Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with June Schwarcz, 2001 January 21

Funding for this interview was provided by the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America. Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with June Schwarcz on January 21, 2001. The interview took place in Sausalito, California, and was conducted by Arline M. Fisch 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.

June Schwarcz and Arline M. Fisch 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

[Joined in progress.]

MS. FISCH: -become interested in art because of your family?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, there were no artists in the family. My mother's parents were born in Russia, and my father's grandfather came to America from Germany. He rode in a prairie schooner from Kansas City to Grand Junction, Colorado. He was a very little man and he traded with the Indians as a fur trader and later had a little store. My father was his grandson.

MS. FISCH: Were you interested in art as a child?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I just was always drawn to color and form. As a four-year-old I saw some beautiful flowers just walking about a block away, and I pulled them up and brought them home to my mother because they were so pretty. I found out I shouldn't have done it. [Laughs.]

I've always been attracted to color, but I didn't know anything about art-my parents didn't. There was no museum in Denver, except an Indian museum.

MS. FISCH: Did you have a wonderful art teacher in school who inspired you?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No. Except once in junior high school, I had a teacher who thought I had talent. In high school my teacher didn't give anybody a grade lower than C, because if they turned out to be famous, think of how she'd feel. [Laughs.] I always loved art, and I always made things and did things as a child.

MS. FISCH: You started to study something else at the University of Colorado, and then switched to art. Is that right?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I'd been good at writing, and I'd won a state story contest, and I edited the high school literary magazine. That's what my teachers encouraged me to do. I wanted to go University of Chicago because if I'd been a writer, I would have had a mentor teacher, and she always had loved it. So I wanted to go to the University of Chicago, but my parents felt I was too young and made me go to the University of Colorado the first two years. So I went to Chicago later.

And then-before I went to the University of Colorado, I won scholarships to writers' conferences that they used to have in Boulder. I also had been studying sculpture with a man and got allergic to the mahogany that I was carving, but didn't realize it. I got ill, and they put me in the hospital because they didn't know what was wrong. I decided that posterity would forgive me if I did what I loved to do instead of what I was good at. So after a year in Chicago, which was a very scholarly year, and I'm no good as a scholar, I wanted to go to art school. I went to Pratt Institute, because the booklet that they sent you said that they placed 80 percent of their students. By that time I needed to figure out how I was going to earn a living. Otherwise I would have been an English teacher, and I didn't want to do that.

MS. FISCH: So you chose Pratt specifically because it had that opportunity.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. There was some way I could see. I really didn't like painting so much and drawing. I couldn't draw inanimate objects very well, but I was good at designing, and I liked designing things. I really never wanted to be a painter.

MS. FISCH: So Pratt was the perfect opportunity for you.

MS. SCHWARCZ: As much as I knew. I didn't graduate from Pratt Institute, because my father just couldn't afford to spend any more on sending me to college. Through the school I got a job for a company called Lightfoot

Schultz that wanted an assistant cosmetic package designer. This company was a holding company that owned a soap company called Lightfoot Schultz, Antoine & Jaquet cosmetics. And we often made private brand cosmetics and soaps for Saks and Lord & Taylor and Christmas novelties and Walt Disney animals.

I did have a mentor there. I just loved the head designer, who was very dashing and tall. She decided she was going to take this grubby little art student and make a lady out of her. The offices were on Fifth Avenue between 52nd and 53rd, and we'd go looking at fancy clothes [laughs] during our lunch hour. She gave me a good deal of freedom in designing things; her name was Vanity VanNess.

We designed packages for all that kind of things. I lived on-I was paid $15 a week, which was less than the factory employees, and eventually got raised to 20. But I didn't eat well on that job; but it went on, I don't know, maybe less than two years. Then the war was on in Europe and getting very close to us; already certain materials were not possible to use for luxury objects because they were needed for the war effort. My job had ended because we just couldn't get materials for all that stuff.

I did freelance designing then, and I'd make displays here and there. Then I worked for Bliss Display Company, who made the big animated Christmas windows for Macy's and Bambergers in New Jersey. That was great fun. There were all kinds of different people that were out of work. This was the tailend of the Depression, and we'd all come in August and be fired in November when the work had to be finished. There were bums that bummed around and there were out-of-work actors. There were men that were good with the little mechanisms that animated the figures so they moved. That was really fun, and we'd all hide from the Labor Board team, because we were working at night, too. I enjoyed that.

Then I got a job designing toys for a company called Transogram, and they were very difficult. They had no soul at all. I designed packages. We weren't very happy together. And by that time my future husband got safely back from being in Iceland, and he was going to go to officer's school. Then he was put in ordnance in Aberdeen, Maryland, near Baltimore. After he studied, they kept him on working on ordnance. We were married there and I moved out there.

And then I worked for the-and now I can't remember the name of the department store. A big department store there.

MS. FISCH: Wanamakers?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, it was Hochschild-Kohn. In Baltimore. I was put in the display department. I would help them with windows and things. When it came Christmastime, they let me open my own studio, where I made papier-mâché figures for their Christmas display. They were about my only client. [Laughs.] I made little scenes in alcoves with a papier-mâché technique I'd learned at Bliss Display.

MS. FISCH: So were any of these jobs of any significance to your future development as a craft artist?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No. Probably working for the woman that I liked so much made a difference on my personality and taught me about clothes, which has affected my work. So in that sense, it made a difference.

MS. FISCH: But the experience itself didn't-didn't propel you towards enamels in the future?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, I think every job you have tells you something about art. But, no, I didn't know what enamels were, you know.

MS. FISCH: Well, tell me, where did you learn about enamels? And I know that you're totally self-taught, but what made you decide to pursue enamels?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, let's see. After I got married and the war was over, we moved to Chicago, which was my husband's home. Oh, I had-in my window displays for the department store-Hochschild-Kohn is the department store. In the window display, I painted designs on some curtains that were there. The brother of a friend of mine saw them. He was in the textile business and he asked why didn't I design textiles. So I designed textiles, and you have to make a whole lot and then go peddle.

Then when we moved to Chicago, I continued to do that. Maybe that's when I started freelance. I had a few miscellaneous jobs that some kind of an agent got me in Chicago. Then I got children and I couldn't do much work after that. My husband was asked to design a laboratory for the nuclear research department at the University of Brazil, so we went to Brazil.

We were planning to stay there about six years, but the money for the project was stolen, in true South American fashion, so they couldn't continue with it. We got severance pay and came back to the States, and bought the house in Sausalito. But while he was deciding where we were going to live, I stayed with my family in

Denver. A friend of mine had taken a class at the Denver Art Museum taught by someone who had studied with Kenneth Bates in Cleveland, and so she was teaching this class. There were four housewives who met around a card table with a little kiln every Monday morning. And they taught me. It was like having four different teachers, because they were all interested in a different aspect of it. They lent me Kenneth Bates's book, and I read it as if it were a bible.

MS. FISCH: Well, it was a kind of bible.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. I've never been able to read anything about enameling straight through again. I'd gone to a kind of progressive education high school. My chemistry project had been to make an etching. As I said, I was oriented toward art. When we began enameling, I was a little frustrated with the clumsiness of working with grains of glass, as I've always liked a graphic, linear quality in things. I began etching the copper metal work at home, and I knew how because of my old chemistry project. And I put black enamel in the recessed areas of the etching. So I really did basse taille, but I didn't realize it.

MS. FISCH: Oh, you didn't know that that's what it was called?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No. I didn't know what I did was. We were in Denver for a few months, and when we got settled, we went to Danville, California-or maybe that was before. Anyway.

MS. FISCH: When did you go to La Jolla?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Later.

MS. FISCH: Later.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Quite a bit later. I'll have to look that up. But I could get my resume. So, let's see-

MS. FISCH: To Danville?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, we went to Danville. And it just seems to me I'm mixing my chronology up. We went to Dan-you know, I've really mixed the chronology up. We went to Danville before we went to Brazil.

[Brief interruption.]

MS. FISCH: Okay.

MS SCHWARCZ: I think I have the chronology now. After working in New York, I married my husband in Baltimore, who works at the Aberdeen Proving Ground, and then we went back to-dear God. Went back to Chicago, where we worked on-he was chief engineer for the University of Chicago cyclotron. When that was finished, we moved to Danville, California. Then we moved to Brazil, where he was supposed to build a laboratory. After about a year in Brazil we moved to-I moved to Denver with my children, while my husband decided where he was going to work.

In Denver I had some friends who had taken an enameling class at the Denver Art Museum that was taught by a woman who was taught by Kenneth Bates. Well, I learned everything I knew for a long time, most of what I knew, from these friends of mine and from Kenneth Bates's book. So even though I didn't meet him until many years later, I consider myself his pupil and we became very good friends.

From Denver we bought a house in Sausalito. We lived here for a year, and then-in the meantime my husband was working on a linear accelerator at Yale, so I lived in Sausalito for a year, and then we moved to Connecticut, where he worked for Yale. I-since Yale was close to New York, I went to New York, and went to America House and said that I would like to see the very best enamels there are in New York City. And the nice woman, who was a clerk there, didn't know where to send me.

And I told her what I was doing. In other words, I was enameling over etched and engraved surfaces, and some of my work by this time-I pounded out the metal. In the beginning, when I was in Sausalito, I worked and made a lot of ashtrays of spun copper, some of them etched and some plain, and I sold them in craft fairs. And I still think it's a very good way to learn your medium, because you haven't spent a lot of time on the making the form, and so you don't feel badly if you wreck it. I experimented with everything I could think of-lace stencils and all kinds of things. Then I began to pound out some of my shapes.

When I went to America House, the woman said to me, "We are going to start a new museum and the curator has offices in this building. He's not here right now. Why don't you come back this afternoon and talk to him." So I came back that afternoon. He was a very handsome young Frenchman named Dominick Maillard. He looked at me as if I was a middle-aged housewife, which I was. But he made an appointment for me to see him in a couple of weeks and bring my work.

I brought my work, and he said I had renewed his faith in enamels. So that was very nice. He showed them to Oppi Untracht, who I didn't know, but who was going to write a book about enamels. Oppi photographed them and had some in the book that he wrote on enameling.

So being at Yale, and having contact with New York, I had work in the very first exhibition when the museum opened. Later, after I moved back to California, they had an exhibition of enamels, and they commissioned pieces. I was commissioned to make demonstration pieces of the basse0taille technique.

Okay. So let's see.

MS. FISCH: So from Yale, you moved to La Jolla briefly.

MS. SCHWARCZ: We were in La Jolla for over a year, and I did get to know a lot of craftsmen at the Allied Craftsman group, and I had a lot of friends. It was really fun living in a smaller area, knowing all the people that were associated with the museum and knowing other craftsmen. I met Kay Whitcomb at that time and-

MS. FISCH: The Woolleys? Did you know the Woolleys?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, very well. And I knew the Woolleys and I knew-I knew all the people that were in the craft group then. And then we moved back to Sausalito, and we've stayed here ever since.

MS. FISCH: So you finally settled in Sausalito about 1958, do you think?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, earlier than that. Let's see, we bought the house in '54 and I started to enamel in '54.

MS. FISCH: But when you moved back from La Jolla, that was '57 or '58?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Let's see, when was La Jolla?

MS. FISCH: Yes, it was '57.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. So that'd be '57 or '58. And the museum in La Jolla gave me a one-man show, which meant a lot to me. That was my first one-man show.

MS. FISCH: And that was called the La Jolla Art Center at that time?

MS. SCHWARCZ: That time, yes.

MS. FISCH: Well, that was quite an honor and an achievement.

MS. SCHWARCZ: It was a great satisfaction. Nothing's more fun than showing off to your friends or the people that know you. You know, I had a show in Switzerland, and if nobody knows you, and it's not as much fun.

MS. FISCH: So what kinds of things did you show in that La Jolla show? Were they bowls and panels?

MS. SCHWARCZ: They were both bowls and panels, nothing was spun. Well, sometimes I reshaped spun pieces, but most of the spun copper was too thin and would warp if I fired them a lot. Mostly they were hammered and they were wall pieces. I worked in a variety of techniques. And when we lived in Connecticut, we lived quite in the country. We had 40 acres of land, and so did our nearest neighbors, in a house that we rented. I was etching everything then, and I felt-I was greatly influenced by the nature I saw. And I felt-I used a lot of designs of worms eating wood, elm bark, and the erosion in rock formations. And I did one piece I still have of a barn, where I just drew lines in asphalt varnish on the copper. And I drew a little river and just-it's all rocks and sunshine. That piece was stolen from the Philadelphia museum.

I felt there was a compatibility between the action of acid and the erosion of the elements on things. And so I worked for a long time with these naturally eroded surfaces. But the basse taille was very rich, and in time I got tired of it. By then I was living here. I continued doing the etching, but I have a natural appetite for things that are really more dry. And I love strong, simple things; I love Noguchi and Brancusi and things like that.

When I worked in New York, I saw African art. Well, actually this was before I was married, when I went to New York, I saw African art for the first time at a gallery and I just flipped over it. I'd never heard of it, never known there was such. When I studied art, art meant European art. But I've always loved African Art, and I love ethnic jewelry.

And one time my husband brought home a piece of very thin foil. I mean by very thin, quite a bit thinner than you could buy in a hobby shop for tooling. And it-it weighs about an ounce a square foot. I don't know what gauge it is. I can probably find out. I began gathering and shaping it. I had always liked clothes and did a lot of

sewing when I couldn't afford to buy the kind of clothes I liked.

I began in time to be interested in the forms I could make with the foil. And I think, by nature, I'm probably more a sculptor than a painter, although I do often try to combine both in my work. Not too long after I'd come back to Sausalito I had a two-man exhibition at the de Young Museum in San Francisco with Trude Guermonprez.

MS. FISCH: Did you do work specifically for that exhibition, or you showed the work that you had accumulated?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I work too slowly. I tried to do some things for it. But it was a large show. I had about 50 pieces. And so unless I have a year or so, I can't do work for an exhibition. I had some time, though, and it's always fun to work for an exhibition. But I can't do enough for a whole show in a year, by any means.

MS. FISCH: So the show at the de Young included both the earlier pieces of basse taille and some of the newer?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. In fact, I'd just started doing the electroplated foil. And originally I wanted to do electroplating to make my etching a little deeper. I have pieces that I can show you where they're both etched and then the etching would be partially masked out, leaving certain areas to be plated a little bit. I enameled over it. It would still have quite a shallow surface, because if the metal would protrude beyond the enamel, it would burn black.

MS. FISCH: But it gave you another layer.

MS. SCHWARCZ: It gave me another layer, and that's why I wanted to do electroplating. But then after I got the foil, which my husband brought to me-he had a very good knowledge of metals and techniques and materials and machinery. He was a mechanical engineer. So I was kind of glad to have this foil to work in a larger sculptural way. I felt I couldn't go any further in the basse taille. In some things I have combined them, like a basse-taille band around the bottom. You know, I'd plate it and then I'd etch it. But by now mostly just was interested in the foil and the plating.

MS. FISCH: This house in Sausalito is an absolutely wonderful sight-

MS. SCHWARCZ: Thank you.

MS. FISCH: -and a beautiful building. Tell me a little bit about the house, because there're so many wonderful things here that clearly reflect your interests in art from many places.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, when I get money that I've earned, it doesn't seem to amount to anything if I put it into the household budget, except when the kids were still in college. Then we were always borrowing in the winter to pay back in the summer. But once I didn't have the children to worry [about], I wanted something in exchange for what I did, like sort of a pack rat in some way.

MS. FISCH: A reward.

MS. SCHWARCZ: A reward. And rewards were often clothe,s because I do enjoy certain kinds of clothes and jewelry. But even more, I care about the things that I look at. I wish I could love things and not want to own them, because my house is crowded. A lot of stuff my daughter's taken when I find more things. I love ethnic things, and I've been influenced by many different cultures. We bought a lot of American Indian things early in our time.

And in the beginning, we couldn't afford to buy good art and we bought a lot of folk art, which I have mostly in the back of the house. As time went on and I saw things, I began buying African art. I'm very influenced by Japanese aesthetics, and maybe I can enlarge on that later. Lately I've been buying some ancient Chinese ceramics. I bought one ancient wood figure.

