

Art  
INCONVERSATION

March 4th, 2016

## LARRY BELL with Alex Bacon

Alex Bacon visited Larry Bell in his Venice Beach studio to reflect on the artist's long and influential career, which is currently being celebrated in an exhibition of work from the 1960s at Hauser & Wirth's uptown space at 32 East 69th Street. It runs through April 9, 2016.

**Alex Bacon (Rail):** The show at Hauser & Wirth is titled *From the '60s*. Is it going to take us all the way back to the shaped canvases from the early 1960s?

**Bell:** Yes! Back to 1960!

**Rail:** Wow! So maybe a good place to begin is with how you started. I know you studied with Robert Irwin at Chouinard Art Institute. When did you start painting those shaped canvases?

**Bell:** When I got out of Chouinard. I started doing very organized compositions in oil paint on paper, because I didn't have much money, and paper was a good support. Then the organization became paramount and more important than the paint technique.

**Rail:** What systems of organization were you using?

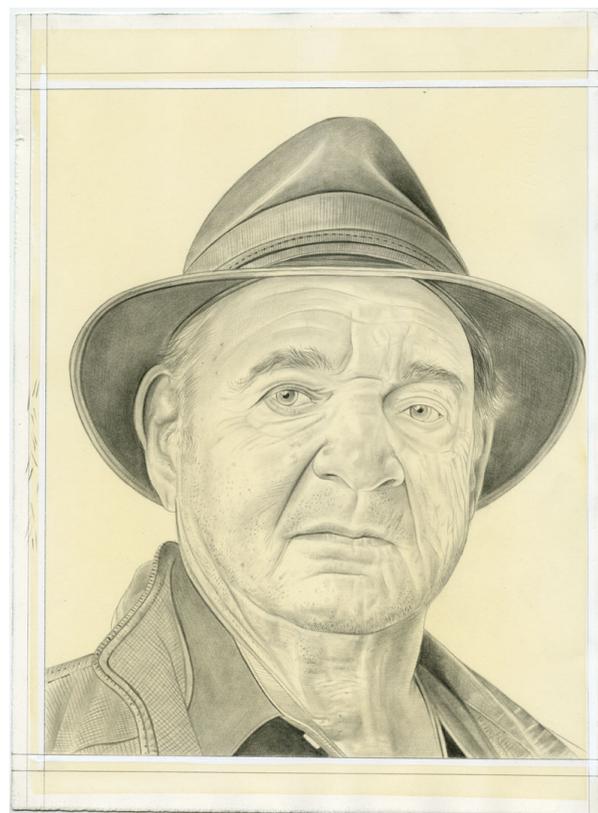
**Bell:** Cubes.

**Rail:** Already around 1960?

**Bell:** Yes. They were a two-dimensional illusion of a cubic volume of some kind—a brick volume or a square volume.

**Rail:** Were they rendered in perspective?

**Bell:** Yes! But they were pretty simple. The canvases were shaped so that the canvas plane itself had an illusion of volume. And then what I did was paint very simple kinds of things into that shape that would



Portrait of the artist. Pencil on paper by Phong Bui. From a photo by Zack Garlitos.

add another volumetric illusion to the imagery.

**Rail:** So it was two illusions co-existing?

**Bell:** Yes, it was exactly that. And then I got tired of painting illusions, I guess. I decided I wanted these things to have some dimension to them so, using the same flat diagram of the cube, I made them deeper. But I didn't find it engaging enough to keep going, and I started wanting to change the dimensions; I started adding things to the construction of the stretcher box, which were pieces of glass. In some cases it was a thick piece of glass that went right up against the wall and you looked through the glass, through a square hole in the canvas, to see the wall.

**Rail:** And how did you have that idea? Why glass?

**Bell:** Well, I found glass a very interesting material because it did something that nothing else I knew of did. It had some very special qualities: it reflected light; it transmitted light; it absorbed light—all at the same time—and had a shelf life of about three million years. So it met all the criteria to be an interesting material. It was available everywhere; it was not very expensive; there were people who knew about a local glasscutter who grinded and made shapes out of it, and so on.

**Rail:** Did you find that wanting to use glass introduced you to people working professionally with industrial and commercial materials in Los Angeles?

