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Oral history interview with Robert Hanamura,  
circa 1977

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Robert Hanamura on November 9, 1977 and July 18, 1978. The interview was conducted by Marsha Miro for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for the transcription of this interview provided by the Smithsonian Institution's Women's Committee.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

MARSHA MIRO: This is Marsha Miro on November 9th and I'm speaking with Robert Hanamura. Bob, you were born in San Francisco in 1923 and your parents were Japanese immigrants; is that right?

ROBERT HANAMURA: Right.

MS. MIRO: And can you tell us a little about your early childhood, what you remember about your parents, your mother and father and anything -

MR. HANAMURA: Well, they were always fighting. I didn't have a very good attitude about my parents so I spent most of my time solo or with other kids. And we would go fishing, swimming, play in the woods since we were in San Francisco, which I now find to be a very neat place after a short stay. I'd like to get back there.

MS. MIRO: Do you remember anything about your early childhood, about friends and the kinds of things you liked to do?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, somewhere along the line I became very, it became very clear to me that I was different in terms of the general populace because we were Japanese. And I really don't know when that became clear but it was obvious and I think there was an immediate or general reaction to want to be like the rest of the people, to be like the rest of the WASPs, although I didn't know that's what was happening.

MS. MIRO: What kind of business was your father in?

MR. HANAMURA: He had a restaurant.

MS. MIRO: A Japanese restaurant?

MR. HANAMURA: No.

MS. MIRO: No?

MR. HANAMURA: No. It was an American restaurant and we only had American food. We only served, cooked American food. And then on weekends and maybe at the end of the month we'd go to a Japanese restaurant, which would be a treat.

MS. MIRO: Did you have much contact with family in Japan?

MR. HANAMURA: None.

MS. MIRO: None?

MR. HANAMURA: None.

MS. MIRO: Your family was all here? It was just your mother and father?

MR. HANAMURA: Right. And the community we lived in was like a Japanese ghetto, which has now been torn down. There's a thing called Japan Town there now. And most of my friends would be Japanese. After hours they would be Japanese. During the day at school I'd run around with the WASPs or whatever.

MS. MIRO: Do you think it was a process of trying to get accepted by them, some of your activities?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. I guess about high school time when you got to that age when you began to think about girls and realize that [inaudible] and so you wondered what the process would be and kind of began to think about that.

MS. MIRO: Were your parents, did they try and assimilate too?

MR. HANAMURA: My mother did. In fact, she spoke English and she made a point of having American friends. She was very vivacious and got along well and I think she kind of resented the fact that my father was very quiet, reserved, and stayed at home.

MS. MIRO: Did you sense a lot of discrimination against you for being Japanese as opposed to -

MR. HANAMURA: Well, it was kind of an undercurrent that wouldn't be clear to others, I suppose. But the Japanese community would talk about it among ourselves and we knew that it was there but we didn't really realize what it was doing to us. What our situation really was relative to the rest of the world was not really clear. We probably didn't even think about it.

MS. MIRO: What was that situation, do you think?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, looking back on it now we can understand the economic situation and the reasons for the evacuation and the stay in camp that most of us went through, which for me I think was a good experience in that I learned a lot and made it clear of the kind of society that we were not familiar with and which I became a part of and now I want to get out of.

MS. MIRO: Kind of went through a cycle?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: In school did you pursue art at all?

MR. HANAMURA: In high school. Well, through grade school and high school and so on I for some reason could draw. I could draw representationally apparently, and it was encouraged. But nothing very, you know, not very deep. Just being able to represent something.

MS. MIRO: Was that in elementary school?

MR. HANAMURA: Elementary, junior high and high school.

MS. MIRO: Were there good art programs?

MR. HANAMURA: Not especially at that time, which it was in the '30s.

MS. MIRO: How was the art considered, just as something extraneous?

MR. HANAMURA: I really don't know how they thought about it, whoever "they" are. I was really more interested in sports and was a reasonably good athlete, and the weather was reasonable so that there was lots of time spent outside playing basketball, baseball, you know, whatever. The art interest I don't think was really an interest. I think it was just something that I probably could do reasonably well and perhaps would do it because I knew that they would kind of appreciate it.

MS. MIRO: There would be some approval for it.

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: Did you take lots of classes or was it just a minor?

MR. HANAMURA: I don't think there was lots of classes given.

MS. MIRO: Even in high school?

MR. HANAMURA: No. I just vaguely remember a very dull drawing class in which not much was said and we just turned in drawings of still lifes or whatever. No criticism.

MS. MIRO: This was in high school probably?

MR. HANAMURA: Mm hmm, yeah.

MS. MIRO: Did you have any friends who were interested in art who reinforced it for you?

MR. HANAMURA: Not especially.

MS. MIRO: Was it as a Japanese heritage in the arts or the culture? Did you get any of that input into your interest?

MR. HANAMURA: Probably, in that we were familiar with some of the history. In fact, most of us went to Japanese school after regular classes just like going to Hebrew school. And I'm sure we learned a lot there even if it was just through osmosis, because I really didn't enjoy it and the first chance I got I got out of there.

MS. MIRO: Did they teach you things about the history, the culture?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, we had books that we learned to read and in it would be any history or whatever condition that they probably wanted to throw out at us. Some of the folklore and the songs I guess we got out of that school. There was also a community of Buddhist people that were involved with the Buddhist church that I think probably really had a much better understanding of the culture. My mother happened to embrace the Christian religion so I got sent to a Methodist church, which didn't deal with any of the Japanese heritage at all.

MS. MIRO: Did you know much about Buddhism?

MR. HANAMURA: No. No, nothing. Only that they were the other people in the community. The community seemed to get kind of divided into those that went to the Buddhist church and those that were outside of it, primarily I think either [inaudible] or this Methodist church. And we would have friendly interaction through sports or socially but I think that kind of clique developed, different kinds of Japanese Americans there. And I have a feeling that the Buddhists got much more out of it.

MS. MIRO: They had more a feeling for their place in this world and -

MR. HANAMURA: Well, they probably knew more about their own heritage and practiced much of it, you know, much of the rituals. And even I remember going to watch them practice archery and things of that nature, which falls into the Zen category, understanding self. And I don't know any of those people now and I'd be curious to see how they turned out.

MS. MIRO: What direction they really took.

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: Did many people go back to Japan from San Francisco?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. Just before the war there was a ship that apparently many of the Japanese people in the community knew that something was going to happen. And I just read something about even FDR knowing something. This guy that broke the Japanese code apparently knew that something like Pearl Harbor was going to happen. So I don't recall now exactly when but just before the war broke the last ship, a Swedish ship was in San Francisco to pick up any Japanese that wanted to go back to Japan. And a large percentage of many I think that were in the Buddhist camp did go there, and I did run into them when I was in service up there, which was interesting.

MS. MIRO: Yeah, to see them again. Do you know why your parents left Japan?

MR. HANAMURA: Probably to, you know, better themselves. To find the promised land, I guess, and then go back with the wealth that they would accumulate. In fact, I think they sent a lot of money back, which I have a feeling that it's in the bank somewhere. Well, I know the bank that it's in but I haven't kept up with it.

MS. MIRO: Are your parents still alive?

MR. HANAMURA: No.

MS. MIRO: After you finished high school you went to the University of California at Berkeley. That was in 1940.

MR. HANAMURA: Right.

MS. MIRO: What made you pursue a career in architecture at that point? What made you decide on architecture?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, I took the Stanford Binet test and I was really at that point, I suppose, not very sure what I wanted to do. And I looked on the board, a board up there, and my folks told me not to go into art because you won't make any money. So I saw on the board well, and the Stanford Binet test also indicated that I had certain kind of ability to look into dentistry, which I really abhorred, art or architecture, something along those lines. So I looked on the board and there was architecture. So on the day that I registered I registered for architecture, not

knowing anything about it.

MS. MIRO: You didn't realize that you were learning how to build buildings or -

MR. HANAMURA: No. No.

MS. MIRO: Really?

MR. HANAMURA: No, I just was a naive 16 year old kid, you know.

MS. MIRO: You were 16 when you finished school?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, 16 or 17. I graduated I remember skipping some classes.

MS. MIRO: Were you brighter than most of the children?

MR. HANAMURA: Not especially, I don't think. I studied fairly diligently in high school. Not real hard, but I suppose maybe better than some of the kids. I guess I was above average; not especially, though.

MS. MIRO: Did you find that you were more accepted by the WASP community or the outside community as you moved into the University of California Berkeley or as you moved out of high school? Did you find any change?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, I lived in Berkeley during that first year and actually joined a Japanese group to sustain ourselves. And I think, knowing the situation, that we would really need to be related to some community, which had to be the nature of the situation there, be with Orientals and especially with Japanese. So we really didn't mix with the Caucasians very well.

