Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Albert Paley, 1982 Dec. 2

Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

Contact Information
Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington. D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Albert Paley on December 2, 1982. The interview took place at the artist's home in Rochester, New York, and was conducted by Robert F. Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview was transcribed as part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

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

Interview

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Transcription begins mid-sentence] - 1982, Rochester, Albert Paley. Maybe you can talk again a bit about anything you'd like to bring out in your childhood in Philadelphia area that you think was significant not only then, but for you later - I mean really through high school or so, were there things that -

ALBERT PALEY: No, I don't think so. A lot of people bring up the aspect of childhood as a predetermined kind of thing. I would say that the only thing that in later years I realized had an influence on the direction that I took - it wasn't just me, but I realized later it was a cultural thing - when I was fairly young, we moved to suburbia, and this was in the early '50s. And we lived in a fairly low - say lower-middle class income type of thing in Philadelphia - row-house situation. So moving to suburbia was like being out in the country, because we had a yard and we'd never had a yard before and that kind of thing. And so it was all very exciting. I had a bike and you ride around and that type of thing. But as the whole development of suburbia and the development of Levittown and consumerism and that whole fusion of identity and mass marketing and all that -

MR. BROWN: Did that bother you when you were a boy, do you think? Or were you -

MR. PALEY: In retrospect, I understand what had happened. But when I was a child, I - you do all the stuff that you do - and like in the suburban area that I grew up in, there was another farming area and they just bulldozed everything down and they made track houses. And there wasn't any trees around, there wasn't any bushes, it was just houses and streets. I became involved with a scouting - in the boy scout type of thing - and like going camping and being out in nature, I mean that was the extreme from the city and it was like - and I realized when I went out on these camping trips and I came back, it was just a lack of trees and it was like a real loss. And I felt that that had such an essence of quality about it that really didn't exist in the environment. And I realized that as a kid, but I didn't ever really know what it meant.

And then later on, the whole plastic nature of the thing - you know everything - and the attitudes and the artifice and the hypocrisy and all that kind of thing. And at that time, I was a teenager so I was rebellious anyhow -

MR. BROWN: How did your parents with it - did they adapt perfectly well to it? It's just sort of, snap out of a city -

MR. PALEY: Oh no, for them it was an incredible step up. You know, they owned their own home, which they hadn't owned before. They had the free of crime, which didn't exist then. But the whole thing - free of crime, and the shopping centers, and good schools, it was the utopia. It was the utopia of the '50s and yeah, so I kind of -

MR. BROWN: Were your parents quite influential on you? Did they always urge you to do your best? Or what sort of ethics did they have?

MR. PALEY: Well that kind of value construct is very strange. My father was an invalid pretty much all of my life. He got severe arthritis and he stopped work when I was 14 and so he was home most of the time. And there was never the pressure to go to school or to be a doctor or a lawyer or do anything like that. But there always was - the statement was always like, it wasn't indifference but they - we don't care what you do, but be the best you can or something like that. But there wasn't any of that type of thing of pushing me in any kind of direction. And actually looking back on it, the last couple years I think I'm being reflective and looking back and I - it was amazing how tolerant they were and never really said anything. I was really free to do whatever I wanted to do and go my own way and actually the lack of restriction was probably good because I fostered my own choices.

They were my own choices and it wasn't really reactionary. You know, so many people when they grow out of childhood it's just a very reactionary thing about the parents and the whole parental authority and that's extended into institutional authority and so on and so forth. And takes them years to break it and I never had that. So what happened was that my response when I started to rebel or react was more towards cultural values or much broader base type of things, it wasn't individual family unit or person or an act. It was more of a visually what the culture is presenting me. You know, this is terrible, this and that kind of thing - reacting that way. And when I finally - it was a real quirk that I got into art school, but -

MR. BROWN: A quirk you say?

MR. PALEY: Yeah, I left high school, I really didn't like school that much. You know, I finished high school, but I was working as a salesman - a stockboy first, and then a salesman in Gimbels Department Store. And then I used to race cars and do all that kind of stuff. And I was offered a managerial position in Gimbels to be a northeast manager of this Gimbel department store in the area that I was in, actually it was selling art supplies believe it or not. And at that time, I was only 19 years old and I looked at all the people in the meeting. Is all this relevant or not? And I looked at all the people at the in the meeting and I couldn't see myself when I was 50 or 60 years old being in the same damn department stores, seemed like a dead end situation.

So at that point I thought about going into the service or doing other things, but - so finally - I had always enjoyed painting and drawing and stuff like that in high school. I was like class artist and all that kind of stuff. So an old friend of mine was in Tyler School of Art [at Temple University, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania]. He said why don't you come over and take a look at it. And I looked at it and it seemed really nice and the whole idea about art in school was - I felt that if you went to school for art, it was advertising - like drawing pictures for magazines and things. And I figured, well, I like to do this thing but I'm not going to go to school because if you try to make work out of it, it would just kill the feeling that I have about it. But I realized after I went there, that wasn't the case and I -

MR. BROWN: What did you see when you went and visited?

MR. PALEY: Well, just the school and the type of -

MR. BROWN: People were doing more of their -

MR. PALEY: Well, just the type of things that were done, I'd never been exposed to that. So I applied to the school and got in. Had a portfolio to get in and all that. And it was - what education did for me at that time was what I guess education is supposed to - the first six months I was there was a total revelation. I mean it was just that it was a world that the values that were presented, the type of concerns, the type of process, the type of endeavors. I was just suited for everything that I found awkward about the business world and about all that stuff and it was just a very warm place to be.

MR. BROWN: Can you remember what some of those revelations may have been?

MR. PALEY: Well, the thing is when I was - I always liked to work with my hands. And I always liked to do - I worked with cars and mechanics and that kind of thing. I enjoyed camping and I enjoyed being outside and the whole thing of - the kind of fear that I had that I had when I in high school was that ultimately I'd be trapped in an office somewhere. You know you couldn't be outside in all that and like the great freedom of being outside. And you get to art school and here are people who are doing those things and doing their activities and it was quality and value in that kind of work and that kind of thought process. It wasn't this removed type of thing that usually in industry you're just a niche along the way. That you had control of this thing and it was important and the quality of the materials whatever it was. And the drawing class, you look at a tree or you look at a rock and you draw it. And obviously it was being presented that these things have value, if you can perceive them. And things that normally everyone thinks is meaningless. So it's taking this thing and it's just - that was a whole reversal of what the culture was about.

MR. BROWN: And you felt that too after you -

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: - made your drawing of the tree.

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah, I mean, I had all those feelings before about that thing but here was an environment that supported and buttressed the things that I felt. And a lot of these perceptions I'm talking about now I only realized afterwards, but it was just a place that seemed very natural. And what I had learned in a six-month period, like after the first semester or whatever, I felt was incredible. I mean, I was challenged, I performed, I developed, and the diversity that happened to me during that period was the greatest growth thing that I felt that I had ever done, and I felt very good and I just wanted more of it then.

MR. BROWN: Generally was it a prescribed curriculum in the beginning?

MR. PALEY: Yeah, well, what it was, it was a prescribed curriculum, and then what they had in Tyler, they had - at the end of your first semester they had what they call a professional review, and after you did all your course work and you did all of that, you had an exhibition as a beginning freshman of the work you had done. And what they had is the whole school - all of the professors in the school would look at the work. You weren't graded as such; there was no grade involved. They were just to rank you, say, on professional standards how you stacked

up. It was nothing more than that because you could obviously pass a course with a C or a B and your work would be terrible.

So anyhow, they were reviewed and they reviewed my work and they felt that it was quite good, or whatever, and what I was allowed to do - because I still had to take all the courses I had to take, but rather then taking freshman and sophomore courses, I immediately went into junior courses. I skipped, basically, two years of school. I still had to take all the credits but I was immediately in my second - my second semester I was into honor courses, so I was associated with juniors and seniors and even graduate people doing those kind of problems, and it was like a real quantum kind of leap.

MR. BROWN: In what way? Were much more on your own?

MR. PALEY: Well, I mean, usually the first couple years you get the skills and you develop that type of thing and you get the mechanics and all that, and then you start thinking conceptually in your last - your final years in trying to get some kind of style or some kind of direction, but I jumped all of that and I was basically asked to perform at a much higher level, which I did well.

MR. BROWN: You leapt right into it.

MR. PALEY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: What sort of things did you go into at that -

MR. PALEY: Well, after having a sampling of all the things there - I'm not sure if I declared a major then or not, but I was very drawn to sculpture and I did a lot of modeling and stone carving. And we had to declare - it was like a - we had a major - you had to have a major and a minor, and I majored in sculpture and I minored in metal, and then I worked all through that time and besides functioning in that way I also got a studio assistantship - studio apprenticeship I guess they call it, which I - when classes were open in the evening I was there and I kind of monitored a class. I cleaned up the studios, I gave out tools, and before that I was paid a given amount of money and also some tuition waiver. This was in undergraduate.

Then when I got into graduate studies I looked all over for different things. I went up to Madison, Wisconsin and talked with [Arthur] Vierthaler and Fred Fenster. And I thought about going with Brent Kington. Well, I looked at different schools, and at that point Stanley Lechtzin, who I'd studied under, had just got involved in elecroforming, and it was very, very intriguing and it was a process that no one else was dealing with. And I was offered an assistantship at Tyler to teach.

MR. BROWN: He'd been your teacher in, what, jewelry?

MR. PALEY: Yeah, in jewelry.

So what happened was is I had this incredible - this thing that bothered me, and I remember, the last two years of school, my junior and senior year. It was the whole thing that I had to make up my mind what I was going to do in graduate school, and in incredible turmoil of whether I was going to be a goldsmith or be a sculptor. And it was the classic kind of thing that sculpture was the highest level of performance in art and jewelry was insignificant, it was the minor arts, and I particularly wanted to be involved in a minor endeavor and that kind of - and it was like fighting back and forth and back and forth and back and forth.

And then at the end I really look back and analyze the work, and at that point that I felt that even though the sculpture that I was doing was half-decent, I felt that with my own personality that the disciplines of metalworking was much more suited for my temperament, and I felt that if the work on the process is something that was really going to let me exercise my fullest extent, that this was much more attuned than what my composition was about.

MR. BROWN: What do you think it was that made it to be more since then -

[Cross talk.]

MR. PALEY: Yeah, so at that time I -

MR. BROWN: - you were more equipped for metalworking than for modeling or stone carving?

MR. PALEY: Well, it wasn't the technique because I was - technically I was quite good on all this stuff, but I think it had to do more with the - it wasn't the technical disciplines; it was the metal disciplines involved.

MR. BROWN: Could you explain?

MR. PALEY: Okay, first of all, with metalwork it's - if you want a given thing, a ring or a stone setting or whatever, you just don't make a stone setting. There is a whole range of things you have to go through, all kinds of processes, and it's a very methodical, very disciplined type of progression. Now, if you're going to do C, you have to do A and D and then you have to do this and this and this and this, and every place along the way, the results of that action determines the results of the next action and so on and so forth. It was very, very challenging.

And I guess I don't feel personally I was aggressive, but I respond in that way to competition, and to me to compete against the system was very, very demanding - could you go through that kind of hurdle or do that kind of thing - to the point that the work that I was doing in jewelry was technically incredibly advanced, and it was just that -

MR. BROWN: You liked that kind of disciplined, demanding challenge.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, it wasn't necessarily the final result; it was the discipline. It was the -on a small scale it's very hard to execute: a lot of time, very subtle articulation with tools, and it was like the ultimate kind of control. And -

MR. BROWN: Whereas in sculpture you didn't have to go through such steps necessarily?

MR. PALEY: No, the sculpture was very direct: you picked something up and you welded it together or you carved it or you did this and you did that, and -

MR. BROWN: It lacked that challenge.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, it was like anything that I wanted to do I could do. If I wanted to carve this, I would carve it. If I wanted to weld this together, I would weld it. But the thing is that doing that jewelry piece that was like the ultimate kind of complexity and the ultimate type of labyrinth to go through to get a final result was incredibly challenging, and it seemed to me like an impossible kind of thing.

And so -

MR. BROWN: Well, did your teachers at Tyler, in sculpture and in jewelry and otherwise - do you think - did their influence differ too? Was Lechtzin the most influential or -

MR. PALEY: Oh, at that time it definitely was, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Whereas in sculpture you'd had [Raphael] Sabatini?

MR. PALEY: Yeah, Sabatini, he was like the - he was fairly old. He was just retiring - he was about to retire. He was - actually, nobody knew his age but he was in his early 70s. And he was from the old school. He had - he did a lot of figure modeling and studied in Europe and that kind of thing, and was heavy - when people were doing all of the stuff that was happening in the '60s, all the Plexiglas and the welded steel and all that, and we were still figure modeling with academic rendering and all of that.

MR. BROWN: So through him, even in sculpture, you couldn't sense the horizon - I mean, it was pretty limited. He was a figure from the past.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, but that didn't bother me because I really -

MR. BROWN: You liked him.

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah. See, the thing is too that I was - the thing that I was drawn - the sculpture that I was doing at the time was figure drawing - figure modeling and carving and things like that and the work in jewelry was non-figurative. I mean, it was purely an abstract kind of thing. But the correlation between the two was that drawing the human body - and if you were just to draw the - say the profile of this human form, it just isn't a line that undulates and changes, but that line, there's a bone under there and there's skin and there's tendons and there's this and there's that in the structure. And that line was not a simple line but was an incredible system of complexity for understanding. And the thing with the jewelry was the same way but was process-orientation - that kind of complexity, that kind of understanding that you could get a piece of wood and there's a dark spot in there and you know it's a knot and that knot is a branch and that was cut, and da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da. And so the understanding of perception of that spot of color was a whole vista of perception; it wasn't just a color.

