# Jeremy Moon 29th October 1973: Interview with Barry Martin

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**JM:** I started to paint very late compared to most English painters that I know. I didn't take up painting seriously and do it full time until I was about 26, in 1961, and had finished at University. I had been through National Service and I don't think I really knew that there were such things as art schools when I was at school. I had always been interested in painting – I was "the bloke who always did painting best at school". I had been born and brought up in a house where the arts in general were a part of one's life. There were books on painting, and I knew about twentieth-century art when I was young and felt in sympathy with it. But my whole attitude to painting was the kind of middle-class art lover's attitude, and it never crossed my mind that I would want to be a painter. I did have a vague idea that I wanted to be creative and artistic –probably one in three people has the same idea. But it took me a long time to go up various cul-de-sacs and follow the wrong trail before I went back to the one thing that I always did when I ran out of ideas, which was painting.

About 1960, having not seen any of the big American shows of the '50s, which I suppose were one of the big formative influences on English painters of my age and my generation, I was looking to different sources in painting. I was looking towards English painters like Roger Hilton, Alan Davie and Graham Sutherland – household names with a kind of national context – and I didn't really know that much about abstract expressionist painting. So, I discovered the current big issues that young painters were thinking about, not first-hand from American art, but from the English reaction to American art.

One particular occasion that had a big effect on me was the *Situation* show around 1960. If that show that I was thrilled by came up now, I wouldn't say that one would quite understand why someone would be so excited about it. But it was like getting the whole message of what modern painting was about suddenly fresh on your doorstep. And it enabled me to actually meet some of the painters, which I did – and remember, I was still in an office job. I bought a small work from one of the people in that show. This was my first meeting with professional artists and once the sort of dam had burst it was just incredible: every other idea I had ever had – my interest in dance, jazz, my career, and various other things – all fell away, and from there onwards there was no doubt in my mind what I was going to do.

The catalogue for the *Situation* show is very interesting because the introduction is very dated now and probably doesn't relate to the aspirations of any of the people who were in it. However, it is a very interesting picture of how young English painters were dealing with the American painting at that particular time.

**BM:** Right. Who, by the way, did you buy a work from? Or would you rather not say?

**JM:** No, I'd rather not say. *Situation* was one very exciting particular moment, which coincided with my realization that painting was what I particularly wanted to do. It was a big influence for a few months, and it washed away the whole world of surrealist art and English semi-abstract art, and my upbringing in that kind of area of art. It was washed away – but not in the sense that I no longer respected it. I still had great respect for a number of artists,

especially someone like Hilton. But suddenly the whole program of the way painting was starting to move suddenly seemed to come into focus, at the very moment when my life was swinging through 360 degrees. So that it was maybe luck or maybe I made it happen – one is never really sure. But certainly, that was an important moment.

**BM**: What effect did that have on the paintings that you subsequently did or were already doing?

**JM:** Well, at the time I saw that show I was painting in a purely amateur way in the evening in my own flat on my own. But I was painting every evening, flat out. And I suppose, if I am honest, I was working through practically every style I could lay my hands on, according to what I happened to be interested in that week – but I don't think that is such a bad way to get into painting. Eventually I arrived at a kind of very amateurish abstract expressionism almost without realizing it. So, when I saw very large, very simple, so called in those days "hard-edged" paintings, it was as though that is what I had been waiting for, for in a sense my own work was moving to that anyway. So, just for a time, everything came together.

**BM:** How large were the paintings you were working on at that stage?

**JM:** Well, I didn't start doing pictures bigger than typical amateur easel painting size until I gave up my job and decided to paint full time, which was at the end of 1961. The biggest paintings at that time were six-foot square, but the scale is completely relative. The ideas that were prevalent in 1960 about what a big painting was seem quite modest. Every art student now thinks nothing of stretching hundreds of square feet of cotton duck. It doesn't really matter whether pictures are big or small – that is not the point. The point is whether the picture is the right size. But it was like a discovery; it was like a new toy perhaps. The realization was that a painting could be bigger than people in previous English school tradition or English painting tradition had realized, for which, of course, there were good reasons. There were also reasons why this degenerated in later years and became a kind of habit. I think this is certainly the case in art schools today, where hardly any of the enormous great vast waving masses of cotton duck are really justified by what's done on them – it isn't really necessary. This is a whole area which now needs to be turned around in another direction. Everything goes in cycles.

