

INTERVIEW

SANDS & RADNA

(ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

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(English translation)

Filename: interview sands radna in dutch.wav
Date: 8 October 2019
Duration: 00:43:19
Speakers: Sands Murray-Wassink, Radna Rumping
Location: First (small) studio at Rijksakademie van beeldende
kunsten, Amsterdam
Transcription date: 2 December 2020
Transcribed by: Martha Jager
Translated from Dutch
to English by: Martha Jager

00:00:02 Sands Murray-Wassink: So Tracey [Emin]... Elke [Krystufek] would never say such a thing. Elke was much more nuanced than that. She read a bit too much of Slavoj Žižek and all those great thinkers. Star intellectuals... that wasn't really my interest, but she was interested in all kinds of so-called great thinkers. And I somehow distrust those super famous intellectuals. Because I think you can be smart without having an academic background. I never wanted an academic background because I thought: if you live, you know things about life, that is philosophy to me. And when you write you are a writer. You don't have to have a degree, or a PhD, or whatever, and I never wanted that. I was very sure of that from the age of sixteen or so. I was very good, I got high marks. And you may not know that either, but when I went to Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, art school, I had a full scholarship. I had \$100,000 or so for four years. I had so much money, I had money left to buy clothes and stuff and my tuition was paid, my room where I stayed, food, just everything. And after two years I quit. I left because I hated it. It was a terrible art school, the only thing I liked was that I got to know Carolee Schneemann. And it was worth those two years... so I don't have a degree. My parents are cultural. My father is an artist I would say, and also a poet, but it was never important for him to be present professionally, he does things for himself and for our family. So, that was my example. And my great-grandmother was also a painter and she also painted for herself, she has never had an exhibition in her whole life. And she turned 95 or so. She started painting at the age of forty-five because... Well maybe not because... Because her husband cheated on her and the relationship broke down. And then she discovered that she had talent, because she made abstract expressionist paintings. I thought her work was pretty good actually, but she never wanted to make a career out of it or anything like that. So my examples have always been people doing it for themselves and not for money or professionalism or fame or things like that. So that's why I'm a bit rebellious against people who make it very clear that they have a PhD. I think that's all unimportant, that says nothing at all.

00:03:43 Radna Rumping: Shall I ask my four questions?

00:03:46 SMW: Yeah, yeah.

00:03:48 RR: Well, the questions are... because I thought it would be nice if we get to know a little bit more about how you handle archives and what is important to you.

00:03:50 SMW: Yeah...

00:03:57 RR: We already talked a bit about Acceptance Art and about making no distinctions and all that. But maybe another question would be: what is it that you really need? Where do you want to be in a year? What do you want to get out of it yourself?

00:04:16 SMW: Above all, I want to be smarter in dealing with the space that I have. I think things need to be much more organized and categorized in one way or another. I never want to be efficient, I don't think that's important, but I do want to be effective. Those two words go together a bit. Effectiveness and ...what did I say? Efficient and effective – I don't want to be efficient, but I do want to be effective, so I especially want to use space smarter. And Robin says that I also have to undergo some kind of change in the way I think and the way I deal with things, papers, paintings or whatever. Because he claims I just drop it somewhere in my room. And he says that must change, because otherwise I will be in the same position again in a few years. So I mainly want to create space. That's really important.

00:05:36 RR: Maybe that also has to do with the moment after making something, right? That moment after?

00:05:42 SMW: Yeah, you mean that change?

00:05:46 RR: Because normally you make something. And then? Do you look at it for a long time? Or does it go through some kind of phase before it ends up somewhere? I have no idea.

00:05:50 SMW: No, usually when I finish something I put it away, my way. Like those paintings on paper that are quite large, on rolls of paper, pieces of rolls of paper:

they are just rolled up in garbage bags. I probably have 100 of them, there are not here yet, but I will have to go through all of that. No, I don't look at it for long. When I'm done with something it's almost as if that energy has left my body and then it's done, and then I just want to put it somewhere or... I'm trying to keep things together, but it's really tricky. Also because I don't have that much space, 25 square meters. Yes, it is very small.

00:06:50 RR: And is it sometimes the case that someone comes to you and you actually feel the need to show something, but because you don't know where something is, you can't show it?

00:07:03 SMW: That almost never happened. I almost always know where things are. But now I'm looking for the first works I made when Carolee was my teacher at Pratt Institute, which are slides because the original works are in Kansas, I think, with my parents. But it's 20 slides and I can't find them. And this morning, funnily enough, I was looking for the light box over there in the other room for the slides. And I found it and under it I found the original pages of *Profeminist White Flowers*. And I would not have known that they were there. And those are works of mine – every two pages is one day, and every one and a half pages is one day, with one photo. So you have text for one and a half pages and then one photo, and that's kind of a diptych, so to say. So there are probably 50 or more of those diptychs... Is it called a diptych? A triptych is three...

