

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **JAMES TURRELL (JT)** Artist
INTERVIEWER: **JEFF WEINSTEIN (JW)** Arts & Culture Journalist / Editor
LOCATION: **THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**
DATE: **JULY 14, 2010**

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JW: We're here. I'm Jeff Weinstein and we're on the fifth floor of MoMA's Education and Research Building with James Turrell at 10:30 on July 14th, 2010. Hello.

JT: Hello.

JW: Well, the story is your story, and we're here to find out how *Meeting* came to be, at PS1, your room, and what your relationship to PS1 has been, as an artist. But perhaps we can start with your background, very quickly. I know we have your background, we know where you're from, but if you'd just like to say a few things about growing up, going to art school, just to get it on the record for the Museum.

JT: Well, I didn't go to art school before this. I went to Pomona College in Claremont, but there were good teachers in art. Bates Lowry, who went to the Modern, and then on to the rescue of the paintings in Venice, was there. Jim [James T.] Demetrian was there. And then I went to Irvine, I applied to go to Cooper Union but didn't get in. I went to UC Irvine, but that's the year it started and that's when John Coplans was there, Tony DeLap, and also as a speaker, was Walter Hopps, or Chico, as he is known. And Frank Stella was coming out the next year but he wouldn't sign the loyalty oath that California had for its state workers, so [critic] Barbara Rose taught instead.

JW: They were a couple at the time; is that correct?

JT: Yes. It was sort of a heady time in California, and that's how I began. My first show was at the Pasadena Art Museum, which was in '67, and that was, Jim Demetrian was there, John Coplans was the curator, and Helen [inaudible] was there. And so that's how things started in '67. I first came to do this show with Alanna [Heiss] called the "Rooms" show.

JW: That was the show in 1976.

JT: Yes. Well, '78, I think it was '78; was it '76?

JW: '76 to '77; it was in the winter.

JT: Yes. And of course, I didn't get everything together to get started, so I started late on that. And then took off the roof. Alanna told me that it was probably about six to nine inches thick. It turned out to be about four-and-a-half feet of concrete up there, because it was made to actually take floors above it.

JW: Now this is for the "Rooms" show you're talking about?

JT: Yes, that's when I first came to PS1. I was late in getting it going, so I didn't get it together. But I had the show at the Whitney in 1980 [a Turrell retrospective]. So I had it complete for that.

JW: So let me clarify just one thing. Alanna asked you to take part in the "Rooms" show?

JT: Yes.

JW: Did she actually, personally ask you?

JT: Yes. And then also, I think Doug[las] Wheeler was there. There were a number of artists from California who were going to do this. And we didn't really get it together

to get everything going in New York at that time. But it was a difficult thing. She had basically, essentially, squatted this building, to take it over. I mean, it's quite remarkable, what was done, when you really think of it. And actually, this story is really Alanna's story, the story of PS1. And I knew, well, Brendan Gill.

JW: He was on the original board.

JT: Yes; sort of Mr. New York. And he was supportive of this, too.

JW: May I ask how you knew Brendan Gill?

JT: He was a writer, and I knew him through Susan Woldenberg. I don't know if she's been in on this or anything.

JW: No. Well, there are many people who could be.

JT: That's true.

JW: We're just going along as far as we can.

JT: Yes, so she had been a student of mine for one semester, the one time I had a lectureship in California. So she introduced me to Brendan Gill, and he was talking about that. Anyway, that's how I got out and met Alanna.

JW: Alanna. I see.

JT: So, she was quite a figure, then. At that time, she was with Jene Highstein. And that was just kind of coming undone, and sort of famously coming undone.

JW: Right. And that means she was married to Jene, and they had a son, Lokke. And did you come to New York to meet her, or did she come to California to meet you?

JT: I was looking at galleries and all of that sort of stuff, then getting ready for the show at the Whitney.

JW: And that was in 1980, right?

JT: 1980.

JW: Yes. So the other California artists that I looked up, because Alanna was interested in the Light and Space group, were Robert Irwin and Eric Orr, is that right?

JT: Eric Orr has passed on, sadly. Robert is still alive and doing work. And he did that screen that was on the inside, the green screen up the stairwell.

JW: Do you know when that was there?

JT: Well all of ours were sort of afterward. And that was no fault of Alanna's.

JW: No, I understand.

JT: Basically, we expected more help, and all that. And that was one of the big lessons for me with PS1, is, you just went and did it, and if you didn't, it wasn't going to happen. So, there wasn't the money for it. I got \$3,000 at first, and then I got Christophe de Menil to donate \$10,000. And so basically, things were done on a very low budget. And Alanna did what she could, but you know, you're an artist, so you kind of had to do it if you wanted to get it done.

JW: Did your gallery help--you were at Pace?

