

Guggenheim Museum Archives Reel-to-Reel collection  
“Image and Object in Contemporary Sculpture” with Barbara Rose, 1967

MALE 1

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the second in the series of lectures on Contemporary Sculpture, presented by the museum on the occasion of the Fifth Guggenheim International Exhibition. Today’s lecturer, one of the most brilliant and outstanding young art critics of the United States, is Miss Barbara Rose. She was born in Washington, DC, educated at Smith College, at Barnard, and at Columbia graduate school, has been a contributing editor of *Art Forum* and *Art in America*, as she is actually, also today, has published in numerous reviews here and abroad, including *Encounter*, *Art International*, [00:01:00] *Goya*, as well as the principal United States art reviews. She has also recently published a very important study of American art, *American Art Since 1900*, the first of two volumes of which has just been published. Her lecture today is entitled, “Image and Object in Contemporary Sculpture.” Miss Rose. (applause)

BARBARA ROSE

Does this work? No. Can you hear me? I’m probably going to surprise you by actually talking about the subject of the lecture, that is, image and object in [00:02:00] contemporary sculpture. The present exhibition is symptomatic of a new interest in sculpture, which seems to be evidence of a general sculptural revival. Today, I want to discuss the nature of that revival, and the way in which it focuses our attention on certain problems peculiar to sculpture which differentiate it from architecture and painting as an art form. I am going to talk a bit and then I’ll show some slides, and then I will ask for questions from the audience, if you have any.

It is generally agreed among critics that with a few notable exceptions, such as Brancusi, Picasso, and David Smith, modern sculpture has not been on a par qualitatively with modern painting. Sculpture has had to depend in the modern period on advances made in painting to a far greater [00:03:00] degree than in the past. The first genuinely modern style in sculpture that was not merely an updated post-Rodin version of Renaissance forms and techniques, was the assembled welded sculpture of Gonzalez and Picasso. This style with its flat planes and open drawing in air derived directly from collage, which in turn was an extension of painting. It has survived until the present and is the point of departure for the formal sculpture of David Smith and Anthony Caro, as well as all of *Assemblage* and the so-called *Junk Sculpture* of Mark Di Suvero, John Chamberlain, and Richard Stankiewicz.

In the ’60s, however, a group of sculptors, whose work has been called *Primary Structures* because it based on simple geometric forms, began reacting against cubist or cubist-derived sculpture. [00:04:00] But their work, too, evolved out of a dissatisfaction with painting, which many young sculptors rejected because of its inherent illusionism. Despite this rejection, however, it is clear that the clean-cut forms, large scale and non-relational composition of the new sculpture derived directly from recent American abstract painting.

Having acknowledged that modern sculpture has been the child of modern painting, we might ask why this filial relationship developed. One reason that painting has been the experimental, radical art sculpture has not is simply because it is cheaper and easier to make than sculpture. Once an avant-garde situation developed in the nineteenth century, the artists became their own patrons subsidizing their own work. This was harder, obviously, on sculptors than it was on

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painters, because sculpture is simply more expensive to make and harder [00:05:00] to make.

Another reason sculpture has suffered in modern times is because traditionally, sculpture has served primarily to decorate architecture. Painters could turn their backs on the salons and create a private, intimate art. But sculpture, once detached from architecture, was permanently disenfranchised. Once public museums became the repositories for art, portable easel painting, which was made for the intimate surroundings of the living room, could easily make the transition to become a museum art. Sculpture, however, which had no tradition as a major art outside of the monumental, could not be so easily accommodated to the museum context. It was only in cubist sculpture that we finally had a modern style in sculpture which could be accommodated to the living room or the museum.

Today, many sculptors are attempting to create a monumental art once more, despite the fact that there is no monumental context [00:06:00] for such work. One of the ironies of the current situation is that as sculpture becomes more architectural, the best architecture is becoming more sculptural. The two arts appear to be heading not for a marriage, but for a militant confrontation, as sculptors increasingly refuse to be mere decorators and architects refuse to have their sculptural forms embellished.

