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Oral history interview with Robert Chapman Turner, 2001 June 11

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Robert Chapman Turner on June 11, 2001. The interview took place at the Smithsonian recording studio in Washington, D.C., and was conducted by Dr. Margaret Carney 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.

Robert Chapman Turner (1913-2003) and Dr. Margaret Carney 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

DR. CARNEY: This is Margaret Carney interviewing Robert Turner at the Smithsonian recording studio in Washington, D.C., on June 11, 2001. Hi, Bob.

MR. TURNER: Hi, Margaret.

DR. CARNEY: I'm going to start with a basic question for you. When were you born and where were you born?

MR. TURNER: If the records are correct, I was born in Port Washington, in New York. And that was July 22, 1913, so I'm told.

DR. CARNEY: All right. Where is Port Washington, New York?

MR. TURNER: It's out on the-really on the Sound [Long Island Sound] part, way out, I suppose, less than an hour out from Manhattan, on Long Island.

DR. CARNEY: Long Island. All right. And did you grow up there on Long Island?

MR. TURNER: No, grew up in Brooklyn and went to school in Brooklyn, all until graduation.

DR. CARNEY: All right. And why was your family in New York?

MR. TURNER: Well, my father's business was there.

DR. CARNEY: And what business was that?

MR. TURNER: He was in construction, and it was called Turner Concrete. It was one of the great bars-they put in concrete, you know-

DR. CARNEY: Oh, the reinforcement and rods?

MR. TURNER: That was really what he was-reinforced concrete. And he really, I think, developed that in a way that became even known. I didn't know that he was one of three awarded something in France, I believe, at some point because of development of this as a kind of slab, that kind of thing. So, I guess he was important in ways that I, you know, as a family you don't always recognize.

DR. CARNEY: Was that a successful kind of business? It sounds like if he got awards, it must have been highly successful.

MR. TURNER: Yeah, it was very successful, and he worked from New York and in offices developed in-now I'm informed that it's the biggest construction company in the country.

DR. CARNEY: What's it called now? Is it still Turner Construction?

MR. TURNER: Well, it's still Turner, but-Curt Turner Construction is part of it. And it was financially taken over, maybe two years ago, by a German company that wanted to use-not to change it, but use their expertise, I suspect.

DR. CARNEY: That's very interesting. That's kind of like the rest of the world being taken over by international concerns.

MR. TURNER: Yeah, it's both good and bad, I guess.

DR. CARNEY: So, are any members of your family still active with that?

MR. TURNER: Nephews and, perhaps, children of nephews, that kind of thing. But, our sons, no. A cousin's son, yes, still. But it's no longer central, I think, to our immediate family.

DR. CARNEY: So, your family, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

MR. TURNER: I had three brothers, one sister, and-

DR. CARNEY: And where did you fall in that group?

MR. TURNER: I fell in as the fourth member, which meant that I had much more freedom than the first member to do what I wanted. And I'm amazed that my father sympathized with my wanting to get into art, of all things, after college.

DR. CARNEY: So can you tell me a little bit about your background and how you ended up in art? Were you influenced in high school at all? Or as you were growing up, were you drawing or painting or making things out of clay? How did you, kind of, fall into that?

MR. TURNER: Well, it was not unusual at all for someone to be drawing and making plasticine models of things. And my mother encouraged that. And I remember she encouraged me getting at least for one year drawing lessons up at Pratt Institute or somebody from Pratt Institute. And I drew for the school magazine. I was, you know, on that.

DR. CARNEY: What was the name of the school that you were attending?

MR. TURNER: Brooklyn Friends School. It's just at the entrance of Brooklyn, really. And people who live really out in Brooklyn say, "Oh, that's not Brooklyn. That's just barely off Manhattan." Which is true. Columbia Heights. And it is quite a beautiful area.

DR. CARNEY: All right. And the drawing classes that you took-you took them at Pratt [The Pratt Institute, Brooklyn and New York, NY]? Or with some-

MR. TURNER: That more specifically, a member of the Pratt faculty gave me one hour a week, I think, of instruction and that kind of thing.

DR. CARNEY: And how old were you when that happened?

MR. TURNER: I must have been 12 years old, something like that. And I remember, again, some arrangements so I could go to a sculptor's studio on Sundays. And I must have been 14 by then, because I remember traveling on a BMT [Brooklyn-Manhattan Transit Corporation] subway on up to the area where the concert hall is right across the street. I think we went to his upstairs studio. And that was kind of exciting because of the reality of the stuff.

DR. CARNEY: So, back to your school-age days. Were you a good student? And did you enjoy it?

MR. TURNER: Oh, I think I was a very mediocre student. I didn't apply myself as well as I could. I'm saying that now, of course.

DR. CARNEY: You weren't rewarded for your academic achievements at that time?

MR. TURNER: No, I wasn't rewarded at all except with a diploma, I think. And in fact, because my French was not great, I went to George School [Bucks County, PA] for a post-graduate year really to catch up on such things as French and so to get into Swarthmore College. And George School was a great experience, because I could concentrate over there. And I learned to study and enjoyed it a great deal.

DR. CARNEY: Where is George School and what is George School?

MR. TURNER: Yeah, that's a Quaker school in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. And I did take drawing and art there under a wonderful woman.

DR. CARNEY: Do you remember who that was?

MR. TURNER: Don't have her first name. A Ms. Baker. And I remember doing a lot of Greek-I mean, not Greek so much as Egyptian kind of things. I had no idea this was a profession for me at all. I was just trying to learn things and that's it.

DR. CARNEY: Was there any pressure in your family to have you go a certain way? I think I remember you have

an older brother that took certain directions. Did you follow in his footsteps in anyway?

MR. TURNER: Not really. My oldest brother entered the company.

DR. CARNEY: What's your oldest brother-his name is?

MR. TURNER: Chandlee or Chand. And he was very nice. I was very fond-I think we got along so well. See, I was just about nine years younger. So I was really his little brother. And he kind of watched after me in a funny way.

DR. CARNEY: And what about the other members of your family? Did they go into business?

MR. TURNER: Well, I think it's significant what you said. I played tennis when I was quite young and kept playing right through college. And my next older brother also played some tennis. Neither of us played golf. And my father said, if you don't play golf, there's no point in getting into business.

DR. CARNEY: That's still true.

MR. TURNER: You don't exchange conversation on the tennis court. And that was all right. So it was, well, quite early that, I think, people knew that there was that tendency. My brother, my next eldest brother, went into teaching and consumer cooperatives and labor unions, studying, and closeness that way.

DR. CARNEY: What's your next oldest brother's name?

MR. TURNER: His name is Haines. And he influenced me, a great deal. He's very serious and concerned about the social conditions of the world, that kind of thing. And I think he had a lot of influence in taking me toward liberal thinking and thinking of peace. And that's partly why I got into being a conscientious objector, probably, a little later on. That was an influence and I admired him for his convictions.

DR. CARNEY: So I guess this leads me back to the question about how important being a Quaker has been in your life. And it seems like we should start there, because that sounds like a family tradition.

MR. TURNER: That's true. And my mother was very close to it. My father was, but not in the same intensive way. They both came from Quaker families. And I know that within my great-grandfather, I think-I don't know, I get lost in great, but-during the Civil War and, I think, just before, down in Maryland, where he was living and was raising a family-and someone said "Look, Richard"-I think that was his name- "I think you better go away for a week or two, because there are people watching you from the trees." There was an underground railroad and he was part of it, I think. And I admired that a great deal.

And I admired on the other side, on my mother's side, Mariana Wright Chapman, my mother's mother. She was very strong in the suffragist movement and became, I guess, the key person in New York and met Roosevelt when he was up-would be the first Roosevelt-about the turn of the century. But she had been very important. And I think that's remained something very significant for me in admiration.

DR. CARNEY: So if you think back about growing up and family influences, is the Quaker part as important as some other family relationships that influenced how you turned out?

MR. TURNER: The Quaker part-I think we just, as members of the family, went to a Quaker meeting in Brooklyn, and there were some wonderful people who came in-you know, would be part of the meeting but also speak, very strong women, for example. And I still remember Jane Rushmore, I think it was. I still remember her talks with interest and admiration. Very strong in conviction. And I'm sure that has a lot to do with it. And it had a lot to do with my becoming quite involved as a conscientious objector and going in that direction at the start of World War II.

And I think it even increased at that time and later on when Sue and I-my wife, Sue, and I-established a home up in New York State after the period and the war was over, conscientious objector, and what I did then. And we established a little meeting just for a couple of more friends who wanted to do it. And then when we went down to Black Mountain College [Ashville, NC], where I taught in 1949 to 1951-there are a number of people there who had started a little silent-worship meeting-it wasn't necessarily all Quakers, but it was that presence at that time. And that was very important that that be available, I think.

DR. CARNEY: Has that actually influenced your work as an artist?

MR. TURNER: It has, I think, and probably, it has in a very significant way. I think the Quakerism I know is-well, you could say, there is no box you're in. It's open and evolving. What we learn is evolving. It's not something set. And that kind of openness is very important to me, certainly as an artist and as a person. And I think that has been central, really, to my work in art, that sense of openness, the sense of the value of each person, the value of individuals, and also the value of-what I picked up from Africa, particularly, the value of trees, of everything

around us.

DR. CARNEY: So it's an involvement with nature, in that connection.

MR. TURNER: Yeah, Margaret, I think it was after I had come back and had been at Black Mountain College for two years teaching, we came back to New York State to raise a family and get my own work started as a potter to earn a living just simply making pots. I didn't even think it was art necessarily, but it was to earn a living and something I love to do with my hands. And at any rate that-I'm losing track of the various things I wanted to say there, but that-

DR. CARNEY: We'll come back, because there's a huge gap-don't worry about that. Could I ask you one more question? And we can come back to anything during this conversation. I don't know personally that many artists that are Quakers. And I wonder, is there any kind of group? Because sometimes if someone's a Buddhist or something, it affects their work and-is there any kind of collective group that are Quaker artists? Or has there ever been an exhibition where they were showing Quaker-related-

MR. TURNER: Not that I know of. This, I think, was a natural avenue for someone who is in art. But I don't think that I know of anyone of all things.

DR. CARNEY: I was just curious.

MR. TURNER: You've raised an interesting question. I had never really thought about that. It was important to me. And I've learned that more in most recent years, how my sense of Quakerism and of its implications for living and conviction has been very personal. I think it's been central to the way I've thought about things and my perception of things. It's made a big difference, because, as I say, it's as though things are an evolving recognition and semantics. It's all about perception. I think perception became a particularly big word.

After I'd been to Africa and seen the Southwest and the convictions and perceptions of the people of this country, the native people of this country, that I perceived that their culture is different, and with very good reason that this culture is different. And at that time, I think, I had skepticism about the great Greek influence in Europe as being partial. It didn't recognize the values that, for example, people in Africa had in their culture in the way they saw truth. And-well, anyhow, that's enough, maybe, for the moment on that little bit.

DR. CARNEY: We will come back to that. Could I ask you a little bit more specifically about what happened after George School? You said you were in preparation for Swarthmore, that you had some deficiencies or something you needed to build up. Can you talk about that, your education? And what happened at Swarthmore? Did you have a major there? And-

MR. TURNER: Yeah. Well, I think that it's interesting I had decided before Swarthmore that, well, maybe I'll stay here two years. I had in mind art. I didn't know what that meant exactly, to get involved and learn.

DR. CARNEY: What years were you at Swarthmore?

MR. TURNER: That was-I think I entered in '33-no, '32-graduated in '36.

DR. CARNEY: So, you said you started at Swarthmore with the idea of being there a couple of years?

MR. TURNER: Yeah, and then I think I became involved with that as being present and continuing; why not continue and graduate? But there was a change there. I entered thinking that economics would be the thing to do at Swarthmore. And it turned out that that was less and less my interest and more and more my struggle to get enough excitement about it to get through it.

DR. CARNEY: Why did you choose economics? What was your initial thinking?

MR. TURNER: Well, I think it's important to business and-

DR. CARNEY: So it was more from a practical-

MR. TURNER: It really was. Yeah. And I don't think I had a real idea what it would mean in terms of direction. And part of the first year, I became interested in literature. But I thought, I can't write fast enough to get involved in that. But increasingly, certainly by about junior year, literature and that direction-art really hadn't entered in particular; it did by, you know, that year and the next year. I got into some art history and stuff. And with Josie Adams, who was there, a very interesting person, with whom a roommate and I went abroad. Met her over there and went around with her-Florence and places like that. So there was that influence while I was still in college. And I knew then that I wanted to go hear the Art Student League or enter in the academy, which is right there, of course, near where I was.

DR. CARNEY: So it was while you were at Swarthmore that you ended up going off to Europe?

MR. TURNER: Actually, the roommate-we had several roommates together-Frank Geotres was a roommate and we remained very, very close, I think, from then on, although going our separate ways. He was in economics and was in Washington, D.C., in the government. And I went to art school, Pennsylvania Academy.

And go back a bit-right after graduation from Swarthmore, before art school, he and I went abroad and that was important-during which, of course, we were in Paris and went down to Florence and Padua and so on, and Venice. And saw things. And it's interesting that Frank, when Cézanne's show came-what was it three or four years ago, whatever it was-to Philadelphia-it was a great, great show ["Cézanne," at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, May 30 to September 1, 1996]. He said, "Bob, do you realize that we saw nearly every one of these paintings back in 1936 in Paris?" You know, I forget which museum. And it dawned on me that's why, of course, they were familiar. But, we knew-they were much renewed, because I was a different person, you know, by just a few years ago; and my sensitivities certainly developed a great deal into recognizing the value of Cézanne. He's the great person for me, I guess. He has moved ahead of Renoir, who was spoken of so highly at the Barnes Foundation [Merion, PA], which I attended after Swarthmore and during my time at the Academy of Fine Arts.

DR. CARNEY: So by attending the Barnes Foundation, what do you mean by that? Did you use the collection?

MR. TURNER: Well, there were lectures there on the different holdings-the art, the sculpture, the paintings, particularly the paintings-that this wonderful, great man, in terms of what he collected, Albert C. Barnes. And we went-those of use who were accepted-went every Wednesday afternoon. You could be there, I think, from one to five or something like that. But we'd be starting in the morning at the academy and then go on out. I'd go out, maybe alone or not.

