

Interview with Lennart Anderson

December 6, 2002

How did you become a painter?

I guess I never entertained any other thought, other than fleeting hopes that I could be a major-league baseball player. Other than that, I never had any ambitions of doing anything else, since I was seven or eight years old. I was a fanatic. I've been a fanatic all my life about it. And it doesn't make it any easier to paint, either. I think a lot of people paint a lot more than I do. I got my mother to take me to the Detroit Museum on a Sunday afternoon. It was a long walk to get there, and after it was over, she said, "You'll have to go on your own from now on. I can't do this." I went there almost every Sunday afternoon. Many, many Sunday afternoons I spent at the Detroit Museum. I was there on Pearl Harbor Day. That's where I heard about it. I was thirteen years old then.

Were there paintings there that made a particular impression on you?

Anything that was painted interested me. It could be the stupidest calendar art. If it was put down with paint, I would cross the street to see it. In a paint store - and I mean a house paint store, if there was a picture in the window, I would cross the street to see it. I loved

all kinds of pictures. I was interested in American painting, because the Detroit Museum had a lot of American painting. It was a great museum. Wonderful Rubens, Rembrandt. It's one of the great museums in this country. People don't realize it. It was very accessible. Now it's not so much so - they charge, you have to pay to get in. It was small, and it was always open. Now it's big, and the galleries are closed. When I go to Detroit now to visit my family, I hardly ever go there. It's gotten remote - they moved a bit farther out.

Did you ever draw from the paintings at the museum?

I never drew from the paintings, but on Friday evenings, there was a recreation class for drawing from sculpture, and after a year or so, there was a class drawing from the model, who was always clothed. I spent Friday nights after the class was over, going to the Detroit Library. I'd pick out these big Phaidon books and take them home, big books on Rubens. I was looking at my painting at Morris Dorsky and I realized that it probably goes all the way back to when I was looking at the Phaidon book on Roman portraits, which were mostly, I guess, cast from life, and I used to look at the big details of the heads. So that's one of the sources. I would copy - I know there was a band on the wallpaper in my room [when I was growing up] - which had, I guess it was boats or something, and I would copy that. I would bring my drawings into the school, hoping that my teacher

would say that I could get into the special [art] class, which met after school. I never could get there. I wanted so bad to get into it, but she finally went to another school and another teacher came. And she found this crazy guy, who was just nuts to get into this class, so she sent me - you had to take the streetcar to get to the other school where it was held. The new teacher saw I was really stuck on it and she let me go. Because I had been held out of it for so long, I was so embarrassed. I got there, and I felt I didn't belong there. But I had been practicing - my painting at that point was crashing waves on rocks. And the teacher, the first day, she wanted to see what the kids did. So she said, do something. So I did my crashing waves on rocks. And the next week she held it out, it was such a good painting, she thought, so different. But it was just one of my routines. Then I started going to the Saturday morning class at the Art Institute. That must have been about the ninth grade. We did copies. The teacher taught at Arts and Crafts, which was one of the two art schools in Detroit. I decided to go also to the Saturday afternoon class, so when I was fourteen, I was painting from the model! Then I got myself into the art high school in Detroit, Cass Tech [nical School]. I was painting in oils by then. I begged my father for oil paints, and he finally gave them to me when I was about - I must have been in the seventh or eighth grade. So I painted in oils from then on. I painted at Arts and Crafts a little bit during in high school, not too much. There was no oil painting in high school. They were geared to *The Scholastic Magazine* categories. They had pencil, charcoal, watercolor, colored inks. So the school was churning out about forty people doing colored inks! The best ones would go to

Scholastic. My high school was winning all the prizes. When I got out of high school, I got a Scholastic scholarship to the Art Institute.

Who were your teachers there?

