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Oral history interview with Sam Gilliam, 1989
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Sam Gilliam on November 4-11, 1989. The interview took place in Washington, DC, and was conducted by Benjamin Forgey for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Sam Gilliam and Benjamin Forgey have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

BENJAMIN FORGEY: I feel like a good place to start - I mean, this is as you know, SG, is about Washington. But I thought we could back up a little bit. I'd be interested to know when you were in Louisville getting your graduate degree, how you decided to come to Washington, why you decided Washington, why you moved.

SAM GILLIAM: I went to graduate school from 1958 til '61 because I taught during the daytime and went to school part-time. I came to Washington because Dorothy and I had decided to get married. All the time that - if I was in the Army here, she was in school some place else. And finally when I was in school in Louisville she was in school in Columbia, in New York City. Then she started working for the [Washington] Post. That was close enough for me to really commute in to see her. So before we got married I decided to come here.

MR. FORGEY: Did you get married right after graduate school, or - ?

MR. GILLIAM: No. I spent four years teaching in Louisville. I think, in discussing where we would start out, the possibility of New York existed if she got a job in New York City, but when she got her job here. But I had teachers in Louisville who told me Washington was such a great place, it was a good time to refer to painters like Robert Gates. So I came here, actually, with that in mind - of doing some extra work with Bob Gates.

MR. FORGEY: I was interested - I read in your previous interview with Ken that you'd heard of Gates out there in Louisville. Had he had a show there?

MR. GILLIAM: He was known to one of the professors, Ulfert Wilke and just sort of got around. Actually both Ken and I were sort of interested in the California painters school, and Gates was somewhat painting like that. That seemed ideal. So I came here and it wasn't long before I went to see him. In fact, I was going to enroll in one of his classes, in the sense that I didn't need to get into an art school; I needed to go out and work. Which was encouraging, really.

So I started to work. I got a studio here and had an exhibit in Adams Morgan and met Tom Downing and. I recognized Tom from having seen an article on him by Adelyn Breeskin. I asked him, "What do you think of my show?" Only a Kentucky boy would come to a big city and ask a man that you've just seen written up in the paper what he thinks of your show. He said, "I like that watercolor there but the rest of it looks scared." (laughing) Somehow we got around to trying to get together.

MR. FORGEY: Where was your first studio?

MR. GILLIAM: The first studio was down on 17th and Q Street, a carriage house over a garage; I think it's torn down now. I was able to put together enough money and to rent a studio before we started having kids, which sort of cut that possibility of finding a studio.

MR. FORGEY: So later you moved back to your house to paint?

MR. GILLIAM: Later we agreed to move into a house in upper Northwest Washington and to have a studio in the basement and to have another extra bedroom for kids. Actually that was quite good because the basement was much larger than even the studio that I had. The studio downtown was just perfect, it was just really fancy - a huge window over a carriage house with single room; just pretty, a bachelor's pad. But yet it was good because the idea of bringing people there to see your work, and after meeting and talking with Tom -

MR. FORGEY: That was in '63, the Adams Morgan show, I believe.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. But after meeting and talking with Tom [Downing], I stopped painting figurative but sort of painting some of the other ideas that had been left behind in graduate school in Paul Klee. I'd been very much interested in Hofmann so I started working these things out. I also started going to New York with Tom and looking at a lot of paintings.

After the show, and after further conversation, even seeing his paintings, I decided not to paint figurative any more and just actually - I mean, if you're involved with Tom you're going to be sort of suspended in what he's talking about. And he always talked about "what's next," "what's coming." You know, "what's happening." (he laughs) Like this is something that you had to join. And this is what I felt like doing. I mean, particularly some incidents, poetry and various things and that it was a way that there was this sort of total involvement of a painting idea. Even of film ideas. So that what he was doing, the visual, was going to become the fastest possibility for being a receiver sort of all information.

So I started working things out. I think the biggest problem that, where I seemed to have been influenced by Tom but I had to stay away from it. And slowly I started to discover, for instance like Noland and Louis, et cetera, but I had to stay away, you know - I had to back off into a corner and not to be able to paint and express these ideas. Until I literally found a way. This was by way of dealing with the painting the things that - a concept that most of them had done and then before they had gone into the sort of structured color field paintings. And I thought that in this way I would give myself at least a clear base and I'd discover something for myself.

In fact that was very good because - oh, I know - I had painted, I painted the other paintings (laughing) but even Dorothy was on my case. I painted stripe paintings, I painted the other paintings, and that I had to paint them in order to know what was going on. But even Dorothy was on my case until suddenly I got something of my own. I even broke away from Tom so much as that I wouldn't show him what I was doing, until finally I was having a show at the Jefferson Place [Gallery] and Dorothy suggested that I should not go out there having done something unless I showed it to Tom. And he had promised to look at it, you know, in a very friendly way. So that I invited him up to show him the paintings and he was very, very encouraging. He had a complete kind of memory that this was of course the way that Morris Louis worked and that "earlier I think that you're perfectly safe," you know. Or "it's a good idea."

This must have been about '66. So that upon exhibiting those paintings, I had my first sort of thrilling reviews out here. Did we talk, was it you I was talking to? - no. But someone once asked me why did I think that Tom was so solicitous. If younger artists taught at the Corcoran, he would help persons like Michael Clark or [Edward] Kelley, Hines[?], or if he met someone else he would encourage them.

MR. FORGEY: He had an extraordinary stature in the Washington community at that time. I mean, even his contact with you was so meaningful and so direct. And you talk to a lot of artists of this generation and Tom was right in the middle of their life.

MR. GILLIAM: And he had - he feared Gene Davis, you know, I mean he feared - not Gene Davis as an artist but Gene Davis in terms of a person of his ability to get things done that Tom with two kids and no money and teaching in Arlington could not. So that he just felt that all of us can take over all of them. In fact these were the first words to come out of his mouth - he'd say, "When they see these paintings, they won't be thinking about Gene Davis any more." The '65 show at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art with Gerald Nordland which he felt that the show had been done primarily to highlight Gene Davis -

MR. FORGEY: That's the first cohesive showing of the Washington color school as a movement, as I recall.

MR. GILLIAM: Right. I know that the kind of - they were 3-D paintings that Michael Clark painted which even influenced Tom. He said that he felt that now we really had something going, so they're going to be looking at us and not at him. But that was good, I mean that was good for the younger people because literally we were the center of attention. Rockne was even involved in this light. It helps for someone older to fill your head full of bullshit, you know, fill your head full of lots of things. I mean, I went to New York and met lots of artists. I was surrounded at openings. I went to talk to Castelli and things like this and I heard the scuttlebutt and this feeling that you could, you know, become a part.

I think the thing that was really still mysterious and that he never really talked about until one night at a party he was talking about Noland. One night at a party at which Tom and Noland were there, Tom just got very angry all of a sudden and he said something like, "Oh, he's having a good time now but he won't be having a good time when I finish with him." Dorothy went over and told Noland that I was a fan of his. Ken, also, was very friendly and invited me to visit him at South Shaftsbury and I went up to visit him. I asked him what was wrong between him and Downing and also I think it was at the very time that the Nordland show was, because we had a catalogue and we went at the same time as Ira Lowe and Cornelia [Noland]. And Ken sort of grabbed the catalogue in order to actually just throw it down almost in the same motion. I asked him what did they have against these guys and he said they did not work out their own ideas.

So that, I mean, even there, with Noland, there were paintings that you were intending to paint. If you read all the magazines, you've read all the catalogues and things like this, you can almost do what was "next." And I saw certain paintings I at least decided not to go in that direction either but to try and to move some place else. The one night I saw an exhibit of Noland at Emmerich that year. I began to understand why. This was like there was

one half of what color painting was that was located in Washington and there was another half of it located in Vermont and in New York and this was Noland. Noland was more structural, more complete, and sometimes even more volumetric. Tom was almost painting the fixture, you know, the ring, the flattened image of these kind of things until he started to paint the plank paintings and various things like that.

MR. FORGEY: Those were the ones that were influenced somewhat by Michael Clark.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. Influenced by Michael Clark and openly influenced by Stella too. I think that talking with Noland and getting his attitude, also about what was going on in Washington, I began to question, I think it was the beginning of questioning why do this, you know. Why continue to paint, you know, even sort of stain paintings. And even though lyrical abstraction came out painting stain paintings, I was never included in a show. So that certainly by the end of 1968, the ideas of process through Robert Morris and various things was that I started really getting away or kind of flirting with how to get away, in doing the drape paintings, which was the kind of move or the kind of thing that was very important. It was important then, it's very important now.

MR. FORGEY: It was obviously very important in a lot of ways for your personal identity as a painter and for, I think, a move away from - what you're describing I think is some kind of stultification of ideas for a younger generation -

MR. GILLIAM: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: - within this over-all thing, which was bereft with jealousies and personal things.

MR. GILLIAM: And also a kind of stultification of ideas for market games and the kind of control that Greenberg exerted over certain aspects of the New York market, I mean, just for sale; and that really the reason why Tom was not picked up was simply the fact that he would cut into Noland's market. So that he was just kept -

MR. FORGEY: There was a tremendous resentment, and as it played out very horrible resentment, among the other very fine painters of the Washington color school. Which brings up the notion with the idea of kind of going back again over the same territory: who else were you talking to at the time? I know you knew Howard Mehring, didn't you?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes, I was a very good friend of Howard's. I actually had the respect of Howard and had more respect from Howard when he could not get shows in New York and he was taking his work to Germany and he was putting together packages of paintings to sell and he would come and talk to me about actually selling work. But I didn't have Howard's respect like Tom down to the point that there would be dialogue or conversation, or that if you ask a question, he would answer it. Howard's difficulty was that he treaded on the same kind of ego that Ken had. Although Ken wasn't until you got into the area of questioning him about his relationships to people in Washington, he wasn't a hard person at all to get along with. But that was the word that everybody said, "just you wait and see."

But I think that what was important that I sort of got a little bit of the rules of survival there, to sort of stay out of the way. To a great extent is that after the show at the Corcoran and after the things that Walter [Hopps] did, such as the show in Minneapolis or being included in Chicago, I was as well known as any young painter of my generation, perhaps other than Ron Davis, and that after '69 or so, there was not that much that was happening. There were a few painters at Emmerich but there were not that many people that were sort of "making it." Things were pretty dry.

I think that one of the good things is that about '69 or about that time we had the studio on Johnson Avenue and that Tom's fortunes began to reverse totally. He'd been put out by his wife, his paintings were going to be ___ed and that as they were, they were being sold out. So we got them and stored them in our studio for a while. This really made us friends, in the sense that we did something for him and certainly felt that we were doing something for him after he had done so much for you.

MR. FORGEY: Again backtracking a little bit, were there other people? When you came to Washington, what was your take on the scene and were you seeing other people? It's all very important and related to the color school and your development. But were there other people -

MR. GILLIAM: There were other people. There was Blaine Larsen, there was Willem de Looper, who because we all showed at the Jefferson place. Because we were following Tom and others, there were a lot of people that were isolated from us. We also discovered how that we had to create or to knit political relationships with sort of a lot of teachers at American University. You had to be openly responsive to them, recognize them as much as you were always recognizing Louis and Noland and such like this, in order to open things up.

When Nesta [Dorrance] took on a lot of young people or younger artists, the older group left the Jefferson place -

MR. FORGEY: These are mainly the American University professors?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. So in order to counteract that, we always referred to their work in a very nice way or were nice to them. I think that one of the things why we were so _____ this way is that we noticed that none of the four remaining artists in Washington spoke to each other.

MR. FORGEY: You mean Tom Downing, Gene Davis, Howard Mehring and Paul Reed?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. They did not speak to each other. And we felt in order to have a circle or group of people, we just got along with everybody. Until we stopped and we started doing at least the same thing. One person who actually - this is after '67 - who came to help a lot, was Andrew Hudson, who had been an art critic for the [Washington] Post for a time and then was released and then just sort of existed as a teacher or a lecturer on various things. I think he helped a lot of younger people while Tom was gone, sort of looking at painting and making comments and various things and befriending people, and pushing what galleries there were to take artists and that helped to keep things going.

MR. FORGEY: Well, obviously, '67 was a big year. I keep wondering - I know you had contact with people like Alma Thomas. Did you have any contact with Howard University, early on in your career here in Washington?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. One of the things that I actually tried to do was to teach at Howard. It was at that time that I met Doctor Porter. He felt that I was too - what I said was that I was too "passionate" a painter to be worried about teaching. But if I was going to teach, I should try to teach in high school. So I did that. And I would see him. In fact, the comment was made that Dr. Porter and I were the only two black persons that went to the Corcoran. I would often go by and would talk to him.

The reason was that he was also a friend of a teacher of mine in Louisville, and this was the reason why I thought that I would have an inside track in terms of getting a job at Howard. I've never figured out why he wouldn't hire me, other than I was just not a part of the political scene. I was not painting abstract painting but there was nothing to be gained politically in terms of actually hiring me. The person that Howard would hire, I don't know. Howard had a lot of standby teachers. David Driskell was such a one. He was very friendly on the outside and had a way of particularly encouraging me because I was sort of one of the young artists who got first into a "white gallery" and beginning to do things. I guess you could say he's crazy. I knew Alma, because if there was anybody doing anything, Alma would call you and would talk to you. Alma had studied with Jacob Kainen. I was surprised that she would even know - I would just get together and have her get supplies and various things, go over to her house. Trade liquor. She had a good bottle of scotch.