And I was in that two years, I think, before the war came along. And Bertrand Russell lectured there in my final fall, until he and Barnes had a falling out. It's almost inevitable when you think of the two.

DR. CARNEY: That sounds like an amazing group.

MR. TURNER: And Sue and I by that time-this skips around-at the Academy I was awarded one of those-awarded a fellowship for travel and then tuition for the next year. That was in 1939, I guess. And then, I never figured out why, I was awarded a similar scholarship the next year, too.

DR. CARNEY: So were these additional trips to Europe? Or were these the trips you were talking about-

MR. TURNER: This would be my second trip to Europe.

DR. CARNEY: Your second trip.

MR. TURNER: And with Sue, this time in 1939 on scholarship. So we saw some of those same things, of course, in Paris and Florence. But we went to Ireland, which is important, to get a sense of the hard life there, but the wonderful countryside, the peat bogs that were so important to them-tea, tea, tea. We bicycled there, Sue and I did, for a couple of weeks, going around the southwestern rim, getting to Parknasilla, which is on the southwest tip of Ireland, which is much like Florida in terms of its flowers, plants, because of the Gulf Stream, you know, coming up around, the warmth, coming up around that area.

DR. CARNEY: So, you're going to have to fill me in for a moment about how you met Sue.

MR. TURNER: She graduated a year ahead of me at Swarthmore. And in the autumn, I guess it was-September, autumn-in the year following her graduation, in the fall following her graduation, she had been in Europe and had taken students over there. They toured around England, it was. And then back in Washington, we were in a small group, party; we'd known each other in Swarthmore all the way through. But my roommate, another roommate, went around with her, and I went around with another woman while in college. But I became so interested in what she had done in England, and finding that we had parallel kinds of thoughts and feelings about things, that I think we began to see more and more of one another. And then we were married, I guess, within the next year.

DR. CARNEY: In what year did you get married?

MR. TURNER: Nineteen thirty-eight.

DR. CARNEY: I may be remembering this incorrectly, but isn't there some really interesting story connected with you two in Europe and some traumatic events there?

MR. TURNER: We went there in 1939, December of '39. And anyone who had been there, thought about it, realized that war was really quite imminent, even though maybe people tried to not think about it. And we really

didn't think about it when we were in Ireland or too much in Paris. And I got Fourniers paints there to take back. And we had bicycles from Ireland and England, which we had with us. But I don't think we biked in Paris. But we wanted to keep them, to save them.

And what was traumatic, I guess, was we went down to Italy in August. And we finally realized that the news was not better, but worse, with regard to the imminence of war. We got on a train. I remember it was wood-slotted, and the Italian soldiers with their sabers walking the aisles all the time. But we woke up in Paris and I got a paper. And it was right there and it said, "Poland," you know, is "bombée." So the attack occurred the very morning, I guess, we arrived back in Paris. We had seen on the train coming up the way that on both sides farm wagons were leaving the border, because people thought there would be war starting right there.

And two things, I guess, about being in Paris that morning. We found out promptly; when we went back to lie down, rest for a few moments, the door blew open and in came a very nice guy who had been carrying our trunks up and so on-being helpful. He burst into the room and said: "I'm mobilized. France is mobilized. Goodbye."

And so I went with a friend who had also been awarded a scholarship. And his name was, if I can remember, Apillo Johnston something Lewis. He had been named for a Civil War southern general, which was quite amazing. At any rate, he and I went to the train station, where we'd take off to go west and out to the-as we were advised-to go out to the coast to be ready to sail from there at some point, if we get tickets.

So, we in the meantime, retrieved tickets from the-which was it? American Express, in town. And she had been there that morning, came before the conflagration had really started. Came back, and the tickets-she was recognized by the salesman, or the man up front-tickets came hand over hand on back to the line-the tickets that we had reserved to go on the ship, I think, to-we were going to Amsterdam. At any rate, and then she trotted up the street and was joined by a French person, a Frenchman, who said "You know where you're going? Let me go along with you, I'm mobilized. I've nothing else to do."

So she was escorted up to a corner that she could get in, see the station, and when she got there, she found that I had the tickets for the luggage that we'd left there that morning. And how to convince the luggage master and so on? And an Englishman came up and said, "Keep quiet. I'll handle this."

So I think, as I recall from what Sue said, he in French said that "her husband is mobilized and she has to get out. He has the tickets; she must get the tickets. And you'll find in her luggage this is her name. And you'll see all this in her luggage." So, somehow by that means she got the tickets and ran across town to our station.

In the meantime, we had secured tickets to go west, Apillo Lewis and I. And three o'clock train became three fifteen, three thirty, four o'clock; the train was still there, no Sue. She arrived at four thirty, and she said we were white as sheets.

And so then we took the train west, got to Etretat, which is famous for painters, you know, as Monet, Etretat Cliffs. And we were met by an old lady with a wheelbarrow, and, I think it was her granddaughter. And she said: "Here. Put all your stuff in here. I'll take you up to a hotel"-which she did.

I met someone there, a young man who put his-I think his parents on the ship that was leaving that day. And then he and I went in every afternoon and tried to get tickets to get out somehow. Of course, at that time the harbor was sealed off. So we finally, some weeks later, were put on a train, and we went south-the whole group, I guess, went south through Paris and right on without stopping to Bordeaux area. And so we sailed from there.

But, in the meantime, I remember one morning on the top of the cliffs-beautiful, just lovely. The spitfires would go down under the cliffs and around. There was that part. And I wrote Dr. Albert C. Barnes and said: "If I get back from the war period and the cliffs of Etretat, may I enter your Barnes Foundation for the year?" And maybe he couldn't resist that, but I got in. And Sue got in the next year, I think, and became friends with Dr. Barnes.

But that was the-and then the other, I suppose-instead of spitfires, when we got over to this country on the ship, there were these little toy, colored airplanes floating around the sky. We couldn't believe it. And the contrast, you know, that shock, and then the shock of going to the World's Fair that afternoon after we had arrived on this boat.

DR. CARNEY: I remembered you had told me years ago. We were leading up to that.

MR. TURNER: Yeah. At any rate-that was the contrast in it.

DR. CARNEY: Tell me about the World's Fair.

MR. TURNER: Oh, I don't know much about it. I was just in shock, and I saw some things, that I didn't care very

much. I guess I should have looked more carefully. But I remember the usual thing. You traipse around to find certain kinds of food or something to drink. And I don't remember anything very significant really.

DR. CARNEY: There wasn't any political-

MR. TURNER: No. I don't remember any commotion whatsoever, just these crazy little airplanes floating around.

DR. CARNEY: Sounds like you had enough of that anyway.

MR. TURNER: Yeah, well it was pretty tense. You never knew what was going to happen at that time.

DR. CARNEY: So then did you go back to the States soon to begin with the Barnes Foundation?

MR. TURNER: Yeah. So, I had another year at the Academy to finish up my fellowship. And this is before I was awarded another the next year, for the next year. But we went back. I went right back to the Academy and spent the year that, I guess you'd say, that I'd earned at the Academy studying. And Sue went back and found that she had a job. Well, I guess she already knew she had a job at Swarthmore as assistant to the dean. So things kind of worked out. We didn't get to Amsterdam, obviously, but-that's the way it worked out for us.

DR. CARNEY: All right. And, so, during this time period, your interest in art obviously had-your interest from economics to art was fully-

MR. TURNER: Total.

DR. CARNEY: Total.

MR. TURNER: Economics was just trying to get through it. I think I got a C in money and banking, and got through somehow. Then, as I had mentioned, my roommate and I went abroad. And I know he was very grateful for that trip all his life. And we remained very close friends even though we didn't see one another more than maybe once a year.

DR. CARNEY: And when did you make the decision about going to the Pennsylvania Academy of Arts?

MR. TURNER: Well, I think that was the easiest decision, you know, because I knew that area from being at Swarthmore. And it must be that Josie Adams that Frank and I had seen with a few other people in Paris, and then we all went down to Florence and Venice-she probably was instrumental. I don't remember anything specific in saying: "Yeah, that's a good place; you ought to-"

DR. CARNEY: In what years were you at the Pennsylvania Academy of Arts?

MR. TURNER: I got there in the fall of '36 and studied and at the end of-and in painting entirely. And at the end of two, no, three years, I guess, was awarded this scholarship, traveling scholarship. They call it the Cresson Traveling Scholarship. So that, as I think I mentioned, I went back to the Academy with the tuition free. I still don't know why I was awarded another one at the end of this year. But something must have been impressive.

DR. CARNEY: So at this time you were-it was painting. You weren't doing any clay work.

MR. TURNER: Not a bit. It was all painting. And that-we couldn't go abroad with my scholarship. So I decided that I wanted to see what was in museums all over the place in this country and in Mexico, which is what we did. Maybe not the most-

DR. CARNEY: That was the second time you went on the scholarship? You traveled all over the U.S.?

MR. TURNER: Yes, and became acquainted then, I think, with the-because we went right across the desert, you know, from Tuba City into-past Grants and so on into Santa Fe. But on the way, what was the-on the way there was the gathering place of the Navajos in particular, but I think all of the Native Americans. I may think of the name later. But the gathering place every summer. And so we went across from Tuba City to this place.

DR. CARNEY: What year was this that you did all this traveling in the U.S.?

MR. TURNER: That would be then be 1940.

DR. CARNEY: And then you still returned to the Academy again for another year?

MR. TURNER: I did. But I really wasn't there very much, I have to confess. I mean, other things began to-I wanted to paint on my own. And, you know, the war began to be pretty close in feeling. And I can't remember when I found my number. I thought I didn't see my number anywhere in the draft. But then it was up fairly high. And so

I had to contend with that. But that was 19-by then it was 1942, I think. Must have been. Yeah. And that's another episode entirely.

DR. CARNEY: Did you have any children by this point?

MR. TURNER: No.

DR. CARNEY: Okay. So, what happened-what did happen with the war and the draft and your other plans?

MR. TURNER: Well, that's another episode. But it does, it does have a kind of continuity, I guess, of my experiences and pulling them into what I did.

I was in touch with the American Friends Service Committee right there in Philadelphia. And we must have applied and were accepted to go Mexico City to run the Quaker Center there, which is where people particularly from Spain-remember there was a civil war and that was very important. We lost a friend who had been in our dorm. In that very first year, I think, he went over to be part of the fighting against the fascists and so on. And people from Spain and others would come up to Mexico City. And this was a stopping-off place, a place of regeneration or whatever. And it's interesting that we heard before we went or had intended to go that the Quaker was appropriate for that area, because so much of it is Catholic. And the Quaker and the Catholic both have a sense of the myth, you know, different, I think, from mostly Protestants, kind of a direct line.

And so we were-I've never forgotten that. I've always felt sympathy, you know. And particularly much later, this all jumbles together, but the war in El Salvador. We had gone to El Salvador under the AID program. Everything's coming together here, Margaret. You'll have to bear with it. Nineteen sixty-three that was. Sue and I were in El Salvador under the AID program and met excellent friends there with whom we had that friendship for the rest of our lives.

And what was I going to say then? Back to the fact that our plans were thrown astray because the draft board-my number came up. And they said, no, you can't do that. You can't go to Mexico City and do that, and so on.

DR. CARNEY: Oh, so you were planning to do that, but before your number came up.

MR. TURNER: Yeah, but the draft came up, so, I was drafted and then I had to secure my conscientious objecting status. And I was secure in my own sense that that's what I had to do. And as kind of a personal conviction, I guess, almost beyond what makes good sense or not, but-and after getting 1-A, then, I guess, the draft board accepted me as a conscientious objector. And I was assigned a certain place that-there were three peace churches who took responsibility for setting up camps for conscientious objectors who had been accepted by Selective Service. At that time, I hadn't thought of objecting even to Selective Service. You know, that idea. And so I went to one of these camps, was assigned to one of the camps, of all places, in Big Flats, New York.

DR. CARNEY: Really? Big Flats. Yeah, between Corning and Elmira-thriving place.

MR. TURNER: And it's very complex what happened after that. But I was assigned to that base camp. And it was woods and planting and-mostly, the work of national importance; we began to be completely skeptical. You know, we knew that these things were good that we were doing-cleaning up the woods and planting, and so on. So there was an opportunity. And I remember now-I hadn't thought of it-I volunteered to go abroad to work in one of the countries being under siege, as it were, and went out to Earlham College [Richmond, IN], where the training of the unit was. So I was a part of that training to go abroad.

DR. CARNEY: Where's Earlham College?

MR. TURNER: Earlham College is in Richmond, Indiana. And it's a Quaker College, essentially. And so it made sense that we were assigned there-this unit.

DR. CARNEY: Was Sue with you during this?

MR. TURNER: Yeah. Sue was with me-not during my days in the CO camp and so on. But we went out there to Earlham College and lived there while I did this training. Maybe we were both in the training because she probably would have gone abroad to, I don't know. But, that was not official, I think.

But, the day we got out, or the day after-I think the day we got there, Congress, bless its heart, decided that no conscientious objector could leave the country.

[BEGIN TAPE 1 SIDE 2.]

MR. TURNER: You know, it would be dangerous to spread word around, I guess-whatever it was. And I can't be accurate on that. But it was just-without looking into it, it was kind of a shock.

So, we went back after-we were given a month-plus, I think, to disorganize. So we had a month training, mostly for language in France; mostly I think that was the idea then. France still in the minds of people was the way it had been in World War I, you know. But, some people, some of our unit, knew at that time and later did go to China as part of a team to aid people wherever necessary.

So, back to camp, and again, I think that the peace churches knew that we were restless, that these camps didn't make quite sense in terms of doing work of national importance, and I guess I would say, trying to think of things that were positive that would equal in some way the kind of sacrifice that people in the services were going through.

And so of the options, I took the one to go to a Maine training school for the mentally deficient. It was a hospital, but it was also a place where people with either impaired, but mostly their mental abilities were starting from where most animals are, you know. They couldn't even care for themselves in the hospitals, some of these people-on up to the people we call worker-patients in the hospital. We didn't set this up. But this is the way it was up there.

DR. CARNEY: And where was this?

MR. TURNER: This was in Pownal, Maine. That's some 20 or 30 miles from north of Portland, Maine. It's near the coast.

DR. CARNEY: I don't suppose you were using any of your painterly skills or anything at this point.