The only teacher who really tried to teach anything to me was a guy named Elmer Forrestberg, who had an idea about drawing the figure, which I didn't follow, but the basic thing, was to always do the whole figure, on the whole page. He had a thing about ovals. There was an oval for everything. He was very good, and it didn't really look as bad as it sounds, but I didn't like the idea, so I never did it. And as long as I got the figure on the page, it didn't really bother him. The other teachers didn't really teach much. I had Louis Ritman, Boris Anisfeld. Boris Anisfeld ran me out of his class. I was trying to paint like Velasquez at that point. It was my second year at the Art Institute. He was a Russian, and he was a very famous artist earlier on. He was hired by the Art Institute over Chagall. He had a big reputation, especially as a scenic designer, for ballet. But by the time I had gotten there, he had lost his reputation. He was supposedly a Velazquez-ian. His teaching was supposedly on Velazquez, and I was trying to paint like Velazquez. And in the end, I think I was closer to Velazquez than he was. But my work had a certain caché about it that would attract people who were first-year [students]. They would come into the class and see my work, and we would talk, and the teacher was just eating himself up with anger, that

I was getting attention from these people, who knew nothing. So he tore into me one day. So I left his class. I wasn't getting anything from him. Then I went to Louis Ritman, who had spent a number of years in Paris, and he had selected a lot of the paintings in the Louis Stern collection. He supposedly the famous [Henri "Le Douanier"] Rousseau [*The Sleeping Gypsy*] to this country. But he had a reputation as an American Impressionist painter. But no one ever knew he painted that way when we studied with him.

So, after that you went to Cranbrook [Academy of Art]?

Yes, I went to Cranbrook, which is the most important part. While I was in Chicago, I was burning to be an expressionist painter. But I didn't really do it, although some of the people around me were doing it.

You didn't feel the freedom to do it?

Well, they had another life outside of school. When I went to school, everyone else was a GI, and I was a high school student. They came back to finish their educations, so you were sitting next to a forty-year-old guy. They were more mature. They were into a lot of painters who I got to really like, but I wasn't doing it in class. They didn't do it either, but they did it outside. But I didn't. So when I got to Cranbrook, I thought I would paint like

Kokoschka and Soutine, Rouault. Those were my painters. And I was very interested in Rembrandt. Half the day at school wasn't scheduled, so I spent it drawing from a collection of Rembrandt reproductions - portfolios of his drawings. So when I got to Cranbrook I got the nickname "Little Rembrandt." So when I got to Cranbrook, I was determined to be an expressionist. And I did that for about four months, and then, all of a sudden, it just kind of fell away. I was happy doing it while I was doing it. I painted horrendous subjects - dead babies, trash heaps, prostitutes. And I was as innocent as you could be about painting prostitutes! But that was the iconography, you know. It was Rouault's subject.

And you were just painting these from your imagination?

I had a couple of rotten red peppers, that I painted 30 x 42 inches. It was kind of Kokoschka, Soutine, knarled-up thing. Pat Passlof was at the school. She saw the backs of my paintings - they were the other types of paintings. She was interested in those. She had come from Black Mountain [College] and she was very influenced by De Kooning. And De Kooning was very interested in drawing, and my figure paintings were on the backs of the paintings that I was working on. She would see them, and she was intrigued by them. After I stopped [doing the expressionist paintings] - well, what's curious about it was that I didn't really stop as soon as I thought I did. It really went on well into the second year that I was there. I did things that were maybe a little more romantic; they

weren't really that original. I got away from Kokoschka and Soutine, but they were really expressionist pictures. Anyway the fact that this very sophisticated person [Pat Passlof] was interested in what I had done before, intrigued me. And I started doing portraits of students, against the principles of the school, really. They had told me not to paint from life while I was there, that I had done enough of that in Chicago. And I was getting paid for them - I was getting fifteen dollars a piece. I got one hundred and fifty dollars, and I came to New York.

And what was the experience like, making portraits, working from life, after you had been making the expressionist paintings?

Well, it was more of a problem for the school than it was for me. It really wasn't so much about painting from life, or not painting from life. That's a big issue that wasn't ever really thought about. Either you could do both ways, you did it one way, you could in successive days, do different things. I got very interested in Velazquez and Degas. And I think that Degas is more Velazquez-ian than Manet.