JT: No. I originally did start with Pace but that ended within a year because we had a disagreement. And then later, in 1980, I was with Leo, and showed at Castelli Greene Street, in 1980. And I did later patch things up with Arne [Glimcher], and that was a misunderstanding. They liked very much my first work, and then sometimes, showing these big room spaces, it was, I guess, for them, sort of "pitch and switch." That was going to be harder to sell, and so on and so forth. But now we have shown together and. . .

JW: I see. Thank you.

JT: Those things come and go in art. And I have been a part of all of that.

JW: Yes. So you started with almost no money and you had to take off an enormous amount of concrete ceiling. Did the staff help you? The PS1 staff?

JT: Yes. There was a man named Steve. I can't remember his last name now. A very early curator there who had a disagreement later with Alanna, but, not to say that I didn't also. But he helped a little bit, helped me kind of arrange things. I had to have a compressor craned up onto the roof to have the jackhammer, and then I jackhammered that all out.

JW: Did you personally jackhammer that?

JT: Yes, mostly. Percy did the welding and taking out of the beams. I mean, they're huge beams because they did expect to build something on top.

JW: And this was on the-

JT: Fourth floor. Well, it was actually the third, but it's four from the courtyard.

JW: From the courtyard it's four floors, but it's technically the third floor.

JT: That comes into play later when I nailed the Germans in their rooms.

JW: [Laughing]

JT: [Laughing] Their windows were on the fourth. They had to go four floors down to get to the ground, when they got out of their room.

JW: Wasn't this dangerous for you to do? Did you feel safe doing this, doing all of this physical work on the roof without too much help?

JT: I did have help, and then Craig [inaudible] came later to help. So, no, it didn't. At that time, New York was not as safe, also. Going out on the number 7 [subway] and going out to Long Island City was not as; to go there late at night was different than it is today. New York has changed amazingly; it's gentrified everywhere, and it's a much gentler place.

JW: Many people have said that it was difficult for people at night, and sometimes even during the day, to get to PS1.

JT: Well I lived there, I mean, I lived in the room so-

JW: Oh, you were living there.

JT: I took the roof off and so I had a tent. I lived outside inside PS1.

JW: Do you remember what year this was?

JT: That was 1979, that I was finishing it up, because I got it so we could finish it before the time I had the show at the Whitney.

JW: Yes, so, it's listed, however, as starting in 1986.

JT: That's when it was restored. Because then, after that, we had big leaks and problems that happened, so then Alanna just said, "You've got to come and fix it." And I did. So it was reopened in '86 when I had a show, I think with Marian Goodman, because after Castelli, I showed with Marian Goodman and then with Barbara Gladstone, then back to Pace.

JW: So it was coordinated to open with the Whitney show, at PS1.

JT: Yes. So that's when it first opened, but we didn't have the closing roof working, and all kinds of stuff wasn't done. It didn't drain properly. That was the biggest problem that Alanna had.

JW: When did she get in touch with you to come and say, "Fix it"?

JT: I was sort of pretty much badgered from then on [laughter] to fix it. But I didn't have any money to do that, and I had been sued at the Whitney for a woman who fell in the Whitney, leaning against what she thought was a wall. And it just turned out that her husband was the Supreme Court Chief Justice of the State of Oregon, so they took me to court. And Alanna's husband arranged the defense for the trial.

JW: Frederick Sherman.

JT: Fred Sherman, yes.

JW: And what was the outcome?

JT: Well in the end, it was good. Although it cost him and me money to defend. Even with pro bono work, it's not free. But he was really good about all that. And so that finally went away, but that took three years.

JW: Three years.

JT: That was kind of tough.

JW: It interfered with some work?

JT: Yes. I've learned that, now I don't care for litigation but I'm no longer afraid of it, so. [Laughing] It's kind of how the life in this world goes, particularly in the U.S.

JW: So, you used the word *badger*. . . So Alanna was actively interested in having you re-

JT: That's her personality.

JW: Yes.

JT: That is her personality and it is only because of that that PS1 exists. That's absolutely the case. She is a sweetheart that's tough as nails. And we had our differences on, I mean, I almost lost all her money from the German contingent.

JW: Was that about nailing them in?

JT: Yes. That's when I had this incident.

JW: Would you explain; do you want to go into it now?

JT: That was right before the Whitney show, so that was in '79.

JW: '79. Do you want to tell us about that?

JT: The Germans that were there and they're ones who are now known better in the art world, whose names I won't mention, but they were a pretty rough-and-tumble group. But they came to New York on the scholarship with the studios and all that, and they got nice places. I don't know if they thought they were nice, or what. I think that they thought they were getting something better, but you're right next to New York. You have studios, and so they were going to New York but they were doing their work there. And so they were in the ones right across the hall from where the Sky Space is now. And I was living in that space, in a tent, because it was outside. You opened the door and you were outside. And they had, some of them had brought girlfriends over there, and some had got girlfriends while they were in the U.S.

JW: These were all guys, then.

