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Oral history interview with L. Brent Kington, 2001 May 3-4

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with L. Brent Kington on May 3 and 4, 2001. The interview took place at the artist's home and studio in Makanda, Illinois, and was conducted by Mary Douglas for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

L. Brent Kington and Mary Douglas have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MARY DOUGLAS: Today is May 3, 2001. This is Mary Douglas interviewing Brent Kington at the artist's home and studio in Makanda, Illinois, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Brent, let's start out at the beginning. When and where were you born?

L. BRENT KINGTON: I was born in Topeka, Kansas, July 26, 1934, on a day that, as I remember my mother told me, it was 103, and it was a home birth. So. [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs] Things were different then.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: Would you like to describe your childhood for me?

MR. KINGTON: I was born to very family-oriented parents, from both sides. They were very hard-working people, working-class people, very caring and sharing.

The Depression hit in '29, and it was really very, very bad in Kansas in the middle '30s, right after I was born. My dad couldn't get work, and he had heard that there was work out in Idaho. So he packed up the German shepherd, Dixie, and Mom and me and got in a 1909 Model T Ford. It took three weeks to get to Boise. They got stopped on the street when they drove into town. The local Ford dealer wanted to buy his car, and gave him a job. [Laughs.] So he sold his old Model T and got a job as a mechanic at the local Ford dealership.

They worked there for about two years, things got better back home, and they moved back, just to be near family. I had grandparents in Perry, Kansas, and great-grandparents on my father's side. My mother's family, particularly the sisters-she had three sisters-all tended to live in the same neighborhood, about as close together as they could find a house. So my growing up was, "Belle, do you know that Brent's doing this?" and "Belle, do you know Brent's doing that?" Telephone calls *all* the time. So it was that type of family situation-a very close family.

If I showed interest in something, I got lots of support. I was a loner. I had my dog. Whenever I could sneak away, I'd go back to the creek and spend all day, getting crawdads and chasing snakes. I was kind of a Tom Sawyer, loner-type person. In fact, when I was going to the local school, which was just a block away, if it was a nice spring day, chances were I'd go to the creek and not go back to school after lunch. It was that type of childhood. A lot of tolerance, but a lot of discipline.

MS. DOUGLAS: Any siblings?

MR. KINGTON: I have an adopted sister. My parents very badly wanted more children, but my birth was very difficult, and my mother couldn't have more children.

So they adopted, when I was a junior in high school, a girl that had been abused. I had cousins and they were close, almost like brothers, particularly one, who lives in Denver, Colorado, who is just four years older than I am. So he was a big brother image. I was getting close to adulthood by the time we got the baby.

I showed an interest in sports, and my father never missed a ball game. I demonstrated an early interest in art. They encouraged me. My kindergarten teacher, Miss McGee, was also my father's kindergarten teacher, in Bunker Hill, Kansas. Actually, she was a pioneer and responsible for the kindergarten system entering the public schools in the state of Kansas. So it was, like, 30 years later, I was in her classroom.

She tagged me as hyperactive. Only could wear tennis shoes to school because I made too much noise walking. Couldn't stay in the chair, all that whole hyper business. The one thing I could do, though, was I loved to just lay

on the floor and draw with a pencil and a tablet or any kind of piece of paper that I could find. I loved traditional images.

On the other hand, in my family background, art was the image that you got on the Santa Fe Railroad annual calendar. That was art to me, these wonderful Southwest Indian images. And comic books, I was visually big into that. I was a slow learner in school; again, hyperactive. I don't think anybody recognized I had learning problems. My son is dyslexic and has ADD [Attention Deficit Disorder], and I'm sure I had the same problems.

But I always had caring teachers. The principal of the school, my fifth- and sixth-grade teacher in grade school, Miss Snell, at one of the meetings with my parents, told them I would either end up in prison or would do something very interesting with my life, but she didn't know what. She tracked me throughout my school years. She called my parents when I was in high school, junior high school, and actually stayed in touch in college. And in '63 or '64, she had left the public school system to work for a publisher of educational materials, and she was in this area and called, and we had her over for supper. It was a very interesting evening.

So I couldn't spell; penmanship was terrible. I had difficulty retaining certain things. On the other hand, my parents saw my interest and got me into a summer child-art program at Washburn University, which is a small school in Topeka.

My teacher was a graduate student who was doing degree work there in art education. His name was Rex Hall. And he was really very encouraging to me. In fact, he tracked me also. He stayed in touch, called me every once in a while throughout junior high and high school. He had moved down to Wichita by then and was teaching down there. And he would just call about once a year and see what I was doing, whether I was keeping up with art. Even after graduate school, he showed up at a conference I was asked to demonstrate at in Oklahoma City, a regional conference, just to say hello. So I had those kinds of support people that kind of balanced out other problems that weren't quite as good as everybody would like for them to have been.

The next important person, as far as the art thing, was a lady by the name of Mary French, who came to teach art. She came my eighth-grade year, and within weeks she was insisting I have lunch in the classroom. I took a course with her and would eat lunch and work in the classroom. I'd try to get to school early to do something and stay after school if I wasn't out for sports. And finally, oh, my ninth-grade year-no, it was my eighth-grade year-she took me up to Kansas State University to meet her professor and see student work. She took me to local shows out at Washburn, at the Mulvane Museum, and exposed me to all kinds of art.

She gave me materials from the classroom to take home to use to make drawings and paintings. She sent several pieces to the Senior Scholastic Student Art Competition, which was very, very important to me. It was a very reinforcing program for me all the way through the public school system. I got a couple of Honorable Mentions that first year. My ninth-grade year, I think I took three Gold Keys and six or seven Honorable Mentions with my work.

MS. DOUGLAS: In your artwork.

MR. KINGTON: In the artwork. Are you familiar with the Gold Key Senior Scholastic?

MS. DOUGLAS: No.

MR. KINGTON: It still goes on today. They have a program for junior high and high school students who are in art programs. The teachers prepare materials, help mat, and so forth, and submit the work to a statewide competition, which is juried, and awards are given. In those days-I don't know if it's true today-you got a little lapel pin, a little gold key, which was very nicely designed. And then the Gold Key winning work went to a national competition.

So, for me, winning art awards was just about as good as lettering in football. And being kind of the dumb kid on the block, I was the tough football player and not a performer in the classroom, but I was tough enough that "I do art and you better not mess with me" too, you know. [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: So anyway, Mary French stayed in touch. I'd have to go by her house several times a semester all the way through high school, show her what I was doing. She was still in town when I was at KU [Kansas University]. I still had to go by and say hi. She stayed in touch with my mother and knew where I was going to graduate school. The summer I graduated, my wife and I moved back to Topeka, and she showed up one day with her children. She spent the whole afternoon, had to see everything I made.

MS. DOUGLAS: That's wonderful.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah, it was.

In high school, the first year, the way the system worked, I couldn't take any art classes. There was a required curriculum that had to be fulfilled. The second year, I took two art classes; the school had two teachers.

MS. DOUGLAS: In high school.

MR. KINGTON: In high school. That was a pretty remarkable thing back then; you know, we're talking about the early '50s, '51. And both were vets from the war. Harry Nelson taught painting, printmaking, and drawing, and Fabian Wolf taught the crafts program. She taught jewelry, enameling, weaving, and ceramics.

So my junior year, I took one course each, and in her class I made my first ring, had my first enameling experience. Found that I couldn't sit and read for more than three minutes, but I could sit at a bench and fuss and mess and polish and spend endless time doing this other stuff. I didn't recognize it at the time, but it was, like, this dichotomy that was going on. I couldn't focus on reading, but I could on making things.

I got a lot of encouragement from both of them. They made arrangements for me to spend study hall in one of the classrooms to work. They encouraged me to stay after school if I wasn't out for sports. I was playing varsity football and track at that time, but during winter season, I'd go in after school and go home late. My junior year, I think I won seven or eight Gold Keys and a bunch of Honorable Mentions. My senior year, I took three courses, two with Fabian and one with Harry Nelson, and again the study hall time and lunch periods and after-school art activities.

I had a car by then because I needed to get home from football practice. So Fabian would send me up to Lawrence to pick up silver at the KU student center bookstore for their students and to get other supplies. And she was tough. She was really a tough lady, which is always the kind of person I've responded to.

Actually, she had taught crafts in a military program during World War II. I'll talk about that later, but the military system had an in-depth craft program during World War II, on foreign military posts as well as domestic posts, and in the veteran hospitals. I have no idea what her background was. I know Harry Nelson had an art education background. I think Fabian had a different kind of educational background.

MS. DOUGLAS: What was her full name?

MR. KINGTON: Fabian Wolf.

MS. DOUGLAS: Wolf. It's amazing you had a jewelry program in high school.

MR. KINGTON: Absolutely. And in Topeka-in Kansas. But you've got to remember, there were some interesting things happening in the arts in Kansas. Wichita Art Center had resident European enamellists, silversmiths, and weavers. University of Kansas had a B.F.A. and an M.F.A. in the '40s. Looking back, I feel very fortunate that the public school system supported the arts. Why did the high school have two teachers in art? Why was there a full-time teacher in junior high school in those days, as well as a full-time music teacher? That's unusual now in a lot of schools. Of course, Topeka back then was maybe 40,000 people. It was a large community for the state, but it was still more of a rural community than an urban community in many ways, particularly in attitude. But the school system encouraged the arts.

That year I think I won, oh, like 18 or 19 Gold Keys in the Scholastic exhibition and a number of Honorable Mentions. I think Special Recognition was another category. And then the work went to the national competition, and I won two national awards and some other recognition at the national level.

I need to backtrack here. At that time the University of Kansas had a summer high school program. Art and Band Camp was what it was called. Fabian encouraged me to apply for a scholarship-and to go. In my family the finances were always fairly limited. My father had just suffered a heart attack, and my mother essentially was the breadwinner of the family.

During the war, she had gone to beauty school and opened her own shop. All the girls in the family were workers. They all were either self-employed or worked for corporations. I had one aunt who worked for the telephone company for 40 years, another, a seamstress. My mother's younger sister went to beauty school the same time [as her], and they opened a shop together in our home. So she was essentially the breadwinner while my Dad was ill.

One way or another Fabian arranged for me to have a full scholarship to go to KU's summer program, which was just-it was just heaven for me. It was three hours of class in the morning and three in the afternoon, and I had a jewelry course and a design course. Actually, it was the freshman-level design course. These were literally your introductory university courses for freshmen.

Summer students from the university were also in the classroom, and a number of them were vets. They saw my interest, and therefore they took interest in me. They gave me silver; they gave me exotic woods; they loaned me their tools. They had me coming in in the evening and Saturday mornings. And so I got all this marvelous reinforcement.

I want to say it was a six-week program. It may have just been a four-week program. But there were 350 high school kids there. I mean, it was a big program back in those days. And it was marvelous-you know, every one of those kids wanted to go the University of Kansas, and it was just like this big mix of talent. And it was very, very eye-opening for me. And, of course, it was like, well, this would not be a bad place to go to school.

Because of my scholastic art awards and works at the art band camp, the design faculty at the University of Kansas recruited me. Actually, I was offered a resident scholarship, resident hall scholarship, which was essentially room and board and tuition, which thrilled my parents, my father particularly. He had then suffered another heart attack, so he was not working again.

But Ms. Pringle, who was the dean of students at the high school, called me in, and she was very frank. She said, "Look, you've got this wonderful offer; I can't sign off on it because you won't last a semester at the university." And it was, like, okay. [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: You wouldn't last because your finances would run out?

MR. KINGTON: No. No. My academic status.

MS. DOUGLAS: Okay.

MR. KINGTON: Again, I got through high school because I had a very understanding English teacher. I was such a slow reader, and she had let me make oral movie reports and make illustrations of movies that I'd seen rather than have to read. I got through math with-thank goodness I only had to take one math course, beginning algebra-and I got through by the skin of my teeth with probably a C-minus. I was always verbal enough and a good listener, so that I picked up information and could parrot it back. People couldn't read my handwriting. I never did figure out what punctuation was about. That type of thing. That's what she was referring to. And she was right; I had a tough time.

Well, my father's dream was to go to college. He wanted to be a history teacher. He had a football scholarship at Washburn University of Topeka and played football and went to classes and drove a cab all night as well as other jobs. And after a year, he just couldn't keep up with it. He was a self-trained auto mechanic. He could fix things. He was a great salesman and worked for Sears and sold stuff, and actually had his own sales company after the war. His goal for me was to achieve a university education-something he had been unable to do.

The family finances were such that there was no way they could support my education. And I knew, when I told him what Miss Pringle had said, it was really going to hurt him, and it did. But he was made from hard stuff. It was just, like, "Well, then how are you going to do it?" You know, he was that kind of man.

I had worked, starting in the fifth grade, caddying at a country club not too far away from where I grew up in Topeka, until I could get a temporary union card during the summer. Then I worked construction all summer and made pretty good money in those days. And so we made a deal. My parents would come up with the tuition money, which was a lot for them, but $68 a semester was not a lot of money back in those days either. I would pay room and board, materials, supplies, books, entertainment, car expenses, and all that.

I graduated in '53 from high school and started at Kansas that fall. I ended up going through in four years. They paid my tuition all four years and I never took out a loan. I worked.

That first year, there was little gallery, a jewelry store gallery in the Plaza at Kansas City, and I found out they handled handmade work. I made a bunch of earrings and took them in, and she bought every one of them, for $12 apiece. So every Thursday I would get to this jewelry studio about 7:30, and I wouldn't quit, wouldn't leave, until I had made 12 pairs of earrings. And then Saturday I'd deliver my earrings and get my money.

Unfortunately, the following year she went out of business, so my source dried up. But I was hawking jewelry to fraternities and sororities on campus. There wasn't anything I wasn't interested in or wouldn't try to do. When I couldn't sell anything, a guy hired me to sack cat litter, which was terrible because I've got awful allergies. It was very dusty stuff. I made some posters for the local businesses, painted murals on restaurant walls. I did just about everything to pay my bills.

Which, I think, is kind of leading us into probably what your next question is.

MS. DOUGLAS: I just wanted to back up a minute. The dean of students said you would not last academically, so

she didn't give you the scholarship. So that meant you had to pay your own way through school. But-

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. Well, let me clarify. And she was right.

MS. DOUGLAS: How did you do academically?

MR. KINGTON: Well, I got in, just probably by the skin of my teeth. They never told me what the scores were. In those days you had to take a two-day battery of tests at the University of Kansas when you got there. They didn't have the SAT and all that at that time. I had to take bonehead English, and got a D. And the graduate assistant who taught the course told me that he was just doing me a favor, and I was probably not going to pass the next course.

Well, I flunked the next course twice before I got whatever the passing grade was. I'll never forget the course; it was an important course. I loved the course. I just couldn't do the essays. You know, I didn't test well. The course title was Prose and Poetry, and it dealt with the Greek classics, the tragedies and Chaucer and the Psalms.

And I absorbed the information. I couldn't put it down on paper, and so I flunked, and then I flunked again. And the third time around, you know, it was, just, like, this is really hopeless. The teacher asked a question that none of the other students was able to answer, and I gave him about a 20-minute answer. He called me up afterwards, and he said, "You know all this information." I said, "I've been listening to this information. This is the third time." So he talked to me, and asked, "What is the problem?" I said, "Well, I can't write, I can't spell, I can't punctuate, but," I said, "you ask me anything about the tragedies, and Chaucer, and I'll give it to you." And he did. He passed me.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it was like an oral exam?

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. He gave me an oral exam, which was probably unheard of in those days. [Laughs.] And then, one way or the other, I got through. I passed the other two English courses that I had to take the first time. I still don't know how.

And the other thing that was very much in my favor was that I had no language requirement. As a fine arts major, I had no language or math requirements. For some reason, I had to take three English classes, three business classes, and a geology class. The KU fine arts degree was modeled off of the art academy structure at that point. I suffered through the econ and business law, and geology, I loved. I was an alert listener in the classroom, and, thank goodness, most of the tests were multiple choice or true and false, not essay. And I was a good guesser in business law.

[BEGIN TAPE 1 SIDE B.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, how did you-and I don't want to go off on this too much, but how did this learning problem affect your self-esteem or your own understanding of what you were capable of?

MR. KINGTON: Well, I had the two positive factors in my life that helped my self-esteem. I loved sports, and I was average or a little bit above average. I was good enough to suit up and get into some varsity games. My sophomore year I was on a state championship team. That team took state. The following two years I started varsity both ways, offense and defense.

Of course, for somebody that is hyper, football is a good thing. I wasn't a fighter. I hated bullies, and it was very difficult to get me to fight. I really had to be pushed hard. But it was fun to get out on the field and butt heads, and I enjoyed that. And I threw shot, disc, and javelin in track, and lettered in track, so I had sports. And then the art thing worked for me.

So, when awards came around, sure, some kids were acknowledged for straight As, and I always got sports letters and was acknowledged for the Gold Keys. Also, the '50s were nifty. You know, it was a *Leave it to Beaver* time. Many of my high school friends were honor roll students; I received positive reinforcement from them, my teachers, and my family. I guess everyone ignored my slow side and encouraged what I did well.

Let me backtrack a little bit. I had another great person in junior high school that was a role model also, Otto Bodenhausen. He was a vet. He had been pretty badly wounded, had lost a lung in the European campaign. He was great with kids. My first year in junior high school was his first year teaching, and he started High Y Club. Some of the kids-you know, we were all from lower-income families in that area of town-and he saw some of us could really get into trouble if we put our minds to it or didn't think what we were doing. Nobody wanted to get in trouble because you didn't want to mess with Otto, or you didn't want to be embarrassed by him.

And he was tough. I'll never forget one time I wasn't paying attention in social studies class. He had a wooden

paddle in his desk. He had me bend over, the door was open, and he sent me out of the room, clear across the hall with that one whack. He was a big man.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: He was the football coach and softball coach. He made you tow the line. And he took some kids, like I said, that needed discipline and made co-city champions out of the football team, and the softball team took the city championship. He took us out camping once a month all through the academic year. Even when there was snow on the ground, he took us down to the Y camp. There were all kinds of roller skating parties, dances, ice skating parties, sledding parties. We had weekly HY meetings. We did something in the gym every week. He got some of us a free membership to the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] all the way through high school. He was just a marvelous person.

And as a matter of fact, nine of the guys that started on football our ninth-grade year were starting on our varsity football our senior year in high school, and three or four of the starters on the basketball team in junior high were starting in high school, and many of them held offices in student organizations and clubs and politics and so forth. I mean, he made good citizens out of everybody.

MS. DOUGLAS: Wow.

MR KINGTON: He was a powerful influence.

In the classroom, I'd sit there and I knew I wasn't reading, understanding the information, but I'd listen hard, and then I'd go down to the art room and do my thing. And I ended up with less scars than a lot of people do with ADD or dyslexia.

As parents, we really learned about Tod's problem, and I've always felt like it's a right brain/left brain situation. I've got my strong side in the visual arts. You know, I don't add up columns of numbers. Everything is not organization in my life. It's all visual. It's all how things look. It's measured by the eye, not with a ruler. And I've always felt that that was my strength.

Jane Brown helped us understand the problem a lot when we were at Penland [School of Crafts, Penland, NC], where I was teaching her son. Billy was very dyslexic, and she spent a lot of time and a lot of money traveling to talk to people about the phenomenon. Back in the '70s, they were still trying to figure out what this problem was. And she gave us source information, reading materials, and so forth and so on. She also kept her own private survey of the faculty teaching there. She felt that an unusually high number of metal people were dyslexic. By that, I think she said 85 or 90 percent of the people who teach metal here have dyslexia. And 70 percent of the potters, hardly any weavers. My attitude was, hey, go with your strength. You're visually orientated, you know it. Life has a tendency to balance out.

Plus, I had this support group of kids and good kids to run with, friends in high school. Pretty much, it was hanging out together, and everybody goes to somebody's house on a summer evening type social life, or drive around town, or go steal a watermelon.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: You know, that type of thing. High school stuff. But still today I avoid writing as much as I possibly can.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, there's no cure for dyslexia per se.

MR. KINGTON: No, but you can train. You can train yourself to do certain things. You know, I was the director of the School of Art and Design for 12 years. The day I walked in, the secretary and I sat down, and I said, "Okay, I can tell you what I want to say. I can't spell. I can't punctuate. That's your job. When I send a letter out, I never want to be embarrassed by it. Okay? And get me an adding machine." Well, I ended up not using the adding machine because I'd transpose numbers badly. And sometimes on a long distance call, I have to dial three times, because I'll transpose a 7 and a 6, you know, one way or the other. I have called some very funny places sometimes. [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: But that's just part of it, if you've got a sense of humor about it, it helps. I'm reasonably articulate. I can figure out the rules of the game and play by those rules. And I did okay in an administrative position. I certainly surprised myself. I probably can add quicker in my head than I can on a calculator. You know, it's just one of those things to be lived with.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, when you were at the university in metals, who were your teachers?

MR. KINGTON: Carlyle Smith was in charge of the metals program. And I don't know if you know his background. He's still living. He's in his late 80s now. He essentially was a bench person and designer in Providence, Rhode Island. You know, a lot of faculty in those days didn't have academic backgrounds. They were coming to teach as practicing people in the crafts.

So Smitty, I really don't know what his academic background was, but he had been a practicing jeweler and silversmith, and what work he did reflected that kind of commercial bench work. He was a good craftsman. He knew hollowware, and he knew jewelry stone setting, all of that.

And then a graduate student came, Bob Montgomery. Bob was probably, in college, maybe more influential in some ways than any other faculty member. He introduced me to opera and theater and got me to listen to music and read some things. He was a really good critic and a strong supporter.

Kansas has this history of hiring their own graduates, which I've not always been very supportive of, but he stayed on after he graduated and taught there for several years, and then he ended up moving to Terre Haute, Indiana, and teaching at the university there till he retired. Actually, he was the one that encouraged me to apply to Cranbrook when I decided I really wanted to go to graduate school. He said, "I think Cranbrook's the only place for you."

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, was that shortly after you got out of university?

MR. KINGTON: No. Let's go back to maybe some of the faculty, and then we'll talk about that.

MS. DOUGLAS: Okay.

MR. KINGTON: Evie DeGraw was the weaving teacher, and Evie was a marvelous, marvelous person. She was like a housemother or surrogate mother. And if I'd get in trouble with faculty, she'd have me over to her house and sit down, and we'd talk about that, and then she'd smooth feathers on the other side.

I had really good design teachers. I was interested in everything. What is called graphic design today was commercial art then. And that was a challenge to me. In fact, somebody started a campus humor magazine, and I did, like, a third of all the ads in cartoon form for the magazine and spent endless hours on all these ads, just to keep this magazine going. A friend and I would sit up at night and just-he was a cartoonist, too-we'd just be in stitches and doing these dumb things. Then my senior year, I actually was the art editor for the yearbook and did-I guess, three different, no, actually four different quarterly editions that went in a binder, and I did the covers on that and some other work.

I loved product design. In fact, when I graduated, I could have gone into product design. I was one class away from getting a degree in product design, sculpture, or metal, and it was just like, "Pick a course and get out of here; it's time to go" type of thing. You know, when I went to school, those two national awards I won, one was in painting, mixed media, my senior year at the National Scholastics thing, and the other one was in jewelry. I have always had diverse interests, but prefer making three-dimensional objects.

Of course, for almost everybody that goes to school, if you're interested in art, art is painting. Then you find out what your interests really are through exposure. But I took an awful lot of drawing and quite a little bit of painting, but I was still three-dimensionally orientated for the most part. My 2-D stuff was always very flat, and it still is today. I liked the three-dimensional work, product design, culture, the jewelry, and silversmithing.

I got encouragement and a lot of feedback from the faculty in all three areas. In fact, Smitty and the sculpture instructor, Eldon Teft, got in an argument over me. And each one had one side of the metal barracks, the WWII, rounded buildings. Eldon controlled the door that locked the space between the two areas, a walkway going to the bathrooms on his side. So Smitty and his metal students had to walk around the building to go to the bathroom, as well as all the metal students.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: So, anyway, what was your question, Mary? Do you remember what you asked me then?

MS. DOUGLAS: Yeah. I was asking you about your teachers at university, who they were.

MR. KINGTON: I got a very solid undergraduate background.

MS. DOUGLAS: It sounds like it.

MR. KINGTON: I was prepared for advanced study at the graduate level, no question about it, although after graduation I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I had entertained going to work for Hallmark Cards, which was really just getting started. I can do all kinds of flatwork. And I saw the challenge of the greeting card as

interesting.

You've got to think of the times. Post-WWII designers were doing some very interesting work. You know, it was very exciting about Eames furniture and the Bertoia chairs, and what Knoll was doing, and Herman Miller and the Walter Gropius work.

