

COLLECTOR & CURATOR IN CONVERSATION

N. ELIZABETH SCHLATTER with WYNN KRAMARSKY

The following interview took place at the opening celebration for Art=Text=Art: Works by Contemporary Artists at the University of Richmond Museums, Virginia. N. Elizabeth Schlatter, Deputy Director and Curator of Exhibitions, spoke with collector Wynn Kramarsky at the Modlin Center for the Arts on September 1, 2011.

Elizabeth Schlatter: We're here this evening in celebration of the exhibition *Art=Text=Art: Works by Contemporary Artists*, which is on view at the Harnett Museum of Art until October 16. We are grateful to Sally and Wynn Kramarsky, who have contributed so much to make this exhibition possible. Tonight I have the pleasure of speaking with Wynn, and I'll be sure to leave time at the end in case there are questions from the audience.

Wynn was born in Amsterdam, Holland, and came to the United States in 1939. Although he's here this evening in his capacity as a preeminent art collector, I should mention that he has had various jobs throughout his life. He served in the US Navy when he was just a teenager. He's worked in the securities business, in politics, and in state and local government in New York. Between 1991 and 2006, he operated a space in SoHo called 560 Broadway, where he organized exhibitions from his own collection as well as exhibitions of art from other sources and organizations.

Most of Wynn's collecting has been focused on minimal, post-minimal, and conceptual art, particularly drawings or works on paper, with works by artists such as Sol LeWitt, William Anastasi, Lawrence Weiner, and Mel Bochner, all of whom have pieces on view in the exhibition. Artists associated with other movements, such as Jasper Johns, Ray Johnson, and artists who can't even be categorized, such as the choreographer Trisha Brown and the filmmaker John Waters, are also represented in the collection and the exhibition. Overall, Wynn has collected more than 3000 works of art. He has also generously given art to museums, especially to university and smaller regional institutions.

To get us started, I'm going to ask the obvious question, which is: how did you start collecting art and why did you focus on drawings?

Wynn Kramarsky: Well, the latter part of that question is easier than the first. I don't think you ever *start* collecting. Collecting is something that happens to you. You acquire something because you love it and you want to have it on your wall. And you acquire something else, because you love it and you want to have it on your wall. And before you know it, you have more art than you have walls, and then you're in a situation where, as one of my colleagues recently did, you have to acquire a warehouse. We haven't done that yet, but we did pretty well at 560 Broadway.

Drawings are, for me, special among all works of art because you can see how something is made. You really can get very close to the process of making art. For many years, drawings were considered a secondary aspect. They were the preparation, or something like that. But artists feel committed to making drawings because it is something that they can do as the moment reaches them. There is an artist in this exhibition who is also a sculptor, who once said to me, "Well, you know, if you want to make a painting, you have to get a stretcher and canvas, and by the time you've done all of that, you've forgotten what you wanted to make." So drawings enable that immediacy. And then, of course, there is the presentation drawing. Most of these are presentation drawings of one kind or another, which means that the artist has really decided that he wants someone else to see it. It's not just for his or her own purpose.

[Drawing] is, for me, the medium that speaks loudest and clearest, primarily because I can get very close to it. I have warned the curator and the director that occasionally, when I do exhibitions, I will take something off the wall and pass it around for people to look at, because you really have to look at a drawing very carefully if you really want to know what's going on. And without that, it is something that you can pass by. And lots of people do; they just walk past and say, "Oh, well, that's interesting." [But] if you dig into it, put your teeth into it, it makes you feel, in some way—as a layman, as a non-artist—that you can understand not what the artist is trying to *say*, but what the artist is *doing*.

ES: When you say you can see the process, do you mean the physical process?

WHK: Yes. To begin with, I'm talking about the physical process. Because I think that leads you, then, to wonder, "Why?" And that's a whole other issue then. And that goes on much further than just looking and studying because then, at that point, when you become interested in the *how*, the questions of *why* become almost automatic and are much more demanding at a certain point.