Why?

Because he [Degas] has the attitude of Velazquez. Manet does not. Manet's a different

kind of artist. Degas was the person who was throwing away things. Putting something down on the canvas that says such-and-such, but if you don't look at it too carefully, you see that it's right. Velazquez is that way. Manet is just kind of heavy. Degas's whole personality was closer to Velazquez in the detachment that he had.

Is that what interested you about the two of them?

Oh yes. Degas was very interesting to me. All the way through the 1950's, and I still am.

And what were the qualities about Degas that made you interested in him? What you just said, or something else?

I just identified with him. I was still a kid, going on the streetcar. I was a nut. These catalogs [auction catalog of Degas's studio contents] - I spent afternoons in New York looking at them. The first time I saw these catalogs was on that trip [to New York] after I sold those portraits. I came to New York and visited my friend David Smith, and he had three of them. I was just fascinated, to be able to get into somebody's studio like Degas. Degas is very fragmentary, he's never finished. There's new things that keep coming up that you hadn't known about. So that's where I first saw them, and they were in my head then. But then I went back and spent one year in Detroit, after graduation from

Cranbrook. I remember looking at the catalogs in the Detroit Museum, that they had. But by the time I came to New York I was kind of caught between Degas and Cezanne. And I had to make up my mind, but I never actually did. The one thing that Degas does that, or the kind of artist he is, is that he does need to draw from something. And he is a figurative artist. And I was not somebody who had models, so I was alienated there, though I went to sketch classes in the Con-Ed building and I'd draw my friends. But Cezanne, of course, painted still lifes. So it was easier to go into a Cezanne, than a Degas, just logistically. I also started the street scenes then - they are all mostly influenced by Italian painting rather than Degas.

Tell me more about your Street Scenes - what specifically gave you the idea to paint those?

When I was at the Art Institute, they had a traveling fellowship competition for the students. The year that I competed was 1949-50. In your last year, you spent a lot of time in the competition. You had to do a standing male figure, a standing female figure in charcoal, you had to do a painting from life, and then they assigned a subject. It was really based on the old French Academy. They assigned *Ulysses* as the subject for everyone to paint. I painted a street scene for that. I was influenced by some American painting - there was one person that I liked - Walter Stuempfig. He was a Philadelphia painter who was pretty well known at that time. But I painted an image from my childhood, which I

remember. I grew up in the Depression, and I remember a legless man coming down the street on rollers with a megaphone, and I don't know if he was singing, or what. And so he was my Ulysses. So you've got this grown-up man down at the eye-level of the children. I don't know if I thought about it that way, but in working it out, that's what happened. You have this full figure and then this half-figure at the same height. That was my graduate competition painting. I didn't win the award, which I'm glad I didn't, because you had to travel, and I wasn't... even to this day, I wouldn't want to travel by myself. I hated it.

But you came to New York by yourself, right?

Well, I came not by myself. There were four of us. I came with two weavers, and another painter, from Cranbrook. They were going to open up a shop [the weavers] on Sheridan Square. They had a shop there; it didn't last too long. My friend and I had to find jobs, and we got jobs at Lord & Taylor. We both quit on the same day, without telling each other. It was the weirdest thing. He went back to Chicago. Meanwhile, I met - I'd been looking at galleries, and I thought, I couldn't go back until I had a gallery. So I stopped at Roy Davis's [Davis & Langdale Gallery] and asked if he would take me on, because I was going back. He didn't think I was ready; he didn't think I had enough paintings, but he wanted me to stay in New York; he thought I would be worth keeping an eye on. So he got me a job working for [Robert] Kulicke [who had a frame shop].

And who did you meet there, at Kulicke's? Because there were a lot of artists there, right?

There had been a lot of painters there, in the past. One of them was Bob Dane, who was the gessoer at the frame shop that was right around the corner from Salander-O'Reilly. Velrof Hines - a black guy - he became a restorer later, but he was painting at the time. Kulicke was there, and a guy named Bob Kaiser, who also showed at Rosenberg for a while.

