

## 360 Speaker Series Artist Joel Shapiro in Conversation with Curator Jed Morse

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**Anna Smith:** Hello, everyone, and welcome to the Nasher Sculpture Center's 360 Speaker Series. I'm curator of Education Anna Smith and today it is my honor to welcome artist, Joel Shapiro.

Like many of you, perhaps, I thought I knew what to expect when our curatorial staff announced that we would be hosting a Joel Shapiro exhibition. Shapiro's works in the Nasher Collection are old friends that enliven our galleries with their exceptional treatment of balance and weight. What I wasn't prepared for, however, was an installation that would swallow me whole. A gravity defying array of colorful forms that manage to be both attractive and compellingly psychological. If you haven't yet been to the Nasher to see this installation, I suggest that you treat yourself to some quality time in the space and also take the time to soak in Shapiro's rich and inky drawings, which open up new ways of seeing his sculptural work. Shapiro, himself, is rightly considered one of the most influential sculptors of our time, and we could likely host a second lecture describing his many accomplishments. Some highlights of his illustrious career include over 160 solo shows and retrospectives in addition to works being held in over 100 public institutions worldwide. He has been included multiple times in such prestigious group exhibitions as The Whitney Biennial, dOCUMENTA, and the Venice Biennale. More than 30 commissions and publicly-sited sculptures by the artist are located in major Asian, European, and North American cities. Shapiro was elected to Swedish Royal Academy of Art in 1994 and to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1998. In 2005 he received the Chevalier of Arts and Letters, France.

Our Chief Curator, Jed Morse, will join Shapiro in conversation today. Since 1999 Morse has held curatorial positions at the Dallas Museum of Art and at the Nasher Sculpture Center, where he has recently organized exhibitions focused on the work of Ann Veronica Janssens, Alex Israel, Giuseppe Penone, and Phyllida Barlow. I look forward to an enjoyable conversation this morning, so please join me in welcoming Joel Shapiro and Jed Morse.

**Jed Morse:** Good morning, and thank you all for joining us. We are, of course, thrilled to have Joel here, and I think Anna stole my thunder a little bit with that introduction because it is such a surprising thing. I tried to start off our conversation with something that looks very familiar to most of you who have been to the Nasher Sculpture Center. This is an untitled work from 1985 to 87, a bronze that Joel did that's currently in the Nasher Collection gallery at the Sculpture Center. And it's something that I think is what we've come to expect out of his work. It is a rather simple arrangement of rectangular forms that, nonetheless, shows the kind of exuberance that kind of pared-down and simplified arrangement can have, and the suggestiveness that it has. You know, since Joel did not chose to title his works for many years, they've all taken on various nicknames and this one has taken on the nickname among our staff at the Nasher Sculpture Center as "The Breakdancer."

**Joel Shapiro:** The Breakdancer. (*chuckles*)

**JM:** But, Joel, if this is what I think most people in the audience know of your work, how does one go from that to this, which is the current installation that Joel has made for this exhibition at the Nasher Sculpture Center. It's five independent objects that were selected and then expanded upon for this particular space. So the space had at least something to do with their selection and with the elaboration they went through after that. So how does one go from that dynamic suggestive figure to this much more open and spatial installation?

**JS:** Well, can you hear me? Through hard work. Well, I mean, I don't mean to sound... but when you look at an artist's work, you have to look at the whole body of work, and just like everything else it grows and—is it easier to hold this? Basically, I mean, sculpture is about a language of form and a language of form in space. You know, the space we live in, the space we occupy, architectural space, and I think what I've been trying to do is to try and externalize my thoughts, you know, as form. I don't know why I can't talk; I must be anxious or I had too much to drink. Two openings in a row very challenging. I think we will eventually... I didn't put these slides together, these images. If we look at early work of mine, it was really about insisting, doing something small that was quite insistent that differentiated the space and quality that you experienced without being large and massive.

**JM:** You had mentioned in a kind of impromptu tour with a group of people yesterday that the break dancer figure, we like to call him, is playing with the notion of inverted forms.

**JS:** Well, formally, yeah. There are two mirror images and one is inverted. So I was sort of putting two things together. You do something that was simultaneously going up and going down at the same time. You know, to generate action and activity so the form would be animate. But that's very formal take on it. Also I think I recognized early on that I don't think sculptors invent form. I think they may invent a radical use of form and maybe by organization of different forms come up with a radical resolution, but you're not going to invent a shape. There's nothing new under the sun. But, I do think the organization of form in space can be radical, new, and generate a particular experience.

**JM:** The installation that's at the Nasher right now, there is obviously... There are almost 20 years between the break dancer figure and the installation at the Nasher, and a lot has developed in your work since then. I've kind of organized slides to take steps back through time. One of the other works that we're so thrilled to show at the Sculpture Center within the context of this exhibition is the fantastic sculpture *20 Elements* that most of you know from NorthPark Shopping Center, which is now in the entrance bay at the Nasher.