ES: You can see a lot of the process in Jasper Johns.

WHK: Yes.

ES: Is that what initially attracted you to his work?

WHK: Initially attracted... That's a very difficult question to answer, because the initial attraction goes back to 1957, and even I can't remember that. But that's when Jasper had his first work in a show at the Leo Castelli Gallery, and I bought a little drawing. And if I try to think back to what brought me to that, it may have been just that process: of having seen this was what was done, and wondering why. Particularly because that was a flag drawing, and you wondered then, "Why is he making flags?"

ES: In terms of "what is drawing," there's the work of Kry Bastian, which is in both your collection and the exhibition. *Our Work* from 1997 is a series of sheets of mixed media. And then we also have *Untitled (Safe II)* from 1994. I'm wondering how works like these [sculptures] fit within the rubric of drawing?

WHK: Both of [Bastian's works involve] hand handling of paper and material, and they actually [include] drawing as part of what they are. There *is* drawing. It is more difficult to see in the first piece that you've shown, but if you look at *Safe II*, at the text that's in there, [you can see that the] text has been written and then obscured. That is a process of drawing, and it's a very famous process of taking a text or a drawing and doing something else to it, another process going on. And that is a particularly interesting way of discussing drawing. At that point, you can't help but begin to wonder what motivated the artist to go through that complicated process—when the writing is already a complicated process, and when the thinking about placing it in a found object is a complicated process. And then [the artist goes] on to the next step of saying, "I'm going to basically obscure this writing, because I don't want you, the viewer, to know what this writing is. It is writing for me, and not necessarily for you."

ES: If you go up close to [Bastian's] piece, you can see the writing that's sewn in, and then it almost looks like it's been redacted in some cases.

Also in your collection you have works that truly fall into the category of sculpture, such as a small, hot-rolled steel, wedge-shaped work by Gloria Ortiz-Hernández.

WHK: You mean in the show?

ES: No, but in your collection.

WHK: Well, actually, there is a drawing by Gloria in the exhibition that looks like it could be made of metal.

You have to really look at it. It is hard worked paper, very hard worked paper with graphite.

The sculpture you were referring to relates to a piece from a number of years ago. At one point [in 2004], she made a sculpture out of wax because she just suddenly became aware of the fact that many of the things that she was doing [on paper] felt like sculpture to her. And they felt like sculpture to me, too. At one point I said to her, “You know, you’re going to be a sculptor at some point.” And she said, “Ugh.” She’s Colombian, and she has a Spanish accent, and she said, “No no no!” But when she brought the wax pieces in, I knew it wasn’t going to stop there, and then she made the steel pieces, which you know.

It’s difficult to talk about that process if you’re not seeing [the work]. But if you look at this drawing carefully, you will begin to think this is metal. And graphite, you know, and metal are very close. So you begin to think, this could be a plate, and that plate becomes a sculpture.

ES: I’m going to pull up some of Karen Schiff’s images now. I’m showing these in conjunction with something you once said: “Collecting is a little bit like making love. You don’t know who your perfect partner is going to be, and you really don’t make a choice that way.” And that’s a wonderful quote because it suggests a very passionate relationship with a work of art. I wonder if you can share a little bit about how you feel when you discover an artwork or get excited about some new work.

WHK: The way I found Karen’s work was totally serendipitous because, as you know and as many people know, I am a great admirer of Agnes Martin’s work. And after Agnes had died, there was a tiny little ad in the newspaper that said, “Homage to Agnes Martin.” And I said, “This is an exhibition I have to see.” And this piece [*Agnes Martin, The Washington Post, 18 December 2004, full through, I* (2005)] was in that ex-

hibition, and I don’t want to tell you what Karen does because she will talk about that tomorrow, but what I’ll tell you is that I fell in love with her work and thought it was absolutely marvelous.

