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Oral history interview with Dominic Di Mare, 2002 June 4-10

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Dominic Di Mare on June 4 and 10, 2002. The interview took place in Tiburon, California, and was conducted by Signe Mayfield 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.

Dominic Di Mare has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

[Interview in progress.]

SIGNE MAYFIELD: -- at his home and studio in Tiburon, California, on June 4, 2002.

Dominic, would you just talk about where you were born, and when?

DOMINIC DI MARE: Only.

MS. MAYFIELD: Only. [Laughs.]

MR. DI MARE: Only. I was born in San Francisco, January 11, 1932, on Greenwich Street, okay?

MS. MAYFIELD: Okay. And at that time, what was the profession of your father?

MR. DI MARE: My father was a commercial fisherman. He did not own his own boat, but he worked for another fisherman, and he fished for shark.

MS. MAYFIELD: Shark?

MR. DI MARE: Shark liver. That's what they --

MS. MAYFIELD: Shark liver? What was it used for?

MR. DI MARE: For cod liver oil, do you think? Something like that, but it was shark.

MS. MAYFIELD: Shark, that sounds rather dangerous.

MR. DI MARE: Tell me about it. [Laughs.] It was dangerous. You had to be very careful.

MS. MAYFIELD: Because there's so many great white sharks in the San Francisco Bay.

MR. DI MARE: Well, I don't know if that's what they fished for, but it was a shark. And yes, you do have to be careful with shark. They have very big jaws.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

Talk a little bit about your mother, Dominic.

MR. DI MARE: My mother was born in San Francisco in 1912. Her mother was a young salesgirl working somewhere in San Francisco, who left her to be adopted in an agency; we don't know where. Do you want to know how she got to Pittsburg [California]?

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: She was adopted by a Sicilian couple who were childless, who had gone to the adoption agency to adopt a little boy, a five-year-old boy, and my grandmother saw my mother and wanted to adopt her, but her husband said no. So two days later she came back and adopted my mother without her husband's knowledge and brought her home. And that's how she ended up in this household.

MS. MAYFIELD: Was that a story your mother used to tell you?

MR. DI MARE: Oh, yeah, it's fact. And her brother, my uncle, was Irish, and we do not know if my mother was as well. We suspect that she might have been Portuguese, but we don't know for sure. Isn't that a funny story?

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes, it is. You told me before about your mother's work, her crocheting and her other very delicate kind of crafts. Can you elaborate on that? Do you think that her work influenced your sensibility?

MR. DI MARE: Oh, absolutely. She crocheted -- as far back as I can remember she made doilies, fancy doilies that were starched and put into waves on the center of a table. Every chair had something crocheted. She crocheted bedspreads, baby clothes -- a lot of baby clothes. And to say that it didn't influence me would be really pretty stupid, because it obviously did. And that was also mirrored by the fact that my father always was working on fishing lines, making lines for his hooks and lures and feathers and on and on.

I just grew up in a house that was like a little factory. [Laughs.] The only thing they didn't do was make the string. So yes, there was a great -- I have a very strong connection to the idea of the thread and string. Of course, I've expanded it to where it's almost mythic in some ways, because a string to me is a very important element in the work.

MS. MAYFIELD: Can you talk a little more about that?

MR. DI MARE: To me, it's like that thing that connects you to everything. In some ways maybe this is getting too advanced, but I always feel like there is this string that's attached to the back of my head that just goes forever that way, and it's connected to every possible experience that I've had, and my parents have had, and their parents have had, all the way back. So I sometimes say that, in my work, it's about things that are really primordial.

And to me, it's almost like that idea of fishing, where you cast your line into the water, and something bites it, and you pull it in. In some ways I can almost, like, reel it in and see what's there and let it go again. So yes, the string to me is really almost, I would say, the magical core of my work, and how I see the work to this day.

MS. MAYFIELD: And your work really does have this wonderful sense of continuity to the wonderful craft of fishing that we don't know about today.

MR. DI MARE: No, we don't because you buy everything now. You buy the lures; you buy the nets; you buy the lines already made. I don't even know if they're using the same techniques my father used to fish with.

MS. MAYFIELD: Can you talk a little bit more about some of that? Let's start with a *barangali* [basket used by Sicilian fishermen].

MR. DI MARE: The basket.

MS. MAYFIELD: A Sicilian fishing basket.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, well, I would know. I guess Sicilian would be appropriate. It's a basket about three feet across, made of reeds, with a round wooden base, and around the rim could be strips of cork or strips of matting in which hooks were inserted. A *barangali* holds a line that might be 200 yards long, and at every yard, or so, is an extension line that has a hook on it, okay? I think I said once it was 100 yards; I think it's longer than that.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, how many hooks would it hold?

MR. DI MARE: Well, figure every yard an extension, so that *barangali* would have 250 hooks. When you make the basket, you have to anchor the beginning of the line to the center, and then it's looped -- the line is looped, and every extension is then looped and then hooked onto the edge of the basket. So it's that whole process of grabbing it and looping it, grabbing the hook, hooking it. You do that for hours. And after it's all hooked, then the hooks are carefully removed and baited, and they're usually baited with fresh sardines or salted sardines that have been cut at a very precise angle -- one of my jobs.

So that you end up with this beautiful basket with this reed circle that is bait. And when it comes time to use it, the end of the line, which would be the top of the *barangali*, would be weighted with a weight and tied with a buoy, so that when you threw it over, the line would go to the bottom and the buoy would tell you exactly where it is. And as the boat moved forward, the baited line would flip over in sequence, if you did it right, and so the line would extend and connect up to the next basket.

Then you would add another *barangali* -- and he would do as many as nine. And once they were all laid out along the rocks, or down the side of the rocks -- we did this off Carmel Bay mostly -- then you would turn around and go back to the beginning and start pulling the first line. And that was really hard, because the boat had to be always positioned exactly above the line. And if you were not exactly above the line, you could easily engage the line in the propeller, and then you were in trouble.

My job was to shift the gears of the engine back and forth so that it would be at the right angle. He'd yell at me, you know "Forward, avanti," or whatever, so that it was always pulling correctly. It was very hard work, really.

MS. MAYFIELD: And very precise.

MR. DI MARE: And dangerous, yes. You had to fish along the rocks where the particular fish that he fished for -- which I'm trying to think of what they were called now -- rock cods -- rock cod. Of course, they obviously live amongst rocks, so you always had to be conscious of the fact that there were rocks, sometimes just below the surface. Sometimes they would break the surface and you'd have to really be on your toes.

MS. MAYFIELD: And this was in the bay?

MR. DI MARE: This was off Carmel.

MS. MAYFIELD: Off Carmel.

MR. DI MARE: We never fished for rock cod in Monterey Bay; we'd have to go all the way around Pacific Grove down to Carmel -- Pebble Beach. And we'd fish maybe even off Point Lobos sometimes if you could.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right, those are dangerous waters because the shelf is so deep there.

MR. DI MARE: Right. And you know, there are sea lions. I remember once he caught a sea lion.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, really?

MR. DI MARE: That wasn't so nice. I won't talk about that.

MS. MAYFIELD: Okay. [Laughs.]

MR. DI MARE: It wasn't very nice.

MS. MAYFIELD: [Laughs.] Okay. So all of these early memories in your childhood home of Monterey really centered around the work of your parents.

MR. DI MARE: Oh, the home and the boat. As youngsters -- I grew up with a sister -- we weren't allowed out of the house. I mean, we were, in many ways, captives. [Laughs.] My sister and I sometimes talk about this. We often helped my father with the lures and the lines, the dyeing of the fishing lines, and arranging the feathers, but even though we went to school, we were never really allowed to go to events in high school. I think my sister had it even worse than I did.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, why this kind of strict --

MR. DI MARE: Well, it's the Italian paranoia -- the Sicilian paranoia. We haven't talked about it yet, but my father came over illegally, and after -- I guess while my mother was carrying me, she was pregnant with me, somebody reported him to whomever you report -- customs -- and he was sent back to Italy. And so I think on the whole, that experience, and his return two years later, really imprinted all of us that we were all basically -- I'll use the word "captive." I don't know if I have ever used that word before.

MS. MAYFIELD: No, you haven't.

MR. DI MARE: We were like captives. We were like on this island trying to survive, and the island was our home, and it alternated with the boat. So I was imprinted, right from the beginning, to see the world as a precarious place, a dangerous place.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, how did your father get back from Sicily once he was --

MR. DI MARE: He had to wait two years.

MS. MAYFIELD: He had to wait two years.

MR. DI MARE: He had to apply -- reapply legally. And I guess by the time he got back, I must have been a year and a half, maybe two years old.

MS. MAYFIELD: And where did your mother live in that time?

MR. DI MARE: When I was born, we lived in San Francisco, and so we moved back, I guess -- this is a guess now -- back to live with her family in Pittsburg, California. And when he came back, I think he worked in Pittsburg at the steel mills.

MS. MAYFIELD: In California?

MR. DI MARE: In Pittsburg, California, there were steel mills. And I think, for whatever reason, there was some sort of conflict with my mother's father; they didn't get along. And we moved to San Francisco then. By then my sister had been born, too. So we left then, moved to San Francisco, where he fished for another fisherman, on a large boat. This might have been to fish for sharks.

MS. MAYFIELD: I see.

MR. DI MARE: Yes, and from there, we moved on to Monterey, where he bought his own boat, the *Anna May*.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, I think I remember your saying that when you were a young boy that -- or I think it was your sister told me that she used to see you drawing all the time.

MR. DI MARE: Yes, what else were you to do? You know, I sort of -- I don't want it to sound like I regret it, but you know, we had to stay at home. And --

MS. MAYFIELD: And what did your sister do?

MR. DI MARE: You know, I don't know. She probably learned to crochet, or she probably cooked; she probably helped my mother out. We had no books; there were never books in the house. My father couldn't read English. Once in a while I remember a magazine being in the house, but they were like -- this is terrible -- magazines about murders. I'm serious. They'd show actual crime scenes or bodies or whatever.

We had a radio -- no television, no art on the wall other than religious work. So we had the *Last Supper*; we had a picture of Christ, I think a picture of the Virgin Mary, and a picture of my grandmother. That was it.

MS. MAYFIELD: That was it.

MR. DI MARE: No books. So there was nothing to do other than I learned to just sit and draw. So I drew boats.

MS. MAYFIELD: Boats.

MR. DI MARE: Speedboats, fancy boats. I refer to them as sometimes escape boats. [Laughs.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Escape boats.

MR. DI MARE: I used to love to do that.

MS. MAYFIELD: Your education in public schools really introduced you to the realm of books.

MR. DI MARE: Well, it was hard -- it was very hard on my teachers. I was not a good student, not even in college. I had to almost, like, teach myself how to read. I mean, I could read, but I -- whatever skills are required in reading a book and pulling information -- to this day, pulling information out of them or seeing it as a cohesive thing, it's very hard for me. So when I was in the army, I read a great deal, but it didn't do too much good, I would say.

So school was a another world to me really; it was another world where I really began to experience what it's like to be free to think and do differently than what was required of me at home, which was to be a good kid; don't make waves.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, were there teachers in your elementary, junior high school, and high school years who were influential in art?

MR. DI MARE: Well, certainly -- you know, one very defining moment, I mean, was an elementary school teacher, and we must have been working with ceramics. And I had made a mother and child. I can almost see it, and I must have painted it too, because I remember color. And I remember sitting at my desk, either working at this little figurine with the two people in it, or admiring it. But she came by; the teacher came by with another teacher, and either it was directed to me or to the other teacher, she commented on how she thought I had talent.

And I can assure you; no one ever said that to me, never, not even working with my father. I was never quite able to keep up with my father in terms of functioning as a fisherman, because he expected me to function as an adult, and I wasn't an adult. His voice is always at the back of my head when I work. We can talk about that later on.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, we can talk about that now.

MR. DI MARE: Really?

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes. I remember reading something that Philip Guston once said -- and I don't remember exactly what it is, but it was something like, when you're in the studio and you're lucky, first the critic leaves --

MR. DI MARE: Yes, yes. [Laughs.]

MS. MAYFIELD: -- then the teacher leaves –

MR. DI MARE: Ah --

MS. MAYFIELD: -- and then if you're lucky, you leave; that disassociation of self. But I've always thought that when you're in the studio, first the critic leaves, then the teacher leaves, but the parent really, sometimes --

MR. DI MARE: Stands out.

MS. MAYFIELD: -- sticks around.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, I like that. I've never heard -- you've never said that quote to me before. I like it. I don't think the artist ever leaves. I think that would be a mistake.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, I think it's this sense of disassociation of self, when you are so immersed and in touch with your intuition. It's a different kind of self that leaves.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, okay, since you describe it that way, yeah. But it is true – I think -- I've talked to other artists about this -- they all have little tapes, in their heads, and they're usually their parents.

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: Their parents. And I discovered it when -- oh, quite a few years ago. I used to take great pleasure just sitting at this desk and maybe braid for two days. And I could find myself sometimes in the middle of braiding getting so anxious that I'd have to stop. I mean, I got that anxious. And that was the day that I heard my father's voice saying, "Presto," which is Italian for "faster" -- and he used to say that to me.

He would ask me in Italian, "Can't you work faster?" And this is a guy working with all these little hooks on it, and I'm like -- cutting bait with my fingers there. And when I heard -- when it dawned on me, then I think -- how am I going to say this -- I think we all have these tapes, and I think when we first begin to hear them, when you start to see yourself as doomed to always hearing these tapes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: And I don't think that's true. You have to really listen carefully.