**BM:** When you were painting on the six-foot square paintings and others at the end of 1961, were these abstract paintings?

**JM:** Yes. The thing was that I had only been painting a very short time, unlike any of my contemporaries now. I hadn't done my stint of life painting and life drawing and years of purely academic work outside of some kind of attempted expression. I was in the position that I suddenly had creative ideas and aspirations, and was old enough to deal with them, but I was a very inexperienced painter. I have no doubt that I suffered from that for a long time. But at the same time, it gave me a tremendous advantage; it gave a freshness. People who spend years at art school have to spend years getting rid of it; yet someone who hasn't been to art school has, as you say, kind of freshness. But he also has certain lessons which have to be learnt to be a painter. He has to get them slowly. Ironically, art teaching helped me catch up on those things.

**BM:** When did you first start teaching, Jeremy?

**JM:** The end of '63. I was very lucky; I had a job at Chelsea and St Martin's mainly on the strength of my first show, which I had just before in the summer of 1963. It was at the Rowan when they first opened in Knightsbridge.

**BM:** And they were all abstract paintings?

**JM:** Yes. By that time back, now the die was cast. It would, however, be reckless to say that I had found what I wanted to say for the rest of my life. I never ever feel confident that I know what I am going to do tomorrow. But looking back, I think they did have a completeness. They were very immature and naive in some ways, but I would stand by them absolutely now, and I look back on them quite warmly.

**BM:** What was the response of people and critics towards your first show? Do you remember?

**JM:** Well, you never really know what their response is to a show. Even nowadays very few people in art are very generous with their response, and I have to say that I suffer from the same fault. I don't go around giving a lot in the way of response. Allowing for that I think it probably received quite a lot of interest. I have the feeling that some of the *Situation* painters must have looked at it and thought that it was, in a way, crude and naive. But maybe it added up to some kind of personal imagery, which was something perhaps a bit different from what they stood for. But it is very difficult to judge.

**BM:** But what about written criticism? Do you remember any of that?

**JM:** In those days I think a lot of new painters and sculptors were showing for the first time, and although I don't think that the criticism was necessarily very informed, there was a sort of sincere attempt made to have a look at each of the shows as they came along, and to find out what it was trying to do. This certainly contrasts quite strongly with what happens now.

**BM:** You say that there was a kind of "sincere" criticism which doesn't take place today?

**JM:** At that time, our criticism in this country was still in the standard post-second world war tradition of humane, rather literary, slightly poetic, sort of art-loving analysis area. I think that nine times out of ten new work was totally misunderstood. But I say "sincere" because there was a presumption that anyone who made art above a certain minimum level of competence deserved to be taken seriously and was doing something worthwhile – it required a reasonably respectful look. Of course, one was just as annoyed then by being totally misunderstood nine times out of ten. But I think, looking back, the situation was "sincere" – that is a word that you could use.

**BM:** You said, "as compared with today"?

**JM:** Well, the present situation is totally different. Now there is much more criticism; although in some ways there is much less, in a sense. For example, painting and sculpture get much less attention now in the newspapers than they used to. But this is partly because there are a lot of other kinds of art that are considered to be in the category of visual art; these may be more interesting to the critic in question or more easy to write about – or it may be for other reasons. But at that time an art critic was simply a critic of painting and sculpture. But you see now that isn't so. And if you want me to go on about the current situation as though it was bad…?

**BM:** Well, I think you should now because we are into it.

**JM:** Well, the first thing that one has to say by way of qualification is that I quite accept the fact that all creative people, whether they like to call themselves artists or whatever, are obviously super-sensitive to criticism. Traditionally, going back to the beginning of art and the beginning of art criticism, both sides have been enemies and haven't a good word to say

to each other. So, my criticism could be taken with a pinch of salt, in that maybe it has always been this way. But I think that there are certain features about the present-day situation in art criticism in this country, and art writing in general, which are particularly unsatisfactory. Also, certain features regarding the relationship between artists and these other people who claim to interpret their work calls for comment. They do seem to be causing anguish to a lot of serious artists who shouldn't have to waste so much emotion about something which could possibly be a constructive thing.