MR. TURNER: No, in camp I remember tying up with a very interesting guy who looked at me skeptically when I nearly became group leader of something, you know, in the woods and all that. He said, "Come on, Turner, are you an artist or aren't you?" Because he would work at the camp and then spend the rest of his time just making art. So, I joined him, and I remember one painting-and I still have-in which I used different colors than I ever used before. I don't know-the Renoir influence was over. And so I don't know what the influence was. But it was rather dramatically different in color, real blacks and reds and greens and blues.

DR. CARNEY: Do you still have that painting?

MR. TURNER: Yes. Still do. And it was not basically so different, I guess-at any rate, that was brief.

DR. CARNEY: So you really did have a hiatus from being an art-interested person.

MR. TURNER: Yeah. And this other thing was just part of what we were supposed to do in this, you call it, hiatus, in this situation-conscientious objector. But, what does that mean? And in what way are you helping? So, while in camp, I remember, a number of us would go after supper. We'd catch a ride in town to Elmira and work in a hospital as orderlies. And I wouldn't do that every night, but we did that a number of times and felt that that might be of some value.

DR. CARNEY: How long did this go on? The camp and-

MR. TURNER: Well, the camps-you see, the war started in '42. I got there at the camp in November of '42. Some men had been in from, I guess, late '41. And we were released, I think, in the spring of 1946, about May or June, after other people, you know, had been out. And I had gone back, knowing there would be a release; I went back to camp to be, whatever you call, released, not knowing exactly how soon.

But, I went back from the hospital around March of 1946. So I'd been up-and most of my work was in the hospital itself. So that was a matter of bed patients and working with the fairly able young men who still had some mental difficulty and working with the TB, [tuberculosis] and-not much, just one room of TB I think-and others in the beds. And so it was getting pills and bedsores and always changing sheets and stuff like that. I didn't do it personally, most of it. But, worker-patients and-we got along fairly well, I think.

And I always felt a great tug for those people up there, you know, the kitchen crew, a very pleasant relationship, if you can say that exactly. But it was. I don't know how much more to say on that point. But you got to know the people, mostly youngsters, but some, not all, mental problems. I guess from around age 12 or so, maybe, and then up until their death, 60s, 70s, or something like that. They'd be in the hospital.

DR. CARNEY: I would think something like that could profoundly affect you. Because if you'd followed another track, either if you'd had to go to war or if you'd been allowed to go forward with your art program then, that you wouldn't have seen any-I mean, a lot of people don't ever see those kinds of conditions and-

MR. TURNER: I don't know that it dramatically changed me. But I think that it was a very significant change internally that working with these people and feeling very, very close in sympathy with a human being and the state of people. And probably that had a lot to do with the way I felt about things in art, too. It probably helped

to make that side of Quakerism important. I don't think I did anything worthwhile in there, except be there. Didn't make any changes. But I know some of the men in the mental hospitals had a very significant effect, so that it was the start of-I don't know what it's called-but of the national organization for mental hospitals, whatever they called them, and to upgrade and give some kind of justification for improved conditions and staff and all of that. Because, I think, generally people who either are too tired of working or couldn't get jobs would work in these as just a place to go to work and didn't have their hearts in it. Certainly after a year or two, you can tend to just accept conditions as they are.

DR. CARNEY: Well, it's interesting, since way back in 1904 or something with Arthur Baggs. And you know they did the thing in Marblehead [MA], where the art was therapy. And there were all these different movements. So, it's interesting that that kind of mental healthcare hadn't progressed, you know, so much 50 years later.

MR. TURNER: Yeah, I guess it didn't. It didn't spread to the state institutions.

Now, there was a really neat guy in our unit who did work with patients. I don't know what they called it exactly. But I think partly crafts, partly other things. He was separate from the rest of us in a sense that he had a work week, I guess; I don't know whether six days or whatever. We had a 28-day schedule going right on through, and then had four days off. And I forget, 75 or 80 hours a week, whatever it was. And you got kind of used to it-night shifts, which I kind of enjoyed for the change, you know, just a very different sense of situation and-kind of hard to sleep during the day is the only thing.

DR. CARNEY: How did you end up transitioning from this back to-I'll call it reality, but a different reality, after the camp? What were you doing then? And how did you decide what you were going to do?

MR. TURNER: Before I was out, another fellow and I who were really in art, I think, were trying to decide what to do. And I remember going to-well, we went on a trip together up through New England and so on. I think I realized then, or as a result of that, that I went to Harvard and saw the head of the museum, I guess, area there-I forget his name-well-known guy-about going into art history, museum work, curator, whatever it would be, into that range of things. And also went to Dartmouth where there was the School for American Craftsmen, because while in camp, I didn't see it personally, but I knew there were people who had built a kiln and had started to make things. And it must be then I thought, I can make things; I'm sure I can. I'll use my hands, and that way make a living, because I knew I wouldn't make it from painting. And I'd given up on that as a reality.

DR. CARNEY: So it was through visiting this School for American Craftsmen that was at Dartmouth at the time that you got the idea that making things out of clay would be a useful occupation?

MR. TURNER: That's right.

DR. CARNEY: Okay. Is this the same School of American Craftsmen that ended up in Rochester and briefly in Alfred [Alfred University, Alfred, NY]?

MR. TURNER: That's correct. Some of the same people, yeah.

DR. CARNEY: And so what did you do with this idea?

MR. TURNER: Well, one thing I did, I heard about Penland School [Penland School of Crafts, Penland, NC]. And I heard there were people down there that used materials such as clay. I better find out-oh, in the meantime, I decided after Dartmouth that I would not go into the art history route. I'm sure that my mind wasn't going to work well enough for that route. And the idea of using my hands remained very important, whatever it would be, and making things. So that influenced me to go look around.

I'd seen these Schools of American Craftsmen. I went up to Alfred to see what the university there in its department in clay did.

DR. CARNEY: Do you remember when this-was this in '46 or '47?

MR. TURNER: This was still '46. It would have been the end of May, I suspect, or in May. I went up and visited and saw Charles Harder. And he convinced me not to just come for a year or two, but why not get a degree. You can get a degree in a year. So that's what happened. That's what I did. And I met Marion Fosdick who encouraged me to come rather than to go to the School for American Craftsmen. I went down to New York and saw Aileen Webb-I think that was her name [Aileen Osborne Webb]. And, of course, she encouraged the School for American Craftsmen idea and so on. But I decided on Alfred University. Then I went down to Penland to see if I liked clay.

DR. CARNEY: Okay. So Penland was after you visited Alfred?

MR. TURNER: Yeah. And I went down-was there for at least two weeks, if not three, and worked in clay for the first time.

DR. CARNEY: Who was in clay at Penland at the time?

MR. TURNER: Oh, I don't know, very nice lady. You know crafts at that time was nothing like crafts today. There were people who knew something about this, maybe even to teach it. But Penland was started as an aid to-as a social project, really, as an aid to the people of the area to come back and learn again how to weave in order to make money, so that the only income didn't come from selling potatoes.

DR. CARNEY: And was that the level you were at at the time that you wanted to learn how to make pottery?

MR. TURNER: I knew by then that people had made pots, you know, in this country and abroad. And I wanted to be a part of it. Yeah.

DR. CARNEY: Was any of that influence because of your trip to the Southwest and seeing Native American workers? Did that have any influence? Or was it really a crafts mentality from an American crafts kind of-

MR. TURNER: I think it was a crafts mentality. As I said, the word "art" was not part of the stimulus. I think I recognized that I must be doing something that used the holistic sense. But, I didn't think of it as craft. I just thought, this is a place where I can learn to make something with my hands. And that will bring out whatever is potential there. And so it was not part of a crafts movement to me. Going to the university meant very much over on the end of-not of art, but of ceramic industrial production-that was the name, I think, of the degree, I keep forgetting. I think it was called ceramic industrial, maybe, production. I'm not sure that was the word.

DR. CARNEY: So, that's right after Don Schreckengost had been there. He must have just left. So, who was teaching at Alfred when you-

MR. TURNER: Kurt Ekdahl came in to teach that. He was right out of Chicago. And he would say ceramics [emphasize broad Midwestern pronunciation]. He had no particular love. But he was an awful nice guy. We got along very well.

DR. CARNEY: What was the-

MR. TURNER: Now, I didn't take his course. He was in-what was the course name? It wasn't exactly industrial production. Industrial design, that's what it amounted to, structural design. He was very good, I think. He and the students didn't get along all that well. He was feared a little bit, I think. In any case, I did not take that. I took painting, sculpture, plaster modeling, and art history, and pottery.

DR. CARNEY: And did Ms. Nelson teach you painting?

MR. TURNER: Ms. Nelson taught painting.

DR. CARNEY: And who taught sculpture?

MR. TURNER: Marion Fosdick. And that was fun. I enjoyed that a great deal. I enjoyed her. And things started to move somehow. And the weird thing is that after being in pottery for that semester and trying to learn how you make things, the exam came along-this was for seniors and the few of us who were grad students-I had never taken clay before, of course-and we were supposed to make something that would be functional, to design it, draw it, and make a model of it, I think in clay; at least I did in clay.

And I remember going off by myself into a room and let it go around in my head. And what came to my mind was the-and maybe this is significant because this is the way my mind went-it wasn't into pottery; it was into the English lute. It's a gorgeous shape. You know that deep, deep and then the strings and then these little doodle-dos out here. And that's what influenced my sense. Maybe I could make something useful like a pitcher that would incorporate that great hollow space and, you know, and, well, it was a lousy pitcher. And I think I got a C. It was all right. But I got involved. But that pitcher became what was called an ashtray. It was really a piece of sculpture with a hollow thing. And it really stemmed, of course, from an English lute. And it had instead of the, you know, where the keys would be coming down vertically from the arm-that's where the foot of the bowl was. So if there was the bowl leading up to, then that thing dropping down as a foot.

DR. CARNEY: So this is your famous award-winning form that you did that everyone copied.

MR. TURNER: I made that. It was accepted at my second year there. It was the end of the first year. They accepted it at the Great Syracuse National, which I had looked at with some awe the year before, at least not awe, but surprise.

DR. CARNEY: So, what year was this, that Syracuse National?

MR. TURNER: That would have been the fall of '46, I think. But from that small object, for which I made a plaster

model, which could be a press mold or a casting, either way, and from that developed a large piece. I remember Marion Fosdick when I had this thing, this, you know, I don't know, two feet or whatever.

DR. CARNEY: Is that the large garden pot that I have on exhibit right now?

MR. TURNER: I don't know if that's the one, but it's almost the one itself.

I remember we were up in the room. And I enjoy this so much because I was always next to Ken Uemara, whose family had been interned, you know, out near the coast. So that was always so much on my mind. God! Why would we do a thing like that? Very nice guy! And he and David Weinrib, who is, I thought, just a superb sculptor with ideas. They were there.

But Marion Fosdick-I still remember her feeling along the edge of that rim and looking out the window and feeling. I don't know what she said, but, well, she must like it. And, you know, we got along well. And that had a great influence-the sense that that might have been functional.

But that was not its main meaning. Its main meaning was the sense of the gathering of stone and ice and hollows, and the sense of the enjoyment of that material to carry an idea. The idea might have been ashtray, but it might have been something else. After a while ashtrays, since we no longer used ashtrays, forget that.

So, anyhow, that was significant. And I remember, though, during that first year of pottery or the art history part, you know, or the modeling with plaster and so on, if I had one out of those three going, I would feel, well, at least something's going. I'd always had at least one of those doing well. And then they had to come together, I think.

DR. CARNEY: So, who taught your history class?

MR. TURNER: I don't know. I can't remember right now. Isn't that weird.

DR. CARNEY: Did Charles Harder actually teach your classes?

MR. TURNER: One really neat guy who came in, whose name I can't remember now, was a wonderful guy, a sculptor. But, he came in-yeah, my final year, maybe.

DR. CARNEY: He was a faculty person?

MR. TURNER: Yeah, he was faculty. Young guy. I may think of his name. It's not Krido [?], but he was a sculptor and he did wonderful things. He had ideas.

DR. CARNEY: Did Charles Harder teach any classes?

MR. TURNER: He taught pottery once in awhile with his tie on and apron. And he was wonderful-both a wag but also all kinds of -he had grown up with-well, the best I remember, it was his family, I think, had been in the lumber town, in which the company owns you. And he got over into Texas, where the oil and all was. And then he went up to Chicago Art Institute. And that was very important to him all the way through his life.

[BEGIN TAPE 2 SIDE 1.]

MR. TURNER: And I think then or afterwards he made some really neat things, as you've probably seen, those large bowls and the sense of the decorative entering it, you know, and color.

DR. CARNEY: Well, we just got an amazing piece. I'm going to forget the name of the gentleman who came for reunion weekend a week ago. And he brought this enormous-a lot of Charles Harder pieces, because he had been-well, he was there around your time. I'll think of his name in a moment. But he had brought a number of pieces because he had been a photographer for Charles Harder as a student. And his wife was secretary for Charles Harder.

MR. TURNER: Oh, yes! Oh, yes! Yeah. I know the person you mean.

DR. CARNEY: It'll come to me in a moment. But he brought this huge platter that Charles Harder did that has an amazing uranium glaze. It's just a flaming orange. And I got out my Geiger counter to test it. It was so radioactive! It made Fiesta ware look like nothing.

MR. TURNER: You've got to somehow come out and test the uranium glaze in the bottom of one of those so-called ashtrays.

DR. CARNEY: Really?

MR. TURNER: I've always worried about that.

DR. CARNEY: Was that something popular then that people were using?

MR. TURNER: Oh, yeah, that color. Fantastic. That, or else the lead red, lead orange. And of course those went out, too, later on. But that was so innocent. And Charles kept a so-called ashtray on his desk, I remember, not with the red, but he went-he said, "Here. Why don't you try this?" I tried it. It's still with me. And I think, oh, is that why I'm getting the aches somewhere? It's outdoors poisoning the birds.

DR. CARNEY: What other students were there? When you were there, there was quite a lot of activity. You had a lot of classmates that went on to some fame, also in ceramics.

MR. TURNER: Well, of course, there was Ted Randall. He and I were kind of buddies. And we used to eat lunch together. A wonderful person, a really wonderful young fellow, Bill [William] Schickel was there. We saw a lot of each other. We felt very close, I think. And we would eat lunch together, too. Bill Schickel. He was only there one year, I think.

DR. CARNEY: Was Susan Peterson there when you were there?