MS. MIRO: What happened in your architecture classes, do you think there was any discrimination?

MR. HANAMURA: No. In school it was okay. I guess most of the students in the school were pretty open. And there was a fair amount of Japanese there. I think there was one Chinese fellow in the school. It was a very small school as far as student body went. And at least three or four of those Japanese students, Japanese American students that were in my class or immediately above me are pretty big names now.

MS. MIRO: Do you know?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, one of them is Obata of Obata, Hellmuth and Kassabaum in St. Louis. They did the Aerospace Center in Washington and the Dallas Airport and a number of other buildings. In fact, Gyo Obata, the main designer, got me through physics. He's a very sharp kid. And George Maximoto was back teaching at the University of California. And a fellow named Fred Taguchi has a firm in Cleveland. And Kimano Usen, I believe in Baltimore. And then the other guy is another big name, Deo Sasaki, who did the Wayne Mall here, the one next to the art building. He's based in Cambridge. Those were big name firms.

MS. MIRO: What do you think happened to you in this school that motivated you all to become really -

MR. HANAMURA: Well, I don't know that the school motivated us. I think it was a tough school. And I was only there a year. The others I think were there at least two years. George ended up at North Carolina working with Bucky Fuller, and Obata and Mano went to Cranbrook so they knew Saarinen. And in fact, I think most of those people did not go to camp. They just left and went to school, which was an option. So I didn't really get much out of school and ended up at Miami University in Ohio after spending a year here at Wayne.

MS. MIRO: Well, let's go back. Let's go to that after. I just have a couple more questions to ask you now. You're not going to get away so easily. Were you all from the same community in San Francisco in the architecture school?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, we were in the same community in Berkeley. We lived in Berkeley. I lived there and we were friends.

MS. MIRO: But do you think there was anything in your heritage that might have driven you to excel or push the architecture?

MR. HANAMURA: I really don't know.

MS. MIRO: Okay, fine. Do you think that those people influenced you, the other students who were your friends in the class?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, I think they were the kind of people that would force you to think about art and

architecture and think about life. They would involve you in a certain amount of dialogue. I guess there was a fair amount of impetus that that class I think probably had, and the instructors were really quite committed and we would spend a lot of time in the school. I guess, you know, like the artists that hang around Wayne probably spend a lot of time talking about their life. So a similar kind of situation I think existed there.

MS. MIRO: Do you think that your commitment to architecture changed from when you entered not knowing what it was about?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. Yeah. In fact, I guess the best experience I had was with an instructor I had at Miami who came to Wayne, and I don't know what happened to him, a fellow named Chaplain, who in his lectures would talk about almost everything else besides art. In fact, he made me aware of Bauhaus and Black Mountain and Bucky Fuller, Frank Lloyd Wright and so on. In fact, Frank Lloyd Wright came to school one day, which was interesting because he was so damn sarcastic and you could see what an egotist he was. But that, you know, all those little things I think for students, I think who are very impressionable, the student gets something out of it.

MS. MIRO: And that all made you feel like a career in architecture was going to be something that was worthwhile or something you wanted to pursue?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, it made me want to learn more about it and become familiar with the people that were involved at the time. I really don't know how this happens but I became aware of an avant garde situation, and I don't know if I thought of it that way. But in the late '40s I was familiar with the big names but I really didn't know what they were doing. And became aware of people like Bertolt Brecht and theater and the whole bit, and wanted to be involved with those in the avant garde rather than just routine situations.

MS. MIRO: That's something that's really stuck with you, hasn't it?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. I really don't know why or how that developed. I really don't know why I wanted to do it but that's the only objective I can see.

MS. MIRO: What happened, you left Berkeley to go to the detention camp?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: That was in 1941, '42?

MR. HANAMURA: Forty two, around March.

MS. MIRO: And why were you put there and what was it like?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, they created Warren was the governor of California at the time and I guess he and FDR somehow developed this proclamation, whatever it was, which decreed that all people of Japanese ancestry west of the Mississippi River had to either move east of the Mississippi River or go to these camps. And so we just and I guess we had maybe two or three months to do it in. All we knew, something was going to come up. But the rumors were, you know, probably pretty true. We knew that we would probably be moved out. In fact, there was a curfew on us, I think almost as soon as Pearl Harbor occurred, and we were restricted in how we could travel and what we could do.

MS. MIRO: What happened to your father's restaurant, did he have to -

MR. HANAMURA: They just had to move out. I don't know that they made any money out of it. In fact, that was a good time for non Japanese to come in and pick up whatever they could at real minimum cost.

MS. MIRO: So you were taken to a -

MR. HANAMURA: No, we just went. We had to line up at some designated place at some designated hour and board these trains. And we actually first went into the we went to various racetracks. I think we went to the Tanforan Racetrack, which was at San Bruno just south of San Francisco. We were there for, I don't know, maybe six months, and then were transferred out to the more or less permanent camp in Utah.

MS. MIRO: What was that called?

MR. HANAMURA: Topaz.

MS. MIRO: Topaz?

MR. HANAMURA: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. MIRO: And how long were you there?

MR. HANAMURA: I must have been there, well, at least a year. I remember, I think, getting out in the fall of '43, I think, and then enrolling at Wayne.

MS. MIRO: What was life like there in that camp?

MR. HANAMURA: It was very casual. The life was, well, it was casual, boring, and like I suppose being like in an army camp, army barracks in a way. Well, those were the kind of barracks that we lived in. But we had, we all ate at a communal hall. There was a little it was zoned into different parts, 10 different parts, I guess. And each little community had their own heads or whatever, and then they together had someone who acted like the mayor, let's say. But much of it was run by I think mostly volunteers from outside who came in to help organize the people inside, who really did not know how to govern themselves. And I discovered that most of these people were communists and that they were really interested in trying to propagate their ideas and to encourage us to learn about their way of political style. But they were very helpful.

MS. MIRO: You said that it was a good experience for you?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, it was good in that it made me understand and realize the more, the realities of the American society and its relationship to the closed community that I more or less grew up in, and at that point made me want to even more, you know, get out and really embrace the American culture, although at the same time I don't know why but I knew that the cultural values of the American society were not good.

MS. MIRO: Do you think it was in relation to what you knew from the Japanese heritage or do you think it was just an intuitive knowledge about -

MR. HANAMURA: Well, I think part of it came from studying architecture and also having some inkling about the way in which life in some parts of California were related, the community life was related to nature and to this kind of romantic idea about the landscape and nature and the sea and all of that in California. Which, you know, I didn't realize it at the time but I think I enjoyed going camping and doing all those things with nature rather than working against it or developing any personal attitudes that came out of the man made world.

MS. MIRO: Do you think that's something that's really influenced your architecture?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, yeah. I'm really kind of, I suppose like a lot of people I'm torn between the two opposites, between those things that you might call natural or come from organic sources and then the other, which is man made, coming from our industrial revolution. And I have a hard time with that because I like both parts.

MS. MIRO: And it's not easy to put them together.

MR. HANAMURA: Well, I don't know if you want to put them together but they're both there influencing you. Well, at this point I'm really more aware of the western heritage in America. I've become aware of the American Indians and really want to learn more about them and their attitudes.

MS. MIRO: Do you think all this kind of fits into your philosophy in architecture and design?

MR. HANAMURA: I don't think I've developed one in architecture and design.

MS. MIRO: Do you want to?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, although I'm really not that concerned.

MS. MIRO: Okay, let's go on. I don't want to keep you on this. We were at the camp.

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: How did you leave and why?

MR. HANAMURA: The options that we had were either to stay in camp forever or go to work somewhere or to go to school. And we could do that provided we were accepted at a school and also at a school that did not have any ties with the military, like any school that had ROTC or whatever were forbidden. So I don't know how I chose Wayne but I ended up going into a civil engineering school but taking, really taking more art than civil engineering.

MS. MIRO: You don't know why you went into civil engineering?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, yeah, that was part of the curricula included things that were required for architecture

curricula. And Wayne didn't have architecture but they had the engineering part.

MS. MIRO: So you decided to pick that up in Wayne?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: This was in 1943?

MR. HANAMURA: I think so, '43, '44 probably.

MS. MIRO: And so you took a lot of art classes. What was the art department at Wayne like at that time, small?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, they were in these little buildings, in houses, and I really don't know if Claxton was the head or not. But I remember one of my first instructors was Alden Smith. And there was a design instructor who was an architect named Picketts, I think, who went on to become dean of the school of architecture at Tulane and then from there I think he went to Washington University in St. Louis. I think Picketts was probably a good design instructor. And interesting enough, in that class was Joy Hackenson, so she and I were both in the same class.

MS. MIRO: That's funny.

