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Transcript

Interview

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH RUDY AUTIO
IN MISSOULA, MONTANA AND SEATTLE, WASHINGTON
OCTOBER 10 & 12, 1983; JANUARY 28, 1984
LAMAR HARRINGTON, INTERVIEWER

RA: RUDY AUTIO
LH: LAMAR HARRINGTON

LH: I'm speaking to Rudy Autio in his studio in Missoula, Montana, and I wanted to say, Rudy, that this is about my third trip to Missoula. I've always been so favorably impressed with the place; there's almost a kind of a romanticism, as far as I'm concerned, about the landscape. When I opened the curtains this afternoon, the yellow trees were so dazzling I could hardly believe it, when the sun came out this afternoon.

RA: It's been fantastic.

LH: And the campus is so beautiful.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And Turner Hall, where I'm staying, is, as Don Bunse [printmaker, faculty, University of Montana] called it last night, spare, as far as the furnishings go. But it's one of the most comfortable places I've ever stayed, and I feel so good in it.

RA: (laughs) Ah, good.

LH: I have a six-foot bathtub, can you believe it?

RA: Really!?

LH: Right. Which is kind of unusual today, except for certain specialized bathrooms.

RA: Well, it's pleasantly camp, I think. (laughs)

LH: (laughs) Well, I just think it's wonderful. I'm enjoying this place a lot.

RA: Yeah.

LH: I was thinking as I enjoy it a lot, about how you came to Missoula over 25ÿyears ago, and I just wonder, before we get into the beginning of your life, actually, if you think you made the right decision?

RA: Well, I think so. Of course, I have to stand by that now.

LH: (laughs)

RA: I really have enjoyed Missoula in all the years that I've been here, since I started the ceramics department here in 1957. I've seen so many good students go through the program, and I've remained good friends with them over the years, which is kind of interesting. I still keep in touch with many of them; not all of them, of course, but especially the graduate students have been very nice to know over the years and maintain contact with. A lot of them have done well, and I think they've all done well. It's just that some have become luminaries in the field and others haven't. But it's been a very worthwhile 25years.

LH: I was also thinking about your own work during that time.

RA: Well, having left the Bray's [Bray's and Archie Bray's refer to the Archie Bray Foundation throughout the interview], I became centered on making ceramic objects, sculpture, and vessel-making. Part of that time, I dealt primarily with murals and reliefs for buildings and that kind of thing. So there was a kind of a change in the direction and thrust of my work; that's true.

LH: As far as the university here, your having been here these 25ÿyears, do you feel like you've had a lot of freedom to do what you felt was right for you?

RA: I think so. Of course when I came to Montana, at the huge salary of $5,000 a year, you know, I knew could pocket half of that money and save it. And then also do my work. Compared to the Bray Foundationÿ-- which was a situation where you worked from sun to sunÿ-- teaching was a snap. And you had your summers off and you had weekends and things like that, that seemed like an awful lot of time to work. I think that if you compare Montana to some of the larger universities, we really have very heavy teaching loads. But I've never known anything else, so I still think it's all right. You know, I hear of schools where the professors teach two days a week and things like that, and I've never known that kind of an experience. We've always worked every day with heavy teaching schedules. But other than that, the university does provide a kind of an atmosphere where one is allowed to work. Now I don't think that you could find it anywhere else. It's the patron of our time, you know. It has given me the freedom to pursue my ideas the way I felt I wanted to do it. I think that if I'd stayed at Bray's and continued to do ceramic tiles and commissions for buildings, it's very likely the work would have been of a different kind over the years. Commercial art, if you want to call it, to some extent. Where you're forced to make a living, you have to know where the next buck is coming from. And the atmosphere at the university has certainly helped me do the things I've wanted to do, or the things that I have done.

LH: Going back to the very beginning: I was reading that you were bornÿ-- is it Arne?

RA: It's Arne [pronounced Arnie] Rudolf Autio, officially.

LH: A-R-N-E, R-U-D-O-L-F.

RA: That's right.

LH: Autio.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: On October 8, 1926.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: So I can say, "Happy Birthday," can't I?

RA: Yes. As a matter of fact, I just turned 57.

LH: Did you have a party yesterday?

RA: Yes, sort of. There were a lot of people around, and I got a lemon pie, which I very much like, instead of cake. (chuckles) One candle. And, actually on my birthday, Lela [RA's wife--Ed.] and I went to Flathead Lake where I have a cabin, and we sailed the boat a little and drained the water lines, and all that old stuff with winter coming and everything. And, so my birthday was kind of sedate, kind of quiet, but they celebrated my birthday yesterday, which was on the 9th.

LH: Oh, I see, this is the 10th, that's right.

RA: Right.

LH: You were born in Butte, Montana?

RA: Um hmm.

LH: I remember going through Butte once a very long, long time ago, and I thought it seemed like a very different looking place, to me. I was very young at the time.

RA: That's a kind thing to say. That it's different. (laughter)

LH: Well, it looked very foreign to me. It's been many, many years ago. I was a child, and I don't remember it too well, but could you describe Butte?

RA: Well, the Butte that I knew was a very interesting busy, bustling place. It was, when I think back as a child growing up in Butte in the thirties and early forties, no mainly the thirties, it was just like living in Brooklyn. It was an interesting, busy city. And very dense with humanity. You have to think of Butte as a bustling mining camp that has been going now for about a hundred years or longer. It was at its peak in the twenties and thirties, and I remember it in the thirties. Or perhaps even earlier than that Butte was sort of an oasis between Minneapolis and the Coast; it was the the big city! With opera, acting companies, the arts, boxing matches, and Lindbergh, and all of those people, you know. The climate and life of the city of Butte was really pretty outstanding at one time. And I can remember places like Park and Main in Butte just dense with people.

LH: Now where was this?

RA: Park and Main in Butte, Montana.

LH: Oh, Park and Main streets?

RA: That's right in the center of town. And there were streetcars and automobiles and people and cops, and it was small enough [so that--Ed.] a lot of people knew each otherÿ-- and very ethnic in nature. There were communities; there were the Italians and the Yugoslavians and the Finlanders and the Jewish people and the Cornishmen, and all kinds of ethnic groups that maintained their own cultural identities in their own little colonies around the city.

LH: Did they come there precisely to work in the mine?

RA: Yeah, this was the immigrant population that came to Butte in the 1900s, on up to about 1920, you could say. The great influx of immigrants. And so they naturally settled in their own colonies, made their own churches, established their own halls and social communities, had their own restaurants, and stores, and yet all of this really melted together in this wonderful crazy city. And the interesting thing was that all of the company headsÿ-- the ACM [Anaconda Copper Mining Company] heads-- were living in the same community, practically next door to the miners, who were down the block. So, they didn't live in New York and clip coupons, but they lived right in the city, in their splendid houses, with servants and everything like that. But the miners were just down the block, a few houses down. It was this kind of mix that made Butte interesting. There's a lot of interesting history about Butte.

LH: I've always thoughtÿ-- I haven't read much about it, and I guess I thought of a more rural kind of situation. I don't know why I would think that, when thousands of people must have had to work in the mines.

RA: Right. This is a kind of paradox, really, where you have a very urban feel to a community, but it's placed in the rural west. Now, my background is so entirely unrural that you can't believe it. I never went out riding horses, or farming. Sure, to some extent, you did that because it wasn't far; 15 miles and you were out of the city, less than that. But, the city life is what I knew and kind of grew up inÿ-- tenements, housing tenements, one right next to another, three- or four-story tenements. No yards, no lawns. It was like living in Brooklyn! That's the closest comparison...

LH: This is giving me a whole new understanding of the way you grew up.

RA: Yeah.

LH: I've always thought of you as a rural person.

RA: Is that right?

LH: That's interesting. Now your family was Finnish?

RA: Yeah.

LH: And you said that there was a colony of Finlanders there.

RA: There must have been at least 2,500 to 3,000 Finnish people that lived on East Broadway in Butte. And they had their own Finn halls, and churches, and stores, and everything you wanted. It was almost a self-contained community. I grew up speaking Finnish. Practically all of my playmates spoke Finnish. And it was very easy to learn the language, because it was all around you all the time. Even today, with the very few remnants of that very old immigrant population, they have never quite adjusted to speaking English, for example. They've always lived in this Finnish community-- and been buried there, for that matter. So, they've spoken Finnish all their lives. They still have a tough time dealing with English; isn't that strange?

LH: Are your parents now deceased?

RA: Yeah.

LH: And what did your father do?

RA: He was a miner. And mother worked in the boarding houses as a cook, and we ran a tenement house, a little, you know, rental house. I think we had about twelve apartments that we rented for $20 a month, or something like that.

LH: How about brothers and sisters.

RA: I have one sister. I had a brother who was killed when he was a child. That was, of course, many years ago. But there were three youngsters in the family. My brother was born in Finland. My sister and I were both born in this country.

LH: And what has [your sister] done over the years?

RA: Trudy?

LH: Has she been an artist?

RA: No, she studied languages and philosophy and writing when she was a student. She studied at the University of Helsinki for a while, and in Germany and elsewhere, but most of her training was at a little Finnish college in [Hancock], Michigan called Suomi College. That's where she did her undergraduate work. Gertie, as I call her-- everybody else calls her Trudy-- Gertie has lived in East Lansing, Michigan, for many years, 30 years, I think.

LH: So out of your immediate family you are really the only one who has been an artist.

RA: Yes. Well, Gertie weaves; she's a good weaver.

LH: Oh she does.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Did your family take advantage of a lot of the things that were happening in Butte, such as... Did you say opera? Was there opera?

RA: Well, that happened in the cultured part of the community. No, I don't think my parents were involved in that. They were very active in their church and that kind of activity, but... Opera in Butte at one time was, you know, part of the hoi polloi that you have to cross, but they did have these theater companies come through and put on plays and all kinds of things, in the early days, before the movies got big. I'm talking about an older history of Butte that I really don't know that much about, just to tell you what kind of a city it was like.

LH: As you look back at it, what kinds of effects, besides what you've already touched on somewhat, did the mines have?

RA: On?

LH: On the atmosphere of the city.

RA: Well, of course, the mines provided the main economic activity of Butte. And there were just literally thousands of miners there from all ethnic groups, and there was a great intermixture of that. But how can you typify a mining city? It's a hard-drinking, tough, you know, fun-loving, but hard-working kind of a city, and that's the way the people were that I knew.

LH: You know, I often wonder... We don't hear about mining cities very often except when there're labor problems, or when there is a mine cave-in.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Those are two things that I remember in my mind at least, when mining comes to my attention. And of course there's been more [attention] now with emphasis on the environment in recent years, but I think about the dangers of the mine, and...

RA: They were tremendously dangerous places to work in, and there were terrible accidents there almost constantly. But of course the company knew, you know, the newspapers and none of this became wide public knowledge.

LH: Oh, the companies ran the newspapers probably.

RA: Right, the ACM Company ran both of the newspapers in town, and so if there was a terrible accident, it was usually buried in the back pages. Unless it was something like the spectator mine disaster where, you know, over 200 men were killed in that particular fire.

LH: That came out, uh huh.

RA: There were several of those kinds of incidents, but they weren't big news, necessarily, national news.

LH: I've thought about the way people must feel in a mining city, and you were speaking about it, about their being very hard-working, but also you were saying hard-drinking...

RA: Yeah.

LH: ...and fun-loving. And it does seem to me that if you lived under the spectre of tragedy all the time, that people would tend then, perhaps, to be more like that than other people might be.

RA: I think you're right, LaMar. I think that's probably generally true, but I can't speak for other mining communities. Certainly it had a lot of similarity to places like Pittsburgh, maybe the steel mills, which was also very dangerous work in the old days, and...

LH: I wonder what this would have to do, too, with religion. If we're comfortable, we don't pay much heed to religion, generally. But if there are problems in life then you begin to embrace it more.

RA: Um hmm, um hmm.

LH: It would seem to me that religion might be, I mean, you can't really generalize maybe, but it does seem to me that churches might be very important in a mining town.

RA: Oh yes, and in Butte too. You know, the largest foreign population there were the Irish of course.

LH: Oh, um hmm.

RA: And there was a very strong Catholic community there. Still is today. In my neighborhood, the Irish, interestingly enough, lived on one side of the street and the Finns on the other; we all became very good friends. The Finns learned about Irish wakes, and vice versa. [spoken with an accent] (chuckles)

LH: When you were there...

RA: They drank together, and, you know, that...

LH: (chuckles) Before you ever became an artist thenÿ-- way back then; I'm assuming you weren't an artist thenÿ-- did you see a lot of art in

the churches around there? Traditional religious art in the Catholic churches?

RA: Well, you see I never went to the Catholic church. I knew they were full of-- we would peek in, see.

LH: Oh.

RA: And we would be amazed at all of this sculpture and everything they had inside. The paintings, very lovely things. No, the art in the Finnish Lutheran Church was very spare, if any. And so I didn't have much contact there. Although as a youngster, of course, it was church every Sunday, and Sunday school, and all that stuff. They would send Finnish pastors from the Suomi College in Hancock, Michigan, and Minnesota to come over here to preach to the flock. They were circuit preachers, who used to come around to our community.

LH: Did your church going go on all through the time that you were in Butte, and perhaps afterwards?

RA: Yes, as long as I was there. I lived in Butte till about the age of 16.

LH: Did you graduate from high school there?

RA: Um hmm, um hmm.

LH: What about some of your relatives? Did you have aunts and uncles there?

RA: Oh yes. I had aunts and uncles, primarily on my mother's side. When my mother emigrated to this country, she had an uncle and a sister living in Butte. That is, one uncle in Michigan, I believe, but a sister in Butte, which was the means by which she was able to come from Finland to the United States. Her sister paid for her passage, in other words. So mother came to the United States, as I remember, around 1914, and Dad had arrived here. They met in this country, of course. Dad was a miner in a small goldmining camp west of Butte, a place called Southern Cross, Montana. And Mother got a job as a boarding-house worker; that is, she was a cook and a waiter. So that's how they got to know each other. And they were married in Butte, in about 1917, I believe. Maybe earlier than that. Yes, it had to be earlier than that. I'm a little fuzzy on those dates.

LH: Are their remains now in Butte?

RA: Yeah. Mother passed away at the age of 90 last year. And Dad passed away about two years before that.

LH: Amazing. I guess I keep wondering then where along in here did you start to be interested in art?

RA: Well, I think that we had very excellent public schools in Butte. I'd like to talk about that a little, because I feel that the grade school and the high school were very important to me. The grade school was completely staffed by wonderful Irish schoolteachers who had a love of poetry and drama, and were very friendly to the arts. We had the Sullivans and the Mulhollands and the O'Briens and they were terrific people, and very good with the youngsters. You can imagine the kind of youngsters they had to deal with; half of them couldn't speak English when they entered the first grade. But by the time they got through with you, you really had quite a lot of exposure to poetry, the arts, and... I think much more so than they do today! I think the art appreciation programs in the grade schools, at least in Missoula, as far as I can compare, are much thinner than what we had. But then again, there was another adjunct to this. In addition to the good grade school background that I felt I had, we had the WPA art program.

LH: Ohhh.

RA: Works Progress Administration. They had artists who were, you know, being supported by the Depression assistance, whatever.

LH: When you were six or seven, something like that?

RA: No, when I was about nine. And they used to come in the schools and put on art shows. And they would teach evening classes, which I attended. I learned to draw from those people.

LH: That would have been over several years, probably, wouldn't it, to...

RA: Well, I can't say that I did this a long time.

LH: You were nine years old in 1935.

RA: I can certainly remember about a year of intensive evening classes with the WPA art people. And then that remained an interest. I used to go up to their center, up on Montana Street, and watch them make silkscreen prints. They were skilled artists at the time. You know, trained artists.

LH: Now probably most of those artists who were working with WPA were from the state of Montana. Is that right?

RA: I don't know if they were or not, LaMar. I wouldn't have any way of knowing.

LH: I think in most states it was that way.

RA: It could be, yeah.

LH: I wonder if you can remember any of their names.

RA: Gosh, I wish I could. I just don't remember.

LH: Well, so really, along in there, you did become interested in art.

RA: Yeah.

LH: Quite early actually.

RA: Um hmm. I had my first show of drawings when I was nine years old, (laughter) which traveled to Billings. I was pretty much of a whiz at drawings, see, and they were impressed because I could copy things out of magazines and do the shading and that kind of drawing pretty well. And then of course, following the grade schools there, I went to a high school and studied with a wonderful lady named Carolyn Busch Jacobs, who had been trained at the Parson's School of Design. She had gotten her degree from Bozeman [at that time Montana State College], studying with Olga Ross Hannon, and she had studied in Paris, so she really was well trained in fine arts.

LH: Now tell me again the name of the person she studied with at Bozeman.

RA: Olga Ross Hannon.

LH: And this teacher's name again?

RA: Was Carolyn Busch, and Jacobs was her married name then.

LH: Isn't that intersting that she had gone to Parson's School?

RA: Yes, um hmm.

LH: And what was her specialty?

RA: Well, it wasÿ-- I can't be sure now. As a teacher she taught us many things like painting and crafts. There was another art teacher, who was equal in importance, and his name was Pop Weaver. We all called him Pop Weaver. Today I don't know his name... I think it was Charles. But anyway, Pop Weaver had studied at the Chicago Art Institute. And he had worked the Ashcan group. His painting and his poster-making were wonderful. And he was a real stickler for having us do a lot of drawing. Practically all we did in his classes was draw portraits and figures. And we used to sit there every day and draw a portrait of some student who'd sit up there, and so we got pretty good at portrait drawing. And Pop was a good teacher, in that respect. He wasn't as good as Carolyn, but he was a more active maker of art himself. He could do all these wonderful beaux-arts posters of school activities, football games, and things like that. I think they were classics.

LH: You had a lot of art training in high school!

RA: Well, really I think so, yeah!

LH: This is something else I didn't know about. This is wonderful. So, you must have graduated, did you say, at age 16 or 17, something like that.

RA: Well, I graduated from high school in 1944. By this time I had joined the navy, and I came back to graduate with my class in the spring of 1944. I was on leave.

LH: So would you have joined the navy in that last year, or...

RA: In April of '44, I think it was.

LH: So then, when you left high school, what happened about the navy? The war was almost over.

RA: Well, it was almost over, but it went on for a couple of years, well, about a year or a year-and-a-half longer. I went to Farragut for my boot training and then I went to Oklahoma, where I was trained as an airplane mechanic. And I spent about two years in Galon, Nevada, out in the desert. (chuckles)

LH: What did you do in Oklahoma?

RA: I was sent to an aviation machinist...

LH: Oh. Yeah.

RA: Training school. I was in that training for about five months, I think.

LH: And then after Oklahoma?

RA: Well, I was briefly stationed at Alameda, California, and I volunteered to go to sea. I wanted to go see some action, see. So they put us on a train; instead of going out to sea, we went out in the middle of the Nevada desert. (chuckles) I couldn't believe it! Here we were out inÿ-- Hazen, Nevada, had some kind of a railroad stop; there wasn't anything there, and then finally about five minutes later some kind of a truck pulled up and we threw our sea bags into this truck. (chuckles) And it took us out to this air base way out nowhere.

LH: (laughs)

RA: And that's where I spent my navy experience.

LH: So you were really happy that the war was about over then. (laughter)

RA: Yeah.

LH: So after that, did you go almost immediately then to Montana State?

RA: After I got out of the navy I went to Montana State, yeah. [I] enrolled in the architecture program there. And I was a very sloppy architect. I kept thinking of how good looking the girls were over in the art department, and I thought, "Hell, I don't need this." (chuckles) And I went over to the art department, really liked it, and... In the meanwhile, I'd gone back to talk to Carolyn, my old high school art teacher, Carolyn Jacobs, and she said, "Sure.

You'd like art. You'd do fine." And so I did. There I met good people. I met my wife Lela, who was a crackerjack art student and president of the Art Club. (chuckles) We fell in love with each other and ran around with each other. And there was Pete Voulkos; he was a student over there at the time. And a lot of good friends that I still maintain close touch with today.

LH: So when you started out, you were actually majoring in art, then? So there wasn't a question...

RA: Well, I majored in architecture for one brief quarter before I entered into the art program, where I stayed.

LH: Oh. So you were really majoring, so there wasn't really any question about what courses you were going to take, probably.

RA: Yeah, right.

LH: What about Frances Senska?

RA: Well, Frances Senska was a brand-new teacher there at the state university, or state college, as it was called then. She'd just gotten out of the Waves-- she was a captain or a lieutenant in the Waves, but she'd had art training at Grinnell College. She'd also had home economics there. But she had studied with Moholy Nagy and Fyorgy Kepes at Chicago Art Institute. She had studied with Maija Grotell, the famous Finnish potter, at Cranbrook. I think this was a brief contact; it wasn't concentrated study. And she had worked with Marguerite Wildenhain for a while. So she had about as much pottery training as one could find, among...

LH: Very broad...

RA: Right!

LH: ...when you think of all three of those.

RA: And so Frances set up a ceramics department there. Not that we were particularly interested in it; we had to take it, see. It was a required course. But it was fun to work with Frances and help her build the shop, you know, build the kick wheels and the kilns, and set up a basic shop, and we dug clay near Bozeman. We used that kind of material. And Pete [Voulkos--Ed.] had to take it too, along with the rest of us-- although he was primarily a painter. But he fell in love with ceramics. He was very good at it. He took to ceramics like a duck to water. And pretty soon he was throwing large vases about eight inches high, and they were perfect. (chuckles) After a while, he was spending all his time in the ceramics department. Pete always had this magnetism about him, even as a student. So we all hung around Pete and watched him throw and make stuff. His work really became very good, you know, in the late forties there. To a point where he was sending to the Witchita show and other nationals and to the Oregon Ceramics Studioÿ-- you remember that?

LH: Um hmm, good.

RA: Under Lydia Hodge. And he started to win prizes all over the country, even as a student. He was still interested in painting, along with ceramics, but ceramics gradually started to take over in his case.

And I hung around Frances a lot. I practically took every course she taught. But you know there were only four teachers there. (chuckles) So they had to teach everything.

LH: In the art department?

RA: In the art department. Frances taught crafts and lithography and ceramics and design. And so I took everything Frances taught.

LH: And were you doing some throwing? At that time?

RA: Oh, of course, we all had to throw a little bit. And then we all had to make things and glaze them. There were certain class projects that we had...

LH: Also hand building? Did you do some hand building?

RA: I started to do that, yeah, I wasn't very good at throwing even then. I can't throw pots. (laughter) But, yeah, sure, I can throw pots, I guess, and I did throw some, later on, but not very well.

LH: How about influences from outside at that time? Was there any opportunity to hear about things that were going on other places?

RA: As you can imagine, we were very isolated. Practically all the information we ever got about the outside art

world was through magazines. There were no shows to speak of. No museums to see, or anything like that. So it was a an inbred kind of training that we got. I think Montana State College had a good art program as far as being an isolated little college town was concerned, but there just simply wasn't any contact with the outside. Except through some wonderful teachers. Bob De Weese came there then, as a painting teacher, young guy, fresh out of college. We were very close to him. He'd studied in Ohio and Iowa, amongst some of the best painters of that time. I can't remember Bob talking about these painters, but Bob was a good painting teacher. We had a lot in common with him. And Francesÿ-- and Jesse Wilbur, of course. Jesse had studied in Greeley, Colorado, with a lady named Stinchfield, and she had these ideas from cubism and that kind of influence, you know. We were aware of Picasso and Matisse and the great luminaries in the art world, of course. We took art history surveys and studied modern art through slides. But beyond that, we didn't really ever get a chance to see the real thing.

LH: The person that you just mentioned a minute ago, was she in Colorado, did you say?

RA: Jesse Wilbur?

LH: No, the one that she had some contact with.

RA: Stinchfield?

LH: Right. Can you spell that name?

RA: It's S-T-I-N-C-H-F-I-E-L-D.

LH: So when you graduated from Montana State, you went to Washington State University for your graduate training, but you also got involved with Archie Bray, all kind of together.

RA: Well, now...

LH: Which happened first?

RA: Following graduation, I applied to several schools in the Northwest, and I got the T.A. offer at Pullman, so I went to Pullman. Pete went to Arts and Crafts, in Oakland, for his graduate work. Pete is a little older, and so he was a little ahead of me. But then, after there, we had done one year in graduate school, and then Pete got... Now, mixed with this, we had met the brickmaker, Archie Bray, you see.

