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Oral history interview with Robert Mangold, 2017 November 16

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Robert Mangold, conducted by Christopher Lyon for the Archives of American Art, at the artist's studio in Washingtonville, New York on November 16, 2017.

This transcript has been reviewed and edited by Robert Mangold and Christopher Lyon. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. The transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is Christopher Lyon. I am with Robert Mangold in his studio in Washingtonville, New York. It's November 16, 2017. Good morning, and thank you for doing this.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, good morning to you.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, just to reiterate, I would like to keep the ball in your court as much as possible. What I find fascinating and hope we can talk about from various angles is your investigation, your exploration, whatever the best word would be, of how paintings communicate, in terms of all their parameters: color, scale, line, and so on. You've looked at a whole range of perceptual issues in relation to your work, but at the same time, you explored at great depth the many ways that the physical manifestation of a painting can be expressive. And looking at all this in retrospect, it seems that there's a quality of kind of methodical, unhurried investigation to all of this. Does that—how do you—when you look back on what you've done, do you see it as a progression? Do you see it as a—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, work leads to work, often. Hopefully.

[They laugh.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, you're always hoping it's going to lead to more work. And what I think is that while the work is constantly changing, it's a kind of journey of a certain kind, through time, and the evolution of the work is unpredictable. You know, it's not—it's surprising, and it changes. The routes you take through work change from time to time. And then, there's a constant reoccurrence of elements that you've dealt with before in new ways. It's a little bit the same, and a little bit different as it goes along.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So, I think that it'll be important for us to just have on the record a bit of biographical background, for the purposes of this. You were born on October 12th, is that right?

ROBERT MANGOLD: That's correct. October 12th, in North Tonawanda, New York.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: In 1937?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Correct.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. And your father—there is still, I think—a landmark in that town is the old Wurlitzer factory. Is that where your father worked?

ROBERT MANGOLD: My father and most of my relatives worked there. It was my grandfather, uncles. And I seem to have been one of the only members of the family that escaped.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yes, it was actually a wonderful structure there, and I very often went with my mother in the car as a little boy and picked my father up when work ended. And I have great memories of that. They had very—my uncle was a gardener there, so they had gardens, tulips, and all kinds of things growing. It was a kind of idea of the factory as a kind of workplace, but also as a kind of—a part of the community, a beautiful edifice. And it was—I don't know when it was built, but it was probably early in the 20th century. I'm not sure.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I think so, yeah. Yeah, there was—I read up a little bit about it. It's fascinating history, the making of band organs and, you know, organs for—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, my father worked on making organs and spraying various finishes on the organ.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's interesting.

ROBERT MANGOLD: I think he worked in a spray booth where he did that. Unfortunately, I think they didn't wear proper masks and everything, because he ended up with emphysema and not very good health. But I think they had the equipment to wear, but they tended to discard it because it was uncomfortable, you know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was there anyone in your family who was sort of directly engaged in art or craft of any kind?

ROBERT MANGOLD: I don't think so. My mother loved to make quilts, as a matter of fact. She and friends of hers made quilts together. And, you know, that was—I watched that. But I don't think there was any direct artistic connection. In fact, it came as a—I used to go to the library with my mother a lot, and she would—we would take books, and one of the things I got was books about drawing. And I don't know why, but people had told me from fourth grade on that I had a lot of talent or something. Some—probably something that wasn't really very—you know, I think these ideas of early talent are often misguided, but in this case, I decided, "Well, I really don't want to do factory work, and I really would like to"—other relatives of mine were farmers, and I didn't particularly want to become a farmer. So I thought, "Well, I'll look up this art thing. I'll check it out and see what I can do."

And I really didn't know that there was such a thing as contemporary artists. I mean, I knew there were people who would stop their car, and would sit and paint a field, or a sunset, or something, you know? But I never thought there was a career, as such. And I was—I think I wanted to be another Norman Rockwell. Because at that time, this was after the war, after the Second World War, and illustration was very positive, and *Saturday Evening Post* covers of Rockwell and other illustrators were visible all the time. I thought, "Well, that would be something I could do, probably. Or try to do." And so, I went into high school thinking that I would try to go to art school at the end of that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Were there any opportunities for you to draw in high school?

ROBERT MANGOLD: I had a very good art teacher, as a matter of fact. His name was Edwin Parske. I took all of his courses, and he would teach you everything from making pottery, to carving, to—he would try to give talks about contemporary art, and often it was kind of sarcastic—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: —but still, he was a wonderful teacher. We did advertising things. He tried to teach a little bit of everything to the students that I knew there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's interesting. So a little bit of graphic art, a little bit of—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, absolutely. Mechanical drawing. Everything was part of his domain. You could take whatever courses he had to offer, and he would offer new ones if there were people interested, and he would—I went into a kind of college entrance course in high school, and then I found out that art schools did not demand language courses and higher math and so on. So, I tended to spend a lot of time in the art classes, and shop. I took a lot of shop classes, in terms of—I always liked working with wood, and constructing. So, I spent time in woodshop.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Later on, you focused attention on art history and so on. Were you a reader when you were young?

ROBERT MANGOLD: I was a reader. I don't think I read the greatest of books, but I did like reading. As I say, I went to the library with my mother, and she would return her books, and I would return mine. And also, I would get these books about how to draw, and—how to draw trees, you know? And how to—and I remember going out, and they never were particularly successful for me, but I liked the idea that I was—and I took a couple correspondence courses. I was living in the country, and—you know, like the—you would get the matchbook covers with "Draw Me" on it, or something.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: So I tried some of these, because they would give me lessons to do, and I would try to do them.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The name Mangold, what's the derivation of that?

ROBERT MANGOLD: It's German. And actually, there are some areas of Germany where there's a lot of Mangolds. I've been—and it's a name of Swiss chard in Germany, I think, or—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really?

ROBERT MANGOLD: It's a vegetable name.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Interesting. Okay. So, you mentioned your mother. And I gather from something I read that she was a buyer for a store?

ROBERT MANGOLD: She did. She had various jobs. My father worked all the time in the factory. My mother had these various other things she did. Sometimes she did wallpapering. Sometimes she worked in stores, and at one time was a buyer for a department store in the Twin Cities, which was what they called Tonawanda and North Tonawanda. Each on one side of the Erie Canal. So I went to New York with her on at least one, maybe two, of these trips. And I would look up on—probably it was a *New Yorker* magazine or something, to see what they had in certain galleries. Because at that time, I was smart enough in terms of what was happening that I wanted to see various gallery shows and things.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, right.

ROBERT MANGOLD: I mean, it was a transition. I went from wanting to be an illustrator to gradually getting interested in artists like Ben Shahn, and—who were illustrator-slash-painter, who did—you know, he did illustrations for *Fortune* magazine and so on. And other people like that. So I kind of followed that idea into fine arts. And eventually Picasso, you know. I was able to make the jump into Picasso from Ben Shahn—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: —and so on. And eventually got to kind of up-to-date.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] There's a mention of you going to the Martha Jackson Gallery, which is very interesting. Do you recall any of the individual works you might have seen, or the artists they might have been showing?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well this was ahead in time now. This is after I had already started graduate school at Yale. And I spent the summer in New York City with—actually I—with my wife. We were married then, at that point. This would have been the very early '60s: '61 or '62. And Martha Jackson would have these kind of Happening shows that would have people—some Pop art—Allan Kaprow and Jim Dine, and different people would have installations.

So I saw that kind of work at that time. And, you know, Sylvia, my wife, had gone to Cooper Union, and the Music & Art High School. So she was very knowledgeable about taking me around to the 10th Street galleries and things.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. To rewind chronologically a little, was your family supportive of your pursuing art as a—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, they weren't—yes, they were. I mean, they were supportive, but there was no particular—there was no money in the family bank account, let's put it. So I had to work a year after high school, and I saved my money to—even art school, which was fairly cheap at that time. So I got into art school at Cleveland Institute of Art. Then stayed there for, I guess, four years, and got into Yale after that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. You went to the Yale summer program, I think, at Norfolk?

ROBERT MANGOLD: That's right. Yeah, that's right. Actually that was responsible for a lot of things. The way it happened then was that the head of the school, I believe, with some of the faculty at Cleveland, chose among their artists, young artists, a person to go to Skowhegan, and a person to go to Yale Norfolk. And I was the one chosen to go to Yale Norfolk, because I think the—they thought I was more of an abstract artist, and that would be better for me than Skowhegan. And the other artist who went was more—dealt with subject matter more.

So, yeah, it was very good, because I went to the Yale Norfolk, met a lot of students from other schools, and met teachers who were at Yale. And the teachers said, "Well, you know, you should come to Yale. You should think about it." And I didn't have great feelings about that, because Yale, to me, from what I understood, was more—well, I guess it was dominated at that time by Albers, and I was really, at that point, very involved in Abstract Expressionist work. And so, it seemed like there was a contradiction there. I would have rather gone out to the West Coast and studied with Clyfford Still or something. You know, that was a thought.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was he teaching at that point?