What seemed very strange was that in Washington you spent as much time visiting people and talking, in order to go forward with something. I mean, that it's not just painting, it's also a kind of socializing that you did. And that was very important, because for me at least because I was on the hot seat. But still, yet, I kept up all of those friendships.

MR. FORGEY: You were on the hot seat in what respect?

MR. GILLIAM: Well, I was getting good reviews. I was selling. Rockne [Krebs] and I had the Johnson Avenue studio starting I think in 1968. We had a Guggenheim. You know, like, all of this, a lot of postural, most of this was being done by Walter [Hopps] whose idea of keeping artists here, helping things to get started here, is that Ed, Rockne and I had gained a lot.

MR. FORGEY: This is an opportune time to talk about the Johnson Avenue workshop grant. How did that come about, and who was responsible, and what did it mean? I know that before that, I mean you had received your first show at the Phillips, the first museum show, which was a real breakout show in a lot of different ways, in terms of career and in terms of actually the work itself, and your expression, and visibility and impact on critics like myself and on lots of other painters. And you'd received a National Endowment grant.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. Well, the Johnson Avenue grant was mostly the responsibility of Walter. I think that Walter, having existed in California - I mean he used to say the kind of things that allow an artist to keep his work going and the things that make a difference whether it's how many days that he can stay away from a job - because artists' job and things like this were actually important - (so somehow is that he is part of the disbanding of the Washington Gallery of Modern Art in terms that they sold the art collection and through the help of the Stern family put in additional money), is that he created three workshops 0 the print workshop with Lou [Stovall] and the architectural and photography workshop, and also one that included Anne Truitt, John Gossage and Joe Cameron. I think over on Calvert Street. And then the Johnson Avenue workshop, which was painting and sculpture, that included Rockne and me. We had the ability to take on two painting apprentices each year.

The first year that didn't work because our apprentices were Bill Butterer and Bob Newman [phon. Sps] and they didn't actually feel that they wanted to be painting on any second floor in one-half of the space and in the lower

ceiling that Rockne and I had working on the first floor. So they didn't come. But the second year we got apprentices also, Franklin Whiate and Chung Chin, each of those persons got \$2,500 a year, we got \$5,000 -

MR. FORGEY: What were the conditions of the grant? You got \$5,000 plus the studio, or how did that work out?

MR. GILLIAM: We had \$5,000 plus the studio.

MR. FORGEY: Who owned the studio?

MR. GILLIAM: It was just rented. It was part of Ace Welding.

MR. FORGEY: So the grant encompassed your getting a studio, a place to work for each of you, plus a floor for apprentices -

MR. GILLIAM: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: - plus a stipend each year for each of you.

MR. GILLIAM: Right. And the stipend would take care of the rent for a certain period of time. I think it was something like \$50,000. But by working on the building ourselves, doing repairs, doing things to keep the rent and expenses down, we made that last almost 10 years. Yes, we fought through 10 years with artists in various things, but of course there was a hell of a feeling of seniority and power just by having that little metal door that you could open up and get into.

When we were passing over the records, I found the tapes that documented the opening of that experience. It was very funny. We moved in in April but it was January or so, or even the December of the previous year, that we were told that we were getting this money. So I was running short - I decided to take off from school in '67. Dorothy convinced me to buy this house with the grant money -

MR. FORGEY: OK. So that's in '67 was the great year -

MR. GILLIAM: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: - you got the Phillips show and then the NEA grant, individual arts grant.

MR. GILLIAM: Right. And I was able to buy the house and take off from work. Then Walter came and said, "You may not have to go back to work because I'm going to be able to give you \$5,000, I'm going to be able to give you the studio downtown, and \$50,000 to keep it going. So I think that what we've been talking about all along, it's here!" We were supposed to get the studio some time in January but we only moved in in April. And I think it was even two months after that that I saw the \$5,000. But what was important was that I said, "God, I used to go to work every day. And here I survived at least six months (pounding the table for emphasis) just on the promise of \$5,000 but (laughing) I still don't have it!" I said, "Hell, I'm learning now how to do something." So I think that that's very necessary, because trusting Nesta [Dorrance at Jefferson Place Gallery] to sell a painting and to pay you, it took a lot of guts just to make out like that.

I think a little bit more that I did it, I was okay and I was comfortable because I was able to paint and I was able to get high on the experiences sides of art. But what about Dorothy?? And I know that she was as nervous as hell. But eventually, I mean each year, we made it. And it was on painting and doing things and eventually on her beginning to write a book. It's that if things were in a bad way, and I'd go talk to Walter, Walter wouldn't say, "Here, let me take these new ideas and interject into here and make things work." He would take the old ideas, the ones that you were _____ and see what he could do with those. And then he says, "You gotta be all right." And here you're ready to go for another four months, you know. I think tht literally that was a very important way of looking at things that I formed - that if I was to paint, it was important that I had to figure out a way (tapping the table in emphasis) to make that work or to put the ideas that were substantial to this situation and to let me go. And I'm still doing that.

I think that was really the time, I mean Rockne lived quite close to here, and I had a studio upstairs. But there still was such a distance - this is before Johnson Avenue - between sort of ideas. I think the most interesting thing is that for friends, none of us had really seen how each other solve problems, how we did things, how we did our work, what some of the formulas were behind doing what we did. But once we got together, it was literally all out in the open. Not only were things made separately but they were also interweaved. Or a lot of times, sitting around doing something, Rockne and a professor of his teased me about having the paintings on the floor to paint them and not resolving them in terms of that. And that's where the drape paintings came from, sort of a solution of that. Once when I had decided to extend this process by painting a painting 150 yards long, and Rockne saw it, he said, "God! That's like a surf."

Well, you had this sort of interaction within our own times, obviously, that Downing and Howard and Morris Louis

and Noland and Reed must have had in their own times. So that there was not just one idea going around the city being _____ on but there were lots and lots of things. And of course you said if Rockne put up a laser some place, I would go, if it was Topeka, Kansas, or New Orleans or Philadelphia or things like this, you were part of the audience. And if you helped with something, you knew more about it. The same with me with to do with an exhibit in New York is that there were several people working at this. I knew, because of once going to London to see Timothy Scott that this was how Noland and Caro worked. They were right together criticizing and helping to build.

So a lot did happen at Johnson Avenue. Of course, the best thing that happened is that we got the building that we have now as a result of Johnson Avenue. Elmer Klavins - he's the husband of Minnie Klavins, into real estate - saw what we were doing and was fascinated. He'd been sent over by Lou Stovall to buy a birthday present for his wife. He had the building at 1428 U Street, which he was giving to Pride, Inc., but they were not keeping their agreement with him. So he asked us if we wanted a building free. We saw a lawyer who pointed out that we could receive a building but we could never own it. So we asked Klavins could we buy it and he gave us a good deal. So we were able to buy the building. I can tell you that having a studio is 75 percent of it (he laughs).

(interruption)

One of the big difficulties of Washington after the Color School painters was that one could work here in isolation and really wasn't certain that they were doing the right thing. This was something acceptable in New York or something like that would actually carry them. And that was the thing that with Walter, with Walter's contacts, and a feeling of contact, for me, with painters in California - Sam Francis, Ed Moses, Robert Irwin even though he wasn't painting in a sense but the payoff of certain ideas - that one could modernize or contemporize what was going on in Washington. The same thing was the goal of the show in 1969. I remember Walter saying that Rockne and Ed were "far out." The only thing that he could say about me was that I was "far behind," (he laughs heartily) So that it became my job to catch up. You know, to relate to things that were non-binding, which obviously then was to break down the idea of provincial painting and to END OF THIS SIDE, TAPE I, Side A

SIDE B, TAPE I

MR. FORGEY: What was your sense of Walter's role? You've described it pretty well in terms of your life. But his overall role here in the Washington scene? His coming and what he did for Washington.

MR. GILLIAM: Walter tried, I mean, he came as a result of having been put out of the Pasadena Museum, actually fired. And he worked at the Institute for Policy Studies - I guess we all know that. But he seemed to be here to inspire every artist here. As I said before, there is something that happens when there is someone to listen to and when there is someone who tells you that you are going to get some help or "I'm going to do something for you." We probably discovered that the artist who has been most individually helped by Walter, besides Marcus Raskin, has been Carroll Sockwell. He has an apartment - studio next to him that's been donated by a businessman here, and a certain amount of work has been sold so that there's a stipend for him to live on. Even though (he laughs) Carroll says he's been robbed. I say, "How could you possibly be robbed??" He says, well, he was paid off on the basis of his being Carroll Sockwell black artist, he wasn't paid off as if he was Carroll Sockwell artist like Frank Stella. You know, that's quite a point, that's a lot. But I think that Walter got involved with mostly everybody or got involved with WPA [Washington Project for the Arts] and that the kind of involvement didn't always mean that he was going to do with money but with a lot of sort of thinking. Maybe that's something that I understand or that I can look to a lot better is because I got mine up front, you know. (BF says, "Yeah.") And it's very curious that most of the artists who Walter sort of talked to early, don't have at least that sort of lasting like for him.

I guess that all of us had a prescription, you know, particular things that we wanted done right here and there, and it wasn't like that. And I think that one of the biggest reasons is that the Stern family pulled out of supporting the workshops. But it seemed there was no intention that Walter came here to stay. But he got fired also from the Corcoran. I mean, that to me in a sense the best thing that happened while he was here was the ability not only to talk but to listen to the stories that he told, you know, things that he sort of pulled together.

MR. FORGEY: He was a great maker of - "pulling together" is just the word - maker of connections, all kinds of connections - intellectual ones and -

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. And like you knew that even though Ed Moses was showing at Emmerich, he had confusions or he had problems doing that, or that he was worried about the work that he was doing. It made you understand that you were not an isolated case, you know, of worry as such. What was greatest about California is that if they wanted something in New York, they could do it - they could do it then and they can do it even now. Even by establishing a gallery that represents the California artists. To an extent maybe we're doing this now. But I know that he did continue the series of credits. [?]

To a great extent he did look a lot at the underdogs. I was thinking of the David Stevens exhibit and Simmie

Knox at the Corcoran? (BF confirms) David Stevens was at Howard and I had no idea that Walter was even going to Howard and actually talking to people. But he was, and he did something.

MR. FORGEY: To back up again to cover this from another perspective, tell me about your first meeting with Rockne Krebs. Where did you meet him?

MR. GILLIAM: I met Rockne through Tom. Tom was moving his studio and needed some help. Rockne had been in touch with Tom after coming here. Then I met him, about '66 or '65, somewhere about then. See, the biggest problem was having someone to talk to. Not someone to talk to on your level - having someone to talk to who just didn't talk about the same thing that you did, because all of us were coming more from our own educational experiences. So Rock and I became real good buddies. (after pause) Something that we aren't right now. (It has passed).

MR. FORGEY: That'll pass, it'll pass. Tell me about the Jefferson Place Gallery. You've referred to this but I keep wanting to back up a little just to cross-reference the early times here in Washington for you.

MR. GILLIAM: Well, Tom was the one who got me into a group show at the Jefferson Place with Nesta. And Nesta was so wonderful that when she came to look at paintings - and I had three kids in the house - she played with the kids and never even looked at paintings. But she said as she left, "Bring me some smaller paintings and you're in the show!"

MR. FORGEY: When is that first group show at Jefferson Place?

MR. GILLIAM: It was 1965. That was de Looper, Blaine Larsen, Robert Tripp, I couldn't name all of us. There were five artists, mostly abstract. Nesta was really great, because by the time that she started remodeling the gallery from one floor at 2144 P From the top and then down to the dcorner, she must have had 35 or 40 artists (he laughs) plus the photography, and plus the dream that actually Bill Eggleston's dealer or friend in Tennessee was going to finance the entire gallery. Everything was going to actually work.

MR. FORGEY: But there was a sense there, even before it started to break up because it was kind of over-expanded or whatever, there was a sense that the Jefferson Place was - everybody was quite aware, I think, that there was this American University "connection" and that that had sort of been broken, that there was some nervousness there. But the Jefferson Place was an important place in and of itself, as the developing esthetic and talents here. Nurturing talent.

MR. GILLIAM: True. It as an entity was working. And how could we compare it to anything? I mean, it was doing as well as anything else had done. In fact, actually better, considering the artists that it was carrying and the time that was involved. I don't know if it was the - well, there were several things that happened all of a sudden that actually the gallery couldn't take. Nesta's illness, and then the suddenness with which the owner of that building said to Nesta that she had to move. Once the building was remodeled, the owners really weren't too kind to Nesta. She had to pay them before she paid the artists, so things just actually crumbled.

But I can remember that Henry Geldzahler came to that gallery to buy for the Woodward Collection. And that even Greenberg came there, and Noland in this sense. And that Walter had talked about that if all the artists who had started at the Jefferson Place could be made to show a painting there or to donate the sales, that it would roll. But I guess that was before dealers also got involved in real estate and other things, you know, new other ways. But it was a great formative experience.

MR. FORGEY: Well, certainly in the late 60s and early 70s it was one of the highlights of the Washington scene. Some of the great shows of Washington esthetic history took place in that gallery.