To be specific about it, one has to be clear what kind of criticism one is talking about. It can be divided into journalistic criticism, which is mainly written for a mass audience, most of whom don't see the work. And although all artists get deeply upset about that kind of criticism in the Sundays[1] (and I get as upset as the next man), one has to say that they are probably doing an adequate job in terms of journalism. John Russell is probably to art what Henry Longhurst is to golf – but Henry Longhurst used to play a good game of golf![2] I just don't know how much one can expect of journalists' Sunday criticism. But that is one area. And when you come down to the new area, the new thing, there is so much more of it than there used to be ten to fifteen years ago – and that's the magazine. Right? The art magazine; *Studio International*, *Art and Artists*, *Arts Review*, *Art International*, the American magazines. We have a whole new area of art criticism.

I think what is happening at the moment is really rather incredible. Just at the moment, there is a marvelous amount of real new painting and sculpture of real quality – not work that has sprung up overnight in the last year, but work that has been building up over the last decade and more. At the very moment when you expect such an art to bring forth a parallel development of serious committed and sympathetic writing, you find what looks like a new generation of pretty young writers bobbing up out of nowhere, who have totally misunderstood the situation and who can't recognize good quality when they see it. This, in spite of brandishing for all to see the kind of language which makes great play with the word "quality". Despite having this ready-made American jargon with which to deal with modern art, they are in fact misapplying it and absolutely missing the point. So, quite apart from getting angry about it, the least one feels is that there is a terribly badly missed opportunity.

**BM:** Who are these people? Are there one or two people who you think are quite good?

**JM:** I don't want there to be any question of naming names in order to get something off one's chest. In the end, I am not even sure how important that kind of art writing is to artists. I think you have to go back a few years to understand the whole phenomenon, because that is when the new tradition of criticism grew up in America, in the late 1960s. It is sometimes called formal criticism; everyone knows what it is. It was an attempt to get away from the sort of literary, poetic and psychological way of looking at a visual plastic art. It tried to get back to the art itself – to look at the form of art, at what was actually happening in the picture – and to describe it. In fact, not many people actually did this, but there was a time, briefly, when a whole fresh feeling came into art writing. Obviously, someone like Greenberg[3] did this at his best – which isn't very often. It was pretty refreshing coming back to the picture, just looking at it.

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[1] The UK Sunday newspapers

[2] At the time of this interview, British-American art critic John Russell was the *Sunday Times* newspaper's art reviewer, and golf writer and commentator Henry Longhurst was its golfing correspondent.

[3] Clement Greenberg

But like everything in life and in art, you get a cycle, a rise and decline, and no sooner is there one authoritative critic who provides a new language, new phrases – new turns of phrase for talking about the new art – then you get a whole gaggle of minor people picking it up with decreasing amounts of perception as they go down the line. Ten years after we have a form of mannerist art criticism, I would regard the kind of articles that one now finds in *Studio International* like this: written by people that, I must admit, I really don't know, but I could quote their names. Young people who write in those magazines, in their relationship to really committed, serious, perceptive art criticism, is, as far as I am concerned, very much like a kind of rather talented, enthusiastic diploma student's relationship to a painter like John Hoyland or Frank Stella. One admires the enthusiasm, and one sees that they are very thrilled with the new toy, but one really can't take it very seriously. Do you agree with this?

**BM:** No. Well, yes… I do. I am trying to do something about it myself. But it is a fact that there are people who don't have the mechanisms to write adequately and with authority about the visual arts. Equally, there seem to be a lot of turncoats around who, like chameleons, change their spots overnight.

**JM:** I think this is all part of the problem. If you take the example of Charles Harrison, he is regarded by some of the writers newer on the scene than himself as a kind of totally committed original British writer about a certain new development in art, and presumably looked up to for his writings about that area of art generally call "Conceptual". Now, it may be true that he has written very well about that territory in art, but it is rather interesting to me – and, I think, rather a pity – knowing the way in which he got into that. I can't help feeling that he was so excited so fast about that area of art that he wrote about it as if it was a kind of alternative to some worn out tradition of conventional art, and not just on its own terms. It was not entirely to do with the art itself, either the traditional art or the new art, but to do with the political and art world context into which he was faced with the choice.