In fact, the recent outdoor exhibition of new sculptures seem merely to point out the fact that contemporary sculpture and architecture are incompatible. The outstanding work in the exhibition, Barnett Newman’s *Broken Obelisk*, was displayed in front of the out-standing site, the Seagram’s Building. But this resulted, not in a harmonious interplay of two contemporary forms of expression, but in a battle of titans as Newman’s powerful forms locked in combat with Meese’s equally powerful forms.

It may be that the [00:07:00] modern artist, be it architect, sculptor or painter, has become so much of a megalomaniacal individualist in the expression of his personal art that the visual arts will never function together as a decorative complex. My own feeling about the current exhibition, excellent as it is in many ways, is that the sculptural form of the museum is more powerful than any one of the forms displayed in it and, in a sense, is constantly antagonistic to the sculpture on display. This is my opinion. Other people may not feel this antagonism.

Monumental oversized paintings and sculptures meant to participate in an architectural situation as decoration in past times are doomed in the present to the museums which are ironically at this point inadequate to exhibit them. And in the displaced context of a museum, they never fulfill the role of decoration which is part of their aspiration [00:08:00] but remain isolated objects for contemplation. It is a common, and I think accurate, critical argument, that the arts in our time seek to distill their essences. What then is the essence of sculpture? How does it differ absolutely from painting and architecture? What is unique about sculpture as an art form?

Sculpture is unique only in its relationship to the human body. That is, in its physicality. A painting is a flat surface onto which an imaginary space is projected. Architecture is a hollow volume into which we can walk and which surrounds us. Sculpture, on the other hand, is a three-dimensional form which does not enclose the human body but coexists with the human body in real space. In this way it is unique. And in this sense, it is an equivalent of the human body,

Guggenheim Museum Archives Reel-to-Reel collection  
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since it has exactly the same relationship to actual space as our own bodies do.

This means that when we see a piece of sculpture, we immediately [00:09:00] relate it to our own bodies in a much more intimate and direct way than we do painting or architecture. We interpret its form in relation to our own. For that reason, most sculpture, even abstract modern sculpture like the work of David Smith, remains in some way anthropomorphic, and alludes to the human figure.

One of the qualities in modern sculpture that dismayed young artists who wished to produce a style as abstract as contemporary painting, was sculpture’s seemingly unavoidable tendency to be anthropomorphic, to in some way suggest the human form or human gestures. For some, the way to escape anthropomorphism was through geometry. In a vocabulary of pure geometric forms, they found a non-allusive solution. But for others, geometric forms, particularly regular geometric forms, were too pat, too familiar, and too much a part of the European Constructivist tradition. [00:10:00]

So that, in comparison with the work of European Purists, the so-called primary structures appear to look more like ordinary objects than like art. That work of Bladen, Judd, DeWitt, Flavin, Morris, Bell, etc., resemble familiar objects is something that one cannot help but remark, I think. We may account for this partially by an aversion to the anthropomorphic on the part of these artists. Having rejected the anthropomorphic, as well as the European geometric tradition, they have almost no choice but to produce works which approximate objects.

The human body shares the space it moves around in with two other types of forms, other living beings, and inanimate three-dimensional objects. It is almost inescapable that sculpture must be interpreted as part of [00:11:00] one category or the other. But I think that the object-like quality of the new sculpture goes beyond this because the young sculptors who are making it are deliberately intensifying its object likeness. Two good reasons have been put forth for why young sculptors make work that looks like ordinary objects. And I want now to add possibly a third.

Clement Greenberg sees the new sculptors as recognizing that recognizing on initial encounter radical art, avant-garde work has always looked like non-art. Greenberg sees the new sculptors as trying to go beyond the context of art in order to be avant-garde. Acknowledging this ambition, he denies that it has been fulfilled. In the new sculpture, Greenberg sees nothing but good design.

Mr. Frye, in his catalogue preface to the current exhibition, suggests that young sculptors are engaged in a romantic struggle to escape art history, [00:12:00] to invent a post-historical style, in other words. I think there is something to this. Certainly, they attempting to escape the recent history of sculpture which has hardly been distinguished. They are refusing to continue in a tradition in which sculpture has been forced to occupy empty niches, leftover architectural space, or sit on coffee tables like functionless ashtrays.

