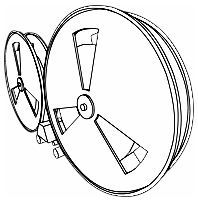

REWIND | Artists' Video in the 70s & 80s
Interview with Marty St James

Interview by Dr Jackie Hatfield, 17th July 2006

JH: Which of your works do you consider to be the most key to you, the most important?

MSJ: There have been a number of key works. I couldn't actually say there is one that particularly stands out, or one that I would say is absolutely key. One of the very first videos I ever made, which was not strictly my video in one sense, followed from when I finished art school and appeared on a television quiz show called *Mr & Mrs*. The idea of the show was that you went on with a partner. They then locked you in a box and you had to answer three questions about your partner. If you got them right, and then vice versa, you won a prize. I won a candelabra and £15. I recorded the programme and then I showed it at my degree show in Cardiff, in 1976. I recorded it and showed it back, which was great. The external examiner was an abstract painter called Adrian Heath, who I've got a lot of respect for. He didn't like it because he didn't think it was art. I can understand that particularly now of course, but it was at that time when video was literally emerging. I suppose it was because it was so conceptual. It pointed to every reason why it wasn't art in one sense, but because of that, it was something that I was very much attracted to. I was very interested in and continue to be interested in performance art and so it satisfied a number of things in my head. I suppose coming back to your question; that was a key work because it was a transition from performance into video.

JH: Was appearing on the game show *Mr & Mrs* an act of performance in itself? When you took part in that, was it not as a subversive activity but as a conscious activity as an artist?

MSJ: Yes it was. I'd heard that John Cage answered questions on an Italian quiz show while on mushrooms. Obviously I was interested in performance and I thought how it would be interesting to appear on a quiz show and be myself, but not quite myself and play with the host verbally. So, I went out and bought a suit and tried to be as straight as possible. I tried to play it as reasonably straight as possible. I'd got things up my coat as well, so there were things under my suit, which I didn't reveal. There were a number of layers to it. I didn't quite understand all the complexities at the time, or whether indeed it would work but in the final show-back of the piece for my degree show, I set up a monitor with the candelabra on the top, the £15 prize and the flashy signature of the host. I was quite specific in what I wanted from it in a sense, but I didn't quite know how it would work. Also, the other thing about it as well is that I wanted to get to grips with how television works. I'd been an audience member of Funky Lucky Starts and all these sort of pop-promos when I was a kid. I'd seen the Beatles and everything. So, to actually see how it works from the other side, and to see the fact that it was all just G-clamped together, was a good experience.

JH: Was that a joint piece or was that an individual piece? Did you do that with a partner?

MSJ: I made the piece on my own. I did the show with my partner at the time. She agreed to come on the show with me, but it was my own work.

JH: But you weren't married? How did the show work? Did you have to be married or could you just go on?

MSJ: Yes, we had to say we were married.

JH: But you could pretend?

MSJ: You could to pretend, if you want you could pretend, yes.

JH: Was there a title for the piece?

MSJ: It was called *Mr. & Mrs*. It's just been archived by the BFI, so I'm very pleased.

JH: When you showed it, was it a single screen piece then?

MSJ: Yes, it was a straightforward single screen piece, which was recorded off the television.

JH: Are there any works that are important to you, but not necessarily considered to be important by others? Naturally there are key works that have had attention, but are there any works that haven't had attention?

MSJ: I think as an artist, we all make works that are key to us in some way shape or form, but whether they are captured on celluloid or videotape or digital, there are always key works. I think a key work, again from that time, was a film I made. When I left Art School I suddenly found myself making 16 mm films, which surprised me because I wasn't very interested in film. The film I made was called *Greenman*. It was quite a key work because it managed to bond together performance and moving image. At that time, I was trying to understand what the differences and the similarities were between the two areas of operation. I'd met a lot of the British performance art scene when I was at Art School. I'd spent a lot of my time at Art School working with them and not actually being in the Art College. I was touring Britain and working at the Serpentine and other sorts and places. It was a great opportunity and the mysteries of performance art fascinated me. It still does and I still talk about this now. I'm about to go off to Argentina to a conference on performance art because I think it's the purest medium there is. The key works, I would say, are the things that have not been captured photographically or video-orientated in that sense, but are things that occur through performance.

JH: How do you feel about the documentation of works such as *Mr & Mrs*? Given it was archived by the BFI, presumably the archive is single-screen. They won't have archived the whole installation piece. How do you feel about the screening of the video works?

MSJ: That's a complicated question because one of the fascinating connections, which I've gone on to talk about and use it in my work recently, is the divide that exists between things. One of those things is the ephemerality of performance, whereby the moment is surpassed

by the drift of time and the fact is not captured. With video, one of the fascinating things about it in my mind is that you've got to plug it in to an electricity supply, and it moves. It's an illusion across frames, across a hit. So, it's not real at all. It's merely a series of static frames that take place. Then you've got things like some of the static works I've made photographically; where they exist in time all the time. All those particular states of being are extremely interesting. I think, as an artist you manage it as best you can, and that's all you can do. Artists work with the technology they've got at any one point in time. One of the more free media is performance, but you get media like video and film, which come along and offer an opportunity. So, you just manage what you can work with.

JH: Can you talk about when you started making video after *Mr & Mrs*? What happened after that? You were exploring the technology, or at least electronic technology, but where did you go from there?

MSJ: I started making film. I must have made about 6 or 7 pieces, but the high point was the grey suit piece in my mind. I remember I tackled it in quite a semi-difficult way. I wanted to use colour and black-and-white and that was extremely difficult at that time because of the way you had to bring those two together. It was an important process. From there I decided that I didn't like film. It didn't suite me as a medium, although I love the physicality of film. I love that it's a physical thing that operates in the projector and you physically have to handle it. What got to me about video was that in my mind, it was very close to performance because it was abstract. It didn't exist until you plugged it in and you actually had to get it to project itself inside a box. When you edited it together, there was the fact that it had to jump from one thing to another thing, and you never saw it going across. Whereas, with film you could see it, stop it, frame it and cut it. I hated that because it kept breaking. But, video for my mind was extremely abstract. When I started to think and work with it, I started to use it not as a recording process but as an element in performance. It was a case of using a time stream of consciousness that actually added another element to a performance or a performance installation. At first I worked with sound a little bit and then I did something at the AIR gallery for London Video Artists. I did three performance installation pieces called *Red, White and Blue*. I did one in Newcastle at the Basement Group and I did one at AIR Gallery and one at what was the Filmmakers Co-op in Camden. They were called *Day's Done*, *Candyfloss Mountain* and *Silent Water*. The one at AIR Gallery was a three-sided performance, with video monitors on the outside. You could get a view of the performance on the inside or you could get a view of the performer on the outside from three different angles. I liked that process of playing between one type of time-space and another type of time-space. So that's where it naturally progressed to, via performance. That's where it started from.

JH: Can you talk a little bit about the technological processes? Did you use editing or was it live camera and live performance that you preferred?