00:08:29 RR: Now I'm having doubts myself.

00:08:31 SMW: Diptych (Dutch: diptiek) is also a Dutch word right?

00:08:34 RR: Yes, I think you can also say diptych (Dutch: diptiek).

00:08:40 SMW: You do have a triptych but I don't know if it works for two. But in any case: so I will find things. But it is true: if someone had asked me where are the original pages for *Profeminist White Flowers*, I wouldn't have known where they were.

00:08:59 RR: Yes.

00:08:59 SMW: But usually when people want to see something, then I know where to find it. But it became more and more difficult, also because I could hardly reach it, with certain things. It is no longer feasible to find things, it has become too complicated. There are all kinds of little papers and like those bags I told you about... [points towards bags in the room] like this: bags in bags. And here's a bag in a bag, and these were actually two bags in a bag with all kinds of little things. Oh, and here's another bag. Yes, well, there are a lot of bags.

00:09:56 RR: So basically you say: you want to be more effective, not more efficient, with the space and your work. And you might want a different relationship – like Robin said – that when you make something you don't throw it on a pile somewhere but...

00:10:12 SMW: It must be put away...

00:10:14 RR: So maybe there should also be a moment after making something, a moment of looking at it and thinking about where it fits?

00:10:18 SMW: Where does it fit... Yes, that's never been my main concern or interest. No not at all. No... and that has become a problem.

00:10:32 RR: Are there other things? For example, is there anything that makes you think "I really want to get to that this year?" Could it possibly be about reflection?

00:10:42 SMW: Well, those are mainly things I encounter, triggers so to say. That always does something to me. Like those pictures of our wedding or things like that, to go through those. Those are moments of standing still, of reflecting and of asking: what does that mean? Where does that fit in my life? They are mainly memories, but I also see them as works. The most important things are those slides I think... all the slides I have. I really want to digitize them, because I really see them as a kind of foundation. A base. Also because a lot of those slides are from 93 – 94. So the beginning of my career as a maker, or how would you put it... I actually quite like 'career' I have no problems with that. It almost sounds perverse: career as an artist. Yes, so those slides

are very important. I think I am always someone who actually has the end point in sight. And this is very complicated for me, what we're going to do... or what I'm going to do – and part of it with you. Because I don't know exactly what kind of meaning it will take on- and I don't know what the end result will be. It would be great if people would become more interested (in my work) because I am at If I Can't Dance [I Don't Want To Be A Part of Your Revolution]. Because through them we'll reach a lot of people as they have a very large mail directory. And people keep them in high esteem, I think. It's an institution with a name. So who knows, people might become interested in parts of my oeuvre, such as paintings or prints of slides or digitized images and things like that. I hope it will also make for a professional... 'Breakthrough' is a big word and you can't count on it and it cannot be forced. But I hope it will mean something in such a way. Not in the sense of fame or receiving more attention for my work but ...care. The word I want to say is 'care'.

00:13:39 RR: I think attention can be read in different ways. There's attention which a person can receive from others... But reading carefully, for example, actually means that you read with care. I think the definition of attention in the latter is nice, because in this process, you care for that which you have made and done before. And by doing that you also make it (body of work) more accessible for others to become acquainted and to care.

00:14:10 SMW: Yeah.

00:14:21 RR: Because the moment you enter your studio now, you cannot have that attention. [laughs]

00:14:25 SMW: And Adrian Piper said that. She said if you want to invite curators or anyone else interested in your work. Then, when it's not organized in some way, it's not that appealing or attractive to people. Because they see a mess and think: what should I do with this? They want some kind of structure to hold on to (to enter the work).

00:15:05 RR: Yes, without having to be super 'clean' in my opinion. Because that can also have a different effect.

00:15:10 SMW: Yeah. And I don't think it will ever be that way for me. Because I am naturally very messy and clean in the way I work and live. I live very hard, I think. Also in terms of things... like shoes, I notice that my heels wear off very quickly and things like that. Somehow I exert a lot of force on objects and things in my environment. So that's something I have to take into account, I guess.

00:15:55 RR: And are there things that you have doubts about, or things that make you feel they might form a trap? Or a direction, a mode of working, of which you think we should be cautious?

00:16:07 SMW: Yes, I don't think it (the archive) should return to the state in which it is now. It has to be different. I find it almost fascinating in some way that I have kept all this. And paintings are one thing, but those folders, those big plastic things full of all kinds of... I want to show you something!