**JS:** Oh it's up there?

**JM:** Yes.

**JS:** That's a work—actually, if you look at the first work, we don't have to go back to it again—you know when you attach one form to another form and using the plane, or if I attach this to that, then I attach that to that, you know all connected flush. There's a certain limit of expressive possibility. Also, and I think that's something I fully investigated in my work. In that early work, I wanted to make a more exuberant, more immediate work, more exuberant and less dependent on a plane as a place, less dependent on, say, the floor or the wall as a means of organization. So I would take chunks of painted wood, not capriciously because there's always a selection, put

them together as fast as possible with a pin gun, shooting nails into the wood. Until I came up with a form I thought was satisfactory and really communicated what I was feeling at the time. And so, this piece was a whole series. A lot of it had actually to do with 9/11. I know this sounds corny, but I was sort of taking pieces—there's a piece in the second room, a wood piece. Do we have a photograph of that? The blue piece?

**JM:** Yeah we do.

**JS:** You'll see it later. I'll point it out.

**JM:** We'll get to it later.

**JS:** You know where I take a form put it in the air and hold it in the air with three sticks. So I've been trying to break away from how the floor dominates the organization of form. The equivalent in painting and drawing would be how the frame or how the picture plane or the sheet organizes your thought. So, in a way, I would like to overwhelm that, or make an attempt to overwhelm that, because I think the possibility for expression is much greater. Is this too complicated?

Okay. I was playing around with the collapse of form and forms, falling and lifting, and I think after 9/11 and looking at the tragic photographs and tragic results, that the reality of collapse and then playing with collapse are two different things. So you saw all these forms cascading down. I mean this really seemed to make my work seem far less significant. Really, it was. I never thought of it as the most significant thing in the world. You know, versus the real world it's a kind of note. And I thought, somehow that pushed my work to another level where I felt the work had to have more meaning and less illusion of fall and maybe more actually falling and coming together. So I began doing stuff really fast, capriciously, with pin guns and lots of wire, where I would take forms and spin them around. What I was intent on was not organizing the work on a plane. I didn't want the tabletop or flatness to organize something. And flatness is sort of a construct. Okay. Next step in the evolution of this piece. So I had a lot of models, and then the Musee d'Orsay, which is the great 19th century railroad station in Paris where they show 19th century work. The director asked me—he was organizing a bunch of shows called *Correspondences*, where he would invite contemporary artists to do a work or exhibit work in relation to anything they wanted in the collection. So it was very empowering. You walk around the museum and there's a guy behind you with a camera. He says, "You can have whatever you want." So I said, "Okay, well you know the Carpeaux, *The Dance*." Is that up there now?

**JM:** There it is.

**JS:** Okay. This one of the great emblems of 19th century French culture. In its day, it was radical. It's a neoclassical work, but beyond the veneer of that style, the kind of configuration really corresponded with this model that I had in my studio. This maquette that was in the studio. I said, "Well, I'd like to do that and I'd also like to bring a Degas wax down to the ground floor. Good luck." So, I mean, he said no. The Degas do not move. Degas would have been the easy one, you know, to show with a piece like you refer to as...

**JM:** The break dancer.

**JS:** "BD." I'm not going to say "break dancer." So I settled on the Carpeaux. And I think that I had looked at the Carpeaux very carefully. You know they have Carpeaux and then *The Gates of Hell* above the Carpeaux on the second floor, you know, and

those are these two, well they're not colossal, but they're very grand sculptures. And Carpeaux was held in total disrepute. If you talk to a serious Modernist, they think that was the end of art. That was the end of old fashioned art. New art begins with Rodin and ended with Carpeaux, but everyone knows that Rodin was influenced by Carpeaux, particularly Carpeaux's models in bozzetti, which are very free and fluid. He tended to have massive amounts of, well he was very popular. Anyways, it's a really interesting sculpture. I'm not going to get into details about the sculpture that I discovered, which I told, I mentioned to Linda Nochlin, and she said, "Only you would find that." But I won't tell you. It has something to do with a Courbet painting. I think there are all these guy artists having sort of fun, and I think Carpeaux and Courbet must have had some overlap. Anyway. So I showed that there. And this is the second time it's been shown at a museum, and Nancy and David bought the piece, which I was ecstatic because kind of everyone, I mean, people in France wanted it. You know it never materialized. Nothing ever happened. So it's great that it found a home. Does that answer the question?

**JM:** Yeah. You know this notion of trying to get away from the power that the ground has over sculpture with expanded compositions. This is something you've been doing for a long time.

**JS:** Yeah, there's a whole history, you know certain sculptors were, you know, work more freely in space, and other sculptors justify everything by linking stuff together. So, you know, you can see Degas and Calder as artists who really project thought into the world, and the way they organize form, and Rodin's somebody who builds form up from the ground, and I think, to a large extent, David Smith does, although not in the more delicate work. It has to do with the attitude, and the sense of self, and place and how you think. So I've been trying to break up form. As I said, you know, there's no inventing. I don't think anyone ever invented form or that there was a new form that never existed. You could say there was modeling in Giacometti that was different, but, and I think if you took... I think it's the organization of form that's really important, and radical, and what differentiates work and how people deal with material. What are we on now?

**JM:** Let me just run through a few of these to get a sense of the chronology. So this piece that you see now is from the aughts: 2000-2007.