And when I heard that particular one, I then knew to slow down and say to myself, "I'm doing the best I can," which is what I wish I had said to him when I was 13, 12 years old: I'm doing the best I can. Although it doesn't stop the anxiety level from building up –

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: At least now I don't have to stop and think about, what's going on here? There are a lot of tapes. I can tell you endless stories about tapes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Endless stories.

MR. DI MARE: Mine and friends and – but to me it's a big key, and maybe we should talk about it when we talk about the studio.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right. Well, let's just jump ahead and talk about the studio right now --

MR. DI MARE: Really?

MS. MAYFIELD: -- because I think the train of thought is good.

MR. DI MARE: Okay, now. I believe you.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, your studio, it's changed through time --

MR. DI MARE: Oh, it's changed --

MS. MAYFIELD: -- through the time that you were a teacher. I saw a slide from that period, and it was stacked

with books, and now --

MR. DI MARE: Shells, books, rocks --

MS. MAYFIELD: Right. It's so pure. Talk about this space.

MR. DI MARE: Well, I don't see it so pure anymore.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, you don't?

MR. DI MARE: No, I know what you mean, though. I think we added this room on I think in the '60s – sometime in the '60s when the Johnson wax show -- do you remember when that was? "Objects: USA."

MS. MAYFIELD: "Objects: USA" -- was it '69 or '68 or '66?

MR. DI MARE: Maybe that wasn't then -- or did we do it then? I think we might have done it then. They bought two pieces for that show. It wasn't a lot of money, but it was enough money at that time to add on this studio, and that's what we did. Before, I worked in that room. It's a little alcove, actually. And it's true that when I first started to work, I filled it up. I mean, I thought it was quite beautiful myself. There wasn't one inch of space that didn't have something on it: shelves, there were tables all along the walls, things under the table, things hanging from the ceiling.

MS. MAYFIELD: Resources?

MR. DI MARE: More stuff, just sort of -- I mean, not stuff that I even used; it was just stuff. I think it was -- in some ways I sort of saw it as like overeating, that feeling you get, you know, that solid feeling. I think, visually, I was protecting myself. I think people sometimes have thousands of things around them because, in some ways, it's protective; it's about safety. And I think I lived that way until one day one of the shelves was so loaded with stuff it fell and it almost hit me. And so I began to clean; to get rid of stuff.

And then I began to have this fantasy that eventually everything in this studio would just disappear. I saw little by little getting rid of things, cleaning things. I never allowed other people's work in here. I never allowed my work outside of here. I never hung it in the house. And I began to have that feeling that I was spending my life outside my studio looking in. That's how I began to see it; that the work was so intense and so real and so important that I wasn't allowing myself to look beyond it. So it was almost again like I was a prisoner or a captive.

MS. MAYFIELD: You've made associations with your studio and your father's boat.

MR. DI MARE: Yes, sure, and I did see it that way for many years.

MS. MAYFIELD: Can you just talk about that a little bit?

MR. DI MARE: Well, I went so far as even to arrange it like it was a boat. You know, I had at one end of the desk my printing press, which I used when I was making hand-made paper, and to me it was like a wheel. You know, I would just stand there and turn it. And I used to see that this hasn't changed much. Outside my studio is a fence that is covered in ivy, and I used to love it when the wind blew because to me it looked like waves.

I guess there was a lot of fantasy -- a lot of fantasy was experienced in this room, and hopefully applied to the work. I saw my desktop as water. It was white. The studio's always pretty pristine. Right now, in my mind, it's quite messy.

MS. MAYFIELD: And it looks perfect to me.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, and you know, it is filled with other people's art now. So I think in this room there's only two things that are my doing -- three things -- four things. The rest is all work of people I don't even know, which to me is very strange; very strange.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, it's very interesting what we choose to collect, what we choose to preserve.

MR. DI MARE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: You know, in a way, it still is a choice to preserve something of your childhood, your father, in that association.

MR. DI MARE: Oh, yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: I mean, memory is the great selective unit.

MR. DI MARE: Oh, sure. I have his lures -- some of his lures.

MS. MAYFIELD: Can you talk about those?

MR. DI MARE: Well, they're hard to talk about, actually. They're lures that he made when he fished for salmon. They were made of an antler, and some of them were cast lead. And according to my sister -- and I don't remember this -- we used to help him polish the antler. He would use the tips, and they would be sliced and then filed round, and then holes bored in for eyes, and he would use sequins, or whatever, and then a hole down the center to hold the hook. And he would use ribbons, little narrow ribbons, and feathers, and I have some of those still.

MS. MAYFIELD: And feathers had what meaning for your mother?

MR. DI MARE: Oh, yeah, the feather thing. My mother was phobic about anything with feathers, so we never -- I never saw a chicken or a turkey in our house until my sister was old enough to cook a turkey.

MS. MAYFIELD: Really?

MR. DI MARE: Yes. So whenever my mother saw feathers, she would just sort of squeal and run out the room. And of course there was my father using feathers. And so, the feather -- I didn't realize this until much later -- almost every piece I've ever done has feathers in it, and it's that connection.

MS. MAYFIELD: And you've selected feathers, too, that are, in a way, emblematic of what your father did. Am I right about that?

MR. DI MARE: Well, he used a lot of chicken feathers. And the last woven piece I did was a piece purchased for an objects show ["Objects: USA"]. And the bottom of it was all of his feathers; I had saved all of his feathers. They were beautiful bundles. They were brown feathers. And how did I get them? I guess when they sold the house, I took some feathers and some rope and his chair, his special chair that he used to make knots.

So the feathers I used for that piece were all his -- I love the idea of restrictions, so that even when I wove, I only wove tabby. You know, there are all kinds of weaves herringbone, etc. I refused to go beyond the tabby. All the knots I've ever used were the same knot. I've never gotten fancy with knots. And so I found, like the wood -- the only wood I would use for the longest time was from my own tree, and it wasn't until like about maybe eight years ago that it dawned on me that I could use wood from someplace else.

So the feathers -- I only used feathers from the golden pheasant the last few years. Before that I would only use emu feathers, which I got myself at the San Francisco zoo. So you could see that, for whatever reason, I do set very strict parameters to materials and to process.

MS. MAYFIELD: Why is it that --

MR. DI MARE: Well, it has to do with obsessiveness, I suppose.

MS. MAYFIELD: I would put out the idea for you to think about that there is a real sense of meaning in your materials.

MR. DI MARE: Oh, yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: I mean, and that if it's a knot, and it's only one knot, it has to go back to something.

MR. DI MARE: Well, it was a knot my father used.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, there you go.

MR. DI MARE: Oh, I think I knew that. [Laughs.]

MS. MAYFIELD: This was a test, right?

MR. DI MARE: But I also strongly believe that the biggest decision any artist makes is in the materials we decide to work with, whether it's paint, or wood, or steel, thread, whatever, because in that is the key; in that is the real connection. And you know, I think when you begin to look at your work from that perspective, it makes more sense to you.

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: Sometimes it's hard to come by. I remember once when I walked along the beach, I found a shoe, a boot, a little toy boot from some little soldier or something; it was a blue boot. And I remember bringing it home, and it sat on my desk for the longest time. And before that, I had not used any color. The sculptural work I did had no color at all. And I began to look at the boot, and all of the sudden the boot was not a boot; it was Italy. Isn't that funny?

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: And I began to stick things into it. And before I knew it, I was using blue in my work.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, blue, too, is the color that your father used to dye --

MR. DI MARE: To dye his rope.

MS. MAYFIELD: His ropes.

MR. DI MARE: One of his boats, the *Two Brothers*, was blue and white, and the blue, to me, is water; it's the subconscious. So the meaning for the color grew.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: And then, of course, the red came along, and then the yellow, and then gold. I thought about gold for a long time, and it wasn't until I had my first gold crown that it dawned on me.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, really?

MR. DI MARE: Somehow, whatever the influence may be, it may come in from the outside in the most unexpected way.

I'm serious about the boot, and also the feather and the gold. So sometimes, things enter your work with sense and honor, and sometimes it takes two years until it registers.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right. You have to be open in order to receive those things.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, well, you have to try to stay open, yeah, for sure.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, let me ask you some other questions about your background. Early on in your college career -- can you talk a little bit about going to CCAC [California College of Arts and Crafts]? That would be --

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, okay. Being the kind of person who is not particularly -- at least in those days -- enamored of the word or the book, my forte was obviously making art. And high school was just that; I majored in art. I had a wonderful teacher; Sophie Harpe was her name --

MS. MAYFIELD: Sophie Harpe.

MR. DI MARE: H-A-R-P-E -- who had an art club, which as a sophomore I was allowed to join; you had to be a sophomore, senior. Once a year, she took us to the city for the Junior Scholastic Art Awards, held at the Emporium. I was going to drag out the medals to show you, someday. Each year I won something. She's the one who forced me, really, to make a portfolio to send to Arts and Crafts in 1950 to apply for a summer scholarship, and I won the summer scholarship. And at the end of the summer session I was encouraged to stay an additional semester. And that was wonderful because I took everything imaginable, from life drawing to color and design and watercolors, et cetera. I also had to work after school, which made it very hard, sometimes until two or three in the morning. I worked at the Claremont Country Club [Oakland, California].

And at the end of that I had to go back to Monterey, where I enrolled at the Monterey Peninsula College. And there, the art teacher, we didn't get along. I must have been a pretty big hotshot, I guess, or something. I was very disappointed in that department, so I switched to a music major and joined the chorus and started taking voice lessons. And when I graduated from there, I went to San Francisco State, only because I was forced to, because I did not want to go to school.

MS. MAYFIELD: But who forced you?

MR. DI MARE: A couple of the teachers at the junior college insisted that I take the entrance exam. And one of them actually drove me up there the morning of the test so I could take the test. I wasn't going to do it. So I got in, and went back to art as my major and music as my minor. And I had some wonderful teachers. In particular, Dr. [Harry] Greene was in charge of the student teachers at San Francisco State. He was very nice to me. He knew, too, that I had no money. I was living in a room, which my sister helped me pay for.

MS. MAYFIELD: Really?

MR. DI MARE: Yes. In fact, I'm trying to pay her back now. She would send me money, rent money. It was a very tough time.

MS. MAYFIELD: She was an older or younger sister?

MR. DI MARE: Younger. She worked for the telephone company. She had a very good job. And Dr. Greene would let me come to the house, and he and his wife would leave the dishes to be done on Saturday morning. I would do dishes; I would vacuum. He once asked me to clean his -- this is off the cuff -- I'm wasting your time now -- he asked me to clean his waffle iron, so I cleaned it with steel wool; I ruined it. But he was very nice to me.

So every Saturday -- sometimes I had just enough money to get to their place out in Westlake to clean it, and I would leave with a couple of dollars. They were very hard times.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right. And it was there that you first took a course in weaving, am I right?

MR. DI MARE: Right. Then I decided to work towards a teacher's credential. There are all these requirements. Crafts was one of the requirements, and it was either a choice of a night class in weaving or a day class in puppetry. So I took a weaving class with Marjorie Livingston.

MS. MAYFIELD: Marjorie Livingston.

MR. DI MARE: Livingston, do you know that name?

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes, she was very important in the field of contemporary fiber.

MR. DI MARE: Right. She's gone now, but she was teaching. Her husband was Mr. Magnani. He taught ceramics there. I took his course too. So I took this weaving class. It was pretty rudimentary -- rudimentary, is that correct?

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: And I don't think she said more than ten words to me the whole time. But you know I did all the part of the tabby -- the rose bath, little samples, hundreds of little samples -- and at the end of the semester you had to turn it in in a book form. And I remember I spent hours putting that book together, and all through it I misspelled the word "heddle." And she went through the whole thing, and each time there was a heddle, she corrected it. And she gave me a good grade.

I got to know her better years later, but she wasn't particularly interested in this kid. But I found something again -- what? It's string, isn't it?

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: There is something about it that just totally, totally enthralled me. And it wasn't so much the act of weaving -- it was just so boring -- it was the act of setting it up, because --

MS. MAYFIELD: Setting up the loom.

MR. DI MARE: Have you ever set up a loom?

MS. MAYFIELD: No.

MR. DI MARE: So you have all these strings all bound -- like my father used to have these bound things -- cut at one end, and you had to take one thread at a time, put it through the reed, put it through the right heddle, tie it in the back. And there can't be any threads crossed; they had to be perfect. I loved that. The real magic of the loom for me was setting it up.

MS. MAYFIELD: And your later work has this wonderful --

MR. DI MARE: Later work?

MS. MAYFIELD: I'm thinking about the rune bundles.

MR. DI MARE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Those top elements are very much like --

MR. DI MARE: A loom. Everything's suspended, yeah. After I did my student teaching at Francisco Junior High School, they wanted me to continue teaching there, but they had no opening. There were two women in that department, Millie Tresko and another woman whose name I can't remember. So I was assigned to Mission High School for a year, probably the hardest year of my life.

MS. MAYFIELD: Why do you say that?

MR. DI MARE: Well, the art department, especially at that level, was used as a dumping ground. So every kid that had a problem, that's where they put them -- that's where they put them, and I can assure you, I was ready at the end of that year to quit teaching. I mean, I would leave school at the end of the day, go to my little apartment, and go to bed. I was exhausted. And every morning it took all the courage I had to get up and go.

And I remember at one point that -- my last semester there I had this class, the last -- is this relevant? – this last class that had five boys in it that were just terrors. They sat at the back of the room and they would do things like play cards --

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, no.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, but they would do it, like, under the table. And then I would see them and, of course, say, "What are you guys doing?" And they would do their whole number on me. And at one point this little girl, who kept raising her hand and putting it down, finally, I said, "Well, what do you want?" -- you know, like that. And she says, "You know, you never call on us; you never talk to us." And it dawned on me while I was going home that it was such an abusive situation, not only for myself but for the other kids, and I had to really buckle down in dealing with these boys. It was really tough.

