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Oral history interview with Gerhardt Knodel, 2004 August 3

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Gerhardt Knodel on August 3, 2004. The interview took place at Knodel's home in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and was conducted by Glenn Adamson 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.

Gerhardt Knodel and Glenn Adamson have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

GLENN ADAMSON: Hello, my name is Glenn Adamson. I'm an interviewer for the Smithsonian Institution Archives of American Art, and today I'm interviewing Gerhardt Knodel in his home in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. It is August 3, 2004, and we are going to sit here in his lovely dining room and talk about his life and career and work and professional activities.

Gerhardt, do you want to say hello?

GERHARDT KNODEL: Hello.

MR. ADAMSON: I think what we should do is just start by talking about your childhood - I'm in Milwaukee myself - so maybe we could start by talking about, you know, being born in Milwaukee, how long you stayed in Wisconsin, that sort of thing.

MR. KNODEL: Interesting question - interesting place to start - and it's kind of a long dip back in time from the perspective right now, but my family - actually my parents immigrated from Berlin, Germany, to Los Angeles in the 1920s and they met there. My father's family had moved there in the late nineteenth century, in the 1890s. He had two great aunts that lived in Los Angeles. We have wonderful photographs in the family album of them in dark black dresses and dark hats, standing in front of the newly planted palm trees in front of the bungalow in what is now the center of Los Angeles.

So, little by little - and I think this is characteristic of so many people who came to the country in the nineteenth century - their enthusiasm for opportunity led to bringing other members of the family and that was the case with my father's side. My mother's - I'm going to tell you this little story because I think it's interesting and I want to remember it - my mother's father passed away when she was very young, four years old, so she was raised by my grandmother, who was a dressmaker in Berlin. And at one point, when my mother was about 15, nearly 16 years old, a quite rogue of a man - he was a young German man who had come from Los Angeles and was on summer holiday in Berlin - met my grandmother, Emma, and they apparently had a wonderful time together, to such a degree that when Carl Jaeger returned to Los Angeles, he wrote to my grandmother saying, "Dear Emma, love you dearly. I'm enclosing two tickets. I want you and your daughter Lilly to come to Los Angeles. And marry me." And my grandmother was quite taken back but the times were such that she said to herself, well, this is an opportunity that I didn't know I was going to have and I know what life is like in Berlin, I think I'll try Los Angeles. So they packed up everything, including pots and pans, which my grandmother were sure did not exist in Los Angeles - [laughs] - and moved. We had wonderful photographs of that whole period of time in the family album.

And so my mother became part of my - her stepfather's life - which was very much about operating a restaurant and eventually he became the - what is it called - the dessert chef - what do you call that, the -

MR. ADAMSON: Dessert chef's -

MR. KNODEL: No, no, no, no, the head pastry chef for the Coconut Grove at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. And so it was great as a child being able to go through the albums of all the cakes he made for all the motion picture studios showing people like Deanna Durbin jumping out of the top of one of his cakes as it was pushed into the center of soundstage number 12, and they were at yet another great party to announce yet another great film.

Well, my father was originally was in the knitting trade, by accident. He came to the United States, arriving at the foot of the Statue of Liberty when he was 21 years old - on his 21st birthday, which is February 21, which is also my birthday. He went to Los Angeles and didn't really have a trade. He had had a very difficult childhood - his father was killed the first World War along with several brothers, his mother subsequently died of grief from the tragedy of the family. He was raised on a farm in what is now Poland by an uncle who was a very wealthy

landlord and it was during that time that my father had access to meeting Russians and other people who were occupying that part of the world or moving through it. He did all kinds of things but basically he had a love for nature, a love for the land. He was a very good person who established very early on in his life that kind of sense of values - a field of values that had to do with personal responsibility and simply taking advantage of any little thing that was available for the sake of being able to make your way through life.

In Los Angeles, he met my great aunt and her husband whose name is Gustav - her name was Bertha - and Gustav was a building contractor and eventually my dad got involved in that business as well. My mother met my father in Los Angeles. She married my father in 1935. They moved to Milwaukee because his business in Los Angeles wasn't doing well. I was born in Milwaukee in 1940.

MR. ADAMSON: Why did they choose Milwaukee?

MR. KNODEL: Well I mentioned he was in the knitting trade. As a young man he didn't know what to do and he had another friend who recruited him into the business of operating knitting machines that were producing a variety of things, including early nylon stockings - that was a big deal and my dad used to take great pride in being able to talk about how he lost his eyesight - [laughs] - setting up all of the equipment for that purpose. You know, it's so interesting, for most of his life, I knew him as a carpenter and contractor; I never knew him in this earlier trade. But later on, we did have a few things to talk about in common as he appreciated my own experience when I got involved in weaving and so on. I think he felt as though he had a little bit of a foot in my door.

MR. ADAMSON: But you didn't have any direct experience with him in the textile industry.

MR. KNODEL: No, none at all. So it was interesting, after my father moved to Milwaukee - this before they were married - he contacted my mother and said, "Dear Lilly I love you dearly, please to move to Milwaukee, take the train" - which she did - and he picked her up and they had the taxi driver as their witness along with the justice of the peace's wife and they were married that evening and so life began for them in 1935.

MR. ADAMSON: It's a family tradition.

MR. KNODEL: [Laughs.] That's right. So in 1944, of course that was during the war years, the family decided to move back to California. My mother hated Milwaukee because it was too close to Berlin. She hated the dirt, she hated the mess, the dirt in the wintertime - that's what she always talked about - the snow gets so dirty. You know, everyone had coal heat at that time and it was a very different place than it is today. And she loved the palm trees, the oleander, the figs, the lemons and all of those things in Southern California and it really was the fuel for her life - she was invigorated by it. So she convinced my father the better place to be was out there. In 1944 they packed up the Buick, my sister Gerda and I had beds in the backseat and we drove out on retread tires, as I recall my father telling the story - I think they used 13 tires to get out to Los Angeles - finally made it and I remember the arrival on Middleton Place as we drove down the street, my sister and I in the back of the car, looking over the front seat. A street that was lined with palm trees and we approached my grandparents' bungalow and my grandparents came to the front door - very big, jovial, wonderful, lovely people - and welcomed us, and that was the beginning of a whole new life for them and was certainly the beginning of my life out there, which became very rooted in California.

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Well you're pretty much a California boy and you really have no Midwestern roots that you recall -

MR. KNODEL: No. You know, in fact, when I moved to Michigan, I had to look it up on the map to see where I was going. [Laughs.]

MR ADAMSON: So your parents, it sounds like they weren't very grounded in a very German-speaking community in the states.

MR. KNODEL: They were in Milwaukee - oh no, they definitely were - both in Los Angeles and Milwaukee, yes. When my parents were in their 80s, their closest friends were still people that they knew before they all got married and they were people who found one another, and they were all transplants from Germany to Los Angeles. There were major German clubs in Los Angeles. My father loved music and he was a singer and he joined a group called the Turners - Turner Organization - which is an international sports organization, but they had a cultural part of their activities as well, the men and women's singing groups and various other kinds of things. And they developed somewhat of a social life there, but more importantly it was with their close friends who were all raising children at the same time, getting together. Everybody had very little, especially in those end of the war years, going into the early '50s. In fact, when my mother died, my father gave me a number of things, and included, was a little brown covered spiral notebook, which had her weekly budgets for maintaining the family. And it was so wonderful to see that because they believed that my sister should grow up in a household without the burden of care that they had grown up with. As children they both had difficult times and

in part it was financial difficulties.

So despite the fact that they didn't have an abundance, they created a sense of security with my sister and myself that was very - it's still very much appreciated. I learned to be responsible - with money, I was the kind of the son who was encouraged every birthday that the money that you receive in those little birthday cards that came from all the relatives and friends would be best spent if you put the money in the bank and saved it, accumulated it for something that was really going to be big and important. So from my earliest memory, I remembering walking to the bank with my mother, making the deposit, and that money accrued and when I was 22, I took my first trip to Europe. For three months - bought a Volkswagen, and all of that was paid for by the accumulation of all those birthday cards of all those years.

Ja [German word for yes], it was an interesting way to think and work, and when my family - I mentioned that my father moved into the carpenter trade, building homes - and he started working for his uncle and as time went on, he became quite an expert in his field and more and more individuals wanted him to build their homes for them and through a number of connections in the motion picture industry, my father met some actors and directors and it was all the way back, probably in the early '60s that I begin remembering the outstanding people that he worked for, creating special homes for Charles Ruggles and he worked for Ginger Rogers, he built her home, and a number of motion picture directors. And for him, all of that experience was very, very exciting because all of these people had architects who created designs for homes that were unlike anything he had ever seen. It was, "Anything you can do, I can do better." That's the mantra of Hollywood, and he benefited by the excitement that was generated in those projects.

Yet, what I ended up realizing years into that whole awareness of what he was doing, was the tremendous responsibility that he had undertaken because he was personally responsible for every detail of those houses, from the very beginning, the first shovel that put in the ground with digging foundations - and they dug them by just shovels in those days - to the very last detail. So he developed a great appreciation for making things, for seeing his projects through to completion, developing a strong sense of accountability toward the people that he worked for, and real joy in the pleasure of the relationships that were developed. And he brought that home; he talked about the people he worked for. In fact, my mother was extremely jealous of Ginger Rogers because she would always serve my father a cocktail at the end of the day. She would say, "Now Herbert" - Herbert was his name - "Now Herbert, you can't go home without a little something to drink." And he never refused, so they usually had a couple of martinis and then he got in his car and went home. And my mother would say, "Your father is late again. No doubt, he's with Ginger." [Laughs.] We always thought that was great.

MR. ADAMSON: Now was he a general contractor? Is that how you would describe him, or was he doing all the work essentially -

MR. KNODEL: No, he was a general contractor, but he was the builder. He was on the site through the entire project and he actually did most of the carpentry work with assistants.

MR. ADAMSON: Can you say a little more about the architecture that he was working on, because you're describing it as a very competitive situation, but are we talking about modernist architecture or is more like -

MR. KNODEL: Actually it was a mix. If you know Southern California architecture, and especially the architecture of the '50s and the '60s - you can think of a few architects who produced buildings that were on the edge - but most people were building homes that were a nice amalgam, but with all the conveniences of that post-war period of time. The thing that I just loved, when I first moved into this house is, that it had not been changed since it was built in 1955. I really enjoy being in the kitchen and imagining the woman - her name was Arlen Lynn who built the house. In two steps she could operate the dishwasher, operate the oven and one of the earliest microwaves - use the ironing board that dropped out of the wall there, access the refrigerator, the kids - everything was in reach and she had the garbage disposal and she had all the kind of those things that gave a new freedom to women of that period of time.

And you know it's interesting - ultimately at this stage in my life, as is the case with most people - you can't avoid dipping back and remembering how times have changed. My father talked about it, my grandfather talked about it, and I remember my grandparents home, I mentioned it was a bungalow, and you know, these had been built as the forward edge of architecture in Southern California of course, part of the arts and crafts movement of the nineteenth century. My grandmother had a sewing room that I absolutely loved being in. As a child, I can remember being not more than three and a half feet high and coming in from running around in the garden. My grandmother sat at her treadle sewing machine and the more she treadled as she sewed, the louder the two canaries sang in the cages. The windows were open and out above the sewing the machine you could see out the windows a fig tree that was heavy with these dark, black figs, and the avocado tree. I can still remember seeing those pear shaped orbs hanging from the avocado tree, and there was always something to eat and drink and my grandfather smoked cigars and he had a dachshund that he loved, by the name of Schnapsy, and he would come in after he had lunch and take a little nap on a quilt that my grandmother had made out of

remnants, bits and pieces of old clothing fabric and stuff. And he would get on the bed with his cigar and Schnapsy and I would lie there next to him and I can smell the cigar, I can smell the dog, I can feel the air, I can smell linens, I can hear my grandmother, I can see the pleasure of opening that little drawer on the Singer sewing machine where she made a foil - covered ball because they had come through the war, and they saved everything - rubber bands, string balls, aluminum foils. From every pack of cigarettes that my grandfather smoked or gum that he chewed, he rubbed the paper to separate it from the aluminum foil and then they put the foil on this little ball. I mean those kinds of things are so wonderful to remember. He made wine, and in his garage he had huge vats. He would buy a ton of grapes, he would go down to the central market in Los Angeles, have a truck deliver a ton of grapes - I don't know if you know what a ton of grapes looks like - it's a lot.

MR. ADAMSON: A lot of grapes.

MR. KNODEL: And there he would have these huge vats, and the fermentation process happened, as little kids we would get up on the ladder and look over the edge into this deep crevasse that was bubbling with fermenting grapes, and of course the whole neighborhood smelled of grapes when his winemaking was in process. And then he got together with an old friend of his, another baker that he worked with, and they would press the grapes and bottle it, and oh, you know, it was really - it was nice.

MR. ADAMSON: Sounds idyllic as a childhood.

MR. KNODEL: It was. It was very - as everybody says, in retrospect, it truly was a simpler time when kids would do what kids are supposed to do and parents did what parents are supposed to do and families were very orientated to one another in nurturing ways. Everyone had a job to do and they knew what it was and my sister and I were given the support that we needed to excel in whatever ways we discovered. My parents, neither of them completed high school education, but they were both very intelligent people. It's just the circumstances of their lives that didn't make their own education possible. So they took great pleasure in the experiences of my sister and myself. I took piano lessons from a very young age, my sister played the violin. She and I played for all the family gatherings, and after we were finished, then all the men would bring out the mandolins, because when they were all kids in Germany, they all learned to play the mandolin; it was very popular. And they used to go trekking you know, up in the hills and they would sing all the old German folk song. That continued in Los Angeles, with family parties under the avocado trees in the summertime, singing late into the night, and always dancing, and the Victrola, wind-up Victrola, which played all the latest music like "Sioux City Sue" - [laughs] - some German music things, then some American.

But they were people who really were finding their way in a land of opportunity and they appreciated every minute of it. They worked hard, but they appreciated what they had.

MR. ADAMSON: It sounds to me like they landed by accident or by dint of being competent, it sounds like they've landed right at the ground zero of American post-war optimism and expansion and all the things you can think about when you think about the '50s.

MR. KNODEL: Exactly. I think that's true and it's been interesting of course, from our perspective now with so much writing that is being done about that time and so much analysis about the big government conspiracies in California, especially with water and power, you know, the draining of huge lakes and so on, all these coercive things have happened to benefit developers. It's interesting to go back and remember conversations where people talked without knowledge about a lot of those conditions that were affecting their lives.

MR. ADAMSON: That was a real innocence.

MR. KNODEL: Absolutely. I'm thinking about a book I'll have to insert the title of it in the moment, but I read it recently and it was about the development of California and especially talked about Lynwood, which is a place not far from where my parents lived - where the McDonald Douglas plant was located. And it talked about the vast acreage of orange trees that were - that were supplanted with new housing and the kind of suburban idealism. Many of my parents' friends were the ones who incrementally left their places in downtown Los Angeles, they moved to the suburbs. What was the suburbs? And then just as the onion rings expands, they move out to the next layer and so on. And when I moved here to Detroit, I felt as though I understood the city so well because it's so much like Los Angeles. It's a place created by the automobile, it had a heart, the heart is regarded nostalgically by some people, it's a place that you only go to for commercial purposes.

I remember Los Angeles as a child in the same way I discovered Detroit much later - it's a place that people went to during the day and everybody left at night. There was no night life, aside from the theatres and the place where the philharmonic orchestra played and so on. You didn't stay in downtown, because it was a place that everyone got away from for the ideal of being on that freer edge, living the California dream, having the block of land with the fence around it, having a little bit of paradise all circumscribed within that space. And suburbia created a new structure for people's lives. It was great in many ways and as long as people have roots of some sort. In the case of my family, having cultural roots in Germany, they built their own society of people

that could go back to their own little plot of land, live their private lives with their families, while also having the larger context to relate to. I think it's only later in succeeding generations where people ended up living far away from the city, never having had a center and ultimately became frustrated and very unhappy. And we know still the product of that as time has gone on.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you feel growing up that you were ethnically German? Did you speak German?

MR. KNODEL: German was the first language that I learned in Milwaukee. My parents, by habit, spoke German with one another, and I don't think that they thought at all about the language which their children would use going to school. I don't think it occurred to them that they had to speak English at home and teach their children English in order that their children be well adjusted when they went into school. It wasn't so much of an effect on my sister who is two years younger, but I learned German, first of all, and I entered school in Milwaukee. When I was four years old, I started kindergarten - they started that early at that time - and my mother would tell me years later, she said, "There's nothing worse than speaking primarily German and entering an elementary school in 1944 in Milwaukee, of all places."

The end of the war, was just a very difficult time - so I adjusted. My mother always said that it was very shortly into my first experience going into school that I just stopped speaking German. And they decided then to speak English at home. They spoke English with my sister and I in our family relationships but with all their friends on the phone, I mean, that old telephone, I remember it ringing, my grandmother and my aunts and so on, and it frequently was just a mixture of English and German, back and forth. I don't say anything that I shouldn't hear in German these days, because I certainly understand it, although I'm not fluent in speaking German.

It's nice to be part of that history and actually to think about the trauma of the German heritage in relationship to living in the United States in the end of those war years and about how German-Americans negotiated their way through all of that; quite fascinating. They did it primarily by being mutually supportive as was the case in the older American cities that were very divided with an Italian section, a Polish section, the German section, the French, etcetera, the English speaking people and Chinatown. Up through the '60s, those divisions still existed. You can still go to Pittsburgh and find ethnic neighborhoods and here in Detroit that's true as well.

MR. ADAMSON: So when you got to Los Angeles, you went to public schools growing up? For the most part?

MR. KNODEL: Seventy-fourth Street School. I look back on it very, very happily. We went to another school first, where I entered as a kindergartener. I was there through the fourth grade and then my father built a home for us in Inglewood, which was kind of in the suburbs of Los Angeles.

MR. ADAMSON: That was that move you were talking about.

MR. KNODEL: We moved out there because we had his great aunt, who lived there, and it's where, well it's just where everything was happening. It was a little closer to the beach and it just was away from the older stuff. It was upward mobility, I mean this was part of it was well, the family wanted to show to one another that they had increasing resources and that was exemplified by the home that we lived in.

So we lived there for only a period of about two years, a year and a half maybe, and then moved to another home, which was a Spanish-style house on 78th Street in Los Angeles, 1946 west 78th Street, and I lived there through the university with my family. And it was the old neighborhood with wonderful, diverse people living around. Diverse meaning various European backgrounds and a number of American families who we look back on - my mother always used to say, "Oh, they're American," and that always interested me. She talked about the Woodses - the Woods family, lived diagonally across - "Oh, they're American." He's a police officer, they have three children, and everything they do is American. And it's interesting to think about what that meant to them and how my parents thought about themselves as being different and actually thought sometimes about themselves as being better.

I think that there was a real difference in terms of social relationships. The way in which one placed oneself relative to other people - manners were extremely important in our family and there were things you could do and couldn't do.

They appreciated those limitations and they respected them and they supported them. They wanted their children to exemplify their values as well, and that is where there was a little bit of tension with some of the people in the neighborhood, but basically my parents were very well-liked by everyone.

MR. ADAMSON: So when it came time for you to think of yourself as being an American, how did you feel about that heritage from your parents?

MR. KNODEL: I have always been a product of my parents. I mean, I have always thought of myself that way, not to the disinterest in other people and other ways of living, but to the pleasure of those positive parts in my own

heritage. My work later on all was inspired by the spirit of that kind of environment. The sense of taking pleasure in what you do, the sense of really working - to establish a place in life experience where you truly live for the benefits of your work. In every case, I know my family and friends all made separation between work and play. They knew how to play together, they knew how to talk about work when it was important to deal with, but it very seldom came into their social interaction.

I think the environment was really important. My parents had always had a beautiful garden, and I think in part it's because they lived during the Victory Garden era. I remember in Milwaukee, I mean, when I was two - I couldn't have been more than two or three years old. I remember walking in the garden, smelling the flowers. In fact, I internalized the smell of peonies from Milwaukee so potently that when we moved to California, of course there were no peonies, and it was only my first spring here in Michigan when I walked around Cranbrook [Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI] in - you know, what was it, in late April, early May when they started to bloom - and I put my face into one of those flowers, and I took the smell that was like coming full circle into something that my body knew and remembered. But only at that moment, did I bring it to consciousness. And only when I had my own garden - started to plant my own garden - I went to the nursery and saw bleeding heart plants. I remember distinctly standing there in front of a bleeding heart plant with my mother where she described what I was looking at. And I remember I looked at something that I knew. Now, isn't that strange that you can have that kind of a connection?

Actually, I have early memory of a lot of sensations. A wading pool - I must have been two or three - sitting on a bronze frog on the edge of a wading pool and the bronze frog was wet and, you know, that kind of very sensory-based, sensual kind of experience where you communicate through your body and you remember. Your body remembers experiences. So when I remember my grandparents' home and my parents' garden - my father gardened in the European way. He put everything in rows. Everything had its place. There were relationships that had to exist between the plants - There needed to be furrows, with spaces that you could walk in between the rows of the vegetables. And they were banked with the taller ones were at one side of the garden, the shorter were at the other. And there was always a sequence and a cycle, and there was never a weed in the garden.

Weeds were not allowed, and I grew up mowing the lawn and my sister did the back yard, I did the front yard. And we had an edger and the edger had to cut the grass precisely where the concrete met the grass, and you had to have perfectly straight lines and the surface of the grass had to be perfectly even - no irregularities at all. And the edges of the beds had to be well trimmed and taken care of. What is interesting about looking back is that I realize I learned a kind of discipline through all of that. Those were my first experiences with design, with creating order.