LH: Right.

RA: And he wanted to hire a couple of potters, or a couple of art people who liked to work in clay. And through Peter Meloy, who's another friend of ours in Helena, we got to know Archie. Pete got the job working as a potter there, because in the meanwhile the Archie Bray Foundation had gotten started. So Pete went to work there and I graduated about a half a year later, and Pete says, "Well, come on over, you know, there's a place for both of us." So we both started to work there, and we helped build the shop, and the wheels, and the kilns, and all of that.

LH: Now an awful lot has been written about the Archie Bray Foundation, I thinkÿ-- I know of about three different places. But would you want to make any comments about Archie, Senior?

RA: Well, he was a very dynamic kind of person in his own way. He was kind of short, but a tough boss in the brickyard. He liked to be the hard-driving boss in the brickyard. And he was a different personality over there, than he was after five o'clock, when he was just as gentle as a lamb. Going back into Archie's history a little, he was one of the first ceramic engineers to graduate from Ohio State, in their ceramic engineering program, which I think was around 1910. Then he inherited his father's brickyard, in about 1930, but he always had a close feeling for the arts, you know. He would actually underwrite the cost of a community concert, for example. I think he played the piano a little. And he was interested in the local theater productions. I can remember working for Archie there. He put on a play, called My Friend Anna. I don't know how he did this, or why he did it.

LH: Was he the producer, or the director, or did he act in it?

RA: Well, he kind of organized it all, and got the players together. I remember Lela and I going down there, painting the backgrounds. (chuckles) Archie always had his hand in things like that. But he wanted to make the Archie Bray Foundation happen. First of all starting as a pottery, but he envisioned painting studios there, possibly printmaking studios, music studios, and the only thing that really got off the ground in his lifetime was the pottery.

LH: Before we go into more on Archie Bray, let's talk then about Washington State.

RA: Okay.

LH: You went there...

RA: Well, I went to study with George Laisner at Pullman, because I'd heard that George Laisner was doing bronze casting, and that interested me. I was interested in sculpture when I graduated from Bozeman. And I'd done some woodcarving and castingÿ-- plaster casting, that kind of thing, that every art student doesÿ-- but I wanted to get into sculpture. I heard that George was a real crackerjack at casting and making things like that. So that was another attraction for going there.

LH: So you really hadn't done any of that, then, when you were still in Montana?

RA: Not at Bozeman, no. Not in my undergraduate years. And having gotten to Pullman I found out that George wasn't interested in casting at all! (both chuckle) But he was interested in many things. In any case, Pullman was a good experience, and I met people like Andy Hofmeister, who was a painting teacher there. And worked with George, and Keith Monaghan. And so it wasÿ-- and Harold Balazs. Harold Balazs was a fellow student and he was worth going to Pullman for, you know, just to get to know him.

LH: What about Harold? What can you say about Harold?

RA: As a student then?

LH: Yeah, and as an artist and...

RA: Oh, he was the same as he is now. Just, you know, going in high gear, running when everyone else was walking, and very active. Gosh, he was making jewelry and painting and doing prints and... The single most memorable thing about Harold in those days-- I remember his graduation, you know. I had another year to go, but he was leaving. And he had a box of jewelry, enameled jewelry, and this is what he set out into the world with. He says, "Well, I'm off to be an artist. I've [got] this little box of enameled jewelry." (laughs) And, you know, he went off to Spokane and started to be an artist and he's been an artist ever since. Glad to say, tremendously successful at it.

LH: So successful at the so-called public art, or architectural kinds of art.

RA: Yeah, right. And today you can go all over Spokane and Seattle and see Harold's work, all over the State of Washington.

LH: What do you remember about his personality?

RA: Oh, just bubbling, all the time. Dynamic. And mixed with that a real kind of intellectual streak. Concerned about good issues, and he read well, and he was active in drama and sports and, you know, just a very active person.

[interruption in taping]

LH: I've seen him [Harold Balazs] in situations where he'll come to Seattle and thenÿ-- I don't know how he gets these [school] kids together, but it probably is something to do with the art commissionÿ-- and he will sit with them and talk with them about a piece that he's done and it seems to me that he relates very well to them. And it inspires them.

RA: Yeah, it does.

LH: And I wondered if you saw any of that in those days?

RA: Well, there really wasn't too much opportunity to see that in Harold then, because aside from the fact that we were in classes together, in some classes, I just knew him as a fellow student. And so I didn't see him in any kind of a teaching role or anything like that. But I've seen him since, you know. We've been good friends over the years. And he's got magic when it comes to dealing with kids. I think maybe partly because he's never had to teach before, in the strict sense, and it's never gotten to be dreary.

LH: Yes, and it's actually a very informal situation usually, when he does that stuff.

RA: Sure.

LH: Another name that stands out for just a very short period of time at Washington State-- but it was probably long before you were there-- but I wondered if you, while you were there, heard anything about Clyfford Still's period there.

RA: Well, I had heard of Clyfford Still having been a student there, but of course he had gone to New York by that time.

LH: Okay.

RA: And really didn't mean much to me then.

LH: So when you were at Washington State, what about influences there?

RA: Well, this is a hard one to remember too. Now here, I probably did myself a disservice by going to another isolated school (both chuckle) when I could have gone to the University of Washington or to Oregon. Those were three options, but Pullman paid the most and I needed the money, with a young family. By that time we had Arne. And so I can't really think of influences. I did make a few trips to Seattle to the Puyallup Fair [Western Washington State Fair.]. We did this with George [Laisner.] a couple of times. But in those trips I met Kenneth Callahan, for example, and-- who else did I meet? The names get by me right now butÿ-- oh, Glen Alps. I worked with Glen Alps during the Puyallup Fair; we were making prints. Glen Alps and I were doing lithographs together. And of course, you know, he was quite a force by that time himself. And...

LH: Was that at the time that there were some quite good exhibitions of art at the Puyallup Fair?

RA: Yes, I think there were pretty good exhibitions. This was about...

LH: In the middle fifties?

RA: In 1951 and '52.

LH: Oh, I see.

RA: There's nothing really memorable. I rememberÿ-- wait a minute. I think I remember seeing Boyer Gonzales paintings at that fair, which were very good for the time. And I think Boyer was a good painter, but shortly after that he became the chairman of the department at Seattle [School of Art, University of Washington]. I've always admired his paintings, but I don't think he painted much after that time, after he became chairman.

LH: He tried [to paint regularly--LH], I think. And every once in a while would paint a one-man show.

RA: Ah, uh huh.

LH: But I think it was very difficult. He was very busy at the university.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: So while you were at Washington State, then, what happened about your own art, as far as...?

RA: Well, I didn't get along with the potter at all. There was a lady named Harriet Middleton who taught pottery, who wouldn't let me come into the shop. (laughter) You know, it's interesting that by this time, Pete Voulkos had quite a reputation, even in 1951 and '52, and she knew we were friends. But her alliances were a little closer to that of Carlton Ball, under whom she'd studied. Carlton Ball and Pete at that time were at opposite poles of the ceramic world. Carlton thought Pete was an upstart, which he was, and (laughs) and Harriet Middleton was Carlton's student. And I suffered from that association.

LH: Ahh.

RA: So Harriet wouldn't let me into the shop and wouldn't let me take ceramics. (laughs)

LH: That's terrible! I mean were you studying ceramics?

RA: Well, actually I was studying sculpture so it was all right, see, I didn't really care. But I knew quite a bit about ceramics and I guess she felt threatened or something, and I'd made a big piece that filled her kiln once, and she wouldn't let anyone else fire, so she had to fire my piece which must have rattled her no end.

LH: (laughs)

RA: She had to do it because it was part of my thesis exhibition. But that's the only time I ever had a chance to work in the shop there.

LH: So you worked with George. In metals?

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Constructing metals?

RA: Mostly I did all kinds of mixed media. I worked in wood, I carved stone a little, I did an aluminum casting, and I did some soldered wire pieces, and just a variety of media, which ultimately became my thesis. It's something I'm not too proud of-- that phase of work, you know.

LH: Now I'm assuming they didn't have any glassblowing at that time.

RA: No, they didn't. But George was a fun teacher. He was always active and, you know, always running around and doing interesting things, so it was fun to be around George.

LH: He did a lot of different things, didn't he?

RA: Yeah.

LH: I remember when he used to enter the Bellevue Fair [Arts and Crafts Fair.]. A lot of people around the Northwest entered that in those years, regularly.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Every year you never knew what was going to come in from George Laisner.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And it seemed like he was very much interested in a lot of things, and most of the things that he entered were really quite good quality, as I recall, too.

RA: Yeah. He was a tremendous craftsman, in the sense that he could make things work.

LH: Would he have used some flat glass pieces of some kind during that period, do you know?

RA: Could have. I remember there was quite a lot of painting that he was doing. And then his sculpture was very jewelry-like.

LH: He entered some sculptural things that were called jewelry.

RA: Yeah.

LH: To the Bellevue Fair.

RA: Yeah. But also some of this jewelry-like-- or its jewelry-like parts-- could also have been part of a kind of a large wood carving too. And it's a kind of mixed...

LH: Combinations of materials.

RA: Combinations like crazy.

LH: Uh huh.

RA: To a point where they didn't really work sometimes. But [he was] a skilled craftsman and [had] a lot of enthusiasm.

LH: It also seems to me that as the years went on George's design didn't really change a lot. Is that right or not?

RA: Very much the Bauhaus... You know the Bauhaus [steel] and that school and...

LH: Um hmm, yes I do.

RA: That was very much a part of George's thinking, as it was, you know, a very pervasive kind of thing in those years.

LH: Um hmm. Now in your own work, were you doing all abstract, or were there figurative kinds of things?

RA: I think they tended to be figurative, but also verging on abstract... Some pieces were totally abstract in nature. And I guess, no, I'll have to take that back. I think there was always some kind of imagery involved, either taking off from the use of the figures, or... I wasn't comfortable with total abstract work, you know. I always had to have something there that I could deal with in the way of figures or animals or landscapes. I did a lot of watercolor painting in those years. And I think that if I were to really look at it, I probably did more painting

than I did sculpture.

LH: Um hmm. Did you do a lot of drawing, through all those years?

RA: Well, quite a bit, um hmm, printmaking.

LH: So the drawing really started very early, as early as when you were in secondary school, actually, and has come right along through all...

RA: Yeah, um hmm. I've always maintained a strong interest in it.

LH: So you got your graduate degree there, and I guess that probably took you two years?

RA: Took two years, um hmm.

LH: And then you went back to Archie Bray.

RA: Yes.

LH: Which you apparently had promised to do. Is that right, before you left there?

RA: Well, I had. We had worked there that summer. You know, there was an intervening summer? [Between normal academic years at WSU]

LH: Um hmm.

RA: And then both Pete and I went back to graduate school, and then we returned. So the second time I returned, it was full swing at Archie Bray.

LH: Um hmm. And the Western Clay Manufacturing Company, which apparently had been the name of the firm for a long, long time, was a commercial brickyard?

RA: That's right.

LH: And sometime in there, then, Archie had started this foundation. Is that right?

RA: Yes, by this time, it was established and the trustees at the time were Peter Meloy, Branson Stevenson, and Archie himself.

LH: Oh! Let's talk a little bit about the Meloys. Apparently they and Branson Stevenson were quite instrumental in getting [the thing built].

RA: Yes, they were. Branson Stevenson has always been a trained artist, but he was a businessman by profession. And he used to do prints and ceramics. Peter Meloy was a lawyer. And he was interested in pottery, primarily due to his association with Hank Meloy, his brother. Hank Meloy taught painting and drawing at Columbia University and he used to come out in the summers to visit Pete. So they would work together in their pot shop and Pete would make the pots and Hank would decorate them. Well, Hank would also do sculpture. Did some beautiful horses and things like that. He was really an outstanding artist. The reason we don't hear much of him [is because] he died very young.

LH: Now this was...?

RA: Hank Meloy.

LH: Hank. The one that was from Columbia?

RA: Yeah, right. And even today his drawings and paintings are just fantastic and he's unheralded, unheard of.

LH: Now I've seen a little bowl, one small bowl, in the collection of the Portland Art Museum.

RA: Yeah?

LH: And it is incredibly beautiful, the drawings on it are [see illustration Harrington, Ceramics in the Pacific Northwest, 1979, page 10].

RA: Really, yeah. That's true. Well, there are literally thousands of drawings, hundreds of thousands of drawings. I just don't know how many that Pete [Meloy] still has of Hank's work and paintings. You see, Hank died when he was quite young, 40, 45, dropped dead in Grand Central Station. Before he was really in full stride.

LH: In New York, in Grand Central Station?

RA: In New York.

LH: Ahh.

RA: But up to that time he had done all this painting, and even today you can go and see them, if anybody wanted to, but Pete has kind of given up on how to get his [Hank's] work known. I really love Hank Meloy's work, even today; I think it's very strong, interesting, good, solid work. Hank was doing a lot of drawing and just starting to paint quite a bit, but I'd say that his main interest was drawing, and sculpture, and to some extent painting.

LH: I think I've heard that the horses that he drew, that were so fine, were based on Chinese horses. Is that right?

RA: Yes, um hmm. He used to make horses like T'ang horses. He'd sculpt them. But his drawing then was a little different from that. Anyway, I think Hank has been a great influence on my life and my work. Even though I just knew him such a brief period of time.

LH: Do you own any of his drawings?

RA: Yes I do. I own one abstract drawing of Hank's. It's a colored drawing, just very fluid, with red and green shapes and black drawing. You know, I think that Hank also, in his own way, was probably interested in Gorky.

LH: Oh.

RA: I see hints of it in his work. But you know at the time Hank was working, people like Pollock weren't really very visible or that well known yet.

LH: Yes, um hmm.

RA: And so it's logical to think of a connection between Hank and Gorky, you know. And yet Hank's work was different, but you just see a few little things about it that was...

LH: Some little things that might remind you of some of the early Gorky things? Or...

RA: I would say the Gorky pieces of the middle forties. The kind of flower shapes.

LH: And strange little forms floating around here and there.

RA: Yeah. You see sometimes Hank would do straight abstract work. And there, I sense a connection. Now I might be wrong. But it stands to reason that being in New York at the time he would have absorbed that.

LH: Well, you know it would be really interesting for more people to see that work too.

RA: Oh, I think so. I think he should be seen. The guy is-- I mean, if it took a good archivist to go in there and select a show of Hank's drawings and paintings, I think it'd be very great.

LH: Because, the time is so right for doing something like that, it seems. Now, his brother may have lost hope that that could ever happen, but he may have lost hope before this period that we're in right now, when people are looking for things like that, it seems to me.

RA: Right. He was, well, let me put it this way. He was so much the artist, if you want to look at it and find a real Montana artist, he was so much better than anything else that was going on up here at the time, like all the cowboy painters and, you know... Charlie Russell, of course, is the big hero here, and he's best known. But Hank, I think, has equal stature, but was never known.

LH: Where did Hank go to school?

RA: I think he studied at the Chicago Art Institute.

LH: Oh.

RA: So in a way he was no longer a native here, [he] kind of moved on.

LH: But Pete remained here?

RA: Yeah, Pete remained here.

LH: And then Branson Stevenson was the businessman.

RA: Um hmm. Well, Branson was probably less visible as an artist. He did do prints, nice prints, nothing earthshaking. But he was always interested in promoting the arts and, oh, he did things, like he headed the art section at the State Fair every year. [He] put on the big exhibition for Montana. And then he was quite a force there, too, you know. He was one of the early potters around here.

LH: Now, before you went to Washington State, had you been hand-building anything?

RA: Probably, but I can't remember too much. Just student projects, you know.

LH: I see. So when you came back then... Oh, I know a name-- Lillian Boeschen.

RA: Lillian Boeschen. Right. Well, you see, in the interim year when Pete and I both returned to school... By this time the pottery was built; it was ready to go. So Lillian Boeschen, I don't know how, but she got the job as being the first resident potter here.

LH: I see.

RA: So really, in a sense, we're skipping Lillian when we say that we were the first ones; it's not quite accurate. Lillian was here for a very brief period, maybe six months, and then Archie fired her. Eased her out.

LH: Now thess buildings that you're talking about. You and Pete had helped build those. Is that right?

RA: Right. And volunteers.

LH: I see. And by buildings, there were kilns?

RA: We built kilns and the necessary equipment for a ceramics shop.

LH: But the beehive kilns, that was part of the brickyard.

RA: That's right. We used to fire in the beehive kilns, in the brickyard, before we had our own kilns built.

LH: I see. I've heard lots of stories about how Archie-- Senior-- used to sell the bricks, and he'd sell your murals along with them.

RA: Right, um hmm. Wellÿ--

LH: And those would have been your first murals, I suppose.

RA: Yeah, you see, it started out this way: He'd go to a contractor or an architect, and he'd say, "Well, if you get this brick from me, why I've got a kid who'll make a nice plaque for you, you know." And (laughs) so I would make plaques. And that sort of started my interest in working with carved brick, and different kinds of things that went into buildings.

LH: Did you also hand-build some of those murals?

RA: Yes, um hmm. But, see, this is the way it started out. It started out in an old terra cotta, traditional terra cotta technique, where you made the model out of plaster, then you cast molds of the model, then you pressed clay into those molds, and that's the way it's done.

[Break in taping]

LH: Okay, now, to continue about the murals at that time, you were mentioning that there was a lot of press-molded kind of work.

RA: Traditional terra cotta forming, which Archie was familiar with. And he kind of showed me how to do this work, and so it was kind of unique to learn how to do it. Somewhere in there I also made a trip to the Denver Terra Cotta Company and watched some of the old craftsmen working. There were still a few of these old terra cotta facades that had to be repaired, and it was kind of sad to see this old plant with these great old craftsmen, you know, in their sixties, who were still pressing molds, and all the skill that they had. Hand craft.

LH: Now what was the name of that place?

RA: It was called the Denver Terra Cotta Company.

LH: I see.

RA: They were interested in me, because, hell, they'd never heard of anybody who still wanted to do ceramic decoration for buildings. (chuckles) And so they were very nice to me and showed me around the shop and how they did things. I wish I could have actually worked there for a while, because then I would have really picked up a lot of information, but with those few ideas and those that Archie had, why I worked in typical old terra cotta techniques. And, oh, I read some treatises by, what was his name? Wilson, of the University of Washington! I guess he was a professor of ceramics there.

LH: Yes...

RA: Many years ago, probably in the twenties. And anyway those were all helpful. But I didn't do all that much. I finally started to make these things out of carved brick, which was easier in a way, it was more direct, and I did four or five of these things for public buildings around Montana.

LH: Now this is still while you were at Archie Bray?

RA: Right.

LH: And would you say that most of these had some imagery, rather than [being] abstract?

RA: Yeah, they were practically all for churches. So they dealt with religious subject matter.

LH: So in addition to the murals, what other kind of work were you doing at that time?

RA: Well, that was principally it, and I did do ceramics and pottery. I did some sculpture, some pieces that weren't related to selling or anything, but working in ceramic sculpture. Some were nonobjective. Some contained imagery. I was feeling around for a lot of different ideas.

LH: How about horse imagery at that time? Did you do some horse sculpture?

RA: I did do some horses.

LH: And maybe some reliefs with horse heads?

RA: Yeah, I did some horse heads, and I did some reliefs, and pressings, and...

LH: I heard that you did something for chimneys. You took it on top of the roof.

RA: Oh, I made chimney pots.

LH: Chimney pots.

RA: Yeah.

LH: And were they more than just functional? Did they have some kind of decoration?

RA: No, they were simply functional, but here was a chance to deal with shape, of course. I didn't know what a chimney pot looked like, but an architect came by and said, "Do anything you want to." Well, of course, not having seen any chimney pots, but he just gave me a general idea of what had to be done, and I went ahead and made these.

LH: I've often thought I'd love to see one of those one day. And I tried to find one of those [at the Bray Foundation--LH] when I did the [historical ceramic show at Seattle Art Museum, 1979--LH], but nobody could seem to find them. I guess there were some hanging around Archie Bray for a while, but they couldn't seem to find them then.

RA: Could be. I think they were used on the job, and they're on a house in Great Falls.

LH: Oh.

RA: I did several of them, but I wouldn't say that this was any kind of extensive direction.

LH: I see. Another thing that you mentioned to me, about this time, you might have been becoming interested in, how can I say it? Something having to do with Eskimo.

RA: Okay. Well, that's true. We were in close association with the De Weeses through those years, and Jenny and Bob [De Weese] and I and a lot of people became interested in Indian dancing, or watching the Indian powwows. So some of that stemmed from an interest in watching the Indian dances. I can't say that it was a profound thing, or a deep-rooted thing, or something that affected me greatly, but I did do some pieces dealing

with Indians, Indian dances, their costume, and that kind of thing, in the sculpture.

LH: But not doing necessarily Eskimo, perhaps?

RA: No. But I was interested in Toltec, the Aztec, some of the pre-Columbian, which kind of looks like Eskimo, perhaps. And I did see some Eskimo sculpture that I liked very much, but I didn't really make any pieces based on that interest.

LH: Do you remember by any chance the piece that the Weinsteins own, in Seattle?

RA: Yeah.

LH: I found it after my book on ceramics was published. I'd been searching for the earliest abstract slabwork that you'd done, and here I found this piece out in their garden.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Would that by any chance be around that period, I mean from this Indian...?

RA: Yeah, that's one of the very early pieces. As a matter of fact, I kind of wanted to get that for my retrospective. But I guess it's damaged or something.

LH: Oh is it?

RA: I don't know now. Well, anyway, it was one of my very early pieces, about 1952, possibly even '51.

LH: And might it have been rather Indian imagery?

RA: I can't know, LaMar, you know. [RA appears to be trying very hard to remember].

LH: It's a figure, I'm sure.

RA: It's a lot of involved, kind of gingerbread, and it...

LH: Well, it seems that in the bottom part of it, from about here down, the slabs are more vertical and horizontal, and then up here there seems to be something that's circular.

RA: Yeah, but it's not really a figure.

LH: No. It's constructed. But the top of it, somehow I see a head, a human head on it, but I may be all wrong about that. So I'm trying to figure out if that's tying into all this Indian imagery.

RA: I don't think so. I think it was a piece that, interestingly enough, I still like a lot. It worked well for that period, you know. Good piece.

LH: And it worked out very well in that show too.

RA: Yeah. I was glad to see that in the show, because it was fun to see it again.

LH: Now, Pete [Voulkos], at this time, at Archie Bray, while you were going through all these things that you're now talking about, was he throwing more?

RA: Yeah, he was throwing pots, and I think he was in what you might call his "Elsie" period [from "Elsie the Cow," openwork bulls], you know; he was starting to attach things to pots. He'd throw a pot, put it upside down, and he was also drawing on them, and flattening them out, and just... It was after he'd gone to Black Mountain College [1953] and worked with, you know, the very latest people in the art world that there was a radical change in his work about that time.

LH: While he was still at Archie Bray?

RA: Yeah.

LH: And before, now I'm talking about the period before [Soetsu--Ed.] Yanagi and [Bernard] Leach and [Shoji] Hamada came [1952.]. Was he, or you, at that time, using any of the Japanese techniques, like in glazing and so forth?

RA: No, Pete was up on that stuff because he'd been doing that at Bozeman, as a senior student in ceramics. He'd also been doing it down in Arts and Crafts [Oakland] and at Mills College, where he worked with Tony Prieto

for a while, I think.

LH: So he was doing a lot of that before Hamada and company ever came around?

RA: Yes. Very much so. I don't think that Hamada, Yanagi, or Leach showed us anything new about technique. We knew about technique. But what they showed us, I think, was a spirit that was very much different.

LH: I think we won't talk about visitors [to Archie Bray]. There is quite a bit of information about that in other places. Archie died in 1953.

RA: Yes, um hmm.

LH: That must have been the very strong end of a period.

RA: Well, we thought the end had arrived. He was the sole support, and we didn't feel that kind of sympathy or interest from Archie, Junior. As it happened, we were very wrong. Because Archie, Junior, was as interested and as helpful and as supportive as he could be without having any, you know, drive behind it. Archie had the motive to do it. And Archie, Junior, simply wanted to sustain his father's wishes. I have to admit Archie, Junior, was very supportive, but he just didn't have thatÿ-- I don't know, had Archie, Senior, lived maybe we couldn't have stood it. He wanted a lot of things done his way, you know.