**Bell:** Yes, because at a certain point I needed them. I wanted a piece of glass to be reflective, like a mirror on both sides. I found a guy out in Burbank that did a lot of work for Walt Disney Studios. He made special reflectors and lenses, what they call front surface mirrors, which is what I was looking for. And those works got me a show in New York with Pace Gallery in 1965.

**Rail:** Were these still the relief works that use glass?

**Bell:** No, they were cubes.

**Rail:** So how did the cubes evolve from the reliefs?

**Bell:** I just decided to get rid of the two-dimensional plane. Period. And stop making illusions of volumes and make the volumes themselves instead. The most natural form for me was a cube because I liked the symmetry of it. And they were pretty clumsy attempts to do something, but, in fact, I sort of bluffed my way through a bunch of constructions that were based on cubes. They weren't very good cubes, they were just cubes, you know? Made of glass and wood, because in the beginning I would make a wooden structure and then glue glass or mirrors to it.

**Rail:** So were the early glass boxes reflective, throwing things back out to the viewer, rather than something you look into?

**Bell:** Some of them were like that but most of them you looked into.

**Rail:** Were you thinking about Albers or anything like that?

**Bell:** No, I was looking at the corners of my room.

**Rail:** Oh, really? So, in a way is this almost like a floorplan?

**Bell:** Yes, something like that. I wouldn't say it was a plan. The imagery was simple.

**Rail:** And maybe it had a sense of your immediate space?

**Bell:** Yes, because the one in the pieces in the Hauser & Wirth show is actually an illustration of the skylight that was above my head. It's a huge picture and this alluded to the volume of the well that went up from the ceiling to the skylight.

**Rail:** Also in your room, or in your studio?

**Bell:** In my studio.

**Rail:** So you were already thinking very much of the painting as an object?

**Bell:** I don't know what I was thinking actually. They were intuitive things. They just happened, and for some reason, this is what they looked like. I don't know why they came up. It was not some kind of a fetish I had with hard edge or anything.

**Rail:** Nonetheless, it's interesting that you would pick something as specific as a window or a room, but then the paintings are in fact different illusions of volumes. To take something like a bird's-eye view down onto a room, and to then use that to skew an actual volume. So there's the looking forward, but also a looking down in the same painting. It's also interesting that at this time you're still painting, even as you are experimenting with the first cubic volumes. So it wasn't like you were moving on from one thing to the next.

**Bell:** No, no, I worked on a lot of different things simultaneously. During this period of time I was even still painting on paper, because this stuff took a lot of time, where there was immediacy with the paint. Because the paper sucked up the oil, there was no mess on the floor and that nervous energy that you have in the studio. I had to get it off somehow, so I was doing paintings on paper, too, at the same time as I was working on the first cubes.

**Rail:** What did you want the viewer to get out of these?

**Bell:** I never had any prejudices about that. I just wanted them to feel finished. I wanted it to feel like there was some resolution to what the viewer was looking at, that there was a finished statement of some kind. There was no more to it than that.



Larry Bell, *Untitled Trapezoid Improvisation*, 1983. Amber laminated glass. Unique. 4 panels. 60 × 72 × .5 inches / 72 × 102 1/8 × 102 1/8 inches (overall). Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Genevieve Hanson.

**Rail:** Were you exhibiting these works in the early 1960s?

**Bell:** Yes, at Ferus Gallery. Just about all of this stuff was shown there.

**Rail:** How did you get involved with them? Was that through Robert Irwin?

**Bell:** Well... no, because Bob [Irwin] wasn't the only person running the place, there was Billy Al Bengston and Irving Blum as well. I knew all those guys. They were my gang and I was the youngest, but I thought I was going to get drafted. I thought I was going into the Army for sure, so I wanted to do something. I didn't figure I'd come back. I went to see Walter Hopps and I said, "I want to do a show sometime," and he said, "I haven't seen your stuff lately." So he and Irving came down. Just like that I had a show at Ferus.

**Rail:** And that was when?

**Bell:** 1962.

**Rail:** What kind of work did you show?

**Bell:** Paintings. And then the next show was the constructions.

**Rail:** Also at Ferus?

**Bell:** Yes.

**Rail:** And how were they received, those early shows?

**Bell:** Well it was pretty early in the game here in L.A. and nobody really talked about them, though the gallery actually sold a couple of them. So that was doing pretty well. I didn't have any track record really.