My mother did it in the home as well - I mean, always Sunday dinner was presented at a table which was beautifully laid with silver and porcelain and crystal and candles and flowers - always. That was basic, it had to happen every Sunday and it was very regular. And those glasses that I have up on the shelf - the colored glasses - came from my parents' table. I remember when my mother sent money to Germany to buy those glasses - called Roman glasses - because they had the money at that point to afford something that spoke another level higher on the ladder. There were 12 of them then that arrived probably in the late '50s, and they were treasures kept in a mahogany corner cabinet. They were used for special occasions. When walking into the dining room, the first thing everyone did was to compliment my mother on the way the place looked. "Oh, what a beautiful table, now let's sit down." And that was the beginning.

Then my grandfather's wine would be poured - you know, always that sense of those kind of amenities where Sunday had to be a different day than the rest of the week was, and you cooked extra special food and desserts were always extremely important. And everyone stayed at the table through the whole meal, and the grandparents spoke and the children listened, and the parents spoke. And sometimes the kids just sat back and got wiggly, and I would wiggle off the chair that I sat on. I remember so well at my grandparents' home - off the chair, going underneath the table where there was this world of turned table legs - mahogany probably or maybe it was walnut - [laughs] - and the lace tablecloth that came down off the edge of the table and legs and shoes, and I loved it underneath there. I just loved that space. It was kind of private, you could hear everything else that was going on, but it was a world that was really apart.

And you know, I didn't think about that until I was years later with Paolo Soleri at Haystack School [Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, ME] - and maybe that was the early '70s - and he was doing his big project with everyone that was in residence there that year, and it was about taking his mega-ideas about architecture and finding an interface with craft. I remember sitting down with him and talking and he was asking us to remember sensations within our field of experience that inform our work. At that point, I went back to thinking my way underneath that table, and honestly today, I still am in that place. [Laughs.] Or in - my grandfather's big chair, or those kinds of places where you find a degree of security and visual environment.

MR. ADAMSON: So it's a place of security, but it's also the independence and creativity possibly.

MR. KNODEL: Absolutely. Nobody else saw the world that I was seeing. That was my space, and I didn't create it, but I appropriated it as children do in the process of play by making meaning out of everything - anything. Today when I am with kids, my tendency is to spark their imagination as quickly as possible, kind of subvert what everything is to get to the place where you start imagining something.

Remembering my grandparents' home - this bungalow style - was very dark on the interior, heavy woods, little light coming in, a little Japanese in feeling of course, and all overlaid with German stuff. The special environment that they created had a texture to it. You know, it had the clock - tick, tick, tick, tick. I have that clock today that sat on the mantle, and it just ticked, ticked, ticked. Every room had a clock in it. After my grandfather died, my grandmother was living there alone. I would go over there occasionally. I would say, "How can you stand the sound of all of that?" She said, "They are my friends, they are my friends." And they were all windups, you know, so time was something you had to interact with. Time stood still when the clock was not operating. So there was that mechanical kind of intervention that set a sound going, and it would be an accompaniment to your lives.

Today a lot of people leave on the television all the time. I never do that - have television as a background for my activity - and still don't especially like the tick, tick, tick of the clock as a steady accompaniment.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.] It sounds like from your family, both your grandparents' generation and your parents', you inherited this very interesting combination of a design sensibility, a certain amount of discipline, maybe even - you could say specifically the word craftsmanship in some ways and your appreciation for that value in a way - but also, that that was all cached in a certain old world aesthetic or sensibility. And I wonder, looking back on it now, do you feel there are aspects of that older way of doing things that inform your work today?

MR. KNODEL: Of course. Of course, how can I be such a hopeless romantic? I mean, all of my work comes down to the opportunity to have an extraordinary experience, something beyond that which you experience on a day-to-day basis - the art experience has to bypass the intellectual - hit you in another place. And it's at that place where you are just pulled in, and if it's worth keeping your eyes on, you are held to it. But, you know, we will probably talk about that later on today.

MR. ADAMSON: I guess what I'm wondering about specifically now though is the question of whether there is an old quality to it or charmingness [*sic*] - those are two different things, but those are things that people associate with old world traditional values. And looking at your work superficially, it seems not post-modern exactly, but it is very new, very much engaged with new materials, and technologies. But do you feel like there is a 19th-century quality to it or historical quality to it that is important to you?

MR. KNODEL: You know, that is an interesting question and I'm not sure that I know how to answer it because I don't believe that those values that one might popularly associate with the 19th-century experience are far away from where we are as human beings and what we need as human beings. It is just that the way of living has changed and therefore our attention to those conditions has likewise changed. We haven't got time to do everything, although I sometimes like to think I do. In fact over the past few years, I have really become engaged in gardening again, and we will go take a walk to the garden a little later, but that is something I never knew. You know, I had to mow the lawn as a kid. I didn't like it; I really didn't like it, but it was only later on when I owned my first home in Southern California that I found myself taking care of my own garden and thinking about my father's garden. I didn't think about it at that point.

So those were good habits. I mean, my grandmother was really the one who had more of an-aesthetic dimension. My grandmother's garden was a kind of mixed potpourri. I think what she wanted to do was bring every good thing, every wonderful sensation she could grab hold of, into her garden. Because she came from Berlin where she lived in the city and she didn't have a garden, in California in her bungalow, she had the cascading bougainvillea, the oleander, and abundant fruit trees.

After dinner at her home on Sundays, the family - my grandmother followed by my grandfather, my mother, my father, then myself, then my sister - we walked in a single row following the leader as we walked along little paths that snaked through my grandparents' garden. And as we walked, we would take four steps and stop and look at things. She had cabbage roses - enormous roses that grew on the fence - and we would have a discussion about them. "Look at my roses, or look at the color, or compare the bud to the full-bloomed flower." And then opposite the pink rose, I remember on the other side of the path was a lily, and I had never seen this lily again - it was a black lily, and it was a very sexy black lily. And it had several green leaves, but coming out of the center was this very large lily form with the calyx that would just point into the sky, and everyone would stop and talk about the black lily.

It was always talked about in a way that had a little emotion to it, you know, that kind of suggestion that it was the weird plant in the garden. It was the one that offered a contrast to everything else.

[Audio break.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, go ahead.

MR. KNODEL: My grandmother had the garden, she made quilts, she sewed clothing for the family, she made carpets - all the rugs in the house she made and they were made from strips of used fabric, all my grandfather's old clothing. She cut it into strips, gathered the strips with a running stitch down the center, cinched up the strips, and then she sewed the gathered units together in a concentric circle. They different than braided rugs, but they are constructed in that way.

So I saw those things. Her life seemed to be about making - just about making something happen to compliment living experiences. These things seemed to be essential to her, they were everything to her. This goes to the point - we didn't have artists in our family. My grandparents had a few oil paintings hanging on the walls and memorabilia that they had brought along - porcelain, silver objects, mainly, functional things. My parents, likewise, had those kinds of things.

When talking about sculpture - they would associate it mainly with monumental buildings or with museums because they enjoyed going to museums. But in their own homes, they had porcelain figures of dancing girls. There was nothing more grand than a painting that showed a drawing room of Louis XVI and all the ladies in court dress and the king sitting on a throne. After all, that was the old world, right? Even in the early part of the 20th century, the sense of the transition from an aristocracy was still alive. The king has it all, you know. It's the aristocracy that have the benefits of the riches of life, and everybody else kind of makes do.

Well, the American dream was about the fact that suddenly - for immigrants especially - they were free of the old limitation, and sky was the limit. And so when you think about what came into that world - the decorative objects that were produced for popular consumption reflected tastes established by the "higher end," those of wealth and position. That viewpoint exists today. It's still a dominant characteristic in the decorative arts.

MR. ADAMSON: So for you that was your first association with the concept of art then in some way?

MR. KNODEL: Actually, I did not know the term - I don't think I knew the term. I knew a little painting and sketching and drawing - I did that as a kid - but in relation to ideas about art, almost all of them came through school. I was in California - I was part of the progressive education movement in California. By the time I arrived at junior high school, all of the stops were out. I mean, California was experimenting with everything. By the time I got to high school - you know, cooking classes for boys and shop classes - absolutely everything. Students found a new freedom in those post-war years in education, everything opened up with new belief that there was new opportunity to create a new society resulting from nurturing all of the parts of the human being. Within a relatively peaceful environment, one could explore.

But in the end, it was not only the students that were exploring, it was the educators - [laughs] - it was the administrators, the teachers who tried everything. I loved art classes, and I had the best experiences. Even in elementary school, that was always a favorite time of mine, going to the art room and puttering around.

But the real turning point happened in junior high school in B7 - the first semester of seventh grade. All the children had to take art and music, and I remember going into the art class where there was this very jovial-looking woman who was standing in front of the class. She was big. I just remember she was big. She had long, dark hair. I liked her when I laid eyes on her, and she put us to work doing the most exciting things - drawing with Crayola and then layering India ink over it and then scratching through to bring the color up from the back side.

Oh, I just loved her because she passed out the watercolor boxes and the brushes, and she told us about mixing colors and she got us very excited - "let a little bit of a black spill over into the red, let a little bit of the purple go into this. And then she would say - and this was my favorite, "And you don't have to clean up your watercolor box at the end of the class. You just close it because the next time you mix colors, you can let some of that stuff that dried up from the previous time mix in and make more interesting colors out of the pure ones that existed in pans." And then she played the guitar, and I thought that was really cool. She played the guitar while we were working, and she told us about her own artwork.

Bunker Hill exists now in Los Angeles - it's the center of the city - you know, where the new Frank Gehry building is located. When I lived there as a child, it was covered with Victorian homes, and the Angels Flight, which was a trolley car, that took people from central market at the base to the top of the hill. My parents lived nearby when they first came from Germany. My art teacher said, "You know, when I was in college, my teacher took a number of the students, into Los Angeles to paint." And she said, "I still love doing that today. I drive to a street in Bunker Hill and I take out my watercolors and I sometimes set them up on the hood of my car and I just get out a piece of paper and a drawing board and I start to draw." And I thought, "That sounds like a wonderful thing to do." It just didn't occur to me that you do those kinds of things.

Then she said, let's try this and let's try that, and within a year I took two art classes and I even won the

Scholastic Art Award, the Gold Key. I remember going to this event - the Scholastic Art Awards - and my parents came, and my Crayola etchings were there on the wall, and my parents were so proud and I was so excited about the whole thing.

This woman - d'Arcy Hayman was her name, eventually moved on to University High School, which was connected to UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles] where I studied, and then made the a leap to UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] in Paris, and she became head of the art section of UNESCO for many years - very successfully so. She was there in Paris when they built the UNESCO headquarters building, and she developed the whole art program there.

And then -

MR. ADAMSON: So can I just pause there for one second. So that is really the moment at which you realized that you were different in this - in other words, you had to taken to this more than other children perhaps did.

MR. KNODEL: No. Lots of kids were into it. But I realized it's something that I liked doing. I was also practicing piano an hour every day. I took all the other classes. I was fairly good in school, and I was involved in all kinds of activities. I also got involved early on with Methodist Church. That's another chapter of my life. I became the president of the clubs, the choir, the head of the youth group. I did all of that stuff. And it's just amazing, as look back, and especially going into high school - I did everything and successfully managed the complexities.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were participating in the whole pallet of experimental education at that time it sounds like.

MR. KNODEL: Yes, yes a lot.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you have an understanding of what was going on in your school as being different from what had happened 10, 20 years earlier, do you think? I mean was it -

MR. KNODEL: No. I'll tell you when that happened. That actually happened when I went to - do you want to hear - should I tell you about Horace Mann? I have to finish telling you about junior high school first. Let me tell you about something and then we'll go to high school. All right?

All right. In the eighth grade, there was this man by the name of William Paul Baker, and he had just graduated from USC [University of Southern California], and he got this position at Horace Mann Junior High School, where I was a student. And I went into Paul Baker's classroom and he was also extremely fascinating as a human being. He seemed to laugh at everything, and he had the best time, and he got so excited by what the students were doing. And having just come out of - USC - he had all kinds of new technologies as well.

He would get everyone so excited that his class was occasionally bedlam. I remember sometimes he just jumped up on the chair, and onto the table, and he took a big yardstick, and he banged it on the table and said, "You kids shut up!" [Laughs.] And he even used the word "damn." I think it was the first time that I ever heard that coming out of the mouth of a teacher. But he created - he created the excitement. He created this fabulous, exciting environment where everybody loved going into those classes.

And we did decorations, for our junior high school dances - I have even done some writing about that. I don't know if you've seen that, but I published an article a number of years ago in *American Craft* - kind of a reflection on all that period. It was really a powerful experience for me. We would go into the big gym and he would pull magical things out as tools, as equipment for making stuff. They were all cheap and available. We learned how to make mobiles as Alexander Calder was doing.

My teachers were blatant in terms of appropriation. They just took bright ideas and brought them into the classroom. So you'd be doing Calder mobiles in your junior high school art class, you'd be using Picasso techniques of various kinds. And they brought in reproductions that we used as inspirations for our own work. And a dialogue was going on. Artists' names were coming into the classroom. We were looking at things. We looked at *Fortune* magazine covers. We explored ideas of what commercial art was separate from the other kind of art. So that discussion - that discussion grew.

But Paul Baker was especially important because he was a man traveled abroad as a young man. I think he was in the Second World War and then he went back to school and then he went into teaching. He must have been in his 30s when I met him. He traveled a lot to Europe and to other places. Darcy Hayman did as well. Oh, and I had elementary school teacher, Joy Bender who just died a few weeks ago, and she went to Mexico and would bring - bring hand painted, ceramic piggy banks for everyone. I loved those objects.

And Paul went to France. The first time I saw slides was in his class. He set up his little slide projector and he showed us all sorts of exotic places - almond groves that were blooming in early spring on hillsides in Italy. And

he would talk about walking through the almond groves, and the white petals just left the branches and you could walk through this. Well I had never had an experience - [laughs] - like that. California has blossoming trees, but it's not like here in Michigan or places where you live in an orchard environment within an abundance of springtime flowers.

And he went to Santiago de Compostela. He took the route of the monks as they walked. And he had the stamps, and the marks, and talked about the mystery and then he'd say, "And then we arrived at the façade of the church," and he'd show a slide and, oh my God, I was so excited by what I was seeing. And he showed us the Coliseum, and he showed us Notre Dame, and he talked about Gothic and Romanesque art, and I thought, wow, there's something going on here that I didn't know about. At this time, my parent's friends were all beginning to go back to Europe. With their growing financial resources they had, the big thing was to go back and visit their homeland. They were the ones who first used the 35 millimeter camera. I swear it was created for these people. And they were the ones who walked around and photographed everything dutifully. They had to document their whole experience with slides. I remember on 78th Street, maybe 30 friends and family all getting together in the living room, putting up the screen at the end of the living room, the projector was set, and they would walk through the experience, slide by slide.

We saw all the relatives, we saw my mother's church in Berlin at the end of Kurfürstendamm, a church that was bombed in Second World War, where my mother received her confirmation. She always referred to it as her church, "Mein kirche." And she spoke with such passion about it and whenever that image would come up on the screen, my mother would sigh - I can always hear her saying, "Mein kirche!" [Laughs.]

So everybody in that audience shared that experience. Well, that combined with Paul Baker and what he showed to me and then as I went on to the university and started taking some art history courses, all of that built this extraordinary expectation.

MR. ADAMSON: The world just opened up.

MR. KNODEL: I could hardly wait to start travel. So that was extremely important. I went on to George Washington High School, a school that had six fulltime art teachers. Everyone took art. Everyone took music. And I was a college prep major not knowing what I was going to do with my life, but I can remember looking over the opportunities for study in high school. They had catalogue and they passed that on to you when you were in the ninth grade in junior high school. And you had to go with your parents to the high school for this kind of orientation thing and make some determination of what kind of major - what you were going to major in.

Since I was the first person to graduate from college in my family that language of "majors" wasn't part of our environment. So it was as much a learning experience for my parents as it was for me.

MR. ADAMSON: And they lived vicariously through you in someway, too.

MR. KNODEL: Oh, absolutely. I think so. Oftentimes in absolute disbelief. [Laughs.] "What is he doing now?" But then it was always exciting and I excelled in all these things that I - all these various ways that I explored. Having the privilege to do all of that was just great, and it was a privilege and I think a pleasure for them, although my father was worried about what I was going to do ultimately.

So when I went to high school, I became a college prep major because according to my parents "you got to get on this track where can earn a decent living." So what were the possibilities? And at that time, I could major in science, I could major in mathematics, science, language, history - And so I decided on language. And what was my language? Spanish. There was no German in the high school - [laughs] - that I went to.

So I decided to learn Spanish and ended up being Don Quixote de la Mancha in the plays. I also took classes in geology, and anatomy, and physiology, all wonderful subjects which I still use today. Maybe in your experience you have the same thing. It's amazing how much you remember from those short-term exposures the first time around.

I also took as many art classes as I could. We had a great art department and they had a class called stage production, which I really became involved in. This is another part of my experience that I haven't mentioned. When I was about nine, I sang in a church choir at Saint Mark's Methodist Church. I was recruited by our insurance agent who came door to door and he talked my mother into buying Prudential Insurance - life insurance. And he said, "Oh, I'm a member of the church up the street. Are you a member of the church?" And she said, "No." And so, "Well, maybe your children would like to come to Sunday school."

So we went - my sister and I. The church property had once been a golf course and the church took over the clubhouse. It was funky and really an interesting space. I grew up in that church. The whole experience of the congregation getting together, deciding that the old club house was not good enough, and having to re-build the entire facility. I was part of that whole process. I was also part of all the other aspects of church - church life

including teaching Sunday school and singing in the choir. I went dutifully every Wednesday night and Sunday morning from being a child all the way through my third year at UCLA.

MR. ADAMSON: Even though your parents were not particularly involved in the church.

MR. KNODEL: They were not involved at all. They were Lutherans who had left Germany. My father found meaning in nature. He was not interested in any organized religion. My mother would have been Lutheran if the children had gone to the Lutheran church. Instead she came to the Methodist church on holidays and occasionally felt guilty about not being more involved.

At about 10 years old, our church choir was recruited by the Los Angeles Conservatory to sing as a children opera choir - to form the children's chorus in the opera company. Before I knew it, I was in the children's chorus of *Carmen*, and then *La Bohème*. I'm the one who sang, "I would like to buy to buy a drum at center of the stage. [Laughs.]

This is also extremely important in my childhood experience because I still love that backstage environment. To me that was the place where everything happened. Right after I got involved in *Carmen*, we performed at the Wilshire Ebell Theatre and some other theaters in Los Angeles - we went to Redlands and performed at that Redlands's Bowl. We went here and there. I loved going with all these talented people, being back stage, the excitement of the performance, the singers rehearsing, hearing their voice - [sings arpeggio] - doing their warm-ups in the backroom, and so on. And the stage settings - moving these huge pieces of stuff around, and seeing the fly space, and being backstage in all that darkness.

We were in the chorus in the second act of *La Bohème* and I remember the curtain going up. Standing off to the side in - all that blackness, and the spotlight coming down and picking out little pools of light, and all of those things that hung up above, and the excitement of changing the scenery, or when the chorus rushed out on the stage. There were huge box of confetti and streamers used in the second act New Year's Eve party - or Christmas Eve party. It's Christmas Eve, I think - isn't it?

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. KNODEL: Just before we were going on stage, the adult chorus members were to grab the confetti and throw it. My good friend Leona had a black cape, and we found that there was a hole in the lining, and we would fill the lining - when no one was looking we grabbed as much confetti and streamers, and filled her cape. Then we took those home because my parents, in the back of their house, had a beautiful room, and they let me use that room - they used it in the summer time but I could have it the rest of the year. It was behind the garage. And in that room, I built a puppet theater where we used the confetti and streamers to recreate the sensation of the opera stage.

And I was very interested in puppets, and marionette theater especially. One day my elementary school renovated its little theater in the school. And my good friend, Colby, who lived across the street who was always into everybody else's business, found out that the curtains were being given away. So he said, "Gary, come quickly." And we took our bicycles, went to the school and I'll never forget getting the big grand drape - half of the main curtain. It was this burgundy color, velveteen fabric and we piled it on to one bicycle and he stood on one side and I stood on the other and we walked this bicycle home and took it to the room in the back of the garage where I now had this huge piece of gorgeous fabric to do something with. Really.

So of course, I made the classiest marionette theater. I mean the curtains came down from the ceiling, they covered all the walls. I had a proscenium. I used Christmas tree lights for the stage lighting. I made all the puppets for various shows. I was especially good with *Hansel and Gretel* because as a child, I went to see the opera when the San Francisco Opera used to come to Los Angeles.

[Audio break.]

MR. ADAMSON: This is disc two of the interview with Gerhardt Knodel conducted by Glenn Adamson on August 3, 2004.

Okay. *Hansel and Gretel*.

MR. KNODEL: To make the witch in Hansel and Gretel particularly frightening to the children in the auditorium, they flew her in on a trapeze. She whished across the stage, and I said, "I can do that as well." So with my marionette, I made that happen.

You know, I recruited the kids in the neighborhood to close the curtains for me and we sold tickets, and it was so much fun. In junior high school - there were assemblies all the time and there was some activity there that I got involved in. But in high school - it was a three-year high school, right away from the 10th grade I became

interested in stage things, especially through set design.

I took a course from Mrs. Ahrens, Genevieve Ahrens, and she was just wonderful. In fact, I took a lot of art classes from her. She was really into the Edward Hopper and Grant Wood School of mural painting. She loved what had gone on in that period of time leading up to the war. Murals were really important to her. I remember her telling us how to compose figure compositions and how to create an environment for them. There was kind of a methodology to the whole thing and the way that she practiced. But she also did the stage work and she helped us to understand how to make an image for a backdrop and grid it and then we would go to the stage to paint the backdrop.

Our high school auditorium was beautiful. I think it was built in the '20s. The auditorium was really wonderful. And I remember the big backdrop and gridding it off, and learning how to make something big from something small.