But see, at that time, too - this was in the '60s and all of that - Minimalism was just kind of getting started; Op art and Pop art was just getting started, and for my temperament, or whatever it was, I was the complete antithesis for that. You know, with the Op art and Pop art they wanted the immediate image. With minimalism it was that type of thing. And what I was dealing with was complexity and interlacing and interrelationships and - I just perceive things incredibly complex, and I have all the skills and disciplines - that what was evident in the

metal, plus the demands of thinking, the demands of control, the demands of process and material. So I just felt that that was a greater expressive -

MR. BROWN: How was Lechtzin teaching? What was it like?

MR. PALEY: He was incredibly influential to me. He had just started teaching there and he was very - an incredibly demanding teacher - very, very demanding. And I really thrived under that because the more that could be put on me, the more I could aspire to, where a lot of people just left his class; they just couldn't handle it. Girls would go out crying all the time and all that. Actually he was quite a - he was quite a son of a bitch, really.

But I thrive very well under that because it was that - maybe it was never, at any point in my life I had ever been challenged in that way and I was able to bite the bullet and there was something to confront; it wasn't a nebulous void that you just bounce around in.

And so it was incredibly productive, and he -

MR. BROWN: You had four-and-a-half years of more or less advanced - three-and-a-half before you even went to graduate study right?

MR. PALEY: Yeah. And he was an incredible technician, Stanley. He - just incredible technician, and very disciplined and researched and that kind of thing, so if there was something that he didn't know he would steer you to it. And just the depth of technical understanding of what was - I mean, by all the teachers teaching in that period - probably even now he's the most technically proficient in all the areas, and I really respected and admired the man.

MR. BROWN: You saw him when he was beginning electroforming.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, but he was still doing other things.

MR. BROWN: But you were seeing how he would do research into a new process -

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah, yeah. And also, besides all that, as far as being a student was concerned, in the realm of being a student, he was a professional artist. He was exhibiting - he was doing work and exhibiting, which most students, the common responses of students are very, very insular and they don't know what's happening beyond the campus and so on and so forth, and Stanley, part of his bent on education was to show the students what was happening outside of Tyler. And catalogues came in from the schools, he had guest speakers in, and he himself would have exhibitions - international exhibitions and things like that. So you became aware of that kind of world.

And when I was a sophomore I started to compete nationally in exhibitions, in regional exhibitions and things like that, and by the time I was a senior I was winning - I'd won a couple of national awards. So I was into all that kind of competing thing and even competing against what Stanley's peers were, and functioning quite well.

MR. BROWN: Were you the exception among his students?

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I was a star.

MR. BROWN: Because usually they don't promote people going out to exhibit - but you were coming along so fast -

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah. No, no, I was - as I said, when I got into graduate school I was a teacher. I was teaching 21 hours a week, which is more than I even teach now. I was still carrying a full load.

MR. BROWN: When it came to teaching, did you do that willingly?

MR. PALEY: Oh, I liked it.

MR. BROWN: Did you like it?

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah, very much.

MR. BROWN: Well, by '67 actually I guess you were starting -

MR. PALEY: Let's see, '66, '67, yeah - '67. I was teaching jewelry classes and also sculpture. I was teaching figure modeling and then I was teaching the jewelry classes - the whole night program I was responsible for, plus some day courses. I was carrying a full load in all my courses plus doing all my exhibition work, and then I started

teaching to make some money on the side - there's an art center there, Cheltenham Art Center [Cheltenham, Pennsylvania], and I taught ceramics and printmaking and a couple of other things there. I also taught weaving.

MR. BROWN: These were all things that you -

MR. PALEY: I mean, I would work - I was like - I was just really drive to work. I mean, I would work all the time. I mean, we would get up at - I'd have to be at school at 8:00 so I'd get up at 7:00 and I'd get there at like 7:30 and get a half hour in before school started. I'd teach the whole day until like 4:30 or 5:00. I'd go back to the studios. I'd stay there. We've had a pretty good group of students there. We'd have dinner and work until 12:00 or 1:00 at night. We did that every day - Saturday, Sundays, just totally working.

MR. BROWN: Do you think partly you did this, as you look back at it, because as a youth there wasn't any pressure, there wasn't any - and so when you saw there's a goal in front of you -

MR. PALEY: Well, it was simply something that - I don't know, it's -

MR. BROWN: You didn't mind work - I mean, you really wanted to -

MR. PALEY: No, I enjoyed it. I mean, that's what life was about.

MR. BROWN: When it came to teaching, how did you develop as a teacher? Were you disciplined? Were you kind of hard on the students -

MR. PALEY: No -

MR. BROWN: - demanding like Lechtzin was?

MR. PALEY: No, I think so. If anything I was criticized because I was too hard on the students that I demanded too much. I couldn't tolerate the lack of attention, I couldn't tolerate sloppiness and lack of concern. If they weren't concerned about being there I'd just as soon get out. I mean, what the hell? To me the whole thing was a very - I think education basically - I mean, looking back to the past; I'm talking from that time - was a very noble pursuit, and the empty movements of those students, for whatever reason, is just - I was totally intolerant of that. They were just there to have a warm place and to meet people - it was completely opposed to what -

MR. BROWN: Politics in those days too, they must have been active in all that - as all students did in the late sixties.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, yeah. Yes, all that was - but it was a real exciting thing because in the '60s the Vietnam War was going on and I was under the gun there. I just got out of that. So there was all of that and all the turmoil and - yeah, it became - besides intellectually and all that, it became a real moral issue because at that time they had the student classification for the draft, and if you fell below a C average you were then eligible for the draft. And there were situations that I was in where a student was performing obviously below par, and it was basically, if the kid cannot draw well, you give them a potential death sentence. You know, it got down to that point. It was very, very real; it wasn't abstract at all. And constantly, because of the war, I kept on pushing those things into perspective all the time - totally pushing it. And it was a very agonizing time for everybody.

But anyhow, and then because of that thing too, because of what was happening in the '60s - the whole thing with the '60s is the whole establishment of a new cultural order - the reaction against the old guard. And especially with the art, with John Kennedy and all that kind of stuff is - the art is kind of the salvation for society, that this is going to rid out the evils and so on and so forth, whether it's city planning, whether it's dealing with humanism or whether it's pulling in human values rather than hypocrisy and that kind of thing.

The development of a jewelry form as an art object was a very aggressive kind of thing. You know, people were dealing with very conservative things and sculpture and painting was art; metal wasn't. And like in spite of all of that you thrust an image in someone's face and they have to acknowledge its existence because it exists and therefore now acknowledge the value construct that developed it, which was the antithesis of what they were about.

And a lot of that was - I mean, everyone in their own way fought all those battles, wherever they were, and it so happens the scepter that I was carrying was in the art area, and that was my - and so it was very, very assertive and a very, very aggressive challenge.

MR. BROWN: In the craft - or the jewelry making in particular.

MR. PALEY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Seen as art - as art objects in and to themselves.

MR. PALEY: But even beyond the traditional conservative things of diamonds and silver and the Tiffany ring and all of that. It was like just taking ornamentation to an extreme and taking -

MR. BROWN: Well, jewelry - the meaning of jewelry as ornament, as -

MR. PALEY: It becomes more than that. Jewelry has always been a symbol - has been a symbol of wealth, has been a symbol of class. It would distinguish one class from another, distinguished sex and sexuality. If one was introverted you wear something very inconspicuous; if you wanted to show off your body you would do something else.

And at that time the whole - men's fashions started to change, women's fashions started to change, women's roles started to change in reference to fashion and how a woman presented her body and so on and so forth. And all of a sudden what was appropriate dress or appropriate attire was being challenged all over, and what position did a woman take in society? And a lot of ways, looking at that way, the kinds of jewelry that I did was very much a - what's the word?

MR. BROWN: Expression?

MR. PALEY: No, it was all - the criticism that was done, a lot of time it was leveled that - like when I would have lectures and things like that they said, "Well, you're not designing for the average person; you're designing for Amazons." And I was taking it as an intellectual thing. I was dealing with form, I was dealing with the formal problems - what a broach was - I was dealing with the three-dimensional relationship of the pins, of the body and so on and so forth, but I was dealing with a very strong kind of powerful statement, and the type of personality that was able to - because if you wear something that totally dominates you, your personality, nobody is going to do that. But this truly was powerful and that only took someone that had the presence and the conviction that could stand up and also wanted to be noticed.

So it was that kind of thing. It was a very assertive - very, very assertive - and I wasn't really thinking about it that much but it was all part of it. You know, it was the period and it was the time, and it fit into all of that.

MR. BROWN: You were exhibiting this widely -

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: - and you were getting a lot of feedback.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, I was exhibiting in the States, and I started - in my graduate years I was exhibiting in Europe.

MR. BROWN: You got to Europe in '67.

MR. PALEY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: You went over there -

MR. PALEY: Well, may main reason there is I had - at that time I was taking on what - in undergraduate work I started taking on private commissions for setting of stones and diamonds, designing rings, and most of my things were commission work. Plus I was subsidized because I was teaching. I had the stipend. So I saved my money and took a trip over there specifically - I mean, I enjoy traveling, but my main reason to go over there was purely professional, because I wanted to see people that I had read about in Europe, and I wanted to see the studios and all of that, because what I felt I was dealing with was very, very important and it was beyond city, state kind of thing.

So I felt that I had a relationship and basic concerns with these people and -

MR. BROWN: What did you -

MR. PALEY: Professionalism - at that point professionalism was like the main thing - to be professional in the function and to know what your area and sphere of influence was, and in that way it was very political. So I went and I met the people that I felt were important movers of concepts and ideas at the time.

MR. BROWN: And what did you learn from these Europeans?

MR. PALEY: Well, it was a very formidable period. Well, first of all I had seen more of the work than I had seen. I had an opportunity to meet with the people, and it was very nice because I was still a student and I was very well received by them into their homes and that kind of thing.

MR. BROWN: You said that the Europeans - you found it was more of a tradition operating still there than here in

each of the craft forms.

MR. PALEY: Well, I meant traditional, not necessarily aesthetics, but in the social - the social context.

MR. BROWN: In society, yes.

MR. PALEY: You know, the - [unintelligible] - what are their names? Well, the major people there, they were teaching in the universities, but they were the picked artisans of the aristocracy; I mean, the whole thing of the nobility used to commission work and so on and so forth, and the European tradition, people would go to classical music; that was part of their tradition. If they wanted very exclusive, elegant things, they would go to the artisan to have it made. In the states what do you do? You make these things; there's no market for them so have an exhibition, and the exhibition is a window for what - I see more of what's happening in the States is a folk art kind of tradition rather than a cultural kind of thing.

But anyhow - so there was that, so they were selling this work and they were existing on the work, and they were written up in the journals with critical kind of evaluation, where all that stuff really didn't exist, in the States anyhow. It was a very new thing. If anything, in the craft in the States it was seen as a very therapeutic kind of hobbyist endeavor. It was something that if you really couldn't make it in other ways you'd do that because it was - and it wasn't the aggressiveness or -

MR. BROWN: Whereas in Europe they had a distinct role in society, and had for a very long time.

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah, it functioned in a very practical way and it made a lot of sense.

MR. BROWN: So how do you come back from meeting with them? Were you in a different outlook or did it confirm much of what -

MR. PALEY: Well, it gave me - as I said, the professionalism was the main concern. And everything that I ran into with exhibitions and museums and people around. In the States it was anything but that. You were kind of humored at best. And going over there I felt that I was aligned and attuned with that kind of cultural heritage, and the strength of conviction was even firmer because it was an international thing; it wasn't a singular voice kind of thing. Yeah, so it just buttressed my own convictions.

MR. BROWN: Did you feel, when you got out of school, you had become - be a professional - you had worked to be an artist and you'd be recognized as such?

MR. PALEY: Well, I always felt that I was and it was a matter of recognition. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: You had worked toward that, for that.

MR. PALEY: Yeah. Well, the whole thing, the whole - I mean, I exhibited incredibly. I mean, I was - every exhibit, I tried to get into. And it was mainly to build credentials. First of all, I wanted to teach and that was a way to build your position, to have - when you came out, how did they select people? And I had quite an impressive portfolio by the time I got out, so that was all very important.

What was your question?

MR. BROWN: Well, teaching was - I mean, when you came back from Europe you were reinforced in your idea of the professionalism that you wanted to pursue.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Why did you want to also be a teacher? These people over there were also teachers.

MR. PALEY: See, I think it has a lot to do with the - it's a very humanistic principle. There's a lot things that, say, a craftsman and an artist, there's a lot of differences, I think. Maybe there isn't. But at that point the term "artist/craftsman" was carried around as the distinction. I don't want to get into the whole rap of that, but the thing is that I consider myself very much a craftsman. I was part of the crafts tradition, very much dealing with decorative arts. I was not an artist; I was not making painting and sculpture - what art is - or, I mean, what was classified as art.

I forgot where I was.

MR. BROWN: Why teaching?

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah, and the whole thing with teaching was that the art object or the work that I was doing was not an arrogant attack upon a style or upon this or that, but in order that I was able to function, all the

vocabulary of process and technique and all that was a lineage; it was a heritage that was passed down, and I felt an incredible responsibility for the continuance of that, that these people had worked that had developed these processes and so on and so forth, and their labors were passed on to me. And if I would accept them as a responsible value, that therefore was my responsibility to carry it on and continue it, to pass it through me, and there is just that link of a chain kind of thing. And that's one of the things that craftsmanship has always been through the past - has been that kind of thing.

So teaching was a very, very natural extension of that. It was not - a lot of times people see, the artist and the teacher as a way to supplement your income and then when you make enough money you stop teaching, but that was not the case. It was very, very morally based that I was able to develop myself, develop my skills, my perception, my thought modes, and all that was the culmination of all those people's experience that I had in contact, whether it was a 15th century monk or whether it was somebody 25 years ago or present. And it's like to pass the word on.