I have these things and live with these cultures, then travel to see them. I've traveled some and I've seen them and I enjoy it, but I'm a compulsive worker. And I don't know why I should be. I don't go out and walk in the beautiful countryside. I just want to get whatever I have done so I can go down and work.

One way I feel about this art, it's so indirect. Even though I know what I want to look at, as I work on my enamels, they most often change into something else, particularly with the metals, which, you know, don't always come out to be the color I'd like. Working in transparent enamels, if they're too thin, they can burn out and make black pits, and [if] it's too thick, it doesn't get transparent. So it's kind of like gambling.

I work on several pieces at a time because I have concentration that spreads around. I mean, I have scattered concentration. And if I get stuck on one, I can work on another. It also is very wise as far as time is concerned, once you heat the kiln, to have several things to fire. When I'm laying out my foil, it makes sense to lay it out and cut out several pieces.

MS. FISCH: In looking around the house at all the many different kinds of things you collect, are you influenced by these things in your work?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I am influenced by the cultures that these came from. I have a lot of art books, and I always can find ideas in them. I don't try to reproduce them. But they give me an idea for surface or shape and texture. I'm never out of ideas.

[End Tape 1, Side A.]

MS. SCHWARCZ: -African things. And I like Northwest, too, but they haven't been as influential. And I like-I like a lot of the very simple moderns. I have a drawing by Ellsworth Kelly of a plant, string bean leaves, and I have a print by Motherwell influenced by Japanese calligraphy. Japanese culture has had a lot of influence on me, more maybe than any single thing. The philosophy of the tea ceremony, where you can show the quality of the material. Everything doesn't have to be slick and perfect and smooth. And I also like Zen things. I've never been-I'm not religious, and I've always thought I ought to learn more about Zen, since I like the culture. But I just haven't the patience for it. I love the way something can be suggested or inferred with it.

I was with the Japonesque Gallery in San Francisco for several years. The owner loved a single rose I have, and one time I was going into town, so I picked one for him, and on the way the petal fell off. And I gave it to him and apologized, and he said, "No, this makes it more interesting." He said, the mind wants to complete it. I'm very interested in that aspect of what makes something interesting. And it is true. I'm interested in things that are subtle, that are behind a fog. I've been working a lot with opal enamels lately because I like light coming through. I'm very influenced by the fog in Sausalito and the way the sun looks through fog that's thick or thin or breaking up.

MS. FISCH: So it's the Japanese aesthetic that sparks your creativity.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. In the older things, they have a wonderful sense of color. I'm not so interested in contemporary Japanese except for their clothes and some craft. But, so-

MS. FISCH: But it's the subtlety of the look that appeals to you.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. I like color, too. I love color, too. I like it all. But I buy a lot of books just for color. But like I think black and brown is a beautiful combination. You know, that kind of thing.

MS. FISCH: Well tell me about the studio which is also part of the house and how it served your needs. I know it's evolved somewhat over the years since you've had new equipment and new facilities, but it seems to work really well for you.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. Well, my studio, I live on a hillside. My studio is the floor underneath the house itself, and it's an unfinished floor. It has no central heating or running water, although in recent years I've gotten plumbing, a faucet and sink in there. For many [years], until about six years ago, I carried buckets from the hose upstairs. Well, after 20 years I got a faucet on the same level. But I was bending over buckets all the time, now I'm too old.

But-and I have very good space, fairly good artificial light, and I used to share it with my husband, of course, who built wooden things. It's a mess. And I only clean up when I can't work any more because it's so crowded.

MS. FISCH: Well, it's a pretty big studio. I mean, you have quite a lot of space to spread things out.

MS. SCHWARCZ: It's the width of the house.

MS. FISCH: And does it-I mean, it serves your needs but is there any way you'd like it to be different?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I'd prefer central heating. Might be nice if I had a toilet there, too. [Laughs.] But it's all right. I get my outdoor exercise going up and down stairs here.

MS. FISCH: And is it easy for you to work there? Do you do all your work there, or you do some of it up here in the house?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I work upstairs-when I'm going to start a bowl, I make little pencil sketches just to help me remember the form that I've thought of, and then I work it out in newsprint paper. It's much easier working with paper, because you can Scotch tape pieces on, and I sometimes make several versions before I get a form I like, and sometimes it comes out very quickly.

Once I've developed several shapes, I roll a copper-thin copper foil-out on the dining room table, and I cut the shapes from the pattern. Then I sew it together with very thin copper wire that comes inside ordinary electric

cord. Depending on the shape, if it's gathered, the copper is stiff enough to make it hold its shape in the bath. But if it's a more smooth surface, I wax inside it before I sew it together so it'll hold its shape as I sew on the bottom and plate bowl. And so most everything I do now is made in foil.

MS. FISCH: What kind of wax do you use?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I use-I use wax I get from the electroplater that's a high-temperature wax. And the reason I use it is ordinary paraffin shrinks too much and distorts the shape and can break off, whereas the high-temperature wax somehow doesn't.

MS. FISCH: And you've melted and painted on?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. And with some techniques-I haven't done it as much lately-I've used a tjanting.

MS. FISCH: Oh, yes, the Indonesian tool.

MS. SCHWARCZ: A batik-

MS. FISCH: A batik tool.

MS. SCHWARCZ: A batik tool where I want to do a design. It's a little tricky because it's so hot and runny, but I, kind of, sit on a stool and balance it on my knees to have the drip not run all over. But that makes it a little thicker. And sometimes I'll paint a design on and electroplate. So I have an electroplated piece where the outside has a design. I might electroplate it to a certain point, then paint the design in an asphalt varnish and reinforce it with wax, because the asphalt varnish breaks down pretty soon.

MS. FISCH: I'm interested in your comments that you've made several times over the years about the role of avocational craftsmen. In 1959 you talked about it at an ACC conference, and I assume it was from a very personal perspective. You said, "His freedom gives him the obligation of high standards and a chance to exploit his material. The relief of pressures of earning a living gives him the opportunity to risk making a perfect mess in hope of producing something wonderful."

Do you see yourself as an avocational craftsman?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I get mad if anyone refers to it as my hobby, but it certainly is something that I've done-my work's been very hard to sell. It takes a lot of time, it's not cheap, and I guess there wasn't the audience for some of the more sophisticated crafts there is now. But I can't-I feel I was a little dogmatic in what other people should do. It's up to them. But I have-I'd be bored stiff if I had to keep turning out things just to sell at craft fairs. And I have made some things like bracelets that are a little easier to make, that they were not enameled. But I get bored. And for me the excitement is making each piece different, and I've been grateful that I didn't have to earn a living, even when we were living very close to the cuff; when we were educating our children, my husband never suggested I go out and get a job. So I was grateful.

MS. FISCH: So you always had the opportunity to work to your own specifications and not anyone else's.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. Yes.

MS. FISCH: Did you ever do any commissions?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I have done a few, but I never was happy about them, and I much prefer people see something they like and get that or not get anything. Because I don't know what they had in their minds when they say they want something, and I'm so worried about trying to give them what they want that I don't use my own mind. And I was in an exhibition, as you were, for the Vatican Museum, *Ceremonial Objects*. I assumed it had to be a religious ceremonial object. And I made one, and I was never happy with it.

Later I heard someone, I forget who, [say] that if it was beautiful, that was the religious thing in itself, which I thought was a beautiful idea and wish I'd realized it; I could have done what I would have felt would be my best instead of what was appropriate for the occasion.

MS. FISCH: Do you ever work for private clients, you know, for an individual? Have you done commissions where someone says to you, oh, could you make me something?

MS. SCHWARCZ: A little, but not a lot.

MS. FISCH: Again, it's not your major interest.

MS. SCHWARCZ: I can make things bright or colorful. I've made a piece for the 80th birthday of the friend who

got me started in enameling, you know, that kind of thing. I can use my own wishes and taste. So I don't mind that. But I don't want to have to think about what anybody else wants. Or, I don't mind if it's subtle or bright, but otherwise I want-I think I do better work if I just think of what I do.

MS. FISCH: I know that you taught occasional summer classes and seminars at several universities in the Bay Area, but teaching doesn't seem to have been an important part of your professional life.

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, I much prefer to do it myself, because then you get the excitement of it. If it comes out, you know, and you know if it's good, it's wonderful-it's like winning a jackpot.

MS. FISCH: Have people asked you to teach?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes.

MS. FISCH: I'm sure they have.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. I've taught summer school at San Francisco State, and I could have taught there more. I don't have a great deal of energy between taking care of a house and a family. My family's grown now, but taking care of them and the house, I don't have energy to teach and do my work.

MS. FISCH: So you also taught once at Arrowmont [School of Arts and Crafts, Gatlinberg, TN]. What did you think of that experience? And did you ever think of teaching there again?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I never in my life had enough time to do my own work, and I enjoyed teaching at Arrowmont, even though it was kind of warm. And I liked-I liked the students and I liked seeing new places, but I just prefer to work at home. And I'm glad. I've never been much in the South, and I think that's the only time, unless you count Baltimore as South. So it was fun. It was fun to all sit together at meals and everything, although sometimes I missed a little time to myself.

MS. FISCH: A little privacy.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. They were working night and day.

MS. FISCH: But was it a one-week class?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I think so. I usually don't like to do two weeks. I will say this, I didn't ever learn enameling in a class, and I'm quite insecure about teaching, you know. I'm glad to tell everybody everything I know. I don't believe in people having secrets. I mean, anybody that's any good is going to have to see their own thing in your technique. If they borrow your technique, you're not going to hear from them unless they can really put something of their own in it.

So I've never had secrets and I'm glad to tell everybody anything I know. And then I want to go home.

MS. FISCH: I don't remember. Did you also do something in Vail, in Colorado?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, I've been to Vail two-I forget. It's two or three times.

MS. FISCH: And you really liked that.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. Vail, there was a great bunch of free spirits there, and it was-it was just more fun. But it was years later and it was a more spirited crowd.

MS. FISCH: And the teaching was very short-term?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. And also because there weren't that many people that wanted to learn basse taille, my classes were often very small, and the man in charge had a theory that if it's listed, he was going to have it, even though you only had three pupils. And so they lost money on me, and I took part in symposiums there. I think one time I had to cancel at the last minute because my husband had some kind of medical condition that we felt might be serious. And it turned out he was okay, but I needed to cancel at the last minute.

MS. FISCH: But I'm sure they understood.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, you know, one of the women told me later she paid up for everything just because she wanted to study with me.

MS. FISCH: On another subject, how have you sold your work, and has that been important to you?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. I want to-I think if it all piled up in my house and never went away, I wouldn't feel-I

wouldn't keep making it. You know, I don't want all this stuff just for myself. But because I'm also a collector, that's the money I use for collecting things. But my work for many years has been very hard to sell, even though I've always had a certain amount of prestige in my field. But since I've had a retrospective, it's sold much more easily, and, of course, times have been good financially. And there're now SOFA [Sculpture Objects and Functional Art, Chicago, IL] shows and things.

I sell now mostly through galleries, but I used to sell through galleries and other places.

MS. FISCH: I know you worked with galleries who market your work. And which ones have been best for you?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, Susan Cummins. Yes.

MS. FISCH: And how long have you worked with that gallery?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I don't even know. I can probably find out.

MS. FISCH: But it's been a good, long-term relationship?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Not long-long. Maybe-I wasn't with her when she first started up. I could find out.

MS. FISCH: Have there been other galleries that have been good for you in terms of placing your work in collections and so on?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Bellas Artes was good for a while, and then they got more interested in fine arts, or work by well-known fine artists. But for a while they sold quite a bit. Then I had a Gallery Japonesque in San Francisco. And it's a beautiful gallery, and I was pleased to be in it.

MS. FISCH: Is that still in business?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Uh-huh. If you want to go see it, I can take you.

MS. FISCH: But you don't sell your work there any more?

MS. SCHWARCZ: For a while I was with Gallery Japonesque, which had a variety. It carried whatever pleased the owner of it, whose name was Koichi Hara. I greatly respected his taste. He had beautiful things in the gallery, and he's the one person whose criticism I took very seriously. And so I was with him a few years, but since then I'm with Susan Cummins. And I was with Mobilia a while. Now I'm with Sybaris too, and De Vera in San Francisco.

MS. FISCH: You've traveled a lot over the years. What are your favorite places? Do you have specific goals when you travel?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I think in the beginning I didn't realize Europe was there, and when I saw Italy, looking at Old Masters' paintings, I could hardly believe it. I've traveled because I wanted to see these countries and I wanted to know their culture, and in some ways I was often fonder of rural areas than city areas. My husband and I traveled to several different places. I have had wonderful trips to Japan. I've been to Japan four times, partly because I like the aesthetic. I like the way they use old dull wood on bridges with metalwork on it, and the contrast between them. All surfaces aren't elegant, the contrast between surfaces, and I like tea ceremony things. And I've wanted to see that element. And mostly in my four Japanese trips we've spent times out of big cities, except for Kyoto.

But I'm not someone who-I have a friend and she says that every time she walks through her front door, she'd just as soon turn around right away and go back on her trip. But I love being home, and I love seeing the stuff in my house, and I love being able to work. As I say, I'm a compulsive worker, and I don't know why I can't give that up, even at my age. But it's still the excitement in my life.

MS. FISCH: Are there places that you'd like to travel that you haven't been?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I think I'd like to see Turkey. I hear people rave about that. And someone invited me to visit him in Prague, and that would have been fun, but I would have had to travel alone. He was going to be there. And I don't hear well and I don't understand directions and I get lost. I just don't want to travel alone. And another friend wants me to go to France with her; I'm very torn, but it's tiring for me now at 82, to travel.

MS. FISCH: How do children and family life affect your work?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I wanted children and I wanted a family, and I enjoyed the children. But I always felt guilty-I felt kind of selfish about wanting to do my own work, and I always felt very torn between doing things for the family and doing what I wanted. That wasn't the way it was when I was a kid. I'd do whatever I had to do and

then go out and play. I wish there'd been someone to say, well, June, it's all right if you go downstairs and play a while.

It was a great conflict, and I was determined my family wasn't going to suffer because I wanted to do this stuff. I was very tired and tense. I wasn't very relaxed [laughs] in those days. And I also had a mother-in-law who was becoming increasingly irrational. She had little strokes that affected her mentally, and I had to take her places and drive her to different religious services and doctors and things. And she did not live not with us but near wherever we were.

So I always thought that after the children were grown up, I'd have as much time as I wanted to work, but it isn't true. You still have to clean house and do dishes. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: Did you even find that being a woman artist was difficult?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I haven't found it so, but I haven't had to have a job, you know, and I haven't had salaries.

MS. FISCH: But you never experienced having your work treated differently because you were female?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No. There are too many women involved in the craft movement for that to happen.

MS. FISCH: And do you think that things are easier for women artists now, or it's always been relatively female-oriented in the enamel field?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, there're some men that are getting-I don't think of enamel as a women's field, because there are several men in it.

MS. FISCH: Very prominent. Yes.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, but you're not with your work. Your work goes off by itself, whether it's done by a man or a woman. Several people that have met me have said they're surprised that I was small and thought I would be a big woman. But I just think that it's-I know there's one article that emphasized the fact that I was a woman, and it's related to clothes. But I know men that can be affected the same way.

But the craft field, I have felt wasn't-didn't have that. Whether getting jobs teaching crafts at universities or things like that are more difficult, I don't know if that makes a difference. But I wasn't involved in that.

MS. FISCH: You've received many honors and awards throughout your career. And what are the most significant ones for you?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, getting a Gold Medal. That was lovely.

MS. FISCH: That was from the American Craft Council?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. And another one was the Metropolitan Museum getting a piece for their permanent collection. And they couldn't afford to buy it, so I had to donate it.

MS. FISCH: But they requested it?

MS. SCHWARCZ: They'd seen my work. Donna Schneier had showed the curator my work. And she'd hoped to sell her a piece, but they said their budget didn't allow it. And so I-they picked a piece. I donated it.

MS. FISCH: How does it feel to be a Living Treasure of California?

MS. SCHWARCZ: All those things are nice, you know, but they don't seem very real to me. Real life is the drugstore and grocery store. But there's no doubt it's a satisfaction. I think I wanted terribly to think my work was good. It wasn't so important for me to think that I was popular. It was important to think that it was worth the doing.

