

[00:00:01.300] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Hello everyone. Thank you so much for being here. We have Robert Barry here with us today. I'm gonna read an introduction which I timed. It's about 5 minutes, and then I think we'll be in conversation for about 40, 45, and then hopefully we'll be able to open it up to everyone and ask your questions about art and life and everything, 'cause he's covered it all.

[00:00:24.940] - **Robert Barry**

Why?

[00:00:25.360] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

In these short 90 years of his lifetime.

[00:00:28.070] - **Robert Barry**

Art and life? Oh my gosh.

[00:00:32.000] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Oops, was that my fault?

[00:00:34.480] - **Robert Barry**

Great start, thank you.

[00:00:37.870] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

It's very special to share this time together in the gallery with Robert Barry, whose work some of you may know deeply and others perhaps are encountering for the first time. No matter your entry point, I'm so glad you're here. I'll begin by introducing Robert and sharing a few words of thanks, and then we'll move into our conversation, which will last about 40 minutes. We'll then open up the floor for questions and discussion in the final 15 minutes or so. My name is Leyka Jandhyala. I'm a master's student here at the Center

for Curatorial Studies, and right now you're in a space, or in Robert's words, a situation I've spent almost two years thinking about. I've also had the rare and meaningful opportunity to be in conversation with Robert in person over the past year. Robert Barry is one of the founding figures of what we now call conceptual art. Born in the Bronx in 1936, he studied at Hunter College with artists like Robert Motherwell and William Baziotes. He brushed shoulders with the likes of Ad Reinhardt, Barnett Newman, and Tony Smith, earning both his BFA and MA at a time when there were no MFAs at Hunter.

[00:01:49.920] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

He later joined Hunter's faculty where he taught for about 15 years. I think you said 16. His practice began with paintings, spatializing them, then moved into string and wire sculptures that slice through space, across gallery walls and between buildings. Beginning in the early 1960s, he started using invisible energy like sound waves, radio waves, inert gasses, and even radioactive material, some of which is buried in Central Park and on the rooftop of the Swiss Institute. He's also always taken photographs, whether or not they're exhibitable. Barry's works point our awareness onto changing nowheres or somewheres through installations, performances, sound, video, drawings, and now paintings that locate us in a specific time and place, often through words. He quietly unsettles our expectations of what art must be, releasing it from the need to be visual, permanent, or even perceptible. What I find striking is how resonant his early works remain with his current painting practice that builds into it elements of change, expectation, and in-betweenness. This afternoon, we may shift our attention to his recent painting titled Unexpected in this exhibition, but first we're beginning with the work of his from 1969 called Interview Piece. For me, this piece functions like a kind of key, a glimpse into Robert's way of working.

[00:03:18.190] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

It invites not just reflection, but the act of thinking itself together. A few weeks ago, writer and novelist Suki Kim spoke about her time undercover in North Korea. She shared

how one tactic of authoritarian regimes is to control the mind, not through overt censorship alone, but by enforcing extreme schedules of required activities and obligations so that no space left in a day is left to think. I've been thinking about that a lot in the context of this exhibition and our time today. It feels increasingly important, urgent even, to reclaim the ability to think freely, to dwell in ambiguity, to sit with something privately, internally, without the need for quick answers, to trust your mind. That's part of why I'm drawn to Interview Piece. It's not an artwork that tells you what to think. It opens up a space in which thinking becomes the work itself. So I asked Robert just on Tuesday if we might read the piece together today. It's in the publication that accompanies this exhibition called Actual but Not Concrete, which I'd like to give everyone here a copy of, and it's reproduced on pages 4 and 5 if you'd like to read along as we read out loud, if you have a copy on you.

[00:04:31.520] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

And before Robert and I begin, I just want to thank everyone who made this conversation, exhibition, and publication possible. Robert, thank you for your generosity, your time and company, and your deep engagement with me To CCS faculty and staff, Lauren Cornell, Ann Butler, my thesis advisor, Alex Kitnick, who supported me last semester and whose class I, et cetera, helped me think about the speaking voice while reading, Tom Eccles, who supported the show from the very beginning, and Ian Sullivan, who gave me this space. Thank you to the faculty, including Evan Calder-Williams, Dawn Chan, Candace Hopkins, Lara Fresco Madra, Sarah Hennies, Professor Mercer, and William McHenry, our librarian, for your curiosity and support. To my cohort and my first years, and to Casey Robertson for your friendship and helping plan this event. Thank you also to my undergraduate friends and everyone who traveled here from New York City and out of state. And last and certainly but not least, the other two artists in this exhibition, Jason Hirata and Ghislaine Leung, with whom we spoke about Berry's influence on us over many, many hours. Our conversation today is not live streamed for a reason. I wanted to emphasize how, like this exhibition context, this event is a situation

that depends on being here together in person.

[00:05:49.190] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

This event is being audio recorded and will be available in the CCS archive. So thank you for showing up to think with us. Interview Piece was first presented as part of the exhibition catalog published in conjunction with *Prospect 69*. A large-scale international exhibition curated by Konrad Fischer and Hans Strelow that took place in Düsseldorf, Germany in 1969. So with that, shall we begin?

[00:06:16.280] - **Robert Barry**

That's a long time ago.

[00:06:17.630] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Long time ago is right. What is your piece for *Prospect 69*?

[00:06:26.560] - **Robert Barry**

The piece consists of the ideas that people will have from reading this interview.

[00:06:34.350] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Can the piece be shown?

[00:06:36.260] - **Robert Barry**

No, but language can be used to indicate the situation in which the art exists. For me, art is about making art, not about someone being aware of it.

