JAMES GLEESON INTERVIEWS: GUNTER CHRISTMANN

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JAMES GLEESON: Gunter, could we begin chronologically and go through your works that we have in the Gallery chronologically, and could you tell us what you can remember about the works as you did them? Which were the first ones?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: The first ones, I think, are these collages. There’s three of them.

JAMES GLEESON: Three of a series. Was it a larger series?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: It was a larger series that I eventually considered for silkscreen printing, but I had up to four colours in some of these and I found that it would have been too expensive to do them so I left it at the collages, as a group of collages. They happened in 1967.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: About the time of the second exhibition, or just previous to the second exhibition at Central Street—my first exhibition at Central Street being in ’66, which was also very geometric. It wasn’t exactly colour field or hard-edged painting, but rather geometric abstraction. Then through the years from ’66 to ’67, in association with other artists and a number of talks and other information, I cleared them out and started to have less small units within them, which tended to go towards the optical. The simplified geometric areas happened in ’67. One of these called Rubezahl was actually a painting, one of the paintings that I exhibited in ’67. There were three, two of which were in the Field exhibition.

JAMES GLEESON: Was this one?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: This one was also, I think it was in the Field exhibition as well as the other one called Krimhilde. They were very faint acrylic paint leaving raw canvas, which was just paint with clear medium but had the look of raw canvas. Also I don’t know how—it was a play on positive and negative shape, one or the other being painted.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: And then the gouaches—

JAMES GLEESON: The two gouaches we have?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: In the Rubezahl one the image continued into the edge.
JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Now, you mentioned to me that the titles you gave them had no explicit meaning, but you meant one was a masculine form and another you thought of as a more feminine form.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. That also, with these, was the first time that I used round or half round or semi circles.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: This Krimhilde, Rubezahl and one other, of which the name escapes me now.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: This one—there’s no title to it—was also a painting in the show.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. I notice we’ve got a date, ’68, on those. Is that accurate?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: No, that should be ’67. They’re all ’67.

JAMES GLEESON: All painted in ’67. Perhaps exhibited in ’68.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: The paintings were exhibited in ’67. But I think the gouaches were done after, in view of using them for silkscreens which never eventuated.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. Gunter, before we go any further, could we go right back and could you tell us first of all where you studied and how you got into—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I didn’t study properly. I started painting in ’62 on my own steam, but with a couple of other people that were sort of Sunday painters or hobby painters with which I didn’t associate much longer.

JAMES GLEESON: How old were you then?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Twenty-six.

JAMES GLEESON: You came to Australia in what year?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: In 1959.

JAMES GLEESON: Nineteen fifty-nine. Could you give us just a bit of biographical background? You know, where were you—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Australian?

JAMES GLEESON: No, the whole thing, where were you born.
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**GUNTER CHRISTMAN**: Born 1936 in Berlin. I grew up in Berlin, went to school in Berlin.

**JAMES GLEESON**: Any interest in art then?

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN**: Not in art, but I’ve always been drawing right through my school days.

**JAMES GLEESON**: Yes.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN**: No, nothing much to speak of, just pencil drawings, watercolour washes and things like that. But I had a continuous interest in it, which I continued in Canada and continued in Australia.

**JAMES GLEESON**: When did you go to Canada?

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN**: After I left school I had a couple of years where I couldn’t get an apprenticeship and finally decided to take anything that was available. That was 1956 and there’s only two possibilities, either bricklaying or baker. I chose bricklayer.

**JAMES GLEESON**: I see.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN**: Just to have a trade. My father kept insisting to learn a trade at least, you know. When I finished that, I think that was 1956. I started in ‘53. I just made a mistake a little while ago.

**JAMES GLEESON**: I see. But ’53 you really started—

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN**: Yes, bricklaying. Finished in ’56 and applied then for migration to Australia, which I wasn’t applicable for that being 20. The age limit was 21.

**JAMES GLEESON**: I see, yes.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN**: To Canada it was 18, so I went to Canada. I spent two years there. Came back to Germany for something like six or seven months or so, but didn’t feel I fitted in. I was a bit estranged and still wanted to go to Australia. Applied for migration again and came to Australia then. Left in ’58, arrived here in ’59. Then took the first job that I got from the Immigration Department, which was a painter and docker in Whyalla. Conditions there and the money wasn’t too good. I left there soon and went to Adelaide. Got a job working in the mines which paid better money. I was saving money then to bring girlfriend over, who never came. Anyhow, I stayed there about 10 months and (inaudible) working in the mines and I was drawing on the side there too.

**JAMES GLEESON**: I see.
GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Then about Christmas ‘59 I came to Sydney. Did a few odd jobs around and eventually started bricklaying. That continued to 1968 on and off, which was good help when I started painting more seriously. I was able to earn enough money in two or three weeks to stay home for five weeks, buy the materials and paint.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Which I started in ’62 and produced nothing of artistic interest till about ’64, ’65. In ’65 I tried to get an exhibition, which didn’t work, and I had the first painting in a group show that Frank Watters organised in Melbourne somewhere, the Artist’s Gallery.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Then I met the people from Central Street and they offered me to exhibit there in ’66, which I did, October ’66.

JAMES GLEESON: That was your first one man show?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Mm.

JAMES GLEESON: Were they similar in kind to this sort of work?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: No, they had smaller units. There were sort of half way between geometric abstraction and Op art.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: In the beginning—how can I say that?—I had the idea that art had to be totally constructive and not emotional, et cetera.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I looked at people like Lohse, Mondrian, Max Bill and these people. That continued until ’69, I think, when my work started to get more emotional content. I finally came to the point where I thought it had to have both, or as much emotional content as well as constructive—

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I see. So our first representation of you in the collection are these two gouaches and this painting.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Oh, that’s also a gouache.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, it is gouache, is it?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: But unprimed canvas, is it?
GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: This then lead to paintings in '68 where I had some cheap canvases, and I was then interested in colour. Still very geometric, still hard-edge, only the areas got even larger than they were in '67.

JAMES GLEESON: Was '68 the year of the Field exhibition?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I think it was.

JAMES GLEESON: I seem to think it was, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I think it was because I used paintings from '67 for the Field exhibition.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Then when the areas got larger and larger, especially the central areas, I started to have after images from the outside area and I couldn't keep the colour clear, so to speak, or unimpeded. The central colour area was always interfered with by after images from colours around the edge of the painting. I did two paintings in '68 where I broke the colour field up into small units, through droplets of paint, and that activity stopped the after images.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. Do we have any representation of that kind of work in our collection?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: No. The first one were the black one, the big black one, and the big white one, which was '69. The first painting of that group was the big black one which I composed out of three colours, plus black.

JAMES GLEESON: What three colours?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Sort of chromoxide green, ultramarine and yellow ochre, I think. Plus black.

JAMES GLEESON: Plus black, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Having then a very large area of sprinkles or droplets—whatever name you want to use—I wasn't sure that I could hold it. My concerns were still colour field, but keeping the whole surface up front and having no deep deep space illusions. I used the bands—

JAMES GLEESON: The sort of vertical bands.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Vertical bands to give it grit or something, because I was afraid I might have holes without the bands, you know.
JAMES GLEESON: It was a kind of scaffolding to hold the thing firm.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, quite. In the black one I used ultramarine. I didn’t want the bands to stand out front. I wanted them to recede just a little bit behind the area, and ultramarine receding just a little bit and giving me sort of vertical blocks of solid mass. That exhibition, all of the paintings in the exhibition, I think I painted an orange one, a red one, a green one, a purple one. I went through all the colours, plus an ochre one, and then having painted the black one, I painted also a white one.