But I did like enameling in metal enough, because it's permanent. It's not going to deteriorate easily.

MS. FISCH: Well, it's interesting that you chose enameling as the discipline that you wanted to work in at the very time when enameling was having a rather hard time with its credibility.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. Well, there's so much awful stuff done in enameling. It can lead to people with very gaudy taste. The thing I liked about enameling is the transparent enamels, or using opaque enamels to enhance the transparency of the enamel. I like light, I guess. And I think with transparent enamel, especially if the metal has been worked in some fashion, it can almost act as a lens that exaggerates what you see a little bit and makes it

look-

MS. FISCH: And you like the shiny part?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Sometimes and sometimes not. But, and I have tried the etching for enamels. I have a hard time making it smooth and even, so I wanted to get sandblasting. My husband did install that for me and buy the equipment. If I want something dull, I sandblast it.

MS. FISCH: So you do actually sandblast some of the enamels now?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Oh, yes, a lot of them. After they're all enameled. I just don't use sandblasting to clean the copper, because I'm afraid of getting little grains of the abrasive material, which keeps the enamel from fusing properly.

MS. FISCH: Let's talk about the work itself. Your earliest work was primarily bowl forms and wall panels, and they had a strong emphasis on surface, the texture of the metal under transparent enamels, and you explained about that process. But why did you favor that particular technique? Was it because those surfaces lent themselves to that development?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I just thought it was interesting to see all these intricacies under the enamel.

MS. FISCH: In 1965 Anita Ventura wrote an article in *Craft Horizons* magazine, and she said, "June Schwarcz draws directly into the metal surface. The source is recognizable-coral, leaf, pine cones, thin-stemmed flowers, and water-shaped rocks. But the drawing is more abstract than stylized." And later she said that you avoid making work that is a miniature of some other medium. And in a way it's a comment about the enamel field at the time as well as about the distinctiveness of your work in enamel.

Was that a conscious effort on your part, or was it simply the aesthetic that you wanted to work with?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I didn't-I felt there were characteristics of enamel that you could use that were not available in any other medium, and that's what interested me, because I didn't want to do what everybody else had done. So, yes, I think with basse taille I worked in various ways.

MS. FISCH: Did you ever do any figurative work?

MS. SCHWARCZ: A few, little, but not much.

MS. FISCH: That wasn't as much an interest to you?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I may have had one that's in some university in Miami, and that kind of thing. And early in life here, I did some angels. I could show you early slides. And sometimes nature things I do, tortoiseshell, bark. But on the whole, I'm really interested in the abstract.

MS. FISCH: This is the end of tape one. We'll continue on the next tape.

[End Tape 1, Side B.]

MS. FISCH: This is Arline Fisch interviewing June Schwarcz at her home and studio in Sausalito, California, on January 21, 2001, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is tape number two.

In 1961 you began to electroplate and electroform in copper. How did that start, and what did that technology offer you? What were you looking for?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I'd been doing enameling with the basse-taille technique, where I would etch the copper quite freely and enamel over it. I began to wish I could go a little deeper and get a little more depth. I originally wanted electroplating to complement my etching, and by etching a surface and then masking out other areas, I could have certain surfaces that would stand out above the rest.

I mean, I could use it to accent. My husband worked for the Stanford linear accelerator, and he arranged that the man who was head of the plating shop could teach me how to do copper electroplating. Originally I thought that I liked the bumpy surface of plating, and I would like that kind of result, although through the years I've come to prefer more control of it, and I try to get a smoother finish.

So Jimmy Pope, the head of the plating department, took me to the laboratory, and the first thing he taught me was how to test my solution. And I have found through the years that it goes out of whack after a certain amount of use. It builds up copper, and you have to take some out, add more water and sulfuric acid. When I've had trouble, after a while I'd come back to him, but I didn't want to bother him too much. I've learned other tips from

friends.

My husband set up the plating bath for me; I have a 30-gallon bath. At one time-you do have to be very careful to keep the tank clean, and I was-it was building up such junk all over. At one point my plating got like a sea urchin, where there were such sharp crystal growths on it you couldn't hold it in your hand. Jimmy said-when I brought it to him, he said, "June, don't say your bath is dead. Just say it's sick. You just have to fix it up." However, he tested it and told me to throw it away and get a new bath. [They laugh.] A bath can last for years.

But I've only changed my bath twice in all the years I've been plating. And I don't use an agitator-- I do use a filter, and that gives some agitation. And because it's in an unheated room, I do have temperature control, but I only use it in the winter when it's cold.

MS. FISCH: What's the temperature of the bath?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Oh, it's room temperature, you know, 70 average. But I haven't noticed much difference when it was colder.

MS. FISCH: And you're able to test it yourself?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. I have-I'm not sure how precise it is, and I use a method that other people don't, but I just test it for acid content and hydrometer. I don't understand why you need a chlorine-there is a small part of chlorine in it, and I'm not very accurate about testing that. And-

MS. FISCH: Well, the bath must be fairly forgiving.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, it's a very forgiving bath. But one basic of plating is it mustn't be too fast, and I probably could plate more quickly than I do. There's so much else to do besides plating that if I plate more quickly, I couldn't make any more enamels anyway. So I err on the side of slowness.

MS. FISCH: What voltage or amperage do you use?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I'm not sure how accurate all my things are, but I use between six and 10 amps.

MS. FISCH: That's quite a lot, actually.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, they're pretty big.

MS. FISCH: How has the process affected, or maybe even driven, your work since then?

MS. SCHWARCZ: It's been a very fundamental part because I've got more interested in form through the years. It would be impossible to do what I do without being able to plate it, because I work with such fragile substance. One reason I have to make my models of paper is because every wrinkle that gets in the foil is there and you can't get it out. So if I want it smoother, it has to all be worked out. But it would still be too frail to support any enameling.

MS. FISCH: You were one of the first artists, that I know of anyway, to use electroforming as a process.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, probably you'd have to have an engineer for a husband. He didn't suggest it, but he certainly set it up for me.

MS. FISCH: Well, tell me about the World Craft Conference in 1964, where that process was presented by someone else.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, Stanley Lechtzin had done research using it in a very different way, and so he presented a symposium. And when I met Paul Smith before the conference started, he asked what I was doing, and I told Paul, and so he introduced me to Stanley. During the conference I felt there were some points that should be covered. I forget what they were. And so Stanley then introduced me and said he'd found I'd been doing electroforming.

MS. FISCH: Did you learn anything from his presentation that made a difference in how you worked?

MS. SCHWARCZ: It was-it was hard to tell. He was more into showing different things you could do with it.

MS. FISCH: And it was mostly jewelry-based, as I recall?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. And he was using a Styrofoam and plating over that, and then removing Styrofoam or wax. It was different ways of working. I've experimented with plating, building up linear structures that I would

sometimes fuse into the enamel. And there're different ways, but we just had very different products.

MS. FISCH: And as I recall, he was very interested in the accumulation of nodes along the edges and so on, and a, kind of, bumpy surface. And initially, I guess, you found that intriguing as well.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, I did, too. I don't know if he was trying to get bumpy. He was using a lot of Styrofoam, and he might have had that bumpy and it plated over. I don't know if he was trying to do bumpy plating. The more heavily you plate, the more it tends to build up bumps. And I don't-so I don't remember if he was aiming for bumpiness, or it was just the material he was plating on.

MS. FISCH: You've said that the technique and process stimulate you in general, that you think through the technique and the process, and that the limitations give you new ideas. Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I find if I want to make a painting-and I used to try to paint more-I had too much choice. You just pick color and put it down. It's not that I think painting is easy. It's just that it gave me ideas to have to work within limitations. I enjoy the limitations of the media. One thing about plating, it's difficult to plate inside a substance, or things like if I make a cylinder and I want to have a bottom to it, sometimes if the bottom is too far from the edge, it won't plate heavily.

Plating is like a wind that goes around and the places that stick up get more plating than the ones that are recessed. It's possible to design anodes to fit into things, but I just never was good at that or patient enough, and I just didn't try it. So I have to design things that don't have structural parts that are too hidden.

MS. FISCH: Well, I remember that you also did some plating in iron, and that's quite unusual, I think. Not very many people do that.

MS. SCHWARCZ: That's a-I use it as decorative plating. It's not-I don't know if you'd call it forming, because I do it on the finished piece.

MS. FISCH: So you don't actually build anything in the iron plating.

MS. SCHWARCZ: No. I can't build up anything except copper. I don't know if it's possible to. It just means all that I know is, copper is for building up for me. And then I can plate gold or silver or iron, or use a chemical patina.

MS. FISCH: Is the iron plating done in a bath, or is that brush plated?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. It's done in a bath. I tried doing brush plating with it, and I didn't get a very strong coat, but it might be-I did it long ago and I just haven't fooled with it. For brush plating you need, I think, a stronger solution than you have in the bath. The iron bath is a mess. Crystals crawl out of it all over your house and it looks awful. And some day I'm going to have to dump it and start anew, but I've had the same bath there for years and I just leave the anodes in.

MS. FISCH: Do you hook it up with the same power sources as your copper bath?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes.

MS. FISCH: Tell me a little bit about brush plating, because again, that's a slightly different method.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, I just went to a trade show. I had to demonstrate electroplating art. They had a man selling brush plating things. It's also called selective brush plating, selective plating. It's a method whereby you have a rectifier, and you have strong solution of the metal you want to plate, and you have your regular plus and minus poles and wires to them. I read in the beginning you can use graphite for your anode to carry the media. But the thing that's worked best for me, and I'm not plating such small surfaces, is my husband made me stainless steel pieces that would have to be attached to the poles.

And then I use-you could use gauze or things, but the thing that works best for me, I found, was white Scotchbrite, which is the finest grade. And because my work is sometimes rough, I just used to tear apart all the fabric things. I think I've seen woven felt covers for anode bars, but fine Scotchbrite works very well. It's kind of hard to find.

MS. FISCH: Right. I haven't seen that very often.

MS. SCHWARCZ: But, you know, LeRoy came home. He knew where he ordered it.

MS. FISCH: So you cut it into little pieces and put it on the end of the stainless steel rod and then dip that into the solution?

MS. SCHWARCZ: It's not a rod. It's a flat-

MS. FISCH: It's like a paddle.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. It's about an inch wide, and I hold it on with a rubber band.

MS. FISCH: And when you use that, are you using it selectively, or it's mostly to get a silver plate on a whole large piece?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I do it both ways. It's a real bore to do a whole piece, but I have-

MS. FISCH: It's slow.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. I haven't the patience for it. I've since learned from Arline Fisch that you should put a nickel coat underneath. That would keep the copper from migrating through. So that means you have to brush plate two things. But again, with brush plating particularly, I found that it makes a big difference to pickle it immediately before plating. I like it. For instance, I can have a gold band across the top where the rest of the piece has got a black patina on it.

MS. FISCH: So you wouldn't ever go to a commercial plater, because they don't do selective plating?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I don't think they do selective plating. I used to plate a whole body of something with that method, and now that I am more rich, I can send it to a commercial place and-it's much better.

MS. FISCH: Yes. They do the whole piece. The whole surface comes out much more evenly.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes.

MS. FISCH: And do you do that sometimes in silver?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I've done it once in silver and twice in gold. It's only in recent years. You know, I don't make a lot. I plate all over.

MS. FISCH: In the early '70s you changed rather radically from making bowls to making "vessels," in quotes. I mean that terminology. Is this because you weren't at all interested in function, or is it more because of your interest in the history and tradition of the vessel form?

MS. SCHWARCZ: It was neither. It was because, now that I could work with foil, it became technically possible that I could work in shapes I couldn't have formed, and I was getting tired of basse-taille enamel. But I am still not tired of bowls, but it gives me more options to be able to work in a higher form. And I'm finding, through the years, I love a higher form, and through the years I realize that I like the way it relates to sculpture and to clothes. The body is a vessel and clothes are covering for it. And so it fitted all into my interest. But I didn't go to it because I realized it. I realized after I'd gone into it.

MS. FISCH: Well, the vessels, as you said, are all made from very thin copper foil, which you treat a bit like fabric. But the forms are developed from paper patterns like clothing.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes.

MS. FISCH: And how did you come upon this way of working?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Partly being stingy. I didn't want to waste foil. And also-instead of sketching precisely with a pencil, I do it three-dimensionally with paper and Scotch tape it. Pins I can add on and take off, and sometimes I make several patterns before I get the shape I like, and sometimes it comes right away. So it's just worked out that way. Because I used to sew and I knew patterns, it occurred to me.

MS. FISCH: Have you always been interested in fabric and fashion? I think you must have done a lot of sewing, because you use pleats and folds and seams and things.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Oh, yes. I wasn't interested much in fashion. I'm kind of a reverse snob in a way. I don't want to wear everything that's in style. But there are certain kinds of style, particularly those based on Japanese clothes, that I've been very drawn to. And there's a certain element of Japanese fashion into contemporary clothes now. I'm drawn to them. But I haven't been interested necessarily in the latest fashion from Paris.

MS. FISCH: No, I wasn't really thinking about that. I was thinking about the idea of pleats and folds particularly.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Oh, yes. I did all that. I've always been interested in fabric, and I'm too impatient to be a

weaver. There's certainly a relationship between my work and my love of clothing

MS. FISCH: I know you're also interested in ethnic fabrics and ethnic clothing, and I assume these have also been fairly direct sources of inspiration for some of your work.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. And I have lots of books about them. But there're lots of things that are inspiration to my work.

MS. FISCH: What kinds of other things inspire you?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, African stuff and the ancient stuff. I love lots of ancient things, and, but also contemporary artists, [Constantin] Brancusi and [Isamu] Noguchi and [Robert] Motherwell and [Mark] Rothko. And I like Morris Louis, and a whole lot of people I like, mostly abstract painters. There are a lot that I like to look at, but my influence has all been abstract. And I've never meant for my work to have any particular significance in the literary or verbal sense.

MS. FISCH: Not a narrative quality?

MS. SCHWARCZ: It's not a narrative quality. I know, sometimes I've had reviews of something I did that was red, white, and blue, and the critic said, "What a wonderful patriotic statement." Well, really, I'd just gotten the idea from a photograph of a barn, a Pennsylvania Dutch barn I'd seen. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: Well, I know that you make lots and lots of paper models. I read somewhere that you have bags and bags of them. How do you decide which one of those models you'll actually make?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, often I keep them because if I ruin a piece, I want to have them to go make it over again. I've got a lot of patterns sitting around that I've got to get around to throwing out. I just make the ones that seem best to me.

MS. FISCH: That you like best right at that moment?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Not necessarily.

MS. FISCH: So you might go back to the other models and pick out another one some other time?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I work in small groups, and I don't go back into old, old things. Mostly they're discarded. I just don't clean house as much as I ought to. But I make a group of new shapes and then I do them. And things I really don't like, I throw out.

MS. FISCH: Is it hard to decide when you're going to make a piece that this is the one you're going to make, as opposed to others that are possible? Not hard? It's very clear?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. I mean, I may like some better than the others but still think they're good enough to make up. And sometimes I get surprised. Things that I wasn't sure about look okay, and vice versa.

MS. FISCH: Well, I know your process of fabrication is a very slow one, and I would assume that that affects your thought process. Because you have all this time to consider whether something's perfect.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I get-I get more ideas than I can use, and I have sketches all over that I can't remember what they refer to. So it's really the enameling that takes me a long time, too.

MS. FISCH: Well, how about the length of time it takes to plate something?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, that's okay, because I can be doing-I plate out three to five days, an average of four, depending partly on the size. But I could be doing other things then. So that's why I like to have several things going, so I don't have to sit there and wait while it's plating.

MS. FISCH: As you're working on a piece, does it gradually evolve and change over the time it's taken you to finish?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Sometimes. Yes. The color. The color makes it have a different personality than I had intended. And sometimes something is good right away and sometimes things-the things I worked the hardest on aren't the best, and you can never tell. But sometimes working hard on it saves them, you know.

MS. FISCH: How do you feel about the time involved, and the pace of making a piece? I mean, it's a very measured and rather slow pace at sometimes, and then at other times it must speed up.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, what I like best is when I'm near the ending and I can see how they come out. So sometimes I get impatient with it. But I always have something going. I mean, I try to. And if I go away on a trip, I like to have something partially made when I come back, so that there's something to start with and I don't have that blank page syndrome.