MR. HANAMURA: It really is.

MS. MIRO: I didn't know she had an art background.

MR. HANAMURA: Hmm?

MS. MIRO: I didn't know she had design in her background.

MR. HANAMURA: Well, I think she has a degree in art.

MS. MIRO: What was the instruction like? Was it conservative, Bauhaus yet or -

MR. HANAMURA: Oh, I don't know. I also recall Marco Nobili there. He had just arrived from Italy and he couldn't speak English very well at that time. I kind of recall that distinctly. I remember him trying very hard, which I appreciated, and I'm pretty sure he also influenced me in my thinking about Frank Lloyd Wright because that was one of his idols. And I recall he did very neat renderings, which I tried to do. I think his class was pretty good. I don't know much about the other classes. The design class I guess must have been okay since I thought I got something out of that. I think I had Auden for lettering and I don't know whether I had him for sculpture or not. I can't remember much about those.

MS. MIRO: Did you feel at the time that you were preparing yourself for a career in architecture, that this -

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: would be a stable thing?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: Yeah?

MR. HANAMURA: I don't know what "stable" means.

MS. MIRO: Stable. I mean, I guess when you think -

MR. HANAMURA: It was an objective.

MS. MIRO: Right. And you're thinking about the '40s, you're thinking about how the country was looking at art at that point. It was still fairly realistic and conservative.

MR. HANAMURA: Well, I didn't know that. Well, I went on to, I transferred to Miami University. Can we get into that?

MS. MIRO: Yeah, we can, sure. It's the next step.

MR. HANAMURA: That was next up. And there I took art and had this instructor who talked about I think he was probably a good representative of the '40s in that he would discourage us to do anything that was abstract and he thought it was just a bunch of baloney and that the real stuff had to do with representation. So but at the

same time I got this other instructor there, same school, who made me aware of the Bauhaus, Black Mountain and all of that, and which really to me was very inspirational.

MS. MIRO: Did it fit in kind of with your philosophy of the natural?

MR. HANAMURA: Not especially.

MS. MIRO: No? It was more the kind of machine?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, that only made me aware of the attitudes and the ideas that those who were the zeitgeist at the time, you know, felt, I suppose, and at the time were into. And I think I had felt some kind of affinity to that.

MS. MIRO: Did you see yourself building Frank Lloyd Wright kind of buildings or Bauhaus buildings?

MR. HANAMURA: No. Well, neither. I think probably at that point, by the time I was a senior I'm pretty sure I knew that the dilemma that was there, which I still have, of the two different kinds of attitude, one coming from Frank Lloyd Wright and the other coming out of the Bauhaus. And I still have the problem. It hasn't gone away.

MS. MIRO: No. Have you resolved it by using it in certain, by applying different principles in different situations, do you think?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, somewhat. Like right now it's kind of interesting that I just finished a showroom for Hagopians [phonetic], who specialize in Oriental rugs. And I got some lady who was at Cranbrook, Betsy Drayheim, who worked with a lady named Kasuba, I think, in New York, who was into stretch fabric. The idea of stretch fabric I think came to me as a perfect foil for Oriental carpets, so I got her to design part of this showroom for me, which is done being stretch fabric has, you know, curves, undulating curves, but at the same time relatively crisp. But with that I incorporated mirrors and hard edge partitions and very kind of Messiaen design but it's tempered with the use of natural wood in articulating certain edges. So that if it is crisp and clean and machine like it's tempered with a certain amount of natural material.

MS. MIRO: That's very interesting. Do you feel the showroom is a success?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, it turned out pretty well.

MS. MIRO: Integrating those?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. MIRO: That's great. You graduated from Miami of Ohio with a BFA?

MR. HANAMURA: A BA, BA in architecture.

MS. MIRO: BA in architecture. Did you have any architecture training there, teachers that were specifically interesting beyond the Bauhaus fellow?

MR. HANAMURA: No, he was the only one, although there was a historian there who was probably a reasonable fellow. He died soon after. I think his name was Dunland.

MS. MIRO: Do you see things in a historical context?

MR. HANAMURA: I try to. I think I've only begun to do that after having had to teach.

MS. MIRO: People want to know the hows and the whys.

MR. HANAMURA: Well, I wanted to know in order to be able to put things in some kind of sequence and some kind of order.

MS. MIRO: You finished Miami and you were prepared to be an architect and what happened next? You went to the Army?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, yeah. While I was at Miami I got drafted and went in the Army and then I came back again.

MS. MIRO: Can you tell us about the Army?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, the Army was like the Army. Well, it sent me to Japan, which was probably a good thing, although I don't think I took advantage of it. At that point I had just, I suppose I was in my second year in

architecture when I got drafted and hadn't run across these people yet. So I knew about Frank Lloyd Wright and did go and look at his hotel. And generally I suppose maybe if only by osmosis I probably gained a lot by being there.

MS. MIRO: What capacity were you there and why did the Army send you?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, I was one of these agents. I was in the CIC, which was prior to the CIA. And actually the only reason I got in was that I was stationed in Missoula, Montana as a clerk and I hated it there. Right now I'm trying to go back there. But I hated it there. I thought it was boring and I just wanted to get out of there and so I kind of bugged my commanding officer into a change and so he acquiesced and asked me if I wouldn't mind going to a CIC training center. And I said, "Sure," without knowing what it was about. And after I agreed then I found out what it was about. And it was a very quick one. It didn't really deal too much with the it was more oriented towards the office part, duties of the CIC organization rather than the intrigue and the other part. So that's how I got over there.

MS. MIRO: They sent you to Japan?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: To do what?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, my first assignment was to go and listen at a labor rally. This was after the war. I got in right after the war. It was 1946, fall of '46, one year after the war ended pretty much. And in theory the CIC was developed from the OSS. The OSS were the spies during the war. The CIC was probably the same personnel but there to investigate or become aware of any subversive elements subversive to the USA. And so I was sent on my first assignment to listen for subversive talk or whatever. And when I went I realized or after I listened I realized that I really didn't speak the language very well or didn't understand it very well because as I grew up the only communication I had with my parents dealt with the day to day requirements of, you know, when do we eat or what time do we go to the movies, and so I really didn't develop a vocabulary. And so I flunked my first assignment. And they then put me in charge of the communication system, which dealt with a network of these agents out in the field or out in the city. We were in Tokyo. And I was responsible for maintaining communication with the field through a broadcasting system.

MS. MIRO: So you spoke Japanese then?

MR. HANAMURA: I spoke it as well as I could, enough to get by. With the agents I spoke English. But in associating with the people in Tokyo I spoke Japanese.

MS. MIRO: What do you think you said it was good for you. In what way, being there?

MR. HANAMURA: I began to become aware of the aesthetic qualities that they had developed. I took a lot of pictures. In fact, I managed to get myself a camera for 15 cartons of cigarettes and began to take pictures. I already had a pretty good design sense. So I took a whole bunch of pictures and they were not bad. And the pictures dealt with aesthetic qualities that I saw that were, that I saw in terms of aesthetics and design.

MS. MIRO: Traditional structures?

MR. HANAMURA: Oh, yeah. Not necessarily architecture but gardens, people, landscape, Fujiyama, and some of the traditional temples.

MS. MIRO: Did you feel like you were part of Japan?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. When I got there I somehow felt that I had grown up there. Although I was there when before I was a year old I think my folks went back there, but I don't remember anything about it.

MS. MIRO: Would you go back again? Would you like to go back?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, I would like to go back.

MS. MIRO: Why did you eventually leave the Army or what happened, why did you leave Japan?

MR. HANAMURA: I don't know the particular Army requirements but I only stayed for nine months and was ready for, I was ready for discharge. And they try to keep you in there by giving you a officer status, but I just wanted to get back. So after nine months I got shipped back and I went back to school.

MS. MIRO: To Miami of Ohio?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: And finished up there?

MR. HANAMURA: Right.

MS. MIRO: So we're back in Ohio.

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: You graduate and you have options. What kinds of options?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, I was hitchhiking through Detroit, mainly to look up an old friend of mine who was an architect.

MS. MIRO: One of the fellows at Cranbrook?

MR. HANAMURA: No. He was from, he graduated from Illinois but he's presently working for Yamasaki. I really didn't know too much about Cranbrook. In fact, I didn't know that these other friends of mine were at Cranbrook. And I was looking for a job which entailed actual manual work rather than in an office.

MS. MIRO: Why?