MR. TURNER: Susan was there in my final year, or bridging over somehow.

DR. CARNEY: Because you graduated in '49?

MR. TURNER: Graduated in '49. So it must be that-see, I went to work in Dan Rhodes's studio for a significant part of my final year. And-

DR. CARNEY: You mean his personal studio or his-

MR. TURNER: Yeah, his personal studio out on the-I forget the name of the road. And I was there, day after day, using his low-fire kiln and making low-fire work with color and everything. And I enjoyed that quite a lot. And finding that what I developed, very simply, what I developed were pieces that were very strong that had a real ring. They were about two percent, I guess, from vitrification and very convincing. They didn't have the stoneware look. But that's what I was working toward, because I was doing also stoneware. And at any rate, I still have a few of those pieces, maybe one or two, I don't know. But that was a significant part of my final year.

DR. CARNEY: So you worked with him. You helped him, but you also did your own work to-

MR. TURNER: Oh, he invited me to come out and work in the studio. "Why don't you work in my studio?" So I did that.

DR. CARNEY: Was that during the time period that Dan Rhodes was not teaching clay? He was teaching painting and some other things at Alfred?

MR. TURNER: I'm not sure. I think he was probably teaching clay at that point. But he may have been doing both.

DR. CARNEY: Did you have him as a teacher then?

MR. TURNER: Not really. No, I don't recall really any formal classes.

DR. CARNEY: I thought there was a time period that he was sort of-I don't know what the right word is-maybe ostracized a little bit from teaching clay and was relegated to something else.

MR. TURNER: I've never-I'm awfully quiet and reticent about asking wrong questions and something. I mean, I didn't know who to ask and I didn't think about it a lot. But, it's true. I don't know whether Charles Harder decided that he needed to be teaching painting.

DR. CARNEY: He was a great painter.

MR. TURNER: He was a great painter.

DR. CARNEY: I remember that from when I was in Iowa, because he was born in Fort Dodge, where I worked. And we had incredible paintings that he did in the WPA [Works Progress Administration] era, things that were just amazing, I mean, really amazing. I thought were even better than any ceramic things he did.

MR. TURNER: Interesting. Yeah. We have a painting of his that he did in Japan. You know, this Japanese paper over color and so on. And you may have seen it. You will see it at our house. And we have it up again on the wall.

It was my first one to put up, I think. And so I enjoy that a great deal. He was a remarkable man, I think. Very bright and very thoughtful, very considerate of his students. Very thoughtful about students, I think. He was also kind of-there was a sense-you shouldn't have in this town, king and queen. You know, Daniel and his wife.

DR. CARNEY: Oh, Lillian. But were you one of the people that Katie Randall would have told me was a Rhodes Scholar-the joke that they label people Rhodes Scholars, the people he selected to come work with him?

MR. TURNER: No, I don't think so. Not that I ever knew. No, but we were friends. I'd been there, I think, before-he came in 1947, I think. So I don't know, we became friends.

DR. CARNEY: Well, he graduated from Alfred in 1943. He was the first M.F.A. graduate in '43. I don't know what he did in between.

MR. TURNER: Well, of course, before that he was selling work at Gump's [San Francisco, CA]. And I still have-we still have one of the plates, you know, with his drawing in it -very, very special. You know, he was an artist. No question. I think there was some sense of hard feeling. I'm not quite sure how. It may be that he wasn't being let in to taking over the department and that Ted Randall had been there. Well, no, had not. Ted Randall came along and became part of the teaching staff about 19-well, even while, I think he probably did some teaching, even well before he got his degree or just after. I'm not sure. But Ted and Charles used to be very close.

DR. CARNEY: Was Bill Pitney there when you were there?

MR. TURNER: Yes. He was.

DR. CARNEY: I'm trying to remember who else was. Is there anybody else that you can remember that overlapped?

MR. TURNER: I know you mentioned Susan. Bill. Bill Parry was there and not there. He was there in 1946, then went out, I think, to California, as you probably know, working in industry. So I knew him early and then again in 1963 when he came back to the faculty, and probably in between. He was a nice guy.

DR. CARNEY: So when was the time period you were talking about, how Dan Rhodes was selling things at Gump's?

MR. TURNER: Yeah, that was before-I think that just preceded his employment at Alfred as a teacher.

DR. CARNEY: Well, when were you selling things at Bonniers?

MR. TURNER: The first question. Dan would have been between his graduation, M.F.A. from Alfred, and coming some four years later, I think, in making his work out there in California selling well, I think, at Gump's. So he had experience. Of course, he had his painting background and all of that. He's very significant, I think.

DR. CARNEY: Were you a student when you were selling at Bonniers?

MR. TURNER: No. No, that's another time period. I'd come back from Black Mountain College. See, I was there from '49 to '51-yeah, through '51, I guess.

DR. CARNEY: So, you graduated from Alfred in '49, and then you went to teach at Black Mountain?

MR. TURNER: And went immediately. I had mumps or something like that. Measles. I don't know. I had something and did my M.F.A. term paper while in bed. I made something for that degree. I made something that could be made and presumably make money. You know, casseroles and that kind of thing.

But, Bonniers, that was 1956-57. I began to go down in the station wagon-pots wrapped up in newspaper and, right from the back of the thing, go into the store and try to sell it. Oh, man!

DR. CARNEY: That's amazing!

MR. TURNER: Pottery wasn't something people knew about in those days. They would take something, you know, for $10. And I remember going to one place and I sold 50 dollars' worth. And at Bonniers they were interested in what I was doing and said, "Can you make this kind of thing?" And so that was kind of a beckoning of what I could make that that kind of a place, which is pretty high-scale and so on, could sell.

DR. CARNEY: Well, where was Bonniers [605 Madison Avenue, New York, NY]?

MR. TURNER: It was 57th-let's see. I'm not sure. And it was right next to a very well-known Scandinavian shop-can't think of it right now-whose head I met and whose child was at George School when, I remember, a lot of art

people and drama people sent their children to the George School for some reason, not too far away, whatever. Aside from the subject-

DR. CARNEY: You taught at Black Mountain for how long?

MR. TURNER: Yeah, that's-

DR. CARNEY: Going back a little bit because we missed a few years.

MR. TURNER: Going back - '46-'49 at Alfred. Went down and taught at Black Mountain College '49 to '51. Came up-decided as a family now that Alfred was probably as good a place as any, because we knew-we had lived in Almond, the little town close to Alfred. That's where we lived during my study period. We appreciated the people, the friendliness and so on, and the simplicity up there. And so what I needed-what we together needed-a family place, a school good enough for children to grow up. And I needed a place that had a barn where I could work, had gas, and electricity, of course. Those are the main things, I think, and of course a house and the school, as I said. So it was certain things I knew we had to have. And this place we found did. So, that was the start of my pottery-making. We redid the house and redid the barn.

DR. CARNEY: So you came as potter, before you joined the faculty? Is that right?

MR. TURNER: Oh, yes. Yeah, I was a potter from 1952 to-when was it-I think I joined the faculty in '58, '57-'58, I think. That's when Charles Harder was retiring. So I went on to work under Ted Randall in pottery and sculpture. Well, sculpture wasn't great. No great Barbara Hepworth or anything like that. For me, it was working with students, working out ideas and problems, you know, little things together, testing materials, testing ideas. And I got quite intrigued. You know, we used plaster and positive/negative and things like that. And I became quite intrigued myself. So that was very important to me, because it was testing ideas, going beyond what I'd been doing and shifting from the idea of function as such, as a basis for making things. It did become-but the abstract became very important right there.

DR. CARNEY: So that was early in your faculty years at Alfred?

MR. TURNER: That was 1958-59, '60. And I enjoyed that very much. I enjoyed the students a lot. I enjoyed the nurses who came in, who volunteered, who wanted to take this, because they were so alert and so serious. They did really very well, a good influence.

DR. CARNEY: So you didn't have just the, kind of, fine arts students? You had a whole mix of-

MR. TURNER: Had the freshmen coming in. And then these junior people going into nursing. That wasn't all; I mean, that was the sculpture class. And then I taught pottery to the freshmen. And taught it, I guess you'd say that.

DR. CARNEY: So, this was a real transition time for you.

MR. TURNER: Yeah, well, from then on I knew that if I was going to teach, I had to keep making-I wanted to have experiences that other people are going through all the time, you know, of making, and the questions and problems, and results to deal with. I wanted to be a part of it, you know, rather than somehow separate. So that experience, that personal ongoing experience, was critical to my teaching.

DR. CARNEY: So what was the actual shift that occurred when you went into pottery originally and you were thinking, I want to use my hands and make something functional and useful, or I'm not probably saying what you were thinking, correct me here, to where you were thinking along the terms of abstract? What happened that caused that change in your work or what you visualized?

MR. TURNER: I think that-I already mentioned that large bowl.

DR. CARNEY: Right.

MR. TURNER: That, to me, was a direction I didn't pursue in the pottery. But it always was part of my feeling about things. So in the pottery what I did was to fall in love with the Sung dynasty and particularly somewhat influenced by Marguerite Wildenhain and Bauhaus kind of thing.

But, I remember-and it was so I did make things that very much were those simple bowls. And I loved making those. I loved all that simplicity and, of course, that's geometric. You know the circle. And I made some, what was then called, free-form long dishes, you know, pressed out. And I liked them-free will, you know, with the large flange and, I don't know, color.

The abstract, I think, came in very simply in the kind of things I made, such as the casserole-circle, circle, circle,

and combined with function, combined with the sense of flange that you could, you know, big circular bowl that you could put your hands under anywhere. In those days I pictured the housewife being able to get something out of the oven, you know, with something over cloth and pick this out without worrying about handles, whether it was functional or not to do that. But it did work. And then it had a low cover and repeat of the circle for the handle, so that it could be put in an oven very easily-low enough and yet wide enough. And so those were part of-simplicity and geometry were important. Those are words I've used to describe how I felt about those things.

DR. CARNEY: Rosanjin [Kitaoji Rosanjin, 1883-1959] came to Alfred. Were you there when-

MR. TURNER: Nineteen fifty-three. Absolutely, I was very much affected by him. And that's when Bizen became important. And in fact, I remember very distinctly listening to Marguerite Wildenhain talk. And knowing what she made and being influenced that I didn't want the perfection that she was after, you know, that you take this off to make it perfect. You take this part off, you know, down at the foot to make it perfect.

DR. CARNEY: I remember you did make some perfect pots. I mean, the casserole that's sitting on my desk in my office is absolutely-

MR. TURNER: They're abstract. I don't know what you have there, but-

DR. CARNEY: I think it was one you made for the department store, maybe.

MR. TURNER: Maybe. I don't know.

DR. CARNEY: It's a great form. But it has some perfect parts to it.

MR. TURNER: Well, I loved-I guess what I was getting to was Zen-the sense of change, accepting change. You know, the perfect, which means that you never change, I've rejected at this point. I began to reject, you know, some of the Bauhaus; some of what came from Greece, in a way, at least the idea of Plato, idea of the perfect cat in the sky. I began to reject that in favor of change and no longer timeless, you know, but alteration, and so that and Bizen became very important. And what Rosanjin said fit in with where I was going in my head very, very well. And I loved his work.

And so, just like Peter Voulkos was coming along not quite that soon, and this Bizen was coming along-I never did it that way for years and years and years. You know, I was just making functional kind of casseroles and so on. But I began after working with Bonniers and other places; I began to not know where I was going. You know, I'd run out of steam of the beauty of the Sung bowls and run out of function as such and knowing I had to move on. And I began-I remember making things, sending them to Syracuse, and either it got in or it didn't.

What's the point of that? You know, what's the point of that thing? It's just shape. And so that a piece that I made, which had that perfection, I guess-well, maybe not-but it was very Chinese in the sense of a big bowl in the center. I mean, a globe with a couple of circle things around it, you know, and pinching a couple here and there to make it have not the sense it had been made in a factory or something. It really had hand feeling. And then the cylinder coming out, you know, as a cone on the top and below. And it did just what I wanted to do. And I thought, that's nothing. What's going on inside it? What's it got to do with life? And that became my dead-end pot in 1962.

It took me until I took a sabbatical in 1966, I think, and really loved it, because then I thought, I know what I've got to do. I've got to go back to abstract and to geometry. That's my focus. That's my basis.

But I was using clay. So I still made hollow form. But I did this so that rather than extreme, you know, oh, a tiny foot with a great expanding bowl and all that jazz, I wanted something that was very quiet and talking to itself, not to me, but to itself, perhaps. So that the difference between what would be a cylinder and another cylinder just below or just above would be very slight, but they would talk. And then what happened was that that transition-what is between the upper cylinder and the lower cylinder-that became critical. You know, that kind of form of one reaching out and touching the other one.

And that became critical and remained that way, I think, in my mind in developing something that used the abstract and used that sense of relationship between two known things to the unknown, the uncertain. You know, the uncertain curve that developed in-oh, I don't know what shapes I was making-but started out with a cookie jar, so called, and then became a base cylinder and moving up to a smaller cylinder above. How's it move up? You know, that was intriguing. I'd be making this and be thinking, that doesn't relate to this. Maybe that's it. And at the top, maybe going into a square.

DR. CARNEY: You talked about gravity, not today, but I read that you talked about that. And that seems-when I read that, I thought, well that makes sense to me. You talked about the significance of that. Does that play into what you're describing now, the fact that there is such a thing as gravity?

MR. TURNER: Yeah, I think that you're playing with and working against, with and against, gravity in doing this because of how you have the lower cylinder and the one above smaller in dimension, how you have them meet. And whatever you're doing with clay, you're constantly dealing with something that happened this spring in the midst of all that gravity and weight. So it's that, I think, that sense of dealing with gravity, using gravity, you know, so that when we're amazed at people running and skipping and jumping, they're dealing with gravity. They're dealing with something that meets and uses that for part of their beauty, I think.

DR. CARNEY: Can I ask you a question about people? You mentioned-and this is going back just slightly-but about Marguerite Wildenhain. Was that when she was in Alfred with the School for American Craftsmen in 1949 or '50? Or was that the time you saw her the most?

MR. TURNER: I don't know when I first saw her. And I admired her a lot. And I bought one of her pieces in those early '50s. I think I'd seen it, and it's a beauty. You have it now.

DR. CARNEY: Thank you.