My own view is that the new sculptors deliberately choose to make their work resemble common objects because they wish to short-circuit perception. Normally, when we encounter something

that clearly announces itself as art, we put a certain so-called psychic distance between ourselves and it. Young sculptors, by pulling up the reactions we have, not to art, but to the ordinary environment, are seeking to eliminate that psychic distance and to force a more direct and immediate confrontation with the work of art.

If this is true, we might be entitled to ask, in what [00:13:00] way our experience of object sculpture does indeed differ from our experience of common objects? I think that in some of the poorer examples of object sculpture, the aesthetic reaction is indeed minimal, and not far from our reaction to ordinary objects which they resemble. In some cases, however, most notably the work of Larry Bell, Donald Judd, and Robert Morris, the ordering is sufficiently persuasive, the form sufficiently emphatic, and the experience sufficiently intense and unsettling to evoke a strong aesthetic response.

And now, I'd like to illustrate some of the points that I've made. You are looking at, on the left, a sculpture by Julio Gonzalez, *A Woman with a Mirror*, of 1936. And at [00:14:00] the right, the Giacometti at the present exhibition, *The Man who Walks*. The sculpture on the left, a metal construction by the inventor of the technique of welded sculpture, is a clear example of cubist sculpture which though, although abstract, persists in having undeniable affinities with the human figure. I think you can very clearly make out the relationship to the head, the arms, the torso, and the legs of a human figure.

Giacometti's *Man Who Walks*, executed a quarter of a century after the Gonzalez, is in every way a more conventional work. Still using the Renaissance technique of modeling and casting, Giacometti distorts the human figure without achieving anything of the great formal significance of the Gonzalez. The distortion is [00:15:00] meaningful in the Giacometti mainly in terms of the sentiment it evokes. Giacometti makes us feel bad that modern man is so nervous and attenuated. But introduces no formal concept of equal potency. His attempt to articulate the surface, the mottling, the fingermarks of the artist, ends up by being very monotonous. The Gonzalez surface, which is anonymous, which does not have any of the marks of the artist, does not call attention to itself necessarily, but it doesn't have this kind of unvariegated monotony that the surface of the Giacometti has.

David Smith's *Voltron 15*, which was also executed in the '60s, shows how closely Smith adhered to the human figure, even in his late work. The flat plane [00:16:00] and open drawing in air are still clearly reminiscent of Gonzalez-assembled sculpture, although they are used somewhat more abstractly by Smith in his *Sentinel* series, of which this work, *Two Circle Sentinel*, is an example. Smith, here, has introduced a new element by scarring the shiny, metal surface so that it picks up and reflects light. This surface, although it is uniform in its flatness, ends up by being far more varied than Giacometti's mottled surface and is a far more, I think, satisfactory and original solution to the problem of surface.

I think it's clear, once we look at the Smith closely, how this is still basically a cubist arrangement of the flat planes and of analogous forms, in other words, this circular form which repeats itself, in this [00:17:00] circular motif here. The rectangular forms which are repeated throughout. And then the dominant form of the rectangle, which is the torso of this abstracted figure, to which all the other parts are related, and which is a dominant form against which the

Guggenheim Museum Archives Reel-to-Reel collection  
“Image and Object in Contemporary Sculpture” with Barbara Rose, 1967

other forms take their place as in a hierarchy.

In the great Voltri-Bolton series of the '60s, begun in Italy and finished Bolton Landing, Smith used parts of tools and machinery. Here, we see Anthony Caro's *Mid-Day*, done in 1950. And Caro is in many ways, Smith's heir. He uses standard units of industrial construction toward the end of making a highly original piece of sculpture. [00:18:00] And by using these industrial units like I-beams, he manages to get a complete anonymity of materials so that much more attention is focused on the form itself.

In differentiation, in contrast to the Smith, he calls our attention not at all to the surface. In fact, he plays down all of the elements of surface by uniting the whole work with a single coat of color. So, we have no tactile association whatsoever with the Caro. What we see is a completely optical image which does not address itself to the sense of touch specifically, in the sense that Giacometti's mottled surfaces do.

