone Forti and others.

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And then they get anointed as, "This is—I'm an art object." [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: "I'm an art object." Yeah. [00:42:00]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, yeah, besides music staffs—I may have mentioned this before, but I was struck by the Rachel Teagle quoting you, "I like the way graphs, charts, maps, and blueprints look. I like the way they're set up as pictures that describe the way the world is or how something works." Is that what you mean by "instrumental"?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, I think so. It's a way to deflect the aesthetic decisions and locking into that notion about the architecture, the kind of functional nature of diagramming an activity or an action and then reacting to the visual consequences that happen.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So it kind of gives you—there's a given and then something to—

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, a response, and then an action to the physical situation.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Yeah, and then the next sequence in this is the *Set Diagram*, and as we talked—ah, there we go! There's an image of the Trisha Brown. Is this part of the piece?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, it is. That's part of the—it's a gray scale and a color bar at the top.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: It was part of the way that—when I was generating them, preparing them for the printer in Germany, we have these things and I just included it in the finished set.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, that's cool. So yet another allusion to print technology. [00:44:01]

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, exactly. This is an amazing place. I mean, they printed this on—I guess they printed it on some kind of then-high tech polyester film or something. They had these enormous tables and then they would heat-seal and there had to be a seam that would be totally invisible, so that it was just like one enormous piece of fabric. Just as a physical object, it was great.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. What happens to things like that?

TERRY WINTERS: They have it somewhere, but they haven't been working on stages that large.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Let's see, 99. Where was I? Yeah, yeah. Let's see, what was I looking at here? Oh, this guy, right. Why was I [laughs]—I can't remember.

TERRY WINTERS: Why were you fascinated by this? Who knows?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No, I mean, it's a beautiful object. I don't remember what I was thinking about. But there—you know, there's this interesting—given a structure and then both verticals and also hash marks, or what one might call hash marks like this, that kind of play around this, and then there's just a ghost of some kind of a circular form. This is another example of that.

Oh, I know what I was going to ask you about. Page 99, there are curving grids. Page 100. Oh, this is what I was thinking about, this sort of regular structure and then, you know, a kind of almost obscured circular form underneath. Same here. [00:46:09] It made me think about the question about building things, that part of building is also obscuring or maybe even destroying parts of a structure, in order to—and yet those obscured parts still peek through here and there, the way parts of a renovated building can still make themselves felt.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, or like parts of a hillside. So it's a kind of geologic stratification that happens in the painting process, where every event contributes in some way, whether visibly or invisibly, to the final image.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There was a term—I don't know if it's your term, perhaps your term: asignifying. You know, sort of like—again, this, like, unhidden.

TERRY WINTERS: Well, things are revealed through the painting process, and concealed. So I think that those two poles are what's really in operation when you're painting: revealing and concealing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Are there forms that become, in that process, asignificant? Like the notion of sort of meaningfully inert? They're there but they're not any longer signaling or having significance?

TERRY WINTERS: No, and hopefully they all have significance. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. No, I mean, which would be an interesting idea in itself.

TERRY WINTERS: To, like, try to build a meaningless [they laugh] painting.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Where things are talking—where things are both expressing and being mute in some sense.

TERRY WINTERS: Well, where they're expressing, it's that thing about—you're getting the signal but it's not—the signal-to-noise ratio is always switching. [00:48:10]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

TERRY WINTERS: And I think it's the struggle to read those signals that the painting is broadcasting, is, like, hopefully part of the engagement with it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That makes sense, yeah. And we did talk about—the body of work that was seen at Lehmann Maupin was the—

TERRY WINTERS: *Set Diagrams*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It is *Set Diagrams*, right, right. Is this where the wonderful—oh, I started to be struck by these, works like this that seem to begin to have a topological aspect to them, like curving space or something like that. When does that notion begin?

TERRY WINTERS: I think in some sense it was there from the beginning, but at this period, during these years, it was something that I was really trying to explore more: how these warped grids began to suggest sort of figural body-like connotations. It's a way to explore, exploit, this Modernist grid and move it into more of a far-from-equilibrium place. Like, make it more dynamic, make more of a dynamical system. And to then react to the consequences of all of these different warps and shifts within these kinds of meshwork images. [00:50:00] These look kind of good. Nice to see these.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, they look kind of good. [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: I like these.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So the fifth—you've mentioned meshes. The sixth section, I think is called *Mesh Works*.

TERRY WINTERS: Right, right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This piece is so amazing, this sort of—what looks like a kind of bicycle wheel.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, it's really my Duchamp homage.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] It's very beautiful.

TERRY WINTERS: I have that up in my house upstate now.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, really? So the spokes are dragging the back of a—

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, knife. A palette knife, scrape it out.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There's also a suggestion, in some of these, of emanations of sound or sound waves.

TERRY WINTERS: Right, yeah. I mean, I think it's, you know, that McLuhan interest, where—what did he call it? I'll think of it in a minute. McLuhan always was talking about how the space of sound is more like the electronic spaces, and the visual system a perspectival space. He was always trying to—auditory [ph] space? What did he call it?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I'll have to look that up.