JT: Yes, these were all guys. And there were also some architects. There was Lars Larup, who I, sadly, he was totally innocent and I nailed him in his room, because I couldn't tell whether he could get out. But at any rate, what happened was, one of them had this girlfriend, Dagmar, and they went out drinking, and they were pretty abusive guys. And they beat her up pretty badly, and she was bleeding from the ear,

so, I thought, "This is not a good sign." So I took her to the hospital and they were wanting me to sign all of this stuff. She couldn't speak any English. It was really a disaster.

JW: Now, who was this?

JT: Dagmar was the girl. And I had working for me, David Scott, who worked for me at the time; is now an artist in Los Angeles. And so I, I mean, she just was really beaten up and crying, so I just took her to the hospital. And then somehow, I got them to release her to me, because the hospital wanted to press charges or get the police involved. I at least kept the police out of it, for the time being. And then she stayed in our part, because I didn't want her going back to the guys who had just beat her up. So, on a Friday night, they came over with the strangest weapons- a hammer, canvas pliers... I didn't know what they were going to do with the canvas pliers [chuckles], a saw, and a crowbar. And there were four of them who came over to divest me of their woman, who was now living in David's tent, because I had a bigger tent, but she had that herself. I was up nailing, and I had a, I used an air-nailer, which used 20-lb nails that are quite big, so it's about the, it's like a 9 mm, not quite like a 45, when it goes off. And so they came over with these weapons to take us on, and anyway, I shot – you just pull the safety back on the edge of the frontage of the nail gun – and I shot a few nails at their feet. And they backed up and they were swearing. And anyway, they were brandishing these-

JW: Were they drunk at the time?

JT: I don't know, to be honest, but they drank a lot. I might have myself. Anyway, I pushed them back with this nail gun because I had been working on the piece, and we did everything with air tools. And so they were quite rude and exercised and telling me what they thought of this whole thing.

JW: *Auf Deutsch?* Or in English?

JT: Both. As best in English as they could, and certainly more in *Deutsch*. [Laughing] Anyway, so, I just shot them back into their rooms. But there were a number of rooms, and some rooms had two doors. There were sort of school rooms that have two doors, and I didn't know what ones they were in so I just took this nail gun and nailed these oak doors, big, old oak doors from schools before, solid wood. With panels, so they had panels in them. And shot at them, and if they started coming out another door, I shot them back in. I dragged out the compressor into the hallway. Now I'm limited because I don't have any-and David wasn't there, I needed someone to get me an extension cord. But I had 120 pounds to do it with. So then I got them all nailed in. I didn't know which one they could come out, so I nailed them all shut, with a few nails, and then I just came back and just nailed them about every inch. I mean, I really nailed them into their rooms. And I knew they had water in there, in some of the rooms. And as I said, Lars, the architect from Sweden, I inadvertently nailed him in his room. So we've since-

JW: Made up.

JT: We've since had our denouement there. [Laughing] He had me come to speak when he was dean at Rice, of the architecture school. So that's when he revealed to me that, I hadn't known about this, he revealed to me that he had also been nailed in there for that weekend.

JW: So that was on a weekend.

JT: Yes. But they got out on Sunday. They got enough stuff together for one guy to get out, down the outside, and they, the German consulate came over to talk to Alanna on Monday. And Alanna was furious with me.

JW: Even though the information about their beating up the woman, Dagmar; that had to come out.

JT: The big thing was, this was going to pull the plug on her program, too.

JW: Yes, I understand that.

JT: It was difficult for both of us, and I felt totally supported by Alanna, but I now understand that she was feeling not exactly supported by me, and anyway, and they kept calling me a cowboy, and all that. And I said, "You know, I am. I have a ranch and I do that. And you do that again and I'll [laughing] do all the more." So anyway, I nailed them in there, and that was a big incident, and it caused problems for Alanna. And the difficulty was that then, David Scott and Dagmar fell in love with each other, so this made it all the more difficult. I couldn't believe it. So my assistant falls in love with her, and they're off as a couple now.

JW: Is Dagmar an artist, or what was she?

JT: No, she was just the girlfriend. But she was always involved in the artists. And David has since -- she's married, and off with a husband in Germany, and David every now and then hears from her. So they have a very nice rapport.

JW: Did this get any publicity at the time?

JT: No. I mightn't have said that...

JW: It's a new story.

JT: So that did happen. And Alanna, I think, handled it all very well, in the end, because it [PS1] didn't lose its support, and they kept the Germans in. We had another little incident with them over at Manducati's, but that was...

JW: Did they stay on for their studio full-term?

JT: Full-term, yes.

JW: And you were also continuing to work on the room?

JT: Yes. So we had sort of a, let's say, cordial-

JW: Détente.

JT: Yes.