ROBERT MANGOLD: He was teaching in San Francisco, I believe. But I don't know, maybe he didn't come in very often or something, but it seemed like a possibility. But it wasn't possible because I didn't have any money left. What happened at Yale is they offered me a scholarship. So I went where I could go, could afford to go. And Yale ended up being fine.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So this was Bernard Chaet who encouraged you, is that right?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, Bernard Chaet [. . . –RM] was a wonderful teacher, and I met him at Yale Norfolk, and he was instrumental in saying, you know, "You should really send an application to Yale, and I think we could help you, you know."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Let me back up a little bit. You mentioned that you were, you know, thinking of yourself as an Abstract Expressionist at that point. But your first encounter with Abstract Expressionists kind of threw you for a loop, it sounds like, in like 1958, and—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, it was—I was a—maybe the third year at Cleveland, second or third year at Cleveland, and a group of students were going to drive down to the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh, which was not a terribly long drive from Cleveland. So I went with them, and it was amazing, because I—it was a wonderful show, and it had literally everything in there from Ben Shahn and Andrew Wyeth to international artists like Tàpies and Alberto Burri, and it had Kline, and de Kooning, and Rothko, and Pollock, and everything. So all of this was on—you know, you would wind your way around the show, and there would be all—it literally had everything there. Matisse and, you know, whatever you imagined. It was quite a show. And the art world was small enough then that you could put a large portion of [. . . it –RM] in one building.

Anyway, it was, the Abstract Expressionist painting was very instrumental to me, because it—I was floored by it. And what it represented to me: It showed me how abstract painting could be something that wasn't abstract nature, as such, and it didn't look like design as such. It was presenting you with an image that was very direct and to your senses, to your emotions. Suddenly it seemed like there was this whole other possibility for abstract art than I had thought of. So I went back to the art school and started trying to make Abstract Expressionist paintings immediately. And I think my teachers thought I had been corrupted somehow.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: Which in a way, I was. I had seen something that I really wanted to try to do.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There's a really interesting comment by you in the Phaidon book interview that Sylvia does with you, which is a really nice interview. And I was just—spinning off of something you just said, you say in that interview, "I felt I had to paint like them in order to process their work." And then a little further down it was, "You only find out if a coat fits by trying it on." You know, there's—I was just so taken with that, as if—that painting was already for you a kind of medium of investigation, and that you felt a need to, in a sense, kind of get inside the head of these artists.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right, and I thought that the only way to do that would be to try to, in a way, imitate the work, try to imitate the ideas in the work. And actually, for the next few years, there were kinds of different influences of that. I had to put into my book of ideas. And one was, as I came into New York, was Pop art, and it was there, and it had to be considered and dealt with. So I had the backlog of Abstract Expressionism that I wanted to do, but I also—there was—I realized when I got to Yale, and went to spend a lot of time in the library, that I tried to leap into the contemporary moment without understanding where it came from, in a way. I was not well-versed on the history of the 20th-century art, from Surrealism to Dadaism to Cubism and so on. I knew that they existed, but I had never really spent time thinking about them in that way. And so, it was a period where I kind of went back from the contemporary moment, to kind of do a study of where it came from, where the elements that I loved so much—where they—what they were reacting to.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

ROBERT MANGOLD: And—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You also had access to the Albright Knox, I think. Is North Tonawanda far from Buffalo?

ROBERT MANGOLD: No, it's about—North Tonawanda is about halfway between Niagara Falls and Buffalo. It's right in the middle. It's complicated, because Cleveland, in a lot of ways—Cleveland had a great museum, and near the art school, and I went to it a lot. But it was very, it was not—what would you say? It was not showing contemporary, the most contemporary art. It was showing—it kind of left off with Impressionism, or Picasso, or something.

And when I went back to—when I would go back at Christmastime, or summertime, to my hometown, and I would go to Buffalo, I would see they were in a very active mode. They had, actually, the—I think it was 1959, maybe, was the Clyfford Still show that was there. Which I saw, which was, you know, very influential, because I saw there were so many works. There were, I don't know, 30 works, paintings, hung very close together. And it was, like, amazing to see—I had seen Abstract Expressionism in bits and pieces, but I hadn't seen a kind of complete showing of one artist that way. And also, they were buying—they had a wonderful Rothko, they still

do. A wonderful Pollock.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You commented in one interview about that Rothko, *Orange and Yellow*, that beautiful glowing thing. That was, I think, part of that campaign where Seymour Knox is giving them money to really invest in contemporary art.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right. And I think they had a connection with Sidney Janis, because I somehow get the idea that Sidney Janis came from Buffalo or had some kind of connection to the Albright. But the Albright was a very active, adventurous museum, going back. They were the first museum, I think, to, buy many artists at the—earlier.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: About that Rothko, you remarked that you were surprised by how thin the paint was. That—I don't know if "thin" is the right word. But that it's not the physicality, it's the image that—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right, exactly. I've never been so involved in, heavily painted paintings. I don't know why. But I've liked the—I've somehow not—it hasn't been something that I've—the physicality of paint interested me less than the possibilities of presenting a kind of opening, like a wall that is there, but it also presents a kind of window to—in a certain way. And this contradiction was, I think, very important to me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, this quote I loved: "For me, these experiences made me realize what painting's unique reality was. Neither object nor window, but existed in the space between."

ROBERT MANGOLD: Exactly, exactly. I think that's what—I mean, you know, I went through a period where I was trying to figure out whether I was going to go more into three-dimensional art or sculpture, and less into painting. Where the painting was actually coming off the wall in different ways. So I was trying to debate that in my mind, and at the same time, I liked—I was very drawn to the idea of painting's uniqueness, which was this ability to be a flattened thing. A thing that you existed in relation to, in a certain way. And that idea kind of won out in my vocabulary.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I think Rob must have borrowed that "between" idea, I think, for his title for his essay in your Phaidon book. You know, "Betwixt and Between." And he talks about some of those issues. But the other—

ROBERT MANGOLD: By the way, there's water here for us.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, thank you. I'll grab it in a moment.

But the other thing that, as you're talking, it makes me think about, is this quality—and I think you talk about this—the quality of a painting that it can be taken in all at once. That it has this kind of immediacy, in terms of impact. This is something Alex Katz talks about, that—I think, you know, that kind of the—that initial impact being so strong.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, I think that was what I got from Abstract Expressionism. You know, when I first saw these works, it was like there was an immediacy that—in terms of seeing, and feeling, and reacting—that was very, you know, very much a part of what the work was. And Alex was a teacher of mine, actually, at Yale, and was very important in terms of his open sense of what painting was. We've remained friends for many, many years.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And Barnett Newman also becomes important for you at this time.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Barnett Newman was—yes, was—became in a way more important to me than Rothko at that point, because the relation of the vertical to the field, and the way it related to the viewer, the way the viewer dealt with this plane, and also dealt with this idea of the figure, was something that interested me a lot. He was—you know, his work was very important to me for a period of time. And still is, you know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: In the interview that Sylvia does with you, you recall, one of you, going to a show at the Guggenheim, and just being transfixed by—I think it's *Onement VI*, the dark blue with the zip in the center.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, it was in the lower bay of the Guggenheim, where they could hang a big painting like that. And it was—you know, it's all I could think about afterwards, was the way that work existed. I used to like the way Barney Newman photographed, or had his work photographed, with a figure standing there, with a viewer often in front. Sometimes it was him, and sometimes it was a woman, or something, somebody else. But there was a sense of the relation of the viewer to the work that was—to this wall of blue, that was very important for me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, this notion of scale is—it seems like that gets almost baked into your thinking, that you're always—certainly in the mid-'60s works, you're relating to this object in a space, and this seems to be important to your thinking.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, there—you know, the work was going through complicated influences at that point. You know, it was the—there was the influence of Newman, and—but there was also the influence of Pop art, because Pop art had made its impression on the world. And it presented the idea of somehow relating to the materials and world that's outside your window as much as what's inside your head, in a way—with your emotions in that way. So I was working with paintings that were like sections of walls that were—I used the—suddenly I liked the idea of not stretching canvas, of working on panels, and working with materials I could get at the lumber yard, and the four-by-eight measurement became a thing where if I was doing a square painting, it would be two pieces, eight-by-eight, and you know, would have a seam in the middle. Because that's the way materials were.

So I did a whole series of—I did a show in—called *Walls and Areas*, in Fischbach Gallery, in 1965. Which, you know, was a very—was my coming-out show, really, in a lot of ways. Because the works hold up very well over time, and they're in very good institutions, for the most part, and collections. And I was—you know, I felt very strongly about them. The walls were like the color of brick, and different—*Yellow Wall*, and *Gray Wall*, and *Red Wall*.

And then there was the areas, which were—I was fascinated—part of my love of being in New York was that you were exposed to all these visions that, as a country boy—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: —I didn't know of. And one of the things that interested me was the areas between buildings. As you would ride along on the train, or the elevated trains, or if you were even riding in a cab or whatever, you would look out, and you would see architectural sections between buildings that had a kind of glow, Rothko-esque almost, and that it was air, architectural air in a way. And it became—so I was interested in the walls as physical, and the space between these walls in Manhattan, and Lower Manhattan, and so on. So, you know, that was an influence that came from Pop art, from the idea of the world around us and how it enters.