MR. TURNER: I admired her. But I didn't any longer like that direction for me. I made a few pieces, which I thought, these are really Greek, you know, in a sense; you know this form and going down-

DR. CARNEY: But it took you a few years to reject that.

MR. TURNER: Yeah, it was Rosanjin. And so by my time, even though I didn't use a lot, by 1953-'54 when she was back again, you know, lecturing and demonstrating, that's when I put down the words of what I now felt and made the contrast between the-what do you call it-the Pacific-Rim direction and the European-Greek direction, where man is top dog. I rejected that, and more and more, particularly when I went to Africa. You know, man is top dog and we have the answer and this is perfection, and timeless, perfect, et cetera. That has its reality, but it's not my reality.

I wanted to work with clay so that the way it moved, the vitality of clay, is not meeting something that's been on the drawing board. It's using clay with abstraction to start with and then seeing what it's going to do, how it will move and change, and always surprise you. And more and more, I began to think that you get to a certain point in the use of the abstract and you think that something may be working, and I like to think that it takes over. I let it take control. That's when something happens. If I'm in control, it uses my dull old mind. But this opening up by letting it move in space, move one part to another, that's when things began to happen. And that's the inner vitality I wanted to get to. It might be called inner space or not. But there's an inner vitality that began to happen. And that was my feeling and sense of what I was reaching for and beginning to get.

By then, you see, I'd gone into the geometry, using geometry but getting to my senses, the thing in which I'm part of the clay. It's an interaction. And there's the vitality in that interaction. And that was, you know, late '60s.

DR. CARNEY: Somewhat Zen kind of philosophy?

MR. TURNER: Well, it could be. Sure.

DR. CARNEY: Had you seen Peter Voulkos working as you were in this transition?

MR. TURNER: I'm trying to think. I'm sure I must have. Well, of course I did, because 1966 he and Rudy Autio and Don Reitz and I were the four people selected to start Super Mud. I don't know whether they knew that's what they're doing. And so I knew Peter then. And then I went out to-at that time-that was a year of transition for me. I was looking for something. I said I had had that dead-end pot.

DR. CARNEY: You were on sabbatical.

MR. TURNER: Yeah. I took a year. I just simply took a year off. I'd been-I don't know, what did they call me-a lecturer or what. But I had been half status. I hadn't had to take-for a low salary I hadn't had to take on the agonies of administrative things. And that changed. But at any rate, when I came back, I think, in '66, I said "Well, look, you better put me on full teaching." So, that ended the whole thing, and get, of course, more money that way. Get on track. Get on track.

DR. CARNEY: So can you talk a little bit about the Super Mud phenomena with-

MR. TURNER: Yeah. I had seen Pete earlier, but I don't remember too much the earlier. And I'd seen his work and seen how people rejected the very early work. But I was just puzzled and interested. And Super Mud '66 he was making whatever he made, you know, in '66. And I admired it tremendously. It's not where I could be right then. But I'm sure it had some influence by my wish to move, start moving in ways in which I was more part of the clay and of the direction clay could go, that it would involve me. And in '66, I forget what all we made, but I remember Rudy making things. And he was so nervous, his hands doing this, but putting these things, these

great big things together. Don Reitz making whatever it was he was making. And at one point he said, "Oh, I don't know, what'll I make? What'll I throw?" he said. And Pete said, "A typewriter. Throw a typewriter."

So that was the kind of sense of the clay and movement in '66. I remember at that time, I made one of my casseroles-the ones I had been making, kind of continuing. I had made a number of things, maybe, then, but-and so the clays are kind of soft. I'd made the casserole itself with its spreading-out wing, as it were, because it reached out and then had a place where the cover-the cover I made separately. And I remember it was wobbling, you know, flowing around. I finally got it to sit down. And Pete said, "Ah, great!" Something like that. So, that sense of me having to deal with something that was trying to find its own way.

And then in '76, I was very strongly in the-I don't know what I called it then, but I'd been to Africa in '72-

DR. CARNEY: That was going to be my next question, how Africa fit into-

MR. TURNER: Oh, yeah. But in '76, I was definitely still into the abstract cylinder kind of thing. And I have pictures of me working on that and taking the upper cylinder into a square, you know, and finding the ways in which-what I wanted was something you couldn't tell whether it was being supported by the lower piece or springing from the lower piece. I wanted a sense of their interplay. You couldn't tell why and how that curve started, you know, as it moved up into the upper cylinder and then became a square at the top or something-that there was no place that you could identify. There was an uncertainty about it. You couldn't pin it down. That's what I needed, and that it had some life and spring, and yet sitting on, each depending-one functioning with the other.

So that's a function of itself. It's not a function of serving food or something like that. It's its own function. Then you can say, well, this is kind of a ritual pot. Or this is a pot of some kind of spirit. I can't think of the right word there, but it brings the ephemeral in, I think, and the mystical. And that's where I wanted to go. So, that was happening by '76. And I felt comfortable with Pete, you know, in the sense of great things he was making. And '72-

DR. CARNEY: Why did you go to Africa?

MR. TURNER: I wondered-I knew I went somewhat earlier than that, maybe a couple of more years earlier. I'd seen in a magazine a picture of a painted village in Africa. It turned out later it was in southern Africa. And there was Nbele, I think, people in South Africa. I didn't know where it was. But I saw it and I was so attracted. I got to see that.

DR. CARNEY: You mean the architecture? The buildings were painted and-

MR. TURNER: The architecture-yeah, the great walls around it. And there in different villages different things happened. But in this particular case-and it's the same one-it was the same effect I had when Sue and I finally went and did see this on our trip to Africa. That was a great thing and an amazing experience, because I remember getting there. Always we would get somewhere on the weekend. Everything shuts down. How could we get to that place from the city? And it was outlawed to do something. I remember taking a shower that morning. We had hired a taxi who said, you know, "I'll take you." And I wonder if I'll be back here tonight? I don't want to do this against the law, what we're doing. We got out there and gave a pound note to somebody. And you know, it was all right to be there. And I took a lot of pictures. I did have a wonderful camera then. And I took pictures around different places, particularly the shrine and that kind of thing up in parts of Nigeria.

I don't know if I'm speaking loud enough, but-that was 1972 and we went-Sue and I-I made pots and I enjoyed them a great deal.

DR. CARNEY: You made pots while you were in Africa?

MR. TURNER: I made pots that fall before going to Africa. We went to Africa in the spring. I had made pots. I remember having a show of some kind at Wallingford Arts Center [Wallingford, PA], something like that. It's right next to Swarthmore. And I remember it because I liked the pots I made then. And-here we are.

[BEGIN TAPE 3 SIDE 1.]

DR. CARNEY: This is Margaret Carney interviewing Robert Turner at the Smithsonian Studio in Washington, D.C., on June 11, 2001-in case we're at the beginning of a tape.

Bob, when we broke for lunch, you were talking about your travels in Africa in 1972 and how you were affected by the painted walls and that. Would you like to continue talking a little bit about how Africa has affected your work, that trip maybe? And you've subsequent trips after that, haven't you?

MR. TURNER: Not to Africa, no.

DR. CARNEY: Not to Africa?

MR. TURNER: This is a one-time-it was kind of swimming uphill all the time to get from place to another. It was a matter of trying to discover what I wanted to see. I didn't know what I wanted to see. But I would hear things. At first it started out as an amazing pottery village. And that in itself was worth the whole trip. And learning that-they already knew there-very sophisticated, this little village. You know, no technical things, but-very sophisticated, a lot of wisdom. So that over there they knew that it's best for the aunt to teach the niece, not the mother to the daughter. They knew that worked best. And there are a lot of things like that that seem to come out. Very sophisticated in what they did. I couldn't see how they could improve it, even though they didn't use wheels and so on. But the most gorgeous pieces came out from the hands and the dance around the pot that the women did in making functional ware.

DR. CARNEY: Was this in Nigeria?

MR. TURNER: This is the center of Nigeria-Abuja is the name. I think it was even the central state; I'm not so cool in those days- '72 [sic]. That's something in itself. Moving on, I heard some people talking about the work, which involved, you know, religious connotations. I forget the word now for that type of pottery. But in any case, I thought that's what I've got to see, and went on.

Incidentally, at some point I found out that the man is supposed be the guide and spirit for the people and that the women were those that held together a family and who had that kind of function. But I also found out that the women in going to the pit to get clay were, at least traditionally, guided by a priestess, so that there was no hanky-panky in the clay pits where the women had to take, of course, all their clothes off. And so there was a spiritual impact of the fact that clay's there, just as in the Native American. The clay, the digging of the clay, is a very spiritual act, and that is something that carries on through the work done, whether, I guess, it's men or women.

DR. CARNEY: That's somewhat different than going down to the grinding room and picking up your bag, and fill in the blanks.

MR. TURNER: Oh, my! Yeah. Yeah, but I think that sense of what they do carries an impact all the way through. It certainly does with the Native American, with the Pueblo people that I've gotten to know of, and know in some cases, and the watching of them. Go where they dig the clay, you know. And I think that the sense of prayer or the act of prayer in one form or another is part of this whole thing of the connection with the earth. So that is a fundamental thing that in some cases I saw, in some cases I read about after we left. Again and again, I would read things that would explain what I had seen. So, that kept on.

DR. CARNEY: You were talking a bit about influences. Besides African and, I think I remember, from an earlier show and some earlier comments today about Rosanjin and how his work had some influence on your work. Who else can you credit with influencing where you are in clay today?

MR. TURNER: Good point. Well, I think there were people certainly and probably cultures. So, Rosanjin spoke of, I think, the 13th-century-wasn't it the 13th-century? That was the height of importance. And nothing else has happened since then, in a sense, for him at least. And so his lecture, which he gave when I'd just returned to Alfred area, was very important. And it didn't affect what I did right then. But it affected my sense, and it grew and grew more in importance as I began to get into things, which reflected that knowledge and that impression.

So for me, about that time, perception became the biggest word there was. You know, that different cultures, different people perceive things differently; therefore, what they do is different. And there's an example, a beautiful statement of the Pueblos-that one of the Pueblos, in a statement about something to the effect, if I recall it: When the potter forms the bowl, it is bringing the spiritual into that bowl and that bowl has as much life as does the fox or the tree or the human being.

And it's such a-obviously in saying that, I'm saying something that is so different from the way we view things we make, even though we may think highly of them. This has to do with the whole sense of the universe. It's a different universe than the European, and our universe from Europe. It seems to me that was fundamental to find that out. And I found that out in my mind, making the connection between what I knew about or read about the Pueblo and the people of the Navajos and so on. And these people, at least of Nigeria, and then through the book I think is called *The Myths of Birth and Death in Africa*-it may have been a longer name, I think that's mostly it.

DR. CARNEY: What was that book about?

MR. TURNER: That book was simply a collection of myths and of different cultures and so the type of culture. For example, I don't know whether this is too much, but there is the myth which has to do with death and children. Originally, as it says, there was no death and when-I always say man-when man became old, just became young

again. And then one of the animals-the turtle, I think-said it wanted children. What do you know about this? But he wanted children, and God said: "No, no. You cannot have children, because if you do have children, after a few, your half must die." And the turtle said: "That's fine. I'm willing." Oh, no you can't do this. You don't realize that you'll die after several children. No, and through the persistence man saw the turtle with children. Said he wanted he children. And the same thing. "Oh, no, you must not think of that, because after several children you must die." That's how death and children came into the world. And only the stones didn't want to have children, therefore they never die.

And many of these-you know, originally there was only a drop of milk. Well, obviously the cow is the critical part of some of these people. They're nomads. So that originally it was the drop of milk was what started the world. It was on that basis. And I say, it's not about fact; it's about truth as perceived by the people who see life as through their own eyes. And so that was both, I think-I think probably all peoples who are of the animist society, animist culture, which feels that they are part of not on top of, but part of nature, and that kind of thing seeps in and affects the way, again, you perceive it.

As I said, perception became the big word for me, because it's through our perceptions-I forget now, there's a scientist John Wheeler; he was an astronomer. If I can remember, he said that our perception of the universe is essentially dependent upon our observation. And I felt that that was true. And of course, that's perception. But I would add that if you say it's our observation, I'd say, well, let that also include that you're aware of when things are altered by what you do. In other words, I think my perception is altered by my working with material and being altered by the process.

When time disappears and you aren't really conscious of what you're doing, so much of being involved in something-and then at that point, if it's really working, the material takes over and kind of leads the way. Now, that may be very personal and perceptive. Or it might be too strange to be real. But that feeling about it is important in thinking affirmatively about what's possible and what may be occurring. So that the other thing in Africa was very significant, as there the energy, not matter, is the basis of our universe and movement and so on.

And so that became important-what those antelopes' heads and so on, which were brought by the sculptor into the village to give that kind of energy and spirit to the village. So the sculptor has a function. The function here, you see, is not the function of making a bowl for rice or something. It's the function of the spiritual, of the spirit, and therefore, I guess you'd say, of ritual. But it's very important that dual function, something for youth, and something for the religious, spiritual life of the community, is critical.

And art there is something, a language understood by all members of the community. So it was not strange. It's something part of their lives. And so they understand when the sculptor makes a man, a form of kind of a man, with horns that come up and curl down, and it's-I forget the kind of curve they call that, when it's an increasing curve that comes down. I may think of it. But they feel that of the ram, that horn and that kind of curve, is the basis of growth and therefore critical to them. So they use that as part of some of their sculptures.

DR. CARNEY: So art isn't separate for the people. It's part of their whole being.

MR. TURNER: It's part of their living, part of their knowledge, and so many things that have to do with the intimacy of life. You know, the talking drums, which tell everybody what's going on, what the news of the day is and watch out for a fire that's just broken out in so-and-so place. These talking drums are also part of it. As I say, in a way it's sophistication of using what they have to do what's necessary. And it's not frivolous. It has to do with life.

DR. CARNEY: I'm going to bring you back to Alfred a little bit. Then we can go back to Africa. You got the full-time position at Alfred after you came back from Africa. Is that true?

MR. TURNER: Well, no. There were two periods there. The first one was leaving teaching for one year.

DR. CARNEY: Right. Nineteen sixty-six.

MR. TURNER: Nineteen sixty-six and making stuff. And then travel. Travel was out to the what we would call properly the Indian country and seeing somewhat the Pueblo area, but more particularly going to California. And I'd already met Pete Voulkos. Or maybe I'd just meet him again at Super Mud. I'm not sure.