But at the end of the semester, an opening occurred at Francisco; the other woman decided to retire. So I moved into a junior high school -- and I think and still think it was the best one in the city. It had a brand new art department in a brand new building; it was beautiful. We had our own private patio. It was so beautiful. The student body was mostly Chinese. They were so polite. It was like another world. It was beautiful. Those were very happy days.

MS. MAYFIELD: And there were great resources there that you discovered, is that right? Is that where you started reading *American Craft* -- not *American Craft* magazine, but its predecessors?

MR. DI MARE: The head of the art department sent us all kinds of stuff. So we started getting all these wonderful magazines, and I discovered *Craft Horizons*.

MS. MAYFIELD: *Craft Horizons*.

MR. DI MARE: And also, when I got there, one of the things I was required to teach was weaving. So it was a good thing I had that weaving course. And so, the summer before I got that job -- no, no, after I got there -- I met Margaret that summer; we got married, I bought a loom.

MS. MAYFIELD: You bought a loom.

MR. DI MARE: I bought a handmade loom from some very nice little old senior citizen, and started to weave at home, placemats and curtains for our new apartment. And from then on, it just grew; it just went on and on.

MS. MAYFIELD: But tell me a little bit about what you thought the role of those magazines were in terms of opening up possibilities.

MR. DI MARE: Well, my only experience with crafts -- and we should talk about what that means -- I guess I shouldn't say it that way, but I'll just say art -- was my experience at college working with clay and working with fiber. So you know, for me, it was always -- I thought I'd be a painter. That was in my head: I was a painter, until my painting instructor told me that I wasn't a painter, which I didn't care for too much -- Mr. -- oh, what was his name? I can't remember.

So when I started reading magazines like *Craft Horizons*, I thought, my God, look what these people are doing. And the first person, actually, was Kay Sekimachi. You've heard this many times -- I've told her this many times too. Every time I saw her work, I just thought it was so wonderful that I copied it. So, basically, my real beginning to seeing beyond the tabby and beyond what I learned at San Francisco State was the things she was doing. They were magical; they were just sort of something a mathematician would love.

MS. MAYFIELD: Because they had a precision and an elegance?

MR. DI MARE: There was a precision about them and a repetition, things that I always loved. And so I tried to duplicate them, and I did. I taught myself -- and then, from then, I stepped forward and began to realize that

there was more here for me than just copying somebody.

MS. MAYFIELD: But the pieces that you emulated, were they her monofilament techniques?

MR. DI MARE: No, I didn't do those. They were the things like the loops. There was a continuous thread that looped. Do you know those?

MS. MAYFIELD: Right, the *Brooks Bouquet*.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, and also --

MS. MAYFIELD: Wall hangings.

MR. DI MARE: -- there was another weaver, Hal Painter. Did you know him?

MS. MAYFIELD: I didn't know him, but I --

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, nice man. He had a studio on Hyde Street, which Marjorie Annenberg [Annenberg Gallery, San Francisco] eventually took over.

MS. MAYFIELD: The gallery -- or Marjorie Annenberg?

MR. DI MARE: Annenberg Gallery. And he used to weave with dried plants. And I tried that for a while. It was really a very interesting time. To me, it was like I was teaching myself through mimicry, which I think we all do at some level, don't we?

MS. MAYFIELD: I think so.

MR. DI MARE: From the beginning, but somehow in my head I knew that up there -- or back there -- was a whole other viewpoint to the process of sitting at the loom, which up to that point had been a passive one, not thinking, just copying.

MS. MAYFIELD: Working in a tradition, and not innovating.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, but realizing that there is more there. So I saw the American -- the *Craft Horizons* as my school; it was my school, in some ways.

MS. MAYFIELD: And how did you feel about teaching kids at that point, too?

MR. DI MARE: It was wonderful. [Laughs.] Yeah, again, as I say, the student body was mostly Chinese. I was able to do projects with them that lasted for weeks.

MS. MAYFIELD: Really?

MR. DI MARE: We did, once, a mural for the school cafeteria. There were six murals, oh, maybe seven feet long by three feet high, all birds, all stitched with buttons.

MS. MAYFIELD: Gracious.

MR. DI MARE: And I remember asking the classes to bring in buttons. They came in with thousands of buttons, thousands. Some of their families worked in the sewing industry. So we did these beautiful murals or birds, all one color, using buttons all the same colors, feathers, cloth, stitching. And these kids would come in every day, and they would work for the full 45 minutes.

We used to do etchings.

MS. MAYFIELD: So when you put forth these projects, did you do them as well?

MR. DI MARE: No, not in the beginning, no. I might sometimes sit with the kids just to talk to them at work. These were really such beautiful times, because they were into anything. We did things with nails. We did a frieze of nails -- nail heads, different levels.

One of my favorite projects -- can I get into this now?

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: -- was the idea that everyone would be asked a series of questions -- these little kids, they're so funny; we're talking about 7th, 8th grade -- and they were to keep secret all of the answers. The questions

would begin quite simply; you know, what's your favorite color, what are you afraid of, what do you think you want to be as an adult, and a whole list of things, which I then coded, folded up, and everyone in the class took one, not knowing who it belonged to, okay? And with that information, they were to take a cigar box and fill it and decorate it for that person, using all the information. It was fascinating.

MS. MAYFIELD: Very interesting.

MR. DI MARE: And I cannot tell you how intriguing it was. As an example, one box was glued shut so the person couldn't open it, because the person on the outside was very quiet, and inside that person was noisy. So inside the box, if you shook it, it made this horrendous noise.

MS. MAYFIELD: Fascinating.

MR. DI MARE: Horrendous noise. And each box had to have a gift for that person. So they never knew who they were making it for, but they began to then look at this person in a new way. It was always amazing that when they finished, they saw the person in a different way. So the outside of the box was all collage or things were glued on; some of them were quite beautiful.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's fascinating.

MR. DI MARE: That was an interesting project. I think it should be used more, somewhere.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, as a person who's basically self-taught, do you think that that your work was helped by creating these projects for students?

MR. DI MARE: No, no, and I wasn't the typical art teacher in many ways. I thought getting the kids to talk was probably just as important as getting them to make.

MS. MAYFIELD: Interesting.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, and that's how I feel about what I do, and about other artists. I think it's always fascinating to me when you talk about what you do, or to be open to talk about what you're doing, because that's where all the information is. The making of things is one thing, but to be able to talk about it, in an abstract way, is that object talking back to you. So whatever information there is in the work, you have it in you. It's a matter of putting it into words. So I think words are very important, very important.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, I think it's amazing, though, that you were able to go from a position of a high school teacher to an artist who exhibited in museums.

MR. DI MARE: There I was, teaching in junior high school, not being represented by anyone, other than maybe Helen Pope.

MS. MAYFIELD: Let's talk about Helen Pope.

MR. DI MARE: Helen Pope -- Helen Pope was one of the owners of the Yarn Depot, a place on Sutter Street [San Francisco, California] that sold yarns. It was the only place, actually. It was owned by several other women.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, what year are we talking about?

MR. DI MARE: We're talking '60s -- early '60s.

MS. MAYFIELD: Early 1960s.

MR. DI MARE: And when I bought my loom, I guess I started to go there to buy yarn. And when I taught weaving, I would buy yarns there, and I got to know Helen, and we became friends. And I became involved in the Yarn Depot. She decided that they would have exhibits there. I had my first exhibit there.

MS. MAYFIELD: Really? And what was in the exhibit?

MR. DI MARE: Oh, my God, you know, how could I -- there were woven things, there were three-dimensional things, actually. You know the box thing that I did with the opening; the first one was in that show. And I remember Trude Guermonprez bought a piece.

MS. MAYFIELD: That must have been a wonderful affirmation.

MR. DI MARE: Well, I didn't know who she was.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, you didn't know.

MR. DI MARE: No. I wish I did know then. I got to know her later.

So Helen Pope, would come to see us. We would invite her over. And she saw me working, and apparently liked what I was doing. I would receive in the mail applications for craft competitions.

MS. MAYFIELD: She sent them to you?

MR. DI MARE: She would write them, and they would send me these forms. Then I'd say, well, Helen, what the heck are these? And she would say, you've got to do this. So I began submitting to these shows, like in Minneapolis, it was fiber ["Fiber/Metal/Clay"]? They had a yearly show. Seattle had one. And the Seattle one, which I think was a regional one; one of the judges was Larsen, Jack [Lenor] Larsen.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, really?

MR. DI MARE: And I got a first prize. They bought the piece -- or did they buy the piece? I think I got cash.

And one day Helen said, "I'm going to New York; I'm going to go see Paul Smith." So she took some small things of mine, went to New York -- I guess she went to visit her brother, who lived in Brooklyn.

MS. MAYFIELD: And Paul Smith was director of the --

MR. DI MARE: The director of the American Craft Museum. And she went to his office and said, "Look, this is the work of Dominic Di Mare," and five months later, I had a show. It was like my first major show.

MS. MAYFIELD: Your first show was at the American Craft Museum.

MR. DI MARE: And it was really kind of nice, because the top floor of the museum used to be the cafeteria, and they decided, from my show on, that it would be a members' gallery. So I had the first show there in 1965. That's when I met June Schwarcz; she had the gallery below me. And I remember leaving Francisco -- or getting a phone call -- here I am teaching in this little room with these little kids -- a phone call from the museum asking if I had a tuxedo.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, a tuxedo.

MR. DI MARE: I said I didn't. They wanted to rent me one. I said, no, I had a dark suit. And we flew back. I remember at the faculty meeting somebody saying, and Dominic's off to New York. It didn't quite register with me.

MS. MAYFIELD: And when you saw your work installed in the museum --

MR. DI MARE: Oh, yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: -- what did that do for you?

MR. DI MARE: Well, it just took me -- it was very abstract. Because I basically am not -- and it isn't my nature to push my work; it's not my nature. I was just working away, having fun at the Yarn Depot, the one little show that I had there. To have this happen was -- I didn't appreciate it at the time. It was wonderful, it was exciting, but it had no relevance in terms of career, or any of those things. It was just like this -- an event that took place in the middle of my life that had no connection to past or future.

And it was wonderful. I remember we stayed in Brooklyn at Helen's brother's house. We caught the subway in every day. They had three special openings. Can you imagine, I got my own three openings? One of them was for museum supporters. It was at a restaurant; they served beef Wellington. Who was there? Some very famous person was there, a writer, who stood up and gave a speech. I sat next to a -- this is all frivolous stuff I'm telling you now, but the woman on my left said she just flew in from Texas -- she had a long gown on -- and I said, "Oh, how nice. And what do you do in Texas?" She said, "Oh, I have a farm there." She says, "We flew over it the other day," she said, "It took us all day."

So it was filled with all these wonderful, very interesting people, of which -- [laughs] -- I had no real connection to. They were all very wealthy people. It was formal; everyone was dressed.

MS. MAYFIELD: And did this bring you into dialogue with other contemporary craftsmen?

MR. DI MARE: No, no, none whatsoever. What did I care; what did I know? I remember -- who -- what's her name, the weaver?

MS. MAYFIELD: Lenore Tawney?

MR. DI MARE: No, no -- we spoke for a few minutes on the phone. We became friends, though, eventually, but at that time, no.

So the exhibition was fun; it was very exciting. We flew back for that.

MS. MAYFIELD: When you returned to the San Francisco Bay area.

MR. DI MARE: Back to reality, yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: -- back to reality and teaching. Did you then join a gallery?

MR. DI MARE: Oh, no.

MS. MAYFIELD: What was the year that you joined -- Ruth Braunstein at Braunstein/Quay Gallery, San Francisco?

MR. DI MARE: Oh, my God. Now we're going to have to look at my papers. We're going to have to stop if you want to --

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, we can take a break.

[Audio break.]

MS. MAYFIELD: So your show in 1965 at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts -- I apologize for calling it American Craft Museum. That was the correct name at that time.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, November to January.

MS. MAYFIELD: That was followed in the next year with an exhibition at Museum West --

MR. DI MARE: The West Coast extension of Museum of Contemporary Crafts.

MS. MAYFIELD: Was that the same work, or was that new work?

MR. DI MARE: No, it was new work. Also, I think I should say that I also shared this space with Wendell Castle.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, Wendell Castle.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: In the New York exhibition?

MR. DI MARE: No, no, in the Museum West. So it was really a two-person show, you might say, instead of the one-person at the time.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, at that time, because you were beginning to really show in prominent spaces --

MR. DI MARE: Really, you think so, because --

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, I think in terms of American craft, they were -- you know, really, the museums helped form the collectors group, or collectors seemed to be associated with them?

MR. DI MARE: No, the only thing I remember was that after I had the Museum West show, a representative of -- what's the big department store in Texas?

MS. MAYFIELD: Neiman Marcus?

MR. DI MARE: Neiman Marcus. They called me up.

MS. MAYFIELD: Really?

MR. DI MARE: They wanted me to weave for them. [Laughs.] And I remember I was called at school, saying that they were at Museum West and they wanted to meet with me. I did go to see them, and I said, listen, I don't do that.

MS. MAYFIELD: Have you ever done commissions?

MR. DI MARE: Never.

MS. MAYFIELD: Never?

MR. DI MARE: Not -- never; no, never. Somebody once gave me, when I was weaving, some yarn from her own sheep, that she had spun, and I looked at it for like six months and finally told her, take it back. I couldn't do it. I totally object to that in terms of what I do. So I wasn't necessarily approached by galleries, because nobody showed crafts. Where would I have showed in San Francisco?