**Rail:** I don't imagine many people were selling at that time in L.A.

**Bell:** No! There was no money. There was nothing. Nobody ever thought there was going to be any money in doing this stuff. We were a tight little group of jokers, just having a good time.

**Rail:** So would you say it was as social, or even more social than it was about aesthetic issues?

**Bell:** Oh yes, I definitely thought so.

**Rail:** Were there conversations among people around Ferus about ideas around art and stuff like that?

**Bell:** Maybe Irving [Blum] and Walter [Hopps] did, but there were no general debates, except over selections of people to participate in the gallery, and that got pretty heated. There were some of the guys who didn't want other people. They didn't want this person and that person, so they'd let their feelings be known to Irving and Walter.

**Rail:** What did you think about some of the work that came over from New York? For example, I know Stella showed a few times at Ferus. Was that influential at all?

**Bell:** Yes. Well, he was one of the young Turks. He was a contender and he was in the place [New York] where people bought stuff and took note of important studio activities.

**Rail:** It must have been interesting for you because, judging by the dating, you came to the shaped canvas independently of seeing those being made around the same time by other people. Stella, for example, would have started painting shaped canvases at about the same time, 1960. How did you have the idea to physically shape the canvas?

**Bell:** I don't remember—that's a good question. I remember going to the guy who made stretcher bars, right around here, he was at a little wood shop. He made stretchers for a lot of the artists. Lucius Hudson was his name.

**Rail:** And you went to him and asked him to make these shaped stretchers?

**Bell:** Yes, and then I went to an upholstery guy to learn how to stretch the canvas and fold the corners and stitch it on that angle—stitch it tight so it would stay that way.

**Rail:** So you didn't feel too much of anything when you started seeing other shaped-canvas work? Did you feel any kind of affinity?

**Bell:** No, I just felt an affinity with my artist friends. I only met Stella in '65 when I went to New York.

**Rail:** You did a show with Sidney Janis in 1964, and Robert Irwin was in that show and few others—you didn't go to New York for that show?

**Bell:** No, I didn't. Bob [Irwin] was in that show, Chuck Hinman was in that show, Robert Whitman—it was called *Seven New Artists*.

**Rail:** What work did you show?

**Bell:** Two cubes. I only went to New York for the first Pace show in 1965. Some interesting things happened to me. The cubes that I showed were pieces that were made here in Venice, but the way I treated the surface was done by this fabricator who did work for Disney, and it cost a lot of money. But he was a very nice guy and he liked doing stuff that was not normal for him; the coating process was very expensive and the guy let me pay him over time. So I had pieces that were sent to New York and several of them broke in shipment. But we shipped everything over more than a month before the show and there was time to repair what was broken—if I could find a guy to do the coating and if I could find a guy to replace the glass panels. And I found one. The guy in New York who did the coating charged me a fortune to do the job. And after we finished up and I had paid him he said, "You're crazy."

**Rail:** What kind of projects would he do normally?

**Bell:** Toy cap pistols: six million novelty cap pistols a year for one place. Millions of Christmas-tree ornaments, too. The balls were glass and they were metalized, mirrored. And then he would dip them in dyes. That's what he did.

**Rail:** So he adopted that process to make—

**Bell:** Well, he adapted one of his coaters to be able to redo my cubes, and the material on the pieces was gold. We had put gold on the glass, so that required a certain kind of technique. The guy knew how to do it.

**Rail:** You were coating the actual pane of glass?

**Bell:** Yes.

**Rail:** Is that what 'vacuum coated' means?

**Bell:** Yes, exactly that.

**Rail:** So could you describe what that process is?

**Bell:** The materials that are on the surface are evaporated in a vacuum. The coating on these things, and on what I've done since, reached the surface of whatever—whether it was paper, glass, or Mylar—it gets to that surface because of the electrons that change the form of the material from a solid to a vapor, even gold or aluminum, say. It gets hot and evaporates it. It's the electrons that do that. So the molecules of aluminum, let's say, are thrown off of a piece of tungsten filament like the filament in a light bulb, and attaches to the surface that I put in front of it. It then builds up the coating because there's no air in the process. Whatever the crystalline structure of this stuff was that gave it its optical qualities are maintained when the film goes back together; the same crystalline structure that gives aluminum its optical brightness goes back together as a thin film on the surface.