00:16:40 RR: Yes.

00:16:41 SMW: [Looks through papers] Yeah, look at this one. These are from de Ateliers and the entire floor was full. There is something on everything.

[reads] "I'm as British as they come", "I'm a real snob", "I'm a bum lover" "I come from a very old family", "I can speak every language fluently", "I love French windows", "dark skies and stars", "I'm a music lover..." And these are just price tags really... "I'm a writer." And I made an installation in de Ateliers with the entire floor full of all kinds of labels.

[continues reading] "My mouth, son of a mother-fucking bitch asshole I tell you I really got something here to take notice of." Yes, this has to take shape in some way. But how? [continues reading] "I'm a wanky guy, I'm highly educated." This is 96, so I was 22 then.

00:18:09 RR: What I actually meant is that this (state of archive) is no longer what you want? ...That things are just somewhere in a plastic folder and are therefore completely inaccessible?

00:18:18 SMW: Yes, exactly. [laughs and reads] These are the prices of works. "I'm a real snob" again. Yes, it just needs to be more structured in one way or another. "I'm well taken care of" Maria Pask said something interesting... Because I was telling her that the works I come across, like these works... I could have made them now. These are not things that I think... That's tricky, because I have a lot of things that I come across... I've been very, very consistent from the age of twenty or so, or younger even. But certainly from the age of twenty. Things haven't really changed. Maria said I have grown as a person, but as an artist I already had the basis for all the thoughts and structures that I wanted to have in my work. About personal things, the distinction between public and private, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality and language. It was all already there. Some artists think in terms of "those were my student days so that is no longer important." But... And that's Acceptance Art again - I see these things as very important. This must mean something. I could never throw it away. Because I think it... [reads] "five thousand pounds, one billion dollars..."

00:20:27 RR: So you don't say 'those were those years' and that was that 'phase'?

00:20:29 SMW: No.

00:20:32 RR: As someone like Adrian Piper might say, for example...

00:20:35 SMW: Yeah, maybe a bit more...

00:20:38 RR: ...like more abstract work, or work that was more about identity.

00:20:49 SMW: Yeah, but she's always... Adrian is always very thoughtful. The way she works is very thorough and thought out. I'm pretty, what do you call that ... productive, actually. I make things very quickly. Those drawings with horses: I can make a work like that in less than three minutes on an A4. Then what does one do with that kind of work? Are they all unimportant things? Should you throw them all away? I think they are all important in one way or another. So that makes it really a challenge to structure. I don't know many artists, personally at least, who are so productive, in such a way that

you make a lot – the volume so to say. So that remains difficult, even with paintings. I think those two lying on the floor (of the room) and most of my paintings... I work for maybe an hour in one sitting, but that's a long time for me and usually I don't work more than one day on one work. When I'm finished, it has been some kind of session, a period of time. And so I see it as a snapshot of an hour or more. But usually I don't proceed with something later on. Sometimes I do when something is very big or when I am very dissatisfied. I even ran into this one [rolls out paper] and this basically failed, but I find it so aesthetically pleasing that I don't want to see it as a failure. Actually it has something. I would show this like this.

00:23:08 RR: But you crossed it out yourself afterwards?

00:23:09 SMW: Yes, yes, yes. Because I thought this work went the complete wrong direction, but actually I think it is quite...I would just hang it somewhere. It has not failed at all. That's also a problem I have – and that's a gift and a problem at the same time – I can hardly ever make something that makes me think: this really failed. Even if I say “this has failed” or if I think it has failed, the next day I will think: that is quite interesting actually, that failure. So it's about value again: the value you attach to things in the sense of “this is better than this”. It doesn't work that way for me. I do like certain things better than others. I don't think this [shows drawing] is that super strong, but what has been written on it, I find hilarious: “being an artist was probably not a very good idea.” There are always parts that I like.

00:24:28 RR: Yes, yes.

00:24:29 SMW: So that makes it very difficult.

00:24:32 RR: And you don't think I'm gonna start over with this work...

00:24:35 SMW: No.

00:24:36 RR: ...and I'm going to emphasize the parts that I find interesting...

00:24:40 SMW: No, no, no, that would be way too... Usually I work in a *trance*, it's not really a *trance* but it does feel like a focus. You can even see it in my eyes. When I take selfies while I am painting, that is a different kind of look, a different feeling and way of looking. It's just different. And I never want to magnify things because I think the moment is very important. The energy that goes through you and on any surface... That's what matters to me.

00:25:43 RR: Otherwise it might become strategic?