This is work that shouldn’t be framed and shouldn’t be glazed over, because you should be able to have it in your hand. And people say to me, when I say this, “You’re nuts.” But I think there’s something very sensuous about a piece of paper with drawing on it. This drawing [*Untitled (Manuscript)* (2007)] is so sensuous—it has such reverence for paper and what paper is and what you can do with it and what it does for you—that you get totally involved with it. There is no way to move away from it if you have it [unframed] like that. You cannot look away. And you begin to wonder, “How can somebody be so knowledgeable about paper?” And this is a deep scientific knowledge, about how paper is made, and how different kinds of paper are made, and what happens when you put pencils to paper. I think I once talked with Karen about the fact that schoolchildren, when they first put pencil to paper, don’t know how deeply they might end up being involved. Because this is a life’s obsession—this knowledge of what paper does for you and what you can do with paper, and how you can communicate that sense of commitment, that sense of belief, that sense of honesty to a viewer, who eventually, regrettably, only sees it behind glass.

ES: I’m going to take this opportunity to ask *none* of you in the audience to take the work off the walls. [*Laughter*] But you are welcome to get very close to the pieces. We aren’t one of those museums that have the beeper that goes off.

This is the work of Joel Shapiro, *Untitled* (1969). It’s one of the older pieces in the exhibition, from 1969. And those are the artist’s fingerprints on the graph paper. I’m curious, when you do acquire a work and you have it over many decades, what kind of relation-

ship do you form [with it]? If you have this falling in love analogy, does the love stay?

WHK: Well, Sally and I have been married for 52 years, and I have work that I loved even before I knew her. [Laughter] So...yes, there is that. Not everything works that way. You see something, you think it's interesting, and you acquire it because you've looked at it several times and it *is* really interesting. You have a relationship with it that you cherish, and you put it on the wall, and four months later, you walk past it and you don't see it. And you notice, if you're a collector, that you're not seeing it. At a certain point you begin to say, "This is not talking to me anymore, and I no longer get the sense of having a conversation with it." And then what I do is, I put it away for a couple of years and I try it again. And if that doesn't work, and you know that it's a decent work of art but it's just not *your* work of art anymore, then you give it away if you can.

ES: Do you have some artworks that are almost like touchstones for you?

WHK: Yes, there are pieces. Sol LeWitt has been so important in my life. The LeWitt drawing that is here [*The Location of Geometric Figures: A Blue Square, Red Circle, Yellow Triangle, and Black Parallelogram* (1976)]: that drawing is an iconic drawing for Sol, and it's an iconic drawing for me. This work makes the message of drawing—and what drawing can be and what drawing needs to be successful—and makes it so clear. The writing is so much a part of it. It is an actual description of what is going on in the drawing, except that no description—no word description—can really tell you what's going on in the drawing. Only seeing it and feeling it can tell you what's going on in the drawing. And Sol knew that. One of the first artists that I collected in any kind of depth was LeWitt, so those are very important to me.

ES: Are there some works that you keep up all the time?

WHK: No, there is nothing that is up all the time in the contemporary collection—nothing. Because that's not fair to the drawing, it's not fair to the other artists, and there's a fair amount of traffic that comes through [the office], and people want to see different things. So I want them to be able to see different things. And then people like you and Richard [Waller, the Executive Director of the University of Richmond Museums] invite me to do a show, and I can show a lot of work to a lot of people, and I love that. I'm very grateful to you and to Richard for having this show here. I really am. And you've been absolutely spectacularly wonderful. You know, I don't always say that about the shows that I've had. [Laughter] Some of them have been more successful than others, but I'm triply blessed, because in my office I have Rachel Nackman, who is the co-curator of this show, and Michael Randazzo. And between those two and you two, it's a show that is perfect, and I am really grateful.

ES: I didn't plan that...just so you know! [Laughter] That was nice.