MS. MAYFIELD: [Laughs.] I didn't live here at that time.

MR. DI MARE: You know, there was -- Ruth [Braunstein], I think, was around, but I was -- you know, I wasn't big stuff.

MS. MAYFIELD: But there was the Annenberg Gallery.

MR. DI MARE: Marjorie Annenberg, yes, she had a small gallery on Hyde Street, and by that I mean really small, that featured mostly her own work -- she was a jeweler.

MS. MAYFIELD: I see.

MR. DI MARE: And other jewelers. And she had this space where she gave shows.

[End of Tape 1.]

[Joined in progress.]

MR. DI MARE: I consider myself self-taught.

MS. MAYFIELD: And you've never really apprenticed with anyone?

MR. DI MARE: Actually, no. But when I quit teaching –

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: Years ago, I missed the teaching so much that I took on a few private studio students.

MS. MAYFIELD: You took private studio students --

MR. DI MARE: Four of them, over a period of two years. And basically they were talented people. I won't mention names, because you would know some of them. But my whole approach was to get them to verbalize. It's that whole thing about talking. So they brought me work, and I would simply ask them question after question about their work and why. And they took it as long as they could and then left -- because it was hard, it was hard. It's hard to talk about your work if you don't believe there's any real connection between you and your work.

MS. MAYFIELD: I see.

MR. DI MARE: Do you really understand that?

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes, I understand that.

MR. DI MARE: If you don't see a connection, then to talk about one's work is very unnerving.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, I think it's interesting that you were really coming to understand all this at a time when, really, in the 1950s, mainstream artists -- those working in Abstract Expressionism, which really had a stronghold -- they weren't necessarily expected to talk about their work.

MR. DI MARE: No, and they took pride in saying, I don't have to speak about the work; the work speaks for itself.

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: Well, that may be the case, but that's a pretty shallow viewpoint of making art. It's only one side of it.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: And it's a side that is only allowed to the audience. But the maker has to be able to speak, at least to himself or herself, about the work if it's to grow and become more relevant.

MS. MAYFIELD: I think that's true.

MR. DI MARE: I mean, you can't follow your work around and explain everything.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right. But you think of -- even at that time you think of some abstract artists like Robert Motherwell, who were so poetically perceptive about other people's works that, you know, I think there's just been kind of a misconception about the validity of that thing that carried through into institutions for a while.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, but you have to remember, too, Signe, that I basically decided almost right from the beginning, after I had discovered and taken all I could from *American Craft* magazine, that I really had to isolate myself. And from then on -- I still kept getting the magazine; I subscribed to it -- I got no other magazines, and I basically taught, came home, and worked. I had no artist friends to speak of. I didn't go to galleries. I didn't even know about galleries, to be honest with you. It never dawned on me to go to a gallery, because they were just showing paintings, and I was working with string and whatever, and I didn't know other people who were doing it until Fiber Works developed.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, can you talk about that?

MR. DI MARE: Well, I didn't have a real connection, other than I had a great admiration for them.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, Fiber Works was in --

MR. DI MARE: Was in Berkeley. It was a school.

MS. MAYFIELD: A school.

MR. DI MARE: It had a gallery attached to it, and it was run by -- it was started by several people, but in particular --

MS. MAYFIELD: Gyöngy Laky.

MR. DI MARE: Gyöngy Laky, yeah. And I remember her calling me, asking me if I would teach there, and I of course said no. But I used to go over periodically and became involved, at some level, with them as support -- as a supportive thing. But other than that, I didn't know anybody, other than what I saw in *American Craft* magazine. I knew about Tawney, I knew about [Dorian] Zachai, I knew about the woman in Chicago [Claire Zeisler], who did some wonderful things.

And then, one day -- when was it; I was still teaching -- I got a letter from a person named Ferne Jacobs.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, yes.

MR. DI MARE: -- it had slides in it -- saying that she had seen my work and she wanted to study with me. So I said, why not? I wrote her back. She flew up --

MS. MAYFIELD: From Los Angeles --

MR. DI MARE: From Los Angeles, spent the day with me, and it must have been very traumatic, because to this day she has trouble talking about it. [Laughs.] I must have said too much and was hard on her, unknowingly. She came up a second time, and we became friends. And so she, next to Helen, was a very influential person for me, because I was able to see in her what I thought was to be work that was about self and struggle and passion. And she was, like, the first example of that to me, someone who had committed herself to the life of an artist and what it had to offer her as a person.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, at that time she was simply doing her own work? She wasn't employed --

MR. DI MARE: She was married at the time, and was doing her forms -- in the early days they were quite simple; I have one in the other room. And from then, it just grew to, I think, wonderful stuff.

So I started a dialogue with her, and she is the kind of person who I learned to trust, because she knew how to talk to me about my work. She knew what to ask me. And it was through her -- I will give her quite a bit of credit for my becoming more insightful about the process of making art.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's very interesting.

MR. DI MARE: I give her a lot of credit for that. I've told her that too; she knows that. So she's someone I totally, totally trusted, because she came back for more. [Laughs.] We became very good friends. She's one of my oldest friends.

MS. MAYFIELD: Do you remember what year that was when she first came there?

MR. DI MARE: It must have been in the '70s ['60s] --

MS. MAYFIELD: In the '70s ['60s].

MR. DI MARE: -- sometime in the '70s ['60s], because I knew her before the New York shows. I wish I could remember the exact dates. It was a very important -- and still is an important connection. We sort of made vows to each other that neither of us would die before the other person would. [Laughs.] And the first person to die will be severely punished. She's very important to me.

MS. MAYFIELD: I see.

[Audio break.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, I can understand, you know, how important that dialogue was that you had with Ferne, and how important that is for other artists to really see -- you know, that they really need to be open to make a few close connections for that kind of thing.

I'm wondering what kind of role your dealers have played in terms of your career. And you don't have to go in real depth. First there was Marjorie Annenberg, and next was Ruth Braunstein.

MR. DI MARE: Right, and Florence Duhl.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right, Florence Duhl in New York.

MR. DI MARE: And then Susan.

MS. MAYFIELD: And then Susan Cummins [Susan Cummins Gallery, Mill Valley, California].

MR. DI MARE: And I would say, of them all -- certainly Marjorie was wonderful because she was the only outlet for the kind of work I was doing then.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: And she was a very special person; she still is a very special person. And I think my connection there was, again, almost a friendship. I used to go in to her gallery, since she was so close to school, and I would stop and see her once, twice a week. As she got sicker, I saw her more often. You know, I don't know if you want to get into that.

MS. MAYFIELD: Talk about Susan Cummins.

MR. DI MARE: I met Susan when I had left Ruth's gallery. I had a show with her. At the end of that show -- I think the second show I had with her -- I just said, enough of this. I just wasn't interested in producing work for a gallery. Ruth is a wonderful person; she's a wonderful dealer. I just thought I was one of the gallery artists. So I basically decided I would never show again, which I've done a couple of other times. And I just came home, and I just worked for myself.

MS. MAYFIELD: I can remember when Susan Cummins first had some of your work.

MR. DI MARE: Really?

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: Was it in the old space? I had applied out of -- what, for a Marin Arts Grant.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right –

MR. DI MARE: And I knew most of the artists who won that. It was Gayle Lucchessa, and there was a jeweler; there was McDonnell, Rose and Rob; they won too. I remember it was a $3,000 grant.

I said, wouldn't it be fun if we -- you know, we get to pick a venue where we show the work? Let's show it to Susan. And I had been going to see Susan for some time. I used to drop in and, according to her, I used to give her all kinds of advice.

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes, paternalistic.

MR. DI MARE: Paternalistic. Oh my, I must have driven her crazy. And so I said, you know, let's have Susan do a poster and we'll show the work there. That was the first time I showed with her. And I remember I was very pushy, and why she didn't kick me out I don't know. I insisted that one of my pieces be in the window. Really, I was so bad. And that's really, really when I began to see that she was a serious person.

MS. MAYFIELD: In Mill Valley.

MR. DI MARE: In Mill Valley. And I really liked her. She really -- she was one of the few dealers I met who was really kind, gentle, and smart, and the agenda wasn't just her agenda, but it was an inclusive agenda that I think everyone who showed with her felt. And then I became, you know, literally a fan of the place, and developed a deep connection with the gallery. So of all the dealers I've had, she's the one that really opened me up, so to speak.

MS. MAYFIELD: Do you think it has anything to do with the fact that she gravitates to artists who really can articulate what they feel about their work?

MR. DI MARE: Do you think so? Maybe?

MS. MAYFIELD: I don't know.

MR. DI MARE: Ruth always said that she gravitated to artists because she was attracted to the process.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, I had not realized that Ruth had began as a sculptor.

MR. DI MARE: I didn't know that.

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes, somewhere I read that.

MR. DI MARE: I met Ruth many, many, many years ago and before she had the gallery in the city. She had a gallery in Tiburon. I've told you this, have I not? And one day there was a knock on the door, and there she was, introducing herself to me. And that's where I first showed my work, actually. She sold my first work.

MS. MAYFIELD: Really? And what was that like?

MR. DI MARE: It was a long panel that folded in half, of a transparent weave. It's owned by a couple in Mill Valley. I think I got $20 for it, or something like that.

MS. MAYFIELD: Twenty dollars --

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, they paid -- it was prepaid.

So Susan is the -- I would -- you know, if I were to list people that were important, you know, way back, from Sophie Harpe in high school, you know, to my music teachers who got me involved with that aspect of my creative self, to Marjorie, I would say Susan is way up there -- Susan -- Dr. Greene. I was very lucky that I had people who, for whatever reason, had a very strong belief in this person.

MS. MAYFIELD: And you, too, had to form that kind of belief in your own work.

MR. DI MARE: Oh, it took forever.

MS. MAYFIELD: And I remember -- what was the year that you decided to quit teaching? We need to talk about that.

MR. DI MARE: I wish I could remember the year.

MS. MAYFIELD: We can look that up.

MR. DI MARE: 1976. To be honest, I had been talking about it to Margaret for several years, you know, that I don't -- this teaching thing is getting to me. And I began to have some negative feelings about teaching. I'd always thought when I got up in the morning that I was going to school; every morning I was going to school. And one day I woke up and I was going to "work," and that changed it.

And the principal at our school was changed, and no one got along with this man. And I stuck it out for a year, and I knew that if I'd stayed there, something awful would happen, because the whole faculty was against this man, and nobody attempted to do anything about it. And up to that point it had been this paradise, a paradise of a school. So at the end of that year, I told Margaret, I'm going to ask for a leave of absence. I didn't want to take a sabbatical, which I never did, which I was qualified to do, but I just knew that I didn't want to stay there.

Also, I knew financially it was going to be hard on us, and I knew if I took a leave of absence, that my medical plan would be financed by them. It was kind of a dirty trick in some ways, but I really was at a point where I just had to make a really big decision.

MS. MAYFIELD: And you had three children.

MR. DI MARE: We were still paying on the house; we didn't owe money. We lived a lifestyle that was pretty simple. My salary as a teacher was not that high. I wasn't making very much money off the work here, but that was not an issue because I'd had an income. So I came home one night, and I said, you know -- we were all sitting at the table -- I'm not going back. And I remember, it was either Marcello [Di Mare], or probably it was Margaret -- "let's try it for a year." And I said, "No, this -- I'm never going back."

Because I also believe that whatever time period you give any objective or event, that's it. So if I had agreed to try it for a year, I know at the end of that year I probably would have gone back. So I asked everyone at that table -- have I ever told you this story -- to visualize money coming our way -- [laughs] – because Margaret said something about, well, we have like $5,000 in a savings account, and if I took my retirement out of the city, it was $10,000. That was it. There was nothing beyond that.

So we all sat around the dinner table -- little Livia [Di Mare] must have been, what, two [six] years old -- and we all visualized a check coming to us. And by God, the next day in the mailbox was a check.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, really?

MR. DI MARE: But the check was a check Margaret had written out of our savings account.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, really?

MR. DI MARE: She had called them up, or whatever, and they sent us a $3,000 check. So it happened; so I thought, oh, this is good. And I thought, too, it would be fun to have a show in New York. And by God, within a week I got a phone call from Jack Larsen -- or maybe it was a letter – saying, it's time for a show in New York. So it has to be before showing with Florence [Duhl].

MS. MAYFIELD: So it was before -- why do I think '75?

MR. DI MARE: It has to be before Florence, because when I had my show at Florence's, it had been just a short time. So Florence was in '77. Could it have been '77?

MS. MAYFIELD: '75, maybe; somewhere around there.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah. And I remember also asking the kids that -- it was either Florence or in two other galleries that he had sent me names of -- and I asked the kids, which one, which one, and they all agreed on Florence.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did they like the name, or how did they know?

MR. DI MARE: I have no idea, but I was learning to trust these kids; they were all psychic. And then a couple months later I got an NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] grant. So what it said to me, that these were all affirmations that it was time for me to think about being a full-time artist in a studio.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, talk about the difference, because it's so important. I hear you so often telling people, telling artists --

MR. DI MARE: Quit the job.

MS. MAYFIELD: Quit the job.

MR. DI MARE: Yes. Well, I think you have to make up your mind somewhere along the line what it's going to be. And I won't say -- it wasn't the easiest decision I ever had to make, but I know, in my case, it was the right one. You have to make that commitment. And so many of us -- so many people who are creative or inventive are pushed toward the teaching thing, you know, as a safeguard, as a net. And I think for a lot of them, it's okay, but I think it certainly takes you off the path, because to teach is very difficult. I think in some ways it, at some levels, kills that spirit in you that is inventive. It may make you strong in terms of work process, but it has to distract you from that central image, which is you.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: Because you're always giving. Teaching is about giving. And so --

MS. MAYFIELD: But it also is something that invades your mind.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, and it's something that's always there, because you always have to think about the next day or the next critique you have to give, or whatever.