LH: Archie, Senior?

RA: Archie, Senior. And very often I was doing real dumb projects that I didn't like very much; you know, being under his thumb. Like doing a glaze tree [described by RA as a tree in clay relief with a bunch of leaves in different colors--LH] for Branson Stevenson.

LH: So there is a lot...

RA: I started to chafe a little bit under Archie, Senior.

LH: There's a lot of romanticism of course attached to Archie Bray, Senior, because that was most unusual for a man to have the drives that he had...

RA: Yeah.

LH: ...and the idealism about a lot of these things that he had. So it's easy for that to take over and the practical sides not. To sort of forget about all that.

RA: Right. Sure.

LH: Well, I think we'll quit for today, Rudy, and then start in 1954, at the time that Pete left for Los Angeles County Art Institute.

[Break in taping]

LH: This is a continuation of yesterday's interview with Rudy Autio. We're in the Fine Arts Building of the University of Montana. Yesterday, we were just finishing up about midway through the Archie Bray period.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And we talked some about your work at that time. Did we talk about production work that you may have done at that time? Did you and Pete both do some production work as I've heard?

RA: Yes, we did. One of our projects was to do cast work. We made little dishes and gift items. Not dishes, ash trays, and planters. Some of these were slipcast in molds, and we did this for quite a while. Oh well, at least a period of about a year anyway. We had a jigger machine where we jiggered some planters. And Harold Balazs provided us with a stand that we put planters in. It became a very popular kind of thing that we sold at gift stores all over the country.

LH: Was that a wood stand, that Harold made?

RA: It was a metal stand.

LH: And so that was done mainly to make some money while you were there.

RA: Yeah, this was just a bread-and-butter item. Along with that, Peter would make some very beautiful pots that we would send. They were teapots and covered jars and bowls and little bottles, and they were very nice

things. I used to do a little bit of that, but this was mainly after Pete left. We had a lot of gift shops that we had to fight to kind of keep supplied. And to a very limited extent, I tried to do that, but I couldn't sustain it. There were other potters that came there then: Doris Strawn and Jim and Nan McKinnell, and they kind of moved into the making of pottery because I couldn't keep up with it.

LH: And as we said yesterday, some of your time there was taken up with making murals and you described the techniques that you used with that.

RA: Yes. Those were terra cotta types of murals. I think I was talking about having gone to the Denver Terra Cotta Company...

LH: That's right.

RA: ...and watching some of these old craftsmen press molds, and they took me through the whole operation there, which was very interesting.

LH: And most of the subject matter for those murals at that time was religious?

RA: The ones I was doing, yes. They were primarily religious murals, primarily for churches and, in a few cases, for public buildings. There happens to be one of the very early ones right on the campus here at Missoula. It's on the Liberal Arts Hall.

LH: Is it on the outside of the hall?

RA: Yeah, it's a real ugly thing.

LH: I see.

RA: Yeah. (chuckles)

LH: It may be illustrated in the catalog. [They continue while looking at the catalog that accompanied the Autio retrospective exhibition of 1983--LH].

RA: Yeah, I think it is. It's this piece here.

LH: Ohhh!

RA: You see, this being composed of sections was then taken apart, each section was cast into a mold, and then pressings were made of each section, and those pressings were fired, glazed, and they're now on the wall over here on the Liberal Arts Building.

LH: That's the round one that's illustrated on page 6 of the catalog.

RA: Uh huh.

LH: Maybe I can go over and look at that when we've finished. Also, I was interested to see the two or perhaps three pieces in the catalog from that early period of figurative work, one being this one on page six, Mother and Child, as early as 1951.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And then The Musicians and The Jugglers.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Those were all apparently from that period.

RA: Approximately the same period. This [Mother and Child--LH] was earlier. The picture of the Mother and Child on page six here in the catalog is a piece I did as part of my graduate work at Pullman.

LH: Ah, I see!

RA: And so that actually is probably 1950 or '51. Even though it's labeled '51 here. I think this is probably a little more accurate because this in fact was part of my thesis exhibition.

LH: And that's terra cotta, unglazed, isn't it?

RA: Yes.

LH: Then you did pieces like The Jugglers and The Musicians when you were at Bray?

RA: That's right.

LH: And those are terra cotta, and are they unglazed?

RA: They're unglazed. No, one is glazed and the other is unglazed. Or one is partially glazed. The Jugglers is partially glazed and The Musicians is unglazed-- stoneware, cone ten.

LH: And it was during this early period at Archie Bray that you did, for instance, the horses.

RA: Yes. I think so. And the Weinstein piece in Seattle. And several like that, which I have no record of any more.

LH: And the onesÿ-- let's see now. Say the one on page 29 of the catalog, which is now in the Museum of the Rockies collection, this piece.

RA: Yes.

LH: I notice it has quite a bit of glaze on it.

RA: That's probably all glazed, yes. That's a stoneware piece about 1955, I think, somewhat later, that kind of followed the sculpture interest; we [Autio and Voulkos--LH] were doing a lot of sculpture, kind of wild sculpture. We started to do wild sculpture in clay. We got away from pots and it sort of paralleled the abstract expressionism movement that was just beginning in New York.

LH: Now, if this is 1955, were you just saying that you and Pete got away from the pots? Is that what you said?

RA: Yeah.

LH: '55 would have been after he left.

RA: Yes.

LH: But going back to another piece then, that is a constructed kind of work, on page-- just a minute I'll find it-- page eight, the one that's called the Tower. This one.

RA: This was fairly early on.

LH: This is dated in the catalog as 1952.

RA: I think that's probably right, um hmm.

LH: And I notice, for instance, that's glaze there, is it not, around that one aperture?

RA: Well, it's probably just slip. No glaze.

LH: I see.

RA: Most of these pieces were unglazed. I wasn't totally comfortable with glazing everything I made in those days. I still kind of liked the unglazed look about it. Because I felt that glaze oftentimes blunted the sculptural detail.

LH: I remember when I had a conversation with Pete some years ago. He had said he couldn't remember any slabwork or constructions that he had made before he left Archie Bray. And we talked about that quite a bit at the time, and he could not remember anything. There is a very nice piece in Seattle owned by the Jarvises [Connie and Fred], which is made up-- by Pete-- which is made up of four thrown elements. There's a thrown element at the bottom, kind of like a vase, and then three, I think, very similar elements that are stuck together like this.

RA: Yes.

LH: Maybe with epoxy, maybe he wasn't yet using epoxy. But the best date that I could find for that was probably 1955 and although Connie Jarvis had her connections [as a student--LH] with you and Pete at Archie Bray, she may have purchased that at a later time, because I don't think he remembered putting together any parts like that [as a totally abstract form--LH] at Archie Bray either.

RA: Well, there's one basic difference between the way Pete and I worked there. I was usually either coiling or slab building, whereas Pete's tool was the wheel, primarily. And even though he cut, slashed, and assembled,

and put parts together, most of his approach was to throw the forms on the wheel and whether he opened them up afterward or not-- I'd say that that was the mainstream of his working technique. But Pete also used to hand build certain things like bulls, you know, with very open structure in them.

LH: Was this still at Archie Bray or...

RA: In the very early days at Bray's.

LH: I see.

RA: He constructed a few pieces that way, not many, two or three pieces. One was a figure. Kind of open, but hand built. And carved. And then another piece that I remember very clearly was a bull, a sculptural bull that was sort of open structure. There were holes in it, and that kind of thing. [It had a] large body with a small head, with horns, and it was a lot like some of the incised decoration he was doing on his pots. He didn't do too much of that, and going back to my earlier statement, his tool was the wheel. And so, as a consequence, those pieces that he did in those years were assembled to some extent, but wheelworked.

LH: So that would be the kind of piece that the Jarvises own, I imagine.

RA: Yeah, I think so. We kind of referred to it as his "Elsie" period.

LH: Oh, I wondered. You said that the other day. Do you mean Elsie the cow?

RA: You know, Elsie the cow. The udders hanging on...

LH: Yes. Yes, I see.

RA: ...and not that we disparaged that, but it was what he himself called Elsie pieces, I think.

LH: Now we also spoke yesterday about Pete having gone to Black Mountain in 1953, and the influences on him at that time. I think we didn't talk yesterday about the Hamada-Leach-Yanagi visit in 1952. You've covered that in a number of conversations, I think.

RA: Yes.

LH: But if you can stand to go through it again, it...

RA: Well, no problem. I may probably remember different things, in talking with you now. But a lot of this is fading into the distant past now, so I can't be too clear on everything that happened there now. The things that seem most memorable to me was the ease with which Hamada worked on the wheel. I think this was the most beautiful part of it, to watch Hamada work on the wheel was just beautiful. It was the economy of everything he did. The feel he had for clay, which can't really be described. For example, if it took one spin of the wheel to make a mark on it, that's all that was necessary, you know. When we throw on the wheel, we sit there and crank away and crank and crank and crank and crank and hope that by cranking something great would happen. [said with a smile in his voice] But Hamada didn't need to do that. And then, the other thing that I noticed was the casual way he handled pieces. He just sliced them off the hump and if he left an accidental finger mark on it, which you know we would have cleaned off with a sponge, why he just left it. And why not? It was just a very comfortable way of looking at it. And I often watched him when he picked these pieces off the wheel; he would examine them, turn them over a little, and then approve, and you could just see that he was at one with the material. [He would] put them aside and kind of look at them a little and then he'd go on to another one. But it was that comfort and ease that he had with his material, the mind and idea and the material was all together.

LH: And at that time...

RA: That was a real revelation to me, just to see it. He didn't have to speak English to be able to tell me what he was doing, you see. And so that was neat. Leach, on the other hand, was the scholar, and he would expound about philosophy and taproots and many things that in retrospect were...

[Break in taping]

LH: [I believe you are saying in retrospect--LH] that Leach's contributions didn't have as much effect on you as Hamada's would have had.

RA: I think watching Hamada meant more to me than hearing Leach explain the philosophy of ceramics.

LH: As you thought...

RA: And yet there was another personÿ-- I don't want to minimize him, either-- Dr. Soetsu Yanagi, who traveled with the group. He was a very perceptive gentleman, who was pretty kind to us and we could see his sense of appreciation as being very important to the whole business as well. He would walk around the yard with us and look at the salt glaze on the sewer tile, and I was a little amazed that a scholar of aesthetics would be arrested by looking at some salt-glazed sewer tile. (chuckles) He appreciated a lot of things like that. He also delivered a lecture about Zen and Korean pottery. This was an important lecture because he was a Zen scholar, having taught at Harvard, and was returning now to Japan, where he later founded the Mingei Society, the folk craft museum. In retrospect, as I looked at Yanagi, he was a very gentle man with a lot of perception and he didn't look down on us, like perhaps Bernard Leach did a little. I never felt that about Hamada. Hamada tolerated us as as being young people who were promising in the arts, and he was very kind to us, whereas Leach was a little impatient with us.

LH: I remember Frances Senska saying how important the Yanagi part was to her, how it gave a whole new kind of philosophical view to the importance of what you were all trying to do.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And an interesting story about Hamada was when he-- this would have been in 1963, when you were at the university.

RA: Yes.

LH: When he came to visit, you may not have been there quite then, I'm not sure. But we went down to a conference in Oregon. I drove him down, and by that time we had a very good collection of his work at the Henry Gallery. I had looked it all over and I had my favorites. And so on the way down we talked about a lot of it and I said, "Mr. Hamada, one that is really my favorite," and I described it to him.

It was one of those square bottles, and each side looked like an abstract painting.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: It was so beautiful, and it was very melted, the glaze and all, and there was no indication of any brushstroke on the outside of it. So it made it a little different than some of the other works that he did. When I told him I liked it, he said, "That's your error!" (laughs) and pointed his finger at me, and apparently he did not like that piece at all. And I learned from him that it had been overfired and the glazes had run. It was looking very abstract expressionist [and loose--LH] on each side, you see.

RA: Oh really?

LH: And he didn't like that piece at all. Well, that was interesting from that standpoint, [that although spontaneity was a major aspect of ceramic production to him, he felt he had lost control in the firing of this piece--LH]

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Do you have any new feelings about Leach's comment about "no taproots"? That's a famous quote; you hear it all the time, and I think that the people who were there were taken aback by what he had to say. I suppose you might mean when you say that he was, I don't think that you used the word arrogant, but some people have used that word in respect to him.

RA: Yes, I don't mean arrogant. I guess I don't really mean that. He wasn't being unkind I don't think. It's like saying to somebody, "You have no past." Well, what can you say to that, you know? You simply don't! (laughter) And so we just kind of took it from there. We didn't feel that that was any great handicap, really. We had a lot of things to do there, and we were very busy doing our sculpture, and pots, and so what? (laughs)

LH: At the time that he said it, then, did it justÿ-- Well, I would think that almost anyone would hate to hear it, but it's as you say, what can you say, and you were busy-- did you have any kind of response to that? Any kind of verbal response to it, or did you just...?

RA: Absolutely not.

LH: No.

RA: At that time I thought that, well, Pete's just as good a potter as Leach. Pete was doing some magnificent things! Of course he didn't have that depth, or that history that Leach had. But it didn't seem important. We were kind of upstarts in our way. You have to remember that we were products of an art school, where we had done drawing and painting, sculpture, and had been serious in those activities, and pottery was the way we were

going at that time. We were bringing a lot of the art school ideas to our ceramics. Not that we felt we were doing anything new; we were just doing the kinds of things we were interested in. I think the most significant change following that was when Pete returned from Black Mountain. He was like Christ having come down from the mountain, or something. Moses. He had a new idea and you could see it. He was just glowing with that kind of inspiration. His work started to go through very dramatic changes after that time. It seemed like he had just been born again, or something. He looked at abstract painting, and we felt that he understood abstract expressionism. And we didn't. So we were wondering, "Pete, what do you see in that?" You know. I remember one time we took a painting that he hadÿ-- I'm trying to remember the painter. I think it was Esteban Vicente.

LH: Oh yes.

RA: And we borrowed it for a while. And Lela made a copy of it, using the same expressive gestures and everything. And I put it in a frame that was just like the one on the painting that he loaned us. I returned the fake painting to Pete, wondering if he'd know the difference. And we hung it up in his house in the back there, where he lived in that chicken shack [at Bray]. He looked at it for a while and he says, "That's not my painting!" So, even though to us it was just identicalÿ-- gestures, movements and everything-- he spotted it right away.

LH: Isn't that interesting. Well, then, that time was after the Yanagi visit and going to Black Mountain, then Pete made the decision to leave, to go to Los Angeles County Art Institute [later known as Otis Art Institute--LH]. And you stayed on until either '56 or '57?

RA: '56.

LH: '56. I was wondering if we could go through a few of the visitors who came about that time and on to the time that you left for the University of Montana. [Robert] Sperry I know came...

RA: Yes, Sperry was there...

LH: While Pete was still there. Is that right?

RA: Yes. Sperry was there fairly early in our work together, and he came for a summer.

LH: He would have come in 1954, the summer just before he took his job at the University of Washington.

RA: Yes. Now you see even though Pete had left at that time, he returned for a couple of summers, to work for a while.

LH: I see.

RA: I think he really missed Montana, and of course we missed him. But we knew he had to do this move. I remember Pete having had this offer from Millard Sheets, who was the director of Los Angeles County Art Institute at the time. He had an offer of $7,500 and it just seemed like enormous amounts of money. And I said, "Pete, I don't know how you can turn this down." You know, "You've got to do this." I will really miss you, and I hate to see you go, but it looks like this is what you have to do." And then, you know, it seemed right that he should go. By this time, Archie had died, and Archie, Junior, didn't really have that much enthusiastic support to run a huge organization. Archie could probably see what I was doing more clearly than what Pete was doing. And so there were other reasons why it was necessary for Pete to leave. Besides, he was getting this attention. Winning prizes all over the country. Pete was winning major awards back there and getting recognition, the Syracuse and Wichita shows. The coast shows in Seattle and Portland and Los Angeles, and so he was beginning to get quite a name. So they were very aware of him down in Los Angeles. Millare Sheets was aware of Pete's work and wanted to get a topnotch potter down there and so he hired Pete. And so he went down there and established that pottery, that ceramic center.

LH: When Sperry was at Archie Bray-- I don't know how long he was there. Was he there long enough to do anything?

RA: It seems to me a summer.

LH: I see. Do you remember what he did while he was there?

RA: Well, he started off in a kind of feeble way, making small pots, but it didn't take him more than about a week and he was making beautiful pieces. He just needed that kick. He was ready for that kick to make some big pots and good pots. And in a space of about a week or two, Sperry was just grooving like crazy. And he was more knowledgeable than a lot of us. He knew how to fire kilns. He knew a lot about glazesÿ-- or seemed to know quite a bit. And I think he had studied with Leah Balsham at the Chicago Art Institute so he had pretty good background in a technical way. And so he was ready to move in a physical way with his pots. Beyond that, I don't remember much more about Sperry's work, except that there were a lot of Hamada-Leach pots around

that were unglazed. They'd been bisqued and he mixed up a batch of glaze-- wrong as it turns outÿ-- and fired a whole kiln full of Leach and Hamada pieces with the wrong glaze on them. (both chuckle) And as it happens it wasn't bad! He'd left something out, silica or kaolin or something, so it was a thin red-iron glaze that ran quite a bit, but at least he did that for us, and fired all those pieces that were made from the previous visit.

LH: Could you discuss some of those other people? For instance, the McKinnells, both the McKinnells [Jim and Nan] and Carlton Ball. Did we talk about them yesterday?

RA: No, we didn't. I think we mentioned it briefly. Jim and Nan were there for quite a while from those very early days on. I can't remember specifically when they came there, but I think that they were there at the Hamada-Leach workshop. At least they were participants or visitors. I may be wrong, but I think so.

LH: His mother lived in Seattle.

RA: Yes.

LH: And so they were around, at this moment, I don't know exactly when they were here, but it did seem to me that they moved back and forth between Seattle, to see their mother.

RA: I think that might have been the case. They moved in for a week or two and then went back, and then they came back on a more or less permanent basis. Because, I couldn't throw the pots and do the other things I had to do. Jim and Nan brought an expertise to the ceramics activity there, that I didn't have. And so, they were there for a number of years, along with me, up until the point where I left. There were other people there: Doris Strawn andÿ-- gee, I just don't remember now.

LH: How about Carlton Ball? What comments do you have about him?

RA: Well, Carlton Ball came there one summer, I believe on a Ford Foundation grant. This was also a time where Pete had returned for a summer. So their visit overlapped. Carlton Ball was very good at all of the things he did, because he was so knowledgeable about firing kilns and very much up to date on materials. We learned a lot from Carl. He was a good potter. He was probably the best potter on the coast at that time, you know. Certainly a lot of what's happened on the west coast was Carlton Ball's doing.

LH: And from several standpoints? For instance, the glazing and...

RA: Glazing and clay bodies and firing techniques and...

LH: And throwing? Was he quite good at throwing?

RA: And throwing. He was throwing big pots, and he was a very good potter and, you know, handled the material and knew what he was doing.

LH: Someone, it would have been Ivarose Bovingdon, I think, said that she visited San Francisco during the World's Fair down there, on Treasure Island. And she saw him throw at that time, and...

RA: That would have been 1939.

LH: Right. The way she described it was, "He threw a pot up to his elbow." Now, as time goes on, those kinds of things are hard to remember exactly, but that sounded impressive.

RA: I think she was probably wrong.

LH: Uh huh.

RA: In '39. Because I remember Carl telling me a story that he had worked with Glen Lukens or something, but he really hadn't learned how to throw very well. He pretty much had to learn how to do this on his own.

LH: I see.

RA: I vaguely remember him telling about that San Francisco World's Fair time, where he had just gotten some clay and was having to figure out how to throw pots and he just, he knew how, but not all that well. So I gather he was very young then and just figuring it out, and...

LH: And probably very early in trying to throw.

RA: And very early. Sure.

LH: Let's see. Were there other visitors that stand out in your mind?

RA: Well, of course, Marguerite Wildenhain.

LH: Oh yes.

RA: She came in, for about a week, I believe. And talk about a dynamite lady! (chuckles) By this time, well this was another summer where Pete had returned. He was there along with Marguerite. Not along with, but he was there at the same time. Marguerite was the star of the show, but Pete kind of overshadowed her performance because he could throw pots like nobody's business. And I think everybody got the message that, well, poor Marguerite, you know, this stuff you're doing is nice, but in the background there were Pete's pots, about, you know, 36 inches tall, with beautiful glazes on them and wonderful drawing-- energetic pieces. Marguerite's were pale by comparison, you know.

LH: And she had been so revered before that...

RA: Yeah. What a comedown!

LH: ...and was probably quite a bit older than Pete?

RA: Much older. And I think she just chafed under his presence there, you know.

LH: She also was a very strong woman, as I understand it.

RA: Oh, she was a powerhouse of a woman! But then, I can remember those lectures she gave us, how important it is to apprentice yourself for ten years and...

LH: Sounds like Hamada.

RA: ...be working under the thumb of the master in order to do these kinds of things that I'm doing. (laughs) Well, no, she wasn't fooling anybody really. And, oh, we respected what she had to say, but she was just sort of completely overshadowed by Pete's presence there.

LH: You know, another similar storyÿ-- just the whole atmosphere-- when Hamada was in Seattle and we were together on that trip, we went to this Oregon college, and everyone was there before we arrived and they were awaiting the arrival of Mr. Hamada. And when he arrived they had made it possible for everyone to make rakuÿ-- in his honor. So they asked him to come over and make some raku. And he declined, saying that he would have to work for many, many more years before he would be able to do that. [He was probably 70 or 75 years old--LH] (laughter) And it was almost a kind of put-down, you know, in a way.

RA: Yeah.

LH: Everyone was so taken aback and they didn't get to do this ceremony that they'd hoped they could. And that ties in a little with what you were saying about Marguerite and the need for having a long apprenticeship and so forth.

RA: Well, that was so far out of our concept, to have to do an apprenticeship. I mean we could make pots like that. I learned how to do that in two weeks, you know! (laughter) Which wasn't exactly the case, but since we didn't know any better, why it didn't mean much to us. (laughs)

LH: Would you discuss Lela [Autio] and Peggy [Voulkos] at Archie Bray? They were the two most principal women there, were they not?

RA: Yeah, um hmm. Peggy was doing the enameling. And this was a very popular kind of thing at that time. Bright colors.

LH: On jewelry? Or...

RA: No, we were doing trays, little nut trays, ashtrays.

LH: Oh I see.

RA: Yeah. Lela and Peggy did that. Peggy more so than Lela. Lela was raising a family then, you know, young kids running around. So Lela's activity was mainly painting at home and when she could she'd come down to the ceramic shop and make enamels. Not so much together with Peggy, but sometimes they worked together. And sometimes we'd all make enamels together. I remember we had to do a bunch of favors for a bankers' convention. We had to make about 250 of them. By the time we were getting to around number 150, those designs were getting pretty jaded. (laughs) We were just sprinkling color on and drawing a few lines on them, you know. Every one was supposed to be an original ashtray, for a gift, a favor. And we were just knocking it out.

As it happened they turned out nicely. But once in a great while we would do things like that, you know.

LH: Lela had a fine background in art.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: At Montana State University.

RA: Yeah.

LH: And did she graduate from there?

RA: She graduated from Bozeman, along with me, probably graduated about a quarter or two earlier than I did. We were married at the time.

LH: Oh, while you were in college?

RA: While we were in college, yes. By that time we had Arne, our oldest boy. Well, Lela was always interested in painting and she did some excellent, wonderful paintings in the early fifties. She managed to do all of that. And paints occasionally, still, but doesn't have that kind of constant production that she... She works quickly and it didn't take her long to get a whole roomful of paintings together.

LH: How many children do you have?

RA: We have four. By that time, Lisa, our daughter, was born. That was in 1952. And so, with a young family and kids, why she didn't do too much around the ceramics.

LH: Well, she must have been really busy.

RA: Well, of course she was!

LH: I think I heard that for some time she was interested in fiber art, was she?

RA: Yeah, this came on later, much later, I would say in the late sixties?

LH: Maybe when the children were grown, actually.

RA: Right.

LH: And does she now paint sometimes?

RA: Well, she does fiber and she paints. She hasn't done it for a while now. She retired from teaching at the high school last year.

LH: She was?

RA: And [God], she'd been teaching all this time at Hellgate High.