And into my - the eleventh grade, one of the teachers and this was - did I mention there were seven teachers in this school - and they were so amazing - the diversity of them. Oh, that was another point I was going to make. One of my early classes was in a classroom - we were all on the third floor of the building. All of the art classes were on the third floor. The room at the end had desks that were set up in rows with the tabletop that would lift up so you could use it as an easel. And in the back corner, I saw a piece of equipment that I had really never seen before. It was a weaving loom.

The high school had been built in the time when vocational courses were taught and developed. There were a number of schools in Los Angeles that were vocational high schools many changed in the late '50s and '60s, but there was still some of that kind of big spirit of learning a trade. Our high school had lots of equipment intended for that kind of training, but there wasn't much going on with that equipment. I didn't do any weaving at that point, but I remember the loom being there.

There was also a ceramics room but it was not very sophisticated as I remember. The strength and focus of the art department was in painting and drawing and the design courses.

MR. ADAMSON: Was there a - were you conscious of the hierarchy at that stage of -

MR. KNODEL: Of artists?

MR. ADAMSON: Of fine arts and crafts being two different things that - and fine art being more important in some way?

MR. KNODEL: No.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. KNODEL: No, I wasn't. They were just different art subjects.

MR. ADAMSON: Different things you could do basically.

MR. KNODEL: Yes. Some were thought of, by some of the kids, as being a little more difficult than some of the others. Painting was a little more difficult. Maybe that was -

MR. ADAMSON: It was just a matter of what it took to get competent to get at it. Okay.

MR. KNODEL: Then into that environment in the 11th grade came Mrs. MacFadden. She was the most unusual person that had come into my life. She had big red lips that she painted out beyond the lines of her mouth. She wore rouge, she had false eyelashes, she wore a wig. I didn't know anyone that wore wigs. When her hair wasn't ready in the morning, she just plopped a wig on her head. She wore felt coats that she made herself. They were sleeveless in the wintertime. Avocado green over an orange dress underneath. She wore really weird shoes. She had jewelry going up her arms. She thrust her hands into the pockets and she would walk like a trooper across the campus going to the faculty dining room. She just held her head high and she just walked. She had attitude. I just loved her.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. KNODEL: And in my annual - because we had our teachers sign our annuals at the end of the year, she wrote, "Dear Gery, love you dearly. Someday we must marry. Signed Anne MacFadden."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. KNODEL: I thought that was just so great to have that kind of relationship. She was there into my 12th year.

I think she taught at the high school maybe a year, year-and-a-half. And I remember her talking to me and saying, "You know, you really got talent. You should really go ahead and do something in the world of art." And she said, "What are you interested in doing?" And I said, "You know, I think teaching sounds really interesting to me. I've been thinking about that." She said, "God forbid! If I encourage you to do anything, it's to avoid teaching like a plague!" She said, "The only reason I'm here is that my design business wasn't going so well." And she was doing it kind of by default; she did everything that she could do to discourage me from being an art teacher.

She didn't like some of the kids and some of them didn't like her at all. There were other teachers who bent over backwards so that everyone in class was involved but she didn't care. She liked the people who liked the subject, and that was it. So we got along really well. But she was the first teacher with whom I had that kind of a frank conversation. Paul Baker and I also stayed in touch. He took great pride in all of my accomplishments in high school and then on into college and he was very nurturing. Especially in the 12th grade, I started to exercise a little bit more of my own initiative. In the 12th grade I designed - *My Fair Lady*, which opened on Broadway in 1956. And our music department simply did a thing that they couldn't do today. They got all the sheet music and since they couldn't get the musical's original books they used *Pygmalion* by Bernard Shaw's, and they patched the whole thing together. So we produced *My Fair Lady*.

I also participated in a dance scene. I danced at that period of time. We had a modern dance program and there were a number of boys who were in those classes, so I played the counterpart to Henry Higgins in our production. I designed all the sets for the show and painted them. Did my Spanish, and my science, and all of that, did the choir, did the family dinners on Sunday. You know, I look back it on it, and I think to myself, hey it was pretty amazing that all of that happened. But that was a balanced life to me. I didn't own a car. Lots of my friends had cars of course. Elvis was big. It was that period.

MR. ADAMSON: It was the car culture of course.

MR. KNODEL: Car culture. The girls - at noon, the girls walked through the high school knitting - they had knitting needles. That's another story. They had knitting needles and they knit socks for their boyfriends.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. KNODEL: And it was high-end when you could knit a choo-choo train with angora smoke that came out of it. So those girls had to know what they were doing. Now isn't this weird. They did that for social identity - Most of them were knitting. And they knit dice. The dice - the pair of dice that hung from the rearview mirror in the '50 Chevrolet.

MR. ADAMSON: But that was sort of another group of people. That wasn't your scene?

MR. KNODEL: That wasn't my - no, no. Well, I mean I was in the middle of all of them. But I wasn't - one of those guys who led in those clubs. That was another world to me.

And I spoke at our high school graduation. I did all of that stuff. So it came to a happy ending. I was a very happy person at that time in my life. I also square danced. And I was in a performing, an exhibition group. This sounds so weird to think even about a time when teenagers squared danced. But we did. We had a big square dance club with fabulous kids from Hollywood, north, out in the San Fernando Valley. And every Saturday morning, I would go to Van Nuys from -

MR. ADAMSON: I was just there.

MR. KNODEL: Via the San Fernando freeway that goes by the Getty [Getty Center, Los Angeles, CA]. And so I'd go over there every Saturday morning to rehearsal from nine till noon. When I didn't drive, my mother drove - a few other people came from the area. And we performed all over the state of California. Everything I was doing was bizarre. I look back and I think, well, what a nerdy thing to do. [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: But it wasn't then. It was one of things to do.

MR. KNODEL: It was. We had costumes, we had respect, we got awards. It was still a social-based environment.

MR. ADAMSON: Because so many of the things you did in high school would today be considered to be socially marginal. You know, the set design for the drama club and -

MR. KNODEL: Everything. It was all kind of, that's what I said, nerdy. You know, you look back on it and you think, wow. But on the other hand, I had enough arenas where I was getting the respect of a lot of people and the art that I produced - people paid attention to it.

MR. ADAMSON: So you continued to show it and enter your art in prize - in competitions to some extent.

MR. KNODEL: In school, there were shows of various kinds and -

[Audio break.]

I was really interested in going to UCLA. And for one reason or another, things didn't work out. I went instead to Los Angeles City College.

In part, I went there because I received some counseling that said lots of students from there go on to UCLA, maybe it's better to treat this as kind of a halfway house, and you'll benefit a lot from it. Actually it was the best thing I ever did, because I went there right away, an art major, and studied with some extraordinary people. Bernard Kester was there. He was just beginning to teach. He had graduated from UCLA and he taught at LA City College. It was the beginning of his ceramics career.

MR. ADAMSON: I had no idea.

MR. KNODEL: That's right, and Mary Jane Leland was in charge of the textile area, and she became my next heroine, and the next love of my life. I met Mary Jane, she had just started teaching. She was from the American Crayon Company and had worked with the American Craft Council. She had, graduated from Cranbrook with Jack [Lenor] Larsen, and a number of other interesting people. Then taught at University of Illinois I think, Illinois.

MR. ADAMSON: At Urbana-Champaign?

MR. KNODEL: Urbana-Champaign, yes. Then went to California, got a job at the American Crayon Company as a demonstrator. They produce Crayolas [now called Dixon Ticonderoga Company, produce Prang crayons]? At that time, they were doing all kinds of enormous experimental and very exciting projects. They sponsored exhibitions to move their products.

MR. ADAMSON: Sure.

MR. KNODEL: She was the art demonstrator and then she went to LA City College. Mary Jane also had the experience from the textile experience that she developed at Cranbrook, where she studied with Marianne Strengell. Her Cranbrook experience formed a structure for teaching. She had basically a Bauhaus kind of experience, and she took that into the classroom. She was extremely rigorous. I experienced my basic design courses with her as Gary Griffin did. He and I still talk today about Mary Jane's projects and her discipline, and how tough she was, and -

MR. ADAMSON: You and Gary were together at City College?

MR. KNODEL: At Long Beach, no, he studied at Long Beach, excuse me, I get ahead of myself. He studied with her at Long Beach. Before that, she was at LA City College, and then went on to Long Beach.

MR. ADAMSON: So you guys didn't know each other at that time?

MR. KNODEL: No, no, no. I'll tell you later about how we met. But no, I was at the entry point and met her, and then I worked with her. I did all my beginning textile work with her. She was the first person that said, "Now I want you to go to the yardage store," which I had done as a kid, because I bought textiles, fabrics for my puppets. I remember as a kids going into the store and buying a little magenta, and a little chartreuse, you know, making lots of things.

So Mary Jane said "We're having this project now, I want you to go to the yardage store. I want you to buy, three one-yard pieces and one three-yard piece of something or other." Then we made wood blocks and then eventually after some experiments, I remember I laid out this piece of fabric, block printed a three-yard piece of fabric. What I loved about it was when you were finished you could roll it up. You could fold it up. You could put it in a bag. The textiles were collapsible. I thought that was really neat.

And I ultimately came to love that, when as my collection of printed textiles grew, I mean, I was still living at my parents home at that time, and all their friends were really interested in my work. So we would go into my bedroom where of course I had decorated the whole place - My mother always said, "It's your room, do whatever you want."

Anyway, we'd get in there and I'd take my rolls of fabric and open them up like that, so the whole thing unrolled and everybody would go, "Oh, look how beautiful." [Laughs.] Then I'd roll them up and put them away. I felt every time I did the unrolling, it was like an extension of myself in an interesting way.

MR. ADAMSON: Like a performance of a kind, almost?

MR. KNODEL: Yes, but as an undergraduate student in the fiber area, we were encouraged to do works that were

applicable to functional use.

I did printing before I studied any structural work. All that printing was done with commercial textiles in mind. We did three yard lengths for casement or drapery fabrics, and for upholstery. We thought about different applications. Exploration of pattern and repetition was the mode of study by contrast to the compositional work that was done in a painting or drawing.

With textiles design for yardage, I liked that the consumer could buy something that was part of something larger. Later on I used that idea in a number of works, you know, isolating - a segmenting of something that had that linear continuum to it, which was part of the basic nature of fabric. There was conceptual spontaneity that I discovered, and it was a time of experimenting with all sorts of techniques. Nobody knew a lot about anything.

MR. ADAMSON: I was just going to ask about that. Was Leland herself - would you say that she was highly technically skilled because of all of her education?

MR. KNODEL: She was. She knew everything that there was to know about hand processes at that time except for chemical dyeing. You know, I've lived through the discovery of macramé, batik, tie-dying, not the discovery, but the re-discovery, because all of those techniques had been done earlier in the 1910s and 20s. They were part of the earlier aesthetic arts and crafts movement. Later, they began to re-emerge as new technical possibilities, and that was a very exciting time to me.

MR. ADAMSON: Did you feel like Leland was involved in that kind - that exploration, and that she was passing that on to you?

MR. KNODEL: She loved screen printing. She was the queen of screen printing.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. KNODEL: And Bernard was the king. Bernard also did a screen printed textiles, which was, you know, his field as well. He did both textiles and ceramics.

MR. ADAMSON: Side by side.

MR. KNODEL: But at Los Angeles City College, he didn't teach the textile courses he taught ceramics. When he went to UCLA he did the weaving classes. He focused primarily on teaching weaving because printed textiles was under the tutelage of a senior faculty member.

And I had the highest regard for everything he did and for Mary Jane's work as well. At that time there was an organization called the Southern California Designer Craftsman. I was young but they brought me along. They said, "You need to know about this."

MR. ADAMSON: Did they bring all the students along?

MR. KNODEL: Actually no. At that time, there was distance between students and teachers. I really didn't know too much about what my teachers were doing.

Teachers were separated from students. You saw their work at a faculty exhibition, but other than that, there was not a lot of integration. Teachers did not work in the environment of the classrooms, the studios where the students work. They had to have their own bag of tricks, they had their own resources and sometimes they seemed quite secretive.

And you say, well, what did they show? Mary Jane had the highest respect for Jack Larsen's fabrics, and also she knew, of course, people who had worked out in California for example, Dorothy Liebes.

Also you had the [Charles and Ray] Eames, the influence of the Eames though Herman Miller fabrics. Mary Jane would take us up to the Beverley area, to look at the decorator show rooms, to go from place to place, and we looked at commercial fabrics. So I knew the Eames textiles, the Herman Miller textiles long before I knew anything about Cranbrook or those connections.

MR. ADAMSON: Even though Leland had a direct connection to -

MR. KNODEL: Yes, she talked a little bit about it, but I was young, I mean I was 18 years old when I started to work with her, and you know, I -

MR. ADAMSON: So we're in the late '50s here when -

MR. KNODEL: Yes, I graduated from high school in '57.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, so I guess one thing I'm curious about there, then, is you know, we always think about the designer craftsmen period and the relationship of the craft programs to industry at that time. And it sounds like you were experiencing textiles mainly as a design category in some ways, as well as an art category, I suppose?

MR. KNODEL: Yes,the place where I become more aware of SCDC, Southern California Designer Craftsmen is while I was in college. Probably at UCLA.

MR. ADAMSON: How many years were you at City College?

MR. KNODEL: Two years, and then I went to UCLA, I completed a Bachelor's degree, and then I did a year of graduate work, because practice teaching was done in a fifth year. It was especially when I started teaching high school that I wanted to develop my own work in some ways. I stayed in touch with Bernard and Mary Jane and they encouraged me to attend meetings of SCDC. I always especially remember hearing Anni Albers speak. And the Pasadena design show was really important.

MR. ADAMSON: Because that was already underway, of course?

MR. KNODEL: That was underway, yes. The earliest of the exhibitions, that I participated in happened [-] one of Mary Jane's students, in my first year of screen printed textiles. One of my textiles she entered in the California State Fair and it won first prize. Big deal. I mean it was really a big deal, $100.

My father also thought that was all right! That prize suggested that there might be possibility for me in this art world. What I was going to say about the context of the work is that, that textile was then shown with ceramics and metalwork and other functional things, like interior environments and pieces of furniture, just as it was the case with the Pasadena design show. The identification of artworks done in the craft media was only beginning.

Remember traditional tapestry was not part of our training at UCLA. Nobody was doing tapestry work. Tapestry was compositional with subject matter. It was really only through the initial in-roads connecting textiles with architecture where the idea of a wall hanging or a room divider like Ted Hallman's work became expressively legitimate. And one began to think a little bit more about compositional possibilities as some of the techniques lent themselves to that.

It is especially interesting that macramé, or knotting, was definitely compositional. So what was the model that people used? There was no reason to do all that knotting, just to make a repetitive pattern, so compositional ideas began to develop.

Batik also opened up that compositional territory, while block printing, silk screen printing, stenciling on fabrics were oriented to repetitive patterning. Batik offered more of a connection to drawing, and so there was some freedom there. But it was the Europeans who started to infuse everybody with greater consciousness of other possibilities.

They had the continuous tradition of tapestry. And when they started to break away with new technical possibilities, they understood art. Artists traditionally drew the cartoons for the tapestry. But in a new approach the person who conceived the image also was the same person who wove the end product. So, a parallel was drawn with the work of painters and sculptors.

And that was, you know, that was a very important and interesting time. So little by little, the awareness of these things began to creep into my own world. Of course Ed Rossbach was there, Ed and Katherine [Westphal] were working up in Berkeley, but there was a polarity that existed separating the approaches in the two universities. UCLA oriented their design work more in terms of a Bauhaus training and Japanese aesthetics while UC Berkeley was more oriented to expressionism. Laura Andreson, the head of the ceramics department at UCLA, brought that with her and it was Bernard Kester's approach as well.

MR. ADAMSON: Sorry, Bernard Kester was teaching at UCLA when you were there?

MR. KNODEL: When I went to UCLA, he went there too, he was teaching ceramics.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. KNODEL: Yes. When I went to UCLA, I became an art major preparing for education, focusing more heavily in the craft areas. I started with some printed textiles, then entered weaving with Bernard, and took the first class with him. I also took ceramics, and then at one point I was thinking about being a ceramics major.

MR. ADAMSON: I see.

MR. KNODEL: So I studied with Laura and with Bernard. Both of them, provided me a way to see. We looked at the contours - it's the first time I heard the word contour I relation to silhouette. And we observed the nuance,

that's the first time I used the word nuance. We were encouraged to "Beware of the nuance, the imperfection," and we learned how to kind of move beyond that.

The piece had to have a wholeness to it, it had to have a total resolve. There were very specific ways that we were trained to see. At the same time, I had trained with Mary Jane. I took all of my basic color classes with her. We learned about scales of grey by making with tempera paint perfect progressions - 15 progressions from black to white. And I could do it. I could likewise mix perfect progression from red to green.

I got an A on everything. When we were asked to organize dots of color on a field and make clusters and constellations of dots move so your eye went to one center then made the transition to a secondary and a tertiary center, I truly enjoyed the adventure and the discovery of a visual language, a language of seeing.

And so, I learned that language. I loved three-dimensional design as well, building structures where I could apply the language from two dimensional to the three dimensional, start turning things around.

I loved assignments for building those balsawood structures, you know, balsawood and cardboard. At UCLA, a 3-D class that I got into used architecture as the framework. We looked at Rockefeller Center. We were looking at the relationship of planes occupying space, and looked at unoccupied space as having physical properties to it.

Mary Jane had led me very successfully in understanding "counterchange" in pattern design, black on a white ground. In painting black, shapes give form to the white negative areas.

There are many ways of entering the world of art and my way honestly came through design. I had extremely successful experiences, in the adventure of problem solving generated out of Bauhaus designed strategies by [Walter] Gropius and all his associates who created these very interesting projects for students. Of course, I didn't realize they were the source of those lessons. It is any wonder I wanted to go into teaching?

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. KNODEL: Teachers enjoyed the adventure of devising sources of inspiration. On a Saturday afternoon, you knew you had to give your classes a new problem on Monday. Question, what am I going to do? What am I going to do? I'm going to do something new, something really exciting. I want to teach them exciting. So you design what you want to teach and couple it with this and this, and all of a sudden you pull together something that has a lot of energy.

You walk into the third period on Monday and you give this challenge to the class and insist that they shut their mouths and they pay attention. "I am, after all, your teacher and I want to give you an experience that you have never had in your life." You just thought it up last night. But that's the power, and that was the excitement.

When I ultimately made the transition into teaching, I was really just translating the excitement I found as a student. Nothing that was limiting. The sky was wide open and you know, I didn't have the burden of "fine art" to deal with.

Picasso was on everybody's shoulders in the '50s and the '60s, an enormous presence. But, I wasn't burdened by Picasso. Then I can remember when *Life* magazine did the big article on Abstract Expressionists who were being shown at the Museum of Modern Art [New York, NY]. I was teaching high school and I remember bringing that article to my class, I usually bought 15 copies of the magazine and passed them out so everybody could look as I lectured about the subject. And I remember - talking about what [Jackson] Pollock was doing in terms of my own experiments in design and the exploration I had done in my own training. And I felt that technique was the link for me to understand contemporary art history.

I had studied art history extensively and I loved it. But my real gut feeling about this was most of this stuff was coming through a place that I had experienced. That is, having materials, having a blank canvas, and doing something that was creative, and letting the medium be the message, letting the composition, letting all those components come together and define a field of energy that was worth paying attention to.

My teaching did not address poor people walking down the streets of downtown Los Angeles and it wasn't burdened by international politics. I discovered aspects of art that were independent from the mundane.

In the early 60s, I heard Anni Albers speak at the Pasadena Museum. She told us most wonderful stories, of how she had discovered pre-Columbian textiles. She was there when the mummy bundle was unwrapped to reveal a textile that was something like 12 feet wide and 30 feet long. It had complete selvages and it was all woven as one piece. In the lecture she posed a riddle, "How did the weft get from the left to the right, and how did the weaver prepare such a huge warp for weaving?"

Then she went into an analysis. She showed how the warp had to be produced by runners that ran between the

warping rods at the other end. They ran back and forth and because they got a little tired the spacing in the warp became a little looser on one side than it is on the other. And she really made the textile come alive as a physical phenomenon.

Over the years I came to appreciate that "art comes from art." By understanding that has come before you discover opportunity for your work as a contribution, hopefully so, a development beyond that has happened. Likewise with my interest in textiles.

As my professional career began to develop, it was all within a framework of expectation of "the new," what could be made that had never happened before. What a brilliant period of time it was, especially in this post-modern world, you just can't go back. It's impossible to rekindle the innocence and the optimism shared by so many young artists, students and teachers.

Go to a junior high school art class today, and they talk about meaning from the very beginning, and it's all constructed within an external world. The art is not constructed within, first, and given the freedom to find its way out. So much potential is stifled.

MR. ADAMSON: You know, it's so interesting too, because for you personally it was - it sounds like it was very continuous with your upbringing which was very optimistic and delightful and filled with play, to the extent that it was involved with art and creativity?

MR. KNODEL: Absolutely, absolutely.

MR. ADAMSON: So just one thing followed right after another.

MR. KNODEL: When you were out in the studio this morning you saw the work that I'm doing right now, which is an extension point. What I have to work at sometimes is not being excessively burdened by the responsibility that I have to be smart about every thing that's happening, and to find my own place, where I'm happy. Still the new work that I'm doing is new to me. I have never made that work before. And I'm proud that the work actually remains faithful to all that has come before and it doesn't turn its back on that.

MR. ADAMSON: I guess, you know, just to get back to the nitty gritty aspects of it.

MR. KNODEL: Sure.

MR. ADAMSON: What - when you were getting involved in all of this, did you think of yourself as caring about it because you would then be able to turn around and teach it to somebody else, or did you think that you were going to be a professional artist who taught on the side?