MR. GILLIAM: And there's nothing like that here now. I mean, there's nothing like that. (he leaves sentence unfinished)

MR. FORGEY: Let's get back to the - we've talked a lot about the sort of social and professional structure. But in terms of your own art, I recently read your interview with Ken and you covered some of this, but maybe it would be interesting to go over this again in terms of your own development; and the Phillips show, the Jefferson Place and the Phillips in '67, and your movement into three dimensions at the Corcoran and that next show in '68. '67 and '68 strike me as very important years in your artistic development.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: Do you look back at them now as a long time ago, or are you still dealing with some of the ideas?

MR. GILLIAM: (after long pause) I look at them as very important years, because they represent the years I started to put things together on my own. But that hasn't been the extent of my ambition and that I think in the

article that John Beardsley writes - the one that I've just given you - I guess that I hear him saying that one of the problems with my work is that I've been too much alone.

MR. FORGEY: Too much alone?

MR. GILLIAM: Alone. Probably outside of certain sort of formulae and various things like this. And I think that more recently and lately, it's something that I started paying attention to all the art that I felt was important to me. This is actually reading, going to see lots of shows and things like this and thinking these things out. You talk about Gary [?] I said, "Great God, he sounds like an Abstract Expressionist painter." That stuff gets you into trouble. But it's that I know one of the things about living in Washington to an extent or even one of the things about getting good reviews may be that things are too easy.

MR. FORGEY: In Washington?

MR. GILLIAM: They're too easy here when no one criticizes because they're just out there and that it's not that they have to be hard but at least it's that you want to be certain all over again. So that I think that I'm saying that one has to find a way to actually re-examine, after all these years of experience is that to use this experience to [tapping on table to emphasize] really look at things, you know. The way that 55-year old dudes start to play with [?], you know. That's been a lot more fun; and I think that to an extent it has produced at least the feeling that I'm doing a lot of my best work now. Particularly since I started to do sculptural relationships, I've started to make the work, the painting, interact with sculpture.

Now, when I did the drape paintings, I wasn't making sculpture, I was reacting against painting [exploding laughter obscuring a word or two] What that is, I mean, is that when I go back and look at it, I have to interpret things differently. I can look at the fact that I was reading a book on Francis Bacon where that he does not make Abstract because it does not communicate the human predicament. I don't know where he's been but I can tell you with this stuff does, you know. It talks about how work made within the time relationship of a person also reacts to him. It's impossible not to. But that I think that also a part of choosing to continue to live here, one of the conditions has been that I have to work a little harder, I have to go to museums a lot more, and I have to travel a lot, you know. I have to come actually sort of broader within this time and not try to live off the older times.

MR. FORGEY: Well, what else would you choose? In terms of living in that kind of - wouldn't that kind of - wouldn't that be true if you lived wherever you live? What you're talking about is broadening your awareness of things.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: I guess here we're always talking, and it's been the same for 30 years or something, it's "New York or Washington?"

MR. GILLIAM: I guess I thought a lot about Chicago or New England. I think New England perhaps above New York. But there's no place like here. There's no place because, not to be superficial, if you see someone in Washington whom you know and you may have just seen them five minutes ago, you still don't get spoken to again. You're put into a certain embryo. I met one of the curators at the National Gallery last night and he says, "Why don't you call me next week some time. Let's get together for lunch." Well, that feels kind of good because maybe it means that my time has come. And then to look at the essence of Jacob - so much knowledge, and just now beginning to paint, to an extent beginning to really be free to paint - is that the real thing about being an artist is knowing how to become or to be an artist every year, forever freshly.

When we say that '67, '68, '69 were the most important years, they certainly were because for some reason I had the guts to try to push all of that that was actually here to at least some sort of end and in some directions that I don't know how I got here. But at least it's a kind of a full way of doing things. I think that now I try to - the difference is I try to do it a little bit more by the rules.

MR. FORGEY: I can't not say that it was the most important years, they were obviously liberating years for your intellect and for your expressive skills, but they were obviously very important and for your expressive skills, but they were obviously very important in that respect. I'll never forget, and I'm sure many people will never forget, the drape canvases the first time we saw them in the Corcoran, or when you came back it seemed like decades later but it was only six or seven years when you came back with the tribute to Mr. Roberson. I mean, they were stunning events, and yet - stunning pieces and events; but when I call them "events" they were temporary in a certain sense. The suspended canvases could be formed in different ways. You were always aware of that, that they were related to the space itself in which they were put. And they weren't really sculpture.

MR. GILLIAM: No.

MR. FORGEY: I remember thinking, well, one side it's the staining through, one side isn't as good as the other because it's paler. You know, you could fold it around but that there was a problem there. If you're looking at it as a painting, you were looking at the back of the painting in some places when you walked around, and when you were looking at it as a three-dimensional object, you had to stand off, in a certain sense not see it as a painting; see it as an environmental work, a site-specific piece.

MR. GILLIAM: I'm planning - I just built one of the pieces that I made in '74 in a forum at Rockville. It's not -

MR. FORGEY: I saw the piece last week, I was just out there. I was going to bring that up, because there it is, I mean, it hasn't disappeared. But tell me about this piece.

MR. GILLIAM: Well, I'm going to do a show of drape paintings in the spring for Chris [Middendorf]. And in 1991, I'm planning to do an installation in Tokyo for USIA. In the piece at Rockville, the fact that there is a scaffold inside that and that you see what the cloth is because the cloth does what cloth does. And in the one in Japan I'm planning to do a house or a bridge or something out of not wrought iron but out of aluminum, that may be about 60 feet for a structure. And then to hang 200 yards of fabric and inside and put about 75 prints. The notion is going to be ferris wheels, cranes and the way that the Japanese - you know, "a thousand cranes" - like a thousand pardons, or something similar. It's a way that this is not sculpture. This can - the one here has an architectural relationship, it's very strong, it has several other things, and thank God for the neon now.

I think what started me to thinking about the pieces in that way was the show I saw of the work of Tony Craig, of English sculptors, and where I said, "By God, the drape in terms of its real meaning, its lightness, its being like a kite belongs here." So I started thinking of how to construct these in such a way that the elements define each other through their opposition. And that's different. Literally, this year I'll do one of these installations in Korea and one in Japan. This year I'll be painting those things again. But now I'm spending a lot of time reading about the sense of interpretation and communication in terms of Japan; I'm much further ahead in terms of Japan as such, and just looking at the way that I can go with this material. But the feeling of the sculpture, a piece that creates an attitude seems to be very, very important. This one here is that we had to move it from just inside the door -

MR. FORGEY: Unfortunately, I think. Because then you had this space was a towering space with a skylight, and then they put in this little sign so you couldn't put your piece there. So I thought that was kind of unfortunate, because the piece in terms of its relationship to its surround, the piece got crowded in. Jack was insisting that no, that was good because it forces, as you walk past, you could get very close to the piece. And then you don't walk past it, you're looking at the piece, you get very close into it. I think the change of location was abysmal!

MR. GILLIAM: It's good to have still done that, because there's a feeling that it's something I can go back into, and it's a way that now as I've said I've tried to do things more constructed.

MR. FORGEY: Well, it sounds to me as if what you're planning is now like a nomad creating tents for structured pieces out of your own work within which you can see your own work and to create a dynamic part that you can _____ to.

MR. GILLIAM: So that I took the - I don't know if Jack explained what all the meaning varies but the part, there's a sort of a cutout piece of black which is actually a wheelbarrow from a painting by Braques with a shadow and I think that the black wheel at the back is actually super. But just to do that. But this is all indicative of the way that I've not only learned from what I've done but it's also indicative of the way that I've learned to challenge what's going on. And I think that once any artist sees Kiefer, and _____ Moses, he just works so hard to make art. And I think it's sort of necessary if you're that kind of artist or if you like that kind of art to actually think about that a lot.

MR. FORGEY: Kiefer has been an important figure in your -

MR. GILLIAM: Yes, in recent years. And mostly because in teaching is that the kids love him so. If you would ask 100 students, "Who is your favorite artist?" "Kiefer." (he laughs) I started to dig in a lot to understand what it was that they were doing and there's a lot of ambition in his work. And a lot of ambition in his work, and a lot of ambition in his references to Pollock as such.

MR. FORGEY: And a lot of ambition too - this is something different between you and Kiefer, not in spirit but in communicative devices. He uses myths and symbols explicitly from the German past. Have you ever been tempted to do that, in any way become figural again? I guess that's the simple way of putting it.

MR. GILLIAM: Yeah. Well, see, I may not have gotten there but I tried to. In the last show at Middendorf, I used each painting as a line from a poem, a poem by John Ashbery. He seemed to have been writing about a house, or something about a tiny cobweb. I mean, all of the titles are figurative in a sense. Michael writes this morning is that the titles can still be taken away but any painting you can take the title away and it's still, you know, you

don't know what it is. But I think that he has inspired one to think in figural terms. I think Robert Irwin has come out and said the same thing, that the object of art should be to have the same meaning in the creator and in the person who's actually observing. And you keep figuring out how you're doing it within terms of what you're really working with. Yes, he has. I think he's pushed that kind of communication, I mean that possibility. But not strong enough to make me really want to give it up.

MR. FORGEY: Well, let me ask you, then, about *Dark As I Am*, that amazing piece that you did; and that's figural - autobiographical and figural. How does that fit into your - this is 1971 -

MR. GILLIAM: Well, that's an answer to the socio-political sort of crisis of who the artist is and shares; that was the same thing. But this was coming from the voice of Robert Morris and the earlier Kiefer the student is doing it again. I'd forgotten about that. I tried, I tried in this boom and in all of the case pieces to do things and I risk it to a point that I would lose and it would lose the recognition as an Abstract painter, a painter of certain substance by doing those sort of things.

But I think that what I discovered also in those pieces that there is a lot of performance in the drape pieces and in these pieces, so that you can do these things. In reading about Bacon, I was reading about how he uses film, he does use film. But he also takes advantage of film by allowing his work to be used in film. So that this multiplicity has its possibilities. If anything the drape pieces, the what I call the performances in a sense, is a way of acting out this other need that completes the whole artist. It's going to be all right if I paint this black. A lot of people, whether I like it or not, took it to mean something socio-political, you know? And then if I make this pieces *Dark As I Am*, of course it's that too but it's nice that the artist acts on all these levels. Because it's a part of the medium of the time.

I don't know if you saw the review of my show in the *New York Examiner* by J. W. Mahoney? (BF says he didn't) Well, first he praised me for being a good artist, but then he said that I am only an intellectual artist and I'm no Postmodernist, and that I've never had more than a couple of good ideas. It's sort of a ridiculous criticism because Postmodernism did not make its point. It may have made a point in terms of the commercial situation, but it did not annihilate the entire form of Abstraction, et cetera, as he wanted it to do. That was one that really made me sad.

MR. FORGEY: I'll have to read it, we'll discuss it next time. Let me ask you to go back again, to *Dark As I Am*. What were the circumstances that - you refer to them but can you be more specific or explicit about the circumstances that compelled you to make that piece.

MR. GILLIAM: With three black artists for a show in Hartford. We were going to do a show that tried to somehow related to the black community and just to, and that for me I thought that these four case pieces, when I got to Hartford, Connecticut, would be the most shocking for me since I'd been criticized as a black artist for never sort of seeing the Cause, or doing various things but painting New York Abstraction, or painting white people's paintings, and things like this, you know. And I decided to show them - [they pause in order to look up a picture in the show's catalogue] Some of it, it was an interesting way for me in that [they're looking at the pictures] see, all of these were the ones at the Jefferson Place, and these are the ones that are in Hartford; but this is also in Massachusetts. And here's this piece -

MR. FORGEY: Using a lot of the same pieces but in a different way.

MR. GILLIAM: These are all the same pieces. This is the first piece in the studio, this is the second and this is the third. You know, something very interesting is that collage and assemblage have a great affinity with black artists, black people. Keith {Morrison?} has talked about this, and that to do this, even though it's just another side of what I'm doing with all the paintings, had a lot of meaning; had a lot of directness. And this is the problem: that -

MR. FORGEY: Well, you put a couple of paint-spattered boots in front of a "painting" made out of the painter's clothing. It has a figural impact.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. But at the same time, I've always asked myself what can you do in this medium to have at least the same impact. Make it good, make it right, you know, direct. I don't know if you've seen the Franz Hals at the National Gallery, "The Governors" -

MR. FORGEY: The one with the black ones, there was a group portrait of the women on the one side and the men on the other? And they're all in their dark costumes with the white collars -

MR. GILLIAM: Well, I'm saying that this is, it's not only the challenge to the painter but the lengths to which he goes just to communicate, because that's what the art form is about. But this was actually trying to make the medium feeling. I think earlier here is that this is also must be the earlier period at which the word "content" was introduced again into the arts. One of the artists who used to paint - did I give you the Anacostia Museum

catalogue, with the red cover? (he goes to look for it)

I saw the piece, I was out there when the show was hung. This painter paints with his hands now, and I think that for a lot of people, maybe those artists living in New York, they feel a personal rejection, where in Washington I don't feel that. I'm not a part of that, in fact there's a lot of other things that such as "DCA City"; I'm getting started with a new generation. I don't know whether you've read - I guess I was talking about this last time, that's why I gave it to you - Mary's "Red and Black to D" [?]

MR. FORGEY: I did indeed.

MR. GILLIAM: That's a very strange look at abstract painting where she has the need to write about Martin Luther King and things like this; this is all that she sees.