I had a very good friend who was an architecture student. He exposed me to a lot of ideas I would not normally have been exposed to in the art and design program. The architects' faculty did not want the art faculty messing their students' heads up, so they had their own painting and drawing faculty, and open drawing sessions in the evening. So I would go over in the evening and draw with a man who was a great draftsman. Bob Moore was my friend's name, and he exposed me to architecture and fine architecture as ideas.

But considering the time, and the preparation of the faculty to teach-some were definitely more prepared to teach at the university level than the other-but you've got to remember the impact of the population of returning vets and the social attitude of increased education. The demand for higher education in the country after World War II was considerable.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, it sounds like the university had a very large and broad art department, with product design and crafts.

MR KINGTON: It did. Actually, there were two departments, and this was kind of like the barracks situation with sculpture and metal. The design department was on one side of the building, and there was an auditorium. On the other side was fine arts. Fine arts consisted exclusively of drawing and painting. In fact, there was a serious philosophical discussion that the painting faculty went through trying to figure out whether to add printmaking as a media or if it belonged in the design department.

Sculpture was in the design department. It was not freestanding with the painting and drawing faculty. And it still isn't. The design and art people didn't talk to each other as a faculty. [Laughs.] Absolutely not. They were very, very separate. Design faculty was more diverse. They had commercial art, product design, and fabric design, along with the crafts, ceramics, weaving, metal, and sculpture.

MS. DOUGLAS: Were the crafts, then, considered part of the design department?

MR KINGTON: Absolutely.

MS. DOUGLAS: Okay. So they were in service to product design and industrial design and whatnot?

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. They interacted. For instance, every student entering the design program had to take one or two metals courses. It was just part of the basic curriculum. Back then, you had six hours in class, you owed three hours more out of class, and you only got one and a half hours credit. So my freshman year, I was in class 42 hours a week for 16 credits.

MS. DOUGLAS: And then the architecture department was separate.

MR. KINGTON: It was a separate-probably a school then; it's a college now. But yeah, it was very separate, its own faculty. Very little intermixing whatsoever.

MS. DOUGLAS: So that must have seemed kind of ridiculous, even at the time, that painting considered itself a fine art, but nothing else was.

MR. KINGTON: Well, I did not recognize it as such at that time, because this is just the way it was. Later on, particularly when I got into academia, I thought it was a very strange structure.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well do you want to talk a little bit about how you ended up going to graduate school then?

MR. KINGTON: I graduated from KU in 1957 and the draft was still on. Graduates had three months leeway, and then you were drafted. There was no military activity really going on at the time. Korea was pretty much over with, except for a police force. Vietnam, we had people over there, but nobody was talking about it. And the military needed to have people in place, trained, but they didn't need people in active duty. They were cutting the forces back.

So essentially the options I had were to wait three months and get drafted and serve in the army, probably for two years, or sign up either with the national guard or the army reserves for six months active duty, in which you received basic training and then MOS [Military Occupational Specialty], and then owed five and a half years active reserve duty or guard duty. Actually, military ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] was compulsory at Kansas, and I had been in the air force ROTC program, which I detested.

Close to graduation, I went in and talked to a marine recruiter and decided-well, look, what am I going to do, what am I going to do with my life? So I went to talk with him. I figured out, well, if I'm going to have to go in, why not the marines? At least I know I'll be well trained and well prepared. And I talked to him about getting into the officers' program.

He was very enthusiastic about it until he checked it out, and the only two degree categories the marines would not accept were art and veterinary medicine, because they were looking for people that would stay in longer than the contract period, and they knew that artists and veterinarians definitely wouldn't stay in. They could keep doctors in, and, you know, dentists, and grunts, but-so then it was like, okay, what am I going to do? I don't want to spend two years in the army walking guard duty in Korea, although if I thought I could get to Europe, that might be interesting. So I ended up joining the army reserve.

I need to backtrack just a little bit. The late fall of '56, my father had another heart attack, so I decided to move back to Topeka and be near the family and get a job. I got a job as a layout artist with Bell Telephone in Topeka, on the Yellow Pages division. I worked 34 hours a week for them, commuted the spring semester up to KU, and I carried 19 hours.

MS. DOUGLAS: You were doing graduate work then?

MR. KINGTON: No. I was finishing up my senior year.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, okay. So you moved back home before you graduated.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. I'm sorry. I meant to preface that.

MS. DOUGLAS: All right.

MR. KINGTON: I wanted to be near my parents because my father was very, very ill. The commuting thing was costly. I picked up the layout job. I worked through the semester and summer and went to basic training that October, that fall. So I had worked for the telephone company for almost a year before I went into the army.

And after I got out, in those days, by law, your employer was required to provide you with an equal or better position than you had when you went into military service. So, thank goodness, they had filled my old position, and they gave me a sales job, which paid a good deal more. I was selling advertising, which was on a salary base plus commission. I was able to work and save enough money for graduate school. I worked for almost two years for the telephone company.

During that time I would visit Montgomery up at Kansas, and he kept encouraging me to apply to graduate school. In fact, when I did go to Cranbrook, he gave me a "care package" of a lot of silver and hand tools. The undergraduates were required to take metal classes at KU, but it was, like, "Once I don't have to take this class anymore, I'm just leaving the tools and extra scrap silver in the drawer." I think Monte gave me maybe 20 pounds of scrap silver and I don't know how many saw frames and files and so forth.

MS. DOUGLAS: That's wonderful.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. He was very proud of me for getting into Cranbrook.

The summer before I went to Cranbrook, which started in the fall of '59, I got married, and I finished up working for the telephone company. My wife had some sort of secretarial position. I sold an MG and bought an old junker, packed a trailer, and drove to Detroit. [Laughs.] And dropped a transmission right after we unloaded the trailer.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: But, we made it. We made it through two years of Michigan weather, and it was a great time. It was a marvelous time. I ran into a designer [Hugh Acton] who worked locally. He was a product designer. I ended up being his model maker for almost the whole time I was at Cranbrook. As a matter of fact, when he didn't have work for me, he needed things drilled and tapped, and he'd pay me a quarter of a cent for each hole, for drilling and tapping a thousand holes. It was that type of thing.

He invited us to parties. He had worked at the GM [General Motors] Tech Center as a designer for several years, so he had automotive designer friends from Ford and GM and Chrysler. I got to know a lot of the designers in the automotive field in that area and kind of had a separate life from school in a lot of ways.

[BEGIN TAPE 2 SIDE A.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Okay. So you were talking a little bit about your experience at Cranbrook.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. To backtrack just a little bit, I got my acceptance letter to Cranbrook right before we got married, so we essentially took our honeymoon and went to Detroit to see the school.

It was probably the most impressive place I'd ever seen. In those days they still had all the huge old elms that lined the faculty row, the Saarinen studio, and all down the main street. There was not a blade of grass out of place and not a piece of paper. And the groundskeepers had just put out something like 120,000 blooming flowers down at the Carl-Milles fountain. And it was just-I was blown away.

Thomas was very, very nice, very cordial to me. Dick Thomas was very much the gentleman. He was the intellectual silversmith. His background was painting. And while he was at the school, he studied painting. Bertoia had just left, so the whole metal studio was just open. Nobody was there, and he got the keys and started fooling around and became interested, self-taught.

That fall he was a very different Thomas. He treated all the new students very, very remotely. From the beginning of school until sometime after-I believe it was Thanksgiving break-he had nothing to say to me whatsoever. And right after Thanksgiving break, he walked by, and I was working on some sort of a ring fabrication. And I'll never forget. He didn't even stop. It was just a slow stroll that he took around the classroom. And he said, "Oh, a sterling silver sewing machine bobbin." And he almost got that piece right in the back of his head. I mean, it was just like-

The class we started off with thinned quickly; it was tough. We had three people leave that year. It was just like, they were there on Friday, and they weren't there on Monday. They packed up and were just gone. By Wednesday it was like, "Hey, where's so and so?" "Oh, packed up and just gone."

And the discipline of the shop, Thomas's discipline, there were no radios; be at your bench at 9:00; can't leave till 5:00; 30 minutes for lunch over at the lunchroom. If you go to the library or go to the museum, you leave a note on your desk and say what time you went and record when you come back. It was the discipline I needed. I needed every one of those things.

I took sculpture and design classes, as well as metal. You could do a major/minor-type thing. The second semester, he started loosening up to me, talking with me. And I later recognized his style was to try to figure out who people were, what they were about, what their discipline was, what their hand skills were about, what we each needed.

He also believed in group assignments. He'd give one, maybe two, a semester. But the important thing he stressed was your own personal work, where it was going.

He used assignments as a way of introducing process, primarily, but he was also flexible with it. For instance, he gave a teapot raising assignment. Well, I had a large commission as an undergraduate student, a coffee pot, tray, demitasse spoons, cream and sugar, and I hated raising, just absolutely hated it. But he allowed me to use raising as the way of exploring form and free-form. I ended up doing a series of masks, face forms, in bronze primarily, and some in copper, and using chasing and repoussé techniques on them.

Probably one of the most important assignments to me, personally, was to design and execute a flatwork pattern in stainless steel. That was really my first forging experience. And what we had to work with provided only a very, very low-temperature heat, so that working with stainless was almost like working cold. There was very little plasticity to it. But I just loved the plasticity of the material and the way I was able to manipulate the form. His assignment was a knife, fork, and spoon, and I ended up, I think, making six more patterns, plus carving sets and a knife and a fork.

Then I got a special buy on a great big hunk of fine silver. It was a quarter-inch thick. Fine silver is used in the silver industry as a pattern material because you don't have to anneal it that much, and you can push it around very quickly. So I bought that, and I don't know how many pieces I made out of it, all kinds of specialty pickle forks, spoons, ladles, all kinds of stuff.

He encouraged me to take chances. He exposed me to ideas. He was a real mentor. And he put me in positions that I would not normally have exposed myself to. He knew a man who owned a machine shop and who did lots of architectural work for buildings. Roger got an announcement for a design competition. There was an association of automotive manufacturers of chrome auto trim. They were subcontractors to the big auto companies. You can remember the amount of chrome that was going on cars in the '50s. Roger gave Dick the information, and Dick gave it to me and told me that Roger would execute it if I'd design it, and I could also work on it.

I started going around to auto display rooms and looking at all the chrome and decided I could define a car with chrome. It was a lot of fun. My design, like, was a Chrysler grill and Ford bumpers and Chevrolet tail ends and Cadillac fins. And they liked it. We got the contract. Well, we started work on it in fall of '60, and I guess it was in

the '60 automotive show in Detroit, the big auto show, and then the piece went to Chicago. And it's the type thing they spend a lot of money on building the display, and then it's trashed. But it got two showings. And I did some other work for Roger, some other design work. So all these opportunities were happening.

MS. DOUGLAS: Is Roger the one that you had started doing some work for-

MR. KINGTON: No. That was Hugh-oh, what's Hugh's last name? Let me tell you a little bit about him, and his name will come to me when I talk about it. Hugh had been a design student at Cranbrook and had gotten a job with GM Tech Center. And GM Tech Center would keep somebody on for three years and then it was either up or out. I mean, either you got a huge pay increase or you just got notice. And Hugh got notice, and so he started his own company.

He designed a line of benches and planters and some other household pieces he could put into production by utilizing all the small businesses that were associated with the automotive industry. I mean, little basement machine shops that drilled and tapped holes, and companies that specialized in oxygen-free soldering techniques to join metal. So Hugh was just virtually on the run all the time taking drilled and tapped stuff to another place to have it cleaned, then to another place to have it joined.

Ultimately he got to be very successful. He came up with a design idea for a coat-and-hat rack and some other office furniture. A company bought him out, and Hugh didn't work for three years. He took his family to Europe to live, and then came back and lived in New York for awhile. Then he moved to, I think it was, Battle Creek, Michigan, and came up with a design for a chair. A company picked it up, he got a royalty of a buck apiece on it, and they were selling 125,000 of them a year. So he bought, like, 150 acres, a beautiful old home, had a barn on it and another building for his studio. And the barn became a way station for cross-country skiing. He had a herd of sheep, and, you know, he had a great lifestyle. Hugh Acton is the designer's name.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, I've heard of him.

MR. KINGTON: Maybe.

MS. DOUGLAS: I don't know why, but I have.

MR. KINGTON: And Roger. I don't remember Roger's last name. Roger was a really interesting guy. He did all kinds of work-oh, there was a building, for instance, in Pontiac that was a 10-story building. They wanted to change the trim around the top of the building, and he bent sheet aluminum and enameled it and installed it. And he could do fine parts machining and a lot of architectural stuff. And he had the tooling for bending the metal the way it needed to be bent on the frame to accept the chrome parts.

MS. DOUGLAS: Was he a Cranbrook grad, too?

MR. KINGTON: No, he was just a local businessman.

MS. DOUGLAS: And so he is who you worked with on this chrome commission?

MR. KINGTON: Yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: At that time, were there undergraduate students there?

MR. KINGTON: There were. There were still undergraduates. My first year was the first year they received accreditation by the North Central Accreditation Agency. Dick had worked very hard on that and he was very proud of it. In those days, people could actually do an M.F.A. in one year. In fact, I know of a printmaker who did it. Of course, they didn't take as much away with them as somebody who spent two years.

You were not allowed to hold outside employment. You're a full-time student. If work came in, commission work, Thomas would pass it out. If they found out you had an outside job, you were gone; just come in and pack you up. In fact, in those days, students packed everything up, tools, etc., at Christmastime and took it home. At Christmas break the studio was locked. And you did the same thing at end of spring term; you moved everything home. No access to the studio.

MS. DOUGLAS: It was like that when I was in school there. I thought that was harsh.

MR. KINGTON: [Laughs] Well, yeah, it was. Now, what was your question, Mary?

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, I just asked about the undergrads.

MR. KINGTON: Oh, yeah. There were undergraduate students.

MS. DOUGLAS: They were there.

MR. KINGTON: We had a class of, I think there were, 10 people in the metal program. Michael Jerry was an undergraduate student, and there were two others. One left. And Lelana Kim, I'll never forget the name. She was from Hawaii. And she left middle of spring term, I think, on one of those weekends. Just gone. And Les Motes. He lives over in Fort Wayne, Indiana. I haven't seen him since, but he was an undergraduate student. Michael went on to go to RIT [Rochester Institute of Technology]. And the rest of us were graduate students.

MS. DOUGLAS: Who were some of your classmates?

MR. KINGTON: That first year was Fred Fenster, and, of course, Mike [Michael John] Jerry went on and taught at Syracuse. After graduation Fred actually worked in the military program I've talked about earlier, taught crafts and did repair for local jewelry people and gallery work and so forth in the area and Birmingham. And then the job opened up at Michigan-or Wisconsin, at Madison-a year after I started here. So he graduated the year before I graduated. Stanley Lechtzin came the next year, and Heikki Sëppa. And I know I'm leaving somebody out that's also made a contribution to the craft field.

They were good people. They set high standards. Lechtzin could be absolutely obnoxious. I mean, for a little guy, he had a big ego and was very challenging and abrasive most of the time, which was okay, you know. Fred loved raising, and his work was magnificent. And Cranbrook was where he essentially found pewter, I think. Thomas had a pewter problem, and Fred just fell in love with pewter. And actually, Thomas introduced the idea of electroforming to Stanley-this is how you plate, and if you just leave it in too long, you get all these knobs and nodules.

Heikki was a one-year student. He was trained in Finland and had excellent experience. He had tried to immigrate to this country. Whatever the problem was, he couldn't get in, so he went to Canada and actually worked as a steamfitter, I think out on the West Coast, for several years before he applied to Cranbrook. Then Thomas got him a job in Louisville, Kentucky, at the art center. He was late getting there because the government wouldn't give him a green card to get in and start his job. He finally did make it. He was there for two, maybe three years before he moved to Wash U. Of course, Stanley went directly to Tyler when he graduated.

I can't figure out who I'm missing. There was one other person. It was a powerful group. It was unusual to have that number of very talented people together at one time. In those days the maximum enrollment at Cranbrook was 103. It was very selective. And compared to KU's $68 a semester, Cranbrook's tuition was $250, and it went up to $350 by the time I got out. It was considered expensive. But it was a marvelous environment.

MS. DOUGLAS: And no coursework.

MR. KINGTON: We had two art history classes that we had to take, and they hired somebody from Wayne State to come up and teach a course. And everybody took it. We broke at 4:00 one afternoon a week and went up to hear lectures.

MS. DOUGLAS: When you were at the university in Kansas, had you heard of Cranbrook before?

MR. KINGTON: Not till Monty brought it up. Kansas was very insular. I don't remember being exposed to larger issues, although Smitty did take us on field trips to Handy and Harmon in Chicago and to St. Louis to the museum. In those days the St. Louis Museum ran a regional exhibition that was full-blown crafts and fine arts. They didn't discriminate. And of course, there was a state craft show, and then you had Wichita National and the old Fiber, Clay, Metal [St. Paul Art Center, Minnesota] show, but there weren't that many opportunities to show. *Craft Horizons* was our link to the outside world.

And, of course, the vets came back from war greatly changed, and they were looking for a lifestyle and control. Taking raw materials and an idea, and controlling it start to finish, is controlling your life. Many of them had never entertained the idea of going to college. It was well beyond them financially, but the GI Bill made higher education a possibility. Of course, the vets returning expanded the demand for higher education remarkably, and enrollments increased at universities, the demand for new buildings and faculty and so forth.

I became influenced by their philosophy and the lifestyle. Doing what you want to do attitude, life will work out. Actually, I never worried about a job. If I can't sell a piece of jewelry, I'll do cartoons. You know, I'll work. I'll do greeting cards or whatever.

And that was everybody's attitude. If you're a product designer, go to Chicago and get a job, or go to New York. But that was simply nothing I worried about, and I still wasn't worried about it in graduate school, other than the fact that, yeah, I had to make an income some way, but it will happen. The main thing is to learn and be in control of materials and processes, and collect as much information as possible. Of course, today craftsmen

have a very different mindset-and we'll talk about that later.

MS. DOUGLAS: Were there many vets at Cranbrook in the student body?

MR. KINGTON: No. Well, not in metal. We're talking about the '60s now, so I think you've pretty much processed all the vets out. Bob Montgomery was a vet, and he came into school, let's see, that would have been, probably, '55. But he had spent several years in VA [Veterans Administration] hospitals. He had to have reconstructive surgery, plastic surgery on his face, and he had a lot of psychological damage. In fact, he was under a psychiatrist's care for years after he got out of school. And, I don't remember, I think he was the navigator on a bomber or something.

MS. DOUGLAS: That would have been rough work.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. But Monty, he was about the last of the vets. There may have been some historians or painters, but in the class work I was doing, there were very few vets. You had people like Wendell Castle. Wendell was there my freshman year, I think his sophomore year, and the next year-

MS. DOUGLAS: At University of Kansas?

MR. KINGTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And the next year, I think he had financial problems and he wanted to get in on the GI Bill, so he did a tour of duty in one of the military services. He came back after I had graduated and finished up in product design, and then stayed on in to get an M.F.A. in sculpture. Just about everybody at Cranbrook was my generation, except Heikki, of course, was older.

MS. DOUGLAS: I was trying to figure out, how much older? Richard Thomas would have been in your group of students.

MR. KINGTON: He seemed senior to us, but probably not that much.

MS. DOUGLAS: Like 10 years, maybe?

MR. KINGTON: Maybe. He was at Riley, Kansas. He was in the army cavalry when they changed from mules and horses to armored vehicles. [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: And he always talked about it.

MS. DOUGLAS: So he must have been quite a bit older.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. Well, no. That was just right before World War II. And they changed from cavalry to armored right after-he told me how they were selling mules off right before they went to war, and getting jeeps and other stuff. So maybe it was just 10 years. Could have been. Maybe a little bit older. I really don't know.

MS. DOUGLAS: You mentioned a minute ago some of the early exhibitions that were going on in Kansas, like the Wichita Art Association and some other ones. Did you exhibit in those shows?

MR. KINGTON: I don't recall ever exhibiting or getting in Wichita National as an undergraduate student, although my name was around. I got an invitation to exhibit in the first exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York when it opened.

MS. DOUGLAS: That would have been in '65, I think, when that meeting was. No-

MR. KINGTON: In '55, '56.

MS. DOUGLAS: Fifty-six. I'm transposing figures.

MR. KINGTON: And I didn't enter Fiber, Clay, Metal until after I got out of school, out of graduate school. I know I can remember sending work to the St. Louis exhibition. You know, I never kept records. And, of course, there was the Kansas Designer Craftsmen exhibition. I was always in that. But it was like that Kansas mentality, "Let's keep it in the state" type thing I was referring to earlier, or "It will just all work out, don't worry about it; the idea is to make it." There was not a lot of push to show in those days.

MS. DOUGLAS: Really?

MR. KINGTON: Within my peers.

MS. DOUGLAS: What about at Cranbrook?

MR. KINGTON: Well, yeah, of course, you have a different culture and environment in the Detroit area there. There were galleries. You had the Michigan Designer Craftsmen that was sponsored by the Detroit Art Institute. I know I was in that show a couple years. People like Mike Jerry and Fred were exhibiting, and I can remember, oh, Mike being very happy when he got into-the Walker Art Center-sponsored jewelry exhibition. I don't remember what the title was. And he had gotten one or two pieces in it. Of course, he was from Wisconsin and would be aware of the exhibitions.

He made me start understanding, he and Fred and other people, the significance of shows. In fact, I envied him for getting in, and I hadn't even entered. I wasn't even aware of it. Thomas didn't particularly encourage exhibiting. Thomas wasn't necessarily a joiner. I don't think he was ever a member of American Craft Council [ACC] or-[tape ends mid-sentence].

[BEGIN TAPE 2 SIDE B.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Well that's interesting, then, that your classmates made you aware of the exhibition opportunities and the importance of it.

MR. KINGTON: My response was, "Yeah, I can do that, too." So they influenced my attitude, and I've always felt that a vital group of graduate students provide equal stimulus in learning, as a good professor or faculty member will. It's important to have that learning environment, competition, and have people set standards that make other people increase their desire to grow or to accomplish. And I tried to encourage that in the program here.

MS. DOUGLAS: I guess I'm curious to know-your experience from your generation is a lot different than mine, but it seems like working in industry or finding jobs, like you described some of the jobs you had at Cranbrook, working for these different designers, that that would be as much or more stimulus to produce and work than working for an exhibition.

MR. KINGTON: Well, it was more real. You know, it's nice to get your ego stroked, but, you know, there's a certain reality to working for a firm or a company. I tried to get summer employment between my two years at Cranbrook at-well, first of all, they had an internship at GM Tech Center for sculptors, and I did not get accepted to that. Then I applied to work for several display firms that were doing all kinds of work-you know, Detroit's a great town for advertising agencies, what I still call commercial art, graphic design, display design, so forth and so on. And that's really the position I wanted.

Again, it was in recession time, so they weren't picking up particularly any young people for short periods of time. In fact, the only job I got, really-well, I got two jobs offered that summer. One was putting tar on a 14-story-high building with a pitched roof, and another one was working on septic tanks.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: So I ended up doing waxwork all summer, which probably influenced me in what I did after I graduated.

MS. DOUGLAS: You did waxwork because you didn't have access to a shop ordinarily.

MR. KINGTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Everything had to be done at home. One day I blew some wax up; I had it on the stove and forgot about it, and it literally covered the ceiling of the kitchen. And I spent days cleaning wax off of the refrigerator, stove, and ceilings. I worked for Hugh Acton a little bit, and drilled probably 100,000 holes and tapped them that summer. But that summer was when I came up with the little bird form that I then used for over 10 years after school.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, maybe we could talk a little bit about your artwork. I know when people go to graduate school, they usually hope to develop something in graduate school that will lead them off in a new direction. What was your work like in grad school? You talked a little bit about it.

MR. KINGTON: Well, it was influenced by Scandinavian design, perhaps production oriented. Casting at Cranbrook and at KU, really both, was considered a way of making multiples. Bracelet links, necklace links, designer rings. Make a mold; you can do a thousand rings off the mold. Hollowware, definitely Scandinavian. My flatware pieces were definitely Scandinavian. I did some fireplace-couple of fireplace sets, definitely Scandinavian. Some other hardware. I collaborated with a student in design by the name of Cooper Woodring on some chair designs. We thought we were going to do one-upsmanship on Bertoia and Eames.

I kept playing around with these little funny silver birds. An African American sculptor, a big, huge man, saw them. I was hiding the birds in the studio from my classmates. It was like, I knew my peers would criticize me for misusing silver. But this guy saw them, and he really liked them. He turned me on to Ashanti gold weights. And,

of course, they deal with parables and narratives. These wonderful little bronze figures-human and animal forms, small compositions.