[00:06:52.050] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

How can these ideas be known?

[00:06:54.390] - **Robert Barry**

The piece in its entirety is unknowable. Because it exists in the minds of so many people. Each person can really know only that part which is in his own mind. I should say his and her. This was from '69.

[00:07:18.870] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Is the unknown an important element in your other work also?

[00:07:22.940] - **Robert Barry**

I use the unknown because it's the occasion for possibilities. And because it's more real than anything else. Some of my works consist of forgotten thoughts, or things in my unconscious mind. I also use things which are not communicable, are unknowable, or are not yet known. The pieces are actual, but not concrete. They have a different kind of existence.

[00:07:55.250] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

How would you characterize your control over the elements of your piece?

[00:08:01.700] - **Robert Barry**

My control is indefinite, but to a certain extent I influence the form of the ideas. How much consciousness control does any artist have over his art? The situation, this interview, also conditions the nature of the piece. I wanted the piece to be the natural result of the interview, the result of this time and place.

[00:08:34.630] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Does this piece in fact exist?

[00:08:37.990] - **Robert Barry**

It does exist if you have any ideas about it, and that part is yours. The rest you can only

imagine.

[00:08:53.210] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

This was really important for me to, maybe for selfish reasons, experience hearing him speak about this work that had been such a fulcrum to the show and my last two years. But I was also curious about what my experience would have been or was reading it out loud, which is so different. And I'm wondering if you've ever read an interview piece out loud.

[00:09:26.620] - **Robert Barry**

No.

[00:09:27.250] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Never? This is the first time?

[00:09:28.710] - **Robert Barry**

Yeah.

[00:09:29.270] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Wow. Do you feel like there's a difference in terms of materiality?

[00:09:35.580] - **Robert Barry**

Yes, for sure. They're different. It just— if you're in a different place in a different time, with different people that you're talking to. It's always changing. Everything is always changing. It's always something new. You have to go with it and try and work with it. And of course it's me, and of course I have a certain style and a certain tone to my voice and a certain history, so there will be something to do that will always be the same. But the world is changing all the time. And life is changing all the time. And so, yes, it's different.

[00:10:23.720] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Yes, it is. I mean, I found myself almost translating for my own self how I would phrase the question. And I realized I have my own way of syntax of, you know, filler words even.

[00:10:39.800] - **Robert Barry**

That's why the Prospect 69, 1969, is important in this situation. And it's a throwback to the past. But even when you go to a museum and you see a work that's been hanging on the wall for 400 years, it's still changing, you know, because people have— there's a history and people are different. This is the idea. It's about what art is, how it's made, what its function is, how it works, why do we have it, you know what I mean? All of these questions. When people ask me, you know, what is your art about? My art is about making art. That's it.

[00:11:25.630] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

It was really difficult trying to figure out who to invite from the undergraduate studio art program because it's not by medium that you work, you know, you're not just a painter, you're not just working with photography, drawing. You have spanned everything.

[00:11:43.980] - **Robert Barry**

Well, that's the mind I was born with, I guess, I don't know, and the history that I have, and keeping life interesting by changing and by trying different things, meeting different people. Trying out different ideas, and looking at other people's art, you know. I came up during the art world, you know, of the '60s, '70s, '80s. It just seems it was a much more exciting place than it is today. Maybe because of my friends. I just saw my old buddy, Larry [Lawrence] Weiner, has a big piece here. In the front that you see when you walk in, and then when you're inside. He was my old friend. He was a friend of mine. You know, I don't think a week passed in our life where we didn't either talk to each other on the phone or have a drink together at Max's Kansas City or something

like that, you know? And we started— we started working together. You know, I met him at Seth Siegelau's apartment in New York, like in 1963 or something like that.

[00:12:57.920] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Well, it's curious you bring up the social aspect of your works because even in this interview piece, and then I'll be done asking about this particular work, you're, from what I've learned, you are both the questioner and the answer.

[00:13:14.280] - **Robert Barry**

It's a piece. It's an artwork. Deal with it how you want to. You can make it a kind of performance or you can read it and think about it.

[00:13:23.500] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Yeah.

[00:13:24.720] - **Robert Barry**

The whole point is how you deal with it based on your history, your tastes, the things that you don't know.

[00:13:40.420] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

I think the reason I emphasize the difference between reading it versus speaking it is because here you're using the question-answer format, the interview format, but then you've also spanned phrases, shorter phrases, and then of course isolating specific words like in the painting here. And now, in the short time I've known you, compared to your whole life, 1% of your life, you've eliminated words. And so I was wondering if you could speak a little bit to that, the difference between words, text, treatment, language, question formats versus eliminating punctuation?

[00:14:20.580] - **Robert Barry**

Right now I'm not working with words.

[00:14:22.910] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Yeah, I know.

[00:14:24.110] - **Robert Barry**

I've sort of gotten kind of tired of it, and I have a piece now in the show in Paris which is really about going back, finding some old drawings that I made, some old artworks, And I never really realized because I sort of got into using text, okay? First you start with text. The look of the word on the page and so forth. Talk about Larry Weiner, this is something we used to talk about a lot, in fact. And so I went back and I found these old works and I decided I'm going to sort of update them. I want to go back. I never really made them. And so I have a piece now in Paris, at my gallery in Paris, which is in a group show. Unfortunately, I don't have a photo. The show opened last week. But it's about different colors in little square paintings and on wood, wood panels. So I'm trying to integrate the wood, the grain of the panel and the color, each one is a different color, and the space between. So it's all still about the space between and the atmosphere around it, which is like this.