00:25:47 SMW: Yes, there are two things I never want to be. Arrogant: for some reason I'm terrified of becoming arrogant. I'm so scared of becoming arrogant that I'm usually way too insecure, I think. And also...what was the second? Strategic: oh no, no, no. I am strategic in my own way, but in a very transparent way. I think being strategic is bad when it's not in public, when someone is suspicious... No, not suspicious, but when someone doesn't admit it or something? I find that very problematic.

00:26:53 RR: Do you actually want to throw things away and have you ever thrown things away?

00:26:57 SMW: Oh, I wanted to say that but I forgot about it! If I throw away or destroy something, I have to recreate it.

00:27:07 RR: Oh...

00:27:07 SMW: Yes, it always returns. And that is very difficult. In principle I never want to throw anything away, because I know that I have to make it again.

00:27:20 RR: Suppose you throw something away; is it that you know (and won't throw away because) “well then I have to make it again tomorrow” or because it gets stuck in your head?

00:27:31 SMW: Yes, it gets stuck in my head.

00:27:33 RR: And do you copy it exactly or is it really only to replace the one you threw away and it could be a new one as well?

00:27:40 SMW: A new one. Like a drawing with a horse or something, if it says ‘I hate life’ and I destroy that work then I have to paint ‘I hate life’ again. Probably

with a horse. And then it exists, as it were, then I don't have to recreate. Because I see it almost – not that I think I'm receiving messages from an unknown creature, or that it's something spiritual or paranormal – but it's a bit like dreaming. Because I feel that if you receive an image or text, if it comes to you in any way, I think it is very important not to edit it. I just want to write it down, or paint it, or whatever. It has to do with thoughts and the structure of your brain. They are all important impulses that I...almost want to catch. In one way or another I want to make sense of the world or something and – and that for me provides something to hold onto. I really see art as a tool, as a tool for living. It's almost spiritual to me. If I didn't have this kind of structure: that my life is my work, let's say. I would get very lost. I would have no direction, and no guidance. So yes, it is important. But yes... structure, I am afraid of that: that it will really be quite a job to bring structure [to the archive]. And I'm also afraid that I'll work too fast, and will be too quick in saying 'this is going here and that is going there.' And that we will be ready in three months and that I will be embarrassed because I said it would take a year.

00:30:15 RR: I really wouldn't worry about that.

00:30:21 SMW: No, no there is enough I think. It's just hard for me to do things where the end point isn't really clearly in sight, if you can say it like that. So it will be quite a challenge for me to be patient and to handle things with care.

00:30:43 RR: Yes.

00:30:49 SMW: It's a real challenge I think.

00:30:54 RR: But you did throw things away at some point, right?

00:31:11 SMW: Hardly ever. The first horse drawing I ever – was in 96, and it was two horses on brown paper, with a black Edding marker and two flowers. Very simple and quite big actually, and I gave that to Maria Pask and she lost it. I gave away a lot of things and I find that very - and then it took until after I turned 40, until I started painting horses again.

I already knew it was important in 96, but it took me 20 years to have the courage to say, this is my work too. So sometimes things took a very long time. One artist I love very much is Linda Montano. And Linda Montano once said that she gives herself twenty years to understand what she has done in her work. And I learned a lot from that, because I try not to jump too quickly to: 'what does this mean?' And certainly not after ten years or so, ten years is too short. I think twenty years is a good amount of time. To really have some kind of distance in looking at things and what they mean. I am curious what the drawings with horses will look like in twenty years. Because they are quite new actually, from the past few years.

00:33:00 RR: But now you wanted to see the horse drawing from 96 right?

00:33:04 SMW: Yes, yes, and I gave Maria a work too: a canvas stretcher (Dutch: spieraam), if you say it like that. It was painted black and it had a piece of cloth. Long before I thought, I have to... I am very stupid in the way I work, very slow and it's all very blunt and weird and it takes a long time for me to have energy and ideas to know what to do with something. So I worked with fabric, even then, in 96. But I never thought: I can just put it on the wall, without a stretcher and paint texts on it. I have made six paintings with oil paint and Jan Dibbets even bought one. Purchased it for his collection. I have a slide of that work, I saw. It is one block of color, it is quite large and it is called "Doctors Painting" because I had just come from my doctor to de Ateliers. I don't know what kind of doctor, maybe my GP or something. But all that's on it is... I walked into my studio, I saw that painting with just... I did something with stripes, to erase it. So it was very thick and it was a monochrome. A muddy monochrome. I walked into my studio and I thought "I just got here", that was very early, 95 or so. And I thought I just got here, so I got red paint and I painted on the top "I just got here" and then I thought, that's done. That's all I do: I just got here, Doctors Painting, done. So I made six of those large paintings, it also took a long time before I just wrote text on fabric... It is very crazy how that works. I'm

just really slow. My brain ticks in a certain way... Some things are very fast, but some things are very, very slow.