I became interested in miniatures and thinking about objects made by nomadic peoples. Detroit was the first time I'd ever been east of the Mississippi. And so I was thinking of nomadic people and realizing I was nomadic. My family was really dispersed. I grew up within this tight-knit neighborhood and family: my cousins were leaving and going to Colorado and California and a lot of different places. And my mind fixed on the nomadic cultures. You know, Eskimos make little carvings, and the Ashanti gold weights. The scale allows for easy mobility. Miniature sculpture.

The way I worked changed after graduate school. I disliked polishing metals, so I rediscovered other processes. I'd never really understood a scraper, and I found that I could use a scraper to refine metal castings, and I designed my own scrapers and burnishes. I ended up using concrete steel brushes to polish my silver. I discovered other ways of finishing metal, freeing my work from white diamond and rouge.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, that's sacrilegious.

MR. KINGTON: Of course, I also rejected the Scandinavian concept, and my work became baroque. I mean, talk about fancy-my new concept was to add as much as I could, and make it drip. And, of course, I was into the whole cartoon thing, and into kinetics and animation. I had a lot of fun. I was trying to project child's play-I started having a lot of fun.

And then Phil Fike, I started seeing his work, and he was moving away from the Scandinavian influence. He was doing some very, very light, delicate, very beautiful gold pieces. He was very heavy into niello. Lechtzin had been an undergraduate student of his, so Lechtzin introduced black niello as a material, too, in a demonstration at school. But I think people were moving away from previous attitudes about metal form and surface after I graduated in '61 - and Stanley definitely went baroque with his electroform work, and I went my own direction with the toys.

Fred put a warmer look on his work and started dealing with surfaces on pewter, and so I think there was all kind of reaction to the Scandinavian concept that was taking place-"There's just got to be something else besides what we had learned to do." Fred and Michael Jerry particularly, their goal was to open a silversmith shop and take commissions and make hollowware. Of course, by the time they graduated, there was no market for hollowware. So their work changed, as many metalsmiths' did.

MS. DOUGLAS: We're talking about Tupperware was making the statement-

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. And stainless steel replaces silver in this country. You have German flatware coming in, Scandinavian flatware in beautiful patterns. Dansk just introduces all this great tableware which is in line with the Bertoia, Eames, Raymond Loewy designs. Fred truly wanted to have his own silver shop specializing in hollowware teapots and coffee pots. And Michael Jerry. Michael went on to RIT [Rochester Institute of Technology] because Thomas didn't have all the answers and Hans Christensen was a hollowware master.

MS. DOUGLAS: So he went to RIT to graduate school, Michael Jerry.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, I was thinking about Fred Fenster's filed surfaces as a reaction, maybe, to this-

MR. KINGTON: Absolutely. I think it all comes together like that. Many of us started searching for different metal surface solutions.

MS. DOUGLAS: It's amazing reading about different metalsmiths, what their backgrounds are. And just looking at the design influence, it's amazing to me the weight that Scandinavian modern has had in the style of American decorative arts.

MR. KINGTON: Oh, yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: And metalwork, especially.

MR. KINGTON: Look at the fibers. Scandinavian weavings and the colors really influenced color and textures in this country. I remember my mother flipping out over a burnt orange and fuchsia lampshade and the textures of fabric for upholstery. And, of course, the metal from Scandinavia really influenced thinking in this country's metal craftsmen.

Japan had a stronger influence on the potters than the Scandinavian stuff, although you can't forget Maija Grotell was making work that was in many ways Asian, very soft and very unassuming ceramic work. Maija was still

teaching ceramics when I was at Cranbrook. She was very elderly and arthritic, but she made it down to that studio every day.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, was the whole faculty basically Scandinavian when you were there?

MR. KINGTON: No.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, Thomas wasn't, but-

MR. KINGTON: No. Maija-no, the Saarinens lived close by, but neither one of them really interacted with the school. Howard Brown was the design teacher. Larry Barker taught printmaking and then introduced paper. Tex Sheevitz taught sculpture, and he was about third generation. He had studied with Frederick Marshall. Frederick Marshall was a disciple of Carl Milles, and then Tex had studied with Marshall. And they all pretty much worked in the same style. Zoltan Sepeshy dated way back. He was the president of the school then and spent more time in his studio drunk than doing anything else at that point. By that, I mean sometimes weeks, nobody would see him.

And who else would there be? Glenn Michaelson taught art classes. Do you know who Glenn is? He taught child art classes on a part-time basis in the basement of the library. And Glenn made some marvelous mosaics, essentially, using natural stones, pebbles and natural pieces of found wood, but very large, murallike pieces that were about texture and surface and light, colors. And I guess that's about it. I had nothing to do with architecture. I didn't even know who was there. Oh, Marianne Strengell was fibers.

MS. DOUGLAS: She was Finnish. No, not Finnish, but-

MR. KINGTON: Yeah, one of the Scandinavian countries. And, of course, she was doing a huge amount of consulting with GM Tech Center. She was working on all their upholstery fabrics and colors, and also doing all kinds of window covering designs with surfaces and textures and colors and so forth.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, why do you think your particular generation of metalsmiths broke away from that Scandinavian model?

MR. KINGTON: Because I think we were all looking to express ourselves. I know that part of it is I just finally got to the point I hated buffing. I can remember a brooch I made-my wife still owns it. I showed it a number of times after graduate school. Every time it came back, it had a scratch on it and it had to be buffed out again. It was just, like, there's not going to be anything left if I keep this up, you know?

I've always been a museum-goer, and because of my interest, I did a lot of looking at the decorative arts. I didn't really start focusing on painting and sculpture until later. And I started realizing that I liked a 200-year-old piece of hollowware much more than I liked a new one, because of the patina of scratches that it had acquired through use before being put in a display case in some museum. It was perfectly beautiful; it was just like, "Okay, just let me make this and take a steel brush to it," you know?

I believe my generation was the first generation of metal craftsmen to seriously start looking for the first time at ancient metalwork history. Not long after I started the program here, I one day just walked in the offices of the museum up in St. Louis. I explained who I was, and I said, "I'd like to bring my students up here to study, but I don't want them to just see the work through glass." We set up a special program, and I'd take my students up. We would go, like, 6:00 in the morning, get up there early. I would tell the curator two weeks before what I wanted, and they'd take all that work out of the display cases. Or we'd go to the display case, they would unlock it, and we could put a 15th-century helmet on, and hold an 18th-century sword, and really investigate Pre-Colombian gold goblets, weigh them, looking at them under magnification.

The most amazing experience I ever had was the first time I could touch one of those tall Pre-Columbian gold goblets, with heavy chased and repoussé. I nearly threw it over my shoulder because, you know, the top edge is very thick, and I anticipated weight, and it was like picking a feather up compared to what I thought it was going to be. It was like picking up an empty glass instead of a full glass. I looked at it, and took my fingernail and touched that top edge, and it dinged. It didn't make a dent, but it flexed. And it blew my mind away. Did you ever see the Gary Noffke piece, the *Gold Goblet*? Well, that had to be solid with this thick edge, but that's the way Gary works. But I also think Gary believed Pre-Columbian gold goblets had thick top edges.

The goblets posed a lot of questions. This is not made of a lot of material; this is very conservatively controlled, as far as the mechanics. And how did they turn those corners? And how do you make a joint where there's no hole for gas to escape, heat and expansion; so what's the joinery process to bring a piece of metal up, turn it 90 degrees and then turn another 90 degrees, and bring it back down and have a thick-looking edge, but it isn't, it's hollow? It just blew my mind away.

So we were doing that in the mid-'60s. We could handle any of their treasures. So a seminar theme would be gold; it would be Egyptian gold, Greek gold, Renaissance, whatever was in the collection. They would pull it all out for us, and we'd sit around with white gloves on our hands. We could weigh work. We could put them under a microscope and look at granulation, Greek granulation, and realize that four spheres had not adhered, and you could see the attachment areas, and that the spheres were being put on tissue-thin metal. It was great.

When Bob Ebendorf did the SNAG [Society of North American Goldsmiths] meeting in New York, I had told him about my experiences with this museum study program with my students and how important it was. He took that as a model for the New York Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art] conference, and the museum allowed us to get into the various departments and hold pieces and study pieces.

MS. DOUGLAS: Mary Ann Scherr talked about that.

MR. KINGTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] It was a great experience. It was a very good experience.

MS. DOUGLAS: So your method of teaching was to expose your students to all kinds of metalwork from all cultures.

MR. KINGTON: Oh, yeah. All kinds and all cultures.

MS. DOUGLAS: Not just Scando-mod.

MR. KINGTON: No. Huh-uh. It's like, my approach was, "When we look at this work, we know it's Greek because the label tells us that. We've had the museum information sheets on the objects. But look at it in terms of what was the craftsman doing and why did he do things the way he did? Does it make sense to you?"

That's the way we were looking at it. Studying variations of techniques, how well they were done, how badly they may have been done. It wasn't discriminating. Gold is gold, so let's put it all together-which is the best? And there's-terms go out of my head. I'm looking for the pre-Greek culture. They used-

MS. DOUGLAS: Mycenaean?

MR. KINGTON: Mycenaean, with a woman doing a handstand on the back of the bull. That, we studied at one of our seminars. It was on the table. And I picked it up, and I looked at it a long time. We passed it around and talked about it. It was a beautiful intaglio, a gold piece. I said, "You know, there's something wrong with that ring." I said, "A craftsman would not do that." We always had somebody from the staff with us, and she jumped up: "What are you talking about? You're attacking this jewel of the museum." And I said, "No, there's something wrong with the shank relationship to the top." And I said, "I can't tell you what it is, I can't discuss the period, and I can't discuss a lot of things with you, but a craftsman wouldn't do this."

Well, she took notes, and the museum sent them to me later-they asked me to sign off on them. The museum queried me a second time about it. About four years later, the British Museum was assembling a Mycenaean exhibition, and the curator requested that piece from St. Louis for the show. The museum queried me again and sent it off. It got there, and within 24 hours they had a telegram from the curator telling them it was a fake, or actually, saying, "Can I take scrapings from this?" And then another telegram saying, "I'm returning the piece, it's a fake." [Laughs heartily.]

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: So we had a lot of fun. The other thing that was really enlightening is that they had fragments of objects. They had a Persian earring that had been separated from its back, had been embossed in wood or, you know, winged eagles-or winged, oh sphinx-type figures-and had separated fragments into two pieces. And you could see what the filler was in it to give it strength on the inside. So there were many, many lessons that could be learned from our viewing experiences.

But I think what I was becoming increasingly fascinated in was richness of surface and ornament. I hated the baroque art movement, but I loved the richness of the work. And I think Stanley came to that conclusion through electroforming.

It was time for a change. If you look at what's going on in painting and sculpture at that time, I was becoming more influenced by contemporary painting and sculpture. I was looking at it, not thinking about doing it, but looking at it, thinking about it.

MS. DOUGLAS: Influenced by the ideas and-

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. I was becoming more and more interested in ideas.

Maybe this would be a good time to talk about the toys. You know, when the children were born, I was making candlesticks, and then when they could use a rattle, I'd make rattles, and when they could blow, I'd make whistles to blow.

MS. DOUGLAS: And you were making these out of metal?

MR. KINGTON: Sterling silver, yeah. Carbondale was, still is, but in those days was a real step down from Topeka, Kansas, and certainly from Detroit. There was no clientele. And I was selling work in Detroit. There was no market in Carbondale. I'd read a book about some royal family that had commissioned a silversmith to do doll furniture for their daughters, and the silversmith spent five years making a palace with all these miniatures in sterling silver, all the furniture, clocks. The clocks worked, all that business. It was like, okay, I'll just become a resident silversmith for my children.

And then, the more I watched them play, they reminded me of my own personal fantasies. You know, a stick is a marvelous toy. To a kid, it can be a pony; it can be a gun; it can be a bow and arrow; it can be anything he wants it to be in his mind's eye. And so the first toy I did was shortly after buying the kids tricycles. A tricycle doesn't last as a tricycle for 15 minutes. One time it is a garbage truck and the next time it is a rocket. And it is never a tricycle, it is always some "let's pretend" type of thing. And so I thought more and more about that, and I got to remembering my own childhood. I drove junk cars all the way through college, but I could always fantasize, wherever I was driving, being in a Ferrari rather than in a used-up Kaiser-Frazer product.

The tricycle series, I maybe did 13 or 15 pieces. I made a figure to try to project this whole idea of fantasy and the delight, the wonderment of play. The air machines were like the tricycle transformed. They always had three wheels, but the tricycle mysteriously, in the child's mind, grew wings and a propeller. And, of course, I at one point in my childhood had a pedal car of some sort, so it was just a transformed tricycle into a pedal car. And I made the car series.

Any toy you can buy a child is disposable. It's designed to be broken. I wanted to make something that had intrinsic and aesthetic value, so that if it was broken, it would be repaired; something that is lasting, that is maybe in some way precious; or if not, the fact that I made them particularly for someone gave it value that it would be respected and have life. I made toys that activated when pulled. When I was a child, I had a little toy that you pulled, and it was a take off on a railroad pump car; you know, the handles go up and down?

MS. DOUGLAS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. KINGTON: It had figures on it. So I made one. It was a very baroque piece. The woman had a 1960's bouffant hairdo with flowers in her hair and a bird's nest in her hair.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: When she went up, she hit a bell and the bell rang. And she'd go down and the guy would almost hit the bell with his nose, but he couldn't quite make it with his nose. They were fun. They were a delight. It was about play and it was about fantasy.

[BEGIN TAPE 3 SIDE A.]

MR. KINGTON: The other thing that was going on in my mind when I was making, particularly, the airplanes was the fact that, again, fantasy or dreaming, this quality the child and man has is a marvelous quality. If you trace the mythological story of Icarus-and almost every tribal group anyplace in the ancient world, it has some sort of storytelling tradition or sacred stories about men transforming themselves into bird or animal forms, flying, and then returning to their own physical body or transcending to a spiritual form and then back. So I used the Icarus theme as the symbol for that tradition.

When you think about the time between the mythological story of Icarus to da Vinci and his plans of flight machines to the development of the internal combustion engine to the Wright brothers' first flight; and then from that time to six to eight decades later and a man walking around on the moon, I mean, that is a remarkable quality man has, to desire something and, with persistence, bring it to reality. So the toys were intended to express that remarkable quality of man.

I started making the toys for my children. I finally got enough guts up to enter a show with them, and then they became very, very popular. I sold tons of stuff. Carbondale was a great place to be in the '60s. We had a marvelous president who had great vision for the university. We had an art historian unexpectedly quit, and the solution was to bring Harry Bober in from NYU, whose specialty was medieval art, particularly the Sutton Hoo collection, twice a month. Fly in, do lectures, fly back.

And Harry saw what I was doing in silver, and he liked it so much, he bought two or three little birds, just to put

in his pocket. And he showed them to a man who was an [antiquarian]. He had a beautiful gallery on Madison Avenue. And the guy ordered-he'd make orders for 12. He gave them out as dinner gifts and to his grandchildren. He also bought two air machines for his grandchildren. And after about 36 to 48 birds, I made one, a little one, and sent him his last order with a special label on that one that said, "This is for your pocket; you're never to give it away." And that's the last I ever heard from him-[laughs]-other than I had a standing invitation to come see him any time I was in New York.

And so I discovered it was okay to have fun and make things. You don't have to be serious about making stuff. You can have a lot of fun, and you're reaching people a different way.

I brought up Malcom Knapp to you earlier in conversation, not on this tape. Malcolm bought a little car out of a show. In those days, I extended a lifetime guarantee-if you break it, I'll fix it free, just like the Zippo guarantee, the Zippo lighter. And I think I repaired his car twice. He would have dinner parties and, over coffee and liqueur, his guests would shove the car back and forth across tables, and sometimes it would go off the end of the table and the wheel would break an axle or something. So I got it back, I'm sure, more than once. And it was fun to have people lighten up and have fun.

Anyway, you had a question earlier.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, it was nothing important. You had said something about-you were describing a toy you made where the man's nose went up and-

MR. KINGTON: Almost dinged but didn't quite.

MS. DOUGLAS: Almost dinged. And it made me think about your caricature of the man. The nose is elongated like a bird's beak, and it related to the birds you're talking about.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. Let me get something and I'll show you what was going on. [Describing an object he brings to the table.] If you look at the bird, the bird and the head are the same form; it's just the material handled a little bit differently. The back of the cranium is flattened off instead of having a tail, and it's got a forehead instead of the two breathing nostrils on the beak of the bird. The nose comes out almost the same as the beak, but it's got nostrils attached to it. The eye placement is about the same. It has ears and at least a suggestion of hair, whereas the bird has kind of feather lines on it, suggestions of feathers. And the nose really is mine. Nobody thought I'd ever grow into my nose when I was growing up. I broke two or three windows out in junior high school with my nose because it was just out there.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: [Laughs] So it was like, oh, the figure is self in some ways, I guess.

MS. DOUGLAS: Gosh. That's funny.

Let me go back and clear up one detail of chronology, because we're talking about SIU [Southern Illinois University] now. Did you get that job right out of graduate school?

MR. KINGTON: Yeah, but it's a little bit longer story than "yes." My second year in graduate school, I had lined up two interviews, both in New York. One was with Oneida Silver. Well, primarily I went for the Oneida Silver job interview and with another silver company, and I don't remember what one, as a designer. That was based on my flatware and other work I was making.

Silver companies were desperate for new designers because they had lost the market. The European stainless steel market had taken over. Some of the U.S. companies were moving into the stainless steel production, but the Scandinavians and Germans, and then the Japanese, had a large part of the market with their patterns. Oneida was looking for new designers. In fact, they had a competition my second year, and Ron Pearson had a pattern selected to be put in production. And Oneida was advertising for interviews.

So I went into New York for an interview, and luckily, I got a free ride there and back. I'd always been aware of Raymond Loewy Associates, and I just walked in and told the secretary who I was and asked if it would be possible to talk with somebody about a position. A vice president came out and sat down and chatted with me a minute, asked to look at my portfolio, and I ended up-I guess was there for three hours. A long interview, he showed me everything, then he offered me a job.

MS. DOUGLAS: Wow.

MR. KINGTON: Hamilton Watch had commissioned them to do some designing for a new line, and he showed me the drawings on all the watches, primarily wrist watches, men's and women's. And he asked me what I thought about them, and I told him I really was not that impressed. He said, "Well, you're absolutely right." He said, "I

want you to look at this." The company had billed Hamilton Watch a quarter of a million dollars for something they could not recommend for production. And he said, "You know, we really need somebody like you."

With my product design background, I had learned to draw that style, use that particular language as far as presenting three-dimensional forms, with the shading and the whole business. In fact, I had talked Thomas into teaching drawing course at Cranbrook, bringing some product designers out to teach evening classes, because I wanted to further develop that drawing style. And they had been wanting somebody on the staff who had the three-dimensional abilities that I demonstrated with my flatware patterns and jewelry, as well as the ability to draw, so that they could realize their designs dimensionally and not make the same sort of embarrassing confession that they had made to Hamilton. Here's your bill but we can't recommend you put the designs into production.

In October, Thomas had started talking to me about going into education. I didn't think I wanted to be a teacher. And he would bring it up about once, if not more than twice, a month and talk to me about it. He told me that he thought I would really do a good job, and he would give me my first job. He guaranteed me my first job, if I would try it for a year.

I really respected the man, and started leaning that way a little bit. Probably the kicker on the decision was that my father passed away, and I really felt that I needed to be closer to my mother. And, of course, she was then a single mother, and Kay was just in grade school at that point. Moving to New York was a very, very exciting idea, but I think out, of respect for Dick, I decided, well, we struck a bargain of one year. And I actually called Raymond Loewy up, and they told me they would hold the job for a year for me. And so it was like, okay, Carbondale's not that far from Topeka. Let's do this and see what happens; I can go to New York City next year.

Right about graduation time, Dick called me into his office and-this really just blew my mind away-he said, "I just want to tell you something, Brent. I know you're busy, you're packing and so forth and so on." He said, "One day I'll step out of this position, and I'll want you to take it over." To me it was the finest compliment that I could have had from the man.

That was '61. In 1982, he called me and wanted me to come up for a visiting artist meeting at Cranbrook. And I went up, and the sole purpose of having me up there was to talk to me. He said, "You know, I told you before you graduated I wanted you to take my position over." "I had my third heart attack this past summer." He owned an island, very small island, in Canada on the lake. He was there by himself. And he said, "I was laying on the ground and knew I was dying, and the only thing on my mind was that I'd never called you about taking the position over, and I want you to take it."

MS. DOUGLAS: Wow.

MR. KINGTON: So it was just like, "Well, you know, I guess I've done some things to affirm all the trust that you put into me when you said that originally." Of course, it just broke me up. I got tears in my eyes. It was just about the nicest single compliment I've ever received.

MS. DOUGLAS: That is amazing.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. Dick got me the job in Carbondale. I was scared to death about teaching. And he said, "Look. You come up." Carbondale started later than Cranbrook. He said, "You come up, stay at my house for a week; you sit in on all the lectures, and we'll talk about the lectures and demonstration techniques, what's in my head, the way I deal with people," and so forth and so on. So we moved to Illinois. And the funny thing about it is I never interviewed for the job. I just got a contract in the mail.

MS. DOUGLAS: Wow.

MR. KINGTON: Sign it; you need to be here by such and such a date.

MS. DOUGLAS: Wow.

MR. KINGTON: I didn't know any of the faculty here. I had dug ditches all summer long because there was no other work in Topeka. And we had to borrow the money to move. I bought a pair of slacks and a pair of shoes and a sports coat and moved Di into an apartment, went to Detroit on the train, spent a week at Cranbrook, and came back on the train. The day I was supposed to report, I put that new sports coat on with a-I'll never forget-blue Oxford button-down shirt, a rep tie, a pair of gray slacks. It was plaid, green/gray thing, sports coat, a pair of cordovan loafers, and a pair of gray socks. I walked in, and the new chairman was dressed exactly the same way except his rep tie was different than mine.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: [Laughs] He just nearly fell out of his chair. So that was my start at Carbondale.

And that might be a good time to break.

[Audio break.]

MS. DOUGLAS: We're back on tape now.

We were talking about when you first came to Carbondale and started the program there.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. As I told you, I didn't interview for the position. I didn't know what to expect. I knew Carbondale had a radio station. I didn't realize it had only one stoplight in town. It had only one railroad crossing, that had an arm on it. And my expectations were not high, and those expectations were met, generally. The metal studio was one room in what was originally the training grade school of the teacher education program at the university. The university started off as a teachers college. There was a buffing machine out in the hall. And I had a desk in an electrical closet, which was my office.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: Fred Laurenson, who had started the program, had a selection of raising stakes. There was a casting machine, a hooded solder/annealing area, one large worktable with benches on it, and a butcher's block for the raising stakes. Essentially that was it. It was a challenge.

And also the program had deteriorated. I believe there was a two-year interval from the time he left and I arrived. The graduate student was doing some teaching. The student interest had dropped off to the point that my assignment that fall was only one metal class. The other two courses that I taught were Introduction to 2-D Design at the freshman level, which was very good for me because the man, Harvey Harris, who was teaching it, was a Yale-trained painter and loved to teach foundations. I would go and sit through his lectures and a whole class with him, then I'd go teach my course. And I learned a lot about teaching from him.

The second semester, here I was, young, bright-eyed, and bushy-tailed. I developed student interest because of the way the first jewelry class was handled. I spent a lot of extra time in the classroom with students. I had enough students for two classes in the spring; and then the next fall, three full classes and a waiting list of about 30, 35 students for another class, and that kind of continued.

There was one graduate student in the program when I came. Carbondale had an M.F.A. degree in metal. A second student who had graduated with a degree in design from SIU came back to do master's work in metal. I don't know if you know the history of the program, but R. Buckminster Fuller was associated with the design program. And so that spring, I had two M.F.A. students. It was a matter of taking advantage of student interest, teaching as well as I could. I think I ended up within three years having, like, 15 undergraduate majors.

The tradition of the teachers college was dominant. I guess 90 percent of the art majors were actually art education majors, 10 percent studio, in the early '60s. By the middle '70s, that had totally reversed itself; it was, like, 90 percent studio and 10 percent or less art education majors. I was the ninth member to join the faculty, fall 1961. And, of course, the '60s was a time of great expansion at all universities. Within 10 years, we grew from nine to, like, 27, 28 faculty members.

MS. DOUGLAS: That was just in the School of Art you're talking about, that faculty?