MS. FISCH: How do you decide about the color? I've always been intrigued by that idea. I mean, you have this wonderful form, and is the color something you have in mind from the beginning, or how does the form affect it?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Color is harder for me than the form somehow. I think up forms more easily. But, of course, the color in part depends on the personality I want to give the piece. I do-although the piece doesn't have verbal significance, I do want to give it a particular personality, whether it's subtle or strong, or things you can't put words to. And color-so color, of course, is based a lot on the effect I want the piece to have. And I like some pieces somber and subtle, and some more bright. And I do worry about it, and I have saved, you know, postcards and books that have pretty colors and think about them. I know when my daughter made coats, she always had a quite good color sense, but with me it's harder.

MS. FISCH: Well, you've said that the color is important, but does it always have to come from enamels? Have you ever considered not using enamels?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, lots of them don't have enamel on the outside, and I use patinas or other plating. But I don't have the techniques or knowledge for some patinas.

MS. FISCH: I mean, you never thought about painting them, for example?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No. No.

MS. FISCH: And now there are a lot of people who use colored pencils.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, I don't-you're going to have to explain that to me. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: Well, it's a sandblasted surface, a very toothed surface, and you just apply pencil.

MS. SCHWARCZ: But how does it stick? Can you wash it?

MS. FISCH: Well, it sticks and then it has a coating, a matte finish on top.

In 1981, Lisa Hamill wrote in *American Craft* that your work had a volcanic look, almost violent, and that the tension between form and texture is resolved by the "smoothing over," in quotes, of the enamel. Do you agree with that?

MS. SCHWARCZ: That was when I was still having-doing rough plating, and I got a new bath after that. And I got tired of that bumpy look.

MS. FISCH: So her comments didn't cause you to rethink the enamel, but rather to rethink the surface?

MS. SCHWARCZ: They didn't cause me to do anything. I was just working towards smoother surfaces. Those were older pieces.

MS. FISCH: Well, yes, some of the early ones were really very heavily textured, very rough, and the enamel almost seems to disappear into the crevices. I mean, I think of one piece that has a plique-à-jour cuff on the top, and you're hardly aware of it because of the density of the plating.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, that's, of course, if you look at the outside. If you don't have just a photograph, you'll see color inside. But when I first enameled, it was rough outside. By the time of Lisa's article, I already had a better bath. At first, I just made a bath using tap water and agricultural copper sulfate, because I thought I didn't want to spend the money, and I got rough plating, which was what I wanted.

MS. FISCH: That would be good enough.

MS. SCHWARCZ: But then when I began plating a lot, I wanted to go more high class.

MS. FISCH: So you have a much more sophisticated bath.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. I buy my copper sulfate already in solution and I have a filter, I use distilled water and I measure it and I test it. I use distilled water.

MS. FISCH: Well, I think it's interesting that you test it, because in all the baths that I've operated, we actually

sent a sample out once a year to be tested, to a lab, and they would write back and give us, you know, the adjustments.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, sometimes when it gets too rough, I do that. I have a hard time interpreting their bath size. Someone promised to help me do it. You know, if I figured by weight, and they do it by-I don't know.

MS. FISCH: Right. It's more difficult.

MS. SCHWARCZ: But I do do that sometimes.

MS. FISCH: How do you decide if a piece is good?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Intuition. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: Have you ever abandoned things that you felt were not successful, or do you keep working them until they are?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I put them away and later go back and work them some more. And often after I've had work photographed, I decide it will look better another way, and I do a little more to them.

MS. FISCH: So you do go back over a piece that you may have thought was finished.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, sometimes, but not a whole lot.

MS. FISCH: But you haven't ever just totally abandoned the piece?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, they go-things go bad. I mean bad things happen technically. You know, until I learned the technique of applying enamel to vertical surfaces, I had a lot of avalanches, so that it was all burned black. There was no way I could fix it. I guess I could have enameled it all black. I threw out ones that were technically impossible.

MS. FISCH: But the enamel process, in the way that you use it, still does have some technical pitfalls, doesn't it?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. [Laughs.] It certainly does.

MS. FISCH: Well, tell us about the blisters, for example.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, that's the plating thing. The bane of my existence is I plate heavily on thin foil. I try to be very careful and pickle it thoroughly and brush it in case there're any loose particles before I plate it. But I must sometimes get something that makes it not bond well, and as I enamel it, it gets blisters. This is always on the inside. The foil is always on the inside of my pieces. And the longer I fire it, the bigger these blisters grow.

I'm trying to use thicker coats of enamel to see if it could keep the bubble covered, so that the bubble isn't so obnoxious. If the bubble breaks, then it makes black specks of burned copper in the enamel that I don't like.

MS. FISCH: Is there any way to puncture the blister?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Sometimes I puncture it, but it's already --

MS. FISCH: Already too late?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, it's better than not. And sometimes I've had great big ones and I don't know why. Unless maybe when I pickled them, there was an air bubble on it, and it didn't get etched away.

MS. FISCH: You said that enameling on a vertical surface, and especially on an interior vertical surface, is also rather chancy. How did you resolve that technical problem?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I asked my husband to make me some special sifters that are like sections of plastic bottles or metal tubing. They're attached to a long stick. So enameling has become much better for me since I bought an air brush and spray on a diluted adhesive. I don't ever measure it, but I mean in my heart to make it one-third clear fire and two-thirds water.

So I spray and sift with these sifters. But it's very slow, because you want to try as much as you can to get the enamel to fall straight down onto the metal. If you sift more than you have to at an angle, they can sort of pile up and leave little air holes. So it's better if you pat it down. So I spray just enough to get it wet and not run all over and sift. And the whole thing is to get every single little grain moistened and not so wet that it runs all over.

And when I went to Japan once, when there was a World Craft Conference, they had a workshop for enamelists,

and we were just doing little cloisonné things, but the young Japanese women had a nice clean folded cloth, and right before we put it in the kiln, they pressed it down to press all the enamel down. And that gets out air traps, and so as much as I can, I try to press down with my fingers. But that's only near the top. I can't possibly get my hands in the lower part, but I wish I could.

MS. FISCH: So you've solved-pretty much solved that problem?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, nothing's perfect. You know, I've really got flaws all over my stuff.

MS. FISCH: I think that's the end of this side of the tape.

[End Tape 2, Side A.]

MS. FISCH: -people in the Bay Area. I know you've participated in the activities of that community, but I wonder if you'd tell us what kinds of activities in the Bay Area happen for crafts people.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, in the beginning there was Northern California Designer Craftsmen, which was a group that covered all media. And among this group most of us wanted to stay home and-or stay in our studio and do crafts and not take part in administration. I did belong to that group, and I made many close friends, in different media, through that, in a way that's a little more difficult today.

There was an exhibition in Limoges-of enamels for people all over the country. Kay Whitcomb sent me a list of names of those people in this area who had submitted enamels for that exhibition. Kay had started to organize an enamel guild in Southern California at that time.

I really felt there was a need for guilds like that, because there was so much information that was difficult for us to get. I hadn't ever studied enamels in a class, but I had read books about it and learned from friends. There're many fine points and experiences that I've learned since from other enamelists that I'm able to contact.

So I started this group, and I really didn't want to, because I don't like organizational work. As I had a family, I never had as much time to do my own enameling, and that was much more important than an organization. There was no one else to do it. I wrote to these names, and several of them wanted to start a guild. In the beginning there were mostly young people in the guild and they had children or jobs, and they-some of them didn't even have time to enamel, let alone take on organizational work. So I did all the work for several years-I don't know how many-and we organized workshops.

And then it just got so there was no one taking over the work, and I didn't want to do that kind of thing. Then some older women came in whose children were grown or away, and I was going to quit, not divorce myself from the guild, but not do all the work any more. And just in time they came and picked it up. So I no longer go to meetings, but I'm interested in it. I was made a lifetime member. I think it's a good thing to have these organizations.

A lot of members in the guild wanted to get more publicity for enamels so that enamels will find a wider audience. My own feeling is the work has to have sufficient merit on its own, but I felt an organization was a good way for us to learn from each other, and we have a little library.

MS. FISCH: What's the official name of the organization?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Northern California Enamel Guild.

MS. FISCH: Uh-huh. And how many members does it have?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I don't know right now, but I guess 50, 60. But we cover quite a wide area, from the south Bay to the north, so often meetings are hard for people to go to. There aren't that many people active in it.

MS. FISCH: Does it sponsor exhibitions any more?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes.

MS. FISCH: It does.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. It sponsors international competitions, and it has shown at the Richmond Arts Center and the Velvet de Vinci Gallery and another gallery. I forget the names of them. People from Japan and England send work. It's very interesting to see the discrepancy and the wonderful technique of the Japanese, whose works are often quite beautiful in a more traditional way.

MS. FISCH: And how often are the exhibitions held? Every couple of years?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Something like that. Maybe. I think it's every other year. I'm not sure. They do have a newsletter, and I forget things.

MS. FISCH: How often does the newsletter come out?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Not as much in the summer, but about monthly. I don't know. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: You've got lots of artist friends who are not enamelists, but other art disciplines. Tell us about some of those, and how you met and what you do together.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, they've been a great pleasure to me, and I met some of them at the old conferences the *American Craft* Council used to hold in different parts of the country, and they were cross-media, which always I liked. And some of them I've met through friends and through other organizations. I'm involved with a craft and folk art museum in San Francisco, and it's lovely to have people that share my love for certain kinds of things.

Most of us in crafts are drawn to folk art and ethnic art. I don't know why there is that pairing. But even when I was in Paul Smith's house, he has a lot of ethnic art there, too.

MS. FISCH: Who are your particular friends in the craft world here in the Bay Area?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, Kay Sekimachi, Bob Stocksdale.

MS. FISCH: And you see them quite often, don't you?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, Kay more, but I don't see anybody very often.

MS. FISCH: And I know you're a good friend of Dominic Di Mare.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Dominic Di Mare.

MS. FISCH: And do you trade work with your friends?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I used to more than I do now. And particularly when I didn't sell, you know, I was glad to trade work. But I think it's-I don't ever ask, or rarely. I don't ask people to trade with me unless I know they want my work, because it's embarrassing, and often people have wanted to trade with me and I liked their work, but I didn't want to own it. And often I preferred to get the money I could get from my work, after they began to sell or when I was broke.

So I don't do as much trading as I used to, and it's very embarrassing when someone wants to trade and I don't want to. I have a lot of other friends in the Bay Area. I'm fond of Carole Austin, who was the curator of the craft and folk art show and curated my show. And I'm very fond of the people at Susan Cummins Gallery, which is my gallery here in this area.

MS. FISCH: You also have lots of professional colleagues, enamelist friends, or people that you know in the enamel field across the country. How do you interact with those people? I mean, how do you meet those people and interact with them?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, the Enamelist Society does have conferences.

MS. FISCH: A national society?

MS. SCHWARCZ: National conferences. In fact, people-it attracts people from Japan and India and England, too. And so I meet a lot of people there. And, of course, people in this area I've met through the guild. And we learn from each other. There're a lot of things I didn't know. I never studied it. And some things, like you put harder enamels underneath softer enamels to keep them from spotting, I mean, from being sort of a dotty, impressionistic look that can come in enamels whether you want it or not.

It's silly. It took me years to realize that, when someone mentioned it to me. So I do believe in taking classes and learning. But there wasn't-you know, when I started, there weren't very many classes.

MS. FISCH: You've also been involved with national organizations, like the American Craft Council. I know that early on you participated in their conferences in the '50s and presented papers on enamels. In 1959 you led a discussion on enamels for a conference of the American Craft Council, and I think in 1961 you did that again; you ran a panel for crafts. Was that an exciting time? I remember that Ronnie Pearson told me that the '50s were so wonderful in the craft world because everybody knew everybody. It was a much smaller community.

MS. SCHWARCZ: It was. It was. And I've never been active in an organizational way. But it was wonderful to work

throughout the media. And it was much easier to get a reputation in those days. Now there's so many good people, it's harder for young people. So I feel fortunate to have started in that period. We also still learned from each other.

MS. FISCH: Do you remember anything at all about the conferences, those American Craft conferences?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I know I worried about my speech. [Laughs.] Well, I remember it. I don't like to read a paper. I think it carries better if you just say it. But I enjoyed it.

MS. FISCH: Well, I mean, from reading them, I know that you must have worked hard to say the right things and communicate the right message.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. [Laughs.] I think it's a mistake to feel that enamels aren't appreciated. And it's true, people don't realize the amount of time and technique that goes into some enamels. Not all. But I feel that isn't the point. The point is, it has to be beautiful, and all the technique in the world won't matter if you don't have aesthetic sense.

It was also nice in those days to have a field open for exploration. I could do things that I felt hadn't been fully explored, and now that's more difficult.

MS. FISCH: Because there are more people and more opportunities, more people have explored more things already.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, exactly.

MS. FISCH: Well, I know you've always been a passionate advocate of enamels as an expressive medium, and I think you've done a great job in promoting the aesthetic aspects.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Thank you.

MS. FISCH: What craft periodicals do you read?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I really look at pictures more than I read all the printing. I certainly see American Craft. Sometimes I get-lately I've been getting the SNAG magazine from the-

MS. FISCH: *Metalsmith.*

MS. SCHWARCZ: *Metalsmith.* Yes, from the Society of North American Goldsmiths. But mostly *Craft Horizons*. And then there's an enamel magazine called *Glass on Metal* that I look at pictures and once in awhile read.

MS. FISCH: Have they played any significant role for you, other than to just tell you what's going on?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, *American Craft* has, because it's had several articles about me, and that certainly helps my reputation.

MS. FISCH: I know that you've always exhibited your work and have participated in many national exhibitions. Do you remember when you first exhibited your work? What was your first exhibition? Do you remember?

MS. SCHWARCZ: My very first exhibition, I think, was at the Richmond Art Center, when they had a craft exhibit. But shortly after that we moved to Connecticut for a year, and I went to New York, and I was able to show my work to the curator of the future Museum of Contemporary Crafts. I had a piece in the opening exhibit of that, I think in '59. And then I had a one-man show in La Jolla, and-and then a two-man show with Trude Guermonprez. Mostly it's been group shows.

MS. FISCH: How important were those shows to you personally and professionally?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I like to show off. Sometimes I don't like to sell pieces because I like to have a chance to show off first. So there's no doubt it's a good-it's a satisfaction.

MS. FISCH: It's a good ego builder, isn't it?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes.

MS. FISCH: Professionally I think they must also have been important, because they gave you visibility in the bigger world.

MS. SCHWARCZ: I think it was, and I've, almost from the beginning, been recognized as one of the important enamelists. Selling was another thing. It was very difficult for me to sell work for many, many years.

MS. FISCH: And did you care about that?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. I wanted-if people would buy them and get them away, then I'd have to make more. If they just would pile up, I would have been-I wouldn't have felt the justification in working and using the materials. So I did like them to move on.

MS. FISCH: Early on you did participate in craft fairs, but I suspect that was very short-lived.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. But I did for a few years, and I don't know if I've said this before, but I bought shapes, shallow bowls to enamel from a commercial source. And I made ashtrays to sell at art fairs, and I think it's a good way to learn your media. If I electroform-of course that was years later, but if I hammer a bowl, I've spent so much time hammering-I'm too careful, and I want to be sure it comes out okay.

So I think it's a very good way to learn to do things. And I used to sell them, and I met people that way and made some friends through those shows. But it's exhausting. And my work, as I began to make my own forms, whether from hammering or electroplating, really became too expensive to sell in an environment like that.

MS. FISCH: So then you moved to working with galleries, and that's what you do primarily?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. And some people in those-now I don't sell directly to people, but in those days more people knew about me than there were galleries, good galleries, and sometimes they'd come up to see me or buy them from exhibitions.

MS. FISCH: But primarily you work with galleries now?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. I do entirely.

MS. FISCH: You've also exhibited internationally in important enamel shows in Europe and in Japan. Were these important, do you think, to you personally?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I-they weren't.

MS. FISCH: They weren't because they were sort of far away?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Partly they were far away. Partly, many of them I didn't think had the kind of aesthetic standards that I want. I just didn't like a lot of the work in them, and I didn't think they had high aesthetic standards.