The greatest difference between the Smith and the Caro is the elimination of the base in Caro's work. The progress of modern sculpture [00:19:00] towards the elimination of the base is one of the most remarkable things that has happened in sculpture in the twentieth century. It seems obvious that taking sculpture off the pedestal, putting it on the floor, makes it that much more a part of our space. In other words, it makes it that much closer to us as spectators. It no longer exists in a world apart on a pedestal, outside of our own space, but it interacts with us as part of our own space.

And this seems to be very much in the contemporary spirit of bringing the aesthetic experience much closer to us, making it more immediate in its impact, and is analogous, I think, to the way in which contemporary painters bring the image all the way up to the surface of the painting, thereby making it literally closer to us.

The Caro is not anthropomorphic in the sense of Smith's work. Clearly, this is not a human figure [00:20:00] that we are dealing with any longer. Nevertheless, the relationships in the piece do suggest analogies with human gestures. The elements lean against one another. They have relationships with one another that suggest actual human emotional responses.

And the method of composing in the Caro is still clearly derived from cubism. The forms, in other words, echo each other, present analogous relationships, horizontals and verticals are repeated, the incline of the plane of the major element is repeated by the incline of the I-beam that's set on it. And in that way, it's clearly still very much part of a cubist orientation towards sculpture. [00:21:00]

This is a work by Robert Murray, called *Windfall*, and now we are dealing with sculpture which is no longer assembled. The Caro is still assembled, that is, put together out of various elements. The Murray is industrially fabricated, and it is fabricated in such a way as to appear made of one piece, in other words, to strike us as a single image, and not as a series of parts which relate to each other.

The use of the bent plane, if you can see the way in which this is one continuous plane. There

Guggenheim Museum Archives Reel-to-Reel collection  
“Image and Object in Contemporary Sculpture” with Barbara Rose, 1967

are only two planes, really. This plane, and this one. This one is bent. And then this one is bent here, and then bent back again, coming down into this point, is, I think, a very original method of working unique [00:22:00] to Murray.

And Murray’s work, like a lot of the most recent sculpture, seems to present a minimum of elements. But what it actually does, I don’t think that the Murray is in any way less complex than the Caro, it’s simply necessary to focus more on nuances. For example, on the way in which the two planes barely touch, where they are joined. And this focus on nuances on small discrimination of perception is extremely central to new work.

This is the piece by Donald Judd on the first floor of the Museum. It is an untitled painted steel work of 1966. Judd was one of the younger artists, [00:23:00] who were critical of cubist sculpture, who wished to escape any metaphor whatsoever for the human form or gesture. As it has been endlessly observed, the piece does resemble an object like a window frame or a door frame. It does not allude to anything other than itself.

And we can see it has certain affinities with recent paintings, particularly in the form of ordering a composition which is non-relational, that is to say, none of these parts relate to one another in any way. He uses a modular unit, which is then repeated eight times. And the units do not relate to each other, but simply in a serial progression form a whole. This straight-edged, angular window frame-like construction, although it looks [00:24:00] very familiar, is finally when we examine it at all, a completely unfamiliar form. It’s not familiar to us either from geometric art or from our ordinary experience.

This is Larry Bell’s *Memories of Mike*, a plated-glass cube. And in the Bell, we remark that the use of color which we observed in Caro, Murray and Judd, becomes the central focus of the work. Color in the Bell appears to be suspended and not anchored to any shape. The scale, however, is that of an object that we can actually pick up and handle. This is very different from the scale of a Judd which asserts a very physical presence and clearly our relationship to it is that we can neither get inside of it or pick it up.

The [00:25:00] Bell is a very elusive and mysterious work. The iridescent reflections which change as the viewer moves around the object, making it particularly difficult to say exactly what it is that’s happening, since they are constantly changing. We can never quite, we can certainly never pin down an image or a shape, and it’s even difficult to say exactly what colors it is we are seeing.