JAMES GLEESON: What colours did you use in the white, it obviously wasn’t all—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: In the white I think I used viridian green, ultramarine, and cadmium orange, plus white.

JAMES GLEESON: All broken down in—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: In small units.

JAMES GLEESON: A small unit. You didn’t actually mix the viridian, say, with white to—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: No, I mix it optically.

JAMES GLEESON: Optically, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Like in the 1966 paintings, I had made optical mixtures with little squares, a quarter of an inch by a quarter of an inch. In some of the paintings I had up to four and a half thousand little squares all painted one by one, which really wasn’t a solution for sort of six foot or seven or eight foot paintings, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Tell me, how did you work on these? Did you, say, mask out the grids first?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I painted the canvas whatever colour I wanted the grids to be.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Then I masked the grids and applied the rest.

JAMES GLEESON: Did you actually drop the paint on?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I dropped the paint.

JAMES GLEESON: It wasn’t hand put on spot by spot?
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**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** No, no. The canvas was on the floor. At first I considered the spray gun, but realising the technical difficulties like changing from colour to colour, like changing from blue to yellow, the cleaning process, et cetera, and all that would have been too much. I couldn't have worked fluently, you know. I realised with the four-inch brush, for instance, the paint being a certain consistency, something between like milk and cream, sort of somewhere there, depending what kind of spots I wanted.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes. It's acrylic isn't it?

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** Acrylic. I flicked the brush in the air and then the paint fell on just like rain.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** All I had to do to control it, watch the action that was happening, and then act accordingly. Say, using one brush-load from the top and another brush-load from the bottom of it. Then another brush-load from the side, then another brush-load from that side again.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see. Your method of control was to work from the four sides in.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** Yes, yes, which later on changed. I did a number of paintings that I only sprayed from one end, from the top end, but that's much later. I think that happened—no, not that much later. I think I started that in '70, 1970, on the unstretched canvases.

**JAMES GLEESON:** What was the date of *Big black* and the *Big white* ones?

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** Sixty-nine.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Sixty-nine. And they were from a show at Chandler Coventry?

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** No, that was still Central Street.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Was it?

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** But Mr Coventry was already co-director of the gallery.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** Where are we now? That's *Big black*, yes.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Those two were from the same exhibition?

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** Yes. Then I think I realised that I didn't need these grids.
JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I shifted them to the edge of the painting and they did the same job there. I always kept them a little black visually, like either darker or cooler, like more blue, or just darker than the central (inaudible).

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: By which the edges receded and brought the whole of the central surface forward.

JAMES GLEESON: Did this arise out of your realisation of that after image you got from your earlier painting, and was it an attempt to control that after image?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I wasn’t concerned about after image because I didn’t have any so to speak of.

JAMES GLEESON: Not in these spotted ones?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Not in the spotted ones any more.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: But without etches or bands, it could have looked too much like a cut off area out of some microscopic—

JAMES GLEESON: I see. So it was virtually to frame it, to hold it within an area?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. My concerns were still of the colour field painting, keeping the so called object—but also I don’t like that name much—to keep it totally flat and have no deep space illusions, and have everything up front.

JAMES GLEESON: The integrity of the surface.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: That’s the word that was used at the time, I think, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: What’s the next one? This one, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: This is one with the line around the—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: This is the show in 1970.

JAMES GLEESON: This has the line around the edge that you were speaking of a moment ago?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. I then started to use several different lines.
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JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Sometimes a combination of two. Well, say for instance, I would, on the edge, screen out all the warm colours—all the oranges and reds, yellows, et cetera—and mask them off, but not mask the blues and whites and blacks, whatever. That way I had the edge integrated with the central field, but still sitting behind the central field visually, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, this must’ve been a fairly slow process. You’d have to wait until the paint was dry before you could mask out to continue with it.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, yes. I sometimes used—

JAMES GLEESON: Quick dry?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Battens.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh yes, oh yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I just laid them on and took them off when I had to take them off, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: The studio I was in was such I had a lot of sunlight, it was quite hot there. Even if it wasn’t, when they dried enough not to run, I took them outside in the sun and dried them.

JAMES GLEESON: Because it would be important for the colour not to run, for each spot to retain its identity.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. Another important thing that I was using consciously then, that spot on spot—say, one spot covering another one by a little bit or by half or whatever—the one underneath will have a negative shape, the one on top will have a positive shape. So it will physically sit in front of the other. What I started doing then, I started weaving them. I used all the ones that came forward, like all the warm colours and the light colours—yellow, reds, oranges, et cetera—I’d always have them in the negative shape. They would be underlaying the others. Like the blues, the greens and purples would always lie on top.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. So that the thing would cancel each other out and retain the surface.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. Be like a woven fabric and that would sort of then, the shimmer affect that you’d get then would hover plain with the whole of the surface.
JAMES GLEESON: Because it's really contrary to the Impressionist idea or the Pointillists who used the warm colour to come forward, to give the sense of volume coming forward, and the cool to recede. You did the reverse in order to hold the surface intact.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, what I used is like if you see it enlarged, like say spots like that—

JAMES GLEESON: Yes (inaudible).

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: The warm one that comes forward would be the negative shape.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes. I understand.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: The blue one would be the positive and that way they'd sort of stay—

JAMES GLEESON: Meshed.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. That was an interesting discovery, I think. So that was 1970?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Nineteen seventy. What's next?

JAMES GLEESON: Now, these are the ones—four more we have; we've only got two photographs here—from the Sao Paulo ones.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Another thing was a lot of things that happened came out of practical considerations. Like I wasn't able to paint large canvases stretched unless I stretched the raw canvas. If I stretched the raw canvas, which being cotton duck, the first water it gets it will shrink. If I ever had to take it off the stretcher, with a six foot canvas, it would be about a quarter of an inch too small.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I'd never get it back on the stretcher again. Right? But that would be the only way to sprinkle on the floor without the canvas sagging through and showing the braces up the top. I build all my own stretchers, reluctantly, which meant I like to swap around and use stretchers again and take paintings off, et cetera, which in fact meant I had to paint them unstretched. That would be the only way in painting them, and having them shrink and then put on a stretcher, and then be able to take off or on again without the missing quarter of an inch, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I understand. Yes, yes.
GUNTER CHRISTMAN: So I started painting unstretched on large sheets of pine board, I think, covered with polythene. That would peel off in the end quite easily, you know, and that’s how these unstretched canvases came about. My consideration was them; that I could hang them directly on the wall anywhere and I tried some with edges and some without edges. But I also had an idea if I put them directly on the wall, flat against the wall without anything in between except double sided tape, I could use a pencil line and about two inches outside the canvas. That would create a visual illusion that would weave the canvas into the wall surface.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: By that time I also wasn’t keeping the colour even any more. I started to reason that if I have foreground and background, that I could use foreground and background (inaudible) if I used it in traditional way, that would be landscape space, where the foreground is at the bottom of the picture and the deeper space illusions at the top of the picture. I didn’t want to go back beyond my beliefs that came out of colour field painting, so I inverted the space and I thought that it would be all right to paint deep space if it was at the bottom of the picture.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: That happened with these Sao Paulo pictures. I more or less painted them from the top end, and it didn’t matter any more whether they were even then. They’d sort of peter out at the bottom.