[00:15:50.300] - **Robert Barry**

It's about me talking with the atmosphere around it and you guys sitting here and thinking about it and thinking, am I going to bother to ask him a question? Do I give a shit about him or whatever he has to say? Is he stupid or what?

[00:16:10.200] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Speaking of context, we are obviously in a gallery space. There's art on the walls and within the space surrounding us. And then we're also in a museum context. And then we're also in an educational institution at the Center for Curatorial Studies. And then on top of that, we're on Bard College's campus. So there's many, many layers that I've

explained to you, which gets very confusing at times. He thought I was a Bard College student for the longest time, and then a professor at one point too. I was wondering if you could speak a little bit to what kind of context in those many layers you hint at or don't hint at and want the viewer to think about in relation to what they're seeing in your work.

[00:16:57.690] - **Robert Barry**

You can think about it or not.

[00:16:59.390] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Okay.

[00:16:59.770] - **Robert Barry**

You're in it. You can't get away from it. You're going to be part of it. It depends on the person. Some people come in with a lot of background and an analytical way of thinking about the situation they're in. Some people deal with it emotionally, or just let it wash over them, or kind of be part of it. It really depends. What I'm talking about is basically, what I'm trying to find is what art is. You know, where is it? Who experiences it? Why do we have it? You know, do we get anything from it? Do we care about being in this situation now, right now? Or if we go into a museum and look at a Vermeer, also, which I love to do, by the way. The Frick Collection just recently opened, and I'm going to try and go. They have beautiful Vermeer paintings, always one of my favorites, and I want to make an appointment to go and see them. And that's important for me, you know.

[00:18:11.680] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

You told me about the chairman of Hunter, Eugene Goossens, who said that art is a form of knowledge.

[00:18:20.490] - **Robert Barry**

Yes.

[00:18:20.730] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

And I was wondering if you could speak of it.

[00:18:22.900] - **Robert Barry**

Well, it means that that phrase sort of registers with you. And I think he was a teacher, an educator, and he organized some wonderful shows, I think, into what was going on in the art world at that time. E.C. Goossens, Gene Goossens. He's the one that offered me the job at Hunter, really. And what is art? It's a form of knowledge. What is knowledge? Knowledge continues because they're always adding something to it. There's always something new that we can add to it. We don't fall back on the same thing, and that's what art is about. That's what art was about in those days, the art world. You know, you could go to a gallery, you can see what— where did pop art come from? What is minimalism? What is— you know, you had one movement, one other way of doing something. I don't know, I'm too old to go to galleries now. I don't really, on my own, I just, you know. But it seems to me that what we're looking at now are old variations on abstract expressionism or, you know, things like that, or minimal, something, you know. But in those days, there seemed to be something going on in the art world, opening up new ways of thinking about how we relate to the world.

[00:20:01.780] - **Robert Barry**

Art is a form of knowledge, and to continue with knowledge, we do have to come up with some new ideas. New ways of looking at things and thinking about things. The world is infinite, actually, and art is a way of dealing with the world, of looking at it. What do you see in art that also relates to the real world that you're in? Art is part of the real world, and in that sense, you have to think, what is knowledge and what is art? And knowledge is a way of thinking and adding to your way of thinking about giving you

new insights and not just always falling back on the old thing.

[00:20:45.580] - **Robert Barry**

I think that's what he was talking about.

[00:20:48.470] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

I like this idea of knowledge because, as I kind of mentioned in my introduction, it doesn't require a reaction or some result. Of absorbing something of that education. But we also discussed the difference between education and knowledge, which are two different— I guess—

[00:21:09.030] - **Robert Barry**

Education can help your knowledge if it's done right.

[00:21:11.950] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Right.

[00:21:12.820] - **Robert Barry**

If it's good. If it's just a question of learning facts and so forth, what do you do with that? What does it mean?

[00:21:22.140] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

I think I just learned on our way up here that you both taught, or you both were a student of teaching art, and then you were also a teacher of studio art. And I was wondering what the difference in your approach was when you were teaching studio art students versus people who wanted to teach art, if there were some key distinctions you made.

[00:21:50.320] - **Robert Barry**

My first teaching was, I taught in a— they used to call it junior high school, I think they call it secondary school now, in the South Bronx. It was all Black kids, Hispanic kids. One time I went to an evening, I can tell you one time we went there, it was like student-teacher night or something like that, parent night. Parents were supposed to come in and talk to them about the kids, you know. And I saw one of my students, one of my female students, just a junior high school girl, working as a prostitute outside of a bar. I saw her there. She was a teenage girl. That was the level, that was where I was. It was the South Bronx, very tough area, let's face it.

[00:22:48.110] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

How old were you at the time when you were teaching?

[00:22:50.690] - **Robert Barry**

30-something.

[00:22:51.760] - Lekha Jandhyala

Wow, my age.

[00:22:54.570] - **Robert Barry**

Yeah. Yeah. I was there for about a year, let's put it that way. Then I took the high school exam and I became a high school teacher. And I taught at a high school not far from where I was actually born in the Bronx. Roosevelt High School, and I was there for about a year or so. And then Goossens asked me if I would teach teachers about art. That was the first kind of teaching I taught at Hunter was teaching teachers about what they should teach in high schools and junior high schools, okay? And then I did that for a while, and then I taught regular studio classes with students who wanted to be on. So I had, I covered just about everything I could cover.

[00:23:44.460] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

And now we have a new layer where we're in school to learn how to be a curator, how to present the art rather than necessarily make the art. Do you have thoughts about that?

[00:23:55.740] - Robert Barry
That's your job.