JW: After that. But that was one of the incidents that happened. The other; I remember coming back after a party, drinking in the city, coming back, and I forgot my keys. So we were locked out, and it was about 3:30 in the morning. And so I remember climbing up the outside. We drew straws; there were four of us; me, David Scott, and two others. There was another guy who helped, too, who helped quite a bit. I can't remember his name; I'm sorry. And Steve. Anyway, so I got the shortest straw, so I climbed up, went up, and it was kind of difficult, but then, in that condition, I wasn't feeling any fear. And I got into the window. It was on the second floor, which is three floors above the entrance place. But anyway, after some difficulty, I came back, I opened the door, and we were all laughing and celebrating, and as we were doing that, the door shut behind me. [Laughter] Locked out again.

JW: Locked out again. Situation comedy.

JT: Then we drew straws and I didn't have to do it. So someone else went and did it. But it was, we were sort of sobered up by that experience. [Laughing] It was a terrific time, then. But for me, that's a time when, actually, I, like many of the artists were actually in residence there. We actually lived there.

JW: Were people allowed to live there full-time?

JT: No, you weren't supposed to, but people did. The same as artists today.

JW: Well, I think now, they've tried to get it up to code now, and people aren't supposed to be cooking in those rooms, but of course, they apparently did. Because The Museum of Modern Art is now in charge of PS1, is partly the reason, I think. It might have also been before the museum.

JT: Well for me, this is a good, I mean, there was always problems on the island [of Manhattan] of having the sort of rough-and-tumble early shows of young artists, and this was a place that was really dedicated to that. And if you wanted the roof off, you took the roof off. If you needed to live there, you lived there. All of those things would happen. So it had that kind of quality. And in a way, the only place at that time doing things sort of like that was the Biennial at the Whitney, which; [JW checks recorder] everything okay?

JW: Yes, I just wanted to check it.

JT: And that sort of didn't go over with some of the trustees of the Whitney, too. Because some of those things maybe weren't ready to bring over to the offshore existence of Manhattan.

JW: So the Whitney objected to the work that you were-

JT: No, no. I'm just saying that this way, by the Modern, the Modern doesn't have to worry about that because now they have that place out in...

JW: Yes; it's a safety valve.

JT: A safety valve; you can do that. In a way, that works really well, and the Whitney has always had problems with their Biennial. And yet, the Modern wasn't looked upon as part of contemporary art any more. And now they can be a part of contemporary art and what's going on, and at the same time, sort of keep the modern classics here, on the island. I look at Manhattan as having as much to do with America as Hong Kong has to do with China. And so, this is an island offshore, and it's an island that the

internationals love to think of as America. But this is where art can stand, and so, it's important. I get involved with that too, but it doesn't have much to do with America, though. You can see that in any election.

JW: As a lifelong New Yorker who has lived in Philadelphia and in San Diego and Los Angeles, I sometimes wonder if Los Angeles feels that way, as well.

JT: Well it does now. LA has now one million Koreans in it. I mean, it's amazing. It's sort of taken over by these different communities, and it is the second largest Hispanic city in the world, Mexico City being the largest. So, you know, the complexion of everything changes. You can't stop demographics. And show me a fence that ever worked. It didn't work at Hadrian's Wall. The Great Wall of China didn't work. The Berlin Wall. It's not going to work in Jerusalem, and it's certainly, well, we have just fences in parts. I don't understand even the concept of our border. I mean, it's actually ridiculous. But so that this change is happening in America, and you can either get with it and embrace it or you can object to it kicking and screaming, which we seem to like to do, too.

JW: So you were working on your room, and it reopens in '86, to a lot of fanfare. It had a very good critical reception, in a very different way than the first time. It was after the "Rooms" show, when you started, in its first incarnation, during the Whitney retrospective, in 1980.

JT: Also, by then, Alanna had PS1 a lot more together, even though you may not think it exactly together, in terms of people, it being part of-

JW: It was reviewed on a regular basis, all of the art critics in New York came out to visit. Many came from elsewhere, as well. And there were a number of big foreign shows that weren't being done in the museums, and other shows like that. There was a different context for your work. It was in a bigger art world. PS1 was perhaps more part of the art world,

JT: Yes.

JW: than it was initially.

JT: Well, it's grown up in the same way that artists of my generation have, too. And it's aged pretty well in keeping itself alive and in the mix.

JW: Do you go back to your room there?

JT: Yes; yes.

JW: How do you feel about it when you go back? Do you, are you looking around practically, to see if it's holding up?

JT: Oh yeah; yeah.

JW: Or is it something that you do with your other work? I don't know; do you go to the Nasher [Sculpture Center, Dallas] and look at your work there?

JT: Yes, I am involved with these things and keeping them going. I have to say that, you know, there are people who thought I was such a fool to put so much money to finish that at PS1, but as far as an investment, it's probably the best investment I've made in myself as an artist, in that it has done more for me in terms of people being interested in doing that kind of work elsewhere, than any other piece that I've done.

JW: Could you give me some details about the money? About, you say you put more money into that.