DR. CARNEY: Oh, back to Super Mud before we go off. I think there'd probably be a lot more interest in what exactly that Super Mud was all about, where that was, and-I know it was in 1966, the first one. Can you talk a little bit more about who participated and why it happene?.

MR. TURNER: Well, it was a university thing, college and university, started by two or three very nice guys at Penn State. And their idea, I think, was to bring first one-and that's when I was there with Pete, Rudy Autio, and

Don [Donald] Reitz-was to bring potters, sculptors, in who were known to people, to college people and having them simply be there for, I guess, three days and do their thing, as it were.

And so, well, I said this earlier, but what happened? Well, one time Don writes through things on the wheel. And then he said, "What'll I throw now?" And Pete says, "A typewriter." There was that kind of jocularity, but also energy. You know? We all were very involved in what we were making.

DR. CARNEY: Was this a kind of a first occurrence of this type, where a group of people were brought together?

MR. TURNER: Yeah, it was the first Super Mud.

DR. CARNEY: Well, had there been other artists-in-residence programs and things like that already happening, where people went off individually to do workshops and-

MR. TURNER: There certainly had been workshops.

DR. CARNEY: But no collaborative kind of-

MR. TURNER: There must have been. But I didn't know of any collaboratives such as this. I mean there may have been others, but this dominates my head as first time I certainly was involved in a collaborative thing.

DR. CARNEY: And did that recur then?

MR. TURNER: It did. They had a program, which every year they brought in, let's say four people-I'm not sure-who were known by people in college, potters, obviously potters, particularly, and the faculty. And this kept going until they decided enough is enough. So that the first time there must have been 50 or 60 people in the auditorium. And the next time that we were in the-I think it was the concluding one-whatever number that was in 1976-I don't know, 2,500 people in the auditorium. And they had screens that you'd look at what was happening. And there were little pieces of clay down here, you know, finger size. There's a screen of this going on, so that the back row could see all of this happening.

DR. CARNEY: Sounds like the Emmy Awards or something.

MR. TURNER: Well, something. I think there were some wonderful things happening all the way through, because there were some interesting people. You know, Betty Woodman and Jay Schein and so many people, Ken Ferguson, and so on.

DR. CARNEY: Can I digress to another topic for you? To do with the American Ceramics Society and NCECA [National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts]? Can you talk about that a little bit and your involvement with NCECA going off on its own, or being established and going off? And I know you were instrumental in the movement. Or maybe you were against that movement. I can't remember exactly where you stood on that. That was in the '60s.

MR. TURNER: Yeah. That was in the '60s. I think Ted Randall-maybe partly through his father, I'm not sure, who had been in the American Ceramics Society-but that was the organization and we were accepted as part of it. I don't know what we were called in it. But we were a wing of this design division, which was separate.

DR. CARNEY: And I think you were the education component.

MR. TURNER: Something like that. I don't remember exactly.

And I remember being part of the design division one year, and then seeing the concept and the kinds of things that people thought about as to what should be going on. And I saw all these miniscule, petty ideas. You know, well, this is how you make platters and you produce it this way. It was something. It couldn't withstand the real vitality of Italy. You know, the works really began to come from Italy and Japan. And so, the Syracuse and Ohio things just simply, I think, didn't have the force of presence and weren't aware of anything else happening. It was just so down-focused somehow or other. And I became very discouraged when I saw what was going on in the design division. It wasn't for me.

DR. CARNEY: It wasn't really art; it was more industrial-

MR. TURNER: Industrial production. This is how you make things. This is how you make a rim.

DR. CARNEY: And America at that point wasn't up on the top of that pile anyway.

MR. TURNER: No.

DR. CARNEY: So it wouldn't have been stimulating from that standpoint.

MR. TURNER: No, it was just how you'd change the decoration on the edge of the plate.

DR. CARNEY: And wasn't there an issue, too, with the exhibition that some people-I think Ted Randall and some other people wanted a different kind of exhibition program with American Ceramics Society that didn't look like it was going to happen?

MR. TURNER: Something like that. I don't remember the details there. I remember being part of an exhibition in 1966. And it was in Skokie, Illinois, I think. I forget who sponsored it. But I think the American Ceramics Society had no particular joining with it. And I think it was maybe right after that, or right in there, that the thinking was that the educational group, if that's what it was, simply weren't a part of this. It wasn't going to go anywhere.

And that's when Ted Randall, I think, and others began to think, well, we have to have our own organization. We do need something to bring people together, who want to talk with one another; I think that's the main thing, and exchange ideas which are relevant to us and relevant to what we think is the development, you know, of clay, our clay.

And it was not industry, even though that had, you know, has real value. But that was separate from what we were doing-one-of-a-kind of things-and our thinking was in that direction. And that direction was becoming art. And being influenced by things that were coming from the West Coast, which were way in advance of this in terms of creation of new possibilities. And that's where, I think, Alfred had to be pulled along, you know, because there'd been so much importance on the technology things. And that continued to be important. But I think the kind of sense of freedom to strike out or do became very important.

So that was the birth of a new organization. And I think it was frowned upon by American Ceramics Society. So, it was not a-it was an accepted parting, but not necessarily one that was approved by American Ceramics Society. Anyhow, that was the start. And I don't know whether that covers the main point.

DR. CARNEY: But you ended up as president of NCECA at some point, didn't you? Was that early in their-

MR. TURNER: Ted was really the organizer and stimulus. He really used that brilliant mind he had for putting things together, making connections that way.

DR. CARNEY: And I think Bill Parry was-

MR. TURNER: Bill Parry was the first president after Ted. Ted said, this is long enough. And so Bill Parry-it was a very modest-sized group, you see, at the start. So how could Ted and then Bill Parry and then me-all of us from Alfred-become this?

DR. CARNEY: Were you the third president of NCECA?

MR. TURNER: I think I was. It must have been. If Bill was the first, I was the second. I don't know. And Norm Schulman, I think, was maybe the next one. I don't remember. We were all very good friends, of course. And it was, as Dan Rhodes or Tony Hepburn said, a club. We patted each other on the back. And it was, as you think along the years, it was a very early kind of gathering and understanding of what would develop.

DR. CARNEY: Well, you've been active with that group ever since.

MR. TURNER: Well, in a way, I think much less active after those first few years. Supportive, but, you know, it got so big that it became something different from the way it started, same as Super Mud. I don't know how the times match, but Super Mud from '66 to '76, and I guess NCECA must have been the early, early '60s, wasn't it, Margaret? Something like that. And it was very close to the time Bill Parry came to Alfred, I think, in '63.

DR. CARNEY: I think NCECA split off, maybe. In '62 there wasn't much else happening. And then in '66 it was really up and running. So there was a few years of-I'm not quite clear on all that.

MR. TURNER: It's interesting. I don't know the story here, but I wouldn't be surprised at all that along comes John Gill. And he sees the relationship, because he's fascinated by the kinds of shapes that come out. The function certainly has a basis for the shape. But the function of that shape is art.

DR. CARNEY: You're talking about his ceramic archive that he put together in the McMahon building? All the wonderful advanced ceramic materials? Yeah. John has an interesting eye.

MR. TURNER: Very, very interesting. So that's kind of a resurgence of something that hadn't been recognized. It's a potential in the development of these amazing forms that are not plates and cups and saucers, and had to do with the NCECA and various kinds of development with new materials.

DR. CARNEY: There seems to be quite a dialogue going on at Alfred right between the engineering folks and the art people and even the digital people. I think it's quite exciting.

MR. TURNER: It's a resurgence. And it's interesting because personally when I was teaching in the late '50s, early '60s, there was a dialogue with the people, with the teachers. And I think they had something to give us, and they respected what we were trying to do, I think.

DR. CARNEY: Can I ask you whether or not you had anything to do with the St. Patrick's Day favors, and did none of that happen?

MR. TURNER: No, I wasn't particularly interested in that. It was perfectly good, it's just that-

DR. CARNEY: I think they ripped off a couple of your forms that ended up as St. Paddy's Day favors.

MR. TURNER: I don't know. I just was not involved.

DR. CARNEY: Can you talk a little bit more about your teaching at Alfred? You taught. You went full-time. I've got the time wrong. I know this already. In 1966 you went full-time teaching in Alfred. And-

MR. TURNER: It was '67. I don't know. It was that year I had off, '66-'67. And I was determined-

DR. CARNEY: And so you continued teaching at Alfred for-till when?

MR. TURNER: Seventy-nine.

DR. CARNEY: And can you talk about that a little bit more, about notable students that you had or faculty, colleagues that you enjoyed, and what the experience in general was like? A lot of people must have come and gone in that 10 years.

MR. TURNER: Speaking generally, I think there was a great change-certainly a development in Alfred in the '70s. I think a function and strong pots, which always are important, had been the focus. And it was about that time that Paul Soldner and Hank Bauer came to Alfred and with tongue in cheek began to throw pots, which meant they began to throw pots around the room.

And it was about that time, I think, that we began to get applications and acceptance of a new perception of clay and what could happen. And that was about '73, '74, in particular, maybe starting in '72, I don't know. But it was about then. And I think I should mention Wayne Higby, who came along in that period.

DR. CARNEY: Was Tony Hepburn already there?

MR. TURNER: No. Tony came in '76. But there was just a superb gathering of talent, imagination, and ideas, and absolutely a new way of thinking about what could be done with clay in the one year that these graduate students had when they came. It was the graduate program that sparked it, I think, originally. And very exciting to me.

And I think that-as I may or not have mentioned here-my early time in sculpture there in teaching was a very important one in working out ideas with students or at the same time they were working, and also the fact that I determined as soon as I got there that my working with clay was critical to my sense of what I was doing as a teacher-that I wanted to be in the same world of making and wondering and questioning that the students were in their working. And I was working both with the undergraduates and graduates. But more and more with graduates, I think, in the last couple of years.

DR. CARNEY: Did you actually have a studio space in the building, in Harder Hall?

MR. TURNER: No, well, I may have been given it. I never used it. For years there until almost to the end, I felt that my work was my work. And I didn't want it to be a focus for students in terms of idea or in sense of copying or anything like that. I thought that energy and what I do is separate from my teaching.

DR. CARNEY: You wanted to the same kind of learning situation that the students were in, but not influencing their work by your being on view, performing for them.

MR. TURNER: For better or worse; and I think maybe the last year or two, this kind of broke down. It no longer was that significant. What I did was just among what everybody was doing. Something. So, I didn't worry about it. And when I was called back by Wayne Higby again to do something-I think he called me-not too many years ago I felt perfectly free to make whatever they thought I might, to show this is what I make, because that's the way I feel and think. And it clearly was what I think, and this is not what you think. But we're investigating the same kind of universe. And so it became that sense that I was separate no longer was so important, I think. But

Tony came-no, I think it was Val who first called Tony on the phone.

DR. CARNEY: That's Val Cushing?

MR. TURNER: Yeah. Or else he saw Val over there. And I called Tony and said-because we'd been struggling for two years.

DR. CARNEY: Well, where was Tony at that time?

MR. TURNER: He was in England. I can't remember exactly where. But I called him and said, Tony would you like to come over to be at Alfred University, you know, as head? And he had one word. Yup. That "yup" became very important.

And he went with me at the last Super Mud. It must have been his first year here in '76. And it was just great to drive with him and drive back, when he typically began to ask questions I'd never asked myself. "Why did I do this?" And I'd never thought of it. You know, I just did, oh, hmm. And it was wonderful, you know, to have that opening up of what was maybe more than I perceived in what directed my feeling or thinking, whatever. Anyhow, that was when he came in '76. And I retired in '79.

My last two years-not to carry this on too much, but my last two years, I think, was in taking half of my salary so that we could have people, potters, artists, come in and be there for maybe a month a piece. And then I think Betty Woodman was there for half a semester. But there's some wonderful people who came in through that thing. And I think that dividing the salary started really something when John Wood and Jessie Shefrin each shared a salary so they could have half a year off.

DR. CARNEY: You had talked about, or I read previously, that you had worked with Jessie Shefrin on some projects you had found really exciting at Alfred. Could you talk about that a little bit? And who she was or who she is?

MR. TURNER: I think it probably started at Penland, where there were rather dramatic possibilities, through dance, body movement, and they work in the studio, where everyone could kind of participate one way or another. And it was a good give-and-take studio down there. And other people-I wasn't necessarily moving in that direction-but with other minds coming forth, it became something, which other people would take part of my pot and effigies would be there the next morning when I came in and everything but me, actually; the hat, the boots, and the pot I'd been making, they made. It was right there, of course. And putting beer cans from the floor to the ceiling and just have a fit there that the column, which takes off on some of the things I do, I suppose. At any rate, it was a good time.

DR. CARNEY: This was Penland way back.

MR. TURNER: Penland 1969.

DR. CARNEY: Okay. So Penland was a playful exchange.

MR. TURNER: And development of things and ideas and of friends.

DR. CARNEY: And who else was at Penland at that time that-

MR. TURNER: Howard Shapiro was the dynamo, I guess. And he would be goading me on, or others on, to do so and so. And he was pretty perceptive in what he did, in what he made, in trying things out. So I think there was, particularly with him, I think they were trying ideas out. And that became my philosophy and approach from then on. And this moves on so far, I guess, but my workshop became more and more, because I wanted to get away from the idea that I had something people ought to copy, you know, or how do you make so and so. To hell with that! It's not how you make something, but how you think and how you perceive what you can do with the material and some other material, the thing you hadn't thought of. So you get beyond that dead mind, you know, and move into new possibilities with the material guiding and some other ideas coming in and becoming a part of it.

So it's that collaboration, I think, and the sense of risk, the sense of risk, I think, entered very much more than I'd ever had.

And I think that and body movement and space, you know, and being part of space was very much a part of '69, '70, '71. And then a group of us who had been jumping in a wagon, going down at four o'clock when we finished making clay, and being part of Carolyn Bilderback's dance session, body movement session, whatever. That was really very critical. I mention it. It sounds small, but it wasn't, because it was risk-taking and it was moving in space. And it was something which made you breathe more deeply somehow and think much more broadly somehow. I don't know. And as I say, it was stimulating. It was testing, kind of a testing, of you. There are words

for that, but, that's-and risking yourself, as it were.

DR. CARNEY: So that influenced some things you tried at Alfred with John Wood and Jessie Shefrin in the '70s?