**JS:** '02-'07. And, again, this piece, I originally put this together using wood, wire, and pin guns. And different chunks from different periods of time that I put all together.

**JM:** And then the piece that we have in the garden at the Sculpture Center is also kind of...

**JS:** Yeah, this is an earlier piece from '96.

**JM:** Yeah, from the '90s. '97.

**JS:** You know, probably the kind of most serious, or sort of largest, for sure, and I'm sure the best kind of configuration of that time. And you could see that even in this, I mean this is a piece... I'm sure I made it one way and then inverted the piece. Or the piece was lateral and then I inverted it. I mean, to try to subvert the form from being so kind of totemic and building up from the ground. Next.

**JM:** And then we get in to some of the suspended pieces, and these are a nice example of that process that you have with starting off with small pieces of wood and pin gun and wire.

**JS:** Yeah, but I mean, I'm not the sort of sculptor who sits there with a chisel, you know, chiseling out a likeness. I mean, I'm just not interested in that. And what I am interested in is how form is organized and what that form means in terms of, you know, what it means as an individual, psychologically, and, you know, I don't like to say in the world because I don't want to be grandiose. Let's go next.

**JM:** And then here is *Verge*.

**JS:** Which one are we on? Oh, *Verge*.

**JM:** Yeah,

**JS:** Nice name, *Verge*. The reason I called it *Verge* is that this is a work that verged on public and private space. It's on Savile Row, and it was a private commission that had to be sanctioned by the city of Westminster, and I actually wanted to project... What I really purposed in this was a lot of falling form, but as I worked more and more with the architect, it became more and more recognizable and unified. But it does sort of intrude into the public realm, and it's suspended. I also thought, it dawned on me, the reason, I shouldn't be such a wise guy, but I think the retail space on Savile Row is incredibly expensive and this piece didn't occupy any of it. So that's why...

**JM:** It didn't take up valuable real estate.

**JS:** I'm just being silly. But anyways, it's very successful. It really works, and you see it from the Academy coming down the street. And now it's in front of, it's over at Hauser and Wirth art gallery, and I can't imagine that they're particularly happy with it. But that's not my issue. The next photograph is a show... This is an exhibition at the Haus der Kunst.

**JM:** In the '90s.

**JS:** Yeah. What...

**JM:** '97.

**JS:** Yeah. That was an interesting exhibition.

**JM:** So I included this one because of the figure walking up the wall.

**JS:** Oh the figure walking up the wall. I did that because this is such a tainted space. I mean this is a building that was built by Troost, T-R-O-O-S-T, who was a ships officer architect. and he happened to be Hitler's favorite architect. Soon to be replaced by whatever his name is, the next one. And this was Hitler's favorite building. And after World War II, the city of Cologne turned it into a museum. One side they have active contemporary art. The other side is a kind of, I don't know if it's the museum of—it's something—don't know if it's state or if it's Munich or whatever it is. And, you know, it's kind of a complicated space. So it was a space that was basically designed for large Nazi sculpture, propagandistic sculpture, and parades and marches. So I sort of took the piece and shoved it high up on the wall as a sort of as some radical gesture in opposition to the use of the space beforehand. But, I don't know if anyone read

that, and it was really difficult to talk about. Nobody's particularly interested, but... They were interested, but they didn't want to hear about it. Anyways, that's how the show evolved. It's a very good show. With painted wood.

**JM:** You know, it's interesting, the figure on the wall. I mean, you've done relief sculptures before, but was that the first time you've placed the figure high up on the wall. It seems to be a predecessor...

**JS:** That was high up. Yeah.

**JM:** ...an important predecessor to *Verge*. That kind of suspended figure.

**JS:** But this had a lot to do with my talk about trying to organize stuff that wasn't involved with the floor and wall. So of course I went from one flat to another flat. But still, if I did this now, I mean I would do an entirely different exhibition.

**JM:** What would you do differently?

**JS:** Well I would suspend stuff. Or else do something gigantic, colossal figure, just like a [toric]. You know [toric]?

**JM:** Yeah

**JS:** Nobody else does. This is not artwork we like to talk about. And actually the Haus der Kunst is where he had the Degenerate Art Show, which was the show where they gathered up all the kind of Modern German painting and you know to show people what they should not like.

**JM:** So this one and then of course the next one which is a work in the Nasher Collection that we have on view.

**JS:** Right.

**JM:** But these are suspended, lifted figures.

**JS:** I was trying to animate form by getting it off the floor and getting it into the air in some capricious or more free-flowing way. And also it kind of has figuration, so you have to look at the strings in the work, even in this show, as some mechanism not unlike a leg or an arm that allows the work to be in a particular place.

**JM:** It's kind of hard to circumvent or undermine the mind's desire to see figures. Do you find that difficult to do?

**JS:** Oh, you were asking me and I was thinking.

**JM:** That's alright

**JS:** I thought you were commenting on what I had said. Repeat the question.

**JM:** So I was just saying, you know, it's sometimes really difficult for the mind to circumvent the mind's desire to see a figure. You know if you stick five kind of rectangular prisms together then you've...