JT: Well yes. Basically, it didn't have a lot of money to finish it, and Alanna had only a certain budget, and of course, all of the artists were busting the budget. So, if you want to do that, go ahead, but you had to figure out how to get that in. So, as I said, I got Christophe de Menil to give money, which she did. Then, even Marian helped a

little bit, Marian Goodman, when I was finishing the piece up at the time that we had a show with her.

JW: That was in the '80s.

JT: That was '87; yes.

JW: So she helped then with finishing this. Do you remember about how much it cost to do?

JT: No, I have no idea, and I'd just as soon not. I think that that depends on, do you put in the budget of living there?

JW: [Laughing] Labor, overtime.

JT: Do you include the cost of the tent? [Laughter]

JW: Well, capital expenses. No, it's, I mention this because the money has come up, as a source of debt for PS1, and I wonder if you know anything about that.

JT: Yes.

JW: PS1 has had a debt in which a couple of the people I've spoken to said was something of a result of the Light artists, not just yourself. And I'm wondering if this is part of something you recall or remember.

JT: No, I don't know anything about that. I honestly don't. I know that I would occasionally get some money from Alanna, but mostly we had to really go out and get it ourselves to finish the thing. And then, so, well if the Light artists put a debt on anything in New York, we're happy to have done that, because New York did precious little else for us.

JW: [Laughing] I'm only trying to clarify something that other people have said, and they don't have a good memory of exactly what it was, either. And again, because the records are not clear, we're trying to-

JT: Well, I think this Steve, he was the one who was trying to, was kind of working the bank. I mean, he actually helped a number of the artists there more than I think he was supposed to. And I gladly partook in that, if it were possible. But he had so many people asking him, that you just had to get in line, a bit. But this was, and I don't know about that; you should talk to Alanna about that. I know that it was a difficult period. Nobody had a lot of money then.

JW: It's very difficult always for nonprofits to raise money, and it was very difficult to raise money for the large numbers of shows that PS1 had.

JT: I mean, I want to say that the amount of art per dollar was probably better than anyplace that I've ever seen. So I think that that kind of efficiency was amazing.

JW: The curators have mentioned that the difficulty was filling that large space when they opened. There had to be a lot of art.

JT: That was true, too; yes. Well, my only work there was the work on that piece there. And my time there was limited. Coming back in '86 to fix it, we did that pretty well then. And then of course, we did a little sprucing up at the time of it reopening when Fred[erick] Fisher did the renovation.

JW: That was in 1997?

JT: Something like that, yes. Which is pretty terrific to see, and each step, I saw sort of a coming of age with PS1, and more importance given to the structure of the organization and to the building, and also to the artists that came out of it.

JW: Do you have any stories to tell or firsthand information about artists that you know who were influenced by going to that room?

JT: No. I do know that there were six weddings and there were two people who asked me to be the godparents of their children that were conceived in the room, so, the room has had its uses.

JW: Conceived in the room.

JT: That's what they said. [Laughing] I mean, people did live at PS1.

JW: There's an installation at the Whitney right now ["Christian Marclay: Festival"] in which there is a series of white sofas and music playing, and there have been; well, I won't get into that.

JT: Well, there were people that sort of, I guess, made a piece out of that, sort of. I know that in Minneapolis, they want to do it in the spoon of Oldenburg that he has in the garden there.

JW: But do you know of anybody who has gone to all of yours, almost 40 rooms, around?

JT: No. I have more than 40. I have works in 25 countries, now. This is something that really did start me off, and I have a great affection for both PS1 and also for the effort that everyone there, particularly Alanna, put in getting that going for people. Because that was really something special that occurred here.

JW: Yes. Okay; I'm going over; do you want to take a break for just a moment?

JT: Yes.

[INTERVIEW RESUMES]

JT: The nice thing-

JW: Okay, we'll start again.

JT: -about PS1, you did do it yourself at PS1. I mean, you had to be responsible. And it wasn't done for you.

JW: It wasn't done for you, or very little was done for you. You were saying a little bit more about the Germans you nailed into the room, that the story has grown?

JT: It has gotten much better. They said I nailed a swastika on the door, and I didn't do that. But where the panels get thin, there's the surround of solid wood. These were big oak doors, and then there were raised panels. So they would be shouting at me and yelling at me, so every now and then, I just put the nail gun and shoot a nail that would go right through, and I could hear it ricocheting inside. And they'd shout back again. So it was a little bit, uh, we had somewhat of a confrontation there.

JW: Yes. You have a good visceral memory of it.

JT: But yes, it's gotten bigger and more involved in what I did. I did chase them down a hall with the nail gun, so that's-

JW: That'll do it. It may not be the case, but I know that Alanna was thinking of bringing a number of people who were doing work similar – not similar to yours, but the so-called Light and Space artists. I think she had a name for the series, the Light and Perception series. And do you know anything more about the other people?

JT: Everyone came and did his piece. Doug Wheeler was going to do a piece on the southwest corner and out on the roof.

JW: Right; this is Douglas Wheeler.