Didn't [Albert] York also work there?

He came later. That's interesting. Because he also came from Detroit, and also went to Arts and Crafts, but I didn't see him there either. Because I left in 1946, and that's just when he came. He spent time after his high school at Arts and Crafts, and I had spent my time during high school there.

So you never met him?

I did. When I came back from Rome, he was working at Kulicke, doing gessoing.

Steven [Harvey] tells the story in the essay [in a Salander O'Reilly exh. cat] that when you came to New York, you were equally obsessed with De Kooning and Degas. Maybe you can tell me about that.

Well, there was a "De Kooning Paints a Picture" [article] in the *Art News* during the year I was in Detroit. And Pat [Passlof] was in New York. And she was one of the first people I looked up when I came back. Abstract Expressionism was in the air. I had a thing about Degas, that he really had a lot in common with Abstract Expressionism.

In what way?

In many ways. His unfinish, for one thing. What he says. For example, somebody said that he didn't seem to have any confidence in proportion. So he says, "Yes, that's just it. I do not have any confidence in it." I don't know it. That's basically a thing about De Kooning, who was doing that. He said, "I can't make any progress until I realize I don't know anything. That's Abstract Expressionism. I could show you things that are in late Degas, that are very De Kooning-like. He [Degas] also said that in later life he dreamt of himself rolling down a hill wrapped in bad pastels. I was thinking about him just the other day - for someone who had the ambitions of Degas, to end up doing pastels is really a come-down. He gave it up. Because of surface, I think. What pastel does is that it's

always ready to work on. Whereas a painting has to dry, and what do you do on top of this, will this stick, will it not. A whole bunch of stuff. And Degas is hyper-sensitive to surface. And I think it's true of most painters that are, they ruin their paintings because they get bad surfaces. They keep working on it. [Anderson shows me an example of a late Degas that he says looks like De Kooning] - It's the changes. He's drawn this arm over something else. It's very much like the [De Kooning] *Woman* in the Museum of Modern Art.

So was Degas your way into De Kooning, so to speak? Or was it something else?

I never got into De Kooning. I was only interested in De Kooning as an early painter. I liked his early painting. I liked what he came from. I thought Abstract Expressionism was basically Poussin. I thought of it as trying to deal with that whole surface, the way Poussin does. Only he's got a lot of space and everything. And Veronese. I think that American painting, until it got modern was not like that.

So, in that sense, do you think there is a difference between abstract and representational painting?

Well, I thought it was inspiring. I thought of the abstract painting that I liked as a goad, as

something that I would try to compete with, without being abstract. I think that a lot of people have done that, later. Maybe even while I was doing it, but I was very explicit about it. I had given up toned grounds, because I wanted white underneath, because I felt tonal painting tended to be recessive, and I wanted to have as much light in it as I could.

Although it didn't work out that way. I used [Jacques-Louis] David as my model, because he painted over white.

Did you ever make any abstract paintings?

A couple of little ones, but they didn't survive.

What did you think of that experience?

It was a little bit of "Who was I?" And what was I doing, doing that? It's where I am.

What was I doing, doing something that would have never occurred to me? My paintings are paintings that occur to me, but it would never occur to me to paint abstract. I didn't feel that I had any claim to it. Maybe I was just excusing myself. It was tough.

Did you ever meet De Kooning?

Yes, once at the American Academy in Rome. I had some questions to ask him. I wondered if he was interested in Pompeian art, early on, or Piero [Della Francesca]. He said that no one knew Piero in the 1930's. Piero was an unknown artist. But Pompeian art, he acknowledged that. He didn't go into it. But evidently, it was a very big influence. Just like Balthus. My thing about Balthus in the 1950's was that he was interested in the wall. And I was too. It was all about fresco, but nobody talked about it that way.