[00:23:57.840] - **Lekha Jandhyala**
Well, I brought a case study.

[00:23:59.700] - **Robert Barry**
I have been asked to curate shows, yes. And what you'll see there are all my old buddies actually.

[00:24:05.530] - **Lekha Jandhyala**
Yes.

[00:24:06.270] - **Robert Barry**
The art that I like, to give them an opportunity to— the main thing about art, as far as I'm concerned, is getting it out there, getting it up for someone to see, putting it on a wall someplace. Let's forget the money, you know, I was lucky that way, but that it's up someplace that somebody can see, you know. Hopefully they'll talk about it. But at least it's someplace where they can see it, get into it. It's available for them. That's what art is really all about.

[00:24:45.280] - **Lekha Jandhyala**
You've made art about time, time is very important.

[00:24:50.080] - **Robert Barry**

Time is very important. It's the one thing that we cannot avoid. We're all locked into it. I think of time as a medium, as something solid. We can't get away from it. We can't get away, you know, we have to think about it in terms of life.

[00:25:12.830] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Yeah, the first time I met you—

[00:25:14.480] - **Robert Barry**

Include it as part of your— if you're going to make art, it's about being in the world. You have to deal with time.

[00:25:22.910] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

I was going to say that the first—

[00:25:24.300] - **Robert Barry**

Especially when you get older like me. You can't avoid it. You think about it a lot, believe me.

[00:25:33.360] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

The first time I met you, you said time is inescapable. You can't avoid it.

[00:25:36.860] - **Robert Barry**

You can't get away. We're all locked into it. We can't get away from it. And it should be— for me, it's a very important subject in my work. It's something I try to deal with all the time, and experience, and that sort of thing. It's always changing and it's one of the most important aspects of, well, life and art and whatever, you know.

[00:26:06.480] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

There's a section in this amazing book that I keep returning to, a conversation between

you and René Denizot, and you were describing how to make a viewer experience time as a felt experience, like, or a perceptible experience. And you were talking about it in relation to darkness. I wish I could pull out the quote, but you probably would explain it again better, where you were framing a person's experience of time or creating this sense of duration by creating a sense of anticipation in them for when the darkness would arrive or be removed. And I guess I'm wondering how you translated something that we would consider abstract or nebulous or invisible, time, into something visible that was specific.

[00:26:59.950] - **Robert Barry**

Well, I did. The kind of works I did in those days with Denizot, who by the way is very philosophical.

[00:27:06.876] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

I love that book..

[00:27:07.810] - **Robert Barry**

French philosophy. And fortunately his English was very good. Very good also. And the pieces that I worked with, of course, were like slide pieces or something like that, or they're more sound pieces, you know, so you walk into a gallery and see an image changing, go from a photo to a word, you know, that sort of thing. So you were caught up in the time between things; what's coming next, what is the past, you know, what can you anticipate, how does this all fit together into one thing. So these are the questions that the technology in those days of the '60s and '70s worked for me. The problem with technology, I have to say, is that it's changing all the time. I don't even know if you can buy a slide projector anymore these days.

[00:28:06.920] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

We have one here.

[00:28:08.870] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Slide projector. Yeah.

[00:28:11.340] - **Robert Barry**

Do you even know what a slide projector is— everybody is very young looking, so maybe they don't know what slide projectors are. All they know is the digital, you know, that sort of thing. I don't know. And also time changing. I mean, we go to, you know, old masters and stuff that may have been made 1,000 years ago, but we see it differently. Differently now, you see. And we have a lot more experience and changes and stuff like that.

[00:28:40.850] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Just the last time I saw you on Tuesday, we were going through your flat files and you had DVDs, you had film reels, and you were saying the frustration of all these materials becoming outdated so fast, and that's why you've returned to painting.

[00:28:58.500] - **Robert Barry**

These pieces, and you know what it is, Do you even know what a video cassette is? The little, you know, can you find a place where you can even play them? I did have a cassette. I managed to find one that played it, but there was one that broke down, and I didn't even know if I could ever get it repaired, you know, to play these things.

[00:29:22.510] - Lekha Jandhyala

That's a problem. You handed me a CD to listen to one of your sound works, and I couldn't find a CD player. My laptop doesn't have one now. My car doesn't.

[00:29:34.740] - **Robert Barry**

That's why I make paintings now. Yes. Exactly.

[00:29:37.510] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

I was like, "I got to ask a friend."

[00:29:38.610] - **Robert Barry**

You got an empty wall, I'll do something on the empty wall.

[00:29:42.640] - *Lekha Jandhyala*

I just wanted to pull up like an image of these isolated words that Robert Barry would project onto walls or—

[00:29:50.010] - **Robert Barry**

You change it in the darkness. What's coming next? What does it all add up to? Isn't that what life is about also?

[00:30:02.300] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

One of the first works that I was introduced to of yours was the *Inert Gas* series, and I know you're getting tired of me talking about older works, but I have to mention this because we have photographers in this space, and just to give you a little context about this work, Robert Barry went around California and released noble gasses all across Los Angeles and the desert. And I just thought it was so amazing that he was really doing this for himself. It was Seth Siegelau, his art dealer at the time, I guess you— I don't know if colleague is the right word, comrade in this situation maybe, who was driving the car, and he insisted that he be able to present photo documentation? You had taken photos of the sites where you had released these gasses.

[00:30:50.340] - **Robert Barry**

He wanted something they could put in his gallery on the wall.

[00:30:54.450] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Yeah.