**JS:** I don't get the question.

**JM:** Do you try to subvert the figure in your work?

**JS:** Do I try to subvert the figure?

**JM:** Yeah. Not really?

**JS:** Not particularly.

**JM:** Not really?

**JS:** I'm interested in any reference in the work. I like the work loaded with layer and reference. I'm not somebody, you know I'm not a minimalist.

**JM:** Yeah.

**JS:** And I also think that the sculpture inevitably is a reflection of the individual who makes it. Even if it's a flat plane on the floor, you know, if it's a Carl Andre, the most reductive piece possible, you know, six plates of steel. That is a kind of surrogate of the artist. So you know I believe that there's real truth in form. What you choose to do is to some extent what you are. There's a truth in form, whether you're a minimalist or a whatever you might do. It doesn't matter. It really is an indication of who you are and you read the work in terms of—as some—well it's not really a surrogate but some manifestation of character, of a total person.

**JM:** This one is really interesting. I was not familiar with this work. This one here,

**JS:** This sculpture, I hope it's still around. It was made out of such junk.

**JM:** But you know, you've got...

**JS:** It's interesting.

**JM:** It is interesting. You've got this sort of independent forms that are loosely connected with those dowels.

**JS:** Yeah, I did a couple pieces where I used dowels, steel rods, to try and animate different, separate different parts and get them... And that all led to the wire stuff, you don't have the piece that's at Yale, huh?

**JM:** The wire stuff?

**JS:** Well, there's one there. It's too interesting. I'll send you pictures.

**JM:** Okay great. And then what would be the kind of immediate predecessor to the kind of work that you've been doing more recently are these spatial installations of planks or rectangular forms suspended in space.

**JS:** Yeah. I was actually, you know, I mean, a lot of the work... There are a number of pieces that aren't in here where I was just placing something in space. I'd have an assistant hold it up, and then I'd just tack the thing up with 1 x 2s just to hold it in position, and then do the next piece and the next piece. So I think, you know, post-then I was doing wire and string and then at some point I just thought, "Well, I can just

suspend forms in space.” And I did a show at Pace Gallery. We don't have any pictures of that?

**JM:** I just included one of them. You've done a lot of work. I couldn't include everything.

**JS:** So we have the one. This is a subsequent show where I was offered a—It's the Museum Ludwig in Cologne—and a young curator saw the show in New York and said, “Well, we have to do this.” And that was a tough space. It was 40-foot ceilings with a monumental... with a colossal stairway going down which an artist had built so it was hard to remove without, you know, offending people. You know, I built a model of the space and I just built these pieces in my studio and began suspending them. It was a lot of narrative in this piece. You know it's sort of sub-narrative. It was not, you know, each unit had its own little story and meaning.

**JM:** They're amazing things because you can't... The photographs just don't do them justice. They're so spatially complex.

**JS:** Yeah, they're spatially complex and they reorganize them self as they go around, so the work is always dynamic to the relationship to the perceiver.

**JM:** It reminded me of what one might experience if they were to inhabit a Malevich Suprematist painting.

**JS:** Really? Hmm... Right behind that black square.

**JM:** You know with the rectangular forms in space and the slight shifts in the rectangular forms...

**JS:** In the installation here I thought, you know, I came out... Of course I know the space. If you're offered to do the possibility of doing something really meaningful in a considered, deeply intelligent space...

**JM:** You're talking about the Nasher installation.

**JS:** I mean, you can't just stick in some objects you made over the last ten years. I mean, you could and be a bore, at least to my eye. So I sort of took the opportunity. I was originally going to use those sticks I just felt I wanted more. I wanted more reference in the work, and I wanted volume within the work, and I was tired of just reading one color against another color. So I had forms in the studio and I joined some together and kind of adjusted them. I didn't have to do a lot of adjustment. I mean, I made them. I sort of... I think I had to change one or two, but I basically chose them and tried to develop this narrative, this sort of dream sequence. I originally wanted the figure on the ground. You wouldn't read it as a figure but it had a torso reference, and then there was this house instead of a head, and that was sort of the... It was almost a synopsis of the exhibition, and if I wanted it the same scale as these things, it became really dopey and it made no sense. And also, I think it would demean the experience of the room, so I pulled that out and it was much more successful and I didn't do the piece. Also it was monumental. It was really dumb. It was a piece about explaining the work away and I just wanted this to be a deep, resonant exhibition, which, you know, I think it is. The only downside is you have to watch where you walk.

**JM:** It's true.

**JS:** So, I mean, the idea of freezing a piece in space: they're not frozen; they move a little bit. I mean, you have to use, again, you have to use the floor and the wall, and I have to rely on geometry and I have to rely on the architecture, but the architecture is not organizing the piece. So I'm interested in this projection of thought into the world. And the green Caro and the selection in the other room is really interesting because some of those artists do that and some don't. It's just so nice to be able to exhibit work within the context of 20th and 21st century sculpture. It's much more, I think, much more meaningful than having a show. I mean, it's not more meaningful, it's extremely... I think you can learn a lot. As an artist, you learn a lot.

