

BORDERCROSSINGS

A MAGAZINE OF THE ARTS

Ann
Hamilton

Aganetha
Dyck

Andrzej Pluta

Edith Dekyndt

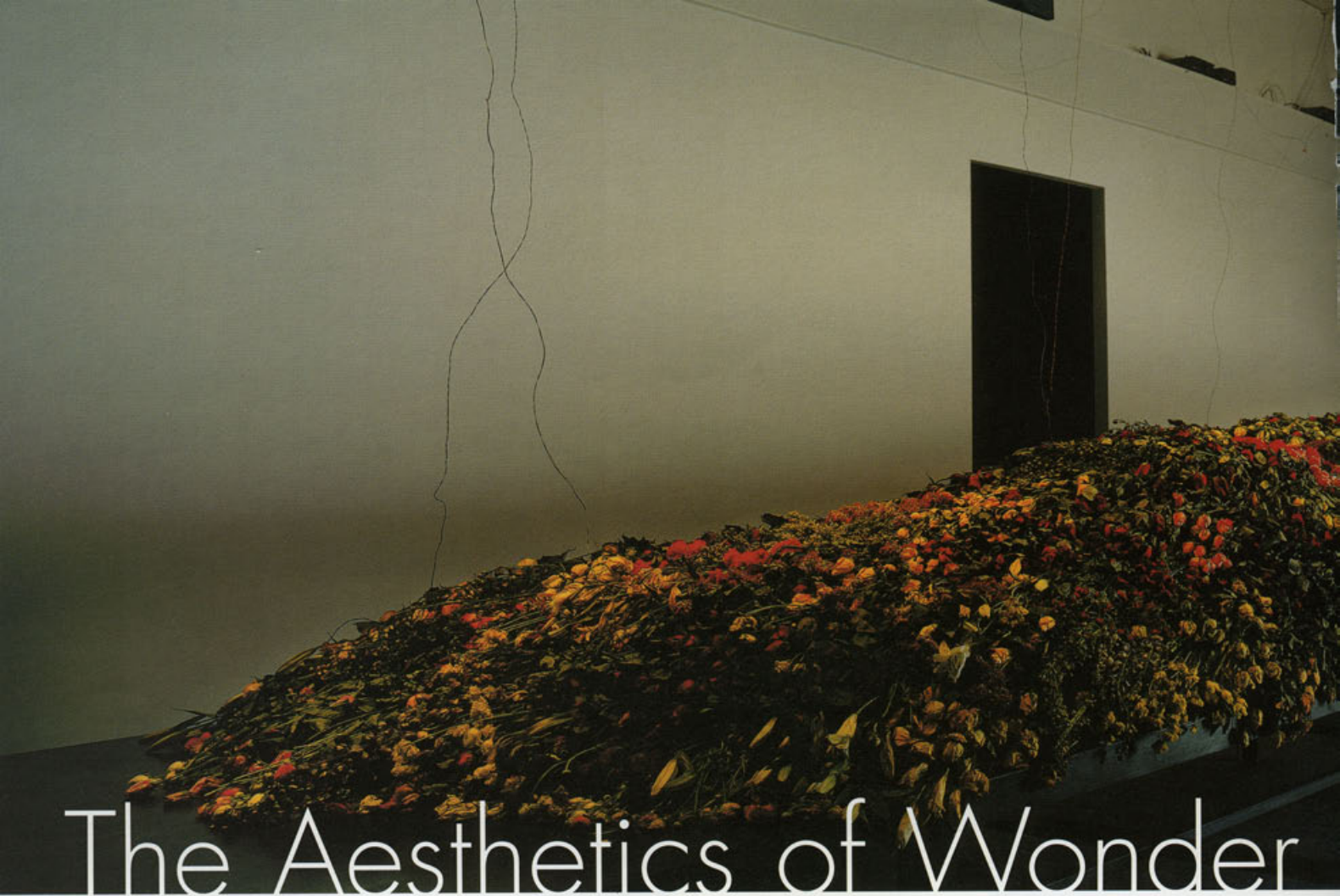
William Eakin

Robert Kroetsch



ONWORK





The Aesthetics of Wonder



An Interview with Ann Hamilton

Introduction by Robert Enright

There is a poem called "Scirocco" by Jorie Graham, a writer with whom Ann Hamilton has a stated affinity, that presents us with the custodian of the Keats memorial in Rome. Graham situates her on the porch beneath the arbor, sorting chickpeas from pebbles and dropping them into a cast-iron pot.



There is light playing / over the leaves, / over her face
making her

abstract, making / her quick / and strange. But she / has no
care / for what speckles her, / changing her,

she is at / her work. Oh how we want / to be taken / and
changed, / want to be mended / by what we enter.

It is thus / with the world?

It is certainly thus with Ann Hamilton. She uses activities no less common—and just as repetitious—as sorting chickpeas to create environments that change us as we enter them, and that have the effect of mending us by the time we leave them.

She has been altering viewers of her objects, installations, performances and films since 1985 when she first exhibited her “untitled (body and object series)”

in Santa Barbara. Hamilton was born in Lima, Ohio, in the mid-fifties; she went to study textiles at the University of Kansas, from which she received her BFA in 1979, and then to Yale to study sculpture. She earned her MFA, taught in California for six years and moved back to Columbus, Ohio, where she has lived ever since. In the last 15 years she has had 26 one-person exhibitions and has been included in 79 group shows; she was awarded a coveted MacArthur Fellowship in 1993 and has emerged as one of the most admired and gifted installation artists America has produced. Last year she represented the United States at the 48th Venice Biennale with a piece called *myein*, an installation which characteristically used the senses—mostly sight and touch in this case—to investigate the perplexing question of what we know and, more importantly, how we know. *myein* employed a combination of architecture, material and the memory that rests at the centre of writing to reflect on a sensory epistemology, a way of

(facing page, top)
mantle, 1998, installation
Miami Art Museum,
16 short-wave radios
with voices in various
languages, steel table,
60,000 cut flowers.
Photograph:
Thibault Jeanson. All
photographs courtesy
Sean Kelly Gallery,
New York.