MS. FISCH: Were they much more traditional kinds of enamels?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, they were-they were kind of bad-mannered, I thought. [Laughs.] And there is a great tendency in enamels to go-I don't mind garish things or colorful things, but you have to learn how to control it.

But also it was a drag and an expense to worry about customs and shipping things. You have to have customs examine them first. So I'd have to have them packed, photographed-enough to identify it with-take them to customs, have them inspected, and pack them up again, so that I didn't have to pay duty when they were returned. And that took extra time to go into town, and I had to go pick 'em up, and you know.

So I stopped, and I no longer-unless someone pays my expense, the expense of shipping them, I no longer do it.

MS. FISCH: So did you ever make any connections with the international community of enamelists that were interesting to you? I mean, did you meet people at international-

MS. SCHWARCZ: Oh, sure, I met a lot of friends at the enamel conferences, and sometimes they come up to see me. And, you know, I met the Woolleys when I lived in La Jolla and other people. Yes.

MS. FISCH: Well, I was interested. I know that you participated in some of the World Craft Council conferences, and that was also a nice way to connect with international colleagues. Did that-did that expand your horizons in any way?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I don't think so. I think it was fun to meet these people, but, you know, the United States is such a vast country and comparatively wealthy. There are just so many enamelists from here. I got to know Grete Korsmo, who is from Norway, and she's a very well-known enamelist. And then, I can't remember the name, the other well-known enamelist in Norway. I could look up his name. He bought a piece of mine from an exhibition, but I never met him.

MS. FISCH: Was that David Andersen?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. And I was very pleased that he wanted a piece. So, those were great. I don't know that they-they probably made me well-known, but they didn't affect my art and my aesthetic influences. My aesthetic influences have been more influenced by things outside enamel. Just all kinds of art, ancient and modern.

MS. FISCH: There are now many museums around the country collecting contemporary crafts. Which ones do you think have made a special commitment to the enamel field, if any?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I don't know of any that have made a special commitment. I know Mr. Carpenter, who owns Thompson Enamel, has a collection of enamels, but it's not a regular museum.

MS. FISCH: Well, where is your work? In which museums' collections is your work represented?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, the Museum of Contemporary Craft has several pieces. Some of them were willed to the-bequeathed to the museum, and some of them they bought I gave to them. And in the early days of the museum, they commissioned some enamels for demonstrating technique, and I was the person that demonstrated the basse-taille technique. And Denver Museum has several. I guess Everson Museum was the first museum that I had a piece in their collection.

MS. FISCH: That's the one at Syracuse?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. Syracuse, and that was selected from an exhibition there. And Oakland, and Detroit, and Minneapolis, and the Metropolitan Museum, a Zurich Museum. And the Coulson Collection used to own-he formed the Neutrogena collection. I think that's in the Santa Fe Museum now.

MS. FISCH: If you were to decide on a place where you wanted to have a real representation, a broad representation of your work, where would you like that to be?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I suppose I'd like it locally. You know, like the de Young or something like that. But-

MS. FISCH: Well, I know the Oakland Museum has made a real commitment to jewelry, but I don't know if they've included enamels.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. They bought enamels early. I think the first ones they bought were from an exhibition-I forget if it was enamels or metalwork, and I won a purchase prize. But they bought a couple since. They have at least three, maybe more.

MS. FISCH: So most of the work that's in museums have either been given by other people, or they've purchased them, is that right?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Some I've given.

MS. FISCH: You have given some. Your work has also been widely published in books and periodicals. Has this been important?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I think it has. People seem to know me from some way or other. And, yes, I think it has.

MS. FISCH: Have you ever thought about publishing a book yourself?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No. You know, I experiment. I'm really not sure of technique. Everything I do is with a prayer, kind of.

MS. FISCH: I mean, you could also think about just a book on your own work.

MS. SCHWARCZ: I'm not interested in it. I just wanted to work.

MS. FISCH: So the catalogueue of your retrospective from 1998 is a beautiful publication, and I know you're pleased with it. But how much were you involved in its preparation?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, they included me in conferences with the designer, and, of course, the photographer is my regular photographer, who photographed them. And they asked for a list of collectors of my work who they asked to contribute to the catalogueue.

MS. FISCH: You mean contribute financially?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. But I approved of the design, but I didn't try to design it. I did-because I was trained by my photographer, I did ask for photographs that filled the page as much as possible.

MS. FISCH: And you are pleased with the results?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. Yes.

MS. FISCH: That retrospective exhibition was called *Forty Years, Forty Pieces*. Was that your choice of title and-

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, that was Carole Austin.

MS. FISCH: That was the curator. [They laugh.]

How did you decide on that perspective, or how did she decide on that perspective?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, she wanted the exhibition to travel, and she felt it would travel more easily if it weren't too large. So she thought it might be 40 pieces. Well, partly it was the museum-the show opened on my 80th birthday, the actual day of the birthday. I guess it was just too neat to resist *Forty Years, Forty Pieces*. See, I started enameling in '54.

MS. FISCH: And was that-did you participate in the decisions about which pieces?

MS. SCHWARCZ: We sort of cooperated. She's a very sweet person. We got along very well. There are pieces I would have liked to have had in it that she didn't like, and some pieces that I hadn't thought I liked a lot which she wanted to include. I didn't have good photographs of things I made in the '70s and earlier, so I-couldn't show her what they were. And she wanted the exhibition to be parts of each period of my activity, and it was hard to have the selection I would have liked through the early period.

But there was some. Forrest Merrill has the biggest collection of my work and has made an effort to have enamels from all the different periods. I once said to him, when I collect work, I want a little bit of everything. He once said to me that he's interested in following the career of a craftsman and seeing how they develop-that's what he's interested in.

MS. FISCH: Well, I remember a collector in Europe telling me that if one wanted to have a really genuinely scholarly collection, one had to pay attention to those kinds of things rather than only one's personal taste.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. That's if you want a proper collection. I want pieces that I want to look at as I move around the house.

MS. FISCH: But is it nice to have someone who collects your work with that point of view?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Sure. Great. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: In planning your-this wonderful exhibition, how much of the work did you have to borrow; did you know where it was?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, of course I couldn't show work if I didn't know where it was. And that happened with several pieces I would have-Neutrogena had a piece that I very much would have liked to have borrowed, but I didn't know where it was at that time. But also we borrowed work from museums, because I thought that was prestigious and they usually picked pieces I liked. But it turned out to be very expensive for a small museum because of shipping. And I think if we had realized that, we wouldn't have borrowed any pieces from the museums.

MS. FISCH: Do you have enough pieces in your own collection to support this kind of exhibition of -

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, I borrowed a lot from other collectors. But there were some pieces-there're some pieces that are unique. In other words, I knew I wouldn't repeat. I don't repeat designs. Everything is different. But some of them are so intricate, I knew I wouldn't-

MS. FISCH: You'd never work in that direction again. [They laugh.]

MS. SCHWARCZ: I do some electroplating cloisonné that just drives me cuckoo, because it's tedious. But there're other things that just come out well, and I think I might not repeat it. So I've kept a few of those pieces I've made through the years and wanted for a retrospective. And of those pieces I gave my two children and grandson-each were allowed to choose three of those pieces for their own, so they own those. And then two of the pieces that were from my collection, I've had under the name of each gallery so people would know which gallery represented my work. And the rest were for sale and they sold quite quickly. But a lot was borrowed from different people.

MS. FISCH: And the exhibition traveled?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. And that's why Carole wanted to keep it small enough. Signe Mayfield was a great help to Carole in starting this exhibition. She suggested that it be kept small so it could be shown in one room, which would make it-people would want to travel it more. It wouldn't be so expensive to ship or need so much space.

MS. FISCH: Where was it shown?

MS. SCHWARCZ: It was shown at the American Craft Museum in New York. It was shown at the Honolulu Academy of Art. And then in Little Rock, Arkansas, the Arkansas Art Center.

MS. FISCH: In Arkansas. And did you go to each of the venues?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I went to New York and to Honolulu. That really is fun, you know. Everybody tells you sweet things. [Laughs.] It's fun.

MS. FISCH: And did the exhibition look different in those different places?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, every place was different.

MS. FISCH: And you were pleased with each new view?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Some. Some were better than others. And I didn't see the Arkansas one.

MS. FISCH: So would you anticipate doing-

[End Tape 2, Side B.]

MS. FISCH: This is Arline Fisch interviewing June Schwarcz at her home and studio in Sausalito, California, on January 22, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is tape number three.

June, I thought it might be interesting to go through the catalogue "Forty Years: Forty Pieces" [San Francisco Craft & Folk Art Museum, 1998] and have you talk about a few of the pieces specifically, about what they're about and how you made them, and why you chose them for this particular exhibition.

MS. MS. SCHWARCZ: This piece, which is *Tribute to an Olive Oil Can*, 1959 [#338, p.15], is etched. It's a wall piece and it's been etched, and it's enameled, transparent enamel over a surface that has been worked some way. The technique is called basse taille, which comes from the French meaning "low cut." As far as its theme-before I was married, I lived in New York, in Greenwich Village, in an Italian neighborhood, and I always was kind of fond of the flowery decorated, crepe paper décor. And so this is derived from an olive oil can, which was English on one side, Filipo Berio-I mean Italian on one side, Filipo Berio, one, and then English, Philip Berio, I think, on the other. And I thought it was funny, but I also liked its ornateness. It's the only one I did like that. It belongs to Paul Soldner, and I mounted it on marble.

MS. FISCH: Is it the earliest piece in the show?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. Partly I didn't have slides or know where some older ones were. But I always was fond of that piece.

MS. FISCH: And what year was this, 1959?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Fifty-nine. Yes. I started enameling in '54. But I did a lot of shallow bowls -- you know, I think I just liked this piece --

MS. FISCH: Because of its association with New York and its image, and so on. I think that's very delightful.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, I think it's quite different than anything else I did.

This piece [*Fugue in Japanese #1*, 1961, #347, p.17] is also basse taille. When we lived in San Francisco, Cost-Plus had some carved wooden boards from Japan that were used to print old books. And so I printed the calligraphy on the copper in a very indirect manner, because the copper was rigid and the board was rigid and I couldn't print it directly. So I rolled asphalt varnish on the calligraphy board, and then I rolled tracing paper onto that. And then I rolled the paper onto the copper, and what resulted was a rather confused image. I know. [Laughs.] I couldn't read it there.

And then I sort of played games with the image, as if I were making an abstract painting, painting it all in asphalt

varnish. And then I etched it and enameled it, and I mounted it on one of the calligraphy boards.

MS. FISCH: So about what size is this?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I could tell you when I look it up. It's in the Oakland Museum.

MS. FISCH: Well, it's 10 inches by 18 inches, or somewhere in that. And it's a flat panel.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes.

MS. FISCH: And it was done also in 1961, and it's called *Fugue in Japanese*.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. I did a series, a few of them, because I really just wanted shifting calligraphy.

So this was a hammered bowl [*Blue Coral Bowl*, 1961, #348a, p.19]. This is from my nature period, and the design is copied from a big piece of coral. It's etched and enameled in transparent enamel. There are very few I could locate of this period. This I gave to a cousin for a wedding present. That's why I knew where it was.

MS. FISCH: So you knew where it was. But it has beautiful blues and greens in the coloration, so it's very much a water piece.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. This is beginning with electroplating, and this is by no means the first piece I did, but it's a spun bowl I re-hammered [*Patterned Bowl*, 1968, #538, p.21]. I etched the design in the inside. I etched the design all over it. Then the parts that I wanted raised with electroplating I left bare and masked out all the other etched surface. I reinforced my asphalt varnish with wax, because the electroplating builds up in all directions, so that it would fill the holes. If there's a hole there, it would fill it up, so I had to put wax to protect certain areas. So that one's probably the most elaborate one I made.

MS. FISCH: Well, it's a beautiful pattern. In fact it's called *Patterned Bowl*. And was it inspired by a textile design?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, it was inspired by a New Guinea shield. But it's primitive. And I like pattern. And at that time I guess I was gradually emerging from my patterns in nature to more patterns from ethnic stuff.

This [*Rough Patterned Bowl*, 1969, #551, p.23] is an early electroplated bowl. The bowl is made from thin copper foil, which I electroplated to a certain heaviness. Then I masked out the design with asphalt varnish, and then when it was dry, wax, to get more depth, to get, kind of, a really deep relief.

MS. FISCH: Well, it's a very, very textured piece. It looks almost like the texture is about a quarter of an inch deep on the outside. I mean, it's built up really heavily.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, it probably is. But if I'd left it in without re-masking, it might have filled up all the design. [Laughs.] You know, it's heavy. But the whole body is made out of foil, whereas the other one was from a spinning.

This [*Blue and White Bowl*, 1970, #561, p.25] is a piece I once traded Margery Annenberg for. She had a gallery that showed my work. She was one of the first galleries to show craft as art in San Francisco in the '60s and '70s. So this, again, has the same technique as the other. The thin foil has been pleated and the band has the design masked out. It was too shiny, and I, sort of, just scratched the base with stones to make it look softer.

But my plating wasn't as smooth as I wanted it to be, and later on I changed. This is a plique-à-jour in plated foil [*Plique-à-Jour Vessel*, 1974, #626, p.27], and again certain parts masked out. But I left the holes; they're a little like stained glass windows around it that are filled with enamel without metal backing.

MS. FISCH: So it's actually a plique-à-jour piece.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, it's a plique-à-jour bowl. And where I wanted to have the holes, I masked it out first thing, before I plated it. Then after I plated a certain amount, I masked out more. It's the way [I] work an etching plate sometimes, only I'm building up instead of in.

MS. FISCH: And then did you actually punch holes in the foil so the --

MS. SCHWARCZ: The foil. Well, then after it was all plated, I could just punch it through, because the foil was so thin. It's very easy to do. It's tedious to get all the enamel to stay in place and not fall out.

MS. FISCH: Well, this has a real cellular kind of structure that looks quite intriguing. I mean, each of the holes is surrounded by a kind of cell structure. Were you inspired by anything in particular?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I don't really remember. It's kind of a natural pattern. I think there may have been an Indian woodblock that interested me. This belongs to Bill Harper. But they're best in front of a window with light shining through 'em. They're often hard to photograph or display.

This [*SLAC Drawing IV*, 1974, #647, p.29] is a rare piece. My husband worked for -- was an engineer for the Stanford University linear accelerator. One time he started bringing home old mechanical drawings for me to use for wrapping paper. I love mechanical drawings. Now they're a lost dinosaur of the computer age, but I made a series of pieces using -- just copying the drawings. And in this case I had a flat piece of copper. I painted it with asphalt varnish. With a metal sharp point, I scribed a line through the varnish so the metal was exposed. And then I plated it so it was raised a little bit. I didn't plate it for very long. You know, maybe -- it depends on how strong the current is, but maybe 24 hours or something, and then just filled it in with enamel.

MS. FISCH: So in a way you had made sort of a cloisonné panel just by virtue of raising the walls.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. And I'd done other things. There's another one in the catalogue where I call "electroplating cloisonné." It is a bowl.

MS. FISCH: Has anyone else ever picked up on that?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I have no idea.

MS. FISCH: I've never seen anybody else do that. And I think it's such an interesting approach, because cloisonné otherwise is so incredibly tedious.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I haven't the patience to do cloisonné, and this was a large -- you know, a large surface for cloisonné. And I am not happy making small things.

This [*Noshi Bowl*, 1977, #717, p.30] was an electroplated champlevé. It's an adaptation of a Japanese design. I think it's dried tuna fish and means good luck, but I'm not sure. But all the black lines were raised, and then I ground the surface back.

This [*Spice Bowl*, 1979, #767, p.31] is again where I drew -- this, again, is sort of an adaptation of a Japanese kimono design, and I electroplated it. I plated some, then I masked out the low ones and plated up the raised ones.

MS. FISCH: Now on these bowls there's no pattern on the inside, is that right?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Right. I only did pattern on that one on the inside, although I did shallow basse-taille bowls.

This [*Portrait of Fujiwara Mitsuyoshi*, 1979, #777, p.33] is again the Japanese influence. It's a bottom part of a picture of an emperor, and this is his staff.

MS. FISCH: Is this a bowl or a panel?