So, you know, I was still growing as a person. I was young, I had come out of Yale, and this was my first big show in New York. I had had a couple other shows. Alex Katz had actually been very helpful to me. He said [. . . –RM], you know, "When you're ready to show, tell me. I'll see what I can do." And he did help me get into—have a show. And actually, I joined the gallery that he, at that time, was in: Fischbach.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So many things [laughs] in what you've just said. So, there's the notion of the architectural and the atmospheric, this—both things, you're trying, really trying to capture both things, right?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And this fascinating—

ROBERT MANGOLD: So I called them *Walls and Areas* to make a point of that there are these two different kinds of works, even though they're shaped somewhat similar. But one came from one idea, and one came from another, that were actually not that dissimilar. Except—well, they were dissimilar. But I was very nervous about them, because I thought people are going to go, and they're just going to think that I've copied walls [laughs] and spaces between walls, and—but not too many people actually even saw them in that way. They saw them as very difficult, complicated images. [. . . –RM]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And those have—I mean, those incorporated into them these voids, or cutouts, or—you know, negative space, I guess, would be one way to say it.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, they—and they were very—actually some of them were very physical. They had—there was like, *Window Wall*, I called one, you know? I mean, there was actually—they were actually meant to look like an area of an apartment house or something, or a wall that you would see with a window here. But there was no attempt to find—there was no attempt to make a formal statement, really. It was as though I wanted these openings to just happen, the way they happen when you're looking out a window. I was very connected to the idea, in New York, that you saw everything in parts. That you had looked out the window, and you saw part of a truck going by, or you saw everything in sections. You saw the lower part of a building, or even the wonderful subway and loft buildings, where they would paint the lower half of the wall dark—let's say, dark green or dark brown—and the upper part light, because the lower part was always getting smashed and dirty by things piling into it. And I loved the idea of slicing—that paint could slice the subway the way they would do the posts. Everything was sliced in half, in terms of light on the upper half, and dark on the lower half. And paint could be a kind of—a demarcation of space in a way that I thought was very interesting and physical in New York. It was like my New York influences.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] I do want to ask you a little bit about this phenomenon that's been retrospectively recognized as, you know, kind of the Yale group of the early 1960s. You were out a little ahead of

a number of the people who were mentioned in that connection. Chuck Close, and Serra, and so on.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Just a year or something. Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Just a year?

ROBERT MANGOLD: It was—I didn't really know Chuck at Yale, but we did overlap a little bit. But everyone at Yale had a—one of the things that Albers did, I think, was to set up a situation where each person could be judged in a different way. So that if you were in the master's program, you got the bachelor's degree on the way to the master's program. You know, like first you would get the—you would get it—it was like a—it was something you got on the—even though you were in a master's program, the graduate program, you didn't have a degree. But you got one on the way to the other.

Some people were given programs where they stayed in at New Haven and Yale totally, and then there were others who were given a situation where you had a year out of residence. Which is what happened to me. I spent two years in Yale, and then the third year, which was the year I was supposed to get my master's degree, I spent it in New York, working. And then I was supposed to go back at the end of the year with the work, which was my thesis, and they would look at it and say, "You graduated." So I was in New York, working, while technically I was still at Yale, which was very helpful for me, because I didn't want to go into the Vietnam War, and since I was still going to school, that was a very helpful situation.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You met Sylvia at Yale?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah. Yeah, we were—we got married in New Haven. Sylvia was—actually, Sylvia was going to leave—she was there a year ahead of me, because she went to Cooper, and Cooper, I think, was a three-year program. So basically we're pretty close in age. She's one year younger than I am. But she got her bachelor—we both got bachelor degrees there at the same time. And then I stayed and got what eventually became my master's degree. And she was going to leave, and so I kind of trapped her into staying by marrying her.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] Some of your other classmates, I think, Brice Marden?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Brice, yes I knew Brice. Brice was a friend at Yale. Very good friend. And there was a lot—see, one of the things that Yale offered, which again I have to credit Albers, and I don't mean to begrudge it, because I think Albers is a great artist. But one of the things he did was made the program very open, and people could come to Yale—and this is a very important point that people often miss on understanding what happened at Yale.

A lot of people went to the Boston Museum School, or different museum schools that did not give degrees. So technically, you couldn't get into a master's program without a degree, without a bachelor's degree. And Yale, as I said, you would get the bachelor's degree, even though you were already accepted in the master's degree, you would get the bachelor's on the way. And a lot of people went there because it was really one of the few choices that accepted art school people. I think Albers was wise enough to figure out that a lot of the best students, the best painters and sculptors and so on, came out of art schools, but they didn't have the degree that someone who went to Vassar or someplace else would have.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Which would be important for teaching, among other things.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah. Well, and a lot of went to Yale to get the credits so they could go out and teach Albers' art courses, because there was a real demand for them. They wanted people who could teach the color course, and things.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, I see. Some people I've talked to about the program, or many, seem to mention the visiting artists that would come in, and that that was an important part of the experience, to just—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, that was true. I don't think that Albers would have necessarily approved of all of the people, but the—I went there after Albers had retired, and the school was being run by a triumvirate of—I'm trying to remember. Bernie Chaet was one, Neil Welliver might have been another, I'm trying to think of who the third. There were three people who were kind of running the graduate program then. And they would—they definitely tapped people who were contemporary, very contemporary people, which—you know, Alex Katz was, and Jack Tworkov came up there, and was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Tworkov later lead the program, right?

ROBERT MANGOLD: He did, yes. Not while I was there, I don't believe. But he did eventually. Al Held came up there to teach, but not while I was there. Although there's been some—he was actually connected to the school while I was there, but I was in out-of-residence thing, so I never met him or anything there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, let's see. So just some dates. So the summer of '61, you and Sylvia moved to New York City. What was, what was your thinking? What was behind that decision? Did you feel that this was like really essential?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Might have been—I'm trying to think of whether it was the summer of '61, or '62, I don't know which.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, okay. Well, this could be incorrect.

ROBERT MANGOLD: But you may be right. I don't—yeah, I went to Yale in September of '60, and I remember that time very well because Kennedy was running for President against Nixon, and I remember the whole—it was a big, big, big time. Then, I guess, I guess you may be right. But I was—Sylvia stayed a year in New Haven while I took classes. So she was actually teaching at a—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, this is probably incorrect then. It must have been '62.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, I have a feeling it might have been '62, that summer we went. We did spend the summer, just the summer, in '61, in New York. And we sublet, actually, Alex Katz's studio apartment, while he went to Maine. He went to go to Maine in the summer.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: As he always does. [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right. And we stayed in the apartment on 28th Street, I believe it was. And that summer may have been the summer I saw the Martha Jackson show that I talked about before. But that—I hadn't really—we went back to New Haven in the fall, spent another year in New Haven, and then I came up in my out-of-residence year, which would have been the summer of '62 into '63.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And you were—and then you had an apartment I think on the Upper East Side?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yes. [Laughs.] Yes, we, coming in, coming to New York, we didn't know where we were going to live or work. But Sylvia had a friend who—they, a husband and wife, or a couple—who were superintendents of a small apartment house, and it involved very little work, other than there were very small halls, and you had to make sure the garbage was picked up. And there was a few things to do, but not a lot. For that, you got an apartment, and your phone, electric, and utilities. And then we found space to work, that we could just work in. So, that was our living situation for about two years. Until we—then we moved downtown.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And you had a studio, I gather, on, in the West 20s somewhere?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, that was while we were living up in the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Do you remember where exactly, or—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Where the—where it was? No, I don't. I don't because we never—it was never a—we didn't live there, so we didn't—it wasn't a mail delivery thing, we didn't recall.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. I'm intensely curious about the art world social scene of the early 1960s. I don't think—as you mentioned, it wasn't a very big world compared to today. And I mean working artists, not necessarily the marketing, or anything like that. You mentioned—I loved the short pieces in the *Art 21* interviews with you, they were quite nice. And you mentioned going to see dance performances at the Judson Church, and so on. For some people, it seems like the scene—the dance scene, for example, was more than entertaining, it was really a, one of the sources of creative, you know, ideas, and ferment. I'm just curious, I'm just fishing here. [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Whether this was something that interested you, whether you and Sylvia saw these performances—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, it was part of the world, you know? It was part of the area that was all this—there was all this—you know, New York at that point, there was just so much going on, and there were kind of Happenings. There were, you know, things that bridged all kinds of gaps in terms of work. Red Grooms was making movies with Rudy Burckhardt, and they were doing—you know, different kinds of things were happening like that, that everyone went to see what the final result was. And many artists were very involved in the performances.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did you get involved? [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: No, I didn't, I didn't. But I liked seeing what was being done. It was a time—you know, there was just so much happening. I think I've said at some point, you know, there was art that was—you know, there

were people making art with light bulbs, and there were people doing—you know, everything was happening. And it was very surprising, the elements that were coming together in the—all at the same time, you know? They weren't coming together, but they were all on view. And you could, you know, choose your poison, you know? You could go and see what you liked, and what interested you. It was a very alive moment.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Who were you talking to? Who were your—what was your circle for discussing art, discussing what was going on?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, we had a studio on the Bowery, a floor—there was a building actually, and Lucy Lippard and Bob Ryman were living on the second floor. And the third, fourth, and fifth, I guess, were suddenly going to be rented. And I think Lucy told Sol, or Sol—I don't remember, somehow we found out about it, and we thought, "Well, we could take a floor." And so we found two other people to take floors. And they were—you know, it was $60 rent a floor. So, it was manageable with—in most cases. These were very rough lofts. There wasn't any kitchens or anything there. But it was—there were a lot—there was a group of people who lived in that area, and Sol LeWitt was one, and became a good friend, and I—but I had met Sol actually at MoMA, as a guard. And Eva Hesse was across the street, and Tom Doyle at that time. So people visited each other's studio regularly, and were aware of what each other was doing. Bob Ryman was in the same building, as I say, and we all—