JAMES GLEESON: That’s right, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: They’d always be bluer or darker or lighter, lighter if it was cooler at the bottom. Within that lot I had several type of etches again, some very thin ones, some white ones. I think there’s too many variations to remember now.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: But I was playing with the edge and, in the small ones of the unstretched ones, I started then to use the edge more or less only at the top of the picture where the edge receded visually behind the surface and then gradually to the bottom integrated with the central area. Which would then the edge, say, plane with the wall and the picture illusion would bring the foreground, the top of the picture forward and sort of tilt it like that.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I understand.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: All the later work came out of that consideration.
JAMES GLEESON: So you were still concerned with what they used to call the integrity of the surface, even at this stage?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. And you’re using of depth and illusion of depths at the bottom is counteracted by the pull at the top, by the line?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. There also is an illusion of depth but only within the edge.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Which would stay quite easily discernable behind and tilted forward.

JAMES GLEESON: How many were there? Now, I was in Sao Paulo at that time. I can’t remember how many were there. There were quite a lot.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: There were 18.

JAMES GLEESON: Eighteen. And they were all variations on this—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: On the theme, yes. There were a few in where the colour was even all the way through. I think the Sao Paulo paintings were the ones where I really started because it had some that were flat and some that curved in at the bottom. The ones that curved in at the bottom were the later ones of the Sao Paulo paintings.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. So this one could have been one of the earlier ones, and this one would be one of the—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: No, this also—wait a minute. I think it does curve a little, it does go in a little bit at the bottom.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, it does. Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I think it’s the colour. See, sometimes I did it actually with tone, like light and dark, and sometimes I did it with colour and sometimes I did it with both of them. I’d have the foreground dark but warm, and the bottom light but cool. Or if I had the top warm and light, then I needn’t have the bottom cool, but just darker.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. So you’re really playing with visual paradoxes?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, yes. Which actually is really what started with my own concern in geometric paintings, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: So there’s a consistent interest going through the whole lot?
GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, yes. There is a continuous line going through with painterly concerns. All things that visually establish themselves on the picture plane were my concerns, and I’d use them consciously. The variations were mostly then discoveries that I made and use them in the process.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, these smaller ones were of the same; a little later, were they? Seventy-three? Seventy-two?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, that must be. With the paintings being so portable, just having to be rolled up and then stuck in whatever place, I think that had something to do that we were able to travel to Sao Paulo.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, what year was that? Seventy-one, was it?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Seventy-one, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. These smaller squarer ones were ones you did after you came back?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: After I realised the portability of the unstretched canvases. Later on I discontinued them when I realised that they weren’t all that practical. Because you can’t have double-sided tape, which is sometimes very hard to remove from walls and some people or some galleries mightn’t like the residue or, you know, some surfaces. Say if you sell one, if you put it on the wall it would have to be permanent, the people couldn’t shift it around. So in the end it wasn’t all that practical after all, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Did the idea of having it actually on the wall have something to do with the kind of painting that it was, you know, this integrity of surface, so that you were identifying it with the wall surface in a way?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, well, my concern there was by having it flat on the wall, I’m actually playing with the wall. I’m using the wall as part of the picture. That pencil line did some optical tricks.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: It separated it from the wall and yet it tied it in. That might sound ambiguous but it did sort of. That two inches on the side from the edge of the canvas to the pencil line sort of seemed to be a little deeper than the rest of the wall. Sort of curving in towards the pencil line, and made them sit very well on the wall.

JAMES GLEESON: So you were really consistent all the way through with this surface and not to deny the quality of the surface itself?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Well, I felt like if I had any strong beliefs that I acquired through the years of hard-edge and colour field, I’ll have to keep them. If I don’t
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keep them then I’d have to go to something that sort of mattered before those considerations which would have been either traditional landscape space or cubism, the two other choices. I realised that a lot of people were inconsequential in as far they may be painting abstract, but they still painted landscape space, in fact, or cubist space. Almost everyone did, you know. Except a few people overseas like Rothko, people like that, you know. I do change my opinions, and I have changed my opinions over the years, but only if I really have good reason to change. Not if I don’t need to.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Also, being historically conscious I don’t want to go back to something that’s been very well done by other people already, there’s no need sort of. A lot of areas like cubistic space and landscape space is almost trampled out.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I know exactly what you mean. Well, the next one is Brightscape.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Brightscape. Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Was that one with pink and a broken edge at the bottom like a cloud?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, broken edges.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Now, having done all these paintings, mainly the unstretched ones that changed towards the bottom, I then got interested in having not a gradual change, but an abrupt change.

JAMES GLEESON: Sudden change, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Now, the abrupt change would have to look natural. Part of the sprinkling was that it was a natural formation. Occasionally the spots had been likened to the microcosm, like the star systems, et cetera, simply because I didn’t put them there really. I just made them happen. They fell by themselves, as rain does, so whatever constellations they formed they were always natural formations, and they’ll always look good like nature does, right?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Now, I was faced then with artificially making shapes and forms at the bottom and I then started to look at landscape painting, mainly Chinese landscape painting of mountain ranges, et cetera, turning them upside down and seeing the lines that were formed, and them looking quite natural. I also looked at formations in the street like, say, sand leaves or whatever, and
where there was a formation of a mass and where it finished in broken lines like a water puddle with, say, sawdust in it.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I started to photograph those things in 1971.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: After Sao Paulo I had swapped my ticket from first class to tourist class.

JAMES GLEESON: That’s right.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I had lots of vouchers. I went to Germany. I saw my father again whose hobby is photographer. In talking about my painting and trying to make it accessible to him, we used to sort of roam through the forest and I took shots of leaves, sawdust, pebbles, stones, grass, anything that was similar to my spotted formations.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I was able then through knowledge of those formations, I was able then to artificially recreate them in the studio.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: That happened with Brightscape, and there was another painting that was very similar. They were the last two paintings I did in Australia before I left for Germany in ’73.

JAMES GLEESON: I remember that, and I remember seeing this in Channy’s Coventry’s house or gallery in Hargraves Street at that time. I was struck by it because it seemed to me a big change from the work that I’d seen just recently, the Sao Paulo kind of work where you introduced these more or less natural forms.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Well, the year before I had a very nice show with the old content with not that much of a change to the bottom. Rather, I had a change all around the sides but the difference with the edges and the surfaces, et cetera, you had to look hard to discern them. Also, they were discernable. I had a group of paintings that I exhibited in Perth that had very loose edges where I doubled the edge rather than spotted it, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: How did you manage that organic termination to the field? You know, I’m thinking of Brightscape now; comes down in a sort of almost cloud-like form.
GUNTER CHRISTMAN: By letting the material do as much as possible.

JAMES GLEESON: You mean the paint?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: The paint, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Flowed.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: The paint plus the canvas, plus the moisture of the canvas, plus the—

JAMES GLEESON: You worked on a wet—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Off and on. I mean, some things I did on wet, some on moist, some on dry canvas depending what result I wanted, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I usually started them off fairly wet and ended up drier, which gave me finer sprinkles.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: It’s a combination of all four of these things, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. But it’s very beautiful, it’s one of my favourite ones Brightscape.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Is it?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I like it very much. I think it’s a very beautiful painting.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Then I went to Berlin and I did two paintings that I exhibited at Coventry, I think, three years ago. Were like those, like Brightscape. I more or less re-did Brightscape in Berlin again, and plus one other painting which I called Berliner haut, which means Berlina skin. I had a sort of a bear skin sort of feel to it.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. Oh, I remember that one. You showed that here in Sydney.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Well, that was a beautiful painting. Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: But those paintings I was quite lucky, and being in Berlin being with all these other international artists, having a show in the town I was born, my whole relationship, relations, I mean, going, watching me, like, I was very anxious. I only did two of that kind.
JAMES GLEESON: What happened to that one like a bear skin?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: That got sold to someone here in Sydney.