MR. HANAMURA: Because I really wanted to know how a building was put together and be able to understand some of the workings of the structure. So I looked this fellow up and he referred me to a guy named Alex Gow, who at that time had a small firm that constructed houses primarily for Saarinen, Yamasaki and this guy named Gerard. And I got a job working on one of Gerard's houses, which was at Grosse Pointe. It was a house for one of the vice presidents of the National Bank of Detroit. So I was working there as a carpenter and they needed someone or the architect Gerard needed someone to bring his drawings up to date for this particular building. So he asked me if I would work for him on the site and develop these drawings. And then he asked me if I would go and work in his office, which was in Grosse Pointe and I was the only other employee except for the secretary.

MS. MIRO: Was he a fairly well known architect at that time in the city?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, he was pretty well known. That's when I became aware of Cranbrook. And his friends were Saarinen and Yama and people like Joyce Nelson and Charles Eames and Noguchi and Steinberg.

MS. MIRO: Saul Steinberg?

MR. HANAMURA: Saul Steinberg, yeah.

MS. MIRO: Were they in this area at that time?

MR. HANAMURA: No, but Gerard had this thing going which got me into galleries actually. He had this space in Grosse Pointe behind Best. Best? Behind one of those big stores. And the second floor was the drafting area and the first floor was a small shop somewhat like Adler Shnay only on a very minute scale, mostly fabrics and things of that order, plus a space that he kind of utilized as a gallery. So I recall him bringing in a show of Steinberg's drawings. That's the only specific show I remember, although I do know that he had some drawings by Picasso there. And he painted himself. He worked and painted somewhat like Wally Mitchell, whom I met at that point. And they seemed to be working with the Artist Market, which was on Madison Avenue then. So I became familiar with the Artist Market. I started to go to Cranbrook and met a lot of people there and Peggy de Salle's gallery. So that became my group of people that I communicated with, people at Cranbrook, Peggy de Salle and people that showed there.

MS. MIRO: Who was she showing, Wally?

MR. HANAMURA: I don't know if he was. I vaguely recall this one artist from California who was influenced by Picasso who died maybe 10 years ago. His name escapes me. But he was a very good draftsman. I can't recall his name offhand.

MS. MIRO: Did it seem like an exciting time, like there was much going on in Detroit that would make you want to stay here?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, yeah. I knew Saarinen's wife. I didn't know Eero himself but I knew his wife, went to some of their parties. Knew people that came to Cranbrook and then went on, like Jack Larson, Toshiko Takaezo.

MS. MIRO: When you say you knew them it was just a social kind of thing or did you have discussions about art?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, mostly social.

MS. MIRO: What kind of people were they that Saarinen was gathering around him to your mind?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, Mitchell's first wife was there, Wally Mitchell's first wife, whose name escapes me. And Warren Platner, Dinkalo. Well, Elliot, was it Elliot Roosevelt who was married to the people, one of the persons who Elliot. His name was Elliot, who started the Knoll franchise here. They and Roy Yama was starting. Obata was here at the time. He came and worked for Yamasaki and then he split and went to St. Louis and started I guess Yama sent Obata down to St. Louis to work on the St. Louis Airport and then Obata formed his own company with a couple of the other people in the firm.

MS. MIRO: In Cambridge?

MR. HANAMURA: Hmm?

MS. MIRO: He formed it in Cambridge or here?

MR. HANAMURA: No, in St. Louis. Obata has a firm in St. Louis of Obata, Hellmuth and Kassabaum.

MS. MIRO: Well, do you think that all these people were here, things were going on. There was a real impetus in design. What do you think was causing it, just Saarinen's presence?

MR. HANAMURA: I think Cranbrook helped a lot. I remember when I was in school I knew about the design show that Gerard put together at the Institute, which must have been around '49. And I still have that catalog. And I didn't see the show because I was in school. Obata at that time was working for Skidmore in Chicago, so I would go and visit him on Thanksgiving vacations, for example. So I became aware of Skidmore and that kind of work. And Lees was in Chicago then. And as a student I would kind of run around taking pictures of architecture.

MS. MIRO: What do you think was happening in Detroit? Is there any particular thing that might have caused this outburst of creativity?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, I think it was Cranbrook.

MS. MIRO: Just Saarinen's not just but Saarinen's presence?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, the school's presence and the fact that people I think the school at that time was a very good architecture school and I think they probably had a very well, Maya Gotel was there and I'm sure that people in ceramics were of top caliber. And then the person in fabrics, I can't remember her name. Her husband was an architect. And I can't remember her name. She did now I recall that she did a lot of designs for Skidmore, commercial weavings that could be used in a commercial situation.

[tape stops, re starts]

MS. MIRO: This is July 18th and I'm talking with Bob Hanamura. We're taking up where we left off. Bob, I would like to know if we can start talking today about why you decided to start an art gallery or how the gallery got started, what it was all about in the beginning and the connections to the community that it made.

MR. HANAMURA: Okay, the original intention of the gallery really was to have something going for my mother, who was here and had nothing to do and was an artist, a watercolorist. So that I thought it would be a good thing to have her keep busy and begin to relate to some of the rest of the community here.

MS. MIRO: When was this that you started the gallery and where were you working at that time?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, okay, when I say the gallery it was a small design studio and a shop that sold contemporary articles like craftware and furniture. And I was working part time for various architects. At that point it was Alexander Gerard, who presently is the fabric designer for Herman Miller and is now in Santa Fe. In fact, it was his operation. He had a small gallery connected with his operation that made me think about having something that would fulfill some desire on my part to relate to art and have my mother become part of that operation.

MS. MIRO: Was this 1962 about we're talking?

MR. HANAMURA: No, we're talking now about 1951.

MS. MIRO: Fifty one.

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. Actually the business, so called business was mainly to present contemporary trends in

design and art I think became somewhat of a fill in at that point. Only I realized a little later that all of this so called good design, which was the name that the Museum of Modern Art had for some of the shows that was going on once a year, realized that the good design couldn't happen without the artists coming up first with the concept and the ideas for visual order and experimentation.

MS. MIRO: So you were working for architects at this point and your mother had come to stay with you from San Francisco?

MR. HANAMURA: Right.

MS. MIRO: And this is how the whole thing got started?

MR. HANAMURA: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. MIRO: She ran the shop as a kind of contemporary crafts and design trends store and then you had your own consulting kind of business upstairs. The two of you worked together on it. That's it. What architects were you working for at that point and what kind of architectural designs were you doing?

MR. HANAMURA: At that stage I think I was working for a fellow named Joe Sear, whose name now is Joe St. Sear since he does a lot of work with the Catholic Church. And I also worked for a Dearborn outfit which isn't in existence anymore, something like Architects Collaborative in Dearborn.

[END TAPE 1 SIDE A]

MS. MIRO: This is side 2. I'm talking with Bob Hanamura. I'm sorry, it's July 18th. Bob, you were talking about the design business you had with your mother. Can you tell us how successful the shop was and what kinds of things you carried that were not readily available in this area before in terms of design, what your desires were with this kind of shop?

MR. HANAMURA: This was early 1950, probably '51, perhaps '52. And when I was in college the museum had presented, the Detroit Institute of Art had presented an exhibition having to do with contemporary furnishings. And as I recall, Alexander Gerard was the person that put the exhibition together. Yamasaki helped him. And people like Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen and George Nelson were involved with that exhibition, which I did not see but I read about it when I was in school. And subsequently coming up to Detroit I worked for Gerard and became aware of the so called contemporary movement in the design area. Not so much art, in fine art that I knew about at that stage but in the design area, especially in architecture and furnishings. So I was interested in presenting some of these things which were not readily available in Detroit at that time, which were things like the Eames chair, laminated wood things by Prestini from Chicago. And then that led into contemporary craftwares such as Toshiko Takaezo and other Cranbrook alumnus by that time. And also began to become friendly with the Cranbrook people and presenting some of the things that they were doing.

MS. MIRO: What was the name of your store?

MR. HANAMURA: The name of the store was Chikurin, which means bamboo forest.

MS. MIRO: Is there any reason you selected that?

MR. HANAMURA: No. My mother chose that.

MS. MIRO: Oh, she liked the way it sounded?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: So how long did this store, this shop last and was it successful?

MR. HANAMURA: The shop ran until 1955 and I don't know that we were successful in terms of money, but a lot of other little shops began after we did and some of them are now successful. But I think I was really mainly interested in getting the information out and after a while I got bored with the whole thing.

MS. MIRO: Do you think that a lot of people came through your store so they had some feeling for what contemporary design was about?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: Did that happen?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, and also I think it was at that stage that I made friends, became acquainted with a lot of

people in the city who were interested in so called avant garde things and which were not readily available to them and they would come by and talk to me in the shop.

MS. MIRO: Where was the shop?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, the shop was in two locations. It started out right off of Grand River near Shaffer and then we moved out to Birmingham on Woodward Avenue and one block north of Maple.

MS. MIRO: And were you doing consulting work with your architecture and your design all along?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, I started to do interior design, which seemed to fit in with the operation of the shop.