MR. KINGTON: Yes. That was just in the School of Art. Actually, it was a department of art. Art was a part of a School of Fine Arts, with a department of art, music, design, and theater. By the mid-'60s, it became a College of Fine Arts, made up of the same departments. There were about 14,000 university students when I came; by 1970, there were 24,000 students, to give you an idea of the growth of the university. There was some reconfiguration within the university in 1970, and we became part of a College of Communication and Fine Arts. It never seemed to me to make sense-radio/TV, journalism, and the arts.

MS. DOUGLAS: That's unusual, wasn't it?

MR. KINGTON: There's only one other college structure like it, and that's Memphis State, and they modeled their college system off of ours. Radio/TV, journalism, speech, speech pathology. At some point there was a spinout of the photojournalism program into a photography academic department. But it was a very strange grouping. The journalism evolved into more about selling advertising than it did writing critically and reporting well. The radio/TV, most of the students either wanted to be sports broadcasters or sell television revenue-generating advertising. And so it was very commercial. Speech is a scholarly activity. The visual/performing arts made up the balance of college academic units.

It was something that never really made sense to me. In fact, before I got out of the chair, a situation occurred

in which I was instrumental in moving the School of Art and Design as well as music and theater to liberal arts. The College of Liberal Arts was a much more comfortable home than the previous college had been.

MS. DOUGLAS: It seems like an unusual mix.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah, it was.

MS. DOUGLAS: So the year you started at SIU, that was '61?

MR. KINGTON: Fall of '61.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, SIU was always known for blacksmithing, the metals program. Do you want to talk a little bit about your interest in iron and how that got started?

MR. KINGTON: Sure. You know, I had only had one experience with iron, which I described to you earlier, and that was the flatware assignment that Thomas made while I was a student at Cranbrook, in stainless steel. I had a lot of fun making it. Actually, the first ACC event that I ever attended was the world congress, you know, Congress of Craftsmen, in New York in '64. I had been in New York in that one short trip when I interviewed with Raymond Loewy Associates.

I received university funding to go to New York for the World Crafts Council [WCC] meeting and was actually there about 10 days. At that time I was able to go to the Modern, the Whitney, the Met, do lots of gallery looking. I was able to extend my visit, because I had had a little contact with Lee Nordness. He had seen my work in an exhibition called Creative Casting at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, and Lee contacted me. And he liked the toys very much. I was also in the Young Americans '62 exhibition. And the toys were getting a lot of attention and being published. In fact, I think the *New York Times*, when they covered Young Americans, showed one of my toys. Lee had seen my work and invited me to visit him any time I was in New York.

So I dropped in to see Lee. I had taken some work with me to New York to try to get a gallery or make a sale. Lee bought a couple of pieces that I had in my pocket, and he gave one to Sam Johnson's sister as a present. His association with Sam and his sister brought about the Objects: USA exhibition later on in the '60s, late '60s. It was '69, I guess.

Anyway, I stopped into another gallery that carried painting and sculpture, but also showed chess sets, and I had a whole chess set with me. It was the little figures that I was doing-and the guy flipped out over them and took them on for consignment, and the set sold within two weeks after I got back.

MS. DOUGLAS: Wow.

MR. KINGTON: At the Met, I spent quite a little bit of time with the arms and armor collection. They had a marvelous Venetian boat prow and other great work. And I saw ferrous metal being treated with the same care and respect that I had been taught to treat gold and silver. The chasing on iron, and the repoussé, and the inlay and etching, was every bit as fine as anything I had ever seen in gold and silver. It's like, hey, you know, this material is not only about cars and buildings and tools and heavy industry. When I got back from New York, I told my wife I was going to be a blacksmith. This was spring of '64. Started going to junk yards and finding tongs and hammers and anvils that nobody was interested in.

[BEGIN TAPE 3 SIDE B.]

MR. KINGTON: Murphysboro is the neighboring town. I found a pair of African American brothers who were local blacksmiths. In fact, one of them, Ben Deal, had gone to Tuskegee Tech [Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, AL] to learn to be a blacksmith in their technical training program, and then he taught his brother Jim. I hung out there and just watched them work.

I found another man. He was very elderly, Mr. Freeman, and he was in his mid-80s, and his health was really failing. I knocked on his door and told him what I was interested in, and he invited me to come over in the mornings and he would show me things. He showed me how to build a fire and manipulate the material, control the heat. He pulled an old overstuffed chair out into this little shop, and he would fall asleep. I'd work for two hours, and then he'd finally wake up and would say something correcting me, and then doze again. Finally, at the end of the week, I just felt like I'd been imposing, but I had learned a lot. And I knew he wasn't feeling well. He was helping me out when he wasn't physically able.

So I thanked him for everything and told him I wouldn't be back, that I just wanted to practice what he had shown me so far. He said, "Well, I'm going to tell you one thing." And I said, "What's that, Mr. Freeman?" He said, "I know something nobody else does, and I'm going to die with it." And I said, "What's that?" He said, "I know how to forge weld copper." And I said, "Well, how do you forge weld copper, Mr. Freeman?" He said,

"That's what I'm carrying to my grave."

When we talk about some of the research with graduate students at SIU, forge welding copper is something we should discuss.

That fall, there was enough budget to purchase a Johnson's gas forge and put it in that one-room studio, and that's like having a jet airliner fire off in a small space; that forge was very noisy. I started pounding on iron then, and I didn't know what I was doing. Everything, of course, was by hand. It was a cramped space, working on a cast-iron anvil mounted on a butcher's block.

I became more and more fascinated with, and attracted to, the material-I showed you a pin earlier, or a brooch forged out of a washer. I used jewelers' techniques to make the pierce-and I pretty much was trying to apply metalsmithing and jewelry techniques to the material, and beginning to understand that blacksmithing was a very, very different mindset than metalsmithing.

From '64 to late '69, I spent maybe a week out of every month doing something with forging, and the rest of the time was devoted to the production of the silver toys and getting work off to exhibits. It was learning to do one thing while doing the other thing. And I've always worked well that way. I started thinking about an idea sometimes two years before I would ever get around to executing it. Everything I tried in iron was experimental eventually. And by '68, I knew that I was going to have to quit working in silver and gold and make a full commitment to ferrous metal, using traditional blacksmithing techniques.

In '69-I lived in Carterville, Illinois-a neighbor who was a builder tore down a house and was getting ready to tear down the garage, and I ended up buying the garage from him for $150. He put a floor underneath it for me, and that was my first blacksmith shop.

Concurrent with that time, the craft program made a move from the Allyn Building, which was the old training grade school, to where the present craft area is in Pulliam Hall at the university. The Allyn building had never been renovated, and it needed to be brought up to handicap standards. It was in terrible shape. You'd flush the toilet and the water would go out on the floor. None of the pipes worked. The electricity was going off all the time. Over a 10-year period I had acquired additional space in the Allyn building, probably had more than doubled the original space, or two and a half times the original space. When we moved to Pulliam, oh, metal increased to five or six times the original space.

The university has a very fine research and development system, and I was able to acquire tools for the university through research grants. In fact, over a period of years, I had probably received in the neighborhood of a quarter of a million dollars in different research grants from the university. Every time I'd go out to an auction or find a shutdown blacksmith shop, I'd go back and talk to the director, and he would come up with some money for me to buy power hammers, forges, and hand tools. I was able to put some tooling together and get a smithy started. It was just a starting point. I got my own shop set up at the same time.

In '68 I made up my mind that by the end of December 1969, I would stop making any silver pieces except for gifts for my children or for my wife. I had to devote myself full-time to smithing, which was literally like going back to graduate school. I took trade-school welding courses. I didn't know what arc welding was. I didn't know how to gas weld or cut. I was not used to any power equipment associated with working ferrous metals. I didn't have a power hammer till maybe '72, I guess. I found a charcoal burner in the area that had been shut down for years, had tons of charcoal, so I used charcoal. It's a good fuel source.

MS. DOUGLAS: Instead of coal?

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. But I was exploring coal, as well as charcoal, as a heat source, and I was also using gas. So I had three fuel sources that I used. And my sense of scale? You know, I took a one-man show to Chicago in 1965 in a briefcase. So my challenge was to increase scale, and understand the material.

Well, as a transition I decided to carry the silver toy imagery that I had been playing with over to steel and to just experiment. I started two pieces the same day, and it took me almost two years to finish them-I increased the scale of two toys, both air machines. One was a takeoff on a helicopter, and another one was a takeoff on a paper glider. The helicopter went from about four inches to, oh, a little over five feet, and the airplane was five foot long. Instead of casting the figures in silver, I used the foundry at the university and cast in bronze the bird hood ornaments. But everything else was iron. And when I finished those, I started a rocking horse. And I was also making a child's weathervane for the playhouse that I built for my children.

MS. DOUGLAS: That rocking horse, I've seen that reproduced in a book.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah, it's in the Dona Meilach book.

MS. DOUGLAS: Was it cut out of sheet, or was it forged?

MR. KINGTON: It was a combination. The saddle, the head, and the tail were cut out of sheet and then forged. And I'd gotten interested in carving steel.

MS. DOUGLAS: You did that with cold work, chisels?

MR. KINGTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] It's cold work. It's a die maker's art. The material has to be totally relaxed, annealed, to carve well. It's much easier to carve iron than it is mild steel. But yeah, it's easily removable. So the nostrils, the eyes, details on the ear were all carved. I forged the stock, as I recall, three-eighths-inch thick. I forged the mane to a long wedge form and then formed a piecrust roll with the mane, and did the same thing on the tail. Then the rockers and other parts of the structure were forged rod.

And at the same time, I was making very plastic pieces with rope twists, and weathervanes with copper sheet, copper rivets, using a traditional pin-in-a-pipe technique for mounting weathervanes.

In '71, I guess it was, I was in New York, and I saw a very important show of weathervanes, early American weathervanes and whirligigs at the Folk Art Museum, which at that time was very near the Museum of Contemporary Crafts. It had a really big impact on me. Weathervanes seemed to be just a very natural extension of my toys. They allowed me the same sorts of freedom. They were both kinetic. Certainly the whirligigs were about play, you know, and movement and fun and animation. So I started just extending the toy ideas over, doing lots of experimentation, and I was thinking about toys still.

I'd remembered seeing a clown balancing toy, a clown on one toe with a rod and balls, and started playing with that idea. Traditional rod-and-pipe weathervane mountings are limiting. It only goes 360 degrees, and that's about its act, and it measures wind in one direction. I started playing with the idea of just going to a point in a small indentation and dropping the weight below the center of gravity. I didn't trust the system until we had, like, a tornado come nearby; it had 90-mile-an-hour winds, and the piece just went into the wind and stayed there and just rocked. This was a steel/Plexiglas piece that I had made. I used Plexiglas on the sail because I just loved the line that I had come up with and wanted to be able to see the line without interruption.

MS. DOUGLAS: Was this a figure?

MR. KINGTON: No. This was almost a return to straight form. Kind of an elegant, gestural line. The base was a piece of metal that created kind of a tripod, just a singular bend and rise, and the finger at the end of that base just went into a little indentation. That and the copper weathervanes were the first departures for me from the figurative work, as well as employing my balancing system.

The work was so new-well, let's see. Nordness bought two pieces for the Objects: USA. One was one of the airplanes, the iron ones, and another was a silver car that actually was stolen at the next showplace it went to. He replaced it with something else; I don't remember what. But working in iron, it was just, like, there was a lot of acceptance. Very few people were doing it. It was very new as a medium, and my work received a lot of attention.

MS. DOUGLAS: I wanted to ask you about that. When you were describing how you were building up a shop at the university, were your colleagues aware that you were working in this material, in this field that had not been in the school before?

MR. KINGTON: Yeah, because that second generation, not the Smith-Thomas generation, but our next generation of people, Lechtzin, Skoogfors, Seppä, Fenster-that whole next group-we kind of networked together and stayed in some communication. I guess that increased in '68. Phil Morton provided the leadership in forming SNAG, putting together a metal organization. I think NCECA [National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts] started first, and then SNAG came. So that really put us into communication. They all knew what I was doing in ferrous metal.

At the first meeting we had in Chicago, which was probably late '68, early '69, there were about 14 of us who were able to come, and everybody was sharing what they were doing with everybody else. And I started showing these-well, the tail end of the toys. I also did a couple large bronze castings of pull toys. One of them is in the collection at St. Paul Arts Center, which is now the Minnesota Museum of Art. It was forecasting the big iron toys-I talked to them, told them what I was doing with the iron, and Ron Pearson said, "You know, I've really always wanted to do iron," and everybody said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah."

The event that occurred here in Carbondale in 1970 was the first blacksmith workshop in the country. First of all, it was very difficult to find books on ironwork and working iron in this country. They were all out of press. This university, at least, didn't have much in the collection. I was able to find different things which I found very stimulating. And in November of '69-this was right before the SNAG conference in the spring of 1970 in the St.

Paul-Minneapolis area-I was working at the table in the kitchen, probably doing some waxwork, and Charles Kuralt came on TV with his *On The Road*. It was billed as "The First and Last Great Blacksmith," something-or-other get-together.

Alex Bealer, who had a public relations advertising agency in Atlanta, had a hobby of going out and talking with people in rural areas, and then writing books on country carpentry, country furniture, and he had gotten interested in blacksmithing. And through interviewing these three old blacksmiths, he put together a lot of information and had just published a book. The old blacksmiths sat for Charles and talked about the demise of blacksmithing, the last of it. And they were all in their late 70s and 80s, and they told stories about blacksmiths and the importance of the role that smiths played in the development of the U.S.

I wrote down the title of the book and Alex's name. I had students from Chicago, and one was going home. I asked him to go by a bookstore and see if he could get me one, and he did. And then I traced Alex down through his publisher and talked to him. I got some money, and asked him, and he agreed to come and do a workshop.

I think it was May of '70. While we were at SNAG, just in general conversation with a couple people, I told them about the workshop coming up. So instead of just having an event just for the students and for me, why, I had guests. Lechtzin came in from Philadelphia, Ron Pearson from Rochester, and Mike Jerry, I guess, was still in Wisconsin, and Fenster from Wisconsin, and Ebendorf brought 12 students up from Atlanta, from Athens. So the workshop went from, like, 12 people to about 60 people. Of course, it was up to me, then, to scour around to find forges and tools and a site.

Actually Lois Moran picked up on it some way. The university had a film production unit.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right. The program in communications.

MR. KINGTON: Lois wanted to record the workshop. So I put her and the director of that program together, and they came up with enough money to make a film. Have you ever seen that film?

MS. DOUGLAS: I haven't.

MR. KINGTON: It's a stitch.

MS. DOUGLAS: I'll have to get a copy of it and check it out.

MR. KINGTON: Well, I've got a copy you can take with you and then send back to me. I've got a video of it. Fred Woell made a video of it when I showed it. He wanted me, the last time I was at Haystack [Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, ME], to bring it up to show, and then he asked to keep the film and made a video. It's not a very good video, but it's all there.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it was, like, a 16-millimeter film?

MR. KINGTON: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. DOUGLAS: And then he had a videotape made of it?

MR. KINGTON: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] An interesting group of metalsmiths are recorded in it. Richard Mawdsley had just started teaching at ISU [Illinois State University], and he's kind of in the background of the film and looks like he's a junior high student. And who else-Mike Jerry, Fred, Ron, Bob, Stanley. Somebody else came in. I had people from, actually, East Coast to Colorado. David LaPlantz came, too. And it was a stitch. I mean, nobody knew what they were doing. It was such a different experience for them working hot metal; it was so plastic. Everyone was excited.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you were teaching and leading the workshop, and this Alex-

MR. KINGTON: Well, Bealer was leading the workshop because, even though he was public relations person, he knew more than I did.

The interesting thing about the film is it undeniably records the birth of a medium, or the renaissance of a medium, into the American craft movement. These old men several months before were bemoaning the death of blacksmithing, and then you get all these academics, the teachers, students together, you have this enthusiasm, and it was really fun. Don't let me forget to give you that video, because it's a very, very interesting document. Every established metalsmith who attended had some effect on the blacksmithing movement.

[Ivan] Bailey was a student of Ebendorf. And Ron was relocating to Deer Isle, Maine. He got his production studio set up, and then built a blacksmith shop.

In some way Peter Ross, who now is the director, or the head demonstrator blacksmith in Colonial Williamsburg, ends up leasing the space from Ron when he's a young man and then goes to Williamsburg to take that operation over. And after Peter, a guy by the name of Doug Wilson leased the shop from Ron and has for a number of years.

Fred Fenster set up a small facility, and he had two students, Eric Mobius and Bruce Lepage. And they've lived on their skills ever since they graduated. They have done well. I guess they completed undergraduate degrees and just started working, but maybe they got masters'.

Bruce and Eric had influenced one young student, Bernie Hosey, who started hanging out in their shop, and he ended up coming here to graduate school. He's one of the finest architectural blacksmiths that you can imagine. He also makes large fabricated sculpture. He did a piece for the Alaskan Arts Council that was, like, 40 tons of steel, 40-some-foot high. He's a loner. He works by himself. He's a Harley man. Can't stand to have anybody around him when he works. Big guy. And he's this old hippie who just makes this great stuff.

Mike Jerry at Syracuse had an interdisciplinary master's program-think it's just an M.S.-in product design, but people have specialized in a particular craft area or medium. I can never remember Jim's last name, but he's done very well as a smith out in the Seattle area.

All the people who were teaching at the university level experimented with blacksmithing but not a lasting commitment. Fred tried iron; Stanley wore himself out working iron. Michael did a bunch of utensils, kitchen utensils, and other containers; but they all touched somebody. Their students and these people committed themselves to blacksmithing. The blacksmiths' workshop played an important role in the rebirth of the medium.

Bealer then called me about a year later. He had found a demonstration site in Lumpkin, Georgia, an historical farm, and asked me to help him set up a second conference and asked me to be the program director for it. We got the word out, and we had about 60 people attend again. This time, it was mainly academia-students and faculty. The second Lumpkin event a year later included people who were not academically associated, maybe a half; and the other half were students and faculty from other places. Elliott Pujol, a past graduate of SIU, was teaching at Tyler, and he brought eight students down to it. And other faculty that hadn't been to the '70 SIU event started coming in with students. And, of course, I took students down.

John Allgood was the head blacksmith demonstrator from Colonial Williamsburg. I invited him to demonstrate. A knife maker by the name of Bill Moran, who was the only blade maker in the U.S. that knew how to make pattern steel, which is part of the research that we later did here-and I'll talk about that later-came. There were several other people. Oh, Bob Ebendorf's-[tape ends midsentence].

[BEGIN TAPE 4 SIDE A.]

MS. DOUGLAS: You were talking about Ivan Bailey?

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. Ivan Bailey was an older student, and after the 1970 SIU blacksmith workshop, he became very interested in iron. He started going over from Athens to Atlanta and working at the little forge that Alex had set up. University of Georgia had an exchange program, and so he ultimately ended up being the first American to go to Germany to study blacksmithing. He was there for a year, maybe a little bit longer. And when he came back, I don't quite know how he made the connection, but he found a benefactor who gave him all the financial backing he needed to open a forge in Savannah. Also Ivan ended up marrying Alex's daughter. And Ivan has been working ever since he got back from Germany.

We had a different group of people at Lumpkin. The workshop was very successful and it brought people together. There was a time that I believed the old blacksmiths were right, that blacksmithing was dead, that nobody was doing it. But that was not true. There were blacksmiths out there working, and the workshops were pulling them together, providing a network.

Bea Hensley, for instance, in Spruce Pine, North Carolina. He had apprenticed to Daniel Boone VII. And Bea and Boone and one other guy made a lot of the work on the restoration work in Colonial Williamsburg. Shutter dogs, hardware, fireplace hardwares, house hardwares, special nails, all kinds of iron work. It was a long project. All three of them, being from that Appalachian region and having some isolation, almost had direct linkage to colonial ironwork. They were still doing that same sort of work. You know, the quilts of the region haven't changed that much; the baskets haven't changed that much. And so they retained that kind of tradition, although Boone was truly a genius.

From what I understand, he did work in the style of European traditions as well as American tradition. He did a little bit of deco. He made a scale locomotive with all the railroad track so he could have something to ride around on. He did marvelous work, from what I understand.

And Tom Bredlow had been making work for the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., which had been almost exclusively a Yellin project. I don't even know the story of how Tom got involved in blacksmithing. He had a Ph.D. in physics. He's a real loner. He's a cranky guy. But he had done a number of commissions for the Cathedral. Very few people knew who he was or what he was doing. He was out there in Tucson just banging iron and sending it to D.C., and doing some wonderful work.

I had run into Tom-no, Frank Turley-because he started advertising his school in the late '60s. He was teaching blacksmithing in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I don't know how I found that out. And because of my interest, when I found out about it, I called to talk to him a number of times, would ask him questions. I actually got a grant to go out and study one summer, and then couldn't go, for family reasons, and sent a talented undergraduate student out to the program in my place.

There was a guy in Philadelphia that was working. You know, they really didn't know about each other. And I think that was the year ABANA [Artist Blacksmith's Association of North America] was formed with 14 founding members.

MS. DOUGLAS: Was that formed at one of these Lumpkin gatherings?

MR. KINGTON: Yes, either the first or the second Lumpkin workshop. I don't quite remember the history. A young guy, Dimitri Gerakaris, showed up. I think it was the second meeting in Lumpkin. We were all at June's Café. Now, Lumpkin, Georgia, is an absolute stitch. It's right in the middle of cotton and peanut Georgia country. And it's, like, the beach. I don't know how far it is from the coast, but it's still beach country there, very sandy soil. And the June bugs were out, and they have a breed of dog called a June hound, which is about the ugliest dog you've ever seen.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: If you look at one and he catches your eye, he falls on his back immediately with his legs up in the air. He just gives up.

MS. DOUGLAS: Submissive.

MR. KINGTON: Just totally submissive. June's Café. So it was a real June-it was not the month of June, but just a real June experience.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: And I stayed at June's the first year. Well, June, she had a little motel. And I think probably the bottom of the shower had rusted out sometime in the '20s-

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, God.

MR. KINGTON: -so you stood in mud to take a shower. [Laughs.] But it was a great experience.

And Dimitri, he was self-trained. He had been a student at Dartmouth. Dartmouth originally was a school set up to educate Native American Indians and teach them trade. And there was a blacksmith shop there, and Dimitri found out about it, got the keys, and just started working when he was an undergraduate student.

MS. DOUGLAS: Now, we're talking about Dartmouth College?

MR. KINGTON: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. DOUGLAS: In the Ivy League?

MR. KINGTON: In the Ivy League. When it was established, it had a big service component for Indians.

MS. DOUGLAS: Wow.

MR. KINGTON: Dimitri was absolutely thrilled to have somebody to talk with. And there was a urologist there who had gotten very interested in blacksmithing. He invited everybody to come over to Greenville, South Carolina, for the next workshop, and he set things up the next year. I wasn't able to go because I probably was covered up in SNAG at the time.

And then the following year the conference site moved to Charleston, Greenville, I think, drew about 70 people; both of the Lumpkin get-togethers had about 60 people. Increasingly, there were less academic people represented and more people who were interested in it as a profession or working in the medium. And I think maybe Charleston, they got 90 to 100 people.

MS. DOUGLAS: Now, were they being billed as ABANA conferences at this point?

MR. KINGTON: Yes, ABANA was really almost a deep southern organization. I was on the board of directors, but most of the members were from Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. It was an emerging organization; it was not a national organization at that point. What made it truly national was the Carbondale in '76 conference. Conference attendance had been increasing from 90 to 100 to, like, 490 in Carbondale in 1976, with people from England and Italy showing up, from all over, Canada, 39, 40 states in the U.S. It went gangbusters. And membership of ABANA jumped to 500, then within a year up to 1,000. Today it's 5,000.

MS. DOUGLAS: So this conference in '76 was hosted here at Carbondale.

MR. KINGTON: Yes. I had great graduate students and a really terrific group of undergraduate students at the time. Jim Wallace, Daryl Meier, and Bob Griffith started pushing to have the conference in Carbondale. They were all graduate students. Daryl was an M.S. or M.A. student. Daryl does not have a background in art, and he found out in the College of Education you could build a special degree for teaching community colleges. So he invented this degree so he could just work in the blacksmith shop and learn along with these other guys.

Wally had an art background. He came from Colorado. And today Jim Wallace is the director of the National Ornamental Metal Museum [Memphis, TN]. Bob Griffith came out of Tyler School of Art and maybe was the last-no, Bill Leth was the last one who got an iron experience before Tyler shut down its program. Griff was-all three were definitely committed to the medium. And at that point I had installed a 50-pound [little] Giant [hammer] in the shop and had a couple of coal forges in, as well as a gas forge in there. The shop was pretty much tooled up. It was a good two-student shop, three with students; it was really tight, and graduate students in the other media wanted to work. So the smithy was a busy place.