JAMES GLEESON: It’s in Sydney?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. I don’t know, I can’t remember now who (inaudible).

JAMES GLEESON: That stays in my mind as a unique one.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. But some of the best things that happened in that were rather through I had a feeling that I was lucky, you know. Being so anxious I then returned to something I knew very well.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: That’s fine sprinkling, and also some of the Berlin light and colour sort of got into me, which was altogether different from Australian. I painted very strongly here, like strong colours. Because in the studio I was painting at certain times in the afternoon I’d have to direct sunlight on the canvas that I was painting. I mean, that’s the strongest thing in our universe is the sunlight, you know. To compete with paint against sunlight is a difficult thing, but it made me paint a certain way and use certain colours.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Then in Berlin I had a traditional type of studio with North light.

JAMES GLEESON: Softer light altogether.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: But very cold light.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Makes me shiver to think of it. But I eventually adjusted to that. Then I adjusted to the different kind of city, to browns and greys, sort of a kind of tryst, sort of environment that Berlin can be, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: So that although your concern is purely an artistic one, an aesthetic one, outside things like qualities of light and conditions do affect you, do (inaudible)?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Oh, certainly. I expose myself to those effects. In fact, the way that I proceed is more or less I let the environment effect me. Then I continue producing my work but it will change since I have changed after exposure to the environment.
JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I see. So that nature is still there behind—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Oh, yes. I found the more I let nature go through me, could see myself as a pipe, like a didgeridoo or something. I’m being the pipe, the environment or nature or all influences come in one side, shape me, et cetera, and come out the other side according to the effects it had on me.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: That changes the painting.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, it changes you and the painting.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Also, of course, environment and experiences and that change my thinking. But it’s a composite sort of thing of conscious and unconscious.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, I think this is very good because when you’re keyed into nature the way you are it means your art never becomes too sterile, it’s always reinforced by the experiences that you have of nature.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I’ve made myself available to outside influences, almost like a block, you know, with occasional smoking grass or hash or something or LSD of which I tried a couple of times in ’69 or something, you know. In that state you are totally vulnerable to everything and everything is now amplified, emphasised; like the littlest noise or the littlest bit of colour seems more. In that state your defences are down, so I’m quite vulnerable to the outside, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I see. Well, now there’s a group of untitled works here.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I think they happened much later, after I came back from Germany.

JAMES GLEESON: How long were you in Germany?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Thirteen months, on a 12 month scholarship. I stayed a month longer.

JAMES GLEESON: So that brings you back to Sydney in what, 1970?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Nineteen seventy-four. What’s the next one? Yes, here we are.

JAMES GLEESON: We’re up to 1974, is it?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, coming back from Berlin.

JAMES GLEESON: It’s a very strong painting, the next one. Have we got the title right; Red silver and black?
GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. I was feeling very strong then. Leaving Australia and not being able to continue my painting in Berlin the way I was painting here, with except the two lucky ones that I painted, and then adjusting to the place with different light, et cetera, and a much drier artistic atmosphere, much more calculated, much more intellectual, I wasn’t able to switch back to Australian light and not quite willing either through some other things. In the meantime, I think I remember three different people that adopted the technique. Now, that in itself doesn’t worry me the least. What worried me, same as in the past, that people had likened my paintings to one other guy who seems to look like my work in reproduction, but not in actual fact. Olitski.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh yes, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: That was a great annoyance to me because I’ve seen Olitski’s work and it’s something totally different.

JAMES GLEESON: Quite different, quite, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: From a structural point of view, because he did something completely different, as well from the physical. The paint itself was totally something else. I came back and some young people were using that technique.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: But they weren’t, in fact, doing what I had done. It only had a superficial look. They never wove it together like I had. So to me it was totally different, and yet these paintings were by people that I thought knew better, were likened to mine, even to the point of mistaking them.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: That was terrible because I realised that a lot of people, their concern for my work or the admiration for my work was very, very superficial. I was hurt in a way that I did have a subject, I was painting a subject. But I was using a certain technique, which was actually the subject was superior to the technique. I still saw the technique as a means to an end, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: But here it had turned around where the end was the technique and that’s not at all what I wanted.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no. I understand.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: So I continued and in the meantime I thought I had made some painterly discoveries by inverting in the landscape space mainly. I then, not being able to switch over to light conditions, et cetera, and not wanting
to sprinkle again and physical limitations, I had a different type of studio in which I could have only painted one painting at a time, which might go over a fortnight or something; the limitations of it being in the centre of the floor. So I wanted to get back on to the wall and I wanted to drop the technique but keep the subject. Now, I had done a number of paintings—all through these years since about 1971—where I used geometrical proportions. I would say that almost every year I did a painting where the change from top to bottom wasn’t gradual, but in three stages. Like all my hard-edge paintings and colour field paintings, most of them, the visions there came out of the Fibonacci numbers, out of the golden section.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, yes, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I started to use that again. I often had canvasses that had been divided into three would make the half, and then the golden section, and they’d all be in the same relation like 13, 8 and 5. With these paintings I divided—you’ll probably find the relation of the bottom part of this painting is that golden section again. But what happened here is like the edges I kept the outside very back. I tried to bring the second area just a little bit in front. If the colour itself sort of suggested deep space, I would then let a few dribbles bring it physically in front and then in front of that the large central top area again.

JAMES GLEESON: That’s what red is it?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: That’s red, yes. But I had some where that area was black and, to stop it from being a big hole, I sort of go over the lines a couple of times here and there, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: There was a whole group of paintings and watercolours within that.

JAMES GLEESON: I think we have some of them here that we’ll probably come to now.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, here we are. That’s in the watercolours. Then I did some and I think one of these two untitled paintings—

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, these are the (inaudible).

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Well, one of them was a division of half and half. I was interested for a while in half. Before I’d never used half and half because I was using it vertically and it was too much of an obvious thing. Like, if you go and look at the canvas that’s divided half vertically, that’s all that sticks in your mind. I found that if I divided the canvas to the golden section, sort of just off the half, like 13 8, the division wouldn’t stick so much in your mind. But whatever happens else on the canvas would sort of be more prominent than the fact that I’ve divided it down the centre. That’s partly why because the gold section is such a natural
division; it least interferes if you have to have a division, you know. But vertically I was able to divide and I did some watercolours in Palm Beach, I think, one weekend there, where I painted them like normal landscape but then turned them around. These paintings came out of that. Here also I think I've got the three division here, the 13, 8 and 5. I wanted brush strokes and I didn’t want to manufacture them, I just let them happen, using colours that don’t go flat but show sort of variations.

JAMES GLEESON: Variations, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. I’d always start at the bottom and then I’d do the next section and then the top section.

JAMES GLEESON: What is the medium, is it watercolour, or gouache?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: This is watercolour. I used a couple where I had silver gouache, but mostly watercolour. Watercolour I had started in Berlin. I have had sort of a bit of scare with watercolour, mainly through the incredible skill in some Australian watercolour and English watercolour. That sort of frightened me away and the paper and all that. When I was in Berlin, the studio I was in—a complex of eight studios—was linked with the Brücke Museum. The caretaker of the Brücke Museum was the same guy for our building. I got to know him very well. So I was able to go to the Brücke Museum as often as I liked sort of, for half an hour or an hour in the afternoon or something. I spent a lot of time in the Brücke Museum. Also, I realised then that I had a great affinity with the expressionists. I had, say, up to 1970, yes, I had been schizaphrene in my division between the constructed and the emotional.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Now these become much more clearly emotional, the brush strokes, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. One night I went to dinner there with Yarmi Postigy and some other people, and after dinner he took us into the storeroom of the Brücke Museum and pulled out these drawers and there were watercolours by Schmidt-Rottluff, Heckel, Kirchner, et cetera, without glass or anything.