**Rail:** And how did you discover that?

**Bell:** The guy who works for Disney. I didn't know anything about the process, he never let me in the back room, he just gave me what I wanted and he did a good job. But I never knew anything about how it was done, and then when I went to New York and located this guy to try and repair them, I went to his place, but he was a novelty metalizer which meant even though the process is exactly the same, the end product was much less refined than that done by the optical coater in L.A. So he suggested I get into doing it myself and save a lot of money. He sold me a used metalizer and gave me a book called *Vacuum Deposition of Thin Films* and told me I should start on page one. I moved and set it up in New York and learned how to run it. A few years later I bought another, the tank I still use. I ordered it in 1968 and it was delivered in 1969 and I've been using it ever since. It was designed to coat two pieces of six foot by ten foot glass.

**Rail:** So you moved to New York in '65?

**Bell:** Yeah, I stayed there for '65 and '66 and then I missed my friends, I didn't like cold weather, it just got too fucking cold. There was a blizzard in '66, there was a blackout, I was not prepared for the traumas of

New York.

**Rail:** You had a feeling that it would be a good place to push your career forward?

**Bell:** Yes, because I did my first show at Pace and they sold everything before the show opened. I had hardly sold anything ever. And here they had sold everything. So I stayed in New York.

**Rail:** And you must have met a lot of people at that time?

**Bell:** Yeah. Judd, and Morris, and Bob Whitman, and Larry Poons, Leo Castelli, Neil Williams, John Chamberlain—

**Rail:** Stella you mentioned before.

**Bell:** Yeah, Stella, Judd, Poons, Williams and Chamberlain became buddies.

**Rail:** Did you enjoy having conversations about art with them?

**Bell:** Oh, the conversations were mostly about humor. There was almost no talk about the significance of anybody's art, unless it was putting it down in funny language. Absolutely everything was based on humor. Nothing was not based on humor.

**Rail:** Even someone like Judd?

**Bell:** Even Judd. He had this round face, and when he laughed his eyes completely disappeared into his cheeks. [*Laughter.*]

**Rail:** Would you spend a lot of time in their studios?

**Bell:** Yes.

**Rail:** So you saw what they were working on?

**Bell:** Yeah, though Judd didn't do much work in his studio.

**Rail:** By that point he was fabricating?

**Bell:** Yes. He had a few old wooden things. I don't think I ever went to Frank [Stella]'s studio until the '70s. He liked to go eat Italian food in his neighborhood, and he was married to [the critic and art historian] Barbara Rose at that time.

**Rail:** I guess they had a lot of parties at their apartment for the movers and shakers in the art world. Did you ever attend any?



Larry Bell, *Light Knot 11*, 2012. 7mm polyester coated with aluminum silicon oxide. Unique. 59 × 41 1/2 × 27 inches. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Alan Shaffer.

**Bell:** Oh yeah that's how I met Judd and Poons and all the rest of them—it was through Frank and Barbara. They had a couple of parties for me, 'welcome to New York' parties, and introduced me to all those guys.

**Rail:** I'm curious: so when you started making the cubes, you also thought to display them on pedestals?

**Bell:** Yeah I wanted them to look like they were floating.

**Rail:** You didn't want to make them large and place them on the floor? What sizes did you work with?

**Bell:** Twelve inches cubed to twenty-four inches cubed.

**Rail:** What were those dimensions based on?

**Bell:** How much I could pick up. I worked by myself, and didn't have any assistants. If something had to go from this to that place, I had to be able to pick it up and carry it over. So when I started working on the large glass things, it was an imperative to have people around to help move things. And not just moving them, but cleaning them and doing all the stuff that is necessary to put them into the vocabulary of the show.

**Rail:** So the pedestals are Plexiglas, is that correct?

**Bell:** Yes.

**Rail:** This introduces an element of complete visibility to the cube, where you can see all of its sides.

**Bell:** Yeah, and it also takes me out of the Minimalist camp, because pedestals are very traditional.  
[*Laughter.*]

**Rail:** Did anyone react to that as a conservative gesture, to put sculptural work on pedestals?

**Bell:** Yes.

**Rail:** Did you see them as pedestals or did you see them as part of the work?

**Bell:** I saw them as both. At the time I was looking for a sale, so if somebody bought them, and they wanted to put them on their coffee table, that was okay with me. I was making these things hoping somebody would want them, so we presented them with Plexiglas bases. Well, some of the early ones were glass, but it was very heavy, expensive, and fragile. The ones in Plexi were cheaper and they didn't break.