MSJ: I've always liked the connectivity with performance but I've always liked some connectivity with the live space as well. One of the things has been the way things are framed or used in terms of what the technology is actually receiving. What's exciting about that, for my mind, is the gap that exists between one sense of reality and the received reality. You can play with that, for example in Wagner's *Parsifal.* There's a wonderful connectivity part

where Klingsor's daughter, suddenly screams in a very loud way at the audience. It's about breaking that theatrical gap between one sense of illusion and another, not that I've ever been interested in acting and things like that, but I am interested in the formal set-up space and how it can be broken down in lots of different ways. I'm not interested in terms of words and setting, actioned in that sense, I am probably much more interested in the shooting space. I find it much more exciting.

JH: With *Mr & Mrs*, I can see that that epitomises some of those ideas about the transition from perceived reality to expected behaviour in terms of the live event and where those things break down and where the unexpected might happen. With a live TV show, it seems to be a place where it's possible to undermine some of those things. Did you think of doing any other live event like that?

MSJ: In the eighties, when I worked with another artist Anne Wilson, we did a series of performance pieces, which included video and a series of videos, which were at that time mainly single tape pieces. They very much dealt with that. They very much dealt with popular culture and the way we see television and the way television was emerging at that time with an image fixation. There was a fixation with dolling up an image to the look of a particular type. So we worked with soap opera themes and popular cultural themes that pushed things over to the edge with make-up and fast editing and soundtracks: things, which were deconstructed or reconstructed in a way to make another type of poetry. I suppose one of the key works there was the *Visual Art Songs for the 80's,* which was a piece with 4 tapes. It dealt with a notion of true-life romance. There was a popular fiction theme that ran through the pieces. Another one was called *American Romance,* which was a visual poetry trip through America. At that time, we did this tour of the States that was over something like 12500 miles, stopping off at New York and Los Angeles, through to Canada, back round again and back out. We did a series of performance pieces there, which were called *Perfect Moments.* They were three-object set-ups and a stream of video that ran through it. So the video informed the performance and the performance informed the video as such. Sometimes it went wrong because it was improvised. The video would carry on and the performance would go wrong or vice versa. A good part of the 80's, in that sense, was very much about bringing together video and performance in a live sense and really using that in a popular cultural sense for a long time.

JH: You're probably one of the early pioneers in that sense, to bring popular culture into the gallery space. That's still something that is only partially addressed, I think. It's hard to explain to student what that context was like. With so many channels that you have on now, it's a completely different arena, whereas in the 70's and the early 80s there were only 4 channels. There were only 3 up until 1984.

MSJ: It's interesting you say that, because it added a natural conclusion in one sense. We started working with television. We started working with the BBC, Channel 4. I remember one of the first things we did was Television South West. We did a programme and we went down to Plymouth to record the show. It was a performance piece for video. We designed it for a television video recording session and they got all the three cameras set up with the lightning in the studio and everything. We'd set certain things that were set in place, objects, actions and had a timeline in our heads. "Action" was called and off we

went. Then immediately stopped, the director said, "Cut" and we said, "What's the problem?" and he said, "Well, when you walked through it the first time, you went round the left hand-side of the chair, but this time you went round the right hand-side". It was that that we were encountering. That was the thing we were commenting on. We were encountering this very fixed head-and-shoulder shot about the way television operated. It's an industry. It is set up very particularly, with formal aspects of time and money. It was based on words and you can't easily break that. Improvisation doesn't exist almost. It was the time when live television didn't exist either, so it was filtered down somewhat. We got through the session, but we ended up with three pieces of work, which we weren't that happy about. They remained rather stiff. We thought, "we could make programmes better than this ourselves, you. Why do we need you?". But then of course, when you get your work transmitted to 7 million people, you think "That's an interesting idea", an opportunity to really fulfil this notion of making a comment about what popular culture and what the media is involved in. But it was like a sort of wet flannel. The next-door neighbour came round and said, "You're on the telly! Can I have your signature?". That was bizarre. It added nothing to the work that was the problem with it. I don't think it added anything to the work as such and so we did things like the *Timecode* programme that went our across the world. I think it was 7 or 8 different countries, maybe even more that it was shown in. That was interesting to do, because it was the one point where Channel 4 got more serious with The Ghost in the Machine coming along. But *Timecode* was a good opportunity to make a video where we were in control, and we can make the piece as such. That was good. Then we went on form. We reached the point where we found ourselves sitting in rooms with something like 15 people, 12 of whom were accountants and business managers and producers. I just had enough. I said, "I don't want to be involved in this. This is not about creativity. In my mind, this is not about making art. This is about something else." I decided at that point that I didn't want to work in that way anymore so I backed off then.

JH: Who produced *Timecode*?

MSJ: It was Rod Stoneman. He was excellent. He was very supportive. Then Margaret Thatcher decided that Channel had to self-fund itself. But, that was a marvellous time because there was the opportunity for British television to really stand out. We had had David Hall's stuff on telly, which was fantastic. So there was a precedent sat there, and there was Nam June Paik's work as well. It was a great opportunity but it faded away and it was quite right it did, in a way.

JH: It's difficult because, with David Hall's work, obviously he is a formal practitioner who was interested in the material that he was using, but those pieces did jar the flow of television. I'm not sure about the subsequent programming. You described it as sitting with accountants and it wasn't about undermining or deconstructing the flow of television, it was really about being part of that flow. So, it has sort of had its natural conclusion in a way. I always ask that question when I'm teaching students. I ask they think it is still possible to make work that interrupts the televisual flow, and they always say, yes. But, I think the mechanism isn't there like it was. It's not that easy. I'm sure that if you went there with an idea like that now, it wouldn't be possible.

MSJ: I suppose you could look at it in a slightly different way and you could say, "So what!" I was talking to an art critic the other day, Sue Hubbard, and we were talking about whether there was an underground that exists in Britain, and in a sense, thinking about that, one could say that television has become unimportant to the artist. Now that sounds peculiar in a world, which is completely besotted with image and sound and communication. But in a sense, it's almost like enveloped in on itself possibly. Maybe artists are saying that it isn't the be all and end all of what our lives are about. Maybe something else is at foot, which is much more interesting and maybe it's the artists that turned their back on television rather than television had turned its back to the artists.

JH: I'm sure. Anyway, the context is different. There's the Internet for example. It means a completely different way of disseminating. Did you have any particular ideological reasons why you started to use video?

MSJ: I had ideological reasons why I was interested in making art. Making art was very important and the choice of medium was very important. I was interested in art which had a sense of pure politic attached to it. What I mean by that is the sense that of this nonsense that we see on the TV, with party politics etc, is nonsense. I'm talking about the individual in the world. We are thrown into a world, which we have no control over where we land. We bring ourselves out of that. One of the things that I think is absolutely extraordinary, is that we have the choice to be creative and in being creative that is disruptive and disturbing to a controlling influence. My father was an engineer from Birmingham and he was the last person, God bless him, who you would have ever have thought would have taken somebody like me to the Art Museum and Gallery in Birmingham. The expectance was that one would end up working in the car factory or whatever. There are people who think differently in the world. There are people who think differently to me. My father was a man, who was into measurement – arms, legs, feet, inches, micro-whatever. He was really into the exact mathematics of the way life contracts and expands and yet he was able to say to somebody like me, who he realised looking at my hands, would never work in a factory, "This geezer's called Picasso". People look at the world differently, and that was my introduction to what I call "my own pure politics" which was this business of how the individual can operate in society and contribute to it in a positive way, by try and imagine whatever that may entail as such. So that short journey, which has been an extremely long journey, has served me well. I retain that at the centre of my thinking as to what I'm involved in and what I believe art could or should be about.