However, in order to grasp the whole of the Bell, it is not necessary to walk around it. And in a sense, this is calling into question the whole convention of sculpture in the round. Because what sculpture-in-the-round, which has been a kind of a great catch-word for twentieth-century sculpture, has forced us to do is to walk around the piece of sculpture in order to see what’s going on around the back, and see how differently all [00:26:00] of the various views of the sculpture operate. In the Bell, we receive the whole image at once. We know that it’s a cube, we can see through it. And there’s no need to walk around it. And yet, we want to do that because we want to see the way in which the reflections change as we do walk around it.

Guggenheim Museum Archives Reel-to-Reel collection  
“Image and Object in Contemporary Sculpture” with Barbara Rose, 1967

The fact that we needn't walk around it in order to grasp the whole shape is also true of Robert Morris' untitled piece, which is also on the first floor. I apologize for this slide, I'm afraid that only a bird could see it this way. But at any rate, it gives you an idea for identification purposes.

This, like the Bell, I think has to do with a new conception of sculpture-in-the-round and what this means [00:27:00] as a convention. We don't have to move around it in order to see the back side of it. We know that these pieces are identical, that they are repeated, and we grasp immediately the shape of each one, as well as the shape of the whole just by looking from one point of view. So, in other words, when we move around it, it isn't to see the back of something, but instead as we move, the same thing happens that happens in the Bell, the whole configuration changes, as if to reinforce our sense of the relativity of point of view.

Morris chooses a scale which is between the object and the monument, very closely related to human scale, and yet very different from the scale of, say, the Bell, because again, like the Judd, we know we can't pick these things up. There's no kind of physical interaction we could possibly have with them. So, while it doesn't overwhelm one with its size, yet, we know that we can't [00:28:00] pick it up and carry it around. The stress is on the actual physical properties of the material here. And like Judd, the ordering is modular, serial, and non-relational or non-hierarchical.

This is a curious sculpture because it seems to fall not into any one of the two categories which we are used to dealing with sculpture with, that is, open or closed. It seems to be neither open nor closed. It doesn't enclose space, it just has a kind of static relationship to space, a relatively passive relationship. It simply exists or occupies space. It is a piece that has parts, and yet, the parts don't seem to relate to one another or to the whole. We simply perceive it as a single [00:29:00] gestalt. In fact, the tendency of the human eye to give a gestalt reading of a piece like that would make us, I think, supply even a missing unit if it weren't there. We can't isolate a part out of the whole here. It's almost like slices of a pie which are not related to a whole but are part of a whole.

I began by showing imagistic, figure-related sculpture, which then became object sculpture as sculptors tended to reject the anthropomorphic. This is the *Giant Soft Drum Set*, by Klaus Oldenburg. The paradox here is that this is the most obviously imagistic of the works I've shown. It is clearly an object. It is a set of drums reproduced in outside monumental [00:30:00] proportions. And, yet, at the same time that it is most obviously an object, it is of the work I've shown, I think even including the Giacometti, the most closely related to the real properties of the human figure. It is vulnerable like the human figure. It is soft. It is irregular.

And as acutely as Oldenburg states this paradox, this is still not the primary value of the work, that is to say, it illustrates this very interesting paradoxical relationship between object and image. Blowing up the image is not what makes this original as art. What makes this an original statement about sculpture is the unexpected soft forms themselves, the original use of material which distinguishes it as sculpture.

Like the work of Judd and Morris, this [00:31:00] work by Oldenburg takes painting as a point of departure. And like Judd and Morris and Bell and any number of the other young sculptors,

Guggenheim Museum Archives Reel-to-Reel collection  
“Image and Object in Contemporary Sculpture” with Barbara Rose, 1967

Oldenburg began with reliefs, and then slowly these reliefs came off the wall, finally to sit on the floor as fully independent three-dimensional objects. Again, another illustration of how closely related to painting contemporary sculpture is, even if it is reacting against painting.

Together with the other young sculptors of his generation, Oldenburg is proposing for sculpture, in this monumental version of sculpture at any rate, a degree of autonomy that it has not experienced in the twentieth century. Lights, please? [00:32:00]

I'd be glad to answer any questions, if there are any? Yes?