**Rail:** And did you find that you could control getting different kinds of effects with the glass?

**Bell:** Yes.

**Rail:** When you were working with the guy in L.A. and he did not let you into the room, would you have to tell him what you wanted?

**Bell:** Yes.

**Rail:** How would you describe what you wanted?

**Bell:** “I want this blue. I want this to reflect blue on one side and look like a mirror on the other side.”

**Rail:** And then when you got the machine and you were doing it yourself, did you find you had a greater range of things you could do since you were in there?

**Bell:** Yes. Plus it was a lot of fun. The same kind of fun that guys who like to fix up hotrods have. Stuff with wrenches, macho shit.

**Rail:** So then, when you were in New York, you were focusing purely on those cubes?

**Bell:** Yeah, Pace said to make some more stuff. “We can sell these!” is exactly what they said. So when I decided I wanted to go to bigger things, the Pace people were a little reticent, because it was more complex to store them and move them, and all of that.

**Rail:** Are you still talking about the cubes or are you now talking about the sheets of glass?

**Bell:** The sheets.

**Rail:** Ok. I think you did the first one for the 1969 show at MoMA, *Spaces*, is that true?

**Bell:** Well, that was glass, but it wasn't the same kind of treatment and arrangement that I used for the later works. What I did for *Spaces* was a dark room containing a reflective surface. It wasn't a right angle thing, the glass was not right on the wall, and there was very low light in there. So essentially the glass reflected the door you walked in through. The light might be illuminating some part of the space that was reflected in the glass, so as you moved towards the glass, you were actually moving away from the source of the light that was being reflected. So the light appeared to move away from you to the same degree as you were moving towards it, until you hit the wall and couldn't see it anymore.

**Rail:** Would you say that at this time you were still interested, as you had been in those early shaped paintings, in certain kinds of illusions?

**Bell:** Yeah, I didn't see them as illusions though, I saw them as real things.

**Rail:** Phenomena of perception?

**Bell:** Real phenomena. What I'm looking at is really happening. There are no tricks. This is another reality, and I know it is because I can see it. That's all I needed. If I could see it, I must be going the right way. Every time that something would make itself clear to me through an improvisational use of the materials, I learned something, and so everything that happened in the studio was some kind of lesson. I wasn't going to lead the work anywhere, I was following the work, that's the way it works. You follow the work. The work is the teacher. Each discovery is given to you by the work.

**Rail:** And did you find that the cubes then led you into wanting to do more with actual space?

**Bell:** Yes, because all of the focus on the cubes was in the corners, the way the light gradated out of the corners; I decided to get rid of the cube shape, just make the corners. And that would allow me to make these visual things much bigger because you couldn't lift a giant cube, but you could put two pieces of glass together and glue them at a right angle, and if they were treated properly and lit properly, they did all kinds of interesting things; and then if you put another pair of corners in front of the first one it does something else. And then if you put them together you can make a big box.

**Rail:** So it was endless, the things that this idea opened up for you?

**Bell:** That was the best thing about it all: the permutations were factorial. If I had twenty-four pieces of glass to set up, I had a factor of twenty-four possibilities. Twenty-four times twenty-three, and that total times twenty-two, and that total times twenty-one, and so on. It was an enormous amount of possibilities with the same parts, and I liked that—that the depth of the potential of each of the things I did was staggering. I could've spent a lifetime dedicated to only one of those projects. It was action, so I was making more and sticking them out there, and I didn't care what they looked like, they just did their thing and looked good.

**Rail:** Did you find that that then required more attention to the lighting, and other qualities of the space, in which you placed the sheets of glass?

**Bell:** Well, when I did a show I would usually set up the pieces based on the lighting that the artist that was there before me had set up for his or her show. So I would compose the work based on what I had, and then when it started to not work I would readjust the things until finally it was all new. I never tried to neutralize a space, I would just take it as it was and then mess around with it.

**Rail:** How would you play around in a space? What was your process in putting together a room?

**Bell:** Let's say the space was 4,000 square feet—was it long or was it square? Was it round, or whatever? Then I would decide how many parts might be the most I could put in, and take as much as I could to improvise with—because they were all improvisational things—and start using them. There were times when I brought fifteen to twenty pieces and ended up using only four, because it didn't need any more.