The students got Evert Johnson, who was the curator of art with the museum, interested in the idea, and Evert provided the leadership on grant writing. He got two NEA grants, one for exhibitions, one for the conference, and actually hired Jim Wallace as a full-time employee for a year. He had to quit school to do all of this. Wally did some of the grant writing, and he learned a lot about what he's doing today at that time. They solicited money from steel companies, coal companies, John Deere, because John Deere was a blacksmith originally. And I think they pulled in about $240,000 in grants and gifts.

The exhibition was a historical survey. Of course, '76 was the bicentennial year. So they curated a group of historical works from the Mint, Lancaster Museum, as well as museums all over the country. The other part of the exhibition was a contemporary survey; what was being done in 1976, and who was doing what. That part was juried. Paul Smith and I juried that portion. It was an exhibition primarily to inform people about the history of iron and current activity in the medium.

[Tape is paused.]

Paul liked the exhibition so much that he told Lloyd Herman about it. They proposed the exhibition loan time be extended, and it ended up going to New York and then Washington, D.C., for openings and very successful reviews.

ABANA had a newsletter at the time, and through SNAG and ACC, we did some of the exhibition and conference promotion. We were anticipating 200, maybe 250, attendants, and we had 490. A lot of people just showed up for the conference.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs] It was like Woodstock of the blacksmiths' association.

MR. KINGTON: Oh, yeah, it was. I got a telephone call the day before everything started from Marion, Illinois.

MS. DOUGLAS: Down the road.

MR. KINGTON: Yes. And this guy said, "I'm from Nova Scotia. I've been hitchhiking for seven days to get here. I am so tired. Can somebody come and get me?"

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: It was amazing.

MS. DOUGLAS: Where did you put everybody up? In the dorms?

MR. KINGTON: No. The university has a summer camp called Little Grassy, or Touch of Nature, located at Little Grassy Lake. And they have some primitive cabins and two very finished, heated buildings. There is a state park nearby for camping, and they could take up to 300 people. We had people in town lodgings, camping out at the lake, camping at the state park and all over the place at Little Grassy. I had to make arrangements at the last

minute to feed an extra 125 or 130 people. They just kept showing up.

The time was right, the mood was right. Everything was good. We set up three demonstration arenas. As we met more people, we heard about other people. Turley was a demonstrator; Bredlow was a demonstrator. Wally was aware of Francis Whitaker, who had a blacksmith shop in Aspen, Colorado. I don't know how we got-I think Richard Wattenmaker, he was the director of a museum, I believe, in Toronto. Wally found out that he was a collector. Richard wanted to be there, and he was invited to talk about the history of European iron.

A very important person who advised the students' research in pattern steel was Cyril Stanley Smith, who was a professor at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology]. He worked on the Manhattan Project, was the author of 50 or 60 books on metallurgy and metallography. He was also a speaker. I found out about him two ways. One was from a catalogue of an exhibition of iron objects held at St. Thomas University that was sponsored by the de Menil Museum in Houston. He had written an introduction to the exhibition. In '64, when I was in New York for the World Craft Council meeting, I was rummaging through the ACC library, and I came across a book of his called *A History of Metallography* [University of Chicago Press, 1960]. I was desperate for any information. So I borrowed it. He ended up being a consultant when we got into the Damascus research.

The three students I mentioned were the research team. Dr. Smith was elderly. He flew in in the morning, intending to be there doing his conference lectures during the day and then to fly out that evening or the next morning early. He ended up staying two more days. He really got so hung up in the event.

MS. DOUGLAS: And this was the Smith from MIT?

MR. KINGTON: Cyril Stanley Smith, yeah. There was also a demonstrator by the name of Slim Spurling from Colorado, and I'm sure there are a couple others that I can't think of right now. We had three demonstration sites; it was a blacksmiths' Woodstock. I mean, people were going nuts. They were going absolutely ape over this whole thing.

At our final dinner, I made a short speech, you know, "Thanks for coming" and all that. "Incidentally, you know, all these sponsors who made this possible, if you could find the time, write NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] and tell them how you feel about the way the government spent their money for this." Fifteen people stopped in Washington, D.C., on their way home and walked into the NEA office. Slim Spurling from Colorado drove to D.C. before returning to Colorado.

Who was the director then? Was it Aleanna Kanorly? Maybe she was there then. She called me and she said, "We're getting all these dirty-faced, grubby guys walking in and telling us what a great experience they had in Carbondale." Slim drove to Washington, D.C., walked in in his dirty jeans. He said, "I just want you to know that I've had the most life-transforming experience I've ever had and I want you to know why. Your money was well spent."

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: It was amazing. It was absolutely amazing. So ABANA then truly went national. We started getting all kinds of European, Japanese, and Italian memberships just from the publication.

MS. DOUGLAS: What did it do for Carbondale? Because if you hadn't been known already for a blacksmithing program, you sure were at that point.

MR. KINGTON: Student applications for the program increased. We had always limited enrollment at the graduate level, and few undergraduate metal majors focused on iron. Carbondale became a clearinghouse. I got telephone calls at 3:00 in the morning: "Where can I get this? How can I do this?" It was a very crazy several years of being, kind of, the information center. People would come by and see how the shop was laid out, or drive 200 miles out of their way just to come by and say hello and talk.

There was a travel agent in town that used to arrange for my tickets to New York. She also led travel groups. She was in northern Scotland with a tour group, and they heard some pounding and ambled over toward it. It was a blacksmith working. They started chatting, and he asked where she was from. She said, "Carbondale, Illinois." He said, "Oh, yeah, that's where Brent Kington is, isn't it?" It's like that kind of thing.

We had a lot of gifts for the conference. We had six tons of steel left over that hadn't been used, with no place to put it, so we put it in a hallway. We were sharing space with the College of Education. And that made people very unhappy, to have steel taking up half of the hallway. A lot of complaining, "Kick them out of the building" type of thing. The provost of the university then was a very, very fine lady, and so it was like, "What are we going to do?" I said, "Well, just give us some space. We need storage space. We need more academic studio space." We were also going through an accreditation review with NASAD, the National Association of Schools of Art and Design. The chairman then told me we had an opportunity to establish a blacksmithing M.F.A. degree

and to establish it as a specialization at the B.F.A. level. So we did that.

Before the conference and during the conference, I had a reporter from the

New York Times call and talk with me for an hour. The Associated Press, United Press, *Christian Science Monitor* [Boston, MA], *Chicago Tribune*, and *Post-Dispatch* [St. Louis, MO] all contacted me. These were all telephone calls-interviews-lasting 45 minutes to an hour and 15 minutes. Articles appeared all over the world. The *Post-Dispatch* sent a reporter down. He was just supposed to come down for the afternoon and get some coverage information. He spent two days. And I think we got a two-page color article in the *Post-Dispatch*. The same thing happened with the *Chicago Tribune*. The local newspaper had absolutely no idea what was going on. Never even mentioned it. People started sending us articles from Tokyo and Prague and Italy, England, this whole business. It was the craziest thing.

We mushroomed then. You know, of course the administration loves attention, and they weren't about to send my hallway iron to the junkyard; they were going to try to fix it. They ended up giving me the space where we are now. I don't know if you've seen that space, but the shop increased by four times, if not five times the space. And we went after Kresge grants. The chairman of the department provided the leadership on that. Normally, Kresge does not grant to public schools, just private schools and other not-for-profit organizations. But the case was made for the uniqueness of the program, and they gave, I think it was, maybe $220,000 for the university to match. So, power upgrading, new equipment, everything came into place for the best university blacksmithing facility in the United States.

In '78 we received another NEA grant to hold another blacksmiths' workshop with Whitaker, Bredlow, and Turley returning, as well as three other smiths and 12 young emerging smiths.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you would have a session and invite people, and then another session?

MR. KINGTON: No. Altogether there were six blacksmiths who were established. We were altogether, six smiths, and then 12 young, emerging people. We worked together and exchanged ideas for two weeks. That was a big grant. NEA paid all the transportation, lodging, food, materials, and supplies. It was a great event.

That was the last event in Carbondale, because I was just totally getting burned out. If you look at the time-we'll talk about organizations later-but I had been highly involved politically in SNAG and then ABANA and doing the conference sort of things. It was just, like, this has got its own momentum, it's not going to die, it will go on. I can slow down.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, I did want to get back to asking you what your artwork was like during all this time when the snowball was happening.

MR. KINGTON: It was very eclectic. I was taking lots of chances, trying lots of ideas. There wasn't anything I wouldn't try. You know, I loved my fingerprints in the wax, so I fingerprinted myself and blew those up, and etched hammer faces so I could fingerprint the steel. I made stuff that looked like wet noodles. I was doing the toys in steel. I was trying very quiet things in line as opposed to extremely baroque and very, very busy work. Forging copper, forging stainless steel, trying to forge bronze and not finding the right alloys, not realizing there was a forgeable alloy, and brass, and not realizing that anyone should never try to forge brass. Testing fuels, buying, acquiring equipment. Learning to weld.

The biggest challenge was scale and increasing scale, and then finding a way to put my signature on my work. You know, I was going from the copper weathervanes to the Plexiglas weathervanes, with a different fulcrum system, to, like, *Uncle Sam* and *Liberty*. And one of your questions was about, do you ever do political statements. Those were the only two political statements I ever made.

MS. DOUGLAS: Your *Uncle Sam* weathervane?

MR. KINGTON: And *Liberty*.

MS. DOUGLAS: And the *Liberty* weathervane.

MR. KINGTON: And, you know, a few-

MS. DOUGLAS: Those were done around the bicentennial?

MR. KINGTON: They were bicentennial pieces. I was in an invitational exhibition of weathervanes and whirligigs in California. It was a big group, Calder and Ricky and some other people. Early American weathervanes were also included. I was asked to do a piece in celebration of the bicentennial. You remember the time, Vietnam, the social conditions, feminism. A lot of things were in flux. But politically, I mean, our government was being looked at in very, very suspicious ways.

MS. DOUGLAS: Nixon.

MR. KINGTON: Oh, yeah. So I said no. And then I really started looking at folk art and started thinking about assuming some of those images and reworking them. Some of those pieces still had paint on them, on various areas of the work, while it was gone from other areas. They had marvelous patinas.

And *Uncle Sam*, of course, and *Liberty* were both very patriotic folk images-[tape ends midsentence].

[BEGIN TAPE 4 SIDE B.]

MR. KINGTON: I got tickled one night in the middle of the night; I just kind of woke up and I knew what I wanted to do, the scene of Fagin whipping the kids into a frenzy to go out and to be pickpockets, and his totally evil, you know, [Nixonlike]-yes, type of image. And so it was like, okay, *Uncle Sam* is Fagin, and he's doing a toe dance on the world. I put a spear in his hand, and almost put the American flag in distress, but it's not. It's upside down, the point at one end, flag at the other end. And then I put a bald eagle that looks more like a hostile parakeet on the end of the flagstaff.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: I had developed all the skills I needed playing around with people banks I made for Christmas gifts and the Malcolm Knapp portrait and so forth. So that all came together for me. I used Rustoleum paints to do kind of faux-rust areas and put detail only where I wanted it with acrylic paints.

What's important about a lot of the folk weathervane pieces is that they were painted, but much of the time they were viewed so far away, you couldn't see the detail, but you saw the graphics of the silhouette. That was very important to me. So I referred to images from different books. For instance, the American flag was not just a rectangle. All the white stripes were cut out. So you see a rectangle for the star ground, and the stripes. So no matter whether there is color or detail, it's still the American flag. It's the only flag in the world that has that configuration.

And then the figure-ground relationship of Fagin doing his toe dance, and there's no question but that's a spear, and that's got to be some sort of a bird on his hat, probably an eagle, and the feathers are ruffled. What is he doing a toe dance on? It's round, so it's got to be the world.

Then I made the *Liberty*. A lot of women participated in, and actually led soldiers, in the Revolutionary War, and in paintings a number of them, they have swords in their hands. Okay? A "Charge!"-type gesture. Well, mine really looks very much like a trollop. I made sure she had the beauty marks and so forth. On the skirt, you can still see just a little bit of pigment, enough to know there were some stripes, and then a bodice with some stars on it. She had the kind of crown that you see on the old images. She's holding a flag very heroically.

I treated the flag the same as the one in *Uncle Sam*, cut out all the white stripes. There was another kind of parrot/eagle on top of it. She was eight foot tall and *Uncle Sam* was about six foot tall. It was all just pierced sheet. Instead of using a jeweler's saw, I used a cutting torch. They were fun. They were a lot of fun to do.

MS. DOUGLAS: Where are those pieces today?

MR. KINGTON: A collector and his wife in Greenville, South Carolina, bought them. I can't remember his name. I did a presentation at the Vatican in Rome, and he came up afterwards and said, "My wife wants me to buy both of those; how much?" He wrote the check right then and there. I told him they were not pieces to put in the weather.

I sent them to him, and about three years later, he called me. "These are rusting." And I said, "Where are they?" He told me that they were outside. He said, "You've got to come and repaint them." And I said, "It's not going to do any good as long as they're outside. Tell me you're going to move them inside, and I will." A year later he called back, and he said, "You have to repaint these." He was a feisty guy. He had been a top sergeant in the marines. When he got out, he started a textile business and made tons of money. He was rough as a cob, and his wife was the finest lady I'd ever met. She was sweet, and very dignified.

Later he called me again and said, "You didn't come, so I just had them sandblasted and somebody else is going to paint them." I said, "Fine." I thought, you just blasted them, okay, so all the paint's gone. But all the graphics are there. [Laughs.] My kids nearly went through the ceiling. I mean, they were furious.

MS. DOUGLAS: So much for-[laughs]-preserving the artist's hand.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. Right.

MS. DOUGLAS: You know, being in the museum business now, that story kind of makes me cringe.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: But, you know, art has a life of its own sometimes.

MR. KINGTON: Oh, yes. And it's just like, hey, a hundred years from now, if they are still around, there wouldn't be any paint on them anyway. So it's all there. There's no question about what my intent was. So the detail's gone, sure. Anyway, they were great fun. But those are the only two political statements I ever made.

That was '76; I did some other work. Then in '77, things started clicking for me. The kinetic system I had come up with was just making more and more sense. I had a sabbatical coming up and was going to have time to work, but I still didn't have a consistent image to work with.

Seventy-eight was a very, very cold winter. The first day on sabbatical, I walked through 30 inches of snow up to the shop, built a fire, stayed 30 minutes, came down and drank coffee. Up, back, up, back. And I was totally ashamed of myself at the end of the day. So the bargain I made with myself was, tomorrow you go up at 8:00 and start working. If you can't pick the hammer up, you've got to sit on a cold anvil till lunchtime. Then you can come back down and have something to eat.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: Then you go up and you sit on that anvil. And you do that until you get busy.

MS. DOUGLAS: That sounds like Richard Thomas again.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. So within a week, I was working, and then the ideas started flowing. That's when I did the weathervane series, in '78, and some other smaller work that I sold. I didn't show much, but it became the precursor to the Icarus series in 1981. It was just that I kept working on the large pieces, and then would stop and rethink the work a little bit, and continue. I guess I made 32 or 33 pieces in five months.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, to get back to what you were just saying about the weathervane series from '78, I'll just describe those or let you do it. That's when you were using-creating a linear form with forging stock, tapering it, and then putting a-

MR. KINGTON: A large disk and a small disk.

MS. DOUGLAS: -a disk. The disk would be the piece that catches the wind.

MR. KINGTON: Right. They were about-

MS. DOUGLAS: Just describe it for people that are listening to this.

MR. KINGTON: The weathervanes were about implied motion and real motion. My intention was that as the pieces moved, space opened and closed, and it never appeared the same. Or when the viewer found himself in a different relationship to the piece from one time to the next, it almost appeared like a different piece; the gesture would change. It was about lyricism.

When I say implied motion, the forged line implied movement-and changed to the viewer when wind moved the piece. It was beginning to develop themes, symbols. The large disk, in my mind, became the sun; the small disk was the moon. It was talking about planetary, universal relationships. The work was about relationships of form and the movement, motion in space, and line and how line looks at different times, from a variety of viewing positions.

MS. DOUGLAS: You actually have a real axis in those pieces. Talking about the moon and the sun symbolism, the fulcrum point serves as an axis for the piece to rotate on.

MR. KINGTON: Right.

MS. DOUGLAS: And that fulcrum point, you had used it before.

MR. KINGTON: I'd used it before on the Plexiglas-steel pieces that I was doing. I did some other work that just played in the wind that ultimately evolved into the Icarus series, because they did not intend to do anything but play, to move. And, of course, the advantage of that particular fulcrum-point mechanism was not only rotating 360 degrees, whatever it is, but also included pitch and yaw. I could make the work dance. So that the weathervanes not only rotated, they would bounce back and forth and rock side to side. And so I started finding that I could orchestrate motion.

The first one nearly drove me nuts. By the time I got through the end of the series, I could predict within an

eighth of an inch the balance point of the piece and where I had to punch the hole. I always thought about it as a weight scale. Put 10 pennies here and 10 pennies here, and things were in balance. Then what attracted me to that was the fact that it could work with a large form and small form, creating illusions that would look like it shouldn't balance, but it did. And so I had created those tensions in my work. The fact that they just wouldn't come off their fulcrum point unless somebody purposely knocked them off pleased me.

MS. DOUGLAS: Because they were so heavy.

MR. KINGTON: Yes, they were very stable. They worked like a sailing ship if you put a sea anchor on it; it would just come into the wind and rock.

We're going to get some noise. The grass is being cut. Let me shut the windows. We want to keep the pollen out.

[Tape recorder is paused.]

MS. DOUGLAS: [Resuming.] You were talking about the weathervane fulcrum point.

MR. KINGTON: The fulcrum point is very stable. We had a tornado pass nearby. The winds were clocked at 93 [mph] here. And the only piece that came down was a piece in which the pedestal was not anchored in the ground. But all the other pieces in the yard just moved into the wind to the point of least resistance and just danced. I wasn't here. I was trapped in a building, in the basement, at the university. And my wife and kids watched the work out the window the whole time.

MS. DOUGLAS: One thing I wanted to ask you about this fulcrum-point system. It's a real exploitation of the material, to let you know what the material is capable of doing.

MR. KINGTON: The strength of the steel can carry-[a dog in the room is barking at the lawn mower outside]. [Addressing the dog]: Louis, you hush up.

This is going to be a good background.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right. [Laughs.] A lot of metal won't do that.

MR. KINGTON: No. And steel has the strength to support a lot of mass, and it has the wearability to stand up to that kind of abrasion over a long period of time.

MS. DOUGLAS: It's like a ball-and-socket joint, except-

MR. KINGTON: Exactly.

MS. DOUGLAS: -the ball is minuscule. It's been forged out to a very small thickness.

MR. KINGTON: It's a very small, rounded area.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right.

MR. KINGTON: It's just a line that finally ends up like a half of a ball bearing, just on the very end, with a matching negative cup in the top piece.

MS. DOUGLAS: But the top piece is much thicker in diameter, the stalk is, or whatever.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. I was working with one-and-one-half-inch-round mild steel rod at that time. And the sheet material was, oh, it was like 18-gauge steel sheet. They were all gas welded together. The fillit, the way the line comes off of the disk forms, was very, very important to me. That transition was very, very important.

MS. DOUGLAS: Now, the other thing-I wanted you to describe the Icarus pieces. You've mentioned those. And just physically, they are sort of a disk-shaped face, implied face, and then it has two wings, almost, coming out behind it.

MR. KINGTON: Wings, legs. Actually, they are kind of like two arms. One becomes the ball for the sockets. In those, I had to reverse the system that I used in the weathervanes. On the Icarus series, I put the ball into the concave retainer on the base. There are differences in motion when you orchestrate that way. And, of course, scale was less important to me on those. They were smaller than the weathervanes.

MS. DOUGLAS: They're still fairly large tabletop-

MR. KINGTON: Well, yeah. They're, like, 40, 42, 43 inches, as opposed to six foot.

[The dog is barking at the lawn mower, and the recorder is turned off. Taping resumes the following day.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Today is May the fourth. We're continuing in our interview with Brent Kington.

And Brent, yesterday we left off talking about your Icarus series, and I wanted to ask about a couple things. One was the painted surfaces on those pieces, and then also that the face on those pieces looks like a bird face. Is that a relationship to your earlier work, the toys?

MR. KINGTON: It's referring to the bird, the nose on the figures and toys.

But also, I've always been extremely interested in ethnic tribal masks. In just about any museum that I go to that has tribal collections, I'll spend time to study and wonder at the mystery of what the function was, what it represents. I'm equally interested in African, Oceanic, and Native American. I like the lack of symmetry in the Algonquin or Iroquois masks-they're very crazy kinds of faces with very large, bent noses.

And the painting is influenced, again, in the facial area, by Native American masks, but I'm also referring to masks throughout the world. In some cases I use multiple eyes, and I guess I'm referring to Northwest Coast masks, which in some cases do have multiple eyes; in other cases there's a mask inside of a mask inside of a mask, and as these open up, they have different kinds of faces. Farther north, the Eskimo masks have snow goggles. I remembered all of these things. The painting on the surface is referring to Aborigines' body painting with kaolin on black skin. I've seen *National Geographic* photographs of young men going through puberty rites with this kind of beautiful hand-smeared faces and body painting; and again, Native American body painting. My work is referring to many cultures.

I used the title Icarus because it's a name, a word that is a symbol for man flying. Of course, I'm not really referring to the fact that he disobeys his father and gets too close to the sun and does the stupid teenage typical trip and melts his wings and falls to his death. I'm referring to the persistence of tribal early man and his persistent dream of flight. And it's almost a continuation of that thought that I referred to in my silver air machines, Icarus to da Vinci to Wright brothers. I'm referring to that and referring to a lot of cultures and times and places with the work. And, of course, it is very, very important to me that they were kinetic and that it looked like flight, or that they could take on motion. There are four elements, generally, two short ones, one going into the fulcrum point.

MS. DOUGLAS: Elements. You mean like big-

MR. KINGTON: Four extrusions. Two long ones that sometimes look like legs, other times they have wing gesture, and in some other cases, the two small elements have more of a wing gesture and the long ones look like legs. I just played back and forth with the lines.

It was a fun series for me to do. And I had a very, very good response to them.

In fact, I had letters from people that loved them. There's one guy in New York City that put his out on the patio every morning and took it in every night like it was a cat or a parrot or something. Some people would absolutely not put the piece outside, and other people would put it outside. The care that I requested they give it was, well, take care of it like you would a car, and wax it two or three times a year and it will hold up. If you don't, you know-

MS. DOUGLAS: It will start rusting.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. And, of course, the painting was coming from all that fun I had on the Knapp piece and *Liberty* and the banks and *Uncle Sam* and all of that. It was an extension of it. Actually, Lonnie Smith thought I was dyeing the material. The material process was not particularly important to me; it was the idea. And just using bare iron or rusting it or whatever, you know, wouldn't have done it. I needed more information on the surface. So the pieces became the canvas. And there certainly is a history of painted sculpture. We know that. So I was just continuing that history, also.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well also, just to talk a little bit about finish, it's necessary to put some type of finish on iron, or it will rust. The traditional finish is a black one, right?

MR. KINGTON: Well, essentially, most people today are working with a contemporary material, mild steel, which has carbon in it. Black iron is a much more durable material in the environment. In fact, there are two pillars in India-one of them is 24 foot, and the other one, I think, exceeds that, that were made 2,000, 2,500 years ago. It's amazing, the industry and the technology the Indians had very, very early on. These are, as I understand it, round iron plates that are stacked and forge welded together to get that height. And as I understand it also, New Delhi is very, very humid, but these pieces are almost pristine.

A funny side story. When I first got interested, I started looking for sources of material in iron. When you talk about pure iron, pure iron is a stringy material, mixed in silicon in between the iron strands. It's almost like rope. In fact, if you take a rod and you cut it halfway through and you break it, you'll see the strands of iron. It will expose the strands where you make the break-not the cut, but where you make the break.

I started calling around, and different companies kept telling me, "Well, we just sold our inventory." And the next place, "We just sold our inventory. I believe it was to Ryerson Steel." They finally told me where they were selling it. And so I called and asked to talk with Mr. Ryerson, the president. I told him my background. I said, "Every time I call someplace, you've bought all the material. I'm just calling you to see if I can buy some of the material." He said, "Yeah, I own it all." It was like he had purchased half a million tons of iron.