MR. KNODEL: When I was at UCLA, my entire orientation was to the future of teaching. My work was all made as a result of solving the problems that were offered in the classes. I was not encouraged to be independent of any of that. That's not to say that I didn't have a sense that some people were independent. Especially in my years at Cranbrook, I encouraged my applicants to always think twice as to whether they wanted to be a student or not, because of what is imposed on your life through education. I highly value artists who arrive at their work without having to come through this avenue of training. But I would never have gotten to the place that I am without the threshold provided by my teachers.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

[Audio break.]

All right, we just had a nice lunch, now we're back to it. We're going to talk again about some of your experiences, still in your educational years in Los Angeles. I guess I'm curious, once you became involved in the designer craftsmen organization, at UCLA, who the other craftspeople that you became aware of were, apart from those who were actually directly teaching with you. And of course I'm curious about the [Peter] Voulkos crowd, whether you were aware of them?

MR. KNODEL: Sure, I went to Otis [College of Art & Design, Los Angeles].

MR. ADAMSON: You did?

MR. KNODEL: And visited there. I remember the work of a number of people that were part of that, that very nice operation. John Maso, Henry Takemoto.

MR. ADAMSON: Sure. And Paul Soldner.

MR. KNODEL: And Paul Soldner, definitely.

MR. ADAMSON: So how did you regard them when you encountered - I mean, because you were coming out of this -

MR. KNODEL: They were doing their thing.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. KNODEL: I had plenty of other things to think about, but it was fascinating to see what they were doing. But I'll tell you about one place that was an interesting challenge. I was elected the representative of UCLA at the All University Arts Festival in 1961 at Berkeley [University of California, Berkeley]. As I recall, I went with a group of people on a bus, and experienced the most fantastic series of art related events in the fields of drama, music and visual arts.

And at one point we were in the art department and I took a little bit of time to wander through the studios. And I went into the ceramics studio where students had taken lumps of clay and they were throwing them in the middle of the wheel, and they were, you know, eccentrically moving - in other words they hadn't yet learned the skills of centering the clay. And then I saw them open the clay volumes and begin to raise the walls, and they seemed to be very happy about the poorly misshapen lump that they cut off and carefully put to the side. They went ahead and produced another. Later I learned that Peter Voulkos was teaching there at that time -

MR. ADAMSON: He had just moved to Berkeley, I guess.

MR. KNODEL: - and the work of his students seemed to come from an entirely different point of view than we had. The difference between the ceramics program at UCLA and Berkeley was huge. I actually went back to Laura and Bernie and said, "You know, I really feel as though you've been keeping something from us."

My instructors had lots of opinions about what was going on up north, but I don't remember them speaking in positive terms about those differences, about that kind of very expressionistic work that was going on in clay. And clearly the methodology for studying ceramics up there appeared to me to be the opposite of what we were doing, our centered, nuanced and highly refined work.

The end products did not look anything like what we were making. But that was good for me because it opened up an idea that what I had been led to believe was a very complete world, was in fact very incomplete. And it was my job to go out in the world and see what was there, and learn for myself, and respond by myself.

MR. ADAMSON: You sort of accepted that responsibility yourself.

MR. KNODEL: Absolutely, absolutely. But you know, you don't shed the lessons so easily if you had strong teachers. And one of their major influences is the way they see the work, and the way in which they articulate that which they see. So when I finished my work at UCLA and began teaching high school, and then started making some work on my own, it took me years to get some of those people off my back, their way of criticizing, their way of analyzing. During those years I learned the importance of independent thinking, and the value of searching for new paradigms for action.

MR. ADAMSON: Before we leave the Berkeley contingent.

MR. KNODEL: Yeah.

MR. ADAMSON: You had mentioned Ed Rossbach and Katherine Westphal earlier. You hadn't really gone into, you know, the way that you came to know them and what you thought about them, because in some ways they were doing some of the same improvising, and experimenting in fiber materials that Voulkos and company were doing in clay, I guess you could say sort of, but then Ed Rossbach had this Cranbrook background as well. So how did he strike you in those years when you first got to know him?

MR. KNODEL: I didn't really know him; it was only at a distance and mainly through opinions of others that I became acquainted. It was only much later that I got to know him at all. We just had an exhibition of his work here at Cranbrook last year. It was very nice to be able to talk about him, and pull some of my reflections together.

He was always respected as a teacher, and I knew a lot of his students, including Lillian Elliott, Pat Hickman, Gyongy Laky. Lia Cook and I have always been good friends. But again it was occasionally some of the teachers that I worked with that had opinions about what was going on there, and it was the easier thing for me to do simply to accept their opinions rather that find out for myself.

In retrospect, you know, and especially through the view of this exhibition that we did, and earlier the Textile Museum in Washington's exhibition of his work ["Ed Rossbach: 40 Years of Exploration and Innovation in Fiber Art," 1990], which I thought was really wonderful, you can see how his work evolved in a very logical way. He

was very systematic in the way that he asked questions. If this can be this, then why can't it be that? If this can be this, and this can be that, why can't we go here?

And so incrementally he moved forward, but he always remains tethered to a source. In the long run, and this was my conclusion after representing him here last year, his real strength is really as a teacher. You know, in the long run, I think that's where he personally had the greatest effect, and where his work was mainly effective.

The arena for his work was in provoking responses to things which could have simply been ignored. He gave them power and position by drawing attention to them, and not only talking about them but reacting to them in his work. I think Katherine in many ways is a stronger artist, and in some ways more creative, there's no faulting anything about what they did. They did it with the greatest level of integrity and with enormous amount of response. Who can ask for anything more. The work was useful, it was pivotal, it affected people, and some of it is still highly regarded.

The problem is that a lot of it also has kind of gone to the wayside as other people have come in and done the work better. But that's what happens.

MR. ADAMSON: But it sounds like these are all things that took you a long time to think about their work and -

MR. KNODEL: I thought about - I wasn't thinking about that, those things at that time. The place - I believe that the area where I began to think more about the work really came as a result of seeing Magdalena Abakanowicz work in a group exhibition that Dextra Frankel curated at the California State University at Fullerton.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. KNODEL: She had Sheila Hicks, Olga de Amaral, and Ted Hallman in that show.

MR. ADAMSON: Francoise Grossen?

MR. KNODEL: Francoise may have, I don't know, no, I think she was still in school, still at UCLA, at that time. What's his name, in the San Francisco area, you know, his father was a fisherman, and he did all the small scale structures -

MR. ADAMSON: Dominic DiMare.

MR. KNODEL: Yes, he was part of it. So that was very interesting to me, I was still teaching high school at that time, so that was very eye-opening.

MR. ADAMSON: So when would that show have been at Fullerton?

MR. KNODEL: In '60 -

MR. ADAMSON: Early, because I always think of that Abakanowicz phenomenon as having occurred in 1971 when she had a big show.

MR. KNODEL: In Pasadena [Pasadena Art Museum, Los Angeles, CA].

MR. ADAMSON: Same year as "Deliberate Entanglements," ["Deliberate Entanglements: An Exhibition of Fabric Forms," 1971, traveling exhibition] but this was before?

MR. KNODEL: Yes, but not much before. I taught from '62 to '68. Maybe it was 1968.

MR. ADAMSON: So what - how do you think about those years, the teaching years, before we get to that, the incursion of the Europeans as it were?

MR. KNODEL: It was a time to grow up. It was a time to take responsibility, a time to take charge, a time to really investigate the accumulation of my experience and see what worked, what didn't work. A kind of a filtering, winnowing process, and ultimately I had great success with it at the time. I realized I could have retired at the age of 51, from the Los Angeles City school system after 30 years of teaching but decided that was not what I wanted to be abou. I was beginning to think about ideas that brought together the stage with interior design. And that was really the beginning of it, the beginning of it all.

It really came about in 1968 as a result of sitting on the stage at Westchester High School. We were about to do another show, I think it was the 40th one I was involved in there, and the head of the department, the head of the drama department said, "Well, here we go again." And I thought, yes, well, here we go again, knowing the kind of distance that we could go but the limitations that there were.

At the same time I was sitting in that neutral space of the stage thinking, isn't this interesting that we will now perform many weeks of hard work to make this space-specific and the moment that we're finished with the project it will all go back to being neutral. At the same time I had rented an apartment, and I walked into the apartment with beige walls and beige carpeting and beige everything, and said, this is like sitting on the stage. And so I thought why don't I do something with the apartment that is a little bit more like what I'm doing on the stage, where I approach things so freely?

But then I had to start thinking about what is the fantasy going to be? What's the storyline going to be here? What is the - you know, how am I going to start to direct - create a construct for this? And it just occurred to me at one point, this sounds like good material to study.

So I tendered my resignation at the high school and went to Long Beach for graduate work with Mary Jane in a very wonderful relationship, particularly wonderful because she let me do what I wanted to do. It was a self directed program. She gave me some critique along the way, did not always say what I wanted to hear, and that was useful.

Nevertheless I had a very strong drive and basically what I was intrigued with was exploring the medium of fabric in relation to an architectural potential for shaping space. That's the way I defined architectural textiles at that point, was ways to shape space with cloth other than those ways that had become familiar through - especially in the International Style of architecture movement. So we had upholstery. We had floor covering. We had window covering. But was that the full extent of possibilities?

Everywhere I looked, fabric was used only for those purposes. I couldn't find examples of people doing other things. So all of my research in the area of portable architecture really started at that period of time. I began to ask questions about the precedents.

I also took a course in the history of textiles with Stefania and Eugene Holt who were the curators of the textile collection at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. And that was in 1967 while I was still teaching high school. Mary Jane and Bernard were in the class as well, and several other people. I think there were six or seven of us. And Stefania Holt was very much respected - she had worked with Adele Coulin Weibel who was at the DIA [Detroit Institute of Arts] and an Islamicist. She had come from that tradition to textiles, and what each of them discovered was more about the language of textiles through time, and about reading textiles in more profound ways. In the history of textile, scholarship really goes back to a period of intensity in the 1910s and '20s, especially in Germany at that time. And many books were published at that time that tried to present the world with important textiles and begin to interpret them. But there was not a lot of creative interpretation going on; most of it was based in historical circumstances relative to other fields.

You know, when you used to go through our history books, you got painting, sculpture and architecture and then on the last page they showed three textiles. Always textiles were the last things. With Stefania Holt, I got an impression that somebody valued textiles at a higher level, that there was a real, you know, something interesting there. Also at UCLA, in the galleries there, they were beginning to bring in some ethnographic exhibitions.

One that I remember in particular was a very powerful show of Central Asian silk ikats and other kinds of textiles, the likes of which I had never seen before. The exuberance, the energy, the power of them, the color, everything seemed so sophisticated. And I'm saying, "What! I didn't know about these things."

I was in my first weaving glass with Bernard. He had an advanced student and he put her to work doing research on double weave, Peruvian double weave. Well, there had been a book published - Rene d'Harnoncourt published a beautiful book on the history of pre-Columbian textiles. There were gorgeous illustrations, and some identification, technical identification. But the fact of the matter is, there were no classes where any of these structures were being made. All of the research pre-war had somehow drifted off, it was not in the educational institutions, and because of the lack of textile industry in California, it certainly wasn't out there.

It may have resided in the East coast or down in the south with some of the textile mills, but then their preoccupation was in reproduction of the past. You know, they were not engaged in much scholarship along these lines either. So it all kind of evolved and things started coming together.

I had a need to study a precedent in shaping of environments. I had gone through the rigors of Stefania's course that took me from the beginning of time through Coptic and pre-Columbian, and we came all the way through Europe, and it absolutely stopped with the 19th century and textiles of the French that were produced in the Napoleonic era.

That was the end of it. She would have nothing to do with anything that followed. It was like that was the end of greatness in this field. And then I had a little orientation to pre-Columbian textiles, starting with Anni Albers, you know, little bits and snippets that were happening here and there. And, you know, it was time for me to be more

responsible.

At the same time, I had some travel experiences. Let me go back. My first travel experience outside the United States was to the jungles of Panama in 1958. I was part of a pre-work team, kind of work team group, that was church related. Sixteen of us went to the jungles of Panama to help save souls and help build bridges of friendship. We worked in a children's camp, damming the water, building structures, doing all kinds of stuff. We had time in Panama City and Colón. And over a period of six weeks, I got to learn a bit about a culture that was foreign to me.

We also met a missionary who made a connection for us in the San Blas Islands. And we got four four-seater planes and we all took off to the San Blas Islands. This was a period before the San Blas Indians had agreed that anybody from the outside could stay on their islands, with the exception of one missionary family who had, through a variety of circumstances, worked their way into the matrix of that society.

It was my first plane ride. The plane landed on this little green strip on the Kuñ a island, the size of a dime. And there were ladies exotically dressed with gold rings in their ears and nose rings, and the patterned skirts and molas that come from there, and all that other stuff, motioning to us.

We followed them and got into dugout canoes and went from one island to the next. We wandered around the little village of Allegand, everything made out of thatched palms. Went into a witch doctor's house. I had never seen bones and crocodiles and all this stuff together.

And, you know, to me this was like, wow, *National Geographic* is alive and well in the world. You know, I mean, I was really so impressed. And then from there, after the six weeks, we went to Barranquilla, Colombia, Caracas, to Jamaica, Haiti, Dominican Republic, and then the trip ended in Havana. And that was the year that Castro was pushing Batista out. And so all the Americans had left. There were signs at the airport that said, "Welcome," you know, "Hilton Hotel. Come stay with us." We stayed in the Havana Hilton Hotel for $5 a night, swam in the pool with Cesar Romero, had a great time. I have lots of stories to tell about that, but that will be another lifetime.

And then ended the trip in Miami, and from there, four of us decided we would probably never get back to the East Coast, so we took a Greyhound bus and went to Washington, D.C. and New York, and then two weeks later, flew home, penniless. But that was the beginning of the world. That was my step into the world as my parents' friends were doing their trips to Europe.

Then I started to go to Europe and began to travel more and more. My first trip to Europe was in '62, and then I went in '64, three months at a time.

Then at that time I started reaching out. In 1964, I went to Istanbul the first time. And, oh my God, I discovered my world. You know, my heart was just beating fast. I arrived in late afternoon. All the minarets and the buildings were in silhouette against the sky and I thought, this is the beginning of forever.

You know, this kind of exoticism is something that I knew existed, and it was always intriguing to me. That which was not part of that which I knew, that which was on the outside. And especially that which was rich and decorative and patterned and full of life and energy, that much seemed to be enmeshed in a lifestyle of some sort, or religion, or whatever it is, that made things intense. So once I identified my need to learn about tents, I had the perfect reason to begin to do more adventurous travel.

MR. ADAMSON: Maybe we should slow down on that architectural textiles thing for just a second, because my understanding so far is that you had been thinking about stage design and that led more or less organically into an interest in architectural textiles. Is that right?

MR. KNODEL: Yes, because the primary reason was I could do the stage design while I was in high school, and had the stage to work with. So I did that, as a student in high school, at both LA City College and UCLA. I was - I haven't even talked about this. I was an art major and a music minor, and then did all this other stuff in conjunction with that and I tried to find time for some theater arts programs and there was never enough time. All the art and music courses were two-unit credit courses, and I usually took seven or eight courses a semester. And, you know, I was just overwhelmed with work, so I couldn't get into study in theater arts.

So when I got the job then at Westchester High School - I mentioned it was a model school, big theater, it had everything going for it. I went to the first performance and I said, "What? The performance is great, the music is great, the acting is great, but where's the visual stuff?"

So I volunteered to do stage work, and then that's what led to about 40 productions over that six-year period of time. *Brigadoon*, you name it, I was there. It was just great, working with the kids and each time, taking that box, taking that proscenium, projecting possibilities in that kind of limited format.

The limitations of stage space demanded a kind of functional response. The way in which one perceives the space is entirely different than real architectural experience. You walk into a point of view. You penetrate layers. The audience is separated from the place of action on the stage.

But still today, that kind of sequencing is really interesting to me. I lived in Japan for a year, and going into a shrine or temple and experiencing the linear progression that takes you through a sequence of tori gates all the way to the cryptomeria box that is under the last structure, with the white silk blowing in front of it, where you can't see what's in it. You know you've been on a linear trajectory that is taking you through space, just as on stage you have a series of flats or backdrops that sequentially lead you into that space.

At one point I equated the backdrops to slices of bread. I was thinking reality is the whole loaf but you don't eat the loaf at one time. You take a slice out of the thing, but in the slice is the whole. And that really intrigued me, making the equation to textiles. The only thing that was odd is that people didn't look at the back side of textiles. But I knew on the stage, on the back side of the backdrop, painted to represent the Alps, was darkness, and there was a door. And you were in a psychological space. It was psychological because you were training yourself, your mind, to be in a certain state that would require you turning a knob on the door, walking through this two-dimensional plane, and on the other side of it you had to be in the Tyrolean Alps. So that to me was an absolutely amazing observation that that plane really contained - it absorbed reality.

You could think about the textile plane as a surface that gathered life experience to it and manifested those life experiences. Now, the painter could talk about the canvas similarly, but it's not the same thing, because again, the back side of the painting is not acknowledged. So I quickly made - I established a difference between the two that this is a new reality that encompasses the conditions of front and back, and therefore is a three-dimensional reality.

Wall hangings hung against the wall, rugs were on the floor, drapery on windows had lining so you didn't see the back side of the textile. So where could I go with it? That then was the question. So I just started experimenting with a variety of media and then various manifestations kind of came out in a variety of ways. But in the end I've always tried to hold onto the theatrical.

And it's not the artificial. It is, as I said this morning up in the studio, that which is bigger than life. The place where there is a suspension of disbelief. You leave something behind to get something else. You can say, I know what this is and dismiss it, or you can say, I don't know what this is. This is the first time with this experience, and kind of take it in.

Then I began to make relationships with clothing as well, considering the shirt on the body versus living within the shirt. I was making discoveries, just one after the next.

I did lectures all over the country on fabric as environment. I still have lots of images from that lecture. I raided every source that I could find that showed and proved the point that fabric creates a world around you. And I think I was one of the first people to talk about the fact that the moment after you're born, you're wrapped in cloth, you live in it, you die in it, and ultimately our vision of angels is still wearing this stuff. The fabric is the stuff that accompanies life. It's with you through your entire life.

Why shouldn't it be an important and expressive part of your life experience? It is, whether you know it or not. Then the next part of my work was simply to accept that fact and ask, "What to give everyone that is what they already know but haven't thought about."

MR. ADAMSON: There's another side to it too, which is that it seems to me like at least one of the ways that you think about this problem is by turning to cultures outside of your own.

MR. KNODEL: That's right.

MR. ADAMSON: So you were talking about tents and the similarly between tents and clothing, the way that they house your body. And that seems to me that you think of that as a non-Western solution to this problem, or a way of exploring the potentialities of the situation at least. So do you see your work as trying to, you know, explore a universal at the same time as trying to explore these non-Western -

MR. KNODEL: It's not - no, I don't think that's correct in saying that it's non-Western, because after all, I was under the table with the tablecloth earlier in my life. I had made blanket tents in the backyard. I knew what it was like to walk under an umbrella with light coming through. I had gone camping in tents with my family. I had experienced a lot of those things.

What I experienced in other cultures was ways to enhance my experience with the American tent is that they were primarily functional, utility-based. Now I saw it in other places decorated tents for the armies laying siege to the city of Vienna. The Polish and the Turks fought battles, and ultimately the greatest booty out of that war

were the tents of the Turkish commanders that the Polish armies took back to Krakow, Poland. And then for 100 years, every time they'd have an occasion of state where they had to influence the people they were negotiating with, the Polish king put up the tents on the grounds of the castle because all of the mystery and the distance of that which was strange and in opposition to them was embodied within those tents, but now they were able to exist in the space of tents owned by the enemy. They usurped environmental and aesthetic power in those tents.

That to me is really imaginative stuff. Doing battle, the Persians, their huge camps of tents that went to Egypt, went all over the place. They would set up camps for 10,000 soldiers. Everybody was living in cloth. And when they made their armaments for attacking one another, they had to think about the way cloth responded to the stuff that was shot out of cannons, cannonballs. You know what a cannonball does in relation to a cloth structure? It goes, "Ha," you know. And so all of a sudden there's a different kind of warfare happening, but I liked the idea of that.

The Europeans were building castles of stone to create protection. The Indians in North India created palaces that were simply pavilions: a rooftop set on columns, and all the walls were made of cloth. Through the center of the pavilion ran water, so you felt as though you were like in an encampment, camping on the side of the stream. And if your enemy should come in the middle of the night, you could get out of there like - you know, it's easy.

Try to get out of a castle very easily. You have to lower the bridge over the moat and all, if you can find your way to the front entrance. Then you become a perfect target for the enemy. So cloth architecture required different ways of thinking.

Cloth architecture is a gentle kind of enclosure. And, you know, I spent a lot of time photographing parallels to my ideas in nature: whole canopies of leaves, the natural environment, the place that people learn about their human needs for comfort.

Coming to Michigan was a knockout for me because I had never seen the leaves change, the colors that leaves change here in the fall. So going to Northern Michigan, wandering through the woods with a couple of friends, I was in my work. What I was seeing there was something only imagined in California.

So these experiences link - just link with each other. And the language of the textile - going back to that point, the language of the textile is made specific to the culture that is using it. But you asked the question about universals that exist, and that's something that is still a struggle, even in practice of religions today. So many people are interested in Buddhism because Buddhism speaks beyond political boundaries, right, and most religions like to think of themselves in that way.

And I was really intrigued in discovering that which was as foreign as I could possibly imagine, and then figuring out what the links were. And, I tell you, that's the beauty of the textile field. It is a universal language. It speaks beyond boundaries and I think it's rooted in human behavior. It simply comes from our experience of living with this medium in such an intimate way.