And therefore it was very, very important, and when I made the selection to go into teaching, when I finally came up here to RIT, I had seven offers for jobs, and the reason I selected this was because it was the most professional. And I felt that that was the best place for the ideas to be fostered and carried on.

MR. BROWN: At the same time, you said you were the star, at least at Tyler, and you were getting some nice criticism from the many exhibitions you were submitting to, but did you ever have that feeling, I want Albert Paley to be the last of this, the greatest expression; I don't care what comes after?

MR. PALEY: No, no, I never had that, no. It was never that, and it wasn't - you see, and the thing is - it's really weird because the thing is I never - you see, one thing that I never could tolerate, even when I was younger, was ignorance, and especially my own, and therefore the work, the actual final pieces and the exhibitions, was never the end; it was like a byproduct. What I was really dealing with was my own education, my own perception, and the work was really a vehicle for my own understanding of myself. I mean, I used it in a lot of different ways - financially or politically or to get jobs or to do that kind of thing, but never satisfied - I'm never satisfied with my work. I don't live with my work. It's not around. I never did. I never, never, never lived with it, because it is not - I would not make an object and then - like, I never desired the object. What I desired was the thought process and the development of perception. You know, how far can you perceive? How far can this be taken? Obviously if you can perceive it, it's not taken far enough. It's that unattainable kind of thing, and I was pushing the boundaries and pushing the boundaries and pushing the boundaries the whole time.

And I was never enamored with my own work, as such. If I could produce it, it wasn't exceptional. I just kept on doing that. So what it was taking, it was taking all of the - kind of the aggressive things, towards the Vietnam War and towards society and all the things that I abhorred outside of me and I turned it inward. And the challenge was against myself to perfect and to create.

MR. BROWN: And it wasn't too much of a step from that to do similar things with students as a teacher?

MR. PALEY: Well -

MR. BROWN: To enhance their perception.

MR. PALEY: No, I would think that - I would think that education is - that you do that; that you take raw material and you try to develop and educate it.

MR. BROWN: You work with metal; you work with students.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, it's a mental process and - yeah, hopefully that's what it's all about.

[Audio break.]

MR. BROWN: So that teaching there went along very well as your inward - your development, your struggle -

MR. PALEY: Yeah, it was very -

MR. BROWN: - your continuing self education.

MR. PALEY: It was very, very compatible, but also, too, it was the - at that time my peers, they specifically very much identified with the craft movement as such in the '60s, beginning the '70s and kept attuned and kept abreast of everything that was happening in the field - kept in touch with people through the exhibitions, through conferences, through contacts, and I knew kind of in the States what was happening and I knew internationally from the contacts I'd made there. And as far as being a goldsmith in the early '70s I felt that I was really in touch with it, that I knew what was happening, I knew what was - and I had that direct feedback. The lines of communication were out and I just worked and worked and worked trying to push that thing further and

further and further for recognition, for influence and just breaking all those kind of things.

And all of my peers and everyone involved in, say, crafts work, the educational institution was a vehicle. All the major exhibitions and the ways of communication in the '60s were through catalogues. I mean, when I was a student you couldn't find out what was happening; you couldn't find - every once in a while *Craft Horizons* might have a little picture of a piece of jewelry but that was it; there was no books around. Graham Hughes came out with a book in the early '60s that had some jewelry but that was even old. And so where do you find it? There was no - nothing, nowhere. And in the early '60s catalogues started to come in from universities - this exhibition or that exhibition or the Silversmiths Guild or that kind of thing. And what happened in the '60s, because of the baby boom in the Second World War, the schools were growing and growing and things were expanding; monies were department - I mean, the departments got money. The elective craft program all of a sudden became a major - therefore exhibitions were held - catalogues. And then the invitational show, which was pretty rare in the early '60s and the late '60s, the invitational show was all over and immediately the means of communication - because of the university as a vehicle, the idea spread incredibly and it was like just opening the door.

And the university did that. I mean, the university became the patron of the arts whereas the papacy and the nobility was before. And it was culturally a very unique situation that happened and we were there at that time.

MR. BROWN: What about the - were you doing a lot of commissions? What about the people who would buy? Were they tuned into this university sponsored system - I mean, it could be chiefly through exhibitions and catalogues -

MR. PALEY: No, not really. Well, I can just speak personally for myself that I did very, very well in Philadelphia. Philadelphia was a very urban center.

MR. BROWN: You were showing at a gallery there.

MR. PALEY: Well, I show with some - no, I never really showed with a gallery. I had shows and different exhibitions and things like that. I was never affiliated with a gallery as such. But a lot of wealthy clientele, I had the skill to set diamonds and deal with gold and silver and all, and I had all the commissions I could do. When I came up to Rochester - Rochester just is very, very provincial, and then the sales were to individuals that would see things in exhibitions and - usually outside of Rochester. And my sales dropped off incredibly.

As a matter of fact, there was a period that was incredibly depressing. There was about three years or so I hardly sold anything - I mean, hardly anything - and it was a real questioning of the validity of what the work was about.

MR. BROWN: You came up here to RIT in 1970 wasn't it?

MR. PALEY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. But in '69 you had a show at Shop One.

MR. PALEY: No, I came up here in '69.

MR. BROWN: Sixty-nine. And at that time -

MR. PALEY: When I came up here, Shop One - I had known Ron Pearson because of my contacts and so on and so forth, and Ron Pearson was one of the owners of Shop One. And I had exhibited and people were aware of me, and when I came up here it was just like being accepted in the community as such.

MR. BROWN: The public - most public introduction to work is by a one-man show.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, so I had the one-man show in Shop One. That was the first real one-man show that I had. I had one from my graduate school but that was something else. And -

MR. BROWN: But on the other hand you found that it was a pretty limited public here compared with Philadelphia.

MR. PALEY: Oh yeah, quite - quite. Yeah, it was very, very provincial. Actually, nothing sold from that show and I had - and after it I had work in Shop One for quite some time and nothing had sold. It was too expensive. You know, crafts - at that time crafts, you may buy a pot for $25 or you buy a bracelet for $15, you buy a pair of earrings for $12, but if you're really serious about buying art or buying jewelry you don't go to those kind of places.

MR. BROWN: Particularly, though, you said you'd come to the School for American Craftsman because of professionalism.

MR. PALEY: Well, as far as the professional program - mainly that the program was a professional program, meaning that the students were able to - see, most programs you have to have a lot of different - you take painting, you take printmaking, you have the split majors, you have minors, and so on and so forth, you have a lot of academic work, and the School for American Craftsmen was very, very heavily into the studio experience, and it was five days a week in the studio and very little academic and hardly anything else outside of it. So it was for incredible concentration and I felt that that was the best kind of environment.

MR. BROWN: When you came in it was just about the time that Harold Brennan was leaving. Wasn't he the man who brought you in?

MR. PALEY: Yes. Yeah, Brennan brought me in.

MR. BROWN: What was he like? What kind of - what did the school seem like to you and what was he like?

MR. PALEY: Well, at that point I was - I forget how old I was; 26 or something like that - and he was ready to retire and he was kind of a father figure as such. I mean, not a father figure to me but he had that patriarchal - and he had controlled and directed the school and so on and so forth, and I was very outspoken and very, very opinionated about jewelry and what jewelry was about and so on and so forth, and really pushed that type of thing and pushed what I wanted for the program and made a lot of demands on the school on my entry.

MR. BROWN: It wasn't much of a program when you came?

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah, well, the school was there; it was functioning. Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: No, but I mean in jewelry.

MR. PALEY: No, not at all. Hans Christensen basically is a silversmith, and at that period - you see, two generations prior - two teaching generations prior to this when this stuff started in the school, silversmithing, in the metal area, was the pinnacle of metalwork, and about the silversmithing - and obviously any silversmith could make a piece of jewelry if he wanted to; that was the idea. You know, in Cranbrook, in Indiana, and in Cleveland and so on and so forth, all the major people were smiths that were teaching, and jewelry was always frowned upon. It was just seen as dealing with the little baubles or so on and so forth. And that kind of arrogance - anyhow, Christensen controlled the whole department politically and it was set up as a silversmithing shop and -

MR. BROWN: He reflected those attitudes; he shared those traditional attitudes.

MR. PALEY: Oh, very much. And I just had - there was one cabinet just with a couple of pliers and things like that that I was supposed to teach a course, and I told Brennan that that was - that I couldn't function under that and it was really an intolerable situation.

MR. BROWN: Was this just after you'd come?

MR. PALEY: No, no, it was before I came. He said - he realized that, and that's why he brought me in; he brought me there to build the department up and he felt that the department had gone stagnant and Hans was a pain in the ass to deal with, and that basically I had the guts and the drive to do it and he'd back me as much as he could.

And the first two years he gave me incredible amounts of money. I forget what it was - $30,000, $40,000 or something, to build the department up, which was incredible. I ordered all the equipment, all the supplies, completely outfitted the shop, which was a boon to me. Here I'd got out, I had the techniques, I had the skills, I had the educational discipline, and here I was in a situation, I got all the tools and the materials; I was able to function. I was very, very politically naïve, however, and that I realized that Brennan cut everybody else's budget in order to give me what I wanted. So therefore the hostility of the teachers in all the other areas was down on this young kid. And the backlash came as soon as Brennan left.

So I was brought in as kind of the - to shape up the ship. So I had developed the thing, I had - I was teaching a graduate - there was an undergraduate and a graduate program. My students had gone out and had gotten jobs and it was functioning really well, and then this backlash came and - so it just got to the point that - not to go into all the details but it just got to the point that I was dealing with political battles, infighting and all of that, and that is not at all what I wanted to deal with. I wanted to deal with art and that kind of thing and it was - and at that point I was offered a position at [SUNY] Brockport, which Wendell [Castle] had previously -

MR. BROWN: Wendell would become a particular friend of yours.

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah, well, I had known Wendell before I came here just because of professional relationships and exhibitions and panels and all, and basically he was - he was one of the main reasons that I came here.

[Audio break.]

MR. BROWN: Who were some of the - when you came up here to Rochester, and even before, who were some of your particular friends? You mentioned Wendell Castle. Did he encourage you to come up here, because he'd been up here eight or so years ago.

MR. PALEY: No, no, not really, but I had - after graduate school I had sent job letters all over, and I interviewed at several places. One was in Colorado Springs and the Art Institute in Cleveland - yeah, in Cleveland - with Brent Kington down a Southern Illinois [University].

MR. BROWN: There were people at each of these places whose work you liked. Is that right?

MR. PALEY: Well, not necessarily. Everyone that asked me out for an interview I went out and reviewed the programs. Finally, as I said, based on professionalism, and all that, I came up here. And one of the things, too, is that I always respected Wendell's work. I mean, Wendell was the contemporary woodworker, and he was up here and functioning and he was in the school and obviously reflected that kind of position and that type of endeavor. And, yeah, so anyhow, so I came up here and met him and all.

But because of the work - it's always my - I've always worked fairly intensively, and I've never really developed friendships as such. Most of the things that I had were professional relationships with people. And my sphere of influence, because Rochester is so provincial that all the contacts I had were mainly outside of this. Stanley Lechtzin was quite a good friend, and Olaf Skoogfors - and then he had died.

MR. BROWN: But he had been a friend?

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Where, in Philadelphia?

MR. PALEY: In Philadelphia. Yeah, very much. Yeah, we were quite close, yeah.

MR. BROWN: What was he like?

MR. PALEY: We spent a lot of time together. Well, see, one of the first production organizations that I joined was Philadelphia Council of Professional Craftsmen, which was PCPC, and Olaf and Wendell being both goldsmiths, they exhibited a lot and there was a lot of interchange in Philadelphia. So I got to know him through Stanley, and we'd go over there for dinner and they'd have very, very formal dinners, and we'd - it was always based on - usually on professional activities. People would come from Europe and they'd have the chance to talk with him and show slides and that kind of thing, so I got to know him quite well.

MR. BROWN: What did you think of his work - his own work?

MR. PALEY: Olaf?

MR. BROWN: Olaf.

MR. PALEY: I always respected Olaf - Olaf's work quite a bit. I mean, Olaf was conservative but he was - he was involved in a lot of broader-based issues. He was very involved with the American Socialist Labor Party and very dedicated in teaching, and very sincere and committed to his work. And he - whereas, say, Stanley was very innovative and delved into the work technically, that kind of investigation, Olaf was more the poetic posture, intellectualizing and delving into the work, the questioning and creative process and that kind of dimension of human thought and human behavior and the philosophy and that kind of thing, much more than Stanley. Stanley was purely - pretty much technically involved. Stanley - of all the years I was a student of his, which was totally I was in contact with him about six years, he never discussed aesthetics and never discussed design with me. With other students he did, but he never discussed design with me.

MR. BROWN: I wonder why since he did with others.

MR. PALEY: He said I knew what I was doing. That's the only thing he said, and he left me alone.

MR. BROWN: But Olaf would talk about such things.

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah, yeah, very much, and -

MR. BROWN: He had definite ideas or -

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah, it was definite ideas. He was very formal. He saw himself as an extension - his lineage - in

reference to constructivism, and all of those references and Dada and this and that and he used to do a lot of reading. And it was a totally different aspect.

MR. BROWN: Had he had design training rather than a craft - traditional craft, European craft training, or had both?

MR. PALEY: Olaf came up to Rochester and he was with Ron Pearson when he was with the School for American Craftsmen. And actually, both of them were married but they had shared a home together. So Ron and Olaf were very good friends.

MR. BROWN: But his training in Europe would have been more in design or an apprentice master kind of traditional craftsman?

MR. PALEY: I really don't know what Olaf's background was in Europe, but I know he came over here and the - I think he came over here fairly young. I don't think that - I really don't know how much training -

MR. BROWN: By the time you knew him his main interest was in design, in theory, or in aesthetics at least.