JH: Do you want to talk about the hat?

MSJ: I met Joseph Beuys two or three times, which in one sense has nothing to do with this, but in another, has everything to do with it. I remember saying a marvellously ridiculous thing to Beuys once. We were talking at the Tate Gallery, he'd done something there some years ago, and I told him that I really liked his performance work. We started to talk about it, and after a while, I warmed to him and started to think, "Have I ever seen a Josef Beuys performance work?" It was wonderful because it questioned me and it questioned him as such, as someone that was presenting themselves in the complete context of creativity and politics. It was an interesting question. Anyway, coming back to the hat. My step-grandfather wore a hat. He used to sit me on his knee when I was a kid, there'd be no

collar on his shirt, but he wore his hat. He stepped out of the First World War into his hat. He exchanged one hat for another hat, so to speak. So, the hat for me has got many, many connotations and is very, very important because it also symbolises where we are and what we inhabit and how we actually communicate with ourselves and each other. The hat has served me for many, many years. The hat has met other hats as well.

JH: How has video evolved as a medium for your artistic production? As a technology, it has shifted dramatically over the period of time that you've been using it. Do you use it any differently now, to how you used it earlier on?

MSJ: My favourite comedian was Tony Hancock and Tony Hancock was one of the first people to use video, not him himself, but his TV show, *Hancock's Half Hour*. When the Americans and the British were just developing video, his early shows were one of the first shows to be recorded on tape. It was the late 50's early 60's. My last performance piece using video was at the Riverside Studios where Tony Hancock actually used to record *Hancock's Experiment,* so there's a lovely connection betwixt the two of them. The reason I say that, is that partially it's to do with economics. I remember you'd sit there and go "One, two, three, clunk" and there was this big square button that you used to press and that was the edit. Then you'd have to go back and check whether it ripped apart on these reel-to-reel machines. You could never afford one yourself particularly, at the time. I couldn't. But then, they got cheaper and cheaper and soon the camcorder came around and it became cassette-based medium. I think it's wonderful the way it's gone. I think the way it's gone into the computer is wonderful. It's been terribly frustrating as well though. I remember the transition in the early 90's was a bloody nightmare. It really was a pain thinking about what card to buy, how fast it would go and how many megabytes were needed. I remember getting my knee on a card and trying to ram it into a Mac. It was a £4.500 card. So, the transition has been a wonderful transition but I think that it has been a real learning curve for everybody. But the sad thing about it, and the good thing about it, is that the industry has still got that clamp on it, in terms of what is produced and in terms of the technology. You can use it and you can doctor it, this way or the other, but obviously the whole thing is still driven by commercial factors.

JH: Do you think you still use it in a similar way to that which you described about using it to highlight or to play with the transition between the live space? Do you still use it in that way, or have you shifted, given that the technology has shifted into the computer?

MSJ: It's an interesting question. I think I do still use it that way, but maybe the area that I'm inhabiting has taken on a slightly more defined, but at the same time more expansive, way of thinking about it. I find myself now, very much interested in the elements of live space performance, but I also find myself very interested in ideas related to what moving image presents, in relation to what actual performance presents in relation to what a static image presents. So, the field of enquiry is still the same, but it's, dare I say, refined a little bit more to considering those formal qualities that exist between those different areas. In general terms, it is operating somewhere between the moving and the static.

JH: Yes because, the computer has actually created the situation where you can see the frames of video whereas you didn't use to. When you were using tape, the interesting

thing about it was that you couldn't see the frames, unless you fiddled about with the machine, but now, it looks like a filmstrip. So, it's interesting what you said about the static and how that becomes part of the process as well.

MSJ: I think it's right. I think that there's a more analytical approach to it now. I think that the computer has availed. It has allowed us to take on a much more critical view about the way it operates.

JH: It's midway between film and video in a way the technology allows you to sort of see the frames as you do in film. The software packages make it appear like film, they don't have it go down the route of the unseeable. It's down the route of the frame.

MSJ: I think that's fascinating. I think there are two elements there. One is the fact that artists respond to what is available to them. That then throws up other possibilities for artists. I think that's extremely important. You can operate in terms of what the technology is and what technology is available. Even the shift from U-matic to the digital, it's a massive shift mentally as well.

JH: Yes, even if you are making installation and you are making performance works it completely changes what's possible. It makes for more possibilities. Not having a U-matic tape is fair enough. It's a lot easier to use computers for me.

MSJ: They were always very heavy, U-matic machines.

JH: But they're very robust.

MSJ: Yes. I remember once editing a 14-channel installation piece called *The Dancer*. I did it with a company called Samcon in West London who were very good. They were sponsoring the piece. It was for a show in the Camden Art Centre in 1990. We were sat in North London on a blazingly hot weekend and the machines just kept breaking down. They kept overheating. What was wonderful was that they got this massive wall of machines. So, every time they broke-down, they said, "I'll go and get another one". So, we pulled another one out and put it in. They were very heavy though.

JH: How did funding play a part, or not, in the continuation of your practice? Did you straggle to get funding? How did it affect your practice? It was not cheap making video.

MSJ: It was not cheap making video at all. The computerisation of video might be a bit cheaper, but with the computer, it makes it available to everybody and I think that's very interesting. Funding has always been a dodgy subject. I have had works funded by various bodies including The Arts Council and other bodies throughout Britain and abroad. I've had funding from television and I've had private funding. It's taken up a lot of time. There's an extraordinary thing about human beings in that they would give money to buildings, but they won't give money to people. It just shows how dispensable we are as things and how mistrusted we are by politicians. I think that the difficult thing about funding has actually been the amount of form-filling and energy that has gone into the funding side of things, when they could have been used for other things. You're writing things, which bitterly

people need to tick boxes and check. That has been a difficult bit. It's taken a lot of energy and time.

JH: Could you describe how you moved from making work in art school and were obviously interested in making a bit more video works as part of performance, how did you manage that? Was there a key moment at which you got a reasonable amount of funding early on, or did you struggle for a bit and gradually get funding? There was a point at which your work was very successful. You had a lot of exhibitions, and you had the National Portrait piece, so it was very visible at one point. How did that happen? How did you work through that?

MSJ: I spent two years dressed as a radish and that was difficult. When I came out of art school, I was determined that I would have as little to do with society as possible and so I dressed myself as a vegetable and planted myself in various places. I was a non-resident radish. That was a period when I decided that the purest form of art was one way and that was it. That was an interesting period of time. You work and you work. You believe in your work. You do your work and you engage. You disengage. You find points of attack, not of weakness but through strength whereby you develop a way of thinking "This is what I want to do, how do I do it?" It sounds incredibly simple, but it's actually quite complicated to fit the two together. Then you hit down at it. But, I don't think I ever totally depended upon specific types of funding or really expected them in a sense. I've realised it was a bit more complicated than just funding. It was about actually wanting to make the work exist and finding any way to make that work exist without compromising it in terms of its quality or in terms of the ideas. It was about locating possibilities and opportunities. There were high points. There had been high points and low points with the work in terms of where those opportunities have come along. But once again, I think you learn to manage how to get to grips with that. Things like *The Portraits,* was a requirement to try and put things together creatively, which now I'm taking apart again. It's trying to put together performance and object and video and the technology, and then finding a context for it really. So, I think the funding for every artist is an obstacle. But, it's an obstacle that you try and put out of your mind. You are just trying to say to yourself "Well that's a secondary thing really". One of the things I do think, is that as an artist, you try and manage the funding in a way whereby it doesn't impede upon your ideas too much. That's difficult, but I think you learn that as you go along with the nature of your own beast. I think one of the things that I have not wished to do is to become reliant on specific types of funding because it can tie you down. It can tie you in knots. If you remain as independent as possible, I think that's the most important thing. There have been many opportunities where this vacuum could have sucked me up. You try to be as independent as possible. It's the independent underground artist syndrome.