[Anderson shows me a painting he did while at Cranbrook, explaining:] An attempt to paint a Velazquez of a very emotional subject. I wanted to see if detachment was capable of painting something that was emotional. It's got very limited color. It's Degas, and it's Velazquez. It's Degas in the figure moving. And it was influenced by Tintoretto, too. The Miracle of St. Mark. I wanted to get a figure up in the air.

There was another early street scene that got destroyed. It was started in a rooming-house up on 74th Street. Pat [Passlof] came to see what I was doing. I brought it down to Tenth Street. I had it on 6th Street too. I was pushing it in a cart near Cooper Union, and I bumped it into a city bus, and I ripped it. It finally just fell apart.

Tell me about your time in Rome.

I was all prepared for Rome. I felt I belonged there. All my painters had been there:

Degas, Ingres. I just felt I was home, in a way. So it was very exciting. I was there three years. I was the first of a bunch that went there with that idea. After there were others, like Ted Schmidt who was a student of mine.

Since you brought up teaching, maybe we could talk about that a little. What are some of the principles you teach your students?

I teach composition to some extent, but my graduate level classes are based on the figure. It's kind of ironic, because if they're like me, when they get out of school, they won't get to paint the figure much. Maybe some will. I don't know. It's just not a practical thing, unless you can figure it out. I've been uncomfortable having a figure. Hiring a model to come up. I have no idea what I want to do with the figure. I can't fool around when the model is up here; I can't just say, I don't know, and stand around. I can do that with the still life for days, and not get anything. So getting a model up here would drive me nuts. They'd wonder what kind of a strange character this is. A lot of people who are working with figures have done a lot more of them than I have. I do portraits, heads and things.

But why is that different for you?

A head is not such a complicated thing. A figure involves a lot more. I can't allow me that

kind of freedom to hope that something is going to occur. I just can't do this, so I don't paint the model. I like to paint the model; I'll paint it in class.

So what are the sources for the figures in your paintings?

I use the mirror. I make it up, which is always bad. I realize that I don't have a strong enough imagination or something to break away from conventions I might have. They are weak because of it. This figure here - the male figure - [in *Idyll III*, 1977-2002(in progress)] is pretty much put together - some of it is from the mirror, but it's just hit and miss trying to find the proportions of a figure that age. I don't have a model, so I'm just trying to do a young person. I will work from Polaroids. Photographs are usually helpful, but I don't want the painting to have the idiosyncrasy of a photograph. I'm not painting that kind of a picture.

Do you make drawings, and use your drawings for the figures?

I do drawings. But they're only good when I have them from life. I've noticed everything I draw from my imagination falls into a cliché. It's received. You think you're making it up, but you're not. It's a compendium of stylistic tics. They look fine when you do it, and then a little bit later they start swearing at you. They don't quite work out.

Anyway, you wanted to ask me about what I teach. I teach handling of paint, a progression, an order - what should be done first, what should be done second. But the essential thing about my teaching - it goes back to Forrestberg - whereas he used ovals, I take a measurement. That measurement is very simple. You extrapolate from that measurement everything. Everything you draw is related in some way to that measurement. I wrote something all about the measurement in the exhibition catalog [Lawrenceville, New Jersey, Rider University Gallery, 2000. *Lennart Anderson Drawings and Paintings*, exh. cat.]

Do you use any other measurement devices in your classroom, like a plumb line?

Well, everything you draw is in relation to horizontal and vertical. If you can get a clear idea of that, and keep that which is hard.

So when you are making these figures, are you thinking about the measurement, even though you're not working from life? Or does it just come naturally to you?

No, it doesn't. It's very hard because when you're up there [at the canvas], you're standing there, and the figure is dropping away from you. And you can't see the proportions. So if you don't have the mark, you'll never get it.

So you do start with the measurement?

Yes, I do. Or if I'm working from the Polaroid, I would break it down. I use this Polaroid for the male figure. It's a Polaroid that Barbara [Anderson's late wife] took of me years and years ago. It's not adequate, maybe that's why I'm struggling with it so much. But it does give me something to go on. I go back to this. I try to get away from it, but I can't. It gets worse.