**JM:** The green piece in that photograph—

**JS:** It's hard for me to hear you. The sound back here is not good.

**JM:** Um, so the green—

**JS:** My hearing stinks. What?

**JM:** So the green piece in the back of the gallery was made as a negative or an open form in correspondence with the massive orange form that's kind of suspended against the wall.

**JS:** Well I think there's a kind of, you know, this show... The front of the gallery or the street side... The blue and the red piece really kind of work with each other, and then there's this sort of isolated yellow form in the center, and then the back two pieces, one is green and one is orange. Really big. That's a big form, and they're very lightweight. I actually had that form open and I had it in an entirely different position, and then I kept rearranging the form. You know, as you build the form you have another sense of its meaning. So you would adapt and adjust the point of view. It's pretty free, I mean, the problem being an artist is remaining free. It's not sort of narrowing down your works or you're doing the same, you know, boring thing over and over again. I think the idea is to, at least within your capacity, you know, to sort of explore the full range of possibility. There are probably another 20 ways this can be configured. On the other hand, it would not have been configured... The configuration is dependent upon the space.

**JM:** The next photo is of the red piece, and I chose that because it's the photo that gives the clearest sense of this kind of form that's reminiscent of a house. That's something that's been a part of your work since the early 70s, and I wanted to show a few things and then we can talk about that form. If we can get it to move here... There we go. So there's *Deux Maisons* in Orléans, France.

**JS:** *Deux Maisons*, right.

**JM:** Yes.

**JS:** Are you showing that now?

**JM:** Well, I just clicked through it.

**JS:** Well, that has a little backstory.

**JM:** Oh, well let's go back. What's the backstory to this one?

**JS:** The backstory was the same. The Director of—Serge Lemoine, who's a Modernist and a very important history professor in Paris. There's a new tramway, and they asked artists to do follies—architects and artists—to do follies at each tram stop, and he particularly liked my work. But this is Orléans, you know Jean d'Arc. And well the backstory is, by the time the piece was up I think the... So all this whole folly when... It's great, but this is the entry into the town. I thought it was, you know, I was slightly uncomfortable. It was slightly too much of a radical statement. Anyway. Then the politics changed, one administration, something happened. I forget. He was a more liberal administration, then a conservative administration came in, and in France you don't... you can... and I think the new mayor was not so sympathetic. But anyway, it's there, and it actually has gained in popularity. So that's the turnaround as you drive into town. I'm not telling you a story. I'm sorry. Okay. The next one is *Loss and Regeneration*.

**JM:** Yeah, the US Holocaust Museum and Memorial.

**JS:** That was a competition, and I actually, originally wanted the house on the building, and I was told by the architect quite bluntly, "That won't get through Federal Fine Arts. I can guarantee that." So that's so much about that. That was a complicated piece, and it was... This was very controversial. I mean, certain people, as Walter Benjamin said, "There is no poetry after the Holocaust." I don't think.... Which meant you can't make art. It's been interpreted as you can't... Art can't exist after such a sort of catastrophe, but I think there's a number of artists involved in this project. Richard Serra had a work inside. Ellsworth Kelly has a work inside. Sol LeWitt has a work inside. And I was in a competition, I think it was Martin Puryear, Walter de Maria, and John Borofsky, and, you know, who submitted to the outside judge,s and they picked me, and you know my position was that, you know, you're mediating a situation. You're not making anything that's an equivalent. I mean, art's not an equivalent of, necessarily, of anybody else's experience. And I think it's effective.

**JM:** Art is also a way that we as human beings try to, if not make sense of, to deal with history and the past. It's one of the ways that we...

**JS:** All memorials deal with the past. In fact, I mean, a big transformation in sculpture was about... Sculpture was no longer about memorialization, but was really about the artist's experience in the world. But, historically, almost all public work was, you know, collective memory. So, to some extent, the form that I made really was about a collapsing figure and the collapse of culture. But, you know, that's not the equivalent of, you know, of a catastrophe. But anyway, it was challenging and it looks good. I went back, and it's become part of the Washington firmament. I mean, it's like... I was visiting there because I took my grandchildren to Washington, and, you know, a guy runs up in a jogging outfit, you know, to the sculpture. It was part of his course. He had to run to eight or nine different monuments in the city. So it really is an important part. I wouldn't take them inside. They're too young. Anyways, it was an important work for me.

Yeah this was a work I did. This is a work I showed in the Haus der Kunst in a small room. So it was an iron house and a kind of vaporizing, light, floating wood house. This has a lot to do with the show.

**JM:** Yeah. You know, not only the suspended form but also, you know... If we can... I'm going to go back to the next one, which is one of the earliest ones, but that house,,,

**JS:** Where are we? This here?

**JM:** Yeah, the 1974 piece mounted to the wall on this kind of... I don't know what to call that coming out of the wall.

**JS:** Well that was an interesting piece.

**JM:** But the house is...

**JS:** I remember talking to someone about.... I gave a talk at CalArts, and I had seen Donatello's *David*, you know, in Florence, and I was so intrigued by the angle of the helmet and how Donatello established the space of the perceiver and controlled the space of the perceiver, which, by the way, I think he did, and I think that's why he's the greatest. And I remember this kid laughing. How could you compare yourself to Donatello? I told him, I'm not comparing myself to Donatello, it's just, I'm trying to utilize something he figured out, which most artists, most people don't understand. Anyway, that wasn't what that piece was about. This piece was about memory, the future and the present. Whatever artists think about. I mean, it's complicated, you know. You think about your own history and, you know, how are you going to get out of the miserable situation, the psychological state you're in, and where you're going to go. Can anyone read that or see that?