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ROBERT MANGOLD: —Lucy would come up and see what I was doing, and Sylvia was doing, and so on.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So you—and I gather you were working as a guard at MoMA in the summer of '62, according to what I had read. But you also, at some point, got a job in the library where Lucy was working. [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right. It was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was this simultaneous, or [laughs]—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, I was hired I think in the summer, because everybody had vacations. So they needed an extra guard to fill in for the people on vacation. I had applied at all the museums, because I thought it would be a good possibility, and I ended up getting—MoMA at that time, there was a woman who was doing the personnel thing, who liked the idea of having poets and writers and artists as guards, and was very encouraged to do that. Was encouraged to do it, or she allowed it to happen that way. And so, we would—it was a great place to work, you didn't begin until I think the museum opened at 11:00, and you—so you got there at a certain time, and it closed at 5:00, so you had plenty of time to work beyond that. It was a union job, which got decent pay. Let's see, I forgot what I was thinking of pursuing there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] I was wondering how you got to the library.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Oh, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was it Bernard Karpel? Was he—

ROBERT MANGOLD: So I was working as a guard, and at one point they said to me, "Well, you know your job is going to end in September. But we have an opening for someone up in the library, and if you would like to do it, it's a"—the job was called a page, I think. Which was that you went and got books for people, in the stacks, when they came into—and put them back afterwards. And it was great, because you got to see all of the wonderful collection of books and publications over the years. And so I did that—actually I'm trying—I'm not sure how many years I did that. But I was showing at the time, so it was kind of an interesting situation. I was showing at Fischbach Gallery, which in the earliest days, was called Thibaut Gallery.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh. It's the same place?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Same place.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh! Okay.

ROBERT MANGOLD: It was the same address, and Madame Thibaut left working with Marilyn Fischbach, and Marilyn ran the gallery herself. Thibaut Gallery, it had more of a European connection, in terms of [Hans] Hartung, and I don't know—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I see.

ROBERT MANGOLD: —Fontana, and people like that. And, Fischbach—Marilyn, through the help of people in the

gallery like Alex and so on, was suddenly very involved in, or more involved in, what was going on now in New York, and less involved in the historical connections of the work.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is so interesting, it's filling in a lot of gaps. I spent quite a bit of time working with Rob Storr on his Louise Bourgeois book. And one of the signal events in Louise's career was participating in that *Eccentric Abstraction* show at Fischbach that—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Oh, yeah!

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —that Lucy organized.

ROBERT MANGOLD: That's right, and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But now I'm realizing this was part of a whole circle [laughs] of people.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Eva was in that, and a person who actually lived in our 163, an artist, Frank Lincoln Viner, who—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT MANGOLD: —was in that show, also. No, that was a key show that a lot of people saw and were aware of.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And Robert Ryman also was a guard that worked at MoMA when you were there?

ROBERT MANGOLD: I think he had just quit.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh.

ROBERT MANGOLD: I think he had just quit, I didn't meet him there, but I met him through Lucy, who was still working in the library then. Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I see. I see.

ROBERT MANGOLD: But Sol was still there. And I think Flavin was actually a guard for a while. But that was also before I was there. Maybe the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: On our way in here, we passed the large sculpture by Sol that you have outside the barn here.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And I'm—I just have always been so curious about him that the people who knew him well seemed to have this almost, I don't want to exaggerate, but almost a reverent attitude toward him, that he was just a remarkable person. This summer I interviewed Chuck Close, and we did it in his studio in Long Beach there, where he is now. And the only work by another artist in his studio is a suite of prints by LeWitt. And I just thought that's so interesting.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, no. Well, Sol was very—he was very involved in—what could I say? He wasn't narrow in his approach to art and what he liked. In other words, you could be doing something very different than his conceptual ideas, and he was, you know, very involved. And plus, he was—I mean, he was extraordinary as a person. He was—he would—I mean, we had a great relationship through sports, because we used to go to football games together.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: And there was even—we used to—there was softball games that used to occur in the parking lots downtown, and so a lot of us would go play softball on the weekends. There was no parking—there were no cars [laughs] in the parking lots, so we would play down there. But Sol was a great sports fan, as I was, and we used to go to Mets games, and we ended up getting season tickets to the Jets games for a period of time. We used to meet and go to those games. So we had a great sports connection, aside from the art connection.

But Sol would send—you know, Sol was kind of ahead of me in terms of European interests. There were people, dealers coming over from Europe, and Sol would send them my way, you know, say, "Well, you should go see Bob Mangold's work. It's right around the corner."

[They laugh.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: Because I was on Eldridge Street at that point. We had moved from the space at 163 Bowery, and found a place on Eldridge Street, where we had an apartment floor, and then a floor beneath it. And Sol was a real estate person. He would know when something was rentable, or coming on the market, and he would try to get one of his friends to do it. So we jumped at this place. It was actually very good. At that point, we had a young child, Jim, and he started going to school in the local school, public school. And it was—you know, it was a great area. At that time, it used to be ethnically very Jewish, in terms of the weekend was a great shopping area. It was wonderful. The pickle place, and the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: They would be selling chestnuts and—you know, it was real old-time New York. Sweet potatoes and things on the street.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So Jim was born in the end of '63, is that right?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah. Sylvia was pregnant with him December. It was soon after the Kennedy assassination, actually. It was like, yeah, '63. And then our youngest son Andrew was born in '71, I guess.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, that's a big gap.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah. It was.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, that's the same in my family, my daughter's about eight years older than my son. [Laughs.] Just the way things happened.

And you taught at Hunter briefly, I think in '64. But you also began teaching at SVA, which lasted for quite a while, is that right?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, it did. What happened was I—I'm trying to think which came first. I got a job—oh, I know, I got a job teaching something like a drawing course, or I'm not sure what it was at SVA, but they could only give me one class or something. Anyway, it was when I stopped working at MoMA, I started getting these little bits of teaching jobs. So I had this one at Hunter, but it wasn't enough.

Then I—Don Nice, I think, was the department head at SVA. And Don was at Yale, too, when we were—we knew him. He hired me to teach at SVA, and SVA then later, I think at the half-year point, Hunter wasn't sure whether they had any class for me or not, so I said, "Forget it, it's alright. I can teach at SVA." And there wasn't a big difference in money or anything. So I started teaching more classes at SVA at that point.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Do you have a—did you develop over the years a particular way of approaching your teaching, or a goal that you wanted to—you know, the students to walk away with, or—

ROBERT MANGOLD: No, I don't know that I was such a great teacher. I mean, I sometimes think I probably wasn't, that I did it to earn a living in a way. Because I needed to supplement, we certainly weren't making any money from painting at that point. But I wanted the student to feel—the young artists, I wanted them to feel like they could show me anything, that they could do anything, and that there was a kind of freedom to—and I would look at it. And we would talk about it. But I didn't have any goals, in terms of how I was going to teach. I mean, there were moments when they wanted me to teach a Yale color course or something, you know. And so, I did try to do a color course at one point, based loosely on the color course at Yale.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What if we could—I'm trying to circle back here a little bit to your way of thinking. The way of approaching, of thinking about future work, or assessing somebody else's work. And again, I'm fishing here a little bit. [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It's okay.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But is there at all a sense in the way you work of first, you know, kind of determining the boundaries of a problem, and then kind of working your way toward the center of it? Is that—I'm just so struck by the—frequently it's the edges of your work that start the mental conversation somehow.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah, I'm not sure what the question is there, but—what you're asking me—but I—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How you approach a problem, I guess.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, I—as I said in the beginning, I think that the work begets work, you know? I usually find openings in the work that I want to explore, that open to new possibilities. And sometimes, they're a little contradictory. So I've—you know, I've done—there was a period where my work was much more conceptual. In

the late '60s, I think it would be, I started doing things that were—I started following ideas out in a kind of very conceptual way, and then I realized at a certain point that this wasn't working for me. That I really wanted to go back to a kind of idea of works that were—it was kind of when I left panels and went back to using stretched canvas, I decided that I wanted to go back to making paintings.

But there's always an area of dissatisfaction with what I'm doing. And a feeling of great satisfaction. So I'm always in a kind of—between two walls trying to work my way on, forward. [. . . I can only decide, make decisions, by doing them. –RM] I can only pursue the conceptual direction in the work—which developed with the circle parts, started with the circle parts, and different ways of dividing the half circle into sections, and so on. I can take that to somewhere else, and somewhere else, and one—I've just come across this because it came up.

I think it was 1966, I did a—I decided that I was going to make—there was the idea of multiples were very prevalent. There was, like—a lot of people were doing sculpture, and they were doing sculpture that was prefab in one way or another. And that they could make—they could do identical sculptures, maybe seven of them, or four of them, or whatever they wanted. And they were called multiples. And I thought about this, and I thought, "Well, I'm doing one-color paintings, and they're on hard board, Masonite, and I'm going to, for this holiday season (it was 1966) I'm going to make a whole series of identical paintings, and give them to my friends as a gift."