[00:30:55.900] - **Robert Barry**

And what I did— well, inert gas, first of all, it's gas that doesn't mix with anything else. It remains. It's called inert because it remains. You breathe it. There's inert gas in the air here now. We're breathing it in and out. It's part of the atmosphere. It's not something that's strange or it's going to poison you or anything like that. And it can be isolated from the other types of gas in the air. And what we did was we decided that we'd take a photograph— each one would be documented in a different way with a photo. Of the location and the little container. They come in different containers. You could have one of those bottles, metal bottles that come in glass containers or whatever. And we would photograph it, and then we would make a kind of a statement, print it out very carefully under the photograph. And there's helium and, you know, I forget what they are now. I can't read. There's only like 5 or 6 or 7.

[00:32:04.000] - **Robert Barry**

There weren't that many, by the way. There's only like maybe half dozen, something like that. But they're real, isolated, you know, they really exist, and they're taken from an enclosed space, from a measured volume, to indefinite expansion. That was very important for each one of them. Neon, from measured volume to indefinite expansion. August 6th, 1969. That was the piece, and a photograph of the space of someplace out in the desert in California.

[00:32:46.760] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

There were deserts, beaches, there was a beach.

[00:32:49.740] - **Robert Barry**

Yes, right, on the coast of I think Beverly Hills, maybe.

[00:32:55.940] - **Robert Barry**

Send it out over the ocean.

[00:32:58.350] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

But what I loved is you had said you were okay with presenting those photos because they showed nothing, because you can't see that gas.

[00:33:10.890] - **Robert Barry**

You can't see it, you can't smell it, you can't taste it, you can't sense it.

[00:33:17.530] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

But it's always there.

[00:33:18.670] - **Robert Barry**

But it's always there.

[00:33:20.530] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Similar to *Radiation Piece*.

[00:33:22.640] - **Robert Barry**

And you can control it from a measured volume to indefinite— I like that term— indefinite expansion.

[00:33:35.980] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

I'm trying to decide where to go from there because I want to bring— control, maybe one of them. To bring it back to your painting practice today, you told me about how

you are thinking about matte versus gloss.

[00:33:55.710] - **Robert Barry**

That's what this is about.

[00:33:56.680] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

This work, particularly.

[00:33:58.200] - **Robert Barry**

Yeah, this is a series of works that I did. I sort of call them *monochrome paintings*. And it's a series that I worked on. Until about a year ago. So what's the date on this?

[00:34:13.560] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

2024.

[00:34:15.120] - **Robert Barry**

All right, so you take the color, you have a background color, and I was working with text in those days, words, and I like the idea of having the words go around the edges of the canvas and sort of like off into the wall around. [Thinking that] the painting is part of something larger, and that words can be like objects. They exist as something. Maybe hard to get a perfect definition, but, and if someone looks at it, they have their own version, their own way of thinking about what that word really means. And what it means in their life, which is true of anything. If you take an apple in a still life, what the hell does that mean? You know? What does an apple mean? If you think about it, if you take the time to think about it, and what you do with it, and where it comes from, what the history is, and all of that stuff, and what technique you use, to paint it, to reproduce it, and all of that.

[00:35:32.410] - **Robert Barry**

This is the way I sort of thought about these individual words. At first I started with texts, different phrases, but then I got into the individual words and how they look and set in this visual space. Then I was thinking about working with the visual space. This painting, this piece here, it's white on white. If you look closely, you'll see there are actually white words that go around the edge and into the white wall around it. It's sort of cut off, but it suggests that it's part of something larger, part of something bigger, that these words exist in the world. It's a kind of still life in a way. And if you move around and the light catches, the words are painted in the same white as the background, but it has a different medium. I use glossy medium, so the words have a little— they reflect the light, whereas the background is the same white, but it's matte medium, so it's flat. So the glossy white shows up against the black. And I did a whole series of pieces like that in red and yellow, green, blah, blah, blah, all that stuff.

[00:36:55.090] - **Robert Barry**

Black. She liked the white one, so that's the one she wanted to put into the show.

[00:37:00.320] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

No, I actually, I like the indigo blue one, but then someone came—

[00:37:04.150] - **Robert Barry**

Why didn't you take that?

[00:37:04.750] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Because you had like 20 gallerists come in and they took everything in the short time I've known you. Every time I've visited you, he's made at least 7 or 8 paintings. He's so productive. He goes every day. You go every day. And every time I'm there, we go to the studio and we see what's new, or it's gone and I have to find a new favorite. I find a new favorite.

[00:37:32.770] - **Robert Barry**

That's my life. These ideas come out of my head, so I have to do them. That's what I'm saying.

[00:37:42.460] - **Robert Barry**

You have to deal with it. I have to deal with it.

[00:37:44.500] - **Robert Barry**

I gotta get it out before I forget it. When you get old, you forget things very easily, believe me.

[00:37:51.220] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

He tells me often.

[00:37:52.830] - **Robert Barry**

That's the idea behind this piece. It's part of a series of these monochromes. She wanted— she took the white one, and so, you know, and it's about moving and functioning in the space in front of the painting.

[00:38:11.310] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

It's 2:40 now, so I want to make sure there's time for people to ask questions.

[00:38:16.440] - **Robert Barry**

Anybody care?

[00:38:18.840] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Yes, yes they do. Maybe if you speak loudly, or I can repeat it if you need to hear it better.

[00:38:27.110] - **[unknown speaker 1]**

Thanks so much for being here. It's really cool to hear from the artist about how I loved your reflections on time and how things have changed over time. Can you tell me if there's something that exists today that didn't exist when you were starting out in art that you wish that you did— that existed then and maybe would have changed your path?

[00:38:49.320] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Like a material or a subject?