MS. MIRO: What happened when the shop closed?

MR. HANAMURA: I went to work full time for a couple of architects and then around 1960 got tired of that and decided to open up a regular gallery.

MS. MIRO: And that was called?

MR. HANAMURA: That was just called Hanamura's.

MS. MIRO: And where was it located?

MR. HANAMURA: It started at Finkel near Schoolcraft and then around 1962 or thereabouts moved down to Harmony Park across from the Artist Market.

MS. MIRO: That was just a convenient location for you? Was it any kind of an art area at that time?

MR. HANAMURA: Morris Brolls was down there and I think one other person in the area. It seemed to have the possibilities of a small community or a group of people to relate and communicate with one another within a small, rather pleasant park like area.

MS. MIRO: And why did you decide to start a gallery?

MR. HANAMURA: I think -

MS. MIRO: Rather than a design shop or something like that?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, the gallery was in conjunction with the design shop so that there was that relationship. And I think my interest really came from my probably being frustrated as a designer or maybe let's say that I thought my calling was to be some kind of an artist, craftsman, which I never went through with in school. And I think I tried to support those people at that stage.

MS. MIRO: What was the state of crafts at that time in this community, in this country?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, at that time as far as I can evaluate it it seems that ceramics was the main area that people were either involved in or familiar with, and most of the ideas and concepts about form et cetera seemed to be related primarily to the Scandinavian countries with a slight influx from the Japanese folk art scene. And then there was a undertow of kind of highly sophisticated, slick things like jewelry that seemed to develop from industrial design and architecture and probably from the Bauhaus.

MS. MIRO: What kinds of things did you carry in the crafts and who were the artists?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, in crafts we were trying to encourage the local craftsmen so that we primarily showed local talent and on occasion would get someone that I had known from the '50s like Toshiko Takaezo or even Countler, who is now in Seattle doing pop kind of ceramics. I would get Bob Stocksdale from Berkeley; Gertrude Natchler, who just died, from the L.A. area; people from arts and crafts and from Wayne. I can't remember all the names.

MS. MIRO: Any names you can remember?

MR. HANAMURA: Pitney and a lot of artists. We tried to pair off craftsmen with either a painter or sculptor.

MS. MIRO: Why?

MR. HANAMURA: I thought that the idea of craft at that stage was a little restricting and that craftsmen as I saw it were also artists. And also the idea of so called fine art being able to coexist with something that one may have considered craft, the ability for the two to be shown at the same time. And also in the context, I think, of

the fact that those things could be shown or coexist within an environment. Therefore the gallery was designed in such a way that it would be rather clean and fresh and crisp and have essentially a so called international design look.

MS. MIRO: What artists did you carry, represent?

MR. HANAMURA: The person at that stage that was most well known was Mary Jones. We've had people like Oliverio. Even Arris Koutrillos just before he graduated from Cranbrook had a show in my gallery. Hammondy, Doug Purcell, Wally Meade. These are people from arts and crafts who no longer are doing art. The later people like Egner and so on came after the gallery closed.

MS. MIRO: Now, what was the art like that they were doing? Was it something you would consider avant garde art? Is that what you were looking for?

MR. HANAMURA: Okay, at that stage, which we're now talking about the early '60s, I was familiar with Greenberg and that whole school and their ideas about American art. So I had become kind of a champion of Jackson Pollock and the whole abstract expressionist school. So essentially the art that we showed came either out of abstract expressionism or the people that were just beginning to get into that kind of feeling, that kind of attitude. I showed people from Ann Arbor too, like Al Mullen, Mignon Chang, Bill Lewis. A lot of people from the late '50s and early '60s.

MS. MIRO: Did you have shows once a month and then you changed and there were openings?

MR. HANAMURA: Right.

MS. MIRO: And things like that? Was that a relatively new phenomenon in this area? Were there other galleries here that you modeled yourself after or was it your own idea?

MR. HANAMURA: No, there wasn't any other galleries that I modeled myself after. When I really started I think Donald Morris had a gallery with a partner out around Northland somewhere. And I think, well, Derelic was around and the other lady.

MS. MIRO: Anna Warby?

MR. HANAMURA: Anna Warby. But they tended not to deal with what I thought were more contemporary issues. And then towards the mid '60s the Hudson Gallery opened up and I can't recall the fellow's name but he -

MS. MIRO: Was it Landry who was there then? No.

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: Was it Landry?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. He'd come in from New York. And so I think this was probably the first instance of New York shows being presented here. And then following that the Castle Gallery opened up.

MS. MIRO: What kind of impact did the Hudson Gallery have on your gallery and people's attitudes in the community towards contemporary art that you remember?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, the thing was that it was all very good. Especially I felt good about it because Hudson's was just down the street. And we didn't coordinate our openings or anything but we did exchange ideas and talk to each other. And also then the artists would make it part of their routine to come to the Artists Market or to visit my gallery or go down to Hudson's.

MS. MIRO: So it was kind of like a little community starting up?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, it seemed very encouraging at that stage.

MS. MIRO: Were there collectors developing that you knew about or was that still -

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, at that point too the Friends of Modern Art began. I don't recall now exactly what year they began, somewhere in the mid '60s; '64 maybe, somewhere in there. And the gallery owners were actually invited to participate with them and go to their meetings, dinners, whatever, so that we all got to know each other [inaudible] and then I don't recall Derelic being there. But we began to know some of the people that the Founders Society, people that were involved with the Founders Society and the Friends of Modern Art.

MS. MIRO: Any particular patrons that you remember?

MR. HANAMURA: I can't recall any ones specifically by name now. We had a lot of architects too that through my contacts with the architecture community I was able to encourage some of them, and there really weren't that many, but to get Leo Redstone, people from Smith Henschman and even O'Dell [inaudible] get some of the architects out and on occasion also try to let them borrow things that might work on the particular job that they may have going on.

MS. MIRO: Were you successful with the gallery, do you think, in terms of the dollars kinds of consideration?

MR. HANAMURA: No, I don't know of any gallery that really makes money except perhaps I know Donald Morris is doing well financially. But actually I didn't look at it on those terms, so that my concern was different. It really, we really were trying to expose the community to the art community. The intent was to have the general public become familiar with the community of artists and craftsmen, especially those living in Detroit.

MS. MIRO: How strong do you think that community was?

MR. HANAMURA: The Common Ground started too somewhere along during that period. The gallery was there first but then the Common Ground came into being somewhere along there and the city planner I guess, city planner -

MS. MIRO: Blessing?

MR. HANAMURA: Blessing, I think, was kind of responsible for that to gel and come together there with the judge in Birmingham now whose name I can't recall. But they got together this building out on the east side, the east [inaudible] area and that was very encouraging, I think, for the artists because that became a place where the artists anyway could get together and develop ideas, talk to one another, see what everyone else was doing. And the community, I think, really had its beginning there.

MS. MIRO: Did you have any, were you doing any architectural design or interior design at this time too?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, intermittently. Every now and then I'll do a small job or something. But I would also be working part time because I didn't really have the capital to begin the gallery as such and it was really a drain on the bank account, which was rather nil.

MS. MIRO: Did you have any financial backers at all or did you do everything on your own?

MR. HANAMURA: No, I think I borrowed \$500 from the bank or something like that.

MS. MIRO: So it was really a very personal commitment on your part?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: You didn't have support, intellectual support except the art community supported you?

MR. HANAMURA: That's right.

MS. MIRO: Did the artists come and sit in the gallery and talk? Was it kind of a -

MR. HANAMURA: Well, I think the openings did that. I wanted to get into having forums and things but it just didn't get to that stage.

MS. MIRO: What was happening over at Wayne State at that point? Was there anything you were involved in there?

MR. HANAMURA: No. Wayne State I don't think well, maybe I shouldn't say that. Bob Wilbert was there and he had started a series of shows at the AAA Gallery, which was on Grand River, and essentially was part of a framing shop. And Bob I think was the first one really to let the artists know that there was someplace where they could show, the contemporary artists, and that other people became aware of the quality of the art being shown there. And I really don't know what that had to do with Wayne except that he was there. I really didn't know him much at that stage. It's only after I began teaching there that I got to know him more. Although there were people like Gans Pom that I would show who taught there briefly and then went on to Michigan State. But I don't know that there was that strong a group of people at Wayne there in the early '60s as there was in the late '60s.

MS. MIRO: How about arts and crafts at that time?

MR. HANAMURA: No, arts and crafts seemed to have their arts and craft look or attitude, which I wasn't interested in.

MS. MIRO: Were you making any craft objects yourself? Had you started glassblowing at all?

MR. HANAMURA: No. I started that somewhere around '72, '73.