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah. Well, he was teaching at the Philadelphia College of Art. He was a professor there and he was teaching jewelry design, but in his own work he was dealing with bodily adornment and he also had a production line where he had an individual working for him and he was doing no-cast productions and moldables and all that, and that was very much in the same alignment that Ron Pearson was - I think that kind of relationship of the artist craftsman. He saw himself split three ways: one as a production jeweler where you had to make certain - not necessarily concessions but production work was a certain type of criteria, his teaching and his one-of-a-kind work. So he saw that dichotomy, where Stanley would make concessions to that kind of thing. He was within academic research and just did these things. Olaf was a very human person. His work was conservative but it was really sound. It was - so, yeah, that was Olaf.

MR. BROWN: Did you ever - you mentioned Wendell. Did you become fairly close to him when you came up here?

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Or did you just get very close -

MR. PALEY: Well, the thing is that most of my friendships, as I said, are professional, ultimately based professional friendships where the friendship is based in respect for what the person is trying to do. Yeah, he's the oldest friend that I have here. I mean, he was here when I came - we still keep contact. But my social sphere is very small. I just don't - I don't have time; I just work all the time. I have everything - I have all this other stuff to do so I never really see people. Everything else is more important so it's not that type of thing.

And indirectly, through the work, it was might not meant to be, but because of the direction and the perspective that I developed with the thrust of the work, I always was kind of a loner. When I was doing the involved large-scale jewelry and that kind of complexity, nobody else was doing it. It's, like, away from everybody else, so there was no - I always kind of wanted that kind of camaraderie where we could sit down and talk abut aesthetics and ideas and the whole type of thing that happened with Picasso - when people get together and exchange ideas. I never had that because there was - people weren't thinking the way I was doing; they weren't working the way I was doing.

MR. BROWN: And did many of them react kind of unfavorable or puzzled at least?

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah but that never bothered me. Criticism never bothered me at all.

MR. BROWN: But I mean at least it didn't make for camaraderie.

MR. PALEY: No, no, not at all, but that criticism never really bothered me. If anything - no. And then I started - actually, I started working in iron as soon as I got here, and that iron show that Shop One had, that was - within the contemporary field of metal work - as I said, that silversmithing initially was the prime thing, and then in the late '60s, jewelry kind of eclipsed silversmithing and became the prominent thing in all the exhibitions. The traditional tea service and everything, people became more - not necessarily nomadic but the whole values were changing, and therefore silversmithing was - the '60s things were immediate and fast and direct and that kind of thing, and not necessarily theatrical - that's a bad word for that kind of thing. And so all the exhibitions you saw, the jewelry was what was reflective of the period. And -

MR. BROWN: And yet you were also working in iron too?

MR. PALEY: Well, that's what I was leading up to, that part of the craft and what I was always concerned with was what people were researching and thinking about, and Ron Pearson and Brent Kington both were the first ones

starting to do research in ironwork. Brent was doing jewelry and doing wax and things like that and he started forging iron. Ron Pearson had done - well, most of his production jewelry was forged silver and bronze and then he started forging iron. So there were the two people that initially had started working in that. That wasn't really the reason I was drawn to it.

So anyhow, I started working and that first exhibition at Shop One was - I guess the ACC [American Craft Council] put a slide kit together and all that. That was the first real exhibition - national -

MR. BROWN: And that was about when?

MR. PALEY: In 1970, I believe, that drew notice to art - I mean, to art as - to iron as an endeavor. And as I said, the ACC backed it and they also did an article in a magazine. At that point it was Brent, Ronnie, Barry Merritt - he was doing some iron jewelry with steel - Radakovich - Toza Radakovich and, I think, James Hubbell, and myself. I think that was it.

So that was the first real focus as an exhibition, and it was kind of interesting that that type of thing happened. Right after that a lot of people started getting interested in iron. It was something like the phenomena that happened with glass. Here there was this stuff that has been around, that has always been around. You know, Harvey Littleton started blowing some glass and doing that and all of a sudden, out of the - not stagnation but the ceramic field was so broad that all of a sudden this stuff just popped up, and it was - the excitement at that time - you look back now and the early '60s the glass things they were blowing were just amorphous bubbles. Now they look pretty damn ugly, but at the time there were incredibly exciting. It was very much - at the time it was very spontaneous, it was very fast, it was very immediate, it was very emotional, and disciple at that time was - it was just all - it was the temperament and the feeling. And glass took off just like a shot. And -

MR. BROWN: Do you think they were reacting or they just suddenly saw its potential when you worked with it and weren't concerned with what conventional thing is done?

MR. PALEY: No, well -

MR. BROWN: That's why it was so amorphous in the beginning. Maybe they were just trying out their freedom -

MR. PALEY: Well, it was a lack of - well, it was a couple of things. I was a lack of control but also the craftsman's approach of just dealing with the qualities of the material and see what it'll do.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, see what it will do.

MR. PALEY: But there was no real skill; they were just kind of basically blowing. But what it was was like that total freedom. There was no restriction - because the potter had to knead the clay and do this and work hard and fire, and all of a sudden this glass did this stuff. But it was very - the whole thing of the '60s being so immediate because all the other things were so pressing, like the war and all that was so challenging that you just couldn't take time to do those things or you're being confronted on all fronts by everything.

MR. BROWN: Did something like that happen with iron?

MR. PALEY: Well, what had happened was the iron now, because everything that I had talked about - about metalwork, especially silversmithing and goldsmithing, is just a tedium -the working and the working and the refinements and the things go slower and slower and slower. And with iron, the same kind of spontaneity - to iron it was the reference, say, from glass to clay that the iron was hot - you could bend it, you could form it, the form was immediate, and people were incredibly excited about it.

So people got really pretty excited about it, and at that time Brent was at Southern Illinois - got together with Alex Bealer, who has since died. He was I think an advertising consultant or something like that, and he was very interested in blacksmithing - the Southern traditional type of thing, the nostalgia and all of that. So he and Brent got together and they established ABANA, Artist Craftsmen Association of North America. Not Artist Craftsmen - American Blacksmith's Association of North America, and they had the first meeting - I believe it was '71. It could have been '70. And they had a lot of old smiths from the hills and all that, and a lot of the younger people - it was kind of interesting. What happened is that - there's a couple of reasons. First of all, one was the academic thing and the relationship to the craft endeavor. There was a new thing that broke out and there was a new area of exploration and all that. That was one. That was very much an academic response to it.

And on the other hand is that the response to the establishment and the whole dropout thing of the '60s, blacksmithing fostered that as a lifestyle very much. The blacksmith was the self-sufficient, independent, non-institutional kind of guy up in a cabin somewhere that was able to make his living, and also fostered that individualism and self-assurance and that, and also was stereotypic of an incredible macho kind of endeavor. So for all of those reasons - so if you have a lot of the - and strangely enough it's very paradoxical that - I didn't go

to that one; I tried to get Brennan to get me some money but he couldn't. But I didn't go to that one but for most of the people involved in the educational institutions at that point were there from all the different colleges. At that time I was working quite a bit in it.

So anyhow, they had some seminars and all that. Well, after that it just took off. Everybody in all the schools were getting forges and doing blacksmithing, and for about three years after that it was every place you looked people were working with iron. There was just hundreds and hundreds. And this association that started with like 25 people had grown to several hundred within a couple of years.

Then - well, I was asked - and I think it was 1976; it was five years after that - they had a large conference down in Southern Illinois and I was asked to address the conference and went down there, and it was kind of interesting. There was several hundred people there and the guys were walking around with denim jackets on and tattoos of anvils on their arms and feathers braided in their hair and - like a real down-home hillbilly kind of thing. And I went down there - I was quite excited about going there. I had just finished the Smithsonian gates [*Portal Gates*, 1974, commissioned for the Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.]. They got quite a bit of coverage. I did the main fence for Chattanooga [1975, Hunter Museum, Chattanooga, Tennessee], which a movie had been made, and I had exhibited and things were going really well for me and I was - I would never go to conferences unless I'm invited, so I was invited to speak.

So I felt that I had the chance to make quite a contribution to them. And it was - not redneck but it was a real dropout kind of thing, and it didn't - I never feel I deal with intellectualism but it was completely the antithesis of what I was dealing with. There wasn't research and investigation into aesthetics at all. You know, it's an artist-blacksmith association; you would think that there's technique to blacksmithing and the artist was the perception, and the mind and the hand going to development, but it was totally lopsided. And the majority of people were making Bowie knives and things like that, and just totally wrapped up into the nostalgia and the stereotype.

So my main lecture, after I realized what was going on, was that the whole thing - the technique, really - I mean, you have to master technique but the main thing was the thought process. And if anything, historically the smiths of the past, the reason that they were so important is they were incredibly innovative. When Bowie made his knife it was a great invention on the cutting implement. You know, it's very, very revolutionary and the blacksmiths that they looked back to were the ones that fostered the machine age. They made the prototype machines and so on and so forth. They were men of invention and insight because the had the skills and disciplines, and if that was the stereotype, you don't - these things were done 200 years ago and it was the real challenge to be as innovative and try to put contemporary form in basically an anachronistic endeavor, and that didn't go over too well.

And there was something - even some calls from the audience were, "We're here to talk about blacksmithing; we don't want to hear about this art shit." And it really kind of typified the whole thing because it was - the art or the aesthetics was that it was seen as the hierarchy establishment aristocracy. So I - so anyhow, they have a newsletter that I, for a long time, sent the information to - it was published - because I thought it was important as an educational means and so on and so forth, but the aims of that institution on society and what I deal with - but anyhow, what happened was after the people worked at it for some time they realized it's a hell of a lot of hard work, and after you pass the immediate results there's a lot of work and a lot of discipline to go beyond it. So what started out as a boom really died, and now there's hardly anybody working in it. But there's still - they still have all the people making pothooks and all of that, but it's more of a - it's more of a folk art tradition that's continued the same as, like, say, the Williamsburg tradition - like people that work that way, it's more of a historical, sociological kind of progression, and people really weren't dealing with it as a contemporary - yeah, so that was - yeah.

MR. BROWN: It sounds like it's the last gasp of the '60s, the alternate lifestyle and all the things that it builds into it.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, very much. And now it functions - it's more - yeah, it's still there and people are doing things. But anyhow, my main concern with the iron was to try to find contemporary form and how can it be used and so on and so forth, and I started making candlesticks and some lamps and things like that. Oh, this is kind of going back a bit. This was all while I was working out of a garage out of my home. I started working in the - actually late '69 in iron, and I worked with iron and jewelry simultaneously for - equally for about five years.

MR. BROWN: Still pretty large-scale jewelry?

MR. PALEY: Yeah, because I was exhibiting very heavily and that's what I was known for, but I was still doing the iron. I was three days doing the iron. I worked three days in the iron shop, three days in the jewelry shop, and teaching was kind of stuck in there. And I was excited about the iron. The iron was plastic, it was fast, it was expressive, and the plasticity was very exciting and the movement of the metal. And I experienced that in the

iron and then I would go back to the jewelry and the plasticity, say, in silver and gold is very, very resistant and when you forge it or you move it, it moves very slowly, almost imperceivably. And after really experiencing that and the iron and steel and then coming back and doing it in the silver and the gold, my perception was there and therefore I saw it, so the forms became more fluid and whatever.

Then when I interpreted it into jewelry with the skills of a goldsmith, which was refinement and response to detail and surface, I took that back to the iron shop, and then the forms that I was doing, the discipline of a goldsmith, of the detailing and the refinement and the control they put there. So that period of five years was incredibly productive for me as far as the production of a forged aesthetic and bouncing back and forth. Each one gave vitality to the other and it just jumped; it just went up.

I entered a competition for the Smithsonian gates I think it was in '72. I'm not sure of the exact number, but I think the Lloyd [Herman] had told me there was about 30 people that he had asked to submit designs, and I think out of the 30 about eight submitted, and mine was selected from that.

MR. BROWN: What did you submit?

MR. PALEY: A drawing.

MR. BROWN: A drawing.

MR. PALEY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Was the drawing quite detailed? Were you working -

MR. PALEY: No, it wasn't - well, the drawing was kind of loose. Actually, the drawing now, it's in the Smithsonian. It's in the Cooper-Hewitt [Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York City].

MR. BROWN: Had you been doing much detail drawing previously?

MR. PALEY: No, none at all. No. All the jewelry and all the iron work, I never drew it intentionally because I was pretty skilled in drawing because I had six years of academic drawing, and I drew fairly well. But I felt that it was - see, one of the things is I was trying to deal with the development of three-dimensional form in the jewelry and in the iron, and I felt that the response - or the reliance on drawing to develop ideas was extremely deceptive because you draw something down; you look at it, you respond to it, and you're responding to a two-dimensional type of thing, and the assumptions that you would make from that image I think were very, very misleading. So I dealt directly with the material, directly with structure, directly with all that kind of balance and proportion and I didn't draw.

Now, I make a distinction between drawing, too. One, if you have an idea in your mind that's crystallized and you just want to remember it so you put it down in a drawing and you record it so you can bring that back, that's a lot different than using drawing as a thought process that you draw and you think about and you respond to it and you do that, and that's the kind of drawing that I hesitate at getting into because that's what I thought - I kept sketchbooks and all but they're mainly recording ideas and I wasn't -

MR. BROWN: For the Renwick competition you just show your idea.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, so with that - there I did work the idea out in drawing. I had never done a large-scale piece of iron. I did two maybe candlesticks that were about six foot high. The drawing was accepted. I couldn't do it myself, so at that point, based on the commission, I hired an ex-student, Richard Palmer, and I leased a space, and that was in 1972 when I leased the space that I'm now in, and I bought a power hammer - first power hammer. Everything else I had done by hand and swung a hand hammer for like five years. And opened the shop up and when I was getting ready for the gates, I did one piece of sculpture - it was the largest piece I ever did, it was about 14 foot long and about 10 foot high. And it was just a free-form iron, just a gestural piece - just trying to approach iron in a sculptural form. Yeah, and then I started on the gates and the gates took a year to do.