MR. ADAMSON: At the same time, if I can ask you to place yourself in history, though, it seems to me like a lot of these realizations that were coming upon you, to me they have a very distinct -

[Audio break.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. We're now on disc three, still on August 3, 2004. Glenn Adamson interviewing Gerhardt Knodel.

Gerhardt, I was just saying that it seems to me like some of the things you're talking about are to some extent grounded in the late '60s, and even more specifically, possibly the late '60s counterculture to some extent, the idea of living lightly on the land, the idea of looking to non-Western cultures for, if not ideas, then places to embellish or fill out your ideas. And I wonder to what extent, first of all, just on a practical level, you were involved in that.

MR. KNODEL: Was I a hippie? [Laughs.]

MR. ADAMSON: Well, that would be a crude way of putting it. And also whether you felt like you were part of a community of people that were looking at like ideas, or whether you felt that it was much more of a logical conclusion of a Bauhausian analysis of form and materials. Maybe it was a little bit of both.

MR. KNODEL: Yes, that's interesting. Maybe more it's a completion of something else that came earlier. I mean, I was not involved in all the political movements at that period of time. I was sympathetic, but I was not an activist, actively engaged. And so I think it's a matter of coincidence. It's just something - all these things kind of

came together.

Of course I'm a product of the time in which I lived and worked and a product of special opportunities. Opportunity to have all of these diverse experiences is really a product of a moment in time. I don't know, if I was born in the time in which we're now living whether life would evolve in the same way. I think it would probably take quite a different course. But I'm accepting of that and I like that idea very much.

I like to think that in one's life experiences there's a whole menu of wonderful opportunities that are presented to you, and you have a chance to take from them or turn away from them. And if you make the right decisions, these opportunities help you to know more about what your own destiny is anyway. It's like nurturing something that is there from the beginning.

I don't believe I started with an empty slate. I fundamentally believe that the power of experience that we have doesn't dissipate when we die. I can't believe that all these thoughts that I've had and all these reactions that I've had over the years have just emerged out of nothing. That they are just mine. I mean, I believe that there was some kind of energy that is the source of my being.

So I think that there are moments - when I look at history, there are places where I discover characters that I'm interested in in Shakespearean plays or there are moments of time where I say, I could have been that. You know, I could drop into that moment and take on that role very beautifully. I've always said I'd have no trouble sleeping in Louis XV's bed. I mean, I could be in the center of that world and be the master of all that I see. I would have no difficulty with it. Perhaps all the responsibilities that come along with it are something else, but the sense of space and commanding a sense of comfort with that dimension has never been a problem.

So the moment that I started traveling I did begin to think more about the shape of the globe, and decided that I could never be satisfied living on the face of this earth unless I flew once around it. I could hardly wait for my Pan Am flight that went all the way around the Earth. I did that several times. And it provided a sense of where I was in space, place and time.

And it's what I say about graduate students today. The best that we can do for graduate students is give them a sense of who they are, and do that within a critical environment so they ask as many ambitious questions of themselves as possible. And they can go off to wherever they're going to be in the world, and find a kind of position of comfort being there, because they've been put through - they've been tested along the way.

So in a lot of ways I find that the experiences of my life, although they were not structured, they happened along the way. Ultimately, I put them all on the same page. They become kind of a test through which one moves. You know, trial by fire. So you either take it or leave it. Can you do something with this or not?

You know, what do you make out of life? You read a great book, what do you do with it? Do you just put it back on the shelf? Is that the end of it? How do you make use of these experiences? I'm an accumulator. I've always thought of my life that way. That's why I started collecting textiles.

Basically what I was doing is accumulating positive energy that came through those beautiful objects that ultimately stood next to me like my relatives and tested my performance. And I wanted to be able to place myself next door to something Tibetan, something that's Indian, something that's Indonesian, something that's South American or whatever. You know, I wanted there to be a relationship wherein I fit into the bigger picture. Now, that sounds like an older person speaking. [They laugh.]

[Audio break.]

MR. ADAMSON: Okay. So, yeah, the question, of course, is whether then you could see yourself as participating in a zeitgeist, I suppose, you know, in retrospect. I mean, I think of people like Barbara Shawcroft, Ted Hallman, I think of Museum of Contemporary Crafts [now the Museum of Arts & Design, New York City] "Meditation Environments" show ["Contemplation Environments," 1970].

MR. KNODEL: That's right.

MR. ADAMSON: And that's all around the same time, it's 1970 -

MR. KNODEL: That's right. That's right. Absolutely. And I have opinions about it all.

MR. ADAMSON: Okay, shoot. [Laughs.] I mean, it seems to me, to my own perception, looking back on it, is that it seems to me like your work was much more abstract and formal in a sense than what they were doing, just to take Shawcroft and Hallman as examples. Because what they were doing, it seems hippie to me, whereas looking back at the pieces that you had in the California Designer show, for example, they don't seem that way. But I wonder if it seems that way to you, and if so, what do you think accounts for the difference. Or maybe I'm

being too simplistic.

MR. KNODEL: Yes. It's an interesting point which I really haven't thought a lot about before, because I don't compare - I haven't really compared so much. As I said, I have opinions about that work, and I would say that which is really shared among Francoise Grossen and Sheila Hicks, and others going back through all of that period, is the sense of experimentation, the adventure of discovering something new, and the mutual support in doing that. I think what shifted so much was the frame of reference for appraising the work. In some cases a frame of reference existed, and Sheila worked very hard to establish her own. That was a mission in her life. I think she learned that from Europeans.

Sheila wanted her work to be contextualized with an intellectual dimension. Most other people that I knew did not care so much about that. Sheila could talk about where she was coming from, what influenced the work. But I think when it came down to the work itself; it was oftentimes a kind of strange manifestation of its technical potential, evolving directly out of what the technique would allow.

Neda Al-Hilali did that very much as well, although Neda brought a frame of reference from her Middle Eastern experiences. She knew camel trappings and all of the parts of the lifestyle that I'm talking about, like in Afghanistan. And she wanted to create something that was a counterpart. But she had working for her kind of personal mystique. You know, all of her very wild -

MR. ADAMSON: She was a phenomenon, yeah.

MR. KNODEL: - exotic individual. Would that exoticism be the same today? Absolutely not. It was definitely integrated into that moment of time. The clothes that were worn, the hair, the jewelry, the way of being, the way of talking, the relationship among people. It was just like creating the accoutrements of a new culture.

And it was called - it moved from a center that was closer to bread, and it moved out to a place that was closer to art. But I don't think that the people who initiated the stuff were as much interested in the art as they were in the other parts of it, the bread baking, doing something that was right with the self. So that's where the viewpoint that the Europeans brought to bear was extremely important for us.

And there were a few people, you know, Mildred Constantine who had been working with Jack Larsen on a show in New York, the wall hangings show. And Dextra Frankel out west, they were attempting through exhibits and writing to identify that which was going on. The artists could only do that in limited ways. What was going on was the Lausanne Biennial in Switzerland [International Biennial of Tapestry] where they seemed to know what to do. That exhibition was very important as it actually caused artists to stand a little taller, be a little bolder, take on the responsibility that moves something from a humble place of origin within the self to something that is responsible in a broader, bigger way.

The collector Paul Hershler was living in Pasadena, and he was on the board in the Lausanne. He knew Pierre Pauli and other people that were involved, Jean Lurçat.

MR. ADAMSON: Jean Lurçat.

MR. KNODEL: Jean Lurçat. He was in on early discussions about whether there was a possibility for the future of tapestry and the building of a structure for an exhibition, which would basically promote the commercial sales of tapestries in architecture by proving that they were still being made. Eventually that focus went awry. I'm not sure that the founding fathers would have liked where those initial ideas went, but they did evolve. And therein was great excitement.

When Jagoda Buic's work appeared - when Magda [Magdalena Abakanowicz] came in with her Abakans and Ritzi and Peter [Jacobi] first presented their woven coats, those tapestry coats, all of a sudden people were looking and saying, "Wow." In the first place, this work is big. It's not little shrimpy stuff, you know, little diddly doo stuff.

And that's where I had a "leg up," because I was not afraid of large-scaled work, of painting the big "backdrop." I felt comfortable working on architecturally - scaled projects which filled up my apartment.

Even when I moved here to Michigan, I put the big dining canopy that I had made for my degree show over my bed in the apartment at Cranbrook. I tried to suggest some possibility of using these things. But there was no market here. There was no interest.

Today you go through interiors books and everything is full of the influence of textiles. Even Frank Gehry's work, the reason people love it, is because it looks like it's breathing, and breathing is what textiles do comfortably. A sheet hanging on the wash line. You know, it breathes without any problem.

But earlier on, and especially in the International Style, walls did not express the fact that they were breathing,

except through suggestion of materials, glass and screening and that kind of thing. But this whole physical dimension of expression in a pliable plane, the kind of response to the impulse of being, where the inside pushes to the outside, and is manifested in terms of curves and so on that feel comfortable to be with, little of those characteristics existed in architecture.

So when those qualities started to occur in three-dimensional tapestry forms, like Magdalena's "Abakans" you could walk around them and so on, and begin to see something that your body knew because of a clothing association. But still, nobody made the big links. Then Frei Otto, the great architect and engineer from Switzerland, came forward with ideas about membrane structures. He started using some of the technology of new materials, knitted textiles and so on, to twist and torque. And he began to establish a language, a biologically-based language of the body and the way inner parts of ourselves respond to the act of being alive, and then he created a counterpart out there in the built environment.

He was a lone voice for many, many years. Today you can go through lots of magazines and find a lot of people and companies making soft architecture. But at that time there was nothing. There was really nothing. I had to go to Switzerland where the action was happening to see what was possible.

Francoise Grossen came back from Morocco and she showed me a photograph of the street of dyers where they had strung all these cords over the street and hung skeins of yarn over them to dry. I looked at that and I said, "Oh my God, that's what I'm trying to make."

So, of course, I had to make a trip to Morocco. I was studying tents, I was reading about 1,001 nights, I was reading about the Persians. I was looking at reproductions and miniatures. They've got glorious tents. I'm saying someplace in Iran, or someplace in India, or someplace in Afghanistan there must be the leftovers of a civilization that valued cloth architecture. So, of course, I had to go to India.

I first went to India in the early '70s. I go there, I'm there for three weeks, starting in Bombay, going up to Delhi, stopping at Ahmedabad and other places along the way. I see lots of ethnic textiles, I buy tons of stuff. I'm on the train, its Christmas Eve.

We got on the train, didn't even know we're supposed to have backpacks. Instead, we're carrying bundles of mirrored cloth because I couldn't resist buying it. And in the middle of the night it's like freezing, the wind is blowing in the open windows, so I have to get out my mirrored cloth and wrap myself in it for survival's sake. [They laugh.] You know, that's the only time I've worn that cloth. We arrived cold but we made it.

Later we went to Iran, to Shiraz, for - Noruz is the new year celebration. Every hotel was sold out. Only accommodations were in a tent on the edge of the desert, provided by the government. It turned out to be just great.

In Istanbul I went to the palace and looked around. All of a sudden I realized all the tiled walls were actually an imitation of the textiles that people used to live with. I became aware of how many characteristics of our physical world are rooted or linked to textiles.

Francois was very excited about sculpture in her work, and rope, but she had a love affair with the rope. And she limited herself to it. And Barbara Shawcroft, for such a long time, limited herself to the rope. And I don't think it was the right strategy.

I think if they had explored their work in other media, a broader scope of work or responses to the stimuli could have resulted. But you have to remember also that artists were having a heck of a time getting any attention to come to themselves, and the model was the abstract expressionists who were doing really well out there in the world and who had created what appeared to be signature styles in paint and canvas that collectors followed.

The signature thing is still important today, and students still look for it. But they don't look for it in the same way that they did back in that period of time.

MR. ADAMSON: Maybe we should talk a little bit about the institutional base for all of this, because we have moved into a period - now you've started talking about all these people on a first name basis, as it were. You know, Francoise and Neda. You know, I guess I'm curious about, first of all, the context in which you interrelated with these people, not just fiber artists but people in other genres as well. And then second of all, and this is going to be a big topic, but the museum context for all of this, and the exhibition context for it. You just mentioned that there isn't a ready venue for a lot of this work to be shown and purchased. So things like "California Design," "OBJECTS: USA," the "Deliberate Entanglements" shows.

MR. KNODEL: "Young Americans."

MR. ADAMSON: "Young Americans." The other shows that the museum collaborated on at that time. How would

you describe that whole picture of institutional backdrop for what you were trying to do in your work and all the personal relationships that you were having then?

MR. KNODEL: All right. The talk on the street was that we were doing good work but nobody would pay attention to it. How are people going to get excited, aside from your relatives and your colleagues that you share your work with in the studio? How are you going to get people excited about the work?

Remember that the American craft movement was still in its early stages of its life. In the '60s, what Paul [Smith] did at the [American Craft] museum was wonderful, in taking the experimental dimension to the world at large through his devices and through the magazine but it had fairly limited application. I mean, it was centered in New York. That was a long distance from California.

When I think of what was there in Los Angeles at that time, when they finally started The Egg and the Eye [now the Craft and Folk Art Museum, Los Angeles] restaurant on Wilshire Boulevard, that was a big deal. That was a venue. There were no galleries that were showing textiles, but there were organizations, such as the Southern California Designer Craftsmen, that found a place for them to be exhibited.

The Pasadena design exhibition was also important out there because it had commercial objectives to it. But it also allowed for an influx of ideas to come in from individual artists and craftsmen. That was the brilliance of California Design as it evolved, and I think Eudorah [Moore] should be really credited for that, for recognizing that it's not just the thing that is established as a result of production, but it's the conceptualization that is worth looking at. The California Design exhibit in Pasadena was a byproduct of California searching for an identity and trying to promote business as well.

So in my own experience at that time, in the '60s, I knew that there were pockets in the United States where crafts groups were supported, had exhibitions, usually under the title of a "designer craftsman exhibition," provided a chance to show work in a group exhibition. And there was some reporting that was done on those exhibitions. They were not without reviews. The American Craft Museum was developing and they were doing some of these exhibits as well.

[Audio break.]

There were no big leaps that were made anywhere along the way at that time. Even painters and sculptors didn't have a lot of places to go to. You know, we tend to forget that Jackson Pollock had his difficulty of finding any venues for his contemporary art in New York. And what a limited number of galleries there were - in the war years especially. It's amazing to see how the phenomenon has developed in recent years.

The universities, therefore, played an important role because universities had museum galleries and there was opportunity in those galleries to show the work of their students. So young people who were going to a university might be shown in a student exhibition, or a special exhibition. Also the Designer Craftsman organization worked to find the venues for exhibiting.

MR. ADAMSON: What kind of venues did they tend to be? Were they -

MR. KNODEL: In Los Angeles, there was the Barnsdale Art Center, which was owned by the city of Los Angeles, a place that was open where they accepted temporary exhibitions. What were some of the other places out there? You've no doubt spent time with *Craft Horizons* magazine.

MR. ADAMSON: Sure.

MR. KNODEL: You know, you can go back to *Craft Horizons* and see the listings and the meager opportunities at that time. So within that limited context, the European show in the biennial in Lausanne, really offered a completely fresh model and a challenging model. The question was could an exhibition of that scale and visibility happen in our country?

Fortunately, there were a few people like Lenore Tawney who directed her attention to the whole New York art scene. She didn't isolate her work. She ended up being the darling of the craft field but she would have been as happy had she been left alone and primarily recognized by painters and sculptors, and forget the rest, and just leave me alone, except that she got a lot of recognition and exhibition opportunities associated with the craft field.

Sheila Hicks, an American, showed in - she was comfortable there because she lived in France. I liked some of what she was doing because she seemed to be really American. I only got a little disgusted when she tried to become too French. But in the early years, she reached out as an American from Kansas and kind of went out there in the world and took her - she's a very bright woman - but she could take an "ah, shucks" kind of attitude along with her.

She also built around herself a mythology of the creative individual - a real hybrid - the person who stands between cultures. More successful is Issey Miyake, I think. But that position really worked for her. And then she also created many works for places that needed that work and there was nothing better than that work to offer at that time. And in the end, time determines a lot. And an interesting part of any interview is trying to accurately remember the reactions at the time you made a work versus the point of view you have towards something many years later.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. KNODEL: In retrospect, what we oftentimes hear about are the good intentions of the maker. We don't really hear about the "criticality" in the life of these works because they don't have a very intense relationship to critical practices in contrast to high-profile painting and sculpture, which is integrated in the critical world. Up through the early '80s, there was not much of a critical environment to engage in. A breakthrough occurred when Jack Larsen and Mildred Constantine did their exhibitions "Beyond Craft" and then "Mainstream" ["The Art of Fabric: Mainstream"]. Mildred had MoMA connections and Jack was connected with the design field. A lot of people liked him, and especially loved his creative work, and they trusted him, and he had the interest and the skill to place the work in a very interesting environment of intellectual possibilities. And look what they did. They boldly declared their exhibitions to be important movements of the moment. Something had emerged out of popular culture, out of macramé, and all these other hand processes, but it had now reached a position where it deserved international attention. And besides that, it connected with some things that happened in the past. They were also smart enough to dig back and identify a few contemporary painters and sculptors who happened to be using related media. Claes Oldenburg ended up becoming a very convenient person to align with the field. And then, when Erika Billeter, who did her exhibition "Softart" at the Kunsthaus in - where? Was it Basel or Zurich -

MR. ADAMSON: Zurich.

MR. KNODEL: It was a wonderful, wonderful show, again, ground breaking within the European environment. She just pulled everything that was soft and had some pedigree to it and then she inserted some of the new within it. She substantiated from Francoise's work by association within that context.

Now has Francoise's work held up in the long run? Where is Francoise? I don't even know what's happened to her. We used to be very good friends. And Sheila - what's happened? I just don't know. I got so tired of her rap, I stopped listening to her.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah. Did you also know - it was interesting to hear you talk about Lenore Tawney, and I wonder whether you knew Claire Zeisler because she was the obvious -

MR. KNODEL: Oh, yes.

MR. ADAMSON: The great American figure, the other one that you haven't talked about.

MR. KNODEL: Claire, amazing person. Claire was an old hippie, but she wasn't a hippie. No, I mean she was an older person living within that culture and deriving a great deal of pleasure out of it. Smoking, drinking, smoking, smoking, drinking, drinking, working hard, collecting, living with her [Joan] Miros, and her grand basket collection. You know, she was amazing and I had the highest degree of respect for her. She was a person who not only loved beautiful objects, she was in love with the idea of making beautiful objects, and she knew how to craft material, and she crafted work in close relationship with those things in her vast collection. Were you ever in her collection? Oh, you know, it was just splendid.

And you can't live with all that greatness - great painting, great sculpture, great everything without wanting more. She and her husband went out to the Southwest and they ended up buying a collection of baskets. She asked, "How much is that basket?" And they told her the price. She said, "I'll take them all." She bought the whole shop contents. And ended up with masterpieces - Pomo to Zuni - I mean just great stuff.

If you would talk to Claire, she would say things like, "Oh, I liked playing with it. I played with. I just played with it until I discovered something." Her slinky pieces - "I just thought it was play." And that's the way she thought. It was other people that moved the work into an elevated environment, but she made it available to them.

The work developed special attention in relationship to new architecture. John Portman was extremely important. The Atlanta Peachtree Plaza, the Embarcadero Center in San Francisco, and then here in Detroit, the Renaissance Center. Everywhere he built those projects, they validated fiber works.

Earlier, Corbusier had been interested in bringing textiles out into the architecture, but it was always a wall-related context in the same way he used travertine marble. But Portman liked the idea of kind of bringing textiles out into space and he trusted artists to invent new solutions. He actually gave artists energy and

inspiration through the commissions that he made possible. When I met him here in Detroit he showed me a space 70 feet high. He asked, "Are you interested in doing the work?" And I said, "Well, I don't know. I'll see if I can work it into my schedule."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. KNODEL: "I think I might be able to squeeze you in between three and four." And Henry Ford II was part of that meeting. We walked through the building together, and they talked about the future, and what their $350 million was going to do, and the fact that it was the beginning of a big change in the city of Detroit, and on, and on. "So how would you like to do that?" I think Claire, and I think Francoise, and I think Sheila all would have answered in the same way. "Yes." Not afraid of it, right? And then go ahead with it.

So that recognition - I'm trying to think when the *Art in America* - what was his name that did the article in *Art in America* that was a review of the "Mainstream" show when it was out in San Francisco. Art critic. What's his name? Anyway, because he was primarily involved in the contemporary art movement at the time. His recognition - the fact that he talked about the work was really impressive.

These things just all happened you know, kind of - they were very sporadic and happened in bits and pieces - I should really look at my resume to look from the period of time of 19 - I think my resume starts in '68 - where did I show, you know, Ludwin [ph] Colorado at the "We Love Fiber" exhibition. Either - they all have cute names to them, right?

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. KNODEL: The 1960s was a time of "collectives" of interdependence among people working within the field and together claiming a territory that was separate from the fine arts. That lasted you know, for a long time. My students at Cranbrook were asking about identity over and over again, you know, "What's our role, what's our idea," you know, "Where are we coming from, what is the language that we work with, why paint it, why fiber, why sculpture, why fibers," and you know, "What's the difference between disciplines?"

And then you get smart people like Warren Seelig, where - who discovers Constructivism through Constructivist discourse he finds a line which that works for him - aha, that's great - and others found it in other ways. And then what they did was to substantiate their ideas about the field by taking it into the classroom as teachers. That generated a groundswell through education. If we had not used the institutions of this country in the post-war years and the opportunities that they provided to expand the definition of art and classes that were offered both within state and private universities, it would never have happened, I believe.

A good friend of my father's was Maria Kipp. Have you ever heard of her? She was a weaver in Los Angeles.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, sure.