MS. SCHWARCZ: A panel. We got a hydraulic press. My husband helped me. I shaped a series of convex panels. And this has got a little basse-taille areas that were etched. It's got lines that were raised like champlevé. I enameled it and I ground it all back. So it's called a portrait of whatever that emperor's name was without his head.

This [*Striations*, 1981, #815, p.35] is just an experimental piece with the foil, and I scribed lines in it. I made, again, a small series, but some of them I had a lot of difficulty with, because the lines made them curl in different ways and sometimes they'd curl apart when I fired them.

MS. FISCH: This reminds me so much of a Morris Louis painting that I saw yesterday in the Andersen exhibition at the Modern.

MS. SCHWARCZ: I love his work.

MS. FISCH: I know, and you mentioned that. And it's incredible, the coloration. And I guess it's the striped pattern here that is so reminiscent of that.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. I did a bowl just this year in a similar technique. I realized I was thinking of Morris Louis when I did it. I have a book of his.

This, again, is a foil bowl [*Raku Vessel*, 1981, #820, p.36]. I used a raku technique on this. I learned about it from ceramics. I mean, I never studied ceramics, but friends told me about it. So it's gathered. And I also sew these bowls. I forget just when I began sewing them. But they're much stronger now that I sew them because

sewing is, I guess, like rivets. I use very thin copper wire that's found inside ordinary house appliance electric wire. And I just use a needle and it goes right through.

Then I enameled it. In this one, part of the metal is exposed and part of it is enamel. The inside, of course, is completely enameled. This is in the Sake's collection at the de Young Museum in San Francisco. When I took it out of the kiln and it was red hot, I put a big canning pot that I'd stuffed with acanthus leaves, and they burned and created a reduction firing. It won't work with small pieces. They would cool off too quickly. Or this is my experience. Some people have thrown enamels in rice hulls, and they stick to the enamel, but they do make it a reduction firing too.

MS. FISCH: Were the acanthus leaves green?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes.

MS. FISCH: I'm amazed. I always think of raku as using dried materials.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Maybe they do. I don't know. Mine were. They were just -- you know, anything that was small would fall onto the enamel and stick to the enamel, or maybe even fall on before I got it over the bowl. So the acanthus leaves were big enough to stay in the pot long enough. Smelled terrible. I tried rhubarb, but it cooks into a mush. It didn't work. I don't do it much any more, but I used to do it a lot.

MS. FISCH: It seems to have a kind of velvety texture on the gathered part.

MS. SCHWARCZ: That's a texture that I get in plating. The more heavily I plate it, the rougher it'll get. Sometimes the plating is, you know, clean and nice, but it's often not. And I do test it and try to keep in balance. The copper builds up in the solution, and with time, you just have to take some solution out and add more water and more acid.

MS. FISCH: In this case it's very effective, because it almost looks even more fabric-like because of the texture.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. No, I like that texture on a lot of things, particularly when I don't enamel it and leave it just showing. But I don't want to -- I want to be able to control it more and I can't always. I do use a commercial brightener, which I didn't use in my earlier work.

This piece -- I enameled a series of four turned bowls [*Fortuny Bowl*, 1981, #829, p.37]. I saw an exhibition one time when I was in New York at the Fashion Institute of Fortuny clothes. I had never known about his work. I flipped, and I -- it was such dull light to protect the silk that I never could find the photographs as much as I wanted. I've since bought a book that had a few in it. But the colors were so beautiful. They were soft. I don't know if he used vegetable dyes. He used all those rich brocade things.

MS. FISCH: Have you ever been to the Fortuny Museum in Venice?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I only had a day and a half in Venice. And I think if I'd known it was there, I probably would have gone to see it instead of important cathedrals. [They laugh.] Ah, I wish I'd known.

MS. FISCH: Well, it's a fascinating adaptation of that great swirling, kind of art nouveau pattern that he did in velvets and silks. It's absolutely beautiful.

MS. SCHWARCZ: I did about three or four. There's a big poster of one of the Fortuny bowls on the kiosks in San Francisco, advertising the museum without my name, but the name of my photographer.

MS. FISCH: You know, isn't that annoying? [They laugh.]

MS. SCHWARCZ: My photographer was mad. But anyway. And this I call *Lillian Elliott* [#833, p.39], because I'd gotten the idea from a shape she made. And she was a good friend of mine, a very good friend. And she died.

MS. FISCH: And she was a basket maker?

MS. SCHWARCZ: She was a weaver first and then a basket maker.

MS. FISCH: And this particular piece of hers, was it made of fabric or paper or
-- because she worked in a whole lot of different materials.

MS. SCHWARCZ: She worked in a lot of things. It might have even been bamboo. I don't remember.

MS. FISCH: But I love the way you have made those strips.

MS. SCHWARCZ: She also worked in bark a lot.

MS. FISCH: Right. But this is such a simple, direct way of making a form. I think it's absolutely wonderful that you just made slits, and then brought this up and joined it at the top.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I experiment a lot with form, and I can do that in the paper. But there are friends -- Olga de Amaral, who I never see much, but I think there's such an affinity in our tastes. You know, I saw a beautiful catalogue of hers, and I didn't dare buy it because it was too close to what I would like to think of, you know. I think I don't get ideas from other enamelists either for the same reason. I want to do it differently. But there aren't so many enamelists that work freely.

So this [*The Sea*, 1983, #882, p.40] is an electroplate cloisonné, and I did a few of these. But it was tedious to lay it in. I covered it with asphalt varnish, drew the lines in, and this is sort of an ocean design, water design, that I saw in a Persian painting.

MS. FISCH: Well, this is much smaller scale than the other cloisonné, than the big drawing cloisonné piece. I mean, the cells that you've created are a little bit more --

MS. SCHWARCZ: They're smaller.

MS. FISCH: -- like cloisonné.

MS. SCHWARCZ: But the bowl isn't. The bowl's not a tiny bowl. And I really had had to have a bad cold before I could make myself sit and finish laying those things in. [Laughs.] And so this is a plique-à-jour along the top.

MS. FISCH: Now did you brush plate that, as we talked about?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, I brush plated that. I didn't know I was supposed to have nickel underneath gold and silver, and I think the copper color has migrated. I almost wish I'd asked the owner if I could plate it over.

MS. FISCH: Well, it has a really lovely coloration, though, at least in the photograph, that you probably wouldn't get if you did over-plate with silver.

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, I wouldn't.

MS. FISCH: And I think it's quite beautiful in the detail.

MS. SCHWARCZ: It looks a little blotchy.

MS. FISCH: Well, it's blotchy, but it's blotchy in a pattern, so I think it's quite convincing that it was intentional.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Good. Thank you. I like this part.

MS. FISCH: Yes, that very heavy -- heavily plated cuff on the top, which is beautiful. That creates a beautiful tension in that piece [*Vessel with Plique-à-Jour Cuff*, 1983, #894, p.41].

MS. SCHWARCZ: And it should be in front of a light source. It's hard to photograph looks.

And this is influenced by those old bronze Benin heads [*Benin Head, 1984*, #917, p.43]. They had these patterned headdresses. So this, again, was built up on a spinning, but I had heavy spinnings. I stopped using commercial spinnings years ago because they were too thin and distorted in firing. And so this design -- I painted out the lower parts, and the design was done in successive layers, masking out with asphalt varnish and wax, and then I iron plated it.

MS. FISCH: It has a beautiful golden color, which I guess is a combination of iron and the choice of the enamels that you used, but the whole piece has a sort of golden glow to it.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, of course, there's the glow of the copper showing through the inside. But when I iron plate something, if I want it to stay gray, and I did in this, I paint it as soon as I can with a diluted, a thinned-down solution of linseed oil to seal it. And if you could see the bowl, there are lower parts of some of the dots which have rusted, and I like that, where the oil didn't --

MS. FISCH: Didn't penetrate. Uh-huh.

MS. SCHWARCZ: This is in Kent State [*Chalice for Kubla Khan*, 1987, #958, p. 45]. It was bought with money James Michener had donated for the art collection there. This is a vessel with a basse-taille etched top. And all of these are made on foil.

This-- I just like engravings, and I just copied the lines from a Whistler engraving or etching, rather, and etched it [*Whistler Vessel*, 1987, #960, p.47].

MS. FISCH: And that's why it's called *Whistler Vessel*. I wondered. [Laughs.]

MS. SCHWARCZ: And the lines don't form a picture of anything. It's just a variety of textures. I rubbed finely ground black enamel in some of the lines, which are the lower --

MS. FISCH: When you do that and you rub the enamel into the lower part, do you fire that first, or --

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, because everything would burn black. So I have to put enamel on top. I have to have the copper completely covered with enamel, or it'll burn black. But I do usually fire the inside first, and then the outside's black oxidation, I have to clean that off. The reason I fired the inside first is because my kiln doesn't heat evenly, and the bottoms often don't fuse properly, because the kiln has no elements in the bottom. I didn't realize it was going to show up like that.

This is, again, brush plated silver, and it's tied with a little piece of wire.

MS. FISCH: And it's called *Gathered Silver* [#1047, p.49], and it does just have this wonderful textile-like quality, as though you had the cylinder of fabric and you just kind of squeezed it. It's wonderful.

MS. SCHWARCZ: That's one thing that interests me in the foil.

MS. FISCH: This [*Herringbone Silver*, 1990, #1048, p.51], is a very favorite piece of yours, this particular one?

MS. SCHWARCZ: It's probably the piece that's most people's favorite. I think I like strong, simple pieces for my own favorites best.

MS. FISCH: And you think this one is more complex rather than simple? I mean, I find the form very simple. Of course, the surface is very complex.

MS. SCHWARCZ: I like this piece. You know, I wouldn't let her -- I wouldn't let Carole select anything I didn't like. And we got along very well, you know.

MS. FISCH: There weren't any conflicts?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No. There was plenty of work to choose from. A friend of mine owns this. I think more people wanted to buy that. But again, it was in Susan Cummins's show a couple of years before I had my retrospective.

MS. FISCH: And nobody bought it.

MS. SCHWARCZ: And this is in the Metropolitan Museum collection [*Untitled Vessel*, #1063, p.52].

MS. FISCH: And you patinaed the outside surface.

MS. SCHWARCZ: I patinaed the outside, but looks as if it wasn't completely clean when I patinaed it.

MS. FISCH: Oh, you mean that little mark up at the top?

MS. SCHWARCZ: It has a little variation. Sometimes I leave things just with the outside done just from firing.

MS. FISCH: What kinds of patinas do you use when you use patinas?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I use – the only one I use is Mi-Tique, or m-i-t-q-u-e [sic], I can tell you who makes it. I think it's Mitchell Bradford. And from number 1791. The solutions I use are for copper and bronze. They may make solutions for nonferrous metals. I don't know. But I went crazy trying to blacken it with liver of sulfur. If I got it as black as I wanted it, it would come off. But this stuff you can use cold. You dilute it with water. You can re-use it and refresh it by adding a little more. And I love it.

So this piece [*Rothko*, 1991, #1076, p.53] is obviously Japanese tea ceremony-influenced, where they gave us permission to have rough forms, and I compressed it. With enamel you put things into a red-hot kiln, and you take them out a few minutes later when they're red hot, and I just bashed it with a heavy board and compressed it.

MS. FISCH: And the enamel didn't shatter. It was still --

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, because it was still hot and melted. Earlier on in the game I tried it with another piece and I squashed it too much. [Laughs.] So I learned.

MS. FISCH: So you knew what the limits were.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. And Bill Helwig once suggested that I put a brick or something that would stop the squashing. But it's great satisfaction, banging things. I used a piece of -- Transite board.

MS. FISCH I would never have thought that that was the way you accomplished that.

MS. SCHWARCZ: And this piece is in the American Craft Museum [*Many Colored Vessel*, 1991, #1091, p.55]. And I have made a lot where I roll off the foil, it often gets a little wrinkly, and I like to capitalize on that texture.

MS. FISCH: Well, the color is particularly beautiful in this one, I think, with the --

MS. SCHWARCZ: I like the colors. That's one of my favorites. And this [*Vessel with Darts*, 1991, #1092, p.57] is one that--you might say it came from dressmaking, where you make little darts and things, and these are darts that I cut the middle to make one going one way, and the texture comes from the condition of the plating bath, and I iron-plated it.

Some things I iron plate. If I don't oil them, they still keep some of the gray look. Some get rusty. Some rust right away.

MS. FISCH: So was this one oiled, because it seems to have some kind of rust tone?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I think not. I forget, but I think didn't.

And this one [*Split Red Vessel*, 1992, #2000, p.59], I just took the form, and I liked that form, so I tried to make others, but I could never make them work, because the enamel expands when it's hot and then contracts when it's cool. And if I had a complete circle, that would keep it rigid. But I guess there's discrepancy between the rate of expansion and the cooling of the enamel and metal. And time after time, I would get one I felt was so pretty, and as it cooled I heard crack, crack, crack, and that was that.

MS. FISCH: Well, I love the interior fire of this piece. I mean, it's so black on the outside, and then it just has this glowing ember tone on the inside.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. Thank you. I have a good photographer. This [*Vessel with a Slanted Collar*, 1992, #2006, p.61] is one of my favorites.

MS. FISCH: Why is that?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Because I like strong, simple shapes. And so the plating has a little bit of roughness, which shows up in the coat of enamel.

MS. FISCH: Well, I like the gradation of tone that you get....

[END OF SIDE A, TAPE NUMBER 3.]

MS. SCHWARCZ: This piece [*Apollo's Pool*, 1993, #2025, p.63] was inspired by one, Josef Albers's paintings of squares and the games he played with color. I made it three-dimensional, and I happen to love yellow.

MS. FISCH: As did Albers. He made many yellow paintings.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. Yes. Now he's another, not a primary influence, but I'm very interested in the way he uses color.

MS. FISCH: Well, I like this piece so much because it is based on squares which are not precise squares, and it has a nice depth, but it's still quite a shallow piece.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes.

MS. FISCH: It wasn't intended to be functional, I'm sure, but it has a beautiful capacity.

MS. SCHWARCZ: [Laughs.] That's an idea. Not intending to be functional.

MS. FISCH: But it actually captures color in a way that a painting wouldn't.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Bill Harper named it.

MS. FISCH: *Apollo's Pool*.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Oh, yes, excuse me. I really just -- unless they have a specific reference, I prefer to number them to have them identifiable, so anonymous was the view the viewer could give his own interpretation.

MS. FISCH: So you don't necessarily choose the titles? I mean, you don't necessarily make titles for all your pieces?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, very few. Some of them.

MS. FISCH: I mean, these all seem to have titles, but was that after the fact?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, Bill said, it's just easier to talk about them when they're identified and referable. And so -- but I don't care.

MS. FISCH: It's not your thing.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. There are just --

MS. FISCH: But I think it's interesting. I mean, Bill's right. It gives the viewer a little bit of a connection into what you were thinking about. And even though you don't want the reference to be too obvious –

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I do sometimes. You know, like the olive oil can I did, and I made one that was playing games on a child's letter to me thanking me for something. I called that *Robbie's Letter*. But anyway.

But this piece [*Vessel with Horizontal Lines #2*, 1994, #2040, p.65], I drew lines and electroplated it. Ater I had electroplated the shape, I then painted it with asphalt varnish and then drew lines on it. And then when I fired it, heated it to get the wax off, a lot of the lines fell off. And I tried using white glue, and it held it long enough to fuse them in the enamel.

MS. FISCH: So the lines are actually under the enamel.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, but some of them stick up above. Yes. I enameled the inside, and that's the ones that fell off. And this is a two-part wall piece with a gold-plated square [*Red and Yellow in Two Parts*, 1995, #2060, p.67], and I just wanted to play with color there.

MS. FISCH: So you still do some wall pieces, because I see this piece is from 1995.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. I made a few pieces, maybe three years ago, for wall or table pieces. They could be either one. But no one seemed very interested in them. And I guess I'm more interested in vessels, too, because I've got two colors to play against each other. But once in a while, if I want to do a flat piece, I'll do it.

MS. FISCH: So is this totally flat, or is that one of the slightly domed pieces similar --

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, it's not domed, but it's foil, so it's just by its nature sort of --

MS. FISCH: Sort of soft in its form.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, and it's electroplated, so I guess I must have plated it part way and masked out part for the recessed gold area and left that without enamel until it was -- I mean, left that area bare until I finished enameling it. And then I gold plated it.