MR. BROWN: And how did it go, working with an assistant?

MR. PALEY: Well, it was the first time I ever did it and it took me - well, first of all I had to train him. But basically, it's hard to say that because we were kind of - I was training myself all the time, because I'd never worked with a power hammer. So we learned things together really. But one of the things - running my own shop, the whole thing of being independent, self-sufficient - I used to alloy my own metal and make my own tools and do my own things. And when I had an assistant, just on a human level, it was very hard for me to work with somebody, because I was always in the - whether I was brought up that way or whatever - if you can't do something yourself, you don't ask somebody else to do it for you - I mean, if you're able to do something yourself, you don't

ask somebody else to do it. So he'd be standing around and I'd be working and when I'd need help he'd give me a hand. Or if I needed a tool, I'd go up and I'd get the tool and I'd bring it back. And I just felt that it was - it was humiliating for me to ask somebody to do what was in the process of the thing kind of a demeaning kind of thing. And I felt very, very awkward about that.

So anyhow, but slowly that kind of worked out and we worked very efficiently together. And I said it took a year, which was an incredible amount of time, but most of the equipment was old stuff and reading how to do it. Anyway, we finally did it and installed it and after - in the midpoint of the gates, I was contacted by Chattanooga - Budd Bishop, who is the director there [Hunter Museum]. They commissioned the fence on top of the new building became a sculpture port.

MR. BROWN: Chattanooga Foundation for the Arts.

MR. PALEY: Yeah. Well, the Hunter Museum of Art - yeah I think that's the part that - And so I started the work on the fence while the gates were still in-progress, because there was a lot of finishing on the gates, so it was like an overlap. And the gates were basically a big piece of jewelry. I hadn't really come to grips with the structural aspect of the iron. There was a lot of very intricate drilling and tapping and interlocking of it. It was just a jewelry discipline blown up. And I'd just taken it and I'd blown it up into scale. And there's a lot of other ways I could have worked with the steel that would've been much more expedient, but it was - the thought mode was still jewelry.

MR. BROWN: So it was a rather complicated construction.

MR. PALEY: Oh, it was incredibly complicated. I mean it was hundreds of screws and bolts and interlocking members and all of that. And that, after experiencing that, I got the fence and the fence - I mean, it's 87 foot long and about 13 foot high and it would be tons of steel. And at that point the gates were still kind of manageable, event though they were massive to me that obviously another approach was necessary and I tried to really look for solutions that would create form that didn't sidetrack all of the various issues. So that the gate - the fence is incredibly free, it's just more of a gestural type of approach and the steel is not as refined, it's just hammered out. And being able to really loosen up and do that, so that was a good balancing act right there.

MR. BROWN: You did a lot of binding - I see your pieces here - look like bundling, at least that's the effect of them.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, yeah. Well, that's - I mean all of these processes that are handed down, they're very deceptive, because there's certain ways of joining that are natural to the material - the same as when we're dealing with wood - a dovetail or a finger joint or whatever is the way you do it. And this might be done for several hundred years, but it's in reference to the material. And iron is the same way - the riveting, the collaring and all of that was a vocabulary of the iron, the same as the weave of the canvas was the vocabulary of the painter - whether he used it. But however it's because I wanted to break out of - all the time I was concerned about historicism that I realized that it was - that the clip or the rivet became a design cliché and automatically you're trapped into an aesthetic formula that ultimately, you're just lured to it. There's no way to work around it. And when I was doing the gates especially - the gates have a lot of coils and spirals and tight bundles - and the coil and spiral if anything is indicative of or representative of forge work, is the coil on the spiles, a very natural thing that happens. It's hot, it's a taper and you go like that. And in Renaissance work, in Gothic work, it's all there.

And I realized that that was a real trap - it was so natural, it became a trap. And I kind of made a resolution at the time that I would never use a coil again in my work. And after the gates, I stopped it. And the fence - there's hoops and whiplashes and all that but there isn't any coil motifs. And at this point, I have not done a coil yet since that time and now I'm loosening up again, I'm going back into different types of things. But there was real obvious concerns of where the pitfalls were and I tried to get away with it. And I tried to look for structural joinings and types of form development that would ultimately render different conclusions of form. Because at the same time, I was not dealing in a figurative mode, I was not dealing within an abstracted nature mold. I was really looking just basically with alteration of mass and form and basic things like gravity and balance and that kind of thing.

[Audio break, tape change.]

MR. BROWN: You just brought up the word - used the word historicism with reference to the Renwick Gates particularly and I guess then you mentioned in the breath something about the coils, for example. Is that what you meant by the types of things that have been used in the vocabulary of ironwork for hundreds of years or did you also mean - were you by the mid-'70s becoming more conscious or more interested in or adapting certain things from historical styles?

MR. PALEY: No, no not at all. As a matter of fact the - I've always been interested in history, especially in art

history because I try to understand what the flow is culture and all that are about. I was aware of history but, I mean, people can become proficient in the work but usually what is lacking is the perception an individual has in the development of things. And just in taking from past elements and kind of making a collage out of those past things really doesn't develop any new perceptions, I feel, as far as form development.

MR. BROWN: So what does historicism mean in the context you were using it?

MR. PALEY: Well, as far as adopting without changing the various historical vocabulary of the material - the iron - the tendril and grape leaf, and all of that type of thing was used a lot also. That was the kind of thing I was trying to stray away from. So it was really a paradoxical thing because if you think of iron and steel in the 20th century and you want to be a 20th-century artist and reflect the culture, the I-beam and the car bumper is what is indicative of the culture. And I realize that dealing with iron - that it's a 19th-century aesthetic - I mean, there is no way you can get around it because industrialization transformed the material in such a way that it doesn't have that kind of sensibility. So there is no way that I could compete with that. And so I -

MR. BROWN: And yet your aesthetics are rooted in the past in every other medium too, whether it were painting or to a slight extent, the ceramics, weaving, jewelry.

MR. PALEY: No, but it is a lot different because there was a continuing - a continuing with all of those things and they change - they change throughout time. And some things with their individual nature stopped because of the culture - like I say, scrimshaw.

MR. BROWN: But at the same - some extent with iron - it's -

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah, that is what I am saying; it stopped at the turn of the century as an aesthetic. I think the same thing with scrimshaw. You know, the whaling industry went out - all of that kind of thing and people still do scrimshaw work but it's 1850 - there is no way you can break that because it's of that criteria. And in a lot of ways the iron had that kind of stopgap; it had that interruption.

MR. BROWN: It's kind of fixed in time to a degree.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, very much. You know, I kept on thinking - I keep on seeing the correlation between kind of the new freedom that was seen in glass - that what could be in iron but the restrictive nature of the material in reference to glass really didn't yield that readily. Well, anyhow - so that -

MR. BROWN: The Renwick thing was a big project. It was sort of blown up piece of jewelry and - well, it had overly historical references in it.

MR. PALEY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: And so when you -

MR. PALEY: Yeah, I realize the fear of the historical.

MR. BROWN: The Hunter fence - chance - you did break out, you did simplify - you flowed more - it was more in accordance with -

MR. PALEY: Well, one was just the massive project of just being able to form all of that metal. So it needed a kind of freedom but also I wanted to stay from that - specifically the coil. I mean, that is what I had seen and - yeah.

MR. BROWN: Well, here is a mirror of 1970 with it's coils, it's little loops.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, right. Well, see as I started working, I said the earlier pieces were an investigation of the material. And one of the things that is very natural to the material is the taper and the coil, and that kind of thing. And from there, I did a couple of other pieces and then it went into the Renwick gates and then we went to the fence.

MR. BROWN: There were some other things you were doing at this time. In '72 - I was going to ask in passing that you were a consultant of this thing in North Adams, Massachusetts - a community - Hoosick community resources cooperation. Is that a group that was restoring some old mills? Something like that?

MR. PALEY: Yeah, there is a - it had to do with urban archaeology. There is an old mill town that the textile mills were around this valley.

MR. BROWN: How were you drawn into that?

MR. PALEY: Well, what had happened was - well, Marianne Beinecke - they had the Beinecke Library and all

[Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University] - she had gotten some grant money together and they went - the North Adams - it was a town that after the textiles moved out, it just died. And so it was basically dead for, I don't know, 75 years or whatever. And it was a whole mix of cultural reasons that she wanted to regenerate it. One was as I said part of urban archeology to keep the old buildings. It was a bigger kind of thing of the artist community and getting people together, and you get artists together and this - all of this is not necessarily a myth, but people like to play on it. You get them together and all of the fertilization of ideas and all of that kind - I have heard that - it's really idealistic.

Anyhow, and so they had gotten some stain glass people and some other people and they acted as a consultant - they wanted to me to set up a blacksmith shop and a bronze foundry and basically a metalworking thing and start a school there, and wanted me to move there and set up my own business and they would finance me and do all of that. And I was up there several times and -

MR. BROWN: Did they come up with anything to speak of?

MR. PALEY: Well, they started working - they had a lot of money and started to get it together, but I had seen so much idealism - people trying to pursue their dreams and all of that and it was doomed to failure. I mean, the thing was - the project was so massive and so expansive. The only thing that could hold it together - even at the time I realized it - the only thing that could hold it together was a hell of a lot of money and they said that there was money. But it was an - it was transplant - it was an artificial thing and the work that I was doing - I mean, the work I have always done - it's been incredibly esoteric stuff and the only that it can survive is just by - [laughs] - just by keeping all of my support systems together. And it was too much of a gamble but it just seemed doomed to failure - and I think it has - I think it has folded pretty much. So anyhow, that's what that was about.

MR. BROWN: You went back to - you traveled to Europe again in '73, seeing the work of Gaudi -

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah, what - the point I was in in '73, I had gone through the gates and all of the time working besides just looking at iron. The thing is I think that all - for me anyhow - but a lot of creative work is just a process of what inherently or whatever is inside of you through the process of working that this self-realization and you learn skills and discipline how to best unlock certain things from yourself and how to function. And besides doing all of the technical research, I try to understand my own design sensibilities - why did I respond to something when I didn't respond to something else.

It wasn't a philosophy and it was a value judgment; it was just an emotional response. Why did that happen? And I tried to find that there are systems or patterns of this kind of response because when I sit there and I draw something I do a bunch of designs and I like one drawing over another and why. And it was very - it bothered me that I didn't have those answers. I mean, I knew I liked it but that wasn't enough. So I tried to psych myself out to find patterns of thought and so on and so forth.

Well, anyhow, I realized that in fact what I was dealing with was ornamentation, which was kind of shocking because that always a very negative - detrimental word. But I realized that and I realized probably what I was doing was a real reaction against modernism - that everything that I had seen - things that bothered me - but I realized that that's - that was the pursuit of the work and if that was my inherent nature then I should find out more about it.

So if there is any place to find ornamentation - and especially with iron - is in Southern Europe - Spain, Portugal have an incredibly rich heritage of ornamentation and cross-fertilization of the various cultures and so forth. So I went there and the first place we stopped was Lisbon and I went to like a [Calouste] Gulbenkian Foundation and saw the Lalique work. It was the first time ever seen - it's a large collection of Lalique there. And it's the - I had seen a couple of - prior to that I had started reading about Art Nouveau because I really liked the sensibilities and the totality of the form and the integration of - I mean, creating a functional object far beyond its needs into an aesthetic display. And I had read about it and I had seen some things in that but I saw the Lalique exhibition and I mean, it's very, very figurative and all of that. It was a very moving thing - it was an incredibly moving - and I felt an - it had incredible empathy and the romanticism and the poetic aspect of it.

And then we went to Spain and just walking down the streets - just huge ornamentation and it's big clusters of flowers and fruit out of stucco and stuff just hanging off the walls. It was like a Disney Land. It just blew my mind. These people are going a day - through every day activity and just incredibly - of course it was culture I wasn't aware with either and it was incredibly shocking to see that - how everything - all of the ornamentation we have is very conservative and if anything it's in a neoclassical condition - it is like stuck in an arch or in a capital, but here you have the façade of a building and there would be this huge cornucopia or this huge lion and these things would just be just abundant and ornament for its own sake.

And I tried to understand that and I looked at it and I looked at systems - I mean, not famous people but just the stuff on the building and I would look at the systems that they would have - how they would balance it and what

that meant, and a trompe l'oeil effect that sometimes would be a cast iron urn with cast iron flowers on it and then there would be a plant that was in there and the plant would have flowers and dah-dah-dah-dah-dah-dah - and all of that in the play and the complexities. And it fit it into all of that.

MR. BROWN: Those are cultures where ornament is very important to them.

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah - yeah, but see that is really not - that is really not what the American culture is about.

MR. BROWN: It just suddenly showed you it was possible.

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah - yeah, I mean, I had - in the books and all of that I had seen ornament. It wasn't - I mean, it wasn't a revelation but being just bombarded with it. But I was really there to understand it - try to understand it - sensitize myself to it.

MR. BROWN: Did this make you feel much more confident about where you are tending perhaps?

MR. PALEY: Well, it was just like - it was just a search and seizure mission - [laughs]. But I just saw it - I took like thousands of photographs when I was there but it was mainly to understand because I was drawn to ornament. There was a fascination about it but I didn't understand why. And so I was looking for systems of order, or systems of balance, or systems of application or something, and I went through - I'm pretty methodical when I take problems and break them apart. And went to see [Antoni] Gaudi things and looked at that. Gaudi was always considered, like the pinnacle of Art Nouveau ironwork and the dragon gate [1885, Guell Pavilions, Barcelona, Spain] there and all of that, and I looked at the stuff and it was nice but it didn't really impress me. I mean, it was very manageable; I mean, it wasn't as fantastic as I was led to believe.