JT: But I think that he was going to, it had a drop-off or something that Alanna thought was dangerous, and she just thought that, basically, we were pretty impossible as a

group. And when we got the opportunity, we upped the ante every time. So I think that that was not so easy for her. And, I don't know. Anyway, it was something to come to New York from California, because everything was easier. It was easier to get materials and to have them to drive up with them, although, PS1 was pretty good for that. I used the limo. She had this limo that had been donated.

JW: [Laughing] So you were taking lumber, two by fours, in the limo.

JT: Yes. That's something that's kind of terrific.

JW: Any other artists that you can recall from that group?

JT: Well, those were the ones that did or were going to do pieces there. Doug's didn't get done. Irwin's did, but I don't think it's there any more.

JW: Right.

JT: I'm not sure she cared for it that much, because it sort of was, it made it seem more jail-like or something. But it was a nice piece when it first went in, but things don't get really maintained well there. That's one of the things that happened. And of course, I took care of that by continually coming back to redo the piece.

JW: That's why I asked.

JT: And so that happened, as I said, in '80, briefly, and then it deteriorated because it wasn't draining well and needed the covering roof and all, sliding roof. Then in '86, that pretty much did it, but then, when Fred [Fisher] came, we then went and did that again. So, it does take some maintenance, but certainly, the whole building does, too. And every time I've come, it's always been up another level and getting better, and now that the Modern has it, it's doing the same thing again. So, I guess, terrific. But the same thing has happened to all of the artists who really grew up with it. And I'm certainly one of those.

JW: Can I ask you just a question about the piece, which you may have answered elsewhere? Did the name, *Meeting*, come because of your Quaker family background?

JT: Yes. And also the idea of the meeting of the space inside to the space in the sky, and feeling that juncture, having it be a visceral, almost physical, feeling, as though there were material or something there. Because in my work, I often took light and gave it a feeling of thing-ness, of solidity. And Irwin kind of came from the opposite direction. He would often take some thing, like scrim, or his painting, or glass, and dissolve it with a light quality. So in that way he almost used light to dissolve the physicalness of the material, and I used light and tried to give a materiality to it.

JW: A couple of questions about the work, too. It's got artificial light. Did you experiment with different colors, different tints or intensities?

JT: Yes, and I do that much more now. I actually changed those, so that that kind of work has evolved over time. But in this work I used the Osram Linestra [bulbs], which is made for dressing rooms and bathrooms. That is, it's a tungsten light that makes your face look warm and good. You can really see the difference if you put a fluorescent light in your bathroom; you look terrible under it. So that's what that was made for, but it had the ability to go end to end with lights not having a gap, like most fluorescents do, so I used this around. And the big thing is that any time you light a white surface with warm light in the interior, you'll intensify it in the opening, the quality of blueness. It can be a rainy day and you'll have blue sky. So this idea that we make color, something we're quite unaware of, that we give the sky its color, was something that I was doing in this piece. And that was the first one to involve doing that. Before, it was just working with the space outside of the space inside. But basically, our, the light on the inside stays on, and when it's the end of the day and still daylight, you don't notice the light that's on in the interior, because our light is not of much significance. But then, as the light goes down in the sky with dusk, the light

on the interior becomes more prominent, and it has this effect on the coloration of the sky.

JW: And it changes over the period of time.

JT: I also like the fact that PS1 then was a little bit rough and just made such a pure sky out of New York, which was kind of unexpected.

JW: Well, that was my next question, because you have done work all over the world. Did New York have a feeling? You just said that PS1 was a rough place and it was a rough place in a rough neighborhood, and this certainly felt as if you had come into a different space.

JT: It made it more transcendent than it was ever intended to be. But I like that quality very much, because I have a fondness for New York. My aunt was a big part of New York. She was editor of *Seventeen* magazine, Frances Hodges, then she started this magazine called *Mademoiselle*. She lived on Gramercy Park at number four Gramercy. I now have a place at number two Gramercy. And she would finish off her day at the National Arts Club, having her martini from that bar made by Tiffany, and sitting out in the bay windows, looking out over 20th Street, watching New York. And that was her idea, she was one of those who didn't think anything took place west of the Hudson. So that drawing by [Saul] Steinberg was, that cartoon by him, was perfect for her. But she had been a Quaker, and Quakers aren't supposed to be interested in fashion, and they don't believe in art or music, so we came from the conservative Quaker background, Wilburites. But she wore bonnets as my mother did, and she loved bonnets, so she became a milliner. In the '50s, she was the one making those hats that you saw at Belmont and at the Kentucky Derby, those beautiful, spectacular hats. And then she became editor of *Seventeen*. So she was my kind of Auntie Mame. She introduced me to New York. Sadly, she died just before I had the show at the Whitney, so she never got to see the results of her nephew's doing this work. But she was the one who gave me the idea to kind of

contend with culture, that it's something you should love to do and take part in and that many did it. And her idea was that it was just something to be counted amongst those who took part in that. And that pushed me as being an artist. There are thousands of artists, hundreds of thousands of artists, but to be counted as one doing it, that's it, I mean, that's what you're going to get, and that kind of acceptance, if given a little bit earlier, can make people less bitter about whether they make it or don't make it or whatever happens in life, because it all comes in grades. And boy, you saw that at PS1 because everybody was striving there, and but, you know, that was the pure striving. That's what made PS1. That's what Alanna pushed for. She loved that, and that is her place. She brought that into existence, made it, went through all of the problems of it and trouble and trouble of all the artists. I mean, artists aren't easy, you know? [Laughter] And I now know that dealers and collectors and museums aren't either.