MS. FISCH: So when you want gold, you always gold plate? You don't use gold foil?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No. Gold foil, I didn't like the edges of the foil. They somehow didn't seem to be organic enough for what I want to do. I like it in other people's work. You get a lot of brilliance in it. But, no, I don't think there's a piece done in years and years with gold or silver foil. I did experiment with it earlier.

And this piece belongs to the Detroit Museum [*Untitled Vessel*, 1995, #2061, p.69]. The outside has been sandblasted to make it dull.

MS. FISCH: So it's enameled, and then the enamel is sandblasted?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes.

MS. FISCH: And that mattes the surface totally.

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, it dulls the exterior surface.

MS. FISCH: Uh-huh. And are there degrees of matte? I haven't sandblasted enamel.

MS. SCHWARCZ: I suppose. I mean, they aren't for me with my setup. But it might be, if you use a different size grit.

MS. FISCH: Well, you could also, I suppose, mask out. I mean, you could mask --

MS. SCHWARCZ: Oh, yes, I've done that. When I want to I sandblast copper, I have to mask out all the enamel. I don't want sandblasted enamel on the inside.

MS. FISCH: The parts that you don't want to matte.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. No, but I can make stripes on this by just putting tape down, masking tape.

This is -- you know, I wrinkled the foil and used that as my pattern [*Harlequin*, 1995, #2062, p.71]. It's mostly transparent enamels, but there are a few areas that have opalescence enamels, which are translucent, and I'm quite interested in them. These enamels with different colors that are almost like a painting are the hardest for me to do and take the longest, partly because I'm not a painter, but partly because you have to remember what you put down, and you're not very sure what you're getting. And of course, you can always add color in subsequent layers, but you can't very well take away things.

MS. FISCH: So you get -- you achieve this sort of watercolory effect by layering different colors, or do you do it all at once?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, I keep working on it and adding things. You have to add enough all over so that the copper's not going to burn or show through, and then it -- but I don't put an undercoat, which many people do, because I think I get more definition by putting enamel right on the metal. But of course, certain enamels you can't use right on metal. They won't -- their colors won't come out, particularly the reds, pinks, and oranges, some oranges. So I do add some of those colors later, after it's already been enameled. But also it's a matter of aesthetics, and I think it needs more of this and that, because it's always impossible to tell what you've got the first coat, even though you try.

MS. FISCH: And what is it about the opalescent enamels that are difficult?

MS. SCHWARCZ: They aren't so difficult. It's just putting enamel on where you don't -- the enamels don't change color the way glazes sometimes do in a ceramic kiln, but they're in a powdered state, and if you have flux and white and opal white, they'll all -- and light pink -- they'll all look white in the powdered state. And then when they get melted, they'll all show their color. And they also change the more you fire them. You know, they'll get clear, less cloudy. So you don't -- I don't really remember what I'm doing enough to really know what I'm getting. I can know I want, maybe, top colors lighter and bottoms darker, stuff like that.

This is in the Denver Museum [*Untitled Vessel*, 1995, #2073, p.72]. The woman who taught me to enamel, whose name is Terry Touff, who lives in Denver, gave it, as well as #2062, to the Denver Museum. And also she gave this, not very willingly, because it's crooked, but the curator liked it. So the bottom is opal white and the top is patina with that Mi-Tique. I engraved a line. I put it in pickle, and the pickle flowed a little bit. It didn't come all the way up and made that circle, and I decided I liked it, so I kept it.

MS. FISCH: So you emphasized it?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. And this piece is in the Boston Museum [*Tipped Cube Vessel*, 1996, #2082, p.73]. And enamel burns off high points, and Jonathon Fairbanks, when he saw that, asked me how I kept that from burning off. And I've never met any museum person that would have any idea it could happen. He must have an incredible knowledge of techniques. But the way I kept that bright was, every time I fired it, I'd put a little bit of a new flux coat on it, just on those corners.

This belongs to Bill Harper, and this is just textured iron plating [*Vessel with Pleats*, 1996, #2087, p.75]. All these, of course, are enameled on the inside.

And this again is texture [*Vessel with Dark Band*, 1996, #2094, p.77]. This is patina with two different tones of Mi-Tique.

MS. FISCH: Well, it's amazing that you get such variation with the same chemical.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. It depends how long you leave it in. But they also have -- I could give you the numbers of it. But they also have one that's brown and one that's black. But you can use the black one briefly and get a brown from it. I do have both colors.

MS. FISCH: And do you put anything on top of them? I mean, do you wax them or spray them with anything?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, but you can.

MS. FISCH: And they don't get finger marks?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, you have to scrub it off. There's sometimes a little bit of loose black things when you finish it. But I haven't had any change in it. The iron plating may change colors sometimes.

And this bowl [*Bristle Vessel*, 1996, #2095, p.79], I used a thin copper wire that I use for sewing and just wrapped it around and around a bowl. I guess I did it before I enameled it, but I might have -- no, I couldn't have. I plated it, and then I wrapped it around and enameled it, because you can see the thin wires. If I plated the wires, they would have --

MS. FISCH: They would have disappeared. Or they wouldn't have been so sharp.

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, they'd be thicker.

MS. FISCH: Uh-huh. They wouldn't be so sharp.

MS. SCHWARCZ: They'd be sharper. But the enamel runs off the high point. That's what gives it the black, because I didn't put any black on it.

This is -- I wanted to look down into color.

MS. FISCH: This is a, sort of, tripod bowl [*Ancient Altar*, 1996, #2099, p.81]. And you've done several, I guess.

MS. SCHWARCZ: I've done two.

MS. FISCH: Two.

MS. SCHWARCZ: But I wanted to look down. I wanted the color to look deep.

MS. FISCH: But is it influenced by any kind of tribal piece, because that tripod shape is often used in African vessels?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, my husband, the engineer, said, if you use only three legs, you're going to have an easier time of making it be level. It's harder to make four legs fit. [Laughs.] But I like a -- I like tripod look anyway. But I do use a tripod for that reason. And this, again, has that texture.

MS. FISCH: Well, this is interesting because it has an opening on the bottom that you look into [*Vessel with Triangle Removed*, 1997, #2105, p.83].

MS. SCHWARCZ: In later years I've been doing a lot of openings, and I want to see color through.

MS. FISCH: I think it's wonderful, because when you enamel the interior on the very tall, slender ones, you really only, kind of, see the top.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, exactly.

MS. FISCH: And it's wonderful to be able to peek in and see the color.

MS. SCHWARCZ: I really like it. I mean, I've been doing a lot. I mean, I like that idea. But that's just a texture.

And this had various abstract colors inside [*Square Geode*, 1997, #2110, p.85]. It's hard to do, because it's harder to lay colors here and there when you want them. And then this had other colors on the outside with opal white on top. And I sandblasted the outside of this to make it look a little more chalky, to make the inside look more lustrous.

MS. FISCH: Well, it's very effective because, again, it has this wonderful fabriclike quality on the outside.

MS. SCHWARCZ: It's really related to fabric. Again, that's --

MS. FISCH: So those are the 40 pieces from 40 years.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. And I'm not even sure if there're not more.

MS. FISCH: If you were to have another retrospective exhibition, would you like it to be larger? Would you like it to be more complete? Would you like to see a bigger range of work?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, you know, I'm insatiable. I always like a bigger show. I don't know if I-there are a lot of earlier things that I couldn't find. But I do try to make everything different from everything else, so I would be happy to have a larger exhibition, but it isn't something I felt-I didn't feel deprived when I had this show.

MS. FISCH: Well, you said when it was at the American Craft Museum in New York that they actually added pieces.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. Yes. And I was glad to be able to add those. And there were some pieces that I added that I really liked, but I just couldn't have all.

MS. FISCH: Well, tell me what you're working on now, because I know you haven't stopped working. You're still working hard.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. My problem is that I have less energy. But I find my work getting bigger, and I don't know why, because it's harder, at 82, to put them in the kiln. But it's so easy when I'm working with paper to do it. But I'm still interested in things that have portions cut out, and so you see the relation to the inside. I like light. I like light showing down into it, through it. And I can show you one or two pieces.

MS. FISCH: Well, you said you were working on five pieces right now?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. I think it's five.

MS. FISCH: Now, tell me about them. I mean, I can go look at them, but the person listening to the tape can't see them.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, maybe it's easier to talk about if I go see them.

MS. FISCH: Okay, we're in June's studio now, and she's going to tell me about the things she's working on right now.

MS. SCHWARCZ: I'm holding a piece of foil that has had a design inscribed on it of an old mechanical drawing for a steam engine. So I trace the design on the foil with a sharpened wooden end of a paintbrush to get a little depth. I'm going to plate it, and then I'm going to enamel it. It's an experiment to see if the lines will show through. I'm going to put a dark brown on it, and over that I may put a little flux, but I may use the flux in the second firing.

As I keep firing it, I think the enamel will run off the high points, and the brown will be thinner and lighter. And I think the design will be very subtle and hard to see, but it might be of some interest.

MS. FISCH: So you have a definite vision of what you want them to be from the very beginning?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, yes. That's not always true, but often it is. Or often as I work on something, it'll change or I'll see other possibilities. But on this, which is quite simple, I think I know how it'll [come out].

This, I have four pieces here. I work in series, and I will spend a week, maybe, making new shapes, and then I plate them one at a time for around four or five days each, depending on how heavy I want the plating, partly how large the piece is.

MS. FISCH: When it's in the plating bath, do you have to keep turning it around?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, but if I don't have my anodes evenly spaced, it will plate unevenly. And I also have to be sure that the current is really plating it. There have been times in my early years of plating when it was connected-I don't understand it-it was connected, but not a good connection. And when I go to check on it, half of it's been eaten away at some point. [Laughs.] So I'm always very careful now.

I have four pieces here that have been sewn and waxed inside, and plated. Getting the wax off them is a headache. And I boil it off and I burn it off on a hibachi. And there's always a little bit of remaining wax, which I burn off in the kiln, but I'm always afraid of getting carbon deposits, so I try to get as much off before I put it in the kiln.

MS. FISCH: So that's why you don't burn the wax off in the kiln? You don't want all that carbon in the kiln.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. Yes. I don't know. It would be a fire in my kiln a long time. I don't know if that would be harmful or not, but I don't want any carbon on it.

So these are plated. This one is open, and I'm interested in being able to see the inside from the outside. I haven't quite decided what color the inside will be, but probably a light color, because I'm going to make the

outside mostly fire scale outside, with enamel put in certain recessed area. And here I'm going to have bright blue or some color in there.

MS. FISCH: So it will be a mixture of enamel and oxidation on the surface?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. Yes. It's sort of like one up there. So all of them-I have a definite color, so I have one here that's partially plated, and then has a band of lines that have been-

MS. FISCH: Yes, they've been folded and then opened up a little bit, it looks like.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. And this is sort of-there was a Buddhist statue where he was wearing a bunch of clothes that kind of reminded me of this. And I made little knots in my sewing to add an additional texture.

MS. FISCH: It's amazing how thick the edge has gotten from the plating.

MS. SCHWARCZ: The plating always attracts the most current at protuberances. So the edges are always thicker, which adds strength to it. So I'm glad of that. If you paint inside with wax and you have even a pore left, it'll plate on that little pore, and sometimes it's hard to get. If it's really a pore, you could pop it off, but if it's more, it's often hard to get off.

MS. FISCH: If it's attached, do you have to grind it off?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. Yes.

MS. FISCH: Do you check periodically during the plating process to see if the wax is holding up, and so on? Or you just hope that it is?

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, I don't. My greatest trouble in life is that as I keep firing things, sometimes the inside foil blisters off the outside plating. So it's terribly important to have the piece terribly clean before I put it in the copper plating, and to have pickled it right before you plate it and also rinsed it thoroughly so you don't pollute your bath. But-so I don't always control it, but it's the bane of my existence.

But I try not to break the connection and take it out any more than necessary, because sometimes the parts do separate. If I am plating and I want to take it out to add additional elements, I then-when I want to re-plate, I start it out very slowly and pickle it before I start plating. Even though it will be clean to the eye, it can still have oxides from the air in it.

MS. FISCH: Well, copper especially oxidizes so quickly, you have to be very careful.

I'm interested in this piece, which has a very interesting interior, because it looks like you gathered it and then flattened it, and so there are this-there's this deep pocket on the inside.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, this is more characteristic of my older work. I used to make a lot of gathered pieces with cuffs on them. And I made this as a-I thought I was going to need a special demonstration piece for my technique demonstration at the Craft Museum for my retrospective. But it turned out just a simple small bowl was all they wanted. So I'm making it up to use it.

MS. FISCH: Well, how do you get-I'm intrigued. How do you get it clean enough on the inside, now that it's all scaly from being burned?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, it's full of fire oxide now, and I'll wash out as much as I can with just water, and then I put it in the-

MS. FISCH: Pickle?

MS. SCHWARCZ: -pickle bath and pickle it clean. And I, you know, really polish it a lot before I plate.

MS. FISCH: And you polish it now with steel wool, or pumice, or both of those things?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, and wire brushes too.

MS. FISCH: And you can get inside? I mean, that's really hard to get in and underneath.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, sort of, with wire brushes. You know, there are parts that are undercuts that-what's hardest is sifting an enamel on it. And no one can see it, because it's an undercut, but it can spit little copper oxide pieces on the floor. So I just recently talked to Tom Ellis at Thompson Enamel, and I'm going to see if I can get some brush-on enamel that I can paint on.

MS. FISCH: In that underneath part.

MS. SCHWARCZ: To protect it so it doesn't spit out copper oxide. But I'll have to make a paintbrush with the brush part at an angle to the handle, or something, you know.

MS. FISCH: So you create lots of engineering problems for yourself just in the way you make the form.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. Yes. Yes. And my husband used to be good at making these forms for me. All those special shaped sifters-

MS. FISCH: Oh, yes.

MS. SCHWARZ: -I'll use for-

MS. FISCH: They have very long handles and little tiny baskets on the ends of these long handles.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, some of them-you know, they're all different.

MS. FISCH: What are they made of?

MS. SCHWARCZ: They're made out of plastic tubing, sometimes medicine bottles glued to chopsticks or dowel rods, and with wire mesh. There's one little tube that-one little tool that I bought in Japan many years ago for the equivalent of 20 cents, and it's a tube with slanted-cut on a slant and a sifter on it, and it's very useful for sifting lines in small areas and under edges.

MS. FISCH: And certainly easy to make your own version of those.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. So then I made some. But I'm going to have to replace the mesh. I've worn it out.

MS. FISCH: What kind of mesh do you use?

MS. SCHWARCZ: It's a problem finding just the right mesh. But any kind of mesh, I use silk stockings a lot, but-

MS. FISCH: Have you ever seen stainless steel mesh? They use it for silk-screen printing, and it comes in lots of different sizes, I mean different meshes. That might work quite well.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Do you get it just at an arts supply place, or a silk screen place?

MS. FISCH: Silk-screen place, but also they sell it at Metalliferous in New York, in one-foot squares, in different sizes.

MS. SCHWARCZ: I'll write that down when I go upstairs.

MS. FISCH: I'm going to just ask you a little bit about your equipment, because I think it's such an important aspect of your work.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Okay. I'll just write it down.

See, this was way up here, so really you can feel it bend, you know. It's not as heavy as I wish it were. If it's not mishandled by the time I enamel it, it'll strengthen it.

MS. FISCH: This is a piece that has a tripod base, but the legs are very long and straight, so that the interior was high up, and that makes it hard to plate the bottom. So it's a little thinner than you would like.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes.

MS. FISCH: Probably the enamel will stiffen it up.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, yes. So I don't know how much, when you fire something and a thin layer of oxide comes off, if you're making it much thinner.

MS. FISCH: Well, a little bit, because you're actually burning some of the metal off. But what size is your kiln?

MS. SCHWARCZ: My kiln. I have a Vcella kiln. But it was-I have a Vcella kiln that I had custom-made. My first kiln was a Vcella, made when Mr. Vcella was alive, and it was a wonderful kiln. But at that time I was making smaller, more shallow bowls and wall pieces. So I didn't have the height that I needed for my vessels, and I ordered another kiln. By that time Mr. Vcella had died, and this is a very good kiln, but it doesn't have any elements in the floor. So I have trouble with my higher vessels, having them mature evenly.