MR. KNODEL: She had a weaving workshop - Melrose Boulevard, perhaps? - and my father, before he met my mother, he used to date one of the weavers there in her studio. How did I get to Maria Kipp? I don't know, maybe Bernard Kester knew about her. I went there and met this woman who knew my parents. Maria Kipp had done the great curtains for Bullocks Wilshire and she had incorporated new material like Dorothy Liebes did, heavy new yarns, new spun yarns. She made something with substance and it was interesting, it was modern, it was textural, it had a different character about it and - but it found its place within architecture. Maria's work was still alive in the 1960s.

But a lot of the people who were studying in the university art programs were not interested in handwoven modernist textiles. It's like the other day that I was telling someone at Cranbrook - I went to Cranbrook in 1970 and no one looked at the Milles sculpture there, Carl Milles' work. Mythology, figurative stuff. Lots of students who went through - intelligent, sensitive people who went through the program - never paid an iota of attention to those pieces. Today, Milles' work can become a subject matter for a semester of study because the environment of inquiry has changed and interest in subject matter has changed.

The subjects and language of a field of study comes to shape the field itself. Having been involved in teaching for such a long time, to me it's so interesting to talk to students today, and I want to tell them about the way it was so that they appreciate that not everybody used to drive across the United States in an SUV. There were more resistant modes of travel, but sometimes, the resistance, whether it be 13 flat tires on the way from Milwaukee to Los Angeles, or the horse that dies halfway across the plain, can help you think about the journey a little differently.

So the question today - do we just forget about the pasat? Can it be useful to us in one way or another? And what I find in talking with some people is that the past can come forward in interesting ways, not that they can become part of the '60s in any way - they can't, that's an impossibility, but I think that there are certain places

where you can go to fundamental values to see certain things in motion, that are interesting to think about.

Remembering Sheila, Hicks, I can't help but think about her in relationship to lots of agendas, different kinds of objectives. Also, the World Crafts Council meetings. Then they held one in Toronto and brought all the European stars in the textile field - they all came and everyone that was there - there must've been thousands of people that attended, it was a huge event, everyone .felt blessed by being in the presence of these powerful voices. I was 10 years younger than Magdalena. When I was 30, she was 40 and I was 30 when I went to Cranbrook. I remember thinking to myself, "I can hardly wait to be 40. If Magda at 40 is a potential of what I can become, that's what I want to be."

I was in Los Angeles when Magda had the exhibition at the Pasadena Art Museum. And we sat on the floor in a little circle, and Magda just talked with everybody and she's extremely friendly, she was young, she was energetic, she had taken a lot of risks and she was in America, and the Americans were eating it up. And she loved the audience. And after she was there for "Deliberate Entanglements" - that was the first year I was here at Cranbrook, '71 I think.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. KNODEL: It was really nice for me. I mean again, I was at the early end of my experience and I had a chance to be with all those people out there, see Deliberate Entanglements, meet all these people. I was head of the program at Cranbrook, my second year or whatever, and I thought, ah hell, I'll just ask Magda to come to Cranbrook. So I said to her, "What are you doing after the event, can you come to Cranbrook? Cranbrook's this fabulous place, you have to see it." And both Magda and Jagoda Buic agreed to come. And I got them to come here and speak in the old lecture hall. I sent messages ahead to announce to the student body, this fabulous artist is coming, she's bringing her films - that was the first time that I saw those new films - Magda on the desert you know, with the Abakans blowing in the wind, and I announced it to everyone.

We had a packed auditorium. Magda came in and she talked. There have only been two times in the 33 years I've been at Cranbrook that there was standing ovation and the first one was for Magda Abakanowicz. It was just fabulous because everybody understood. It was a heroic move. She was doing something that was superhuman, that reached beyond the "let's make nice in this world" and professionalized the idea of being an artist. She spoke as Picasso would speak, she spoke as the big guys would speak, and she was a woman that came into that arena. She was there to represent the edge of a long history. She spoke about being in Warsaw after the destruction in WWII and about picking up bricks, working with other people. She had come from a very privileged background and there she was, one of the members of the team. She spoke of her life that evolved out of those conditions. The Jacobis did the same thing, finding their voices as artists within an alternative resource, in the farmland, in the peasant structures, in the low materials, not silk and merino wool, but sisal, the stuff of the land.

As Americans in the 1970s, we didn't have to think about those things. At that period of time. Natural fibers were not part of our daily diet here; I mean the fiber in relationship to cereal hadn't even been invented yet. [They laugh.] Thinking in terms of the designer craftsman weaving tradition, of making advances on what had previously been called casements and wall-hangings, here comes Magdalena Abakanowicz, and she's talking heroic sculpture in the Greco-Roman tradition. That was extraordinary, you know, it's like the reason you go to the Olympic Games, to see how somebody plays the game differently than you do in your country. It was on that potential and power that the Museum of Modern Art opened up its doors a little bit to textiles and some publications also began to feature the new work.

MR. ADAMSON: So, in your own work, you then had to turn around and deal with that incredible raising of the bar essentially.

MR. KNODEL: Yes. I followed Sheila, Claire and Lenore and Olga de Amaral. Second generation, we're closer relatives. Francois, Walter Nottingham. Sherri Smith and Neda al-Hilali.

If I had gone into the field with an understanding about the big picture, I might have acted a little bit differently. But under the circumstances, I acted as only I could do, which was just take the opportunities as they come. If John Portman wants to talk to you as a result of having sent your work from your degree show out in Los Angeles to him - fine, let's talk with John Portman, you know! I did that in '73, I sent him slides. He asked, he actually had heard about me - he asked, and I sent slides to him. And then what did he do, he copied some of my ideas and interpreted them in other ways and they appeared in all of his buildings - my panel pieces and all of that. And I said, "John, why didn't you ask me?" But I didn't know enough about the law or didn't understand negotiation. And after all he was the guy on the mountain top. But eventually I got a little payoff and the project that I did with him developed my courage.

I left the opening of my degree show, which I thought was very good, and the people that got to see it were also impressed. I had compliments from people who were near to me, but I remember sitting in my car in the parking

lot thinking, "Where are you going next?" There was absolutely no venue, there was no support, there was no place to take that work. I said, "You know, this is kind of like experimenting with something, a new pill, and not having a company to sponsor it once you've discovered the cure." Like, I thought, well if my world was here I would know many more places to make connections. But I didn't have them, so the only possibility was just to continue pursuing what seemed right and relevant to me and just keep looking for opportunities while continuing to teach.

So I arrived at Cranbrook by divine feat, no - [laughs] -

MR. ADAMSON: How did that happen? How did you find the job there?

MR. KNODEL: Oh, it happened by accident. After I concluded my degree work, I was teaching summer school at California State University, Long Beach and one day after class, as I was floating in my swimming pool - I had just bought a house in Palos Verdes on the edge of the ocean - thinking to myself, why are you in this house? This feels like something a retiree should live within, it's too nice for you - this is what you have later in life. Anyway, the phone rang and I paddled over to the edge next to the waterfall and the lava rocks - [laughs] - and the tiki torches, picked up the phone and it was Mary Jane Leland. Mary Jane called saying that she had heard that Cranbrook was looking for somebody to head the fiber department and she thought I was absolutely the right man to do it. And I said, "Mary Jane, get real. I mean, I am just a babe out of the woods, I haven't begun my professional career yet. I've made work, I have lots of teaching experience and all of that business, but as an artist you know, a successful designer with reputation, I just didn't have it." And she said, "Darling, don't worry about it, I just suggest you call them." And then a short while later, Bernard Kester called me and said, "I just got this call from Cranbrook and I think you should look into this." So I called Cranbrook and spoke to Sue Thurman, vice president at the time - she said, "Well why don't you send a portfolio to us?" So I sent in my portfolio of my graduate show, primarily, and a few other pieces - I had been in "Young Americans" also and -

MR. ADAMSON: By the time, you had at least one California Design show.

MR. KNODEL: - and the -

MR. ADAMSON: Right?

MR. KNODEL: Oh, yes - no - oh yes, I had been in the California design show, but the big one, in which I showed almost my entire degree show - that was the very next one that was upcoming. Eudorah had come to my graduate show and she said, "I love it all, we have to have it all in the Pasadena Museum." And I said, "Eudorah, I don't think it -

So anyway - [laughs] - so I sent the portfolio and someone said to me, "Well the least that can happen is that you get a free trip to Michigan." So I said, "Okay." Well within a few days the phone rang and Sue said, "The president of the Academy and I are very excited about your work, we've shown it to a number of people, we'd like for you to come and visit." So, I put my surfboard out in the garage and I had on very tight, white pants - well, not tight, but I had a Hawaiian shirt on and blond - my long blond hair. And I just came to Michigan. Margie Hughto picked me up. She was in her second year at Cranbrook, and so she picked me up and she gave me all of the "dirt" when we were going to Cranbrook.

Cranbrook had just had a revolution and half the faculty was dismissed or left the school. Primarily, it was over the issue of whether the institution was up with the times. Most of the agitation was created by Californians who were in school there. So I arrived, I took my walk around the grounds and I thought, "Oh, my lord, I never knew a place like this existed." It was exactly as my grandmother had described Schoenbrunn Palace grounds you know, with trails through the woods and I could just see the horse-drawn carriages come through the woods. The whole idea of my childhood, seemed to be there.

MR. ADAMSON: So you loved it.

MR. KNODEL: Absolutely. And then I did the interview with the board and talked with a number of other people. The first morning I was there I met with Richard DeVore, head of ceramics, and he provided lots of information about that which I couldn't see.

For example, in the previous year Esalen had been there to help solve - you know the Esalen Society from California - Esalen. So they had been there and trying to help everybody get through some major problems. Everybody was encouraged to do sensitivity training and touchy feely things in the woods. They were trying to unify the participants. I looked at the degree show, which was in the museum at the time and there were a lot of shaggy things - Bob Kidd was in charge of the Fabric Design program and they had done all sorts of experimental stuff. Walter Nottingham studied there and Walter and Ted Hallman and Sherri Smith were students there. There was a diversity of that work going on, but the program was led by Bob Kidd, who basically was a casement fabric, rug and upholstery guy.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. KNODEL: And Arturo Sandoval was there and Arturo just hated the whole thing because he wanted to make a sarcophagi out of mylar and all this stuff and Bob insisted that he make three-yard panels before he could do the other work because that was the training that Marianne Strengell had provided to Bob.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. KNODEL: So anyway, I was here for two days and I experienced my first thunderstorm that first night. Sue Thurman took me back to [Detroit] Metro Airport and then Wally Mitchell, who was the president of the Academy, had flown down from his house in Harbor Springs and he met me at the airport for a two and a half hour meeting. Although he was not at the Academy when I arrived, and he said, "I have been in touch hourly with our board members, with faculty, with students, with everyone you've talked with. Everybody thinks you're absolutely right for the job, and I'm going to offer it to you."

And I said, "What the hell." I said, "I was just here to see Michigan for the weekend." [Laughs.] And I remember going back to Los Angeles where I had a new house. I had everything, everything was set up there. And you know, I just thought to myself, "Well, you're always saying you want new experiences to happen, so here's one, and if they think you can do it, maybe you can do it." So within a few weeks, I packed up my car, with two boxes of slides and a suitcase of clothes and two boxes of yarn, and I drove across the country and saw the Rocky Mountains disappear in my rearview mirror. I kept looking for more mountains up ahead, they never arrived, and all of a sudden it was Big Beaver Road and Cranbrook. I ended up walking into my studio, which was provided, you know, they provided living space and the studio and I sat in the middle of this big room with two tables and one chair and I thought to myself, "Now what?"

I remember the feeling of that big, empty room and I didn't know anyone here. In fact, that was a major change in my life because I left the first half of my life behind and this was completely new.

MR. ADAMSON: The clean break.

MR. KNODEL: - the clean break.

MR. ADAMSON: In terms of personal relationships as well?

MR. KNODEL: I left it behind. Everything. It was very difficult. I thought I'd keep tethered to Los Angeles. I owned property out there, also an apartment building with some friends, and you know, I kept my connections with my family, relatives, my sister, you know, a big family.

Here it was start from scratch. The best thing though was I had the entire inheritance of Cranbrook to claim and I was now on the edge of it. So one of the first things I did when I arrived, the first fall was to go to New York and see a few people connected with Cranbrook. Do you know Mary Walker Phillips? She was a graduate of Cranbrook, she was a knitter and she had published a lot of books, and was shown in the Venice Triennial of Design that Jack Larsen was very involved with and she made a lot of work that hung in that space - got a lot of notoriety and then got to be a very strong voice. She came from Fresno, California. She lived in New York; she rented a place, seemed to have good family connections. Her work was in many galleries, she was showing all over the place, and she was an eccentric, so I liked her very much. She was the first artist I got to be friends with; she arrived wearing a purple and green woven coat with some kind of animals klutching one another's tails wrapped around her shoulders, and I said, "Oh what have I done?" [Laughs.] Oh shoot.

So I made my first trip to New York where I could see Jack Larsen because so many people I had studied with knew him in Long Beach. The metalsmith Al Pine knew Jack; and Mary Jane Leland had worked with Jack at the Academy.

MR. ADAMSON: And you had never met him.

MR. KNODEL: I had never met him. He was a famous influential designer and I had learned a lot from his production textiles. Mary Jane had a big collection of them with me that we looked at. I wrote to him for an appointment. He set the date. I nervously arrived at his reception room and thought, "Well, I don't know how I'm going to get through this," but I did. I sat on the other side of the table, he proceeded to do an analysis - you know, he had had such a profound experience with very accomplished people and I'm sure he didn't have the slightest idea of what the hell I was doing there. He was interested in my work but he immediately made suggestions, "Now I have this property out in Long Island, and we might be able to use something like this that you have made out of wire. I see it in the garden."

I tried to find a language to communicate with him because I didn't come from his design world and I wasn't really into the art world at that point. I was a maker of things you know, and knew a lot about technology, and I

could talk about design, about design ideas, but not the commercial world. So we had a little awkward exchange and he was all right but -

MR. ADAMSON: Beginning of a beautiful friendship.

MR. KNODEL: Yes, it lasted you know, and I worked very hard to build the connection. But that was my job, it wasn't his job, it was truly my responsibility. So Cranbrook provided an arena of opportunity and responsibility at the very highest level, and great connections with extraordinary students. I worked night and day; I mean I worked six days a week regularly, nine o'clock in the morning until eleven o'clock at night. That was my routine. I lived across the street from the studio. I invested myself very heavily in the students and I invested myself very heavily in my work because this was an opportunity not to be squandered.

Along the way, the field grew and because I had a responsible position, I had to learn about it. I was building a language, you know, and building a new identity for the field within the construct of the Academy. Ultimately what we came to was to reduce the tension that existed between very disparate conditions and more and more as the time went on, the playing field leveled among the disciplined study. In the 1970s painting and sculpture had perceived themselves as positioned very high on the ladder. George Ortman was the head of painting. I don't know if you know his work, but he was so damn arrogant. He would frequently comment on work of my students, saying, "Yes, but it's decorative," you know. With an affectation of the painter and with the cigarette in his fingers you know, he would say, "Perhaps they will read the right book. This person needs to study," and then he'll tell you the name of a painter who was indispensible to the fiberwork. Never a reference to textiles as the source.

Years later I got to the position where I could sort of say, "Yes George," or to a painting student, "Yes, interesting, but the fault lies in your lack of understanding the decorative tradition that this work is a part of." Fortunately, the P and D movement, the Patternd and Deocration movement in painting became very healthy and established a common ground for communication. Robert Kushner and Kim McConnell developed their language in relation to decorative arts. Many new possibilities emerged in that time, in the '70s - late '70s -

MR. ADAMSON: Late '70s.

MR. KNODEL: Late '70s. And then, Holly Solomon and her gallery - she's a person I visited whenever I was in New York. Every year I took the students to New York. I heard about Ursula von Rydingsvard and she seemed interesting. We went to Christo's studio. In fact, just the other day - Jane Lackey asked me, she said she was taking her students to New York. I said, "Call Christo. You absolutely have to." I said, "He's an educator. He loves students, you know, it's worth it." She seemed shocked! Jeanne-Claude called back and said to me, "When are you going to be here? Sure we'll work it out, but this is the way we do it."

MR. ADAMSON: Can I ask you about Christo actually, whether you saw a reflection of your work in his and vice-versa?

MR. KNODEL: I think he's a hero. I think he's a real hero. There are very few people that I give that credit to, but he's a person who has remained steadfast to experiences he had early in his life. In a lot of ways I feel he and I get along quite well. I've only met him on a few occastions, but what I like is the fulfillment of his dreams, placing something at a very high level and being tenacious with it until you arrive there, not compromising along the way and creating something that is as important as the man on the moon.

I went to Berlin when he wrapped the Reichstag, and that was a transformative experience. It was transformative to the building, to the German people, and it was transformative in the world of art in terms of the way it engages politics and histories and so on. I see it as being absolutely amazing, and it was a carnival at the same time!

So I have the greatest respect for what he's done and it interests me a lot. Ultimately in the history of art, among the people that I admire most are the people who have an ability to express themselves in unusual ways and find means to bridge to diverse audiences. Michelangelo deserves the reputation, da Vinci deserves the reputation, because of heroic acts that went beyond the canvas, or the block of marble. You know, I went to see - the filmmaker - the big show at the Guggenheim last year [Guggenheim Museum, New York City].

MR. ADAMSON: Matthew Barney?

MR. KNODEL: Matthew Barney's show ["Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle," 2003]. And you know, I really liked that work. It's epic. He doesn't piddle around with stuff, and he gets to the place where most people won't be. One of the biggest problems in our country today is that most people will not allow them to be challenged. They won't allow themselves to be as big as they can be. They don't want to learn what they can learn, they don't want to experience what they have the potential of experiencing. Why not, why are they afraid?

A lot of people get short changed along the way. Nobody helps them to make that leap into a category where the imagination is really the driving force and where the sky's the place you reach for. Stars, you start putting them together and making bears and other constellations. That to me is really living.

MR. ADAMSON: It sounds to me like, you know, it was really in the '70s that you started challenging yourselves to do just that in a lot of ways. I mean, now you're talking about the broader, contemporary art world for one thing, and the way that it sounds very different from the way you look at Abstract Expressionism in the '50s and '60s. You know, you're thinking of the pattern and decoration artists for instance as possible peers of yours, which seems like a -

MR. KNODEL: People like Robert Kushner went into territories that crossed over the border for a painter -

[Audio break.]

To my mind the decorative arts was a wonderful field to explore. The crossover breaks down these divisions, and it was very, very healthy. Also the interesting Islamic world to me was really powerful. I discovered the beauty of the magic square and the way it yielded geometric images and the way in which the geometric images yielded complex ways of thinking of pattern that ultimately became the ceiling in the buildings at the Alhambra in Granada. And today you look at them and say, how did anyone get to that? But if you understand the means to arriving at that station, then it all can be deconstructed, but it never loses power in the deconstruction. In the end, you still admire what it is in the sum total.

And that's what the history of decorative arts can give us. I mean so many people going to Cambodia now to see Angkor Wat. Why? Because it's just - it's just a path into a kind of a pattern. [Laughs.] But it's pattern extended in such big, grand ways. Or if you go to Borabador to - in Java you see that stupa, or, you know, they stand in Sainte-Chapelle [Paris, France] and look at the lights coming in those windows. It's all part of that tradition. It all goes back to clothing. It all goes back to decorating the model. It all goes back to very simple things.

MR. ADAMSON: Maybe this is where we should sort of turn back into your work actually because that brings up something we were talking about earlier this morning. The concept of a module as a basic unit that you can multiply out into a large scale work. And it seems to me like that was a least part of your answer for how you were going to try to work on an ambitious scale. Starting to do your architectural commissions. And I wonder if you could talk about that a little bit - the idea of - that the unit and the whole, and repetition.

MR. KNODEL: Well, in terms of abstraction, in the '70s, there's no problem understanding that at all because it was existing everywhere in art. The grid was fundamental, right? Oh, my gosh and you think of all the work that was produced during that period of time to the point where I said, "If I see one more work based on the grid, I'm going to eject." [They laugh.] And especially since the range of work that I was looking at didn't include any woven textiles. So it's kind of like ignoring the mother ship. But they didn't recognize the place from which that all came.

So, what? Okay, the intersection of two lines goes back to a place of origin, as I said in the - as Marsha quoted in the book, I see it as the beginning. It's the starting point. Where this and this intersect, it's always the beginning. And every time something is woven, it repeats that potential. So in a way, it's like birds building nests. They all create something of an element of truth that exists. Instinct leads them to build a nest. Innately they know how to put it together, and by creating it again, they reiterate the importance of its existence. That's like life itself. It's beyond our control.

So it's interesting to think about what you can do that works with conditions of that sort. So I believe that good weavers throughout time instinctively sensed something of that truth - that place of origin - but never articulated it really as a kind of concept that could help you in some way. What kind of help do you need? Today we need the help of the support of what we do in terms of ideas, right. Doing is not enough.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. KNODEL: So I think once you can arrive at the place of origin, it gives you a filter through which to see experience. And actually, if you put on the lenses of a weaver and you see the world through those lenses, it is a world that is quite different from the world of the photographer.

So then where are we going?

MR. ADAMSON: Then how do you think about an issue like scale?

MR. KNODEL: How do I get - so.

MR. ADAMSON: These ultimately become tactic as well in order to -

MR. KNODEL: My grandmother had a very small ice cube tray and I have an icemaker. My ice cubes just keep coming of that machine. I don't have to fill the tray nor am I limited when my guests arrived to the cubes that are in the tray. I can offer more than that.

The spirit of making textiles is that the point of entry and the point of departure are never truly a beginning and an ending. What you simply do is you enter a field of something that has some continuity to it. Every cloth that was woven before the one that you weave sets up the spirit leading to what is to come ahead. It doesn't matter whether the work is 100 yards long or 10 inches long. It just flows that way.