MR. BROWN: But you liked it?

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah, I liked it very much but I wasn't amazed. It wasn't that kind of thing - whatever that -

MR. BROWN: But you did kind of gradually discover why you like ornaments?

MR. PALEY: No. I think - I just think - I think it's a - I don't know - I think it's - I just think it's very inherent in our sensibilities. I think that the response to ornament - the response is not through the intellect but it's through the senses and through the emotion, and I think that it's just something that you inherently align with because of your physical, emotional, sensual self. If you see beautiful colors - that whatever the color is you respond emotionally. And I think that that in many ways draws and aligns more to the - I kind of see it as a basic humanism rather than a kind of a logical rational kind of victim of things.

MR. BROWN: You were gradually accepting yourself for just -

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah, yeah. I mean I -

MR. BROWN: You're heading in the rational -

MR. PALEY: Yeah, oh, yeah -

MR. BROWN: The functional.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, because a lot modern art and a lot of the development of that - and at that time conceptual art was in and it had a lot to do with theory and thought; it was very, very much intellectually based. The reason you really appreciated something was its significance because of what kind of intellectual thought and posture -

MR. BROWN: You were discovering you were more of an expressionist - more of a spontaneous -

MR. PALEY: Well, the thing is, it's not that I - it's not that I was really in reaction against it. I think that given what I am or what - that I want to function in the fullest kind of capacity. And when I strongly align with something where I have no previous condition, there is a real attraction there so it must be something that is inherent in my own perception. So I try to - I go along those way and try to understand that and develop it so I can - so I can exercise that. And it doesn't mean that it's a reaction against those things but I'm just not attuned -

MR. BROWN: No, I wasn't suggesting -

MR. PALEY: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MR. BROWN: This '73, '74, you were really beginning to pin yourself down perhaps.

MR. PALEY: But see, at that time took, that was a - I talked about the whole thing of being aggressive and attack - that was a really radical position of starting to talk about ornament. I mean, ornament - when I was in school, ornament was seen as an incredibly negative thing. I mean, the Bauhaus just was even a moral to deal with ornament. And here I was talking about ornamentation and decoration, which was - it was really - I mean, it was really attacked and all of that, but -

And, in doing the gates and doing all of that kind of thing - now this book just came out on ornamentation and the front page we have there are the gates. And those gates were conceived and executed even in early '70s. And so it's a 10-year delay. We went from the drawing and the beginning of the work and 10 years later, now it's seen and saying this is the new sensibilities. So it's 10 years - a generation coming into it - a decade.

MR. BROWN: How did your students take of all of this? Of course they were young and you were their leader.

MR. PALEY: Well -

MR. BROWN: You were at Brockport.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, but I tried - with my relationship with students I try to do the same thing; I try to find out the student's interest and give them as much exposure or direct them towards books or give them techniques they need to develop themselves, and I really don't see disciples as such. So I always try to nurture the individual's own potential. There are some who are always into clarity and I kind of - precision - I might get them involved with lathe turning or millwork where they can get that kind of incredible patterning and all of that kind of thing. And - yeah, it really isn't fostering a philosophy. It's much more altruistic - my teaching position.

MR. BROWN: You continue at Brockport - you're still there.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, I'm still there.

MR. BROWN: Did that work out fairly well and you could handle it well within your - were the demands not great?

MR. PALEY: Well, it's a different kind of situation. When I left RIT, I realized that might position as an educator - that I would not be in the same position - that I was not - where I could profess professionalism, say, in RIT, there is no way I could it Brockport. Brockport was not a professional program, it didn't have the degree, it didn't have graduate students, and so therefore my position as an educator went beyond the institution that I felt that through the exhibitions and through my lecture engagements and all of that, that is where I would be fostering my aesthetics and whatever I was doing. And so it went beyond the campus and beyond the students that way. I mean, I had always done that before but I was - still the education was very much of - but I realized that then that was not feasible.

MR. BROWN: I mean, RIT, the School for American Craftsmen was an academic platform.

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah very much.

MR. BROWN: Critical for our stage.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, very much and it was very valid there but as I said, with the politics and all of that it was just so time consuming and so emotionally draining and that's - I didn't like the competitiveness of all of that; that's not what art was about that way. That is one of the reasons I shied away from business with all of that. I just didn't aspire to it.

MR. BROWN: Whereas the competitiveness against yourself was another matter.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, when I was work; yeah, but that is different.

MR. BROWN: Sure. So it works out quite well to be in this very low -

MR. PALEY: Yeah, but you see, you see, when you're competitive against yourself, I don't see it as destructive; I see it as a kind of an - not antagonism but it's part of the growth process. I mean, it demands change, it demands resolution, where competitiveness against other people is many times incredibly destructive and something I just don't believe in.

MR. BROWN: Well, you exhibit tremendously throughout the mid-'70s.

MR. PALEY: Well, see, that has a lot to do with - as I said, the educational systems grew and there was a lot of complaints that the whole ivory tower thing was just getting blown out of proportion. If you take a look at all of those exhibitions, most of them are invitational exhibitions and universities. And the schools grew and they had the art galleries, and the exhibition halls, and it was invitational after invitational, and it was a very, very closed

circuit. There were very, very few things that extended into major museums. And that was very much part of that. It became - people would sing back to one another.

It was a very in-group kind of thing, and it was kind of awkward too for the younger people coming up because at that time, even though I was very young and of a different generation, I was very much established, and people were - the younger people couldn't get into these invitational shows because it was six people or seven people and there was only maybe 10 or 12 people working, and we kind of monopolized the whole thing.

MR. BROWN: This was true also - there were some museum exhibits too - some of the major museums were having exhibitions then - Boston [Museum of Fine Arts, Boston].

MR. PALEY: Yeah, they started picking up but the majority of the exhibitions were - but some of the exhibitions started to happen in museums.

MR. BROWN: But they too were invitational so probably a small group, right?

MR. PALEY: Well, see what had happened then is that you would have - since the Bauhaus - everybody says, "Oh, the walls between arts and craft has been torn down." They can say as much as they want philosophically but in reality the painting and art galleries in New York City - they sell painting and sculpture; they don't sell craft. I mean, now, you're starting to get some glass and - but I mean, still - but that's 50 years. And what they say and what happens is different.

So when the museums started looking for exhibitions and things like that, they realized that this craft thing or whatever is going on - they want to have a good show so they pick out people that they know can perform; they are not going to take unknowns because they are taking a gamble having the show in the first place. So they pick out the people that have a good track record and that is how they are plucked out there.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, so they in effect did the same as the academic - the new art galleries in the universities.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, and most of the - a lot of the museum shows too were juried shows - the initial ones. The invitations started coming later. So therefore, if they had a couple of hundred people, they would take 10 and that would be like the best kind of thing to happen rather than taking a chance on somebody because the thing is where fine artists had publications and had a gallery, and had all of that kind of PR backup, the craftsmen did not because they weren't dealing with the money market that could really supply them with that. Yeah, yeah, it was very, very skeptical - I mean, museums are very, very skeptical because there is a real stigma on the crafts. And in fact they were; a lot of them were very hobbyist and the people - there wasn't much professionalism in the crafts and I can understand that attitude.

MR. BROWN: Even in the '70s?

MR. PALEY: Well, it started to break down, but even so; the professionals involved - I mean, the real people that elevated into the different areas of the craft - there is not many and stereotypes of there for reason [laughs] - when it works against them.

MR. BROWN: Even though by then there were a number of craft schools. I mean, the School for American Craftsmen here was not a premier school necessarily by the '70s; there were notable ones elsewhere. But even despite that, you say that most crafts fit stereotypes.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, but look at all of these people - I mean, all of the people that - like you're looking at - not kind of heuristic fostered ideas and they developed an educational system and they were responsible for what is happening now with the current trend. But in their own time when they were working and considered experts in the field, where were they accepted? The museums weren't buying their work, collectors weren't necessarily buying the work; there were basically - they were able to create a unique item that - it wasn't even a collector - somebody wanted a silver pitcher and they wanted a handmade one or whatever, and it was really a lot different.

MR. BROWN: But by the '70s, they had - all of their students were beginning to populate the country.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, well, as I said, they had incredible influence that way but I'm speaking of culturally and like the art market or influencing taste in judgment and creating symbols for a period. It wasn't - that wasn't happening. See the best thing the art can do is to reflect the culture or to transform a culture, and to change people's lives or the realities or whatever. And these people had not - not in a great cultural sense have not done that.

MR. BROWN: What about the American Crafts Council? By the 1970s - what affect was it having?

MR. PALEY: Well, it was really an incredibly important -

MR. BROWN: You had joined it when you were beginning at Tyler right?

MR. PALEY: Yeah, yeah, as far as an educate - as far as an institution it was incredibly valuable. One, it gave identity to the craftsmen. I mean, I very much associated with being a craftsmen and identified myself as such. And the *Craft Horizons* and the Museum of Contemporary Crafts [now the Museum of Arts & Design, New York City] - the embodiment of that. And the library and this thing in New York, and so on, and so forth, they were in the early - the major exhibition - the exhibitions were like the "Young American" exhibition and they fostered national competitions and regional competitions and brought focus to what was happening.

It was the only thing that was happening at the time and it was very, very important. As I said before it was the only vehicle of contact - the only vehicle of communication was the magazine. If you take a look at some of the old *Craft Horizons* - back into the '50s it's crazy and ludicrous compared to what is happening now. I mean, it's grown - I mean, the jump has been incredible.

Only later on was I aware of their beginnings and trying to save Appalachian crafts and the whole humanist thing - what that was about. It was a lot different because when I was involved in it, it was a vehicle for exposure and there was a way to compete against your peers, and it was a way to get exposure in that kind of thing. And all of those - the Indian crafts - the basket weaving or all of that - I just was really kind of shunned because these were people that really weren't questioning and really weren't pushing anything; it was just like the perpetuation of the craft, which in a lot of ways is very much what the American Craftsmen stands for. By anyhow, it was really a vehicle of that and -

MR. BROWN: And yet it wasn't sufficient to really chip the major - in the art public - a major impression -

MR. PALEY: No, but see, it never was; it never was. And it was a - in the craft activity, it was very important, very vital with the seminars and all of that, but it was never able to make that break - never able to do that.

MR. BROWN: To the broader culture, the public, or money public.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, and as my work maybe became more advanced or more sophisticated or whatever, and it started getting into other levels, what had offered me support before no longer supported me and they couldn't offer anything to me anymore. I mean, I just basically outgrew that kind of relationship. The same as I - I stopped showing in university shows because they weren't reaching any public that I wanted to reach and I - see that's one thing; I've kind of - I kind of do the work and then the work pushes me through stuff. I mean, I'm very much a bystander. I make the stuff and send it out the door and it gets reviews and books are printed or articles are printed, then I'm asked to do something else and I send something else out and it's like I just kind of follow the work.

I mean, it's very much like that because it's a very private endeavor; it's a very insular endeavor. But the work itself has forced me into different arenas that is - and now one of the most awkward things is forcing me to be a - to be a businessman. That is one of the main reasons I got involved in art - because I hated the - those kind of disciplines. Now the volume of money that goes through this studio in trying to balance finance and all of that is just incredible - it is something I had never disciplined for but the work is demanding that I - I deal with lawyers and I deal with contracts, and I deal with budgeting of moneys, and the flow of capital and all of that. So therefore - I mean, that's something I never really get into but the work has forced that and it really in a lot of ways is very, very separate from me in way.

MR. BROWN: But the work - you like it almost to pull you along.

MR. PALEY: Well, as I said before that the reason that I was involved in it was it's a stimulating thing and it's a vehicle for my own education. It forces me, whether I work myself into a technical corner and then I have to work it out and I learn what I do from getting out of the problem. This is the same thing that happens with the other thing. And it's the same thing, it's just a different - a different -

MR. BROWN: You think of it as the same thing [laughs]?

MR. PALEY: Yeah, yeah, it's the same thing, yeah.

MR. BROWN: But you said you operated in the American Craft Council and in '78 you went to Kyoto, Japan for the - and give a talk at the World Crafts Council.

MR. PALEY: No, I don't mean that I don't believe what it stands for and all of that but as far as assisting the endeavor that I'm involved in - I cannot do that anymore.

MR. BROWN: What it was it like - what was - was there anything of any significance for you at that trip to Japan in the talks you gave there?

MR. PALEY: Well, it was very - I was very pleased in order to - in order to get that.

MR. BROWN: Was it sort of an autobiographical talk? I mean, you tied jewelry to architectural metalwork.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, I just talked about my - about the jewelry and then the evolution of the jewelry to the metalwork.

MR. BROWN: Was it a discussion situation? I mean, were there questions?

MR. PALEY: Well, it was a lecture - well, it was a lecture and I had question and answer sessions and things like that. It was - it was the first international forum that I was in and several of the individuals that I had met when I was in Europe in '68 were there and so it was really nice to see all of those people that had helped me and so on and so forth and kept in contact with. And I had shown in Japan before that and actually, even though the World Crafts Council or the ACC and the World Crafts Council developed the developed the exhibition, the people that are responsible for getting me there were the Japanese.

The Japanese were the ones - my name was not on any of the lists that the ACC put through but my list was on the Japanese list so I had made some good friends there and they were very curious to see the stuff and they were very much trying to get a hold of Western stuff - like wrought iron specifically. They are traditional bent but they don't have a tradition of ironwork in Japan because there just isn't any iron. I mean, they have Samurai and all of that but it's very, very - it's a very, very small amount of that amount of metal. So mainly it was based on the Japanese and I'll tell you, it was a real good - again, it's respected; internationally it's respected.

MR. BROWN: The effect on you - I mean, you were just that more known; you were able to touch base -

MR. PALEY: Well, no, it wasn't that. On a very personal level it was - when I got to that point, that was - what date was that?