MS. MIRO: Did you want to get into that professionally or was it an outlet?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, I had always wanted to, you know, be some kind of craftsman and that looked like an area that was just starting. In fact, actually I got into it because Bob Susstock roomed with me for a few months and he had just started into glassblowing and I got intrigued with the whole thing and followed his development. And he then, well, he went as far as he could with it, I think, and then he turned to other media.

MS. MIRO: We're in the mid to the late '60s now and was there a real sense of community developing? Were the art schools turning out more artists who were able to stay in this area and work and sell their work or was it still limited to a few faculty people from each?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, I think what happened was that people, you know, in general became more aware of contemporary art to begin with, and then for some, well, I don't know what the real reasons are but Wayne seemed to develop especially in the painting area and printmaking. I suppose Arris Koutrillos and Egner must have had some bearing on the situation. They both came in at the same time. And I had also started to teach there. And I don't know if I'm being, you know, prejudiced but I did learn a lot from those two people and began to observe the quality of the art that was coming out of Wayne State. That plus the fact that the galleries were beginning to pick up more contemporary works and even the museum, like somebody like Wagstaff coming in, I think all kind of gelled, I think, at that point.

MS. MIRO: You started to teach at Wayne after you closed the gallery or -

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. Well, during the last year Auden asked me to teach a class and I guess Olga Constantine was going on sabbatical and I came in to take her place for one year.

MS. MIRO: Let's talk then about the end of the gallery, why you decided to close it.

MR. HANAMURA: Running out of money.

MS. MIRO: It was purely financial?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, also after a while you realize that in terms of support, financial support, that there are only so many clients or people that buy art or the kind of art that you're interested in, which I thought was the best art. So after you visit these people and see these things on their walls you realize that either they're going to have to get a larger place or that they're going to have to start a gallery of their own. And also if the buyer, if the client really isn't interested in promoting or helping a particular artist I think they would have to stop at some point.

MS. MIRO: Did you feel you were supporting some artists?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, not especially. I'd give them shows and, you know, help them out here and there and do things for them, which sometimes will cost money. But I wasn't really supporting any artist.

MS. MIRO: Did you sell much through the gallery, do you remember? Is there one particular artist that seemed to be more saleable?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, we would have a show that we would expect to sell from, like Mary Jones or Harry Boris, who is in Chicago, or Wallace Mead. But also at the same time it was much easier to sell crafts than the so called fine arts, so we would kind of depend on the craft end to hold up the gallery actually.

MS. MIRO: Any particular craftsmen that sold better than others and what kind of things did they do that made them saleable?

MR. HANAMURA: I think actually sales depend a little bit on the, on politics and also on the reputation, so that we would kind of on occasion try to get the big names and we would know that the big names would sell. I suppose we could get almost any big name but we would try to select those that we believed in and those also that generally were familiar with the community or had gone to Cranbrook at one stage.

MS. MIRO: You say "we." Was there more than one person involved with the gallery?

MR. HANAMURA: No, but it kind of becomes a group effort in that I would begin to talk to other artists and craftsmen or to people that worked in my gallery who generally were students at either Arts and Craft or Wayne and I would gather information that way.

MS. MIRO: So it was really you felt in some ways a community effort too besides your own?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, although it was essentially my decision.

MS. MIRO: Right. What kind of pottery were most of the artists working on at that point, was it functional?

MR. HANAMURA: Essentially they were functional. Although as I recall, you know, even within the conventional format, like Dick Devore would, you would know that his things weren't that functional.

MS. MIRO: Did you sell Dick Devore's pottery?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, before he came to Cranbrook. He was in Flint at that point. Actually, as I think about it, most of the artists and craftsmen really were the university instructors at that point and those were the people that I was closest to. I think it began that way, getting their stuff in the gallery and then even seeing some of their students' work.

MS. MIRO: So they were Wayne, Michigan, Cranbrook professors primarily?

MR. HANAMURA: And Flint, and one or two people from Arts and Craft.

MS. MIRO: When you started teaching at Wayne was that kind of a prelude to closing the gallery? Did you have a feeling that you were going to have to?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. I don't know how I thought about it at that stage but I think a year after I closed the gallery or I had started teaching about a year before I closed the gallery.

MS. MIRO: So you kind of felt like it was going to be difficult for you to continue. Did you feel that other galleries were taking up where you had kind of left off so you weren't leaving -

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, Stevens came in and actually we worked out a little deal with him to take over the space and he used it was the Stevens Gallery then.

MS. MIRO: Did he take some of your artists too?

MR. HANAMURA: Not many that I recall.

MS. MIRO: Just different taste?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, the taste was a little different.

MS. MIRO: He was bringing in some national figures too?

MR. HANAMURA: I don't know that.

MS. MIRO: No? But you had national people also.

MR. HANAMURA: Well, I don't know that they well, like we might be able to get together group shows so that we might show Moholi or somebody like that, only within the context of a group thing. Several reasons, like I couldn't afford to do that and also I don't, I didn't think at that stage that the people would be able to understand it.

MS. MIRO: What kind of traffic did you get through the gallery?

MR. HANAMURA: Most of the traffic were students and maybe other gallery people. Lester Olin would, you know, drop by sometime. And architects. I don't know what the percentage would be but I would imagine that the general public might have accounted for 50 percent of the traffic and then perhaps the other 50 were artists, people related within the arts.

MS. MIRO: How then does the next link would be the communication with the public. Were your shows covered by the newspapers? Did you feel they got fair kind of treatment or -

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, I think the newspapers were encouraging. Joy Hackson at the News and -

MS. MIRO: Morley, was it Morley Driver?

MR. HANAMURA: Morley Driver at the Free Press. They were both supportive. I think they really both made an effort to cover the shows even if they sometimes didn't. I think both of them really were supporters. You know, Joy still is. Supporters of the Detroit arts scene. So that they would do as much as they could to help any event

or any galleries like that.

MS. MIRO: Were there any particular shows that you were especially proud of that you thought were very significant? I know that you kind of have a overview now looking back. Sometimes one show stands out as special in your mind, two shows, ten shows.

MR. HANAMURA: I think probably the best artist that I was able to present was Mary Jones. And Harry Bohrs from Chicago was, I think, a happy thing that occurred. He's from Chicago and the reason I got him to show was due to Morris Barzoni, who was responsible for me getting involved in the gallery business to begin with. I think I showed a lot of young people too that were just beginning and their things at that stage I saw as being rather experimental. People like Arris, even Joe Oliverio. The opportunity to show people that were just fresh out of school and trying to find themselves was something that I kind of enjoyed being able to do.

MS. MIRO: I guess is there anything else you would want to say about the gallery years, the time spent?

MR. HANAMURA: Not especially.

MS. MIRO: No? Okay. What did you find Wayne like once you started teaching at Wayne? You were still part of the art community. Was it a different atmosphere for you? Were the things that were stressed different? How did you find the students? What was the art community at Wayne like, if there was one?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, the Wayne community of students I think or I appreciate now as being very much involved with acquiring a certain amount of information and wanting to know as much as they could. A lot of them or most of them, I think, were working or working part time and so they were really going to school to gather, to get something out of it. And I found them in general to be quite challenging. At the same time there were also these political problems and different points of view about what art is or what good art should be and so on, and I think that's good.

MS. MIRO: Can you identify some of those opposing points of view? You don't have the identify the particular people who had them.

MR. HANAMURA: Well, you know, I guess the American idea of a vanguard will be one as opposed to and that vanguard I'm talking about would be involved with taking history, the history of western painting or western art and trying to extend it in whatever direction you thought it should go, which is different from let's say someone or point of view in which one would be working towards understanding and expressing one's own ideas about life and art through whatever they were doing without a concern of that kind. And then another point of view probably goes back to imitation, the representation of something. And I think all those views existed at Wayne. Well, I'm sure it existed in most schools but I think at Wayne the vanguard area is stronger than many other places.

MS. MIRO: Did you teach from an avant guard viewpoint or didn't that apply?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, I guess I did.

MS. MIRO: Who else was teaching there at that time that you were friendly with?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, Arris and John and Parrish. Let's see. I think those were the people that I would generally speak with after hours. As a matter of fact, I had a studio right next to John and we would discuss things quite a bit.

MS. MIRO: Where was your studio?

MR. HANAMURA: At Convention Hall.

MS. MIRO: What was it like at Convention Hall at that time? That was a new development, wasn't it?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, that was very exciting. This was late '60s and Faust, Gordy Newton, Sestock, they were all there at that point. And Michael Lukes. And they, at that stage the idea or now I see that, you know, there's something called Detroit Art or I think I see something called Detroit Art. At that stage there was nothing like that and it seemed to me like the beginning of a kind of way of looking at the world that one now calls I think kind of a Detroit Art.