So all these things are link to each other. That's what so interesting about art in mid-century in America - that there was this kind of displacement of that kind of notion of continuity that art became the exception rather than rule. It's not the way you "fit in," it was the way you were "apart from." So the opportunity that the crafts have to offer is bringing that awareness back into the world at large and to be able to bring it in through the language of art is really interesting to me.

Anne Wilson has tried to do that and she's been one of the most successful people because I think she's still very rooted in textiles in her work, and textile sensibilities, and yet she's done what I think I've done and other people have - that is to look within the field of textiles as a resource and then to use the contemporary discussion, overlay the two and you find with the marriage of the two something else coming out of the gate. Anne's work always comes from a deep place within herself, which is, I think, supported by the training that she received - the way in which she came up through textiles. She would never be doing the work that she's doing now had she been a painter. Wouldn't have happened.

So all of this said - [laughs] - to get to your point about size, scale, repetition, and so on - to move from a single element or a few elements to something that is big - much bigger is very easy to do - very comfortable to do. The piece that was at the [Detroit] Renaissance Center - made of fabric planes that visually descend - well I supposed I could have done a building that was 140 feet high. The proportions and the compositions would have changed, but the basic idea was still the same. And there was an idea behind the piece that began with the question of was how to occupy the space with fabric planes.

I decided that most everything that Portman put into the space had weight and volume and existed as permanent structure. Yet the most interesting aspect of the complex structure was the space itself through which visitors would be moving. So I thought, well, how can I show -

[Audio break.]

MR. ADAMSON: This is disc four of the interview with Glenn Adamson and Gerhardt Knodel.

Okay, you were talking about the Renaissance Center.

MR. KNODEL: So the question is how do you enter a space like that? You can enter the space with an object such as a work of sculpture that is something that has existed outside the context of what is there and people can appreciate it for it's self righteousness - [laughs] - it's ability to be its self.

My thought about it was that I wanted to find something that appeared as though it had been created by the space that it was in. And it was an extension of the way the architecture - the architect - thought about this space. Ideally, I'd always felt this way. If my work really "works," the audience thinks it was the architect that created it. It's so integrated.

So as I started playing around in my mind with what could happen. I thought about cutting the spine off a telephone book and dropping it off of the bridge on the seventh level and just letting the pages meander down. And I thought, this is just perfect because the pages are capturing the light, they are showing the resistance of the air, but reflecting the pull of the gravity, they are affected the air as it operates in relationship to the plane. And I - [laughs] - thought, well, I wonder if I could make something that looks that way. I could have made a film of throwing a telephone book off the top. That would have been one way to do it today.

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. KNODEL: But no, that wasn't good enough for me. I had to weave the thing. But see, it made a lot of sense because, going back to the beginning of our conversation where I was talking about the bolt of textile and being able to throw the bolt, holding on to the end and see the whole thing as a visible plane that extends yourself like a roller coaster, the roller coaster is the adventure - when the car comes to the top of the first hill and you see that ribbon out ahead of you, that becomes like your next breath - your cycle of breathing. It is your life. It's like you see your heartbeats out in front of you. Your future is right there.

So when you're going to throw the telephone book off the bridge, the result of the action is already predictable,

but it will never be exactly as you make it at that moment. Right? So I feel with the textile. All right, so let's try various ways to express that action. And what was noticed in the piece - it was called *Freefall* when the piece was finished, it really did have that quality about it. And it was further activated by the fact that the pattern of experiencing this space in the building was circular. And you always got lost along the way. [Laughs.] It's the failure of the building. You get away from one point and it seemed like it took a half an hour to get back to the starting point and you didn't know where you were in the building.

But once my work was installed, people knew when they arrived back at the place of origin. As the viewer moved, the work visually changed. When you approached it from the other side, it looked different than the place where you left. At every level it changed. You could be intimate with it, you could be distant. In other words, you activated the piece and you could never say, "I know the piece," from any point of view. It wasn't intended that way. It was intended to be from - seen from the seventh floor looking straight down, and from the bottom looking straight up and so on.

MR. ADAMSON: And everything in between.

MR. KNODEL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]. So you see, at that point, it moves the medium into the same realm as the bolt of fabric that is going to be made into a shirt, or a dress, or whatever because this is nothing until you put it on. You have to wear it. And so for me, the architecture is wearing the textile and creating circumstances, which allow it to be in space. And there are no circumstances in the world that are like the specific circumstance of that place. Right?

The project that I did at Beaumont [Hospital] - is a screen of 28 panels, 100 feet long, and about 50 feet high. I had been asked by the architect to work in this big atrium space - glass ceiling - uniting an old building with a new building. In Michigan, there is law that if you stay in the hospital room for more than 24 hours, you have to have natural sunlight coming into the room. So the way the architect got around making his an addition to the hospital - was to make an architectural "interval" with a glass ceiling five stories in height.

I worked for months with ideas about occupying this big three dimensional space until finally I visited, again, while the building was under process, and I realized that the waiting rooms on one side of the hospital in the new addition looked directly across the space into the 28 private rooms that faced out into the atrium. And in order to assure their privacy, people would have to close the blinds, therefore, denying themselves the pleasure of the sunlight, which was their right - not only God-given right, but a right given by Michigan law. So immediately I said, it's clear what I have to do. My artwork has to assist in creating somewhat of a barrier between these two places.

So we can look at a picture. This is not the greatest photograph, but this publication didn't use the one that I was really interested in. But you can see what I did was I made a double screen - it's made out of fiberglass fabric, commercially woven. What I discovered I could do with it was take a knife and slit it and cut out linear elements to create this rather lacelike quality. And here you can see in the lacelike quality are words. And then there are also images of leaves that - there you can see one right there. The structure has an interior to it - you can see a little bit here. The interior has some translucent nets and there are colored leaf-like shapes that float on those nets.

So the idea was to create a screen for each of the 28 rooms, and the screen would have some text. Within the room, I would have a legend, and the legend would locate the words outside of your window relative to the language of the whole piece, and in the sense of the whole piece, you would get a sense of belonging to something larger. In other words, the meaning here is dependent upon interconnection of all components, which is always the problem in a hospital where individuals feel disconnected. You always are so internally focused when you're sick and you're in a hospital. You lose the sense of connectivity despite the medical profession that creates connections in a lot of rich and interesting ways.

So I thought I would make something like a tapestry - a plane that is fractured, that has an interior space, and when you walk across the bridge over here, you'll be able to look down that channel and see all these platelets flowing along. And there will be a sense of kind of connection.

The text that I used came from the various cultures of the world at different periods of time talking about healing. "Rain beats on leopard's skin, but it does not wash out the spots." "Natural forces within us are true healers." I like that very much. "You can't dance at two weddings at the same time, nor can you sit on two horses with one behind." I'm trying to build with a little humor.

In the past last six months I have been over there to visit several people, and it turned out all of those people were staying in rooms that looked out onto my work. When I made the piece, even when I was finished, I didn't see it from those private rooms. So it's been great for me to have that experience and to ask, "Well, what is it like to be with this?" During the day, the sunlight moves here, so there's a lot of shadow patterns that are cast. At night, there's a single lamp inside that makes each of these glow like a -

MR. ADAMSON: Chinese lantern.

MR. KNODEL: That's right.

MR. ADAMSON: One thing I noticed about both this piece and *Freefall* in the Renaissance Center is that you seem very unafraid of metaphor and spirituality in your work, and you seem to have very little interest in irony -

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

MR. ADAMSON: - all of which are qualities that one doesn't necessarily associate with post-modernism - if we're going to call a period style that we've lived through that past 20 years. And yet, there are other aspects of your work that do seem somewhat post-modern like the fragmentation of text and the use of text as a kind of an emblematic large-scale conditioning element.

And I wonder how you see yourself fitting into that - even if we were just to talk about those two projects or if you talk about this generally. How do you see yourself fitting into that period style and also period feeling? And do you feel like - as the contemporary art world has become more and more ironic in general tenor, do you feel like you've become a little bit marginalized because your work is more genial or easy to absorb for the public in some way because it needs to be as a public artwork.

MR. KNODEL: I don't know that the work is ever easy to absorb. I mean it's accessible - anyone can look at it, but to go beyond looking to really seeing and then finally to understanding in something else.

MR. ADAMSON: It's certainly not shocking though in any way.

MR. KNODEL: That's right. And I don't think anybody can really stand on the edge on anyone else's perception. There are various ways in which you can hang out your sign and perhaps draw more people to your door. But I think in the long run, the importance is the experience once you get there. These are choices to be made along the way.

I have really always been interested more on the nurturing side of art rather than the destructive side. The world is full of commentary. We get it in various forms all the time. Still, it's nice to be with things, with experiences that you can't entirely encapsulate with your head - with your mind - that you can't deconstruct with language, that offer some kind of resistance. That may be an old traditional argument, but you can't argue it. I think it's just a simple, simple choice.

What I've tried to do is to enrich the work as time has past - to enrich it with meaning. And I always go back to *The Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries [15th century] because they were a place that was a turning point for me when I saw them at the Cluny Museum [Musée National du Moyen Age, Paris]. Just remember the scene of a woman, and her servant, and the animals, and the environment, and the reference to the natural world. But then, if you look carefully, you see that the ground itself has been separated from the earth and it's floating up in space against another field. So all of the sudden, that which you believe to be grounded in real experience is shown by the artist to be part of something imaginary and wonderful. That is a dream state. It's a state between the consciousness of the every hour and the mystery of that place that's in between. I like going there. Is the dream state any less a part of our being? I suppose that's the question.

So do I dream in deconstructed - using deconstructed kind of logic? [Laughs.] You know, well, yes, because of the multiplicity of things that go on in that world. But do I try to reason through that world? I don't. It's only when I wake up and reflect and say, "What was going on there?" But in the dream itself, I'm merely trusting the multiple experience regardless of how bizarre they are. That they can co-exist with each together. So that's an interesting question about how you read. The contradiction and internal dialogue that is a part of a lot of work today has always been part of art, but it may not have been analyzed or revealed by contemporary commentators. It's difficult to comprehend because we're not in the lives of the people who conceived those work. I think a lot religious work is especially true along those lines.

MR. ADAMSON: How would you characterize yourself spiritually at this point? I mean, you don't seem like a straightforward Methodist any longer.

MR. KNODEL: No way. [Laughs.] That stopped a long time ago. That's a difficult question. The reason I left that structured religious experience really resulted from asking too many questions that were not answered by people that I respected or had learned to respect. And one of those areas of questioning had to do with the similarity that I observed in religions that were represented as being very different from one another. I couldn't get answers from the good Methodists. And I thought, this is not working for me. I just can't - I just can't deal with it.

So I think I'm much happier being within a world where co-existence is a possibility. I don't worry about the

tensions as perceived by other people. It doesn't bother me at all. I think what drives Islam is fundamentally similar to what drives Christianity, and yet it's the fanaticism, it's the extremes that create the problem when religion becomes politicized that we get into the inevitable traps. But the original impetus is very much in line with the impetus that individuals discover in being alive in the first place, and that is that life is a remarkable experience, and all we can do is make the best out of it while we have the pleasure of living.

And therefore, it's always been of interest for me to learn as much as I can about other people - about other systems of beliefs, but never for the purpose of exclusion. Sometimes that acceptance can be regarded as being soft I suppose, but that's all right. I've got other things to think about. It's not a primary - I don't move it to a center that is primarily important. I mean look at this world that I'm living in. It's a wonderful place.

As far as teaching is concerned, because I think that's one of the values of one's life is to be able to communicate some of these things with other people, I would say to arrive at a place where you can communicate some degree of joy, satisfaction, and true pleasure from the experience of living is a forceful position as important as communicating anxiety and frustration. I've seen it on all sides from all kinds of people. So in the long run I guess - you know, I haven't got any big thoughts along these lines. I haven't worked it out in any -

MR. ADAMSON: Well, the reason I think it's worth the discussion, I guess, is because it seems like it does inform your work to some extent. It seems like many of your sources are religious in character and -

MR. KNODEL: Hmm. Religious or spiritual?

MR. ADAMSON: Or spiritual. Yeah, I'm not sure what the line between those two things is, but - and I think that the work, particularly the - is it called *Lifelines*? - the last piece you were working on in the hospital - it seems very kind of sacred in some ways in its imagery. And I don't know whether that's just a matter of you drawing on imagery that has a certain degree of power or whether it's that you have a kind spiritual life that is running through your work, through your teaching in a conscious way.

MR. KNODEL: I think it's trying to solve a problem and the problem is the specific project in that space - the subject matter, the content, and trying to think carefully about it and find a position where I can do something relative to it. I had never made that piece before; I'll never make it again. There's a lot about it terms of sense of materials and sensibilities. Maybe it's related to other things. But basically, I see it as a one-time deal. Like the Pontiac curtain that we talked about earlier. That was just a one-shot deal as well.

I had been in Italy in the early fall of a particular year. I think I was there in October or November - I was on leave - it was 1980 - and then Pontiac had the Super Bowl in January and when I walked down the street and saw all those people standing in abandoned buildings waiting for the Super Bowl parade to happen, I drew a relationship between the faces of the people who were standing there blankly and the faces of the building, which are the true embodiment of the people who had high aspirations of the businesses that were being built and had to face the street in a way that would accepting or engaging of audiences. And so I started taking photographs of all these people who had just left the cold. They were just standing there in the shop windows of abandoned buildings because it was so cold outside, waiting for the parade.

And all of the sudden it clicked that I had been in Orvieto, Italy, had stood in front of the façade of the cathedral where there is an embodiment of the all the saints and sinners of the church, and the town fathers up above. They were all there, played out on that façade. Heaven, hell, past, present, future - everything was there. And I thought, why don't I make a curtain for Pontiac that looks that way. That led to a huge undertaking, but the photographs that were taken - do you know about all of this? That I took the photographs in the back of a restaurant. And that was a great - and I didn't know where I was going with it. It's just one thing after another. Asking, putting a little card on the table, "Please come back and have your photograph taken when you're finished lunch. Artist in town wants to do something." Everybody said, "Artist - I've never met an artist in my life. You know, well first go back and see what he looks like."

MR. ADAMSON: [Laughs.]

MR. KNODEL: And then, you know, I snapped the photographs and made these enlargements - I mean full-size screen printed images. One thing led to another, and then the ultimately the goal was to create an Orvieto kind of façade, which was first shown in the Cranbrook Museum. And people walked in at a distance - when you go into the museum tomorrow, you'll see what it's like - you walk in the front door and my work was at the back of the gallery in line with the entrance axis. And people saw the thing in the distance and they were just drawn to it. Let's see what this thing is. And along the way, some people were walking away from it saying, "Oh my God, I just saw the editor of our local newspaper." Or, "I think she's a hooker down on the corner," or this, and that.

Then the mayor of the city held a reception for the whole city in that - in the gallery, in the museum when I had the show there. And he stood before the audience saying something like, "We are here to make Gerhardt Knodel

citizen of the day for what he has contributed to the identity of our city. Most of us don't know what it is to be artists, but at Christmas time, all of us decorated our Christmas tree; maybe you changed the color of your bathroom or kitchen last month. See? You are involved in art activities." I mean that was the only place he had to enter the field of art. But it was great. It was truly meaningful. I have never forgotten it and I just always feel as if I can make that link. And I have met hundreds, and hundreds of people who said, "I remember seeing that piece." Or, "I remember it." What more can you do? You know, that's all you can do.

Now, one thing that's happened that I'm very aware of in my work is that a lot of the commission work no longer exists. You know, they were made for buildings, and I go years later, and they're gone.

MR. ADAMSON: No phone call, no explanation.

MR. KNODEL: No phone call, nothing. My first big awareness of the fact that work wouldn't exist forever was at the Murrah building [Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building] in Oklahoma City where I had a major work that died in the tragedy that happened there. And it didn't occur to me when I heard about that event, it didn't occur to me that that was the building my work was in until a couple of weeks later. And, oh the Murrah building! That's the building in which I installed work that Joan Mondale dedicated. I have great photographs of her standing on the stairwell with me. The image [*Sky Ribbons: An Oklahoma Tribute*, 1978] was in part the American flag and all these ribbons that had been part of Native American history. And there were lots of connections that I made through that piece.

And so I called GSA in New York - or Washington. And I said, "You know, I feel a little awkward asking this, but did my work survive?" And they said, "No, sorry." A lot of the work did survive that was in other parts of the building. There are other places where the work likewise dissapears despite the fact that I have a contract, and I'm supposed to be advised of all things. The building changes ownership and all of the sudden, the work is gone.

MR. ADAMSON: They get amnesia. You continue to work almost entirely with public art projects, though - correct? I mean, that's what you spend most of your art producing time doing?

MR. KNODEL: No, I've done lots of other things. I've done exhibitions and -

MR. ADAMSON: Well, that's true, yeah.

MR. KNODEL: - made works, and other kinds of - [laughs] - smaller artworks.

MR. ADAMSON: I guess what I'm wondering if how many things do you make that wind up just going into people's home as a part of a collection?

MR. KNODEL: Some, but not a lot. I don't have a huge production in the first place. And I would say that the majority of my investment is probably along the lines of the larger works. But there's quite a lot of works that are in private collections.

MR. ADAMSON: Are there parts of you that you feel like you can let out when you're making your own work, either speculatively or for a private client as opposed to for the - for a public context. Or is it just too totally different ways of thinking about the working process? Because you've described the public art project as being like a problem solving endeavor. And I would imagine that a speculative work is much less of that nature because it's much more open-ended.

MR. KNODEL: Yes, but don't take that to an extreme because I don't. I mean in terms of problem solving. There's no artwork that exists without having parameters that bring it into being. There are always conditions. Even a painter faces the question of how large should the canvas be. And oftentimes, when the painting is begun, the painter doesn't know the subject matter or what the work is going to be about. You work your way into the condition that's provided or that you create for yourself.

So I would say in all honesty, I try to deal with all pieces with integrity. But I understand the question you're asking. You asked about irony and all of that kind of thing that I don't involve a lot in the work. I'm much more interested in posing an unanswerable question than I am in posing a riddle that has an answer to it. If it can be generated and there's a gap that is created, that to me is much more intriguing. And I think that is - [laughs] - a valuable territory to go after.

Do you know I did this exhibition with the collection at the Textile Museum in Washington called "Mysterious Voids at the Heart of Historic Textiles" [July 1995 - January 1996].

MR. ADAMSON: Oh, okay.

MR. KNODEL: Do you know about that? That was a very interesting project. The curators there and Ursula

McCracken asked me if I would like to look at their collection and pull from it a group of related works, the works that I found of interest. And then do a little writing about it or develop a context of thinking about those works that would connect with my own work.

At that particular period of time, I was engaged in looking at some historic textiles from different cultures that have what appears to be a void or a field of color at the center of the textiles surrounded by very complex, highly charged imagery. And I thought, well, I'll go to the Textile Museum and see if they have work of that sort and they did. And I found the characteristic voids in the textiles of many cultures, different periods of history.

The point that I was making with the work is that it's very interesting for a weaver to be filling space and creating it simultaneously. So line by line, pick by pick, you are building a structure. You are constructing something and yet expressing the opposite of that, emptiness, nothing. It's in the space of emptiness that we function. So I had set up a little question with pieces in the exhibition relating to the fact that voids that I see in a lot of these textiles were never empty. They would speak about a fullness of potential. And it is that fullness that exists with regard to placing ones self at the heart of anything. The arrival at a state of awareness allows you to locate yourself in the first place with regard to an experience, right?

You stand on the edge of the Grand Canyon and you say, "Wow," and the next thing is you say, "I am standing here on the edge of the Grand Canyon, saying wow." And then some people fall apart because then they start think about how tall they are relative to the space and other people soar like birds - you know, all kinds of things happen. But that notion of being centered is pretty interesting I think as you look architecture. And I was making the point that that existence - that existed within the textiles as well.

I showed the textiles with a "subtext" of photographs that I had taken in architectural situations all over the world in my travels. The architectural reference was to help the audience look at the textile and find themselves in the place that the weaver had intended a body to occupy. And that was for the point of saying that all of these textiles have an architectural component about them. But they also have the spiritual component.

When you live on the plain in Afghanistan, and the wind and the snow blows like crazy, and all there is freezing environment around you, and you are separating yourself from the outside with a felt cover over a wooden frame, a little fire at the center, and the smoke hole, you are in a place of extraordinary vulnerability only protected by your ingenuity and your belief in what you build as being functional in that environment. I think that's embedded into textile making in a very interesting way.

The void can be any place in the world you go, and I can be standing in New York City on a street corner, or Detroit for that matter - somebody from Mexico is walking here, somebody from China is here, somebody from Germany is there, an American is on this side of me. They're all speaking different languages. I don't know what any of them is talking about, and I try to make sense about being in that place.

Well, that's in many ways about centering - locating yourself. It all goes back to the Greco-Roman notion. Christian Norberg-Schulz did that wonderful book called *Genius Loci* [*Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli, 1980.] where he goes to different cities of the world and talks about how the spirit of place brings forward that which is. That nothing is created without building a relationship to that which is. And that's what creates continuity and ultimately, that continuity is valuable in the course of human history.

[Audio break.]

Like language; we don't sit here and analyze the source of our language when we're speaking to one another. That's fascinating to me. If I draw a relationship to textiles in that sense, then - and the textile was one of the first things that human beings invested themselves in it's the common link - then my job is not to get in the way of something that has a trajectory through human existence but to add to it in a way.

Today a lot of artists are finding power in the force of resistance in rejecting or disputing that which exists and moving meaning around in really interesting ways. But I would simply ask, does their work create further impetus or does it slow - is it an element of entropy? Does it kind of slow the mechanism? I think that's worth thinking about.