So, I made these quarter circle paintings that were sprayed, and absolutely the same from work to work. And I liked the idea, then I gave them out to individuals who were—from people like Sol to Mel Bochner and other people. That was a way of me extending the idea of what a work could be. Then I had ideas of—that, "Okay, so I could make a painting over and over again." And they would be identical. Then that had a certain implication. And then I decided that, "What if I make a work over and over again, one inch larger than the one before it?" So that I have 12 works that were—and their only separation is that if you put one next to another, you'll see that it's slightly bigger. And it worked against the idea of one—the major work and the study, or the sketch.

So I did these, I went through some of these ideas, and then I realized that I had pages and pages of possibilities, and I decided that I wanted to go back to making individual paintings that were not about exploring this area that, actually, I think of as quite interesting, now that I think back on it. But I wanted to go back to making separate works that began and ended with themselves. Not really, because they were done in series and groups. But that they were not part of a chain the way conceptual art can be.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, right. You used the term series and groups in somewhat different senses.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, well, a series—yeah, I probably should be more careful. When I start on an idea, and I see that there are several possibilities, I can take this. I know that there's—I have a sense that there will probably be a group of works that will come out of this. And it's not a series in a tight way that I'm going to explore all the possibilities of a certain idea. But I know that there are some variations that are worth pursuing, that I want to see completed, so I'll do that much, but I'm not going to, as other people did, make all the variations of a particular idea. So it was a kind of separation from that conceptual idea, and back to the idea of independent work, that exists by itself in groups, you know, that there's always a group of works that—or you hope that there will be. I mean, otherwise it's a lonely studio.

[They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is so interesting, because again, you seem to be occupying a little bit of a middle, or an in-between place, between the kind of Abstract Expressionist grand gesture kind of thing, and Conceptual art's emphasis on doing things in series, and you know, with prerecorded plans, as it were. And you're somewhere in the middle there, you're insisting on the autonomy of the individual painting, but you're also thinking about it in a systematic way. You were in a show called *Systemic Painting*, I think that—

ROBERT MANGOLD: That's right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —Lawrence Alloway organized?

ROBERT MANGOLD: That's right, that was the—of course the *Primary Structure* show, which happened at the Jewish Museum.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Kynaston organized that, right?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah. And actually he came and looked at my work, I'm thinking about it. Because I was doing things that could have gone into the show, but didn't. I was considered maybe too much—it was too much of flat painting idea. And there was a lot of people who were doing painting. And so, this was—the answer, where the *Primary Structure* show was all sculpture, became all sculpture, I think initially it had a little broader idea,

and then *Systemic Painting* was a name given. I don't know whether Lawrence came up with that, he may have. And then, the work was the painting side of this new work. So on one side you had the—you had new work by Judd and so on, and Sol. And then the other side, you had everything, you know, everything else, that was painting, more painting than—but the idea of *Systemic Painting*, I never totally understood what that was. I guess that he had used a system for making it, but—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There were so many labels [laughs] bandied around at that time for—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Labels, yeah. People were really into labeling. Because—well, unlike today, there was a kind of idea—well, maybe it's today, too. But there was a kind of idea that everyone was waiting for the next thing, you know? Abstract Expressionism, Pop art. They were waiting for the next title to demand attention. And Conceptual art. So it was—it became—the idea of putting a label on it seemed important, I guess, in those years. I don't know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well you've ended up getting grouped [laughs] with Minimalists, but—which I think may be something you don't feel entirely comfortable about, or you've come to accept it, or—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, it's complicated, because Minimalism was primarily a sculptural, a sculpture movement. And thought of that way. So there were kind of conflicts of this certain kind. I always felt a little sidetracked by the idea that, you know, I wasn't doing sculpture, and that what I was doing was this flat painting idea of form, and they were very minimal in—but you know, I don't know. I don't know where we're going. But I—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] I was just curious about your attitude toward that label at this point. I mean, I—

ROBERT MANGOLD: No, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's kind of a historical thing now, I guess.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, I've always thought, "Well, I don't mind it, when people say I'm a Minimal artist, because it connects me with a certain time and space." You know, so that's helpful. But you know, if they're putting all the people I think of, in terms of Minimal in one group, that's okay.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] I wanted to ask a little bit more about this notion of the atmospheric. I was at—and, you know, I'm not sure that I really completely—that I understand it. I just turned to this page, by the way, as a possible example of this series thinking.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right, right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Exactly, that's exactly what I was talking about, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Let's see, where's—

ROBERT MANGOLD: And then that, that was what came after it, was the idea of like, a circle within a square, and so on. It was a kind of a single idea, which could have variations. But was not—there was something very important about the Conceptual thing of making—I wanted to see—I wanted to see what would happen if you made a work, and it was the same as making the same work over and over again. If you made a same work, and changed the size slightly from work to work. And then you gave these works out to different people, and they hung at different spaces. And that people would see those works, and think, "Oh, that's such and such."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: And no it's not. It's a little bigger, it's a little smaller. But it became a kind of—it was something I wanted to see what would happen if you made the same work. If making the same work is possible, then if you made it in different sizes, then it defeated this idea of the major work and the study—which was very—which was in my mind at that time, too.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, isn't that also a bit of a general trademark of your generation, that that hierarchical European sense of, you know, you make studies, you make a maquette, and then, you know it works its way up the ladder to your major medium.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And that's just—you know, you all seem to have found ways around that.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right. Well, I think it was something that I was certainly questioning at that point. And I

realized that I could get lost in it, in doing this, in doing a work in 20 sizes, or something, you know? There could be—it could become almost self-defeating. And I really wanted to reverse myself, in a way.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I was wondering—I'm very curious about these early works that had this kind of gradation. Were you—how were they painted? Are they sprayed?

ROBERT MANGOLD: They're sprayed oil. I started using a spray gun. I mean one thing that I was trying, one thing that I was trying to do, in separating myself from Abstract Expressionism, was I was trying to get away from the idea of the touch, of the sense of the hand in the work. The signature brushstroke, the signature.

One of the things that I started then was using a spray gun and oil paint, and then, you know, the whole process was I would spray, I would spray it. And I wanted there to be, particularly in some of the pieces, I wanted there to be a base. I wanted there to be a—it all comes from looking between buildings, you know? The idea of how light changes, in terms of—in fact, I was in a show called *Light Art* one time.

[They laugh.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: That light, that light—there's a transition in the light, and with a spray gun, it's very easy to have that happen. But I didn't want to have stripes. I just wanted there to be a sense of, that the surface is alive, and that it's not really a single color, that it's a transition, and that this made you see it differently. So, it's an edge, a cutout edge, almost. And then a transition on the surface.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It strikes me that there's an odd parallel here with things that were going on, on the West Coast at that time, with artists using spray technique that derived from car culture and so on. This seems 100 miles away from that, but—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, it was—I think I was involved—and I think again, this came out of the influence of Pop art, that there was a sense—I was, like, happy not—like I would go and get—outside of the oil paint that I used, you know, I liked the idea of using a spray gun, and that the materials were more industrial, in a sense, that I was spraying on something that wasn't a stretch canvas. And that plywood and Masonite and certain things could be used as a base for painting. And it lead into the idea of going through [to –JM] a roller as a way of applying the paint. Because it was a way of laying paint down as though you were painting your wall, and not being careful in a way, that if it were an actual—if it were coming from your hand.

I liked the idea of this separation between me—my hand—and the mark. Spraying was one way of doing it, and then I very soon stopped spraying, because I wanted to use acrylic paint, and acrylic paint doesn't spray very well. It clogs up, and it's much more of a problem than oil paint. And I also wanted to get away from oil paint, because I don't like waiting for things to dry. I like the idea of being able to move more quickly on a painting than that. So, I wanted to—I decided that I would use rollers. And I—you know, I actually—I've been using rollers for the most part ever since. There's been a few groups of work that haven't, but there's still roller trays always in my studio.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You also became known for using colors that were pretty far from the kind of wonderful artist colors that you—color—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, people don't know what to call my color, I don't know what to call—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] I'm struggling here.

ROBERT MANGOLD: No, I don't know what to call it either. I didn't want to be stuck in primary colors. I didn't want to be stuck in red, blue, green, yellow, black and white, or whatever it is. You know? I wanted to be able to have color be expressive and poetic. The dilemma, of course, is that you don't want it to become taste. You don't want it to become tasteful. So there's this kind of battle. You know, I'm used to always fighting these battles in myself about what I'm doing. And I think there's always been a little bit of that, that I wanted to work to have a kind of—I liked the idea—I think I've said this quite a few times, but not in this context: I liked industrial color. I liked the color that people put on walls, and that people buy for their drapery, and people—

I remember we were living down on the Lower East Side, and they had these new towels hanging in the—there were a lot of fabric stores over there, in the windows. And I saw, you know, there was an orange and a blue, and something else, and I thought, "Yeah, that's the kind of, that's the kind of color that I'm interested in." And I'm interested in the color that my staple gun has—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: —that file cabinets have, and manila envelopes, and you know, I like the idea that color identifies with things. Like, I'll be doing a great painting, and I'll think, "I want this more like wet cement, or I

want this like"—I think about references, but—and so I plunge into that idea of color that is all around us, all the time. In fact one of the first critical reviews I got was that my paintings were the pastel, something about decorator colors, or something, I don't remember what. But I thought, "Yeah, that's it! That's more like it." I mean, I don't aim for pastel, but I definitely aim for a kind of implication of color in the world. Not color from a color book. Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So the *Walls and Areas* are on Masonite, is that right?