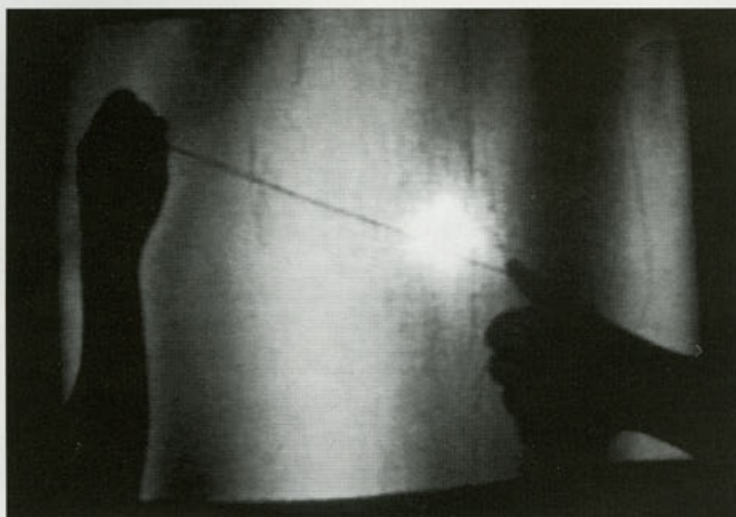
(facing page, lower)
mantle, detail, stitching
seams of wool coats.

knowing that feeds on everything from the information gathered at the tips of our fingers to the way that high chroma fuschia powder flashes on the lining of our retinas.

Hamilton recognizes that the senses are compensatory; when one doesn't supply us with what we need, another will act as a surrogate, giving us enough information to begin the process of reading any piece. Often, in her work, what emerges is a chemical-free synaesthesia, a mesmerizing drift that moves effortlessly from touching to hearing to looking. Hamilton is the visual poet of the threshold, the delineator of entrances and exits, and the

1997 for the Musée d'art contemporain in Lyon, France. *matter* was like being inside a painting, where the space around you was the skin of the painting made three-dimensional; by being inside, you were floating in pigimentary space. You were not looking at it; you were inside it looking out, as if art were a mirror with a one-way gaze. But what's notable about this interior place is that it's so compelling you never want to leave its seductive confines. The fact that six peacocks move about the installation like kinetic jewels only supports the idea that Hamilton's is a complete aesthetic world that makes no concessions to the unbeautiful.

That said, it makes the sublimely beautiful out of quotidian objects and actions. It is not just that she is about the activity of work; she is also about its artfulness. Most of her installations involve a prodigious amount of material and work: *kaph* (1998) created a 16 x 118-foot wall that occupied the gallery space like a lyric *Tilted Arc*—the piece also required 1.8 miles of plastic tubing, water and 3000 small orifices; in *privation and excesses* (1989) she used 750,000 pennies held together with a thin layer of honey; *indigo blue* (1991) collected 14,000 pounds of men's blue work pants and shirts; *between taxonomy and communion* (1990) included 7000 panes of glass and 16,000 freshly cleaned human and animal teeth; *mantle* (1998) presented a 48-foot-long talking table layered with 60,000 flowers; *tropos* (1991) covered the floor of a 5000-square-foot gallery with horsehair, extending Meret Oppenheim's *Breakfast in Fur* into a visual and textural feast. These are feats of labour in addition to being feats of the imagination; Hamilton and her collaborators assume the responsibility of getting the job done in a way that is pragmatic and unfussy: it is the efficient aestheticization of the Protestant work ethic. It is also no less a transformation of what is normally regarded as women's work—repetitive and unhonoured—into an activity that assumes the significance of ritual. It's not always clear how the accumulation of act and object, or process and product, add up in work of this nature; there remains in Hamilton's installations (just as there does in great poetry) an air of the inexplicable. Like the scirocco, the stirring wind in Graham's poem that "works the invisible," there is something in her art that insists on muteness. It is like decorum; if it were a quality of personality it would be reticence; if it were a category of love it would be courtly. And then once it has achieved these discretions, the work passes through to



(above and facing page)
salic, 1995, 360 salt blocks,
22 video projections.
Photographs: Herbert Lotz.

sculptor of the amplified spaces that exist on both sides of these liminal apprehensions. It's worth remembering that the liminal is not just a measure of being spatially situated at the threshold, but is also a sensory shift where one perception blends into another.

There is never anything in an Ann Hamilton installation that isn't precisely chosen. What makes her work so remarkable is that from this exactitude she is able to generate such an explosive poetics of experience. Her work is produced out of something like a visual ingestion of her materials, as if her whole being were able to get to the matter of their beauty and use. Last year the Musée d'art contemporain in Montreal presented an exhibition of 43 works created between 1984 and 1997 called "the body and object: Ann Hamilton 1984 – 1997" that had been organized by the Wexner Center for the Arts. Montreal also included *matter*, a major installation made in

the other side, slipping through some threshold to make itself felt, becoming massive and demonstrable, articulate in character and sensual (almost libidinous) in its affections, found moving in its affectings.

The following interview with Ann Hamilton was conducted by Robert Enright in Columbus, Ohio, in February 2000.

Border Crossings: I have an image of you moving through space with your antennae out, listening and looking very closely. Are you always attentive to the world around you?

Ann Hamilton: Some days I'm not sure that I am. When I make a site visit, I try to go without expectations, to be blank, to allow every hair on my body to be an antenna. I pay attention to what floats up into thought because it is in the experience of being in the space that the piece will emerge. Otherwise, I won't understand where the work grounds itself. In the small rotunda of the pavilion in Venice, I just kept walking around that compass pattern, turning and turning. I realized, when the piece was done, that if you stand there and turn, you turn from four different landscapes. And that's really one of the key places for the piece. It's not necessarily the place where people stop but it was key. At the Dia Center for the Arts, I remember walking and turning in that space. There were ice-cream trucks outside but I could never see them. This was before Chelsea was what it is now, and I kept going to the window and thinking that you extend your hand to know the sound. It's like you want to affirm things through touch that you can't see. It was that reach between touch and grasp that keyed the piece. So a part of it is researched but it always comes back to sensing something that's present in the space. It's not a narrative but it is a presence that I'm hoping to make experiential in some way.

BC: Do you first make yourself a tabula rasa, clear your consciousness of any preconceptions about the space you open yourself up to, and then do extensive research which brings in the cognitive function?

AH: Sometimes I don't really trust my intuition, so I have to madly justify it. I'm trying to figure out what are the tensions that can rub up against each other. They may come from a physical description of the actual space or they may come from the larger, immediate social history of the site.

BC: In San Francisco, did your awareness of the panhandlers, of always having to have pennies available, become the point of departure for the piece?

AH: Yes, in some ways. Also, I had just come off a huge project in Los Angeles. It was three enormous rooms. We were camped out forever in the museum and I've never had so little sleep in my life. My mother was there as part of the crew. It was a significant effort on everyone's part. So when you finish a big project you have enormous questions, and one of mine was, is the next stop Disneyland? Does it get bigger and bigger and does it perform more? How is it performative and how does



it allow you to actually be absorbed into it? All I'd do was walk around the neighbourhood. I was thinking about my excesses and, obviously, the privilege of having time off from teaching, a budget and this space in which to work. Every project is made up of an infinite number of very small decisions. The experience of a piece being formed is likewise made up of the confluence of the thing you happen to read when you're waiting for a plane, the conscious, guided research and the physical experience of walking the site. All I'm doing is paying attention to the questions that come up.