I feel that when he first tuned into abstract painting, he was genuinely excited by things that were happening. Obviously, I have personal experience of his response to my work, but I am not just talking about that. His heart was in the right place. He was genuinely moved by what he felt and what he saw, and it was new to him and new in paint. But as soon as he tried to pursue this new discovery further and meet a wider range of people who were involved, and other perhaps more established commentators, tastemakers and critics, I suspect he became disenchanted by the peripheral elements in the whole art world. So that he thought a lot of the things that surrounded contemporary abstract painting were distasteful, either in America because they appeared to be examples of commercial pressure or critical dogma, or whatever. Instead of going back home and trying to find an alternative way of looking at the art he still believed in, and not just picking up an existing jargon, it seemed to me that he threw the baby out with the bathwater and turned on the art itself.

I know that he wouldn't accept this, and I don't expect him to. And it may not be the whole truth. But I have this feeling that a lot of people became very excited, very rapidly, with forms of art that were aggressively avant-garde, aggressively away from the conventional forms of painting and sculpture. Many of them did so for negative reasons, which may have been quite understandable, but which were fatally wrong.

**BM:** There is, here, a comparison with the start of painting for you. You talked about the artist going through a procedure. There is an organic building up through experience with the work itself, eventually arriving at a position through a backlog of experience, where there has been separation and selection and experiencing right through. One criticism I would

probably make of these recently sprung critics is that they have never gone through a whole procedure of experience.

**JM:** Well, I think that this is the crux of it, as you rightly say. I would put it like this: art is like life; it moves with the same rhythms as life. However much you use the phrase "time flies", in everyday life our experience is that time doesn't fly; that it still takes nine months to produce a baby. And I'm not in the least trying to be romantic about it. In fact, I'm trying to be realistic. Art moves in this natural cycle, in ups and downs. But the public image of art is altogether different. The public image of art is a picture of frenetic activity, with individual concepts of aesthetic reality changing almost every 24 hours. But a critic who spends his whole time trying to hold onto art by its shirt tails, in a desperate attempt to keep track of everything that has happened, is forced sometimes, it seems, into a kind of time cycle that is absolutely alien to the natural cycle that I am talking about. Perhaps this is a problem that one should have sympathy for. Nonetheless, it isn't an excuse for critics to treat art as though it was a form of novelty that was only of interest in that way.

**BM:** I often think that some of them do think of it as kind of football match; a ninety-minute struggle between two teams, trying to score enough goals to decide the winner…

**JM:** I think there is a difference here between journalistic criticism, where they cannot keep on writing the same thing about the same people. But when you have magazine criticism, this is written for people really close to art, for people who make art. Whether or not there are a lot of new things happening all over the world when they look at one particular kind of art over a period of time, they should make allowance for the slow evolution of it. Coming back to what we said about critics, if it is true of art that it develops slowly, then of course it follows that the kind of perception a critic has to have will only come slowly. It doesn't mean that nobody should be an art critic for over twenty years at all. But it does mean that an art critic should have some element of… I would have to say modesty, in approaching art.

Artists have it every day. At the moment, we are getting a really embarrassing brand of art writing. Obviously, one doesn't read much about it. It is so embarrassing that one feels sorry for the people that are doing it. But that an activity that has kept some of the greatest men in the history of the world going for a lifetime can be minced up and shredded in a few pretentious, ignorant words by some young kid just out of the Courtauld,[4] who has just had a couple of drinks with Greenberg, is really intolerable to a lot more artists than such a writer might realize.

**BM:** To come back to your own work, Jeremy, you had the show in 1963 and then you started teaching at Chelsea and St Martin's. What events following that were important for you?

**JM:** Well, it is impossible on the spur of the moment to fish out the events of that period. Going back to what we were talking about just now about time cycles, in a way I feel the honest answer is to say nothing, in the sense that what I had done in that time is terribly unspectacular. I got married and had three children. I've kept teaching because I needed the money. I've made a little more money each year since then, so that I now make a little over half my income from my work – which is better than some people and worse than others.

But having said that, I have done ten years' painting, and that is ten years of fantastic living that you can't express in terms other than the work. It is ten years of ups and downs, with

[4] The Courtauld Institute of Art

tremendous exhilaration when I've made work I was happy with, and depression when I felt I would never paint another picture. It is in the work.