When I started working on this exhibition, I started hearing a lot about you through the artists. A lot of the artists told me about what an amazing person you are—not what an amazing collector you are, but what an amazing *person* you are. This is a work by Jane Hammond [*Four Ways to Blue* (2006)]. It was made for your eightieth birthday, and I know she's close to you and your family. Deborah Nehmad is here also, and while this piece [*Untitled* (2003)] was not made for your birthday, she did make another piece in the collection for your birthday. Rachel scanned your archives that related to each of the artists, so I was able to look at all these cards and letters that they sent you from trips, from holidays...and I've never worked with a collector who has had so many good relation-

ships with artists. I wonder, is that something you seek? Is that something that's important to you?

WHK: It is important to me, if I collect an artist in any kind of depth, to at least know the person. It isn't important to me to know them well. It's serendipitous when an artist whose work you admire also turns out to be a person you admire, and that isn't always true! [Laughter] You know, there are people who make wonderful work, and there are people who collect wonderful collections, and the artists and the collectors are not always so nice. That happens. I've been very lucky. I am very fortunate that *many* of the artists that I have known have been wonderful people—and generous, all of them. All of them are generous to a fault.

Whenever I talk about artists who have been generous, I have to talk about Sol LeWitt again. When Sol was already famous, you'd introduce him to an artist, and he'd look at their work and he'd say, "Oh, let's exchange work!" And at that point the artist would be what we call a "newbie," a young artist hardly known, having never been shown anywhere, who would sell his or her drawings for \$300 or \$250. And Sol's pieces would be worth \$7000 or \$8000, but that didn't compute for him. He would exchange work! He was always so encouraging to artists and was just wonderful. A great human being, missed terribly.

ES: There are a couple of artists who may have only one piece in the show, but they've been very influential. Of course, if you mention text and art, the one artist that a lot of people think of is Cy Twombly. I know he was an important influence on several of the artists in the show. Twombly, as many of you know, was born in Lexington, Virginia, and studied with Pierre Daura for a while when he was a child. He also studied at Washington & Lee University, and he just died earlier this year.

One artist whom we know has been influenced by Twombly is John Waters, and this is the John Waters who did *Hairspray* (1988), the filmmaker out of Baltimore. He's spoken about his appreciation for Twombly, and he actually collects some of his work. If you go into the gallery, you'll see their two pieces next to each other. Another artist who talks about the influence of Twombly is Christine Hiebert. I know that you didn't always have an appreciation for his work, necessarily, and I think this is true of many people.

WHK: No, it took me a very long time. A lot of the paintings are monumental. They're over-sized, and I had terrible trouble dealing with that monumentality. That is troublesome for me; with a lot of things, if it gets too big, I lose track of what's going on. That's probably my fault, but so be it. But many years ago, there was a Twombly retrospective in Paris, and I had a light bulb experience there. All of a sudden, I felt that I had begun to understand both what was going on and what I had been missing before then.

So I started looking for a drawing, and I looked at a lot of drawings, and many of them did not speak to me at all. This drawing [*Untitled* (1971)] speaks to me for reasons that probably have less to do with Twombly than they do with how I feel about drawings. That's partially because this is a drawing that so marvelously takes advantage of *paper*. You know, the way colored pencil takes to paper, the way lead pencil goes on paper, the way ink goes on paper. This drawing deals with all of that, and it is, for me, more of a recitation of what he is thinking—on paper and about paper—than any kind of subject material. None of that is as important to me as the fact that, here, you can really see somebody who thinks and feels the wealth of experience that you can have with an object on paper.

ES: I think that's related to what Christine Hiebert has said about Twombly too. She talks about how he really freed up for her this role of writing and mark making.

Are there any other artists with whom you've had a light bulb moment?

WHK: Not nearly as much as I did with Twombly. Usually, with most of the artists whose work I've collected, I've seen a particular work several times before I make a decision. With Twombly, I was *looking* to make a decision. You know, I was searching for the right drawing. And I knew there had to be one. I just had the feeling that there had to be one.