MR. FORGEY: Well, did you feel in the preceding years - again we're back in the late 60s - were you beginning or in the 60s in general were you feeling a lot of pressure from - on the one hand, here you are feeling pressure from Tom Downing, and on the other side, were you feeling a lot of pressure from socially conscious black artists and black intellectuals? I mean, you just referred to it but was that an explicit part of your experience? Were you getting a lot of heat -

MR. GILLIAM: I was getting a lot of flack, and then it stopped. And then I realized that it wasn't, I mean, this was like it stopped here when Paul [Richards?] began to write more about Howard University. And then a lot of the people there stopped staying away from downtown galleries and started going to see [Franz] Bader and at least got to show. And when breaks came for them, it stopped. And I realized that it wasn't about esthetic, it wasn't about morality, it was about money. (both laugh) Someone actually told me really that "one of the reasons they're criticizing you is because they are afraid that they would want the same thing that you're doing from them. And they're content to paint figures." (he taps table for emphasis)

That's my shortcoming, because I would be moral. I mean, I would have a moral reason for doing some of these things. And I guess I could have the freedom to have a moral reason if I'm making the money that I need to make. But if they aren't making the money they need to make, then they have to have a way of actually pulling things down. I know that the show at the city museum there was a lecturer on Sunday following the opening and I had some of the hardest questions, like, from the hip. Someone says, "I've finally decided, SG, that I can only accept art that has valid content." Not funny titles and things like this. That's good for you! I mean, I appreciate, yeah, doing that. But it's about money. It is about money essentially, and that the more that shows like Rick Powell does and others, the stuff begins to sort of disappear a little bit. END OF THIS SIDE, B, Tape 1

BEGINNING SIDE A, Tape 2

MR. FORGEY: Let's continue with what we were discussing.

MR. GILLIAM: I guess that the crux of this is that some of this is kind of an honor and it's focused you and it's focused around a degree of success or a lack of success. And obviously many black artists would not relate to the success of white artists, they relate more to some way that is obtainable of success for black artists. I remember something I recall that was very beneficial when I thought about all of this, where to always sort of locate yourself, and I asked Richard Hunt in Chicago how did he handle this sort of situation. And he said he's doing just like his father did. I believe he owned a sawmill in a small town in Alabama and he made enough money to support his family and kept the sawmill going. And therefore he said he was looked at with a bit of respect, and that's the reason he said why he lived in Chicago rather than New York. It was small enough for everybody almost to know him and he could have a degree of success there, and that he could handle that.

I guess this is how I almost felt about one feels about Washington. But the fact that I'm not in New York, people don't see. So therefore you're sort of strange, so they have to talk about you or criticize before they actually know or come to meet you.

MR. FORGEY: That leads right into the Washington question, though. We've referred to it and you've explained a lot about it, but your decision to live here - and you referred to it as a sort of continuous decision. You make up your mind every so often. "Well, yes, I'm going to stay here."

MR. GILLIAM: Yes, that's true. Well, being an artist and having an art career are two different things, because the aspect of a career, making money from it, living from it, is a very unwieldy thing. You saw me go through the mail. Well, that little ritual is very unwieldy and it doesn't always mean that you're "making it" the way you want to or doing things. And I know that it would be useless to live in New York because it would be so crowded in this sense, and I think the contact that I've built up over the years is insurmountable. So it's better to stay here.

I've learned the difference between what is really good and real for me and what is something that I dreamed would be real and good for me. I've learned to - I don't mean to say I've learned to love this but I've learned to

accept this, the matter of staying here.

MR. FORGEY: In terms of alternative moves, what are those that you've considered?

MR. GILLIAM: New York! (both laugh) I haven't thought about a lot. I've thought about Chicago; I would like Chicago again. I mean, to look at the towns that have good galleries and a good art community in that sense.

MR. FORGEY: What was your reaction when - there was a sort of exodus, not sort of but a definite exodus from Washington in the mid-70s. Just to name one, your old friend Ed McGowin left. But a lot of artists did. _____ Newman among them. And there was a feeling that, well, it's sort of played out here. Did that have any effect on you, I mean, did you think that? How did you feel when these people started to move out?

MR. GILLIAM: I think it was about the worst thing that I've seen. Because it's been hard to keep things started. It's been hard to keep down the feeling that there's nothing here. If people would come to see anything here, I mean those guys who draw a crowd, then someone would ask the question, "Who else was here?" There's less to actually draw persons here now. That's really true, it's not lying.

MR. FORGEY: Well Paul is always saying about the museums that they're such a big attraction. You're talking about something else.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes, I'm talking about something else. But [Michael] Botwinick would say that there's nothing to draw people here for the artists here. When Botwinick was here he was saying that if we could get a pattern among the directors and curators, when people come here to see the museums, to say, "Yes, but there's also an interesting group of artists here you should see." And those kind of things. But I think the power to draw has been actually lessened. It's less of a town. Not that there aren't some good artists here. But those people had a kind of maturity and knowledge both of New York and other places and if they continued to settle here, then they would have bought whatever they had to bear in Washington. And I think that's what it needed.

MR. FORGEY: Did Gene Davis play any role - I mean, that model of existing outside of New York and still relating to the larger market, have any influence at all on the way you thought?

MR. GILLIAM: Not a lot for me, because it was all centered on him as far as I was concerned. Lou Stovall feels quite differently about Gene and that's because of the number of prints that Lou printed for Gene and it meant that his name went out as a result. One has talked about all sorts of things that would help the situation here, but I think that nothing would help it like the energy, the dialogue of people. I mean, look: what if Martin Puryear had stayed here? And he had of course become as successful? Things would have helped a lot.

MR. FORGEY: He didn't seem to give it much thought, staying here.

MR. GILLIAM: No. He took off for Chicago.

MR. FORGEY: But you know, it's interesting. In your discussion of Walter Hopps's role, which was pivotal in so many artists' experiences; but there was some circulating around, and you probably know better than I, but there was a lot of resentment of Walter, too. Like, you and Rockne and Lou and a few others, you know, were the recipients of the real insider stuff. I know Mary Beth Edelson, for example, when she left she was furious about Walter. So there was this existing resentment -

MR. GILLIAM: But he didn't pay attention to what they were doing.

MR. FORGEY: Pardon me, but I always interpreted it as partly because it's a small community. There aren't that many different centers of activity to go by. So when there is this one center, which was Walter Hopps - kind of a "traveling center": I mean, first at Washington Gallery and then at National Museum of American Art, wherever he situated.

MR. GILLIAM: Well, I guess Mary Beth's center in women's art, and women's art that was also critical of the processes that other forms of art actually needed. (long pause) I can understand why he would not be liked, because the question that would be asked when I had Johnson Avenue was, (pounding the table) "How did you come to get this?" (he laughs) But remember that after Walter, there was Roy Slade and Roy had his own element that was put together and drawing people. Even when Howard Fox was here he had his own element. So that this is just the politics of it. We need certain aspects of politics, certain aspects of business.

In fact I think that for me when the Jefferson Place passed, when Walter left, and then when you're left with nothing but this sort of corporate - they're not curators but corporate consultants, you knew that art had left the town in a great sense, and I think that the ideal thing, you wanted the feeling that Washington of the late 50s had been almost like a part of New York and you wanted that kind of thing. I wasn't here then to know how many persons actually participated in the dialogue of Louis and Noland, but at least there are ideas, there's an idea

context that's developed. There are contacts of course. At least when Walter was here, there were always people dropping into town to see him.

MR. FORGEY: Your involvement with the Washington scene is very close, as a matter of fact. You've done a lot of things. Tell me some of the things that you've done - and the beginning of that question was, was that a result of basically Walter's leaving, of the exodus of the mid-70s when so many of our most talented artists uprooted, went to New York, weren't known there, and it's taken each and every one of them about a decade or so - I guess Stackhouse a little less - to establish themselves there. A radical move, to move from one scene where you're really known and it's quite "together," uproot yourself and go to New York where you're just a little fish. And as a matter of fact if anything coming from Washington is a handicap. Your involvement in the scene stems from that time - I mean, your intense, purposeful trying to build something here, stems from that time?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. And I think it comes from an act of desperation. When you referred to us as "the third wave," we had something. If you would look at the atrium of the Corcoran around that time, there were a lot of people actually trying to become a part, you know, or something that was actually going on. I think of Bob Stackhouse and Ed McGowin, but there was Vanessa [Gurin] who had such a drive to be an artist, it was very stimulating. But once certain things had gone, the only thing left was WPA [Washington Project for the Arts], because it was a buffer against the Corcoran. And then when we lost WPA, in the sense that it was not a place that was interested in showing local artists -

MR. FORGEY: Be more specific about that. Just lay it out here. You're talking when Al Nodal left?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. And when they brought in Jock Reynolds with a phony contract (he laughs) that says that he had veto power over any program voted in, which meant voted in by the visual arts committee. And it had always been the intention of that committee to maintain a balance of programs for Washington artists against whomever. And Jock wiped those out and started bringing in out-of-town artists. He had more money to spend on artists coming in as guests, you know, than perhaps was ever involved in the local period.

This was possible because one had never been able to raise the money to support an art activity in Washington. As much as they liked Al Nodal, he still was not "in the black." And because he ran a deficit all the time, the wealthy people on the board had a certain thought about artists - they don't have any money, what good are they, it would be better to build a program the other way. That was Howard Fox's doing. He knew that he was leaving so he set up the situation which got Jock elected. And until we asked to see Jock's contract, nobody on the board knew that he had certain sort of freedom clauses and things like this. But I think this kind of acting out and various things were desperation.

The same thing was actually true of the Corcoran, of trying to get an artist on the board. It worked at the Corcoran because Jane [Livingston] and Michael Botwinick turned over \$90,000 for the show -

MR. FORGEY: Let's back up a bit. Start with the evolution of the Corcoran, and your view; you've known the institution for a long time.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. I've known, I guess, and I think that one of the things that happened as artists who were known is that you felt that one would get a lot faster if you risk the notoriety. There were a lot of people that actually followed Rockne and I and others because we were known. It looked like there was a connection of people who had not gained anything and those who had something. So that we kept people whipped up over the studio to inform them, really, of what was going on.

But this was a very good time, because we were able to use Walter as a model to Peter Marzio, or we've known directors of the Corcoran who would come over to our studios and would drink and would share with us, not only aesthetic opinions but also a sort of business directions the Corcoran Museum was going to go. In fact, it was so good that at one time when Walter first left that there was a curator for the Chicago Art Institute who was going to come here and they sent him over to talk to Rock and me about the feeling of the artists. It was Jim Speyer. We could bet that he would have the support of the artists as such. They're still doing that, I mean, there's something to indicate that Christina Orr-Cahall and they go down, go see artists as such. It doesn't mean anything but they go.

Well, I think this kind of friendship started when Bill Williams was director. He was always the way that after the opening, we would go out to a bar or some place and shoot pool and various things, and just actually talk. Or we'd go dance. That was very exciting.

The point and I think the disappointing thing, was that about a year or two ago, we lost faith in all of these processes. I think that still goes on, and therefore to an extent -

MR. FORGEY: Only two years ago?

MR. GILLIAM: I think it was about two years ago.

MR. FORGEY: It seems to me that you've been, that you're making a distinction here, I'm just -

MR. GILLIAM: I'm saying that when I quit the coalition and when I knew that the coalition as such refused to have any dealings with the director of the Corcoran and never got around to dealing with the director of the Hirshorn, or moved in in order to create, have some momentum, some feeling of connection, which I think is really the only way. When we wanted the Corcoran to form a liaison committee with the artists of Washington, because Rock and I knew the assistant director of the National Gallery, we went and got him and Jacob Kainen. And they came and said, "I think this is a good thing." And they did it. I think as times change, you need to renegotiate all of those kinds of things.

Artists, number one, need to know how to live in the art world. I mean, you need to know how to do this and how to -

MR. FORGEY: But what changed so much? Because when Williams, H. Hopps and Roy Slade were directors of the Corcoran, there was no need for such a formalized method of communication.

MR. GILLIAM: That's a good question, because when Walter was forced out, the fact that Nino Osnos [sp?], for instance, was trying to organize the Corcoran workers into a union. And Melzac asked Walter to fire her and he wouldn't. So he got fired. That in itself - Walter's firing and Nina's firing - sort of broke the kind of harmony that the artists and everyone had with the Corcoran. The only harmony, then, that they would have with a museum existed with Gene Davis. He was the only one that knew how to operate. Nobody else except for a few of us actually knew how to have friendships with Jane or with the director. The only recourse was to make nasty remarks when some reporter would ask us, "How do you feel about the Corcoran?"

But I think that it's very strange, because at the height of what was going on someone pointed out that we had probably better political relationships than any art group with museums perhaps anywhere in this country. Perhaps not as good as Los Angeles, because they were really quite tough. I think that the shame is the inability to maintain faith, at least in sort of political processes that can get you somewhere. One of the problems of artists' political processes is that they're just as important as fame in the art world. So people's ego gets involved and they take over the groups and various things -

MR. FORGEY: Bureaucracy and politics take over from art, which is presumably the purpose of it all.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. What happens in New York isn't any better. At least the process is closed, and the process is closed except for those at the top. I think that they said that the artists' union in New York was dissolved when they gave Carl Andre a show. I of course was accused with the show at the Corcoran of having accepted a bribe from the Corcoran when I took the show in the spring - the 1983 exhibition. We also knew that the group show was coming forth with \$90,000. But then it became very, very difficult when the artists attempted to curate that show.