The next piece...

**JM:** Here, we'll show that.

**JS:** Yeah, that little chair. Now, I had a show of this work at Paula Cooper again. I mean, I originally showed it with Paula in '74 and I made the piece in '73-74. At that point... The other thing about my work is, I think I've always insisted on the size, and I haven't pumped the work up to fit a certain context. And nobody's invented the chair. No artist. I mean, every artist has used chairs. Many, many people have. You know Piero della Francesca's little chair. So it was sort of... So the size of the chair was about my, was very much about me and my sense of, you know, melodramatic isolation, whatever it may be, and trying to engender that little space, you know, where you sit, and so I just decided I would just show it the size that I made it in a public space, and it really condensed space. It had a radical shift in scale. So I was worried when I did this show, "Oh, this stuff's never going to work again." It was so contextual and so much about perceiving it at the time when I made it, but actually it did the same stuff again. If it's properly installed, then boom. You know, it really condenses space. Now, I'm not the only artist who condenses space. Look at the two little Giacomettis at the Nasher. Actually, did I say Giacometti? The insistence on his modeling, and hand, and a smaller figure. He's...

**JM:** But there's an important thing about the relationship of the viewer to that minuscule thing on the floor. And so there were rectangular cast iron forms that the chair-- forms that looked like houses that were all placed on the floor with a lot of space around them, and then this piece, which is in the Nasher Collection, that's on view again.

**JS:** Look. You can see this piece... Is this the one that's up now?

**JM:** Yeah, it's up now.

**JS:** You can see this piece as sort of, you know... I mean it. So this thing I'm engendering, that interior space... So the outside's a boundary. When I did this work, I was well aware that it was... Well, maybe it took me three or four years to get away from the notion of... What I didn't like was flatness, you know, that the work was on the floor and then the top of the work was parallel to the floor, which seemed to me not... That's why I began making those reaching pieces that you call "the break dancer." I really wanted the work to be animate within the space and not dependent on flatness like painting. So, you know... Or Don Judd for that matter, where a lot of Minimalism accepts the floor as the arena and the standard to work. I don't. I felt it was one way of differentiating myself. But you can see this interior, it's just the next room over. And now I have the great interior space, so you know I'm projecting thought into it. It's no longer about... It's a different kind of declaration. It's more proactive, more mature artist.

**JM:** But the sense that, you know, that space, whether it is small and presented on the floor, whether it's a large object in an even bigger space, there's always that sense of how one encounters it. And even the house that has the projection coming out from underneath it from the wall, there is that sense of how the viewer experiences that object in a physical space.

**JS:** Well, see.... I think better sculptors, I mean, I was thinking about this because... Did anyone see the Donatello show last spring at the Museum of the Bible? Which, unfortunately, closed, but I don't know how these people did it. They had ten Donatellos. Not ten, maybe six Donatello's and Brunelleschi models. I'll never throw out an interior model again. Anyway, it was just, you could compare Donatello to his peers. The peers were lovely sculpture and they may have been a nice likeness of St. Jerome or something, but they didn't consider the perceiver, where Donatello really in a way, I mean, there's a theatricality. He was very aware of how people would look at the work, and the work is animate and active in a way that other sculpture of that period is not. I mean, it's really... Everyone knows he's a profound and great genius but that's the reason why. I don't know if it's been articulated that way. Then somebody in New York found a little putty that he thinks is a Donatello, and he had a show. I didn't see it. All these heavy German art historians wrote texts trying to justify that this was, indeed, a Donatello. I think it may be. It closed with a picture of my work so I bought two copies. I said, "Gee, if only my mother could have seen that!" But it's sort of a joke. They're trying to justify. They're trying to utilize contemporary art to justify the authenticity of the Donatello. What may or may not be a Donatello. And I think the piece is still around. I have to go see it. And God only know what it was selling for. Probably cheaper than contemporary art.

**JM:** But this interest in space and our experience of objects in space, I mean, all sculptors deal with this, right?

**JS:** Yeah, I mean, that's what sculptures... But if you're involved with likeness, then you're trying to do work that's mimetic, you know... it may be mimetic but it may just be statuary. It may not be about an experience. And I also think, you know, it's the artist's responsibility, to a certain extent, to determine how a work is perceived.

**JM:** Yeah.

**JS:** I think someone like Donatello was an absolute genius. Well, many people were, Anyway, he in particular.

Well this is an installation I did.

**JM:** I had to include this because...

**JS:** Because no one knows it.

**JM:** From 1969.

**JS:** And it's made out of baling wire. And it was a room in a small college in Georgia. A friend of mine was teaching. It was an African American college, I forget which one. He was teaching art, so he invited me to come down and do something. So I went to the local feed store—I went to one yesterday—and I bought... I don't know how... Baling wire is baled up with baling wire, and it's sort of interesting in retrospect.