There's a wonderful Twombly story, which I've told you. The Menil Collection has a building of just Twombly's work, and one room has seven huge paintings on the walls. Huge. One day the guard in that room called the director, who is a friend of mine, and the guard said to the director, "There's a woman who's come in here, and she's taken off all her clothes, and she's dancing in front of the paintings!" And the director said, "Well, just let her dance, and I'll come over." [*Laughter*] And he went over and he watched her dance, and after a while she stopped dancing and she put her clothes back on and she left. You know, I think it's a wonderful homage—both to the paintings and to that director—that he didn't interfere. I think it's really quite wonderful.

ES: I'd say we'd welcome naked dancing, right?
[*Laughter*]

WHK: Richard?

ES: I'm just putting that out there.

Another artist who is very present, even though we don't have a single work by him in the exhibition, is John Cage. For those of you who don't know, Cage was a very important twentieth-century composer, artist, writer, and innovator. This is a drawing by Nancy Haynes from 2010, titled *memory drawing (John Cage + Merce Cunningham)*. She has been very influenced by artists that she associates with creative movements in the 1960s, such as Cage and his partner,

the choreographer Merce Cunningham. There's another piece that quotes Cage, and it's by Ann Ledy [*Untitled* (1980)]. It includes quotes from artists and philosophers, and the largest quote on the whole piece is from an article by Cage talking about one of his pieces called *Empty Words*. We've shown John Cage a couple of times here at the University of Richmond.

WHK: Truth be known, if it weren't for John Cage, this exhibition wouldn't be here, and we wouldn't be sitting here, because I came here to see a Cage exhibition about a year and a half ago. And we started talking and that's how this all came about.

Cage, well...it's almost impossible to talk about Cage unless you have about five and a half hours. Because he's so influential—in so many ways, about so many things—that any time you start, you always end up linking him to this, that, and the other thing. He has become most famous for sound and music. And eight out of ten, if not nine out of ten, of the people who talk about John Cage's music talk about a piece called "4'33", which is a silent piece. There's no sound at all except ambient sound. And that's what they know. John was also a brilliant visual artist and very influential on dance because of his relationship with Cunningham.

But for me, there is a quietude, almost an aura, around his drawings—mostly his smoke drawings, which are made by wetting a sheet of paper and then exposing it to fire so that the smoke makes the image. You stand in front of those drawings and you can't have an evil thought—you just can't. And of course that has influenced many people, but his writing and his thinking, and his relationship to dance and relationships with other artists, have also been immensely influential.

ES: We should thank Steve Addiss [Professor of Art, University of Richmond] for those Cage exhibitions coming about. There are a number of artists in the

show who knew Cage, like William Anastasi, Dove Bradshaw, Ray Johnson, and Jasper Johns. He was very influential.

Along the lines of John Cage, and this is a bit tangential, but in thinking about his interest in Buddhism, I was struck by the number of pieces in the show that have a meditative presence. This is the work of Jill O'Bryan, a book [*Breaths #1* (2009)]. This is a beautiful piece, and if you get up close to it you can see there are pinpricks in the paper that were made during the length of a breath, and the holes were rubbed with graphite so you have the marks and then the shadows or rubbings on the facing pages. I believe she has even talked about how making it was a meditative process. But it's also a meditative process to look through the book, with the movement of the air through the holes and that relationship to breathing and the body. There's another work, which is also quite meditative, and that is Mary McDonnell's piece [*Untitled* (2007)].

WHK: There's something else that those two pieces have in common. Both were really serendipitous discoveries. Both of these artists know that I really didn't expect to acquire their work. In the case of Jill O'Bryan, I went to see the work of her partner [Charles Ross], and as I was leaving the studio, I saw a work on an abutting wall. I started to look at it, and I asked, "Whose is this?" And she said, "It's mine." It was a work that was half finished, and I said, "Well, when you finish it, I want to buy it." It was 40,000 *Breaths* (2000-2005), and it's a very big piece. So that's not what I went there for!