As for exciting events or shows that meant a lot, I honestly can't push any names out into the air. Of course, I have been excited, but I feel that since I first started it is all part of the same continuously living and working. I like all the things that everyone does. I have hobbies, certain things I like doing apart from art.

**BM:** Would it be right for me to say that your paintings could be described as constructed paintings? Could that be just a general word that one could use as opposed to any other word, or is there another that might be more appropriate?

**JM:** Well, I don't think it is a good habit to get into trying to characterize one's own work in an objective way, because I don't really see the work in these terms. I don't really like the word "constructed", but I don't know why.

**BM:** But how would you describe your work? Because when I used the word "constructed", I wasn't saying that all your work could be labelled with it.

**JM:** No, no, I know what you mean.

**BM:** There is a kind of calculation involved.

**JM:** Well, I would put it this way… Some of the painting around that I like best is, for example, work of people like John Hoyland or John Edwards at their best. They are both very good artists. But those artists paint a field of space and color in paint and light and always they come back to the blank canvas and take it from there. I really don't work like that, in the sense that I always need to have some fairly specific idea to work with. What other word can I use? This idea of a particular image that, although experienced with the general process that I generally work with, has a kind of life of its own as one pictorial image. I approach each painting with "now I'm going to do this and do that", which is different. But in the end, the language is still a pictorial, visual language of light and space and form on a plane, and I think the word "constructed" is not right. And even when I have shaped the pictures – of which I have done a great deal – I still feel that it is a world of light and space.

**BM:** It's a coherent world of light and shade. In the Hoylands and the Edwards, the way that light and space is arrived at is, as you say, in the process of working quite different – but it is also quite different in its realization on the canvas. When I used the word "calculated" in your work, I mean that there is something that has to do with a kind of metrical experience. I'm not just looking at that point simply in the way that areas of color are quite clearly defined in your work, that often the field of color is quite often not broken. It might optically be disturbed by the way it comes up against the edge of another color, so that you have after-image interference with fields of color. But the fields of color are never physically broken as they are, for instance, in a Hoyland or an Edwards. So, when I talk about the "calculated" coherence in your works, that is what I am referring to.

**JM:** Yes… well… yes. That rings a bell. That sounds like me. Yes. One thing that really interests me is that I have an idea that – contrary to what a lot of people think about work that overtly looks intuitive, gestural and painted out of a continuing process – is very often backed up by a more conscious idea or concept in the painter's mind than work that appears to be the end product of a very rigorous program of work.

**BM:** Pollock is an example. I am sure that, for a lot of people, the first involvement with a Pollock painting is one covered by the words "abstract expressionism".

**JM:** Yes, that's true.

**BM:** But, of course, it is not really. When you come down to analyze the painter's intentions and then the way he carries it out, there is a very rational thinking going on in the gesture, the expression, the paint, the density, actions and so on.

**JM:** But this is why the old dichotomy that everyone was brought up on either romantic or classic art simply doesn't fit with the feelings that you have when you make work – although maybe the world can be divided into this or that. I really do float forward into work in a complete state of mental chaos very often, and produce work regarded as being almost calculated and, as some people would say, cruel almost to a fault. And yet that is not the experience I have. And it's not the experience I reckon I was after. Which just proves that you can't judge what you are doing yourself.

**BM:** But with your paintings, unlike the two painters we have just mentioned, I have never been aware of the paint constituting the body or object of the painting. It doesn't contribute as the heavy impasto paint does in the way afore mentioned.

**JM:** In some ways, I admire that physical quality, and the warmth and generosity that it signals. And I think that the John Hoyland show that is on now[5] is a marvelous example of painting where the stuff itself, the way it has been pushed around by the man who made it, is both the content and the form, and creates the feeling. I think that's a tremendous show. I think, in some ways, that maybe I'd like to paint a picture like that. But when I actually come back to my studio, to the ideas and guidelines, to my sense of reality, then there is no choice in the matter. I can't choose what kind of painter I am. I can't choose to be a warm, ebullient extrovert when I'm not that kind of person. But then that is only talking about different kinds of art; it is not talking about quality or reality. And what I am interested in above all else is reality, and the criterion always with me is not "Am I painting a beautiful picture?" or "Am I painting the next problem that everybody says we should be looking at?" but "Is it real?" But again, and again and again, I catch myself not doing that, and always the picture fails, and I wake up at the end.