MR. TURNER: Yeah. With Jessie, for example, it was showing a film, probably, with- what's the dancer who was at Black Mountain? Merce Cunningham-and pictures of how he taught-or not how he taught, but how he moved, you know, in which a chair was part of him. He was still sitting on a chair while moving, you know. And so a lot of things happened from that.

You know, being blind, nothing new about this, but putting a cloth over your eyes so you made things just with your hands. And then whatever it was there, you took out, because this was yours, to some place in the woods and found a place that it belonged. So this sense, I think, of participation in what you were inviting to happen-you didn't know what the result was going to be-but you were part of it, it was a part of you.

And I think that, and increasingly when I've done workshops, it's been presenting a problem or project that had not been considered at all. You know, throwing things upside down on you in terms of ideas and presenting something that would be puzzling. And I think I've done that for the last 10 or more years whenever I've gone. And it's been wonderful because the response has been so great. And I mean, great in size and great in fun. And finding things that had been unexpected were unexpected coming out. So it's that sense of movement beyond your own mind-set and finding ways to do that were challenging, but not too difficult.

But I know a Swarthmore student was at the last session at Penland. And she was having difficulty in knowing where to go with a project. And she was trying things out and they were just fine, but still not quite getting to where she felt something was happening. But then she worked with two other people. And just working with them, all of a sudden she was free and things began to happen for her, which were part of these things they were building outside, you know, with-I forget-what it was isn't important. But it became a collaborative thing, in which she suddenly found the opening for herself through working with others.

DR. CARNEY: Bob, can you talk about what you've done since you've "retired"? I'm putting retired in quotes there. What have you been doing since 1979 besides getting awards? But you could talk about that, too.

MR. TURNER: Just continuing, I think, until the last two years, when we moved. And that's been just a slowdown. When we moved into a retirement home. And I have got a studio down where there was a garage. And I'm starting work again in clay and all that.

DR. CARNEY: Tell us where your retirement home is.

MR. TURNER: That's in Sandy Spring, Maryland. I think it's called Friends House Community. I don't know. Friends House Community. And it's quite good because really it's not a-it's something that you do a lot for yourself. There's a community garden. And when the asparagus comes out, somebody washes the asparagus.-Sue and I, did last year-and prepares it. The same with other vegetables. Somebody else cuts up stuff, so that it's good in that sense of collaboration and of sharing jobs that need to be done, as well as taking care of some of the older people, things like that.

DR. CARNEY: What did you do the 20 years between 1979 and 1999?

MR. TURNER: That's what you want to know. I think it was making pieces-

DR. CARNEY: I'll come back to the other.

MR. TURNER: I think it was making and finding what direction, what's going on anyhow, because I had continued to develop two things. One is abstractive bases, geometry of bases. But then recognizing what had been so influential in Africa as evidence of energy given to the people by sculpture, and a lot of that was accumulation.

There would be something, and then if it was any kind of a figure, then things put on or over it, you know the accumulation of-and accumulation would be there of something that was important in their lives, like the turtle or anything. It was very common maybe, even a mailbox or something. But, this accumulation and addition to some object or other, it might be a figure, you know, human figure; it might not be. And I think-I thought about that, wondered why was that so influential, because I don't do accumulation, if that is the word. But, I think that what I made-particularly earlier ones, the Ashanti, which we can talk about it, Efe. These are names that come from villages that were important to me as symbols, you know, of the movement and going to places over there, Ashanti and Efe, Niger, and so on.

DR. CARNEY: So is that work you did during this alleged retirement-

MR. TURNER: This period actually after Africa, it was making things which are not too far from what I had been making. Well, I'd have to pull back. They were somewhat different. But it was still using some of the same kind of

cones and squares and circles. That kind of thing. And then the shape which developed was presuming-no, I guess, was bringing forth a response. If this is there, what's going to happen? What do we see in nature? You know, where there is outcropping rock, and what happens after that, and where do things grow? And why do things look that way in nature? You know, what's happened? Was this an eruption? Or was a flood coming through here? What is the evidence that there's response to what was there and what in a sense the whole earth or the universe-what was there? And how and what could happen and did happen? Why did this happen?

[BEGIN TAPE 3 SIDE 2.]

MR. TURNER: So, I call it not accumulation so much as a response, a response of that object to what could happen, you know, by things coming from the outside. And they might think things flying through the sky and because it's there, landing on it, as well as something in this Efe, in which I deliberately put two strips because I was so influenced by the sense of pair, and realizing that pair makes, really, a three, because you have the space in between the two little strips. And that became, oh terrific. I love that kind of thing happening, very small but significant part of the side of this kind of a dull or upside-down cone form that I had in support of a cylinder.

DR. CARNEY: It's great. I'm visualizing everything.

MR. TURNER: Yeah. Well, starting with something that is abstract and real and we know it-we know that's a cylinder, we know that that's a cone form, and we know that the cone form is supporting the cylinder, it depends on the cone form, and the cone form depends on the cylinder to be part of it, to grow from it and so on. So there's that relationship. And then how do they connect really? And so suddenly there's a need for not a snake, because I don't make snakes, but maybe some kind of shape to be finding that it needs to connect, that it needs to move up and find what's going on up there. So it's kind of a discovery of shapes and forms.

DR. CARNEY: Could I ask you a question about materials? We haven't really talked about that all. But the work that you're doing now and the work that you're describing, can you tell me what kind of clay body you were using and what temperature you fired to, a little bit of that? It may not be totally relevant, but I think it would be of interest.

MR. TURNER: Well, it's just the fact that I worked in stoneware mostly. I haven't used, although I enjoyed, the low-fire very much for one reason. I haven't gone there for that wonderful color you can get. I like the stoneware because it really was the-is a sense of the earth, I think, that probably-you know, landscape, earth, that has a lot of importance, to me.

DR. CARNEY: Do you buy stoneware material that you use?

MR. TURNER: I buy materials and mix them so that they come out at that temperature with this kind of texture and color. And, yes, then a glaze is put on. And some years ago, I wanted to get a certain kind of dry texture. Couldn't get it with a glaze. You know, how many years do I want to spend trying to get a dry glaze that fits what I want? And so I don't know where I found out about sandblasting, but that provided me the dryness and the something which accepts you. You know, it doesn't shoo you away as shine does, particularly over surfaces that move. It's dry, so there's a lot of subtlety there. And I found more and more that by control of the sandblasting in terms of how thick is the glaze here that-I want this glaze to be thick here because I know that when I sandblast it, it will go almost black, whereas this part over here is going to remain rather on the sunset-red color.

DR. CARNEY: What kind of glaze do you use?

MR. TURNER: Well, there are several. This one I'm talking about is what some people call a "Shaner"-type glaze, that kind of matte black-I mean, I'm sorry, matte red, really.

DR. CARNEY: Oh, the [David] Shaner red?

MR. TURNER: Yeah. That kind of thing. And they say by sandblasting, it gets an eroded sense, a sense of oldness, and a sense of something that you've moved toward and it doesn't push you away. You can touch it and it may have a certain texture for you in your hand, usually fairly smooth and delicate, but not. Over the white, when I use a white glaze on a white, on a white body-

DR. CARNEY: And is that a stoneware body, too? The white? When you're working with the white?

MR. TURNER: I worked with the white, with a white glaze over it.

DR. CARNEY: But, that's stoneware, too? It's not porcelain?

MR. TURNER: It is. It's a porcelaineous material. And I don't use it that way. And as far as I'm concerned, the

white clay is probably not as much see-through, you know, when you get to a very thin-but simply white. And the glaze is it's a very simple, three-part thing, like Leach glaze, you know, just the three kinds of materials.

DR. CARNEY: And what cone do you fire to when you-

MR. TURNER: Fire it to cone 9, 9-1/2, maybe. It was higher, up to 10. Now I like the lower one so it doesn't get to the shine so much. It's about cone 9 in stoneware, around there.

DR. CARNEY: Is there anything else about the technical part of the materials and things that you think is important to talk about it?

MR. TURNER: I used to know so much about glazes and how glazes are formed and the earth and everything else. And I've more and more used that knowledge, but never think about it. And only think about when I know I have to do something. But, I'm not-I should be experimenting more, but my experimentation is really with using what I have and using the sandblast as almost part of a painting technique, that is, that I can get different colors. Where I want this to be black, I can get it more or less black. By black, I mean kind of a burnt effect. You know, when I say burnt effect, oh, yes, in Africa they say, "Yeah. See all that black over there? That's when the god, because we were disobeying it, burned the earth." It's the same story as the flood story.

And so certain things, connotations, connections-it's all about connections that you know. There are either connections anyone can see or that are important to you. So that black I had known before has to do, probably, with something of that sense of a burnt and dry area. And then the red really has a lot to do with the way the sun hits stones. You know when it's going down, that red glow? It probably has a lot to do with that.

DR. CARNEY: Can you talk a little bit about different places that you've given workshops or you've been an artist-in-residence over the years, whether it's been recent or longer ago? You've been to Penland how many times?

MR. TURNER: I counted the number of houses I've slept in. It must be about nine, since 1969, I guess. And it's about every five years, at least recently. And I've enjoyed it. It's always been one week, recently. It's one week and I don't fire. They don't seem to mind.

But so we concentrate upon stories that people make up. They want to make that story come real with materials. You know, it may be tissue paper, it may be wood, it may be wire, it may be leaves. So there's the option of using what's around to figure out what they want to do to, in a sense, bring that story to life in things you can see and touch maybe. So it's wonderful. Wonderful imagination. Wonderful stories that have come out from people who-everyone brings a piece of poetry you like or writing you like.

And then we share that at some point along the way after we've gotten really started. So they just fit in, the story fits in, as it were, to where each person is. And so the poetry is then, maybe-I'd say there are 18 or 20 people-20 or more maybe-divide up into-I'd like to work with you on that, that story. So that maybe it would be three working together.

And I joined them the recent year-the last one, I guess. And I can't remember what the poem was, but it was great. And I remember that-oh, I know what we need. We need a pendulum. Where can I get a pendulum? And I think I found one of these-what do they call them? Some bob, metal, with a string up here. And so it comes down within a quarter of an inch of the table. So there's that sense of connection. But not quite, you know, so there's that thing, that tentative and fascinating thing in which things don't quite touch. And I don't know why that was part of it, but that and other people made other kinds of things that seemed to fit in, so that we came together and said, yeah, that seems to be it. Let it go that way. And that would have been one of the projects, you know, at the tip end, using what people had done.

Earlier than that, mostly, people would not have collaborated. They would have started on their own making something. And then we start off usually with people making very simple abstract shapes, whatever they are.

DR. CARNEY: Is that working in clay, when you do the-

MR. TURNER: Yeah. We're using clay to make these shapes. Let's say the first day, something like that. And they're willing to go along with this craziness but-you know, make a chair. Make an apple. Make a pipe, a pipe that bends, that kind of thing.

DR. CARNEY: You talked about the poetry connection. Could you talk about your interest in literature, perhaps, Chekhov [Anton Chekhov, 1860-1904] or something else? But also related to that whole thing, weren't you and Sue both active in the Weed Playhouse and some other kinds of-can you talk about those kinds of connections for you?

MR. TURNER: Well, it goes back to college and Chekhov. That was my final year, I think. And I was really enjoying what I was doing then, and particularly this novel. It has several-Emily Dickinson and several American novelists. And then we got the Russian. *Brothers Karamazov* and several people. But Chekhov, Chekhov, as I recall, is his letters and short stories that I concentrated on and got a big kick out of them in the sense that they were revealing kind of the inner life of a person and why he did certain things. You know, being asked by his mother to drink milk because he it would make him healthier. He had certain response to milk. You know, I think it was wine.

I remember in particular because, you know, it suddenly gets fixed in your mind as the symbol of the observation-again the observation. In the late afternoon sun of a leaf-I don't know what kind of a leaf, let's say, but kind of purple, lavender purple leaf with dust on it, the dust from the road nearby-and it's the sense of connecting with that quiet observation that's part of the story. It doesn't tell the story but it does in a way because it observes something that was going on, not being talked about, not causing the kind of contretemps that they occur, but simply something that is part of life and part of the inner sense of these people and where they lived at that time and what they had as part of their environment, whether they talked about it or not. You know? So, I think that that kind of thing in Chekhov-the sense of very acute observation and very simple ways of talking about it-was important to me.

And I think when I realized, when I'd been in pottery for maybe five years after art and the academy, after the war, and coming back, so it was some 15 years later, I said-I remembered that and I said, "Oh! That's what I'm doing now. That's where I am." And I know, therefore, why Swarthmore was important, you know, because I got to a point where I could appreciate what people were doing with their heads and their imagination and words. The bringing together so that you had something, which is poetry and which enlivens us from the connections it makes. It's all about connections.

DR. CARNEY: Did that cause you-in addition to your work-did that cause you to keep journals or to write letters or to keep some kind of record in that same way that Chekhov had done?

MR. TURNER: It did in college, in the college I definitely did. But I didn't afterwards. Just lazy or-

DR. CARNEY: Did you save those things?

MR. TURNER: I've wondered. I don't know if-I could look for them. I probably would find that they're drivel, you know. But they were very important at the time, and writing them, writing a kind of a journal or a response to some story, was very important to me. I mean, I enjoyed it a great deal.

DR. CARNEY: Have you ever used that as a method when you taught, to have your students keep journals or-

MR. TURNER: I haven't. A lot of people have, I think. M.C. [Mary Caroline] Richards, I'm sure. Many people have. I knew her at Black Mountain. She entered clay when I was there. When I started teaching with her the first year, by the first year she came in, I think. And that was kind of neat, because she found things that I really hadn't thought about that she wanted to do.

DR. CARNEY: Bob, can you talk about some of the-you've gotten a lot of awards and honors. Can you talk about that? You received a gold medal, I remember, in 1993-well, I was there; I remember it. I saw it. But I wonder if you could talk a little bit about how you've been honored? I'm sure we have a list somewhere of all the awards and everything that you won. But can you talk about that recognition?

MR. TURNER: Not very much. I don't know why. It's something that I don't think about. It comes along and it happens. And I think if that's praise, then I think that I use that to feel that what I'm doing isn't all that stupid or, you know, caught just within myself, that gee, I really-when people say, "What are you doing?" I think, oh, not very much. You can see that, can't you? And then I say, "What's the matter with that person? Couldn't he see what I'm doing?!" But, if someone praises, well, if that's what I'm doing, that's all.