I told him what I wanted, and he said, "Oh, sure, no problem." He said, "The price has gone up." And I said, "How much?" And he said, "Well, for you, it's doubled, but it's going to go up about five times." And I said, "Can you tell me what's happening?" He said, "Yeah. The production in Europe of black iron has ceased." And he said, "Cities like New York City specify it for all the metalwork, all the ironwork that goes into the subways and sewer systems." And he said, "I cornered the world market and I'm going to make a lot of money." [Laughs.]

So it's specified as a material for underground use in New York because it lasts much longer than mild steel does. And, of course, it was used historically for ship chains and anchors; it just is a much more durable material.

A lot of people resort to a lot of different paints to protect their steel-polyurethane, oil-base paints, lacquers. Steel needs an undercoat for most paints to adhere to the material better. I like paint. I have used a formula of mixing a black Rustoleum with brown Rustoleum satin paint and then mixing graphite into it. And then I can wipe that out and it has a metallic look to it.

Personally, I don't mind my work rusting. It's the nature of the material. I have pieces that I made in 1970 that are still out and around the yard, and it's still in good shape-yeah, if you bury steel and you dig it up 10 years later, it's really been changed; it's really been modified. But if mild steel gets wet from the rain and then air dries, it can develop a very heavy rust grain on it. It's just a matter of brushing it down.

On the Icarus series, I undercoated with Rustoleums, and I used gessoes in some cases and then acrylics and/or oils. In other cases, I just painted directly on rusted steel with gesso. After I allowed a dense rust to occur, I took all the large grain off, painted with gesso, and then put it back outside and let it age. And the rust has a tendency to create a color in the gesso, very beautiful browns and warm ivory tones. In fact, that piece outside the window has been allowed to go to an outrageous kind of condition, with rich iron oxide color tones.

Of course, I don't deal with the important weathering issues that a lot of people have to deal with as far as gates and fences and durability. I'm dealing with different ideas. In Europe they have some sort of paint that-I think, at least, it's paint, I've never found anybody who can tell me what it is. But it's almost like galvanizing, but it looks more like paint. It's a very, very durable surface. I've known some people who galvanize their work and then paint it.

And I had a student-[tape ends midsentence.]

[BEGIN TAPE 5 SIDE A.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Okay. You were talking about a student?

MR. KINGTON: He took a workshop with me. He's a business owner. He has a pretty big operation in Florida in ornamental ironwork. He's had a client in the Bahamas that specified that-and this was a very, very fancy, very large gates and fence forged in bronze. Another client specified a white nickel alloy material, just to avoid the rusting and no problems with cleanup and maintenance.

Samuel Yellin used linseed oils and, I believe, either peanut or banana oil on all of his work at the National Cathedral. I think he specified that it was to be wiped down with an oil once a year to protect that surface. I have used a mixture of 50-50 turpentine and linseed, which I use on wood also, and that dries out pretty nicely, and then you can wax on top of it. The people that I've seen use full-strength linseed undiluted, the surface ends up looking like honey's been spread on the surface.

MS. DOUGLAS: Gummy.

MR. KINGTON: Gummy-looking, and I just don't like it. I won't do that.

We did some research with metallizing bronze particles on top of iron, which is an industrial process that started way back in the '30s. The problem is that it's very porous, so once the surface is on, polyurethane or something

has to be painted into the porosity to seal it, or that just becomes a conduit to moisture.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you've been dealing with this issue all along in your ironwork.

MR. KINGTON: Right.

MS. DOUGLAS: And the painting, like you said, in the Icarus series, is more about the idea.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. It's not about preserving at all.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right. Well, what about the next body of work you did after Icarus?

MR. KINGTON: I handled many of the surfaces the same way in the Crosier series. Those pieces, though, were more about man's need to make ritual objects for office and station. A king has his scepter and crown, a bishop has a crook, or a crosier, a tribal chief, a staff, and sometimes you see a wand, a short-handled piece with some sort of hair that is, you know, a fan-type of object. I know somebody that has an 18-carat gold Rolex, and that's his status piece; for him, the watch represents attainment and status.

I titled the work Crosier. I had become interested in ritual objects-well, at Cranbrook, Thomas certainly gave everybody an orientation to liturgical work. It's been in my mind for a long time, ritual and spiritualism, the sacred. It kind of keeps flowing in and out in my themes of my work in a lot of ways. For instance, the flight theme, that's a spiritual thing, man becoming godlike. So I'd been thinking about it and started making what I called cruciforms and crosiers in study form.

The palette I used became much brighter than the Icarus series. I love a particular medieval blue and a particular red, and I used a yellow that was very, very bright, because I've seen those colors in medieval paintings. And I also started doing some gilding with gold and again referring to religious objects, but not any particular religion, with the intention that these also refer to objects of status and spiritualism in other ways. You know, "the Pharaoh is eternal," has an afterlife.

You saw the Crosier in the other room yesterday. When the idea finally became refined, it's like, yeah, it's a stick figure. I'm referring to pictographs in a lot of flat work done by primitive people, or early people. Definitely it's a male figure. There's a hip mechanism. And then from the waist, there's a very, very long gesture. If you look at what should be arms and a head, it almost becomes a bird form. So it's like the transformation of human to spirit, or human to bird.

I also made several spin-off pieces that were celebration pieces. For instance, in '87 I was invited to teach in a University of Georgia-Cortona program. I'd been focusing on this work before I went, but the opportunity to be in Europe for three months, and particularly Italy, in and out of basilicas and museums, and see this overwhelming body of liturgical objects, the liturgical theme from the medieval to Caravaggio, you know, it was just a marvelous experience for me, reaffirming what I was thinking about and helping me refine those ideas.

We traveled to hill cities or to Florence every weekend. The bus would take students and faculty and drop them off. One of the places we went was Siena the day of the Palio. I had never seen so much pageantry in my life. It was totally unbelievable. And understanding the history of Palio, why the horse race was brought about-it's about neighborhood pride and neighborhood competitiveness-was enlightening. The costuming was absolutely gorgeous. I mean, the finest boots I'd ever seen, handsome boots that were just beautiful. And arms and armor and flag throwers and horses and their trappings were unbelievable.

And, of course, the horses were blessed. This race is the most violent thing I've ever seen. In fact, the press of the crowds was so horrific. I can't stand crowds; I can't stand having people touch me on four sides. We went to a little bar and sat and had cappuccino and watched the race on the TV. We saw it better than most people did anyway. Fights were breaking out all over the place, neighborhood fights, which is the reason the Palio started hundreds of years ago.

And so that piece came about because of the pageantry, and which also had religious status overtones to it.

This is a circular race, but at some point, a third of the way around, the rider lost his horse. The horse went into a wall, broke its leg and broke the rider's neck, and the race didn't stop.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh, no.

MR. KINGTON: This had to be the most violent event I ever experienced.

MS. DOUGLAS: And it was a horse race.

MR. KINGTON: Mm-hmm [affirmative], dating back, maybe, to the 11th century. Because the neighborhoods

were knocking people, each other, off because maybe they-for whatever reason, didn't get along with each other.

MS. DOUGLAS: Like feuds.

MR. KINGTON: Feuds, yes. So someone came up with the idea of a race to act as a safety valve. Neighborhoods invest alot of money into their horses. They find the finest riders. I don't think there's a saddle on the horse, only a bridle for control.

MS. DOUGLAS: Wow.

MR. KINGTON: But, I mean, their riding is serious stuff. So that kind of fit into the whole celebration thing I was wanting to include in my work.

MS. DOUGLAS: What does the word "crosier" mean?

MR. KINGTON: It's a bishop's crook. I'm referring to a shepherd's crosier, which is for herding sheep. And for a bishop, they become extremely ornate in the Catholic religion, and very, very beautiful, generally, metalwork, a wood staff, very, very ornate, oftentimes at a wealthy cathedral.

And the other thing is, at the end of the Icarus series, which must have been about '83-I may have pushed to '84-I'd been dealing with kinetics for 14 years. The work had to be on the horizontal to distribute weight. I had to deal with physics, physical issues to make this happen. And the Crosier series allowed me to go to the vertical axis.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right.

MR. KINGTON: And think about the vertical.

MS. DOUGLAS: And it was not kinetic.

MR. KINGTON: No. No, they were static pieces. They implied motion, but they were simply line, color, theme. I'd put a little bit of gold or a lot of gold in a particular place, and then I'd wipe it out and break it, so that it appeared more like what I was doing with *Liberty* and *Uncle Sam*, deterioration of time, what place does an object belong? I did the same thing with the paint on those pieces I'd put paint on, and then I'd use abrasives to cut back through to the metal and let the metal rust up. I've got a great old punch toy in the other room, cast-iron, 19th-century punch. It's been around so long, the bare metal shows, and the paint has been patinated, and it's been played with, handled. So it just acquires a patina.

There was a time-maybe even between the Icarus and the Crosier pieces-I made a small series which I titled Europa, which was referring to the rape of Europa in the Greek classics. And the course I told you that I took three times, the English course at the University of Kansas, made me love Greek classics. Some of those marvelous stories gave me freedom and influenced my work, but not necessarily referring directly to the stories or expressed in any obvious way. I was also thinking of the Mycenaean female and bull, the female dancers with the bull, the animal-human relationship in some way similar to the bull-deity-Europa-female. A piece from that body of work was in Paul Smith's "Craft Today," his last exhibition in New York before he retired as the director of the American Craft Museum

MS. DOUGLAS: "Poetry Today"?

MR. KINGTON: "Craft Today: Poetry of the Physical." I was commissioned to make a Europa similar to the one in the exhibition for installation in Japan.

After I finished the Crosier series, it seemed like a good time to reassess my work, to look back, look at what I had done over the past 35 years. "What is significant about iron? What is the history of iron?"

I did a lot of reading in art history. One book, *The Forge and the Crucible* [Mircea Eliade. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979], written by a professor of Eastern religious studies at the University of Chicago, traces the role of the blacksmith from ancient man through tribal man. It was a great book to read. It was important for me to read it at that time. Tod read it with me. He was back from Japan by that time.

MS. DOUGLAS: Tod is your son.

MR. KINGTON: Yes. We started sharing information and discussing that book and others concerning the historical role of the blacksmith in Europe, Asia, India, Russia. If there's a belief in a deity, there's generally a blacksmith associated with a deity. The blacksmith as god for the Vikings was Thor. The Greeks had their own blacksmith god in their mythology, the Germans referred to the blacksmith as the Rheinmaster, Poet Master.

In certain African cultures, the smith is referred to as Father Earth, because he takes from the earth iron ore and he makes tools. In practically every culture, the blacksmith is referred to as the giver of culture, you know, the maker of tools for agriculture. How can you harvest if you don't have a sickle? He was toolmaker for the other crafts. In some regions of Africa, the village potter is Mother Earth, Father Earth's wife. They were considered shamans-transforming earth to make objects for use, iron tools and clay containers.

Although in different areas of Africa, tribal communities see the black side of the blacksmith, the dark side, the weapon-maker. And he's only allowed to come to the edge of the village to repair tools or make tools. The same is true in India, where there's a nomadic group of blacksmiths. They're not part of any community. They make tools, they repair tools, but also they're weapon-makers. Of course, the weapon-maker is the dark side of the blacksmith. The provider of war tools. The inventor of war tools.

Tod had collected tons of catalogues on a variety of artists, and he insisted I read. The other thing that he pushed me into was to look at my bad habits and get rid of them. Why do you have to gas weld everything and fill it? Why can't you forge weld together? Why can't you create other kinds of attachment processes? With Tod's painting background, and my background in crafts traditions, there was conflict, there was challenge. It was a very, very interesting and exciting time for me. And it's, like, okay, from now on I won't weld with a welding torch; I'll use it for cutting materials so I can get it down to a size I want to work, but that's my limit; that's a limitation. I've always worked best with limitation.

Generally, my mechanical vocabulary has remained simple. And I think some of that came from what I saw in the early '60s. I juried a show, and a jeweler had submitted a neckpiece, a brooch of some sort, and chain. But it had cabochon and faceted stones. It also had enamel and niello, as though, "I can set stones, both kinds; I can enamel; I can do niello; I can saw, file, polish." There were about three other techniques thrown into that thing. That was a summary of what the crafts were about then; learning to do all these things and taking pride in that. But, for crying out loud, you know, it's not about doing all those things.

The other thing that Tod encouraged me to do was to not make anything for a year or two. Nothing. Just play. Have fun and try ideas. And I did as he suggested. I was having a lot of fun, and it occurred to me, "Hey, you've got 35 years in at the university; you've had a great time and you've had marvelous students. You're certainly sick of the university politics. Why don't you just do what you want to do?" And, of course, my family was very, very supportive. So I just said, okay, pull the plug, let's do it. [Laughs.]

MS. DOUGLAS: You mean you retired.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. Just, like, bang.

MS. DOUGLAS: Retired from SIU.

MR. KINGTON: SIU. Tod came back about a year before I retired.

MS. DOUGLAS: What year was that, actually?

MR. KINGTON: It was '96. I think it was January '96. And I spent the next year just trying crazy stuff, rethinking everything.

MS. DOUGLAS: In the studio.

MR. KINGTON: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] You know, I really respect the historical role of the blacksmith. He is the giver of culture. He is the innovator, the toolmaker. A blacksmith named John Deere designed a plow point that would break up Illinois prairie grass, because no other plowshare would do that, and that allowed Illinois to become a rich agricultural state. He was a blacksmith. He was not a tractor engineer; he was a blacksmith.

If you look at the history of iron and its importance to early architectural structure, household utensils, tools, hinges, the shodding of domestic animals, the tires on a wooden wheel, tools for stone carvers, woodworkers, and farmers, the smith was central to the advancement of culture.

Diderot's *Encyclopedia* on the diverse arts and sciences illustrates about 106 different ferrous industries in 18th-century France, everything from the making of a six-ton anchor for a warship under huge, water-powered trip-hammers, to making tiny fishhooks, and, in between, all things necessary for domestic use, war, and commerce.

Craftsmen today do not serve their society in the same way as they did, say, 200 years ago. Historically, a community depended on the potter and basket maker for containers; weavers for fabric; woodworkers for furniture; pewter-, copper-, and silversmiths for kitchen utensils; and blacksmiths for tools.

The blacksmith enjoys the same freedom from demand that the craftsman after World War II does today. The Industrial Revolution, the Machine Age for the most part, put the hand crafts out of business. Machines provided

the traditional craft products at a much lower cost.

[BEGIN TAPE 5 SIDE B.]

MS. DOUGLAS: You were talking about how the blacksmiths enjoyed freedom from demand, like the craft people in mid-20th century. Today craftsmen create a demand for their product, because of its uniqueness, beauty, quality.

MR. KINGTON: They create a demand for what they make, and there's a market for what they're doing, but their objects are not absolutely necessary. Like anything anybody makes with their hands, it's not necessary except for preference over the mass-produced product, because it's one of its kind, or is limited in production and has aesthetic value.

From our reading, thinking, experimentation, Tod and I did some collaboration together. It was a lot of fun. We talk about his interests; he responds to what I'm doing. Our work runs in parallel ways but is very separate.

The book I referred to, *The Forge and the Crucible*, caused me to do a lot of thinking about my work. For instance, nomadic man generally defined their territory by some sort of a vertical, post, pole, staff, an emblem of the group. Whenever they moved, they would put their staff in the earth, and it would also define their territory, hunting-gathering area. It defined sacred space, turf, home. And it also was an axis that tied the core of the earth or the womb of the earth to the heavens or deity. Symbols, I grew up with a family that used the term "let's put our stake down here; this is home. Rent it, buy it, pitch a tent, it's our space." Our home-

The spire is essentially the same thing for a congregation of people who have the same religious belief. It's an axis. It ties a sacred space together with the heavens, the deity, or it's a finger that's pointing to a deity, a congregational finger that's acknowledging a deity. A spire is defined in the dictionary as a long, tapered piece of grass. I kept rethinking these ideas and started a series of long vertical forgings that come to a point almost like a blade of grass does. They're spires. I refer to them as *Axis Mundi*, referring to the author's work, axis of the earth. In some cases I make the same long, linearal [sic] piece with some variation in form. I add a crescent to the top end, and when I do, the title changes to Crescent. And I am referring to the moon. In some early cultures, the moon was a symbol for a female deity, so I'm referring to a deity in my work.

When I started about three years ago, I was needing volume to enhance the linearal forged-steel work and started considering wood as a material, because the historical relationship between wood and iron and steel is just consistently apparent. The wood on a gunstock, the wood in an 11th-century Italian door that ornamental iron is attached to, scrolls, hinges, and nails to reinforce the wood, to discourage the battle-axe from going through.

Wrought iron provides security and it's ornament at the same time. You know, there are doors at Notre Dame that are just huge wooden doors with about as much ornament in iron that you can put on the wood. Of course, nails went through and were bent over and cleated from on the backside to secure it. It's a way of holding the wood together and providing security and providing ornament.

For the handle on a hoe or an ax or a hammer, wood is by far the best material to use. I had never considered using wood as material to work with, but the linearal quality of the steel needs volume and balance. Wood seemed an obvious solution. I wanted surfaces that were similar to what I've had on the wrought steel, and I want the forms to be very organic, because they're representing earth forms or earth mounds.

There was a gallery in St. Louis that specialized in ethnic crafts, and that had to get in a shipment of African adzes. I had been looking at adzes and thinking about buying a Japanese or Swedish one, but I just didn't like the looks of them. When I saw these, it was just, like, wow. It's just a forged wedge of steel. The blade is wide and it tapers to a square tang. And a piece of wood, a handle was drilled out, and then the steel was forced through the hole hot, burning a seat in it. It's very easy to knock out the blade. It's very secure for working.

So I bought a couple to see how they worked. And then I started making my own tools of better steel. I roughed the wood out with a chain saw, and then it's all hand-adzing, which is almost like planishing a piece of metal. The resulting surfaces are very, very similar to forged steel. But, of course, I was carving, removing material, finding form.

I experimented with the surface of the wood for color, using an old process that was used on Kentucky long rifles to patina the wood. That was iron dissolved in an acid solution. But I did not like working with acids, so I started using just charcoal and working the surface of the wood to color it.

And, of course, there's a symbol there with the black pieces of charcoal. Charcoal was used as a heat source for smelting iron and for forging for thousands of years. England practically cut down every tree to make charcoal, before the discovery of coal. In Africa, they're making charcoal for the blacksmiths. They still use charcoal in

Japan. Charcoal was pretty much the universal fuel for smelting any forging ferrous and nonferrous metal throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia.

MS. DOUGLAS: Is charcoal a product of coal?

MR. KINGTON: No, it's burnt wood.

MS. DOUGLAS: Burnt wood.

MR. KINGTON: Wood that is ignited in a kiln and then starved for oxygen so it isn't consumed. All the moistures and acids are consumed, and the wood is converted to charcoal. It's essentially the carbon. When you build a fire and provide air to the forge fire, the charcoal burns at a high temperature. Good charcoal can get to 2300 degrees Fahrenheit. Coal will attain the same temperature range, once it has been converted to coke.

Charcoal from hardwoods are generally better than softwoods as a heat source. Historically oak was considered an excellent charcoal for making iron and forging iron. I liked using oak for carving because of its history as a fuel for smelting and forging.

MS. DOUGLAS: You're talking about the meaning of materials in your sculpture.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. Well, some of the symbols.

MS. DOUGLAS: And for, you know, cultures, what wood, oak in particular, has meant historically in culture, and iron. I think that's a real rich subject to explore in craft media, that not only the material itself, but the way it's been worked traditionally and historically, brings a life of its own to the work. It's like you're starting out with something that has meaning; you're not just giving meaning to something.

MR. KINGTON: Right. I know the history of these materials and their relationships, and it's important to work with those. At least it's important to me. The viewer may never catch on to it, but it's my own personal narrative.

MS. DOUGLAS: I wanted to ask you about or make a comment about function in your work, too, because even though the last few series you've been describing are not functional from the strict sense, they always refer back to a functional form or object, like the Crosier series of sculptures refers to that functional object. Even though it might be a ceremonial object, it still has function.

MR. KINGTON: Right.

MS. DOUGLAS: Or the Icarus pieces being related to the weathervanes. And even the first weathervanes you started making that were very sculptural, that series in the late '70s, they were functional as weathervanes, but they still were really about volume and mass and line being forged out and creating a sculptural object.

MR. KINGTON: Right.

MS. DOUGLAS: Do you think a lot about function in your work, then, or it just is a natural-

MR. KINGTON: You know, it's something I've been thinking about for more than 10 years. It seems to me that sometime, maybe even before the '90s, but certainly into the '90s, that function started becoming less and less part of my vocabulary. I don't know where that puts me, and I don't even care. That's somebody else's problem-probably is going to be somebody else's job to figure out what it's all about. I do like making functional things, but most recently, if I made a functional piece, it's likely to be a tool, a hammer of a particular size, or another adze to do a particular job.

When I make a piece of jewelry, and I still do, it has to function, or my wife won't wear it. Why make it if she won't wear it? Jewelry is really about wearability and enhancement and body adornment, being comfortable. When I make jewelry, it's specifically for my wife or my daughter. It usually relates to my large forged pieces, but it must function as jewelry.

Two years ago I designed a series of products-Tod and my daughter, Brooke, had been thinking about starting a business. I made a letter opener that is a beautiful form, and it functions marvelously. I'd love to see it go into production.

I have lots of books, generally the oversized ones. It's hard to find bookends to hold them because they're too big. So I designed some bookends using a hand image. I made, for instance, that coat hook over there. And we actually got to the point of having some laser-cut just to look at it and test the marketability.

We designed some dog tags for production. We started making identification tags that had a high-end flair to them instead of the bone motif. I've always hated the kind of jump ring, the key ring thing. I always break a nail

on them getting them open. We came up with the solution for a tag that can be clipped on the collar D-ring and closed. It's a piece of jewelry for a pet. [As Mr. Kington is making this reference to "jewelry for a pet," his dog is snoring loudly nearby.]

So I guess I reserve function for things that need to be functional, and allow myself the freedom to not have to worry about function on other objects. In some cases, I am referring to the function, as you pointed out.

I guess the other thoughts that had been going through my mind through this period, the past five years, [is] what should forged iron be in the 21st century? Do I have anything to say about it? Do I have anything to contribute to that history, a history that I very much respect? And if I do have something to contribute, what is it? What should it look like? Should it do something? Does it have to do anything? What I'm doing with line? Line undulates. It moves. It has plasticity to it. It has surface. It's about visual graphics. Is my work about private narrative, and why do I keep referring to the sacred?

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, that's a good jumping-off point to talk about other people's work in the field, or the field in general, of blacksmithing. When you say, "What should iron be in the 21st century?", do you see the field of blacksmithing moving in any particular direction, as an art form, I guess, rather than-

MR. KINGTON: I guess, you know, I had great hopes in the early '70s of blacksmithing moving into the mainline crafts, so it would become as vital as ceramics, metal, fibers, and glass. That was my hope. My big disappointment is that that has not happened.

MS. DOUGLAS: That was another question I was going to ask you, was, is SIU unique in its focus on blacksmithing in the art department, or are there other programs similar to it around the country?

MR. KINGTON: It's going in other places. SIU is the only M.F.A.-granting degree program in the United States. SIU also offers a B.F.A. specialization. There are universities who offer courses now. In Wisconsin there's a program with a smithy. The students do iron work. In northern Michigan, Dale Wedig is an excellent blacksmith. He teaches a smithing course.

Arizona State University-and again, names are failing me at this point - a metal teacher out there does a lot of ironwork, and he's had several students do undergraduate and graduate work with him in iron. The Madison smithy shut down. Tyler, Stanley's facility, shut down. Whatever RIT had is, I'm sure, gone. It left when Paley left. Michael Jerry had a smithy at Syracuse. Phil Fike had one at Wayne State. And the last student that came out of his program graduated about four years ago.

There are very few. So what you have is a fairly large body of people that is interested in blacksmithing technique and process. Very few have formal art backgrounds. Very few take responsibility for their education in visual arts. The magazine *Anvil's Ring* becomes a pattern book, a design book for ideas. Somebody will send a photograph in to the magazine that is not really a good idea or well done, and for a year you'll see that piece copied, just getting worse and worse, duplicated by other people. If the first piece had any integrity, it's long gone by the third generation of duplication. I am very disappointed.

There are learning opportunities at national conferences, state organization conferences, get-togethers, workshops. Other than SIU and a few other universities, the main learning going on, as far as some sort of formal coursework, is Haystack, Penland, Coppertown, and at the Campbell School [The John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, NC]. Arrowmont [School of Arts and Crafts, Gatlinburg, TN] shut their blacksmith shop down years ago, back in the early '80s, I think. About the time Colorado Mountain College out in Vail closed.

MS. DOUGLAS: Summervail.