TERRY WINTERS: But the fact that sound waves, sonic waves, fluid dynamics—the way that fields are activated by different forces, and that those forces warp the space itself, or the space itself is a kind of real thing, and that changes the reading and the meaning of these things. So I was interested in how that could happen. Like in this. Like, the kind of change of whatever pressure, or the collapse of something, will make a different kind of form. [00:52:11]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Turning catalog pages.] There's a picture of that installation. Oh, here we go, these are these beautiful things. Where was the [long pause]—just going through this, I was struck by these pieces that follow the *Mesh Works*, where—oh, wow, so that's the Merce piece?

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, that's the Merce Cunningham thing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

TERRY WINTERS: And then I did these costumes that were, like, the luge team, the American luge team or something. [00:54:01]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, yeah. [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: This very graphite-colored, form-fitting costumes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It looks wonderful. Oh, yeah, *Turbulence Skins*, here we go. Many of these kind of mesh-like forms are there, but it's as if you start to introduce interruptions—

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —or disruptions, in the wave.

TERRY WINTERS: There are kind of holes in the space, or bodies emerging from it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is so beautiful. I was struck that there's such depth to this, and these pieces that seem to be almost floating on the surface, and yet it's in totally undefined space. [Laughs.] "What is it? I don't know." You know, it's an imaginary space, but it's very specific.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, that's the hope, that it doesn't become just some sort of Surrealist dream place or some—that it's somehow rooted in the material and rooted in the specificity of the object itself.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's a great example. So, you created this book with Jean Starobinski. I think we mentioned it last time. The title is *Perfection, Way, Origin*. It must have been a kind of daunting title to respond to.

TERRY WINTERS: Unbelievable.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] Perfection.

TERRY WINTERS: I mean, yeah, I didn't know what to do with it. It's a long story, but he's someone else whom Hendel knew, in Geneva, and I was going to Geneva then. She was working at the museum then, and I was going a lot to Geneva. [00:56:03] I had met him and we talked, and we had this idea: I would do some etchings and he would contribute, like, a line that we would put to the etching. And I would go there every time I went to Geneva, and I would show him proofs of what I had been working on. He was a very formal guy, and I would go to his apartment and we would have tea and sit there, and we would talk, and then he would look at the etchings, and then I would leave. Like, never got anything.

And this went on for over a year, definitely. Probably a couple of years. And then he said, "Here's the text." And it was, like, *Perfection, Way, Origin*, and my 10 etchings didn't seem up to the task, so I ended up making a whole group of other etchings to go with his text, and worked with a designer. The 10 original etchings that I was bringing him and showing him became a portfolio that came with the book.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh [affirmative]. I wondered—I mean, it sounds like in a funny way, it kind of—you kind of backed into this in a certain sense, and yet it's interesting that the Starobinski text seems, in a way, almost like an indirect manifesto. I'm thinking specifically of the—there's a page reproduced, "the instant of disillusion," that asserts "the Work," capital W, "the complete self-sufficient artwork has given way to works in series that embody different moments in a process that has no culminating product."

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah. It's nice to think that I could have triggered his interest in all of those. He obviously is developing—it was part of something he went on to develop about writing about the arts. [00:58:04] He then wrote an essay about—I think just specifically about music, or opera, and maybe something else—about him trying to deal with the arts. The text is absolutely beautiful, and in some sense, it's sort of this selfish desire on my part to collaborate with these writers I admire, because I get something out of their text. Because whether they like it or not, [they laugh] I'm somehow responding to things for me. Like, the *Turbulence Skins*, that's a title from Ben Marcus, who—I had worked with him on doing a book.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: He's at Columbia?

TERRY WINTERS: He's at Columbia. I was always taken with him, his writing, just in the way that he used language in this totally abstract way.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's really striking.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I mean, it's a real parallel to what you were doing. He's describing, very specifically, some completely unspecific [laughs] place.

TERRY WINTERS: I know, exactly, exactly. So you're confronted with these very familiar words, but they're, like, describing things you don't quite get. So that was the same thing. I mean, he came here, we looked at drawings, we talked a few times, I met him up at Columbia, and then I showed him drawings and then he came up with that title and developed the text.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's a wonderful title.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, the title is incredible. I mean, because it was more, in a way, instead of all these computer readings—I mean, that's what all these—the turbulence of the whole painting process and the fact that it's a skin, and I think that there's a way that that's related to the body, related to this idea of movement. Just—it's more—not exactly down to earth, but it's more connected to some idea of living and life.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's interesting in a way, because, you know, the orthodox, critical position of maybe the '50s, early '60s, of what might have had to do with, you know, just respecting the surface. You know, the surface was all, what you see is what you see. [01:00:11] The implication in some of these works of—the surface is more of a membrane, or, you know, the surface of a liquid that can be disrupted by bubbles, by partially seen things coming from below. You know, it's adding without violating the fundamental idea that the painting is, after all, an object in space.

TERRY WINTERS: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It implies something going on beneath the surface that, if you allow yourself, you can experience, or something like that. I'm just spinning here, but, you know.

TERRY WINTERS: Spin away. [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There's a wonderful phrase in the Starobinski: "We are still allowing for a succession of provisional totalities." I just love that, "provisional totalities."