JW: It's amazing anything ever gets done and up, but it did at PS1.

JT: Yes; yes. And the artists who went through there, it's legion. The numbers are amazing. I'd like to see them take a little bit better care of the Serra piece up top. But there's interesting pieces there.

JW: We're about at the end, unless you have anything to add. I know you have a big show coming up in 2012, and that's at the Guggenheim and also at LACMA.

JT: Now it's 2013 because there are problems of budgets everywhere and people like to think that the Light and Space artists break the budget. But we don't have to worry about shipping or insurance, so that's a little bit different. But it is true that pieces that require space and making things correctly are expensive to make.

JW: You know, I do have one other question. I don't mean to be anticlimactic. When you were working with your crater, from 1979 on, was there any back-and-forth-ness, when you were at PS1? Did you travel back and forth a lot?

JT: A lot of the work that I have done in art, I have, I mean, I have used art to actually sort of perfect and get a good sense of what I am doing at the crater. Because there, I pour it in concrete, which is a little bit different than using sheetrock and studs. And that's informed a lot of the work that I've done there, and I've tried out many of the things that I've wanted to do in different exhibitions before making it at the crater later on. And that's been coming along now, recently. I had two years, a tough two years to raise money, but, you know, same with LA MOCA, they've had their problems. I mean, all over the world we've had some trouble this time.

JW: Yes, it's been a difficult two years, at least.

JT: I had to stop the construction because I couldn't afford to keep it going. So it's only now that we're starting it up again, in October.

JW: Well, that's good news. And for the record, that's the Roden Crater.

JT: Yes, and there is one piece called *Second Meeting* which is very close to this, that I had at LA MOCA, and then now is owned by the Einsteins [Cliff and Mandy, Los Angeles]. So those are really the only pieces that are kind of alike, because all of the other Sky Spaces have been different shapes, different sizes, different forms. But those are the two that are alike, this *Meeting* and *Second Meeting*. But it's a piece that really informed a lot more than just the work that I was doing at the crater. It informed a lot of the work that I've done around the world. So I have great affection for Alanna and for PS1 and for all of the people that went through there and made it uniquely what it was. I mean, it was a terrific chapter in our art, there's no doubt about it.

JW: I will look for those nail holes on the doors, if those doors are still up.

JT: They had to be replaced. Yeah, that cost some money there, that you can add to my bill, too. [Laughter] But as I said, I got a little over-enthusiastic, and Lars, I didn't

know, because they had these double doors in some of the rooms, so I thought they could get out, and somehow, he was just sitting there working as a young architect coming over from Sweden, and I nailed him in his room. [Laughing]

JW: Well, it might be a good lesson for some architects to be nailed into some of their own rooms. Thank you very much.

JT: Thank you.

[INTERVIEW RESUMES]

JT: We were talking about-

JW: Promises being made that weren't fulfilled?

JT: Yes, and this did happen. So then, you know, I would see more of that, in art. It's not just at PS1. But the big thing is that nothing happens if you don't have a dream. You can't get any money if you don't have a dream. But having a dream doesn't mean you get it. [Laughter] And watching Alanna and the board and everyone there really try to do that, earnestly try to do that, desperately try to do that, I can't but feel great affection for that.

JW: I understand that. Do you have any details, though, without making anyone feel bad, yourself or otherwise? About promises made, and were you disappointed in any way that was a real problem for you?

JT: I think that coming from the West, I was very naïve about how things worked in sort of rough-and-tumble New York. And I had expectations. Sometimes artists and this end of the creative process often have unexpressed expectation. I certainly had a lot of that. And then there was expectation that was encouraged, by Alanna and everyone else, because they were really wanting something good to happen. They

made good things happen. They created out of dust; I mean, my God; I still can't believe it. You look at it now, everything seems sort of, again, gentrified.

JW: Established.

JT: I had a studio on 141 West Street that Heiner Friedrich took over.

JW: Who? I'm sorry; for the sake of the recorder, that who took over?