(interruption)

MR. FORGEY: Now, I'm referring to historians who would find this tape of value, simply a baffling reference to "the coalition," and so on. I'm just basically trying to get the dates in order to be of more use.

MR. GILLIAM: OK, all right. I think the Washington Coalition of Artists was founded about 1982. It was founded by about eight to ten people, among whom were Lindsey Makepeace, Rockne Krebs, Lizette Brennan [?], Sheila Ishan. Some of the founders became the first "board." The good thing is that it was an involvement of artists for political gains rather than for actually aesthetic. Greg Hannan [?], Rex Well were important; Martha Jackson-Jarvis, Simone Gouverneur.

Often I think at that early time, in order to get things done I mentioned that we called upon other people to give us support for a certain policy. I'm still always curious about how - we were given \$90,000 to do the group show, the whole big show for which artists curated the catalogue, The Washington Show. The ending of that show saw the outspoken writers mad at the artists. So the board of trustees were mad at the director for having done the show, calling it the worst show that they had seen. And the director, Botwinick, being fired; it's just that every time that one set something into motion, it all falls down. And of course there is still certain artists' animosity that stems from that show and period. When we say that we don't speak to each other, some of that was caused by incidents at that time.

MR. FORGEY: What was your emphasis in forming the Coalition? Your personal involvement? Why did you think it was important?

MR. GILLIAM: I knew it would work.

MR. FORGEY: Why was it important to form an artists' coalition for political aims?

MR. GILLIAM: Well, for one thing, it was important in order to unify artists but also to inform them of the process that they could use. (long pause) The strangest thing is that I think it worked a lot, but it worked the best when the artists did things for themselves, like holding a convention. This was where the people referred back to Mary Beth Edelson and the convention for women that she held in Washington, which was very significant in the women's movement. When conventions were held, every artist being subservient to every other artist and showing them slides and things like this, of everybody who cared to bring slides, or creating slide registers, and things like this, is that we had a way of actually organizing processes or organizing situations in which there was no organization. Fortunately this is still going on. People are still trying to organize.

There is something also very significant also about organizing the Coalition. It meant that you weren't afraid to fight. It meant, for one thing, that you weren't afraid to risk museums or directors or curators not giving you shows. And perhaps what really happened by forming the Coalition, we also broke the system of tokenism that existed. That's true and it's not true - I mean, say that the old system of patronism was broken because no curator was going to feed the hand of the person that was biting that hand.

But actually it wasn't true. When Botwinick came, he allowed for a wider freedom of political means than any other director. Well, Peter Marzio did. He formed at least a political process but he was not really around long enough to be a part of it.

MR. FORGEY: That's so ironic, because what Botwinick did, apparently, was to infuriate the staff somehow. But you're saying that he was more open to the artists.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. Well, the artists got mad because they felt that he was open only to certain artists. Me, for one. (long pause) But the worst thing that happened was that a lot of artists joined the Coalition in the beginning but they didn't stay. They didn't trust the methods, I mean the reasons why we wanted it, they didn't like the fact that everything was coming through us. And for a lot of reasons. Then for some reason they just didn't like us. It made them feel sort of shaky, it made them feel that if they stayed in they were taking a chance on their artistic career in Washington. I think that if we can survive, DCAC - District of Columbia Art Center - is a better process. Because it has a product involved. This is the same thing I said about the Coalition - that it was good when it was doing something.

MR. FORGEY: Well, doesn't it have something to do with the fact that it has a visible end? I mean, not goal, necessarily, but there is a visible quotient? That's visible, I mean you see the art, there is a space, and you see exhibitions there.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes, visible and/or visible product.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. GILLIAM: And also there is a visible group who benefit, who have nothing at all. It's a lower group of people who are college graduates, just out there. Many of whom are probably about 22 to 27 or so. It's very interesting that in some of the programs we see the group that is also over 30 and see how lost they are. The only thing you have is "job" that you may not be interested in. Some of the activity on the [Robert] Mapplethorpe show recently in my mind was very revealing of the amount of expertise that persons have in terms of their own interests. Since there are a lot of things that come together in Washington when they were arguing Mapplethorpe and things like this, you sort of have an idea of what was happening with the group that was 30 and above. They don't look any better or any more respectful than the group of artists you're pointing to.

I think if DCAC works or even continues - it's working already - you'll have potentially a much stronger group becoming politically active and making their art. To now I think our weakness is that we have not added, we have not become strong organizationally and we have not become strong in building aesthetic programs, you know. When I was teaching in Pittsburgh I found the word "Post-Modernism" was used frequently by students in class. I would come to Washington and wouldn't hear it at all. People were just that outside of it.

At least opening a quasi-educational institutional may be the best place to start in Washington because one doesn't realize how much the sense of art has disintegrated when it gets all the way down to 21 years old from about 35 or so. Maybe I'm being alarming -

MR. FORGEY: How do you feel about the idea that being a - you're formalizing in both the Coalition and now in DCAC, in one way attempting to formalize something that, as you described in your earlier career, when you were one of these artists between 22 and 27 or 35, that happened - you sought it out, or it sought you. But nevertheless the process happened in a more informal way and had more to do directly with art.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. Well, I don't feel very good about it. I think that this is where we were headed when we were

talking about the loss of WPA as an organization that served at least local. And what's even worse about DCAC is that there's no painting, there's no sculpture; there's only performing art. Someone says, "there's no performing sometimes, there's just hollering." It's just people getting together and behaving themselves doing their own thing. Maybe this is this generation, but it's gone very, very far from an art context to a club.

Well, I don't feel very good about it, because I'm in charge of the management and budget committee. This is what we're discussing all the time. But at least this is the first time that we've also had a process that seems to work for reflecting upon (tapping table for emphasis) how to get something done and what is being done. There are a lot of heartaches - not heartaches, but you have to toughen up again to be a part of that organization. But there are a lot of disappointments, but at least we have three years to work something out.

MR. FORGEY: How do you explain the centrality of the Corcoran? It's true of you and it's true of all of us: we go back to the Corcoran. The centrality of the Corcoran in the consciousness of the Washington art community. There are a lot of other museums, other institutions but -

MR. GILLIAM: The Corcoran used to give an annual show with a prize, that was not only annual but also national. It was the only game in town in that regard. The Corcoran never asked for us but they didn't throw us out, either. The Corcoran was the first to have an area show. I don't know the exact history of it but I do know when I say that Bill Williams didn't ask for us but he didn't throw us out, he was very much involved with the school. And I think that the centrality of the Corcoran existed more when they tried to rebuild the school.

MR. FORGEY: When was this?

MR. GILLIAM: Under Meyer they started hiring most of the Washington artists. Roy Slade and Rona Slade and I and Tom and Gene and Paul Reed all became teachers during at least a five-year period at the Corcoran. I think that kind of thing began to change. But the difficulty has been - it was something that was said by artists in L.A. - that we have to (tapping table) get shows in New York so that people will recognize us at home. I think that Washington has never really kept seeking and asking in terms of the whole art world in order to make Washington actually work. Maybe that's one suggestion. But also I think that right now having a fullblown art center seems to be less important than it was when I came up or Rockne came up under the influence of Tom and others.

MR. FORGEY: Hmm. That's an interesting thought. END OF THIS SIDE, A OF TAPE 2

BEGINNING SIDE B, TAPE 2

MR. FORGEY: We were getting on to teaching, which has obviously been a subsidiary but an important part of your life.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. It gave a lot of choice. That if things started to slow down in terms of career, I could go teach and bounce back. But the thing that really is true of teaching and that is good is that the average teacher has to relate to his students an experience of not exhibiting at all, an experience of not trusting anything in New York, an experience almost even now of not even trusting graduate school. You use someone's money for four years and then you have all these hard luck stories to tell.

I think that's one of the things I insisted on doing. We had a club pretending to go into graduate school where the kids had to think about finishing their career, or planning it. And I think that this is one of the things that has been the crux of forming a coalition - the idea that an artist should have a planned career, something that he thinks about. The real reason for that is what in my mind happened to Tom. I mean, his early death. Howard Mehring's stopping painting, or even Paul Reed. You could say, hell, three very successful artists stopped making art. While they were identifiable here, there are more artists over the country who are doing exactly the same thing. So teaching also became a very deliberate way of trying to change this.

I was told by the Dean of the College of Fine Arts at Carnegie Mellon that one of the best reasons I was there for him was the fact that I looked like success, where they don't see it. Of course, that gets you into a lot of trouble with your fellow teachers. And here is one of the reasons that kids don't have a method, have a plan, when they graduate from college as to what they're going to do and how they're going to use it. Sometimes they have never really experienced the thinking processes of an older artist. I mean, things just actually have closed down a lot in terms of the teaching and the developmental aspect.

I was saying that if you met a hundred artists, and a hundred students mentioned Kiefer, they were aware that Kiefer was a part of the revolution that [Joseph] Beuys created among the German schools. A lot of them wondered what would school be like if I went on and created my own. The only thing is - we didn't take them up on it, we didn't push them to go out and do these kinds of things that would validate, you know, who they are.

I think the weirdest thing is that there's no philosophy in art school. I mean, there's none of that they're looking

at. It's exciting to me just to find tons of books, from Malraux, or Russell who wrote "The Meaning of Modern Art." It's various things that they could exhaust by holding small seminars to talk about Stella's book, and various things as to what the meaning was - how they could use this as a tool and not have to be afraid of it.

I think this leads to my thinking to the point is that maybe, and it's naïve, but one of the problems of Washington is that it doesn't require anything here, you know, you can just get off. (he laughs) Maybe but, I don't know, I'm not lying, there's not much art, there's not much painting, you know. But of course there's not a lot of painting as such because painting is not stressed. "Doing your own thing" is stressed but not painting as such. I'm one of those dinosaurs now, you know, in the sense that (he laughs) - it's not true. (trailing off)

MR. FORGEY: Well, to go back, you started, you were teaching in Louisville -

MR. GILLIAM: I taught elementary. Then I taught junior high. Then I came here to Washington and taught high school for five years, at McKinley. Then I taught at Maryland Art Institute from '67 part-time, and I taught at the University of Maryland up until '83. The rest of the time, six years at Tech, CMU.

MR. FORGEY: What's been the drive to keep you teaching? I presume at a certain point it wasn't necessary for you to do it financially.

MR. GILLIAM: I had three kids, and there was a kind of fairness that I found out quite early that if I worked, it was just - not if I worked, but if I taught in addition to my being an artist, things were a little bit faster, more flexible. The rejections that you were going to get didn't hurt so much. I actually could have got on without teaching in '83 but the kids were in college and I figured that I needed to give them a no-risk plan for going through college.

MR. FORGEY: Are you still teaching?

MR. GILLIAM: No, I quit in September. One of the policies is "teach when necessary but certainly quit when it's actually not." I didn't particularly like the politics of Pittsburgh, although it's a great school for students. It was not only too distant but the fact that I was not from Pittsburgh not did I live there meant I could not actually keep the gossip and the rumors and the infighting under control.

But one thing that has happened is that I've always been able to get lots of work for visiting artists - our artists in residence or temporary artists. This is what I've done: when I wasn't teaching regularly, then I would do the lecture and things like this, and that helps.

MR. FORGEY: Do you ever keep in contact with any of your students?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes, yes. I still write recommendations for them. We still talk by telephone, they still come by, they still invite me to lecture to their graduate school class, and various things. And that's very good.

MR. FORGEY: In terms of the network that we were discussing way, way back, I was thinking about the apprentices that went through the Johnson Avenue experience. Have you kept in touch with any of them? Who are they? Do you think that that was an important and forming kind of experience?

MR. GILLIAM: You know, I have, vaguely. They are Genna Watson and John Dixon. That's a very splendid experience, because one of the graduate students at CMU, who was a whiz, and had won a \$15,000 scholarship her first year in graduate school, was talking to me about how much Genna and John still remember and talk about Johnson Avenue. I think that ability to have a history, I think that made Walter very perceptive, - that we tunneled into a place that didn't have much of a history and that we could give ourselves a history. The fact that the student was talking about it and I could tell from the way she worked that she said she learned more from Genna and John, that together they had corroborated some of those things. So that was good.

The only other person that I still see is Franklin White. I don't think Franklin is painting now.

MR. FORGEY: I haven't seen anything of his for so long. He's such a good painter. Well, it's interesting then that Genna Watson and John Dixon, I mean it's interesting to me that they have gone on now, just recently, and formed their own kind of program with other artists, and exhibited together, and put out a catalogue.

MR. GILLIAM: This may be that looking at all of the processes that have come into existence to keep things alive, maybe that's fertilizer, what you actually need. The wondering force, or strange force, that's a combination of some of the students from the Corcoran. Of course, there's a group at Howard University and there are a few others. (long pause) I guess the galleries are as good now as they ever were. END OF THIS SIDE, B Tape 2

BEGINNING Tape 3, SIDE A - Second part of interview, Sat., 11/11/89 in Sam's studio. The intention in this interview is to go back over some of the same ground we covered last time, except this time focusing on the art. Note to transcriber: We're going to use visual aids, a chronological slide presentation.

MR. FORGEY: So, SG, are you ready for a retrospective tour of your art?

MR. GILLIAM: I'm ready.