So I try to do the inside first and have it lying down so the bottom is near the elements of the back, so they'll fuse a little more. Because lots of times they never did fuse right on the bottom. And I could, of course, raise it by getting a higher stand, but some things are too tall to raise. So this is about 18 inches long-deep-and about 15 inches wide, and with a floor in it, it's about 14 inches high.

MS. FISCH: So those are the limits that you have to work within your-

MS. SCHWARCZ: I have to work below the limits, because I can't put them in that accurately. I do have a wonderful firing fork that my husband made for me that has a T in the center and then a rather long piece of wood that fits under my elbow, and I can use a kind of leverage. So I can fire things that are heavier with this fork than I could with an ordinary fork.

MS. FISCH: That's a wonderful invention.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Oh, it's so good.

MS. FISCH: Because it does give you plenty of support, because those pieces are heavy when you're pulling them in and out with one hand.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. Yes.

MS. FISCH: And you wear a face mask when you-yes, I think that you do.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, I do. I do. And I wear glasses that keep out whatever bad rays there, or ultraviolet, maybe. I forget. There're two kinds of rays, infrared and ultraviolet. I forget which this is. But they can cause certain damage.

[End Tape 3, Side B.]

MS. FISCH: This is Arline Fisch interviewing June Schwarcz at her home and studio in Sausalito, California, on January 22, 2001, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This is tape number four.

June, we've talked a lot about the technical aspects of your work, but I know that you also think a great deal about philosophical and aesthetic aspects of your work. So I'd like you to talk a little bit about that part.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I'm primarily interested in having things that are beautiful, and of course, beauty is a complicated thing to devise, to find. Santayana's book, *Sense of Beauty* [New York: Dover Publications, 1955, c. 1896], has helped me sort of crystallize many of my ideas. I don't know that he changed the way that I do anything, but he defined what I'm trying to think of. He called beauty something that gives visual pleasure to a sensitive observer, so we're not trying to please the-we're pretty snobbish. We're not trying to please the masses. And I'm not trying to do something pretty.

Of course, the art that's available in our time influences our aesthetics, and so does the slickness of the machine work. So I've been influenced by many things, among them Japanese art. There's a little book called *In Praise of Shadows* [New Haven, CT: Leete's Island Books, c. 1977], by Junichiro Yanazaki, I think. And he writes about how beautiful things used to be in old Japan, when they were seen by lantern light, and how costumes in kabuki theaters in the bright stage lights now seem so gaudy, where just the golden threads blending in shadows were so lovely in the old days, and how beautiful the white painted faces of women with blackened teeth were in candlelight, and how they would just glow in the shadows. And I always was interested to know how blackened teeth could be beautiful. [Laughs.]

So I like that aspect of things. I like the Zen aesthetic philosophy. I've never had the patience to get interested in religion. I've often felt I ought to, but I'm not religious, and I am too impatient to meditate, and I don't want to achieve nothingness, but I like the ways things in Zen are suggested and just implied with maybe a couple of brush strokes and unfinished things.

One time when I was again showing at the Japonesque Gallery in San Francisco, Koichi Hara had been at my house and very much liked a single tea rose I had. So I picked one to bring to him and a petal fell off on the way there. When I gave it to him, I apologized for the missing petal, and he said, no, it makes it more interesting because then the eye completes the other petal. That was an interesting idea to me, and I do like things that are not completely said. I love fog; I live in a foggy area. I love seeing through mist, and I love-I almost love Old Master drawings more than paintings, except that I like color. But because I like the way that the drawings suggest more with a few lines. I like subtle things.

And I know in receiving a dozen roses, we all like to get a dozen roses because it represents congratulations, or wishing you luck, and I love you, maybe. But they're actually kind of dull with all these roses all alike in a bunch. And I like better a tea rose from my garden that might be a little crooked and might have a little hole here and

there, but it just is more interesting and there is more vitality. So all these ideas I'm sure influence my work.

Santayana made-I haven't read him carefully because, again, his sentences are very impacted. But one thing that I felt from him is that so much of what we feel is beauty is the way we live in this world and space and walk and our weight. If you see a person just standing there, if you see a ballet dancer, you want a variety in the motions to keep you interested. But if something is off balance, like a painting with lines all looking as if it's going to fall down, you think-I think you think, sort of subconsciously, I'm afraid of falling down, and it therefore reminds you of something unpleasant that you don't want to see and be reminded of.

I love work with air in it and space in it, and Santayana says we like that because of the joy of breathing. And I feel that when you see, say, a stone wall with an arched opening, you're sure that whatever's behind that wall is beautiful, whether you can see it or not. And it may not be a lovely garden, but there's something about half-seen things that makes you want to see beyond.

And I know I'm very fond of [Richard] Diebenkorn's paintings. There's a painting that's illustrated in a book I have that's all full of muted browns and oranges and grays, but in one spot, not in the middle, but off center, is a little lick of the most intense orange. That orange makes all the rest recede and the dullness of that, the other colors, makes the orange look more intense, you know. So these are things I try to think of.

I've been making a lot of vessels in the last few years that have openings, because I think it's interesting to be able to see the inside from the outside. And I like working three-dimensionally because I have another surface I can put color in. And I'm very interested in color, although I also like subtle things, too.

MS. FISCH: Well, I think there's a very interesting tension in your work between the expectation and the anticipation, that when I look at your work, I sort of anticipate a surprise somewhere. [They laugh.] And I think you programmed that in intuitively, rather than consciously.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, but I think-I think beauty is life affirming.

MS. FISCH: Well, beauty used to be a word that everybody avoided, because it seemed sort of banal or too ordinary, and I think it's wonderful that you use that word a lot.

MS. SCHWARCZ: I couldn't think of a substitute.

MS. FISCH: And that beauty drives your work.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, because it gives me a pleasure in both-well, it's great if you think you made something good, like winning the brass rail on the merry-go-round-the brass ring on the merry-go-round. But it also makes me happy to live among things that I feel are beautiful.

MS. FISCH: And it also relieves you of the expectation of function that seems not to enter into your work very much.

MS. SCHWARCZ: That's true. No. I just like a vessel form. I think it's related to the body, and I get drawn to vessels.

MS. FISCH: You said once that you wanted to be an artist and that you intended to walk where you chose and not where-and not care about what other people called it. And maybe you could talk a little bit about how you feel about your work in that regard, that it doesn't have to have a label.

MS. SCHWARCZ: No, I feel that very strongly. You just do what pops into your head. I've been very fortunate inasmuch as I was supported by my husband. So the time that I had to make my own work, I wanted to truly be as good as I could. And for many years it was hard to sell. But the excitement was in doing something I could be proud of.

But since my things go from-vary a great deal from anything really useful-it doesn't matter what you call it. It's just I want to do what I want to do. And I do feel that, you know, in my life I've seen a great vitality in the crafts made in both their use of material and their exploration of space, almost, it seemed to me, more than in the fine arts. But you know, that's not important. It's just all these labels are limiting.

MS. FISCH: Right. They are limiting, and I think you're right in saying that the unity of the craft world has enjoyed a lot of exploration and a lot of freedom because it's willing to explore and not worry so much about-perhaps about what the world calls what it's doing.

MS. SCHWARCZ: And our generation is very fortunate in that there was a lot to explore in those days. Now things have been, you know, getting very explored, and there are very many more technically accomplished craftsmen.

MS. FISCH: Well, I think the challenge now for young artists is not technical. But the challenge is to do something individual and imaginative and innovative that isn't just, wow, look at that technique.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, that's great. But you know, certainly I want to do it as an individual, not be part of any school. I'm not influenced by other enamelists. I'm interested in all kinds of other things, fine artists and ancient art.

MS. FISCH: Have you ever seen any old enamels that you found particularly intriguing? I know that when I look around your house at what you collect, I don't see very many things that are enamel.

MS. SCHWARCZ: No. No. There are some enamels that I like. They're mostly small. For things around my house, I like things I can see when I walk by. I'm not drawn to little precious things. But, so the only enamel I have is a fake, but an old fake. [Laughs.] It has a signature "LL," with a fleur de lis, and I knew that was the signature of a famous enamelist in Limoges many years ago, and he did a lot of religious things. But I finally took it to the Victoria and Albert Museum, where they look at all the things, and looked with great scorn, near the end of the last-well, the end of the 19th century or in the beginning of the 20th, and it was not a true signature. And later when I saw some of his work, I never would have confused him. But that's the only enamel I bought, except brooches from friends.

MS. FISCH: Well, I'm sitting here looking at this wall in your dining room, and there are some wonderful objects that I'm sure have meant a great deal to you. And I wonder if you want to comment on any of them and how they inspire you or how they feed your soul.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I will say I sometimes go in periods, you know, where earlier I was interested in Japanese things, and I've been-and so I'm interested in African things. And lately I've been buying some ancient Chinese ceramics. But always I'm drawn to simple things. I'm not drawn to things with elaborate ornamentation, too. And I like glass because I like light-through things. And I forget if I said I use a lot of opal enamels, or I'm interested because of the fog, and I find that things [are] half-seen.

And so I have an African head from the Mende tribe. It's a woman's initiation ceremony. And it seems to me to have a kind of calming peace to it.

MS. FISCH: But it also has this incredible ornamentation on the head that reminds me of some of the ornamentation on the outside of your bowls, that kind of encrustation.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I hadn't thought of that. But it does, doesn't it? It never occurred to me. Yes. I've had that a long time. And I do like patterns and I like form. I like jewelry. There's something about liking ancient things and knowing that men made things that they love that we can still love, that that gives you a kind of feeling with other people.

MS. FISCH: It gives you a connection.

MS. SCHWARCZ: It gives you a connection and a feeling you understand other generations a little, and it makes the world seem not quite so lonely.

MS. FISCH: Tell me about the hat up there.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, it's an African hat that has no particular psychological connotation to me like the head. But I just thought it was pretty stunning. I like the pattern, and I like the technique. I'm very interested in textiles and textures in textiles.

MS. FISCH: But it also has a vessel form. It's just upside down.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. Yes. Yep, it does. This one, yes. And before I collected anything else, we collected Indian, American Indian, things because my husband liked those too. But all of them I like. And that's a 14th-century covered bowl, I think from Java. And then I liked even the looks of erosion on it.

MS. FISCH: Is it a metal vessel?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. It's copper or bronze. Its lid comes off.

MS. FISCH: And it has a heavy patina, and it's been eroded, as you say.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well the patina's from being buried. And then the wooden plate and bowls are Bob Stocksdale's. He's a good friend of mine. And the framed piece is a Chinese rank insignia. And I just thought it was pretty. [Laughs.]

MS. FISCH: What about this lampshade-like thing hanging up above the spiral piece? [Laughs.] I'm intrigued by that.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I have worked with and I am a friend of Frederico de Vera, who has a gallery, and he came here one time to pick out some enamels that he wanted to sell. He said, June, I found someone throwing this out, so I brought it to you, and here, I'll put it up. [They laugh.] So it's been there ever since. It is a coil of interlace.

MS. FISCH: So it isn't anything you selected. It just came.

MS. SCHWARCZ: [Laughs.] No. I feel as if it sprouted like a mushroom on a damp day.

MS. FISCH: Well, it's a wonderful image, I think, hanging up there, and it casts marvelous shadows on that white wall.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. And the other two are Indian cradles, and we got them at different times. But one is a doll cradle and the other is the baby cradle. It was the same tribe.

MS. FISCH: Isn't that interesting. When I saw them, I thought they were lobster traps. They have a similar kind of-

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes. I like lobster traps, too, but I don't have any. And the little discs are sunshades.

MS. FISCH: Isn't that wonderful. They're basket forms made of reeds, with removable hats.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes.

MS. FISCH: Are there any other pieces in the rest of the house that you particularly find-

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, there's a little boat made out of junk, with a little solitary figure on top of it. And I got that after my husband died. It's kind of a memorial to him, because he loved boats and all his life he dreamt about it, and finally after he retired he, with the help of friends, built one. Then there're some American Indian, Southwest American Indian, pots, and some pre-Peruvian Columbian pots. I have a little triptych on the lower shelf. I have- and I did have pieces of pre-Columbian textiles that I gave to a museum. But I've always loved that kind of thing.

And I have a pre-classic Mimbres bowl, which doesn't have the characteristic drawings on them that they do. It's a geometric thing, and another geometric bowl from pre-Columbian in the Southwest.

But I have things by friends, by Lillian Elliott and Kay Sekimachi. And I have contemporary things, jewelry by Kiff Slemmons and ceramics from Anne Hirondelle and Dominic Di Mare. And I have a Japanese pothook-it goes over the fire-I bought just because I thought it was a beautiful piece of sculpture.

MS. FISCH: So you continue to collect. I mean your collection has not reached its final proportion.

MS. SCHWARCZ: I've got too much, and I swear I've got to stop, but I never do. I like to say greed keeps you young, but that's maybe my justification for it. [Laughs.] Anyway. But it would really-if someone said I could never buy anything, I suppose I'd feel sad. But I don't like my house to be too crowded. I've been able to give some stuff to my daughter. And so then I don't feel unjustified in having bought something.

MS. FISCH: Well, I know you've recently bought this beautiful contemporary Oriental rug. And how do you feel about that? It's a gorgeous small rug.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, I love it. But again, I thought, I have two. I don't need a new rug. But I have-

MS. FISCH: Right. But what drew you to that particular rug?

MS. SCHWARCZ: The color. I think I love yellow. It sort of gathers light. And it's just a very pretty, subtle rug.

MS. FISCH: When I looked at it, I thought it sort of embodied many of the things that I think about your work, that it is the collection of light and this wonderful reflective surface, which looks a little bit like enamel, and it glows with a light and a spirit that I think your work has.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Well, good. Thank you. [Laughs.] My desire is to make things that are beautiful. There is a great trend in this country now to have it have meaning. And I think they mean meaning you can describe in words. I think if something is beautiful, that is a meaning, whether you could say it in words. And I was asked to submit some things to a jury for inclusion in a book of crafts, and I was rejected. And the jury statement said the beauty isn't enough. It has to have meaning.

I think they meant a verbal meaning or narrative art, which is very much in style. I don't have any objection to that kind of art if it's possible to understand something of what it's implying. But I don't think it should be necessary in art to have that kind of story line to it. And I'm quite impatient with artwork that has no meaning at all unless the artist can be there to explain it or give a printed record.

It's possible to work with meaning to give you a hunch of it without your maybe getting the exact. If it means something beyond itself, that's swell, but it shouldn't be a necessary part. I suppose in art I'm talking about abstract art, maybe. But abstract art, too, carries meanings and references. There isn't anything we can make or do that doesn't refer to what we all see and like, even if it's two parallel lines. So I'm interested in just the way it looks.

MS. FISCH: And is that, in the end, I suppose, the reason why you don't necessarily title your work, too?

MS. SCHWARCZ: I want it to mean whatever it means to whoever it does, and I don't like thinking up names, but I don't want to limit its meaning to someone when I hadn't had any when I made it. I wouldn't mind-I do try to have a specific personality, not necessarily a verbal personality, but I do want each piece to have a kind of personality, whether it's strong or bright or subtle. Not things I necessarily could put a word to, but I try to make each piece different, and I try to get a quality into it that's its own personality.

MS. FISCH: Would you use the word *spirit*, too?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Sure. Spirit would be all right. But just as I-sometimes I want it to be subtle and sometimes bold and dramatic and strong. So sure, spirit's swell. I believe in spirit. That's one word that I sometimes feel self-conscious when I use it.

MS. FISCH: Why would you feel self-conscious about it? Do you think it's a pretentious word?

MS. SCHWARCZ: Sometimes, yes. Yes.

MS. FISCH: But it's interesting, because you use the word when you talk about other objects-that what appeals to you about them is often their spirit.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Yes, that's true.

MS. FISCH: And I think that, in like manner, your own work has that kind of energy and spirit.

MS. SCHWARCZ: I would love to have it.

MS. FISCH: Oh, I think you absolutely accomplish that.

Thank you very much, June.

MS. SCHWARCZ: Thank you.

MS. FISCH: This is the end of the interview with June Schwarcz.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated... *February 11, 2002*