JAMES GLEESON: That would be marvellous.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I realised a matter of factness, the straightforwardness of these watercolours, and that took my scare away. Also, by that time I had painted all the paintings I used for the show and I wasn’t selling anything. I realised that everything I do there I have to take back. So I went and bought a whole set of handset red sable brushes and watercolours. Another thing that I noticed was that they weren’t using watercolour paper or any kind of expensive paper. They used the most readily available paper which is white Ingres drawing paper. Almost all of them; almost all Heckel watercolours on white or slightly toned Ingres paper.
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JAMES GLEESON: Is that so?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: So I started off buying different types of papers and found that the easiest one was Ingres paper, in fact. I used them in the same technique that I have done with canvases before. I covered boards with polythene, then impregnated the underside of the paper with clear acrylic which stuck the paper down, kept it flat, and I carefully tried of course not to get any acrylic on the front of the paper wiping it off while it was wet. It would dry then, stay flat without crinkles or anything. I was able then to use it right up to the edge, and when I was finished I was able to just peel it off, you know. The paper would be preserved through the acrylic and I could paint on a flat surface.

JAMES GLEESON: You wouldn't get these wrinkles that would normally happen with watercolour.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I realised then the trick to watercolour wasn’t so much the type of paper you have, rather the knowledge of the paper. To, say, stick to one paper and get to know that very well and keep using that.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I see. So you did the underside of the paper with clear acrylic and put it down on board, and then worked on it—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Worked on it when it was dry or any way I wanted without any—it would stay flat all through the process.

JAMES GLEESON: Now, did you have to wait till the acrylic dried before you peeled it off, or would it come off—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Oh yes, it would have to dry. I couldn’t peel it off. If I peeled it off before it would—

JAMES GLEESON: Buckle.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Buckle, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Where is it? There is one watercolour—oh, it must be in this (inaudible).

JAMES GLEESON: It might be in that, yes, the one that you’ve given us as a gift.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: This is one that I did in Berlin. But that’s not on Ingres paper, that’s some other paper. Thin enough to see. Heavy paper would stay flat in this process. But I did all sorts of experimentation then with paper, just trying to get to know the medium. I stuck to paper because I had to transport them back again.
JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: This sprinkle one, '73, that's one of the first ones I did in Berlin.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, can we come back to those later and finish with this lot because this is a sequence, isn't it?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, more or less, yes. They are all—

JAMES GLEESON: All '74.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: All watercolours that link up to this painting.

JAMES GLEESON: Red silver and black.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: So this came first and these followed on?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Well, I don’t quite know. I think that all happened at the same time more or less. Well, that would be the closest to that. But at the same time I did these—

JAMES GLEESON: They're characterised by, what, a horizontal division?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. I kept that to the minimum and that sort of links up to the use of the edge in the sprinkle painting.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: But the thing I wanted to do is I wanted to do with a different technique the essence of the concern from the sprinkle paintings that had this inverted space.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: That's another one of this type. That's another. Oh, this one here I think I followed the lines through after they had shaped themselves.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. How can we identify that one? Are we right? They say here felt pen ink. Did you use a felt pen?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: This may be a felt pen. I had some water soluble felt pens that I might have used in this one.

JAMES GLEESON: That is a much more sort of developed sort of treatment of the form.
GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Well, in this lot they’re not strictly watercolour. Some of them, half of them maybe watercolour, some may be gouache. This one, I think, has wax crayon on it. I can’t see it there. But I think this might have (inaudible).

JAMES GLEESON: It looks as though it has been rubbed with wax crayon. That texture.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. I sort of bring out the texture again. I made it more plain.

JAMES GLEESON: This is the only horizontal one, I think, of the series. All the others are vertical.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: That’s a very wet one. With all of these, that would come first, the bottom.

JAMES GLEESON: You always worked from that deepest space (inaudible).

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Because whatever happens I want the foreground at the top sitting in front, so if there’s any runs or something, they’d have to be in front of them, so I’d have to work up from the bottom.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, I see. Yes, yes. Well, exactly the same thing that you were using in that painting, the Red silver and black.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, yes. Here’s another one of that’s like the red silver and black.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, I think those really are a sequence, aren’t they?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: They’re all related problems and related ideas?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, and they’re all very close together. But there is variations within that.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Well, this one that uses wax crayon is a variation, and the one that you used the felt pen is another.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: It all wasn’t strict. I had done a few watercolours that were straight watercolour with which I was quite satisfied, but then I tried to get different things happening and I tried crayons, wax crayons, pencils, gouache, all sorts of things. All these are, I think, variations on the theme.

JAMES GLEESON: We don’t seem to have any of yours of that floating tray period.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Oh yes. They’re coming. They’re in here.
JAMES GLEESON: Now, this is the recent series of drawings that—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Were donated by—

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, given by you to us.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I chose this drawing more or less to represent the different concerns. Some of these, actually chronologically, they tie in somewhere in between these.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Like this one came before the ones we just talked about.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, shall we pause for a moment while you arrange those drawings in a sort of sequence, a chronological sequence, and then we can come back to them?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: When you’re ready.

JAMES GLEESON: Good. Well, now we’ll go on to this group of works that you’ve given us recently. Now, are they in sequence?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Which were chosen by me more or less of work from different periods and relating to different concerns, and I’d say there’s a little bit of everything there.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, that’s a marvellous holding.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Let’s start with this here. That’s one of these half half compositions.

JAMES GLEESON: Watercolour?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Watercolour; ’75. Again, painted from the bottom to the top with overlaying, and the thing was that all strokes, or whatever happens in here, sort of relate from the outside. As well as starting from the bottom, I’d start from the bottom line and then the side of it. Since you’d have to sort of paint a little bit more careful on the edges, I could then go free in the centre. The way I got these figurations in that, they’re all purely accidental, happening out of the action of painting. Realising by that time, painting was to brush again on the canvas, I had something like six years sprinkling; in actual fact, no contact with the painting itself.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I see.
GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Therefore, of course, all that time I never developed a brush technique or a personal hand writing or something. That, of course, started to be a concern now. Since then I’ve found I have a possibility of several brush techniques, partly linked to the medium I was using. Like acrylic or oil or watercolour would necessarily of course give a different character to the thing. But yet I wanted a brush stroke that was similar at least in any technique and recognisable. I was actually searching for that and I posed myself some restrictions. So to let the action or the brush or the action take over with as little as possible conscious control by holding the brush at the very end, by painting at an arm’s length, and trying not to over-paint a brush stroke that was already put down. Like writing it or beautifying it or something.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Added one after the other. Then whatever configurations that happened in there, by having started with the edges and the bottom of it, they would always be in relation to the outside. I’d keep the integrity, so to speak, that the configurations came out of. Also, they may be running contrary to the rectangle, but they’d always be in relation to that because they happened out of the rectangle. It might not look like that because they’re fairly chaotic in the centre, but still they’re only possible through this procedure. I was able to be free in the centre as much as possible since I’d established the sides.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Now, I’ll put that away. We’ll call that No 1 so I’ll know what sequence we’re talking about for identification purposes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Okay.