MS. MIRO: What would you call that viewpoint?

MR. HANAMURA: It's one that comes out of a way of working, process art essentially. In fact, I vaguely recall a show that came here to the Institute that I think Wagstaff had something to do with it. I don't know what the name of the show was but there were people like Eva Hess in the show, which the Detroit these people, Gordy

and Michael and so on, could relate to very easily. And I think there was something about that show. I wish I could remember what the name of the show was.

MS. MIRO: When was it, do you remember? About '70?

MR. HANAMURA: Around 1970. We could all kind of relate to it and see similar attitudes. And also, you know, it's kind of a tough attitude, tough and rough, and I suppose kind of a macho thing.

MS. MIRO: Why do you think there was a macho thing involved in it?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, just by observing the attitudes of the painters, essentially. Well, maybe Gordy especially but I can kind of sense that feeling.

MS. MIRO: How did it adapt into a Detroit style? What would you characterize Detroit style as?

MR. HANAMURA: Well -

MS. MIRO: If there is such a thing. I mean -

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, I don't know that there's a Detroit style but I think there is a sense of raw energy that one can feel from the works of people like Lukes, Gordy, Egner, all of it really coming out of an outgrowth of the use of materials or the way of putting things together which doesn't necessarily remain flat, physically flat, and tending towards breaching the gap, I suppose, between sculpture and painting. And the use of colors, the color range. You know, when they first I don't recall now. Someone made this remark about Detroit art and I said, "Yeah, it's like the Ash Can School but more like the back alley ash can." The usage generally of material that have been already used or something that you pick up in a junkyard, or Michael Lukes' rabbits. One senses the struggle, the urban actually it's urban. It's an urban struggle that the thing has gone through and been transformed into this so called rabbit and one can feel the oppression and the difficult time that Michael had gone through in order to get to that stage, and I really admire him for that.

MS. MIRO: What was he like as a person at that point?

MR. HANAMURA: I don't know that he changed too much. I guess he's mellowed since those days. But very, he was very strong, surly, and positive. But also felt that he was bucking the odds and was very difficult to socialize with because he would always have a chip on his shoulder.

MS. MIRO: What was Gordy like?

MR. HANAMURA: They were similar, quite similar.

MS. MIRO: Bob Cesta?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, well, I don't know if Bob was really trying to be like them or not. I think he tried to join the other he went out to Providence, went up to Rhode Island School of Design and I really don't know what happened out there but he came back and became more of an outcast, outcast in terms of society.

MS. MIRO: Not in terms of the artists but in terms of -

MR. HANAMURA: No.

MS. MIRO: Society's terms?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: How about John Egger? You became friendly with him at that point?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. John, I met him when he first came. He was and still is full of energy, quite well versed, very sharp, perceptive, and always eager to talk about art. In fact, I think I got most of my bearings in my way of looking at things from John just by talking to him.

MS. MIRO: What kinds of things specifically do you attribute to his energy in terms of what kinds of ideas, just your notions of the avant garde and what art should be do you think came from him?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, he kind of reinforced the ideas that I had gotten from Greenberg and from reading Michael Freed and those people. And I guess it was also dealing primarily with two dimensional art, not so much with sculpture but with painting.

MS. MIRO: Was he kind of taking the same attitudes in his classroom too at that time?

MR. HANAMURA: I don't really know what went on in his classroom, but looking at his work I can see his close relationship to Stella. And we had talked about that too a lot, and I can understand his affinity to the ideas of Stella.

MS. MIRO: Even in the late '60s they were there?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. Well, the things that he came here with probably were the things that he had done at Yale. They were triangular pieces which referred back to Larry Poons at that point, who had set up a system of these blips. And John was working that way when he first came to Wayne and maybe even at that stage probably still hadn't arrived yet.

MS. MIRO: Do you think John was influenced by Stella?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: What do you think his impact on the rest of the school was when he first came? Was he a young upstart in some ways or was he -

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. Well, I don't know that he was outspoken but he was, he would be able to articulate ideas and positions that the general art community felt but could not articulate. So he, I think, really turned out to be kind of a spokesman for the artists, those artists I'm speaking about, and he was doing that within this academic situation. And I recall going to some meetings or I don't know that they were meetings but public things, and I can't recall exactly what they were. But he would come up with questions and remarks that everyone would be in favor of. They would clap and, you know, you'd know that John had hit the thing on the nail. He was very perceptive. I think he's, it seems like he's in the right place at the right or the right person at the right place at the right time.

MS. MIRO: What were your classes like at that point? You were teaching design, modern design, Bauhaus?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, no. They were two dimension design classes. They were quite intriguing. I really didn't know too much about it, you see, when I began, and so it was a learning process for me. Or eventually I could, you know, I knew certain things that I thought were good and then when one had to teach the thing you realized that you had to put that into language. And I read a little bit of [inaudible] Strachan and realized that I really have to develop these verbal skills and began to be able to communicate as clearly as I could using terminology that other historians and critics used. And I referred to even people like Kleinheim and Keppish and Mahoney and Greenberg and so on. And just by having to talk and discuss these things what [inaudible] was talking about all the time became much more clear for me. And some of my classes were very good and we had a good time generally. Quite a few good students, like Nancy Breck.

MS. MIRO: Brett?

MR. HANAMURA: Brett. And Valerie Taylor. And I'm sure there's a whole bunch there.

MS. MIRO: You can't remember any others that stood out?

MR. HANAMURA: Bruce Shaw was in the class. He's in glass now. He had a show at O.K. Harris about a year ago. He's teaching at Ohio State. Well, let's see. The lady that just graduated from Yale, Pat Halpert. And a fellow that used to work at Hillbury's.

MS. MIRO: Gil Latham?

MR. HANAMURA: No, I didn't know him.

MS. MIRO: Oh, at the architect's?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. Webster. Paul Webster.

MS. MIRO: Did you feel like with Convention Hall and with Wayne there was a kind of real community that had finally developed?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. Well, at that point somewhere in the mid or I guess it must have been early '70 the Willis started. Well, it was, I think it was the late '60s. Now, I'm not sure. I think it, well, I'm not sure now but I remember going to the first few meetings and realizing that some kind of a formal situation was beginning to take place.

MS. MIRO: Who do you think was really instrumental in the Willis happening?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, Greg, Greg Murphy and John. And Arris was in there. I think those were the prime that I can recall. I'm sure there were others but those stick in my mind.

MS. MIRO: Did you think that that was going to be a catalyst for the community, the Willis, at that time, the whole idea of an artist co op?

MR. HANAMURA: I don't know that I thought of it as a catalyst but I thought of it as a good thing that would help to bring a certain group of artists, their friends and hopefully the general public together.

MS. MIRO: How was it having artists with studios beyond their own home? Wasn't that kind of a new thing in the community at that time at Convention Hall, the artists having lofts and then a gallery starting? There was an energy that was new to the community or do you think it was an outgrowth of what had started with your gallery and the generation before?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, I think it goes back. I don't really know, you know, the history so much. I do remember going to the, going to Arts and Crafts when they were down on Irskine somewhere.

MS. MIRO: Irskine and Caplan? No?

MR. HANAMURA: I don't know the name of the street now. And there were artists living in lofts and things back then too, so it wasn't anything new. I think essentially there were just more of them, more artists. You know, I don't recall now. De Kooning was somebody who it was said that when he walks down SoHo now, you know, there's a whole bunch of artists. Well, when he was walking down 10th Street in those days it would be very rare they would run into an artist. So there's more artists around.

MS. MIRO: Do you think there's any reason besides more art schools? Do you think society is more tolerant or demands more art?

MR. HANAMURA: No, I don't know that society demands more art but I think the people that are going to art school or decide to become artists, partially I think they do it because they do want to fulfill that part of their life which I think they find missing from the general established lifestyles, let's say, or generally established modes of making a living.

MS. MIRO: How do you feel about the image of the artist as the noble savage living penniless in a loft and sacrificing themselves for the art? Do you think that there's truth to that kind of notion?

MR. HANAMURA: I think the artists like to believe that it's true, but I don't know about that. I think that's kind of a romantic idea that we've gotten from knowing about van Gogh and so on. I don't think Matisse, you know, ever suffered that way, or even Seurat, although Seurat never sold anything when he was alive.

MS. MIRO: What about the artists in this community, how do you think they see those notions of what it is to be an artist?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, I think they I don't know that they have a very clear picture of the relationship between their community, which there is one now, and the rest of the society. I think it's very difficult for both kinds of societies to understand the kind of value systems that are operating, so the artists may be operating under one and the rest of the world on another system. I think generally the whole world is really going in the wrong direction, but especially Japan, and I think it's all America's fault. This affluent society that America has become I think makes it very difficult for one to really understand or try to understand what kind of relationship one is supposed to be having with one's friends and with one's community and with the rest of the country and with the rest of the world.