Can we talk about the issue of finish in your work? Has this painting [*Idyll III*] been "finished" at various times?

It's been finished a number of times. I thought it was, but when I come back to it - usually when I go away for the summer, I think I've gotten it to where I want it, but when I come back in the fall, I am crestfallen, and think, this is terrible. But I manage to get away from it for three months, and do something else, so that's helpful. But then I know that I've got another year that I'm going to be screwing around with it.

Can you describe the changes you made, for example, from when it was exhibited at the Center [for Figurative Painting, November 2000- January 2001] What did you want to

change about it?

I thought it was too gray. The thing about it - I don't know whether it's me - or the place. It looks different at the gallery than it does here. It satisfies me here, but it looks so different elsewhere. It's the wall. The wall and the relationship of the light to it is something that I paint with. I can't not. This is adjusted to this light, and even though this light changes a lot, it's all here. I'm used to it here. The electric lights in the gallery brought out the surface. I don't see the surface here. I'm not interested in the surface that the light brings out. But also, last spring I was painting on it with my cataracts, so I just about ruined it last spring, I couldn't see anything. I think it has a laid back, passive quality. It's not aggressive, but when it's at the gallery, it picks it all up. It's very disconcerting.

I still wish I could get more color into it. The tree is much bigger [than it was when it was exhibited at the Center for Figurative Painting.]

The male figure has been trouble from day one.

What do you see as being wrong with the male figure [we are looking at a photograph of an earlier stage of the painting]

The legs. They're ugly. They're ugly. That's all I can say. The foreshortening caused the back leg ... they're not beautiful.

Tell me about going from that painting, the Bacchanal [1955], to the Idylls. [the Bacchanal was the original painting that inspired the Idylls.]

I wanted to do something much more academic [when making the *Bacchanal*], but the situation was such that it became a different kind of painting. It was a sketch for something like the *Idyll*, but I wasn't doing it there. It's a much more modern painting. It's more Matisse, or something. It's a different thing. But I didn't intend to paint a large picture like the *Idyll*. I knew that I was not going to. I wanted to paint something like the *Idyll*, in spite of everything. In spite of the fact that I loved the *Bacchanal*. But I didn't want to be that painter.

Why did you want to paint something more academic?

Well, I use that word because I know it's a hot button, you know. To me, it's not academic. It's great. So that's what I was trying to do. Paint a great picture.

Great as in being in the tradition...

Yes, of the great painters. This tradition, here [the tradition of the *Bacchanal*] of Matisse

and everything, is a modern greatness. I was not really interested in doing that full time. I wanted to try to paint... It was a bet. It was just a big bet on my part; could I do this? Could I make it stick? Could I do it well enough? Could I make people turn around and say, that bastard did it, and it's a great painting, against everything. I was determined to do that, and whether I did - I'm sure I didn't. But that was the agenda to go ahead.

Can I ask you about another hot word: realism. Do you consider yourself a realist painter?

Well, for someone who is so interested in looking, and seeing well, to say I'm not a realist is kind of a conflict. But I'm not particularly interested in "realist painting," in quotes. It doesn't interest me at all. But then, the great painters that I love, all have that element. It can't be divided off. I think people who say they don't like realism, but they like Corot... Then they have to say why they like Corot: they like his paint, or his light, they go on with all this stuff, but it's all tied up with how he sees. So it's a difficult word for me to talk about. The Nietzsche quote that Scott Noel put into the catalog. [the essay in New York, Salander O'Reilly Galleries, 2002. *Lennart Anderson Paintings 1953 to 2002*, exh. cat.]] - that's what I'm all about. That's it. What is it?

[I read the quote]:

Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to live. What is required for this is to stop

courageously at the surface...

That's it. You see? So I'm painting surfaces; I'm painting how things fall together and separate out. But to do that, you have to put something on the table that does something for you. It's always there; it's in every place you look - surfaces. But you have to set up a still life - it drives me crazy. Sometimes I can't get anything. I have tables of stuff here.