JT: Heiner Friedrich. And he had; I sold the key to him. I guess he sold the key or involved somehow Cy Twombly. They had a show there together. But I can remember going around Soho together. There was nothing there. There were printing presses above me and printing presses below me going ka-chunk, ka-chunk, ka-chunk, all day. And, boy, it was really different. We came from California where we had, our work luxuriated in space. We had a lot of space. That was cheap. Came to New York, it was still cheap then, but not as cheap. And everyone thought that we fixed up our spaces way too much. I can remember Barney [Barnett] Newman talking about Irwin. [Saying] he took a perfume bottle and sprayed it into the room. Maybe he was a little bit, had some derogatory things to say about the aesthetic of the West. But we thought that for us, the East Coast setting was the Canal Street setting. You just went down Canal and bought things and made your work from that. So that would be more with Judd and artists like that. So it was an interesting time. And Flavin, too. We had all of these issues going, and those issues are long past. I mean, they're over. [Laughing] I remember Irwin going on and on about that, too, and we both would, at times, each in our own different ways, but it was something to come here and work at that time. And the big thing is that whether or not you had everything provided, and you didn't, but it was opportunity. You could feel that there was opportunity, and that's what Alanna made. She opened opportunity. And so, you didn't have to take it, and taking it didn't mean you got much more than that, but you had a shot at it. And so, people did that, and that was what was so terrific to see. There were some really good pieces made there. But

the money was something that was difficult. And I remember talking with Brendan [Gill] about that, and he said, "Well," he said, "Yes, money is going to come," but he told me also, "The money that comes to PS1, it can't just go to you." [Laughing] That's what he'd tell me. Of course, of course. But there's this sort of overhead and he knew that with galleries, because that's why galleries weren't doing these kind of shows then. Now they will. It's just quite amazing that that's changed.

JW: Well, galleries are acting like small museums, in some cases.

JT: That's true; that's true. When the money was there, and it may be there again, who knows. It's an interesting time that we've just gone through. But ...in the early '90s when things got flushed out, career artists never had a chance again. You saw, and the same thing happened after the second-and third-generation Abstract Expressionists. Good, competent artists were taken out by-

JW: By Pop, and later, Minimal, Conceptual work.

JT: So that keeps happening. And it's pretty tough, but that's, you know, it's fair. There's no promise in any of this. And so, that was coming up against that, when opportunity was there, but you didn't have the wherewithal to do it with. You had to gather that yourself. And I think that the artists who did that did very well. Others were embittered by it.

JW: Do you remember anybody in particular embittered by that?

JT: Well, I was a good friend of Fred Sandback, and a more elegant, purer art you could hardly find. And his work is work I really love, and you see it up at Dia Beacon. It's wonderful. But it was hard on him just seeing other art getting more money, being sold for more, and he was just like a young artist, we both were showing over in Europe, again and again, because we both had art that was a little bit difficult to sell. And you couldn't exactly put it in your East Side apartment. And so, with my work, I

needed at least your dining room and perhaps you should buy the place next door.
[Laughing] And I'd just as soon do it at your country house.

JW: As you say, you have the Einsteins who took a whole one of your pieces.

JT: Yes, and that's where that first started. I actually offered, I donated that to LA MOCA, and they didn't accept it. And then the Einsteins bought it. So that's what happened there.

JW: I see.

JT: So, and I've seen other friends who have had a really hard time with the substance of what happens in art. There's no guarantee of being a big star and selling it for a lot of money, and sometimes, as I said, this whole thing at PS1, that was pretty much self-financed. I got some help but surely not enough. But it was probably the best thing that I ever did.

JW: Do you see anything like that happening now? Is there a PS1 correlative for 2010?

JT: Well, the thing is, watching things, I mean, now things are kind of coming up again in LA. They're certainly going in Berlin. There I just think cheap rent-

JW: -is the key.

JT: Is a big key, yes, it is. Because even in Berlin it's pretty tough with the German thing and the collectors aren't there. A few dealers now are there, but they're mostly still in Cologne and Frankfurt and Düsseldorf areas. And the collectors, too. But it's enough of a thing going there that it's made its own presence felt. You have [*New York Times* staffer Michael] Kimmelman going over there and living. And who would have thought that it would happen there? But the same thing is true with what happened in France. I mean, if you were in the '20s in France, and you said, "Art's going to actually leave Paris, and you know where it's going? It's going to go to the

US, to New York,” everyone would have just thought you were full of it. But, in fact, it has this certain economic need to have good rent. So you see Brooklyn kind of going now, but it’s getting expensive.

JW: Brooklyn is already “gone” and people go to Philadelphia from Brooklyn.

JT: Yes, that’s true. So it is interesting how it keeps kind of popping up in different places and it kind of has to. You need fertile ground. And first of all, you need low rent, to begin with, then you need a group of artists to make a critical mass. It doesn’t take too many but it takes some.

JW: Well, PS1 is thinking of restarting or expanding its studio programs. It had both the international, which you know about, and a national.

JT: That’s what works and that’s what I almost took under for Alanna. That was, she didn’t appreciate that. I might have overstayed my welcome there. But what I did, yes. Well, that’s good, yes.

JW: I think we may be at the end now.

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END INTERVIEW