MS. MIRO: Do you feel more comfortable with the artists' viewpoint, the artists' values?

MR. HANAMURA: Not particularly. And I suppose I admire their individuality. But I also have a strange sensation or feeling about the idea of an avant garde, which I have championed all along, have a feeling that it's some kind of a man made idea which may be an isolated thing that may not be of much worth within the context of a whole.

MS. MIRO: Do you think that that applies to your whole viewpoint on architecture and design, too, that art refers to nature rather than just art itself?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, yeah, now you're talking about -

MS. MIRO: Something else.

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. Well, I guess, you know, just it's a philosophical problem and I don't know where one

finds out these things.

MS. MIRO: Don't you think that if you're talking about people like Gordy and Michael and those people that we've been talking about, that their art do you think they were making their art to be avant garde artists or do you think they were making their art because it was an individual expression? You separated the two.

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, I have separated the two. I guess that's not quite right, yeah. I think that it's an individual expression of theirs which comes out of the environment that they're in and also comes from the, all of the things that they've taken in through their antennae and regurgitating it comes out, true. Although, see, that's a lot of, you know, interchanging of ideas.

[END TAPE 1 SIDE B]

MS. MIRO: This is reel 3. I'm talking with Bob Hanamura on July 18th. We are continuing our discussion about the role of Detroit artists and art in this community relative to ideas about what has happened here. Bob, how long did you teach at Wayne? Was it always part time also?

MR. HANAMURA: I taught part time for five years, probably about 1968 to '73.

MS. MIRO: And you taught design the whole time?

MR. HANAMURA: Yes.

MS. MIRO: So Olga Constantine came back but you still continued teaching?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. I taught part time.

MS. MIRO: Did you do any architectural consulting?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, I would do a few jobs on the side.

MS. MIRO: Anything that you would want to comment on?

MR. HANAMURA: Nothing especially, although I did help Jim Duffy do his little gallery downstairs there. You've been out there?

MS. MIRO: Uh huh. [Affirmative.] What was Mr. Duffy like to work for?

MR. HANAMURA: I thought he was relatively easy to work with. He had come from a background, I think, where he would expect certain quality of work and once one understood that then you knew what to do. He seemed to be pretty perceptive and has pretty high standards.

MS. MIRO: So then it was a good commission for you. You enjoyed it?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, because I was able to get some other artists involved with it.

MS. MIRO: Who?

MR. HANAMURA: George [inaudible] made some seating things for him. They're really kind of sculptural or they're sculptural things one could use. And Gordon Orear did some ashtrays. Also, Heinstad was supposed to do something but I don't think she did. And then Sestat did the door.

MS. MIRO: Was that kind of your initiative that brought those people there or were they just suggestions you gave?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, they were suggestions.

MS. MIRO: Was that the first time Sestat had done any kind of furniture like that? He did the bedroom set later, I think.

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. Yeah, I encouraged him to do that.

MS. MIRO: The bedroom set too?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: Was that part of your whole idea of the merging of craft and art again?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. Yeah, I think that if the artist really had, you know, so much insight into those kind of qualities that if they wanted to they could make functional objects or those things that work with architectural interiors and I like to encourage that.

MS. MIRO: Were there any interesting visiting artists to Wayne while you were there, any particular people you -

MR. HANAMURA: No, that didn't start until after I left.

MS. MIRO: Was the faculty fairly easy to get along with or were they kind of divided at that time in terms of attitudes towards art?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, they had their little personal ideas and attitudes that I think made it, you know, difficult for a very close relationship between a good bunch, but one can get along with a small group.

MS. MIRO: What group did you see yourself as part of, the Egner?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. Well, John and Tom Parrish came in I think a few years later. We got to be pretty close. I see John or Tom Parrish now quite often.

MS. MIRO: How come you stopped teaching at Wayne?

MR. HANAMURA: The University of Michigan offered me a full time job so I couldn't resist and I took it.

MS. MIRO: How did you happen to get a full time job there, did they know your work or your teaching?

MR. HANAMURA: They knew both. And the person that actually recommended me was the person that is teaching interior design there, who I had known in the '50s.

MS. MIRO: Who is that?

MR. HANAMURA: A fellow named Bill Carter. He had worked at Ford & Earl. So he recommended me when the position came up, apparently.

MS. MIRO: Who was the dean at Michigan then?

MR. HANAMURA: Joyce Bayliss. He's a former Cranbrook person and he had also known me before.

MS. MIRO: And so your position at Michigan was teaching interior design?

MR. HANAMURA: I taught interior design and two dimensional design.

MS. MIRO: What was the faculty like at Michigan?

MR. HANAMURA: I can compare it to Wayne, I suppose. They were, I can just say that they seemed to be completely opposites. The Michigan staff is a very conservative and relatively older group of people, whereas at Wayne I don't know what the percentage is but there seemed to be more young ideas going on at Wayne. And I think too that the kind of students at the schools makes a difference. The students at Michigan seemed to, you know, they're bright and sharp and so on but they seem just to want to get by there and not challenge anything. They're not into a big quest of any kind. They just want to get by and get along and get done with it in four years and, you know, maybe get married and so on.

MS. MIRO: What kind of art did they make relative to conservative art, do you think?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, and not much insight.

MS. MIRO: Without the questioning it's not easy.

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah.

MS. MIRO: So do you think that even though they had a stronger intellectual backup in terms of the university and requirements to get in that it didn't really help their artistic abilities?

MR. HANAMURA: You mean the school didn't help them?

MS. MIRO: Right.

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah, well, I think it's a vicious circle. You get this rather complacent group of students and then the faculty the same way, and therefore they just kind of feed on each other and it becomes very

nondescript.

MS. MIRO: Do you think that they were trained to be good artists or good teachers then maybe? What kind of training do you think the students emerged with from the University of Michigan?

MR. HANAMURA: I don't know that they're trained for anything, actually. I think it's really an typical ivory tower situation and they're not aware of really what else is going on. Not totally, but generally speaking 90 percent of the arts school is content with doing their own little thing without questioning its relationship to the rest of the world or to society or whatever.

MS. MIRO: And how does that compare to what you felt at Wayne?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, at Wayne there's a lot of energy of seeking and questioning and really as an instructor I felt that I had to really dig into things and be able to respond to the students if not with answers, which you rarely had, but with a certain amount of insight so that you can direct the students and help them find themselves actually. And at Michigan there wasn't that kind of challenge. They were more interested in their grades and making sure that they satisfied all the requirements and made it to the football game in time and things like that.

MS. MIRO: You taught there from 1972 to?

MR. HANAMURA: Nineteen seventy three through '78.

MS. MIRO: This was your last year there?

MR. HANAMURA: Right.

MS. MIRO: How come you're leaving?

MR. HANAMURA: I got fired.

MS. MIRO: Do you think it was because of your attitudes and your energy and your kind of zeal that showed up in contrast to the complacency that you're describing?

MR. HANAMURA: Well, partly, I think, but this was also some kind of political thing that I never really got to evaluate to clarify the real reason.

MS. MIRO: Are you glad to be leaving?

MR. HANAMURA: Yeah. It's a good chance to get away.

[tape stops, re starts]

MS. MIRO: So, Bob, you're now through at the University of Michigan and as I can see around your apartment here at the Knickerbocker, seven years in the kind of wonderful clutter that it is, you're packing up. What are your plans?

MR. HANAMURA: If I ever get packed up I expect to be moving to San Francisco and collecting unemployment.

MS. MIRO: Do you have any regrets about leaving Detroit or you feel it's time, that you've given your all to the city and you want to move on, or what?

MR. HANAMURA: The reason I'm really here was that I was hitchhiking through after I left college and got a job and I said to myself at that time that, "Well, after this job I'll move on," and that was 30 years ago. So I'm really happy to be leaving, although the part that I kind of regret leaving are all of the friends that I've made here and the fact that there are certain things that I had hoped to get established and going that I would like to be part of. But I think this is a good time and the opportunity to make the move that I thought I would make back in the '50s.

MS. MIRO: What kind of things did you want to stay around to see flourish or get going more?

MR. HANAMURA: I'd like to see what really will happen to downtown Detroit and whether the renaissance really will make that difference for Detroit. I'm curious in terms of urban planning and architecture. Then I'm curious about all of the artist friends that I have, wondering how and what will happen to their goals, if they'll be able to do what they think they want to do and whether all of these galleries will flourish or what.

MS. MIRO: Well, you can come back and visit.

MR. HANAMURA: Yes, and I suppose that probably will happen every decade.

MS. MIRO: Every decade? We'll send you - Stanley will come from Laramie with his tepee.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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