ROBERT MANGOLD: *Walls and Areas* are all on Masonite and plywood.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How is it—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, plywood would be behind the Masonite.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Behind it. So they're rigid with plywood behind Masonite.

ROBERT MANGOLD: The plywood behind Masonite, and then maybe some support wood behind that. Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It must be fairly heavy.

ROBERT MANGOLD: They are very heavy, and many of them got seriously damaged [laughs] from falling off of walls, and things.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, goodness.

ROBERT MANGOLD: It's—yeah. I knew this was not a practical way of making paintings.

[They laugh.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: There's a reason that the hollowness of a canvas is very appealing after a while.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] And the fact that you could actually lift it off the wall, huh?

ROBERT MANGOLD: That I could actually take it off the wall, and put it back up on the wall.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: At what point did you move back into canvas?

ROBERT MANGOLD: I would say '71. Maybe '70 was a little bit of both. But by '71, '72, I was definitely making stretchers, and stretching. I would make the *Square Within a Circle* kind of group of paintings. And similar ideas like that, were all stretched canvas. And then I—you know, I haven't made a painting on Masonite—well, I shouldn't say that. But I've made studies. I've made models that were—sometimes I do works—you know, I do border on—I use—obviously from the things on my wall now, I border on relief. Relief plays a real role in the work. And the edge—I've always been very determined that edges are just edges, and they're not—I never paint around the edge [. . . –JM]. That an edge is an edge, and you're supposed to look at the painting from in front, not a three-quarter view. That it's okay to see how thick the stretcher is, and so on. But that it's an edge, what you're looking at, that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So the function of the stretcher is basically just to pull it off the wall some?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right. That the canvas can't exist by itself without the—I—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But you're also—in this green one there's a relief element coming forward.

ROBERT MANGOLD: It's the only time I've done that since *Window Wall* or something. These paintings actually that I'm working on now are very similar to some of the early paintings, which were kind of made out of Masonite. But these are canvas.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: For the listener's benefit, just remark that all of them, except for this one on the right, have a void, an opening. But it's more or less square in these, versus the more window-like—

ROBERT MANGOLD: They're all dealing with squares, double squares, but most of them are cutaway square holes in different ways. And there's one cutaway hole, and one actually where the panel comes forward a little bit. So that it becomes more sculptural, or a relief. I'm becoming more of a relief artist, as I turn 80.

[They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Every time someone says that—I took a class with Bill Rubin once when I was at the Institute, and he would just stand there and say, "Ball relief." [Laughs.] I can never hear that word without

thinking of it.

So back to chronology briefly. In the summer of '66, you and Sylvia had a chance to spend the summer at Al Held's place, I guess in Boiceville, that's what I read. I have no idea where that is, but.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, I don't know what year it was, but you probably got it from someplace that's correct. [Laughs.] Al Held had bought this farm in Boiceville, and he was going to Europe for some reason that summer. And he was looking for people to live there in exchange for painting the barns, or some of the barns. I'm afraid we didn't paint as much as he hoped. So Sylvia and I were there, and an artist, Paul Brown, and his wife at that time, Susan Shatter. I think they were married.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Paul Brown's married to Debbie Wise. Is that right?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right, right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, okay.

ROBERT MANGOLD: So Paul was up there, and we were all—Paul was constantly listening to Louis Armstrong, I remember that. I wonder if he still does. But we were all supposed to be painting the—I remember painting a silo, which is a very difficult job. You have to move the ladder a lot.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: But we tried to get a decent amount of painting done. But I think I was also maybe teaching one day a week at SVA, in the summer school. I can't remember.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You said that being there, and looking out over the hills, you became aware of, you know, the atmosphere and form in that environment. I mean, I was wondering if you could—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right. I was actually very nervous about—we had a young son, and we were trying to figure out how we were going to manage this in the city, with—private schools were very expensive, and public schools were kind of a mess where we lived. And so—anyway, we were trying to figure out the future. Let's see, what did you—oh, I know.

We were in the country, and I always had the idea that the country was anti-art. Maybe because I grew up as a kind of farmer, that the demands of—that the city was where you did paintings, that you don't do paintings in the country. And I always had—I had much more of a fear of that than Sylvia, who was all for leaving the city. [Laughs.] She was ready, I was much more nervous about it. And that summer we spent at Al Held's was a test case, allowed me to work, and I realized quite naively, I guess, that I should have known that you don't—in a way, where you live affects what you do, but also in a way, it doesn't. And that you could be living in Germany for a number of years, or you could be living in Italy, and while it would affect your work, it would also not dominate your work.

So, when you're living in the country, you see certain things, you see certain kinds of color and certain kinds of things. But I've never felt able to go out and see nature color, and then translate it into a painting. It's never interested me. But I always think of my color as culture color. That it comes out of culture in the sense that it's manmade color. Whether it's from somebody else's paintings, or industrial, or the color of school buses, or whatever, that's where my color comes from. It doesn't come from—there are a lot of times of year when there are certain kinds of yellow flowers all over in the country. But I never know how to deal with that, to this day.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, it's interesting that in a sense, it kind of let you know that you didn't need the city.

ROBERT MANGOLD: That I didn't need the city, or that I could be anywhere. That you carry—at a certain point. Now I think there's a time when you're maybe just starting out in the art world when it's very helpful to be surrounded by your peers, and be able to go back and forth to studios, and see what they're doing, and talk about it. And then there are times when you no longer need to do that, that somehow, there is your—what can I say? You no longer—you can work out of yourself in a way that you couldn't have when you were a certain age. That you can somehow—that the elements are all there, and you can, like, just go with them. And it takes—you have to learn that, and you have to begin to get adjusted to that idea.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And yet, it seems to have opened something up for you. I mean, you went from the fragments you talked about, you know, that city thing of seeing things, you know, in sort of cropped [laughs]—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right, right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —to work that kind of implies a larger view.

ROBERT MANGOLD: That's true. I think that's probably fair and true. Yeah. I think that the kind of vision that you see in the country is very different, and it does have its effect. It does. I'm sure that living in very specific places that have very specific—if you lived, you know, near the ocean constantly, I'm sure that would affect something in the work. If you lived in Africa, or if you lived someplace where the imagery is very different than what you're used to, it has to affect you somehow.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I'm wondering if this new awareness has anything to do with the *Curved Area* series, and the move into incorporating drawing into the paintings. Nancy Princenthal, I think her essay in the Phaidon book is quite good.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, she was given the hardest job, because she had to kind of deal specifically with everything. She kind of had to carry—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, I like Nancy a lot.

ROBERT MANGOLD: She had to, like, put all the pieces together. Like everyone else was given more of a chance to talk about certain things, a certain area, or—to really experience doing that book was very good. Unfortunately, I sometimes think it's the reason that a museum didn't do the show afterwards, that the fact that the book had already been done. Like it's no secret that I am very annoyed and angry at the New York museums for not doing a retrospective show of mine. I felt that the work deserved that kind of attention. But I often think that because—I'm not sure whether the book happened because the show wasn't going to happen, or whether the show never happened because the book already existed. Because—but I'm—the book was a wonderful job. The publisher at Phaidon was really very involved in—wanted to do the best book possible, and it was a good experience.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, you were lucky. [Laughs.] Phaidon doesn't do things like that really anymore. They've gone through quite a lot of transition, and—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, I think he's—I think he's stopped—I think he may have sold it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Somebody else—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, it's owned by what's his name, Leon Black, and somebody else. And I mean—

ROBERT MANGOLD: But we spent a long time working on this, thinking about it, and talking about it. And we got, you know, really good text, and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Richard Schiff and Robert are really first-rate, for sure. So, the—speaking of Nancy, so the end of the '60s, the *WBX* series.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Let's take a minute while I chew my—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] Yes, go right ahead.

ROBERT MANGOLD: I have a little snack here.

[Audio break.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: You wanted to bring up about Nancy, or—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I wanted to transition a bit into the, you know, the use of drawing in the paintings. And she makes the remark, which I thought was a really interesting one, that the *WBX* series begins to articulate a field that's defined by straight and curved edges. And so, my question is, is you know, is this a shift of focus for you, from—she calls it a change from configuration to condition. You know, the condition of the field. It's kind of fancy, but it struck me as an interesting remark. And I was wondering how your thinking was beginning to change at the end of the '60s, as you—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, up until that point, and I had done a couple works where I used a pencil line to demark the vertical, but I had, all of the lines tended to be spaces between the panels, tended to be—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Then, with the next works that started, I began to use the pencil, the drawn line, as a balance to the exterior shape. In other words, the combination was the shape or form, and then the drawn line within that form. The works, I think, and I'm trying to remember—the works I think stopped being sections, a

painting in sections, and became an area, a wall-like area, that then the line related to in different ways. It touched in different ways, and so a series of works might have a curved line that touches, goes all the way from top to bottom, and touches all four sides, or it could be—you know, there could be any number of possibilities. But that it was these two elements, balancing with the color. So there was the, you know—but it was no longer a dividing. It was no longer—the line became the subject, in a way.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, okay.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Because the shape was the field for the line, and the line was the element that—I mean, the idea of making a pencil line eight feet—you know, in an eight feet ellipse, or circle, or whatever it might be. Or six feet, or whatever—extends the idea of what a line can do. And this was very, you know—I was very interested in seeing well, you know, if I make this just a line, will it be able to—I wanted everything to be on the same competitive level. So that the color and the shape and the line would be equal, in a way. And could the line hold up on such a big task? It seemed like the weaker of the elements, color, is what it is, and shape is what it is. But the drawn line is something that's—I don't know. I risk saying that it's the subject of the painting, you know, the line becomes the subject of the painting, because the—but I don't know if it is. I'm saying that I'm risking—