JAMES GLEESON: So that becomes No 1.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Right, No 2. Is another version of those that I had done; I hadn’t given up the sprinkling altogether.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I still used it a fair bit in the watercolours. This is a similar watercolour to the large painting, *Red silver and black*, only it hasn’t got three divisions. It’s only got two divisions and the other sort of top square plus the surrounds. I sort of tried things there where they’d blend softly or hard and different variations. But this top square sort of would stand out in front of this other area which would recede a little bit, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes. So that does link up with what you’ve been doing in acrylics to a large extent?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. Here’s another one, half and half. With some of the watercolours that I got framed I had problem where the framer didn’t keep the right amount of edge around the watercolour painting.
JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I then started to build the edge that I want, the distance that I want from the frame, build it into the work itself, so the central area would always have to be framed. Then I wouldn’t have to worry about, what do you call it, the (inaudible)?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. This is a horizontal one?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: That’s a horizontal one, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Divided equally into two parts, and using the same brush?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. In most cases I would have the outside area flat. But this one I just fancied to make it as interesting as the centre half, centre part.

JAMES GLEESON: So that the part that you would plan to have covered was actually painted?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. That would have, of course, then have to be shown; be part of the picture.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. So that if we and when we get around to mounting it, the mount should come right—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: There.

JAMES GLEESON: To the edge of the dark surround.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, right. See, in some of the others that we discussed before I had done the same thing. Only the way that I painted, I sometimes had dribbles running into the mount areas, so to speak. So I had to consider the outside area as part of the picture already, you know. That is just a conclusion from that where I deliberately used the outside.

JAMES GLEESON: Good. Well, that’s No 2.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Here is—

JAMES GLEESON: No 3. You told me this was done in Berlin, if I remember.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. One of the very first ones where I tried to sprinkle in watercolour and it’s a fairly open sort of thing.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. When you use a brush like that you, don’t strike it on anything, do you? You just hold it and jerk your wrist?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: No. With the large works I have two different types of actions. In sprinkling I either flick the brush, it bounces off the palm of my hand
and would make the bristles flick. Or I hold it tight in my hand and use the whole of the forearm to flick.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: For that, of course, both actions would result in a spread area that's fairly large. Now, with watercolours—and not wanting to spray the whole bloody table—and using a much smaller brush, I sometimes flicked it in the hand as I'd done with the four-inch brush. But occasionally when I wanted more accuracy, I'd bounce it off my left forefinger.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Sort of just like that.

JAMES GLEESON: Do they give smaller spots when you bounce it off your hand?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: No, not necessarily smaller. The smallest or largest usually has to do with the amount of paint in the brush, as well as how liquid it is, you know, the liquidity.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, of course.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: The bouncing off the hand would just give me more precision in certain—see, occasionally it would sort of accumulate in one area, say, too much, then I'd need sort of a certain area there with more sprinkles and I would direct them in that direction to get a fairly even gradation or flatness, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Oh, good. Yes, we're up to No 4. Now, No 5.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Is something completely different here?

JAMES GLEESON: Another Berlin one, is it?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, another Berlin one. It goes within the experimentation that I did of sort of putting paint on partly dry, partly wet paper and dabbing some off again with a moist or fairly dry sponge, and bleeding it out to one end.

JAMES GLEESON: It gives a very pleasing affect.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. Very, very natural sort of formations, as you would get, say, in nature; say, in rust or something like that.

JAMES GLEESON: This again is —

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Here we come to—
JAMES GLEESON: Reversed landscape effect with the depth and the weight at the bottom.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Right. I don’t exactly know. It’s black and white but still has warm and cool a little bit, and I don’t quite know now from this photo what’s the top and the bottom. But it will be fine at the bottom possibly.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Here’s a group of four that go together. Watercolours.

JAMES GLEESON: Now, how would you—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: They’re pure watercolours and here they work all round. There is not top and no bottom with it. They’re uprights, so vertically.

JAMES GLEESON: All verticals.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I used yellow, red and blue, which I did through the years every now and then I’d restrict myself to either black and white or yellow, red and blue—plus white in this case. Having established these brush strokes according to the whole of the shape and then just filling in the area, so to speak, I did that in sequences of, say, white first, yellow, red and then blue.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: The next one starting with yellow, then with red, then with blue, and then the last one being white, and then starting with red, blue, yellow—no white, yellow, et cetera. I will have these four variations on those sequences. They’re sort of painted all round and you can see again I started established the side and then let the inside go as it went, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: What sort of brushes would you use?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I’d use these red sable brushes that I bought. I bought them in Germany because they were a lot cheaper there and they’re beautiful brushes.

JAMES GLEESON: Good. Well, that’s a sequence.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, they belong together. Now I think we’re coming to the—

JAMES GLEESON: The tree, water tree?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: *The watertanks*. There is two types. One I call *The watertank* and the other one I call a shuffle box, a dry shuffle box without water
where the material is loose and sort of shuffled, bounces off the side and finds its own order. Going back to '71, taking shots at nature of similar formations—

JAMES GLEESON: Was this in Berlin?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: In Berlin, yes. I found that the end effect, as much as I would have liked to use the photos in the painting, I couldn’t use the actual photos because they're contrary to my concerns out of colour field painting, because they were sections of a larger reality. One thing I never wanted to do since ‘67 for sure was that whatever order or structure I had within the painting, it would have to relate to the outside limitations of the picture.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. So it’s not a detail from nature, it’s complete in itself?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: When I used measurements, all measurements came out of the dimensions of the actual shape. When I used sprinkles, they were always considered from the edge in. No matter how obliquely they would run to the geometry of the square or rectangle, they would always still be drawn from the fact that it’s a rectangle or square and is a total reality within itself.

JAMES GLEESON: I understand that, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Now, these photos were of course a section of a larger reality. I would be right back in the landscape painting again, which are sections of a larger reality, whether that’s an illusion or not. Occasionally some painters you would have where poses as part of nature, but yet every tree and rock in there is carefully considered in relation to the edge. Right?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes. Like Cezanne or Poussin.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, exactly. But these photos, I couldn’t do that because they were just actual sections, you know. Whatever natural formation happened within or was visible within the photograph, it only came about through a larger reality. Like those couple of square feet I photographed, say, in the gutter there, and showing me some constellations of bits of paper and leaves and sticks, et cetera, would actually be having that formation and that structure or composition because of the rest of the street.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: The street would then, say, link up to the next hill. It would link up to the weather, to the way the water runs, to the wind, and whatever happened there was actually on account of the rest of the universe.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, of course. Yes, I understand.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: What I wanted in my paintings is its own complete little universe. But I still wanted the same natural character of the order. I noticed that
anything, no matter how chaotic it is, anything that happens through nature, whatever type of stuff it is, the constellations in that, they would always have a character. You would recognise that character and be able to tell this happened naturally. There is one culture though, mainly Japanese and some Chinese, where you actually learn through their aesthetic and tradition how to recreate artificially a natural order. Like, say, three rocks in a Zen garden or a flower arrangement. They have within their culture a way of artificially creating natural order.

JAMES GLEESON: This is something that you’re interested in?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: I understand.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: That I was after, right? Then I found that if I put now the nature within a known limitation, like actually wall it in to a box.