LH: Teaching art?

RA: Teaching art, uh huh.

LH: That's in Missoula.

RA: Right.

LH: I didn't know that. She must have been a tremendous support for you too.

RA: Oh, absolutely. I wasn't smart enough to, you know, do this all alone!

LH: (laughs)

RA: You know, Lela's been kind of the driving force, the organizer behind me and I have to admit that it could have very easily been the other way, you know. Lela's a very talented artist. And I think that she let a lot of that slip because she's been supporting me. And I regret that. I wish that Lela's career could have paralleled mine and... Well what can you say. The years have slipped by and it's hard for her to pick up the things that she did before, and yet she has that capability. I still, even in my own work, have the deepest respect for Lela's perception. When she walks around the studio and says, "My God, that's awful." Or, "You shouldn't use that blue

on a yellow." It will bug me for weeks! I have that much respect for what she's thinking about that I think that a lot of my work is a union of what Lela thinks and what I do, you know.

LH: And of course, as you said, "What can you say." It generally has been throughout history, if someone has not developed a talent they have, it usually has been a woman who hasn't done that, I think more often than a man.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Although it may have been the other way around sometimes. But it is a very difficult question.

RA: It is.

LH: And I know that I'm certainly enough of a feminist that I'm working constantly for women to develop themselves. But I also can understand how it doesn't happen sometimes.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And why perhaps it's important for it not to happen. Who can answer those questions.

RA: Yeah.

LH: It's a very, very difficult question.

RA: Right.

LH: It would be interesting to talk to Lela and see how she feels about it, because she could probably explain it way better than we can.

RA: There's no way to replace those years that go by, see?

LH: Well, that's true.

RA: Even though you retain the same perception, those years in the meanwhile have gone by. While you're in those years, the woman is in those years, you're always postponing, postponing. Okay, now that, you know, Christopher's in school, now maybe I'll have a little more time, but it isn't all that simple. You can't buy back those years. I have every confidence that if Lela got back into painting, she could be working very intensely in important ways, but there's no way you can pick up those years that have gone by. All of the shows you've missed, all of that. It's almost like starting over.

LH: Now you have some grandchildren.

RA: Yeah, um hmm.

LH: How many?

RA: One.

LH: Oh, just one grandchild; this is the little girl.

RA: That's all I need right now. (laughter) It's wonderful. I think the interesting thing about a grandchild is that you're beginning to see all of the things you missed about those kids that you had, you know, on your own, who grew up so fast, and you were so busy in your career to pay much attention to them. But now I've got a little more leisure to watch that grandchild pick up all those interesting things, growing up.

LH: And that grandchild is really brilliant, I think. I met her just last night.

RA: Oh, of course. Absolutely. (laughs) She was that way when she was born! (laughter) Accomplished on the second day that she was on this planet.

LH: Her father told me last night that when she was being born, and then was born, and the doctor's interaction with her immediately, he said, "She was a fighter." Right then. That she showed him that she did not like having to have been born, in no uncertain terms. That's what he said. (laughter)

RA: Well, I don't know about that; doctors say nice things to you.

LH: Well, I guess so. But she did have that look in her eye when I met her.

RA: She is very independent, I'll have to admit.

LH: Um hmm. Let's go back to Bray, just quickly. You had made your decision then to go to Montana.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And as I recall, Archie Bray had reached a point where it had to make it alone. And after Ken Ferguson came for a few years.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And then Dave Shaner was there.

RA: Um hmm. To be totally accurate, we did hire another potter, who came there for a year, Eugene Bunker.

LH: Oh yes, I remember that name.

RA: Then, he didn't work out. He had a lot of problems. He was a fine potter, but his personal life was problematical at the time. And so Jim McKinnell kind of steered the ship for a while, and then we got Kenneth Ferguson over. And he was a godsend. Ken Ferguson had a purpose and a clarity about the organization, and through sheer hard work and persistance, he put the thing on its feet, got it on a sound footing. And you know, this was a very difficult period, because the brickyard folded. The whole business collapsed around him. The financial support just disappeared from under him. And it was all that he could do to hold the thing together there for a couple of years. That was a point where it could easily have folded forever, but for his persistance in keeping it together. Very lean years. Together with him, Dave Shaner joined the foundation. Dave was there longer, I think, in terms of anybody. And Dave is a very bright man, and a good potter, and perhaps even more sensible than Ferguson. And so during Shaner's tenure, as the director there, the pottery finally became firmly established and I think it's in good health now. There's been a succession of good people there.

LH: Including Dave and Judy Cornell.

RA: Dave and Judy Cornell. Dave was the resident director, Dave Cornell, following Shaner. And now, of course, we have Kurt Weiser, who is just a terrific young man. He's a wizard with clay and loves the work and does beautiful things. There's just been a new vitalization there, under Kurt Weiser.

LH: Can you say, today, what you think has been the value of Archie Bray Foundation?

RA: Well, I think, in perspective, it sort of started on the ground floor of a nationwide interest in ceramic art. The fact that there've been so many good artists who have spent brief periods there-- some under scholarship aid, and others through just kind of visiting sessions where we've invited them to come-- that it's had a great deal of variety in terms of the kinds of people that have been there. And now there seems to be a whole new generation of fine young talent, who come there to work. These kids are very knowledgeable about ceramics. I'm just amazed at what they know. You know, LaMar, it used to be that young people wouldn't even consider entering a ceramics program; it was looked down on, as a craft [spoken disparagingly] let's say. The talented kids went into painting-- and sculpture. But so many of them now go into ceramics, talented kids. So there you have it. You get these wonderful, talented people who come to Bray's and they really do wonderful work there. They amaze me! Because of what they know, what they can put together. I don't think it's necessarily exclusive to Bray's, but this is sort of a national phenomenon. A lot of talent all over. Much more so than, you know, when we started out, in terms of ceramic art.

LH: Would you say that Archie Bray has been more important to people from out of the area, or people in the area, or is it a kind of combination?

RA: Well, certainly I don't think the Archie Bray Foundation has been important to the area so much, because I don't think they still know what's going on at Bray's. In Helena, they know it's some kind of a brickyard pottery thing out there, but they're not aware of its importance. I think it's better known nationally. People come there for a while and then they leave. And many of these people go into teaching or become active studio potters. [They] sustain the life of that, in that way.

LH: That's very similar to Pilchuck, the glassblowing school.

RA: I kind of think so.

LH: Now it's becoming much better known locally, but for ten years it was better known internationally than it was around Seattle.

RA: Sure.

LH: And there are plenty of people who don't know it's there even now.

RA: Yeah.

LH: So eventually you left-- Oh, I know, there was one other thing I wanted to ask you about. Before you left Archie Bray, I thought it was in 1956 or '57, I understood that you did a stint as assistant curator at the Montana Museum [Montana Historical Society] in Helena.

RA: Yes.

LH: What was that about?

RA: Well, quite honestly, I had differences with the bookkeeper at the Bray Foundation. As it turned out, he turned out to be an embezzler, and ran off with funds that we had earned in the ceramics operation for the Archie Bray Foundationÿ-- made us look bad. And I told Archie about this, and it later turned out that they did uncover the fact that this bookkeeper was embezzling the place blind, at our expense. We were at a break-even point, but it caused enough friction and disagreement that I felt that my usefulness there as a director wasn't productive enough. Archie finally understood it all, and we remained good friends.

LH: Archie, Senior?

RA: Archie, Junior, now.

LH: I see. Later.

RA: This was several years after senior died. By this time I felt that it's time to look at other things. I went to California for a brief time, I worked at the Advanced Kiln Company [in Los Angeles--LH], and I made some gallery contacts down there, and I was living with Pete. But that couldn't last; I'd left my young family up in Missoula without any visible support, and the little bit of money I earned down in Los Angeles wasn't enough to sustain us. So I wrote to my good friend, Kay Ross Toole, who was director of the historical society. By this time, we were good friends and I asked Ross if he couldn't give me a job for a while, and he said, "Sure, Rudy. Come on up; you've got a job." He sent me a couple hundred dollars and I was able to get out of California and I went to work as an assistant curator at the historical society museum for a while. I did work at Bray's, however, at the same time. I had a commission to do, but by this time I didn't have to be the resident manager, and Archie let me work there and do this commission, using brickyard materials. Things were fine but I had left Bray's in an official capacity, and I was just working there as an artist.

LH: And were you at the museum for only a matter of months?

RA: It was a period of about four to six months, as I remember. On the payroll, making dioramas and doing all kinds of odd jobs around the museum. Making coffee in the morning, you know. Making coffee in the afternoon for the staff, and...

LH: Is that the time then that that diorama...?

RA: Yes, the Lewis and Clark...

LH: Right!

RA: No, actually I had made that somewhat before.

LH: I see.

RA: It was an independent commission. That's how I got to know Ross Toole, for example, who was a tremendous person, wonderful guy, who just died last year. He was teaching history on our campus. But that was an important contact. Because at the museum I got to know people on the university level here, and by that connection I came to teach at the university.

LH: That decision must have been a fairly major decision. As it turned out, it has been.

RA: Well, yeah. It...

LH: And before that, before you actually made the decision, as you mentioned a few minutes ago, you'd gone on visits-- or one visit-- to Los Angeles, to be with Pete.

RA: Yes.

LH: And to look around down there.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: I wonder if this is a good time to discuss what you found down there, when you were there.

RA: Okay, well, sure. This was a very vital time, too! Because I was working at the Advanced Kiln Company with Mike Halen, who was a wonderful guy, by the way. Gave me a job down there and wanted me to stay. I got to know people like John Mason, and Henry Takemoto was there as a student-- or was he? I'm wondering if I met him somewhat later. This gets a little bit fuzzy now, but I remember people like Kenneth Price. They were students, who hung around Pete. I don't think Kenneth Price was actually a student at Otis Art Institute, but he used to hang around. Billy Al Bengston was there making pots, also. And of course, Paul Soldner. Paul was a real supportive soul. Mike Frimkess was there as a student.

LH: Who?

RA: Michael Frimkess. So there were all of these real important people whoÿ-- and I'm probably excluding some...

LH: Would Ron Nagle have been there at that time?

RA: Ron Nagle came later.

LH: I see.

RA: Later in the Bay area. But that was the core group there at the time. There was one person who I'm omitting. I can't think of his name now.

LH: Was he more of a painter than a potter?

RA: Oh, was it Rothstein or... Gosh, he's a good person. I just can't think of his name right now. Anyway, there was this nucleus of people that were very much a part of that movement, in Los Angeles. I was very impressed by both Paul Soldner and John Mason. John Mason was doing terrific things, with a great deal of facility and energy. And I think that, well, the thing of it was that John Mason had already worked in the ceramic industry so he was very knowledgeable about glaze materials and, you know, how to deal with the technical end of it. Plus the fact that he was so immersed in this immediacy of making things happen that was so much a part of the abstract expressionism movement. And he was starting to deal with color. I think he was kind of making some moves away from the stoneware, the grim look of stoneware. I may be a little wrong on that, but I remember his work as having a lot of vitality. Paul Soldner was doing some commissions for Millard Sheets, so he was one of Millard Sheets's factory people. But along with that, Paul Soldner was making some huge, heroic-sized objects, piling pots one on top the other, and they were towering pieces six, seven feet high. And there was all kinds of nice energy. Jerry Rothman! He's the man I was trying to think of. Jerry was throwing washtub-size pieces of clay on the wheel. But the thing that kind of comes to my mind was the inventiveness of people like Michael Frimkessÿ-- real sharp art student. And Kenneth Price. They were just really inventive. They brought their art school interest to their work, that knowledge. Even though it was highly influenced by what Pete was doing, you could kind of see that they wanted to work for themselves. You couldn't escape Pete's influence. He was so domineering. I mean it, the strong presence of his personality and everything, so a lot of this stuff did look like it was Pete, but you could see these little marks of independence on the part of Takemoto and Price and Frimkess. Frimkess started to do things like making ceramic hamburgers and neckties and hats and sort of anticipating what later became a pop art movement, as you recall.

LH: That's early. Very early, isn't it?

RA: Yeah. I think he was ahead of that time. He was doing television sets a little bit later and things that were really bizarre, you know. You weren't supposed to do things like that in art. But Mike Frimkess was. I don't remember those things so precisely as being associated to that period, but at least those people were part of that and it was a real dynamic time.

LH: There's been so much theorizing over the years about all of that being abstract expressionist work.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And I wonder, in retrospect, what you think about that kind of label for it.

RA: I don't think you can label it anything else. I don't know how you could. I think it was just an energetic, just a lot of high energy in clay, and certainly by this time it had moved way off of the functional pot idea. I don't know why people were so concerned about it. It was kind of an inevitable move.

[Break in taping]

RA: [Many people viewed these artists as--LH] the enemies... [This was probably said before formal taping began; there are several interruptions in the taping of this short segment.] Their philosophy was so upsetting to many people that they actually became hostile. And (chuckles), well, I don't know. I think it was great. You know, it had to happen.

LH: And if you say, "Well, yes, it was abstract expressionism," it's so difficult to use all of these terms, and still they do seem to serve a purpose sometimes.

RA: Yeah.

LH: But I wonder, was it abstract expressionism, which was just in the air, not because of this change in the clay field, but from DeKooning and so forth in the east, or was it something else that was building among that group down in Los Angeles?

RA: I think that's a better way to put it, LaMar. I think that it was A.E. in the air. And there's another way to [feel] that. Clay was such a fluid material anyway, that it was so like paint in many ways, that it was a logical extension of that.

LH: You know that comment that someone made one time about the brickyard, where you and Pete were for such a long time, and what went on in the brickyard, and what Yanagi saw as this rough glaze on a piece of sewer tile.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And the images that you saw all the time around you, in whatever was happening in the brickyard. And who was it that said that that kind of thing makes a strong image in your mind?

RA: I think, of course, in looking back at the work we did at Bray's in those early years, I think that if I could characterize it as anything, it was kind of experimental. I think it was just at the verge of moving into something real vital. But we were just kind of trying it out. And certainly, if one were to compare the work we did there to work that was being done elsewhere, we were miles ahead, see.

LH: Of almost anyplace, really, in the United States.

RA: Yeah, right. Pete's pottery was... There's a situation now. You have to imagine, here's a gifted man who was an artist who was working at pots. And the only pots that he'd seen were Stig Lindberg's pots in one of the ceramics magazinesÿ-- narrow necks, you know, and they were only about this big [indicating about two or three inches high--LH], but he imagined them to be this big, and so he made them this big. I think that astounded the pottery world at the time. Plus the fact that they were so well made, you know, the art on them was terrific. The drawing and glaze and union of form and painting on them was just superb, as good as it could be, at that time. But thenÿ-- I'm getting a little mixed here as to what I was trying to sayÿ-- but when it moved down to Los Angeles, it began to take another form. It was more, it was solid. It started to feel it's way, to become more assertive. It was a little tentative back in the brickyard, but down here it became more assertive.

LH: Now you'd had this association with Hamada, and had watched him throw and had watched him glaze and all of this, which is one kind of Oriental work. Had you had very much introduction to historical kinds of Japanese ceramics?

RA: None whatsoever.

LH: None!

RA: No. The first time I saw Oriental ceramics was when Hamada came by, or at least had a consciousness about it. Oh, of course, we studied art history, and we looked at the few little tiny pictures in Helen Gardner and that was about the extent of it.

LH: But you hadn't seen...

RA: I had no appreciation for it.

LH: You hadn't seen any of the pots, for instance, done in Japan...

RA: No.

LH: ...that were so freely built and glazed and...

RA: None whatsoever.

LH: ...Shigaraki and some of those.

RA: Having, you know, studied in schools where you didn't have any kind of exposure to that, practically no study of Oriental art history...

[Break in taping]

LH: Well, I guess my question asking about the influence of Oriental ceramics is just, as I look at a lot of those [historical--LH] Oriental examples, I'm always struck by the similarity between them and what we think of as abstract expressionism, and I wondered how much of that wave you, or the potters who practiced it in the early days, really had been associated with or exposed to.

RA: I think Pete had seen it of course when he was in the Bay area.

LH: Oh you mean after he moved to Los Angeles?

RA: No, before, I think. I'm sure he was conscious of it, because he got his graduate degree at Arts and Crafts.

LH: Oh yes! [whispered]

RA: And worked with Kuykendahl, but I think an even more important association was probably with Tony Prieto. Now Tony Prieto was-- oh, and he was another one of our important visitors [at Bray--LH] that I forgot to mention-- but Tony Prieto and Pete were quite close down in the Bay area. I'm sure that Pete had seen Oriental pots. I don't know how he may have been affected by it, but certainly he was aware of it, and I began to see it in the calligraphy, the kind of decoration that he had on his pottery. I don't know if Tony Prieto did much of that. I certainly don't see much Oriental influence in Tony's work. But certainly in my own case, Hamada was the first Oriental potter I'd ever met or really been conscious of Oriental pottery about. He was my first contact with it.

LH: When I look at Hamada's work, I don't see [abstract expressionism--LH] there quite at the level that I see in some historical thingsÿ like Shigaraki, but there are some others too.

RA: Yes.

LH: He was much more of a...

RA: ...modernist.

LH: Well, yes, I guess you'd say that. Where the other was very primitive.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Before we get into a discussion about your time at the University of Montana, I wondered if we could talk a bit about what you see as the place of public universities in the ceramic movement, and, I suppose, also in the craft movement.

RA: Well, I think in a lot of ways that the universities have fostered the ceramics movement. Certainly it's probably been the key instrument for fostering a national interest in ceramic art. It has provided the place for artists in ceramics to work. I don't see how it would have operated otherwise, and become what it has become today. As I was explaining yesterday, I think that the university is the patron of ceramic art. It has been. Maybe for art in general for many, many years. It's provided a place for me and for people like [Robert] Sperry [at University of Washington] and Carlton Ball and Peter Voulkos and Robert Turner, and many, many artists in clay that I don't think could have happened otherwise. If they would have been potters working in their little sheds, making stuff for the market, I don't think the work would have taken on the dimensions that it has now. Because we didn't really have to sell the work, and it became exhibition material, became a vehicle for the exchange of ideas, or, you know, to express an idea, and it didn't have to sell, you see. Where a potter has to make his living by making bowls and cups and saucers and... And I think that that's, maybe I'm being inaccurate there, but that's the way I seem to see it.

LH: And I guess that would certainly apply to painting and sculpture as well. Or any of the arts.

RA: Right.

LH: And composers, and many creative people.

RA: Right.

LH: And I guess the same would apply to some of the private institutions, such as Cranbrook.

RA: Um hmm. Well, they are schools, you know.

LH: Um hmm. As you look back in the earlier stages what were some of the schools that you felt were the most important?

RA: Well, of course, in the early fifties, I think that Ohio State was an important school. Alfred was an important school. I didn't know too much about Los Angeles, but it seemed to me that Carlton Ball was down at UCLA. Or was it USC? I forget which institution he was associated with. He had been there, I think, and there was a lot of that, I mean the important activity was happening in the Los Angeles area. In the Bay area, I have to think of Tony Prieto and Marguerite Wildenhain. But Tony Prieto was at Mills College, whereas Marguerite was at Pond Farm, at Guerneville. I have to think of Cranbrook, with Maija Grotell there, as being an important school. And beyond that, I can't really...

LH: Did you mention Alfred?

RA: I did mention Alfred. That was the principal school of ceramics. And in many ways it still is. Because they do the job right there. They examine ceramic art from its beginning through design to a fair examination of what the art issues are as well. I don't look at it as necessarily the most important institution. I think this is much more widespread now, but if you want a single institution, I think you'd have to say Alfred.

LH: How about organizations during, say the fifties and sixties, that you feel were important to ceramics as well as crafts.

RA: Well, early on, I think the Scripps Invitational was an important thing. As far as we were concerned, the Pacific Northwest [the Bellevue Arts and Crafts Fair] was important, with their crafts exhibitions. I think that was very vital to us. Beyond that I can't really remember. I think the Wichita, or noÿ-- certainly the Syracuse show, the Syracuse national was an important one. Wichita, and then Miami. They all had national exhibitions which in those years were important to ceramic art. I didn't exhibit in all of those, but I think that you were conscious of it through those exhibitions.

LH: Did you know about the School for the American Craftsman? Was that ACC [American Crafts Council] sponsored?

RA: I think so, but we were so far away from that, being out here where we were, that it certainly wasn't immediate to my thinking.

LH: Did ACC mean very much to you in Montana?

RA: Not in the fifties. No. I think it began to become important in the sixties. It became somewhat more national, I think, or at least that was my sense of it.

LH: I think they may have started having the regional representatives in the sixties, where they didn't in the fifties. One of the main things they did in the fifties that some people were able to get some benefit from, were those designer-- they called them designer craftsman shows. And there was one, I think in 1953, that traveled a lot. Now whether you were involved in that or not I don't know.

RA: I remember that we did send some pieces to the American-- Was it, some organization, some arm of it. They seemed to have-- what was it?-- a showroom, or a gallery...

LH: They had America House.

RA: America House! That was one that we used to send work to.

LH: In New York City.

RA: New York City. But even today, I really can't remember that it was highly important to us.

LH: Did you get Craft Horizons?

RA: I think we started to get that in the late fifties.

LH: And did that mean very much to you?

RA: Not really. It started to become important in the sixties, however.

LH: Um hmm. I wonder, before we talk about the University of Montana, if we could talk about a subject that you were discussing last night, and that is the problem of recognition for artists...well, at any time, and perhaps

mainly because we're in Montana, because you are rather remote, it seems like, in Montana, that it may have special significance.

RA: Well, I think that it's an uphill struggle for any artist to get recognition. I'm not so sure that it's any more difficult-- I mean, I imagine the problems are a lot the same, in different ways for someone who grows up in, or develops in an urban center, where you're surrounded by a lot of competition, or whether it's harder for us out here in the rural areas to reach out to places like that. I can't know. It seems to me that in my own case, I've just now, in the past few years, reached a kind of level where you might say I have a national reputation. But prior to that I think, in my own case, I felt I was well known in pottery circles. At least I had been doing workshops as long as I can remember. I think that in the early years-- let's say up till about 1965-- it [the reputation.] was more regional in nature. But from that point forward it's been national in nature. And it's only been in the mid seventies that one could say that I have exhibited on a national level, or acquired that kind of attention, or recognition. So it's been a very slow process as far as I'm concerned. (chuckles)

LH: And that has to do perhaps with your own pressing of yourself on the art community-- or lack of it-- or perhaps with some artists they would have a dealer to speak for them. And to my knowledge I think you haven't ever had a dealer, have you?

RA: I did have a brief honeymoon with that guy in...Seattle. (chuckles) What was his name?

LH: Robert Carpenter [had The Collectors Gallery in Bellevue in sixties--LH].

RA: I guess I've erased his--

LH: Robert Carpenter.

RA: Robert Carpenter, yeah. And that was a disaster. I guess I've been a little gun-shy about dealers and showing, but I've never really made much of an effort to reach dealers. I think it's kind of reversed itself and gone the other way. One of the big people who has helped me was Alice Westphal at Exhibit A in Chicago. She gave Pete and I a show sometime in the middle seventies. From there on, I've been associated with Alice Westphal, and now I'm associated with Garth Clark and the Morgan Gallery, as my principal dealers. And I have to admit that I don't know why I hadn't done this before. But these people are wonderful people. When you get gallery people behind you, it makes all the difference in the world. And yet I know galleries are towing the line. It's a marginal operation, even among the best of them. Very, very hard for them to deal with the art world and all of the complications and the ads, and the expense of running a gallery, and trying to convince the artist that, yes, indeed they deserve 50 percent, and, you know, I don't begrudge those people anything they earn. I think the good people really have done a good job for me. But how does a young artist get in contact with these people? I don't know. They can't handle everybody. And yet they have to be discreet about the people they pick. They have to have confidence in them. It's a two-way street with dealers. But it's one way you get recognition.

LH: You know, I've known a lot of artists who would criticize dealers. They've had a lot of bad experiences with them. Or perhaps they're concerned that they will have bad experiences with them, because of things that they've heard. But it seems to me in your case that your not having had a dealer all these years has not been because you really thought about it very much. It seems to me that what you've done is make your art, all these yearsÿ-- period.

RA: Yes.

LH: Without a lot of consideration of what did I do? Or should I do this or that?

RA: Or "making it," the big thing in quotation marks, "making it."

LH: Right.