MR. BROWN: Seventy-eight.

MR. PALEY: Seventy-eight - before I was very concerned about being recognized, about being established, about - we were concerned - well, not me necessarily but having the work respected - that I felt that I was doing something important and then if somebody else thinks it's important too, therefore I guess it's important to me - [laughs]. And that was kind of very reassuring. It was like being accepted in this exhibition or not accepted in that exhibition shows a quality of the work. Well, by about - then I went through all kinds of trauma, you know, because things get caught. You know, if people expect this kind of work and then you just keep on doing that kind of work, it becomes a whole rat race. If you become trapped in your own cliché and you keep it up.

And whether it's my own maturity or not but by that time, all of those things of - image of what I was or what I wanted to be kind of went away and it was very much a human thing that I - and I met people that I had shared things with before and was - it was nice camaraderie and all of that and trying to understand what the Japanese culture was about, because I had been reading some things; I was always fascinated by Japanese stuff. And it was just a real nice experience. I never really tried to cultivate it for contacts or developing exhibitions or anything.

MR. BROWN: You had matured pretty much and accepted yourself very much by that time as well as your own work, right - I mean -

MR. PALEY: Well, well, as far as the - as far as the professional kind of aspect, I didn't feel that I had - I just - as far as - not necessarily false fronts but the - no I - the thing is that it started out being competitive with other peers and other people around me and trying to assert the quality of my work and so on and so forth. But what had happened is that the - I went through all of that stuff and I was involved in an endeavor - I wasn't competing with anybody. Nobody was doing forged ironwork; no one was dealing with aesthetics or the involvement that I was dealing with. And I was - I worked myself through that whole crowd. And all of these talks of art and craft, and this and that, and this tradition and that - it all of the sudden I - I was very concerned about all of that stuff and then all of the sudden I'm out of it.

MR. BROWN: I can see it was - [inaudible] - in 1980, the College Art Association - "crafts, colon, catalyst for the arts."

MR. PALEY: Yeah, well -

MR. BROWN: At that time, you were still fit to be said or -

MR. PALEY: Oh - well, yeah, I could still say it but the thing is that I paid my dues for so many years and worked so hard that when these kind of laurels finally started coming in - I had never been to New Orleans - I had a great - I gained about six pounds even though I thought the food and all of that -

MR. BROWN: But seriously the appropriateness of that topic for you was the thing of the past. You thought maybe it was still worth getting it across the -

MR. PALEY: Well, I mean I - the thing is that I felt - I always felt kind of a - as I said before - a responsibility and that -

MR. BROWN: Was there was proselytizing to be done? You were on the panel.

MR. PALEY: Well, yeah, I mean, I said what I thought had to be said; I wasn't trying to change anybody but I felt that for whatever reason I was selected as a spokesmen for a given topic so I did that - because I've always - I've always felt that the work itself - I mean, it seems very trite - but the work itself - the quality of the work is - time will attest if it was valuable or not - something was significant in the period - it's significant in the period no matter what the hell you say about it.

MR. BROWN: Do you recall whether in that panel you still had to argue for the quality of the crafts within arts.

MR. PALEY: Well, that always comes up and as soon as that happens, I just wash my hands of it. I mean, it's just damn rhetoric and it just people that I - yeah.

MR. BROWN: Was there anything else memorable in that town that you can -

MR. PALEY: Yeah, the same old rehash. The panel - it was kind of a - when I start seeing those kind of panels, it's like all of the years have passed that the same old - it's the same old things and people argue about the same things and the lack of bad taste - I mean, the response - bad test and that kind of really superficial humor that is seen in work and stuff, it's - and the battlefront or whatever as far as ideas and all of that is - I gave up a long time ago on that kind of thing and it's only through - it's only through the work itself because the work is the only thing that changes things and getting the work out and having the work function - the quality of your work - if it has quality, it will show through and it will be remembered, and if it doesn't, it isn't. And that is why there is so much concentration and effort that goes into each individual piece I do. I mean, it takes so long and all of these concerns.

MR. BROWN: Did personal life play much of a part in your life? You were talking about in your family growing up - they were supportive; they were there - the same thing as friendship and all of that later?

MR. PALEY: No, I think I'm very - I guess, I'm very much a loner in that way. That there is a certain -

MR. BROWN: It happens from time to time -

MR. PALEY: Well, not even that. As soon as I became involved with art, it was a - I mean, it's a word that has very little meaning any more but became very dedicated to a principle and I just worked towards that, and it's - I realized early on that it was - not that I didn't want to have a family but that I couldn't - I wouldn't be able to give the time to children that I felt was important, so I didn't have them. It was very altruistic for the child, not for myself. And it was on that basis - not that they would get in the way, but it was truly that - and that was a judgment I made very early in my life because I knew the way I worked. I basically had time for my wife or whatever, and I had no time for friends, and the work has become more - I guess it's a compulsion - I don't know, but it's all encompassing. It takes all of the time. So friendships and private - because I don't have any real social life, my private life is very important to me. But in actuality, it occupies a very, very small percentage of actual time. I mean, I'm saying this as we're sitting here - that's the way the day goes. [Laughs.]

MR. BROWN: I just want to ask about a couple more works - just briefly maybe - the Senate Chamber gates for the state capitol in Albany, New York [*Albany Portal Gates*, 1980, New York State Chambers]. How do you assess that in your -

MR. PALEY: Well, I think - oh, I think that is good - that is probably the most significant piece.

MR. BROWN: And how do you compare that against, say, the Renwick Gates - seven or eight years -

MR. PALEY: Well, first of all, as I said before - that I try to look for how the best way that the iron would find its fullest kind of expression - one, in the development of form and what I understood form to be and also its application. And I realized, that doing candlesticks and doing tables, and all of that was not really the fullest expression of what the art - what the metal could be and that its real association was with architecture - that it's - whether it's an affiliated art or an applied art, or whatever, the unity of the arts - and that is specifically architectural ornamentation - that it's full expression is with architecture and that is where the statement of ornament is more fully expressed.

And at that point, I trained workers and I maintained a full - I have five people - now, I had seven before, and the shop is postured with the equipment and the skill labor because when architectural work comes up, that's what

we're after. And in the meantime where there isn't the money, we do the smaller kind of decorative art things - not that they're not as important, but that paces the shop - and so the big pieces come in that we can make statement. And even though they are smaller in scale, the Smithsonian Gates with a statement - defense with a statement - it's not just scale but it is application and the Albany Gates by far were the most involved and probably most sophisticated thing I've done - involved in the way - first all of all, the scale and the logistics and the quality of the piece is far advanced. But also, it forced me to into greater interaction with the whole business aspect - with lawyers, with insurance policies, with subcontracting, with committees, with bureaucracy - it just - it extended into all aspects of the social strata that never happened before.

There was political controversy because of some of the - because of state money being spent - being spent for them. When we're installing them, the camera men were there justifying why they would spend so much money for these things and they were useless, and so on and so forth. I mean, it was - it started bouncing off of all of these things that never even affected before and so it had risen to that level. Politicians specifically even in the state senate were arguing specifically about the gates - why were they being done and so on and so forth.

So from something that before you couldn't even get somebody to react against to the point where in political circles and people's television at night, and the newspaper - all of these things are being discussed about these gates. And I don't see it as any - I mean, I never really get amazed at the work and I don't look for those kind of things. I'm aware of what happens around and that it achieves that thing because in fact it did affect these people in a lot of different ways. And that is why I think it's probably the most significant thing that I've done.

MR. BROWN: Did it affect the way you were designing and your process in executing - and thus the result to a degree - the fact that there was such a broad culture or social base.

MR. PALEY: Oh, no, no, no - that didn't affect it. Well, it affected it in the respect that I couldn't be casual when I was designing. But I realized that this was a very important commission - the symbolic aspect of it didn't bother me - I mean, as far as the state senate and all of that kind of like thing - the herald - the heralding - what ever you put - that didn't bother me. But the thing is it was very important and it was very - I mean, it was very - it was a public commission. It's a lot different - I mean, when you design for the public, it's a whole different set of perimeters you deal with and that this was a given statement.

And also too, I was very, very - went into an H.H. Richardson building, and I'm very, very concerned about the -

[Audio break, tape change.]

- H.H. Richardson building, and it's an incredible landmark and an incredible piece of architecture and whether Richardson was dead for a hundred years or not didn't make any difference but that environment was - it was my environment and I had a function in unison with him and, I mean - [laughs] - the statement was there - his significance is there and I - and the weight of not failing in that situation was a very - [inaudible, cross talk].

MR. BROWN: These drawings we're looking at here - these are reproductions.

MR. PALEY: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: They are just some of the spectrum of the - that you proposed. Some are more about this era and others -

MR. PALEY: Well, the first - that one on that top was not involved with that. It must be a misprint but I - the two at the bottom were - anyhow, there was a theme of three that I did - the two in the catalogue here - this one came just before this one. But if you really look at it, the drawing might be a little heavier or whatever just because of the quality of the drawing, but if you look at the structural systems - the development of the form, it's the same kind of variables; they are just switched around and some are given more emphasis or not. But it's a very formal building - therefore the symmetry - it's very massive - it has to do with the weight - a lot of coloration is there - coloration of the pieces - a high level of craftsmanship and refinement, and response to detail in ornament and that is there.

So a lot of the - most of the common denominators in the development of the gates are also synonymous with the Richardson interior. But I don't think they are in the historic - I mean, if you look - you can look at any gate in that period and they really don't - I don't see them as a historic thing really.

MR. BROWN: But it was very gratifying commission.

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah, very much. Yeah. Financially, it's the largest amount of money that ever went through the shop. I think I probably broke even on it actually but, yeah - I mean, that's the thing I just - very difficult judging those things.

MR. BROWN: Was there any - were the certain political figures who backed you - who really wanted this to be done?

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, it's -

MR. BROWN: Nineteen eighty - this is after the time of Nelson Rockefeller.

MR. PALEY: Well, actually, believe it or not - believe it or not - see, another reason too that this was kind of significant is that John Mesick - he was the architect that came to me on this. Mesick, he was kind of a rebel. When he was in architecture school - this was back in the '50s - he was involved with restoration. And back in the '50s, in architecture school, being involved with restoration - I mean, people were gearing up for the international style glass and steel buildings, and he was seen as a real freak. So he developed this interest of his and started doing some restorations in buildings and actually his reports afterwards on the restoration has become the formal governmental standard of restoration work - of what is considered pure restoration and not. And it's an incredible extreme of how one goes about it.

So anyhow, he was a restoration architect on this job and it's to the celebration the 100th anniversary of the opening - it was 1881 and they brought back the Senate chamber to its original grandeur or whatever. Well, he had seen the gates that I did in conjunction with the development - was the exact same thing that happened with the Renwick - with the development of the Renwick Gates. The Renwick Gates went into a refurbished neoclassical building and based on that, he, with the secretary of the senate, pushed this through. And it was voted upon but they never wanted to spend public money on it because anytime you spend public money on art, there is always controversy and politicians don't want to deal with controversy.

So actually, Rockefeller was going to fund it and we had a meeting with Rockefeller - actually, it was the week after he died - it was all set up and then he died. And actually, we were held up in contract for over a year before I could actually start work because of no moneys. And I just had to hold the shop at bay until the thing broke. So finally, we had the moneys and got to go ahead and so on and so forth -

MR. BROWN: Well I noticed just today in the shop - this very large piece I've seen - plate steel - core ten steel that you are assembling for this newly open museum here in Rochester - Strong Museum. How did that come about - I mean, it looks extremely different from anything we have talked about so far.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, I don't know how I feel about it. I feel -

MR. BROWN: It's very massive - a great wheel like thing -

MR. PALEY: Yeah, I feel kind of - I feel very uneasy about it because the jewelry dealt with body ornamentation and the iron deals with architectural ornamentation - the major problem is the same. And the functionalism was very much part of a total consideration. I have done sculpture in the past but it isn't my real main concern. I mean, everything I deal with - I deal with form and I deal with contour and all of that but dealing purely with sculptural problems, I've never - very rarely do I isolate myself to do that. However, I was approached - it wasn't competition - I was approached by the museum to do a piece - a sculpture. I was kind of amazed that they did because as I said, it wasn't a competition; they just approached me to do it and it's a fairly sizeable commission.

MR. BROWN: Particular people over there? This is the Strong Museum.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, with the board of trustees, the people were involved.

MR. BROWN: People who were certainly aware of your earlier work.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, well, see that's thing - like you said, talk about the distinction between art and crafts and all of that - they just see me as a metal sculpture and they see this stuff - they see a gate as a piece of sculpture. I don't - I mean, a gate is a gate, and sculpture is sculpture. But they see me as a leading sculptor in the city I guess and so they wanted a piece of sculpture. Well, I don't make sculpture but it so happens I'm making a piece of sculpture now.

MR. BROWN: Is this to be a gateway in a manner of speaking?

MR. PALEY: No, no, no, no. It's just a - it's just a formal three-dimensional piece. But it's a - I mean, that just shows you the lack of understanding in a lot of ways but it was - it was a sizeable project because I've always dealt with sculptural pieces ever once in a while and it was a chance to really do a big piece. And I had never done a hollow fabrication and I had the facility to do it -

MR. BROWN: Is that what they wanted or did you decide? You tried something much larger.

MR. PALEY: Oh, no, it's totally up to me. I could have done anything I wanted. A lot of the proportions and the

angle and the scale, and all, of the piece is directly related to the building. So even though it's a freestanding piece, the harmony is a space and the location, and all of that dictated very much. So in that way, I kind of handled it problematically as architectural ornamentation but it is a - it is an object placed in a given space but of the right proportion or whatever. So that way all of these other cannons that I use for direct application - like archways and all of that, I use the same way here as a three dimensional form.