MR. KINGTON: While Summervail was open, they had a shop. There is starting to become an apprenticing program in the U.S. A number of shops that are operating now are getting enough work that they're finding a need for journeymen blacksmiths.

But it truly bothers me that a blacksmith makes something he calls Art Nouveau and hasn't the foggiest idea what Art Nouveau is, certainly what the best part of Art Nouveau was. They have never bothered to even look at some of the fine French and Belgian ironwork. They don't know what Art Deco is. They make copies of what they think is medieval. There aren't that many castles being built in this country, but they're selling their work. It truly bothers me that so many working blacksmiths are so uninformed about the history of their craft, the history of art.

On the other hand, there are people who are doing great work, really fine work-Tom Joyce, for instance. I've used him repeatedly as an example of somebody who has taken responsibility for his education. You may or may not know this, but Tom's a high school dropout, never went to college. He fell in love with blacksmithing when he was 16 and apprenticed with a smith and is very much self-educated and self-trained. He's the master smith. He

reads technical books, processes, has studied art history. He's essentially a scholar. He's very knowledgeable of the art scene. Al Paley is making great work; the best work being made in the U.S. today, or for the most part, are blacksmiths who are university educated in the fine arts and the crafts.

We were talking at lunch yesterday about our grandparents and parents going only through the eighth grade and still having a great life. There are a lot of successful men and women who only went to the eighth grade. It can be done. It's just that they took responsibility for learning. Tom has taken responsibility for his own education. I have very little patience with people who don't, who are not inquisitive enough to go to the library, where they have access to materials; who will not darken the doors of a museum; who are not inquisitive about the history of art, and painting and sculpture as well as the decorative arts, and have no interest in the fact that a potter is every bit as enthusiastic about his material and process as they are in theirs.

MS. DOUGLAS: I think every field of art has a level of practitioner that is like that, that does not take responsibility for knowing things, like, say, somebody that paints by number, hobbyists that make things from kits. They're not interested in knowing how to do something in the real way, the traditional way. And I'm wondering if blacksmithing is more prone to that type of individual, from what you're saying.

MR. KINGTON: There's a certain male mind-set that gravitates to the physical process. But the people you describe, the paint-by-numbers person, isn't taking commissions or selling that stuff.

MS. DOUGLAS: That's true.

MR. KINGTON: These people are. And so if someone is selling work, they have certain responsibilities. If somebody commissions a medieval gate to go out in front of their side-by-side trailer, they should know what a medieval gate looks like, what it's about, the difference of the stylistic trends of medieval iron work in Germany and France.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right.

MR. KINGTON: Too many smiths haven't got the foggiest. You know, they'll probably start going back through past issues of *Anvil's Ring* and use it as a pattern book and come up with something that they think maybe is medieval.

MS. DOUGLAS: It sounds, too, like they're catering to a culture that doesn't care about authenticity of reference or history.

MR. KINGTON: Well, that's the other thing.

MS. DOUGLAS: Because you see that in the building industry.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah, absolutely. I don't know anything about surgery, but

I certainly hope my surgeon-[tape ends midsentence].

[BEGIN TAPE 6 SIDE A.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, you were talking about authenticity being necessary with a surgeon.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. Tom Joyce is not the only good designer. There's some very good work being done by the Bondis, and, of course, Paley's doing his own thing. But if there are 5,000 people working at the anvil out there, probably there may not be more than 50 people really doing high-quality work. And of that 50, 15 to 20 of them have walked through Carbondale one way or the other.

MS. DOUGLAS: So it's tied into a market, in some respects, architectural ironwork, that market?

MR. KINGTON: Architectural ironwork pretty much happens on a commission basis, but there are a lot of people doing work, and there are a lot of new building and renovation opportunities. Some potters prefer porcelain over some other clay material. So in blacksmithing, you have people doing architectural work, everything from really serious, eight-foot fences and large double gates, to bladesmiths, to people who make black powder guns, others, hardware for the house, the fireplace, you know, just about anything that can be made in iron. And, of course, there are some people that are making what they call sculpture.

This is another pet peeve that I have. Words have become so meaningless, so insignificant. Whatever art means to you is art. When somebody tells me this is their art, what are they really saying? Somebody on TV who is in a position of authority in reporting calls something art and it's not. It's accepted as art whether it is or not. This is culturally very confusing to a lot of people. And, of course, the majority of the population has no idea what art is, so if some yo-yo walks up and says, "Well, this is my art"-it's accepted as art.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right.

MR. KINGTON: This country is essentially a visually illiterate country compared to Europe and Japan. It's sad.

MS. DOUGLAS: So essentially what we're talking about is bad work.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. Tons of bad work's being done, but there is some very, very good and very competent work being done by some good designers.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, maybe now would be a good time to go back and talk about some of your more, not necessarily successful, but some of your better students that came out of the program. And I'm referring to-or influential, maybe-that group that worked on Damascus steel, and talk a little bit about the research that they did here, too.

MR. KINGTON: Okay. Let me set it all up with the background.

MS. DOUGLAS: Okay.

MR. KINGTON: It starts before they were students in Carbondale. I told you earlier in this conversation that I had picked up a book from the American Craft Council Library in '64 called *A History of Metallography* by Cyril Stanley Smith, and in it was the chapter that dealt with pattern materials. At least the chapter started off by talking about pattern in natural materials, wonderful wood grains, grains or patterns in stone.

And from that he leads the reader to the nature of iron and steel, alloys, and ultimately discusses the Saracen blade, which was a pattern steel blade that was made using a smelting process that was developed fairly early in India. And because of the molten heating process and the fact that the closed crucibles were charged with charcoal or bone meal or whatever they used, carbon was infused into the iron, and then through the cooling process there was carbon migration to very natural kinds of pattern arrangements, similar to what we-you know, a diamond has its own crystalline structure, a garnet has a different crystalline structure. And so the same sort of thing was occurring in the crucible steel, creating areas of high-carbon steel and iron.

Dr. Smith discussed the superiority of the Saracen blade. The Crusaders rode heavy horses, wore heavy body armor, had heavy iron swords with very little carbon content, and the Saracen blade that was, at least according to myth, was able to slice through a silk scarf when it was floating through in the air. The blades were very sharp, and they had high-carbon steel pattern in them. And they would literally cut through armor. And, of course, the Arab horse, as opposed to a draft horse, was very fast and agile, and they did a lot of damage to the invaders from Europe.

As battles were won, weapons were collected and taken back to Europe. The armorers there were put to the challenge of, first, of reproducing the blade, introducing ornament into the blade and making a blade of equal superiority. Their effort was through the processes that they were aware of, and that was forge welding, joining different ferrous materials of high- and low-carbon contents. The Japanese solved the same problem another way with high-carbon steel and iron, which is every bit as good, if not superior to, Saracen blade.

There was an evolution of developing a wood grain or pattern blades. And one master smith in France finally got so good he was able to write something like "God Save the King" down the middle of a blade.

One of the members of the pattern steel research team was a man by the name of Daryl Meier. And he was big-time into buckskinning. I'll explain what buckskinning is. The people that enjoy dressing up like pioneers and shooting Kentucky long rifles, throwing tomahawks and throwing knives. And there's a lot of competition, and they have rendezvous. I think there's one over in Indiana that attracts over a thousand people. They pitch teepees, build huts, and cook out, and have shooting competitions and throwing competitions.

And Daryl couldn't find a tomahawk that would not break. He showed up at my studio in Carterville one day. He introduced himself and told me what he wanted. One of the few books I had that I could refer him to was *A History of Metallography*, because Smith discusses process and the nature of steels, which is what Daryl was interested in. He came back about two months later, and he had lots of questions to ask. He wanted me to show him forge welding. And I did.

He was not a student. He was teaching-I think he was teaching mathematics at a local high school at the time. He was a B.S. graduate in education from SIU. And he wanted to discuss the blade I told you about, with "God Save the King" or whatever it said down the blade. He said, "You know, someday I'm going to do that."

MS. DOUGLAS: But he was not a blacksmith at this time?

MR. KINGTON: He was not a blacksmith at this time. In, it must have been, 1974, Bob Griffith started his graduate work at SIU. He came to school from the Tyler School of Art. He came to study blacksmithing. Jim

Wallace came from Crested Butte, Colorado, to study blacksmithing. And Daryl, because he didn't have an art background, he just wanted forge practice, invented a special M.A. degree for himself through the College of Education which would give him certification to teach blacksmithing at the community college level.

Now, I also have to backtrack to the 1972 Lumpkin, Georgia, the first ABANA get-together-it maybe wasn't even ABANA then-the ironwork, blacksmithing workshop in Lumpkin, Georgia. Daryl had continued to stay in touch with me-he had high interest in pattern steel; he knew I was going to be the program director, and he asked me if I would ask Bill Moran to demonstrate, because he really wanted to make pattern steel. Bill was one of the persons that I did select, and he agreed to come. The problem was-[laughs]-that he would not show anything that was a secret about his process. Daryl was very disappointed and said quite a few nasty things about him.

He said, "I'm going to do it in spite of him." There were so many questions about the pattern steel process, technique, all the steps involved with material, and the making process. And 1974, these three students, Jim, Bob, and Daryl, all had the same interests and started working together trying to solve these problems, and were having trouble. I was able to tap into the Office of Research and Development and get them monies - which is very unusual because in general those funds were for faculty research.

As I recall, I was able to get them materials to experiment with, different alloys of steels, metallurgical coal, which is not what we were using at the time, but we needed a finer coal to do the work. I called Mr. Cyril Stanley Smith in Cambridge, and he agreed to have telephone interviews with them - they'd all three get on the telephone and talk with him-and he advised them on the problems that they were having.

A professor in the physics department had a special heat-reading device. They could point the instrument at a piece of metal in the fire to tell exactly what the temperature was. And, amazingly, the three of them had been guessing within 20 degrees, just visually. They had been reading pretty accurately for months, but it was useful to confirm their ability to read the welding temperatures of their metal in the forge.

I was to able to attain travel money for them. Smith was very generous with his time. They wanted to drive to Cambridge and spend two days with him, and he said he would have them. Then he gave them an alternative. He was doing a lot of consulting on the West Coast, and he agreed to take a flight that would stop in Chicago, and he would spend five or six hours with them, and then he would take a late flight on to California. He was really a nifty guy.

They started having a very high level of success. If you look at the chapter in the Meilach book, they were not only getting the metal to fuse well through heat and pressure, but were getting good pattern development. They did some marvelous work. They were open. They were inquisitive. They would try anything. You know, a "failure is a better teacher than success" sometimes.

Then at about that time, Dona Meilach became interested in publishing a book on blacksmithing. She just knew that there was a market for a book on iron. She had done a book on, I believe, woodworking before that. She would visit craftsmen and ask them to make contributions, write sections, provide photographs for the book. She essentially coordinated it. She was writing the book, and she called and asked if she could visit. I think she was intending on coming for a day, and she ended up staying for a week.

A number of graduate students in the program provided written contributions. The large percentage of the photographs in the first edition were SIU past graduates and graduate students. And so the results of their pattern steel work is pretty much documented in the chapter that Daryl, Jim, and Bob wrote.

It was just a major breakthrough, the first published information in the U.S. on pattern steel. Bill Moran was pretty much the only pattern steel smith in the United States, and he was making a lot of money as a bladesmith, a knife maker, selling pattern steel knives. Well, as soon as they published, all the secrets were out, and there must be a thousand blade makers in the United States today who make pattern steel blades.

MS. DOUGLAS: Now, where were the results of their research published, in this book?

MR. KINGTON: In this book and-

MS. DOUGLAS: The Meilach book?

MR. KINGTON: Yes-then I think information was also printed in *Anvil's Ring*, but primarily in that book. And that book sold very quickly because there was a market, a great need for contemporary examples of ironwork. It was more about contemporary work than it was about history. It had a little bit of historical work and some examples of Yellin are included.

MS. DOUGLAS: Was this research submitted as their thesis, also, for grad school?

MR. KINGTON: No. We did not have a thesis program. Well, I'll put it this way. The graduate student has two options, an "in lieu of thesis" project, or a formal written thesis. And the "in lieu of thesis" project is an exhibition of a body of work dealing with particular processes or ideas. Daryl was not an M.F.A. student. He probably had to do some sort of a thesis for the College of Education, but Wally and Griff didn't. They presented a body of work in their grad exhibition.

MS. DOUGLAS: But then you had subsequent graduate students that did research, technical research like this, too; like Marvin Jensen did research in mokume gane.

MR. KINGTON: Well, remember yesterday when we were talking, I told you about Mr. Freeman "I know how to forge weld copper and I'll take that to my grave"? Well, in the '60s, actually when I was at Cranbrook, there were weak efforts to make mokume. And I say weak because generally it was one-inch-square pieces of metal and stacking them together, soldering them, and then milling them out to sheet. A trying of a number of pattern development techniques-but the results were not very good.

The craftsmen could lose up to 90 percent of the material through cracking and breaking of the solders and the differences in materials. I remember when I was in Rochester, visiting artist Al Paley was making big jewelry pieces and incorporating this technique into his jewelry and complaining he was losing 80 percent of the material.

In 1964 what Mr. Freeman said really clicked in my head as far as the history of metallography and Cyril Stanley Smith, because he describes mokume as well as pattern forged steel and Damascus steel. So I thought, you know, if fusion bonding works that way in ferrous metal, why can't it happen the same way in mokume with non ferrous metals? I'd bring that idea up every once in awhile to these guys when they were making the pattern steel.

Joel Schwartz came to school in 1975. He started graduate school in blacksmithing. And his wife had a position teaching dance for U of I, and he would go up to Champaign-Urbana every weekend and started spending lots of time in the library. The library happened to have a full collection of the-I believe it was a journal called *American Blacksmith*. I believe it stopped publication around 1910.

In one of those publications, Joel found an article on how to forge weld copper, and he brought it back. We forge welded about 20 pounds of copper that day-we found every piece of copper that we could locate, and we started forge welding copper, which bonded easily; it just went together. So what's next, try bronze and copper, silver and copper, brass and copper. Well, brass was a huge mistake. The bronze alloy we had was not compatible with copper, nor was sterling. But we were getting metal to stick when we found compatible metals, and instead of losing 90 percent due to cracking, we retained 90 percent. And we were forge welding large pieces of metals using the coal forge.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you were forge welding mokume instead of soldering it together.

MR. KINGTON: Yes. I'm a great fan of Theophilus's book on the diverse arts [*On Diverse Arts*], which I refer to a lot. I don't know if you're familiar with it, but he was an 11th-century monk someplace near the border of Germany and France. He was in charge of a monastery that was apparently devoted to making liturgical pieces. It's in three sections; one in the painter's art, one, stained glass, and the other one in metal, and the metal is the most extensive. It's a "how to do" book. There is a short section on making a five-piece chalice by fire-joining, no solder.

MS. DOUGLAS: Forge welding.

MR. KINGTON: No, the process is probably similar to the process of gold granulation. A diffusion process, not a fusion process. I located a chemistry professor that had a deep interest in old and ancient terms for chemicals and chemistry. The book-it's essentially the assemblage of recipes for doing things. For example, he repeatedly uses urine from a 14-year-old, red-haired boy, or a goat that's been tied up to a stump for two weeks, as a part of chemical formulas, to mix with flux, color metal, or make a paint formula more stable.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs.]

MR. KINGTON: The book raised a great many questions about medieval process and chemistry. What does that mean? Well, the boy's probably at this point in puberty and would have certain chemical properties. Urine has been used historically by man in a variety of the crafts. It sets dyes; it was used by stone masons. So Russ was very helpful in understanding chemical terms.

There's a drawing of the oven that was used for heat joining, which is essentially a forge that's elevated higher than a blacksmith's, so that you can see what you're doing. Essentially, that chalice went together the same way gold granulation works-diffusion bonding.

Historically, mokume really is only a 500-year-old process, a Japanese invention by a craftsman that made sword fittings, who was trying to match the ferrous metal patterns in the Samurai sword with nonferrous pattern metal. So Richard and I applied for an NEA grant and got good funding to continue our research.

MS. DOUGLAS: Richard Mawdsley.

MR. KINGTON: Yes. Richard was now teaching in Carbondale and about that time had been invited to a workshop at Long Beach State, an NEA grant for a selected group of craftsmen to work with a Japanese master who made the sword hardware, you know, the little pieces that are bound under the handle and the sword guard and so forth. The Japanese master primarily worked in nonferrous materials. Well, he introduced the Japanese alloys of kuromido and-

MS. DOUGLAS: Shibuichi.

MR. KINGTON: -shibuichi. He made his own alloys, and he had a very special way of alloying the metal and pouring the metal in boiling water on a piece of cotton. The result was beautiful, very clean, oxygen-free billets. Richard and I started making a variety of silver alloys to be used in the mokume experiments.

At about the same time, the Pijanowskis [Gene and Hiroko Pijanowski]-and I didn't know this, and I don't think Richard did, either-the Pijanowskis were pursuing work in mokume. They had spent time in Japan on sabbatical leaves, and they had been taught to use Japanese processes and techniques.

[BEGIN TAPE 6 SIDE B.]

MR. KINGTON: Richard and I invited Gene and Hiroko to come to SIU for a weekend workshop-a time to work together and share information.

MS. DOUGLAS: It was all essentially Japanese craft.

MR. KINGTON: The mokume?

MS. DOUGLAS: The mokume and the techniques you were pursuing.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. It was exclusively Japanese. It's a Japanese technique. The Pijanowskis had observed, as I recall, five different craftsmen making mokume in Japan, and they were replicating the processes of the Japanese craftsmen.

We invited them to SIU to exchange information. So they came. And they were only having, as I recall, 70, 80 percent success. They were not getting full joinery. They were having separations and so forth, primarily because of their heat source, not their metal preparation. We were having 90 percent success, and we were working with much larger pieces of metal. They had information on Japanese alloys and also brought rokusho and kuromido. Kuromido has a small amount of arsenic in the copper. That particular copper with the arsenic in it is important in mokume because of the way it colors in rokusho, a patina solution of copper sulfate.

The other thing the Pijanowskis made us aware of was the rokusho process of creating the patina, which was very important because it identifies all of the different alloys we were working with as different colors of patination. For instance, silver colors gray to white, and kuromido, I guess, is like eggplant, plum. Copper, persimmon to brick red. You're not looking at bare metal now; you're looking at a color wheel, which is marvelous to work with. Depending on the metal alloy, amount of silver to copper, gold to copper, the alloys take on a variety of colors and hues.

MS. DOUGLAS: And rokusho is the patination process.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. They brought packages of it back, and I had it analyzed at the SIU chemistry department. They had it analyzed, and there was always, at least here, a trace element that the chemists couldn't identify.

You can make your own. All you have to do is, just, you get some old copper, and you shave the patination off of it, and mix it in distilled water. Keep it at a boiling point in a copper container-any iron that gets in the liquid will kill it. And to accelerate the coloring process, a daikon radish is shaved up and rubbed on the surface of the metal to be colored-but when we made ours-and I guess they tried it, too-we could not get the same color results. Whatever the reason, the chemists could not tell us what that other one half of one percent was, and so we just didn't get the same results from our formula as resulted from the rokusho from Japan.

Well, they wanted to show us how they prepared and bonded their mokume. Laboriously cleaning metal surfaces with willow charcoal.

MS. DOUGLAS: [Laughs] You're talking about the Pijanowskis?

MR. KINGTON: Yeah, with their willow charcoal, scrubbing all this stuff-it was labor intensive.

MS. DOUGLAS: Following what they had learned in Japan.

MR. KINGTON: Exactly. And, of course, finally I couldn't stand it, and I just degreased my metal, and we went down to the forge. We had six large billets fusion-bonded, and brought it back upstairs and showed it to them. And they finally finished theirs and showed us how they did it, and they got some layer separation. And then they tried it our way, flattened the sheets of metal. Flattened the sheets. Degreased with pumice, stack it, and wire it together.

MS. DOUGLAS: Clean it.

MR. KINGTON: And get it clean-degrease.

MS. DOUGLAS: By the most efficient means.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. You don't want body oils or oxides on the surface; just get it really clean and stack it. They just hit it at the right heat, and it worked for them.

MS. DOUGLAS: Right.

MR. KINGTON: Marvin Jenson made a very important contribution to our work. He has one of the most interesting group of abilities and an analytical mind of any of the students I've ever had, worked with. He is a problem solver. He's a mechanical genius, you know. I gave him a pocketknife assignment, and he didn't just make a folding knife-he figured out how a switchblade works, and he made a switchblade. You know, I don't think there's anything he can't do if he sets his mind to it.

He came up with the idea of a pressure plate to hold the stacks together. That was one of the important contributions he made. The only limit that we had on the size of what we could make was dependent on the size of the hammer jaws on the power hammer. We had been doing, like, 15 layers of metal at one time, maybe three-inch square. And Marvin, with his pressure plate, the bolts served as a guide to keep everything lined up, the stack of all these metal sheets lined up, and kept it tight so that there should be no oxygen migration between the stacked sheets of metal. Oxygen causes oxidization and, therefore, keeps the metal from bonding, not taking. I don't know when it was in the sequence of our research, but everything he did just kept going together, and he made a 20-pound billet.

MS. DOUGLAS: Of mokume.

MR. KINGTON: Of mokume. Of course, the question was what would he do with a hunk of copper that's a four, four and a half inches cube? You don't take a planishing hammer and make a sheet out of that. Out of a four-inch cube.

MS. DOUGLAS: Put it on the trip-hammer?

MR. KINGTON: Work it with the trip-hammer. And work it hot. It's very plastic. All those materials are similar. They have similar plasticities. The nice thing about all the Japanese alloys was that they had similar plasticity, plastic characteristics, and they dispersed heat about the same way. So he made this huge piece of material. We had the large power rolling mill at school, which has six-inch-wide rolls, and so we could roll smaller sheets of material under the power hammer. We'd work it to a quarter of an inch thick, and the mill would smooth everything out. But Marvin's sheets were, you know-was huge, and he worked his billet under the power hammer and by hand on the anvil.

MS. DOUGLAS: My God. So that's how he was able to raise whole vessels out of mokume.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: Because he had created basically a huge sheet of metal.

MR. KINGTON: A big sheet, right.

MS. DOUGLAS: No one else had done anything like that.

MR. KINGTON: No. And then he had to make a large container to color it in. You know, he had to raise a huge copper cauldron.

MS. DOUGLAS: Oh. He had to raise a copper pot to do it in, to do the patina process.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, essentially, that research that was done here has sort of spawned a little mini-industry in the jewelry field.

MR. KINGTON: Because of the research at SIU and at Michigan University, making mokume is today quite common. I think we-the SIU students, published twice in *Goldsmiths Journal*, and the Pijanowskis-I think maybe they published three or four articles.

We got telephone calls from jewelers who wanted to make mokume but had absolutely no idea what the forge was, and they weren't interested in using coal and getting dirty. And it's, like, "Richard, is there another way we can solve this problem?" I believe Marvin also was involved. And it's, just, like, "Hey, it's just oxygen-free environment; we've got a great gas burn-out kiln; let's see what we can do to create an oxygen-free kiln environment." And it wasn't long until we were joining using the gas kiln. And, of course, you can do the same thing in an electric kiln. And we published that information to help the jewelers.

Still many jewelers would rather buy mokume than make it. Well, after Marvin left, a student came in, a very talented blacksmith student, Phil Baldwin. He primarily was a bladesmith and very influenced by the Japanese samurai blades. As a blade designer, he is superior to most knife makers in this country. He also had an excellent understanding of practical metallurgy and developing pattern steel.

Phil was interested in using mokume in his work - I have an example of his piece that you can see-because of the traditional relationship of the hardware to the blade and the pattern relationships. He worked a lot with the patina process, the rokusho, because we were still trying to answer questions about the formula. We got hints that maybe human urine after drinking wine-oh, I guess that was the Pijanowskis maybe said-the urine of a man who had drunk a lot of wine could affect the formula.

MS. DOUGLAS: You're talking about the trace element in rokusho that couldn't be identified.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. So Phil drank a lot of wine-[laughs]-and experimented with that. And, you know, it produced results, but not really, I guess, equivalent to the Japanese rokusho. But Phil brought his own innovation to the SIU research, pattern development and his understanding and appreciation of Japanese traditions. After graduation ,Phil was awarded an artist residency. The craft school is-

MS. DOUGLAS: Portland?

MR. KINGTON: -in Portland, and he was there a couple years. He set up the first smithy there, as a matter of fact, and met Lane, the woman he's married to now. And she got a teaching job in Springfield, Missouri. As a matter of fact, while there, Phil became a mentor to Rick Smith, who is now teaching here at Carbondale, and taught Rick to make pattern steel well before he was accepted as a graduate student here. And then Lane was offered a job teaching at University of Washington-Seattle. Phil set a smithy up and was doing commission work. He was selling a lot of blades, the blades were moving more toward the high-end cutlery for food preparation. And the guy-maybe you remember his name-who owns Reactive Metals?