MALE 2

Your opening remarks, you said modern sculpture started with Giacometti?

BARBARA ROSE

No, I don't think modern sculpture started with Giacometti. I mean, I think that only in the '30s did Giacometti have anything to do with modern sculpture.

MALE 2

But did (inaudible) before (inaudible)?

BARBARA ROSE

I think all, with the exception of Lipchitz, who was a very important twentieth-century sculptor, I don't think that any of those people had anything to do with modern sculpture. I mean, I think that they are using an updated version of Renaissance forms and techniques, and they're either derivative from other people who are genuinely the innovators in modern sculpture, like Arp, like Picasso, or else they're just simply continuing in a moribund tradition. Lipchitz and [00:33:00] Moore, for a short time, again, mainly in the '30s, was doing work that had something to do with the modern tradition in sculpture. And Lipchitz a kind of, I think, sculptural genius. He kind of eludes these categories and is able to make work which is formally retarded but still has a great emotional force. Whereas, I think the recent work of Moore is just inflated, pathetic, sentimental, and totally without meaning as sculpture. Yes?

MALE 3

In this last group of (inaudible) --

BARBARA ROSE

Yes.

MALE 3

Do you find that the words (inaudible) echo something like this?

BARBARA ROSE

Yeah, I think that all these problems about semantics, I mean, I take as a definition of sculpture, a three-dimensional form that is seen in a museum or an art gallery. So, yeah, I mean, I would accept that as a definition for sculpture. Yes?

MALE 4

(inaudible) [00:34:00] architect has played the role of creating form (inaudible) operate within or

Guggenheim Museum Archives Reel-to-Reel collection  
“Image and Object in Contemporary Sculpture” with Barbara Rose, 1967

outside (inaudible). For painting and for sculpture, (inaudible) anthropomorphic relationship where man had put himself into a (inaudible). (inaudible) your definition of sculpture (inaudible) contemporary sculpture, that is one of dividing the anthropomorphic from these forms. How does sculpture fit in? What [is it?] in fact (inaudible) no relationship (inaudible)?

BARBARA ROSE

No, I didn't mean to give the impression that this new sculpture is not related to man. And as I said, the scale is very much related to human scale. What I mean by anthropomorphic is something that is created in the image of man. And the new sculpture does reject the [00:35:00] image of man, but that doesn't mean that it doesn't have a relationship to man. I mean, obviously, it's made by men and it's appreciated by men. As far as the whole problem about city planning and architecture, I do think that there's a crisis there. I think that the outdoor sculpture show, though it's intentions were very good, was by and large a failure because you had this constant competition between the sculpture and the architecture. The only piece that was shown to any advantage was the Milkosky downtown at the Paye Apartments, where you had a large, green lawn, so that the sculpture could be isolated and didn't have to be seen silhouetted against architecture. There seems to be some kind of impasse, and I think it's a problem of modern society that the arts are not interrelated in any way. Yes?

FEMALE 1

(inaudible)

BARBARA ROSE

Some artists [00:36:00] make art that they want you to touch. I don't think that any of the artists in this show want you to touch the work. Yes?

FEMALE 1

(inaudible) something looks like [a pipe?] or some machinery (inaudible). Does the artist want to recognize it as (inaudible)?

BARBARA ROSE

Oh, no, no, I know what you mean. The pieces of machinery that are incorporated, no. They're using it in a completely abstract way, they're just using it as material and because of the formal interest of the forms.

FEMALE 1

(inaudible) back to machinery and (inaudible)?

BARBARA ROSE

I don't think that many of the assemblages are trying to evoke any of your associations with machinery. For example, the Mark Di Suvero, which I think is a very fine piece in the show, is made out of part of a boiler. I don't think that there's any interest on his part in evoking your associations with the parts of boilers. I mean, it's just material that's used in a very [00:37:00] abstract way.

FEMALE 1

(inaudible)

Guggenheim Museum Archives Reel-to-Reel collection  
“Image and Object in Contemporary Sculpture” with Barbara Rose, 1967

BARBARA ROSE

Yeah, feel, but not go up and touch.