BC: So you determine what to include from the concatenation of experiences that you come up against?

AH: How do you sift through and decide if something's important or something's not? What are the things that stick? I don't know if it goes beyond that. There's a certain point where you start to see what it's about. It's



matter, 1998-1999, Museum of Contemporary Art, Montreal, silk fabric, peacocks, voice, typewriter ribbon. Photographs: Thibault Jeanson.



the part that's hardest to unravel. How is it you go through this labyrinthine process and get to this? Why does one person associate in one way and one person in another way?

BC: *In the Charleston piece you conducted over a year's research on labour history. You clearly set out to imbue yourself with a detailed historical knowledge of the context out of which you were making the piece.*

AH: Right. And I brought in artist friends and we talked. I wanted to have a reader in there but I could never figure out what the text would be. We sat for days and talked about all the meanings and what would happen. In the end the piece is informed by those conversations with friends and intellects whom I really respected. But I kept thinking, how does the material hold and become imbued with an historical absence that can't be told in a story? In the end the work is as much about a kind of felt knowledge, and an acknowledged loss, as it is about information. James Young was here, speaking on the history of Holocaust memorials—he wrote *The Texture of Memory*—and it was an excellent talk. It made me think back to Venice. I hadn't thought about that piece as having a memorial structure. Nor about Charleston. I remember saying, 'I don't want to be so arrogant to think that I'm going to construct this revisionist history, that I'm going to come in and tell this other story, the story not being told on these carriage tours as they move people around Charleston.' And yet there is an absence in American culture of the recognition that our democracy began in slavery, that we were a slave-owning country, which is something we're thinking about very much right now in relation to an upcoming project. So how do you evoke that in a poetic way that allows you to feel the absence?

BC: *Is your resistance a question of not wanting to be arrogant in assuming that you can tell a story in its fullness? So you come at it poetically.*

AH: I think it's also about my trusting that the felt response to things motivates us in ways other kinds of information don't. It's like a really strong emotion; you read the paper every day and some things you wish you could unread. What do you do with those feelings? We need to be able to name things. We're always trying to find a way to talk about those things that are hard to talk about, that don't easily end up in language. My way is through materials. How they hold meaning for us helps establish how we make metaphors. We need objects because they tie us to history.

BC: *And it's through material that you're able to elaborate the sensate intelligence which seems to be at the centre of your work?*

AH: I think that's part of it. It's as much a part of your intellect as other modes of information. But I think it would be too simple to stop and say that's actually what the work is about. I think it's only one of its structures.

BC: *Dave Hickey registers your complaint that you don't want to be seen as the material girl. Your point is, it makes the work seem less important if it's about the things from which it's made.*

AH: Actually, in some ways I long to be more focussed on material than I am. One of my dilemmas now is how much time I spend on the phone. I'm orchestrating, I'm researching, but I don't feel like I'm touching materials enough. So, one of my big questions in the year 2000 is, what are the multiple ways in which making can take form? What is the process? There are certainly lots of projects I would love to pursue, but



I don't know if I'm going to like the process necessary to realize them.

BC: *It's hard to be a material conceptualist, isn't it? You can't be Duchamp and just think about the piece you're thinking about. It's got to be made.*

AH: Well, it's because it's also in *how* it's made that it actually has a presence or not. Unless you're in there doing it, I think you miss a part of the thinking-through. Similarly, at certain points, being the person who's in the piece in a live way is also one way of understanding its relationships. Each piece has many parts—from the first visit, through the research, to the making, the public presentation, and then deciding what happens with it afterwards. Can I save any of it? All those questions come up. All those are the piece for me as the maker. Each one has a different process and it's from the way you pay attention to each one that the next piece emerges.

BC: *Are art and life the same thing for you? Are they interchangeable?*

AH: I made a decision very early on that I don't want to live my work all the time. But it's not like there's a hard defining edge. I know when I did *malediction* in the early '90s—it was after having done a lot of very

large works—it was important to go back inside the piece, to be there every day to see what happened after three hours, after six hours. What happened on the fifth day that was different from the first day? I feel that work is an act of paying attention. I'm sitting there and I feel the temperatures change; I feel the presence of people coming in; I am aware that an act of witnessing goes on and that it allows the piece to carry on. It allows me to sit there and put the dough in my mouth and take the dough out of my mouth. It's an honouring of something when you give it that much time.

BC: *Do you want to get autobiographically, and bodily, involved in each piece?*

AH: It's like anything: it's piece by piece, site by site. I'm getting ready to do a project with Meredith Monk. We have no idea what the form will be but I'm really excited about it. I can remember being in Calgary when she came to the Glenbow. I was a young artist and still enmeshed in a textile program and I heard Meredith perform a solo work. I remember thinking what an extraordinary thing it would be, if I could ever make work that feels like this sounds. So when she called me a couple of years ago, I was jumping out of my skin. But

myein, 1999, Venice Biennale, installation, American Pavilion. Photographs: Thibault Jeanson.

I don't want to do a big stage production. With Meredith I want to explore what is my sensibility and what is her sensibility, and how can they meet in something that is very modest in its production. Meredith promised me that I'll be able to sing by the end of the collaboration. If you've ever heard me, you would know this is an optimistic long shot. But what is the impulse to bring something from the inside to the outside? What is it about that lip, that edge where sound or language exit the body?

BC: *Your investigation of the threshold, of the line between inside and outside, is mesmerizing. Is there some singular event in your life that made you realize the centrality of this notion of entrance?*

AH: It's just a condition that we inherit. I can remember at one point in a lecture, thinking, I'm not interested in making pictures of the body, but I am interested in the experience of the condition of the body. Everything about a threshold is an inherited physical predicament. We're simultaneously insides and outsides, we're containers and we're contained, we're born into material and we're born into language. It's the way that our physical selves actually establish so many of the metaphors within which we think. So I'm very interested in people who are writing about the mind in the body and in research into contemporary neurology. I'm very much the lay reader when I go through this material, but I feel a confirmation, and sometimes the inheritance of a language that allows me to name some of the relationships that are abstract within my work.