[They laugh.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: I'm risking here. But it's, you know, still part of the work today, and it has been consistent in the work for a long time, since the early '70s.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. One aspect of it is that it interestingly breaks down that traditional hierarchy of the drawing, and the painting, and the—

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ROBERT MANGOLD: Right, right. And, you know, because one could just as easily call many of my paintings drawings, in the sense that while it may be one single color, and within a shape, the line is what we walk away with, in the end. We walk away—well, I would like to think that none of the elements, you can't separate them, you can't separate the color from the line, and you can't separate the—that they're locked in a kind of deadly embrace of some kind.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] Deadly embrace. Well, again, you were—you seem to be trying to fuse things that people would conventionally consider to be, you know, in separate realms.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right. I think that's true. I think that—you know, I—at a certain point, I broke the ideas down into these certain elements, and the elements worked together and also work in tension with each other.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, it seems almost like a dialectic process, you know, that the two things are—there's this tension between them that gets resolved in the work.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Are there failures?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Works that are failures?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah. But I usually try to winnow them out and, you know, I do a lot of little studies, and line drawings, and then I do a drawing, sketchbook-size, and maybe adding color. So I do a lot of steps along the way. And then I do a bigger work on paper with—which is the kind of final step before I order the stretcher made. So most of the time, I make those decisions in the drawing point of the work. When it actually comes to doing them, I may change the idea of what color I'm going to paint it, or darker—you know, I may decide that it needs to be lighter, and not as dark, because I don't want the form to be too strong, or something, you know? But I don't actually do many works that I destroy. I mean, I kind of destroy them along the way.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: They never get to the—I mean, there are some that I have, but generally, I try to sort them out before I get to that point. It always seemed very wasteful, because it's very expensive to make a stretcher, so by the time I get to making it, or having it made now, I'm pretty sure, I'm pretty certain of what I want to do.

Sometimes—is a painting ever a disappointment? That's a different question. I don't know, I think that I could say that maybe all paintings are a disappointment, that they're—you're always hoping for something more than what you end up with. That there's always a little bit of disappointment, and I don't know whether all people who

create stuff feel that way or not. But I certainly always feel like, "Oh, I"—that "I'm happy I made this work, and I'm, I think the work is really good. But I thought it would be better. In my head, I thought it was going to even be better." I don't even know if it's true, but I think that there is a kind of—I wonder if when people finish a book, doing a book, if they've written a book, and they say—everyone's congratulating them, if there isn't a side of them that says, "Well, it is, it is great. But I hoped it would be even better."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] I'm quite sure.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah. There's a—you know, anyway. Do you work with assistants at all?

ROBERT MANGOLD: About two years ago, I started having somebody come once a week. He's a young man who's an artist, and he's—like the—I can't even move that blue painting. Like it's gotten to the point now that at my age and infirmities, that I need help in doing certain kinds of moving. But other than that, like, I'm not—maybe I'm not working quite as large as what I did. But I've always liked to—I don't like people around my studio when I'm working, and I don't like to have to—they're a distraction, and they cause me to—they cause my thoughts to get sidetracked. Just having an audience, I don't, can't paint with an audience.

So, I have somebody who comes in once a week. But for all the period up till five years ago, or four years ago, or maybe three—I don't even know how long it's been—but I've done it all by myself. I still do all—I don't do the stretching, he does the stretching now. But I do the priming, and the painting, and the drawing, and everything. It's helpful to have someone do the more muscular [laughs] things when you get older.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, we're sitting just beneath a really gorgeous drawing that's dedicated for Sylvia. And I had meant to—I wanted to ask you, there do seem to be, especially in the early '70s, a number of intersections between your work and Sylvia Plimack Mangold's work. And then, I noticed in the house, one of the trompe l'oeil paintings of floors, with the ruler in it, is hanging on the wall.

And so she's making paintings at that time. I realize her work now is in a different direction. But she's making works at that time that seem to me to be dealing with scale, perception, viewer's interaction with paintings, from an entirely different direction from yours. But there seem to be shared concerns. Is that—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, I think there has to be. And you know, we've existed for so long being a part of each other's studio, in the sense that we see everything that the other person does. And it's—yeah, I am surprised, actually, that as time has gone by, our work seems closer than it might have seemed at one point. You know, that there's a lot of things we agree on about art, and there's a lot of things that we don't. But there's things that—I think there's a kind of connection in the work that—well, it's there. You know? What she does with her elements, is not—there is definite connection. There is. I don't, wouldn't attempt to try to—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: —or I'll—yeah. I'll say something I regret or something.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] And just in 1974, you and she spent the summer in Italy, I think. And—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yes, that's probably—that's about right. Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I was really fascinated to read about this. You were responding to Trecento painting, Giotto's fresco cycle at Assisi, Piero della Francesca, and so on. But then it bumps up against the beginnings of panel painting in your—except early panel painting, like Cimabue in Siena, where you just—that's when it loses you. That's when you cease to be interested in it. What were you seeing in this? What did they used to call them in the early 20th century? They called them Italian Primitives, I think.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, I found they—actually, I found the Duccio and the panel painting that existed remarkable, actually. It made me—I mean, you know, what you notice at different times is such a different, such an amazing thing. When I was going to school at Yale, they had wonderful early Italian painting in their collection. And I wasn't particularly drawn to it. But at that point, and when I was in Italy, it was a remarkable opening of—I mean, the frescoes are wonderful, and—but even the, you know, the panel paintings are extraordinary, with—yeah, I—the Sienese was a great period, and I got a lot from looking at it, and being there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Many of those paintings have unusual shapes. But—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right. Well, they were very involved in shape, yeah. And, you know, that was one of the things that was—the shape was not a given. The shape was changeable from work to work. And the altar pieces, you know, were—the artist was able to find his own way of redoing the same subject over and over again, with—in a way that's—I don't know, I've lost myself.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] It's a remarkable period in the—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, it's great. And we got a lot out of being there. It was a really great time, we had two young boys there then. And our youngest son was born in, what did I say, '71? I think that's correct. Sometimes I'm not sure whether it's '70 or '71, but I think it was '71. And—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did they enjoy it?

ROBERT MANGOLD: They did. The youngest one kept thinking of these spider ceilings, these spider ceilings, and —

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, yeah. [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: But it was a great time. It was wonderful for Sylvia and I to see what we—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Have you gone back?

ROBERT MANGOLD: We were, we went a couple times to Florence, I think. Now I'm trying to remember when we did this without the kids. I think one time I went by myself, and one time—anyway, Florence is so amazing. And then one time I went with my son, my youngest son, to Venice, which I had never done, and Sylvia has never been there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's magic.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] Okay. So, let me see where we are. We're 15 minutes or so into a third hour, and I thought that perhaps we could use a little bit of this final time to—you had this show at Mnuchin Gallery, and let's see when this was. Oh!

ROBERT MANGOLD: Last year.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This last year.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Last spring.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Last year, yeah. This year, 2017. Yeah.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Early last spring.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And it's just a kind of nicely done, compact survey of the works from 1965 until 2003. And did—what was your experience seeing this work in series? And in a fairly compact space?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, you know, this—you mean the works at the Mnuchin show?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Or, I mean, just having the opportunity to see this, you know, kind of compact survey.

ROBERT MANGOLD: No, I thought it looked—I thought it was wonderful, because most of the works had a single wall to themselves. You know, the space is kind of grand in a non-museum way. And the show was actually—I found out about it. It was going to happen with or without my help. I mean, they had borrowed quite a few works, and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Whose initiative?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Mnuchin, or—yeah. I remember Douglas Baxter at Pace said to me, "Well, you're going to hear about this sooner or later"—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: —"they're going to do a show, and they would like to borrow a few works to add to it. And it's up to you to decide whether you want to put your name to it and be part of it, or not." So I—we did lend—that painting we lent, actually.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: *Pink Area*.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: 1965.

ROBERT MANGOLD: That's one of the few works from that show that's still free in our collection. So I did. Because I thought, "Well, if it's going to be done, it might as well be done better than worse." And aside from the fact that his son had just been tagged onto the Trump administration.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, God. I was afraid you were going to say that. [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: That was a bit of a problem, but no. It was great seeing the works, because these—I don't get a chance to look at my older work that often. And, I like the fact that the works exist, coexist. You know, that works from 50 years ago can coexist with works made 10 years ago, and 20 years ago. And there—there's a kind of give-and-take in relation to them. So, you know, I enjoyed seeing the show a lot.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This work, 1966, *1/3 Gray-Green Curved Area*, seems like an example of the institutional color that we were talking about.

ROBERT MANGOLD: It was. It's a gray-green that I kind of like a lot, that I use. And in this—you know, I don't—I can't remember whether this painting actually has a gradation on it. I don't think it does. I think it's—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Doesn't look like it.