MSJ: As an artist, how do you support yourself financially? For instance, did you do teaching or did you do gallery work? Most artists have a structure that they work within.

MSJ: There is an art critic, who once said that the only interesting thing about British video artists is that they teach whereas American artists do other manual jobs. I nearly got up and strangled him. I've existed through a number of different ways over the years. I came to London and taught a little bit for a number of years in order to support my work, and

then found other sources to support specific objects and projects. I had a combination of teaching, awards and funding from other sources. So pulling a number of things together really. There would be times when I didn't have to depend on things like teaching, but as an artist, you put a number of things together.

JH: Where was your preferred context for the works to be shown?

MSJ: I suppose at the end of the day, the preferred context for my work is the gallery, both for the video type works and the object based works. I've worked everywhere. I've worked on ferries, in supermarkets, on television, on the street, in landscape, in all different types and places. I've made performance work and I've made video installation work, but I suppose the considered space is the gallery. Of that nature, it is probably the space I feel most happy with. I remember walking into a pub called The Hen and Chickens once in Brecon in Wales. I'd got something like 180 slides strapped to my head. I was being booed and shouted at. "Here comes the Arts Council grant" was shouted. But, by 3 o'clock, I'd got the whole of this pub stood on stools quoting poetry and offering all sorts of different things. I think art can change people. Creativity can change people. But, like everybody or everything else, you're only alive as long as you are alive for. It's a good question as to which is the best context. I suppose the best context is the gallery.

JH: Why do you prefer the gallery space? You've worked across many different spaces. Is it because the gallery is specifically for art?

MSJ: No, it's the space that you don't get threatened in so much. It's a more considered space. I was on the Tube a few years ago in Oxford Circus. I got this wonderful image and thought, "I have to make a piece of work about this". As the train pulled out from the empty tube platform, a man leapt on, but his head got stuck in the doors. The funny thing was, he was wearing a bowler hat on his head. As the doors crushed his face and he went very purple, I remember thinking, "For Christ's Sake he's going to kill himself!" He sucked his face in, pulled his head out, and the doors slammed shut in front of him. He was left standing on the platform as the train pulled away, while all that was left on the train, was a spinning bowler hat on the floor. It was a beautiful image. That was my perception of something, which could be art. I see things now, which could be art in the street, and I've done many different things in different contexts. But, I still feel that the type of work I make, or have come to make over the years, having tried all these different situations, I still prefer the possibility of anyone coming through that door, from any walk of life, as long as they can give a little bit of time and thought to something other than everything else. One of the struggles with the context, which is why I think it's such an interesting question is how you get through that business of fighting against everything else in order for people to see something as close to the way you want them to experience it as possible. I spent time in Japan, and in Japan, I think some of the issues and some of the images related to the Shinto shrines. That is extremely beautiful and extremely wonderful because the context is being provided in a very particular type of way. When I look at a Monet painting, or a Rembrandt. I want to be alone with it. I don't want to be with the traffic lights at the same time. I think that is quite important.

JH: One thing we don't have in this country, is a dedicated space for the claims of work that have happened in the late 20th Century. With moving image works, we don't have a place at all.

MSJ: It's amazing isn't it? They set up a museum like the Tate, and that and yet its relationship to moving image is extremely small.

JH: Do you think you have achieved your ambitions with dissemination, or were there things that you'd really like to do that you haven't yet done?

MSJ: I don't think any artist can ever really complete their ambitions. The business of being an artist is a positive thing. You've got to be extremely positive about things, but at the same time, I think every artist in one sense underachieves otherwise they wouldn't do what they do. It gets you up in the morning. There are lovely stories about Picasso, and trying to get him out of the bed. Sometimes in the morning, it was really difficult to get him out of bed. He'd get a black cloud on his head and say, "Oh God I'm the worst person on the Planet Earth". This was coming from one of the greatest artists of his own time. So, no is the answer. I don't think I have achieved my ambitions. I think the relationship between context and dissemination is interesting but it's a complicated question. It goes back a little bit to the business of showing on television. You show on television and you say "Seven and a half million people saw my work last night; that's good!" Then you show it in a gallery and maybe, six or seven people see it in a day. Maybe 87,000 people see it in a month if it's at the National Portrait Gallery. So, I don't think it's about quantity.

JH: Maybe it's about connection? Maybe the question should be about whether you have connected with your audience?

MSJ: That's a good question. It's interesting to question the relationship between the artist and the audience, as to whether one ever completely fulfils or feels that they have reached their target. For example there's a friend of mine called Karl Hyde who is the lead singer with Underworld. He is a wonderful man. We hadn't met for 20 years. He helped me with my show when I was an art student. Karl has been very successful with his music. He said an interesting thing to me when we met. We were sat having a cup of tea together in Selfridges and he said, "My last memory of you, was 20 years ago when you were sat on a step dressed as a radish; and I said to myself, I don't want to be like that. I don't want to look or be like that." For 20 years he couldn't get that image out of his head, so he had to ring me up. I think that's interesting in terms of the way we are as people, and the effect that creativity or making art, can have on people. You meet people, many years later, who had seen a video piece or a performance piece or whatever, and they have carried it through their lives in their heads, and in a small way it's changed. It's put another bit of the jigsaw in place for them. I think that in terms of reaching the audience and the answer to your question, is no, I don't think I've completely reached or completely satisfied my ambitions. But, I think that the wonderful part, is when you do actually make a connection with someone.

JH: Were there any specific facilitators or curators that were important to your work?

MSJ: There have been a number of people who have been very helpful and instrumental over the years. A number of those people are from outside of Britain. In the 80's Steve Rogers, who sadly died at the end of the 80's, was extremely important. He became a manager and he was very helpful, very supportive and very knowledgeable about the way the arts worked. He was brilliant. Then there were other people like Nina Colosi in New York, who has been a wonderful supportive to my work, and Tatiana Kolodzei in Moscow, who has also been very important to my work. Then there were the people at the National Portrait Gallery in the 90's, who were very helpful and supportive of something, which was difficult for them to deal with. I think one forgets sometimes that institutions move at the pace of a snail and that even the people in institutions who wish to push and progress stuff, sometimes they can't. They often can't because they are up against all sorts of difficult things, administration etc. So yes, there have been a whole number of people who have been important. There's a massive list of people I could mention and talk about being wonderful, but there is also a list of other people I could talk about as not being wonderful.

JH: What critical feedback or public attention did the work attract? The reason I ask that question and the other question as well, is because part of the project is to excavate things that weren't necessarily written down. So it's quite important to mention people that were important because they might not be mentioned already. Critical feedback is also important because there may have even been verbal feedback about your work.