JAMES GLEESON: A tank or a box.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Or a box. So whatever happens in there would always happen on account of the limitations. Say, by bouncing off and flows going around with it or swirling or whatever, the same laws would apply. But the edge, the limitations are visible and recognisable. Yet, I realise that the visible order in there would have the same character as the natural order outside in the street. I then proceeded to investigate that with my water tanks. I’ve had dry shuffle boxes first. But then I realised that one job I did I, say, I cut it down to simple elements, like geometric, like three sticks of a certain length.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I’d shuffle them. In one job I did that 40 times without deliberately trying to get any particular formation, but giving it one shuffle with the hand, recording it, and I did that 40 times and then superimpose these 40 positions on one sheet of paper. I realised that they all tended to go towards the top right hand corner, which then indicated that my hand action was actually visible in the sum total of all the formations. My physical activity was shaping the results. So then that’s when I started to use a watertank, where I could simply activate the watertank by lifting one end, or turning it 360 degrees, and then leaving the things to themselves and letting them find their position. I found that even if I used things that sort of in painterly shapes, circles, squares or whatever, in certain colours, they would be separate and sort of actually cutting into the depths of the picture. But through the surface adhesion of their composition or consolation, they would sort of touch and link each other and create a—I don’t know—a surface tension that would keep the picture flat again.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.
GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I went right into that. Another thing that plays a part in here is when I started to take these photographs of nature, of certain formations, I also realised that it was fairly hard to find unspoilt nature. I found a lot of pollution. Wasn’t actually critical of it but started to appreciate it on a kind of colour and shape, and concentrated actually on that.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: But apart from that I also used strictly geometric things. Some of the geometric things in the watertanks came out of pollution like bottle tops or something, or the plastic. I ended up realising that there is a lot of plastic stuff floating around in the streets, or lying around in the streets. In the beginning I had used natural shapes like leaves, but some watertanks I left for about a week or a fortnight to be absolutely sure that they really found their own place. They were rotten. So I made circles and sticks out of plastic and sort of artificial type of leaves, and they would float, they wouldn’t go rotten, and I’d also have them in different colours, et cetera. This—where we are?—one, two, three, four.

JAMES GLEESON: What number is that now we’re are up to? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, this is number 10. The first of these—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Number 10 is actually a mix between natural and artificial. These three sticks make up the length of the painting surface and again I have these (inaudible).

JAMES GLEESON: These three sticks here are—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Divisions again. Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: The length of them?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. The length—

JAMES GLEESON: The vertical length of the (inaudible)?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Again, these pieces would be in proportion to that.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes. So this mathematical (inaudible) idea still with you?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. Well, the whole shape, I think, is that and there are portions of that shape. This may be year 16th I think, I don’t know. Possibly, but whatever it will be linked. I found that depending on the type of stuff I put in the watertank or in the shuffle box, if I put natural things and leaves, that would
almost look like a Japanese composition. If I put geometric shapes in, especially in the dry ones, I would get a composition similar to the ones that Malevich had, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: He was one of the few Constructivists who painted with geometric shapes but placed them intuitively. While a lot of others calculated the position, like Mondrian and the other (inaudible) people, you know. I think that’s why I had Malevich-type looking compositions because he placed them intuitively and he must have had a natural feeling, a feeling for placing these things naturally because his compositions looks totally natural, ‘just right’.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, No 10. Now, were these a tank?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: That was a water tank, yes. Oh, another thing that might be important, like that group of four, again I continued to proceed in the same way. If I had an area in between, so to speak, in between the shapes, I would paint it as such, and I realised if I treated it like that it didn’t matter what configuration the in-between area took. By sticking to the shapes, like outlining them and then filling in, whatever variations in the texture and colour and depth I got would still be in keeping with the whole because it came out of the actual positions. I didn’t go contrary.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I see. I understand. Good. No 10. Now, No 11. This is a dry shuffle box?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: No, that’s a water tank.

JAMES GLEESON: Is it?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: It’s also a water tank. You see the way they adhere. Again I used these three sticks and then those three round shapes are in relation to each other the same as the sticks are.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I used several variations, light on dark, dark on light, and tried to simplify it to get to the essence of this natural character. Here is another one with a combination of natural and artificial shapes.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh yes, leaf shapes and squares.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: They were actually leaves that I used, and these were pieces of plastic that I used in a watertank, plus some berries. I think they were purple; or red maybe. I think they might have been red. What was I going to say? The relationships of the pieces, I don’t know how they work but I think in this one
they’re just numerical. I do things like use one plus two plus three, or two plus three plus five, or three plus five plus eight, up to 13 usually.

**JAMES GLEESON:** You’ve written on this something: Uncertain something to positions. Can you read that?

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** Water tank positions.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Oh, water tank positions.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** Water tank positions. The title water tank, they come out of water tank. But I tended to use the watertanks more than the dry shuffle box, for they give me a more natural composition.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Talking about No 13.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** Yes, the shapes here.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Three rectangles.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** Three rectangles and they came out of the total (inaudible). They were geometrically worked out. I think that large shape is the quarter and that’s again the two smaller shapes. Yes, a lot of this I didn’t use the golden section. I just used half and half of halves again.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** So that it’s half halved which gives me a quarter, then I quarter that large shape again and there two quarters of the quarter which make up half of that quarter.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see, yes.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** I think that’s black and red, I think.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Good.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** Here’s one.

**JAMES GLEESON:** No 14.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** No 14. That’s a water tank. I think it’s quite an early one; ’75. They’re all natural, natural like all found things. I found them all while I was staying in Canberra; leaves and bits of plastic.

**JAMES GLEESON:** I see. You’ve got a note on the bottom there.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** Yes. I selected the pieces, I think, to make up yellow, red and blue, some of the pieces, some straws, which I cut to a certain length, I
think, plus a few matches. I can’t see. Some of the differences between the shapes and the ground is only a colour difference.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: They are not visible in the black and white here. But I think the number of the pieces are considered; they are somehow in relation to each other. I think you’ll find that with all my work there’s usually a numerical or geometrical relationship between the pieces relating to the whole of the thing. Or are just inherent within themselves, like from piece to piece.

JAMES GLEESON: Good. No 15.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: No 15 is an odd one that came in between. That’s sort of a little bit of everything. I started dropping the paint like in sprinkling, and brushing with some watercolour, and then I used a sponge. All that is like the early one’s where it happened from bottom to top.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: The sponge shapes, four of them, which are not strictly geometrically in accordance with the total shape, I think—they make roughly a sixteenth or something—but the position of those four were arrived out of a separate watertank.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, I see, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: But superimposed on the—

JAMES GLEESON: Different techniques.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, on the other (inaudible).

JAMES GLEESON: What’s the word you’ve written down there?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Four mitte Brust.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. What does that mean?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Four with the breast. This shape, it just happened.

JAMES GLEESON: It looked like a breast. Yes, I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: It looked a breast.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, you’re quite right.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: So I called it Four—
JAMES GLEESON: *With the breast.*

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: *With the breast,* yes. Four, meaning the four points.

JAMES GLEESON: Four shapes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Prints.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Good. No 16.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: No 16. This was an actual sketch that I used for painting. I have a large painting with that composition. Apart from that, it’s a pure watercolour, which I haven’t got too many anymore. Usually you find one colour or the other being gouache or something. But that is pure watercolour. It just sticks and I think there’s 13 of them.

JAMES GLEESON: All the same length?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: All the same length, yes. I don’t any more, I don’t really know what the length is but it has something to do—I can’t remember. But I used that for a large painting. This is a dry box.

JAMES GLEESON: This is No 17.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I think I had a dry box filled with sand and little squares that I cut out of cardboard plus a few sort of bamboo sticks, very thin. Just to have some linear things and some shapes. I shuffled them in a dry box and then re-transposed the composition on to this, and painted that fairly straight and continued on the wet paint with outlines around the shape.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I think that’s red over yellow or something, or ochre.

JAMES GLEESON: What would you do, would you sort of pencil in the shapes and their positions?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, what I often did is the very shapes that I had in the watertank, if they were artificially made, sticks and squares and rectangles, et cetera, or circles, I would have the same shape again in cardboard.