MR. FORGEY: We just projected on the screen one of your earliest color paintings. I wanted to ask you a little bit - right before this, before you got into this mode, and you had just arrived in Washington, you were painting figuratively. (SG confirms) Do you still have those paintings around, or have you -

MR. GILLIAM: I have a few of them. I never show them. Occasionally I will peep at them, but to a great extent they're very interesting paintings because they lead right into these paintings. They were made after the California figure painters like Diebenkorn or Park or Olivera, and they were Expressionistic and they were about painting and drawing at the same time, and they were about accidents. And of course in the way that Diebenkorn works, except that he worked with oil and with figures for the most part, he might well have been a Color Painter if he had been in a different environment, at that time.

MR. FORGEY: How do you feel about those paintings now when you peek at them? Do you feel there's any source there, in addition to those you've mentioned, for your current work? Do you feel any continuity at all, or was this a major break in your mind?

MR. GILLIAM: Making the color paintings?

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. GILLIAM: They were a major break because we were after an image rather than after an overall structural composition that used select things to represent the whole. Without the image, one could concentrate on the full composition. With the paintings, they were about a certain amount of cuteness, a certain amount of significant detail. That led, what I represent as cuteness, to represent, say, certain things. And I realize now that I wasn't quite capable, I wasn't mature enough to push those paintings to the whole relationship that I was able to in these - in fact, abstract meant more to me then, literally, than it does now. And it meant more to me then, I mean I was thinking about that, that here is that being just out of school, the quality of an Abstract painting is something that was very, very new.

And it was more about defining something that was going on right then and there, rather than being so interested in defining "painting like painting" or "painting like historical painting" or "painting that was so referred to Pollock" or doing, you know, certain sorts of things because I had not looked at those things, I had not exhausted those things, so I could be making paintings after paintings; I was making me something right then and there.

MR. FORGEY: Did you experiment a lot with Abstraction before you came to these images which are chevron-like images or -

MR. GILLIAM: Yes I did. I must have spent at least two years - let's see, this was made in '67 - I spent at least six years almost randomly and then finally in '65-'66 doing nothing but experimenting. And the biggest part, the strongest thing was that it wasn't so much a language as it was experimenting to get away from the look of so many painters who were capable of opening my eyes. I had painted stripe paintings, for instance. And then I met Noland and I started painting chevrons. So I had to get out of that, until finally I took the jump by going back to a more evident stain painting as a format, and then trying to reveal some of the things that was a part of painting this way, that I had to get away.

MR. FORGEY: So this painting here from 1967 is - when you prepared these slides for me, I took it this is where you wanted to begin in a sense, (SG confirms) this is what you feel is maybe your first - what do you feel about this painting as a first kind of statement?

MR. GILLIAM: Like the first successful painting. I mean, it came directly from hard-edge paintings that were a part of the first Color Paintings that I started to make. The title of it is "Skeletal Curl." It shows the perspective development of space in reverse. There's the hard and the soft color, which gives a certain spatial existence. And it showed how that with an idea it could be made all at once and just by pouring, literally pouring, and a slight use of masking tape - in other words, the masking tape that had been used to make hard edges is now painted and then pulled off while the painting is wet. Then you get the bleed.

MR. FORGEY: Is that overpainting the stain?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. It's overpainting or pouring paint right into the color.

MR. FORGEY: Did you do a series of these?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes, I did a number of these. These were called fan paintings. I did a number of small ones and

large ones. I did a number of these that worked quite differently. (he searches among the slides) This one in particular, Red Petals, which was the cover of a catalogue for a Phillips exhibit in 1967. It was made flat, and as the colors were poured onto the painting, they collected at one point where through gravity there was a puddle, and overnight they would bleed into all these sort of low points where the heaviness of the paint would collect. And when you looked at it in the morning, this was it.

I think that this was the most important thing that started to happen, that I could paint and go away and overnight the surprise of the painting, the surprise of the identification with the painting would be formed. Literally this quick way of making a painting through bleeding, through running, and through collecting - a sort of accident, a part that I controlled, and then a part that I didn't control, a part that I set into motion, and that this was the painting.

MR. FORGEY: A lot of critics at the time, myself included, we all saw, when we started to see these paintings at the Phillips Collection especially, began to identify a going-beyond Louis and Noland and the other Color Painters, and back to incorporating elements of Abstract Expressionism, which you've just described - the kind of the accidental effect, the joy of discovery in the act of painting. Were you conscious of that at the time?

MR. GILLIAM: Not only was I conscious of it, it was something that was very necessary. I mean, there wasn't any way beyond Louis and Noland particularly unless you begin to start particularly at the same point that Louis had started before he arrived more at a minimalistic or a minimalist attitude toward the painting and began the figure but before is that he had folded the painting, he had folded the canvas, had done all of these things for surprise to create a vocabulary. To me the only way to work was to go back and that, there's a side here. Restore. This goes almost as far back as Pollock's Blue Poles, that is, taking the canvas and folding it and the exposed surface is dusted with aluminum powder.

I didn't know as much as I know now about this, nor do I feel the significance of knowing now what I didn't know then, but it was one thing that here in Washington I was encouraged to do a great deal. Certainly by Tom, when he said, "That's the way to go about it because that's the way that Louis really explored at it." Even though I wasn't necessarily ahead, as a younger person, I was almost behind, I was still independent, I mean I felt independent -

MR. FORGEY: I understand that. And if you look at this image, and you compare this to what Louis was doing at that time, this is a much more mature kind of statement, much more aware of what you're doing here. (SG says, "Uh-hmm," agreeing) And the formal elements of the vertical striations and basic vertical organization here, one still feels the geometry of color field painting, but also one feels all the tactile essence of Abstract Expressionist painting.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes, but there was a way of making these work in a synthesis that was a part of other things like the thick stretcher that is on the side, the beveled thick stretcher that made the painting an object at the same time and also made it more so of a volume.

I think that this was the real important thing next to what happened in this work called A Warmth, A lightness, A Glow, which is a four-part painting, in which the painting is made into a politic. And here the freedom of the sheet is still there but by segmenting it, the painting pulsates and reads and acts out another aspect of being poured, being free, being part of a whole and all of those things.

MR. FORGEY: How did you come to the beveled edge?

MR. GILLIAM: I stole it. (he laughs) I stole it from Ron Davis. In fact, Rockne, who was always helping me steal things, was telling me things I ought to do. He pointed out for us how Ron Davis was using the Plexiglas and allowing it to float right in space by putting it on this beveled edge and was something that I ought to try. As I said I lifted it in order to try it, and it worked. And then when I flipped it over, it worked even better.

And that's one of the things I think, well I guess we'll get to later, that one of the difficulties of going beyond what was happening in the immediate environment was the lack of diversity. I mean, you had to experiment to find yours, by yourself, while the other groups had each other to play off of, unless you really looked outside. And this was talking to Rockne at this point.

MR. FORGEY: If I recall correctly, there was a show of Ron Davis's here at around that time?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes, at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art.

MR. FORGEY: (as they peruse slides) Do you still own most of these paintings?

MR. GILLIAM: No, I don't. In fact I sold most of them. I own most of the large ones.

MR. FORGEY: Where was your studio at this time? Because you had to have a big space to do those canvases.

MR. GILLIAM: The studio was Johnson Avenue. A space that was about 25x50. It was a wonderful time to be painting. Although I was quickly absorbing a lot and doing things within a certain vocabulary, I particularly wasn't that much aware, nor did I care to be aware, of persons like Stella until later. Later, Stella also had a show at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art. I mention him because Stella was producing a contrast or something that was different to what was really going on in Washington or what was really different from what was going on in most of the country. Even though I was not aware of it I was alluding to what was going on with Lyrical Abstraction, even though I was dependent more upon Louis and more upon the stronger aspects of Color Field painting to develop these pieces.

(They continue looking at slides) I think this was a work about 1972. The interesting thing is that there is a lot less of a dependency upon geometry of the fold and more - I think the paint is wetter. The paint also ranges from thick to thin and the control of the painting completely depends on the structure. I mean, when I mentioned earlier that I'd thought about what I was going to do in terms of the paint, the color, and I made the painting, then I folded the canvas, and then I, sometimes as in this instance it would appear, poured laquafare [phon.sp.] onto the canvas after it had been painted. Then I let it almost dry, and the next day I would pull the canvas open. Just upon the immediacy of overnight that the painting was made and then I knew that I would put it on a beveled stretcher.

You know, a lot of this, also, had come from making watercolors. It wasn't so much practicing to know if I could make these - I could make them - but it was practicing to establish a rhythm, you know, a trust in working this way. Each time that one of the paintings was made, there was going, I mean an attempt to go a little bit further. Here on the screen we have a painting that is about 9x20 feet, called Double River. It's an all-white painting that is painted rather thick and is the first, also, of the paintings that was raked with a rug rake. A hardener was used in the paint called Aquasol [phon.sp.]. And then the paint was thrown with a stick. And once the paint was on the canvas, it was raked with a rug rake. Then two strips were cut from either end of the canvas, the painting was cut in the center, and these strips were collaged back together in the center.

MR. FORGEY: Is this the first instance of collaging in your work?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes, I think so. I had started in about 1970, remember that this is a gap or a break in which I had made the draped canvases; but I had started to build up coming back to painting and by 1976 I started in earnest collaging strongly. I think that when I said that I had finally known of Stella but I didn't pay attention because even here this concept that was used by Howard Mehring was fruitful enough -

MR. FORGEY: The concept of an all-over field?

MR. GILLIAM: An all-over field, and then breaking that field with cuts, geometry was fruitful enough to still build of what was here.

MR. FORGEY: We're going back in time now a little bit to -

MR. GILLIAM: 1974.

MR. FORGEY: This is '74 but conceptually this is draped canvas. Where is this installation?

MR. GILLIAM: This is in San Francisco.

MR. FORGEY: The suspended or draped canvases are a little bit out of sequence here [SG concurs] but nonetheless this is an opportunity to talk about that period where you -

MR. GILLIAM: Right. There were two kinds. There were at least two kinds of these - those that were hung freely in space, such as this one, the very early one in the studio that depended upon the wall and gravity for its structure; and those that had poles and were draped over poles or other elements within the space for their structure. This is one of the original ones that was painted on canvas, 10x75 feet. When I first made these, starting in the latter part of 1968, the idea occurred to make several, and I made it do what I wanted it to do, or I experimented to see what it could do. This process had occurred because I was always painting large paintings or small paintings together at the same time in the studio. As various persons would visit, particularly sculptors, they couldn't understand why I had the need to stretch the paintings, or why I didn't just put the painting directly on the wall without the stretcher. Jim Sterett, a sculptor, teacher of Rockne's was one such person.

The notion sounded exciting but it was the idea: it was too formal to, I was too formal to do that. I had to do the paintings, had to do the pieces that were on the floor on the wall in relation to painting. So I started trying to put up curtain rods and to hang these like curtains. But it didn't work. In fact, when it didn't work it failed and I had this beautiful fall of canvas going to the floor in one swoop. (laughing) I knew I had it. So I decided to first make

several of these canvases and to put them up in the studio in various ways.

It was at that point that we were offered a chance to do the show at the Corcoran. I'll tell a joke on myself, which was very very true. When Walter was first talking about the show, he admitted that he was worried about me. The show was going to be about things "far out" -

MR. FORGEY: This is Gilliam-Krebs-McGowin?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. That he was worried about me because Rockne and McGowin had far-out ideas and I was sitting on "empty." Literally it was because of the show that I looked for something to icon and to begin to build on the process, build through the process. And really, even though I had switched from Color Field paintings to the poured paintings, the complete idea of catalyzing my own work through just constant change had not happened, it was still much like I was in college, why throw away something good. But when I got to the draped paintings, it was quite easy to use the exhibit at the Corcoran to explore several changes with the work. It was just like a squirrel, I was putting up nuts and saving them.

MR. FORGEY: Right. You can maybe go a couple ahead. There's the Corcoran installation I wanted to take. Now, this is probably part of some of the same canvases that you were experimenting with in your studio. Correct?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: But challenging those big spaces at the Corcoran must have been in a sense the big challenge - what are you going to do with those big spaces other than just hang paintings on a wall, a window in the wall?

MR. GILLIAM: Well, one thing that I was going to talk about is two aspects of space. Deep space, and space that is vast. Or in one instance in tying up a piece is that I moved from making just an object to making a theme. Painting has always been tantalized by the sense of whether it's real or abstract. I just started playing now freely with those things and looking at them. Also, I just began to play with the ways of art. And thank God it worked. (laughing)

Also, in the atrium I built the piece that was 225 feet of canvas, and that worked and led to the piece in San Francisco that was done with 150 yards of canvas just for sheer bulk, and then using the poles to create structural relationships with the room. But just the sheer bulk of canvas, the presence of sheer bulk and canvas sort of made the art. I didn't know it but I was completely away, to a certain extent, from Color Field painting, because I had lost at least the formality or the sense of formal structure that held it together. But I got lonely for it.

And in the black paintings, later, of 1977, coming back to painting, I started to work with the center, started to work with a kind of a surface that was both surface and recessive at the same time, and by cutting established a relationship with painting and _____. So I completely renewed myself with the touch of formalism and a touch of Abstract Expressionism at the same time. In fact, people often thought of Milton Resnick in terms of these paintings, and often commented on the paintings, that they were not paint, that they were made with tar rather than paint.