BC: *I love the story about your grandmother who read to you. Was yours a reading family? I ask because language and books seem absolutely central to your consciousness.*

AH: But you should see the way I read. Sometimes I think things get a little mythologized and Dave Hickey is a great storyteller. Reading is really important to me, but now I'm beginning several investigations in making how I read be the material of the work. That's my project. And it actually comes out of Venice. My emerging question was, what does it mean to be a reader? Everything I have done has been about a trace—an indexical mark—and reading is something that leaves no material trace. Yet, it's something that I'm doing all the time, so how do I use it? Is there a way to make it material? Is there a way to bring to the surface the way someone reads? Michael and I are both doing a project in Virginia and I have been spending time at the Special Collections Library. Among the documents they

have there are the Bibles that Jefferson cut up. He had the Latin and the Greek and two English versions. I'm interested in how they reflect the selective process of a particular reader. I've always wanted to be able to record the way that we remark upon words as we read, but not to stop and self-consciously go through that process of writing it down. Because, for me, it stops the associative brain. I want to stay within the associative thinking engendered by a certain kind of reading. One of the things about the way I read is that I'm reading for words. I read and it's like those three words fit together and I go 'aha'. It's that sense of recognition about the quality of how those things sit together.

BC: *Which made me think that you'd prefer poetry because usually its concentration allows that degree of recognition.*

AH: I read a lot of poetry but not necessarily more than other kinds of writing. I'm reading Helene Cixoux. Ann Carson was someone I was reading last year. Another book that had a tremendous influence on Venice was Robert P. Harrison's *Forest: The Shadow of Civilization*. It's a history of the idea of the forest within the literary imagination. Dave Hickey was probably right in his sense that I'm not reading for the argument. But that's okay; perhaps every reader uses and misuses a writer. Increasingly, I want to make a piece about the relationship between the reader and the writer. And one of the ideas I'm tossing around involves two ventriloquists who are both throwing their voices. One is the reader and one is the writer. So the challenge for me is, can I write this text? I'm not a writer, so do I use found text? I'm sampling the first line of every book in a stack of books at the library with an optical scanner. Just the first line because I don't know what it's going to be yet.

BC: *But there are poetic fragments in your pieces as well. Were those chosen because of the meaning you assumed from the particular texts you had read? I hear Whitman and T.S. Eliot.*

AH: Yes. More recently, as the work has emptied materially, the selection of text has become specific. It's only something that I see now. It's like the burning of the lines in the books at Dia, the erasing of the books. It's not a particular title, it's the act, the whole field of language as it's embodied in the series of books. Even with the spoken pieces—the Eliot and Whitman are very particular but still experienced as a field of language. The words become the text. It really started when I made the

stitched gloves for Lyon. The words are in a cursive writing in which the line is continuously drawn. Writing and sewing are acts of incorporation. Although the text is very carefully written, it actually erases itself as I write. The space between the letters closes. This space in-between is the same thing as being in-between in the architecture. That place of in-betweenness is uncomfortable for us to occupy. I've been very tied to the work of Susan Stewart and we've had an ongoing conversation. Her work helped me articulate and name things I was doing with scale and helped me see the work in a larger context. Then I came to actually use her poems as material in my work. One of the poems, "Slaughter," describes the act of slaughtering an animal; it describes the knives and each hand's role. It is factual, visceral and interwoven with the history of sacrifice. There are six people involved in a traditional animal slaughter, so the stitching of words onto the glove are, for me, about taking on that relationship. It's a way of taking responsibility for the thing described. The Reznikoff poems I used in Venice are similar in the way the act of description becomes the thing described. It is not like telling you *about* it, it is it.

BC: *Does it matter to my understanding of the piece that I know six people are involved in a traditional slaughter? How much does that knowledge make the piece more meaningful for you and beyond that, for the reader/viewer?*

AH: I think it's a huge question. It's one of the big questions for my work right now. I know in *tropos* I chose books that had no title or chapter headings, because you weren't supposed to go to that book and find a clue. The language wasn't a clue. I chose it for the look of the book, the page, or the no-title heading. So now in the exhibition in Lyon I have five texts and one is written by a man. The physical act of dissecting parts of the body—the head, the arm, the hand, or the neck—are woven literally in the way that they're written, and the four pieces of writing by women are all poetic in structure. One is "Lamentations" by Susan Stewart; one is by Rebecca Cox Jackson. She was a Shaker visionary and it's her vision of being flayed, of having her body literally turned inside out. Another is this poem by Jorie Graham about Penelope at her loom; and the Angela Carter piece is the last part of her retelling of the Little Red Riding Hood story. Each one is a very visceral rendering of the body. On the other hand, I was reading John Donne and Elaine Scarry on Donne's poems. She

talks about him as the poet for whom touch is the primary sense. One of the things that the act of reading does is to flush to the surface another associative level in the work, one that I'm sure would not be available to almost anyone experiencing the work. It's like the interior life of the work, which is a little bit different from your question about the importance of knowing these texts, about how available they need to be. I think it's like anything, the more you know, the more the experiences can reveal.

BC: *So all knowledge is gain?*

AH: Yes, but if you don't know it, it doesn't mean there isn't an experience. You can listen to music and not know the words, but it doesn't mean the music is necessarily less meaningful. Or in a painting, where you no longer have knowledge of the iconography. Meaning can be lost to you unless you do a lot of research, but there's still an experience. The question for me is, how do you make it available?

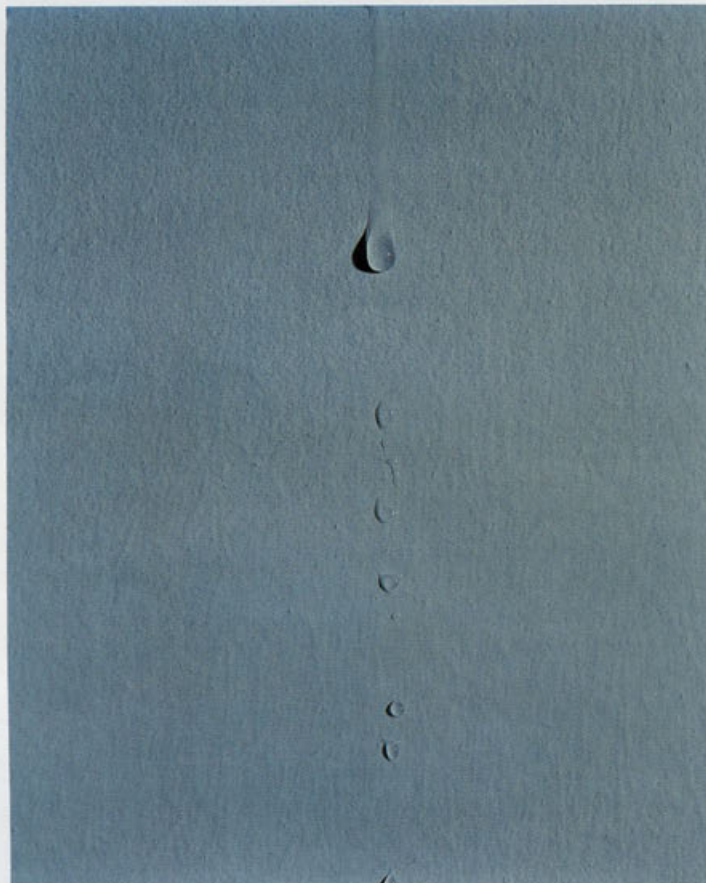
BC: *And does the constant repetition of "work" function in the same way? Is the making of the piece its own validation? I don't have to know how many people and hours were involved, or how much material was used, but is it necessary for you in making the piece? I'm talking philosophically, not practically. Practically, you've got to have as many burns on the wall as you need to get that much soot, but is the work the essence of the piece?*