RA: Everybody wants to make it now, and I don't think that was important to me. Of course I would have been glad to sell my art for bundles of money, but I just didn't realize it could be done, I guess, and... (both chuckle)

LH: Do you have any comments to make about criticism? Now or in the past or...

RA: Just an observation. It seems to me that there is a whole new climate being created now for criticism. That there are a lot of people who are seriously considering becoming critics (chuckles), or are starting to write for some of the new publications, and they're kind of anxious to get into that world. It's almost like something new has started, in the area of criticism. Lot of aspiring young writers, lot of former artists who write well, who are beginning to write-- and in a very knowledgeable way. I've never been more conscious of the critics until recently. Maybe that's because I've been in the news lately. (both chuckle) But, yeah, I think it's something that I'm becoming aware of. But... What was your question? (laughs)

LH: Well, have you ever given any thought-- or have you recently, since you're in the news more-- to constructively thinking about if criticism is important at all, of what makes a good critic? Or what makes a good critique?

RA: That's a tough one.

LH: Because it's real easy to criticize the critics.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: There's no doubt about that. And I think that art critics have, you know, hundreds of bases that they operate from.

RA: Yes.

LH: And some maybe don't have any base at all, and perhaps no philosophy, actually, and just sort of get into it.

RA: I respect a critic who knows a lot and who's honest. Now, I suppose that's true of anybody, I guess. You respect somebody who's honest and knows a lot and says what he thinks. At the same time, for the critic, it's so important to be knowledgeable. You can't fault a man for giving a lousy review to you if he knows what he's talking about. But what I despair about is if a person, a critic, has thin knowledge about the subject field, and makes scathing remarks on the basis of his thin information. I respect a good critic and I think that they're very important, and I think they're necessary. I could level the same criticism about artists who don't know much. They deserve to be really lambasted. I have to think of this story of this guy who was a painter, somewhat successful, who didn't even know who Rembrandt was, you know. The guy was an up-and-coming great success, abstract expressionist painter, but he had never heard of Rembrandt. So that's what I call an ignorant artist. And I just can't know whether I respect that work or not. If I saw his work in depth.

LH: Another thing that I find about criticism so often, is that so many aspects other than the art, and maybe how the art ties in with society, which as far as I'm concerned is a good subject for criticism. But oftentimes, the art will be politically oriented. Or it seems to me that a lot of critics want very much to be recognized for their criticism, and this is causing problems all the time, because those things seem to be bigger than the desire to learn as much as possible about the medium and the style and the technique and all of that, and also about the artist. And I think that causes a lot of problems. Do you feel that or not?

RA: Yeah, I think that's what gets in the way more than anything.

LH: Ego?

RA: Ego, um hmm.

LH: And, of course, there again, you can say that about artists, I guess.

RA: Well, I don't expect the critic to be an artist, but I expect the critic to know a lot about artists and about the way they work. And I think the critic can have a marvelous neutral position as an observer, and can weigh things in a much more balanced way. You know, artists have enormous egos. I think that that could be a problem for critics, because how is he going to feel about lambasting somebody that he likes quite well but also sees some deficiencies in his work, and he has to be honest about that. I think that honesty is really the best thing. Even honesty can come through-- even if the person's knowledge is a little thin. But you can respect honesty. I hate critiques that are so obviously balanced in favor of the artist that it doesn't say anything. You know where it's coming from. And, sure, I've had great reviews on the one hand, and then I've had some where people have said some very honest things. I've gotten some reviews that were terrible, but based on thin knowledge. And those are the ones I dislike.

LH: Well, Rudy, I think we'll close off and take up again when you come to Seattle in January for your show.

RA: Okay.

LH: Where are the places where your show is going to be?

RA: Well, this year I'm planning to show at the Deborah Ratner Gallery in Cleveland...

LH: Now wait a minute. Is that this retrospective show?

RA: Oh. The retrospective is going to travel to Bellevue...

LH: And it's already been at Yellowstone?

RA: It's been at the Yellowstone Gallery. It's been in Helena, at the Historical Society Gallery. And, after Bellevue, then it travels to the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan [Wisconsin]. And from there it goes to New York, to the Crafts Museum [ACC].

LH: And that will be the last place?

RA: It will end there.

LH: I see. And where did you say you'll be having a show with a gallery?

RA: Well, one-man shows at this point that are very definite are the Deborah Ratner Gallery in Cleveland. That'll be in April, I think. Then the one with Garth Clark in New York in the fall.

LH: That's his new gallery in New York City?

RA: New gallery. And there are other shows. I think I'm supposed to have one in Rochester, and I haven't responded to that, but I think I'm committed to that one, Rochester, Minnesota.

LH: Well, thank you very much.

[Break in taping]

LH: ...continuation of interview with Rudy Autio, sculptor, from University of Montana, now visiting in Seattle for the opening of his retrospective exhibition at the Bellevue Art Museum. He starts this segment with comments about artists who influenced his art and life. He is discussing Pete and Hank Meloy.

[Break in taping]

RA: ...and plates, but at the same time you felt that Hank Meloy had survived through his brother's work. Pete wasn't gifted like his brother was, in the sense that he could graphically do the drawing and painting like Hank could. But they were very close and I think that association sort of survived in Pete.

LH: Now the beautiful little bowl that's in the Portland Art Museum. It's small, I believe it's a thrown bowl, and has very beautiful drawn horses on the outside.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Would that bowl have beenÿ-- it's, I believe, a collaboration?

RA: It was a collaboration piece-- I'm sure-- by Pete, who threw it, and Hank who decorated it.

LH: I see. How about...

RA: I don't think Hank was all that interested in throwing pots. He would make slipcast horses and deal with that kind of sculpture, but he was not particularly interested in throwing.

LH: What other ceramics artists in, say, the United States have been important to you?

RA: Well, at a distance, and through the magazines, I used to admire an old guy named Viktor Schreckengost.

LH: Oh yes.

RA: And you know, now I'm talking about the early history. I used to wonder how in the hell did he make those huge architectural pieces. That was when I was first starting to do architectural ceramics. I later met Viktor. He's still a very vital, big, interesting man, and as I read more about him, the more interesting he is. He was active through the twenties and thirties, forties, and fifties.

LH: He used to enter all of those Syracuse shows.

RA: Yeah, uh huh.

LH: I remember seeing his name in there.

RA: I've almost lost touch with those early artists. Now even in my thinking, but as I scan the magazines, he was certainly one of my early heroes, since I kind of wanted to do big ceramic clay stuff. And then I later did a lot of it. I'm trying to think of some others now. The [Edwin and Mary] Scheiers' Pottery, from New England, and of course Leach, Hamada. There really wasn't that much information around, you know, in those years. Tony Prieto, and Carlton Ball, and his association with Aaron Bohrod, the painter. Those were in the magazines in those years

and they were interesting, but we were also, I'm sure, very pleased with what we were doing too, at Bray's. Because it was sort of like that.

LH: I thought I read someplace that you may have admired the work of [Kanjiro] Kawai.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Is that right?

RA: Very much so, yeah. I just can't remember where I first saw Kawai's work, but I think my first real contact with seeing Kawai's work was when Pete [Voulkos] had picked up a couple of small objects that Kawai had made. Very small. They were just little...

LH: Covered jars?

RA: ...covered jars.

LH: Covered boxes, or something like that.

RA: But they were just very beautiful. And to me they had a lot of beauty about them, unlike the kind of association I had with Hamada's work, which was kind of a little bit rough and casual or Zen. Kawai was more controlled, and yet it was still loose and very ornamental-- or not ornamental, but just really worked as clay.

LH: It was elegant, don't you think?

RA: Elegant is a good word for it, yeah.

LH: You know, as I look at Kawai's work, and after I heard that you liked it, I was thinking-- comparing his work with your workÿ-- and thinking how many of the colors that you have used over the years,

while they aren't necessarily pink like his pink, but there is a kind of connection between...

RA: You know, I think that I was consciously trying to make Kawai's colors. He would use certain kinds of effects with heavy slip and color-- usually copper reds-- that I think I was really trying to get at, at one time. I'm sure of it.

LH: You know his pinks? Do you know what I mean by the pinks?

RA: I think so. They were copper pinks, I think.

LH: Would that be a copper? A version of copper red.

RA: Yes, um hmm.

LH: I see. Have you had an interest in the-- I don't think we've talked about this-- in the pottery coming out of the Southwest?

RA: To some extent, in the very early years, I was peripherally aware of the Aztec-Toltec sculpture, and as it related to my own interest in Marino Marini, the Italian sculptor. There seemed to be an affinity. In Marini's work, you also feel the heavy influence of Oriental sculpture. It was a kind of a distillation of an interest in Oriental figures, as well as maybe Picasso, and all those influences that we were familiar with. Marini was a good sculptor, and I liked his work a lot when I was a graduate student. Tried to make things like his. That then kind of became an interest in Southwest sculpture. But I'd say that that period was fairly brief. I don't think that it was anything that I could say was a major interest. It was a kind of a flirtation with it, of seeing where this might go, but not really profoundly, I don't think. It didn't last long in any case. And then I got interested in some of the abstract expressionists, but never quite could understand that, see. I guess I had a feeling for it to some extent, because clay can be pushed around in a similar way. But abstract expressionism never really took a serious hold on me, because I didn't understand it quite, you know. It seemed to me that at that point in the late fifties when Pete and all of those people down in the Bay area wereÿ-- or in Los Angelesÿ-- were very much into A.E., I never quite had a feeling for it, although I was trying it, pushing clay around in a similar way. Flirting with it. And even sustaining that kind of thing. After I'd got a few ideas working that way, I did carry that kind of influence up into my own work, without ever clearly having understood what Hans Hofman or DeKooning was really doing, or Kline was really doing. Never felt that I quite had a handle on it.

LH: Going way back into history-- well, let's go back to the beginning of what we today call modernismÿ- say the middle of the last century. What artists coming up through those decades have you enjoyed a lot?

RA: Well, I have to say that I've always been interested in Picasso, and Matisse, and the early colorists, Bonnard, Vuillard, Whistler... People like that, of course. They're major people that everybody studies. And so you become conscious of a certain freedom in the use of color and form, and this becomes imbued in your psyche, or whatever it is. It becomes part of your thinking; you don't really think too much about it. It's there. You're not copying somebody, although I have to admit that if I see a stunning Matisse, that will be like a neon light burning in my brain for some time, when I think about the cunning way he has dealt with line. I saw a big Matisse show back in New York a few years ago, and saw some of his early paintings-- the Dancers! You remember that famous painting?

LH: Is that the circle?

RA: Yeah. It's a huge painting and I looked at the way he had resolved the line on it. I said, "My god! This guy was doing what I'd like to do now!" See. And the way he invented that line and made it work and work as painting, but also describing the figure. It was just very canny, you know, the way he did it. And so, those kinds of messages kind of stick with youÿ-- longer than they should. Maybe. But they're there, and you don't erase them, but you kind of assimilate them, you know.

LH: Into your own vocabulary, in a way.

RA: Right.

LH: Have you spent very much time looking at classical figures and...?

RA: Not a lot. Of course, I liked the figure solutions of Munakata. Who I think was just as interesting as Matisse.

LH: Oh.

RA: But Matisse is superb. He's more lyrical. See. And Munakata was restricted by a hard thing he had to carve, the wood that couldn't let him fly that way, and maybe he would have. I don't know. Japanese drawings, you see them on kites or anything, there's a certain kind of traditional elegance and a formal way of solving figure description that I admire. It's sort of part of their national character. It's very widespread. You know, any one of a hundred artists might do a similar kind of thing. And it's a very lyrical kind of line.

LH: And it's similarÿ-- You could almost say that there's that same lyrical kind of line in the way they solve their daily problems too.

RA: It could be, um hmm. And Egyptian figures. Greek figures. There is a simplicity-- I just looked at some Greek figures on some pots in Volunteer Park [Seattle Art Museum] again. I always go back and visit some of those. Those lines on those figures are done with such an assurance. Those guys were masters! And I saw them at the Metropolitan recently. Same kind of thing. They would take a brush, very fine line, and you could see where they started up here at the arm and came down. Came down and described fingers and hands and arms, as it related to the whole, you know. Those guys were masters. There have been masters of figure drawing for centuries, you know, you can't really pick one. They're just all over us, or have been there. Or these are the survivors maybe. Some of the gothic figures you see in medieval manuscripts, the way they've solved a space, and the way they've fitted figures into those spaces are also very, very interesting, done by medieval masters, in their own form of formalism. And, you see, all of that is just the kind of thing I'm interested in, in figure drawing.

LH: Have you ever looked at Giotto very much?

RA: Yes.

LH: Some of those primitives?

RA: Um hmm, um hmm.

LH: Do you enjoy that?

RA: Yeah. I don't think he was fluid, but you have to understand that he emerged from a period where-- it was a cutting edge stuff, Giotto. I mean he had just come out of the Byzantine. And so, yeah, I admire that, of course, perhaps not as much as some others, but it is all very interesting.

LH: Let's talk a little bit about some things that I consider to be more projects, although they will involve your art. For instance, I noticed that you've had a number of grants for research. There was one in ceramic research from the University of Montana. No, let's take the Tiffany first, in 1963.

RA: Okay, the Tiffany.

LH: What did you do with that one?

RA: Well, mainly I used the money to travel to Italy with. It wasn't a large grant, but it was an important one in its time. It gave me $1,000, which was just enough to persuade me I should travel to Italy. Why, I don't know. I picked Italy because that's where a lot of art happens. And so, what did I do for it? Well, I promised to write a paper on the use of additives to clay bodies. I had been...

LH: Additives.

RA: Different kinds of technical things, like grog and sand and sawdust and straw and fibres and... And to some extent I'd been doing that for years so I had a setup project. All I did was write about it. I did receive the grant and I sent some slides. I don't know what persuaded them to give the grant. Certainly, people have dealt with technical material far better than I have.

LH: Well, they probably felt you needed a trip, Rudy.

RA: It could have been. (laughs)

LH: You didn't really ever go very many places, did you?

RA: That's right. I didn't. And so I also intended to go to Italy and study art, and they did help me there.

LH: While you were there you probably visited all the museums and...

RA: As many as we could, right. I remember the Vatican and the Uffizi and all of the great museums in Florence and Rome and the stimulation of just being in a different culture. Meeting Italian people first hand. As to how they've lived with these monuments all these years. They were matter of fact about it, but you felt that it must have done something to their souls, because they were so wonderful, you know. (chuckles) And art was so present in everything that they did it seemed. You know, when you come from Montana, it's quite a contrast.

LH: And because you had been in Montana so much and really had not traveled a lot, it must have had quite an effect on you.

RA: Oh, absolutely, right. And then when we lived in Italy for a short while-- it wasn't a long time, but the impact was very strong-- I said to Lela, "You know, we haven't even seen New York City. We ought to go to New York!" (laughter) New York was wonderful. There was just everything that I had hoped to ever find in art in New York. This was back in '64. And I maintained a studio there for a while with Dave Askevold, one of my former students. And Martin Holt, one of my former students, was there as well. So I had a kind of built-inÿ-- what would you say?-- circle of friends. And they helped me get situated, together with the family, and we spent about two or three months in New York, four months I think, and that was fun. I was ripe for it at the time.

LH: And was Lela with you during that time?

RA: Yes, the whole family was with me. We put the kids into school in Brooklyn and we just lived there. We found an apartment, we found our furniture in the streets, and... (laughter) We were just all set up. I loved the humanity. I really did.

LH: What did you do with the grant in ceramic research from the University of Montana in 1972?

RA: That never got anywhere. I was too busy; I had to cancel it.

LH: I see. And then...

RA: I had proposed an innovative kiln that I could build that could be moved and [a process] using these new fiber materials that I was conscious of. But I never got around to doing it. I don't know why; I just didn't get to it.

LH: You got a fellowship from the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] in '81, and I think that there weren't any restrictions on what you could use those for, were there?

RA: That's right. There was one of those wonderful grants where you could use the money where you wanted to use it.

LH: They show a lot of trust in you.

RA: Yeah, I couldn't believe it. I think that in the large measure that's due to Jim Melchert, very innovative kind of way to give people money-- I think others have abused it, I'm sorry to say. Some buy sports cars or travel to the Galapagos for some reason. (chuckles) For probably good reasons. Maybe a guy needs a sports car to

stimulate him, but it doesn't look good. Anyway, I decided it was a chance to go to Helsinki, which is something I wanted to do. And it coincided perfectly with a Finnish designer who had been traveling in the States who wanted to have some people come from the United States to visit their factory, because they were looking for cross-stimulation as well. To find out what the Americans were doing, because there's a lot going on in American ceramic art. So it just was perfect; it was a perfect situation. I wrote to this designer, Tapio Yli-Viikari-- he's the head of the design department at the Arabia Factory. He set me up with a studio and place to work and an exhibition at the end of that term of working, and it was just like going home, you know. It was a wonderful experience.

LH: And it was going home.

RA: Yeah, it was.

LH: Because your ancestors were from there?

RA: Sure. And I still had a reasonable command of the language from having spoken it in the home with my parents. And as I spent a little time there, it just all came back very quickly, and I'm pretty fluent in it today.

LH: I think what we'll do is talk about some particular objects of art. Some of those will have been done during the time you were in Finland on one or the other of the trips that you've taken there. So let's not talk about the work right now, but what did you find when you got there...? Did anybody know you when you got there? As a fellow Finn, or did you go there rather cold, in a way?

RA: Well, I have a lot of relatives there. And that contact has been there for years and years, of course. But I didn't want to get into that. My interests were narrow, or, you know, are in the arts and I just didn't feel that I was ready to do the relatives trip, which meant going to visit hundreds of people here and there, and having dinner and remembering cousins and grandfathers and... I'm not opposed to that, but I felt my time was, you know, limited to two months and I wanted to get the studio thing.

LH: Did you have much association with other artists? Now you were in the Arabia factory, so I suppose there were some designers around.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: I would think. Did you have much contact with your own type of artist while you were in Arabia or outside of Arabia.

RA: Yes. That developed very quickly. On the first day of my arrival, Tapio picked me up at the airport [while] he was attending a meeting of potters and craftsmen. He left the meeting to pick me up, and he brought me back while the meeting was still in progress. So here were about 50 craftsmen, potters, weavers, people of that kind, who were having a special kind of conference. And I sat there with my bags, fresh off the airplane, and right then and there I met a great number of people. It was just a big social whirl from that point forward, you know, with these others. Anna Maria Osipow, who was probably the best known potter, lady potter, in Finland, was at that meeting, and I got to know her very well, and we're very fast friends today. She has...

LH: Rudy, can you spell her name?

RA: Yes, it's A-N-N-A, M-A-R-I-A, O-S-I-P-O-W. It's a Russian name, actually.

LH: I see. So were you meeting mostly people who were working in ceramics, artists who were working in ceramics...

RA: Primarily.

LH: ...rather than painting and so forth?

RA: This is very strange. Now, that's not entirely true. I met about three different strata of people there, that I had a very interesting time with. The potters and the creative people were one segment of society I met. There was another segment of society that I met-- my sister has maintained close ties with former students from Finland at East Lansing, Michigan [Michigan State University], where she lives, see. Her husband has taught there [professor of agronomy--LH] for many years. So I met that group of people, and then there were all of these show people I met, for some peculiar reason. Magicians and performers, very interesting people. (chuckles) After I'd lived there for about two, three weeks, Tapio, my designer friend, said, "Well, how in the world have you ever met these people?" you know. But I used to go down to the bars and I'd make these contacts, and I got to know one of the most famous magicians in northern Europe, you know, who travels all over the world, and he's an interesting man. (chuckles)

LH: Was he a Finn?

RA: Yes.

LH: And did he speak Finnish.

RA: Oh yes. He doesn't speak any English, but...

LH: Well, this must have been wonderful. [Could] you spell the name of the designer that you were associated with?

RA: Tapio Yli-Viikari.

LH: And this was the designer who you spent some time with.

RA: That's right. He set me up at the factory.

LH: While we're at it, we might as well have the name of the magician that you met, if you know it.

RA: Okay. This, this magician is Solmu Makela, who turned out to be interested in art because he has a marvelous collection of old circus lithographs, probably the biggest in the world. And so he wanted me to see it, and he invited me up to his elegant house, his apartment in Helsinki, and on leaving he gave me a whole role of copies, you know. Just a treasure!

LH: Copies of these...

RA: Very old circus posters.

LH: Wouldn't they make a wonderful exhibition?

RA: They're great! They're just fantastic!

LH: Now you went back to Finland two more times, is that right?

RA: Right, um hmm.

LH: The first time was 1981?

RA: Yes, um hmm.

LH: Then when was the next time you went to Finland? And for what reason?

RA: The following year I talked Pete and Jim Leedy into going back with me, to do a workshop.

LH: Now this was associated with that poster, I think, that you gave me when I was in Missoula?

RA: Yes.

LH: With the...

RA: ...the three of us in there?

LH: Yes.

RA: And the round plate?

LH: Right. I think the poster referred-- Oh, it said, "From someplace to Helsinki and back again."

RA: "From Flagstaff to Helsinki and Back," yeah.

LH: So perhaps that refers to an exhibition?

RA: Well, we had a kind of a joint workshop in Flagstaff prior to this, but it wasn't really related to the Finland trip until somewhat later.

LH: I see. The three of you did this?

RA: Yes. And we sort of worked together at a Flagstaff potter's conference the year before, before I went to Finland, even on my first trip.

LH: Oh, I see.

RA: It may have been two years before. I think it was. But anyway, you see Joel [Eide], the gallery director, also became interested in this, so he made that kind of a connection.

LH: Surely, I see.

RA: He invented it.

LH: This is the gallery director in...?

RA: Flagstaff.

LH: Well, I can imagine that that would have been quite a trip, with the three of you.

RA: Oh! It was. (laughs)

LH: Because just you and Pete would have been enough. But to have Jim Leedy, it must have been a wild trip.

RA: They were very interested in Voulkos.

LH: The Finns?

RA: Yes. Particularly Anna Maria. You know, they read our magazines.

LH: I see.

RA: And so they wanted to know, and of course Tapio had met Pete also. So they were very interested in possibly having a workshop if we could work it together. They didn't have the money, but they said if we could get there, they'd arrange things for us. Pete came to my show in Chicago and I says, "Pete, you gotta come with me. We'll have a lot of fun." So Pete says, "All right, you set it up." [spoken gruffly] (laughs) So I set it up, and in the meanwhile, you know, Jim was somewhere around the fringes there, and he said, "Man, Rudy, I'd sure like to go with you guys." And I said, "Sure. Come along." So I told them that instead of the two of us coming there [would] be three of us. We got together in Seattle and flew into Helsinki, and we had a wild week there together.

LH: One week.

RA: That's all that Pete could afford, see. He could stay a week, and Jim stayed two weeks. I stayed a third week, you know, did a lot of different things.

LH: So actually you weren't quite as tied into an institution this time.

RA: No, not this trip, no.

LH: Except for that workshop.

RA: We initially did the workshop at the University of Helsinki, in their ceramics department. And then it so happened thatÿ-- just a coincidence-- but they were closing down the museum, for repairs. They were closing down the ceramics department and we had to move to another little town to complete the workshop. And so we did, and Pete threw a number of plates. There was a lot of confusion going on, and so it was kind of a disorganized workshop. Pete had made a lot of parts that he couldn't finish, and Jim and I took some of these parts and we later assembled sculptures out of them. In the meanwhile, Jim made a number of pieces of his own-- and so did I, for that matter. But Pete was pressed on having to return, so he came back to the States.

LH: So he didn't get to do that.

RA: He didn't get a chance to finish it up, right.

LH: I'm sure that the three of you were very much involved in the activities that you were going through while you were there, and sometimes when you're... You probably had a wonderful time, I would imagine.

RA: It was really crazy.

LH: And sometimes in a situation like that it's hard for you to pay much attention to what's going on around you. I wondered if you have any vision of what the people in the workshop thought about the three of you.

RA: I really would have a tough one there. Of course the fact that I could speak the language made me a little more aware of what was going on. I was the so-called "Boy Scout Leader," and I had to look after these two guys

all the time. And try to translate. And then there would be times when I would forget important matters. So both Pete and Jim would be in the dark, while I was knowledgeable. I'd forget to tell them. And so all of a sudden, you know, we might be piling into a car because we were supposed to go to some city somewhere, and Pete and Jim would say, "Well, what's going on?" And I'd say, "Oh, didn't I tell you? We're supposed to go..." (laughter) So a little friction developed there as a result of lack of communication. Not serious friction, but the thing was that they also wanted to do other things and, as a matter of fact, they did. They traveled to Stockholm together and took in some museums over there while I stayed in the country and visited some of the people I'd known.