MSJ: Living, or being based in Britain is a mystery, I think. I don't know whether it's because we are work based or what, but it is a bit of a mystery being in Britain. The critical feedback has probably come about later rather than earlier in my lifetime, which I was expecting. Earlier on, your critical feedback was whether you got an Arts Council grant or not. Sometimes you got three lines in the Sun newspaper, but that was your critical feedback. Occasionally you would get something in Studio International. In art schools, they prepare you a little bit for how to deal with things, where you've got to be proactive in terms of actually connecting the brain and the hand: the thinking and the practice. When I left art school, you were thrown out on the street and that was it. It was great because I met so many wonderful people and that but the art of survival was slightly different. More recently, I think things have become more reflective. I think that people are starting to see the work as a package. Over the history of the last 20 years it's changed. Tracy Emin came down to Cornwall and gave a talk. The astonishing thing about Tracey Emin is her prerogative. She spoke about her work as if she just sprang out of the ground, in a "Nothing else happened; I just was here" sense. That's great, but it is a load of bollocks as well. It is not true. There were a lot of other things that had gone on before. So I think it's an interesting question.

JH: Is that to do with context, which is the whole celebrity culture and the whole idea of the 90's of "There is no history"?

MSJ: Yes, I think it was that. I think the other thing is that it goes back to where I've been coming from with this medium. Why did I use video? Why did I use performance? The fact it's ephemeral. It was the fact that it's short-lived. It's a medium that's more like a butterfly than a gorilla. It floats somewhat. The market really rules the day at the end of the day. Teaching in art schools now, I'm aware that it is very much market driven. That's

what it is. The 90's sprang up with this other set of values, which was trying to tip things on its head. There is a market. There was a SAATCHI market, which had been invented. It was great for the time, but obviously its consequences was to knock out the previous 10 or 12 years that had happened with a medium, which was not particularly popular, even though it was a populist medium. In some ways it is testament to the medium that in itself, video is a populist medium and yet the video artist never became that popular.

JH: But that's a social supervene on necessity. If there is a social need for it, it will be a populist thing, but there wasn't. The market wasn't there. It was a bit too soon. The 90s prove that. You go down to the Tate Gallery and it's packed. It's a different climate. The Saatchi thing created an advertising context for artists. I think the kind of philosophical reason d'etre for video art, from the 70's certainly, was that it was ephemeral. It was a non-saleable thing.

MSJ: No that's right. I can remember collectors and curators saying, "This is great work but we couldn't possibly have it in our gallery, or try and sell it, because you just can't collect this stuff" It was non-collectable. I remember Bonhams and the people that do the auction stuff there. In the 80's there was some charity event and they asked me to put a piece of work forward. I gave them a videotape and I remember the man picking the videotape and saying to me, "What's this?" In trying to sell it they said, "We can't possibly sell this. It's a video." There were other bizarre situations like curators that didn't know anything about video, but they had a video machine at home. When they went in the gallery they went "Uh-oh", but in actual fact they would switch their video on at home. It's peculiar. It's like the left hand and the right hand not being able to talk to each other. But it was to do with the market then, it was to do with collectability. Other artists have probably got different views about how that history is being told and how that sprang up, but my view of it came through performance art and into video because it connected totally with my philosophy and my way of thinking about the way creativity should form its own context and have its own arena, which I could inhabit. Of course the dangers of that, are that you remain more underground than underground, if that's possible. You lie beneath the dead. But, that's the territory you enter. It's like Michael Foot and the Labour Party. You remain badly dressed and hang on in there with what your beliefs are as an artist. I think the beliefs and the thinking was always much more important to me throughout and remain that way.

JH: Did you sell any work? Have you got any work in collections?

MJS: Yes, I've got work in collections. There are works in at the National Portrait Gallery and there are works in private collections.

JH: So you sold work to individuals?

MSJ: Yes

JH: Did you sell that through a gallery or was that through private interaction with someone and they saw the work?

MSJ: It was a combination. It was really a combination. It's never really been through a gallery. I had galleries that represented my work but in a combination of ways. It was not in the way whereby I could retire tomorrow.

JH: It's quite unusual. Not may artists that we have interviewed for REWIND have said that they sold pieces of work. It maybe more frequent as we go down the list towards the 90's.

MSJ: There have been quite a few commissions that I'd done as well. It's been a combination of commissions and selling work and then self-funding the work and thing like that.

JH: The National Portrait Piece, is that still running?

MSJ: They show the pieces every so often. In 2000, there was quite an important show for me: *Painting The Century 101 Portrait Masterpieces*. They chose an artist from each era of the 20th century and there were some very good artists in there. I showed *Boy / Girl* a video diptych, which was a video projection piece. It was a great thing to be involved with because it put the work in a credible context. It was quite nice for me because it brought the work back on to a point to say, "Hang on a minute, this is the past. And this is the present future, slipping into the 21st century15 years later." Nevertheless, it was good. So to be stood up against Picasso, Warhol and Bacon, amongst others, was good for the work and it was good for video. It was quite an important thing to be involved with.

JH: Were there any of your works that lead any of the contemporaneous philosophical debates at the time? You talked about the Portrait pieces. Were those key?

MSJ: They were funny actually. When I look back on them, as I can now, of course they were funny because they bridged a number of landmasses between video, the gallery, institutions, the hip and the hop. The bridged a number of different cultural trends at the time. There was a group of video people that didn't like them because they saw them as a bridge. Then there was the institutionalised people that looked at them with knitted eyebrows as if to say, "Now where is this coming from?" Then there were writers and people that were more critical, who were seeing where the bridges were, and were trying to connect them. Sean Cubbit saw the connectivity between what the possibilities were between them. So, they were interesting and it was interesting that Sam Taylor-Wood did a video portrait of David Beckham in a recent show, because I think that picked it back up again.

JH: Did she acknowledge your work?

MSJ: No, I didn't expect that to happen. It's not hip to acknowledge the past. But, I thought that was interesting.

JH: When you say that some of the video artists at the time, didn't acknowledge or didn't agree with the work, why was that?

MSJ: They agreed to the work a little bit coolly. There was some mumblings that they weren't very enthusiastic about that particular type of work at that time.

JH: Was that coming from LVA people or from elsewhere?

MSJ: No, it was from other organisations on the edge of that probate. It's interesting. One or two have recently said to me that the work was ahead of its time. But, I thought "Well, if it was so ahead of its bloody time, why didn't you support it at the time?" There's always a little bit of that. But that's the past and just the way it went.

JH: Were there any critical or philosophical discourses that you agreed or disagreed with at the time?

MSJ: It's a difficult one. There were a number of art critics I didn't really agree with. One of whom, I threw out of a show I had. I did a video portrait of July Walters and he came along to review the show for a couple of newspapers. He said, "Oh this is disgusting! I can not understand this accent! I don't understand this accent! This is neither total art nor total portraiture. I just can't understand it." It was because I did a portrait called *The Actress of July Walters* with Anne Wilson when we were working together at the time. Of course, she always spoke with a Birmingham accent, which is what I made her to do. I asked her to do it because she likes to be directed. This was partly why some of the video lot didn't like the fact that I was working with people like this at the time. It was a very thick Birmingham accent that she came out with, and of course it doesn't take much to upset various parts of people's worlds.

JH: But in a way it's a good thing.