**JM:** That dynamic occupation of space. And then, you know, the drawings also deal with space in a really interesting way. I mean, the way that the small figures or the houses on the floor are like a figure on a ground.

**JS:** Well, the early drawings, you know, those banded drawings had a lot to do with... I did a lot of work with little apertures. I think the Dallas Museum of Art has one. You know, you sort of look at a space and you have to magically enter into it. The reason why I stopped doing that small work, aside from the floor... I wasn't... I was not interested in magical thinking, and I thought that that work was just too psychological and too much of a small, other world. It just is not something that I... You know, I've always wanted my work in the real world. Or, I wanted to be in the... I didn't want to be in the magical world of, you know, an artist who's totally deceiving themselves and structuring a kind of synthetic life around the work.

**JM:** So there are 26 works on paper in the exhibition at the Sculpture Center here.

**JS:** Huh?

**JM:** There's 26 works on paper...

**JS:** Oh, in the exhibition. Oh yeah,

**JM:** Most people are used to... you know, you've been making drawings, paintings, works on paper since the very beginning with the finger print works.

**JS:** Yeah, the history of my drawings... The first drawings exhibited were finger print drawings. I did a show at Craig Starr of those

**JM:** Not too long ago, just last year.

**JS:** Not too long. Really early work from the late '60s. I've always drawn. I just have to say that artists, I mean I think that at least I can say for myself but to some extent sculpture regardless if it's immediate or not immediate in very involved... the logistics involved that are time consuming. So it takes a long time to build something and frequently you know like the early drawings these sort of more geometric drawings... I don't know what's up there.

**JM:** They're up there now.

**JS:** A lot of it had to do with... I think these are maybe wilder... You know, doing things on paper that potentially would have been burdensome to do in the real world.

Or doing things on paper that you couldn't do. So I mean, to a certain extent, the drawings might anticipate things I would eventually do in sculpture, or they might refer back to things I've done. They're never mimetic. They don't look like the sculpture, but they're fast. They're relatively... You know, in a drawing, again, now you have the page, so the page to some extent, you have to overwhelm the page, and more recently...

**JM:** So these are two of the drawings that are included in the exhibition. And all of the drawings are from 2015, so just these are all from last year. You can sense a distinct change in the...

**JS:** Well, I got tired of working with chalk and rigidity, so I started doing gouaches again maybe three years ago. And I had an exhibition at Pace, and it was a very good show. I mean, it was an interesting exhibition. You have the catalog right?

**JM:** Yeah.

**JS:** And again, I thought those things weren't deep enough, so I began doing these drawings, which are much—I thought, very deep and meaningful.

**JM:** A lot of them are loosely related to each other because you would apply ink to a page and then lay another page over it, transferring, and then continue working on the transferred page.

**JS:** And then I change them. Well. I just wanted deep. meaningful drawings.

**JM:** They're really loose and atmospheric, and, I mean, there's a very complex sense of depth within them.

**JS:** Well, they're two batches of drawings. Some were freer and more buoyant, and others really sort of bereaved and deep. You know, it's a really wood batch of drawings. What a way to talk about my work. I act as if I'm talking about food or something. But you should see the show, I mean spend some time in in it. Thank you. I think I'm wrapped up. Any questions? Sorry, Jed.

**JM:** No, no, no.

**Audience Question:** I'm very curious about your work space that you have over time, and how that might have changed and therefore been reflected in the work that you do.

**JS:** Well, I think so, but not... I mean I've had big... My first studio was about 2,000 square foot, you know. It was a loft building downtown. An old federal building. A pretty building. Now I have a really large studio, which allows me to see things that I normally would not see. But, you know, and I'm really adamant, I'm opposed to the colossal, like, I don't like colossal. I don't trust it as a meaning that, you know... And also art has a political side to it, and I don't mean, I'm not talking political party, but certain work has to do with a certain aspect, you know, one sense of humanity, freedom and this and that. I don't like big imposing structures.

**AQ:** I have a quick question about your use of color, and obviously I'm a sculptor and I use color a lot, and there seems to be a real specificity to the use of color and what hue of yellow and how it's applied on, especially these pieces here. Some of them are very fine this washes and some are more dense. So, maybe, and obviously your

drawings, the history of the drawings have these blocks of color that seem like there's a story to some of the colors. You know, I haven't heard you talk about color.