**BM:** Could you expound on this reality for you, Jeremy? Do you mean by it that when you come back to the studio you have your ideas and the theme you want to do, but what's in your mind at the time, that's the reality?

**JM:** No. It's more unique and specific than that. When I've had a show and I'm trying to get going again, and I have completely exhausted myself of a certain idea, I really move around in all kinds of directions, painting pictures, all of which get destroyed. Anyone who saw what I did would think that perhaps I was off my head, and yet every step I take seems absolutely right for a day or two.

**BM:** Is that real, though?

**JM:** For a day or two, and then it goes wrong, maybe for technical reasons, or I lose interest. But only then do I realize that it is going wrong because it is not real. I am not responding. It is not alive. That is another thing: it is not alive.

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[5] John Hoyland, *Paintings*, The Waddington Galleries, London, UK, October 18 – November 10, 1973

So, in the end, this brings one back to this sort of idea about contemporary criticism. You see, formal criticism, in its later degenerate stage, makes the absolute assumption that artists have some kind of objective control over their work, and that they are all really engaged in some sort of heroic, dialectical "hunt the thimble"; that what it is really about is smart moves by really ambitious, smart, thinking people. But I really reject that absolutely. There is nothing in my experience of trying to make art that suggests it can be made like that, and there is nothing in my judgement of contemporary art that supports that feeling. It is true that certain very good artists in America use that language, but it is a kind of American habit of speech; it shouldn't mislead you when you come to look at their work. In the end, the essence of all art is this intuitive sense of reality as you experience it yourself; and, of course, the look of your picture if you are a painter. The look, the actual image, of course, is inseparable from the time that you live in and the work that is around you. But it is not a question of being the dominant thing for me, anyway – and I can't speak for anyone else – this sense of when it is real – I can't explain it anymore, I mean.

**BM:** Yes, Jeremy. The reality or aliveness, that kind of quality that you feel when the work is going right for you. Is that something, for instance, that you also think about in relationship to the viewer when he or she looks at your painting? Is this a necessary activity that takes place between the viewer and the painting, and when it does take place, that is when the painting is really working for you in respect to the viewer?

**JM:** I honestly don't think that I ever think of the viewer, ever. I just don't think that it comes into it at all. I really don't.

**BM:** But if one thought that a critic was a viewer who often wrote misunderstanding the work, it is presumably because one knows something more about the paintings; something that one would at least like a viewer to get from the paintings if he read it correctly.

**JM:** Well, yes. If I have said that I think critics misunderstand painting, all I mean is that they don't see the painting. Because a painting, once it is finished and it is hanging up, is an objective fact, it is there. It is open to different readings according to the different temperaments of the people that look at it. But it is there, and you can't attach a booklet to it giving instructions on how it should be experienced. So, if I say that somebody misunderstands my work – say, on the basis of reading what a critic has written about it – it must be a specific thing that he said. For example, the painting lacks space, when it is a painting that is all about space; or that the painting is too systematic, when it isn't in the least systematic; or it ought to be systematic when it is. It is a simple matter that a lot of people who are writing about paintings are quite clearly not looking at paintings.

**BM:** You used the word "systematic" …?

**JM:** Well, I used that word particularly, because a few years ago I had a show in which I showed some paintings which were mainly two-color diagonal grid paintings, and one critic who wrote at length in one of the magazines about this show treated the pictures throughout on the basis that the grids were a given system, and a given factor in each painting was then presumably the color of the grid or the size of the grid. And it seemed to me that this was a complete and absolute misunderstanding, and misreading, and not-seeing of the paintings. There is a fundamental difference between adopting a configuration like a grid or a band or some geometrical configuration, and there are a number of artists, good and not so good, whose approach to art involves choosing a system for reasons to do with logic and clarity. But I don't regard the configurations of my paintings, whether they have been grids or whatever, as used in that way. For me, a particular grid in a particular painting is not a grid in

the sense that everyone knows but is a system of verticals and horizontals that represent a particular thrust carrying a particular color and a particular feeling. And it is not a system…

**BM:** They generate a type of feeling in the viewer…

**JM:** Yes. If you use grids, you are using a system, and then you must obey the rules of that kind of art – it's ridiculous. It is like saying if you use brush marks, then there is a way to paint that kind of picture. It shows that critics who write and think like that are not really getting inside the language of painting. What they are getting inside is certain notions to do with certain kinds of painting. They are generalizing about certain approaches to painting. But they have got to make an effort to look at each painter's work on its own terms.