It was not something that I paid attention to, because I depended upon paint, you know, I depended upon my Washington instincts more than I did upon the sort of immediacy of the emotionality of the paint acting like tar. Even though I had even given a painting a title of something like tar. (searching) This is called Carrousel Merge and it's a piece at the Walker and was actually the first of these pieces that were made about 1971 as a commission. It was a way of solving the problem of, can anyone else put these pieces up but you? Just by putting up eye hooks in the ceiling and measuring points on the canvas where it was to be tied, and once it was tied there would be a mark there, that this piece can be taken down and put up. It doesn't look as good (both laugh) but -

MR. FORGEY: Has that happened with any of these suspended can vases, this commission? Has it been reinstalled periodically -

MR. GILLIAM: Yes, it has. Every two years. At one time it was loaned to another exhibit. People make use of photographs in order to reinstall it.

MR. FORGEY: Well, now we're coming back to the rectangle and the paint again.

MR. GILLIAM: Into the early 1970 paintings. This painting is collaged by cutting and putting in the strip in the center. Even with the cutting of that and putting it in, and also by placing the triangles on top of the canvas, as a part of a drawing.

MR. FORGEY: In painting such as this, in this sequence of paintings, did you work them out on a small scale at

first, ever, or - you referred to watercolors as a technique but in terms of planning your larger can vases at this point, did you ever do smaller studies?

MR. GILLIAM: I drew, I made drawings for these. Pencil drawings, with notations as to what could be done or ways of thinking out how the painting could be made holistic, that painting and drawing could appear at the same time. Once I had figured out these things I did them. There were several things like even putting down masking tape on the lefthand side and painting another color, and then when the tape came off the undercolor would show through.

MR. FORGEY: When you get to the full scale, full size of these, how much experimenting did you do then? How faithfully did you follow your ideas in the drawing? How much leeway was there in the execution of the final work?

MR. GILLIAM: I'd always use the drawing as a starting point and would have to, when I was making the painting, change the painting according to how successful it looked. If it didn't look good then I would keep on working. This [image] is part of a show in Atlanta, done in 1976, and the pieces are called Cut Cowls. The smaller works called Cowls were made and later were cut, and then the cut pieces were assembled together on the wall as opposed to allowing the shape that was painted to remain as a whole.

MR. FORGEY: So that theoretically, anyway, you could take this and make a very different piece of art out of it, in a different situation.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. I guess that at some point, compared to what was happening otherwise, I was still after either a formalist vocabulary or a realist-involved vocabulary, rather than a minimalist vocabulary.

MR. FORGEY: "Realist" in what sense?

MR. GILLIAM: That I alluded to figure, figure-based objects. Here the height, here the sense of cowl tended to define the work.

MR. FORGEY: Did this have anything to do with - we referred to this last time - the installation and series of works you did "Dark As I Am?"

MR. GILLIAM: Yes, it did, it did.

MR. FORGEY: This is just less autobiographical or less directly referential?

MR. GILLIAM: Right. And it also meant that if I - I don't know, I guess it was one of the things that happened because I was in Washington, that if I had a choice of actually advancing what I was doing, I thought up the idea as to how I would advance myself, rather than aligning with an idea that I had read about or in terms of someone else's work. I realize that that has always been a criticism of artists in Washington, that you get too far away from following what, in the mainstream, is going on and actually begin to create your own concepts or follow your own concepts et cetera.

Although I often look aside and would find that I wasn't necessarily getting behind, I was keeping up (he laughs) so that I continued to do these kind of works.

MR. FORGEY: Do you think Washington was a liberating force, the distance from the sort of main intellectual culture, the publishing culture, the market of New York?

MR. GILLIAM: I think it was strongly liberating, I think it was also strongly challenging. I think the difference, I think the one thing that had to occur is that one had to really work and you had to put out to make things happen. And of course the kind of instincts that one had had were literally good instincts because you saw the cycle, the way that things were happening. And there was no reason as opposed to being open to the following, why not just to do this? I sometimes felt that maybe I would have had better understanding or I would have arrived at certain junctures a lot sooner if I had been more direct. Say, if I had become a Minimalist. But I did, at one point. I thought it was necessary to do things this way. But in this point I accepted the challenge of actually being a loner. In fact, the actual suggestion for doing these came from someone else who talked about the confusion of the large scale in these pieces, and how it would be nice if you could define these pieces in small-scale relationships.

MR. FORGEY: Who was that?

MR. GILLIAM: This was Paul Richards. The large scale without the small scale just took people out too fast. He pointed out that at the Corcoran I did have a small-scale piece and that that was good. It's a funny thing, how someone says, "Well, I see you have this big locomotive but I like that pencil that you have on the table." So you being to actually think about it.

MR. FORGEY: In terms of the liberating effect, though, and what you were talking about, about locating yourself, not in terms of what was being talked about or what was felt to be "important" in the mainstream art world, I think that to me that's been a very positive thing about your work. I think a lot of people always figure, "What is SG going to do now?" There wasn't a whole lot of predictability in terms of what we were going to see every two or three years or every year at the next exhibition.

MR. GILLIAM: Well, you know that in every thing there is a next step, there is something I think that is predicted by the work. It opens itself up. These pieces were as much Renaissance, to a certain extent, in terms of their silhouette, as they were just canvas liberated from the stretcher. There was something to be done. Much a I started to use the piece of wood, or the tube in various things: those things were actually there. (searching for a slide) There is another slide in which there is a - (the carousel is rotating) There is a slide of the full piece, so there is a ladder -

MR. FORGEY: I don't think you sent that to me.

MR. GILLIAM: - but I think that the idea becomes, again, environmental rather than purely figurative and it begins to open up.

MR. FORGEY: What was the date of this Atlanta piece?

MR. GILLIAM: 1976. Very, very interesting is that I started out making extensions of the painting but I ended up making installations. I ended up, therefore, taking on the language of installations, the sort of closeness to the body, the closeness to the person, you know, moving through that space. Which was very good, because I think that now everyone is concernining themselves now, in 1989, in Abstract art with meaning. "What does this mean?" What is almost reality, in a sense?

My biggest job has been to teach myself not to be afraid of losing something. Which was always the reason why, if I got so far ahead over here, I circled back and tried to pick up the pieces. That's not bad; that's pretty good.

MR. FORGEY: No, that is pretty good. END OF THIS SIDE, A of TAPE 3

BEGINNING SIDE B, TAPE 3

MR. FORGEY: Now we're with a great big long horizontal beautiful gorgeous blue painting. What's the title of it?

MR. GILLIAM: It's called Leah's Renoir. My youngest daughter had an assignment to make a painting after a famous artist, so she chose Renoir and she asked me to help. (both laugh) So I wanted her to remember that at least there were other capable famous painters (more hearty laughter) closer to her that she lived with. These kinds of paintings helped me to almost build the painting back to more Abstract-based ideas, rather than just the drape paintings. What better way was there to do this than through the collages? This painting is completely collaged in pieces from the canvas, the painted canvas, that are blue, and then only one yellow piece, which makes the yellow piece float in that entire field of blue. Whatever discovering I had made within the early previously [sic], I began to put together in these paintings to really make them work. I think that this painting was exhibited at Patricia Hamilton in New York. One of the problems, at least for me living in Washington, was getting a gallery in New York and keeping it, or trying to get a new gallery when all I had to show them was drip paintings. So I began to solve that problem by almost making "safe" paintings, but then making some things that I wanted to do. And what I was really doing was reinterpreting the attitude of the drape canvases back into stretched canvases.

MR. FORGEY: Was that by structure primarily? And all-over painting?

MR. GILLIAM: By structure, by cleanness, and by this precision. These are the Chaser series, are depending on precision of cutting and doing things. (sound of slides being riffled through)

MR. FORGEY: About how many of these did you do, this eccentric polygon shape?

MR. GILLIAM: At least 20. This is called Architectural Notions for a New Nation. I know now that, I certainly know that trying to calm down paint or solid paintings and things like this did not help me get into New York. But it didn't matter, because even being here, a lot of people saw the paintings, and they were fairly strong paintings for Washington; and things were accomplished. I mean, I meet people who will remind me that they saw such-and-such a painting.

This series, which was called the Red and Black series, was a series of 30 paintings. They occupy the space with the same feeling of the drape painting -

MR. FORGEY: Absolutely. It looks as if you can recombine them in a similar way - rebuild them, recombine them, restructure the space, even though you're using paintings on a wall.

MR. GILLIAM: And that was done. That was often done as the spaces were changed. The thing that we got at the Corcoran is that we did change things.

MR. FORGEY: Tell me about the Red and Black series, though. How did that start? How did you decide to do such a monumental series of paintings in red and black?

MR. GILLIAM: This painting here, for instance, occurred slightly before that. And I wanted a way of doing almost one painting that would fill a large room, that later could be broken up and could be sold. This would be a series of paintings much like you would do a print through a series of multiples and then later you could break it up and could dismiss it. And I think that these kinds of ideas helped to do a lot. I mean, people remembered those paintings as strong, and the absence of being in New York means that you don't "keep up: because you don't pay attention to what's going on, you just do these little diddley things on your own. But in a sense this was very effective -

MR. FORGEY: You might be the only person in humanity who could refer to the Red and Black series as "little diddley things." What about the choice of colors, the red and the black? Did that have particular resonance for you? Or was it just that they were two strong -

MR. GILLIAM: Yes, they were two strong colors. I was doing a painting based on the simplicity of a blueprint, the fact that a blueprint operates with a blue ground and white drawing. Here, each of these (carrousel rotating again) black paintings had something like quarter-inch-wide lines against this ground. So, if this was to be like an architectural relationship, it worked almost like a large blueprint on the wall rather than as a painting.

Of course, the interesting thing which I'm still finding out is that this aspect of painting has the possibility of volume. It's reflective; this is the way that the white wall is duplicated against the painting. It does so many things from another approach.

This [painting] is not the first of the D paintings but the D paintings came as a result of a sculpture that I did for Davis Square, which was called Sculpture with A D. The sculpture was so successful that immediately I began to attach it to the notion of painting. [carrousel turning again] This is another painting with a D.

Also, I think that the most significant thing that had happened, and this is about 1981, is that I had advertised for an architectural student as an assistant. My first reason was to get an architect who could build models, and through the mode-building we could apply for commissions -

MR. FORGEY: Build models of rooms, or spaces?

MR. GILLIAM: Of sculptures. We could either represent ideas by building models, or we could upon applying for a commission build models and through them succeed in getting commissions. This was a way of going on without teaching, managing to stay in the studio a lot. What happened successfully is that this is how Steve came to work for me. Steve Frietch; and he's very good. He doesn't mind doing all these kind of cuttings for the collages and various things so that not only were we able to immediately start to build models but were able to make large transformations in the way that the collaged paintings were going together, and immediately started to work better with metal.

MR. FORGEY: What had been the idea of bringing metal in? I mean, the D's were made of metal, correct? (SG confirms) And you did a piece in Atlanta that had a separate piece of metal.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. Well, something more practical than - in the beginning, when people saw cloth, they had a fit. In fact, I assume that most of the protest against the pieces that I put up, such as the piece in Atlanta, was made because of the cloth. But the more that you could involve harder material, like stone, marble and other things, they'd lighten up on you. Finally, the next chance that I had to do a commission, I used all metal. And I figured out that the attitude toward metal is that it's very clean, it's very acceptable. And finally, I guess, it's part of the notion of doing commissions that it's the beauty and mysteriousness of the material quiets them down, so you can get your idea across. And that once I did that - and plus this is that [carrousel turning] it's so nice that it became an immediate material for me to work with painting.

Here: this was the actual first metal piece at Davis Square. This was a very successful piece even though I then began to hear that I was working like Stella. And this was a piece also that we learned a lot on. From doing this, we learned not only how to work in metal, so to speak, but the possibilities that it later had for us.

MR. FORGEY: How did using metal change - I mean, we're not talking basically in a piece such as this you're using metal as if it were canvas as a surface to paint upon. (SG confirms) And yet the colors come out harder, there's a different, more resilient kind of quality to the color. I would just offer your technique and your approach to surface -

MR. GILLIAM: Well, the greatest change was not in metal against metal, but as in I believe here - these two pieces in the corner - the Ullico - those are canvases. And when you began to use metal against canvas, that's where the change began to actually occur. At this point, even more so [continuing to look through slides] is that one began to deal with sculptural possibilities in metal, a different formal category altogether, and different possibilities.

I think that what has happened is that the intervention of new materials was allowed, those questions that were asked or those questions that were possible to be asked and to answer them; or, if not answer them, then I asked the questions and tried to do something different in response. I think that when I started talking about doing commissions and wanting to stay out here, I've come to realize how difficult it was to "make it" as an artist unless one could base one's existence on more than just painting, or more than just printmaking. Having done that reasonably successfully, I feel that I can take more risks.

MR. FORGEY: About how many major commissions have you had in the 80s?

MR. GILLIAM: About six or seven. Well, one thing is that it's also changed - using the metal has changed also the ways that shows are done, and the concept of the paintings. For instance, I remember that at one time I made 30 paintings for two shows, one for Monique Knowlton and one for Chris [Middendorf?] which occurred almost back to back. But for this exhibit for Barbara {Fendrick} I'm only making seven. That's because their concepts of mounting metal on canvas is much more difficult than simply painting the paintings. Or the paintings are made as if they're fabricated.