[Anderson shows me a still life painting illustrated in the exhibition catalog]: It had Poussin, De Kooning, Piero, all that stuff is in that painting. That's what I was thinking of.

[We return to a discussion of *Idyll III*, and its different stages]

At one point the tree was too much like that in the Titian, I really kind of stole it out of the *Bacchus and Ariadne*, so I decided I had to get rid of it.

I'm trying to make it all together, in a very gentle - I shouldn't say gentle but that's what comes out of it if it's right. Just trying to get things to be less annoying to me. I'm still trying to make a painting that doesn't embarrass me. That's all that I'm trying to do. This is going to be an embarrassment. It's inherently going to embarrass every painter that's painting today, if they tried to do it. And I'm trying to do it so that it doesn't embarrass me.

So the other two versions [Idyll I and Idyll II], you're satisfied with? They don't embarrass you?

Well, I can't do any more. They're out of my hands. But this painting [*Idyll III*] was a criticism of these two. I wanted to fill in all the spaces.

So, in a painting that might have a more definite finish - how do you know when it's finished?

You just used the word finish in two different ways in one sentence. Finished, and definite finish. Are you talking about the surface of the painting, or the whole painting?

But when is my painting finished? I don't know. Some paintings I work on for two days.

But this [*Idyll III*] is not the same kind of thing. As somebody said about Caravaggio, when he died, he wasn't less a criminal, he was more a criminal. He was getting worse.

And that's what's been happening to me. Years ago, I said, I've got to stop this. This is going to kill me. I keep working on these paintings, and this one is way beyond anything I could have imagined. The painting, *St. Mark's Place* [1970-76] - when I used to show my slides of that, I would say - and it haunts me now, "They put up the World Trade Center while I tried to paint that picture." And they finished the World Trade Center and I was still working on it.

Were you thinking of Balthus in this painting [St. Mark's Place]?

I wasn't thinking of Balthus, but I knew Balthus was there. It would be interesting for someone besides me to look at it and tell me what's Balthus about it. I don't know. It was done from some photographs I took before I went to Rome. It's not at all like the photographs. I took the photographs with me to Rome. I made a lot of stuff up. I wanted to do something really large - and they had these big stretchers there when I went there.

What colors are on your palette?

I don't really think about color. I think about harmonies and light, and things like that. Still life will - if something is on the table that has a certain kind of color that I like, I'll work with those kinds of colors. That isn't to say that I don't have color, or that they can't be identified by color, but I don't know what it is. I've never made a big deal about the color. It's basically value. It's crying in the wilderness, but it's mostly values, and relationship with tones. Value is just without color, but tones are color and value together. It's where things are combining with other things that interest me. I just don't have to be painting to enjoy that. I can amuse myself on the subway looking at things, and studying how things are making connections.

Was there a point at which you realized you were a tonal painter?

I'm not ashamed of it. Now I realize that it's the only thing that's any good, basically. All the paintings I really like - and I mean Matisse and everyone, I like that.

So you think Matisse is a tonal painter?

Yes. He's basically a tonal painter. I don't know what a color painter is, actually. I like to say that the only time there is color is when it's in the tube. It's in the tube, the screw is on there - that's the color. It's in there. Once you bring it out, it's tone. Once you put in on the table, or on the palette, it's a tone. It's in a place; it's taking part of the area. I think I more agree with Picasso that color is very tricky, and I know it's true in terms of how light changes the picture so much. So tonal painting or value painting - the less color the better in a sense, because it stays there, it doesn't keep shifting around.

Painting, to play with this business of certain intensities of different colors together that are the same value, is very interesting. There's a saying, "Nature is best at the distance, it's all together." There's a harmony, and I guess that's what interests me: harmony. That includes color - color is an element. I made paintings based on black and white Muybridge photographs. There's no color in them. But I don't have any problem dealing with that. To me it's not hard to understand what the colors might be when you look at a black and white photograph.

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