Mary [McDonnell] is more a painter than a drafts-person. When she had an exhibition in a gallery on Madison Avenue, a painting of hers was in the window, and I stopped and said, "That's *interesting*." I went in and I asked, "Does this artist do drawings?" And I was told, "No, we don't have any drawings." About two years later, I saw another work by Mary in the window, and

I went in, and then there *were* drawings. That's how this drawing came into the collection.

And yes, they are contemplative and meditative works, because you experience time, the passage of time. If you experience an artist's making something during a passage of time, it makes you have a *sense* of that time, and a sense of the commitment of time, and the demand that kind of commitment makes on *you*. It is also wonderfully restful if you're agitated, because it forces you to look at these things very carefully. And if you look at things like this very carefully, you *have* to bring down the agitation.

ES: Do you ever find that's hard for you?

WHK: Well, after all these years, I now know what that process is, and I know that I can trust that process. I know that at a certain point, I can look at particular works of art and it'll settle me down.

ES: Do you like video art?

WHK: I don't like video art for a different reason. It is because the image is too short. You know, I have a whole problem with video and television: it ages me. Every day ages me. [*Laughter*] It ages me because I want to stop and look, and I can't. And the sequence just doesn't...I'm not quick enough for that. My eyes cannot digest enough of what's there to be appreciative of it. And that's not my fault, that's not the artist's fault, that's the fact of time.

ES: I was just thinking because so many people refer to video as a time-based medium. But it's a different experience...

WHK: It's a totally different experience.

ES: When I was working with Rachel on this show, she mentioned that there were a number of pieces that had never been shown before. I believe this is a piece that

hasn't been shown widely: it's a gorgeous book by Sara Sosnowy called *Blue* (1995). And John Fraser is here...

WHK: Well John Fraser has shown before.

ES: But these are brand new works.

WHK: Yes.

ES: And the Buster Cleveland pieces, [*ART FOR UM* (1993-1998)], have those been shown before?

WHK: No. When we started talking about this show, we started talking about text almost from the very beginning. We've never done that before, simply because most of these exhibitions have been selections from the collection, which means that they're singular objects that have particular significance to the collection. These works by Cleveland have no particular significance to the collection. It is just wonderful work that I love, and I thought it was fun and I had a great time with it. It is a way of drawing and printmaking that is very individual, and the fact that all of these were hand addressed fits them very much into the area of drawing.

ES: Right. Would you mind telling us a little bit about Buster Cleveland's art? I'm not sure if people are familiar with him.

WHK: Well how do you talk about Buster Cleveland's art...I don't think I can do it justice.

ES: Well, I will say that there's a case of his pieces in the gallery, and they're each 5 inches by 5 inches.

WHK: And they're all altered images of *Artforum* covers, and all of them include other artists' work. [The series] was a commentary on *Artforum*, and it's both a slight dig at it and a slight appreciation for it. And it is humorous.

ES: And these were subscription-based, right?

WHK: Yes.

ES: So it was \$100 for a year.

WHK: Yeah, or \$1000 for life.

ES: So how many did you get per year?

WHK: You usually got twelve, because it followed *Artforum*.

ES: And then he made his own stamps, too.

WHK: Yes. I first saw his work in a gallery whose name has become famous, but the history may not be. The gallerist was Gracie Mansion, which is also the [name of the] residence of the mayor of the city of New York. But Gracie's first gallery was her bathroom, and people would walk through her apartment to go into the bathroom to see the art. And that's where I first saw Buster Cleveland's work.

ES: You have some Ray Johnson pieces as well. Do those get shown much?

WHK: No. I have shown one other piece that is very personal.

ES: The name of the project was the New York Correspondence School.

WHK: Yes, you would receive something in the mail that had either a drawing or an image or something like that, and it would say on there, "Add something to this and then send it..." to somebody else, with their address. And then you might never see it again. Or sometimes you would get something that had already been seen by two or three people, and then you got to keep it. So some of these are kind of wonderful, and you can only show a certain amount of it. [This piece] is actually something that I added: it was a bear souvenir that I had in the office, which I Xeroxed onto whatever it was, and I sent it to somebody else.