The configurations of the piece really were determined by the fact that they were mirrored on one side and went together at ninety degrees. Some of them were trapezoid shapes, some were rectangular, some of



Larry Bell, *Bette and the Giant Jewfish*, 1963. Vacuum coated glass and chrome plated metal. Unique. 16 1/2 × 16 1/2 × 16 1/2 inches. 36 × 16.5 × 16.5 inches (pedestal). Courtesy of the artist and Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen.

them were triangular. I did a big piece called the *Iceberg*, which was the iceberg and its shadow; the iceberg was twenty-eight panels of clear glass, and the shadow of the iceberg was twenty-eight panels of gray glass. So there were fifty-six parts, I never saw the whole thing up. Thirty-one was the most I ever put up.

**Rail:** How did the studio function for you in this kind of context? You must have done a lot of playing around in general in the studio once you had this condition.

**Bell:** Yeah I did some playing around, I made models and they were pretty slick. If the room was forty-by-forty feet, say, I'd make a grid and just use an inch-to-foot scale, and take pieces of glass together that could simulate the floor of a forty-square-foot room, and place them based on the matrix. Then I would go there without the model and try to bring a feeling of spontaneity to the installation. A lot of times these things had to stand on the floor, and a lot of times the floor was no good, the floor was uneven. In those cases, the composition was based on what the floor wanted rather than what I wanted.

**Rail:** How did people respond to these works?

**Bell:** People liked them. They had a good time. I liked watching people go around them. Were they looking at themselves or looking through it at somebody else, walking in their reflection? What they were looking at is what I found interesting.

**Rail:** You also had a photography practice. For example, you photographed some of Robert Irwin's early installations. You would photograph them, in a way that he quite liked, almost like composite photographs.

**Bell:** Yeah, I did some things with photography. I wasn't that interested in the pictures; I was interested in the process. I had a camera; it was a light angle camera with a lens that moved 120 degrees. I had about seven of them, I was totally hooked on these cameras and I changed a little bit of something on each of the cameras, so that each had something different going on. But I didn't pursue photography very much.

**Rail:** Did you ever exhibit your photography?

**Bell:** Yes, a few people wanted it. I did a show in France in Nîmes, and the curator insisted on showing the photography. She thought she could do an exhibition that would prove my work was more related to the writings in science fiction than they were to Minimalism.

**Rail:** How did you feel about that thesis?

**Bell:** I thought it was a great idea, I didn't have any problem with that. I thought it was neat.

**Rail:** Do you have a personal relationship to science fiction?

**Bell:** Well, it's only through one writer, H.G. Wells. I was always a Wells fan. [The curator] made a case for it, and I named a lot of sculptures after characters in Wells's stories. Griffin was a central character in his story of *The Invisible Man*. In *The Invisible Man*, before Griffin tried his potion on himself, he tried it on his landlady's cat. The cat disappeared except for its eyes. I set up a piece in my studio in New Mexico, and my daughter came in. She was about five at the time. She went inside this thing and disappeared inside it,

except for her eyes. She reminded me of the passage from the Wells story, so I called that sculpture *The Dilemma of Griffin's Cat*. Griffin showed up in a lot of my work. He was an interesting guy, the character. He had this theory that he could make flesh become transparent with his combination of some chemicals and stuff like that. His professor at school said he was crazy and gave him a really hard time. He went about proving he was right, but what happened is that he may have been right, but becoming invisible is one thing, and becoming visible again is another thing that he didn't consider. He was so focused on only one side of it.

**Rail:** You were saying that you don't identify your work with Minimalism. I'm wondering if there are other artists that you feel an affinity towards? Do you agree with people who would place you alongside your peers in California?