00:35:40 RR: It goes gradually so to say?

00:35:45 SMW: Gradually yes.

00:35:46 RR: You are probably actually practicing or rehearsing those sessions and without realizing it yourself, something is shifting until it clicks and you think: 'I can also paint on it directly.' It comes from something you are subconsciously already developing.

00:35:49 SMW: Yes.

00:36:10 SMW: Subconsciously, yes. Exactly, it is all a process. It certainly has to do with that. That is why I see it all as one thing. It's Acceptance Art, again. It's an oeuvre – I don't always find that word very appropriate – but everything is connected. It's like a spider web or something.

00:36:35 RR: Perhaps the English term 'a body of work' is more fitting here?

00:36:38 SMW: A body of work yes.

00:36:39 RR: You don't really say that in Dutch: a body of work.

00:36:40 SMW: Yes body of work sounds better, especially since I call myself a body artist ...body artist. So that's definitely better.

00:36:56 RR: I looked at Adrian's [Piper] rules... They are actually very practical, aren't they? You can create categories per year, per medium and then within that. But actually none of it has to do with content per se. It actually looks at what year you made that and whether you consider that as art or more as context. Would you like to start that way? Can you say something about that, which characteristics your archive should have and which demands it must meet...

00:36:57 SMW: Yes.

00:37:37 RR: ...And whether that should be done in order of date or by subject. But these could also be other notions that you find important for the structure of the archive.

00:37:52 SMW: Yes, that's a very good question. Things are brought together in terms of years or in terms of time or in terms of periods. And then I think it ends up like this... Ah, it's overwhelming. It's really... In English you have an expression 'I painted myself into a corner.' Do you know that?

00:38:30 RR: I understand it but haven't heard it before.

00:38:31 SMW: 'I painted myself in a corner...' And I really did that literally. I painted myself in a corner and now I must experience it. I have to do this. But basically, except for an era or rather a period of time, it is not so clear at this point how that would or should work. But I feel like it should be on the floor, as Adrian suggests. There or here [points to a location in the studio] and that we start by making piles of this and that. And then gradually I want to try to make sense of how things belong together or something. But it's still – to be honest – it's still unclear to me. It's almost... like I think: this is unachievable. But I like the process ...if there's a way to start and move on, that's already a lot. That's that 'process' again. It doesn't have to be that clear now, I guess.

00:40:08 RR: No.

00:40:09 SMW: But, I actually want to. [laughs]

00:40:12 RR: So maybe it's nice to say we'll start with Adrian's set of rules.

00:40:15 SMW: Yes...

00:40:17 RR: Primarily because it's a rule. So, piles on the floor.

00:40:19 SMW: Frédérique [Bergholtz] is going to print them. We're going to hang them here. Very big. I said A0... "I want to have them printed in A0 and put them up there." If there are public events of If I Can't Dance and the archive, I think it will be great to hang them up. That people have an idea of ...that it has to do with structure in some way. But piles are

certainly good and – and it doesn't have to be too precise – it could just be a start: this is a pile of similar things, for example. [reads from paper and laughs] “I have deep feelings.”

00:41:25 RR: I think that's a very good start, because you can only form an opinion about something when you can behold it.

00:41:31 SMW: Yes.

00:41:34 RR: But maybe you already have something completely different in mind and disagree with Adrian's rules, on the other hand you may also find it a very nice guideline to start with...

00:41:51 SMW: I think so. I keep coming back to her list of suggestions of how it should or could be done. And I think... piles for example, that's already a lot. And I have to organize those slides, maybe I have to do that myself. I have to sort those slides myself to be able to digitize them. At least some of the slides, because I need them for the 26th. If it's not possible here at the Rijks, I'll have it done elsewhere. I saw 55 cents a slide so that might be worth it.

00:42:52 RR: Maybe we can stop by in a minute.

00:42:56 SMW: Do you know it?

00:42:56 RR: Not very well, but they said it's located at the *Media Ship*.

00:43:00 SMW: Yes.

00:43:01 RR: I am always a bit lost myself, but I think I roughly know the way.

00:43:04 SMW: Yes.

00:43:05 RR: It's upstairs. Maybe there's someone there we can ask.

00:43:08 SMW: Okay and let's bring a slide or something... like: “look what I have!”

00:43:13 RR: I'm going to stop recording, I've asked my questions.

00:43:15 SMW: Okay.