LH: Now was Lela with you the first trip?

RA: She hasn't been there at all.

LH: I see.

RA: My son Lar was with me on the last trip that I made there last year when we picked up the work.

[Break in taping]

LH: So Rudy, we just talked about the second trip to Finland, when Peter and Jim Leedy went with you, the workshop at the University of Helsinki, and the other activities that you had at that time. Do you happen to remember which year that was?

RA: That was the year before last.

LH: Well, this is '84. Do you mean '82?

RA: This is the last trip, the last trip we went together with my son, Joel Eide, and myself. We traveled there for a very brief week to pick up the work that we had made the summer before, you know.

LH: That you and Jim and Pete had made?

RA: Yes. We had left a number of works back there. Some of it we shipped over, but we had an opportunity to travel there, and [it was] a cheaper way for us to deliver the work and sort of assess what we had done. Make a judgment [as it do], in fact, [as to] whether it was worth putting into an exhibition over here. So that was the reason for our last trip.

LH: All right now. Who did you say went with you on the last trip?

RA: Joel Eide.

LH: Who is that?

RA: He's the director of the gallery at the Flagstaff museum.

LH: Oh, I see. And you said your son went with you?

RA: Yes, Lar traveled with us.

LH: How long did you say you were there?

RA: Well, we were there for just a brief week. We picked up the work and Tapio, the designer at the factory, helped us get everything organized and packed, and Anna Maria helped us, along with her helper, Lenna. We were able to get all of the work together and bundle them up like footballs. And carry them as baggage!

LH: Oh! So they weren't huge pieces then?

RA: Well, they were large pieces, but Finn Air let us haul them as baggage for some peculiar reason, and they were very helpful to us.

LH: So now that's not too long ago that you were there the last time.

RA: I really didn't do anything art related. We were just tourists, for the most part, during this last trip, and it wasn't nearly as-- Well, it was interesting to me, but it couldn't compare with the kind of trip that Jim Leedy and myself and Pete made the summer before, you know. (chuckles) Doing the workshop and meeting a lot of artists and...

LH: But with the three trips, you probably have gained a kind of feeling about Finland now.

RA: Very much so. I'm going back there very soon again.

LH: Are you?

RA: I'm designing a rug, a wall hanging, which will be executed by the Finnish weavers. And they raised the funds for it now. It's for our performing arts building in Missoula. And it's going to be a very large weaving that's going to hang on the wall. So I'm going to go back and talk to the craftsmen and the weavers and work out a few technical problems and see how they're going to be able to put this thing together. It's going to be an odd-shaped piece. Not quite a rectangle, but it'll be sort of kite-shaped. It's going to hang in the stairwell between the staircases going into the auditorium. And it'll be about 30 feet long, about 20 feet high. It's going to be a field of colored horses running around. Should be very exciting. I'm looking forward to doing it.

LH: And this will be executed by individual weavers in Finland.

RA: Weavers that are part of an organization called the Friends of the Handicrafts.

LH: So that it won't be done on machines?

RA: No, it'll be handmade.

LH: Handmade.

RA: Hand woven, um hmm.

LH: Do you have any idea when they might be ready for installation?

RA: Well, we're kind of shooting for a target date of January next year [1985].

LH: I see.

RA: So I'll have to get over there this year some time again and get that thing going.

LH: Now let's get down to talking a little more about you as an artist and about your art. I think I read someplace that-- and this was some time ago, so you may state it in a little different way now, or you might not-- but you like to be known as an artist in clay rather than a sculptor or a potter. Would you say that still goes?

RA: Well, I think it's pretty much that, yes. At this point in time, I can't think of what else it'd be, and certainly my interests seem to be going that way more and more. I do draw a lot and paint, but this is all support for my interest in ceramics. At this present time, and in the foreseeable future, most of my showing will be in ceramics. And it's true; I do do a rug now and then and I'm doing a tile piece for a church, or for a school building in Walla Walla that should be completed the end of the summer sometime. That has to be worked in there somehow. But the designs are all completed so it's just a question of getting the work done. And these fall out of the vessel/ceramic format to some extent, because they tend to be flat surfaces like paintings, but at least one will be done in a tile medium, which is ceramics, and so here again, I'm back into clay on this mural. It's something I'm looking forward to seeing put together. I think it'll be quite nice. It'll be big.

LH: Now where did you say that's going to be?

RA: It'll be in the Blue Ridge Elementary School in Walla Walla, Washington.

LH: That will be hard for all of us to see. We'll have to see reproductions probably. I think people don't too often go to Walla Walla except either on business or perhaps to the college over there.

RA: Well, it's part of this One Percent for Arts that the...

LH: Washington State Arts Commission?

RA: ...State of Washington has.

LH: Okay. You also said one time that you feel slips for the ceramist are as valid as oils and watercolors for the painter. And clay is as valid a medium as wood and stone are for the sculptor.

RA: Um hmm. I think that's true. I see no reason to change that. You see, I look at the work of the person who works in clay as the work of an artist. Because he chooses to work in clay, it only makes it technically different.

LH: Um hmm.

RA: Essentially it's an aesthetic problem. It's a concern with your ideas and what you have to say, how you say

them.

LH: Some time ago, my thoughts, as an art historian, were very much into thoughts of creativity and of theory and of, for instance, also the expressive qualities in a work of art. And lately, although I've always thought peripherally of media, I've been thinking a lot more about different media recently.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And I just wonder if we could discuss your views, if you have any that you [would care to] articulate, about the importance of a medium to expressing one's feelings or whatever in a work of art.

RA: Well, of course, the media has to be there. It's just a vehicle though, and it always should be remembered as just a vehicle. It's not anything else. Whether it's oil or neon or stainless steel or butter or ice or material, like weaving. I really don't see any separation there. I think that of course there are technical impositions that are put on you as an artist. You have to solve certain technical problems. With ceramics there's a considerable amount of need to solve technical problems. But I think that's true of anything. Even in painting, the painter doesn't escape the need for having some technology. He still, after all, has to know how to stretch a canvas and he has to think of permanency, why, he has to think of whether these colors are going to be permanent and will they withstand light and time, and so there's always that technical element. You know, today we're looking at some paintings that were painted with coal tar derivatives at the turn of the century that have gone black.

LH: What kind of derivatives?

RA: Coal tar. Those brilliant dyes they had, they're now black. And this is true of Whistler, particularly. But you see, if a painter is conscientious he thinks about these things. So there's that side of it, and it's true in ceramics, but I think there's too much of this business of pigeonholing people as being potters or being sculptors or painters simply because they choose to work with traditional media. I think that picture has changed and has been changed for many, many years now. But it's convenient to think of people as painters or as sculptors and potters. Whereas the artists themselves don't really feel bound by those kinds of limitations, I don't think!

LH: I'm thinking of when the artist first makes the decision. Perhaps a work of art might be very spontaneous and there isn't very much that leads up to it. But many times, works of art are not so spontaneous and there is intellectualizing about what this is going to be. And there has to be decision about what kind of medium to use.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Now, also, generally, most people get started in a medium and then do very well on it and many times...

RA: ...continue to do it.

LH: ...stick with it forever.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: But I think of some people who have changed some over the years, in media. And I'm assuming that the reason for the change might be either, one, just fascination with some medium that comes along that

looks interesting, or, actually, there is some thought-giving that this medium is going to say what I want to say better than some other medium. And I wonder if you can discuss that at all.

RA: Well, yes, I think that ceramics has been attractive to me because it is a very spontaneous medium, at least it initially was. It was something where I could quickly execute ideas, and then by firing they would become very permanent and durable. I think there's that initial attraction that it had for meÿ-- and still has. I like the permanence of ceramics in the sense that it's chemically durable. I know I'm not going to be around here, you know, in a thousand years to see if that theory is true, but there is that side of it, that I think has always been interesting to me. At the same time I'm aware of its limitations, but you have to work with clay in such a way as to allow it to shrink and you are always confronted with its brittle, fragile character and you'll never change that. If you drop a piece of ceramic...

[Break in taping]

LH: ...if you drop a piece of ceramics, it's going to break?

RA: If you're going to drop it. Or it can shatter and break, and still it's not beyond restoration, however. You know, these things happen to paintings too. Paintings tear, or they rot, or something. So every material has its own, you know, built-in life, I guess. But ceramics, I think generally has a healthy long life compared to many. But aside from that, perhaps getting closer to the question does the artist who works in a limiting material like

clay or fiber or metal, does he in fact have the same kind of freedom of thought, let's say that a painter has? Perhaps not quite. I can see that a painter is probably having to deal with his ideas straight on, and trying to approach the truth of what he's saying, in a far more confrontational way than let's say a potter who can make excuses that now he can let that part go and solve some color problems in porcelains, see. There are some dodges built into material that are irrelevant. And I think that that oftentimes may have something to do with the question of whether you're really being creative in the medium or not. You see what I'm saying?

LH: Yes I do. And you know Joyce Moty?

RA: Yes, I know of her.

LH: I'm thinking of Joyce. Do you remember her, they were actually covered jars. We called them cookie jars.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: They were made with ceramic and each one was her vision of a different type of person in the world. There was the truckdriver, the prostitute, the... Just a great range of types of people in our society. And each one, while it was never heavy social comment, I think, not really heavy, it was her statement about these various types of people.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Okay. These ran about 18 inches tall, and she began feeling that she wanted to make these things larger, and wanted to show more detail about each one, and she moved out for a while, of clay, and began making wood constructions that were as tall as a human being, actually.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And she was able to do, of course, three-dimensional kinds of structures.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And eventually, in the last group that she did, instead of just doing spray painting on them or brushing the paint on smoothly, and then putting on all of these detailed aspects of the person, these individuals she's depicting, she began doing very abstract expressionist kinds of surfaces on these figures.

RA: Um hmm, um hmm.

LH: And she also got into showing some cubistic kinds of attitudes, in the way they stood. For instance, she had the front view and the side view at the same time, on a leg that might be extended out. Well, she chose to change the material because for her purpose at the time the clay was not going to be able to...

RA: It was too limiting.

LH: ...speak what she wanted to say.

RA: Yeah.

LH: Now she's very much tied up with ceramics and continues to use ceramics, but she did change the medium for that purpose, and it seemed to me that that told me that the selection of the material for whatever it is you want to say is really an important aspect of art.

RA: Well, I certainly do. When the person becomes totally comfortable with the medium, however, I think it pretty much says what he wants it to say. Or maybe it says all he needs to say. (chuckles) It's another way of turning that one around a little bit. It's quite possible that a person gets so conversant with the material that it does everything quite completely for him, you see.

LH: Um hmm, one material.

RA: Yes.

LH: Of course, Joyce is developing; there's no doubt about that, and, well, all artists do who are good artists.

RA: But, at the same time, now, you take the history of a lot of people that you and I know; they have broken off working in clay to do other things. Pete's a good example.

LH: Yes.

RA: He did bronze for about ten years. But now he's returned to clay and has been for another ten years or more. Which tells you something. That he has felt that what he has to say is couched in his medium of clay perhaps more truthfully than it was in bronze. And that's not to say he didn't do some fantastic bronzes, but look at the demands it has physically. There's really no point in having to, for a man like Pete, grind on a cylindrical element 20 feet long for two days in order to make it shine brightly, let's say. What's the point? He says things so beautifully in the turn of the wheel and the way his sculptural attack, or the way he works sculpturally with the thrown form, that it's like a world of its ownÿ-- so well said, that he didn't say in bronze.

LH: You know, speaking of Pete and his most recent work, I've heard a number of places that his work-- and I have not seen any of the most recent work-- has been highly acclaimed and very well received.

RA: Oh! Yeah.

LH: Now, did you see some of his most recent work in Kansas City when you were there?

RA: Yes, well, I see the new work that he's trying to resolve now.

LH: I see.

RA: He's got a stacked piece there that has gone through, oh, according to Jim it's gone through about a half dozen changes.

LH: What kind of piece?

RA: A stacked piece. It's one of those tall, you associate them with tall bottles, composed of a number of thrown shapes stacked one on top the other.

LH: Oh yes.

RA: Hence, the name stacked. And the pieces I saw down there hadn't reached the stage of resolution yet, but they were very powerful and vastly different again from-- or, considerably different from...

LH: From the plates.

RA: ...from the immediate forerunners, stacked pieces and the plates. Well, the plates weren't there in evidence yet. He's still working with the very heavy-rimmed plates that are different from the plates that he made in the early seventies. Within that, there has been an evolution, but not getting too far from the idea, see. But, going back to my original point, people do break off and work in other materials. And in Pete's case, again, I suppose that there was an early frustration with clay, because it never quite rounded the corner of acceptance. When he started to work in bronze in the early sixties, there was a time where one almost felt that if you're going to do ceramics, it's never really going to be accepted by anybody. I mean, reach a true level of acceptance. So it was very tempting for him to get into bronze. I wonder why. Maybe that was the reason he got into it. Of course, he had been a foundry man in his youth, and he knew metal, so he was going to go into metal in an important way, and he started to get big commissions. But short of having arrived at the very ultimate level of acceptance, even in bronze, you know, Pete was well received, but not quite up to the big guys, see. (chuckles) Because after all he was a potter. Maybe they held that against him. There was a failure, I think, for them to have the vision to see what Pete was about. I'm talking about the critics and the people who really accept art on its ultimate level. I don't know what the reason was, but he's very comfortable in clay again. This is where Pete comes through. And it's magnificent art. Certainly as good as any of the very best, I'm convinced. And it's now at a level of maturity and confidence and assurance-- Pete's work. There's absolutely no doubt that this man is a great master. A great genius in his time. That's something that has puzzled me, why it's only now that they're beginning to recognize Pete on that level.

LH: But of course history is full of that.

RA: Yeah, um hmm.

LH: Let's talk about a subject that has interested me always. Here again, it's a matter of how does the artist select. I'm thinking of three-dimensional work as opposed to two-dimensional work.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Of course that would mean, I suppose, painting versus sculpture. But it doesn't have to be paintings. Do you think that we all have some kind of vision that works better in two-dimensional, or works better in three-dimensional?

RA: I think that a sculptor's vision is trained to some extent, is more nearly trained than a painter's vision to see

and work in three dimensions. I think it's a case where-- I think you notice it especially if you deal with students who've never done sculpture before. They may be excellent painters, or graphically skilled-- they can draw figures etÿcetera. But when they are confronted with sculpture they're always, at least initially, faced with the problem of how does this become interesting and how, when do they get comfortable working in volume, in volume relationships? Talented kids usually round that corner pretty quickly, if they become interested in sculpture. But I really believe that you do have to have a sense for three-dimensional vision. And it's oftentimes acquired. But it's acquired more easily by people who have an innate talent for graphic vision as well, see.

LH: Um hmm.

RA: You can see it, as I said, in student work more easily than you can in...

LH: Now, I'm also thinking of, while I like all, I mean, either two-dimensional or three-dimensional art, that I can't say that I have a preference. There's something about a three-dimensional object-- being able to walk around it, or hold it in your hand and feel it all over-- the tactile qualities of it.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Or the fact that time is involved in it. You don't see it all at once; you have to look around.

RA: You have to take a little time to travel around it, um hmm.

LH: Yes, it takes time, and then that begins to get into the fact that, for instance, music-- I'm very crazy about music, and there is the time aspect in music. It doesn't all happen at once. It...

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And I wonder if you think very much about that kind of an idea.

RA: Yes, I do [now] more so than I did in the past. I think that right now the kinds of problems I'm working with in clay, I'm super conscious of things being in the round. And that's because of a development in my work in the last couple of years where I'm intrigued by the problem of, or the potential of, imagery and figures unfolding in the round. Not saying it's a new idea; it's been with us for thousands of years. But in my particular application, where I use a lot of vaguely shaped pots, I like to have these forms relate to parts of figures as they round the pot and put it into a new configuration of shape relationships. This is an exciting idea to me. And it's fun to work with right now. So I'm playing that one up at the moment. I'm sure that the Greek potters, when they were making their pots too, wondered how's this side going to fit with what I do on the other side, see. They tried to keep a union of things going. At the same time, when that pot was turned away from them, they could only remember what they had on the other side. And they'd have to twist it back to look at it, back and forth, see. So it was a very simple kind of activity of relating, but they were very conscious of having to keep that thing together, you know. It's the same thing I'm dealing with now. But the fact that my pots are not symmetrical, puts it into a slightly different play of form and shape that is essentially the same kind of problem, but it's couched in a slightly different way.

LH: Except with your asymmetrical things, doesn't it seem almost a necessity for more integration, somehow?

RA: Yes, now I...

LH: Because what you're doing is going all around without, you don't have panels on the sides of the pots, that you...

RA: No. No, I don't... At the moment I'm not concerned with panels. And so I try to make an agreeable composition of form and surprise and color, dark and light, and pattern and whatever you may call that, as you go around it. At the same time one of these ears that sticks out on my pot could be a head or it could be an elbow, or a leg or a horse's head or something like that, but which has to make a little bit of sense in a painterly sense, as you come around. I could make that into sculpture if I wanted. I could make it into a horse's head, but it wouldn't be nearly as much fun.

LH: I was wondering if you'd talk a little bit also about-- because this is really important it seems to me in what you're doing now-- negative space and positive space and what you're doing around that pot.

RA: Um hmm. Well, where you deal with negative/positive spaces, that also becomes an intriguing visual problem. You see, I'm so involved with the visual aspect of what imagery does now on the vessels, that, sure, dark and light, and pattern-- all of that-- has to fit, has to work. Just as though you took a blade of some kind and cut this piece in two and unfolded it. You could see it as a painting. But now you take both ends, you fold it together and you see it in the round. So it has to have that same kind of logic as you go around it, I feel. It has to work, in other words. At the same time, it carries, I take liberty with the interpretation of the figure. I'm

stretching it out sometimes. But even there the figure has to have some kind of logic about it. You just can't have a leg that's two miles long going around the thing. It just wouldn't be a figure anymore, see. There has to be a point where you say, "This is enough. It has to end here. Maybe I can have another element take over, and have that occupy its own space."

LH: How about your feelings about size over the years, in your work?

RA: Well, I think I'm comfortable working in the size that I'm working in right now, which is generally in vessels that are about 30 to 35 inches in height. I like at least that size. Whenever I'm working on something smaller than that, I have to come to terms with that new kind of scale. And after I've worked with it a while, I have exactly the same problem-- or the same confrontation of a situation that I have to solve, as if that pot were three feet high or whether it was ten feet high. I think that you just have to mentally come to terms with it. I can spend as much time on a small pot as I do on a large one, except physically it's easier to flip around, you know. (chuckles)

LH: You have done a lot of large things.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: We'll get to some of those pretty soon when we look at some of these pictures.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Already, we've talked about your early work, for instance the early figurative sculpture, like the horse's head and The Musicians and the Mother and Child, and some of the figures that seemed perhaps to be derived from the Aztec-Toltec. And throughout all of those, there would, probably, be the influence of Marini?

RA: Yeah, um hmm.

LH: And Picasso?

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And possibly Henry Moore?

RA: Possibly, yes. He was one of my heroes. Still is. In a lot of ways.

LH: And did Matthew mentionÿ-- or was it someone else, who mentioned Noguchi...

RA: Oh, Noguchi, of course. One I failed to mention to you. Yes! Noguchi in the early fifties had done some ratherÿ-- I won't say superficial, but certainly he didn't get into clay very profoundly. He had an innate feeling for what clay ought to be doing, I think. And there was a book I'd seen of Noguchi's work, in which he very freely dealt with clay slabs and parts and just kind of stuck them together. I think a rather important influence. However small that seed might have been, however small the impact, I think that [his work] had much to do [with] what happened to clay later. Yes, that's true. They were much like the Haniwa figures, you might say.

LH: Oh, like the Haniwas, yes.

RA: Yes. And there was that sort of a free expression, pushing clay around, not detailed working of things. Only he took it a step further, ripped them apart, stuck slabs together. Oh, yeah, Noguchi's one of my heroes. He's undoubtedly one of the great masters of our time, and he has never been quite given the level of admiration that he deserves. Tremendous insight and a good designer, all of which is part of his great art.

LH: Before we get into the three-dimensional things, or into the clay vessels, let's talk about your architectural art. Now I have the catalog for your show.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And it also has other objects in it that are not in the show. I've made a notation of some pages, and I thought we might look at these things, and you could discuss them as we go along. This is the catalog titled Autio, which was published in connection with the present show which is traveling around the United States.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And on page six, there's a relief done in 1953, and that may be one of your earliest...

RA: Yeah, this is the earliest of architectural ceramics I did. And god knows, I wish I hadn't done that...

LH: (laughs)

RA: ...but I knew something had to be done. (laughs) Well, I was very proud of it at the time. I think that as you look at itÿ-- I was fresh out of school, Picasso heavily on my mind, and it isn't a good Picasso, and it isn't a good Autio. (both chuckle) But it was a knock-out design and people liked it and so I went ahead and built it. It's now on the Liberal Arts Hall at the University of Montana. This was very early. I can't even remember; it's about '50 about '52.

LH: It has a 1953 date on it.

RA: '53, that would be right. Anyhow, I'd been at the Brays for a year at that time.

LH: And of course this was several years before you went to University of Montana.

RA: Yes, um hmm.

LH: Another one here [on page 30--LH] that came along fairly soon after that was-- it's dated 1955 here-- the Diorama of Lewis and Clark Party at the State Historical Museum [Montana Historical Society] in Helena. What do you have to say about that one?

RA: Well, Kay Ross Toole was the director at the Historical Society and he was really desperate to find people who could do sculpture because he wanted to do dioramas of this nature for exhibits. We got to know each other and so he commissioned me to do the figures for this diorama of Lewis and Clark on the Beaver Head, in 1803, I believe it was, when the expedition hit that part of the country. And there's about 32 figures modeled in beeswax and microcrystaline wax, and I did all the plaster work here and the canoes and the grass and all that. The background was painted by Les Peters, who was a Western painter in Great Falls.

LH: Now, are the figures-- it's a little bit hard to tell here-- are the figures in relief, and then some of them three-dimensional?

RA: No, they're fully rounded figures.

LH: I see.

RA: They're actually built in three dimensions, but to give the illusion of space, the figures in the background are smaller than the figures in the foreground.

LH: I see.

RA: It does give some illusion of space.

LH: You and the painter probably needed to work together closely, or did he do his painting first and you filled the...?

RA: I pretty much did the diorama and he stepped in there and painted the background. (chuckles)

LH: I see. (chuckles) So you planned how much smaller a figure would be in the back than one in the front and so forth.

RA: Yes, um hmm. The case is all designed by me, such as it is, and Les Peters, who was a very fine painter in his own right, for the kind of thing he did, painted that background.

LH: I see. Now this is very much different, in the techniques you used, from for instance the carvedÿ one we just looked at...?

RA: Oh yes, right.

LH: The one at Liberal Arts Hall at University of Montana.

RA: Right. Well, you see now, this is the...

LH: Was it carved?

RA: Yes, this is a very low plaster relief carved in sections that were later cast into clay.

LH: I see.

RA: And this [the diorama] is done in the round. These pieces were done in a more traditional sculptural

manner. It's very close to, you know, Western cowboy sculpture.

LH: Um hmm, it is.

RA: Which is a form that I'm familiar with.

LH: Which imagery shows up in some of your vessels too.

RA: Yeah, I think so, to some extent.

LH: Okay. Now let's look at this one [untitled mural at the library in Cut Bank--LH] that was done in 1956, on page 11.

RA: All right, now, I can't tell you if there are influences that are here or not. This is just a kind of a decorative tile slab or frieze. It's kind of geometric in its design character. If anything, there's something remotely Oriental in it, I think. You know, in its influences. The horse is probably derived from one of the many horses I've made, inspired by Hank Meloy, who was interested in the Orient and that kind of thing.

LH: But they are strange kinds of animals too in a way.

RA: Yes.

LH: What are they? What kinds of animals?

RA: Well, this is a buffalo. This is a horse, and this an oxen. And there was a symbolic content to this, that the early part of this sort of portrayed or symbolized the land before man explored it, which is sort of represented by the horse, which kind of implied exploration and the presence of man in the West, and then settlement, which is sort of represented by the ox, you know, plowing and discovery and pioneers and all of that.