ROBERT MANGOLD: I think it's all flat.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Hard to tell on reproductions sometimes.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, the *Pink Area* does, but this doesn't, '66. And then these were made, and these were —

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So there's an example, half-X series, half-W series, and half-B series, all from 1968, half-circles. Yeah. With the horizontal element at the top.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, they—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Were these shown together in the show, as a unit?

ROBERT MANGOLD: No. But there was a wall of models. In other words, I made a wall of models that were all Masonite. But they weren't one piece. I just showed them that way so that you could see the connections between the works. But—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: These are all small works, right?

ROBERT MANGOLD: —these are not supposed to have this heavy black line around it. I don't know whether that's—I think that was a framing problem that they couldn't be taken out of or something.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh. So these are supposed to just exist with the color—

ROBERT MANGOLD: —with the color ending.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —making the edge.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. So these are works on Masonite. But they're relatively small, two feet across.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, okay. So, 1973, this is a circle painting with a square inscribed in white pencil.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, that's—I didn't do too many white pencil ones. But if I don't, if I only use black pencil, it limits the kind of color I can use as a primary color. Because you can't see it if it's too dark a color or something. So you can't see it equally. So, this was—because it was kind of a dark purple or—I guess that's what it is.

[They laugh.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: I can't remember. I used the white line. But there were a few I did that way. They're all done, they're all kind of done with, what do you call it? A colored pencil. And then they're—what I would do is roll —for several years, I used to use a matte varnish, I think, that I put over it. So that the line is kind of locked into the surface. Now today, when I'm still doing it, I always put the line underneath at least one coat of paint, so there's a kind of—it becomes part of the work. It isn't on top of the work, sort of.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Are the circles, when they're done, are they done freehand, or—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, in this case, it's a stretcher that's made. So it's—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I was looking for an example of one of those oblique ellipses.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right. They're done freehand. If it's—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: They are done freehand.

ROBERT MANGOLD: If there is a—yeah, there's not one there. I would—when I did the ellipses within a frame, I had a certain system that I wanted the curved line to be continuous, and to hit certain points, so that it would be at the middle of the panel, and the edge of the panel. Anyway, it was set up so that each work would have the same possibilities. I don't know if there's a—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Let's see, I'm trying to—

ROBERT MANGOLD: No, I guess not.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I brought a couple of others with me.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, here, there's these—this kind of—in this case, it was, like—yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Now, there's—there are a number of the pieces that—this is a void in the piece, right?

ROBERT MANGOLD: This is a void, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is *Four Color Frame Painting #5*, 1984. Also in this, I guess shown in this show was a model for a color frame painting. And it's four painted elements, and then an elliptic—is that an ellipse? It's not exactly an ellipse, is it?

ROBERT MANGOLD: It's not an—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: It's a hand-drawn, continuous curve.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There you go.

ROBERT MANGOLD: And you know, the—it's balanced to hit the corners, and, you know, it's supposed to do a certain thing. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The colors are really interesting. I mean it's like jazzy office furniture or something.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, some—that's true. I've only done multiple-color paintings in a few series. + and *X*. in fact there was a show in England of works that were + and *X*'s, and *Frames*, and they were all multiple-color. But I haven't done that many multiple-color paintings. They've tended to be one color or, for the most part—yeah, that's another one.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, so this is an actual full-scale painting. *Four Color Frame Painting # 13*, 1985. But the color choices here seem more, I don't know, tasty or something. [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right, not as bright as the other ones.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, they also, they're not always correct in the photo. But what happens in these frame paintings is that you lose the sense of the wall, and the opening, you know? I mean, it's hard to read it, which—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Right, because they're silhouetting the object against the white page, and you don't get any sense of the wall.

ROBERT MANGOLD: You don't have it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah.

ROBERT MANGOLD: There's no—I mean, sometimes they fake shadows, or something, to try to give—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] I know that's to drop shadows. But there's also something marvelous, perceptually, going on here. Because you become aware pretty quickly that you're mentally filling in the—you know, connecting all of this, and imagining this as a single form.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Well, the idea that a single drawn line can hold four rectangles together. And in other words, they—it, without the line, the four rectangles—well they would still exist in a structure, but the line kind of—you know, I love—I don't know, I love the idea, the image of a—there's a wonderful image of a cowboy doing a lasso thing, where he gets the lasso, and it gets bigger, and bigger, and bigger, and then he jumps through it. You know, it was actually done, I think, in *Oklahoma!*, but it was a traditional thing that you would—I loved the idea of the ellipse becoming so big that you can go through it. So, it becomes like the plane of the canvas, you know? It becomes a—there's something, as you were saying, magical. There's something magical about the idea of the line, and what it can do.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's a marvelous analogy, the lasso.

ROBERT MANGOLD: I love—I often think of that. I often think of that, that image of when you see it onstage, or something, of someone getting it bigger, and bigger, and bigger, and then he—jumping through it is like breaking the plane of something. That's like a lot of—certainly is involved in my work a lot.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. But there's—and there is a piece from the '90s here, a *Plane/Figure Series*, a double panel. This is quite large. And with sort of kissing ellipses or something. To me, it's just so—I love this moment here, where it kind of slips into the space. [Laughs.] Where they're violating each other's space, so to say.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right. And they kind of—between the perimeter of the work, and the drawn ellipse, they're kind of balanced, in a kind of leaned, as though they're being held there by some, you know, strange—even though if you had two physical things that way, it wouldn't—you know, it would fall. But the line thing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, it's so interesting, you know, the colors are butting, and they're doing their number. But they're being somehow overshadowed by these little thin lines. [Laughs.] So that they become the subject. And it's like the colors—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, that's—I guess that's what I was trying to say before, that the drawn line in a way becomes the subject for the setup. The form is the setup. And then, the line drawing is the interior, alive thing that makes it all as though you were—if you snip that line, it would all, like, fall apart, you know? Like it's the element that holds everything together.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's really fun. [Laughs.] It's like watching a couple of acrobats.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Oh, that's true.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

ROBERT MANGOLD: I like that painting a lot, actually.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, well, here's another one that's doing something a little bit different. This one sort of illustrates your problem with the—

ROBERT MANGOLD: —dark.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —black line against the dark ground.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But again, you're letting the viewer fill this in, because you know, we can see enough of it to know where the rest of it must be.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right. And if you're there actually, you can see it. But it's—yeah, that—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is a little evanescent [laughs] up here. I don't know what it's like in reality, probably it's more visible. But again, interesting choices of color. I don't know what I would call this exactly. I mean, it's gray, I suppose.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, I don't know. Actually, yeah, I'm not sure if that has any brown in it or not. I can't remember what it's like in reality, although—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And then there are these marvelous column things, figures, from the, from—these are from 2003. These are fairly tall. Like seven-and-a-half feet or something?

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, they're made of—you know, it's a kind of grid of four squares going up, I think. But they're not—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, you can just make it out.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There's—this one's crossing the line right there in the center.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Right. I think they should be four squares it makes. And—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, this one actually has some intermediate little—really hard to make out. You know, I have another one here that I think would be clearer. This one, you can see the grid underneath it, a little bit more clearly. I don't know if that's a similar work.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But the grid is really obvious there.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, you can't really see it here. In fact, there's a vertical line in these. You know, I don't even remember what—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, you can see the vertical here in this one.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Too, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Yeah. What's so remarkable about—there's something very musical about these, and you know, the idea of a sine wave, or you know, or some kind of a—

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah, there's—they're rhythmic, huh?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

ROBERT MANGOLD: There's a kind of—yeah, they could definitely be looked at in that way. And thought of in that way. But it has to do with, again, there were all these points, you know? And so it has to do with what's hitting what, and the relationship of the three become a kind of dance of their own. You know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is such a good example of a sort of—taking a scheme that's, in its own terms, entirely rational and regular, and then it generates this remarkable [laughs] surprise. And there's an aspect of that in Sol LeWitt's work, too, where you just—if you do something, you know, repetitively and with certain parameters, the results are, like, unpredictable and kind of marvelous.

ROBERT MANGOLD: What is that you have? This is the catalogue of—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is—I don't know what it is. I took it out of the—this is Pace.

ROBERT MANGOLD: So this is—yeah, this was *a Vol* [Column/Structure Series –JM]. Yeah, here you can see the grid. And it's a very simple idea of just, like, connecting in four parts, and connecting in two parts. Actually, this is the other half of this. So it's almost like a two-part thing. Yeah, looking at these, you know, I have to figure out—what happens is, I have to figure out the logic, because all the works have a kind of logic, but I have to refigure them out when I look at them, because they're—you know, the logic is buried in what you see. And then you have to think, like, "Oh, yeah, now I remember what this was about. I was doing this."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: It's what happens when you do so many works over such a period of time. Sometimes, I get something sent to me, and they say, "Is this really one of yours?" And I look at it, and I think, "Yeah, it looks like mine."

[They laugh.]

ROBERT MANGOLD: "I had better check, I don't know." There's been a couple situations where people have forged a drawing or something, you know? It has happened. But usually what is tricky, what fouls them up is the signature on the back, so now it's usually signed in a way that I never sign it, or something strange. Yeah, my work is very logical and illogical. It's the same old division in my work, that one thing battling another thing.

Well, maybe we've run out of gas, huh?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I think so.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

ROBERT MANGOLD: Unless there's something particular that—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No. I was going to say, I think we came to a nice place there. This is almost two hours and 40 minutes, which is a good long while.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]