So I stayed home and I started to work. And Margaret, who was very good at managing money, managed very

well. I was never pressured; she never pressured me to work and sell. I just produced work, and kept producing, without the distraction of having to earn money or to show. And those are the biggest distractions of all, is the money. And so many artists, that's what they end up thinking about: the survival aspect of being an artist, rather than what I call the revival aspects of being an artist. You have to grow as an artist. You may not be able to have the income of a lot of people who decide that that's going to be their goal in life.

But you know, we've always survived. I mean, when Margaret used to worry I would say to her, we're never going to starve; what are you worried about? You know, I didn't see that in my future. I never worried about those things. Isn't that interesting?

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes, it is.

MR. DI MARE: Because I think whatever you worry about becomes the focus of your life.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right. Well, there also is -- you know, when you think about the support to artists, the galleries, there are some collectors. I have, in my memory, something that you once said about the Goldsteins, because they helped put your son through MIT.

MR. DI MARE: They were very big supporters, Dan and Hillary Goldstein, and they saw my work in "Objects: USA." I think it's the only time I ever sort of replicated anything. There was a ceramic mask in that show, which didn't survive, which I made for them, which was then destroyed in the earthquake.

And I got to know them. They loved what I did. They would send people to me sometimes. They would come in and buy large quantities of work. If there were any rough times financially, we had wonderful supporters.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's wonderful.

MR. DI MARE: So we managed.

MS. MAYFIELD: But too, I always think that writers have such a great influence upon an artist's life, and I know for you there was that wonderful article in *American Craft* magazine by the poet ["Dominic Di Mare: Houses for the Sacred." In *American Craft* Vol. 42 No. 5, October/November 1982, pp. 2-6].

MR. DI MARE: Betty Park. Have you read this lately?

MS. MAYFIELD: Not in a long time.

MR. DI MARE: I read it the other day; I was very moved. It's just so beautiful.

Betty Park was the other person I should put on my list of influential people that --

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, the article appeared in October-November *American Craft*.

MR. DI MARE: Right.

MS. MAYFIELD: And Betty Park was a poet, right?

MR. DI MARE: Poet-writer, yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: Poet-writer.

MR. DI MARE: Taught writing at some school back east.

MS. MAYFIELD: And she really connected with your work in a marvelous way.

MR. DI MARE: I thought what she had to say was so right on. It always made me think of the poet who wrote for the catalogue.

MS. MAYFIELD: Simone di Piero, W.S. di Piero, yes.

MR. DI MARE: That kind of connection.

MS. MAYFIELD: There is something about the metaphorical writing of a poet, that when they look at artworks -- their writing is so fresh, and, to me, it opens up associations.

MR. DI MARE: You know, it's like the last line in Park's article that says, "From just such a shifting confluence of past and present, when innocent and awesome memories from childhood come together with the life of the moment, there will continue to arise new symbols of Dominic Di Mare's sea-born myth."

MS. MAYFIELD: I would agree. I think it's absolutely wonderful.

MR. DI MARE: The whole article is just like that. She stayed in our home. She came here; we spent three days just talking; and I think she spent a day alone in my studio. And we walked and talked; it was just the most beautiful connection.

MS. MAYFIELD: I don't think that writers have the possibility of doing that kind of thing today; I mean to really --

MR. DI MARE: Well, that's the kind of thorough person she was. And she was sick at the time, too.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, did you begin a correspondence with her?

MR. DI MARE: Oh, yeah, yes. I spoke to her the last two years of her life. She had cancer -- she had cancer when she was doing this. She was trying to deal with it. So I called her once a week, all the way to the end, and sometimes she couldn't talk. I could hear her in the other room -- and whatever, so I got to know her husband very well too. Yeah, that was very important. I can hardly talk about her, it's so horrible.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right. Well, would that we had more possibilities to --

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, she's really missed. Betty was just awesome. I mean, whenever I feel alone and I'm wondering what the hell I'm doing, I read this. She was a very special woman, and I still miss her.

MS. MAYFIELD: And what a wonderful affirmation. The work pictured in Park's article is some of the work that I love the most.

But let's talk about the weavings from the late '60s?

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, they were from a new place.

MS. MAYFIELD: That article -- "Paper, Wood -- " what was it called? I can't read it.

MR. DI MARE: "Paper, Wood and String of Dominic Di Mare" [Written by Mary Fuller McChesney] it was. It's a very strange title, but I thought some of the work from this period was really nice.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, fabulous, right. And we're talking those felt and paper bundles.

MR. DI MARE: It's when I was working with paper --

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: -- paper and felt; my paper-felt period.

MS. MAYFIELD: And you're using wood from the Hawthorne tree.

MR. DI MARE: For the first time, yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Can you talk about that?

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, I remember distinctly. I had asked Marcello --

MS. MAYFIELD: How old was he?

MR. DI MARE: Oh, he must have been a little kid -- 10 [14], maybe younger. Margaret, or I, had gone back and hacked away at this Hawthorne tree. It was getting to be so there were these piles of branches, and they had been there for months. And I said to him, you know, would you like to go out and bundle them up? And he cut off these sticks, all the same length and tied them all together.

MS. MAYFIELD: And he never had that training on the boat.

MR. DI MARE: Nope, nope, tied them all together, and there were these bundles. And as soon as I saw them, I thought, my God. So I should probably give him some credit, too. In fact, the first piece, or maybe it was the second one; I named it after him. *12 Earth Meadow Poems, Marcello*.

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes. But it had artichoke paper in it?

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, from the backyard.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, how was that made?

MR. DI MARE: Well, I was starting to make paper then, so I had a vat out there.

MS. MAYFIELD: And wasn't it a student teacher that got you started?

MR. DI MARE: Oh, Carole Olwell. She was a student teacher and decided to do a papermaking project, and showed up one morning with a bucketful of pulp. And they made little screens, and they made paper, and I helped. And I was totally, totally enthralled -- totally enthralled and started to make my own paper, and that grew into all kinds of things.

MS. MAYFIELD: And what did you make your paper in?

MR. DI MARE: A big -- well, at first, a tub, but eventually in a chest that was my father's.

MS. MAYFIELD: And what was it used for?

MR. DI MARE: I think he brought it from China. It was a camphor wood chest.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, wonderful.

MR. DI MARE: It was beautiful. It smelled wonderful. I have no idea where it is anymore. I remember taking all the brass fittings off it, and I don't know where those are. And I had it out in the backyard with a plastic sheet inside, and that was my vat for the longest time.

MS. MAYFIELD: When you made the artichoke paper, where -- did you get the artichokes?

MR. DI MARE: From my backyard; my folks planted them, back here, artichoke plants.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, really?

MR. DI MARE: And they're still there. We still eat artichokes from them. They're at that end, on the other side of the fence. And one year, I guess -- or that year, we hadn't picked them and they just blossomed. So I collected them and made paper out of it. That was the most fun; I loved making the paper.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you?

MR. DI MARE: I used to give the kids like two cents a sheet, and, you know, I would make the paper and dump it onto the felt, and then they would do the press thing.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, wonderful.

MR. DI MARE: And I paid them. I think even Livia had to do it. They still gripe about that.

MS. MAYFIELD: I'm wondering, too -- I mean, one thing we haven't talked about, you were raised as a Catholic --

MR. DI MARE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: -- and there are things that seem to surface in your work that seem connected --

MR. DI MARE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: I wonder if you can talk a little about that and about spirituality in work.

MR. DI MARE: I would say that in just about everything, except maybe the drawings and the portraits, there is some aspect of my Catholic connection, minimal as it is now. I don't attend church; I haven't for many years, but I did go through catechism and I was confirmed, and was terrified by the whole process. But I also recognize the magical aspect of the experience: the altar, the incense, the costumes, the hard seats, the kneeling, you know, the whole ritual.

I think -- sometimes I still miss it. In the summertimes in Europe I love going to the churches, just to be in them, because they're so vast, you know, and beautiful. So I think in all of the work, certainly in all the three-dimensional work, they are about shrines, and there are certainly remnants of church experience in them. And one in particular that I think is quite obvious is the idea of the confessional, that in quite a few of the pieces there is some portion of it that is like the little thing you see speak through, which is usually some sort of a grid.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: So yeah, there is something. And also, it's that nice overlap between the idea of the boat and the church, the making of implements. To me, they're all things like you would hold and use somehow to, you know,

protect yourself if you wish. Because I still think all of us have that primordial need to feel safe, and the idea of the amulet and the wand. I think all of us do at some level. And I think everyone probably has a shrine somewhere in their house, and they probably don't even know it.

MS. MAYFIELD: I think so too. Or they pick up talismanic objects.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, or they collect something.

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes. And I'm thinking, too, about just driving in Monterey, where you grew up -- Monterey, California -- and how you pass a wall, and inside a wall there's a shrine. It's like old Italy.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, in many ways. You're talking about the church I used to go to.

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: I haven't been there for so -- the last time I was there was for my mother's funeral. That was the last time; we're talking about 20 years ago.

MS. MAYFIELD: Do you remember the inside of that church?

MR. DI MARE: I remember it was quite beautiful, sort of very primitive at some levels: the Stations of the Cross. But one of my things to do this year is to go back, which I know I have to do.

MS. MAYFIELD: It's still a place of great beauty.

MR. DI MARE: Oh, I know that, but, you know, my connection is pretty intense there, and I have to go back.

MS. MAYFIELD: The church and the docks.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: And you remember all the nets and all the --

MR. DI MARE: Oh, yes. I have to tell you, that's where I spent most of my life is down there, either on the boat or -- we had to row to the boat. The wharfs are such that you're not allowed to dock against them, so my father had a special place that was his under the docks, where there was a skiff on pulleys. And I've used that in some of the work, I don't know if you know, like the piece that you like.

MS. MAYFIELD: Which one? I like so many.

MR. DI MARE: The triangular one with white feathers.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, yes.

MR. DI MARE: It has these strings that come down. We used to lower the skiff down into the water, because you had to keep it up above the water, up against the bottom of the pier, and row out to the boat. And then when you tied off from your anchor, you tied the skiff to the anchor so that when you came back, the skiff was there so you could get back to the pier.

Why am I telling you that?

MS. MAYFIELD: Why are you telling --

MR. DI MARE: [Laughs.] What is the connection there?

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, I think your work relates to some of those photos that I found at the Monterey Library, California History Room. The nets that they were hauling up add to the grand drapery in some of your works.

MR. DI MARE: Well, the whole place was about fish, you know, from the canneries, when the canneries were really way up high above Monterey, a place called Tortilla Flats. It's on Roosevelt Street. And whenever the cannery started working up to cook the sardines, you smell, then, that wonderful sweet sardine smell. Of course, my mother worked in the canneries, too.

So the whole place was about fishing.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: And when the sardines left, for some mysterious reason, that was very bad, because everything

fell apart, all of these big purse seiners -- all of these wealthy Italian families that had made their glorious living off of sardines, they were in trouble. The canneries closed. So now, Cannery Row has nothing to do with the cooking and canning of fish. It's a tourist attraction.

MS. MAYFIELD: And you were there during the war as well.

MR. DI MARE: Right. I remember when the war was declared, I was in bed with the measles.

MS. MAYFIELD: Really?

MR. DI MARE: Really. And I was in bed, and I remember my mother brought me a glass of Campbell's vegetable soup. And I think I was listening to Jack Benny on the radio. How old would I have been then? Use your math.

MS. MAYFIELD: Ten [Nine].

MR. DI MARE: Okay.

MS. MAYFIELD: Is that right? You were born in 1932 --

MR. DI MARE: '32, January. And they interrupted the program to announce that Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: And above us -- we were living down by the customs house -- above us was the Presidio, up the hill from us. And I remember watching soldiers come marching down to board the trains to go to San Francisco to board troop ships.

MS. MAYFIELD: And you had some memories, too, about something I think I never heard about, and that was the internment of Italian-Americans.

MR. DI MARE: Italians, yes. Some of my family's -- some of my father and mother's friends who were -- I don't know if they were citizens or not. My parents certainly weren't sent off, but they were sent off. They were sent to, I think, places like Marysville.

MS. MAYFIELD: Really?

MR. DI MARE: They weren't interned in camps, like they did with Japanese. But they were sent away from the coast.

MS. MAYFIELD: But they were called back because --

MR. DI MARE: I don't know when they were called back.

MS. MAYFIELD: I think they were called back because the Italian-Americans were so important in terms of the fishing industry.

MR. DI MARE: That makes sense.

MS. MAYFIELD: And in the war, soldiers needed food, and canned fish certainly was something that was very important.

MR. DI MARE: There you go, sardines. I didn't know that. Certainly they were the industry. They were certainly -- I remember Chinese fishermen fishing -- and certainly they were involved in the fishing industry. I hadn't thought of that. But the Japanese were whisked away; I know that. There were a couple of Japanese kids in my school that I didn't see after that -- very unfortunate.

MS. MAYFIELD: That was a difficult time.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah. You know, the rationing, I remember all that stuff: my mother going to buy 25 cents worth of hamburger. The butter that she -- or it wasn't butter -- that you had in a bag and you broke the capsule and you mixed it so it would look like butter. You don't have anything like that, do you? [Laughs.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, just thinking about things -- do you think of yourself as part of an international tradition?