**BM:** A feeling I have had from your paintings, even where quite a lot is going on in the inside, is quiet and placid. There isn't a turbulent activity. All your paintings have, more or less, taken me on the cerebral front in the sense that they have made me think about the relationship of the parts to each other, and the way that parts relate to the edges of the canvas or to internal structuring.

**JM:** Well, yes, I think that is OK. I think that, certainly, I'm not displeased to hear you speak about the work in that way – although it isn't necessarily the way I always see the painting myself. But I think a lot of my work recently perhaps has had that quality. I would like to think that it had. But also, a kind of common factor of movement, flow, or rhythm – which doesn't contradict what you have said – is something that is in a lot of my work and is very much part of what I do. But they are not mutually exclusive.

**BM:** But even so, the movement is a quiet movement.

**JM:** Well, I don't know. I think, in a way, this isn't just a personal thing, a matter of personal taste; I think it is actually part of the way painting speaks. That is why I don't really like optically a very active kind of painting, or paintings which carry the idea of movement or flow into a very literal form. And the reason, ultimately, why it doesn't seem satisfactory is that it isn't necessary to do that in painting. It seems that all the rhythms and flow and life and vitality in painting actually operates best when the painting itself is one static harmonious form. This is the whole point, in a way, about painting. A Monet, Cezanne, or a Matisse painting of water flowing, trees fluttering or light in all kinds of different strengths and intensities, bright objects – but still the whole thing is caught in a single moment and this is why painting isn't constricted by time. Many young students and people say that making films and videos is so great because you can actually make your art move. They don't realize that this is a terrific sacrifice. It is the very fact that painting doesn't have to go in time that enables it to achieve such intensity and completeness at its best. It is something very, very central to my whole belief about painting.

**BM:** Do your beliefs in painting also have something to do with any religious feelings you have?

**JM:** Well, I'm not religious in any literal and obvious sense of the word, but I don't think that anybody engaged in art doesn't acknowledge that the activity perhaps has something in common with things to do with religion – but it is difficult to talk about. The point is that art is a moral activity. Maybe not everyone agrees with this, but I think that it is, and that the moral, ethical element in it simply derives from the attempt to be truthful and to be honest. However, I don't think of artists especially in this respect. Any man can make this an important aspect of his life, and it is presumptuous to think that, because he is trying to be an artist, he has a monopoly on the desire to be truthful. It is a paradox that artists who

search for some kind of truth or honesty in their work are sometimes unusually inefficient in doing it in their own lives.

Yes, it is one of the many activities where there is an accent on truth, which perhaps makes it especially concerned with the things that religions at their best have sometimes been concerned with. But not in any specific, literal, obvious way, you know. Just in that fundamental ethical element in the whole activity. Do you agree?

**BM:** Yes, yes. But I think that, perhaps, this search for truth was probably not that simple…?

**JM:** Actually, the reason that I don't like answering that question straight out as a simple "yes, I think art is like religion" is because in the last twenty years qualities have been ascribed to certain kinds of art, in particular abstract painting and abstract expressionist painting. This work is actually considered to be literally a religious symbol, and a lot of rather empty art has been thought to be really much better than it was on bogus grounds.

**BM:** What do you think of someone like Barnett Newman?

**JM:** Well, I've always had a very soft spot for Barnett Newman. The whole idea of Barnett Newman always appeals to me. I have a feeling that the total achievement isn't perhaps quite as great as one would like it to be. But I like some of his work very much.

**BM:** But what about the spiritualism attached to it?

**JM:** Well, I don't really like that. I don't really understand all that. You have to be Jewish to understand. I'm an Anglo-Saxon. I'm a middle-class Anglo-Saxon.

**BM:** Well, it's nearly the end of the tape Jeremy.

**JM:** Good.