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. So, *Turbulence Skins* is the final category in the Addison catalog. And we've talked a little bit about scale, and this notion of affective space that can seem so deep perceptually. There's a reproduction of work, *Standardgraph 2*, on page 136. Oh, there's the—

TERRY WINTERS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, this is the Ben Marcus book, this thing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's so interesting, the way this is constructed.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, so what I did—I sort of worked with Ben, because I knew about his writing through, actually, someone who had been working here. And I was invited by the Columbia print department up there to do a project, so I thought, "Well, okay, I'll do a project with a writer who's up there." [01:02:06]

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TERRY WINTERS: "Makes sense." And then from working—I worked with 2x4, with the graphic designers, on producing a number of things, actually. And I just had them drop out imagery for me, so I could insert Ben's text actually on top of the drawings I was doing. And then I used colors from a set of Post-its. [They laugh.] So it was like, we put Post-its through the whole book.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There's an interesting back-and-forth between you and the writer here—I don't know if I made a note of it—that there are—where you even contributed a bit to the narrative. There's a page referring to a rescue, and you add a written note, "No rescue actually occurred."

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah. Those were all fragments he gave me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, they were. Okay, okay.

TERRY WINTERS: So I wrote on some of them, and then I told him he had to go do it too. So I had him write on some things too. So those are his addendum.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it, got it. So it's the story commenting on the story commenting on the story.

TERRY WINTERS: Exactly.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And we talked about that, and we've talked about Twombly last time. You know, it's interesting that each—it's like, [laughs] tilting, you know, it's waiting for the bowl to come out or something. Each writer seems to find it necessary, at some point in their essay, to try and describe what it is they think you're doing. I like the Rachel Teagle essay a lot and she says, "Winters works directly from source material but does not illustrate the image to which his titles refer. He describes his technique as an interactive transformation of existing forces." [00:02:06] You used the term "forces" not long ago. "Informed as much by his choice of pencil or pen, as by his selection of appropriated photograph or diagram. It's a process of manipulation and mutation that produces evocative analogues." And that's the other word, "analogues," that I just wanted to underline there.

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, that's a nice way to think about it. I mean, that ties in more to what I was saying about what I would hope would be a kind of poetic dimension to what the work is, rather than a kind of reductive reading about the natural or the computational. That's really where the unspoken desire is.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, this is what I was mentioning to you before, that I've been—[phone rings.]

TERRY WINTERS: That's my phone.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Do you want me to stop?

TERRY WINTERS: No, I'm just going to shut it off.

[Tape stops, restarts.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The artist I was trying to think of last time was Michelle Stuart, who made these big pieces that are up in Dia now. They're very large. They must be like 12, 14 feet high, rubbed with clay from some pit in New Jersey, made in the '70s. She's done a lot of scientifically related work, but the danger is kind of what you were pointing at before. It's like the metaphor collapses into content. You know, keeping those things in the air, where you can have this apparent content, but it has to be read metaphorically. And people seem to have trouble with that in visual art.

TERRY WINTERS: Where it collapses into just being a kind of scientific, scientific [ph], or whatever the word is.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, exactly. [00:04:00] And then it loses credibility because that's not—

TERRY WINTERS: I mean, that was—you know, that's a little bit—one of the Deleuzian ideas I like was that every discipline had to like—is really dealing with its own issues. Like, ultimately, I'm really coming out of painting and what other painters have done, however much I might be fascinated or curious or inspired by. Another great thing about the Deleuze thing was, he said he sort of depends on people's misreadings and misuse of what he's saying. Because I never really understood what he was talking about, [they laugh] but the language of it was so beautiful. Some ideas I kind of got.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. [They laugh.]

TERRY WINTERS: But not in any kind of really deep philosophical way, just the language and what he was talking about in aesthetics was very moving to me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Anyway, so speaking of painting, I just find it so interesting when you describe painting, this very traditional medium, in a techie way—but we talked about that, by bandwidth. I'm running aground here, I have to say. [Laughs.]

TERRY WINTERS: Welcome ashore. [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I mean, it was interesting to read Richard Schiff talking about—I mean, this sort of triple point in physical science where a material can be solid, gas, and liquid all at the same time or something. And then he's imagining that you're trying to have that imaginary moment when all these things come together, which is a lovely idea. It's also, he calls it—at some point, it's like reality intrudes on him and he calls it "grossly metaphorical." [They laugh.]

TERRY WINTERS: Grossly.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But this is what I'm trying to get at a little bit, is just the limit—maybe it's just the limits of words. You know, when words can't quite get to where you're trying to go.

TERRY WINTERS: [00:06:08] Yeah, that's the Wittgenstein thing. You know, the real thing, the real subject, has

to be passed over in silence, and that one hopes that that's what the paintings embody in some way. And, you know, you don't want to sound too self-important and you don't want to make claims for the work, and you just hope it has a kind of impact outside of yourself. Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, that's kind of a nice place to stop, perhaps.

TERRY WINTERS: Okay.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: If that's—

TERRY WINTERS: Yeah, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And I want to thank you very much for submitting to this.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]