MSJ: Yes. Well what was wonderful about that particular experience was that I then went round, and switched all the works off. I think there was about 9 or 10 video portraits in the show. I switched them all off and said, "Right you are not going to review my work". It was wonderful, you just click the button and the painting doesn't exist anymore. So, I was then told, "You can not deny the art critic access to the art". You can with video.

JH: It wasn't Brian Sewell was it?

MSJ: I was just trying not to mention his name, but yes, it was. He obviously didn't think video was art, but then again, I don't think he thinks anything is art necessarily, unless it is something, which dates between 1500 and 1712.

JH: He has a particular field. Everyone has their preference.

MSJ: I think though, the thing with video art was that it wasn't necessarily to do with content. It was to do with the actual medium itself, which caused the problem.

JH: Right, because it was subversive as soon as you put it on in a gallery space.

MSJ: It was subversive. The video portraits tried to talk about that. They tried to establish further that debate between the tradition of using the frame and the contemporary use of the medium. It also represented, as we said before, a popular culture in television. So, it

had all the wrong type of signals, which could possibly be thrown up at that particular time. It still does to a degree.

JH: Going back to the contextual critical writing, presumably we are talking about the 80's at that early period, were you familiar with David Hall's writing or for example, or Peter Gidal's or Tamara Kirkorian's? Was that a debate that you weren't interested in, given that you were interested in performance debate and possibly painting, or fine art, as it was called at that point?

MSJ: It's true. I was not interested in that moving image debate. I was interested in the performance and the fine art debate. That was the area that I came from. That was the area that intrigued me the most and I wasn't that interested in the debates around deconstructing the filmic image or whatever. I'd read about it, but it wasn't that I dismissed it, it was that it wasn't something that was central to my way of thinking. The debate came out much more to do with the semi-political debates around what the medium itself could achieve in relation to other areas. The reason I've welcomed very much the digital experience, is the fact that it has managed to combine things, which I like very much and appreciate that way. It's set up by the critical debates in terms of the way it operates and it combines the things. It brings things together.

JH: What ideas and other artists work influenced your work, and what inspired you?

MSJ: That's a long question and it's a long answer. I was at a conference a couple of weeks ago. There was a wonderful speaker who was talking about museums. I was going to ask something, but I couldn't formulate the question. It was impossible and I found myself sat in this conference going cock-eyed, trying to formulate the question. I could only make it into a sort of memory. I was born in Birmingham and the first time I went to an art gallery museum I was shocked with what was in it. For some reason and I don't know why, this may sound extremely naïve but I didn't expect those things to be in it. It was full of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, which looked like something else. It was full of classical sculptures or neo-classical sculptures, which I couldn't relate to. The conference was very much about museums and the way they are structured, particularly from the Victorian age, which was bonkers. I remember in the museum, there was a Jan Dibbets installation piece. I remember that really struck me because it was the first time I really encountered anything, which was contemporary art in that context and I understood that a lot more. I don't know why because it was a completely abstract piece of work. It was a colour piece. But, I understood it, or I thought I did. The other stuff I didn't understand at all. That was in the 60's. The Pre-Raphaelite works are extraordinary heavy. They tread the boards of history in a very peculiar way, I think. They also depressed me because they are also about the things I don't like about Birmingham. So they have a double layer sandwich for me. But, as I've said before, I come from the Midlands where you are expected to go to a car factory or something. There's nothing wrong with it, but I didn't want to do that. I wanted to be a professional footballer, that's what I wanted to be. The trouble was, I kept seeing the grass as being an extraordinary experience and when the flood lights came on, I became interested in all these special effects so that was another form of theatricality that I liked. I liked the fact that the grass got greener when the lights went on and that the costumes got brighter. One of my first performance pieces I did about football.

JH: Do you think you articulated it like that when you were young? Do you think that you were thinking along those lines when did your father take to you to the art gallery you were 9 or 10 years old? You must have been aware, from that experience that there existed this other thing, this other place, where other things were possible.

MSJ: I think that was it. I thought there were other ways of thinking and that was extraordinary. Then gradually the business of contemporary artists started to drift upon me. I became intrigued as to why people did things and that you can do things differently. Then I met all the British performance artists who were doing things like giving bread and jam away on the street, which was ridiculous. There were people like Roland Miller and Rob Con. There was a whole nest of performance artists who were doing really peculiar things like wearing art costumes and stuff. That really did turn my lights on. I thought, "This is extraordinary. This is magic!" I think that that then connected with what was possible with video. You could articulate it into something. I think that was very important. Then there was a whole suave of artists who had run through my experience, who have been absolutely fascinating for me. I think the original British Performance artists that I was involved with in the 70's, were a big influence on me: people like Roland Miller, Rob Con, Stuart Brisley and other people like that. I thought this was amazing. I started off as a performance artist in the late 70's and then started working with another artist in the 80's, Anne Wilson. We worked together through the 80's, which was great. We travelled throughout the world with video and performance and all the rest. Then I got involved in London Video Arts. Getting involved in London Video Arts was great for me because it focused not only on the equipment in the workshop side but it also started to focus where people were thinking. They were coming at it in their own way. They were approaching video in a structured way or in a formalist way. But there was were also approaching video in a performance way by people like Jez Welsh, David Critchley, Cate Elwes and even David Larcher as a filmmaker on the outside. There was a whole group of people there. LVA was wonderful. It was a new experiment. I think the thing about it was that it really felt like it was a new medium. It was a new thing that was opening up and all of the difficulties of that were amazing. I thought that was important.

JH: Did you get to the Filmmakers Co-op? There was a tradition of performance there.

MSJ: I did one of my first performance pieces at the ACME gallery, but I did a performance piece at the London Filmmakers Co-op as well. That was one of the things that I always felt slightly aside, because I was straddling the two areas. It was a bit of, "Oh, he is a performance artist". So, there was always that straddling of at least two or three different things.

JH: Did you feel that you were less likely to be labelled at LVA? People were coming form lots of different media including sound and film, whereas the Co-op was specifically for film by that point.

MSJ: Yes, the Filmmakers Co-op was very particular to film. I showed some films at the London Filmmakers Co-op when I first came to London, but they kept breaking in the gate. They kept snapping apart. Nevertheless, they were well received. I learnt that I could articulate

the technology and I think that was the thing about video I loved. It was that you had something, which you could really get your teeth into and you could use in lots of different ways. I felt there was a lot of potential with video because it was at the beginning of its history. Film felt fine, but somehow, I didn't feel like a manipulator in the way I would like to. With video I could quickly get to grips with it. Film felt laboured to me. I love film. I think it's a wonderful medium, but it felt laboured for me.

JH: What about the separate communities of the Co-op and LVA? Was it really that you were interested in being with the LVA community more than the filmmakers? It was different from the States, which had a merged situation, whereas in Britain it was separate. Did you feel that it was philosophically separate as well?

MSJ: I think it was, yes. Other people have their own views, but my sense of it was that there was a clear definition. There were the filmmakers and then there were the video lot. There were different groups. I remember, I used to go into the Royal College of Art because a friend of mine used to be a student down there on the filmmaker course. It was all about deconstruction. It was radical and it was meaningful. For me, I just felt that it was different. It just felt a bit laden. The attraction of video was that was new. It was unbroken ground. That was what was interesting about the group of people as well. Even though were a few technical people there who were the type to say, "Hey you folded the leads up" and all the rest of it, there was more a sense of, "you can get hold of this thing and you can swing it around. You can find out what it can do. I think that was an important thing for my mind. It was an unexplored area. It felt like that and that was good.