ES: Nice. There are also, I'll just mention briefly, a number of artists in the exhibition who make their own stamps. Did you know Donald Evans?

WHK: Yes, I certainly did. As you said in the introduction, I was born in Holland, and lived there until I was thirteen years old, so I spoke some Dutch. I spoke *good* Dutch then, but I don't anymore. This artist lived in Holland. He was an American, an expatriate, who lived in Amsterdam and tragically died in a studio fire there, when he was 35 or 36 years old. But he created worlds. He created countries, and each of the countries had postage, and he created the postage. These are all watercolors, hand-done watercolors, and the stamps are also hand-done.

This is a particularly funny one [*Etat Domino Stamp Sheet* (1973)]. It says "Airport Adelshoeve," which is the invented name of the invented airport in the invented country. It's about the anniversary of the first stunt flight at that [fictional] airport, and you know, you have to look at it in the exhibition, because these are exquisite little watercolors. They are so beautiful. You begin to wonder, "What is this? What is this country, what is this nation that he's created?" For those of you who are stamp collectors, he also created what most stamp collectors have, which is an album in which you put the stamps, in glassine envelopes. For each of his stamps he created a sheet in the album, and when he sold one, that one was entered into the album, and it is a fascinating study of somebody who is really concerned about that. The worlds he created are marvelous. There's a whole Caribbean country that he created, which has wonderful fruits and vegetables and things like that.

ES: Well, we have a bit of time left. Does anyone from the audience have some questions?

WHK: Ahhhh, come on...

ES: Oh, that sounds encouraging, doesn't it? [*Laughter*]

Audience: Could you talk about text itself, as mark making or drawings you think of as text?

WHK: Well, this is why I like to stand in front of art when I'm talking about it. Because the text is individualized, and there are some works here which *are* text. You have that book page...

ES: By which artist? Molly Springfield?

WHK: Yes. This is copied text [*Chapter IX* (2008)]. There are a number of artists who pay homage, in a sense, to philosophers and other artists by actually copying their text by hand. It is another way of making an image that you have to think about. Why is there an image of a text that you could read as a text? And *should* I read it as a text? Or should I read it as a drawing? And if you look at it long enough to find out what you have to resolve, that's the real point of it. To make you look long enough to find out that there is something more, that there is something going on there that is different from a printed page of a book. That must be significant. And then you begin to think about what the significance is, and at that point you look inward and you say to yourself, "You know, I could never do that. That's crazy; I would never do that. Why would an artist do that?" Wonderful! Now you're beginning to think about something, and you're beginning to think about art and about what art is all about and why it is so wonderful.

ES: You know who fits that description, actually, is Annabel Daou. I hope she doesn't mind me mentioning that.

WHK: Annabel is also here, and you can confront her when you see her. Annabel is Lebanese and she's fluent in Arabic. This drawing [*Constitution* (2004)] is a transliteration of the Constitution of the United States Preamble into Arabic. And once you begin to think

about what this is, and then you see it and think about the page not being fully covered, you have a whole lot of other thoughts.

There is an interesting story that goes with this. The chief financial officer of the Museum of Modern Art in New York came to my space once and saw this drawing, and he started reading it in Arabic. This is the chief financial officer; this is not the curator. I was dumbfounded. I said to him, “What the hell?” And he said, “Well, I was going to study Persian miniatures, and then the money ran out and I got an MBA.”
[Laughter]

But it is really all about that process of making you think, stopping you to think, making you think, “Why would somebody do this? Why is this art? What is art?” And you know, the question of what is art is there throughout this exhibition, and really throughout any collector’s collection. You never really resolve that question, because every time that you come to a new art object, that sense of wonder and that sense of quietude that you can’t explain arrives—sometimes that sense of excitement, sometimes the sense of, “Oh my god, I could never try to even think about that!” And then you’re already thinking about it, and you come back to it, because once you begin to think about something for that long, you take a second look. And that’s the purpose. It’s a wonderful purpose.