**Bell:** Yeah, sure.

**Rail:** Does the term "Light and Space art" mean something to you?

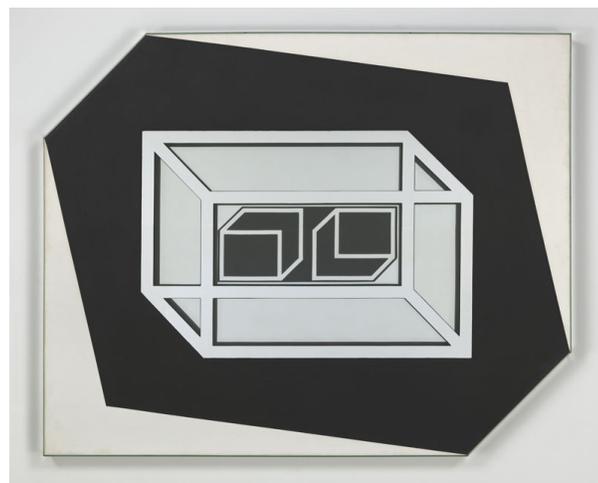
**Bell:** Well, look. It's too generic. If there was no light, you couldn't see anything. And the stuff that you see is in some space. And so "light and space" means practically nothing because everything is light and space; there's nothing that isn't. All that we see is the light reflected off of some surface.

**Rail:** I guess one could say that a lot of your work has been about investigating the terms of perception, and how different kinds of perceptual effects can be generated, organized, or constructed. Certain New York artists we've been discussing—someone like Judd, say—are controlling certain effects. If you go to Marfa and you see the 100 milled aluminum boxes, there are effects that happen, which are happening in the eye even more than they're happening in the actual space. So there's a certain relationship, it seems, between that and what you have been saying you'd like to achieve in your work, in terms of perceptual phenomena.

**Bell:** That wasn't lost on Judd either. In general, I refused to give anybody shit because I didn't understand their philosophy. I don't want to understand. I want it to be a mystery. I want to see things I've never seen before and find surfaces that are interesting to look at. Whether I'm working with them or somebody else is.

**Rail:** How did you end up getting back to two-dimensional works in the 1970s?

**Bell:** It's the same coatings that I put on glass that I started putting on paper. Like I said earlier, glass reflects, transmits, and absorbs light all at once. Paper doesn't do that. But it has an interesting surface; it collects the material in an interesting way, everything is very readable in this media, and aluminum tends to make things look white.



Larry Bell, *Untitled 1962*, 1962. Mirrored glass, acrylic on canvas. 53 × 66 × 3 inches. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Genevieve Hanson.

**Rail:** What are the patterns and the different colorations based on?

**Bell:** Gradients. I like the transitional aspect of the colors fading in and out of this page plane.

**Rail:** Are these works that are on the wall of your studio right now on canvas?

**Bell:** They're on paper. I do mount everything on canvas because the paper tears and breaks easily. When it goes through the plating process, it gets crispy, like a salty cracker. So by taking these parts that I put a lot of energy into coloring to be something, the first thing I do is mount them on something that won't shatter, and that's what the canvas is about.

**Rail:** Are you comfortable bringing in a conversation about painting into the work?

**Bell:** Well, I didn't really think of them as paintings, but I guess they're not that distant from collages of a painterly kind.

**Rail:** Because in a way they do seem related to the early paintings in the sense that they create these spatial illusions.

**Bell:** They're not so abstract; in fact they're all based on torsos. If you look, you'll see: the line of the neck and the shoulder is something that is in all of them. The source came from the gesture that was made when drawing with a knife, or with a blade cutting through this Mylar with that same line of the neck, and the shoulder, and boob, and so on. And then I could take a corner of that plane that I just made a drawing on with a cut-through line, and take a corner of it and slip it through one of those lines I cut in there, and it becomes a sculpture. Gravity grabs it, and when it can't go anywhere, that's the form. Period. It also had a lot to do with just not wanting to lift heavy shit anymore. [*Laughter.*]

**Rail:** It's a way to sculpt but without a lot of physical exertion.

**Bell:** Right. You get a lot of action out of these things; they do amazing things. Just watch one. Go sit down and just look at any one of them. It moves very slowly with air currents in the room. What you're actually seeing is what the piece sees; you're looking at the reflection of what's around them. They're totally hypnotic. That one over there, it's just doing its thing and there's no particular reason why one starts turning and another doesn't. I think they're magical. They throw off something I call "fairies." They're little bursts of light that are reflected off of them, and they go creeping across the Mylar and sometimes you see them on the floor.

**Rail:** So for this reason, do you find it useful to live with them, and to observe them over a long period of time?

**Bell:** Yes, and they collect dust. That's a very interesting aspect of these things too, because the dust diffuses the light off the surface.

**Rail:** So you don't feel strongly that they should be kept dust free?

**Bell:** No, everything on the surface of this earth has the right to a patina. Period. [*Laughter.*]

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