And I deal with form and the relationship with form and the proportions of form in that all of the time, but nevertheless I feel uneasy about it because besides what the rest of the body of the work is, I'm really pushing towards ornamentation and now the whole - the post-modern and that kind of thing - it's on the forefront of the development of a philosophy and so on and so forth, whereas in sculpture, I don't have that philosophical thrust or position to make. So I feel slightly uneasy about it.

MR. BROWN: Is some of that going to come into the sculpture, though, do you think? The ornaments?

MR. PALEY: Oh, well, as far as the actual sculpture itself, the forms there are developed specifically out of the kind of the forced aesthetic - the vocabulary I've developed to work in. The blade-shaped element is definitely a forged form. The circular motif with the other elements branching off - I've been dealing with all of those relationships for 10 years.

So the aesthetic, the relationships to form, the interlacing of forms, the aspect of movement, the aspect of all of the things that are specifically related to forged ironwork has just been reinterpreted in a constructed aesthetic. So therefore, there is not a break in that way but because it's hollow construction, the character does change a bit but the main fundamental reasons for form development reside in the forging.

MR. BROWN: It's just largely going to core ten steel. At least for the most massive assembled parts.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, it's all core ten.

MR. BROWN: And are you going to color that or -

MR. PALEY: Well, the core ten -

MR. BROWN: - or work on the texture?

MR. PALEY: No, no, it's not - it's just a highly refined form and the core tens - the self-healing steel just rusts for a couple of years and then keep its own surface. Technically, it's quite a piece; there isn't one flat plane in; it's all concave convex surface. In fabrication it's very, very difficult to keep because of the flowing distortion. The inside structure is all honeycombed with crisscross braces and super structure like an airplane fuselodge to keep them from warping and racking. Technically it's a very sophisticated piece. I've had about two men on it now for six months and the problems of warpage and keeping clean contours and all has been incredible. It should be a real good piece.

MR. BROWN: You are about finished - that was what I was trying to get at. The way you - you mentioned the Albany Gates -

MR. PALEY: Oh, it's the same type of thing. It's been welded together. Besides all of the planes and the contours being true, it's been welded together - there is like five weld beads inside and out on each - came out totally of five inside and out on each joint. And so the joints in fact are thicker than any of the parent metal. And then the actually weld bead or the edge is highly refined and ground down and this is - again, goes way back to the jewelry. There is the refinement of line and the clarity of image and that kind of thing. So that's been maintained and it's going to be - and that scale - it's going to be a real clean, slick piece.

MR. BROWN: The coloring itself - what would be - there are elements that you are forging today - I mean, the one I saw -

MR. PALEY: Oh, that's right - that - no, that's for another piece - yeah. I mean, the piece - it will just be oxidized -

MR. BROWN: Oxidized core ten.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, it will be just that one horizontal member and circular.

MR. BROWN: But no level surfaces?

MR. PALEY: No.

MR. BROWN: Even if with uniform oxidization that will still catch the light differently and affect - the reflected light - there will be different colorations on those different surfaces.

MR. PALEY: Well, there will coloration of -

MR. BROWN: I mean, of the light.

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah - yeah, there is a lot of subtle - well, yeah, coloration as far as modulation on light and shade, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Not within it but -

MR. PALEY: Yeah, yeah, because it's a lot of very slight facetings and things like that so - yeah, so it will be a nice play on surface and -

MR. BROWN: Maybe it'll have an organic system about it.

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah, well, that's -

MR. BROWN: A forged work aspect.

MR. PALEY: Well, that's the thing - yeah, it does the - the element of the movement and the plasticity and all of that - it's a little more confined because of the hollow welding, but as I said, it's all concave, convex surfaces, and there is that whole element of movement. And I mean, it's not dealing with plate and line, which normally fabricated stuff deals with.

MR. BROWN: But when you chose to do it fabricated - a fabricated piece, you decided you would also to these concave-convex surfaces.

MR. PALEY: Well, that is the aesthetic that I'm dealing with.

MR. BROWN: Right. You couldn't take them - the usual way of fabricating sheet metal - plate metals - flats.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, well, that is the most - no, therefore I wouldn't have done it because it's not involved with the aesthetic. But when I looked at the project - first of all, I looked at the project and I looked at the space that was the best placement for it and given that space, the piece had to be big. Given forging, I couldn't make it that big because you just can't forge stuff that big. If you forged a bunch of elements, as heavy they would be, it would look like very thin lace next to the building. It would just be this linear kind of doodle. So therefore, by taking that and blowing it up, the only way I could approach it was hallow fabrication; it is the only way I can get the mass. I guess that is why we relied on the - and then mainly the core ten just because it's maintenance free and that is kind of what they wanted because painting would have just been problem all of the way around - it makes a lot more sense.

MR. BROWN: You were able to study the proportions and space, and everything very carefully?

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah, we spent a lot of time.

MR. BROWN: As far as you know the trustees of the museum are going precisely with where it should be and how you want it placed and so forth.

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah - no - oh, no, I had control of that. I was just asked to design the sculpture and then as the thing went along and at the meetings with them, I also controlled the placement and the landscaping around it. The architects - you always get very, very full reigning - I wasn't the - I guess they were just kind of feeling me out and seeing what would happen.

MR. BROWN: It's so often - as you know, public sculpture is faulted for rather outdoor large pieces that seem to just be plunked without too much respect to the building. It's probably not the fault of the sculptor - perhaps even the architect - [laughs] - it's just two separate occasions.

MR. PALEY: Oh, it's the fault of the architect I think because - well, you see, that was the thing that happened in the '60s. You had the cooperate buildings - the international style buildings and then they always felt that they had to humanize it someway, so they want to plop a piece of sculpture in front - you have you token Henry Moore or your this or you that. And so at best, the little courtyard was left or something was there. So here you have you building architecture and then here you have something for the people to look at and like.

And what it was - it was kind of an arrogance on both sides - the architect and the artist - I think it's just really humorous when you see these pieces in the front of the buildings when you think about the way the allied arch used to be - the integration. You had a whole vocabulary of murals and sculpture, and buildings, and it created one environment, and that was totally fragmented after the Second World War - I mean, First World War.

And only now are architects starting to take those problems on again. And even though this building now is kind of a slick kind of building, there are still just the - I mean, the architects never - the architects were just as arrogant as the artists to create a statement that was unaffected by other things and other variables.

And now they are starting to work together to humanize - not humanize but to integrate, harmonize the environments. And that is the whole - this ornamentation thing and it's starting to come together with all of those things. I mean, I think that 10, 15 years from now, we look back at the glass and the concrete buildings with the red Picasso in front or the Henry Moore, or whatever, it's going to look ridiculous - I mean, it's going to be humorous that the things had paired off to that extreme - I mean, almost one thing the antagonist to the other and not -

MR. BROWN: And perhaps neither relating to the surroundings.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, I mean, it's like the philosophies have been pulled to such extremes that the - I find it very, very awkward.

MR. BROWN: Do you see a future of other big commissions?

MR. PALEY: Yeah, the only thing that I think is I don't - I mean, people can be - can do good stuff and all of that but the timing is so very, very important how one makes it or not. Yeah, I mean, it's - I mean, if Peter Max came back now - not came back - but if Peter Max all of the sudden didn't work 15 years ago and started working now, his work wouldn't be accepted. It's not the time and whether it's too naive now, or too idealistic or whatever, it just - the work would be the same but it - no way could it reach fruition.

But the thing is that as I did my kind of personal thing with the jewelry and it kind of went on with everything else that happened with the craft movement as such, I was fortunate because of timing. I didn't pick it but my sensibilities were such, I was in the right sync. And as I was saying when I was doing - I had never done gates before, I had never worked with architecture, and I won this commission, and I did the gates and felt very strongly about them, and 10 years after that, now the people are looking at the gates as being something that is noteworthy - that ornamentation now is something to be considered.

And they are saying they should be considered now like it's a new revelation - I have been dealing with it for 10 years. So the timing is right. I don't take any credit for that; I'm just fortunate that it so happens what made me anxious or what made me respond all of those years, other people were feeling. And it so happens now, probably into the sphere of my own contemporaries, and if I was feeling the same thing towards able to visualize that through work, maybe that is where there acceptance lies, I don't know. But it's just - it's just fortunate so - good fortune.

MR. BROWN: Well, for you, there is this convergence now.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, because - yeah, because it's another world. You know the skyscrapers and the glass, and the designers and the architect of that period, the people that had lived through the Second World War and the new vision of the new society - I had never experienced that; I experienced the aftermath of that. Watching the bomb go up on television and fire drills when I was a kid, and all of that - I mean, I never went through the fear of war; I just knew what had happened afterwards and I'm a different generation.

And what they had given up for that vision was lacking in the generation that came after and now the generation is claiming its own again. And every generation does that - it just bounces and bounces back and forth, and it is nothing - I never really started out for that. You know, I was just - being an artist was a very isolated thing, a very insular thing, and I just tried to educate myself -

MR. BROWN: But you had moved toward a fairly integrated perception.

MR. PALEY: Well, I think it's - I don't think it's anything unique; I think it's a just a maturity. I mean, anytime people grow outside themselves and they extend outside themselves - I mean, I think that's just a normal thing.

MR. BROWN: Only you were comparing - citing back to the '60s, you see the unintegrated sculpture and the architecture next to it.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, well, I'm seeing that now.

MR. BROWN: Those people who did it then may have felt very integrated.

MR. PALEY: Oh, yeah, I mean, at the time when I saw the stuff - I mean, it was - I liked the work and it was the statement about what the art was and I was involved in art and it was the expression of the time - it really was the expression of time and it was - that was a great time for art - was in the '60s. But I'm saying my - when I'm speaking now, it's my perception at this point in time looking back at it.

MR. BROWN: But on the other hand, it bodes well for what seems to be your direction, the future - what looks like may be happening.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, well, as I said -

MR. BROWN: The reintegration.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, well, see the whole integration, say, with the jewelry and dealing with the jewelry - the integration of ornament to a given space - that of the human body. Now, the ornament with building - that problem and the subtle relationships and the sophistication of that stuff over the years - it's been like 15 years or whatever I've been working with that. And I've gone past a lot of the most immediate kind of things and delving with a lot more complex type of things. And so I have developed the skills in order to handle it. And if architects call up, it's not a great problem; it's not a new revelation. I can approach it in some of the same way. Yeah, it's just fortunate.

MR. BROWN: Do you think most of the sculptors, or painters, or whatever who are called upon as newly integrated - this interest in integration will be able to follow through with it.

MR. PALEY: No -

MR. BROWN: I haven't thought about it.

MR. PALEY: No, I don't think so because if you take a look at any -

MR. BROWN: This isolated path.

MR. PALEY: I mean, take a look at any - when a philosophy comes up or a movement comes up or whatever, people want to be with the state steps so they jump on the bandwagon kind of thing. They take their perceptions - what they have developed and they just try to change it over to fit the mode. And anytime, between one period and another, there is always that period of - whatever - it's confusion but it's just very awkward kind of integration - they stumble through it because they don't have the vocabulary. And after that very awkward period, then the style emerges and it gets a clarity, and it get an identity and then it's developed and then it becomes bastardized, and then it just fades away. And it goes through that whole - from the beginning to the classical and it does that and it dies.

And right now - what is happening now is that you are in that transition period. And post-modernism and the whole philosophical thing is happening with architects and now it's happening with the arts and ornamentation, you're going to get - I mean, the stuff that's going to come out of post-modernism is going to be hard - a lot of it because it is - it's a turmoil thing that the artist - I mean, the architects now realize that the other - the formulas have become such cliché's that they are not responding and they are not vital, and they are looking for new vocabularies to use and they look around and the easiest thing to use that has authority is historic styles, and they are using that. And then the next step is to try to create a new kind of history and then they look for people to do it and the people aren't around, so they have to put the need. The need is there and then finally the means will be developed.

And so what happens - a couple of individuals for whatever reason have developed those skills on kind of an allied path somewhere and they are just converging together.

But it's nothing new because you take - like, when I was in school - like figurative painting or figurative work - it's incredibly, passé. It was - it was just as bad as ornamental work that you - it was - I mean, abstract expressionism was kind of just about waning but all of the people that have been fostered by that - [Robert] Motherwell, and [Franz] Kline, and all of those people were still there, and so you get that. And then [Frank] Stella started happening. But figurative work - then all of the sudden, you take a couple of more years and then pop art, and then photo realism, and all of that.

Now, all of the sudden, you get these - all of this figurative work that is happening - these figurative paintings - these guys are 45, 50 years old but they have been painting figurative paintings in their rooms for the last 20 years, but now all of the sudden you see these great figurative works and all of that, and it's the new realism and the guys have always been around but the culture has not been sensitive to it, but it's the person with the vision that is in step or is out of step, and you can't really help that - you can't change what you are.

MR. BROWN: Well, the piece that you put outside the Strong Museum will be a great testimony.

MR. PALEY: Yeah, that is going to be - I'm kind of excited about it because it's a big project but I do have ambivalent feelings about it.

MR. BROWN: But you'll be raising the bar, won't you?

MR. PALEY: If it's appropriate, yeah. I have never done anything just to do it. I take a lot of stuff on to keep the shop busy but it's only stuff that I kind of believe in. But I wouldn't just make stuff - I mean, a lot of times I'll do stuff for exercise. I mean, I don't think they are great pieces or significant pieces, but if I want to explore something and commission is a way to do it, I'll do it.

Like that piece we're doing the heavy forgings for up there, we just wanted to do some heavy forging and heavy textured work and here was a chance - we're basically getting paid for investigation. And I think that is a very sound thing to do but it's not the concern and the responsibility, and the care, and everything that went on with, say, the designing of the Albany Gates - no way - went in that sculpture - was a very casual, a very immediate kind of thing, and I was responding to a limited problem solving situation, and that's all it's meant to be. I mean, it's not a major piece.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...October 25, 2007