**JS:** Oh yeah, well, I didn't talk about the color. Color has always played an... Somehow we were looking more at woody/bronze stuff. I've always used color. I mean, color was a way of, you know... The idea about paint and color, I mean, basically, is color... If you have wood, you know, think of wood as nature, as something natural, and think of color as something... This really sounds sort of, as a thought, as a kind of as culture, it sort of... You know, it's a choice you make. Today I want to wear a pink shirt. You know, that's a cultural choice. I want to wear a pink shirt because it looks good with green and it's the only shirt I have left. So I say if I choose to paint a piece yellow, the paint itself is a kind of... So you're masking what you're masking or hiding to some extent what material the sculpture is made out of. These sculptures are made out of 1/16 Baltic birch. I mean, it's sort of... Oh, 1/18... 1/8-inch Baltic birch. It's pretty ordinary European plywood. Comes in 5 x 5 foot sections. So once you... So I choose... So you're painting. It means you're hiding the material or you're allowing some of the material—putting an envelope between the material and the perceiver and between yourself and the material. You're kind of engaged in marking it with paint. “Okay. This is mine and I'm going to paint it.” An assistant may have helped me on it, but now I'm going to destroy all their work, if you will. Slather paint on it. Anyway, then the way you approach the paint and the color you know that's so subjective. I mean so the big orange piece was a very intense orange. It was like cadmium orange medium. It was a powdered pigment that I mixed with casein so it's really intense, and it was just too... It was overwhelming. That green piece could never engulf that orange piece if the orange piece was so intense. I mean, it really stood out. So I repainted it. I toned down the paint with white and repainted it. So now the surface of that piece is a more considered surface than the color in the surfaces of the other pieces. Like, the red one, which I wanted to be kind of bloody and liquid, you know, was very... And the guys got finger prints on it, which didn't bother me because the piece was so sort of amorphous, the paint, and so kind of transparent—we see through the paint and have a better sense of the wood. So you know how you paint and the choice of color... Color can be very psychological. Color definitely has reference. I mean, I painted the green thing because I wanted it to look sky-like and landscape-y. But, you know, then there's the sub-thing, you know. We have, you know... There's pretty... The only thing missing, I think, in there... How many colors in the chart? You know, we have three primaries and orange and green. And once you get into the process of working on a piece you know things flow. And you not making you're making all these choices. You're not... When I talk about them sounding... I'm intellectualizing them, I think. When you're doing them, they're much more instinctive and they're much more about history of work. And I've always used color as a mask, as a way of—as a surrogate for casting. There's a way of sort of unifying. You know, if you have something made out of 15 pieces and you paint it all one color, you kind of unify the experience depending on... And certain colors you perceive from a distance...

**JM:** Well, you had also selected,,,

**JS:** Nancy.

**JM:** Yeah.

**Nancy Nasher:** The thing that was so surprising the other night was when you were outside looking in and you see the reflection of the pieces. You see the shadow. You see their shapes, different shapes on the floor and ceiling. You also see the colors on

the floor and ceiling. I mean it is not... Did you know, or you probably did, the impact of these forms in all of those dimensions in this space when you were making it? In other words, it is so dynamic and powerful with all these various reflections and changes. Was that something that...

**JS:** Well no, it was a great. It was a surprise. I mean, but you know, I think that's how... The most phenomenal thing is that the green one, in certain light conditions, becomes a positive, but, I mean, I think if you really work with a certain degree of freedom—you know, it sounds Pollyannic—that's a great space. I mean, the Nasher gallery is a phenomenal... It's, you know, one of Renzo's great buildings. It's just the perfect place to have an exhibition, and I've seen bronzes in there that look good and it's all very natural. So, you know, it's all stone. There's no color. There's color, but the color is natural color. So when you have this sort of natural, considered environment, and you put in your own form, you know, that's much more subjective, it really comes alive. You know, I saw the violet reflection on the floor—there's something to be said about great daylight. I did an outdoor sculpture with color, and I had no idea the external colors would reflect and create a third color. And I think that happens in the gallery too. You know, looking at it the other night was phenomenal. It was unbelievable. It was really. I have never seen work look that—mine or anyone else's. I'm not talking about some take... I'm not saying this is something I achieve, but it is phenomenal. I hope somebody got good pictures. I tried to get a good picture. It wasn't so easy. And then seeing, you know, Mark [di Suvero]'s piece and that fabulous—which is a great sculpture—and that fabulous Antony Caro, where Caro is just flinging stuff into space. It's great. And then going inside and seeing David Smith and Tony Smith. You can see all that from the Garden. You could see a lot of the sculpture in the adjacent room. You could see the piece from NorthPark. It's great. It's an experience. I should have made a movie, but I had too much to drink.

**JM:** Why don't we take one more question.

**JS:** Any more questions? Yes.

**AQ:** You talk a lot about action and movement in your work, but have you ever considered...

**JS:** I can't hear you, come down.

**AQ:** You talk a lot about action and how it's really,,,

**JS:** Oh action. Activity.

**AQ:** Uh-huh. So have you ever considered, like, mobiles or motors or anything to get your work physically moving?

**JS:** Have I ever made mobiles? I did early on. I did a piece... God, it was the first Whitney Program that my wife—she was a teacher and she was invited to do this—and I did an early piece where I had two, like, washers—it was really crazy—on the ceiling chasing each other. I mean, they were animate, but I've never done mobiles. I mean, I'd rather have somebody walk around and that becomes the change in the work. Move around. And it's hard to do. I mean, you know, Calder has the mobile very locked up. It's hard to do anything. I've had pieces where parts dangle, but I've never done anything that was sort of in motion, or where I want it to be in motion, other than some early probes.

**JM:** Great.

**JS:** I'd rather make you do the work. you have to walk around and look.

**JM:** Alright, well thank you everyone. Really appreciate you coming out. Joel, thank you.