FEMALE 1

(inaudible) silly or ridiculous (inaudible) feel odd and peculiar. Are you supposed to feel that way?

BARBARA ROSE

Maybe they are odd and peculiar.

FEMALE 1

(inaudible)

BARBARA ROSE

No, I think if they feel odd and peculiar, it's probably that they are odd and peculiar.

MALE 5

That's a [very different?] concept. (inaudible).

FEMALE 1

I'm not being [flippant?], I'm being very --

MALE 5

No, no, no, (inaudible).

FEMALE 1

(inaudible)

BARBARA ROSE

Well, look, in any given exhibition, there are going to be, first of all, any number of different points of view. As many artists that are in the exhibition, there are going to be that many different aesthetic points of view. Each spectator has a different point of view. What you get out of a piece of art [00:38:00] depends very much on the degree to which you are on the same wavelength as the artist who made it. And if you're not, you're probably not going to get the whole message that's implicit in the work.

FEMALE 1

(inaudible)

BARBARA ROSE

Because that's the material that Oldenburg chose and it's very deliberately chosen because it has certain kinds of reflective qualities. Also, after he had decided he wanted to make this soft sculpture, in other words, a new kind of sculpture that wasn't hard, he had to have recourse to sewing, what, so therefore, you have to make it out of material that can be sewn. And then you have that limitation and then you look at all the different kinds of materials that could be sewn. And that's the one that most appealed to him. I think probably because it's hard and shiny at the same time that it's soft. I think that that appealed to him. Yes.

Guggenheim Museum Archives Reel-to-Reel collection  
“Image and Object in Contemporary Sculpture” with Barbara Rose, 1967

MALE 6

Why do you feel that (inaudible) sculpture and the architecture [00:39:00] (inaudible)?

BARBARA ROSE

Because I think it doesn't do justice to either the sculpture or the architecture. I was interested in it, actually. I mean, I was interested in that experience. And most of the kinds of combats I saw between the sculpture and architecture, I wasn't interested in.

MALE 6

But I think first of all there is (inaudible), and also (inaudible).

BARBARA ROSE

I would certainly agree that the other sculptures were by and large not up to it in quality. The tension in the Newman, of course, exists within the work. But I think that if the work were in a more specific context, in other words, where it didn't have to do battle against another set of very powerful forms that it would emerge much more clearly. I mean, I think that yes, of course, look, that's a sculpture which has an enormous amount of tension involved when you have those two points. When you have this huge form balancing on a point, on the point of another form, I mean, you have something which really challenges [00:40:00] credibility, first of all. How is this brought about? And in some respects, it's the kind of tension one gets from a master act in juggling or something. How on earth is somebody balancing on the fingertips. And there is, within the work, I think, a tremendous amount of tension. But I think that the tension between the work and the building was gratuitous and not necessary. Although, as I say, I agree, I was kind of interested in it. I was glad to see it there, but I wouldn't like to see it stay there.

MALE 6

(inaudible)

BARBARA ROSE

Well, yeah, the great philosophers said, we only experience by contrast. And I guess, in that sense, we do. I mean, the contrast between the two types of forms perhaps made our experience of each one.

MALE 6

(inaudible) [00:41:00]

BARBARA ROSE

Oh, I think it would. I mean, I think --

MALE 6

(inaudible)

BARBARA ROSE

I don't know, I would have to see it, you know, in another context to know. Yes?

MALE 7

Do you mean that (inaudible) sculpture should be judged in terms of [formal?] (inaudible)?

Guggenheim Museum Archives Reel-to-Reel collection  
“Image and Object in Contemporary Sculpture” with Barbara Rose, 1967

BARBARA ROSE

I think that all art should be judged qualitatively on that score. I think there are other things in art that interest us, but that the quality in art resides in its form.

MALE 7

(inaudible) be not interested in formal (inaudible) expressiveness or --

BARBARA ROSE

Well, I don't think there, I think there is only formal expressiveness. That's my point of view. Yes.

MALE 7

I don't mean to put you on the spot (inaudible), but (inaudible) all art has to be judged (inaudible) formal (inaudible)?