But of course this was a slow process, to work oneself into or to work up to. I guess the ability to deal with technique or craftsmanship is a possibility.

MR. FORGEY: Were the D paintings important as a step in this direction? (SG confirms) Collage with canvas, primarily?

MR. GILLIAM: And then with a D on the side. And the cleanness of those canvases as such, I think, was rather surprising to me. And they were important. I mean, I think the mystery of them.

MR. FORGEY: In terms of the use of metal, it looks - I mean the D is just a punctuation mark, (SG confirms) whereas in the later works you get totally involved, you're using metal and canvas at the same time, juxtaposing the two surfaces. You're again treating metal as if it were an easy material.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. Or giving it - I mean, everything is treated like canvas and the fact that it's different material simply gives you a different surface to work with, that exposes itself more as a drawing. So the painting still is whole - I'm looking at the one on the screen, one from a series called the State series, from '84 or so. These paintings normally were three columns in width - I mean by that, the painting forms an H here, each of those are like columns, and the metal is used to create a circle or to introduce various planes.

Now, the interesting thing about the painting is that it's made by stacking or changing, it can be changed or manipulated.

MR. FORGEY: I was asking you before: your procedures on these. Did they change significantly through having an architect work for you and working in metal? How do you approach doing something like this? I mean, how much preparatory work do you do, and how much is manipulated at the -

MR. GILLIAM: Well, the most interesting things were the conversations about how one could proceed. If I was told that I could do what I wanted to do, I didn't have to worry about how it was going to be put together. I could depend totally upon drawing or painting. Or if I got to a certain point in the building of something, and said, "I don't like this," well, you don't have to accept that. There are these possibles and these possibilities. One of the things is, that Steve Frietch and I went to hobby shops a lot, finding hobby sets or various things that were put together that would facilitate our building or conceiving an idea. And the more that we could do these things, then finally we'd come closer together in understanding. I mean, just different ways of preparing.

Also, Steve, for instance, seems always ahead of me. I guess it's not as precious to him as it is to me. "So why don't you just start it upside down??" (he laughs) Things like this. So I think that that became important. Steve Frietch has been with me since '81.

(next on the carousel) This painting is called Flowered Wedding. This is an interesting painting because in my paintings from the State series, things began to appear over the surface of the painting and in front of the canvas; whereas the top and side of the canvas is still reiterated or defined, its sculpture is built from the floor up over the surface of the canvas. There's a contrast of a sculptural moment against the painted moment. And I think that it's something I started to play with.

MR. FORGEY: Let's talk a little bit about color, and your changing attitudes towards color from the early years to the mid-80s where we are at this point.

MR. GILLIAM: In the earlier years, color was used rather freely. I could use as much color as I liked. And now, in order to control the work, I mean I like to see a work that contains no more than five colors, sometimes even less, sometimes even one color, in order to, because I think that as in sculpture, and the patina, because of the amount of action or activity, the color sometimes has to be simple in order to establish at least a relationship. So I've begun to use less contrast in order to maintain strength. To increase meaning or dominate them, and that I guess this kind of thing happened with the Red and Black painting. And having seen that, I tried to work at it over and over again.

We were talking earlier that Greenberg says that sculpture cannot handle., that color doesn't work well with sculptural sort of meaning. You tend to, maybe that's true but it's less true if the color works more in a complete descriptive way, you know, developing the meaning of the piece. And maybe this is why that when the fullness of the work is defined in a pictorial way, and sculpture is subordinate to that, then that's the way of getting it to override a pure sculptural meaning.

MR. FORGEY: In a sense I could consider these structured paintings, not colored sculpture.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes, yes; sure.

MR. FORGEY: But in terms of your color, I mean it has always been one of your strong suits, your expressive suits, it seems to me, basic strengths as an artist. Has that changed at all?

MR. GILLIAM: It's changed a lot. I just say that it's the thing that I've worked at the most. Yes. For instance, I find that I'm able to use black and white, like here; but it has changed a lot. And the way that it has changed has been to become, I would say, more solid. Being more simple, being more direct. Or the other way would be to say that it has changed because I think about it rather than that I'm being intuitive about it.

MR. FORGEY: Is that just a matter of maturation, experience, having done it?

MR. GILLIAM: It's a matter of maturation, it's a matter of objectivity, a matter of getting to look more at painting, to read more about painting, to think more about painting. You realize that you can't have a much fun as you thought you could, but you can get sort of solid sort of results. It's also a result of doing more and having more time - the more you do, which means the experiences are increased. And of course being very observant and sensitive to what goes on.

MR. FORGEY: What are some of the things the important stages in your reading? Are there a couple or two or three major -

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. I spent about 60 days in bed with my back, last year and the year before. The first time I started to read everything I could find about Pollock again. The next time I began with Cezanne and got into Braque and Picasso, into his two sort of active, relatively, periods. As a result, I felt that I knew very little about either because so many people had couched Pollock in their own terms, also the same with Cezanne. He was actually probably the most beautiful and the most revealing in that when I discovered that he made use of the word "systemic." It wasn't "systemic" but "systematic," His use of the word "volume" or "passage," you know; basis for the systematic process that he developed in painting which probably I don't think I ever knew anything about even though I'm a contemporary artist.

I began to change. I think that even in teaching students I began to fill in a lot of holes by having to read in order to tell them what was going on in the Impressionists - the simplicity with which the things were done; or Raphael or Matisse. I mean, I just started to think. And I think it's kind of correct because all of this may have happened in a principal order because I really became a contemporary artist, you know, as a young color painter without "graduating" through history as such. I mean, I came in in the midst of the process and began to build it. Now, going back and filling in some of the gaps I think is very important.

MR. FORGEY: How would you describe - in a sense, it's not that you haven't been, that's what we've been talking about in a way - your system, your systematic process. But would you care to reflect on that from the point of view of your most recent show, your most recent series of works that are just being shipped out of here now? How do you see a systematic process in your case?

MR. GILLIAM: Well, as a result of looking at Cezanne and Braque, I'm more basic. I mean, all of these pieces are defined, they define better the elements - the sculptural, the planar element, the sense of - I read a beautiful book by William Tucker on "The Language of Sculpture" which talked about the surface in Rodin, etc. I started to hinge the elements to something and to deal with a system. And I feel a lot more comfortable and I wonder, I mean, I've always done these things but I've found one a little bit more to my liking; at least for here and now. I

seem to have, I've answered so many questions better in the photograph of first painting that's reproduced on the cover of the invitation. To an extent, there's been a reaching for this. I've reached for it in the way of let's say the Color Field painters but in my own language. This is what I mean that dealing with the systematic aspect and what Cezanne meant by that is not just to deal with intuitive but to deal also with intuitive in regard to a number of other painters from the past whom you respect or whom you've learned to like and you feel that it's right in terms of.

I think that actually a chance to really treat yourself to some reading - I stopped teaching this year and I've had more time to burn in terms of seeing something come about. But you know, if 20 years ago I'd gotten that old Cezanne book and had had a chance to read it, I would have thrown it away because it would have made me nervous (both laughs) to stay that steel [?]. I think that I feel now that I'm able to give art validity when I can execute it in a system and when I can discover principally certain systematic things, and can even begin to discover how these systematic relationships were always important to other artists whom you may respect, such as Louis.

MR. FORGEY: After seeing that piece in Rockville, and then a comment that you made a couple of weeks ago, is there any degree of circling back? I mean, the piece in Rockville again employs structured suspended canvases in a total tableau. Are you in some way circling back, reevaluating your own artistic past in any systematic way?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. I think that's the beautiful thing that happens with that piece in Rockville is that you have a chance to reexamine the other piece. And now I know where I stand even in regard to that one, having done it. And particularly when I'm ready to make the piece for Japan.

MR. FORGEY: For Japan, yes. It's an installation piece, a structured piece.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. And I'm beginning to play with the idea of not using the hard sort of structure like on the bottom but to let the cloth just to blow free within the space. When I was saying that Warren mentioned the double space for it you should have a higher ceiling, that being able to hang that piece just in the air and do that, and then to allow it to correspond to immediate things like chairs or boxes or ladders or things that are free in the space, would be better. I mean, it's also an aspect of growing and corresponding to the way of putting the cone and these pieces together on top of that painting to make things work.

MR. FORGEY: I've brought along that catalogue, to be able to refer to it, of that catalogue of your most recent works that are going to be shown in New York this week and that are all about this sheer disassemble. Now, these are very large. Are to be hung on a wall?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: And they're made of canvas and painted metal. And it looks here as if you're painting the canvas and the metal in a very similar striated, very thick impasto way.

MR. GILLIAM: Son in principle the painting comes from the Red and Black series, that's where it started. I'm very interested now if - just to ask the question - this may mean something to me but it may not mean that much to the viewer. So how do you handle it, you know, so that we're both on the same plane? And that here there is the feeling of trying to bring them into one experience by that one color is very, very important. I don't know that if ten years from today I were actually going over these same questions, I would have the same concern. But I think that what is going on is that the more I open up, you know, through questioning or through systems that we're talking about, somehow the better and the more direct a painting becomes.

I noticed that when we were looking at some of the polygons in the slides, the Chaser series, how much these are like that. This sense to make the painting about something, much to be experienced here as the target. I remember when I said that I was thinking that Tom used to explain Noland by saying that he succeeds in making the painting mean something that the people know something about. That's half the job done. I'm adopting a similar system, of presenting a relationship that is familiar and then I hang the color, the painting, the movement in space. And that can be trusted to the artist, but the rest of it requires a certain sort of mental approach.

Now, one thing that I knew that I had to do as soon as I finished the first seven paintings, was to make one bigger. (he laughs) To make several of them bigger, just to put one really in space, let it establish a certain dynamic quality. They're not here. The smaller paintings are much more colorful, they're not [sentence unfinished] So that having established the monochromatic clarity of these is that yet later in the smaller ones, one could go on to a stronger relationship.

MR. FORGEY: More polychromatic?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. END OF SIDE B, Tape 3

BEGINNING SIDE A, Tape 4

(sound of slide carrousel rotating)

MR. GILLIAM: This is nothing but metal and sculptural pieces. (more rotating)

MR. FORGEY: Where is that building? I haven't seen that piece, which is wild to me. The Union Labor Life Insurance Company.

MR. GILLIAM: It's down on New York Avenue, the Block building, just before you get to Union Station.

MR. FORGEY: I hate that building. No wonder I haven't seen the piece, I never thought of entering that building, I didn't think there was anything worth going into it for. Now I'll go. (carrousel resumes rotating)

MR. GILLIAM: These were pieces done for the last show. We constructed three sculptural models for commissions and used them as a means of getting to these things.

MR. FORGEY: Are these the smaller works you were referring to?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. This one is smaller. They're about 46x52 inches.

MR. FORGEY: The whole series is based on "the target in art" -

MR. GILLIAM: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: - with polygonal canvas behind?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: I see what you mean. But it seems to me this is characteristic - I mean, in terms of the variety of the coloring. But hasn't that been a sort of tide in your work? I mean by a tide, it comes and goes but you go to, for example, the big yellow painting here on the wall. What's the name of that, in the studio?

MR. GILLIAM: Yellow and Gingers.

MR. FORGEY: All right. Between kind of all-over, not exactly monochromatic, more monochromatic kinds of work dealing with a whole field and a kind of field that you can get from this more or less single manipulating that color. And then going to very, very intense polychrome. It comes and goes in your work.

MR. GILLIAM: Yes. But here, like in these, it's almost a dependency upon a painting. And as the pieces get smaller, the field goes, and it's more a dependency upon a certain sort of sculpture or relief quality. (carrousel resumes) This piece is a model that was made for Louisville, Kentucky. A commission for which we presented a proposal and now we have to go and present the proposal to a group of funders.

MR. FORGEY: This would be suspended between two beams in a high-ceilinged room or something?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: And the intention is to - it's a beautiful model - fabricate that in metal?

MR. GILLIAM: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: Now, these colors here are - each piece of metal has a solid color attached to it. Is that your notion?

MR. GILLIAM: Right. It has a stronger red relationship, red and black. The school colors, Louisville University, are red and black. It's very interesting because of the truss, I think. That was Steve's idea. Well, we had a similar idea together, and then Steve brought in the idea of a truss and I "bought" it.

MR. FORGEY: It's beautiful. What would the scale of this piece be, if completed?

MR. GILLIAM: It's about 25 across by 14 by 9.

MR. FORGEY: In the relationship here, because of the angle I guess, it looks almost as tall as it is across. (after a long pause) How do you feel about, I mean, in comparison to Stella, which started so many years ago. You implied you were uncomfortable with it -

MR. GILLIAM: Well, it didn't work as well as I thought it did. I mean, I've had to go back and look at a lot of pieces

et cetera. Stella works, I mean he works more metaphorical. He's too busy stealing from Leger and from Lissitsky and things like this, to be worried about anybody like me. But I think my problems are entirely different, and that is a certain kind of literal quality I'm bringing to the work. What I have to worry about is doing this, you know and it's not anything that's [unfinished sentence] I think when it's done, it's done with a certain sort of meanness rather than relationship talking about like Stella. It's like destroying paintings.

MR. GILLIAM: So where are we?

MR. FORGEY: I think we're done.

MR. GILLIAM: Oh no! [sarcastically]

END OF THIS SIDE, END OF INTERVIEW

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