MR. DI MARE: Nope.

MS. MAYFIELD: Or something American, or something --

MR. DI MARE: Nope. See, I've spent my whole life trying to just identify with myself -- [laughs] -- and that was hard enough without it being international. I know my work has been all over the place, but I don't have that mentality.

MS. MAYFIELD: And did you follow your work?

MR. DI MARE: No.

MS. MAYFIELD: I mean, your work early on was in the Triennale [Triennale di Milano, Italy].

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, that was thanks to Larsen.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you go?

MR. DI MARE: No, what did I know? I got a letter from Larsen saying -- or was it Mildred Constantine -- saying, yeah, we're doing the show, would you like to have a piece in it? And they requested a particular piece -- *The Box Sleeves* -- and I sent it to them. And I remember -- this is so funny -- Mildred then was with the Museum of Modern Art; she was one of the curators. And after the show she wrote me and said, they would like to own your piece, the Museum of Modern Art. And I was at that point where I thought, well, I can't give it to them, which is what I think she was asking for.

MS. MAYFIELD: Probably.

MR. DI MARE: Probably. And I said, like, I wanted $125 for it. Well, they didn't accept the price. My work could have been included in the collection.

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: It was all so new to me, and I wasn't really thinking that way.

MS. MAYFIELD: You were probably a little busy teaching and doing your own work.

MR. DI MARE: Yes, and a young family, and trying to do two things, three things at one time. I had no ambition, for some reason or other. I think if I look really back, I've missed many opportunities to get the work out, but there was a part of me that just said no to that. And there's a part of me that's glad for that, and there's a part of me that wonders. Do you understand what I'm saying, really?

MS. MAYFIELD: I think so. There are a lot of artists that are so involved with the career path, I think, that actually they're turning out work that's not that great.

MR. DI MARE: Well, I don't even know if I thought that logically. There just -- there's an aspect of my personality that -- that's not part of it. I sometimes wish I had some of it.

MS. MAYFIELD: But also there were periods where -- I mean, at a certain point you were really known for creating objects.

MR. DI MARE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: And you stopped working and did --

MR. DI MARE: But see, that's that obstinance.

MS. MAYFIELD: -- and did drawing for a year, right?

MR. DI MARE: Yes, I just decided to draw. Isn't that crazy? I think Ruth is partly responsible for that. And somewhere in this room there is a folder --

MS. MAYFIELD: Ruth Braunstein.

MR. DI MARE: I refer to it as my first eight drawings. Somehow -- I must have been thinking, I don't want to do this anymore. And Ruth said, well, let's -- you know, do a drawing show. So I said to myself and to Margaret, I'm going to just draw for a year. How insane. Who would have bought them? It was like totally moving yourself out of the marketplace. And I drew for six months and I almost went crazy, and then I went back to making sticks. But I'm glad I drew, because that opened up a whole new zone, if you wish.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right. And you still are drawing.

MR. DI MARE: I still like to draw, because it comes from a whole other place. It's sort of a sudden feeling that

that part of you that has no history --

MS. MAYFIELD: Interesting.

MR. DI MARE: -- whereas the other work is all connected to the history. It's sort of like the future versus the past.

MS. MAYFIELD: You started to touch upon travels.

MR. DI MARE: Travels?

MS. MAYFIELD: When did you first leave the United States and see other parts of the world?

MR. DI MARE: Well, first that was in the military. I was stationed in France, the city called Metz.

MS. MAYFIELD: During the Korean War, right?

MR. DI MARE: During the Korean War, yes. I was assigned to a post office -- wonderful -- APO-208 that was the base post office, so we handled all the mail for France. And when I arrived there, I was immediately put on the night shift, which everyone joining the post office had to do. I was told it was just for a couple of months, but when I started working, there were guys that had been there over a year.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, no.

MR. DI MARE: So it was like from 11:00 at night, you went and you dragged stuff down to the railroad station, and you loaded the train that was heading for Paris, and you loaded the train that was heading for Munich, and you came back to the post office, sorted the mail, and then, like, at 6:00 in the morning you went to bed.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, no.

MR. DI MARE: So after a month of that, I said, I can't do this. I went to the commanding officer and said, it's time now; you told me one month. I want another job. And he must have been in the right frame of mind, since he was a drunk, and he gave me another job, a daytime job.

MS. MAYFIELD: In France, then, did you have an opportunity to go to museums or explore things?

MR. DI MARE: I didn't know museums.

MS. MAYFIELD: You didn't know -- [laughs].

MR. DI MARE: Tell me, how can I get this to you? I was totally naive.

MS. MAYFIELD: Okay.

MR. DI MARE: No, my idea was to go to Paris. I met a friend in Paris, went to the Folies Bergere; we ate in restaurants. I didn't know about the Louvre. You don't seem to understand.

MS. MAYFIELD: I do understand about that period in time.

MR. DI MARE: I'm sorry. [Laughs.]

MS. MAYFIELD: What about the second time that you went abroad? When was that? I mean, after that period?

MR. DI MARE: With Margaret.

MS. MAYFIELD: With Margaret.

MR. DI MARE: Well that was many, many years later. Yes, and I did travel. I remember going to Paris, into Germany. Wait, that's not true. I did go to the Bayreuth Festival, which was music: Wagner.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, wonderful.

MR. DI MARE: So, I did go to opera. I was interested in music, I think, then. I really -- you know, I wasn't making art in those days. This is in the army. I was a kid. So, I'm sorry to disappoint you. [Laughs.]

MS. MAYFIELD: No, you don't disappoint me.

MR. DI MARE: Wouldn't that have been nice if I knew about art? No. I discovered Shakespeare, though, and Proust.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's wonderful.

MR. DI MARE: So it wasn't until many years later that I really began to look outside of myself to see what other people were doing. Certainly by the time Margaret and I started to spend the summers -- this was like 13 years ago [in Switzerland] -- our main purpose was really to see art, so everywhere we went, that was our goal.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did it have an impact on your work at all?

MR. DI MARE: I won't say so much on work as on myself. I remember the first time I was really moved by a piece of art -- can I refer to it as a piece of art? I take this back. I did go to the Louvre when I was in Paris. All of a sudden I remembered it.

MS. MAYFIELD: When you were in the army? Okay.

MR. DI MARE: Yes, when I was in the army. How bizarre. See, you've triggered something there. I remember in those days when you walked into the Louvre, you walked into the entryway, and when you turned to the left, there were these steps going out to the *Winged Victory*.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: Okay? And I remember walking in -- I must have been in my late 20s, 25, 26 -- I turned to my left and I looked up there and I thought, wow. I felt like somebody had hit me over the head. Here was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. Because it was like a boat; it was like a boat. You know what it's like; it's this thing that --

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: It's like something on the bow of a boat. So I did spend time there. I don't know what I got out of it other than that. I probably went to see the *Mona Lisa*, because I must have heard of it. So, isn't that interesting? You triggered that. I had forgotten that. I had gone there to meet a friend who used to accompany me on the piano -- Angie Machadowas her name -- who flew into Paris, and I went to the airport. I must have been there maybe for five days, but I got there before she got there, and that's what I did.

MS. MAYFIELD: I want to ask you a couple of other questions --

MR. DI MARE: Okay.

MS. MAYFIELD: And you can answer them very briefly if you wish.

MR. DI MARE: Yes or no.

MS. MAYFIELD: Have issues of gender, race, ethnicity applied to your work?

MR. DI MARE: No.

MS. MAYFIELD: Okay.

MR. DI MARE: Why would they?

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, actually, I think that the Sicilian connection is there.

MR. DI MARE: Do you think so?

MS. MAYFIELD: You should answer this, by ethnicity, I think, is meant more in political terms. And that question --

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, certainly not. And Sicilian -- I mean, my father could have been what? He could have been a truck driver, a cabbie. I don't think it's that at all.

MS. MAYFIELD: Okay. Has the market for American craft changed in your lifetime?

MR. DI MARE: I can't answer that.

MS. MAYFIELD: Okay.

MR. DI MARE: I don't know how to answer that. It's been good to me.

MS. MAYFIELD: It's been good to you.

MR. DI MARE: It's been good to me. And certainly I know people who are trying hard to push that, like Camille Cook, you know, Friends of Fiber Art International.

MS. MAYFIELD: She's been a moving force in contemporary fiber, and its acceptance in museum circles.

MR. DI MARE: Right. And people like Helen Drutt, if you wish, collectors like Pfannebecker, Bob Pfannebecker.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: Larsen, and Mildred Constantine, you know, who did big shows, especially Mildred and Larsen --

MS. MAYFIELD: Jack Lenor Larsen.

MR. DI MARE: Larsen, I mean, big shows, two big shows, and books. So, I've had that connection with them, and certainly I appreciate what they're doing and have done.

MS. MAYFIELD: But you've been in exhibitions that were huge survey exhibitions of American craft.

MR. DI MARE: Right, yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: How do you feel that that American work ranks on an international scale? That's a difficult one without knowing what was happening abroad, but in terms of contribution.

MR. DI MARE: But you know -- several of the shows have traveled all over the world.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: But I don't really know if "Objects" ["Objects: USA"] traveled.

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes, it did.

MR. DI MARE: It did. "Objects" traveled; American Craft Museum had a show that traveled all over. So I think these big shows, organized mostly by people from the East Coast, were very important in getting the work out there.

MS. MAYFIELD: But have you had contact with artists, let's say, earlier on in the contemporary fiber field, who were from abroad, that you --

MR. DI MARE: No, no. I didn't want that -- I never worked with those kinds of connections. I knew of people, but I didn't seek friendships.

MS. MAYFIELD: But you have been very fortunate in that your work was received really well early on.

MR. DI MARE: Absolutely, and I would say -- I would thank Mr. Larsen for a lot of that, as well as Helen [Pope].

MS. MAYFIELD: Jack Lenor Larsen's early books on contemporary fiber?

MR. DI MARE: And also their recognition of my work and interest in my work. You know, he arranged for my first show in New York, or set me up for that. So, yes, I've been very lucky in that all through my life there have been people, who -- pushed me to a place as advocates.

MS. MAYFIELD: But are there writers in areas of contemporary fiber or American craft that you felt played a meaningful role beyond these wonderful poets?

MR. DI MARE: Yeah. Certainly I think Rose Slivka.

MS. MAYFIELD: Rose Slivka.

MR. DI MARE: She was very important.

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: Also a person now who is an editor.

MS. MAYFIELD: Lois Moran [*American Craft* magazine].

MR. DI MARE: Lois Moran.

MS. MAYFIELD: She's made a great contribution.

MR. DI MARE: Oh, yeah, she took over from Rose. Yes, even people -- I'm not a jeweler, but I think Helen has done a lot for --

MS. MAYFIELD: Helen Drutt?

MR. DI MARE: Drutt.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: You know, even the Brown/Grotta Gallery. I don't have any connection with Tom Grotta, but I like the way he works out of his home. He sells work through catalogues. So there is that aspect of documentation, which I think we sorely need.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right, bringing in other guest essayists to write and catalogue.

Is criticism written by artists more valuable to you than others? I'm thinking of the writings of Jan Janeiro, who is also an artist.

MR. DI MARE: And Betty Park. They're people who were all advocates for me. I knew they loved my work. I knew them well. Certainly what they had to say was interesting.

MS. MAYFIELD: Did you ever have a bad review?

MR. DI MARE: Once, and it killed me.

MS. MAYFIELD: It did? When was that?

MR. DI MARE: With Kenneth Baker.

MS. MAYFIELD: Kenneth Baker?

MR. DI MARE: No, it was before Kenneth Baker.

MS. MAYFIELD: Thomas Albright?

MR. DI MARE: No, another one.

MS. MAYFIELD: Someone for the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah. Was it Albright? I had a show at Ruth --

MS. MAYFIELD: Braunstein's?

MR. DI MARE: And his comment was very brief. It was basically that I was repetitious, which is probably true at some level.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right, but part of that kind of obsession is what builds your work.

MR. DI MARE: I was crushed.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, dear.

MR. DI MARE: Totally, totally crushed. But then --

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, it's difficult to find really great writers too; I'd have to say. I'll just go back to the same question. Can you discuss your views on the importance of fiber as a means of expression?

MR. DI MARE: Well, I think it's only relevant if the person working with the fiber has a connection to it that's not superficial. And how brief is that?

MS. MAYFIELD: That's very good.

MR. DI MARE: Very good. I get an A for that.

MS. MAYFIELD: What are the similarities and differences between your early work and your recent work?

MR. DI MARE: I would say, on the surface they're one and the same, and the difference would probably be in the complexity of it now, compared with the simplicity of it then.

[End of Tape 2.]

[Joined in progress.]

MS. MAYFIELD: -- Dominic Di Mare, for the Archives of American Art in Tiburon, California.

Dominic, I wonder if you could comment upon how you view the role of universities in the development of contemporary craft?

MR. DI MARE: Well, you know, I list on my biography that I'm self-taught. And although I did go to the California College of Arts and Crafts, San Francisco State, the Rudolph Schaefer School of Design, I don't feel I learned anything there, even technically, that I could say I applied to the work I do. I did take a weaving class -- that's when I was introduced to the loom -- but it was basically just weaving patterns.

So, in terms of my development, I would say there wasn't much of an impact. But certainly, there are people like [Ed] Rossbach, Trude Guermonprez, who had big influences, but I don't necessarily connect them to the university, but as really special people who had special talent that attracted other people with talent and allowed them to develop.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, don't you think, in many ways, one of the things that people don't talk about is the way that artists continue their self-education?

MR. DI MARE: Oh, yeah.