MS. DOUGLAS: Bill Seeley?

MR. KINGTON: Bill called me up. One of my students, Kara Nasca-[interrupted by barking dogs].

[Audio Break.]

MS. DOUGLAS: So you were getting around to talking about-

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. Bill called me, Bill Seeley, because of a document that Kara Nasca, one of my graduate students who studied at the Cleveland Art Institute, had put together. It was essentially a recipe book. She solicited recipes on techniques, processes and formulas, from different working craftsmen in the field. Bill wanted to sell it as a publication through his business, and she ultimately didn't want to do that, which was fine.

Bill was selling titanium and special alloys, as well as materials, and I told him I thought there would be a market for mokume, because jewelers didn't want to mess with making it. They just didn't want to deal with the process, which maybe says something about the attitude of their generation. My generation of metalsmiths were anxious to rediscover and use old techniques and processes. Phil Fike discovered old niello formulas at the British Museum library and took joy in sharing that information.

MS. DOUGLAS: Meaning that your generation did want to make their own?

MR. KINGTON: Well, we would spend endless amounts of time just making this little precious piece of material used in an object, a piece of jewelry.

So anyway, he said, "Oh, yeah, it would probably sell big." Phil's a great technician. I gave him Phil Baldwin's telephone number, and they got together. So I guess Phil works three days a week making billets. Bill must be selling a lot of the stuff. So this was just a nice commercial spin-off of some of our research.

Richard and I have always encouraged students in self-directed research. As an example, Mary Lee Hu, when she was here, she was taking a weaving class, and she was having problems finding anything personal to express in her metalwork. I'd been experimenting with weaving metal wires. I found the results interesting, but it bored me, so I badgered her into working with wire. That was when she got to wire structuring. I would make suggestions to students and push them if I thought a process or concept was suitable; or if they had areas of interest that appeared worth exploring, I would make suggestions and try to encourage the students into pursuing it. Some of our students have become very closely identified with a concept or process.

Anyway, that's a long story, starting with Mr. Freeman. But it was an interesting journey.

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, certainly something that I was aware of as a metal student was that SIU was a place where this research had taken place and where information was being developed in certain specialized areas of metalwork.

I wanted to touch base on a couple things that we overlooked or wanted to go back to. One was your involvement with SNAG and the American Craft Council and other craft organizations. I believe you talked about something you're doing with Hindman School [Kentucky School of Craft, Hindman] right now in Kentucky. And the thing was, which is not really related, but to talk about some of the historical exhibitions you've been involved with, like "Fiber, Clay, Metal."

MR. KINGTON: Right. Maybe start with the organizations.

Philip Morton in the late '60s was writing a book on jewelry techniques, and he contacted a number of metalsmiths for photographs, some people for contributions, and asked me and, I think, Stanley to be proofreaders and/or just to respond to what he was doing with content. And so there was a lot of communication going on. And, of course, a lot of the younger people, my generation just out of school, were networking and talking back and forth, but the primary get-together of metal people and other craftsmen would be at ACC events.

Because of the growth of crafts in the United States, there came an increasing need for media organizations-ACC had been a wonderful mother and fostered amazing growth in the crafts of the media groups. The groups were so large by the late '60s that ACC conferences could not meet all the needs of the media groups. And so it was becoming increasingly apparent that we needed some sort of media group. It was Phil's idea to form, and he and I talked about people who should be on the forming committee. I'm sure he bounced the idea off other people that he was in communication with. We met in Chicago in '78, had a first meeting, and then met again in Boston the following spring.

MS. DOUGLAS: Was it '78 or '68?

MR. KINGTON: Sixty-eight, I'm sorry, '68, and then I think Boston was in '69, the following spring. At some point, we elected temporary officers. Phil was the acting president and I was acting vice president. There was a lot to do, charters and tax status things and not-for-profit paperwork, and contacting other people that should be included. I think there were, like, 14 of us in Chicago and a lot more in Boston.

We started planning on a conference site for the first metal conference, and it was obvious that a great way to establish that or to get it on a firm base would be with a competitive exhibition. And so after planning in '70, we met in St. Paul and approved a charter, and name, etc. I won't get into the details, but there were a lot of arguments and disagreements about the nature and exclusivity of the organization and what SNAG was actually about. And it certainly could be agreed that it was important to have a clearinghouse, a way of exchanging ideas and information, a way of socializing with peers, and the need to promote the metalsmith's product.

Elections were held in '70, and I was elected president and served-I believe the terms were three years-served till '73, and then went on the board of directors and served on the board. I don't think this is the place for it, but there were some continuing philosophical disagreements going on, and I resigned from the organization a couple of years later.

It should be remembered also, to put this kind of in context, that about five weeks after the St. Paul meeting of SNAG, we had the first blacksmithing workshop here in Carbondale in 1970, and then ABANA started forming in '73, and I became an officer on the board of directors of ABANA and served into '78.

I've never been a political animal. But I felt both media organizations were important. It was very important to me to get them formed, but I wasn't interested in the politics of them. They certainly served my purpose as far

as being able to network and promote the media. The one thing, certainly, in my mind, was the importance for young craftsmen coming out of school to have an arena in which to meet older people and share information, meet their peers, and move into the mainstream of their field as soon as possible. In '76, I was asked to serve on the board of trustees.

MS. DOUGLAS: Of the Crafts Council?

MR. KINGTON: Of the American Craft Council. At the time, I was not a member. A lot of craftsmen in this country have kind of a family relationship with ACC, a love-hate situation, and sometimes it can be very petty. "I sent you a photograph and you didn't put it in the magazine." I hadn't been a member because I thought ACC had lost touch with what it had created, and it was a mother that was too busy doing other things. In fact, one of the reasons for the rapid growth of new media organizations is because ACC simply wasn't meeting the various craft media needs. The craft movement had gotten huge, and there was just no way ACC could meet all the needs of its membership.

So I went on the board, and I felt I had something to contribute. As I told you, I was told the night before my first board meeting that there was a very distinct-it does not exist today-but there was a very distinct difference between a craftsman trustee and a trustee. Craftsmen trustees were advised to keep quiet. I wasn't there to keep my mouth shut. However, a very sobering thing occurred the first day of the meeting. Mrs. [Aileen Osborne] Webb stepped down as the chairman of the board of trustees after many, many years of dedicated service. I certainly respected her as a lady of great dignity and dedication. She was the giver, the provider of the whole craft movement, and a woman of great stature, in my mind.

In many ways serving on the ACC board was more fun and challenging than the forming of the two other metal organizations, simply because of the time. Many of the board members of ACC at that time were family members and friends of Mrs. Webb, and when she resigned, they felt no longer responsible to be part of the board. In fact, many of them didn't even come to the meetings. New board members that came on were-Barbara Rockefeller, first of all, took the chairman's position. She had been on the board for a while. She was Rod Rockefeller's wife, who was Nelson's first son, oldest son. And she continued that tradition of Mrs.Webb's; she felt she had a responsibility to make a contribution to the community, to society and culture.

She also was able to attract some very interesting people to serve who did have interest in the crafts. Ted Nierenberg started the Dansk international business, the fine Scandinavian design company specializing in eating, cooking, serving utensils that he started, I guess, in the '50s. And there were a number of other people that did have more-[tape ends midsentence].

[BEGIN TAPE 7 SIDE A.]

MR. KINGTON: [Begins midsentence]-who were, I felt, much more interested in the crafts and the health of ACC. ACC was in a desperate position administratively and financially. It had gone through successive groups of presidents, or directors, chief administrators, whatever their title. In 1978 Sam Scheer served as the administrator for a year or two before he resigned. Ted Nierenburg was retired. He decided to move into the city and to devote himself to the Council, try to get things up and running and look at all operations. He received reports, but he wanted to deal with the day-to-day issues.

We had been talking for some time about a change of what the real mission of ACC and of *Craft Horizons* was and what it was doing. I guess my position was to look critically at the Council's operations and its services provided through the magazine and through the conferences, communication of information-was the Council addressing critical issues in crafts, criticism. Maybe instead of doing what the craft media organizations were doing well with their publications, maybe ACC should focus on the promotion of the product and elevating the craft movement in the sight of the collector and the general public. The magazine needed a different format.

And there were other trustees who had similar ideas. Drewry Hanes came on the board about the same time Ted did, or maybe a little bit before. The mission of the museum was also under discussion. The Council's only income generation was primarily the magazine and membership fees, and it was always an issue of how to attract more members, how to sell more magazines. There was also discussion about the possibility of newsstand sales. But Rose was very resistant.

MS. DOUGLAS: Rose Slivka?

MR. KINGTON: Slivka.

MS. DOUGLAS: Who was the editor at that time?

MR. KINGTON: Had been editor since the '60s sometime. She was resistant to change because, "It costs too much money to go for more color. Everybody wants it to stay the way it is. We change format from time to

time."

One significant change, I guess, was that after Tarrytown-which was a big trustee meeting on the Rockefeller estate, a retreat of four days-we were dealing with all these issues, rethinking what the Council was about.

I suggested that all the media organizations were having trouble with their bookkeeping, their publication, their membership lists-why doesn't the Council provide a central service that all the media groups can buy into, have a central publication house? With some expansion, a small amount of staff, ACC could benefit the organizations, continue to provide leadership in the crafts through service.

Ted, on his day-to-day activities, started doing background checking on the magazine's publication costs with other printers. Rose's position was, "I have the lowest cost to do the quality job we're doing." Well, Ted started doing his own checking and he found that he could add a third more color for less money. And essentially, then, Rose was just let go. Lois Moran, who had been associated with the Council for many, many years, was well suited to move into that position. That was when she was made editor of *American Craft*.

The other thing we talked about at Tarrytown was consolidating names of the organization and its operations. We had American Craft Council, and the Council had recently taken over responsibility for American Craft Enterprises, which, you know, started off with Carol Little and a few other wives of teachers starting a craft fair. Rhinebeck was getting bigger and bigger. And the Baltimore market was already in place, and AC Enterprises became another income-generating arm of the Council.

We were also looking at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, *Craft Horizons*, the library, so it was decided to consolidate names and make sure everybody knew that the magazine was a publication of the American Craft Council, so it became *American Craft*. And the museum became the American Craft Museum instead of Contemporary Craft. Paul made a significant argument as to the name, limiting the mission of the museum.

There was a lot of debate on whether it really is a museum or a gallery, because a museum has holdings, a collection that can be studied, permanently displayed. What the museum did have was in a storage building over in New Jersey. There was also discussion about the museum spinning out and becoming its own freestanding not-for-profit nonentity. That did happen, I guess in the late '90s.

And then the next problem we had to deal with was MoMA [Museum of Modern Art, New York City], getting right of eminent domain to kick us out of the building that housed the museum.

MS. DOUGLAS: At that time it was on 53rd Street but on the side that MoMA's on.

MR. KINGTON: Of MoMA, yes. That was really strange. Bob Peterson, who had just come on the board, was a very interesting man. I don't know if you know who he is. He started the Jack In The Box restaurant chain and was bought out. The way he presented himself was, "Well, I loved to make hamburgers, and I started Jack In the Box, and somebody had to buy it from me, so I bought banks and hotels in cities I like to live in." He apparently had a bank and a hotel in Switzerland someplace. But he was a very low-key, common man. He was a very bright man, but he was a very down-to-earth kind of guy. And, you know, the day that it was announced that we were being kicked out, he said, "Well, I've got a million dollars; let's find another place."

This was unheard of. William Paley-who was on the MoMA board-convinced the politicians in the city and in the state to give a not-for-profit institution, not a state institution, the right of eminent domain and the right to collect taxes, to build a high-rise condo, charge rent, and collect taxes, and to use those taxes and profits for the purpose of museum enhancement and collection development. New York paused over this. It made some people mad that one museum would treat a sister museum that way.

MS. DOUGLAS: So you're talking about MoMA's ability to do-

MR. KINGTON: The power to do that.

MS. DOUGLAS: To do eminent domain.

MR. KINGTON: Paley and the Rockefellers as well as other powerful people on the MoMA board, in effect, didn't have second thoughts about putting a small museum out of business.

MS. DOUGLAS: It was a brownstone.

MR. KINGTON: Just a little brownstone, and to just say, "You don't exist anymore." Plus it affected the American Folk Art museum, too, which was on 53rd Street. And so it went crossways with some people. ACC didn't know what kind of friends they had in New York.

So there was a lot of negotiation and positioning. Ultimately ACC was offered more money for the building, which

is a lot more than it was worth. MoMA renovated the building across the street for the museum, and they offered free office space in the city for the magazine and officers.

MS. DOUGLAS: That was down in the 40s somewhere, I believe.

MR. KINGTON: Those offices?

MS. DOUGLAS: I think so.

MR. KINGTON: Probably. Some time went by, and Ted got a telephone call, late in the evening, from somebody who didn't identify himself, but told him, "Did you know that CBS has pretty much bought up everything but a parking lot and your brownstone on 53rd Street for their new building that they're going to put up right next to the other CBS building, and that they will be approaching you to negotiate for sales?" And, of course, CBS does not have the right of eminent domain.

That's essentially how the American Craft Museum was positioned to move into the ground floor area of the new CBS building, with a lot of concessions, but not everything the ACC board had hoped for. They had negotiated for ownership of space and perpetual utilities free. That's what they were hoping for. I went off the board in 1980 while those negotiations were going on with CBS.

MS. DOUGLAS: Nineteen eighty?

MR. KINGTON: I was on the ACC board of trustees from '76 to 1980.

Since then, I've had involvement with the National [Ornamental] Metal Museum [Memphis, TN]. I was on the board of trustees for 10 years. You brought up the Hindman School. Two years ago I was invited to serve on a national steering committee, an advisory committee, for a new crafts school that is designed to be an artisan school, a different format that you normally have in the university and college art departments. The original budgeting for the school and community from the state of Kentucky was in excess of $30 million, but a lot of that is going to city infrastructure, flood control, sewage water, and so forth.

MS. DOUGLAS: Is this a school that's being built from the ground up?

MR. KINGTON: The first stage of it is going into the renovation of a marvelous old high school building that was a CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] project, beautifully designed. Almost looks like Prairie School design. And the next stage will be $8 million for a new wing. They will have woodworking, blacksmithing, jewelry, silversmithing, ceramics, and fibers when the building project is completed. There will be a director, a dean, who has been hired now and will be starting in June, to supervise renovation and construction-tooling up the studios and faculty hires.

And there's a marketing arm for the school. Gallery space is now being renovated for that, and there's a special community resource center that will have computers available and other support systems for people who complete the educational program, as well as craftsmen working in the area, to help market and promote their products. There will also be a marketing agent associated with that group, directly tied into what is a fairly well developed craft statewide marketing system now, sponsored by the state, with a publication and two craft fairs.

MS. DOUGLAS: And just to clarify, is this going to be called the Hindman School?

MR. KINGTON: No, it's going to be called Kentucky School of Craft.

MS. DOUGLAS: And is it associated with the Hindman Settlement School?

MR. KINGTON: No. It's attached to the community college system in Knott County, which is-I don't remember the name of the town.

MS. DOUGLAS: And is it open to any person that wants to attend it?

MR. KINGTON: Yes. There's a high level of dyslexia in the area, and so it will be possible to attend the school for studio practice with no expectations of certification, but there will be business courses, and students who become certified will have had business courses that are directly customized to their own particular business needs, bookkeeping, so forth and so on. The model program that we're using is just outside of Asheville, North Carolina, a community college, just off of Highway 40.

MS. DOUGLAS: Haywood Tech?

MR. KINGTON: Yes, Haywood Tech. We've got a faculty member who teaches business for the crafts program there, who primarily teaches in the business programs, but he and the ceramist there have developed courses

specifically for those people who are wanting to open their own potteries. So that's become a very strong model for KSC, the model that's going to be in place here. And they will have computer literacy. The students will be able to make their own graphics and their own promotion, and there will be a support system for promoting and aiding the sales.

MS. DOUGLAS: Is it for college-age kids or high school, or-

MR. KINGTON: College age, but we are also trying to develop a summer program for high school students that would be based on something like the program I described I had at the University of Kansas. It would be a summer residency for talented high school students, but would be particularly for crafts instruction.

MS. DOUGLAS: But for high school kids.

MR. KINGTON: Yes. And they're also thinking about demonstration programs in the public schools, special workshops that have participatory kinds of activities for high school students. The first year KSC students will attend structured process- and product-orientated classes.

The second year will allow more latitude, encouraging personal design. There certainly will be an effort to retain and respect the traditions of mountain crafts, but the student will not be limited to that. Upon completing the program at KSC, if a student wants to go on to the university and study more art design, design theory, so forth, they'll be encouraged to do so.

I worked as a consultant for the Appalachian Center for Crafts back 20-plus years ago. This concept was their original mission to start with. It was similar to KSC's, and then they lost site of their mission, for a lot of different reasons that I won't go into now.

MS. DOUGLAS: So this place sounds like it's specifically geared toward serving the community or the region that it's in.

MR. KINGTON: Yes. It's designed to do that, but they're hoping that it will become a model, attracting out-of-state students also. It is hoped that its school will stimulate a community of self-employed craftsmen that will benefit the people and business owners in Knott County.

Right now in Paducah, Kentucky, downtown, there are some great old buildings; there's a program offering very low-interest loans to purchase buildings and encourage artists and craftsmen to buy those buildings and renovate and open studios and shops. There are some very interesting things happening in Kentucky right now.

MS. DOUGLAS: It's not a new theme for craft to be tied into economic redevelopment in a region.

MR. KINGTON: And certainly North Carolina. Again, we talked about this, I think, at lunch. When Becky's survey comes out, you might want to tell what that survey or her organization's name is, because I don't remember it.

MS. DOUGLAS: Handmade in America.

MR. KINGTON: Yeah. When that comes out, I think it's going to shape the thinking of a lot of state politicians. They're going to be more and more interested in what the craftsman is doing as a business owner and taxpayer.

MS. DOUGLAS: We just had some kind of study interested in seeing what the impact of the Mint Museum of Craft and Design has been just in Charlotte in terms of sales of craft, bringing more people to the area that want to buy, that kind of thing.

MR. KINGTON: Right.

MS. DOUGLAS: Do you want to say any more about craft organizations you worked with?

MR. KINGTON: No. I think pretty much that covers it. I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunities I've had as far as being involved in forming two media organizations and playing some leadership role in both of those and seeing them become very, very healthy organizations, ongoing organizations serving the particular needs of their members. They're healthy and strong, and I believe they are going to remain vital.

If anybody has benefited from American Craft Council, it's certainly been me. Mrs. Webb touched my life when I was in junior high school. My mother's third cousin bought me a subscription to *Craft Horizons* when I was in the ninth grade, and it had to have some impact on my life. I know *Craft Horizons* was in the classroom in high school, and I certainly read it throughout my college days at KU. Mrs. Webb affected my life in many ways. The day she retired from a leadership role in ACC, I was certainly mindful of all she had meant to my life; it brought tears to my eyes as well as a lot of other people. Through her generosity, in time, service, and financially, she touched many people.

I was happy to provide service, and I've certainly been honored by the organization. So. What more can I say?

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, it's a wonderful connection.

I also wanted to get you to go back and put on tape what you said this morning about the "Fiber, Clay, Metal" exhibition in St. Paul.

MR. KINGTON: What question is that? [Looking at papers.]

MS. DOUGLAS: Well, that wasn't really a question. It was more that you were talking about the nature of exhibitions.

MR. KINGTON: Oh. Yeah. It's right here. Again, there were two national exhibitions back in the '50s and '60s that were very important. One was the Wichita National. The other one is the Fiber, Clay, Metal USA exhibition.

There probably are people that will disagree with me, but in my mind, the '64 "Fiber, Clay, Metal" exhibition was a pivotal exhibition. Several things occurred that changed the way exhibitions were juried in the U.S. I made an effort to talk with Malcolm Lynn, who was the director of the St. Paul Art Center, the sponsor of the exhibition, to ask him what had happened, because the jury result shocked the craft world of the country. It was like an earthquake. There were a lot of upset and very irate craftsmen throughout the country.

The first thing, Malcolm told me that they were generally used to-or St. Paul Arts Center was used to-receiving about a thousand pieces for the exhibition, maybe a few more, a few less, and-

MS. DOUGLAS: And you're saying the physical object, the real thing.

MR. KINGTON: The physical object. Pretty much up to this time, the object was juried and not a slide. Slide jurying of the work was something that occurred later. I think this event caused that decision. Instead of receiving a thousand pieces, as they expected, they received something like 3,000 pieces, maybe more. They had to be unboxed, uncrated, put on tables, or presented some way for jurying. The staff was overwhelmed. The jury was overwhelmed, in that it took so much more time to view. Peter Voulkos and-I don't remember the other two people who served on the jury, but there's an article in *Craft Horizons* following this event, a review of the show, that lists the names of the jurors.

The jury was overwhelmed by the amount of work and made a single observation-the similarity of much of the work. There's little to no personal identity; the subject of the work was more about "see how well I can throw, see what kind of glazes I use." And this was a consistent criticism through the ceramics, fibers, and the metalwork. So they refused to give the announced awards, first, second, third, purchase awards, honorable mentions, and so forth. They refused to award any of those. They made up their own award, which was "special recognition." And they juried into the exhibition something less than a hundred pieces out of the total number of entries.

That created shock waves. If you look at most of the work being done in the '40s, the '50s, and early '60s, the craftsman's search was really about process and information. It was about how to do things. How does the craftsman understand his or her media, refining control over process and technique, mastering one's craft media.

There was probably less emphasis on personal expression in the schools.

[BEGIN TAPE 7 SIDE B.]

MR. KINGTON: I can remember Ken Ferguson telling me that he called 15 friends one time because he discovered something about a particular glaze. It was this sharing, giving thing. It was a wonderful time. It was really a joyous time. It was almost like a convention of Baptist missionaries converting each other, you know, and converting other people to this wonderful world of making objects and sharing information. The crafts were about materials and process, from the late '40s well into the 1960s.

The "Fiber, Clay, Metal" jury brought up a number of questions. Where are all these people coming from? How did they get here, and how did they all learn to do pretty much the same thing? So the jury statement was one of, "Well, when are craftsmen going to put their signature on their work? When is it going to look like somebody is an individual, who is special, who is different, who is trying new ideas, who is taking chances? There's got to be more to it than everybody making the same variations of similar craft objects."

The nature of the exhibitions started changing then; it became standard to jury by slides. The craft object started to become more of a personal statement. National exhibitions continued to receive large numbers of entries and jurors became more selective.

"What have you got to say? What is the content-concept-idea that you want to express? Use technique and process to realize your ideas. The process you use to make your object is not the subject of the finished piece."

MS. DOUGLAS: It sounds like this exhibition raised the bar.

MR. KINGTON: It did. Yeah.

MS. DOUGLAS: And also, because you had so many thousands of people responding to it, it sounds like it was one of a handful of venues to show in.

MR. KINGTON: Well, the opportunities to exhibit in the '50s was much less than what occurred in the '60s. In the '70s there were many exhibition opportunities. I think in three years I was in, on the average, 20 shows a year. And, you know, that's a combination of competitive and invitational, exhibitions at university galleries, [commercial] galleries, and museums. University galleries were very important to the exhibition activity at that time because there weren't that many places showing crafts. You had the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York, the Renwick, Wichita Art Center, St. Paul Arts Center-a few others.

There were state designer craftsmen shows that were encouraged by ACC. Regional craft shows. More and more museums became interested in the craft movement and wanted to present the work. But, as we talked earlier on this tape, it was very limited; at least I thought it was very limited in the '50s, and in the '60s. The "Fiber, Clay, Metal" exhibition was definitely a turning point. And I think more opportunities to exhibit came in the '60s because the bar was raised, as you said.

MS. DOUGLAS: Did you want to comment on any other exhibitions you thought were important?

MR. KINGTON: No. I was invited to participate in a lot of shows and certainly got a lot of feedback. But I always felt that this single event was an extremely important event, at least for me. And I believe in the American craft movement.

MS. DOUGLAS: Are there some other areas that I haven't asked you about you'd like to-

MR. KINGTON: You know, I think, Mary, we've covered almost everything one way or the other, at least mentioning it, the long list that you had. And I don't know, other than I've enjoyed it.

MS. DOUGLAS: Okay.

MR. KINGTON: You've made me feel comfortable.

MS. DOUGLAS: Okay.

[END TAPE 7.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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