AH: It's the essence of coming to a relationship with it. But I don't know if it's the essence. I think that with some of the earlier work, every act of making was laid out as a material mark, and the labour and hand were transparently present in the pieces. That led to romanticizing the process. And I don't want to minimize that in any way. When I do big social pieces, it's a process that I love. The way you come together with people and work side by side is a conversation very different from when you gather for a drink or for dinner. It's a way that you meet strangers and fall into a conversation. On the other hand, it's not the subject of the work; it hasn't necessarily been central to its meaning.

BC: *I've got to admit that when I watched the tape for the stone piece in aleph, I had a sense of its being a feat. It seemed your tongue slowed down, moving the stones in your mouth, as you got more tired. Was that a deliberate measure, or did you finally get so tired you couldn't do it any longer?*

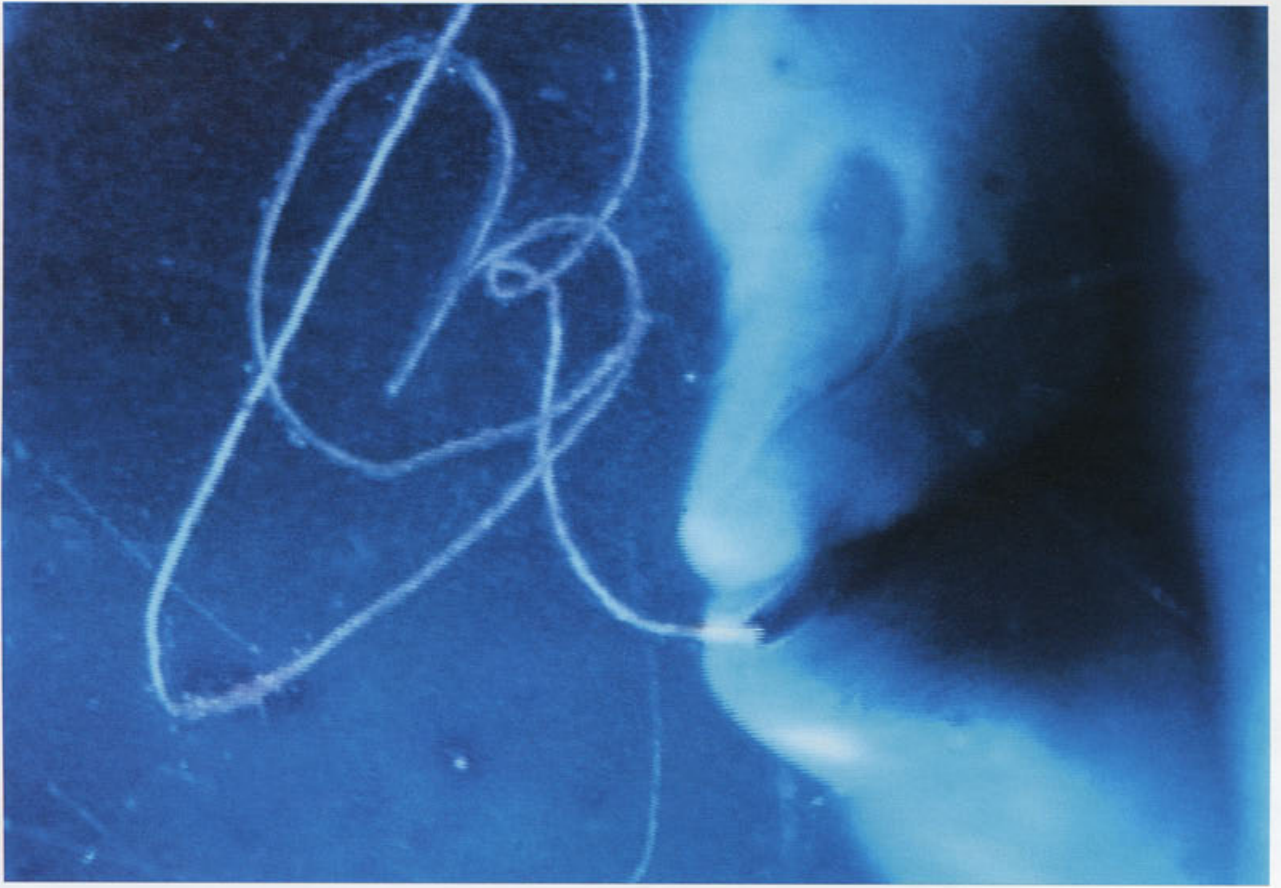


(all) *bounden*, 1997, hand-stitched organza, wood embroidery frames, chairs, wall tearing with water drops. Photographs: B. Adillon.



(facing page, top) *reserve*, 1996, detail, table, fabric, video monitor. Photograph: Kristien Daem.

(facing page, bottom) *a round*, 1993, installation, Power Plant, Toronto, canvas floor, sawdust-stuffed wrestling dummies, column-mounted mechanized punching bags. Photograph: Cheryl O'Brien.



AH: It's not even that long. It's very short; the tape is looped. It's that it's perpetually in the present and never falling in and never falling out. I was afraid I would choke.

BC: *It's pretty tense.*

AH: I think there are a lot of tensions within the work. Sometimes these are beautiful, absorbing pieces, but they're tense, uncomfortable, and not easy works. That video is hypnotic and you could fall into it; on the other hand, it also pushes you back. That seesaw has been very much a part of the structure of my work.

BC: *You've used what look like stacked bodies; you put the mouth moulds into a kind of casket. From the beginning there has been a strong sense of mortality in the work. It's a tendency which gets overlooked in discussions about the aesthetics of your pieces.*

AH: Yes. It was interesting hearing James Young speak because it made me glance back through a lot of the work and think about it within the language of memorials. I think certainly loss has been a huge part of the work. It's like the powder in Venice that you can't hold onto—the movement of descent in time. All those things are about time passing, about something that's being lost. On the other hand, part of the work has wanted to carry something forward into the present, and those two things are always touching each other. It's like sitting there day after day, putting the dough in my mouth. I can't remake a body, it's literally a futile act. But another kind of act is to take this space where we form language, where language exits to the world, and fill that hollow space and try to make this body from it. Obviously, it had many references that go back to Judea-Christian culture, although I'm not necessarily following through on all those permutations. I don't know if I'm intellectually lazy or just happy to know that those references are there and I'm prepared to let them float.