MS. MAYFIELD: And in terms of that, just thinking about that, think about different kinds of things that may feed into your work, say, reading poetry and other kinds of things, and just talk really broadly about that.

MR. DI MARE: I think being an artist really means that you are at a very special school, and it's a school in which you are the principal teacher --

MS. MAYFIELD: That's very good.

MR. DI MARE: -- you know, if you really come down to it. And that if you don't view it that way, then you might as well be on a treadmill that just travels the same terrain forever. And that part of this education is that wonderful -- allow yourself to be in that wonderful arena where everything about yourself opens. Okay -- and I think I've said this before -- I think all art is autobiographical. And if you are the source, then you have within you all of the requirements to develop work that's unique and special, if you view it as a learning process and not just as a process of manufacturing something.

And I think a lot of art is just that; it's sort of something that's mass produced for a marketplace that needs it. But I never saw myself that way.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: And I basically isolated myself. I purposely -- after I started to roll, and I began to see that there was a vocabulary that was personal just to me, and a viewpoint of the world which is mine, that I realized that in order to find that, to get there, I had to stop looking at art or even know any artists. I didn't know anybody for years.

MS. MAYFIELD: Let's talk a little about that personal vocabulary.

MR. DI MARE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Let's talk about just the notion of that repetition of black-white, black-white that's in your work.

MR. DI MARE: Well, you know, that's kind of funny. I think what it expresses to me is that whole idea of all aspects of one's life, that it's a mere repetition of itself. And you can equate to even the process of listening to your heartbeat, or the fact that you take in a breath and you exhale a breath. And that is totally continuous; it's totally continuous, and also, too, in aspects -- the aspect of your whole past.

I think at some levels we're all repeating the negative aspects and the positive aspects of our parents and their parents, all the way back, all humanity. So the black and white to me is sort of affirming that aspect of how I see my reality: that it is about repetition, it's about precision, and it certainly reflects my whole upbringing. My sister's visiting us now, and yesterday she and I began to talk about just that, you know, and how she -- I found out yesterday, she too had to cut bait. I always thought I was the only one to cut bait, which meant, of course -- and we've talked about this before -- every slice of the sardine had to be equal and at a certain angle. And I learned yesterday that she was as involved as I was in the life, our life, with our parents. And yet, she -- you

know, it isn't integrated into her life.

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: I don't see it as integrated. I should probably ask her that. Certainly I totally absorbed it. It's almost like a totality. Charles, the writer --

MS. MAYFIELD: [Charles] Talley.

MR. DI MARE: Talley, of course now a Jesuit [Franciscan priest], or a priest, once was part of a group that met in my studio for a couple years, and he referred to my work as being in like a "frozen past." And as soon as he said that, I thought, yeah, well, there's some truth to that.

MS. MAYFIELD: You once talked about a seminal experience that you had on your father's boat.

MR. DI MARE: Oh, on the boat.

MS. MAYFIELD: Could you talk about that?

MR. DI MARE: Actually, there are quite a few, but one in particular, and probably it also reflects through this black-and-white thing. We were off the coast of Mexico. I must have been 12, maybe -- maybe even younger, I think. We had dropped our sea anchor, and there was no land in sight -- we dropped a sea anchor, which is like a parachute, and it slows you down so the current doesn't take you too far off course. And I could not sleep; I remember that I couldn't sleep. My father was sound asleep. I got out of my little bunk, went on the deck, and there were no stars. I don't remember any stars or any -- it was pitch black. And as I sat there I heard this sound approaching the boat. And as it got closer, it dawned on me that they were, like, splashes. And this sound, too, at the time, felt like it was just rushing at the boat. I had no idea what it was. It could even have been a ship, for all I know, heading right for us, because we were in a traffic lane.

And as it came closer, it dawned on me that it was a school of either dolphins, or albacore, or some large fish -- came by us, and it got louder and louder, passed me, and it kept right on going. And it dawned on me that I was witnessing this magical parade, if you wish, a procession, and that I was the only person there to hear it. And to me, that was so powerful, you know, because I think when you're young, you feel so connected to everything and everybody that you assume that everyone is feeling, thinking, and seeing what you're feeling and seeing and thinking.

And it dawned on me that you can isolate yourself to a point where it's almost like a religious experience. And it was one in which there was no picture, no color, but it was just a sound. It was very powerful. It was scary, too, at the same time. But it was like that whole process of, something happening -- I'm sure it has happened to many a person sitting in a boat out in the ocean, to have a school of fish pass by you, going somewhere to do God knows what, or to be consumed.

MS. MAYFIELD: But at your age, you must have been very open --

MR. DI MARE: I was open to that experience, surely. Being on the boat as a young person, all there was was getting up, fishing, cooking a meal, going to sleep. There was no -- nothing else; no other stimulant other than the environment you were in, which was pretty powerful.

MS. MAYFIELD: And you've talked about the wake of the boat as part of – feeding your vocabulary?

MR. DI MARE: Oh, yes, especially at night, because at night, with the propeller churning, it kicks up all the phosphorous in the water, and so it glows. It's like looking into a vat of thousands of fireflies. It's a real light; it's so beautiful. And also, part of my job on these excursions off Mexico was to sit on the bow, with my father at the back, watching the lines, the poles, and I would scan the horizon for any disruption, you know, any break in the surface. Because usually the water was pretty smooth, and if that was the case, then I knew that these were big fish trying to escape larger fish.

So my job was to direct my father -- [laughs] -- to these, you know, these surfaces that were being disrupted, and, hopefully, catch fish. And for a long time I saw coming into the studio as just that, that I came into the studio and I always had that surface that I was going to work on. And it was like that was my sea, and that out there on that desk I would sense some sort of eruption on the surface, would be the idea for a piece.

MS. MAYFIELD: Didn't you once mention that the loom itself --

MR. DI MARE: Yes, to me, it was like a sea, was it not; a linear sea, a parallel sea, a parallel reality, if you wish. I'm pushing it a little. But all surfaces to me always make me think of the surface of the sea, and the fact that it's almost like a thin membrane. And sometimes, when we moved through it -- I used to think, you know,

instead of the boat moving on top of it, what if the bow slightly tipped down and we just went into it? Because I knew, even at that age, that we were floating over miles of water, and that below us was the equivalent of the Swiss Alps. I knew -- I knew it; I felt the danger. I knew it was dangerous to be out there.

MS. MAYFIELD: Okay. Is there anything else you can think of in your three-dimensional objects that relates specifically to memories?

MR. DI MARE: Oh, sure. In fact, I just showed you something that to me is a direct connection of that. A lot of the three-dimensional work that I have made always have, or usually have, accompanying it some sort of wand, a paddle, a net, a scoop, a spoon. I think somebody looking at them may not see them as that, but to me they're really -- they were all like oars, and reflected tools that were used on the boat, but certainly on a miniature level.

But there were -- there were sticks that had hooks on the end, there were sticks we used to poke things with, poles that were used to steer the boat, hoops at the end of the sticks that had nets that were used to scoop with. It was endless -- oars, all kinds of oars.

MS. MAYFIELD: And were these all kind of beautifully made, because they were all handcrafted?

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, not necessarily, not necessarily. I won't say that, no. No, I can't say that, except maybe the lures, my father's lures, which I've showed you. In fact, I dragged some out the other day, yesterday, to show my sister. He made lures out of antlers.

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes. Those are beautiful.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, they're beautiful. And it hadn't dawned on me until maybe like about five years ago that I collect antlers, and I did -- at a conscious level I was not aware that that was what my father did, until one day I looked out there and saw the pile -- I had a pile of them -- that it dawned on me that I was, at some level, still connected to that image and that material.

MS. MAYFIELD: And the cross shape that is repeated throughout your work.

MR. DI MARE: Well, it's the church and it's the mast.

MS. MAYFIELD: The two together --

MR. DI MARE: The two together.

MS. MAYFIELD: -- the mast of your father's boat, which was different from -- in shape from a Christian cross, right?

MR. DI MARE: Yes, because the vertical element was much longer. I think the horizontal member is shorter, is it not, than the --

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: -- the vertical.

MS. MAYFIELD: But it's interesting that the repetitive elements that you see in your objects are not necessarily carried over into your drawing.

MR. DI MARE: Oh, now, the drawings are something else.

MS. MAYFIELD: Can you speak about that?

MR. DI MARE: Yeah. It's almost -- and you know, then there are the portraits, which are from another place too.

MS. MAYFIELD: So first you did some very kind of abstract drawings that have a character that feels very much like those of Mark Tobey.

MR. DI MARE: Yes, really? Okay.

MS. MAYFIELD: And then, recently, in the past few years in your summers you've gone to Switzerland, right?

MR. DI MARE: Right, and done portraits.

MS. MAYFIELD: And done very surreal portraits.

MR. DI MARE: Yes. To me they're all part -- they're all from different parts of my body, if you wish. That the

portraits are really -- off the top of my head; the drawings are from somewhere in the middle of my head; and the three-dimensional work is from somewhere in the upper chest.

MS. MAYFIELD: Something more visceral, or something --

MR. DI MARE: More visceral, yes. It's more felt. I like that because the drawings are totally, totally about trust and just moving, because the drawings take a long time. People have commented that it made them think of Tobey. Tobey, to me, was mostly marks; he made marks. I could be wrong; I don't know his work entirely.

MS. MAYFIELD: You're right, yes.

MR. DI MARE: Whereas mine are really shapes; they're shapes, are they not, if you think about it?

MS. MAYFIELD: They are shapes.

MR. DI MARE: If I were to drag a drawing out here -- although, I have done marks too, that's true. But to work on a drawing, it's really -- if I make the image -- see the imagery of water, it's like under the water, just under the surface, whereas the portraits are the surface, and the three-dimensional work is somewhere much deeper.

MS. MAYFIELD: There is something very textile in terms of the approach in your abstract drawings.

MR. DI MARE: In the abstract, really?

MS. MAYFIELD: Right, in the fact that they seem to be layered and continue kind of into infinity.

MR. DI MARE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: Would you agree with that?

MR. DI MARE: You know, I was looking at two of them today that I'm going to bring to Switzerland, and I would say, they're about water, wouldn't you say, and certainly --

MS. MAYFIELD: The ones that you're showing me from your book -- there's still something so layered and dense.

MR. DI MARE: Oh, definitely. I would talk more about the density in them. There's a thickness -- I would say there's a thickness to them that I try very hard to do.

MS. MAYFIELD: I'm thinking about the drawings too. You know, within your retrospective -- we added drawings in the Fresno presentation --

MR. DI MARE: Right. Keep going.

MS. MAYFIELD: -- and there were some very, very large-scale drawings that we included that -- they had a density, but they also had kind of a lyrical quality.

[Audio break.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, in terms of doing your work, where you've done so much in two-dimensional work, and you've done work in objects, and you've done weaving, because you were initially identified as a contemporary fiber artist.

MR. DI MARE: Yes, I still am for some reason.

MS. MAYFIELD: How do you see yourself? How do you see a definition of your work?

MR. DI MARE: Well, I remember Jack Larsen asking me that.

MS. MAYFIELD: Really?

MR. DI MARE: This was quite a few years ago. And when I left, actually, weaving, I was doing ceramic things. I was working at ceramics. And he kept saying to me, well, what do we call you now; what are you now? And he -- of course, I think a lot of people in the textile field feel that anyone that has moved into any arena of success, that they want to hang onto you. So --

MS. MAYFIELD: I see, because it's such a marginalized field?

MR. DI MARE: Yes, and such an isolated field that for years they always included me. If there was an invitational or something published, my work was included. I know that I do use string and thread. I don't use a loom, I don't

use yarn, but there is always an element in my work, even in some of the drawings, where there is a filament of some kind, horsehair, if you wish. So I often wonder about people like Anne Wilson now, who was in the Whitney Biennale.

MS. MAYFIELD: Biennale, that's right.

MR. DI MARE: See, isn't that interesting?

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: I think someone like her, who is -- I know her, but not very well. She's very active; she's very political. I'm sure she teaches at a university. And I think if you do -- if you're in that arena, then you can push your work up into, if you wish, another level.

MS. MAYFIELD: Or a different realm.

MR. DI MARE: Or a different realm. And I forget what I said to Jack, that -- I don't care, I told him. At that time, I didn't care. I mean, what was the big deal?

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: And for a lot of craftsmen it is a big deal because it's about status, I guess, and status was not one of my goals.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, it may be also kind of a faithfulness to the history of the material.

MR. DI MARE: Yes. And I would say I do have that, and I have a collection of textiles, contemporary textiles. So I will say, yeah, I still have an affinity to it, but I don't really, really see myself as a textile artist. I haven't for many years.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, there seems to be something of a dilemma today, because the art versus craft issue seems to be so bantered about –

MR. DI MARE: It's endless.

MS. MAYFIELD: When really you have artists, or you have individuals that are craft artists, and you have artists working in craft media.

MR. DI MARE: Right.

MS. MAYFIELD: And it seems to have a distinction.

MR. DI MARE: And what museum does not have a collection? I look at the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City] now, and it has this show of textiles, these wall tapestries. I mean, is that still -- would you still refer to it as a craft media?

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, I think Jack Lenor Larsen makes the point that in antiquity, people will accept fiber.

MR. DI MARE: Fiber.

MS. MAYFIELD: But in the contemporary arena, it's associated with women's work.

MR. DI MARE: Right, as something you put on yourself.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right, right.

MR. DI MARE: He also always spoke of the pre-Colombian textiles, where we had no idea who made them, and yet they are so beautiful.