LH: The question of symbolism in art is such an interesting question, I think, and, you know, many people say you should be able to look at the art and know all about it. I tend not to feel that's true, because certainly in this piece, there is a kind of mysterious look about this. And now you've mentioned something about it, maybe there's some of the Orient in it. I don't quite know what the mystery is about it, but I would not have known what you just told me about the symbolism.

RA: Of course. How would anybody know, just by looking at it.

LH: No way.

RA: It's something that oftentimes is an explanation after the fact, but in this case they needed some kind of rationale for the making of a work of art for their library. And so I invented one, you know.

LH: Uh huh.

RA: And this is something I don't usually do. But I felt, at least in those years, that it was all very new to me, and what shall I do for this? They were interested in something to do with the land. And so I hatched up this kind of idea, that animals at their peak might have represented certain phases of man coming into this part of the country. It's all right. It's no big deal. But that's the way it works there.

LH: Now, a little bit later, when we finish looking at two or three more of these architectural pieces, I do want to talk to you about the limitations that a person working in architecture may feel.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Look at this piece, now. This [Christ and the Children--LH] is a carved brick relief done in 1957 for the Gold Hill Lutheran Church in Butte, Montana.

RA: Yes.

LH: Would this be perhaps your first carved brick relief?

RA: It was the second of a series I did. I think the Gold Hill was probably my third carved brick relief.

LH: Let's see. This is page 28, and a detail of it in full view is on pageÿ12.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Well, this would have been after, probably after you went to the university?

RA: No, it was before I went to the university.

LH: Just before. It's 1957?

RA: Just before. This was the last project I did before I went to the university.

LH: Still at Bray?

RA: Archie Bray, um hmm.

LH: I see. And this would be an example, perhaps, of the story that Frances [Bray] tells about how Archie sold the bricks along with a mural from you.

RA: That was an instance of the kind of work I did, yes. To sell brick with, right. But by this time, my only connection with the Brays was that I was just working there. I no longer was resident director.

LH: I see.

RA: I had quit the Brays in that capacity, but was just an artist working there and then I came to the university, see.

[Break in taping]

LH: This work is fairly simple and straightforward in the way it's done. It's directly carved into the brick in these modules. Is that right?

RA: Yes, um hmm.

LH: And a rather, well, I guess you could say, quite a cubistic kind of style.

RA: I think that's fair to say, sure. There are some elements inluenced by, maybe, Egyptian. I looked at Egyptian figures and Egyptian reliefs. And at the same time there's a mix of art school and Picasso and god knows everybody else in there. (laughter)

LH: On page 36 is a reproduction of the tile mural, Early Days on Last Chance Gulch, at the Union Bank and Trust in Helena.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: This is the long one [6 feet high by 70 feet wide-LH] behind the cashiers...

RA: Yes.

LH: ...which is an interesting piece. Now how is this one made?

RA: Well, you can't tell too well from this picture, but that's also done in relief so that there is some relief carving in it. But it's been stained with engobes and it has a very light glaze over it. The colors in there are browns and light blues, whites, and yellows, and for the most part they're very subdued colors. Also the color of the clay has been left liberally there, so there's...

LH: Now you speak about the light blue and the yellow. Is it easy to lose light blue and yellow with too high a temperature, or not?

RA: No. Those are pretty stable.

LH: Oh, they are.

RA: Yeah. The blues, yellows, greens, browns, blacks, whites are stable. They're not fugitive. But bright reds and oranges and certain kinds of yellows are, yeah. And so this was done very safely with colors that I could achieve at that temperature.

LH: And I suppose the bank, while they may not have told you specifically what they hoped the imagery would be, they may have had some idea in mind about it.

RA: I think that they were very proud of their Western history, on Last Chance Gulch. I thought that this would be a suitable kind of thing. I felt comfortable doing it, you know. It wasn't too far from what I was doing, and it had a lot to do with tile-making. You see the pattern of any kind of a large tile mural is influenced by the shape of tile.

LH: Oh yes.

RA: You can't get away from that. So I just went along with that, and so it's broken character has to do a lot with the shape of tiles.

LH: Okay, let's go to this relief, which is made up of three panels, done in 1961 out of terra cotta, and it hangs on the Montana State University Library in Bozeman. [L. Harrington, Ceramics in the Pacific Northwest, University of Washington Press, 1979, pages 24 and 25]

RA: Um hmm.

LH: It is hollow-built.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Could you comment a bit on the way you did that work.

RA: This was built on a floor, knowing that it had to shrink down to this size to fit niches that were provided in the wall. I used a typical slab-built technique that I used for building pots. There's an illustration on the opposite page, showing me building one like that.

LH: This one right here?

RA: Yes, if it isn't the same one. [meaning the 1961 three-panel terra cotta--Ed.]

LH: It's really quite deep relief isn't it?

RA: Yeah, that relief projects, I think, at its highest point about 14 to 16 inches from the wall, and they're done in sections. And the sections might be comparable to large stones. So that the bricklayer was able to set these in the pre-arranged pattern as he put it on the wall.

LH: Now were you able to work as you wanted with this abstract form?

RA: Pretty much. I think that here was a time where they said, "Okay, do anything you want to," kind of thing, but all of a sudden I was confronted with all this freedom that I was not used to [in his architectural commissions--LH]. (chuckles)

LH: (laughs)

RA: And I felt that, well, I'll do some things that reflect my interest in abstract expressionism. It's not that, of course, but certainly it has a lot of that character to it. It has no reference to anything, outside the fact that I kind of looked at these as organic forms, like trees, see. And each tree had a certain kind of structure to it. This one had a structure that was a little different from the next one, and the next one had a little different structure from the last one. So there were three of them in that grouping. That's one of three.

LH: And they're all on the same wall?

RA: Yes, um hmm.

LH: Another one that came soon after that one I believe, and this one is again in the retrospective catalog [on page 43--LH].

RA: Um hmm.

LH: It's an untitled concrete and ceramic sculpture, 1966, at the Music Building of the University of Montana, in rather geometric forms.

RA: Um hmm, um hmm.

LH: Now how about that one?

RA: There was very little clay in this piece, except for the ceramic tile, the round inserts that went into the concrete. This was all formed by forms that were cast and then bolted together, of casting cement. And this was rather carefully planned so that all of the parts would fit together by bolting and epoxy cements and turnbuckles and different kinds of ways of holding that together.

LH: And you saw this just as an abstract sculpture. It isn't for any use.

RA: That's right. It has no particular use. You see, this thing has a strong bearing to some clay pieces that I'd done earlier. If you go back here I think in the same book, there's a... My very early sculpture wasÿ-- I don't know if I can find it now. There's a structure like a tower, or series of pieces, somewhat related to this. You see this has legs?

LH: Yes, it does.

RA: Okay, there now...

LH: This would be the untitled sculptural piece on page 29, which we talked about earlier.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: That was also made in 1955.

RA: Yeah.

LH: So, quite a long time before that one [at the Music Building--LH].

RA: Quite a long time. But it was still a way that I remembered as working in clay. And I think somewhere in there, there's sort of a tower piece-- I can't find it right now. I think it's in here somewhere. Oh, where is it? Here it is. You see this piece?

LH: Yes, this one on page eight [of the catalog entitled Tower--LH].

RA: Yeah, [I'd done] a number of pieces like that in the early fifties that were sort of like platforms or tables with legs that, you know, went one on top the other.

LH: Which reminds me some of Patti Warashina's work of ten years later!

RA: Well, that's possible...

LH: Slightly.

RA: ...but it's a very logical way to build with clay.

LH: Um hmm, a construction, um hmm.

RA: Sure. And so these things were part of that kind of clay experience and it became translated into this piece that you just talked about, that cement sculpture [at the Music Building].

LH: Um hmm.

RA: As a matter of fact, a model was made of clay. I still have the model. But it became translated into cement.

LH: Now we're going to need to go on, if we're ever going to get to your vessels, but I did want to ask you about one other public piece, and that was the big grizzly bear [from 1968 executed for the University of Montana Oval Building--LH]. Isn't that bronze?

RA: Yes, um hmm.

LH: It was cast in bronze at the University of Montana?

RA: No, it was cast at the San Francisco [Art] Foundry, but I did build it at my studio in Missoula. This piece was commissioned by a group of students and [was] really President Panzer's idea. We got drunk together in the penthouse of the Fairmount Hotel, and being in my weakened condition, I said, "Yeah, why not? Let's do this big bronze bear for the campus." And, God, that took a whole year out of my life. I found out I didn't know anything about bears, and I had to study them. You know, you don't walk up to grizzlies in the woods and study grizzlies. There was very little information on what grizzlies look like. They're big furry animals and the only grizzlies I ever saw were in the Kansas City Zoo. And they looked so scruffy and funny. One didn't have any hair, and the other one was very hairy. And they're just very peculiar looking animals. I could never get a handle on what a grizzly looked like. So I did about a year's worth of models and studies and finally came up with this thing. It's okay, but I really don't have much feel for that.

LH: Isn't that a tremendous amount of work to go into that piece?

RA: It was an enormous project, as it turned out.

LH: How tall was it? Is it?

RA: Well, it's about seven, eight feet high, I believe.

LH: Well, it's a very big work.

RA: Yeah.

LH: Tell me, briefly, about how you feel about architectural art, and for instance, relationships maybe between the artist and the architect. How you think the relationship should be to be the best. For instance, would it be better if the artists were called in sooner than they are, and the other question would be about, for instance, the limitations that are put on the artist in architectural work.

RA: You know, I wish I could talk clearly about that. I still have such mixed feelings about whether or not good art can actually be done for architectural situations. There is this question of-- You know, it's even acquired a label now, LaMar. It's called corporation art, and among artists it's somewhat looked down on, sort of disdainfully. And that's really not fair to the sculptors who really kind of work pretty hard to make a nice piece of work for a building or for a specific site. And it doesn't detract from it that it can be a work of art, but oftentimes it's not the case. And I can't tell you why. There's a certain sterility about it. On the other hand, if you get somebody like Dubuffet to do a huge piece for the...

LH: Chase Manhattan Bank?

RA: ...Chase Manhattan Bank, what a wonderful thing that is. Because it's all Dubuffet, it's his, it's monumental, it takes your breath away, and you see it, and it's just very interesting. I'm not saying it can't work, but there areÿ- as you travel around the country and look at these important bank buildings-- all this sculpture looks the same, doesn't it? It lacks individuality.

LH: Yes, I believe that. And the thing that troubles me about it: I think that some very good art can be made for spaces like that, but it seems to me that the artist is terribly limited, because the minute that the art begins to be controversial, in the least kind of way, then it can't be in a corporation.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Because the corporation would not be able to cope with it. And it's the same way with public art in the state. For instance, I don't know whether you have been aware of the problem of Michael Spafford's spectacularly strong murals that he did for House of Representatives in Olympia, Washington.

RA: I'm not familiar with those, I'm sorry.

LH: Well, his work is powerful work. He's been a powerful artist for many, many years. He did the Trials of Hercules and one of them has to do with-- isn't it Hercules?-- going after the queen's girdle.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And a lot of legislators saw rape in this and they won! It came down or was covered up.

RA: Good Lord.

LH: And it is one of the most powerful total works of art I've ever seen, and it has something going against it from the very first place, the minute that it had any subject matter like that in it at all.

RA: Um hmm, um hmm.

LH: So you can tell, the way I'm saying this, that I feel really strongly about the limitations that artists have when they set out to do something, either for the public or for a corporation.

RA: Yes, but you know this hasn't always been true. I mean, if you look at it historically, artists have worked for architecture since time began. And some powerful, good art has survived this way. And so I'm just saying that maybe contemporary artists don't quite have a handle on it yet.

LH: It could be, of course, that much of the earlier work that was done with architects was of a religious nature.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And I suppose at various times there must have been a lot of controversy, perhaps over the imagery in that.

RA: Sure.

LH: And the way certain religious subjects were depicted...

RA: But you didn't have to satisfy a legislature. All you had to do was satisfy the Pope, who was oftentimes pretty liberal and came from noble families. (chuckles)

LH: That's true. But when you get into a corporation, there just, I think, is no doubt about it, that there cannot be much adventure...

RA: True.

LH: ...as far as the subject matter.

RA: Right, right.

LH: And the more I look at it, it seems, with corporations, that it either has to be very low-key kind of narrative, with very little figurative imagery in it-- and certainly-- there cannot be any nudity in it at all, and...

RA: No. Yeah, right. Those things are problems for artists to cope with, and so often these artists are young people, who are just getting started. They're having to resolve all those dilemmas. They're wanting to get work, they're wanting to get paid for good work, they're doing the best they can, they're trying to solve these dilemmas of, "If I put clothes on this, why it's not quite the same as," you know, "having the nude figure I want to deal with," you know, and they're having to go through all of this agony in their heads that has nothing to do with art. It's just having to do with the people that are going to have to live with it.

LH: And of course, another aspect of this is that there are a lot of artists whose main purpose is to shock.

RA: I know. That's the other side of the coin.

LH: Um hmm.

RA: And then of course I don't think that belongs either.

LH: No.

RA: I think that a person who does work of this kind has some kind of responsibility, as to what he puts up.

LH: Some integrity...

RA: I mean that isn't the forum for him to give his message. Diego Rivera tried it on the Rockefeller Center-- you know, back in the early thirties-- and they made him take it down. But he was a communist and he was stickin' his tongue out at the people, at the Rockefellers. (laughs) Well, I think it would have been beautiful if that mural would have survived, but it didn't. And that's only one case where issues are kind of separate from the art. [Was a] good art, the issues were probably bigger and couldn't be resolved, political conflict. But I really don't think it's any place for an artist to air his dirty laundry, you know. Whatever his message, it's not going to sit on a public building. He's stupid if he thinks it's going to.

LH: That's right.

RA: Then he shouldn't even enter that kind of a contest. He should have the honor to stay out of it or something. And give his political message by some other means, you know.

LH: Let's get into your vessels and certain other sculpture. Now, it does seem to me that you could probably describe most of your work, except for this architectural kind of work, as rather intuitive, I would think.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: But I wondered if you could say if you have a way that you approach a work. Do you do very much planning beforehand?

RA: Well, not really, LaMar. But I'll have to admit that I have made a lot of pieces in the way that I have made them for years and years now, in a sense that they don't really require planning. They pretty much have evolved into a style of working, or a way of working, that is somewhat predictable. Each piece I make is going to be very different, or is going to be different in some way or another. I think that the themes are similar and predictable. In that sense, I know what I'm going to do, but I never exactly know what's going to happen with pieces. Sometimes I'll work on a piece and get into an unbelievable muddle with it, and it can sit around for

months. Painting is taking me a long time to do now.

LH: Is that right?

RA: Much longer. You know, there were times when I could make, crank out five or six pots in day and paint 'em up, but I can't do that. Sometimes it takes me months now. The pieces that I'm just now finishing up, I started in August of this past summer [8 or 10 large pieces in unfinished state--LH]. So you see these pieces have taken me a long while to get to a point where I can work on them.

LH: Certainly more time is needed when you're putting figures on the outside...

RA: Yeah.

LH: ...than if it's completely slab-built and constructed [with no imagery on the surface--LH] and so forth.

RA: Sure. Sure.

LH: Let's talk just for a minute about a piece here that I've always loved a great deal. It's called the Angry Young Bird.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And it's in the collection of the Henry Gallery [of which LH is the Associate Director Emeritus].

RA: Um hmm.

LH: It's kind of an unusual piece for you.

RA: It is. I can't really account for that one, LaMar. It just happened one day and I kind of liked it. I've never made one like it again, or similar to it.

LH: Was that made pretty quickly?

RA: I don't think it took me too long to make that.

LH: It looks terrifically intuitive and swift, spontaneous, and I guess abstract expressionist, I suppose you could say.

RA: Yeah, um hmm.

LH: The expression there, I think, is just superb. That is really an angry young bird.

RA: Hmm, well.

LH: Or an angry society or an angry whatever.

RA: (laughs)

LH: I mean, the energy of the anger is there, it seems to me.

RA: Uh huh.

LH: That was done early-- in 1959. There was another piece that always interested me that is owned by a man in Portland [Fred Peano--LH]. I think it may be one of your very earliest, completely slab-built vessels.

RA: The Flesh Pot. Is that the one you're talking about.

LH: No, not that one. This is on page 66 of the Harrington book. It's in black and white here.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: About 1959. That's pretty early for that piece [being completely abstract and expressionist in handling--LH], it would seem to me.

RA: Yes, it is. That's one that I had at the gallery in Portland. It was-- what was it called again, in those years? The Oregon Ceramic Studio.

LH: Yes, right.

RA: I used to work in that manner. It was a fairly thin, thin coiled-type construction.

LH: Oh, coiled!

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And then cut afterwards?

RA: It was hand-built just the way you see it.

LH: I see.

RA: And I used the tips of my fingers to rake the form, the surface, which accounts for the texture of it. That's also similar in construction technique to this piece on the other page.

LH: To the large 66-inch-high abstract piece from 1961 across on page 67?

RA: Um hmm. Yeah. There aren't too many pieces that have survived out of that period of working. But it was a kind of controlled, deliberate way of resolving sculptural ideas. Very little of this is evident in the retrospective I have.

LH: Right! That's true.

RA: There's none of it, as a matter of fact. Except the Bird, possibly.

LH: Uh huh.

RA: The one little bird that's in there.

LH: You don't mean the Angry Young Bird?

RA: Yeah.

LH: That one's in [the show]; is that right?

RA: Yeah. But here again, that piece is just a little different, you know. It is heavy into subject matter.

LH: Okay, now, let's go on to page 34 of your recent catalog. Oh! These are very interesting vessels. These would be about '59 or '60, I think.

RA: Um hmm, um hmm.

LH: Where you have a slab piece built in fairly even sections, rather than, you know, asymmetrical.

RA: Yes. Um hmm.

LH: And it has three thrown sections on top, which you really didn't do much of, isn't that right?

RA: Um hmm. I never did much throwing, but there were a few instances on pots in those years that I did throw, quite a bit. I didn't throw much, and I never have, but if there was any point in my career that I threw some pots, that was in that period. And some have survived. Because throwing is so prolific you can just make a lot of it in a short time, when you're really working that way.

LH: Now these are quite symmetrical looking.

RA: Yes, um hmm.

LH: And probably more symmetrical than almost any other period.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: We go almost immediately here on page 25, to this very asymmetrical abstract work [from 1959--LH] that has the finger marks [at the seams--LH]-- I guess they're finger marks, or so I think they are.

RA: Yes, um hmm.

LH: A little bit like piecrust.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: I don't know whether you did much of this fastening of the sections together so visibly after that.

RA: No, that was kind of a move away from this controlled type of hand building. That followed later, and it's very close to what I'm doing now, um hmm.

LH: Even way back in 1959, actually.

RA: Yeah, right.

LH: Okay. On page 38... Oh. This is the same work that we were just looking at in the other book.

RA: That's right, um hmm.

LH: Owned by Mahlon Reed in Portland, Oregon.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: It's dated in the book here as 1961. Now these were probably the largest things you ever did-- is that right?-- in ceramics.

RA: This is fairly large. This is about five-and-a-half, six feet high or something like that, uh huh.

LH: You did several, two or three?

RA: Well, yes, quite a few of them. They were more of this size, see. This is similar, again, to that mainstream of work. But they were very light, hollow-built sculptural pieces.

LH: Now are both of these hollow-built?

RA: Yes, um hmm.

LH: On pages 38 and 39.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: But the interesting thing I always found about these [both from the same year--LH], in comparing them, is that this one [page 38--LH] seems quite symmetrical.

RA: Yes.

LH: And ordered.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And this one [on page 39--LH] doesn't seem that way.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: The latter one reminds me very much, although it's three-dimensional, of those hollow-built reliefs you did [in 1961--LH] for the State University in Bozeman.

RA: Yes, well, it's similar. They kind of emerge from a similar period.

LH: I always felt that if I squinted my eyes I could transfer them, one to the other.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Now, let's talk about the piece that the [R. Joseph] Monsens own. I think it's a particularly fine piece. This is on page 42. Well, now, wait a minute.

RA: That piece there, yeah.

LH: This piece. Now, this was one of the several dozen or so pieces that you had at the show at the Henry Gallery in '63.

RA: Yes, um hmm.

LH: And this may have been done in '62?

RA: It was probably done in '62 or early '63. I've never been definite on the date on that piece.

LH: This to me is just one of the most perfect pieces you ever did.

RA: Well, thank you, I like it quite a lot.

LH: I love the way it flares in and then out again.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: It's quite tall, and I don't remember the colors right now, but I guess it's white slip.

RA: White slip, probably blues, and maybe some iron pattern in it. I haven't seen it for a while. It was in my opening in Helena, and I saw it again after not having seen it for a while. It also traveled with the Monsen collection to San Francisco and other points, but...

LH: Now it's interesting to compare that one with another one on page 32, which is from exactly the same period.

RA: Yes, that's right.

LH: And and although they're similar forms, there's quite a difference in the, in the... What would you say?

RA: In the...

LH: The outside form.

RA: Yeah, the silhouette is different.

LH: The shape, the silhouette, yes.

RA: They do come from the same period. As a matter of fact they were all very close in there. This one is in the Henry Gallery collection, and this one was destroyed in a shipment to England.

LH: The one on page 33?

RA: Yeah, uh huh. But they were all done with similar feeling, except that I was using a trowel to shape certain surfaces on the other pieces, where I'm not so sure I used a trowel here. I don't recall that I did; I may have. But the application of glaze was similar, done with a heavy broom-like brush.

LH: Let's see. Then we get to that remarkable piece called the Flesh Pot, which was in that same show [at the Henry--LH], in 1963. And both sides of it are shown on page 48 of the present catalog.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Would this have been one of the earliest pieces that you used the female figure on the surface?

RA: I had done a few prior to that time. One is in the Syracuse collection. It's about '61.

LH: Oh, smaller than this piece?

RA: Smaller than that, yeah.

LH: I see.

RA: But I had used figures-- which I did periodically-- which are not shown in this catalog-- and I had done a few of them. There's also a piece where I incorporated figures that's in this kind of group also, that's owned by a collector in Columbus right now. Let's see, I guess I don't have it. No, it's not in here. [pauses] Oh! I don't know why I can't think of his name. Anyway, it's not coming to me right now. But I did figures spasmodically here and there, occasionally. The one I recall is a kind of Oriental-type figure, done with brushwork on white slip, about 1961. That's in the Everson Museum collection.

LH: Tell me-- now we're going to get into your most recent work in just a minute, with the figures. What do you see as the difference between this particular pot and the more recent figures? Do you see a difference?

RA: Well, you see, I was looking at Munakata in those days.

LH: I see.

RA: See, and I liked the way he...

[Break in taping]

LH: This is the Flesh Pot on page 48. You were looking at Munakata in those days.

RA: Yeah, and I liked the way he had sort of cut up his figure to allow for space between even the head and shoulders, or something, so that the arms, legs, heads were just sort of decorative elements akimbo in this space. They didn't necessarily have to be connected, but they still had the effect of figures. And I liked that, I keyed on that, and I thought this would be nice on pots. So I tried this piece out that way. For one thing, this piece was very symmetrical and tidy, as far as its sculptural character was concerned. There weren't any loose slabs or shoulders or sculptural elements sticking out of it, and it sort of demanded some kind of important painting treatment. And more so than the others, which were very sculptural and could almost stand alone as sculpture, because they had heavily faceted sides or planes for color. But this, being a big sphere with no interruptions, just seemed to need something very active, as a painting. Figures were with me, and having looked at Munakata, why it just turned out that way. Certainly not as good as Munakata, but I think the drawing was interesting to me, because it was the first time I'd tried anything quite like that.

LH: Let's look at page 47, on which there is one of the newer pieces, a slab pot with some of what you might call ears out at the side, and an animal.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: This is called Figures with Cow, done in 1980, a vessel.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: This may have been one of the earliest uses of animal form on the outside of a surface?

RA: It's a possibility. I certainly don't remember using a lot of animals up to this point. A few dogs were appearing. Yeah. Maybe some of Mary's [Warner] or Roy's [DeForest] dogs were starting to make their appearance in my imagery.

LH: Who was the first one, before Roy DeForest?