BC: *But in the context of 20th-century history, the material you use and the way it's used inevitably suggest the Holocaust. The work can easily be read as a comment on that monstrous event, which I assume wasn't your intention in any single piece?*

AH: No, but if, as Elaine Scarry says, the Holocaust is the unmaking of the body, then animating the world is the act of making the body. The Holocaust is obviously a central event in the long social history of the body. So yes, the work probably does tie back to that. But it's not

central to my thinking as I'm making projects. As I'm making projects, I'm caught within the detail. I start there and as the work grows, I slowly step back. Part of that stepping back is to understand what the impulses are and the images and materials to which I'm drawn.

BC: *Are you surprised by the fact that your cumulative acts of minutiae and intimacy add up to things of such beauty and scale?*

AH: They're never what you think they're going to be; they're always their own beast. It's like watching a kid grow, you don't see them growing because you're there with them every day. Things start from very intimate gestures. In fact, they're very domestic. The huge silk canopy in Lyon came from making the bed with Emmett in the morning. You know how kids hide under the sheets. That's where it starts. There's something I love about the scale of these enormous spaces; it's about absorption and immersion and this sensual, oceanic scale. I suppose it's like being in water, which is the closest you come to losing a physical border around you.

BC: *The sensuality in the work is astonishing. There's almost nobody who so consistently and exquisitely realizes the senses in the way you do. How did that come about?*

AH: I could never answer that. I have a wonderful family, that's why I live here. It wasn't that my parents were necessarily artistic or that they pushed me, but they always gave me unconditional support. You don't realize until you're an adult how rare that is. It really isn't the norm at all. I always felt things were possible. If you could imagine it, it was possible.

BC: *But the Midwest is thought of as a place characterized by emotional and physical reticence, a place where you don't indulge in a poetics of space or material.*

AH: I think that's why I had to come back here. I don't know what it is about this landscape, but it's interesting when I travel how often I fall into conversations with somebody who ends up being from Ohio. There is, here, an American pragmatism and Calvinism—whereby one is measured by what one "does" in the world. These values are in the culture, in the air you breathe as you grow up. It's what makes you prod and kick at things.

BC: *But you don't operate against the culture. It's not as if you're some radical rebel out here being defiantly sensuous.*

AH: Oh no. Not at all. I think it's just about revealing things.

BC: *Since we're touching on the sensual, tell me what were the mechanics of the sifting system in Venice.*

AH: It was an auger system. I worked with a wonderful engineer in New York, Marty Chafkin. Marty's not just interested in the mechanics of doing, he's interested in why I'm doing it. So it's a real collaborative conversation. What I often try to do is lift something from an existing technology and use it in a different way. I had used an auger system on the project at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, so I was familiar with it. We didn't know how we were going to do it, but we knew of an existing system—flexible augers, a plastic tube with a screw that turns in it. Marty regulated the speed of the motors and how they all charge and “talk” to each other. Each room had its own system. Basically, we made an auger with two hoppers in each of the closets, one feeding each of the four rooms. We regulated the speed so the powder sifted through-out each room's perimeter. We had some problem with static electricity, so in the beginning we were asking, where did the powder go? It was a horrifying moment. Going back to your early question, by assuming the scale of architecture I take on physical predicaments I wouldn't otherwise encounter. Also, in this case, embedding the system in the building required another layer of thinking and application. We got up in the rotunda and found that the wall every tube had to pass through was covered with transformers. We had to rewire the building. On the one hand, you're tearing your hair out, and on the other hand, it is exhilarating. You've got a problem and you're got your sleeves pulled up and you know there's a way. You know it's bigger than you; it's much bigger than you.

BC: *Let's talk about your education. What did you find in Kansas when you went there to study?*

AH: I went because Cynthia Schira was teaching there, and I had seen and loved her work. She developed a method of weaving, using the supplementary weft. She was a great teacher and a wonderful artist. When I was first in Banff I was doing work that was very much like hers. I still feel a lot of my work comes out of a textile sensibility—if you think about cloth as a metaphor for the threshold and for covering. I've started some recent drawings because I'm trying to find something I can do every day as a practice. The line is for me just like thread. My grandmother taught me how to knit when I was

young and I keep thinking that my first hand is a sewing hand. One of the things that excited me so much about Lyon was the history of silk in that city. A wonderful man who had worked in the silk industry all his life, Jacques Brochier—the catalogue is dedicated to him—took us around and introduced me to the industry, took me to factories to have fabric dyed, to see the silkworms. They were on their bed of mulberry leaves and because you think the dots are eyes, it looks like they're raising their heads. It's as if they are performing a slow, sensual, underwater dance. Anyway, it was a pleasure to allow, through the stitching, some of that early lap work which I really love. The old and boring distinctions between art and craft isn't an interesting discussion to me, but the process of textiles still is.

BC: *Was your decision to go to Yale a shift in your thinking about what it was you were doing? Presumably you went there to work on sculpture, which wasn't what you'd been doing in Kansas.*

AH: Well, I had been in Banff. One of the influences on my work that a lot of people wouldn't know about was my time in Canada. So many lecturers came through Banff that I was like a ping-pong ball. I hadn't ever been to art school, so I suppose that's what Banff became. And a lot of Canadian artists—like Liz Magor—were huge influences on me. In Montreal I worked in this small futon factory, doing production sewing, and it was there that I decided I was going to go back to school. With me, it's a question of going to the thing I don't know rather than the thing I already know, so I decided to go into sculpture. Sculpture is about the relationship between things in space and that's what interested me. So I ended up at Yale. It was great to be in a big university where I spent a lot of time sitting in other classes, being a sponge and taking advantage of the university structure. You never know what work is going to really give you permission.

BC: *So why did you go to the west coast, then?*

AH: I left graduate school and started teaching right away in Santa Barbara. Then I moved back here in '91. I do a lot of lecturing and I like to teach, I like the contact but because my work has necessitated being gone so much, it was very hard to maintain a regular teaching schedule. I think people thought I'd lost it when I came back here. They thought I was having a breakdown or something. But my work is not based anywhere,



iris print currently being worked on with the Institute for Electronic Arts, Alfred, NY.

so what's the difference if I travel from Ohio or from California? I've never lived in a really cosmopolitan centre. It surprises me when I think about it because I spend time in New York and other major cities. But I think that you have to work from what you know to what you don't know. And I feel here that I have a permission to not know. It's less pressure than being in New York and also my son has grandparents and cousins here, which is really important to me. I think Columbus has allowed my work to grow in a way that would be harder in another place.