MR. ADAMSON: Well, it's interesting then to think about the literary qualities of your work. You know, people talk about texts and textiles a great deal, and now they even talk about looms and computers as being related genetically. And so it's interesting to see your insertion of text into the textile medium because it's like you're drawing attention to the fact that the textile has a common language as well in a way.

MR. KNODEL: That's right.

MR. ADAMSON: How do you see that continuum of activity taking place against the architectural backdrop? Because you're essentially working not as an architect but you're working between architecture and non-

architecture in a way. Do you spend a lot of time with architects? Do you read architectural history?

MR. KNODEL: Right now in my position -

MR. ADAMSON: Only if they work with you, right, at Cranbrook? [Laughs.]

MR. KNODEL: Yes, you know, this is always really desirable, and unfortunately I'm going to be the person who leaves the face of the Earth very unfulfilled, full of possibilities. That is - it is a frustration, and to say, you know, what could I have done if this had happened and what if that had happened? I think of - you know, a friend of mine here, the woman that gave me these two stone pedestals in my garden, she has a very interesting idea. Her business has been very successful. She's in the landscaping business and has captured the imagination of lots of people through her landscape projects. And that has given her the energy to indulge in her own creativity at her own belief system, which has moved her forward to the level of success in the landscaping business.

She was trained as a painter but is now a landscape architect, and she knows about the history of the Bauhaus, and her new idea is to create a new Bauhaus in Pontiac, Michigan. And what she's doing, she now has 17 people working for her and she's expanding her workforce. She's hiring people who she deems to be very creative to join her in the process of her work, but to generate products that are much more intense in both their challenge and their insight into problem solving than what she has done. Her work is already wonderful, but what she's done is she has moved this into a kind of communal situation, a situation that's shared with others, and she's welcoming others now rather than saying, "I'm the power source and you work for me to support what it is that I do."

That's really interesting to find those kinds of relationships, and that would be ideal in my life. I wouldn't even mind joining her team at some point, because her people are open to making something out of their relationships. It's what the whole high-tech industry in our country has benefited from, this openness, that willingness to collaborate, to find new points of intersection. It's what my leadership at Cranbrook is all about, trying to build - to find the potential in the intersections that happen at the moment. And relative to your question, I can only say it's something that I would have wished for my own career as an artist. Then all I can do is say I can taste this and pieces of this but I'll never taste the fullness of it because I refused to discipline myself in ways that devote all of my energies - not discipline. I'll never be able to focus myself in ways that really require a 24-hour devotion to that kind of pursuit. That's what makes it successful.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. KNODEL: And I never have been able to give that kind of level of attention to it, and I have the highest respect for artists who do, for people who are totally submerged in their work and make it the air they breathe. That's amazing to me.

Yet on the other hand, I'm very excited about what I'm doing, and I'm very excited about the potential of what may lie ahead. I don't know what that is. So it's a strange kind of circumstance that I find myself within. I don't want to claim territory that is not justified. I don't have that big of an ego. I feel as though I've exercised integrity in what I've done and that I've turned some corners that others haven't turned and I'm happy with things that I've done along the way and feel that some of them are still alive in interesting ways for me.

MR. ADAMSON: Maybe this would be an appropriate time to turn the conversation towards your actual directorship at Cranbrook and talk about that sort of directly.

MR. KNODEL: Okay, before we go there, I want to look at this piece -

MR. ADAMSON: Okay.

MR. KNODEL: - which I've always liked. This piece is called *Guardians of the New Day*, and I did it after seeing *Lady and the Unicorn* - not so long after that. At the time I didn't know of anyone who was including figures into textiles. So what I did was take photographs of my colleagues. This is Steve Murakishi, who is head of the printmaking department. This is Michael Hall, who is head of sculpture. Here's another Michael Hall. And this is Roy Slade, who is president of the academy. This is Joan Livingstone. She was there at the time that I did the piece. And these are two more students I'm teaching.

Basically what I wanted to do is to see if I could create a textile that actually was the environment for holding these figures in relationship to the way that I've been talking about the figure in architectural space. In order to accomplish that end it was necessary to enforce the two-dimensional nature of the textile and to allow the process of its making to somehow join the environment or atmosphere which held these figures and gave them a kind of a definition in space. Long story.

I'd been to Japan; I spent some time in Japan and saw these grand figures that stand at the entrance to a

Buddhist temple.

MR. ADAMSON: The guardian figures.

MR. KNODEL: The guardian figures. You know, their eyes are bulging, the muscles are bulging and so on, and I thought, well, this is kind of interesting that you go over the threshold into the place of worship and focus, but along the way are these human beings that are watching over the space - watching out for you in making that transition. At the time there was so much language coming over the airways about ecology, environment - I remember even in my lifetime where the word "environment" was not used and all of a sudden it became the buzzword, and then ecology and taking care of the environment, and water and air and land. So I thought, well, those are the properties that we're watching over these days, so can I make a textile that functions that way?

In my response entitled *Guardians of the New Day* [1987], my guardians are inhabiting the environment, and other figures like shadows are watching over them, and even within that environment there are other figures on another level that are likewise active, and they're doing their own whatever they're doing in the course of this whole action. I tried to plant the larger figures in a space so that they move along with the surface. What gives them a sense of being in the space is the threads of the warp and the threads of the weft which hold them in place.

I like these works because of the way the figurative images are embedded - the figure, subject and environment exist in a two-dimensional plane, and the plane is simply a textile. That's still a possibility to me. That's interesting. That possibility is not going to go away. It's not going to go away in my lifetime; it's not going to go away in yours. It will reside with us for a long time out ahead. How we show it is something else.

The *Lady and the Unicorn* helped me along, and some other do tapestries as well. Can anyone else be interested in that? I don't know?

MR. ADAMSON: Well, it seems fundamental enough. I mean, what you're - on a certain level what you're talking about is akin to the problem of painting, which is depth on surface, right, except that you're - it seems to me - it's funny because in a way you're in exactly the opposite situation as the one that the fiber art field was in the '60s where it was how do you get from the flat wall hanging or casement or whatever it is to the three-dimensional sculptural wall hanging or ceiling - hung object? And it may even involve a three-dimensional installation of architectural fabrics and so on. It's like how do you go back to that flat - that physically flat thing and bring to it all of the dynamism and volumetric understanding that you were able to have when you're working in a room?

When we were talking earlier in your studio about those pieces that you have that have voids in the center of them, which is related to your textile museum show as well -

MR. KNODEL: That's right.

MR. ADAMSON: - that seems to link with this as well, you know, how can you make a, quote, "two-dimensional" thing that is fully cognizant of its own three-dimensionality but also asserts its plainer quality still?

MR. KNODEL: Right.

MR. ADAMSON: So it does seem like the inverse of some of the things you're doing with space.

MR. KNODEL: Yes, that's interesting. Sure. Sure.

MR. ADAMSON: So -

MR. KNODEL: Yes. Sometimes we work in circles, right?

MR. ADAMSON: Right. Right.

MR. KNODEL: Yes, I don't know, maybe I'm interested in the theater of experience along these lines as well, those juxtapositions of meanings that happen all over the place. We were talking a little bit about the political climate while we were having lunch, and it is that kind of environment in which we're living today that creates for me, for every man, the contradictions that are very much alive in the world today and are kind of invigorating a lot of discussions on lots of levels. It's where we feel a lot of intensity at the moment.

I'm really anxious to see how this is going to move. I mean, will we ultimately move from the point of view of the United Nations, a place, idealistically speaking where we ultimately agree for the sake of the Earth that we have to cooperate? Will our reasoning minds take us to that place someday? And in doing so, will the common threads of humanity be realized? Will our differences be so marginalized because of the necessity of staying alive that agreement and compromise and collaboration is absolutely essential to survival? I think we've lived a life of

privilege where contradiction is what has fueled a lot of our attention, but is that in the cards for us in the future, and what will that amalgam be when all these parts are mixed together? What will that condition be?

China is fast-forwarding today in such extraordinary ways, and yet it has one of the most ancient cultures in the world. Where is that culture going to be two generations from now with the speed of forward momentum that they are experiencing? And will some voices of resistance be that which help in that process or will it be a process of assimilation, past, present and future, allowing for the evolution of a new matrix of some sort which is still in respectable relationship with heritage, or not? I don't have the slightest idea about that. All I can see is the change and say, "Whoa, what's going on here?" Who in the past ever expected the world to change so fast as it's doing right now?

Does art make sense of human experience in time? What is the element of time that exists in art? We talk about good art as being timeless. What does that mean? And what is the potential of work in the post-modern condition to take a role in that evolution? I don't know. Or maybe I'm bringing forward something that appears to be a contradiction which really is not.

MR. ADAMSON: Maybe we should talk more specifically about crafts too during that period. I mean, we were very specific for a while there about the '60s and '70s and then I think we started talking about your work in general, and I think in the '80s and '90s - and '00s now we can talk about as well - a lot has happened to make the crafts more successful commercially and much more high profile culturally in some ways, and yet, particularly in the fiber art world, it seems like there was a peak in the early '70s that hasn't been equaled since -

MR. KNODEL: That's right.

MR. ADAMSON: - which - and I myself have had more to do with ceramics and furniture, which has, I think, expanded more during this period, and I wonder how that looks to you, having been there at the time. Do you think that there was a heyday there, and why hasn't it been repeated cyclically since then?

MR. KNODEL: Because there were not enough people with imagination to move it forward in territories that it needed to go. That's the big problem. The field of fibers was a place for wonderful gestation to occur, ideas to come forward, be explored, learn the possibilities. I mean, look, you know all the categories, feminism, gender identity and places where the alternative voice - even the voice of craft could speak strongly. Women's work - look at the number of books that have been written on that topic. But ultimately, who benefitted? People who came from the fine arts did; people who were working in painting and sculpture and who understood the power of ideas and could read them in a context.

There's a different kind of time that exists in most of the crafts than there is in the world's fine arts. The way in which ideas drive new work moves a lot of work in the field of painting along faster than what has happened in the craft world. It's only as contemporary history is being studied the agenda, one, has been studied and appreciated by students that the whole process is moving along at a different pace today.

MR. ADAMSON: Because the craftspeople have learned to prioritize novelty and change.

MR. KNODEL: And to recognize that the reputation that you earn for yourself is going to come, to measurable degree, through the critics or the people who pay attention to your work, who write about it and talk about it. People very quickly absorb new ideas and digest them, and unless you can stay ahead of the pack as far as this is concerned, you're going to be run over by them, right? So that's a choice to be made. aI think of Kiki Smith and the way she raided the closets of craftspeople. A lot of her work is wonderful. The first time I saw her embroidery of the circulatory system, or she made these portraits of the human body done with embroidery I thought, brilliant; why have I not seen embroidery of this sort coming from somebody in the textiles field?

It was clear to her that the way the needle passes through the structure of the textile is similar to movement in the whole circulatory system within ourselves. She made the link. Bright idea. Then she connected the history of representation of the human figure as a subject matter for painting and sculpture and in that relationship the ideas can be buoyant; it can move much more than it can within the context of craft criticism or even the interests of the fine art critic looking over the fence to see what's going on within the world of craft.

MR. ADAMSON: Do you think that there's also been an institutional weakness in the fiber area, even compared to some of the other craft media? I mean, it seems like you don't have the number of galleries, for instance, that's promoting the work. Well, you have a couple - Brown Grotta Gallery [Wilton, CT] leaps to mind certainly, but you don't have quite as strong of a dedicated periodical base that's focusing specifically on fibers.

MR. KNODEL: You know, I think - do you look at Surface Design magazine?

MR. KNODEL: A little bit.

MR. KNODEL: I think they're doing a much better job. I think there's a more careful look at what they're writing about. There's some improvement. But you can say, what is the model for that? The model for that is the better art journals. Work can be really interesting and deserve attention, and I think that there are probably lots of pockets in this country where a lot of interesting work is going on that we don't have the slightest idea about because the national magazines never get there.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. KNODEL: But I think maybe the power of that work, as it enters the lives of audiences that have access to it, may be the ultimate reward for the work. I mean, what else is there in the long run than to affect someone with what we make, and a national periodical is not going to be the means - nor is the popularity contest, getting 100,000 people in the museum to walk quickly by the work by contrast to the work being seen in a local gallery by fewer people who spend more time with the work. What's the difference? What difference does it make?

I think from the point of view of scholarship, the scholar looks for important subjects that stimulate intellectual response to the artwork. What the writer does is not the same as what the artist does. The writer is dependent upon the turf that the artist opens up, but the writer himself has his own art to explore. What we don't understand is that there is a difference between the two. What the writer writes and what the artist makes are not the same, and yet too many artists go the writers to determine what the art should be. They learn a discipline, a way of thinking and a way of working and a pacing of the work that is really iniated by the critic reviewing the work.

So it's not a wonder that many craftsmen have gone to the commercial world. In the commercial world at least they find a less educated but more receptive audience to turn over their product. I mean, if you're a production potter, what are you going to go with 10,000 pots in your studio? Better that they get out in the world. So this other mechanism works.

Am I interested in most of that work? No, I'm not. Honestly, I'm not. I'm brought in to jury shows. Last year I did the high-end Ann Arbor art fair out here - not impressive. I found a couple of things that really attracted me but the rest of it was just stuff, and I'm not interested in promoting the proliferation of stuff. I don't do it at Cranbrook. I won't do it with the faculty that I work with. I'm very privileged to work with a group of people that understand what that's all about, and yet it's not to the exclusion of any method of working. Anything can work as long as there is seriousness of intent and a true investment of the individual. The risk is the artist's to take. Invest yourself; see what comes of it. You do the best you can do. That's the only shot that you have, and if you're fortunate, someone will discover the power in it, and no matter how much other people talk about it being good, it ultimately won't be good unless it finds that larger, profound - identity within a profound environment.

How much of art has been talked about by critics as being great which a few years later just sinks into that oblivion and is nowhere?

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. KNODEL: Look at the P & D movement. All of that stuff - what happened to it?

MR. ADAMSON: So you're a man of a certain stature nationally in the craft movement at this point, and I realize you're running Cranbrook - [laughs] - so obviously your primary responsibilities lie there, but looking back even over the past 10 or 15 years, how do you feel that you've tried to conduct yourself as a leader of the movement and where would you - if you had the time and energy, where would you push it right now? Or is that not something you concern yourself with?

MR. KNODEL: I'm really interested in exciting juxtapositions. If I had a museum to work with, I would look always for interesting collisions, contrasts that encourage people to understand this and that and then consider the meeting place, the place in between. And there are loads of opportunities along these lines today.

Also, the past collides with the present in interesting ways, and I'm not talking about the deep past. Ten years ago is ancient history to some people. The way the '50s and '60s and '70s and '80s and '90s come forward into the 21st century is really interesting, and I think that there are ways of recreating the meaning of anything that has happened through provocative investigation. So therefore, seeing Ed Rossbach in the latter part of his life continuing to make baskets out of the same tradition and context out of which he had worked previously, but all of a sudden the world is changing around him and the question is, what is the relevance of those pieces in this moment? Think about Lenore Tawney work - Lenore's work recreated itself in different moments of time according to the buzz, according to the language at work, and there were moments of intensity and there were moments of less intensity, but ultimately one has to ask the big question, how is the work going to survive?

It is the educator's responsibility to bring forward those values as part of the broad menu and say, maybe I lived there, or I remember when, or I talked about somebody who knew, or I've experienced - you know, and just bring

these forward as interesting possibilities. The big problem is the bucket is so full of possibilities today that, as I've said earlier, for the educator, how do you make choices of what's going to happen? How do you as a critic determine the subject matter that you're going to follow? How are you going to create importance as a critic or as a writer or as a curator? You would hope that's what you do. You would hope that you make the right choices and that there are some people that follow you and agree with you on the choices that you make.

I am interested - not afraid of, but I am interested, in the fact that we may be developing a world where those choices will become less relevant, and it simply is the post-modern condition of accepting multiplicity, plurality as a condition of life, and that anything that we aspire to has to go back to being framed within that earlier mode of thinking. That's what you were leading several times with your questions.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah.

MR. KNODEL: But I don't know that. You see, at Cranbrook, when you walk around you'll see buildings that look like they come from the 19th century, housing an institution that focuses on the future. So how do the two come together? At one point I was encouraged to lop off a few departments that may not be relevant in the future. Put in their place those disciplines which are clearly responding to new technology, and that are creating the sparks for tomorrow. I thought about it. I decided ultimately that would be complete foolishness on my part, because I don't believe we are in a position of predicting what will survive with importance. It is better for me to support the fact that we can have students who join a discipline of study that has been intact for 75 years at Cranbrook, and you can leave knowing you have contributed to that condition and its evolution.

But a new leader may feel absolutely opposite and may be given the right and the privilege by our board of governors to move the institution differently and to say, all of this has come to an end. Tomorrow is a new day. Let's strike out in that territory. That's simply the difference of opinion. It's fabulous to have the privilege to think about that subject and to take action on it and to pursue it.

I nurtured the head of our architecture, his name is Peter Lynch, he worked in Stephen Holl's office for eight years, was out on his own. He's an interesting guy, spent a lot of time up in Canada for a while. He came to Cranbrook when Dan Hoffman left eight years ago, and I hired him. He was one of the first people I hired when I became director, and I hired him basically in that I believed that he had the potential of realizing something significant within the possibilities of our institution - not the world as a whole but Cranbrook in particular. Basically what I'm working off of is my own experience. What I am today is a result in part of the opportunities given to me by the institution, and what I'd like to do is to think that I could give that opportunity to other people.

And so, what I look for is not mastery in accomplishment but indication of potential, and a sense in an individual that they can grow with the institution and they can take the institution to places that it has never been. Cranbrook was formed by the talents that came from other countries. It was like summer camp. People came together within the vision of the founder, George Booth, and he simply said, "I believe that creativity has a role in this world and I'm looking to build the best place possible to make dreams become realities. Let's see what we can do." And he got a weaver from here and a sculptor from there, and an architect from somewhere, and then so on. These people ended up being brilliant, because they were given the opportunity to build the whole place. They not only created a course of study for students, they were there to build a place of the future.

And so when I became director I was asked by the president of the Cranbrook Educational Community, "What do you need?" I said, "Give me 300 acres; I'll start all over again!" That's all I wanted, 300 acres and the budget to build the next academy. "And if you want - truly you want me to redo this institution in the very best sense possible, that's what you must provide for me." They said, "Sorry." [Laughs.] "We can think about some new buildings. We're not going that far."

MR. ADAMSON: "What's your next idea?" [Laughs.]

MR. KNODEL: I've tried to build within -

MR. ADAMSON: Incrementally.

MR. KNODEL: - the context of what we've got, but never ignore what has been. The question is, how to use the present productively and find a relationship to the institution that will alter your experience, so that you come out the other end of the tunnel a changed person, but changed to the betterment of yourself - to the improvement, growth, maturing, and the blossoming of your potential.

There are not a lot of institutions where you have that pleasure. We can never be Chicago or New York. All we can do is be meaningful to 150 people.

MR. ADAMSON: Yeah, it's much more introverted, but it does have advantages that a university setting just can't

provide.

MR. KNODEL: Absolutely, and it's not for the same people. This world is a big place and our differences are great, and so why not get the right people matched up to the right institutions? You know, if this is not right for you, go to the place that is, or let me suggest what would be better for you. That's the best that we can do.

So, again, this is interesting to make one's way through life in relationship to art and find a satisfying and productive position to take, all the while knowing you can be satisfied on Thursday night with the brilliance of your idea and the energy of inspiration on Friday morning you wake up and you say, "Well, what a dumb idea that was." You're constantly on the seesaw. The moment you start to bring other people into the world you complicate relationships. We like to think that "outsiders" living on the hilltop in Kentucky or whatever, are purer in some sense because they've not been adulterated by the big context of the big city. but we haven't chosen that context to work within. That's our problem; we're not the guy on the hilltop in Kentucky. We may know a lot more about that problem than he does, but that's our problem.

Public art is interesting because it moves out into a broader arena. Architecture used to be so boring, but architecture has new potential now. Look at what Danny Libeskind has accomplished. You know he was at Cranbrook for six years. And I remember when he came there. I was there when he was hired and the whole thing. I remember his. rhetoric, the whole spiel he gave. He was brilliant. He was a great intellect, and he just opened up worlds I didn't know what "phenomenology" was until Libeskind came into my world, and said, "Sit here with me; I'll give you a little lecture." Four hours later we were totally exhausted. It's like this interview today - [laughs] - totally exhausted. You would leave the auditorium but you'd say, "Oh, man, did I get a load full there. Now let me think about it for the rest of my life."

MR. ADAMSON: But you're right that public art - and architecture, but for you public art is almost like the inverse of Cranbrook. It almost is like a necessary inverse, like you have this very inward - directed thing about breeding creativity and then at some point you go out into the wide world where people have no idea who you are or where you came from and you have to give them an experience that communicates.

MR. KNODEL: But I think you can develop strategies for work within that world that are very connected. I think that's very possible, and that's what educated people should do. The dumbest students are the ones who have never thought their way into the pleasure of a global perspective which their education should have offered them in the first place.

MR. ADAMSON: Right.

MR. KNODEL: They will never go anywhere. No matter what it is that you do; you've got to be heavily invested in it and you've got to believe that it is relevant in some way or other. We're not looking for people who like to sit facing the corner and do embroidery. We're looking for people with an eye to the world. To work in an environment that appears to be isolated, and then produce work for the world is the interesting part. That is the point that I was making about the people who created Cranbrook in the first place. They came from all over the world, they created focus while they were there in their collaborations with one another, and they gave back to the world something that we're still talking about. That's fabulous. And it never existed in isolation. It's not because Saarinen or Charles Eames and Ray Eames were isolated from the world that they did what they did; it's because they knew how to think about being personally centered in a world of problems. They found the space and time to focus.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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