JH: What about the sound on your works? Did you make your own sound?

MSJ: Yes, I can't stand appropriated sound.

JH: When you say "appropriated sound" do you mean composed sound added on?

MSJ: Yes, I don't understand why people do that. I made my own sound, yes. I've just completed a piece, which I've just shown in Argentina. It is called *Homage* and has something to do with it. You make the image and you make the sound, you make as much as it as you do as you possibly can. I was talking to Cate Elwes about this a couple of years ago. What I didn't like about film was that you had to send it away. I always felt frustrated by the fact you had to send it away. It would go somewhere and then if you were lucky, it came back and then when it did come back, if you were lucky, it would come out. That loop was just frustrating. But, with video you pressed the button and "Wallop!" there you were. It's not just that, it's a philosophical thing as well. I found video very abstract. It was to do with not being able to see it, not even holding it up and seeing it. Now, with video, you can see it frame by frame. You can make it appear and disappear. I like the idea of how you make the mistakes with it as well. You can make a mistake with it very quickly. So, all those sorts of things added up to a way of thinking and a way of dealing with it, with an immediacy and a completeness, which I found really exciting and still do.

JH: And sound was part of that process?

MSJ: Yes, sound was part and parcel of that process. But, I suppose in a way, it's the image. Adding sound can change it, which is extraordinary as well. At its best, I think the most enjoyable element of video, is when you bring it all together. It is when you bring the sound, the performance, the lightning and the editing together and get away with it.

JH: Could you talk about your collaborations with other artists? Who did you collaborate with, when did you collaborate with them and which works were produced as a result?

MSJ: In the late 70s and the early 80s, I worked on my own. Then, around 1982, I worked with another artist. We worked together for a number of years on a number of pieces, performance installation and video pieces. I worked with Ann Wilson for that period of time. We toured performance and video and everything. We made all our stuff for television and started the video portraits together in the early 90s. That was a very productive time. It was very interesting to work with somebody else as well and the difficulties and the joy of working with somebody else, which was great, because two brains are sometimes better than one. So, the late 80s were a very productive time in that sense.

JH: Have you collaborated with any other artists or was that the major collaboration?

MSJ: That's been the major collaboration. I have collaborated with other artists, but to a lesser degree. I've done things with other artists groups, whereby we've done tours together or we've had exhibitions together or we've collaborated on panels or things like that. But, there's quite a joy to work on your own as well. Going back to the medium of video, one of the things about this medium is because it was set up as an industry. I was talking to the professor of film, up at the University of Hertfordshire and we were talking about all the different parts to film and television making. You've got the producer. You've got the director. You've got the lighting person, the camera, the grid etc. You could end up with 450,000 people involved in something. But when you do it all yourself, it's extraordinary. I remember a BBC cameraman looking at a piece of work of mine once, and saying, "Oh you should put down the tripod. You should have had a dolly there" or "you should have had this and that". It's not really the point. It's only part of the point. Then there's the massive collaboration with television and the industry. I think, being a visual artist, that that can kill a visual artist. I'm intrigued that some artists have gone down that rout completely and use other camera people. I think it's amazing, but I found that I couldn't easily do that. I suddenly found myself in this detached position of director or performer or something. I was mainly a director and I never really felt that comfortable with that. I felt much more comfortable when I could spin the camera around my head or get off the script. I think that answers a lot of questions about collaboration, about the industry, about writing proposals, all these different areas that you have to deal with as an artist. The less you have to deal with that, is sometimes the better.

JH: I think that's a question about intuitive process isn't it? It's about finding that intuitive process with the technology, which is actually effectively an industrial technology.

MSJ: Yes, I think that's right. I think that interface between yourself and the medium and how you can actually use it is extremely important. But, it is also to do with the sort of person you are and whether you can sit down and write a script or use words to do what you want to do. I use a lot of visual images and drawings. The work comes very much through that, and if anything in terms of process, it's to do with the process of trying to reach, particularly with the works I've been doing recently, a state of meaninglessness as I call it, whereby it's not about creating meaning. It's about trying to create a sense of meaninglessness. That in itself is quite difficult because as human beings and as creative people, sometimes we slip back into the narrative or we slip back into the three-part action of the way life is, with a beginning, middle and an end. To try, without using the word deconstruct, reach that point, intuitively with a given medium is important. I think that was also one of the frustrations about film. I didn't feel I was engaged with it in that sense. The wonderful thing about performance is that it's a marvel. You are there straightaway. You are nowhere else. You are there.

JH: Were you part of any other community or collective group of artists during your career?

MSJ: As I said before, I was part of the London Video Arts setup in the 80's and then moved from there when LVA had some difficulty with its name, just preceding the LUX move, when it merged with the Filmmakers Co-op. I removed myself a bit. I always remained slightly outside of that context because I didn't want to get embroiled with the politics of it. I was involved as a workshop member with LVA in the 80's and used their facilities. I used the all U-matic decks and made performances there. I did things on coaches and things like that. I showed when Jez Welsh, Dave Critchley and Steven Partridge were there. I wouldn't say I was part of the inner circle I would say I was part of the outer circle. There's a bus in Birmingham called the Inner Circle, the number 11, and then there's the outer circle. I was on the outer circle bus.

JH: Do you believe there were any collective goals of LVA when you were a part of it?

MSJ: I think one of the main goals was to actually set up an institution, which could share equipment and workshop equipment and allow people a reasonably rated access to equipment for making video work. It was also to facilitate a library of work, tapes and some exhibition opportunities. I think that was the goal. They were the goals that I related to and thought worked well at that time. It facilitated well at that time and being on the outer circle it was very, very useful. It was good to be with like-minded people. Other than the equipment issues, it was good to be with people that were driving in the same type of direction; even though sometimes they were coming from different angles and different factions. I think that was never that strongly evident though. It was a good ship to be on at the time.

JH: Obviously you shared each others work, and you saw each others work, but did you see any sort of other international works? When you went to festivals, as something that was part of your process, did you see other works?

MSJ: There were the things that LVA set up: the connections with Canada and all the Canadian artists. I went all across Canada showing video works and was involved in some of those

video showings in Canada. I thought that was a very strong link and that was interesting because of the types of philosophy and thinking that was coming out of Canada at that time. I liked the structure of the Canadian art scene in terms of its network of artist centres. It felt to me very much that Canada had invested in the new technology at that time and that artists were using it quite straightforwardly there, which was good. There were centres in that western front in Vancouver and other places, in Toronto etc. That was very purposeful in the 80's. There was a good connection there.

JH: Did the British work translate to Canada? Was the British work seen by Canadians or did the artists have to tour it themselves?

MSJ: It was a combination of both. I toured Canada and the States a lot then, but there were packages of video that would go out to Canada and other places as well which would be viewed. I think that, particularly in Canada, it always went down well because it was understood in terms of where it was coming from philosophically, politically and socially. I felt that was probably more so in Canada than the States, but I always felt there was a strong connection there. But, there were connections in other places as well, like in Holland, which was a particularly strong one. More recently I've been showing in Russia, Japan, South America and the United States. I think that it's taken a long while for some of the thinking to catch up a little bit in terms of the work's roots and where it has come from. It's taken a longer time and has its own difficulties and its own individual difficulties. Its not necessarily part of a package as such.