BARBARA ROSE

I said qualitatively. There are [00:42:00] other standards of judgment. I mean, we could be measuring something other than quality. Yeah.

MALE 7

(inaudible) frequently utilized (inaudible) to make some kind of (inaudible) human perception about human activities, (inaudible) position of human beings (inaudible) set of events. (inaudible) all points of (inaudible). What happens now to an art which is very concerned about these formal (inaudible) comes up with brilliant insight (inaudible) [00:43:00] (inaudible) other people? Or, in fact, is there some sort of relationship? Is there (inaudible)?

BARBARA ROSE

Well, I think all art is about human relationships because it's made by human beings and it's seen by human beings. And, I mean, you know, this is the endless twentieth-century argument. And it's kind of the humanist against the formalist, and I stand with Mondrian. And that, I mean, human art is human art because it's made by human beings. And as for, there is a problem about the social, historical, political, philosophical, religious, economic background of art. And it does seem that in the nineteenth-century painters extricated themselves from that context. And this is one of the things that the avant-garde is about. The avant-garde revolted not only against the academy, but it tended to extricate art from its religious, philosophical, ethical, moral, social, economic context. Yes?

FEMALE 2

My question has to do with the many levels of viewing art. For example, (inaudible) to create something and then (inaudible). This is a sense of (inaudible) [found object?] but has enabled one to see it at several levels, depending on you as a person. (inaudible) sculpture (inaudible) primary sculpture, (inaudible) related to machinery, how [can he not?] expect that on this (inaudible) [sensory?] level we would not sense both what he did and what he used in the doing (inaudible) and relationship to something else? If what you say is true about what he wants us to see and what he doesn't want us to remember (inaudible) associated with something else industrial.

Guggenheim Museum Archives Reel-to-Reel collection  
“Image and Object in Contemporary Sculpture” with Barbara Rose, 1967

BARBARA ROSE

Well, actually, [00:45:00] none of the artists who make primary structures use machinery of any kind. So, that’s kind of null.

FEMALE 2

(inaudible) it’s the material.

BARBARA ROSE

Well, the only one I know of who uses found objects at all is Flavin, who does use fluorescent lights. I do think that there is a kind of semi-ironic commentary on the technological age in Assemblage, which incorporates found objects. But when, for example, David Smith uses pieces of tools in his work, he uses them only because he is interested in the form. I don’t think that there is any ironic commentary in Smith on our relationship to the machine age and technology. Primary structures is completely uninvolved in machine images, in found objects. I did make the point and I hold to it that they may intentionally make these art objects look like common objects. For example, [00:46:00] that [Danya?], when one looks at it, one can think, this looks like a window frame, or this looks like a door frame. And I think this may be intentional because they do not want us to have that distance from the work, that psychic distance, as it’s been called, from the work which we get when we know we are looking at “art.” So, they don’t want you, in other words, to get all that complex of ideas that you bring to art moving, they want you to have a more direct experience of the work, the kind of experience, in other words, that you would be ready to have, with an ordinary object. They want you to feel as, say, close to it and familiar with it, as you would with ordinary objects. That’s just a hypothesis, incidentally. That’s my explanation for why these things look like objects. I gave you two other reasons other people feel that they look like objects. One more question, yes?

MALE 8

Could you comment again on what are your feelings about the surface [00:47:00] texture of Giacometti sculptures (inaudible) or detract from it (inaudible)?

BARBARA ROSE

Yeah, I think they do nothing. I think that they are relatively unvariegated and that I, some people find Giacometti very moving. Outside of his work of the ’30s which I enjoy very much and certain other isolated works, I do not find these attenuated, elongated images moving and I find his use of surface very expected, very conventional, very unvariegated, and not interesting or moving. Yes.

FEMALE 3

(inaudible) how do you account for (inaudible)?

BARBARA ROSE

That’s a question you can only ask Mr. Murray. (laughter) I couldn’t account for it. I think that’s all. (applause)

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Guggenheim Museum Archives Reel-to-Reel collection  
“Image and Object in Contemporary Sculpture” with Barbara Rose, 1967

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