RA: Mary Warner. She was a painter at the University of Montana.

LH: I see.

RA: Very good painter. And she had done dogs, and I think that she had come from that area near Sacramento where Roy DeForest was from. Suddenly dogs began to appear in all kinds of painting, and I guess I used dogs as well. I like dogs.

LH: Did you look at [William T.] Wiley very much at that time?

RA: I haven't looked at Wiley too much, but I suspect that he's on the periphery there somewhere also.

LH: (laughs) Now this would be the first piece that we've talked about that has these sort of ears out at the side.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And you've already alluded to that a little bit before...

RA: Yeah.

LH: ...in the purpose you put these ears to, as far as a drawing and so forth. Do you have anything more to say about that in this particular piece?

RA: Not really, it was one of a series I was decorating. This was shown by Alice Westphal. I'm not sure, maybe she owns this piece. Does she?

LH: On page 47.

RA: Yeah.

LH: There, this has considerable color on it, compared to others.

RA: Yes it does. This is low-fired color, stains. It's fired, I think, around cone 2, which means that some of them

aren't as fugitive as they might be at a higher temperature. And they're kind of interesting. I usually fire much hotter, and so I don't get that kind of color until I refire with low temperature glazes.

LH: I see. And sometimes you do do that.

RA: Quite often.

LH: Here's a piece from 1980 called Incised Figure. This is on page 57.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Oh, there may be an animal over here.

RA: Yeah, I think so.

LH: With a female figure.

RA: Um hmm, there's a horse in there. Um hmm. It's a lot of heavy slips with this graffito drawing into the soft clay through the heavy slip.

LH: And you don't use this sgraffito on every pot, do you?

RA: No, not really. Not on everything. I think on porcelain I'm more inclined to paint the figures on; and with the soft clay, I tend to scratch into it.

LH: Ah hah.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: This piece on page 60 is called the Rodeo.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: So that would, as far as I'm concerned, be the first time I see this kind of western imagery beginning to come in.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Where does that come from?

RA: I don't know. You get bored doing figures and horses after a while, so...

LH: (laughs)

RA: ...or nudes and dogs, so then once in a while you start-- You know, when you're confronted with a room full of shapes to paint and decorate, why you do change subject I guess.

LH: (chuckles) Did you go to the rodeo yourself?

RA: I do in the summers, yeah.

LH: You do.

RA: Yeah, I do once in a while.

LH: So it's just natural that that kind of imagery would come into it.

RA: Of course, yeah. And I haven't done much of that. I'd say for the most part, where I'm consciously dealing with western imagery like that, the western cowboy imagery, it tends to be a little forced.

LH: Even though you probably have been in the middle of...

RA: I'm a little self-conscious about it, yeah.

LH: You really have been in the middle of Remington and Charlie Russell, haven't you, all your life over there?

RA: Of course! But I don't quite feel comfortable with that, LaMar. You know, I think it's like...

LH: So you do your own kind.

RA: Yeah.

LH: On page61 -- Oh! This is an interesting one. Two views of the same pot called Figure and Horse.

RA: No, they're two different pieces.

LH: Figure and Horse and Running Figure.

RA: Yeah.

LH: Those are beautiful, the way you've fitted in the imagery...

RA: They're very sucessful.

LH: ...to the form.

RA: Right. I have to agree with you; they work real well. I did this as a demonstration piece down in Victorville, California. And it just happened to work well. It was a situation that was kind of forced: an audience watching me, and I had to move and couldn't fool around too much, and decisions were made very quickly. I think it shows a certain pace of working that happened to work; it doesn't always work, but it did in that instance.

LH: And it gives you the feeling that it was done quickly.

RA: Yeah.

LH: And she really is flying around the vase, isn't she?

RA: Um hmm, um hmm. Yeah, that's a good piece. I like that one. Turned out well.

LH: And the one called Figure and Horse reminds me so much of the [new] drawings...

RA: Yeah, I can't recall that one specifically. I know it was in a show in St. Louis, and it was a good piece; I liked that. But gee I don't know where it is right now.

LH: Well, that's too bad.

RA: I don't think it's in the exhibition now.

LH: That's the bane of the art historian, these artists who don't know where their work is. [said with smile in her voice]

RA: But I believe it was purchased by some St. Louis collector.

LH: I see.

RA: Lela might know.

LH: Here are some interesting pieces on pages 52 and 53. Oh. These are made in Arabia [in 1981--LH].

RA: Yeah, those were a couple of pieces I made at the Arabia Factory.

LH: How big would they be?

RA: Well, this one's a large piece. It could be 30 inches.

LH: Ah hah.

RA: And this one's somewhat smaller. It could be like this [gestures: 25 inches] and I gave this to the Applied Arts Museum before I left Finland. I donated it to the Taideteolisiusmuseo.

LH: This one. The one on page 52. I see. Were the people who were there surprised at these things? Did they seem shocked about what you were doing?

RA: You never know if a Finn's surprised or not. They're very reserved people.

LH: I see.

RA: Unless they get drunk. Then they're apt to be a little more...

LH: They might not talk about it till they get home. (chuckles)

RA: ...emotional. I think they enjoyed it a lot. I certainly felt a great warmth and an acceptance. The critics were very nice, although even there, I didn't know whether the critics were finding the words to say, you know.

LH: They probably didn't understand it fully, it would seem to me.

RA: I think so. Very sharp, but they weren't used to reviewing ceramic art, for one thing, but they were still very kind and interested.

LH: How about this work on page 64 called, Blue Lady Sleeping?

RA: Yes.

LH: One Awakening.

RA: Yeah.

LH: That would be one sleeping on one side and one awakening on the other. 1981. You also made that at Arabia.

RA: At the Arabia Factory, uh huh.

LH: I see. Do you have any comments about this pot?

RA: Everybody likes those pieces.

LH: It's lovely.

RA: I don't think it's very significant. You know, I don't think it's a major piece. As a matter of fact it kind of borders on the sentimental.

LH: And actually...

RA: And, I don't know; I was at the end of a decorating day and these pieces assumed more importance than they're worth.

LH: It's an interesting thing about this piece. And that is that you really are working with panels here, in a way.

RA: Yeah, um hmm.

LH: A little bit like a Greek vase or something like that...

RA: Yeah, um hmm.

LH: ...instead of this imagery that is moving around the work. Well, this one is a glorious piece called Magic Horses of Columbia Gardens. Looks pretty big.

RA: It's a good-sized piece, but not as big as some. I'd say it's about 25 inches.

LH: That's on page 65.

RA: That's in the retrospective show right now.

LH: Now, where does this come from? The Magic Horses of Columbia Gardens. Did I understand that that's a...

RA: Well Columbia Gardens was a playground for children in Butte, Montana. They had a carousel there, full of wonderful circus horses, or carousel horses. And the theme of that comes from that, after I made the pot.

LH: I see.

RA: See, they need titles. So...

LH: Oh yeah. So this is not dredging up from out of your childhood, it's just...

RA: No. No. I made the piece and then we have a title-making session. We all get our heads together. We should call this Man in a Rubber Suit Fondling Handicapped Woman, or something like that. (laughter) But they don't quite get to be that... (laughter)

LH: Now on page 66 is one called Drum Lummond Ladies...

RA: Yeah.

LH: ...and Lippazano?

RA: And Lippazano. There's a white horse there, and this comes from a title, the title comes from a title-making session (chuckles).

LH: I see.

RA: I like the words Drum Lummond; they have a nice ring to them. It comes from a mine in Montana.

LH: I see. And there's your poetry coming into it again.

RA: Yeah, right.

LH: Now, most of these works have been a stoneware body, is that right? But some porcelain.

RA: Some porcelain, uh huh.

LH: How did you decide to make that switch...?

RA: Well, I became fascinated with the color of porcelain when I worked in Finland. I was always aware of its potential for color, but it didn't actually happen until I got to the factory and I asked them, "Do you have porcelain? Do you have slips?" They said sure. And so they brought the porcelain, they brought slipsÿ-- and slips like slips I've never seen in my life. They were so brilliant on the white porcelain that at first I couldn't handle them.

LH: Ohhh.

RA: They were so bright.

LH: Now would this be with the second firing?

RA: The first firing. This is cone 10 firing, right up to the top.

LH: To get these bright colors?

RA: Yes, uh huh. I've never been able to get those kinds of pinks and brilliant porcelain colors. That's my own limitation.

LH: Okay, now, this was at Arabia?

RA: Yes.

LH: They have a lot of quite bright colors in their dinnerware.

RA: Yes, they...

LH: So they're probably using some similar...

RA: I suppose, but their laboratory has no problems with technical stuff, see. Whereas I wouldn't know how to do it. And when you have engineers and chemists down there who do it every day, they know the right stains, the right bodies and everything, that work well with them. And I haven't had time-- or the head-- for that kind of research. So I have to use a formula, if I have one. And I haven't been able to find quite that color intensity. But I get it in a different way. I refire the pieces with low-temperature glazes; it's a second way of getting at them. Anyway, that turned me on, getting back to your point. And so I've worked with porcelain since, but don't have the brilliance that I had with the work in Finland which is very luminous and maybe almost out of hand.

LH: Well, now, some of the pieces in the [retrospective] show at Bellevue would...

RA: Were Finnish pieces, yeah.

LH: ...would have some of this bright color, uh huh.

RA: Yeah, there's at least two pieces from Finland. Three, actually.

LH: And I think you have seldom worked with what you call earthenware.

RA: No, well, practically all of the architectural ceramics is an earthenware base.

LH: Oh yes.

RA: And so there's been a lot of that kind of clay. I'm familiar with it, but I always feel that the vessels probably ought to be hard. I don't know; it's a hangup I have, that they should be vitrified and hard and... I like that quality about the vessel pieces; they have that hardness.

LH: Your most important beginnings were also at a time when you were able to get plenty of gas at high temperatures, if you wanted it that way. Isn't that right?

RA: Um hmm. Um hmm.

LH: So that hadn't started off with electrical kilns, isn't that true?

RA: Ummm.

LH: Or using low-firing.

RA: They were all gas fires.

LH: Yeah.

RA: High-temperature work.

LH: So you really were kind of brought up on that.

RA: That's very true, um hmm.

LH: As far as the glazes go, while a lot of people who work in clay work with slips, you have tended to work a good deal with slips, and when you say, "engobe," is that similar to a slip?

RA: That's a slip. The same thing.

LH: It's clay that's...

RA: Colored.

LH: And watered. Thin clay.

RA: Colored with opacifiers and various chemical coloring materials.

LH: Okay. And the other, the glaze that you use, so often, the Italian one.

RA: Majolica?

LH: Yes. I don't know that there are too many artists who have used that on such a long-term basis as you.

RA: Well, I guess not. I guess it's a corrupt form of majolica, but majolica technically is where you put glaze on the surface and then you take stains and you paint on top of that raw glaze, then it's fired together.

LH: Okay, and the majolica glaze is a tin glaze, is that right? And it's white?

RA: Yes, majolica glazes usually have tin as a base.

LH: And are usually white?

RA: Yes, um hmm.

LH: And then you stain over this, or...

RA: ...decorate on top of a raw glaze.

LH: I see.

RA: And you get a brighter color that way. Because it's on top of the glaze, see. The truth of it is, however, I don't work in a true majolica sense. My way of working lately has just been slips or engobes on the greenware,

and then a clear glaze over that, see, at high temperatures.

LH: I see.

RA: So following that high-temperature firing, I will then put low-fire glazes on top of that and refire again, see. So it's multi-firing. But that's where I get the bright reds and pinks and oranges, if I use them.

LH: Now we've talked some about your efforts to integrate the drawing, the color and the form of the drawing on each pot, and how important that is to you.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Let's see now. I wanted to ask you a little bit about your drawing, the so-called paintings that have become an important part publicly, I think, of your work.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: You probably have always drawn, and it seems to me that you told me when you went to Arabia sometimes at night you would-- wasn't it you who told me you would draw maybe 40ÿdrawings in a night?

RA: It's possible I-- yes, some of them were very quick, but, you know, by the time I collected them, the value of all of these wasn't that good, or the importance of...

LH: Drawing to you as an artist was important.

RA: Yes, that was important. But out of that I might pick three or four or five drawings that I thought were good, see.

LH: So I suppose those drawing sessions were a kind of inspiration to you for going into some other pot, perhaps, or...

RA: Well, yeah. It sort of started, LaMar, as a kind of a support for the ceramics. Sometimes I'd get a shape-up not quite knowing how I wanted to resolve the figures and shapes that might go on it. And it's not the same thing to draw on a piece of paper as it is to draw on the pot itself. They're two different surfaces. But nevertheless, sometimes the drawing kind of aided me in a way. And I could sort of prepare myself for drawing on the pots. After a while, then-- and I'm talking about a space of say, going back five years now, where I've started to do more drawing-- they began to be important in themselves. Sometimes I'd just do drawings for their sake. But I think originally it has to be looked at as a sense of one supporting one activity and the other activity...

LH: Now, when you're drawing these figures, for instance, I wonder if you look at those-- or maybe you don't think about this way-- I wonder if you look at them as being realism, or are they some personal rendition of the human figure, not thinking of anything else? Or do you see them maybe in an idealized kind of sense?

RA: Um hmm.

LH: A kind of universal sense of a figure.

RA: Well, certainly they're more universal. You know, they're not specific people.

LH: You know, Dennis Voss made some comment-- I didn't hear all he said that night-- I think he said it over in Montana. He said that so many people compare your drawings with Matisse, and he felt that that was too easy a solution. Do you remember what he said about that, particularly?

RA: No, I don't.

LH: Okay. I'll have to talk to Dennis about that sometime. And we've talked about how you generally put the titles on afterwards. You can't be too sure where the imagery came from, a lot of times.

RA: Not really.

LH: Whether it came out of your subconscious or whether it came off the landscape or what.

RA: There have been instances, LaMar, where I've tried to take a theme, like... Okay. Let's say, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Having read e. e. cummings, or something. And I thought, "Well, why not. Let's try one." And they fail miserably, because I'm working from the theme to an idea in pottery and it doesn't work for me. I just have to start playing with those surfaces, and this looks like it's going to be a figure, and so I'll start there, twist it

around. This looks like a horse could go here. You see I have already boiled that down a little, you know. I'm more than likely going to use figures or horses or something that has almost become a form of shorthand, in a way. You know, I can draw these with facility and I pretty much know how they're going to shape out in a lot of ways. So I can't very well be thinking of, you know, Zeus and Minerva or something, because that comes after the fact.

LH: In some statement that you made, I remember you said that you thought that titles are important, that an interesting title, maybe a provocative title, can give especially rich experience to the viewer.

RA: Well I think it can. Sure.

LH: And you also mentioned that it's not exactly poetry.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And the title is not really art. But it's somewhere in between there.

RA: I think so, um hmm.

LH: Is that what you said?

RA: Um hmm. I think that's accurate.

LH: I wanted to ask you about a particular work. Oh, I guess this is a drawing, or a painting, called Wonder Horse Plunges Towards the Watertank? [page 62 in the retrospective catalog--LH]

RA: Um hmm.

LH: 1982.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: Where did that...

RA: Title come from?

LH: ...imagery come from?

RA: The painting was made first. The painting didn't come from my knowledge about these old circuses where horses would plunge into a tank of water, but we began to think about it afterwards. And it was right for the title, you see. (laughter) It was just a painting I did very late at night once, and I was going to work on that some more, but then, having seen it, it just didn't need anything more. It was very loose; it's very...

LH: Did that work, that imagery come out of something that you had remembered in your early childhood?

RA: Sure. Don't you remember the days when they used to have carnivals come through, and they used to have the trained horse who would be led up blindfolded onto a platform, and he would jump off into a tank of water! Ten or more feet! They used to do crazy things in these carnivals!

LH: I've never seen that.

RA: Ahhh.

LH: That's amazing. Let's see now. We're just about finished. And I wanted to ask you a question about something that's terribly important to me.

[Break in taping]

LH: I can tell you why art is important to me, as a viewer, as a part of society. And I'm wondering if you could [verbalize the meaning of art in general, or of your art, to you--LH].

[Break in taping]

RA: ...work, it's just a very necessary thing. I can't imagine life, my life, being any other way. I think that even as I get older here it's almost a necessary part of my life to have to work. It's just very important that I work almost all the time. I can leave it for short periods of time, like right now I'm in Seattle doing other things, but I feel at a loss because I can't get to my shop and work on something. I just feel incomplete somehow. Okay, see, so I'm not doing what I'm really supposed to be doing now.

LH: Um hmm.

RA: And I feel a kind of a sense of loss being away from the studio and not at least having a few hours of coming to terms with the work that I'm supposed to be doing.

[Break in taping]

RA: Well, of course, it's very necessary, you know. I couldn't imagine my life as being anything else at this point, you know, but then I am myopic, because this is what I've done all my life see, so I can't speak for others, but the way my life's been shaped now, for 57 years, it's always been with art or around it, or at least not being very far from it for a period of time.

LH: I was going to ask you to discuss the creative personality and the unique needs of that person, but you've done it.

RA: Um hmm. I think so. I've shared that same thing with other people who get very restless. After a while they just start to pace the floor. Everything is kind of boring, you know. It's not exactly what they should be about. They don't like to vacation for long, you know. And they're probably thinking of getting back to work and doing something. I've shared that feeling with Pete and Jim Leedy and others that-- Of course, we have great times together, when we talk-- And interestingly enough, we've been collaborating a little. And I was saying to Jim Leedy that, "Christ, Jim, you and I are too old to go to grad school anymore, so maybe that's why we have to get together and collaborate once in while, to learn from each other." And... (chuckles) So there is that need for sharing too, that is good among artists, people that you love and respect and get along with and they can see what you're doing, and you know what they're doing, and there's a sharing on that level as well.

LH: You've been in Montana all your life.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And, well, you've left Montana a few more times in recent years than you did in earlier times. It seems to me that you're a part of the land and the history and the whole ecology of the place there. And I don't think you think of social and political issues as much as certain artists do.

RA: I'm not apt to, I don't think.

LH: You spend your time on the art, it would seem to me.

RA: Um hmm, um hmm.

LH: But you are in a very beautiful state, environmentally.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: And I wonder if you have any thoughts about that environment over there and its future.

RA: Oh, of course, you're concerned about the degradation of the environment, of how it can be damaged-- and it is constantly being eroded in very small but almost permanent ways. I keep thinking of what Montana was like when I was a kid. And how beautiful and pristine and beautiful and clean and everything it was. Even in my own experience, having lived on Flathead Lake, I can see the deterioration of that lake from what it was when I first moved there and what it is now. And so I'm very conscious of this kind of degradation of the environment. There isn't much one can do about it, I guess. But certainly, you resist that in any way you can. At the same time I suppose you accept a certain inevitability about it. And, so...

LH: But of course the other thing, that we were just talking about a minute ago, and that is that what you're doing is a positive force in the world.

RA: Um hmm.

LH: So maybe that's the most each of us can expect to do.

RA: That's probably all we can ever do.

LH: Except for the revolutionary who goes out and...

RA: Yeah. Not that I'm not disturbed about, for example, the threat of nuclear war. Of course we are and the awful things that man is doing to himself. Of course, [we're] terribly concerned about this. The almost acceptance by man of nuclear arms as being a solution somehow. I just can't understand why people think that

way. It just seems utterly crazy that man could think that way, and accept that. So of course, I'm disturbed, but what can I do about it, you know, there's very little I can do about it, except resist where I can and hope that at some point in time we'll have statesmen who can really talk to each other.

LH: And continue to work.

RA: Yes.

LH: For you.

RA: Right, make the world a better place.

LH: I alluded to the celebration, the tribute to Rudy Autio, I think it was in October, at the University of Montana. And I want to tell you again how much I enjoyed being over there for those two or three days, and what a wonderful tribute I thought that was in every way. It seemed to me that it was handled in just the most appropriate and beautiful way. I was so impressed with the president of your university when they had the dinner party at their home. What was it? A sit-down dinner for, weren't there a hundred people there that night?

RA: Quite a few people. I didn't count them.

LH: Quite a lot. And it went on for two or three days, this celebration, and it was an appropriate thing, after so many years there. And I'll bet you enjoyed it. Did you?

RA: Well, of course. I was tremendously flattered and overcome by it all, and...

LH: Seeing people that you hadn't seen for a long time.

RA: Oh, really, yeah! It was just great to have that happen.

LH: And the opening of the show...

RA: Um hmm.

[Break in taping]

LH: By the way, how does the show look in Bellevue?

[Break in taping]

RA: I don't think that the curator of the exhibition is that familiar with ceramics. For one thing, here again, pieces are very low and you're looking inside these as though they were soup bowls, you know, in many cases, and this kind of work has to be on an eye level where it can be seen. I think that the Henry Gallery has understood that for years and so have many other galleries, situations. But I can appreciate the difficulties of mounting a show of that kind. You know, lots of pieces, heavy crates, and not having the proper stands.

[Break in taping]

RA: They need someone who has dealt with clay before, and who has a feeling for it. You don't put vessels that you're going to walk around, you don't ram them up against the wall, if you can help it. To a certain extent you might have to do that, but they certainly ought to be on a a visual level-- that's fundamental for sculpture.

[Break in taping]

LH: Tell me, Rudy, I have just one more question and that is, did you mention that you will be retiring, you know, when you're going to be retiring from the university?

RA: Um hmm.

LH: When is that?

RA: Well, I'll be retiring after June.

LH: Of 1984?

RA: This year, yeah.

LH: Ah hah.

RA: I'm hanging it up. I'm going to be just like Sperry, you know, who is teaching one quarter each year. He thinks it's wonderful. I'm going to do the same. But following that, I have a prospect of going to Japan for a while, to work in Jun Kaneko's studio over there. You see, Jun Kaneko is in Cranbrook and so when he's in Cranbrook he can't be at his studio in Japan. And he said I'd love it if I went over there. And they'd love me. See, so I might go over there for a while. But that has to be after Helsinki. I'm going back there again for a while, and...

LH: Do you think in '84?

RA: I think so.

LH: In the fall maybe.

RA: It'll have to be this year. It may be a short-term trip, just enough to work with the weavers, but that'll be in store for this year, plus all the shows I have to do.

LH: I think you're going to be really busy.

RA: Oh God, LaMar, I'm just right up to my eyeballs in work and...

LH: I guess we could go on for another couple of hours, or three hours, but I think we better quit now. It's been a long interview and a wonderful interview. Thanks, thanks very much.

[The following is an addendum, read into the microphone by LaMar Harrington:]

A brief segment at the beginning of the session in Seattle on January 28, 1984, was erased. Autio's remarks are summarized by the interviewer as follows:

Autio's unorthodox arrival as a faculty member at the University of Montana in 1957, hired outside of any department by President Aden Arnold in the hope that Autio would produce a lot of architectural art for the campus, started his career at the University of Montana in a rather shaky way. Instead of doing the architectural art and, miraculously, considering the cavalier manner in which he was hired by President Arnold, Autio was accepted into the art department by the art faculty, consisting at that time, at least of Walter Hook, Carl McFarland, and James Dew. He had a wide range of teaching duties in early years in art and art education, and during the later years he taught in the graduate program. He discussed, or at least mentioned, faculty colleagues Rudy Turk, Ted Waddell, Jim Leedy, Don Bunse, and later Dennis Voss and Ken Little. He mentioned, in passing, certain early students, Richard Bosard, Leonard Stach, Jim Stephenson, David Dontigny, David Askevold, Doug Baldwin, Fred Wollschlager, Jay Rummel, and later students, Pat Zentz, Linda Wachtmeister, Amanda Jaffe, Stephen Morse, Sarah Craige, and William Gilbert. He discussed the few dealers that he's had over his career. He mentioned the disaster with Robert Carpenter of Bellevue, Washington, in the sixties; his productive relationship with Alice Westphal at Exhibit A in Chicago in more recent years; and his present exploratory association with Garth Clark's Galleries in Los Angeles and New York. He mentioned his interest in poetry. And he also mentioned what he called his recreational reading of Civil War literature. These were some interests of his. At the end of this unrecorded session, he was just beginning to talk about artists who had been influential to him over his career. He mentioned Peter Voulkos, Bob DeWeese, Hank Meloy, and Pete Meloy. That was the end of that unrecorded session and his remarks about Pete Meloy are continued at the beginning of side five, which is actually the first taped segment in Seattle on January 28, 1984.

[END OF INTERVIEW]