I don't know what it is, whether it's a power thing or, you know -- I don't know what it is. I do remember once getting very upset -- and I don't know if this applies. A magazine -- a textile magazine sent me a letter asking me to participate in a project where they would send all these textile artists a box, and in that box would be a spool of this, a spool of that, 20 buttons, a screen, or whatever, and then each person was asked to make something. You know, and I'm not political, but that really blew my mind because I -- I called them up and I said, would you do that to a painter? Would you send a painter four tubes of this and four tubes of that, and 10 brushes, and ask them to paint something? I thought it was very demeaning. But I think in some ways part of the problem of the textile movement and their inability to move beyond just being a craft is this attitude that it is minor and it is obvious. You know, I know that's not the case.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, I think too that the Organization of Contemporary Fiber Art that Camille Cooke initiated, that they've gone a long way in terms of trying to position contemporary fiber works in a museum, in work, and create symposiums, et cetera, around that.

MR. DI MARE: Yes, you can't help but be impressed by that. And they are in the process now of publishing, whereby museum collections that represent weavers and textile artists are documented. Part of the problem is there isn't very much documentation for the crafts and craft movements and how it relates and connects to other medias, because certainly textile art has been sculptural. I mean, look at [Magdalena] Abakanowicz -- I can't think of her full name.

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes, Abakanowicz. That's right.

MR. DI MARE: I think probably a lot of it has to do with drive, you know, drive and where you see your work, how you see your work.

MS. MAYFIELD: And don't you think a lot has to do with the way museums have to catalogue things in terms of defining certain departments? If you get to a big museum, that museum that collects prints won't necessarily collect artists' books because of the definition, and yet a library will collect artists' books, and that's an example of something that falls in the holes. Now, with contemporary works like the ones that you did, which are really part weaving, part object --

MR. DI MARE: Part drawing, part this, part that, yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: -- it creates a problem in terms of --

MR. DI MARE: Where do you fit in?

MS. MAYFIELD: -- are you sculpture or are you craft, or what are you?

MR. DI MARE: So, it's that all-time question, what do you do, and how do you explain it?

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: I remember once when I was working with handmade paper, someone said, you mean, paper like money is printed on? [Laughs.] They had no idea. And I have been one of these people that has just moved along. I think if there's any real connection to everything I've done, the thread has always been there. Even when I left the loom and did ceramic things, there was the thread there.

MS. MAYFIELD: But is there a connection to the thread to --

MR. DI MARE: The portraits?

MS. MAYFIELD: -- the contemporary portraits --

MR. DI MARE: The portraits, to me, are just an aspect of myself that's mind-boggling, because they're very surreal. They're self-portraits; they're watercolor. I can only do them in one place, and that happens to be in a village in Switzerland. I've tried to do the portraits here; it doesn't work. And they're really -- to me they're cathartic, which I don't think -- I think the three-dimensional work is more about support and making real something that is very fragile in myself.

The portraits are more about power, about seeing myself as I would love to see myself, or not see myself, in environments that are really very strange.

MS. MAYFIELD: There's such a wonderful sense of whimsy in the portraits.

MR. DI MARE: You know, some people see whimsy. [Laughs.] Sometimes -- I don't think the one I'm looking at now, which I have up in the studio, is whimsical.

MS. MAYFIELD: This is true.

MR. DI MARE: It's a portrait of myself with my eyes closed, in a glass-and-wood vessel, with water up to my chin. My eyes are closed, I'm bald, I have no eyebrows, and I have something running into my ears, which is that black-and-white element. So if any connection, there is that.

MS. MAYFIELD: That the portraits include some kind of aspect of your --

MR. DI MARE: Always kind of a black-and-white element.

MS. MAYFIELD: Some kind of aspect from your art, from your previous work?

MR. DI MARE: Yes. And you might even refer to it as a thread, because in some ways it is a thread, isn't it -- [laughs] -- that's black-and-white?

MS. MAYFIELD: That's fascinating.

MR. DI MARE: So, you know, that's interesting to talk about because I've never related it that way.

MS. MAYFIELD: I'm curious about one thing, and that's that -- well, I guess last week when I called you, you seemed so happy because you were making a piece --

MR. DI MARE: Yes, yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: -- and the piece was a magical wand.

MR. DI MARE: Right.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, are you that happy when you are doing a portrait or a drawing?

MR. DI MARE: You know, to begin something is about struggle. To be in it is about happiness.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: To be finished is about resolution. And the resolution in all -- the difference in the portrait is I end up with a conversation with myself, whereas with the objects, it's about the feeling.

MS. MAYFIELD: I see.

MR. DI MARE: I don't know if in an earlier interview I talked about the fact that when I had my first show in New York at Florence Duhl's, there was this dentist that used to buy my work. And I guess he was like most dentists, a frustrated artist, and his wife did not like the fact that he bought things. So he would buy my work and hide it under his bed. And the next year I'd come for another show, and out it would come.

He bought objects that I made. At that time I was making small things that had sticks and wands, and I began to think, well, maybe there's a part of all of us that still has a need for magic and adornment and power, which I think primitive man -- that's what primitive men must have done. He made things that he wore and buried and hid that were about power and protection, and beauty, if you wish.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: And I think that all of us, to this day, if we really, really look into ourselves, and even look around to see what things we have about us, that they're about those things. So I love making the wands. And my feeling now with my gallery closing, that I won't --

MS. MAYFIELD: Susan Cummins [Gallery]?

MR. DI MARE: Yes, I won't make anymore big things, you know, big, standing things, but I might just continue making little power sticks and clay, because it is a most wonderful feeling that you don't get from a portrait, painting a portrait or doing a drawing. Doing a drawing and doing a portrait is like taking a hole and trying to find what's in the hole.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, what did it feel like to see all of your work together at the retrospective exhibition?

MR. DI MARE: Well, I wish everyone could have that experience, because it's like you go through life creating words, little words or maybe two words together, and then you leave that and you go to the next thing, and you do maybe a half a word, or whatever. So in some ways, a retrospective is to see everything linked together like it's a poem or a story. There's this quote I have somewhere that said, "This artist spent his whole life drawing trees and horses and buildings and clouds, and on his deathbed he had all of his drawings laid out in front of him, and what it created was his portrait." It was him.

So yes, to have all your work, or almost all your work together, is a gift I wish everyone could have. That's how I saw it; it was a gift.

MS. MAYFIELD: And because the exhibition traveled and varied so differently in installation?

MR. DI MARE: Yes, each place was different.

MS. MAYFIELD: At the Palo Alto Art Center, the walls were --

MR. DI MARE: Yes, dark, dark -- and that, to me, was like being underwater, and I saw that whole show as being underwater. [Audio break] -- there was a bridge where you looked down, so it was like you were above the work looking down into it.

The Fresno venue, I loved Fresno because it felt like nighttime. There was no natural light at all, but everything was spotted. I thought that was unique, didn't you?

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: Quite beautiful. And even outside of Chicago --

MS. MAYFIELD: The Wustum.

MR. DI MARE: The Wustum, that was pretty different because it was like someone had put it in their home. Didn't you get that feeling? And of course, the Renwick was more like a museum show.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: Would you agree with that?

MS. MAYFIELD: There's something true about that.

MR. DI MARE: There was something very different about it. It was just so thoughtfully placed. It was more studied. Whereas the installation in Palo Alto was more Ted Cohen's artistic vision.

MS. MAYFIELD: Evocative.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, evocative.

MS. MAYFIELD: But wherever you were, you could see a relationship --

MR. DI MARE: To others, yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: -- of one piece of work to other works.

MR. DI MARE: Yes. And also, it's so affirming – it's such an affirming experience that you have produced a lot of work, not that everything is beautiful and perfectly refined, but that it is like looking at the sea and the swell. At the top of the swell it was wonderful, and then it had to go down to another level, then up again, sometimes higher, sometimes not as high. Does that analogy --

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: Do you see that? So it is like a journey, but it isn't a journey on a flat surface.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right. I also feel that there are some artists' work which, if you see one piece or another it means something, but to see the whole body together feels more true as a way that we really should look at art.

MR. DI MARE: Yes, I like that. I had a friend who used to love to come see me when I was working on a structure, because what I did was I made all the pieces. I'd make all the legs and all the -- and I would always have them laid out, you know, with the braided things here and a pile of feathers there. And she loved my work at that stage.

MS. MAYFIELD: How interesting.

MR. DI MARE: Isn't that interesting?

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: So it was more like the recipe of the work, seeing it as a recipe. And I love that part too, but putting it together was the real excitement for me.

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, really?

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, I was trying to add on to that.

MS. MAYFIELD: Like building the setup on the loom.

MR. DI MARE: Yeah, it's sort of like buying a cake mix, or actually --

MS. MAYFIELD: Buying the cake.

MR. DI MARE: -- buying the cake. [Laughs.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, fascinating.

MR. DI MARE: The process of making something is really -- people have asked me, where do you get the ideas? And I always say to them that, to me, my ideas are always there. I've never -- you know, people say that -- what is it, writers; they get blocks?

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: I don't understand that.

MS. MAYFIELD: I understand it!

MR. DI MARE: Do you really?

MS. MAYFIELD: Yes.

MR. DI MARE: I don't see it so much as a block as that the energy required to be the creative person has to be directed somewhere else, and if you don't do it, then that can be, quote-unquote, the block. But it isn't a block. It's just that you have -- it's your body, it's your life, it's your reality telling you that you have to focus somewhere else: on a relationship, a job, whatever. Because to make -- to be in that creative mode is pretty intense.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, I know that the painter Larry Thomas says that he can't work until he is in what he calls "that space," which I think of as a psychic space.

MR. DI MARE: Yes, an energy space.

MS. MAYFIELD: Right, and that sort of says the same thing.

MR. DI MARE: And it's pretty powerful. I worked -- I remember working on a piece -- and where is that piece? Bob Pfannebecker owns it now. Was it in the -- it was in the show at the Renwick. Remember the little small -- one the first of the morning stations.

MS. MAYFIELD: Okay.

MR. DI MARE: And I remember I had the whole structure put together with a bundle, trying to figure out how to put the bundle inside, and it fell off my desk and it broke up into all these pieces. Well, did you think I would throw it away? I had to put it all back together. And I did. That piece was once a lot of little pieces. It was -- you know. So to be in that space is about a very incredible energy that's not a physical energy.

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, how would you advise a rising artist, so to speak, to get into that mental space?

MR. DI MARE: You know what I tell young people? And I don't get as many around -- there was a while where I had a lot of people knocking at the door. I'd tell them -- they usually are going to school somewhere -- I tell them to drop out. It's almost like Leary, remember? What is it: tune out, drop out, or whatever? I tell them that what it's costing you to go to school, you could rent a little studio somewhere, a hovel if you wish, and just do work. And that I really believe that for every question we have about ourselves and our work, that inside us is the answer. And that I think for whatever -- I think at some levels we're brought up to think, even when we're in school, that there is some other person that has the correct answer. And I think we go through life expecting someone outside of ourselves to give us the answer or solve the problem, or to direct us. And I think as soon as you accept that responsibility, you're on your way.

MS. MAYFIELD: Now, do you think, though, the --

MR. DI MARE: You're going to argue with me, aren't you? [Laughs.]

MS. MAYFIELD: Well, yes. The average person --

MR. DI MARE: The average person.

MS. MAYFIELD: -- may not have had that time on the boat, where rumination and contemplation became part of the skill to continue. Do you think that's true?

MR. DI MARE: Well, see, I can't --

MS. MAYFIELD: Oh, you can't.

MR. DI MARE: The only way I could respond to that is that whenever I was feeling high and mighty about being an artist, I would say to myself, every man is an artist. In fact, there was a quote, and the quote goes, "The artist is not a special kind of man, but every man is a special kind of artist." See, I believe that.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's very good.

MR. DI MARE: I do believe that. So, if everyone's an artist, you know, where does that put you?

MS. MAYFIELD: Right.

MR. DI MARE: It puts you on a very healthy plane, does it not? Because think of those artists you know who think they are special and gifted and privileged. Do I strike you that way? I must if I'm engaged in all these endeavors. [Laughs.]

MS. MAYFIELD: I always think of you as a special artist, so that's a difficult --

MR. DI MARE: But every man is a special kind.

MS. MAYFIELD: But let me ask you perhaps one last question, and that's – if you were to -- you've been a teacher --

MR. DI MARE: Yes.

MS. MAYFIELD: -- a teacher for middle school children.

MR. DI MARE: Yes, I taught junior high school.

MS. MAYFIELD: And you've also taken on that kind of paternalistic role in terms of --

MR. DI MARE: Yes, other artists.

MS. MAYFIELD: -- teaching other artists.

MR. DI MARE: Right.

MS. MAYFIELD: What advice do you have to someone who would want to be an effective teacher?

MR. DI MARE: Teacher. I think in order to be a good teacher -- you know, I've had some good teachers, but they were only, to me, good in that their talent, their gift, was so wonderful and so unique, just to be with them was a privilege. But you knew at the same time that all they had to offer you was what they had, and that it was relevant to them. So it's almost like when you're with a good teacher, they sort of loan you their glasses, and you see like they see and sense the value of being an artist and making art through their eyes. But what you really need is your own special set of glasses, which you have to make yourself. And you have to grind those lenses and make those frames, and it has to fit you perfectly. No one, I think, can give you that, do you think?

MS. MAYFIELD: I think that's a very good -- good philosophy.

MR. DI MARE: Yes, so, it's the work. It's your own personal work, and you have to reach that point where you realize it isn't about what you do with your hands, it's about what goes on in your head. And that's a whole other kind of talk, if you wish; what goes on in your head.

MS. MAYFIELD: That's very good.

Well, thank you, Dominic.

[End of interview.]

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