BC: Many of your pieces deal with making language tactile and then with erasing it. Are you at war with language at the same time that you're enamoured of it?

AH: Probably, because as Maria Porges says, words are all we have and they're never enough. I've gone through this thing in my head: is it just that I want to be a writer? I think part of it is we make hierarchies and we privilege certain kinds of information. If something can be said in a discursive manner, then sometimes we'll elevate that over other ways of being or knowing in the world. It's like a teeter-totter. I want to bring up perceptions that are felt and emotional. Obviously, I love words. I think they are incredibly important. The ability to name something differently is also to invent the world. But it's not just that I erased words, it is *how* they are erased. In the Charleston installation, the words were erased from the back to the front of the book. By removing the mechanically produced text and replacing it with the mark of the body, a space was made

that became the trace of the thing that's not in the history told in the book. My work is to always place the body in the experience. In my move away from material I don't know if I'm in an incredible predicament or just a different phase as text becomes more specific. But I had read Charles Reznikoff's haunting, incredible, disturbing poems and histories in the middle of thinking about Venice. I thought a lot about the discussions going on in Europe on the memorialization of the Holocaust. How do you deal with the unsavoury part of your own country's history? In Venice, as in Charleston, I didn't think I was going to tell another story, but I was looking for a way to remark upon an erasure and a silence. So to find and translate the poems of Reznikoff was really central to the piece. I don't know where I'm really going with it. I know that as I'm doing these drawings, I'm starting to allow myself to write. As I'm beginning to work with the line, I talk to myself about what's physically happening in front of me. I have three pencils in my hand and I describe to myself the action of each pencil.

BC: Would you reject an essentialist argument that your approach to things is gendered? It's what a woman would do as opposed to what a man would do?

AH: I never know how to answer that question. My experience is female. That determines a lot of what I make. But I don't think I'm an essentialist. There are so many other factors that make us how we are and respond in the way we do. I think it's that I'm leery of categories in general.

BC: *Would you also resist the implication that your pieces have to do with the Protestant work ethic which formed so much of this country?*

AH: That's true. But go to Holland and it's there too. I just think it's too limited a reading. It's not open enough.

BC: *The intensity of the work is important to you?*

AH: The making is as important to me as the thing made. But a lot of pieces don't have a lot of making. You're assembling stuff, you're bringing in technology and you're solving problems. I don't think that's making as we traditionally think of it. Hand-making is still important. If we extend ourself out into the world via technology—whether it's satellite or radio, the recorded voice, digital technologies, the Internet—what is it about this thing that is really fundamental in terms of making a relationship to the world? I'm circling back constantly to figure out what that hand is. Right now I'm getting ready to do a project which I'm still up in the air about. I've been videotaping the drawing of a line. It's a very small image, a telephoto projection of the video, and it's actually tracing around the room. This line is tracing itself but it never leaves any mark: the body is absent. The Aldrich piece with the hand and the black muff asked, where does hand-making come back in and where does it seem relevant? Is it a nostalgic activity? I don't know but when I find a process like playing with these drawings that allows me to be in a state of attentiveness, then the work remarks upon those moments quite literally. You could ask, is this a hermetic, individual process, or is there something larger in it? I think there is. As I go back and forth, language and material rub against each other. The language becomes material, it excerpts itself as text; the gesture actually becomes image and then becomes mark and trace of material. All those things have multiple relationships and they keep recycling in different ways. I don't know if I've ever come to some ultimate reconciliation of materials and words, but I've been inside them in different ways. I was thinking about how some people entered the Dia project with the horsehair. For some people it was like the hair that gathers in the bathtub. For others it was a sublime ocean. People were terrified; some dove in. Some people had the same reaction to the powder in Venice. They wondered if they were being poisoned. Other people just flung themselves into it. We exert control over certain of our experiences through language. We're also afraid of material absorptions. In this

case, those things rub against each other in a way that is tense and emotional and sensual and all sorts of things.

BC: *Did you like the idea that the footprints would take the fugitive powder out of the building and that it would have been tramped through the Biennale?*

AH: I thought it was really interesting that it quite literally bled the edges of the architecture. I have said it was like the insidiousness of American popular culture going out to the world. It's as if you couldn't contain it. I think the fact that people marked and wrote on it—at times there was a lot of daily graffiti written in the powder—was really important. Some people thought it was interesting and should be left, and it was a serious conversation among the guards in terms of taking care of the piece. What was the correct response? I thought it was an important reciprocal part of the work. It was like getting another piece of the project.

BC: *Do you relate at all to what artists in the Arte Povera movement were doing?*

AH: It comes out of such a different political atmosphere that I think it has very different meanings. I was certainly aware of them early on. Increasingly I have to really hunt and research the things that I'm using. They're not the detritus; they come with a really different economy.

BC: *How influential had Pina Bausch been on your work?*

AH: I think there was an emotional thing in Bausch's work that was really compelling. The way gestures flip and become their opposite. Something that's really tender becomes aggressive and destructive. I obviously found an affinity in her.

BC: *Her Rite of Spring is done on loam so the whole stage is covered in earth, and you can feel and smell the bodies of the dancers working in it.*

AH: And they get muddy and it's incredibly beautiful. I love her work. I saw *Carnations* this spring, a piece I hadn't seen before. I don't think it was one of her strongest pieces; for me its emotional line didn't change so I didn't have as much a connection to it as I've had to some of her other work. Her sense of scale still appeals to me.

BC: *When we went to Montreal and saw mattering, it was the closest I've ever imagined to what it would be like to be inside a Rothko painting. There is something very painterly and formal about your work. Is that a conscious evocation?*

AH: I don't think it's conscious but I think it's there. I remember having an interesting conversation with Dave Hickey about painting in relationship to Pollock that concerned the horsehair floor and the gesture of the work. There is a connection in the *blue writing* video I showed you to the Hans Namuth film of Pollock painting. However, I'm writing an alphabet and it's the beginning of the cursive writing. The connection was in retrospect. In some ways I think I'm going to end up drawing and painting.

BC: *Are you saying this in jest?*

AH: No, I'm serious. Who knows where it's going? You trace yourself back. But if the hand-making stays in the work, the hand is a drawing hand, and I'm really interested to see what form that ends up taking.