[00:38:51.530] - **[unknown speaker 1]**

It could be cultural, it could be physical.

[00:38:55.350] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

I'm going to try to rephrase your question, but tell me if I'm not accurate. She's asking if there's a concept, an idea, a material that exists today that didn't exist when you were making— when you first started making work about time. Kind of? Okay.

[00:39:16.230] - **Robert Barry**

Things change when you get older. Let me say that. Okay. But also another thing about getting older is memory. Sometimes— I don't know if it's about getting old. I'm trying to work with that right now. Didn't exist in the past because I wasn't old, you know? I'm trying to work out something along those lines, yes, let's say that. And I don't know if anything will come out that I care about, but it's about getting older and losing all your friends. I mentioned Larry [Lawrence] Weiner, when you go out to the front of this big piece by Larry. He's one of my best friends. We worked there, we slumped together. And seeing that, seeing that piece, sort of brings back some memories. I don't want to call it forgetfulness. I don't know what to call it. We'll see what happens. But it keeps me

busy. It gets me into the studio, okay? Takes up time. Takes up my day, which is good. So I don't sit there and watch TV or something.

[00:41:02.510] - **[unknown speaker 2]**

Hi, thank you so much. I found it really interesting. It's really interesting how you talked about your work in such a material way, that this artwork is in the real world and it's really existing and it's made for people to see. I was wondering if you could talk about what conditions in the '60s maybe that you were responding to when you started to move toward the inner gas work that's very invisible, and alternatively, what conditions today that you decided to move back to paintings?

[00:41:40.460] - **Robert Barry**

I don't know what you mean by conditions.

[00:41:44.000] - **[unknown speaker 2]**

Maybe was there something in the world or in the art world or the people around you that made you decide to move away from material sculptures and towards this kind of indefinite expansion?

[00:42:06.530] - **Robert Barry**

It's difficult to go back to those. It's a long time ago. I think it might have just conditioned...That's a tough word. I can't give you anything really specific. Maybe it had something to do with something I read somewhere, or something somebody said to me. You know, when I was an undergraduate at Hunter, one of my teachers was Robert Motherwell, who was a very well-known artist, but he was also—I think he studied philosophy, and he talked a great deal about the art world, and things like that, and the kind of paintings he made. He made a certain kind of painting at that time, which he was well known about, but he was very philosophical about it. Maybe something like that, that dimension about art that might— that suggests the visible—

what's visible suggests something else, something like that. That when you look at a work of art, it suggests something beyond itself. Maybe that's where it came from and sort of sunk into me. This is something Motherwell used to talk about a lot, and what a work of art suggests. I don't want to use the word meaning, but because that's what critics do, art historians, they talk about the meaning, but it may suggest another dimension.

[00:44:01.650] - **Robert Barry**

This is one of the good things about art. And I think that might be where I went into this trying other things. What's invisible? What is invisible? Maybe I read about it somewhere. I don't know. It might have been something I came across in my reading or I don't know. I can't say exactly.

[00:44:25.870] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

I think I attempted to answer this question for myself through your interviews. And he had a work, I think, that kind of marked this transition for me, where you produced a painting with four corner points of painted canvases that were fixed against the blank wall. So that—the painting's pictorial surface was kind of demarcated by these points on the wall. So it was just as much about that invisible, what could be assumed as empty blank wall.

[00:44:58.680] - **Robert Barry**

I did a piece called The Space Between Things, or I was in a show called that, or something like that. Space between what's going on between you and me, okay? Can we do something with that idea and make art? That's what I was probably thinking about.

[00:45:17.910] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

I felt you were contending with the terminology that's just become accepted as part of art speak, which is like, a painting means this, and then how can we push that limit of

that containment?

[00:45:34.640] - **Robert Barry**

Well, that's what sort of came up a lot in talking, hanging out, having a few drinks at Max's, and, you know, talking with— having a big fight with Joseph Kosuth or something like that.

[00:45:50.510] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Yeah, even on the way here, you were like “I don't like the word conceptual art.”

[00:45:55.260] - **Robert Barry**

Oh, Weiner hated it. He didn't like that term at all. I agree, actually. It sort of eliminates that whole physical aspect of it.

[00:46:04.160] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

It was really hard writing like a two-word summary of what this show is about because I was like, I shouldn't use the word conceptual because you wouldn't like it [laughs] but you know what you said to me?

[00:46:19.870] - **Robert Barry**

I don't know. After a while, I don't even think about it. It's just something that someone else uses a lot. I don't use it. But if someone else wants to use it and put you into some sort of historical context by doing that, it really deals with a certain time now rather than a description of the work. I mean, there's a whole physical aspect too— look at Larry Weiner's piece out here. Look what it's made of. Look at the silver. Look at how it works against the design of the marble and the floor, you know. Notice how the various bands are at different angles to each other, how you go inside and outside. You're not telling me that's an important part of the piece? It's not just the idea of it? Of course it is. You go through it. You walk over it. You look down at it. You have to walk around this way if

you want to take it all in. And the silver probably, I mean, when it was first put up, the silver was probably very silvery and reflected the outside light a lot more.

[00:47:27.830] - **Robert Barry**

And this is the way he thought about things, of course. If you look at Larry's work, how it's arranged in space and the space around. It's very important.

[00:47:38.950] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

You've talked about implementing change into the work, and I think this idea of reflection or how light is caught or refracted is something you always have a sharp eye for.

[00:47:53.890] - **Robert Barry**

Hopefully.

[00:47:54.760] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

It's funny though, I will say that when I told you about the exhibition, I was describing Ghislaine's work and Jason Hirata's work, you said, "You've really put together a conceptual show," and I was like, "No, he used the bad word."