JAMES GLEESON: Duplicated, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: And would use those shapes—

JAMES GLEESON: As a template?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, yes, using them on the paper and just outlining them in thin pencil.
JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: So I have the positions, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Oh, that was a good idea.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I’d have them next to each other, I’d have the watertank or the shuffle box on the left here and the paper there. I did some where I actually measured this it accurately, and then later on I sort of I measured them only by eye. You know, that judged it.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: With the eye it’s all there very close, but not perhaps one hundred percent accurate. There was a couple watertanks that I did where I actually changed—I don’t know if there’s any in that lot—where when the watertank made nearly the middle, say, by a couple of millimetres, I would actually put it in the middle. If it nearly made a quarter or something I would actually make it a quarter. If the edge of it sort of tended to go towards the corner and, say, missing it just by a little, I’d make the direction of the edge of it towards the corner or something. Those that usually have the indicator on the bottom, they’re called adjusted watertanks.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. If they haven’t got that—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: So if there’s any in this lot that were adjusted watertanks—I don’t know if there is any, I doubt it—

JAMES GLEESON: That’s what you’ve done.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: That’s what I’ve done in those. That was a short period. I did that only when I had enough confidence to.

JAMES GLEESON: But the adjustments would be very minor ones, wouldn’t they?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, yes. They would never be very—

JAMES GLEESON: More than a few millimetres.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Now, the last of this—

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: The last, and that’s my latest.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I’m still painting on these things.
JAMES GLEESON: You’re doing an actual acrylic of this?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: No, oil.

JAMES GLEESON: Oil, is it?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Since I’ve started painting small again—

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Say, in the winter my studio is very cold. It’s just a garage with a corrugated iron roof, concrete floor, so it’s very cold. With small things, where don’t have all that much activity, it’s freezing cold so I tend to paint in this little room.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I also found that I’ve gone back to oil paint in smallish, say, up to four feet. It seems to be the nicer medium. I also think I have perhaps some nostalgic link with it as well as I seem to have greater control. Like when I use small brushes, no matter what quality they are, in acrylic they tend after half an hour in water, they tend to be uncontrollable, they spread out, et cetera. It’s something that I don’t have in oil; they stay the shape, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: This is again, I’ve turned to the street and to pollution. I’m not criticising it, I’m not judging it. It’s not social political.

JAMES GLEESON: You’re just observing it.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I’m just observing it as part of my reality, as my true environment; realising, of course, that it is here to stay. It cannot be undone. It can’t be undone by law.

JAMES GLEESON: It’s a mark of man.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes. So I’ll find enough visual excitement in that to paint it because all possible shapes and all possible colours are in that. I don’t have to have a car, go out in the bush; I can paint my urban environment. I think that’s quite important for Australian art to concentrate on the urban environment.

JAMES GLEESON: Was this done from a box?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: No.

JAMES GLEESON: No, it’s not.
GUNTER CHRISTMAN: They come out of a series of photographs. I’ve taken lots of photographs where I photographed straight down to the ground, and eventually I started photographing towards the wall, like in a horizontal fashion, to accumulations of refuse; boxes, cardboard boxes, garbage bags, all sorts of heaps, and mounds of refuse. That came out of one of these photographs.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Recently I’ve been using the projector and I paint from the projected image.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. So this is quite a new departure in your work.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Is this going to be the nature of your exhibition at Channy’s Coventry next week?

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Yes, yes. That is it. I had two groups of photographs. I had 10 days in New York and apart from my sound sculpture I wasn’t able to do anything there but I still wanted to take something home. Now I have groups of slides, colour slides, from Germany, from Australia, and there the last couple of days, I went and bought three films and took shots of street rubbish, flat on the ground in this case. Plus a couple of heaps all below Kennell Street, around West Broadway, Kennell Street, through the Chinese area there, around City Hall and back up West Broadway again. I also found that the things laying on the street always have a distinct character, whatever place it is. Like street garbage in San Francisco looks different to Berlin, looks different to Auckland, looks different to Sydney, et cetera.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: San Francisco seemed to have a lot of paper and very little plastic on the ground. New York has a lot more plastic, as well as some mind blowing surprises, you know, things I never expected. But having lots of bits of plastic like in the form of bottle tops, bags, broken unidentifiable bits, plus bits that come off cars, like bits of rubber, et cetera, washers or things like that.

JAMES GLEESON: Metal.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: It’s fairly similar to Sydney. I painted a group of paintings from the New York slides, and then we had this garbage strike some weeks ago when the Festival of Sydney was on, and it was a marvellous opportunity to take good shots of heaps and heaps of it. I bought a film and shot a lot and I used those for the upstairs section of the exhibition. So you’ll have New York street downstairs and Sydney upstairs.
**JAMES GLEESON:** Well, it’s good to have that example of this new direction that you’re taking.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** Yes, I thought I’d just include that too, and that’s a straight watercolour.

**JAMES GLEESON:** In a way though, it’s related to the water trays because the element of chance takes a part in it, and yet everything takes its place according to the nature, it’s weight, and so on.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** Yes. Also here, I’ve turned them upside-down. I had to use that. Like, I want to make that clear that there is no such thing as upside-down for me.

**JAMES GLEESON:** No, quite.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** The bottom is where I put my signature. The top is the foreground in the picture, in my paintings anyway.

**JAMES GLEESON:** Yes.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** That’s something that goes through from the unstretched paintings in 1970 or ’71. I’ve kept that and I’ve sort of reasoned to myself that if I keep this kind of composition, by having the foreground at the top, I can again turn to landscape. I have done a few landscapes many years ago, that are actually straight out landscapes. One of a whole Ashton painting called *Mountain Steeps*, just to demonstrate the link of what I was after there; this inverted landscape space, as I call it. That’s the one thing that link’s it up also—

**JAMES GLEESON:** With the earlier work.

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** With the earlier ones. It’s the composition of these paintings where the foreground’s at the top. Another thing I found, that having the foreground at the top, it’s sort of hanging over you like, say, a cloud formation or something. If you look into the picture and sort of perceive that reality and think it to be true, then what you’re seeing is something that hangs over you. Now, that could be either pleasant or unpleasant and you would have to come to terms with it one way or another if you want to continue looking at that picture. But there is such tremendous psychological strength in that, that I just like using it. Even the most lyrical softest of things I still have a certain strength in it by the illusionary vision hanging over one (inaudible).

**JAMES GLEESON:** (inaudible).

**GUNTER CHRISTMAN:** Yes, which you’re forced to come to terms with. Also I like this aspect of having it hanging over, as against most people or most artists still assuming the traditional aspect of looking down on things, psychologically being in control, being superior. I want the—
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JAMES GLEESON: The reverse.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: The reverse of that, which I think is a very valid aspect of reasoning.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: That needs to be contemplated and it has relations to certain attitudes of philosophies that one could have, like the acceptance of your environment, the acceptance, say, for instance of pollution, whether it be sound pollution or air pollution or whatever. There is a lot of it that is reversible, like some chemical.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: Like cadmium and—what’s the other?—mercury, for instance, as well as air pollution where some photochemical reaction has occurred that can’t be undone any more. It’s here to stay. That may be the only link with the social aspect of reality where my art links to the outside reality, is finding a way of accepting reality, coming to terms with it.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, Gunter, thank you very much. I think that gives us a very good survey of what you’ve been doing up to now, and I look forward to seeing the show very much.

GUNTER CHRISTMAN: I thank you.