BC: *In blue writing the first marks you make form what is either a heart or testicles. It's as if the start of drawing is a generative emblem for the sexual origin of being. Was that just an accident?*

AH: Half of it is accident. You do things and, you hope, you recognize them. I don't know if you can always intend them. Half the time your own intentions also get in the way of seeing what is actually happening, so you're always trying to put them aside.

BC: *Why the peacocks?*

AH: I really don't know. I did all sorts of reading about peacocks and it was probably one of the only times I've used something that has a real iconographic history. The park outside the museum in Lyon has an old zoo and there were peacocks walking freely around. I wanted something that had to do with the history of luxury and so the peacocks were perfect. Who knows where I ever got that idea? When I lecture I still don't know what to say, except that the space under the moving canopy was the space of the birds.

BC: *Do you actually sense that there is more meaning in the intricacies of the in-between, rather than in what's clear and direct?*

AH: I think so. The thing that's not quite there and that's hidden is always the thing that we need to look at. I suppose it's being constantly at this edge—not quite in and not quite out. That's a very active place. Once things get named they get a mantle or a cloak around them. I'm interested in the form that's not quite set. I'm at that point where I'm more comfortable not knowing. As a maker you have to allow yourself to not know. And that carries

forward into qualities of ambiguity in the work. I think one of the things about the work is that it resists closure. There's no narrative closure in the relationships between the parts. It was interesting to me how impatient people were in Venice. Americans are particularly impatient with things that are ambiguous. We want to know what it is; we want to know what category it goes in. It's thank you very much and you move on to your next experience. And everything about the Venice piece was the opposite of that. I can remember a conversation with someone about the colour: why this colour, what does it mean? I chose the colour because it was so highly chromed as to be almost toxic, and to resist easy symbolic interpretation. You can't read it; it's not the colour of blood, it isn't the colour of a flower. I was very comfortable with that because I'm interested in those states. But it undid some people.

BC: *What you've done is to set about creating an epistemology of doubt in the visual language you use. Normally we think of language—whether pictorial or verbal—as being a way of affirming meaning. You're about unaffirmations.*

AH: What I hope is, you stay in there long enough to let it wave over you. Everything is contingent and the work is remarking upon that. It's about that moment when you call something forth. What you're calling forth isn't a didactic message, though, it's a way of being present.

BC: *The engaging thing about that moment is that it continues in every other moment.*

AH: Maybe it's that we insist on everything being a mirror. It's like the pieces are mirrors and what you bring to it is what you see. And what you bring to it is what it is. But I don't think it's hermetic. One of the criticisms of the work focusses on the relationship between these things. 'Why are they together? They make no sense, they don't add up, this doesn't work.' I think that people are not looking at what something actually is. You have to look at it and think about it materially; describe it, not by projecting meaning onto it, but by describing what it is physically. If you can enter a work that way, it will unfold for you. You have to let the felt relationship between things rise to the surface.

BC: *Are you after wonder and enchantment?*

AH: Very much. I think when you stand and wonder at something, it opens you up to be more receptive. It's a more imaginative place. The critical self-scrutinizing mind is really important and I'm a very critical reader

of all sorts of things, but to be enfolded into wonder and to be suspended into that is an experience in which I'm very interested. We don't have enough of it. A lot of what artists make comes out of a legacy of Duchamp that is about shock. I don't see anyone who has articulated the aesthetics of wonder.

BC: *You don't make ugly things. It seems to me that even in the earlier work, which was sometimes difficult, you seemed to be seduced by beauty.*

AH: I want things to be beautiful, unapologetically. I know people have seen the beauty of the work as especially problematic. It's not a problem for me. I want you to want to look at them and beauty has to be a part of that.

BC: *Are there any shortcuts?*

AH: As I've said, the making of it is as important as the thing you get to. One of the things that comes forward through a lot of the process work in the '70s is that the integrity of the act laid itself out transparently. I'm still very much embedded in a lot of that thinking. I make moves within the work, based on finding a process that has the integrity and the focus I need. The form is propelled out of that and it distinguishes my work from a lot of other installation work. I think a lot of installation has been about making this place *other* than where it is. It's a total transformation. And while I'm interested in some of that work, my attitude is very, very different. Just as I go back and forth between language and material, I also go back and forth between integrity of process and seduction of image.

BC: *You learn an awful lot every time you do a piece, don't you?*

AH: Oh yes. It's not like you come up with ideas and execute them any way. I don't know any artist who works like that. One of the things that happens when I visit a site is that I look at the space with this sidelong glance and I think, what is this one going to do to me, and vice versa? You're always collaborating with the space. I'm like a dog circling; where am I going to sit down? I'm nervous about the space initially and I want to leave right away. Sometimes the spaces that are the most difficult for me, I've learned the most from. Like the piece here for the Eisenman Building at the Wexner Center, which I was not at all fond of, and for which I've still not developed a fondness. I hated the arrogance of this intellectual system, and a building that was made from the outside in. But it's like how Pina Bausch can

really flip on you. You think you're doing one thing and you find out you're doing the opposite.

BC: *I was going to ask you if you're obsessive.*

AH: I actually don't think I am. I'm interested in the fact that there's no repetition and that every time something's done, it's done differently. It's the Gertrude Stein side of me. That's what the repetitions always come out of for me. I don't feel it's obsessive or about removing yourself, or isolating yourself from the world. It's actually a form of engagement, like when you read something over and over again. It's the way you incorporate it, it becomes *of* you in a way. I'm seeking that relationship to things always.

BC: *The scale of your work invariably reminds me of the scale of big abstract American painting, which leads me to the obvious question. Do you think of yourself fundamentally as an American artist?*

AH: Yes. I don't know how to elaborate on that, but I think I definitely am an American artist. I think what I do comes out of Whitman and out of an American pragmatism. At different times people really wanted to make direct links to European work and while that may be useful for comparison, it's not at all what I work out of. I suppose there is a kind of optimism in the work that could only come out of being raised here and having lived here.

BC: *Maybe your sense of space leads you to Charles Olson's spatial writing, his composition by field. The language can drift in and out. Space is something you're not afraid of; it's not the whale that's going to swallow you up.*

AH: I can remember those drives back and forth across the prairie and driving to Banff and that sense of the horizon and the sky being over you. When I first started making work that ventured outside the confines of the structure of the loom, I called on the memory of that experience. I wanted to make that experience. I remember sitting outside Calgary, where the grass folds around you and you experience an infinite horizon. You don't feel small in relationship to it, you feel part of it. To me there was an emotional abandon in that landscape and certainly it is still very much evident in my attraction to volumes of space. Also, when you live in the West, you realize it is never filled. Ohio was one of the first gridded states but still it is infinite. I grew up with that horizon; I inherited the incessant horizontality of landscape and writing, and in my work they meet. ■