[00:48:09.450] - **Robert Barry**

I said, "Conceptual."

[00:48:11.250] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

[laughs]do we have any other questions? No? Do you have any questions for a mix of people? We have undergraduate students, we have art lovers, we have art writers, we have art thinkers, we have art parents.

[00:48:38.180] - **[unknown speaker 2]**

Do you think you'll ever return to using language in your work?

[00:48:46.530] - **Robert Barry**

I don't know what I'll do, you know. I haven't left it. I'm still doing this whole series called Incomplete. Everything is incomplete. And I still have some that I have to finish. The thing about me is I'm always—I start a series and then I have another idea and I leave that aside. I'll finish that up, take care of that later. But I have to get these taken care of now or I'll forget about it, you know. I'm still involved in the Incompletes, which uses the word incomplete, dot, dot, dot. Okay, so you may have the word incomplete, and the last half of the third dot is going off the edge of the canvas or something like that. So I'm working on that also. I have not stopped using language. And I still have a lot of stencils of words that I haven't used yet. I go into my studio, I see things there that I haven't finished. I gotta finish this idea out. So, you know, it's what they call the creative process, I think, I don't know.

[00:50:01.240] - **Robert Barry**

I've always got 3 or 4 things going at once. Let's put it that way. Okay. [laughs] If some idea comes up with something, somebody wants to do a big piece on the side of a huge building using some text, I'll do it. Some big thing, you know, it'll be there forever. Get paid a million dollars. Oh, okay, I'll probably work out something [laughs].

[00:50:39.970] - **[unknown speaker 3]**

You were talking about going and seeing Vermeer paintings and also having CDs, which are outdated technology, and also invisible work or not perceptible work. I was wondering how you feel about moving into digital.

[00:50:58.820] - **Robert Barry**

I know. Yeah. AI and all of that.

[00:51:01.260] - **[unknown speaker 3]**

Yeah, just curious.

[00:51:02.480] - **Robert Barry**

I'm old. I really am. I can't. You know, I don't know. I'm not sure how it works anymore, you know. Right now I like going into my studio. I live alone now. My wife is gone, of course. About once a week my son comes by and say hello, bring me some food or something. I don't really know how that's going to work. If I see somebody and I see something going on, it may suggest something to me. I'm not really sure. I can't predict what it'll be. I can't say no. I'm not going to say no to anything. I mean, I'm 89, you know? I don't have that much time left. My mind is active and I'm always looking for something new. So we'll see. That's all I can say. We'll see. I don't know. I can't predict. If I see something that suggests something that I might be able to use, we'll see how it works.

[00:52:16.040] - **Robert Barry**

I'm not going to say no, but I'm not going to say yes. Wait and see.

[00:52:22.700] - **[unknown speaker 3]**

Do you have faith about the world being able to use it?

[00:52:26.020] - **Robert Barry**

About the what?

[00:52:27.310] - **[unknown speaker 3]**

About the rest of the world being able to use it?

[00:52:30.290] - **Robert Barry**

I'm having a lot of problems with Trump right now, I have to say that. I mean, I think he's

very dangerous. God knows what's going to happen. I don't know. Things are changing. Who knows what it'll be like in 1,000 years? I don't know. A million years from now. We'll be here, the world will be here, the Earth will be here. The sun isn't going anywhere. We may destroy ourselves with atomic bombs, with hydrogen bombs, and, what is it, human beings have only been around for about a couple hundred thousand years. We see these dinosaurs that were there 40 million years ago. Once we've destroyed ourselves, maybe dogs will take over. They'll be the next— dogs and cats will be the next intelligent beings on our planet. And they'll go to war with each other. I don't know. Maybe they'll evolve. These animals evolve. That's what I mean by time, by the way. That's what's so important. Is this creative dimension that we're all in. And we have to understand it.

[00:53:45.240] - **Robert Barry**

I mean, who knows what things will be like a million years from now? I don't know. Or 200 million years. The Earth will still be here. The sun will be here. The sun's got, what, 2 billion years left, 4 billion years. The Earth will be around a couple of billion years. What the hell's a million years? It may be long gone by then. Who knows what art will be.

[00:54:13.620] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

I do want to mention your It Isn't series. As I was researching the series for our class with Ann [Butler], you had performed the work with Julia. And I had told you this, that as I was looking through the archive, I found that Robert Barry had curated this exhibition of his friends. And one of the most amazing things about going to your home was seeing the work of your friends all over your walls.

[00:54:41.540] - **Robert Barry**

Traded works.

[00:54:43.370] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

And..?

[00:54:44.260] - **Robert Barry**

Great work traders.

[00:54:45.780] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Great work traders [laughs]. I mean, it's an epic collection. And the postcards—

[00:54:51.340] - **Robert Barry**

Even artists traded works with each other.

[00:54:56.400] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

But also those postcards. But I wanted to just take a second and read the artists who were part of Robert Barry's exhibition Part of Your World, because it's quite an epic list of people. Robert Morgan, for example, has been a writer that I frequently go to, and I wanted to pull up all these quotes of people who have written about Robert and quotes that you have said, but there's only so much time in the day. But I'm going to go ahead and read these artists, and that will also give you a sense of this kind of amazing network and community you were a part of. This exhibition was called In Other Words: Artists' Use of Language, Part 2, an exhibition with Giovanni Anselmo, Ian Wilson, Peter Downsbrough, Sol LeWitt, Louise Lawler, Lawrence Wiener, is it Hannah Darboven? Hannah Darboven. Giulio Paolini, David Askevold, Robert Morgan, Tom Marioni, Ann Kawara, curated by Robert Barry, February 9th through April 2nd.