We’re so grateful to all artists, not just the artists who are here, but to *all* artists who work, who make these things that are not only a joy but also a power, to make people think about what their place in life is and why they should be doing these things. It’s a great contribution that artists make, all the time. I often say that America is in deep trouble at the moment because we don’t make things anymore. The exceptions to that are the artists who are making things—making wonderful things. [Applause]

ES: Do we have any more questions?

Audience: It’s been a real treat to see the Mark Lombardi and the Ed Ruscha. Any comments you’d like to make? Just your thoughts on collecting their work.

WHK: The Mark Lombardi piece [*Casino Resort Development in the Bahamas, c. 1955-89 (Fourth Version)* (1995)] is a drawing that speaks to me because I spent twelve years of my life in politics and I guess I must have been six or seven years old when...so I spent eighty years of my life *in* politics, but I spent twelve years of my life *employed* in politics. This is a drawing that is about politics, and it is about government, and it is about the trouble that we have as human beings, and how certain human attributes overpower all other things. And most of the time, he’s talking about greed and what greed does to people and how many people get involved in greed. But even if you looked at it just as a drawing, if the names and the connections didn’t mean anything to you, the drawing has an excitement. You feel the visceral excitement that goes on, as if these lines are veins and streams that go back and forth to each other. If you stand far away from it, you come closer just because of that. Lombardi was, again, someone who recognized that paper is something with which you can do things that are just so amazing. It’s not a happy drawing. It is not a drawing that makes you feel good, because it’s a drawing that tells you too much about humanity and greed and the problems that result from that.

Ed Ruscha’s drawing is very different. It is a whole other aspect of drawing. Anybody who looks at this [*Suspended Sheet Stained with Ivy* (1973)] from far away says, “Is that three-dimensional? Is that an object or is it a drawing? Is it flat?” It really does look completely three-dimensional. The fact that it floats that way is a really wonderful thing that Ruscha has done, using graphite, and it is just a beautiful drawing. It, by the way, is a contemplative drawing, very much so. In the center of that sheet, if you will, there is a stain. In many of his drawings, he put stains: grass

stains, tobacco stains, and things like that, because he wanted you to look carefully to see that it is not really a sheet. It is just the paper that he's made to look as if it is a sheet. And that is a wonderful stain drawing.

Some years ago [Ruscha] had an exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C., and there were a number of stain drawings in that show, one of which was a bloodstain drawing. And I spoke with Ruscha; I was there for the opening, because they borrowed one of my drawings. He was there for the opening too, and I asked him whether he had any more of the bloodstain drawings, because while I had a stain drawing, I didn't have a bloodstain drawing. A few weeks later, I got a postcard from him that said he didn't have any more bloodstain drawings, but he was sending some other drawings to New York, and I should go and look at them. And I went to the gallery that represents him and saw this drawing [*Gray Sex* (1979)], and I had a feeling that I had to buy this drawing. It was my seventy-fifth birthday, and I figured that *Gray Sex*, which is the title of this drawing, was an appropriate birthday present for me on that day. [Laughter]

ES: Is there anyone who has one more burning question they would like to ask?

Audience: Can you talk about the Alice Aycock drawing [*The Garden of Scripts (Villandry)* (1986)]?

WHK: This is probably the drawing that most closely relates to what we're talking about, because Alice has made a number of drawings that are text mazes of one kind or another. It's a difficult drawing to say anything about when it isn't here [in this room], because you really have to look at that drawing and read that drawing to get what her feeling about it is. My sense of it always has been that this garden-like area with all this text around it is really telling you to contemplate more carefully. It is again a drawing that demands that you get closer, a drawing that demands that you spend time with it.

ES: This is a big piece.

WHK: It's a very big piece, yes. Well, you know, her sculptures are very complex and very big. And she has made other very big drawings.

ES: Thank you so much, all of you, for coming, and I hope you'll join us for the reception and to take a long look at a lot of the works in the show.