So I think I need that boost in confidence that what I'm doing is worthwhile not only to myself, but apparently other people like it, too. But I never go much beyond that in wondering why. I'm always wondering why. That would be true. And why I got that second crescent, you know. I couldn't imagine why I got that second crescent. I didn't see anything. And then someone said, "Well, I don't see much there." "You don't?! You haven't looked!" You get that strange kind of dichotomy, I guess, in which you really believe in what you're doing. But then you think, well, compared to what, you know? In this universe, compared to what? All those things are nice, I guess, because they give you confidence somehow that something seems to be working, if other people can see what you think you can see. And in that sense it's important.

DR. CARNEY: Well, where else-we talked about Penland. Where else have you gone to do workshops? Have you done Archie Bray or Watershed [Center for Ceramic Art, Newcastle, ME], or can you tell me other places?

MR. TURNER: Yeah. I just mentioned. There may others, Haystack and Anderson Ranch for the Arts [Snowmass, CO]. They're different, I think, in concept.

Penland, I was thinking-I think Penland is part of a tradition of crafts. It was put there because craft was a way of helping-remember, I mentioned this, I think-the people of that area to find a way to make money enough to help support the family and so on. So that was crafts, and you made crafts that would fit into something that was functional and simple.

And I think Haystack had much more to do with ideas that were somehow implicit in what you did. And I think craft was important there-is important there-but that's craft-one's craft is not crafts plural. You know, I think this is different. One's craft isn't-I guess, finding ways in which you use the material so that it does something that you respond to, that responds to you. So that means kind of a discipline, internal discipline of how you use things. Rather than a how did they make that, I want to make those, and copying it, which is following what's already been made and it's not got to do with art in, essentially, sense, I think. It has its own value for production of things that are needed. And that's been critically important.

But I think this other thing of art is when we use material-you can call it craft, I guess-there's craft in painting, obviously. But in this case it's using material, which has a-well, like sculpture, really. But I rather think that it's-you know, it's crazy to bring this up, I guess, anymore-you know, is it art? But maybe what works in a mythic sense can be called craft, can be called art. But it may be something, neither painting nor sculpture-it's its own self. It's its own self. It's not more than, less than. It has its own identity and its own life somehow.

And it does as crafts, or as crafts in the sense of following a design-but also it has the possibility we've been developing more and more-always been there, of course-of using materials so that it has to do with the-I don't whether you want to say spiritual values-but some kind of inner values that are critical to your life. And try to get at what is critical to you, try to get at a life somehow, and get it out so you can see it.

DR. CARNEY: What about Anderson Ranch?

MR. TURNER: And that's the third.

DR. CARNEY: How does that fit in?

MR. TURNER: I think that has clearly recognized itself as an arts center. And so you say craft. Yeah, craft, but it's art. You know. And I think the people that are brought in there are much closer to the art field, so-called, in printmaking. Artists come in to make prints. People goes there as much as anything to make prints, probably. And that's possible at any one of these. But, I think there's an emphasis and particularly, I think, like in photography. I think there's no sense that there's a craft. You know, this is a form, which they use to produce these kinds of images and so on. And I think there is that-it's a matter of degree, you know, because you can have the same people, maybe, in any of these three places. But at any rate, I don't know whether that's just my personal thoughts as you asked your question. And more could be said, and maybe it could be said differently.

DR. CARNEY: That's very interesting.

MR. TURNER: But I've been at all three. And I responded a bit that way in each case.

DR. CARNEY: Can you talk a little bit-we've not really talked about galleries, that whole system, and dealers, and how that's impacted your career. You talked about taking your wares to Bonniers. But in lieu of doing that, which galleries have helped you? Or can you talk about your associations with various people in those entities?

MR. TURNER: Yeah. I'm trying to get my mind working on history.

DR. CARNEY: Who was the first gallery that represented you?

MR. TURNER: I think it was Kirpal [?], and she had a gallery at about 77th Street, I don't know, somewhere up there. Awfully nice person! And I was simply making things and she was really taking-

DR. CARNEY: This is when you were a potter.

MR. TURNER: This would have been in the earliest '50s, I think so, early to mid-'50s. And then I got associated with Bonniers, a Swedish firm. I really made things that they said they wanted, which is what I like, you know, a large abstract ring of clay with one inch of space inside or something that's kind of an ashtray. You know, it's any kind of thing. Incidentally, I found one which was made like that after I made them, was made in some kind of a production-no, it wasn't production-but, made somehow down at Williamsburg. My brother, who was on the board down there, had one of theirs on his desk, and I said, "Where did that come from? I didn't make it! Who made that?"

DR. CARNEY: Is that the same type of piece? We have the collection at the museum in Alfred; that's Charles Redfern's collection. And there's a piece that's sort of a disc-like, an inch thick, with a wide rim; it's that era?

MR. TURNER: Probably. Yeah, that probably is one of them. That was one of the small ones, I suspect. I made large ones.

DR. CARNEY: When did you make the very successful-I think you even won an award, or it was in an exhibition-the kind of bluish-black glazed pieces with the two handles on the lid that are so gorgeous?

MR. TURNER: Yeah. That was 1966-67. That was an NCECA award, I think.

DR. CARNEY: Was that a result of your taking some time off? Was that before that or after?

MR. TURNER: Specifically. See, that's just the year I took time off. It may have been '66 or '67, but that's when I developed that. And it was the geometry. You know, two cylinders and then that little bowling alley in between and joining them, where things can roll around this way; space can roll around. And just a little difference in the dimensions of the two. And then that lid on top. And I always saw that as you move toward the center of that rising form, not all that-yeah, that rising form-just rising enough. This is talking about gravity. And then holding what you call those two, kind of, clasped heads or whatever they are right there. So that provided something for two fingers to go through. But also provided a very-I hadn't thought of this-very different kind of sense of clay and a sense of movement and of austere things below, except for that roll-around little negative space.

DR. CARNEY: Those pieces have a movement of their own, which is sort of a perpetual motion, I think, for the viewer.

MR. TURNER: Maybe.

DR. CARNEY: Did you have a gallery representing you at that time?

MR. TURNER: I must have taken it to a gallery. I don't know that I took it to Bonniers [New York].

DR. CARNEY: When did you start with Helen Drutt [English]?

MR. TURNER: That was mid- to late '70s. That was maybe '76, something like that, '77.

DR. CARNEY: So, had you had other galleries before that? Gallery representation?

MR. TURNER: I'm trying to remember. I must have.

DR. CARNEY: I know you worked with Dorothy Weiss at some point.

MR. TURNER: That came then or just a little later, I think. Came a little later in San Francisco. And the Okun-Thomas Gallery in St. Louis. That came about the late '70s - '77, '78, not sure.

DR. CARNEY: So, it was really in the '70s that you had good gallery representation?

MR. TURNER: The galleries began to move in somehow. See, I was making things that really were different than I had been making 10 years earlier. I think it was simply another-either another thing or another level for people-and to know their perception of things. And so Helen Drutt-I became part of her gallery in the late '70s. It was about '78 or a little earlier. And Exhibit A was in '78-'79, because I remember having a retrospective exhibition in the Fosdick-Nelson Gallery [Alfred, NY] in '79-'80. It might have been 1980. But I was retiring, or I had just retired. And so there was this retrospective.

And so Alice Westphal saw it and invited me to come in to-maybe she had already invited me to come in, I'm not sure-to her Exhibit A gallery in Chicago. I think Dorothy Weiss-about then or later-as I say, Helen Drutt already had-there may have been one other gallery, I don't know. But they were kind of around the country.

DR. CARNEY: Has that been useful to you?

MR. TURNER: Oh, yeah. I liked each of the galleries. I liked the people. And they were very supportive. You know, it's nice to have people like your work or use it, want to have it. Very instructive. Alice Westphal would have things out and she'd say, you know, that piece, someone has been in twice now to look at it. I think if he comes a third time, he'll want to buy it. And that usually happened. It takes three times for my work to begin to enter anybody's consciousness. It's a little strange for a lot of people, I think, to know what it is really about.

LIZA KIRWIN [Curator of Manuscripts, Archives of American Art]: We're going to have to wrap it up. I hate to interrupt you.

DR. CARNEY: Are there certain points that you'd like us to touch on?

MS. KIRWIN: One thing I was thinking about, we have Bill Brown's papers and also Fran Merritt, and to me, in listening to you talk about collaboration with Penland, it seemed like that was part of Bill's philosophy and things that he brought down from Haystack, when he knew Fran Merritt [founder of Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, ME], was the idea of having the studio open 24 hours a day. Do you have any recollections of Bill that you could share?

MR. TURNER: Bill Brown. Yeah. He was very funny, very alert. I asked him what the secret of Penland was, because it goes so well. He said, round tables. And of course he's absolutely right. He had come through our studio with his sneakers, in which he could tap dance, you know. And he'd say: "Faster! Faster! Come on!" And of course, we were on the wheel at that moment, I guess. And so he had a wonderful lilt. And of course, he had studied and had been under Fran up at [inaudible]. I didn't know Haystack until after I'd entered Penland. I think I entered -joined-Haystack in-I don't know-mid- '70s, something like that. And of course, liked it a great deal. It's a great place.

And I liked, as I think I've written, I liked very much the importance of summer sessions, which were intensive and brief and absolutely focused, so that both teacher and student knew the kind of almost collaboration there of thinking. And I felt as against or as different from the college situation, where there's a separation and break in focus, you know, in a lot of cases. Collaboration-working on things together. It has been very, very important, more and more important as I began to, you know, really get into teaching and through the '70s and '80s, really, I guess.

DR. CARNEY: Bob, I wanted to ask you about exhibitions. You've been in lots of exhibitions at museums and galleries. And I wondered if you could-I know you were in the Syracuse shows several times-has that altered anything, seeing your work in a museum as opposed to being in your studio or in someone's home? Do you have any thoughts about that and your relationship with curators and the museum world? Or has that been handled through gallery associations?

MR. TURNER: I don't think too much about it and often don't go to see when there's one or two pieces in a large exhibition, because I like to think that four or five pieces tells you about the person, not about just that piece, but a sense of that breadth and intent of the person. So I tend to think that way, rather than being interested which is there of the great variety of possibilities, which is also a possibility, and is there too many of these persons with one piece only. And so I've tended to, I guess, be involved when-not always-but tended to like to have several pieces. Maybe I'm the only one in the gallery, maybe not-but several pieces, so that there's a sense-at least for me-of what I'm about and what this variety may show of different aspects of maybe the same thing.

DR. CARNEY: Well, that's always a problem in museums, that if they only have one work in a permanent collection-I think we've actually talked about this, and that's one of the ideas at Alfred, that at least if you could have representative life work of at least Alfred-trained ceramists, that it's really important to see that breadth of the work like you've described. Lots of institutions just have one. It's very common.

MR. TURNER: It's very difficult. It's difficult to fathom. If you see even two, you're beginning to get a sense of the person, a sense of what the person is after, because the difference between the two tells you something more about the way that mind is going, you know, that kind of thing. And I've been more and more, I guess, since the '80s anyhow, more and more just working with the exhibitions by my gallery of my work. That's Helen Drutt certainly. And I entered Revolution-that's a gallery-in '94, I think, 1994. And I've enjoyed that association a great deal.

DR. CARNEY: And I also saw a show of yours when I was in Arizona a year and a half a go. What was it? The Hand and the Spirit?

MR. TURNER: It was The Hand and the Spirit. That great Joanne Rapp. And now it's the Gallery Materia [Scottsdale, AZ, formerly called Joanna Rapp Gallery / The Hand and the Spirit], I think it's called. And I don't know-it was in transition when I had a show there.

DR. CARNEY: That was a great show.

MR. TURNER: Good. I'm glad.

DR. CARNEY: You were there. I remember. One more question as we're wrapping now. Are there people, things, places, any other recollections you'd like to hit upon that would be important in this Smithsonian recording?

MR. TURNER: There could be many possibilities. One thing I hadn't mentioned, and I looked up, the name of James Shrosbee.

DR. CARNEY: And who is James Shrosbee?

MR. TURNER: He's someone I hadn't known of. And I don't know exactly where he teaches, out in the Midwest. And he had a point of view which I think represents a very thoughtful, spiritual quality, which is important to him and which, I think, is represented as you look at his work. I wanted you to see this, for example, and you could read what he wrote. But I think it's when a person recognized connections between what he makes and something that's important to the head and the spirit. And that certainly was James. We had a wonderful panel, the moderator from Texas and two women, and Jim and myself. I enjoyed them so much.

DR. CARNEY: And what panel was this?

MR. TURNER: Oh, yes. It was *A Glimpse of the Invisible*, was the name of the panel.

DR. CARNEY: Where was that?

MR. TURNER: That was in Denver.

DR. CARNEY: Was that in conjunction with the NCECA conference?

MR. TURNER: It was, in a sense, the theme of the NCECA conference, I guess, two years ago. Wish I could remember the name of the person who was the curator. But, it was really quite exciting for me, because the people gathered and because we could go anywhere we wanted to with this rather ethereal question. What do you do, you know, with a glimpse of the invisible?

And it's interesting that I got a kick out of it, and we were going to start a journal among ourselves. And I think it got to me and I don't know what's happened to it. That's not too important. But it's nice that thing can occur occasionally. It's that kind of collaboration, rather than Super Mud-you know, I love that-but this kind of collaboration between heads talking and feeling out. And you see their work and see what they're doing, and then they talk about it and it becomes very poetic for me, and a lot of meaning.

And incidentally, the one quote from an African thing is: "Sculpture has meaning in itself." It's not a copy of words or other kinds of forms of language. Sculpture has its own meaning and you find it in it. And I kept a lot of examples where I think that's been shown to be true in various cultures, including that place in Africa where farmers found something; they dug up something, which was clay-like and so on. And because they saw it wasn't their culture, they didn't know what it was, but it had an effect upon them, and so it became critical to them as kind of a focus of meaning for them. And you know, that kind of thing. I think where things speak out of their own form, it is their form.

DR. CARNEY: I think that might be a good place to conclude. I want to thank you very much, Bob. It's been my pleasure to interview you today. And we look forward to the next chapter.

MR. TURNER: Well, it's a pleasure to try to think over whether these are real. Anyhow. Yeah, it's important. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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