[00:56:06.840] - **Robert Barry**

Is Carl Andre in there?

[00:56:08.510] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

No, no Carl Andre, but you've been in many, many shows with him, no?

[00:56:14.920] - **Robert Barry**

Yeah. Right after he was accused of murdering his wife by pushing her out the window. I went there, I went to his place, and I can see how she could have fallen out. I talked to him about it. I said, no, no, you know, the windows were actually very big windows. I don't know if you know about that, you know, he was arrested, they thought he murdered his wife by pushing her out the window. He lives on the 5th floor, and there's a big cement street down below, so you could see, if you look out the window like this, you could see how she could fall, die, you know. I said, no, no, I can see, you know, I can see how she could have accidentally slipped. He drank a lot. They both drank a lot. That was the problem.

[00:57:15.810] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

On that cheerful note, Ian has a question.

[00:57:18.690] - **Robert Barry**

And he didn't have a lot of— you know, if you went into his apartment, he lived in a very elegant apartment on Fifth Avenue or something. There was nothing in there except a big metal piece on the floor, very little furniture. Yeah. So what can I say?

[00:57:40.540] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Ian?

[00:57:40.940] - **Ian Sullivan**

So I was wondering if you could take a moment to reflect a little bit about the painting because it wasn't necessarily on the final checklist.

[00:57:51.930] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Yeah. I know you've seen every version [laughs].

[00:57:55.910] - **Ian Sullivan**

Maybe share with us kind of the arc of working together and collaborating and studio visits. Earlier decisions or considerations about the lead piece in the collection.

[00:58:05.980] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Yes. Yeah.

[00:58:06.940] - **Ian Sullivan**

And how we got to the painting, because there are other pathways to get here.

[00:58:11.940] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Yes. Robert, he asked me to share a little bit about how I came to include this painting specifically in the show, and how it initially approached you. And I'd love to share this. I hope it's okay if I just spend like 1 to 2 minutes. I first came to you wanting to exhibit a lead container, and just to describe a little bit about this history, I had learned about Radiation Piece, which is in Central Park on the rooftop of Swiss Institute, and I was interested in how this lead container operated as what I thought a trace of the work, because the radiation makes the lead container radioactive, and I found out that you were in New Jersey. I got your email contact. I emailed you expecting some studio assistant to email you back, and you emailed me directly saying, "Come on over, let's talk about it." So I came over and you said the lead container, which I had found in the Panza collection, is not an artwork. It's not a trace of radiation. It's not anything to do with the piece itself, because the piece was about radiation as it exists without these byproducts, or things that it kind of spills into.

[00:59:32.330] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

So it was that refusal that launched the interest in the painting, because you told me, "Do you want to step inside my studio? I'll show you what I'm working on now." And so I came inside. And at first, I was not interested in the paintings. I didn't want to do the painting. I was like, I'm stuck on the lead container. I'm going to make something work from the historical work.

[00:59:55.320] - **Robert Barry**

Yeah, everybody wants something from the past.

[00:59:58.430] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

But then you sat down in your chair and you saw me looking at the painting. You're like, "well, look at it, look at it". And you told me to look at it! And I was like, you know what, a challenge has been placed, I'm going to spend time with this thing. And I asked you, why did you pick these words? And you said, that's for you to decide and draw your own relationships around. And it was that, that direction from Robert that convinced me that I wanted to include a painting, because it was that full journey of really trusting my own individual perception of these words and like allowing that again and not needing you to tell me exactly what each work meant, that it's open. And that's why I love your work. I hope that answers your question. But I hope to maybe one day present that lead container because of the problem [LAUGHS] the problem it presents, as a curator.

[01:01:03.500] - **Robert Barry**

I've had radiation—I have a radiation piece in my—

[01:01:07.020] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

You told me.

[01:01:09.110] - **Robert Barry**

In my studio. They say if you're— it doesn't affect you if you're more than 18 inches away. Okay. So I keep it away. I've seen it. And it's been there for many years and I'm still— [laughs] Kicking around. It's there. I kept it. It's the material itself that has all this radiation.

[01:01:38.720] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

You actually told me “you can order it yourself.”

[01:01:41.270] - **Robert Barry**

Yes, you get it from, I think maybe somebody at Hunter. I think you get it, there are shops that sell these things to science teachers. In high school. That's where you get it.

[01:01:57.090] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

You hung out with the physics people.

[01:01:58.310] - **Robert Barry**

Easily available. No big secret. No big deal. You don't need a special license or anything like that.

[01:02:05.540] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

I read there's this amazing Smithsonian archive interview where you talked about befriending the physics professors.

[01:02:13.000] - **Robert Barry**

Yes.

[01:02:13.470] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

And they showed you a catalog where you could order all these things.

[01:02:16.460] - **Robert Barry**

Absolutely right.

[01:02:17.400] - **Robert Barry**

And that's how he got his hands on it [laughs]-- so I think we're at 3:05.

[01:02:23.990] - **Robert Barry**

I need the physics department.

[01:02:25.030] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

Yes, you know who to befriend.

[01:02:27.610] - **Robert Barry**

No big deal.

[01:02:28.080] - **Lekha Jandhyala**

You know the right people [laughs]. But I just wanted to mention that I'd really love to give everyone here a copy of the exhibition catalog that I produced. It includes the interview piece by Robert and an essay by me and another work that references a work by Jason Hirata. So I hope, I hope you can take that away. And thank you for being here. Thank you.