JH: Do you think you were responding to a wider international movement with your work?

MSJ: I think so yes, having just come back from Buenos Aires, and sitting on a panel with an artist from Brazil and artist from Argentina, New York, Britain, Poland. I think it's even more responsive now than ever. It's more evident than ever that there is an international sense of purpose, which comes through artists work all over the world. I'm saying that from a western perspective of course, but I think there's always been a sympathetic connectivity between artists, even when they are fighting. I do get a sense that there is an international context or a sensibility, which people speak the same language of.

JH: Do you think as an artist it's important that you connect with that international tribe rather than just being in the UK?

MSJ: Yes I do. I couldn't have existed within the bubble in the UK. I think it's absolutely imperative. There is the thing that a Prophet is not necessarily known in his or her own land, and also, I think the thing is with it, is that it feeds into the work. It gives you a sense that other people are there. It's like the invention of the motorcar or something, it's always happening in more than one place. You can't really pin it down to one place. For me, it has fed into the work, like going to Russia and doing a residency in Moscow. I had a show in Moscow about three years ago, it was a three-screen installation piece, *The Journey of St.Maurin*. I shot it in France and showed it in Moscow at the National Centre For Contemporary Art. The day after, the fuse blew. It was typical of Moscow. Everything went blank. The fuse was very big. It was not a little fuse. So someone's got to invent it again or something. But, the whole experience of being there and dealing with a language,

which you don't necessarily speak, but knowing that the language of the visual arts is universal, is great. I think that's the thing about visualisation of any shape or form, with moving image, people pick it up and use it. That's what they do.

JH: What are your most recent works or works in progress?

MSJ: The background to the most recent works over the last 4 or 5 years are works which are generally dealing with this notion of existing somewhere between the moving and the static. The pieces take the shape or form of installation pieces like the show at the Chelsea Art Museum in New York, which was a four-channel video installation dealing with notions to do with journey and notions very much to do with self as well. So nothing's changed really about my work in that sense, but I am re-exploiting this notion between where we exist and what the camera does or what the camera can throw up in terms of illuminating or extending that thought. What I mean by that is how the camera can travel and how the camera can view things. Whether it's viewing the person, or whether it's the person viewing something outside of the person, or whether it's to do with a form of rotation or a form of travel with the camera, which can throw up other possibilities. So it's very much the process and the form that it can actually take I'm trying to deal with in a sense. The piece I showed in Argentina, *Homage*, is the first single-channel 7 or 8-minute video that I've made for a long time. It is a type of video portrait, but is very much to do with trying to reach a platform for the work, which extends beyond logical thinking or logical meaningfulness. So it's about trying to reach another platform in order to attain the work.

JH: Was that piece exhibited in a gallery space? Was it shown as a projection?

MSJ: It was both. *Homage* was shown as a projection piece on a loop, but it has also been shown as a miniature video portrait as well. It's got sound. It's got a sort of chanting sound with it as well. So, it combines sound and performance and editing an image together. It also combines the notion or the idea of views in static images and moving images at the same time as well. The video portraits that I made in the 90's combined the idea of using miniature portraits or single monitor portraits or multi-monitor portraits. Those pieces were very much about fragmentation. Whether it was actually used in a piece like in *The Dancer* or *The Swimmer* at the National Portrait Gallery, with 11 channels of information and the notion that time is running along one way but also the image is fragmenting another way. Then the sound is doing something else as well. So, that was very much about trying to break the image up and deal with the way it fragments in a particular type of way through using those multi-channel effects. I used the word effects carefully. The recent works are much more about moving it on from there and talking about what can be achieved with video projection and what can be achieved using the camera and performance to try and break up or fragment that image in quite an abstract way. So they are different processes really. The portraits in the 90's were using TV monitors, which could be flat screens now. I don't really mind whether I use monitors or projectors. It is horses for courses in that sense, but I am quite happy using monitors, especially flat screens. I wish flat screens had been available in the early 1990s. I could have used them beautifully. I remember ringing up the engineer up at the University of Cambridge and talking to the liquid crystal department. They were working with televisions. I

remember asking them if I could get a big one. He said, "Oh no, the technology is not there." Now of course, it's all over the place for £300.

JH: I wanted them because I was interested in screen-space and touch-active spaces. I wanted a big flat screen, almost like a sheet of glass and that was only 10 years ago. Obviously, it wasn't possible then, Steve Littman said "Oh well, they'll soon bring out LEDs in a roll, like paper."

MSJ: Yes, it'll be like the pages in a book.

JH: Yes, I would love that, although I haven't seen one yet. But it would be great. You could just pin it up somewhere like the paper. Then it could be intuitive.

MSJ: I would absolutely love that. It would be wonderful I think. But, it is funny how formal video is as a medium. We talk about all this flexibility. We talk about how flexible and how quick and all that it is, but it's also quite fixed in terms of the industrial technology of it and how it's commercially related. It's very much about working round that as well. I say to students, that the thing about this stuff is that you get somebody in front of a video camera, they are full of a sense of "Wow, that's me" and then that wears off. Then what happens is they have to start to deal with it and it's strange. That is extremely difficult to deal with because it is so available and it is so vanitas as well. It's a sort of yin and yang thing, whereby you get this initial fervour with the stuff. Then gradually that wears off and you've got to deal with it. It's actually quite a difficult thing to deal with because it's presenting you with a set of problems. It's not like paint or pencils. It's then setting you another set of problems that you have to deal with. You deal with it here or you deal with it there, and you deal with it afterwards. It can be very tight.

JH: I think it's like sculpture. It has the same problems for me as sculpture because it has the potential of being something extraordinary. A sculpture has endless possibilities. You've got space, time and physicality. You can have anything, but then you can't because you have the restriction of the materials you are using. Plaster is fixed once it's dried and the same with clay. So, I didn't see it dissimilar to other art forms.

MSJ: I think it is interesting. It's a bit of a trite thing to say, but it is this notion of sculpting in time. With the recent pieces that I've been dealing with I'd thought about that in a more fluid way, whereby trying to get to grips with this notion of actually what is it. What is this stuff? What can it do? How can you get to grips with it and use it in a way whereby you can reach another point with it? I think that business of how it travels, how it runs, how it uses itself, how it deals with time is like performance in that sense. It is sculpting in time. It's time-based in that sense and it's an old-world time-based media, the old British art school world. But I think it's a rather wonderful term as well.

JH: There was a bit of contention about who came up with that terminology actually. Apparently John Latham came up with the term "time-based art". I don't think it was just his terminology. The notion of time-based was historical but "time-based art" was a specific term coined by John Latham. "Time-based media" is a bit of an oxymoron though. I'm not sire you can have such a thing.

MSJ: I don't think you can, no. I always thought it was funny all those struggles in the art schools to say, this is painting and this is sculpture and this is time-based media: the other thing.

JH: Is there anybody specifically who inspired your work?

MSJ: The people that inspired me to work in the field of art and to become an artist were very much the early British performance artists. I think that was a very big pull on me and I do think that the business of coming out of working class Birmingham, which was a hard environment, and having had an odd and difficult childhood, the performance artists I ran into were extraordinary I think. That really gave me another view of things. I pay homage to people like Beuys as well. There is a whole list of artists that I could go though and movements, which I could say inspired me to make art, but I think I'll leave it there for now.

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